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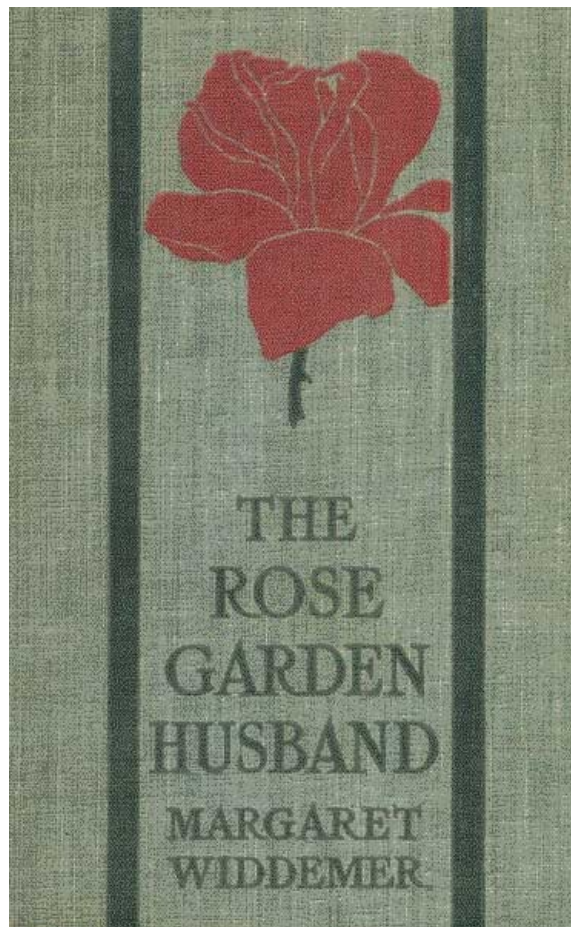
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# **THE ROSE-GARDEN HUSBAND**

**BY**

**MARGARET WIDDEMER**

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

**WALTER BIGGS**

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**"YOU KNOW, I MARRIED YOU PRINCIPALLY  
FOR A ROSE-GARDEN, AND THAT'S *LOVELY!*"**

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**IN LOVING MEMORY  
OF  
HOWARD TAYLOR WIDDEMER**

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## THE ROSE-GARDEN HUSBAND

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### I

The Liberry Teacher lifted her eyes from a half-made catalogue-card, eyed the relentlessly slow clock and checked a long wriggle of purest, frankest weariness. Then she gave a furtive glance around to see if the children had noticed she was off guard; for if they had she knew the whole crowd might take more liberties than they ought to, and have to be spoken to by the janitor. He could do a great deal with them, because he understood their attitude to life, but that wasn't good for the Liberry Teacher's record.

It was four o'clock of a stickily wet Saturday. As long as it is anything from Monday to Friday the average library attendant goes around thanking her stars she isn't a school-teacher; but the last day of the week, when the rest of the world is having its relaxing Saturday off and coming to gloat over you as it acquires its Sunday-reading best seller, if you work in a library you begin just at noon to wish devoutly that you'd taken up scrubbing-by-the-day, or hack-driving, or porch-climbing or—anything on earth that gave you a weekly half-holiday!

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So the Liberry Teacher braced herself severely, and put on her reading-glasses with a view to looking older and more firm. "Liberry Teacher," it might be well to explain, was not her official title. Her description on the pay-roll ran "Assistant for the Children's Department, Greenway Branch, City Public Library." Grown-up people, when she happened to run across them, called her Miss Braithwaite. But "Liberry Teacher" was the only name the children ever used, and she saw scarcely anybody but the children, six days a week, fifty-one weeks a year. As for her real name, that nobody ever called her by, *that* was Phyllis Narcissa.

She was quite willing to have such a name as that buried out of sight. She had a sense of fitness; and such a name belonged back in an old New England parsonage garden full of pink roses and nice green caterpillars and girl-dreams, and the days before she was eighteen: not in a smutty city library, attached to a twenty-five-year-old young woman with reading-glasses and fine discipline and a woolen shirt-waist!

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It wasn't that the Liberry Teacher didn't like her position. She not only liked it, but she had a great deal of admiration for it, because it had been exceedingly hard to get. She had held it firmly now for a whole year. Before that she had been in the Cataloguing, where your eyes hurt and you get a little pain between your shoulders, but you sit down and can talk to other girls; and before that in the Circulation, where it hurts your feet and you get ink on your fingers, but you see lots of funny things happening. She had started at eighteen years old, at thirty dollars a month. Now she was twenty-five, and she got all of fifty dollars, so she ought to have been a very happy Liberry Teacher indeed, and generally she was. When the children wanted to specify her particularly they described her as "the pretty one that laughs." But at four o'clock of a wet Saturday afternoon, in a badly ventilated, badly lighted room full of damp little unwashed foreign children, even the most sunny-hearted Liberry Teacher may be excused for having thoughts that are a little tired and cross and restless.

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She flung herself back in her desk-chair and watched, with brazen indifference, Giovanni and Liberata Bruno stickily pawing the colored Bird Book that was supposed to be looked at only under supervision; she ignored the fact that three little Czechs were fighting over the wailing library cat; and the sounds of conflict caused by Jimsy Hoolan's desire to get the last-surviving Alger book away from John Zanowski moved her not a whit. The Liberry Teacher had stopped, for five minutes, being grown-up and responsible, and she was wishing—wishing hard and vengefully. This is always a risky thing to do, because you never know when the Destinies may overhear you and take you at your exact word. With the detailed and careful accuracy one acquires in library work, she was wishing for a sum of money, a garden, and a husband—but principally a husband. This is why:

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That day as she was returning from her long-deferred twenty-minute dairy-lunch, she had charged, umbrella down, almost full into a pretty lady getting out of a shiny gray limousine. Such an unnecessarily pretty lady, all furs and fluffles and veils and perfumes and waved hair! Her cheeks were pink and her expression was placid, and each of her white-gloved hands held tight to a pretty picture-book child who was wriggling with wild excitement. One had yellow frilly hair and one had brown bobbed hair, and both were quaintly, immaculately, expensively kissable. They were the kind of children every girl wishes she could have a set like, and hugs when she gets a chance. Mother and children were making their way, under an awning that crossed the street, to the matinee of a fairy-play.

The Liberry Teacher smiled at the children with more than her accustomed goodwill, and lowered her umbrella quickly to let them pass. The mother smiled back, a smile that changed, as the Liberry Teacher passed, to puzzled remembrance. The gay little family went on into the theatre, and Phyllis Braithwaite hurried on back to her work, trying to think who the pretty lady could have been, to have seemed to almost remember her. Somebody who took books out of the library, doubtless. Still the pretty lady's face did not seem to fit that conjecture, though it still worried her by its vague familiarity. Finally the solution came, just as Phyllis was pulling off her raincoat in the dark little cloak-room. She nearly dropped the coat.

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"Eva Atkinson!" she said.

Eva Atkinson!... If it had been anybody else but *Eva*!

You see, back in long-ago, in the little leisurely windblown New England town where Phyllis Braithwaite had lived till she was almost eighteen, there had been a Principal Grocer. And Eva Atkinson had been his daughter, not so very pretty, not so very pleasant, not so very clever, and about six years older than Phyllis. Phyllis, as she tried vainly to make her damp, straight hair go back the way it should, remembered hearing that Eva had married and come to this city to live. She had never heard where. And this had been Eva—Eva, by the grace of gold, radiantly complexioned, wonderfully groomed, beautifully gowned, and looking twenty-four, perhaps, at most: with a car and a placid expression and *heaps* of money, and pretty, clean children! The Liberry Teacher, severely work-garbed and weather-draggled, jerked herself away from the small greenish cloak-room mirror that was unkind to you at your best.

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She dashed down to the basement, harried by her usual panic-stricken twenty-minutes-late feeling. She had only taken one glance at herself in the wiggly mirror, but that one had been enough for her peace of mind, supposing her to have had any left before. She felt as if she wanted to break all the mirrors in the world, like the wicked queen in the French fairy-tale.

Most people rather liked the face Phyllis saw in the mirror; but to her own eyes, fresh from the dazzling vision of that Eva Atkinson who had been dowdy and stupid in the far-back time when seventeen-year-old Phyllis was "growin' up as pretty as a picture," the tired, twenty-five-year-old, workaday face in the green glass was *dreadful*. What made her feel worst—and she entertained the thought with a whimsical consciousness of its impertinent vanity—was that she'd had so much more raw material than Eva! And the world had given Eva a chance because her father was rich. And she, Phyllis, was condemned to be tidy and accurate, and no more, just because she had to earn her living. That face in the greenish glass, looking tiredly back at her! She gave a little out-loud cry of vexation now as she thought of it, two hours later.

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"I must have looked to Eva like a battered bisque doll—no wonder she couldn't place me!" she muttered crossly.

And it must be worse and more of it now, because in the interval between two and four there had been many little sticky fingers pulling at her sleeves and skirt, and you just *have* to cuddle dear

little library children, even when they're not extra clean; and when Vera Aronsohn burst into heartbroken tears on the Liberry Teacher's blue woolen shoulder because her pet fairy-book was missing, she had caught several strands of the Teacher's yellow hair in her anguish, much to the hair's detriment.

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It was straight, heavy hair, and it would have been of a dense and fluffy honey-color, only that it was tarnished for lack of the constant sunnings and brushings which blonde hair must have to stay its best self. And her skin, too, that should have been a living rose-and-cream, was dulled by exposure to all weathers, and lack of time to pet it with creams and powders; perhaps a little, too, by the very stupid things to eat one gets at a dairy-lunch and boarding-house. Some of the assistants did interesting cooking over the library gas-range, but the Liberry Teacher couldn't do that because she hadn't time.

She went on defiantly thinking about her looks. It isn't a noble-minded thing to do, but when you might be so very, very pretty if you only had a little time to be it in—"Yes, I *might!*" said Phyllis to her shocked self defiantly.... Yes, the shape of her face was all right still. Hard work and scant attention couldn't spoil its pretty oval. But her eyes—well, you can't keep your eyes as blue and luminous and childlike as they were back in the New England country, when you have been using them hard for years in a bad light. And oh, they had been such *nice* eyes when she was just Phyllis Narcissa at home, so long and blue and wondering! And now the cataloguing had heaved the lids and etched a line between her straight brown brows. They weren't decorative eyes now ... and they filled with indignant self-sympathy. The Liberry Teacher laughed at herself a little here. The idea of eyes that cried about themselves was funny, somehow.

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"Direct from producer to consumer!" she quoted half-aloud, and wiped each eye conscientiously by itself.

"Teacher! I want a liberry called 'Bride of Lemon Hill!' demanded a small citizen just here. The school teacher, she says I must to have it!"

Phyllis thought hard. But she had to search the pinned-up list of required reading for schools for three solid minutes before she bestowed "The Bride of Lammermoor" on a thirteen-year-old daughter of Hungary.

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"This is it, isn't it, honey?" she asked with the flashing smile for which her children, among other things, adored her.

"Yes, ma'am, thank you, teacher," said the thirteen-year-old gratefully; and went off to a corner, where she sat till closing time entranced over her own happy choice, "The Adventures of Peter Rabbit," with colored pictures dotting it satisfactorily. The Liberry Teacher knew that it was her duty to go over and hypnotize the child into reading something which would lead more directly to Browning and Strindberg. But she didn't.

"Poor little wop!" she thought unacademically. "Let her be happy in her own way!"

And the Liberry Teacher herself went on being unhappy in *her* own way.

"I'm just a battered bisque doll!" she repeated to herself bitterly.

But she was wrong. One is apt to exaggerate things on a workaday Saturday afternoon. She looked more like a pretty bisque figurine; slim and clear-cut, and a little neglected, perhaps, by its owners, and dressed in working clothes instead of the pretty draperies it should have had; but needing only a touch or so, a little dusting, so to speak, to be as good as ever.

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"Eva *never* was as pretty as I was!" her rebellious thoughts went on. You think things, you know, that you'd never say aloud. "I'm sick of elevating the public! I'm sick of working hard fifty-one weeks out of fifty-two for board and lodging and carfare and shirtwaists and the occasional society of a few girls who don't get any more out of life than I do! I'm sick of libraries, and of being efficient! I want to be a real girl! Oh, I wish—I wish I had a lot of money, and a rose-garden, and a *husband!*"

The Liberry Teacher was aghast at herself. She hadn't meant to wish such a very unmaidenly thing so hard. She jumped up and dashed across the room and began frantically to shelf-read books, explaining meanwhile with most violent emphasis to the listening Destinies:

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"I didn't—oh, I *didn't* mean a *real* husband. It isn't that I yearn to be married to some good man, like an old maid or a Duchess novel. I—I just want all the lovely things Eva has, or any girl that *marries* them, without any trouble but taking care of a man. One man *couldn't* but be easier than a whole roomful of library babies. I want to be looked after, and have time to keep pretty, and a chance to make friends, and lovely frocks with lots of lace on them, and just months and months and months when I never had to do anything by a clock—and—and a rose-garden!"

This last idea was dangerous. It isn't a good thing, if you want to be contented with your lot, to think of rose-gardens in a stuffy city library o' Saturdays; especially when where you were brought up rose-gardens were one of the common necessities of life; and more especially when you are tired almost to the crying-point, and have all the week's big sisters back of it dragging on you, and all its little sisters to come worrying at you, and—time not up till six.

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But the Liberry Teacher went blindly on straightening shelves nearly as fast as the children could muss them up, and thinking about that rose-garden she wanted, with files of masseuses and

manicures and French maids and messenger-boys with boxes banked soothingly behind every bush. And the thought became too beautiful to dally with.

"I'd marry *anything* that would give me a rose-garden!" reiterated the Liberry Teacher passionately to the Destinies, who are rather catty ladies, and apt to catch up unguarded remarks you make. "*Anything*—so long as it was a gentleman—and he didn't scold me—and—and—I didn't have to associate with him!" her New England maidenliness added in haste.

Then, for the librarian who cannot laugh, like the one who reads, is supposed in library circles to be lost, Phyllis shook herself and laughed at herself a little, bravely. Then she collected the most uproarious of her flock around her and began telling them stories out of the "Merry Adventures of Robin Hood." It would keep the children quiet, and her thoughts, too. She put rose-gardens, not to say manicurists and husbands, severely out of her head. But you can't play fast and loose with the Destinies that way. [Pg 21]

"Done!" they had replied quietly to her last schedule of requirements. "We'll send our messenger over right away." It was not their fault that the Liberry Teacher could not hear them. [Pg 22]

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## II

He was gray-haired, pink-cheeked, curvingly side-whiskered and immaculately gray-clad; and he did not look in the least like a messenger of Fate.

The Liberry Teacher was at a highly keyed part of her narrative, and even the most fidgety children were tense and open-mouthed.

"'And where art thou now?' cried the Stranger to Robin Hood. And Robin roared with laughter. 'Oh, in the flood, and floating down the stream with all the little fishes,' said he—" she was relating breathlessly.

"*Tea-cher!*" hissed Isaac Rabinowitz, snapping his fingers at her at this exciting point. "Teacher! There's a guy wants to speak to you!"

"Aw, shut-*tup!*" chorused his indignant little schoolmates. "Can't you see that Teacher's tellin' a story? Go chase yerself! Go do a tango roun' de block!"

Isaac, a small Polish Jew with tragic, dark eyes and one suspender, received these and several more such suggestions with all the calm impenetrability of his race. [Pg 23]

"Here's de guy," was all he vouchsafed before he went back to the unsocial nook where, afternoon by faithful afternoon, he read away at a fat three-volume life of Alexander Hamilton.

The Liberry Teacher looked up without stopping her story, and smiled a familiar greeting to the elderly gentleman, who was waiting a little uncertainly at the Children's Room door, and had obviously been looking for her in vain. He smiled and nodded in return.

"Just a minute, please, Mr. De Guenther," said the Liberry Teacher cheerfully.

The elderly gentleman nodded again, crossed to Isaac and his ponderous volumes, and began to talk to him with that benign lack of haste which usually means a very competent personality. Phyllis hurried somewhat with Robin Hood among his little fishes, and felt happier. It was always, in her eventless life, something of a pleasant adventure to have Mr. De Guenther or his wife drop in to see her. There was usually something pleasant at the end of it. [Pg 24]

They were an elderly couple whom she had known for some years. They were so leisurely and trim and gentle-spoken that long ago, when she was only a timorous substitute behind the circle of the big charging-desk, she had picked them both out as people-you'd-like-if-you-got-the-chance. Then she had waited on them, and identified them by their cards as belonging to the same family. Then, one day, with a pleased little quiver of joy, she had found him in the city Who's Who, age, profession (he was a corporation lawyer), middle names, favorite recreation, and all. Gradually she had come to know them both very well in a waiting-on way. She often chose love-stories that ended happily and had colored illustrations for Mrs. De Guenther when she was at home having rheumatism; she had saved more detective stories for Mr. De Guenther than her superiors ever knew; and once she had found his black-rimmed eye-glasses where he had left them between the pages of the Pri-Zuz volume of the encyclopedia, and mailed them to him. [Pg 25]

When she had vanished temporarily from sight into the nunnery-promotion of the cataloguing room the De Guenthers had still remembered her. Twice she had been asked to Sunday dinner at their house, and had joyously gone and remembered it as joyously for months afterward. Now that she was out in the light of partial day again, in the Children's Room, she ran across both of them every little while in her errands upstairs; and once Mrs. De Guenther, gentle, lorgnetted and gray-clad, had been shown over the Children's Room. The couple lived all alone in a great, handsome old house that was being crowded now by the business district. She had always thought that if she were a Theosophist she would try to plan to have them for an uncle and aunt in her next incarnation. They suited her exactly for the parts.

But it's a long way down to the basement where city libraries are apt to keep their children, and

the De Guenthers hadn't been down there since the last time they asked her to dinner. And here, with every sign of having come to say something *very* special, stood Mr. De Guenther! Phyllis' irrepressibly cheerful disposition gave a little jump toward the light. But she went on with her story—business before pleasure!

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However, she did manage to get Robin Hood out of his brook a little more quickly than she had planned. She scattered her children with a swift executive whisk, and made so straight for her friend that she deceived the children into thinking they were going to see him expelled, and they banked up and watched with anticipatory grins.

"I do hope you want to see me especially!" she said brightly.

The children, disappointed, relaxed their attention.

Mr. De Guenther rose slowly and neatly from his seat beside the rather bored Isaac Rabinowitz, who dived into his book again with alacrity.

"Good afternoon, Miss Braithwaite," he said in the amiably precise voice which matched so admirably his beautifully precise movements and his immaculate gray spats. "Yes. In the language of our young friend here, 'I am the guy.'"

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Phyllis giggled before she thought. Some people in the world always make your spirits go up with a bound, and the De Guenther pair invariably had that effect on her.

"Oh, Mr. De Guenther!" she said, "I am shocked at you! That's slang!"

"It was more in the nature of a quotation," said he apologetically. "And how are you this exceedingly unpleasant day, Miss Braithwaite? We have seen very little of you lately, Mrs. De Guenther and I."

The Liberry Teacher, gracefully respectful in her place, wriggled with invisible impatience over this carefully polite conversational opening. He had come down here on purpose to see her—there must be something going to happen, even if it was only a request to save a seven-day book for Mrs. De Guenther! Nobody ever wanted *something*, any kind of a something, to happen more wildly than the Liberry Teacher did that bored, stickily wet Saturday afternoon, with those tired seven years at the Greenway Branch dragging at the back of her neck, and the seven times seven to come making her want to scream. So few things can possibly happen to you, no matter how good you are, when you work by the day. And now maybe something—oh, please, the very smallest kind of a something would be welcomed!—was going to occur. Maybe Mrs. De Guenther had sent her a ticket to a concert; she had once before. Or maybe, since you might as well wish for big things while you're at it, it might even be a ticket to an expensive seat in a real theatre! Her pleasure-hungry, work-heavy blue eyes burned luminous at the idea.

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"But I really shouldn't wish," she reminded her prancing mind belatedly. "He may only have come down to talk about the weather. It mayn't any of it be true."

So she stood up straight and gravely, and answered very courteously and holding-tightly all the amiable roundabout remarks the old gentleman was shoving forward like pawns on a chessboard before the real game begins. She answered with the same trained cheerfulness she could give her library children when her head and her disposition ached worst; and even warmed to a vicious enthusiasm over the state of the streets and the wetness of the damp weather.

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"He knows lots of real things to say," she complained to herself, "why doesn't he say them, instead of talking editorials? I suppose this is his bedside—no, lawyers don't have bedside manners—well, his barside manner, then——"

It is difficult to think and listen at the same time: by this time she had missed a beautiful long paragraph about the Street-Cleaning Department; and something else, apparently. For her friend was holding out to her a note addressed to her flowingly in his wife's English hand, and was saying,

"—which she has asked me to deliver. I trust you have no imperative engagement for to-morrow night."

