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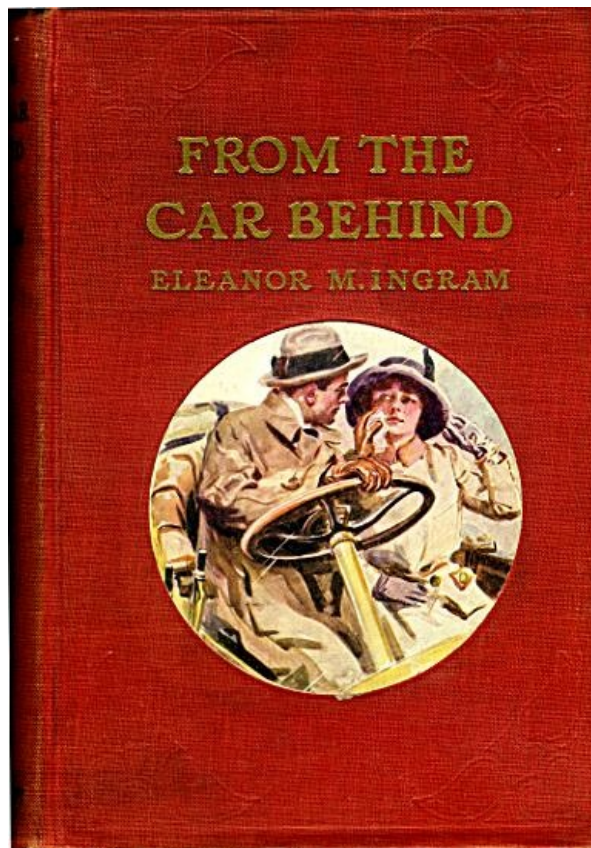
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FROM THE CAR BEHIND

SECOND EDITION

BY

ELEANOR M. INGRAM

AUTHOR OF
"THE FLYING MERCURY," "THE GAME OR THE CANDLE," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR
BY JAMES MONTGOMERY FLAGG



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TO MY DEAR
AND
GRACIOUS MOTHER

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I

[Pg 11]

THE KID AMATEUR

Gerard paused on the steps of the cement plateau overlooking the racetrack, his eyebrows lifting in the wave of humor glinting across his face like sunlight over quiet water.

"What?" he wondered. "Who——"

The grinning mechanic who had just come across from the row of training-camps opposite supplied the information.

"Oh, that's Rose's rose. Ain't he awful tweet?" he mocked.

Gerard continued to smile, but his clear amber eyes grew keenly appraising as they followed the flight of the rose-colored racing car around the circular track.

"He can drive," he gave laconic verdict.

"Sure," assented the mechanic. "But he'll be the last rose of summer, all right, when the race comes off. He'll not last twenty-four hours—a kid amateur. If you ain't coming over, I'll lead myself back to my job."

"You never can tell," warned Gerard, tolerantly. "No, I'm not coming over, Rupert; run along."

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He moved over to one of the grand-stand seats, as he spoke, and sat down, leaning on the rail with an easy movement of his supple figure. That was the first characteristic strangers usually noted in him: an exquisite Hellenic grace of strength and faultless proportion. He was a man's beauty, as distinguished from a beauty-man; other men were given to admiring him extravagantly and unresentfully. Unresentfully, because of his utter practicality and matter-of-fact atmosphere.

The afternoon sunshine glittered goldenly across the huge, green field and the mile track circling it, where four racing cars sped in practice contest. Two of them were painted gray, one was dingy-white; the fourth shone in delicate pink enamel touched here and there with silver-gilt. Its driver and mechanic were clad in pink also, adding the completing stroke to an effect suggesting the circus rather than the race track. There was much excuse for the laughter of the camps, and that reflection of it lying in Gerard's eyes.

Yet, the rose-colored machine was well driven. More than once the watcher nodded in quick approval of a skilful turn or deft manœuvre. Once he rose and changed his position to see more distinctly, and it was then that he first noticed the girl.

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She was so beautifully and expensively gowned as to draw even masculine notice of the fact, the veil that fell from her silk hood to the hem of her cloak would alone have purchased the motor costume of the average woman. Against this filmy drapery her intent face showed as a study in concentration; her dark-blue eyes wide behind their black lashes, her soft lips apart, she too was watching the pink racer. But there was no laughter in her expression, instead there was the most deep and earnest tenderness, a blending of the childish and the maternal that made Gerard catch his breath and glance enviously at the driver of the gaudy car.