Something *had* happened!

"Why, no!" said the Liberry Teacher delightedly. "No, indeed! Thank you, and her, too. I'd love to come."

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"Teacher!" clamored a small chocolate-colored citizen in a Kewpie muffler, "my maw she want' a book call' 'Ugwin!' She say it got a yellow cover an' pictures in it."

"Just a moment!" said Phyllis; and sent him upstairs with a note asking for "Hugh Wynne" in the two-volume edition. She was used to translating that small colored boy's demands. Last week he had described to her a play he called "Eas' Limb", with the final comment, "But it wan't no good. 'Twant no limb in it anywhar, ner no trees atall!"

"Do you have much of that?" Mr. De Guenther asked idly.

"Lots!" said Phyllis cheerfully. "You take special training in guesswork at library school. They call them 'teasers'. They say they're good for your intellect."



"Ah—yes," said Mr. De Guenther absently in the barside manner.

And then, sitting calmly with his silvery head against a Washington's Birthday poster so that three scarlet cherries stuck above him in the manner of a scalp-lock, he said something else remarkably real:

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"I have—we have—a little matter of business to discuss with you to-morrow night, my dear; an offer, I may say, of a different line of work. And I want you to satisfy yourself thoroughly—thoroughly, my dear child, of my reputableness. Mr. Johnstone, the chief of the city library, whose office I believe to be in this branch, is one of my oldest friends. I am, I think I may say, well known as a lawyer in this my native city. I should be glad to have you satisfy yourself personally on these points, because—" could it be that the eminently poised Mr. De Guenther was embarrassed? "Because the line of work which I wish, or rather my wife wishes, to lay before you is—is a very different line of work!" ended the old gentleman inconclusively. There was no mistake about it this time—he *was* embarrassed.

"Oh, Mr. De Guenther!" cried Phyllis before she thought, out of the fulness of her heart, catching his arm in her eagerness; "Oh, Mr. De Guenther, *could* the Very Different Line of Work have a—have a *rose-garden* attached to it anywhere?"

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Before she was fairly finished she knew what a silly question she had asked. How could any line of work she was qualified to do possibly have rose-gardens attached to it? You can't catalogue roses on neat cards, or improve their minds by the Newark Ladder System, or do anything at all librarious to them, except pressing them in books to mummify; and the Liberry Teacher didn't think that was at all a courteous thing to do to roses. So Mr. De Guenther's reply quite surprised her.

"There—seems—to be—no good reason," he said, slowly and placidly, as if he were dropping his words one by one out of a slot;—"why there should not—be—a very satisfactory rose-garden, or even—*two*—connected with it. None—whatever."

That was all the explanation he offered. But the Liberry Teacher asked no more. "*Oh!*" she said rapturously.

"Then we may expect you to-morrow at seven?" he said; and smiled politely and moved to the door. He walked out as matter-of-coursely as if he had dropped in to ask the meaning of "circumflex," or who invented smallpox, or the name of Adam's house-cat, or how long it would take her to do a graduation essay for his daughter—or any such little things that librarians are prepared for most days.

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And instead—his neat gray elderly back seemed to deny it—he had left with her, the Liberry Teacher, her, dusty, tousled, shopworn Phyllis Braithwaite, an invitation to consider a Line of Work which was so mysteriously Different that she had to look up the spotless De Guenther reputation before she came!

One loses track of time, staring at a red George Washington poster, and wondering about a future with a sudden Different Line in it.... It was ten minutes past putting-out-children time! She stared aghast at the ruthless clock, then created two Monitors for Putting Out at one royal sweep. She managed the nightly eviction with such gay expedition that it almost felt like ten minutes ago when the place, except for the pride-swollen monitors, was cleared. While these officers watched the commonalty clumping reluctantly upstairs toward the umbrella-rack, the Liberry Teacher paced sedately around the shelves, giving the books that routine straightening they must have before seven struck and the horde rushed in again. It was really her relieving officer's work, but the Liberry Teacher felt that her mind needed straightening, too, and this always seemed to do it.

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She looked, as she moved slowly down along the shelves, very much like most of the librarians you see; alert, pleasant, slender, a little dishevelled, a little worn. But there was really no librarian there. There was only Phyllis Narcissa—that dreaming young Phyllis who had had to stay pushed out of sight all the seven years that Miss Braithwaite had been efficiently earning her living.

She let her mind stray happily as far as it would over the possibilities Mr. De Guenther had held out to her, and woke to discover herself trying to find a place under "Domestic Economy—Condiments" for "Five Little Peppers and How They Grew." She laughed aloud in the suddenly empty room, and then lifted her head to find Miss Black, the night-duty girl that week, standing in the doorway ready to relieve guard.

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"Oh, Anna, see what I've done!" she laughed. Somehow everything seemed merely light-hearted and laughable since Mr. De Guenther's most fairy-tale visit, with its wild hints of Lines of Work. Anna Black came, looked, laughed.

"In the 640's!" she said. "Well, you're liable to do nearly everything by the time it's Saturday. Last Saturday, Dolly Graham up in the Circulation was telling me, an old colored mammy said she'd lost her mittens in the reading-room; and the first they knew Dolly was hunting through the Woollen Goods classification, and Mary Gayley pawing the dictionary wildly for m-i-t!"

"And they found the mittens hung around her neck by the cord," finished the Liberry Teacher. "I know—it was a thrilling story. Well, good-by till Monday, Anna Black. I'm going home now, to have some lovely prunes and some real dried beef, and maybe a glass of almost-milk if I can



persuade the landlady I need it."

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"Mine prefers dried apricots," responded Miss Black cheerfully, "but she never has anything but canned milk in the house, thus sparing us the embarrassment of asking for real. Good-by—good luck!"

But as the Liberry Teacher pinned her serviceable hat close, and fastened her still good raincoat over her elderly sweater, neither prunes nor mittens nor next week's work worried her at all. After all, living among the fairy-stories with the Little People makes that pleasant land where wanting is having, and all the impossibilities can come true, very easy of access. Phyllis Braithwaite's mind, as she picked her way down the bedraggled street, wandered innocently off in a dream-pace full of roses, till the muddy marble steps of her boarding-place gleamed sloppily before her through the foggy rain.

She sat up late that night, doing improving things to the white net waist that went with her best suit, which was black. As her needle nibbled busily down the seams she continued happily to wonder about that Entirely Different Line. It sounded to her more like a reportership on a yellow journal than anything else imaginable. Or, perhaps, could she be wanted to join the Secret Service?

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"At any rate," she concluded light-heartedly, as she stitched the last clean ruching into the last wrist-covering, sedate sleeve, "at any rate I'll have a chance to-morrow to wear mother's gold earrings that I mustn't have on in the library. And oh, how lovely it will be to have a dinner that wasn't cooked by a poor old bored boarding-house cook or a shiny tiled syndicate!"

And she went to bed—to dream of Entirely Different Lines all the colors of the rainbow, that radiated out from the Circulation Desk like tight-ropes. She never remembered Eva Atkinson's carefully prettied face, or her own vivid, work-worn one, at all. She only dreamed that far at the end of the pink Entirely Different Line—a very hard one to walk—there was a rose-garden exactly like a patchwork quilt, where she was to be.

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### III

When Phyllis woke next morning everything in the world had a light-hearted, holiday feeling. Her Sundays, gloriously unoccupied, generally did, but this was extra-special. The rain had managed to clear away every vestige of last week's slush, and had then itself most unselfishly retired down the gutters. The sun shone as if May had come, and the wind, through the Liberry Teacher's window, had a springy, pussy-willow, come-for-a-walk-in-the-country feel to it. She found that she had slept too late to go to church, and prepared for a joyful dash to the boarding-house bathtub. There might be—who knew but there actually might be—on this day of days, enough hot water for a real bath!

"I feel as if everything was going to be lovely all day!" she said without preface to old black Maggie, who was clumping her accustomed bed-making way along the halls, with her woolly head tied up in her Sunday silk handkerchief. Even she looked happier, Phyllis thought, than she had yesterday. She grinned broadly at Phyllis, leaning smilingly against the door in her kimona.

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"Ah dunno, Miss Braithways," she said, and entered the room and took a pillow-case-corner in her mouth. "Ah never has dem premeditations!"

Phyllis laughed frankly, and Maggie, much flattered at the happy reception of her reply, grinned so widely that you might almost have tied her mouth behind her ears.

"You sure is a cheerful person, Miss Braithways!" said Maggie, and went on making the bed.

Phyllis fled on down the hall, laughing still. She had just remembered another of old Maggie's compliments, made on one of the rare occasions when Phyllis had sat down and sung to the boarding-house piano. (She hadn't been able to do it long, because the Mental Science Lady on the next floor had sent down word that it stopped her from concentrating, and as she had a very expensive room there was nothing for the landlady to do but make Phyllis stop.) Phyllis had come out in the hall to find old Maggie listening rapturously.

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"Oh, Miss Braithways!" she had murmured, rolling her eyes, "you certainly does equalize a martingale!"

It had been a compliment Phyllis never forgot. She smiled to herself as she found the bathroom door open. Why, the world was full of a number of things, many of them funny. Being a Liberry Teacher was rather nice, after all, when you were fresh from a long night's sleep. And if that Mental Science Lady *wouldn't* let her play the piano, why, her thrilling tales of what she could do when her mind was unfettered were worth the price. That story she told so seriously about how the pipes burst—and the plumber wouldn't come, and "My dear, I gave those pipes only half an hour's treatment, and they closed right up!" It was quite as much fun—well, almost as much—hearing her, as it would have been to play.

... All of the contented, and otherwise, elderly people who inhabited the boarding-house with Phyllis appeared to have gone off without using hot water, for there actually was some. The

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Liberry Teacher found that she could have a genuine bath, and have enough water besides to wash her hair, which is a rite all girls who work have to reserve for Sundays. This was surely a day of days!

She used the water—alas for selfish human nature!—to the last warm drop and went gayly back to her little room with no emotions whatever for the poor other boarders, soon to find themselves wrathfully hot-waterless. And then—she thoughtlessly curled down on the bed, and slept and slept and slept! She wakened dimly in time for the one o'clock dinner, dressed, and ate it in a half-sleep. She went back upstairs planning a trolley-ride that should take her out into the country, where a long walk might be had. And midway in changing her shoes she lay back across the bed and—fell asleep again. The truth was, Phyllis was about as tired as a girl can get.

She waked at dusk, with a jerk of terror lest she should have overslept her time for going out. But it was only six. She had a whole hour to prink in, which is a very long time for people who are used to being in the library half-an-hour after the alarm-clock wakes them.

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Some houses, all of themselves, and before you meet a soul who lives in them, are silently indifferent to you. Some make you feel that you are not wanted in the least; these usually have a lot of gilt furniture, and what are called objects of art set stiffly about. Some seem to be having an untidy good time all to themselves, in which you are not included.

The De Guenther house, staid and softly toned, did none of these things. It gave the Liberry Teacher, in her neat, last year's best suit, a feeling as of gentle welcome-home. She felt contented and *belonging* even before quick-smiling, slender little Mrs. De Guenther came rustling gently in to greet her. Then followed Mr. De Guenther, pleasant and unperturbed as usual, and after him an agreeable, back-arching gray cat, who had copied his master's walk as exactly as it can be done with four feet.

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All four sat amiably about the room and held precise and pleasant converse, something like a cheerful essay written in dialogue, about many amusing, intelligent things which didn't especially matter. The Liberry Teacher liked it. It was pleasant beyond words to sit nestlingly in a pluffy chair, and hear about all the little lightly-treated scholarly day-before-yesterday things her father had used to talk of. She carried on her own small part in the talk blithely enough. She approved of herself and the way she was behaving, which makes very much for comfort. There was only once that she was ashamed of herself, and thought about it in bed afterwards and was mortified; when her eyes filled with quick tears at a quite dry and unemotional—indeed, rather a sarcastic—quotation from Horace on the part of Mr. De Guenther. But she smiled, when she saw that they noticed her.

"That's the first time I've heard a Latin quotation since I came away from home," she found herself saying quite simply in explanation, "and Father quoted Horace so much every day that—that I felt as if an old friend had walked in!"

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But her hosts didn't seem to mind. Mr. De Guenther in his careful evening clothes looked swiftly across at Mrs. De Guenther in her gray-silk-and-cameo, and they both nodded little satisfied nods, as if she had spoken in a way that they were glad to hear. And then dinner was served, a dinner as different—well, she didn't want to remember in its presence the dinners it differed from; they might have clouded the moment. She merely ate it with a shameless inward joy.

It ended, still to a pleasant effortless accompaniment of talk about books and music and pictures that Phyllis was interested in, and had found nobody to share her interest with for so long—so long! She felt happily running through everything the general, easy taking-for-granted of all the old, gentle, inflexible standards of breeding that she had nearly forgotten, down in the heart of the city among her obstreperous, affectionate little foreigners.

They had coffee in the long old-fashioned salon parlor, and then Mr. De Guenther straightened himself, and Mrs. De Guenther folded her veined, ringed old white hands, and Phyllis prepared thrilledly to listen. Surely now she would hear about that Different Line of Work.

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There was nothing, at first, about work of any sort. They merely began to tell her alternately about some clients of theirs, a Mrs. Harrington and her son: rather interesting people, from what Phyllis could make out. She wondered if she was going to hear that they needed a librarian.

"This lady, my client, Mrs. Harrington," continued her host gravely, "is the one for whom I may ask you to consider doing some work. I say may, but it is a practical certainty. She is absolutely alone, my dear Miss Braithwaite, except for her son. I am afraid I must ask you to listen to a long story about them."

It was coming!

"Oh, but I want to hear!" said Phyllis, with that quick, affectionate sympathy of hers that was so winning, leaning forward and watching them with the lighted look in her blue eyes. It all seemed to her tired, alert mind like some story she might have read to her children, an Arabian Nights narrative which might begin, "And the Master of the House, ascribing praise unto Allah, repeated the following Tale."

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"There have always been just the two of them, mother and son," said the Master of the House.

"And Allan has always been a very great deal to his mother."

"Poor Angela!" murmured his wife.

"They are old friends of ours," her husband explained. "My wife and Mrs. Harrington were schoolmates.

"Well, Allan, the boy, grew up, dowered with everything a mother could possibly desire for her son, personally and otherwise. He was handsome and intelligent, with much charm of manner."

"I know now what people mean by 'talking like a book,'" thought Phyllis irreverently. "And I don't believe any one man *could* be all that!"

"There was practically nothing," Mr. De Guenther went on, "which the poor lad had not. That was one trouble, I imagine. If he had not been highly intelligent he would not have studied so hard; if he had not been strong and active he might not have taken up athletic sports so whole-heartedly; and when I add that Allan possessed charm, money and social status you may see that what he did would have broken down most young fellows. In short, he kept studies, sports and social affairs all going at high pressure during his four years of college. But he was young and strong, and might not have felt so much ill effects from all that; though his doctors said afterwards that he was nearly at the breaking point when he graduated."

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Phyllis bent closer to the story-teller in her intense interest. Why, it *was* like one of her fairytales! She held her breath to listen, while the old lawyer went gravely on.

"Allan could not have been more than twenty-two when he graduated, and it was a very short while afterwards that he became engaged to a young girl, the daughter of a family friend. Louise Frey was her name, was it not, love?"

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"Yes, that is right," said his wife, "Louise Frey."

"A beautiful girl," he went on, "dark, with a brilliant color, and full of life and good spirits. They were both very young, but there was no good reason why the marriage should be delayed, and it was set for the following September."

A princess, too, in the story! But—where had she gone? "The two of them only," he had said.

"It must have been scarcely a month," the story went on—Mr. De Guenther was telling it as if he were stating a case—"nearly a month before the date set for the wedding, when the lovers went for a long automobile ride, across a range of mountains near a country-place where they were both staying. They were alone in the machine.

"Allan, of course, was driving, doubtless with a certain degree of impetuosity, as he did most things.... They were on an unfrequented part of the road," said Mr. De Guenther, lowering his voice, "when there occurred an unforeseen wreckage in the car's machinery. The car was thrown over and badly splintered. Both young people were pinned under it.

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"So far as he knew at the time, Allan was not injured, nor was he in any pain; but he was held in absolute inability to move by the car above him. Miss Frey, on the contrary, was badly hurt, and in suffering. She died in about three hours, a little before relief came to them."

Phyllis clutched the arms of her chair, thrilled and wide-eyed. She could imagine all the horror of the happening through the old lawyer's precise and unemotional story. The boy-lover, pinioned, helpless, condemned to watch his sweetheart dying by inches, and unable to help her by so much as lifting a hand—could anything be more awful not only to endure, but to remember?

"And yet," she thought whimsically, "it mightn't be so bad to have one *real* tragedy to remember, if you haven't anything else! All *I'll* have to remember when I'm old will be bad little children and good little children, and books and boarding-houses, and the recollection that people said I was a very worthy young woman once!" But she threw off the thought. It's just as well not to think of old age when all the idea brings up is a vision of a nice, clean Old Ladies' Home.

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"But you said he was an invalid?" she said aloud.

"Yes, I regret to say," answered Mr. De Guenther. "You see, it was found that the shock to the nerves, acting on an already over-keyed mind and body, together with some spinal blow concerning which the doctors are still in doubt, had affected Allan's powers of locomotion." (Mr. De Guenther certainly did like long words!) "He has been unable to walk since. And, which is sadder, his state of mind and body has become steadily worse. He can scarcely move at all now, and his mental attitude can only be described as painfully morbid—yes, I may say *very* painfully morbid. Sometimes he does not speak at all for days together, even to his mother, or his attendant."

"Oh, poor boy!" said Phyllis. "How long has he been this way?"

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"Seven years this fall," the answer came consideringly. "Is it not, love?"

"Yes," said his wife, "seven years."

"*Oh!*" said the Liberry Teacher, with a quick catch of sympathy at her heart.

Just as long as she had been working for her living in the big, dusty library. Supposing—oh, supposing she'd had to live all that time in such suffering as this poor Allan had endured and his

mother had had to witness! She felt suddenly as if the grimy, restless Children's Room, with its clatter of turbulent little outland voices, were a safe, sunny paradise in comparison.

Mr. De Guenther did not speak. He visibly braced himself and was visibly ill-at-ease.

"I have told most of the story, Isabel, love," said he at last. "Would you not prefer to tell the rest? It is at your instance that I have undertaken this commission for Mrs. Harrington, you will remember."

It struck Phyllis that he didn't think it was quite a dignified commission, at that.

"Very well, my dear," said his wife, and took up the tale in her swift, soft voice.

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"You can fancy, my dear Miss Braithwaite, how intensely his mother has felt about it."

"Indeed, yes!" said Phyllis pitifully.

"Her whole life, since the accident, has been one long devotion to her son. I don't think a half-hour ever passes that she does not see him. But in spite of this constant care, as my husband has told you, he grows steadily worse. And poor Angela has finally broken under the strain. She was never strong. She is dying now—they give her maybe two months more.

"Her one anxiety, of course, is for poor Allan's welfare. You can imagine how you would feel if you had to leave an entirely helpless son or brother to the mercies of hired attendants, however faithful. And they have no relatives—they are the last of the family."

The listening girl began to see. She was going to be asked to act as nurse, perhaps attendant and guardian, to this morbid invalid with the injured mind and body.



**"NO," SAID MRS. DE GUENTHER GRAVELY. "YOU WOULD NOT. YOU WOULD HAVE TO BE HIS WIFE"**

"But how would I be any better for him than a regular trained nurse?" she wondered. "And they said he had an attendant." [Pg 53]

She looked questioningly at the pair.

"Where does my part come in?" she asked with a certain sweet directness which was sometimes hers. "Wouldn't I be a hireling too if—if I had anything to do with it?"

"No," said Mrs. De Guenther gravely. "You would not. You would have to be his wife."

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The Liberry Teacher, in her sober best suit, sat down in her entirely commonplace chair in the quiet old parlor, and looked unbelievably at the sedate elderly couple who had made her this wild proposition. She caught her breath. But catching her breath did not seem to affect anything that had been said. Mr. De Guenther took up the explanation again, a little deprecatingly, she thought.

"You see now why I requested you to investigate our reputability?" he said. "Such a proposition as this, especially to a young lady who has no parent or guardian, requires a considerable guarantee of good faith and honesty of motive."

"Will you please tell me more about it?" she asked quietly. She did not feel now as if it were anything which had especially to do with her. It seemed more like an interesting story she was unravelling sentence by sentence. The long, softly lighted old room, with its Stuarts and Sullys, and its gracious, gray-haired host and hostess, seemed only a picturesque part of it.... Her hostess caught up the tale again.

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"Angela has been nearly distracted," she said. "And the idea has come to her that if she could find some conscientious woman, a lady, and a person to whom what she could offer would be a consideration, who would take charge of poor Allan, that she could die in peace."

"But why did you think of asking me?" the girl asked breathlessly. "And why does she want me married to him? And how could you or she be sure that I would not be as much of a hireling as any nurse she may have now?"

Mrs. De Guenther answered the last two questions together.

"Mrs. Harrington's idea is, and I think rightly, that a conscientious woman would feel the marriage tie, however nominal, a bond that would obligate her to a certain duty toward her husband. As to why we selected you, my dear, my husband and I have had an interest in you for some years, as you know. We have spoken of you as a girl whom we should like for a relative——"

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"Why, isn't that strange?" cried Phyllis, dimpling. "That's just what I've thought about you!"

Mrs. De Guenther flushed, with a delicate old shyness.

"Thank you, dear child," she said. "I was about to add that we have not seen you at your work all these years without knowing you to have the kind heart and sense of honor requisite to poor Angela's plan. We feel sure you could be trusted to take the place. Mr. De Guenther has asked his friend Mr. Johnston, the head of the library, such things as we needed to supplement our personal knowledge of you. You have everything that could be asked, even to a certain cheerfulness of outlook which poor Angela, naturally, lacks in a measure."

"But—but what about *me*?" asked Phyllis Braithwaite a little piteously, in answer to all this.

They seemed so certain she was what they wanted—was there anything in this wild scheme that would make *her* life better than it was as the tired, ill-paid, light-hearted keeper of a roomful of turbulent little foreigners?

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"Unless you are thinking of marriage—" Phyllis shook her head—"you would have at least a much easier life than you have now. Mrs. Harrington would settle a liberal income on you, contingent, of course, of your faithful wardership over Allan. We would be your only judges as to that. You would have a couple or more months of absolute freedom every year, control of much of your own time, ample leisure to enjoy it. You would give only your chances of actual marriage for perhaps five years, for poor Allan cannot live longer than that at his present state of retrogression, and some part of every day to seeing that Allan was not neglected. If you bestow on him half of the interest and effort I have known of your giving any one of a dozen little immigrant boys, his mother has nothing to fear for him."

Mr. De Guenther stopped with a grave little bow, and he and his wife waited for the reply.

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The Liberry Teacher sat silent, her eyes on her slim hands, that were roughened and reddened by constant hurried washings to get off the dirt of the library books. It was true—a good deal of it, anyhow. And one thing they had not said was true also: her sunniness and accuracy and strength, her stock-in-trade, were wearing thin under the pressure of too long hours and too hard work and too few personal interests. Her youth was worn down. And—marriage? What chance of love and marriage had she, a working-girl alone, too poor to see anything of the class of men she would be willing to marry? She had not for years spent six hours with a man of her own kind and age. She had not even been specially in love, that she could remember, since she was grown up. She did not feel much, now, as if she ever would be. All that she had to give up in taking this offer was her freedom, such as it was—and those fluttering perhapses that whisper such pleasant promises when you are young. But, then, she wouldn't be young so *very* much longer. Should she—she put it to herself crudely—should she wait long, hard, closed-in years in the faith that she would learn to be absolutely contented, or that some man she could love would come to the cheap boarding-house, or the little church she attended occasionally when she was not too tired, fall in love with her work-dimmed looks at sight, and—marry her? It had not happened all these years while her girlhood had been more attractive and her personality more untired. There was scarcely a chance in a hundred for her of a kind lover-husband and such dear picture-book children as she had seen Eva Atkinson conveying. Well—her mind suddenly came up against the remembrance, as against a sober fact, that in her passionate wishings of yesterday she had not wished for a lover-husband, nor for children. She had asked for a husband who would give her money, and leisure to be

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rested and pretty, and—a rose-garden! And here, apparently, was her wish uncannily fulfilled.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" inquired the Destinies with their traditional indifference. "We can't wait all night!" [Pg 60]

She lifted her head and cast an almost frightened look at the De Guenthers, waiting courteously for her decision. In reply to the look, Mr. De Guenther began giving her details about the money, and the leisure time, and the business terms of the contract generally. She listened attentively. All that—for a little guardianship, a little kindness, and the giving-up of a little piece of life nobody wanted and a few little hopes and dreams!

Phyllis laughed, as she always did when there were big black problems to be solved.

"After all, it's fairly usual," she said. "I heard last week of a woman who left money along with her pet dog, very much the same way."

"Did you? Did you, dear?" asked Mrs. De Guenther, beaming. "Then you think you will do it?"

The Liberry Teacher rose, and squared her straight young shoulders under the worn net waist. [Pg 61]

"If Mrs. Harrington thinks I'll do for the situation!" she said gallantly,—and laughed again.

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"It feels partly like going into a nunnery and partly like going into a fairy-story," she said to herself that night as she wound her alarm. "But—I wonder if anybody's remembered to ask the consent of the groom!" [Pg 62]

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## V

He looked like a young Crusader on a tomb. That was Phyllis's first impression of Allan Harrington. He talked and acted, if a moveless man can be said to act, like a bored, spoiled small boy. That was her second.

Mrs. Harrington, fragile, flushed, breathlessly intense in her wheel-chair, had yet a certain resemblance in voice and gesture to Mrs. De Guenther—a resemblance which puzzled Phyllis till she placed it as the mark of that far-off ladies' school they had attended together. There was also a graceful, mincing white wolfhound which, contrary to the accepted notion of invalids' faithful hounds, didn't seem to care for his master's darkened sick-room at all, but followed the one sunny spot in Mrs. Harrington's room with a wistful persistence. It was such a small spot for such a long wolfhound—that was the principal thing which impressed itself on Phyllis's frightened mind throughout her visit. [Pg 63]

Mrs. De Guenther convoyed her to the Harrington house for inspection a couple of days after she had accepted some one's proposal to marry Allan Harrington. (Whether it counted as her future mother-in-law's proposal, or her future trustee's, she was never sure. The only sure thing was that it did not come from the groom.) She had borrowed a half-day from the future on purpose, though she did not want to go at all. But the reality was not bad; only a fluttering, emotional little woman who clung to her hands and talked to her and asked useless questions with a nervous insistence which would have been nerve-wearing for a steady thing, but was only pitiful to a stranger.

You see strange people all the time in library work, and learn to place them, at length, with almost as much accuracy as you do your books. The fact that Mrs. Harrington was not long for this world did not prevent Phyllis from classing her, in her mental card-catalogue, as a very perfect specimen of the Loving Nagger. She was lying back, wrapped in something gray and soft, when her visitors came, looking as if the lifting of her hand would be an effort. She was evidently pitifully weak. But she had, too, an ineradicable vitality she could summon at need. She sprang almost upright to greet her visitors, a hand out to each, an eager flood of words on her lips. [Pg 64]

"And you are Miss Braithwaite, that is going to look after my boy?" she ended. "Oh, it is so good of you—I am so glad—I can go in peace now. Are you sure—sure you will know the minute his attendants are the least bit negligent? I watch and watch them all the time. I tell Allan to ring for me if anything ever is the least bit wrong—I am always begging him to remember. I go in every night and pray with him—do you think you could do that? But I always cry so before I'm through—I cry and cry—my poor, helpless boy—he was so strong and bright! And you are sure you are conscientious——"

At this point Phyllis stopped the flow of Mrs. Harrington's conversation firmly, if sweetly. [Pg 65]

"Yes, indeed," she said cheerfully. "But you know, if I'm not, Mr. De Guenther can stop all my allowance. It wouldn't be to my own interest not to fulfil my duties faithfully."

"Yes, that is true," said Mrs. Harrington. "That was a good thought of mine. My husband always said I was an unusual woman where business was concerned."

So they went on the principle that she had no honor beyond working for what she would get out

of it! Although she had made the suggestion herself, Phyllis's cheeks burned, and she was about to answer sharply. Then somehow the poor, anxious, loving mother's absolute preoccupation with her son struck her as right after all.

"If it were my son," thought Phyllis, "I wouldn't worry about any strange hired girl's feelings either, maybe. I'd just think about him.... I promise I'll look after Mr. Harrington's welfare as if he were my own brother!" she ended aloud impulsively. "Indeed, you may trust me."

"I am—sure you will," panted Mrs. Harrington. "You look like—a good girl, and—and old enough to be responsible—twenty-eight—thirty?" [Pg 66]

"Not very far from that," said Phyllis serenely.

"And you are sure you will know when the attendants are neglectful? I speak to them all the time, but I never can be sure.... And now you'd better see poor Allan. This is one of his good days. Just think, dear Isabel, he spoke to me twice without my speaking to him this morning!"

"Oh—must I?" asked Phyllis, dismayed. "Couldn't I wait till—till it happens?"

Mrs. Harrington actually laughed a little at her shyness, lighting up like a girl. Phyllis felt dimly, though she tried not to, that through it all her mother-in-law-elect was taking pleasure in the dramatic side of the situation she had engineered.

"Oh, my dear, you must see him. He expects you," she answered almost gayly. The procession of three moved down the long room towards a door, Phyllis's hand guiding the wheel-chair. She was surprised to find herself shaking with fright. Just what she expected to find beyond the door she did not know, but it must have been some horror, for it was with a heart-bound of wild relief that she finally made out Allan Harrington, lying white in the darkened place. [Pg 67]

A Crusader on a tomb. Yes, he looked like that. In the room's half-dusk the pallor of his still, clear-featured face and his long, clear-cut hands was nearly the same as the whiteness of the couch-draperies. His hair, yellow-brown and waving, flung back from his forehead like a crest, and his dark brows and lashes made the only note of darkness about him. To Phyllis's beauty-loving eyes he seemed so perfect an image that she could have watched him for hours.

"Here's Miss Braithwaite, my poor darling," said his mother. "The young lady we have been talking about so long."

The Crusader lifted his eyelids and let them fall again.

"Is she?" he said listlessly.

"Don't you want to talk to her, darling boy?" his mother persisted, half out of breath, but still full of that unrebuffable, loving energy and insistence which she would probably keep to the last minute of her life. [Pg 68]

"No," said the Crusader, still in those empty, listless tones. "I'd rather not talk. I'm tired."

His mother seemed not at all put out.

"Of course, darling," she said, kissing him. She sat by him still, however, and poured out sentence after sentence of question, insistence, imploration, and pity, eliciting no answer at all. Phyllis wondered how it would feel to have to lie still and have that done to you for a term of years. The result of her wonderment was a decision to forgive her unenthusiastic future bridegroom for what she had at first been ready to slap him.

Presently Mrs. Harrington's breath flagged, and the three women went away, back to the room they had been in before. Phyllis sat and let herself be talked to for a little longer. Then she rose impulsively.

"May I go back and see your son again for just a minute?" she asked, and had gone before Mrs. Harrington had finished her permission. She darted into the dark room before her courage had time to fail, and stood by the white couch again. [Pg 69]

"Mr. Harrington," she said clearly, "I'm sorry you're tired, but I'm afraid I am going to have to ask you to listen to me. You know, don't you, that your mother plans to have me marry you, for a sort of interested head-nurse? Are you willing to have it happen? Because I won't do it unless you really prefer it."

The heavy white lids half-lifted again.

"I don't mind," said Allan Harrington listlessly. "I suppose you are quiet and trustworthy, or De Guenther wouldn't have sent you. It will give mother a little peace and it makes no difference to me."

He closed his eyes and the subject at the same time.

"Well, then, that's all right," said Phyllis cheerfully, and started to go. Then, drawn back by a sudden, nervous temper-impulse, she moved back on him. "And let me tell you," she added, half-laughing, half-impertinently, "that if you ever get into my quiet, trustworthy clutches you may have an awful time! You're a very spoiled invalid." [Pg 70]

She whisked out of the room before he could have gone very far with his reply. But he had not



cared to reply, apparently. He lay unmoved and unmoving.

Phyllis discovered, poising breathless on the threshold, that somehow she had seen his eyes. They had been a little like the wolfhound's, a sort of wistful gold-brown.

For some reason she found that Allan Harrington's attitude of absolute detachment made the whole affair seem much easier for her. And when Mrs. Harrington slipped a solitaire diamond into her hand as she went, instead of disliking it she enjoyed its feel on her finger, and the flash of it in the light. She thanked Mrs. Harrington for it with real gratitude. But it made her feel more than ever engaged to marry her mother-in-law.

She walked home rather silently with Mrs. De Guenther. Only at the foot of the De Guenther steps, she made one absent remark.

"He must have been delightful," she said, "when he was alive!"

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## VI

After a week of the old bustling, dusty hard work, the Liberry Teacher's visit to the De Guenthers' and the subsequent one at the Harringtons', and even her sparkling white ring, seemed part of a queer story she had finished and put back on the shelf. The ring was the most real thing, because it was something of a worry. She didn't dare leave it at home, nor did she want to wear it. She finally sewed it in a chamois bag that she safety-pinned under her shirt-waist. Then she dismissed it from her mind also. There is very little time in a Liberry Teacher's life for meditation. Only once in a while would come to her the vision of the wistful Harrington wolfhound following his inadequate patch of sunlight, or of the dusky room where Allan Harrington lay inert and white, and looking like a wonderful carved statue on a tomb.

She began to do a little to her clothes, but not very much, because she had neither time nor money. Mr. De Guenther had wanted her to take some money in advance, but she had refused. She did not want it till she had earned it, and, anyway, it would have made the whole thing so real, she knew, that she would have backed out.

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"And it isn't as if I were going to a lover," she defended herself to Mrs. De Guenther with a little wistful smile. "Nobody will know what I have on, any more than they do now."

Mrs. De Guenther gave a scandalized little cry. Her attitude was determinedly that it was just an ordinary marriage, as good an excuse for sentiment and pretty frocks as any other.

"My dear child," she replied firmly, "you are going to have one pretty frock and one really good street-suit *now*, or I will know why! The rest you may get yourself after the wedding, but you must obey me in this. Nonsense!—you can get a half-day, as you call it, perfectly well! What's Albert in politics for, if he can't get favors for his friends!"

And, in effect, it proved that Albert was in politics to some purpose, for orders came up from the Head's office within twenty minutes after Mrs. De Guenther had used the telephone on her husband, that Miss Braithwaite was to have a half-day immediately—as far as she could make out, in order to transact city affairs! She felt as if the angels had told her she could have the last fortnight over again, as a favor, or something of the sort. A half-day out of turn was something nobody had ever heard of. She was even too surprised to object to the frock part of the situation. She tried to stand out a little longer, but it's a very stoical young woman who can refuse to have pretty clothes bought for her, and the end of it was a seat in a salon which she had always considered so expensive that you scarcely ought to look in the window.

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"Had it better be a black suit?" asked Mrs. De Guenther doubtfully, as the tall lady in floppy charmeuse hovered haughtily about them, expecting orders. "It seems horrible to buy mourning when dear Angela is not yet passed away, but it would only be showing proper respect; and I remember my own dear mother planned all our mourning outfits while she was dying. It was quite a pleasure to her."

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Phyllis kept her face straight, and slipped one persuasive hand through her friend's arm.

"I don't believe I *could* buy mourning, dear," she said. "And—oh, if you knew how long I'd wanted a really *blue* blue suit! Only, it would have been too vivid to wear well—I always knew that—because you can only afford one every other year. And"—Phyllis rather diffidently voiced a thought which had been in the back of her mind for a long time—"if I'm going to be much around Mr. Harrington, don't you think cheerful clothes would be best? Everything in that house seems sombre enough now."

"Perhaps you are right, dear child," said Mrs. De Guenther. "I hope you may be the means of putting a great deal of brightness into poor Allan's life before he joins his mother."

"Oh, don't!" cried Phyllis impulsively. Somehow she could not bear to think of Allan Harrington's dying. He was too beautiful to be dead, where nobody could see him any more. Besides, Phyllis privately considered that a long vacation before he joined his mother would be only the fair thing for "poor Allan." Youth sides with youth. And—the clear-cut white lines of him rose in her memory and stayed there. She could almost hear that poor, tired, toneless voice of his, that was yet so

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deep and so perfectly accented.... She bought docilely whatever her guide directed, and woke from a species of gentle daze at the afternoon's end to find Mrs. De Guenther beaming with the weary rapture of the successful shopper, and herself the proprietress of a turquoise velvet walking-suit, a hat to match, a pale blue evening frock, a pale green between-dress with lovely clinging lines, and a heavenly white crepe thing with rosy ribbons and filmy shadow-laces—the negligee of one's dreams. There were also slippers and shoes and stockings and—this was really too bad of Mrs. De Guenther—a half-dozen set of lingerie, straight through. Mrs. De Guenther sat and continued to beam joyously over the array, in Phyllis's little bedroom.

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"It's my present, dearie," she said calmly. "So you needn't worry about using Angela's money. Gracious, it's been *lovely*! I haven't had such a good time since my husband's little grand-niece came on for a week. There's nothing like dressing a girl, after all."

And Phyllis could only kiss her. But when her guest had gone she laid all the boxes of finery under her bed, the only place where there was any room. She would not take any of it out, she determined, till her summons came. But on second thought, she wore the blue velvet street-suit on Sunday visits to Mrs. Harrington, which became—she never knew just when or how—a regular thing. The vivid blue made her eyes nearly sky-color, and brightened her hair very satisfactorily. She was taking more time and trouble over her looks now—one has to live up to a turquoise velvet hat and coat! She found herself, too, becoming very genuinely fond of the restless, anxiously loving, passionate, unwise child who dwelt in Mrs. Harrington's frail elderly body and had almost worn it out. She sat, long hours of every Sunday afternoon, holding Mrs. Harrington's thin little hot hands, and listening to her swift, italicised monologues about Allan—what he must do, what he must not do, how he must be looked after, how his mother had treated him, how his wishes must be ascertained and followed.

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"Though all he wants now is dark and quiet," said his mother piteously. "I don't even go in there now to cry."

She spoke as if it were an established ritual. Had she been using her son's sick-room, Phyllis wondered, as a regular weeping-place? She could feel in Mrs. Harrington, even in this mortal sickness, the tremendous driving influence which is often part of a passionately active and not very wise personality. That certitude and insistence of Mrs. Harrington's could hammer you finally into believing or doing almost anything. Phyllis wondered how much his mother's heartbroken adoration and pity might have had to do with making her son as hopeless-minded as he was.

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Naturally, the mother-in-law-elect she had acquired in such a strange way became very fond of Phyllis. But indeed there was something very gay and sweet and honest-minded about the girl, a something which gave people the feeling that they were very wise in liking her. Some people you are fond of against your will. When people cared for Phyllis it was with a quite irrational feeling that they were doing a sensible thing. They never gave any of the credit to her very real, though almost invisible, charm.

She never saw Allan Harrington on any of the Sunday visits. She was sure the servants thought she did, for she knew that every one in the great, dark old house knew her as the young lady who was to marry Mr. Allan. She believed that she was supposed to be an old family friend, perhaps a distant relative. She did not want to see Allan. But she did want to be as good to his little, tensely-loving mother as she could, and reassure her about Allan's future care. And she succeeded.

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It was on a Friday about two that the summons came. Phyllis had thought she expected it, but when the call came to her over the library telephone she found herself as badly frightened as she had been the first time she went to the Harrington house. She shivered as she laid down the dater she was using, and called the other librarian to take her desk. Fortunately, between one and four the morning and evening shifts overlapped, and there was some one to take her place.

"Mrs. Harrington cannot last out the night," came Mr. De Guenther's clear, precise voice over the telephone, without preface. "I have arranged with Mr. Johnston. You can go at once. You had better pack a suit-case, for you possibly may not be able to get back to your boarding-place."

So it was to happen now! Phyllis felt, with her substitute in her place, her own wraps on, and her feet taking her swiftly towards her goal, as if she were offering herself to be made a nun, or have a hand or foot cut off, or paying herself away in some awful, irrevocable fashion. She packed, mechanically, all the pretty things Mrs. De Guenther had given her, and nothing else. She found herself at the door of her room with the locked suit-case in her hand, and not even a nail-file of the things belonging to her old self in it. She shook herself together, managed to laugh a little, and returned and put in such things as she thought she would require for the night. Then she went. She always remembered that journey as long as she lived; her hands and feet and tongue going on, buying tickets, giving directions—and her mind, like a naughty child, catching at everything as they went, and screaming to be allowed to go back home, back to the dusty, matter-of-course library and the dreary little boarding-house bedroom!

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They were all waiting for her, in what felt like a hideously quiet semicircle, in Allan's great dark room. Mrs. Harrington, deadly pale, and giving an impression of keeping herself alive only by force of that wonderful fighting vitality of hers, lay almost at length in her wheel-chair. There was a clergyman in vestments. There were the De Guenthers; Mr. De Guenther only a little more precise than his every-day habit was, Mrs. De Guenther crying a little, softly and furtively.

As for Allan Harrington, he lay just as she had seen him that other time, white and moveless, seeming scarcely conscious except by an effort. Only she noticed a slight contraction, as of pain, between his brows.