The afternoon was almost ended; as Gerard looked, the pink machine finished its last circuit and plunged through the paddock entrance, to come to a halt before its own tent in the "white city" of training camps. Simultaneously the girl in the upper rows of seats arose, catching up her swirl of pale silk and lace garments and hurrying precipitately down the stairway aisle. So great was her haste that, coming suddenly to the last step, one small, high-heeled suède shoe slipped from the iron edge and flung her violently against a column of the stand. Gerard reached her just in time to prevent further fall.

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"Stand still," he cautioned, quietly steady. "There is a second flight of stairs. You are not hurt, I hope?"

Giddy, for a moment she willingly suffered his support, then drew back on the narrow landing, her color returning vividly.

"No," she answered. "I am not hurt. I thank you very much."

Thick waves of fair hair lay across her forehead above the delicate dark line of her brows, her candid regard met his with the dignity of utter naturalness and a young confidence in the goodness of all men. The impression Gerard received was original; he fancied that her home life must have been singularly happy and innocent, and that he should like to know her father.

"You will let me take you down the rest of the way, at least," he offered, accepting the situation as simply as she had done.

She glanced down the stairs with a slight shiver, still shaken and unnerved.

"You are very good. My car is beyond the corner, there. I—I am in haste to reach it."



GIDDY, SHE WILLINGLY SUFFERED HIS SUPPORT, THEN DREW BACK, HER COLOR RETURNING VIVIDLY

That had been obvious. Yet, as she laid her gloved hand on Gerard's arm, she lingered to look again in the direction of the training-camps. [Pg 15]

"The cars will not go out again to-day?" she inferred, half-questioningly.

"No, I think not. It is already late. This way?"

"Please; to the rear of the club-house."

They descended to the lower floor and crossed a strip of sandy ground to where a large foreign-built touring car waited, empty save for the chauffeur.

"I am running away from my brother," the young girl explained; then, with a playfulness tinged with pathos, "He is practicing out there. And it vexes him if I watch him or say I am afraid for him. He tells me to stay home and forget it. But sometimes I cannot. To-day I could not. Thanks to you, I shall escape before he finds me."

The "kid amateur's" sister, of course, Gerard thought, as he put her in the car.

"Do you always do as he says?" he queried whimsically. "I have no sister, but I did not understand that was the rule."

She turned to him her soft, completely feminine face, and gleamed into laughter.

"I am the only passive member of a strong-willed family," she told him. "I am always doing what some one bids. Thank you, and good-by." [Pg 16]

The margin of safe escape was not great. As Gerard stepped back on the cement promenade, the pink machine shot across and came to a halt near the exit, its driver turning in his seat.

"Any one going to town?" he called, his imperious young voice ringing across the open spaces.

"No," came the discouraging monosyllable from the official stand.

"No one?"

"No."

The driver slowly sent his car forward, temper in every crisp movement, his gaze travelling over

the empty tiers of seats, to fall at last upon Gerard and there rest. With a jerk he jammed down the brake and leaned from the machine. Thick fair hair lay across his boyish forehead above level dark brows, his candid dark-blue eyes went direct to their goal: the metal badge fastened to Gerard's lapel and just visible under the edge of his gray overcoat.

"You're wearing a chauffeur's license," he challenged.

"I surely am. Want to engage a man?" was the grave response.

The boy's arch glance swept the other's face, so definitely stamped with the habit of mastery.

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"If I did I'd ask you to recommend one," he retorted mirthfully. "I'm not as much mixed as I sounded; I wasn't thinking of hiring you. But I did want to ask if you would ride into the city with me. My mechanic is busy over there, I can't find any one else to go with me, and I've got to get my car down to the Renard shop to-night."

"Now I wonder," Gerard mused aloud, "why you want any one with you."

"Because I won't be eighteen for a month," he gave prompt explanation. "Under the latest law freak turned out at Albany, I'm too young to drive a motor vehicle safely on the public roads unless I have a licensed chauffeur alongside of me. Oh, of course you'd laugh!"

"I was only recalling what I've just been watching you do on the track," apologized Gerard, steadying his countenance. "And speculating upon how the average chauffeur would like to try your feats. I shall appreciate the honor of riding into town with Mr. Rose and his rose."

The driver colored and laughed together, as his guest took the seat beside him.

"They're always ragging me—I mean the professional racers and motor men," he avowed, in a burst of resentful confidence. "They called me kid amateur, and rosebud, and girlie, until I just had my car painted pink and bought these pink suits and told them to go ahead getting all the fun they could. I'll get my turn to-morrow night." He twisted his car through the curved gateway, viciously expert.

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"You are planning to win?"

There was no trace of mockery in the level intonation of the inquiry, yet Rose flushed again.

"I want to, and I mean to try," he answered frankly and soberly. "Of course one can't count on that sort of thing. I've got a splendid French machine here. But Allan Gerard is going to race; I'm afraid of him. Why, he hasn't even been out to practice! He says he knows the track, they tell me, and he'll not come down until a couple of hours before the start. That kind of talk *rattles* me—I wish he'd act like other people and not as if he just meant to drop into the motordrome and win another cup."

"I don't believe Gerard intends to pose as confident," deprecated his companion. "You see, he has his automobile factory to manage as well as his racing work; I rather fancy that he didn't come out to practice because he was busy."

"Oh, I suppose so. It just gets on my nerves; I shouldn't wonder if they were a bit raw from so much chaffing by the professional pilots. We're the quickest tempered family that ever happened, anyhow. I'll go off the handle, I know I will, if those grinning drivers get to gibing at me to-morrow night——" he broke off, slamming savagely into a lower gear as he caught a mounted policeman's eye and endeavored to choke his racing car's speed down to a reasonable approach to the legal limit.

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When the desired result was somewhat attained, Gerard spoke with quiet seriousness.

"I've seen considerable motor racing, and I've been watching you this afternoon. With some really steady training and practice you could undoubtedly become one of our few fine drivers. You have the gift."

Rose caught his breath, his blue eyes flashed to meet the other man's with dazzled and dazzling ardor.

"But—you must not 'go off the handle.' Never. You must keep your nerve or quit the track."

"It isn't nerve, it's temper," amended Rose honestly.

Gerard's firm lip bent amusedly, his bronze-brown eyes glinted a fun as purely boyish as could the other's.

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"That's quite different," he conceded. "Temper doesn't interfere with driving; on the contrary, some of the best drivers and most amiable men I know are very demons when they are racing."

"Gerard isn't. They say he is the quietest ever. Of course he's almost twenty-eight and used to it all."

The gentleman in question carefully unfastened his glove.

"Gerard seems to worry you," he commented.

"He does. I don't know just why, but he does."

"Well, don't let him. This is where you leave your machine?"

"Yes. I can't offer to take you wherever you are going, because I couldn't get back alone. I'm awfully obliged to you for coming in with me."

"Thanks for the ride." Gerard stepped out and offered his hand with a glance deliberately friendly. "Good-by; good luck for to-morrow and next day."

Rose dragged off his gauntlet and eagerly bent to give the clasp.

"Wait—you're not going like that?" he protested. "I'd like to see you again. You haven't told me *your* name."

"We will see each other again. That's a safe prediction, I assure you." He withdrew his hand, laughing a denial of explanation as he retreated. "I will tell you my name next time, if you ask me."

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Already half a dozen people had collected around the pink racing car. Others were flocking from every direction, the group forming with a suddenness truly New Yorkese. Indifferent to all, Rose sprang out of his seat and ran through the curious men in pursuit of his late companion.

"Wait," he urged, overtaking him. "I want to ask—did you mean that? About my driving well, some day? I know I'll never get a chance to do it, but do you mean that I *could*?"

"I meant," confirmed Gerard, "just what I said. I usually do. Good-by."

The boy remained perfectly still in the midst of the crowd, standing in his rose-colored costume and looking after the straight, slender figure swinging down the street. When Gerard glanced back in turning the corner, Rose was still watching him.

It was some forty-five hours later that Gerard's prediction was verified, in the glare-streaked darkness of the Beach racetrack amid the medley of sounds from excited crowds, roaring cars, and noisily busy training camps. Under the swinging electric light before the hospital tent, the two drivers came face to face.

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"Nothing wrong, I hope?" Gerard greeted, keen eyes sweeping the other.