"Phyllis has come," panted Mrs. Harrington. "Now it will be—all right. You must marry him quickly—quickly, do you hear, Phyllis? Oh, people never will—do—what I want them to——"

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"Yes—yes, indeed, dear," said Phyllis, taking her hands soothingly. "We're going to attend to it right away. See, everything is ready."

It occurred to her that Mrs. Harrington was not half as correct in her playing of the part of a dying woman as she would have seen to it that anyone else was; also, that things did not seem legal without the wolfhound. Then she was shocked at herself for such irrelevant thoughts. The thing to do was to keep poor Mrs. Harrington quieted. So she beckoned the clergyman and the De Guenthers nearer, and herself sped the marrying of herself to Allan Harrington.

... When you are being married to a Crusader on a tomb, the easiest way is to kneel down by him. Phyllis registered this fact in her mind quite blankly, as something which might be of use to remember in future.... The marrying took an unnecessarily long time, it seemed to her. It did not seem as if she were being married at all. It all seemed to concern somebody else. When it came to the putting on of the wedding-ring, she found herself, very naturally, guiding Allan's relaxed fingers to hold it in its successive places, and finally slip it on the wedding-finger. And somehow having to do that checked the chilly awe she had had before of Allan Harrington. It made her feel quite simply sorry for him, as if he were one of her poor little boys in trouble. And when it was all over she bent pitifully before she thought, and kissed one white, cold cheek. He seemed so tragically helpless, yet more alive, in some way, since she had touched his hand to guide it. Then, as her lips brushed his cheek, she recoiled and colored a little. She had felt that slight roughness which a man's cheek, however close-shaven, always has—the *man*-feel. It made her realize unreasonably that it was a man she had married, after all, not a stone image nor a sick child—a live man! With the thought, or rather instinct, came a swift terror of what she had done, and a swift impulse to rise. She was half-way risen from her knees when a hand on her shoulder, and the clergyman's voice in her ear, checked her.

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"Not yet," he murmured almost inaudibly. "Stay as you are till—till Mrs. Harrington is wheeled from the room."

Phyllis understood. She remained as she was, her body a shield before Allan Harrington's eyes, her hand just withdrawing from his shoulder, till she heard the closing of the door, and a sigh as of relaxed tension from the three people around her. Then she rose. Allan lay still with closed eyelids. It seemed to her that he had flushed, if ever so faintly, at the touch of her lips on his cheek. She laid his hand on the coverlet with her own roughened, ringed one, and followed the others out, into the room where the dead woman had been taken, leaving him with his attendant.

The rest of the evening Phyllis went about in a queer-keyed, almost light-hearted frame of mind. It was only the reaction from the long-expected terror that was over now, but it felt indecorous. It was just as well, however. Some one's head had to be kept. The servants were upset, of course, and there were many arrangements to be made. She and Mr. De Guenther worked steadily together, telephoning, ordering, guiding, straightening out all the tangles. There never was a wedding, she thought, where the bride did so much of the work! She even remembered to see personally that Allan's dinner was sent up to him. The servants had doubtless been told to come to her for orders—at any rate, they did. Phyllis had not had much experience in running a house, but a good deal in keeping her head. And that, after all, is the main thing. She had a far-off feeling as if she were hearing some other young woman giving swift, poised, executive orders. She rather admired her.

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After dinner the De Guenthers went. And Phyllis Braithwaite, the little Liberry Teacher who had been living in a hall bedroom on much less money than she needed, found herself alone, sole mistress of the great Harrington house, a corps of servants, a husband passive enough to satisfy the most militant suffragette, a check-book, a wistful wolfhound, and five hundred dollars, cash, for current expenses. The last weighed on her mind more than all the rest put together.

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"Why, I don't know how to make Current Expenses out of all that!" she had said to Mr. De Guenther. "It looks to me exactly like about ten months' salary! I'm perfectly certain I shall get up in my sleep and try to pay my board ahead with it, so I shan't have it all spent before the ten months are up! There was a blue bead necklace," she went on meditatively, "in the Five-and-Ten, that I always wanted to buy. Only I never quite felt I could afford it. Oh, just imagine going to the Five-and-Ten and buying at least five dollars' worth of things you didn't need!"

"You have great discretionary powers—great discretionary powers, my dear, you will find!" Mr. De Guenther had said, as he patted her shoulder. Phyllis took it as a compliment at the time. "Discretionary powers" sounded as if he thought she was a quite intelligent young person. It did not occur to her till he had gone, and she was alone with her check-book, that it meant she had a good deal of liberty to do as she liked.

It seemed to be expected of her to stay. Nobody even suggested a possibility of her going home again, even to pack her trunk. Mrs. De Guenther casually volunteered to do that, a little after the housekeeper had told her where her rooms were. She had been consulting with the housekeeper for what seemed ages, when she happened to want some pins for something, and asked for her suit-case.

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"It's in your rooms," said the housekeeper. "Mrs. Harrington—the late Mrs. Harrington, I should say——"

Phyllis stopped listening at this point. Who was the present Mrs. Harrington? she wondered before she thought—and then remembered. Why—*she* was! So there was no Phyllis Braithwaite any more! Of course not.... Yet she had always liked the name so—well, a last name was a small thing to give up.... Into her mind fitted an incongruous, silly story she had heard once at the library, about a girl whose last name was Rose, and whose parents christened her Wild, because the combination appealed to them. And then she married a man named Bull.... Meanwhile the housekeeper had been going on.

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... "She had the bedroom and bath opening from the other side of Mr. Allan's day-room ready for you, madam. It's been ready several weeks."

"Has it?" said Phyllis. It was like Mrs. Harrington, that careful planning of even where she should be put. "Is Mr. Harrington in his day-room now?"

For some reason she did not attempt to give herself, she did not want to see him again just now. Besides, it was nearly eleven and time a very tired girl was in bed. She wanted a good night's rest, before she had to get up and be Mrs. Harrington, with Allan and the check-book and the Current Expenses all tied to her.

Some one had laid everything out for her in the bedroom; the filmy new nightgown over a chair, the blue satin mules underneath, her plain toilet-things on a dressing-table, and over another chair the exquisite ivory crepe negligee with its floating rose ribbons. She took a hasty bath—there was so much hot water that she was quite reconciled for a moment to being a check-booked and wolf hounded Mrs. Harrington—and slid straight into bed without even stopping to braid her loosened, honey-colored hair.

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It seemed to her that she was barely asleep when there came an urgent knocking at her door.

"Yes?" she said sleepily, looking mechanically for her alarm-clock as she switched on the light. "What is it, please?"

"It's I, Wallis, Mr. Allan's man, Madame," said a nervous voice. "Mr. Allan's very bad. I've done all the usual things, but nothing seems to quiet him. He hates doctors so, and they make him so wrought up—please could you come, ma'am? He says as how all of us are all dead—oh, *please*, Mrs. Harrington!"

There was panic in the man's voice.

"All right," said Phyllis sleepily, dropping to the floor as she spoke with the rapidity that only the alarm-clock-broken know. She snatched the negligee around her, and thrust her feet hastily into the blue satin slippers—why, she was actually using her wedding finery! And what an easily upset person that man was! But everybody in the house seemed to have nerves on edge. It was no wonder about Allan—he wanted his mother, of course, poor boy! She felt, as she ran fleetly across the long room that separated her sleeping quarters from her husband's, the same mixture of pity and timidity that she had felt with him before. Poor boy! Poor, silent, beautiful statue, with his one friend gone! She opened the door and entered swiftly into his room.

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She was not thinking about herself at all, only of how she could help Allan, but there must have been something about her of the picture-book angel to the pain-racked man, lying tensely at length in the room's darkest corner. Her long, dully gold hair, loosening from its twist, flew out about her, and her face was still flushed with sleep. There was a something about her that was vividly alight and alive, perhaps the light in her blue eyes.

From what the man had said Phyllis had thought Allan was delirious, but she saw at once that he was only in severe pain, and talking more disconnectedly, perhaps, than the slow-minded Englishman could follow. He did not look like a statue now. His cheeks were burning with evident pain, and his yellow-brown eyes, wide-open, and dilated to darkness, stared straight out. His hands were clenching and unclenching, and his head moved restlessly from side to side. Every nerve and muscle, she could see, was taut.

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"They're all dead," he muttered. "Father and Mother and Louise—and I—only I'm not dead enough to bury. Oh, God, I wish I was!"

That wasn't delirium; it was something more like heart-break. Phyllis moved closer to him, and dropped one of her sleep-warm hands on his cold, clenched one.

"Oh, poor boy!" she said. "I'm so sorry—so sorry!" She closed her hands tight over both his.

Some of her strong young vitality must have passed between them and helped him, for almost immediately his tenseness relaxed a little, and he looked at her.

"You—you're not a nurse," he said. "They go around—like—like a—vault——"

She had caught his attention! That was a good deal, she felt. She forgot everything about him, except that he was some one to be comforted, and her charge. She sat down on the bed by him, still holding tight to his hands.

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"No, indeed," she said, bending nearer him, her long loose hair falling forward about her resolutely-smiling young face. "Don't you remember seeing me? I never was a nurse."

"What—are you?" he asked feebly.

"I'm—why, the children call me the Liberry Teacher," she answered. It occurred to her that it would be better to talk on brightly at random than to risk speaking of his mother to him, as she must if she reminded him of their marriage. "I spend my days in a basement, making bad little boys get so interested in the Higher Culture that they'll forget to shoot crap and smash windows."

One of the things which had aided Phyllis to rise from desk-assistant to one of the Children's Room librarians was a very sweet and carrying voice—a voice which arrested even a child's attention, and held his interest. It held Allan now; merely the sound of it, seemingly.

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"Go on—talking," he murmured. Phyllis smiled and obeyed.

"Sometimes the Higher Culture doesn't work," she said. "Yesterday one of my imps got hold of a volume of Shaw, and in half an hour his aunt marched in on me and threatened I don't know what to a library that 'taught children to disrespect their lawful gardeens.'"

"I remember now," said Allan. "You are the girl in the blue dress. The girl mother had me marry. I remember."

"Yes," said Phyllis soothingly, and a little apologetically. "I know. But that—oh, please, it needn't make a bit of difference. It was only so I could see that you were looked after properly, you know. I'll never be in the way, unless you want me to do something for you."

"I don't mind," he said listlessly, as he had before.... "*Oh, this dreadful darkness, and mother dead in it somewhere!*"

"Wallis," called Phyllis swiftly, "turn up the lights!"

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The man slipped the close green silk shades from the electric bulbs. Allan shrank as if he had been hurt.

"I can't stand the glare," he cried.

"Yes, you can for a moment," she said firmly. "It's better than the ghastly green glow."

It was probably the first time Allan Harrington had been contradicted since his accident. He said nothing more for a minute, and Phyllis directed Wallis to bring a sheet of pink tissue paper from her suit-case, where she remembered it lay in the folds of some new muslin thing. Under her direction still, he wrapped the globes in it and secured it with string.

"There!" she told Allan triumphantly when Wallis was done. "See, there is no glare now; only a pretty rose-colored glow. Better than the green, isn't it?"

Allan looked at her again. "You are—kind," he said. "Mother said—you would be kind. Oh, mother—mother!" He tried uselessly to lift one arm to cover his convulsed face, and could only turn his head a little aside.

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"You can go, Wallis," said Phyllis softly, with her lips only. "Be in the next room." The man stole out and shut the door softly. Phyllis herself rose and went toward the window, and busied herself in braiding up her hair. There was almost silence in the room for a few minutes.

"Thank—you," said Allan brokenly. "Will you—come back, please?"

She returned swiftly, and sat by him as she had before.

"Would you mind—holding my wrists again?" he asked. "I feel quieter, somehow, when you do—not so—lost." There was a pathetic boyishness in his tone that the sad, clear lines of his face would never prepare you for.

Phyllis took his wrists in her warm, strong hands obediently.

"Are you in pain, Allan?" she asked. "Do you mind if I call you Allan? It's the easiest way."

He smiled at her a little, faintly. It occurred to her that perhaps the novelty of her was taking his mind a little from his own feelings.

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"No—no pain. I haven't had any for a very long time now. Only this dreadful blackness dragging at my mind, a blackness the light hurts."

"*Why!*" said Phyllis to herself, being on known ground here—"why, it's nervous depression! I believe cheering-up *would* help. I know," she said aloud; "I've had it."

"You?" he said. "But you seem so—happy!"

"I suppose I am," said Phyllis shyly. She felt a little afraid of "poor Allan" still, now that there was nothing to do for him, and they were talking together. And he had not answered her question,

either; doubtless he wanted her to say "Mr. Allan" or even "Mr. Harrington!" He replied to her thought in the uncanny way invalids sometimes do.

"You said something about what we were to call each other," he murmured. "It would be foolish, of course, not to use first names. Yours is Alice, isn't it?"

Phyllis laughed. "Oh, worse than that!" she said. "I was named out of a poetrybook, I believe— Phyllis Narcissa. But I always conceal the Narcissa." [Pg 97]

"Phyllis. Thank you," he said wearily. ... "*Phyllis, don't let go! Talk to me!*" His eyes were those of a man in torment.

"What shall I talk about?" she asked soothingly, keeping the two cold, clutching hands in her warm grasp. "Shall I tell you a story? I know a great many stories by heart, and I will say them for you if you like. It was part of my work."

"Yes," he said. "Anything."

Phyllis arranged herself more comfortably on the bed, for it looked as if she had some time to stay, and began the story she knew best, because her children liked it best, Kipling's "How the Elephant Got His Trunk." "A long, long time ago, O Best Beloved...."

Allan listened, and, she thought, at times paid attention to the words. He almost smiled once or twice, she was nearly sure. She went straight on to another story when the first was done. Never had she worked so hard to keep the interest of any restless circle of children as she worked now, sitting up in the pink light in her crepe wrappings, with her school-girl braids hanging down over her bosom, and Allan Harrington's agonized golden-brown eyes fixed on her pitying ones. [Pg 98]

"You must be tired," he said more connectedly and quietly when she had ended the second story. "Can't you sit up here by me, propped on the pillows? And you need a quilt or something, too."

This from an invalid who had been given nothing but himself to think of this seven years back! Phyllis's opinion of Allan went up very much. She had supposed he would be very selfish. But she made herself a bank of pillows, and arranged herself by Allan's side so that she could keep fast to his hands without any strain, something as skaters hold. She wrapped a down quilt from the foot of the bed around her mummy-fashion and went on to her third story. Allan's eyes, as she talked on, grew less intent—drooped. She felt the relaxation of his hands. She went monotonously on, closing her own eyes—just for a minute, as she finished her story. [Pg 99]

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## VIII

"I've overslept the alarm!" was Phyllis's first thought next morning when she woke. "It must be—" Where was she? So tired, so very tired, she remembered being, and telling some one an interminable story.... She held her sleepy eyes wide open by will-power, and found that a silent but evidently going clock hung in sight. Six-thirty. Then she hadn't overslept the alarm. But ... she hadn't set any alarm. And she had been sleeping propped up in a sitting position, half on—why, it was a shoulder. And she was rolled tight in a terra-cotta down quilt. She sat up with a jerk—fortunately a noiseless one—and turned to look. Then suddenly she remembered all about it, that jumbled, excited, hard-working yesterday which had held change and death and marriage for her, and which she had ended by perching on "poor Allan Harrington's" bed and sending him to sleep by holding his hands and telling him children's stories. She must have fallen asleep after he did, and slid down on his shoulder. A wonder it hadn't disturbed him! She stole another look at him, as he lay sleeping still, heavily and quietly. After all, she was married to him, and she had a perfect right to recite him to sleep if she wanted to. She unrolled herself cautiously, and slid out like a shadow. [Pg 100]

She almost fell over poor Wallis, sleeping too in his clothes outside the door, on Allan's day couch. He came quickly to his feet, as if he were used to sudden waking.

"Don't disturb Mr. Harrington," said Phyllis as staidly as if she had been giving men-servants orders in her slipper-feet all her life. "He seems to be sleeping quietly."

"Begging your pardon, Mrs. Harrington, but you haven't been giving him anything, have you?" asked Wallis. "He hasn't slept without a break for two hours to my knowledge since I've been here, not without medicine."

"Not a thing," said Phyllis, smiling with satisfaction. "He must have been sleeping nearly three hours now! I read him to sleep, or what amounted to it. I got his nerves quiet, I think. Please kill anybody that tries to wake him, Wallis." [Pg 101]

"Very good, ma'am," said Wallis gravely. "And yourself, ma'am?"

"I'm going to get some sleep, too," she said. "Call me if there's anything—useful."

She meant "necessary," but she wanted so much more sleep she never knew the difference. When she got into her room she found that there also she was not alone: the wistful wolfhound was curled plaintively across her bed, which he overlapped. From his nose he seemed to have been

dipping largely into the cup of chocolate somebody had brought to her, and which she had forgotten to drink when she found it, on her first retiring.

"You aren't a *bit* high-minded," said Phyllis indignantly. She was too sleepy to do more than shove him over to the back of the bed. "All—the beds here are so—*full*," she complained sleepily; and crawled inside, and never woke again till nearly afternoon.

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There was all the grave business to be done, in the days that followed, of taking Mrs. Harrington to a quiet place beside her husband, and drawing together again the strings of the disorganized household. Phyllis found herself whispering over and over again:

"The sweeping up the heart  
And putting love away  
We shall not need to use again.  
Until the Judgment Day."

And with all there was to see after, it was some days before she saw Allan again, more than to speak to brightly as she crossed their common sitting-room. He did not ask for her. She looked after his comfort faithfully, and tried to see to it that his man Wallis was all he should be—a task which was almost hopeless from the fact that Wallis knew much more about his duties than she did, even with Mrs. Harrington's painstakingly detailed notes to help her. Also his attitude to his master was of such untiring patience and worship that it made Phyllis feel like a rude outsider interfering between man and wife.

However, Wallis was inclined to approve of his new mistress, who was not fussy, seemed kind, and had given his beloved Mr. Allan nearly three hours of unbroken sleep. Allan had been a little better ever since. Wallis had told Phyllis this. But she was inclined to think that the betterment was caused by the counter-shock of his mother's death, which had shaken him from his lethargy, and perhaps even given his nerves a better balance. And she insisted that the pink paper stay on the electric lights.

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After about a week of this, Phyllis suddenly remembered that she had not been selfish at all yet. Where was her rose-garden—the garden she had married the wolfhound and Allan and the check-book for? Where were all the things she had intended to get? The only item she had bought as yet ran, on the charge account she had taken over with the rest, "1 doz. checked dish-towels"; and Mrs. Clancy, the housekeeper's, pressing demand was responsible for these.

"It's certainly time I was selfish," said Phyllis to the wolfhound, who followed her round unendingly as if she had patches of sunshine in her pocket: glorious patches, fit for a life-sized wolfhound. Perhaps he was grateful because she had ordered him long daily walks. He wagged his tail now as she spoke, and rubbed himself curvingly against her. He was a rather affected dog.

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So Phyllis made herself out a list in a superlatively neat library hand:

One string of blue beads.  
One lot of very fluffy summer frocks with flowers on them.  
One rose-garden.  
One banjo and a self-teacher. (And a sound-proof room.)  
One set Arabian Nights.  
One set of Stevenson, all but his novels.  
Ever so many Maxfield Parrish pictures full of Prussian-blue skies.  
A house to put them in, with fireplaces.  
A lady's size motor-car that likes me.  
A plain cat with a tame disposition.  
A hammock.  
A sun-dial. (But that might be thrown in with the garden.)  
A gold watch-bracelet.  
All the colored satin slippers I want.  
A room big enough to put all father's books up.

It looked shamelessly long, but Phyllis's "discretionary powers" would cover it, she knew. Mrs. Harrington's final will, while full of advice, had been recklessly trusting.

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She could order everything in one afternoon, she was sure, all but the house, the garden, the motor, which she put checks against, and the plain cat, which she thought she could pick up in the village where her house would be.

Next she went to see Allan. She didn't want to bother him, but she did feel that she ought to share her plans with him as far as possible. Besides, it occurred to her that she could scarcely remember what he was like to speak to, and really owed it to herself to go. She fluffed out her hair loosely, put on her pale-green gown that had clinging lines, and pulled some daffodils through her sash. She had resolved to avoid anything sombre where Allan was concerned—and the green gown was very becoming. Then, armed with her list and a pencil, she crossed boldly to the couch where her Crusader lay in the old attitude, moveless and with half-closed eyes.

"Allan," she asked, standing above him, "do you think you could stand being talked to for a little while?"

"Why—yes," said Allan, opening his eyes a little more. "Wallis, get—Mrs. Harrington—a chair."

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He said the name haltingly, and Phyllis wondered if he disliked her having it. She dropped down beside him, like a smiling touch of spring in the dark room.

"Do you mind their calling me that?" she asked. "If there's anything else they could use——"

"Mother made you a present of the name," he said, smiling faintly. "No reason why I should mind."

"All right," said Phyllis cheerfully. After all, there was nothing else to call her, speaking of her. The servants, she knew, generally said "the young madam," as if her mother-in-law were still alive.

"I want to talk to you about things," she began; and had to stop to deal with the wolfhound, who was trying to put both paws on her shoulders. "Oh, Ivan, *get* down, honey! I *wish* somebody would take a day off some time to explain to you that you're not a lap-dog! Do you like wolfhounds specially better than any other kind of dog, Allan?"

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"Not particularly," said Allan, patting the dog languidly as he put his head in a convenient place for the purpose. "Mother bought him, she said, because he would look so picturesque in my sick-room. She wanted him to lie at my feet or something. But he never saw it that way—neither did I. Hates sick-rooms. Don't blame him."

This was the longest speech Allan had made yet, and Phyllis learned several things from it that she had only guessed before. One was that the atmosphere of embodied grief and regret in the house had been Mrs. Harrington's, not Allan's—that he was more young and natural than she had thought, better material for cheering; that his mother's devotion had been something of a pressure on him at times; and that he himself was not interested in efforts to stage his illness correctly.

What he really had said when the dog was introduced, she learned later from the attached Wallis, was that he might be a cripple, but he wasn't going to be part of any confounded tableau. Whereupon his mother had cried for an hour, kissing and pitying him in between, and his night had been worse than usual. But the hound had stayed outside.

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Phyllis made an instant addition to her list. "One bull-pup, convenient size, for Allan." The plain cat could wait. She had heard of publicity campaigns; she had made up her mind, and a rather firm young mind it was, that she was going to conduct a cheerfulness campaign in behalf of this listless, beautiful, darkness-locked Allan of hers. Unknowingly, she was beginning to regard him as much her property as the check-book, and rather more so than the wolfhound. She moved back a little, and reconciled herself to the dog, who had draped as much of his body as would go, over her, and was batting his tail against her joyfully.

"Poor old puppy," she said. "I want to talk over some plans with you, Allan," she began again determinedly. She was astonished to see Allan wince.

"*Don't!*" he said, "for heaven's sake! You'll drive me crazy!"

Phyllis drew back a little indignantly, but behind the couch she saw Wallis making some sort of face that was evidently intended for a warning. Then he slipped out of the room, as if he wished her to follow soon and be explained to. "Plans" must be a forbidden subject. Anyhow, crossness was a better symptom than apathy!

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"Very well," she said brightly, smiling her old, useful, cheering-a-bad-child library smile at him. "It was mostly about things I wanted to buy for myself, any way—satin slippers and such. I don't suppose they *would* interest a man much."

"Oh, that sort of thing," said Allan relievedly. "I thought you meant things that had to do with me. If you have plans about me, go ahead, for you know I can't do anything to stop you—but for heaven's sake, don't discuss it with me first!"

He spoke carelessly, but the pity of it struck to Phyllis's heart. It was true, he couldn't stop her. His foolish, adoring little desperate mother, in her anxiety to have her boy taken good care of, had exposed him to a cruel risk. Phyllis knew herself to be trustworthy. She knew that she could no more put her own pleasures before her charge's welfare than she could steal his watch. Her conscience was New-England rock. But, oh! suppose Mr. De Guenther had chosen some girl who didn't care, who would have taken the money and not have done the work! She shivered at the thought of what Allan had escaped, and caught his hand impulsively, as she had on that other night of terror.

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"Oh, Allan Harrington, I *wouldn't* do anything I oughtn't to! I know it's dreadful, having a strange girl wished on you this way, but truly I mean to be as good as I can, and never in the way or anything! Indeed, you may trust me! You—you don't mind having me round, do you?"

Allan's cold hand closed kindly on hers. He spoke for the first time as a well man speaks, quietly, connectedly, and with a little authority.

"The fact that I am married to you does not weigh on me at all, my dear child," he said. "I shall be dead, you know, this time five years, and what difference does it make whether I'm married or not? I don't mind you at all. You seem a very kind and pleasant person. I am sure I can trust you. Now are you reassured?"

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"Oh, *yes*," said Phyllis radiantly, "and you *can* trust me, and I *won't* fuss. All you have to do if I bore you is to look bored. You can, you know. You don't know how well you do it! And I'll stop. I'm going to ask Wallis how much of my society you'd better have, if any."

"Why, I don't think a good deal of it would hurt me," he said indifferently. But he smiled in a quite friendly fashion.

"All right," said Phyllis again brightly. But she fell silent then. There were two kinds of Allan, she reflected. This kind of Allan, who was very much more grown-up and wise than she was, and of whom she still stood a little in awe; and the little-boy Allan who had clung to her in nervous dread of the dark the other night—whom she had sent to sleep with children's stories. She wondered which was real, which he had been when he was well.

"I must go now and have something out with Mrs. Clancy," she said, smiling and rising. "She's perfectly certain carpets have to come up when you put down mattings, and I'm perfectly certain they don't." [Pg 112]

She tucked the despised list, to which she had furtively added her bull-pup, into her sleeve, took her hand from his and went away. It seemed to Allan that the room was a little darker. [Pg 113]

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## IX

Outside the sitting-room door stood Wallis, who had been lying in wait.

"I wanted to explain, madam, about the plans," he said. "It worries Mr. Allan. You see, madam, the late Mrs. Harrington was a great one for plans. She had, if I may say so, a new one every day, and she'd argue you deaf, dumb, and blind—not to speak ill of the dead—till you were fair beat out fighting it. Then you'd settle down to it—and next day there be another one, with Mrs. Harrington rooting for it just as hard, and you, with your mouth fixed for the other plan, so to speak, would have to give in to that. The plan she happened to have last always went through, because she fought for that as hard as she had for the others, and you were so bothered by then you didn't care what."

Wallis's carefully impersonal servant-English had slipped from him, and he was talking to Phyllis as man to man, but she was very glad of it. These were the sort of facts she had to elicit. [Pg 114]

"When Mr. Allan was well," he went on, "he used to just laugh and say, 'All right, mother darling,' and pet her and do his own way—he was always laughing and carrying on then, Mr. Allan—but after he was hurt, of course, he couldn't get away, and the old madam, she'd sit by his couch by the hour, and he nearly wild, making plans for him. She'd spend weeks planning details of things over and over, never getting tired. And then off again to the next thing! It was all because she was so fond of him, you see. But if you'll pardon my saying so, madam"—Wallis was resuming his man-servant manners—"it was not always good for Mr. Allan."

"I think I understand," said Phyllis thoughtfully, as she and the wolfhound went to interview Mrs. Clancy. So that was why! She had imagined something of the sort. And she—she herself—was doubtless the outcome of one of Mrs. Harrington's long-detailed plans, insisted on to Allan till he had acquiesced for quiet's sake! ... But he said now he didn't mind. She was somehow sure he wouldn't have said it if it had not been true. Then Wallis's other words came to her, "He was always laughing then," and suddenly there surged up in Phyllis a passionate resolve to give Allan back at least a little of his lightness of heart. He might be going to die—though she didn't believe it—but at least she could make things less monotonous and dark for him; and she wouldn't offer him plans! And if he objected when the plans rose up and hit him, why, the shock might do him good. She thought she was fairly sure of an ally in Wallis. [Pg 115]

She cut her interview with Mrs. Clancy short. Allan, lying motionless, caught a green flash of her, crossing into her room to dress, another blue flash as she went out; dropped his eyelids and crossed his hands to doze a little, an innocent and unwary Crusader. He did not know it, but a Plan was about to rise up and hit him. The bride his mother had left him as a parting legacy had gone out to order a string of blue beads, a bull-pup, a house, a motor, a banjo, and a rose-garden; as she went she added a talking machine to the list; and he was to be planted in the very centre of everything. [Pg 116]

"Seems like a nice girl, Wallis," said Allan dreamily. And the discreet Wallis said nothing (though he knew a good deal) about his mistress's shopping-list.

"Yes, Mr. Allan," he conceded.

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It was Phyllis Harrington's firm belief that Mr. De Guenther could produce anything anybody wanted at any time, or that if he couldn't his wife could. So it was to him that she went on her quest for the rose-garden, with its incidental house. The rest of the items she thought she could get for herself. It was nearly the last of April, and she wanted a well-heated elderly mansion, preferably Colonial, not too unwieldily large, with as many rose-trees around it as her

discretionary powers would stand. And she wanted it as near and as soon as possible. By the help of Mr. De Guenther, amused but efficient, Mrs. De Guenther, efficient but sentimental; and an agent who was efficient merely, she got very nearly what she wanted. Money could do a great deal more than a country minister's daughter had ever had any way of imagining. By its aid she found it possible to have furniture bought and placed inside a fortnight, even to a list of books set up in sliding sectional cases. She had hoped to buy those cases some day, one at a time, and getting them at one fell swoop seemed to her more arrogantly opulent than the purchase of the house and grounds—than even the big shiny victrola. She had bought that herself, before there was a house to put it in, going on the principle that all men not professional musicians have a concealed passion for music that they can create themselves by merely winding up something. And—to anticipate—she found that as far as Allan was concerned she was quite right.

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"But why do you take this very radical step, my dear?" asked Mrs. De Guenther gently, as she helped Phyllis choose furniture.

"I am going to try the only thing Allan's mother seems to have omitted," said Phyllis dauntlessly. "A complete change of surroundings."

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"Oh, my dear!" breathed Mrs. De Guenther. "It may help poor Allan more than we know! And dear Angela did discuss moving often, but she could never bear to leave the city house, where so many of her dear ones have passed away."

"Well, none of *my* dear ones are going to pass away there," said Phyllis irreverently, "unless Mrs. Clancy wants to. I'm not even taking any servants but Wallis. The country-house doesn't need any more than a cook, a chambermaid, and outdoor man. Mrs. Clancy is getting them. I told her I didn't care what age or color she chose, but they had to be cheerful. She will stay in the city and keep the others straight, in something she calls board-wages. I'm starting absolutely fresh."

They were back at Mrs. De Guenther's house by the time Phyllis was done telling her plans, Phyllis sitting in the identical pluffy chair where she had made her decision to marry Allan. Mrs. De Guenther sprang from her own chair, and came over and impulsively kissed her.

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"God bless you, dear!" she said. "I believe it was Heaven that inspired Albert and myself to choose you to carry on poor Angela's work."

Phyllis flushed indignantly.

"I'm undoing a little of it, I hope," she said passionately. "If I can only make that poor boy forget some of those dreadful years she spent crying over him, I shan't have lived in vain!"

Mrs. De Guenther looked at Phyllis earnestly—and, most unexpectedly, burst into a little tinkling laugh.

"My dear," she said mischievously, "what about all the fine things you were going to do for yourself to make up for being tied to poor Allan? You should really stop being unselfish, and enjoy yourself a little."

Phyllis felt herself flushing crimson. Elderly people did seem to be so sentimental!

"I've bought myself lots of things," she defended herself. "Most of this is really for me. And—I can't help being good to him. It's only common humanity. I was never so sorry for anybody in my life—you'd be, too, if it were Mr. De Guenther!"

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She thought her explanation was complete. But she must have said something that she did not realize, for Mrs. De Guenther only laughed her little tinkling laugh again, and—as is the fashion of elderly people—kissed her.

"I would, indeed, my dear," said she.

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## X

Allan Harrington lay in his old attitude on his couch in the darkened day-room, his tired, clear-cut face a little thrown back, eyes half-closed. He was not thinking of anything or any one especially; merely wrapped in a web of the dragging, empty, gray half-thoughts of weariness in general that had hung about him so many years. Wallis was not there. Wallis had been with him much less lately, and he had scarcely seen Phyllis for a fortnight; or, for the matter of that, the dog, or any one at all. Something was going on, he supposed, but he scarcely troubled himself to wonder what. The girl was doubtless making herself boudoirs or something of the sort in a new part of the house. He closed his eyes entirely, there in the dusky room, and let the web of dreary, gray, formless thought wrap him again.

Phyllis's gay, sweetly carrying voice rang from outside the door:

"The three-thirty, then, Wallis, and I feel as if I were going to steal Charlie Ross! Well——"

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On the last word she broke off and pushed the sitting-room door softly open and slid in. She walked in a pussy-cat fashion which would have suggested to any one watching her a dark burden on her conscience.

She crossed straight to the couch, looked around for the chair that should have been by it but wasn't, and sat absently down on the floor. She liked floors.

"Allan!" she said.

No answer.

"Allan *Harrington!*"

Still none. Allan was half-asleep, or what did instead, in one of his abstracted moods.

"*All-an Harrington!*"

This time she reached up and pulled at his heavy silk sleeve as she spoke.

"Yes," said Allan courteously, as if from an infinite distance.

"Would you mind," asked Phyllis guilelessly, "if Wallis—we—moved you—a little? I can tell you all about everything, unless you'd rather not have the full details of the plan——"

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"Anything," said Allan wearily from the depths of his gray cloud; "only don't *bother* me about it!"

Phyllis jumped to her feet, a whirl of gay blue skirts and cheerfully tossing blue feathers. "Good-by, dear Crusader!" she said with a catch in her voice that might have been either a laugh or a sob. "The next time you see me you'll probably *hate* me! Wallis!"

Wallis appeared like the Slave of the Lamp. "It's all right, Wallis," she said, and ran. Wallis proceeded thereupon to wheel his master's couch into the bedroom.

"If you're going to be moved, you'd better be dressed a little heavier, sir," he said with the same amiable guilelessness, if the victim had but noticed it, which Phyllis had used from her seat on the floor not long before.

"Very well," said Allan resignedly from his cloud. And Wallis proceeded to suit the action to the word.

Allan let him go on in unnoticing silence till it came to that totally unfamiliar thing these seven years, a stand-up collar. A shiningly new linen collar of the newest cut, a beautiful golden-brown knit tie, a gray suit——

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"What on earth?" inquired Allan, awakening from his lethargy. "I don't need a collar and tie to keep me from getting cold on a journey across the house. And where did you get those clothes? They look new."

Wallis laid his now fully dressed master back to a reclining position—he had been propped up—and tucked a handkerchief into the appropriate pocket as he replied, "Grant & Moxley's, sir, where you always deal." And he wheeled the couch back to the day-room, over to its very door.

It did not occur to Allan, as he was being carried downstairs by Wallis and Arthur, another of the servants, that anything more than a change of rooms was intended; nor, as he was carried out at its door to a long closed carriage, that it was anything worse than his new keeper's mistaken idea that drives would be good for him. He was a little irritable at the length and shutupness of the drive, though, as his cot had been swung deftly from the ceiling of the carriage, he was not jarred. But when Wallis and Arthur carried the light pallet on which he lay swiftly up a plank walk laid to the door of a private car—why then it began to occur to Allan Harrington that something was happening. And—which rather surprised himself—he did not lift a supercilious eyebrow and say in a soft, apathetic voice, "Very we-ell!" Instead, he turned his head towards the devoted Wallis, who had helped two conductors swing the cot from the ceiling, and was now waiting for the storm to break. And what he said to Wallis was this:

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"What the deuce does this tomfoolery mean?" As he spoke he felt the accumulated capacity for temper of the last seven years surging up toward Wallis, and Arthur, and Phyllis, and the carriage-horses, and everything else, down to the two conductors. Wallis seemed rather relieved than otherwise. Waiting for a storm to break is rather wearing.

"Well, sir, Mrs. Harrington, she thought, sir, that—that a little move would do you good. And you didn't want to be bothered, sir——"

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"Bothered!" shouted Allan, not at all like a bored and dying invalid. "I should think I did, when a change in my whole way of life is made! Who gave you, or Mrs. Harrington, permission for this outrageous performance! It's sheer, brutal, insulting idiocy!"

"Nobody, sir—yes, sir," replied Wallis meekly. "Would you care for a drink, sir—or anything?"

"*No!*" thundered Allan.

"Or a fan?" ventured Wallis, approaching near with that article and laying it on the coverlid. Allan's hand snatched the fan angrily—and before he thought he had hurled it at Wallis! Weakly, it is true, for it lighted ingloriously about five feet away; but he had *thrown* it, with a movement that must have put to use the muscles of the long-disused upper arm. Wallis sat suddenly down and caught his breath.

"Mr. Allan!" he said. "Do you know what you did then? You *threw*, and you haven't been able to

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use more than your forearm before! Oh, Mr. Allan, you're getting better!"

Allan himself lay in astonishment at his feat, and forgot to be angry for a moment. "I certainly did!" he said.

"And the way you lost your temper!" went on Wallis enthusiastically. "Oh, Mr. Allan, it was beautiful! You haven't been more than to say snarly since the accident! It was so like the way you used to throw hair-brushes——"

But at the mention of his lost temper Allan remembered to lose it still further. His old capacity for storming, a healthy lad's healthy young hot-temperedness, had been weakened by long disuse, but he did fairly well. Secretly it was a pleasure to him to find that he was alive enough to care what happened, enough for anger. He demanded presently where he was going.

"Not more than two hours' ride, sir, I heard Mr. De Guenther mention," answered Wallis at once. "A little place called Wallraven—quite country, sir, I believe."

"So the De Guenthers are in it, too!" said Allan. "What the dickens has this girl done to them, to hypnotize them so?" [Pg 128]

"But I've heard say it's a very pretty place, sir," was all Wallis vouchsafed to this. The De Guenthers were not the only people Phyllis had hypnotized.

He gave Allan other details as they went on, however. His clothes and personal belongings were coming on immediately. There were two suit-cases, perhaps he had noticed, in the car with them. The young madam was planning to stay all the summer, he believed. Mrs. Clancy had been left behind to look after the other servants, and he understood that she had seen to the engagement of a fresh staff of servants for the country. And Allan, still awakened by his fit of temper, and fresh from the monotony of his seven years' seclusion, found all the things Wallis could tell him very interesting.

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Phyllis's rose-garden house had, among other virtues, the charm of being near the little station: a new little mission station which had apparently been called Wallraven by some poetic young real-estate agency, for the surrounding countryside looked countrified enough to be a Gray's Corners, or Smith's Crossing, or some other such placid old country name. There were more trees to be seen in Allan's quick passage from the train to the long old carryall (whose seats had been removed to make room for his cot) than he had remembered existed. There were sleepy birds to be heard, too, talking about how near sunset and their bedtime had come, and a little brook splashed somewhere out of sight. Altogether spring was to be seen and heard and felt, winningly insistent. Allan forgave Wallis, not to speak of Phyllis and the conductors, to a certain degree. He ordered the flapping black oilcloth curtain in front rolled up so he could see out, and secretly enjoyed the drive, unforeseen though it had been. His spine never said a word. Perhaps it, too, enjoyed having a change from a couch in a dark city room. [Pg 129]

They saw no one in their passage through the long, low old house. Phyllis evidently had learned that Allan didn't like his carryings about done before people. [Pg 130]

Wallis seemed to be acting under a series of detailed orders. He and Arthur carried their master to a long, well-lighted room at the end of the house, and deftly transferred him to a couch much more convenient, being newer, than the old one. On this he was wheeled to his adjoining bedroom, and when Wallis had made him comfortable there, he left him mysteriously for a while. It was growing dark by now, and the lights were on. They were rose-shaded, Allan noticed, as the others had been at home. Allan watched the details of his room with that vivid interest in little changes which only invalids can know. There was an old-fashioned landscape story paper on the walls, with very little repeat. Over it, but not where they interfered with tracing out the adventures of the paper people, were a good many pictures, quite incongruous, for they were of the Remington type men like, but pleasant to see nevertheless. The furniture was chintz-covered and gay. There was not one thing in the room to remind a man that he was an invalid. It occurred to Allan that Phyllis must have put a good deal of deliberate work on the place. He lay contentedly, watching the grate fire, and trying to trace out the story of the paper, for at least a half-hour. He found himself, at length, much to his own surprise, thinking with a certain longing of his dinner-tray. He was thinking of it more and more interestedly by the time Wallis—trayless—came back. [Pg 131]

"Mr. and Mrs. De Guenther and the young madam are waiting for you in the living-room," he announced. "They would be glad if you would have supper with them."

"Very well," said Allan amiably, still much to his own surprise. The truth was, he was still enough awake and interested to want to go on having things happen.

The room Wallis wheeled him back into was a long, low one, wainscoted and bare-floored. It was furnished with the best imitation Chippendale to be obtained in a hurry, but over and above there were cushioned chairs and couches enough for solid comfort. There were more cheerful pictures, the Maxfield Parrishes Phyllis had wanted, over the green-papered walls. There was a fire here also. The room had no more period than a girl's sentence, but there was a bright air of welcomeness and informality that was winning. An old-fashioned half-table against the wall was covered with a great many picknicky things to eat. Another table had more things, mostly to eat [Pg 132]

with, on it. And there were the De Guenthers and Phyllis. On the whole it felt very like a welcome-home.