A sparkle of animation lit Rose's exhaustion-drawn face to boyishness.

"I'm not hurt. I want to tell you that if I'd known who you were, yesterday, I'd never have asked you to ride with me," he answered, warmly impulsive.

"You'd have let me walk?"

"I'd have got into the mechanic's seat and let you *drive*. Do you suppose I'd have kept the wheel with you in the car? But what you said about my driving made it so no one could rattle me, Mr. Gerard; I am not going out of the race because of that, anyhow."

"Going out of the race? Why, you're running in third place!"

Rose shook his head, his mouth set, holding out two blistered hands and linen-wound arms.

"I've given out," he acknowledged bitterly. "There'll be no finish for my car. I can't hold my wheel without an hour to rest and get these into shape. Kid amateur, all right."

"Where's your alternate driver?"

"He slipped on a greasy bit of grass, ten minutes ago, and sprained his ankle. We're out of it, with third place ours and a perfect car to run."

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Gerard looked down the row of illuminated tents to where the pink car stood, palpitating in an aura of its own light, and brought his eyes back to the other man.

"My machine went out of the race, two hours ago, with a broken crankshaft. If you like, I'll be your alternate," he offered.

Incredulous, breathless, Rose stared at him.

"You—you mean—"

"I will drive your car until you are ready to take it again for the finish. I've nothing else to do, to-night."

It was a time and a scene where over-tense nerves not infrequently snapped. But if Gerard was not surprised to see it, Rose certainly was both amazed and humiliated to feel his own eyes suddenly stinging like a girl's.

"If ever I can do anything for you," he stammered fervently.

"I'll give you the chance," promised Gerard, tactfully gay. "Now hurry up your men with the car while I find my mechanician."

The comrade aid had been given to Rose, without the least relation to Rose's sister. But nevertheless Gerard directed a curious look toward the teeming grand-stand, as he turned to make ready. Was she there, he wondered, the flower-like girl with the name of a flower, who had rested in his arms just so long as a blossom might flutter against one in passing? Would her gaze follow the pink racer, still?

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II

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CORRIE AND HIS OTHER FELLOW

The touring car rolled slowly through the October leaves rustling and swirling down the road in jovial wind-eddies, came up to a knoll beside the field, and stopped. The driver turned in his seat to face the two occupants of the tonneau, pushing his goggles up above the line of his fair hair.

"Look," he urged eagerly. "Look at the pitcher of our home team. There, just crossing the diamond—it's a new inning."

"It's not the first baseball game you've brought us out to see, Corrie," observed Mr. Thomas Rose, setting his own goggles on his cap above the line of his reddish-gray hair. "Is it, my girl?"

His daughter laughed, shaking her small head in its crimson hood and glancing roguishly at her brother.

"Nor the twenty-first, papa," she amplified.

"Well, but I haven't brought you to see the game, but the pitcher," the boy protested. "He's a new one; you never saw him before. Look."

"Why?"

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"Because I want you to."

Flavia Rose obediently turned her gaze toward the players, and upon the indicated man it halted, arrested.

"Oh!" she exclaimed under her breath, and sat still.

The men were in their places, alert in poised expectation, the attention of the whole field concentrating upon the central figure of the pitcher at whom the young girl also looked. A slim, straight statue he stood during a full moment, then slowly raised his arms above his head in a gesture of supple grace and ease. The afternoon sun struck across his wind-ruffled brown hair and smiling face, as he gave a brief nod to the catcher and dropped his arm with a lithe, swift movement and turn of his whole body. The white ball shot across, swerving almost at the plate, and crashed into the catcher's mitt.

"He's got speed!" Mr. Rose approved loudly, standing up in the car. "That's pitching! Who's your friend, Corwin B.?"

His son did not answer. The ball was back in the pitcher's hands; again he was lifting his arms in the pose his physical beauty made classic. There was repeated the quick nod, the abruptly swift movement, and the ball sped across, dropping oddly.

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"Strike two!" was called.

Amid the applause and shouts of encouragement, Flavia laid her small, urgent hand on her brother's sleeve.

"Corrie, who is he? Tell us, please."

He moved to see her more directly.

"Do you remember the Beach twenty-four-hour race, last summer, where I finished third? Do you remember how I told you about the big driver, Allan Gerard, who drove my machine for two hours until I could hold the wheel again myself?"

"Of course."

"Strike three—you're out!" rang the umpire's announcement; again the joyous shouts interrupted speech.

"Well, then, that's who."

"That's Gerard, playing ball?" interrogated Mr. Rose, incredulous. "What for? Lost his racing job?"

Laughing, Corrie shook his head.

"No, sir! Gerard is a member of the Mercury automobile company and has their western factory and all that end of the business in his hands. He races the Mercury car because he loves the work and because no one else can do it so well. No; practice for the Cup race opens to-morrow, and he's here on Long Island for that. But the pitcher of our home team put his arm out of business yesterday, and Gerard offered to pitch for this game. He knows everybody here—he always

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knows everybody everywhere, he's that kind. And I want to ask him to dinner," he concluded irrelevantly.

Mr. Rose scanned the field for a flying ball, as a sharp crack announced the first hit.

"Staying out here, or going in to the city each day?" he inquired.

"He's staying in Jamaica, sir."

"Then you'd best ask him to stop at your house until the race comes off, or he'll wreck his machine from weakness brought on by starvation," pronounced Mr. Rose, dryly. "One dinner won't carry him through weeks. I know those hotels, myself."

Corrie gasped, his face swept by delighted awe.

"Really? Oh, I'd give anything to have Gerard, *Gerard*, like that! Do you think he'll come?"

"If he had dinner at his hotel last night, and breakfast and lunch to-day, he'll come," his father assured. "Now be quiet and let me watch the game; it must be near ending."

"Almost, but——"

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"Never mind the *but*, Corwin B. Keep cool."

But Corrie could not keep cool. When his father's attention was engaged he slipped down from his seat and went around to Flavia's side of the car.

"Do you think he would come?" he asked, for her ears alone. "Don't you want him, too? Why are you so serious—what *do* you think?"

Their clear violet-blue eyes met in the intimate household love and understanding of all their lives. Flavia dropped a caressing arm around her brother's shoulders, gently drawing him to face the field.

"Really look," she bade.

Puzzled, he obeyed. Gerard was still occupying the centre of the diamond, holding the ball aloft while his meditative gaze apparently dwelt on the batsman. There was scarcely a perceptible turn of his brown head, yet as the two in the car watched, the impromptu pitcher's glance flashed from behind his uplifted arm and he whirled in a half-circle to hurl the unexpected ball straight across the diamond to where a careless enemy had ventured from second base. Too late the startled runner saw; the sudden attack won.

"You're out!" pealed the quick decision. The game was closed. With the gay uproar of local triumph Mr. Rose mingled his approving applause, still standing upright in the car to view the scene.

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"Well, of what are you thinking?" Corrie repeated. "He's splendid, I know that."

"I am thinking of Isabel," Flavia answered quietly, "and of you. If you take Mr. Gerard home, she will see a great deal of him."

Astonished, he regarded her. After a moment he again looked toward the man opposite, his expression sober.

"It's like you to think of me," he acknowledged, with slow gratitude. "But that's all right. If any one else can get her, I'd better know it now. Of course he'll want her, she's just the kind of girl he'd like, such a sport herself about cars and things. If she likes him better than me, why I'll have to stand it, that's all."

"Then, I shall be very glad to have Mr. Gerard stay with us, dear; don't you and I always like the same things?"

"We sure do, Other Fellow?"

The childhood "play name" brought their cordial glances together, as Mr. Rose dropped into his seat.

"Game's over, Corwin B.; better run get your friend," he notified, cheerily imperious. "Hurry along."

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Half-smiling, half-anxious, Corrie lingered on the verge of compliance.

"I—I feel a chill at the idea," he avowed. "I believe, after all, I'm shy of Gerard!"

"Now what's the matter?" Mr. Rose ejaculated, staring after his son. "Shy; and I've been trying ever since he was born—without succeeding—to teach him that there were one or two people on earth bigger than he is."

"Papa!"

"Isn't it so, then?"

She laughed with him, mutinously unanswering.

Whatever diffidence Corrie had felt promptly vanished when Gerard turned from the group of

players and met him. Flushed with vigorous exercise and recent conquest, his smiling eyes warming to recognition as they fell upon the breathless young motorist, there certainly was nothing intimidating in the late pitcher's aspect.

"I'm Corrie Rose—you haven't forgotten? Come meet my father and sister, won't you?" was Corrie's eager greeting.