Phyllis, in a satiny rose-colored gown he had never seen before, came over to his couch to meet him. She looked very apprehensive and young and wistful for the rôle of Bold Bad Hypnotist. She bent towards him with her hand out, seemed about to speak, then backed, flushed, and acted as if something had frightened her badly.

"Is she as afraid of me as all that?" thought Allan. Wallis must have given her a lurid account of how he had behaved. His quick impulse was to reassure her.

"Well, Phyllis, my dear, you certainly didn't bother me with plans *this* time!" he said, smiling. [Pg 133]  
"This is a bully surprise!"

"I—I'm glad you like it," said his wife shyly, still backing away.

"Of course he'd like it," said Mrs. De Guenther's kind staccato voice behind him. "Kiss your husband, and tell him he's welcome home, Phyllis child!"

Now, Phyllis was tired with much hurried work, and overstrung. And Allan, lying there smiling boyishly up at her, Allan seen for the first time in these usual-looking gray man-clothes, was like neither the marble Crusader she had feared nor the heartbroken little boy she had pitied. He was suddenly her contemporary, a very handsome and attractive young fellow, a little her senior. From all appearances, he might have been well and normal, and come home to her only a little tired, perhaps, by the day's work or sport, as he lay smiling at her in that friendly, intimate way! It was terrifyingly different. Everything felt different. All her little pieces of feeling for him, pity and awe and friendliness and love of service, seemed to spring suddenly together and make something else—something unplaced and disturbing. Her cheeks burned with a childish embarrassment as she stood there before him in her ruffled pink gown. What should she do? [Pg 134]

It was just then that Mrs. De Guenther's crisply spoken advice came. Phyllis was one of those people whose first unconscious instinct is to obey an unspoken order. She bent blindly to Allan's lips, and kissed him with a child's obedience, then straightened up, aghast. He would think her very bold!

But he did not, for some reason. It may have seemed only comforting and natural to him, that swift childish kiss, and Phyllis's honey-colored, violet-scented hair brushing his face. Men take a great deal without question as their rightful due.

The others closed around him then, welcoming him, laughing at the surprise and the way he had taken it, telling him all about it as if everything were as usual and pleasant as possible, and the present state of things had always been a pleasant commonplace. And Wallis began to serve the picnic supper. [Pg 135]

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## XI

There were trays and little tables, and the food itself would have betrayed a southern ducky in the kitchen if nothing else had. It was the first meal Allan had eaten with any one for years, and he found it so interesting as to be almost exciting. Wallis took the plates invisibly away when they were done, and they continued to stay in their half-circle about the fire and talk it all over. Phyllis, tired to death still, had slid to her favorite floor-seat, curled on cushions and leaning against the couch-side. Allan could have touched her hair with his hand. She thought of this, curled there, but she was too tired to move. It was exciting to be near him, somehow, tired as she was.

Most of the short evening was spent celebrating the fact that Allan had thrown something at Wallis, who was recalled to tell the story three times in detail. Then there was the house to discuss, its good and bad points, its nearnesses and farnesses. [Pg 136]

"Let me tell you, Allan," said Mrs. De Guenther warmly at this point, from her seat at the foot of the couch, "this wife of yours is a wonder. Not many girls could have had a house in this condition two weeks after it was bought."

Allan looked down at the heap of shining hair below him, all he could see of Phyllis.

"Yes," he said consideringly. "She certainly is."

At a certain slowness in his tone, Phyllis sprang up. "You must be tired to *death*!" she said. "It must be nearly ten. Do you feel worn out?"

Before he could say anything, Mrs. De Guenther had also risen, and was sweeping away her husband.

"Of course he is," she said decisively. "What have we all been thinking of? And we must go to bed, too, Albert, if you insist on taking that early train in the morning, and I insist on going with you. Good-night, children."

Wallis had appeared by this time, and was wheeling Allan from the room before he had a chance

to say much of anything but good-night. The De Guenthers talked a little longer to Phyllis, and were gone also. Phyllis flung herself full-length on the rugs and pillows before the fire, too tired to move further.

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Well, she had everything that she had wished for on that wet February day in the library. Money, leisure to be pretty, a husband whom she "didn't have to associate with much," rest, if she ever gave herself leave to take it, and the rose-garden. She had her wishes, as uncannily fulfilled as if she had been ordering her fate from a department store, and had money to pay for it.... And back there in the city it was somebody's late night, and that somebody—it would be Anna Black's turn, wouldn't it?—was struggling with John Zanowskis and Sadie Rabinowitzes by the lapful, just as she had. And yet—and yet they had really cared for her, those dirty, dear little foreigners of hers. But she'd had to work for their liking.... Perhaps—perhaps she could make Allan Harrington like her as much as the children did. He had been so kind to-night about the move and all, and so much brighter, her handsome Allan in his gray, every-day-looking man-clothes! If she could stay brave enough and kind enough and bright enough ... her eyelids drooped.... Wallis was standing respectfully over her.

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"Mrs. Harrington," he was saying, with a really masterly ignoring of her attitude on the rug, "Mr. Harrington says you haven't bid him good-night yet."

An amazing message! Had she been in the habit of it, that he demanded it like a small boy? But she sprang up and followed Wallis into Allan's room. He was lying back in his white silk sleeping things among the white bed-draperies, looking as he always had before. Only, he seemed too alive and awake still for his old rôle of Crusader-on-a-tomb.

"Phyllis," he began eagerly, as she sat down beside him, "what made you so frightened when I first came? Wallis hadn't worried you, had he?"

"Oh, no; it wasn't that at all," said Phyllis. "And thank you for being so generous about it all."

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"I wasn't generous," said her husband. "I behaved like everything to old Wallis about it. Well, what was it, then?"

"I—I—only—you looked so different in—*clothes*," pleaded Phyllis, "like any man my age or older—as if you might get up and go to business, or play tennis, or anything, and—and I was *afraid* of you! That's all, truly!"

She was sitting on the bed's edge, her eyes down, her hands quivering in her lap, the picture of a school-girl who isn't quite sure whether she's been good or not.

"Why, that sounds truthful!" said Allan, and laughed. It was the first time she had heard him, and she gave a start. Such a clear, cheerful, *young* laugh! Maybe he would laugh more, by and by, if she worked hard to make him.

"Good-night, Allan," she said.

"Aren't you going to kiss me good-night?" demanded this new Allan, precisely as if she had been doing it ever since she met him. Evidently that kiss three hours ago had created a precedent. Phyllis colored to her ears. She seemed to herself to be always coloring now. But she mustn't cross Allan, tired as he must be!

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"Good-night, Allan," she said again sedately, and kissed his cheek as she had done a month ago—years ago!—when they had been married. Then she fled.

"Wallis," said his master dreamily when his man appeared again, "I want some more real clothes. Tired of sleeping-suits. Get me some, please. Good-night."

As for Phyllis, in her little green-and-white room above him, she was crying comfortably into her pillow. She had not the faintest idea why, except that she liked doing it. She felt, through her sleepiness, a faint, hungry, pleasant want of something, though she hadn't an idea what it could be. She had everything, except that it wasn't time for the roses to be out yet. Probably that was the trouble.... Roses.... She, too, went to sleep.

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"How did Mr. Allan pass the night?" Phyllis asked Wallis anxiously, standing outside his door next morning. She had been up since seven, speeding the parting guests and interviewing the cook and chambermaid. Mrs. Clancy's choice had been cheerful to a degree, and black, all of it; a fat Virginia cook, a slim young Tuskegee chambermaid of a pale saddle-color, and a shiny brown outdoor man who came from nowhere in particular, but was very useful now he was here. Phyllis had seen them all this morning, and found them everything servants should be. Now she was looking after Allan, as her duty was.

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Wallis beamed from against the door-post, his tray in his hands.

"Mrs. Harrington, it's one of the best sleeps Mr. Allan's had! Four hours straight, and then sleeping still, if broken, till six! And still taking interest in things. Oh, ma'am, you should have heard him yesterday on the train, as furious as furious! It was beautiful!"

"Then his spine wasn't jarred," said Phyllis thoughtfully. "Wallis, I believe there was more



nervous shock and nervous depression than ever the doctors realized. And I believe all he needs is to be kept happy, to be much, much better. Wouldn't it be wonderful if he got so he could move freely from the waist up? I believe that may happen if we can keep him cheered and interested."

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Wallis looked down at his tray. "Yes, ma'am," he said. "Not to speak ill of the dead, Mrs. Harrington, the late Mrs. Harrington was always saying 'My poor stricken boy,' and things like that—'Do not jar him with ill-timed light or merriment,' and reminding him how bad he was. And she certainly didn't jar him with any merriment, ma'am."

"What were the doctors thinking about?" demanded Phyllis indignantly.

"Well, ma'am, they did all sorts of things to poor Mr. Allan for the first year or so. And then, as nothing helped, and they couldn't find out what was wrong to have paralyzed him so, he begged to have them stopped hurting him. So we haven't had one for the past five years."

"I think a masseur and a wheel-chair are the next things to get," said Phyllis decisively. "And remember, Wallis, there's something the matter with Mr. Allan's shutters. They won't always close the sunshine out as they should."

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Wallis almost winked, if an elderly, mutton-chopped servitor can be imagined as winking.

"No, ma'am," he promised. "Something wrong with 'em. I'll remember, ma'am."

Phyllis went singing on down the sunny old house, swinging her colored muslin skirts and prancing a little with sheer joy of being twenty-five, and prettily dressed, with a dear house all her own, and—yes—a dear Allan a little her own, too! Doing well for a man what another woman has done badly has a perennial joy for a certain type of woman, and this was what Phyllis was in the very midst of. She pranced a little more, and came almost straight up against a long old mirror with gilt cornices, which had come with the house and was staying with it. Phyllis stopped and looked critically at herself.

"I haven't taken time yet to be pretty," she reminded the girl in the glass, and began then and there to take account of stock, by way of beginning. Why—a good deal had done itself! Her hair had been washed and sunned and sunned and washed about every ten minutes since she had been away from the library. It was springy and three shades more golden. She had not been rushing out in all weathers unveiled, nor washing hastily with hard water and cheap library soap eight or ten times a day, because private houses are comparatively clean places. So her complexion had been getting back, unnoticed, a good deal of its original country rose-and-cream, with a little gold glow underneath. And the tired heaviness was gone from her eyelids, because she had scarcely used her eyes since she had married Allan—there had been too much else to do! The little frown-lines between the brows had gone, too, with the need of reading-glasses and work under electricity. She was more rounded, and her look was less intent. The strained Liberry Teacher look was gone. The luminous long blue eyes in the glass looked back at her girlishly. "Would you think we were twenty-five even?" they said. Phyllis smiled irrepressibly at the mirrored girl.

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"Yas'm," said the rich and comfortable voice of Lily-Anna, the cook, from the dining-room door; "you sholy is pretty. Yas'm—a lady *wants* to stay pretty when she's married. Yo' don' look much mo'n a bride, ma'am, an' dat's a fac'. Does you want yo' dinnehs brought into de sittin'-room regular till de gem'man gits well?"

"Yes—no—yes—for the present, any way," said Phyllis, with a mixture of confusion and dignity. Fortunately the doorbell chose this time to ring.

A business-like young messenger with a rocking crate wanted to speak to the madam. The last item on Phyllis's shopping list had come.

"The wolfhound's doing fine, ma'am," the messenger answered in response to her questions. "Like a different dog already. All he needed was exercise and a little society. Yes'm, this pup's broken—in a manner, that is. Your man picked you out the best-tempered little feller in the litter. Here, Foxy—careful, lady! Hold on to his leash!"

There was the passage of the check, a few directions about dog-biscuits, and then the messenger from the kennels drove back to the station, the crate, which had been emptied of a wriggling six-months black bull-dog, on the seat beside him.

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## XII

Allan, lying at the window of the sunny bedroom, and wondering if they had been having springs like this all the time he had lived in the city, heard a scuffle outside the door. His wife's voice inquired breathlessly of Wallis, "Can Mr. Allan—see me?... Oh, gracious—*don't*, Foxy, you little black gargoy! Open the door, or—shut it—quick, Wallis!"

But the door, owing to circumstances over which nobody but the black dog had any control, flew violently open here, and Allan had a flying vision of his wife, flushed, laughing, and badly mussed, being railroaded across the room by a prancingly exuberant French bull at the end of a leash.

"He's—he's a cheerful dog," panted Phyllis, trying to bring Foxy to anchor near Allan, "and I don't think he knows how to keep still long enough to pose across your feet—he wouldn't become them anyhow—he's a real man-dog, Allan, not an interior decoration.... Oh, Wallis, he has Mr. Allan's slipper! Foxy, you little fraud! Did he want a drink, angel-puppy?"

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"Did you get him for me, Phyllis?" asked Allan when the tumult and the shouting had died, and the caracoling Foxy had buried his hideous little black pansy-face in a costly Belleek dish of water.

"Yes," gasped Phyllis from her favorite seat, the floor; "but you needn't keep him unless you want to. I can keep him where you'll never see him—can't I, honey-dog-gums? Only I thought he'd be company for you, and don't you think he seems—cheerful?"

Allan threw his picturesque head back on the cushions, and laughed and laughed.

"Cheerful!" he said. "Most assuredly! Why—thank you, ever so much, Phyllis. You're an awfully thoughtful girl. I always did like bulls—had one in college, a Nelson. Come here, you little rascal!"

He whistled, and the puppy lifted its muzzle from the water, made a dripping dash to the couch, and scrambled up over Allan as if they had owned each other since birth. Never was a dog less weighed down by the glories of ancestry.

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Allan pulled the flopping bat-ears with his most useful hand, and asked with interest, "Why on earth did they call a French bull Foxy?"

"Yes, sir," said Wallis. "I understand, sir, that he was the most active and playful of the litter, and chewed up all his brothers' ears, sir. And the kennel people thought it was so clever that they called him Foxy."

"The best-tempered dog in the litter!" cried Phyllis, bursting into helpless laughter from the floor.

"That doesn't mean he's bad-tempered," explained master and man eagerly together. Phyllis began to see that she had bought a family pet as much for Wallis as for Allan. She left them adoring the dog with that reverent emotion which only very ugly bull-dogs can wake in a man's breast, and flitted out, happy over the success of her new toy for Allan.

"Take him out when he gets too much for Mr. Allan," she managed to say softly to Wallis as she passed him. But, except for a run or so for his health, Wallis and Allan between them kept the dog in the bedroom most of the day. Phyllis, in one of her flying visits, found the little fellow, tired with play, dog-biscuits, and other attentions, snuggled down by his master, his little crumpled black muzzle on the pillow close to Allan's contented, sleeping face. She felt as if she wanted to cry. The pathetic lack of interests which made the coming of a new little dog such an event!

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Before she hung one more picture, before she set up even a book from the boxes which had been her father's, before she arranged one more article of furniture, she telephoned to the village for the regular delivery of four daily papers, and a half-dozen of the most masculine magazines she could think of on the library lists. She had never known of Allan's doing any reading. That he had cared for books before the accident, she knew. At any rate, she was resolved to leave no point uncovered that might, just possibly *might*, help her Allan just a little way to interest in life, which she felt to be the way to recovery. He liked being told stories to, any way.

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"Do you think Mr. Allan will feel like coming into the living-room to-day?" she asked Wallis, meeting him in the hall about two o'clock.

"Why, he's dressed, ma'am," was Wallis's astonishing reply, "and him and the pup is having a fine game of play. He's got more use of that hand an' arm, ma'am, than we thought."

"Do you think he'd care to be wheeled into the living-room about four?" asked Phyllis.

"For tea, ma'am?" inquired Wallis, beaming. "I should think so, ma'am. I'll ask, anyhow."

Phyllis had not thought of tea—one does not stop for such leisurely amenities in a busy public library—but she saw the beauty of the idea, and saw to it that the tea was there. Lily-Anna was a jewel. She built the fire up to a bright flame, and brought in some daffodils from the garden without a word from her mistress. Phyllis herself saw that the victrola was in readiness, and cleared a space for the couch near the fire. There was quite a festal feeling.

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The talking-machine was also a surprise for Allan. Phyllis thought afterward that she should have saved it for another day, but the temptation to grace the occasion with it was too strong. She and Allan were as excited over it as a couple of children, and the only drawback to Allan's enjoyment was that he obviously wanted to take the records out of her unaccustomed fingers and adjust them himself. He knew how, it appeared, and Phyllis naturally didn't. However, she managed to follow his directions successfully. She had bought recklessly of rag-time discs, and provided a fair amount of opera selections. Allan seemed equally happy over both. After the thing had been playing for three-quarters of an hour, and most of the records were exhausted, Phyllis rang for tea. It was getting a little darker now, and the wood-fire cast fantastic red and black lights and shadows over the room. It was very intimate and thrilling to Phyllis suddenly, the fire-lit room, with just their two selves there. Allan, on his couch before the fire, looked bright and contented. The adjustable couch-head had been braced to such a position that he was almost sitting up. The bull-dog, who had lately come back from a long walk with the gratified outdoor man, snored

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regularly on the rug near his master, wakening enough to bat his tail on the floor if he was referred to. The little tea-table was between Allan and Phyllis, crowned with a bunch of apple-blossoms, whose spring-like scent dominated the warm room. Phyllis, in her green gown, her cheeks pink with excitement, was waiting on her lord and master a little silently.

Allan watched her amusedly for awhile—she was as intent as a good child over her tea-ball and her lemon and her little cakes.

"Say something, Phyllis," he suggested with the touch of mischief she was not yet used to, coming from him.

"This is a serious matter," she replied gravely. "Do you know I haven't made tea—afternoon tea, that is—for so long it's a wonder I know which is the cup and which is the saucer?"

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"Why not?" he asked idly, yet interestedly too.

"I was otherwise occupied. I was a Daughter of Toil," explained Phyllis serenely, setting down her own cup to relax in her chair, hands behind her head; looking, in her green gown, the picture of graceful, strong, young indolence. "I was a librarian—didn't you know?"

"No. I wish you'd tell me, if you don't mind," said Allan. "About you, I mean, Phyllis. Do you know, I feel awfully married to you this afternoon—you've bullied me so much it's no wonder—and I really ought to know about my wife's dark past."

Phyllis's heart beat a little faster. She, too, had felt "awfully married" here alone in the fire-lit living-room, dealing so intimately and gayly with Allan.

"There isn't much to tell," she said soberly.

"Come over here closer," commanded Allan the spoilt. "We've both had all the tea we want. Come close by the couch. I want to see you when you talk."

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Phyllis did as he ordered.

"I was a New England country minister's daughter," she began. "New England country ministers always know lots about Greek and Latin and how to make one dollar do the work of one-seventy-five, but they never have any dollars left when the doing's over. Father and I lived alone together always, and he taught me things, and I petted him—fathers need it, specially when they have country congregations—and we didn't bother much about other folks. Then he—died. I was eighteen, and I had six hundred dollars. I couldn't do arithmetic, because Father had always said it was left out of my head, and I needn't bother with it. So I couldn't teach. Then they said, 'You like books, and you'd better be a librarian.' As a matter of fact, a librarian never gets a chance to read, but you can't explain that to the general public. So I came to the city and took the course at library school. Then I got a position in the Greenway Branch—two years in the circulating desk, four in the cataloguing room, and one in the Children's Department. The short and simple annals of the poor!"

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"Go on," said Allan.

"I believe it's merely that you like the sound of the human voice," said Phyllis, laughing. "I'm going to go on with the story of the Five Little Pigs—you'll enjoy it just as much!"

"Exactly," said Allan. "Tell me what it was like in the library, please."

"It was rather interesting," said Phyllis, yielding at once. "There are so many different things to be done that you never feel any monotony, as I suppose a teacher does. But the hours are not much shorter than a department store's, and it's exacting, on-your-feet work all the time. I liked the work with the children best. Only—you never have any time to be anything but neat in a library, and you do get so tired of being just neat, if you're a girl."

"And a pretty one," said Allan. "I don't suppose the ugly ones mind as much."

It was the first thing he had said about her looks. Phyllis's ready color came into her cheeks. So he thought she was pretty!

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"Do you—think I'm pretty?" she asked breathlessly. She couldn't help it.

"Of course I do, you little goose," said Allan, smiling at her.

Phyllis plunged back into the middle of her story:

"You see, you can't sit up nights to sew much, or practise doing your hair new ways, because you need all your strength to get up when the alarm-clock barks next morning. And then, there's always the money-worry, if you have nothing but your salary. Of course, this last year, when I've been getting fifty dollars a month, things have been all right. But when it was only thirty a month in the Circulation—well, that was pretty hard pulling," said Phyllis thoughtfully. "But the worst—the worst, Allan, was waking up nights and wondering what would happen if you broke down for a long time. Because you *can't* very well save for sickness-insurance on even fifty a month. And the work—well, of course, most girls' work is just a little more than they have the strength for, always. But I was awfully lucky to get into children's work. Some of my imps, little Poles and Slovaks and Hungarians mostly, are the cleverest, most affectionate babies——"

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She began to tell him stories of wonderful ten-year-olds who were Socialists by conviction, and

read economics, and dazed little atypical sixteen-year-olds who read Mother Goose, and stopped even that because they got married.