It was not at all the dignified self-introduction and invitation he had planned as he ran across the field, but Gerard had the gift of drawing sincerity to meet his own, like to like. [Pg 32]

"You haven't forgotten me," countered the other, giving his hand. "And I should be delighted to meet your father and Miss Rose, if I were fit. Perhaps you'll give me another chance."

"Fit? Why, we've been watching you play ball! A fellow don't play ball in a frock coat. We want you to come home to dinner, now, and stay with us over the race. You know I'm practising for it, too. Don't say no," as Gerard moved. "We *want* you."

The impulsive, italicized speech was very compelling.

"Thank you; I'll come over to your car, anyway," Gerard accepted. "But—What is it, Rupert?"

"I guess you'd call it a raincoat," was the drawled reply. "I'd feel bad to find you'd brought out your pajamas, for there ain't anything to do except wear it, now."

"I'm not cold."

The mechanic nodded a brief return to Corrie's laughing salute, and directed his sardonic black eyes to Gerard's right arm, which the rolled-back sleeve left bare to the elbow.

"I ain't specially timid," he submitted. "If rheumatism is part of the racing equipment you like to have with you, I'll just hurry home and make my will before we start." [Pg 33]

With an impatient shrug Gerard slipped into the garment.

"Thanks; you're worse than a wife. Rose, you know Jack Rupert, who's sheer nerve when we're racing and sheer nerves when we're not."

"I surely do," Corrie warmly confirmed. "You rode with Mr. Gerard at the Beach when he drove my car for me. I'm not likely to forget *that*."

The small, malignly intelligent mechanic contemplated him, unsmiling, although far from unfriendly.

"I ride with Gerard," he acquiesced.

And only Gerard himself knew the history of service in the face of death comprehended in the simple statement.

Thomas Rose, repeatedly millionaire and genially absolute dictator in his circle of affairs, was not easy to gainsay. And he chose to assume prompt possession of Gerard, almost before the introduction was over.

"Get right in," he commanded. "Never mind anything, get in; and we'll talk about keeping you after we've had dinner. We'll stop at your hotel for your things, if you want them."

"You're very good," Gerard began, and stopped, encountering Flavia's eyes. Neither had spoken of their former meeting, indeed they had been given no opportunity for speech, yet the acute recollection was a bond between them. [Pg 34]

"We do not wish to be insistent, Mr. Gerard," she said now, in her fresh, soft tones. "But we should be very glad to have you."

Gerard continued to look at her, gravely attentive as she herself. She was as exquisitely dressed as when he had caught her in his arms on the stairs of the Beach grand-stand, the fragile hand she laid on the car door carried the vivid flash of jewels. Somehow he divined that her father exacted this, that in his pride of self-made millionaire he would insist upon extravagance as other men might upon economy. And she would yield. He remembered her playful speech at their first meeting: "I am the only passive member of a strong-willed family." His impression was of her most feminine softness that was not in the least weak.

"Thank you," he answered. "I should have liked above all things to be your guest. But it happens that I have brought my mechanic with me and that I cannot desert him at the hotel. It does not matter at all about relative social position; we are down here together. Moreover, I have a ninety Mercury racing machine to look after, and I should be a most unrestful visitor, up at dawn and out until dark." [Pg 35]

"If that's all," decided Mr. Rose, "this is a seven-passenger car and an architect said my house had ninety-five rooms. There's standing room in the garage, I guess, for a car or two. Corrie, turn loose your horn."

Corrie promptly put his finger on the button of the electric signal, and a raucous wail shattered the sunset hush.

"That's your man, looking this way? I like your sticking to him, Gerard. Here he comes. We're all

fixed, then; get in."

Gerard got in, beside Flavia, who laughingly drew her velvet skirts to give him place.

"I think this bears a perilous resemblance to a kidnapping," she doubted. "Is it quite safe, I wonder? Shall you summon rescue when we reach a populated place?"

"If kidnapping means being taken against one's will, I haven't any case," he returned as seriously. "I don't believe I could be dislodged from here, now, if you tried."

"I had not contemplated the attempt—yet."

"Please do not! I look like a tramp, I know, but I will be exceedingly good."

"Not immoderately good; we are a frivolous family," she deprecated.

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They looked at each other, and their eyes laughed together.