"You poor little girl!" said Allan, unheeding. "What brutes they were to you! Well, thank Heaven, that's over now!"

"Why, Allan!" she said, laying a soothing hand on his. "Nobody was a brute. There's never more than one crank-in-authority in any library, they say. Ours was the Supervisor of the Left Half of the Desk, and after I got out of Circulation I never saw anything of her."

Allan burst into unexpected laughter. "It sounds like a Chinese title of honor," he explained. "'Grand Warder of the Emperor's Left Slipper-Rosette,' or something of the sort."

"The Desk's where you get your books stamped," she explained, "and the two shifts of girls who attend to that part of the work each have a supervisor—the Right and Left halves. The one that was horrid had favorites, and snapped at the ones that weren't. I wasn't under her, though. My Supervisor was lovely, an Irishwoman with the most florid hats, and the kindest, most just disposition, and always laughing. We all adored her, she was so fair-minded." [Pg 159]

"You think a good deal about laughing," said Allan thoughtfully. "Does it rank as a virtue in libraries, or what?"

"You have to laugh," explained Phyllis. "If you don't see the laugh-side of things, you see the cry-side. And you can't afford to be unhappy if you have to earn your living. People like brightness best. And it's more comfortable for yourself, once you get used to it."

"So that was your philosophy of life," said Allan. His hand tightened compassionately on hers. "You *poor* little girl!... Tell me about the cry-side, Phyllis."

His voice was very moved and caressing, and the darkness was deepening as the fire sank. Only an occasional tongue of flame glinted across Phyllis's silver slipper-buckle and on the seal-ring Allan wore. It was easy to tell things there in the perfumed duskiness. It was a great many years since any one had cared to hear the cry-side. And it was so dark, and the hand keeping hers in the shadows might have been any kind, comforting hand. She found herself pouring it all out to Allan, there close by her; the loneliness, the strain, the hard work, the lack of all the woman-things in her life, the isolation and dreariness at night, the over-fatigue, and the hurt of watching youth and womanhood sliding away, unused, with nothing to show for all the years; only a cold hope that her flock of little transient aliens might be a little better for the guidance she could give them— [Pg 160]

Years hence in rustic speech a phrase,  
As in rude earth a Grecian vase.

And then, that wet, discouraged day in February, and the vision of Eva Atkinson, radiantly fresh and happy, kept young and pretty by unlimited money and time.

"Her children were so pretty," said Phyllis wistfully, "and mine, dear little villains, were such dirty, untaught, rude little things—oh, it sounds snobbish, but I'd have given everything I had to have a dainty, clean little *lady*-child throw her arms around me and kiss me, instead of my pet little handsome, sticky Polish Jewess. Up at home everything had been so clean and old and still that you always could remember it had been finished for three hundred years. And Father's clean, still old library——" [Pg 161]

Phyllis did not know how she was revealing to Allan the unconscious motherhood in her; but Allan, femininely sensitive to unspoken things from his long sojourn in the dark—Allan did. It was the mother-instinct that she was spending on him, but mother-instinct of a kind he had never known before; gayly self-effacing, efficient, shown only in its results. And she could never have anything else to spend it on, he thought. Well, he was due to die in a few years.... But he didn't want to. Living was just beginning to be interesting again, somehow. There seemed no satisfactory solution for the two of them.... Well, he'd be unselfish and die, any way. Meanwhile, why not be happy? Here was Phyllis. His hand clasped hers more closely. [Pg 162]

"And when Mr. De Guenther made me that offer," she murmured, coloring in the darkness, "I was tired and discouraged, and the years seemed so endless! It didn't seem as though I'd be harming any one—but I wouldn't have done it if you'd said a word against it—truly I wouldn't, dear."

The last little word slipped out unnoticed. She had been calling her library children "dear" for a year now, and the word slipped out of itself. But Allan liked it.

"My poor little girl!" he said. "In your place I'd have married the devil himself—up against a life like that."

"Then—then you don't—mind?" asked Phyllis anxiously, as she had asked before.

"No, indeed!" said Allan, with a little unnecessary firmness. "I *told* you that, didn't I? I like it."

"So you did tell me," she said penitently.

"But supposing De Guenther hadn't picked out some one like you——" [Pg 163]

"That's just what I've often thought myself," said Phyllis naively. "She might have been much worse than I.... Oh, but I was frightened when I saw you first! I didn't know what you'd be like."

And then, when I looked at you——"

"Well, when you looked at me?" demanded Allan.

But Phyllis refused to go on.

"But that's not all," said Allan. "What about—men?"

"What men?" asked Phyllis innocently.

"Why, men you were interested in, of course," he answered.

"There weren't any," said Phyllis. "I hadn't any place to meet them, or anywhere to entertain them if I had met them. Oh, yes, there was one—an old bookkeeper at the boarding-house. All the boarders there were old. That was why the people at home had chosen it. They thought it would be safe. It was all of that!"

"Well, the bookkeeper?" demanded Allan. "You're straying off from your narrative. The bookkeeper, Phyllis, my dear!"

"I'm telling you about him," protested Phyllis. "He was awfully cross because I wouldn't marry him, but I didn't see any reason why I should. I didn't like him especially, and I would probably have gone on with my work afterwards. There didn't seem to me to be anything to it for any one but him—for of course I'd have had his mending and all that to do when I came home from the library, and I scarcely got time for my own. But he lost his temper fearfully because I didn't want to. Then, of course, men would try to flirt in the library, but the janitor always made them go out when you asked him to. He loved doing it.... Why, Allan, it must be seven o'clock! Shall I turn on more lights?"

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"No.... Then you were quite as shut up in your noisy library as I was in my dark rooms," said Allan musingly.

"I suppose I was," she said, "though I never thought of it before. You mustn't think it was horrid. It was fun, lots of it. Only, there wasn't any being a real girl in it."

"There isn't much in this, I should think," said Allan savagely, "except looking after a big doll."

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Phyllis's laugh tinkled out. "Oh, I *love* playing with dolls," she said mischievously. "And you ought to see my new slippers! I have pink ones, and blue ones, and lavender and green, all satin and suede. And when I get time I'm going to buy dresses to match. And a banjo, maybe, with a self-teacher. There's a room upstairs where nobody can hear a thing you do. I've wanted slippers and a banjo ever since I can remember."

"Then you're fairly happy?" demanded Allan suddenly.

"Why, of course!" said Phyllis, though she had not really stopped to ask herself before whether she was or not. There had been so many exciting things to do. "Wouldn't you be happy if you could buy everything you wanted, and every one was lovely to you, and you had pretty clothes and a lovely house—and a rose-garden?"

"Yes—if I could buy everything I wanted," said Allan. His voice dragged a little. Phyllis sprang up, instantly penitent.

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"You're tired, and I've been talking and talking about my silly little woes till I've worn you out!" she said. "But—Allan, you're getting better. Try to move this arm. The hand I'm holding. There! That's a lot more than you could do when I first came. I think—I think it would be a good plan for a masseur to come down and see it."

"Now look here, Phyllis," protested Allan, "I like your taste in houses and music-boxes and bulldogs, but I'll be hanged if I'll stand for a masseur. There's no use, they can't do me any good, and the last one almost killed me. There's no reason why I should be tormented simply because a professional pounder needs the money."

"No, no!" said Phyllis. "Not that kind! Wallis can have orders to shoot him or something if he touches your spinal column. All I meant was a man who would give the muscles of your arms and shoulders a little exercise. That couldn't hurt, and might help you use them. That wouldn't be any trouble, would it? *Please!* The first minute he hurts, you can send him flying. You know they call massage lazy people's exercise."

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"I believe you're really interested in making me better," said Allan, after a long silence.

"Why, of course," said Phyllis, laughing. "That's what I'm here for!"

But this answer did not seem to suit Allan, for some reason. Phyllis said no more about the masseur. She only decided to summon him, any way. And presently Wallis came in and turned all the lights on.

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In due course of time June came. So did the masseur, and more flowered frocks for Phyllis, and the wheel-chair for Allan. The immediate effect of June was to bring out buds all over the rose-trees; of the flowered dresses, to make Phyllis very picturesquely pretty. As for the masseur, he had more effect than anything else. It was as Phyllis had hoped: the paralysis of Allan's arms had been less permanent than any one had thought, and for perhaps the last three years there had been little more the matter than entire loss of strength and muscle-control, from long disuse. By the time they had been a month in the country Allan's use of his arms and shoulders was nearly normal, and Phyllis was having wild hopes, that she confided to no one but Wallis, of even more sweeping betterments. Allan slept much better, from the slight increase of activity, and also perhaps because Phyllis had coaxed him outdoors as soon as the weather became warm, and was keeping him there. Sometimes he lay in the garden on his couch, sometimes he sat up in the wheel-chair, almost always with Phyllis sitting, or lying in her hammock near him, and the devoted Foxy pretending to hunt something near by.

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There were occasional fits of the old depression and silence, when Allan would lie silently in his own room with his hands crossed and his eyes shut, answering no one—not even Foxy. Wallis and Phyllis respected these moods, and left him alone till they were over, but the adoring Foxy had no such delicacy of feeling. And it is hard to remain silently sunk in depression when an active small dog is imploring you by every means he knows to throw balls for him to run after. For the rest, Allan proved to have naturally a lighter heart and more carefree disposition than Phyllis. His natural disposition was buoyant. Wallis said that he had never had a mood in his life till the accident.

His attitude to his wife became more and more a taking-for-granted affection and dependence. It is to be feared that Phyllis spoiled him badly. But it was so long since she had been needed by any one person as Allan needed her! And he had such lovable, illogical, masculine ways of being wronged if he didn't get the requisite amount of petting, and grateful for foolish little favors and taking big ones for granted, that—entirely, as Phyllis insisted to herself, from a sense of combined duty and grateful interest—she would have had her pretty head removed and sent him by parcel-post, if he had idly suggested his possible need of a girl's head some time.

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And it was so heavenly—oh, but it was heavenly there in Phyllis's rose-garden, with the colored flowers coming out, and the little green caterpillars roaming over the leaves, and pretty dresses to wear, and Foxy-dog to play with—and Allan! Allan demanded—no, not exactly demanded, but expected and got—so much of Phyllis's society in these days that she had learned to carry on all her affairs, even the housekeeping, out in her hammock by his wheel-chair or couch. She wore large, floppy white hats with roses on them, by way of keeping the sun off; but Allan, it appeared, did not think much of hats except as an ornament for girls, and his uncovered curly hair was burned to a sort of goldy-russet all through, and his pallor turned to a clear pale brown.

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Phyllis looked up from her work one of these heavenly last-of-June days, and tried to decide whether she really liked the change or not. Allan was handsomer unquestionably, though that had hardly been necessary. But the resignedly statuesque look was gone.

Allan felt her look, and looked up at her. He had been reading a magazine, for Phyllis had succeeded in a large measure in reviving his taste for magazines and books. "Well, Phyllis, my dear," said he, smiling, "what's the problem now? I feel sure there is something new going to be sprung on me—get the worst over!"

"You wrong me," she said, beginning to thread some more pink embroidery silk. "I was only wondering whether I liked you as well tanned as I did when you were so nice and white, back in the city."

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"Cheerful thought!" said Allan, laying down his magazine entirely. "Shall I ring for Wallis and some peroxide? As you said the other day, 'I have to be approved of or I'm unhappy!'"

"Oh, it really doesn't matter," said Phyllis mischievously. "You know, I married you principally for a rose-garden, and that's *lovely!*"

"I suppose I spoil the perspective," said Allan, unexpectedly ruffled.

Phyllis leaned forward in her blossom-dotted draperies and stroked his hand, that long carven hand she so loved to watch.

"Not a bit, Allan," she said, laughing at him. "You're exceedingly decorative! I remember the first time I saw you I thought you looked exactly like a marble knight on a tomb."

Allan—Allan the listless, tranced invalid of four months before—threw his head back and shouted with laughter.

"I suppose I serve the purpose of garden statuary," he said. "We used to have some horrors when I was a kid. I remember two awful bronze deer that always looked as if they were trying not to get their feet wet, and a floppy bronze dog we called Fido. He was meant for a Gordon setter, I think, but it didn't go much further than intention. Louise and I used to ride the deer."

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His face shadowed a little as he spoke, for nearly the first time, of the dead girl.

"Allan," Phyllis said, bending closer to him, all rosy and golden in her green hammock, "tell me about—Louise Frey—if you don't mind talking about her? Would it be bad for you, do you think?"

Allan's eyes dwelt on his wife pleurably. She was very real and near and lovable, and Louise Frey seemed far away and shadowy in his thoughts. He had loved her very dearly and passionately, that boisterous, handsome young Louise, but that gay boy-life she had belonged to seemed separated now from this pleasant rose-garden, with its golden-haired, wisely-sweet young chatelaine, by thousands of black years. The blackness came back when he remembered what lay behind it.

"There's nothing much to tell, Phyllis," he said, frowning a little. "She was pretty and full of life. She had black hair and eyes and a good deal of color. We were more or less friends all our lives, for our country-places adjoined. She was eighteen when—it happened." [Pg 174]

"Eighteen," said Phyllis musingly. "She would have been just my age.... We won't talk about it, then, Allan ... Well, Viola?"

The pretty Tuskegee chambermaid was holding out a tray with a card on it.

"The doctor, ma'am," she said.

"The doctor!" echoed Allan, half-vexed, half-laughing. "I *knew* you had something up your sleeve, Phyllis! What on earth did you have him for?"

Phyllis's face was a study of astonishment. "On my honor, I hadn't a notion he was even in existence," she protested. "He's not *my* doctor!"

"He must have 'just growed,' or else Lily-Anna's called him in," suggested Allan sunnily. "Bring him along, Viola."

Viola produced him so promptly that nobody had time to remember the professional doctor's visits don't usually have cards, or thought to look at the card for enlightenment. So the surprise was complete when the doctor appeared. [Pg 175]

"Johnny Hewitt!" ejaculated Allan, throwing out both hands in greeting. "Of all people! Well, you old fraud, pretending to be a doctor! The last I heard about you, you were trying to prove that you weren't the man that tied a mule into old Sumerley's chair at college."

"I never did prove it," responded Johnny Hewitt, shaking hands vigorously, "but the fellows said afterwards that I ought to apologize—to the mule. He was a perfectly good mule. But I'm a doctor all right. I live here in Wallraven. I wondered if it might be you by any chance, Allan, when I heard some Harringtons had bought here. But this is the first chance a promising young chickenpox epidemic has given me to find out."

"It's what's left of me," said Allan, smiling ruefully. "And—Phyllis, this doctor-person turns out to be an old friend of mine. This is Mrs. Harrington, Johnny."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" beamed Phyllis, springing up from her hammock, and looking as if she loved Johnny. Here was exactly what was needed—somebody for Allan to play with! She made herself delightful to the newcomer for a few minutes, and then excused herself. They would have a better time alone, for awhile, any way, and there was dinner to order. Maybe this Johnny Hewitt-doctor would stay for dinner. He should if she could make him! She sang a little on her way to the house, and almost forgot the tiny hurt it had been when Allan seemed so saddened by speaking of Louise Frey. She had no right to feel hurt, she knew. It was only to be expected that Allan would always love Louise's memory. She didn't know much about men, but that was the way it always was in stories. A man's heart would die, under an automobile or anywhere else, and all there was left for anybody else was leavings. It wasn't fair! And then Phyllis threw back her shoulders and laughed, as she had sometimes in the library days, and reminded herself what a nice world it was, any way, and that Allan was going to be much helped by Johnny Hewitt. That was a cheering thought, anyhow. She went on singing, and ordered a beautiful, festively-varied dinner, a very poem of gratitude. Then she pounced on the doctor as he was leaving and made him stay for it. [Pg 176]

Allan's eyes were bright and his face lighted with interest. Phyllis, at the head of the table, kept just enough in the talk to push the men on when it seemed flagging, which was not often. She learned more about Allan, and incidentally Johnny Hewitt, in the talk as they lingered about the table, than she had ever known before. She and Allan had lived so deliberately in the placid present, with its almost childish brightnesses and interests, that she knew scarcely more about her husband's life than the De Guenthers had told her before she married him. But she could see the whole picture of it as she listened now: the active, merry, brilliant boy who had worked and played all day and danced half the night; who had lived, it almost seemed to her, two or three lives in one. And then the change to the darkened room—helpless, unable to move, with the added sorrow of his sweetheart's death, and his mother's deliberate fostering of that sorrow. It was almost a shock to see him in the wheel-chair at the foot of the table, his face lighted with interest in what he and his friend were saying. What if he did care for Louise Frey's memory still! He'd had such a hard time that anything Phyllis could do for him oughtn't to be too much! [Pg 177]

When Dr. Hewitt went at last Phyllis accompanied him to the door. She kept him there for a few minutes, talking to him about Allan and making him promise to come often. He agreed with her that, this much progress made, a good deal more might follow. He promised to come back very soon, and see as much of them as possible.

Allan, watching them, out of earshot, from the living-room where he had been wheeled, saw Phyllis smiling warmly up at his friend, lingering in talk with him, giving him both hands in

farewell; and he saw, too, Hewitt's rapt interest and long leave-taking. At last the door closed, and Phyllis came back to him, flushed and animated. He realized, watching her return with that swift lightness of foot her long years of work had lent her, how young and strong and lovely she was, with the rose-color in her cheeks and the light from above making her hair glitter. And suddenly her slim young strength and her bright vitality seemed to mock him, instead of being a comfort and support as heretofore. A young, beautiful, kind girl like that—it was natural she should like Hewitt. And it was going to come natural to Hewitt to like Phyllis. He could see that plainly enough.

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"Tired, Allan Harrington?" she asked brightly, coming over to him and dropping a light hand on his chair, in a caressing little way she had dared lately.... Kindness! Yes, she was the incarnation of kindness. Doubtless she had spoken to and touched those little ragamuffins she had told him of just so.

He had got into a habit of feeling that Phyllis belonged to him absolutely. He had forgotten—what was it she had said to him that afternoon, half in fun—but oh, doubtless half in earnest!—about marrying him for a rose-garden? She had done just that. She had never made any secret of it—why, how could she, marrying him before she had spoken a half-dozen words to him? But how wonderful she had been to him since—sometimes almost as if she cared for him....

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He moved ungraciously. "Don't *touch* me, Phyllis!" he said irritably. "Wallis! You can wheel me into my room."

"Oh-h!" said Phyllis, behind him. The little forlorn sound hurt him, but it pleased him, too. So he could hurt her, if only by rudeness? Well, that was a satisfaction. "Shut the door," he ordered Wallis swiftly.

Phyllis, her hands at her throat, stood hurt and frightened in the middle of the room. It never occurred to her that Allan was jealous, or indeed that he could care enough for her to be jealous.

"It was talking about Louise Frey," she said. "That, and Dr. Hewitt bringing up old times. Oh, *why* did I ask about her? He was contented—I know he was contented! He'd gotten to like having me with him—he even wanted me. Oh, Allan, Allan!"

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She did not want to cry downstairs, so she ran for her own room. There she threw herself down and cried into a pillow till most of the case was wet. She was silly—she knew she was silly. She tried to think of all the things that were still hers, the garden, the watch-bracelet, the leisure, the pretty gowns—but nothing, *nothing* seemed of any consequence beside the fact that—she had not kissed Allan good-night! It seemed the most intolerable thing that had ever happened to her.

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## XIV

It was just as well, perhaps, that Phyllis did not do much sleeping that night, for at about two Wallis knocked at her door. It seemed like history repeating itself when he said: "Could you come to Mr. Allan, please? He seems very bad."

She threw on the silk crepe negligee and followed him, just as she had done before, on that long-ago night after her mother-in-law had died.

"Did Dr. Hewitt's visit overexcite him, do you think?" he asked as they went.

"I don't know, ma'am," Wallis said. "He's almost as bad as he was after the old madam died—you remember?"

"Oh, yes," said Phyllis mechanically. "I remember."

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Allan lay so exactly as he had on that other night, that the strange surroundings seemed incongruous. Just the same, except that his restlessness was more visible, because he had more power of motion.

She bent and held the nervously clenching hands, as she had before. "What is it, Allan?" she said soothingly.

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"Nothing," said her husband savagely. "Nerves, hysteria—any other silly womanish thing a cripple could have. Let me alone, Phyllis. I wish you could put me out of the way altogether!"

Phyllis made herself laugh, though her heart hurried with fright. She had seen Allan suffer badly before—be apathetic, irritable, despondent, but never in a state where he did not cling to her.

"I can't let you alone," she said brightly. "I've come to stay with you till you feel quieter.... Would you rather I talked to you, or kept quiet?"

"Oh, do your wifely duty, whatever it is," he said.... "It was a mistake, the whole thing. You've done more than your duty, child, but—oh, you'd better go away."



Phyllis's heart turned over. Was it as bad as this? Was he as sick of her as this?

"You mean—you think," she faltered, "it was a mistake—our marriage?"

"Yes," he said restlessly. "Yes.... It wasn't fair."

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She had no means of knowing that he meant it was unfair to her. She held on to herself, though she felt her face turning cold with the sudden pallor of fright.

"I think it can be annulled," she said steadily. "No, I suppose it wasn't fair."

She stopped to get her breath and catch at the only things that mattered—steadiness, quietness, ability to soothe Allan!

"It can be annulled," she said again evenly. "But listen to me now, Allan. It will take quite a while. It can't be done to-night, or before you are stronger. So for your own sake you must try to rest now. Everything shall come right. I promise you it shall be annulled. But forget it now, please. I am going to hold your wrists and talk to you, recite things for you, till you go back to sleep."

She wondered afterwards how she could have spoken with that hard serenity, how she could have gone steadily on with story after story, poem after poem, till Allan's grip on her hands relaxed, and he fell into a heavy, tired sleep.



**"BUT YOU SEE—HE'S—ALL I HAVE ...  
GOOD-NIGHT, WALLIS"**

She sat on the side of the bed and looked at him, lying still against his white pillows. She looked and looked, and presently the tears began to slide silently down her cheeks. She did not lift her hands to wipe them away. She sat and cried silently, openly, like a desolate, unkindly treated child.

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"Mrs. Allan! Mrs. Allan, ma'am!" came Wallis's concerned whisper from the doorway. "Don't take it as hard as that. It's just a little relapse. He was overtired. I shouldn't have called you, but you always quiet him so."

Phyllis brushed off her tears, and smiled. You seemed to have to do so much smiling in this house!

"I know," she said. "I worry about his condition too much. But you see—he's—all I have.... Good-night, Wallis."

Once out of Allan's room, she ran at full speed till she gained her own bed, where she could cry in peace till morning if she wanted to, with no one to interrupt. That was all right. The trouble was going to be next morning.

But somehow, when morning came, the old routine was dragged through with. Directions had to be given the servants as usual, Allan's comfort and amusement seen to, just as if nothing had happened. It was a perfect day, golden and perfumed, with just that little tang of fresh windiness

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that June days have in the northern states. And Allan must not lose it—he must be wheeled out into the garden.

She came out to him, in the place where they usually sat, and sank for a moment in the hammock, that afternoon. She had avoided him all the morning.

"I just came to see if everything was all right," she said, leaning toward him in that childlike, earnest way he knew so well. "I don't need to stay here if I worry you."

"I'd rather you'd stay, if you don't mind," he answered. Phyllis looked at him intently. He was white and dispirited, and his voice was listless. Oh, Phyllis thought, if Louise Frey had only been kind enough to die in babyhood, instead of under Allan's automobile! What could there have been about her to hold Allan so long? She glanced at his weary face again. This would never do! What had come to be her dominant instinct, keeping Allan's spirits up, emboldened her to bend forward, and even laugh a little.

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"Come, Allan!" she said. "Even if we're not going to stay together always, we might as well be cheerful till we do part. We used to be good friends enough. Can't we be so a little longer?" It sounded heartless to her after she had said it, but it seemed the only way to speak. She smiled at him bravely.

Allan looked at her mutely for a moment, as if she had hurt him.

"You're right," he said suddenly. "There's no time but the present, after all. Come over here, closer to me, Phyllis. You've been awfully good to me, child—isn't there anything—*anything* I could do for you—something you could remember afterwards, and say, 'Well, he did that for me, any way?'"

Phyllis's eyes filled with tears. "You have given me everything already," she said, catching her breath. She didn't feel as if she could stand much more of this.

"Everything!" he said bitterly. "No, I haven't. I can't give you what every girl wants—a well, strong man to be her husband—the health and strength that any man in the street has."

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"Oh, don't speak that way, Allan!"

She bent over him sympathetically, moved by his words. In another moment the misunderstanding might have been straightened out, if it had not been for his reply.

"I wish I never had to see you at all!" he said involuntarily. In her sensitive state of mind the hurt was all she felt—not the deeper meaning that lay behind the words.

"I'll relieve you of my presence for awhile," she flashed back. Before she gave herself time to think, she had left the garden, with something which might be called a flounce. "When people say things like that to you," she said as she walked away from him, "it's carrying being an invalid a little *too* far!"

Allan heard the side-door slam. He had never suspected before that Phyllis had a temper. And yet, what could he have said? But she gave him no opportunity to find out. In just about the time it might take to find gloves and a parasol, another door clanged in the distance. The street door. Phyllis had evidently gone out.

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Phyllis, on her swift way down the street, grew angrier and angrier. She tried to persuade herself to make allowances for Allan, but they refused to be made. She felt more bitterly toward him than she ever had toward any one in her life. If she only hadn't leaned over him and been sorry for him, just before she got a slap in the face like that!

She walked rapidly down the main street of the little village. She hardly knew where she was going. She had been called on by most of the local people, but she did not feel like being agreeable, or making formal calls, just now. And what was the use of making friends, any way, when she was going back to her rags, poor little Cinderella that she was! Below and around and above everything else came the stinging thought that she had given Allan so much—that she had taken so much for granted.

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Her quick steps finally took her to the outskirts of the village, to a little green stretch of woods. There she walked up and down for awhile, trying to think more quietly. She found the tide of her anger ebbing suddenly, and her mind forming all sorts of excuses for Allan. But that was not the way to get quiet—thinking of Allan! She tried to put him resolutely from her mind, and think about her own future plans. The first thing to do, she decided, was to rub up her library work a little.

It was with an unexpected feeling of having returned to her own place that she crossed the marble floor of the village library. She felt as if she ought to hurry down to the cloak-room, instead of waiting leisurely at the desk for her card. It all seemed uncannily like home—there was even a girl inside the desk who looked like Anna Black of her own Greenway Branch. Phyllis could hear, with a faint amusement, that the girl was scolding energetically in Anna Black's own way. The words struck on her quick ears, though they were not intended to carry.

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"That's what comes of trusting to volunteer help. Telephones at the last moment 'she has a headache,' and not a single soul to look after the story-hour! And the children are almost all here already."

"We'll just have to send them home," said the other girl, looking up from her trayful of cards. "It's too late to get anybody else, and goodness knows *we* can't get it in!"

"They ought to have another librarian," fretted the girl who looked like Anna. "They could afford it well enough, with their Soldiers' Monuments and all."

Phyllis smiled to herself from where she was investigating the card-catalogue. It all sounded so exceedingly natural. Then that swift instinct of hers to help caught her over to the desk, and she heard herself saying:

"I've had some experience in story telling; maybe I could help you with the story-hour. I couldn't help hearing that your story-teller has disappointed you."

The girl like Anna fell on her with rapture.

"Heaven must have sent you," she said. The other one, evidently slower and more cautious by nature, rose too, and came toward her. "You have a card here, haven't you?" she said. "I think I've seen you." [Pg 192]

"Yes," Phyllis said, with a pang at speaking the name she had grown to love bearing; "I'm Mrs. Harrington—Phyllis Harrington. We live at the other end of the village."

"Oh, in the house with the garden all shut off from the lane!" said the girl like Anna, delightedly. "That lovely old house that used to belong to the Jamesons. Oh, yes, I know. You're here for the summer, aren't you, and your husband has been very ill?"

"Exactly," said Phyllis, smiling, though she wished people wouldn't talk about Allan! They seemed possessed to mention him!

"We'll be obliged forever if you'll do it," said the other girl, evidently the head librarian. "Can you do it now? The children are waiting."

"Certainly," said Phyllis, and followed the younger girl straightway to the basement, where, it seemed, the story-hour was held. She wondered, as they went, if the girl envied her her expensively perishable summer organdie, with its flying sashes and costly accessories; if the girl thought about her swinging jewelries and endless leisure with a wish to have them for herself. She had wanted such things, she knew, when she was being happy on fifty dollars a month. And perhaps some of the women she had watched then had had heartaches under their furs.... [Pg 193]

The children, already sitting in a decorous ring on their low chairs, seemed after the first surprise to approve of Phyllis. The librarian lingered for a little by way of keeping order if it should be necessary, watched the competent sweep with which Phyllis gathered the children around her, heard the opening of the story, and left with an air of astonished approval. Phyllis, late best story-teller of the Greenway Branch, watched her go with a bit of professional triumph in her heart.

She told the children stories till the time was up, and then "just one story more." She had not forgotten how, she found. But she never told them the story of "How the Elephant Got His Trunk," that foolish, fascinating story-hour classic that she had told Allan the night his mother had died; the story that had sent him to sleep quietly for the first time in years.... Oh, dear, was everything in the world connected with Allan in some way or other? [Pg 194]

It was nearly six when she went up, engulfed in children, to the circulating room. There the night-librarian caught her. She had evidently been told to try to get Phyllis for more story-hours, for she did her best to make her promise. They talked shop together for perhaps an hour and a half. Then the growing twilight reminded Phyllis that it was time to go back. She had been shirking going home, she realized now, all the afternoon. She said good-bye to the night-librarian, and went on down the village street, lagging unconsciously. It must have been about eight by this time.

It was a mile back to the house. She could have taken the trolley part of the way, but she felt restless and like walking. She had forgotten that walking at night through well-known, well-lighted city streets, and going in half-dusk through country byways, were two different things. She was destined to be reminded of the difference. [Pg 195]

"Can you help a poor man, lady?" said a whining voice behind her, when she had a quarter of the way yet to go. She turned to see a big tramp, a terrifying brute with a half-propitiating, half-fierce look on his heavy, unshaven face. She was desperately frightened. She had been spoken to once or twice in the city, but there there was always a policeman, or a house you could run into if you had to. But here, in the unguarded dusk of a country lane, it was a different matter. The long gold chain that swung below her waist, the big diamond on her finger, the gold mesh-purse—all the jewelry she took such a childlike delight in wearing—she remembered them in terror. She was no brown-clad little working-girl now, to slip along disregarded. And the tramp did not look like a deserving object. [Pg 196]

"If you will come to the house to-morrow," she said, hurrying on as she spoke, "I'll have some work for you. The first house on this street that you come to." She did not dare give him anything,

or send him away.

"Won't you gimme somethin' now, lady?" whined the tramp, continuing to follow. "I'm a starvin' man."

She dared not open her purse and appease him by giving him money—she had too much with her. That morning she had received the check for her monthly income from Mr. De Guenther, sent Wallis down to cash it, and then stuffed it in her bag and forgotten it in the distress of the day. The man might take the money and strike her senseless, even kill her.

"To-morrow," she said, going rapidly on. She had now what would amount to about three city blocks to traverse still. There was a short way from outside the garden-hedge through to the garden, which cut off about a half-block. If she could gain this she would be safe.

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"Naw, yeh don't," snarled the tramp, as she fled on. "Ye'll set that bull-pup o' yours on me. I been there, an' come away again. You just gimme some o' them rings an' things an' we'll call it square, me fine lady!"

Phyllis's heart stood still at this open menace, but she ran on still. A sudden thought came to her. She snatched her gilt sash-buckle—a pretty thing but of small value—from her waist, and hurled it far behind the tramp. In the half-light it might have been her gold mesh-bag.

"There's my money—go get it!" she gasped—and ran for her life. The tramp, as she had hoped he would, dashed back after it and gave her the start she needed. Breathless, terrified to death, she raced on, tearing her frock, dropping the library cards and parasol she still had held in her hand. Once she caught her sash on a tree-wire. Once her slipper-heel caught and nearly threw her. The chase seemed unending. She could hear the dreadful footsteps of the tramp behind her, and his snarling, swearing voice panting out threats. He was drunk, she realized with another thrill of horror. It was a nightmare happening.

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On and on—she stumbled, fell, caught herself—but the tramp had gained. Then at last the almost invisible gap in the hedge, and she fled through.

"*Allan! Allan! Allan!*" she screamed, fleeing instinctively to his chair.

The rose-garden was like a place of enchanted peace after the terror of outside. Her quick vision as she rushed in was of Allan still there, moveless in his chair, with the little black bull-dog lying asleep across his arms and shoulder like a child. It often lay so. As she entered, the scene broke up before her eyes like a dissolving view. She saw the little dog wake and make what seemed one flying spring to the tramp's throat, and sink his teeth in it—and Allan, at her scream, *spring from his chair!*

Phyllis forgot everything at the sight of Allan, standing. Wallis and the outdoor man, who had run to the spot at Phyllis's screams, were dealing with the tramp, who was writhing on the grass, choking and striking out wildly. But neither Phyllis nor Allan saw that. Which caught the other in an embrace they never knew. They stood locked together, forgetting everything else, he in the idea of her peril, she in the wonder of his standing.

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"Oh, darling, darling!" Allan was saying over and over again. "You are safe—thank heaven you are safe! Oh, Phyllis, I could never forgive myself if you had been hurt! Phyllis! Speak to me!"

But Phyllis's own safety did not concern her now. She could only think of one thing. "*You can stand! You can stand!*" she reiterated. Then a wonderful thought came to her, striking across the others, as she stood locked in this miraculously raised Allan's arms. She spoke without knowing that she had said it aloud. "*Do you care, too?*" she said very low. Then the dominant thought returned. "You must sit down again," she said hurriedly, to cover her confusion, and what she had said. "Please, Allan, sit down. Please, dear—you'll tire yourself."

Allan sank into his chair again, still holding her. She dropped on her knees beside him, with her arms around him. She had a little leisure now to observe that Wallis, the ever-resourceful, had tied the tramp neatly with the outdoor man's suspenders, which were nearer the surface than his own, and succeeded in prying off the still unappeased Foxy, who evidently was wronged at not having the tramp to finish. They carried him off, into the back kitchen garden. Allan, now that he was certain of Phyllis's safety, paid them not the least attention.

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"Did you mean it?" he said passionately. "Tell me, did you mean what you said?"

Phyllis dropped her dishevelled head on Allan's shoulder.

"I'm afraid—I'm going to cry, and—and I know you don't like it!" she panted. Allan half drew, half guided her up into his arms.

"Was it true?" he insisted, giving her an impulsive little shake. She sat up on his knees, wide-eyed and wet-cheeked like a child.

"But you knew that all along!" she said. "That was why I felt so humiliated. It was *you* that I thought didn't care——"

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Allan laughed joyously. "Care!" he said. "I should think I did, first, last, and all the time! Why, Phyllis, child, didn't I behave like a brute because I was jealous enough of John Hewitt to throw him in the river? He was the first man you had seen since you married me—attractive, and well, and clever, and all that—it would have been natural enough if you'd liked him."

"Liked him!" said Phyllis in disdain. "When there was you? And I thought—I thought it was the memory of Louise Frey that made you act that way. You didn't want to talk about her, and you said it was all a mistake——"

"I was a brute," said Allan again. "It was the memory that I was about as useful as a rag doll, and that the world was full of live men with real legs and arms, ready to fall in love with you."

"There's nobody but *you* in the world," whispered Phyllis.... "But you're well now, or you will be soon," she added joyously. She slipped away from him. "Allan, don't you want to try to stand again? If you did it then, you can do it now."

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"Yes, by Jove, I do!" he said. But this time the effort to rise was noticeable. Still, he could do it, with Phyllis's eager help.

"It must have been what Dr. Hewitt called neurasthenic inhibition," said Phyllis, watching the miracle of a standing Allan. "That was what we were talking about by the door that night, you foolish boy!... Oh, how tall you are! I never realized you were tall, lying down, somehow!"

"I don't have to bend very far to kiss you, though," suggested Allan, suiting the action to the word.

But Phyllis, when this was satisfactorily concluded, went back to the great business of seeing how much Allan could walk. He sat down again after a half-dozen steps, a little tired in spite of his excitement.

"I can't do much at a time yet, I suppose," he said a little ruefully. "Do you mean to tell me, sweetheart—come over here closer, where I can touch you—you're awfully far away—do you mean to tell me that all that ailed me was I thought I couldn't move?"

"Oh, no!" explained Phyllis, moving her chair close, and then, as that did not seem satisfactory, perching on the arm of Allan's. "You'd been unable to move for so long that when you were able to at last your subconscious mind clamped down on your muscles and was convinced you couldn't. So no matter how much you consciously tried, you couldn't make the muscles go till you were so strongly excited it broke the inhibition—just as people can lift things in delirium or excitement that they couldn't possibly move at other times. Do you see?"

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"I do," said Allan, kissing the back of her neck irrelevantly. "If somebody'd tried to shoot me up five years ago I might be a well man now. That's a beautiful word of yours, Phyllis, inhibition. What a lot of big words you know!"

"Oh, if you won't be serious!" said she.

"We'll have to be," said Allan, laughing, "for here's Wallis, and, as I live, from the direction of the house. I thought they carried our friend the tramp out through the hedge—he must have gone all the way around."

Phyllis was secretly certain that Wallis had been crying a little, but all he said was, "We've taken the tramp to the lock-up, sir."

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But his master and his mistress were not so dignified. They showed him exhaustively that Allan could really stand and walk, and Allan demonstrated it, and Wallis nearly cried again. Then they went in, for Phyllis was sure Allan needed a thorough rest after all this. She was shaking from head to foot herself with joyful excitement, but she did not even know it. And it was long past dinner-time, though every one but Lily-Anna, to whom the happy news had somehow filtered, had forgotten it.

"I've always wanted to hold you in my arms, this way," said Allan late that evening, as they stood in the rose-garden again; "but I thought I never would.... Phyllis, did you ever want me to?"

It was too beautiful a moonlight night to waste in the house, or even on the porch. The couch had been wheeled to its accustomed place in the rose-garden, and Allan was supposed to be lying on it as he often did in the evenings. But it was hard to make him stay there.

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"Oh, you *must* lie down," said Phyllis hurriedly, trying to move out of the circle of his arms. "You mustn't stand till we find how much is enough.... I'm going to send for the wolfhound next week. You won't mind him now, will you?"

"Did you ever want to be here in my arms, Phyllis?"

"Of course not!" said Phyllis, as a modest young person should. "But—but——"

"Well, my wife?"

"I've often wondered just where I'd reach to," said Phyllis in a rush.... "Allan, *please* don't stand any longer!"

"I'll lie down if you'll sit on the couch by me."

"Very well," said Phyllis; and sat obediently in the curve of his arm when he had settled himself in the old position, the one that looked so much more natural for him.

"Mine, every bit of you!" he said exultantly. "Heaven bless that tramp!... And to think we were talking about annulments!... Do you remember that first night, dear, after mother died? I was

half-mad with grief and physical pain. And Wallis went after you. I didn't want him to. But he trusted you from the first—good old Wallis! And you came in with that swift, sweeping step of yours, as I've seen you come fifty times since—half-flying, it seemed to me then—with all your pretty hair loose, and an angelic sort of a white thing on. I expect I was a brute to you—I don't remember how I acted—but I know you sat on the bed by me and took both my wrists in those strong little hands of yours, and talked to me and quieted me till I fell fast asleep. You gave me the first consecutive sleep I'd had in four months. It felt as if life and calmness and strength were pouring from you to me. You stayed till I fell asleep."

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"I remember," said Phyllis softly. She laid her cheek by his, as it had been on that strange marriage evening that seemed so far away now. "I was afraid of you at first. But I felt that, too, as if I were giving you my strength. I was so glad I could! And then I fell asleep, too, over on your shoulder."

"You never told me that," said Allan reproachfully. Phyllis laughed a little.

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"There never seemed to be any point in our conversations where it fitted in neatly," she said demurely. Allan laughed, too.

"You should have made one. But what I was going to tell you was—I think I began to be in love with you then. I didn't know it, but I did. And it got worse and worse but I didn't know what ailed me till Johnny drifted in, bless his heart! Then I did. Oh, Phyllis, it was awful! To have you with me all the time, acting like an angel, waiting on me hand and foot, and not knowing whether you had any use for me or not!... And you never kissed me good-night last night."

Phyllis did not answer. She only bent a little, and kissed her husband on the lips, very sweetly and simply, of her own accord. But she said nothing then of the long, restless, half-happy, half-wretched time when she had loved him and never even hoped he would care for her. There was time for all that. There were going to be long, joyous years together, years of being a "real woman," as she had so passionately wished to be that day in the library. She would never again need to envy any woman happiness or love or laughter. It was all before her now, youth and joy and love, and Allan, her Allan, soon to be well, and loving her—loving nobody else but her!

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"Oh, I love you, Allan!" was all she said.

Transcriber's note:

There was no Table of Contents in the original, one has been placed in this etext to assist with navigation.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ROSE-GARDEN HUSBAND \*\*\*

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