Radiant, Corrie was already behind the steering-wheel, an impatient hand poised to release the brake.

"Beside me, Rupert," he blithely invited, when the mechanic came up.

Rupert looked at Gerard, received his gesture of corroboration, and lifting his cap to Flavia, took the designated seat without comment.

"Don't you care where you're going?" presently demanded Corrie, moving up a speed. He respected Allan Gerard's little mechanic almost as much as he did Allan Gerard, knowing his reputation in racing circles; the glance he gave to accompany the query was an invitation to friendship.

Rupert braced one small tan shoe against the floor, as the car wrenched itself out of a tenacious sand rut.

"I ain't worrying," he kindly assured. "Any place that ain't New York is off the map, anyhow."

"I thought you belonged out west with Mr. Gerard."

"I guess I belong to the Mercury racer. But I'm officially chief tester at the eastern factory, up the Hudson, except when there's a race on. Since Darling French got married, I've raced with Gerard. Were you aiming to collect that horseshoe with a nail in it, ahead there on the course, or will it be an accident?"

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"It's going to be an escape," smiled the driver, swerving deftly. "Tell me about the first part of the ball game, won't you? I missed it, going after my father and sister."

"Who, me? I ain't qualified. The curves I'm used to judging belong to a different game. I guess, if you listen to what's being said behind us, you'll get the better record. I'm enjoying the novelty of the automobile ride, myself."

"You must be," Corrie agreed ironically. "You get so little of it. They are not talking *real* ball."

But he settled back to listen. In fact, it was the recent game that was being discussed in the tonneau, with Mr. Rose as chief speaker and Flavia as auditor. The party was of enchanting congeniality.

They drove first to the hotel where Gerard had been stopping.

It was quite six o'clock when the touring car rolled through Mr. Rose's lawns and landscape-garden scenery, to come to a stop before the large, pink stone house of many columns. Mr. Rose had a passion for columns. Across the rug-strewn veranda a girl advanced to meet the arriving motorists; an auburn-haired, high-colored girl who wore a tweed ulster over her light evening gown.

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"I thought you were never coming," she reproached, imperiously aggrieved. "I hate waiting. And I want uncle to send Lenoir after my runabout——"

The sentence broke as she saw the man beside Flavia, her gray eyes widened in astonished interest.

"My niece Isabel Rose, Mr. Gerard," presented Mr. Rose. "And now you have met all of us. Come on, Corwin B."

Isabel Rose gave her hand to the guest. She had the slightly hard beauty of nineteen years and exuberant health; contrasted with Flavia, there was almost a boyishness in her air of assurance and athletic vigor. But in the studied coquetry of her glance at Gerard, the instant desire to allure in response to the allure of this man's good looks, she showed femininity of a type that her cousin never would understand.

"I should not have minded waiting," she declared, in her high-pitched, clear-cut speech, "if I had known something pleasant was going to happen."

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"If that means me, Miss Rose——" Gerard laughingly doubted.

"I don't see anyone else who happens; the rest of them are just always here," she confirmed,

shrugging her shoulders.

He regarded her with the gay indulgence one shows an agreeable child. "Then, all thanks for the welcome. I shall try to live up to it, if you will not expect too much."

"Oh, but I shall!"

"Then perhaps I had better retreat at once?"

"You might try, first. Don't you think so, Flavia?"

"I think we might go in," Flavia smilingly suggested from the threshold. "We could assume Mr. Gerard's safety so far."

"Come on, Corwin B.," his father summoned again.

But Corrie sat still in his place, leaning on his steering-wheel and gazing curiously at his cousin and Gerard. Nor did he follow the group into the house; instead, he took the car and Jack Rupert around to the garage.

A little later, when Flavia Rose went upstairs to make ready for dinner, Isabel followed her, frankly inquisitive. [Pg 40]

"Is this Mr. Gerard the real Gerard, the Gerard who races cars?" the examination commenced, as soon as the cousins were alone.

"He is Allan Gerard," Flavia stated. "Did you have a nice game, this afternoon?"

The distraction was put aside.

"Oh, pretty fair. I walked home across the links and left the runabout at the club. Did you ever meet Mr. Gerard before? You seem to know each other pretty well."

Flavia's delicate color flushed over her face; for an instant she again felt Gerard's firm arm around her and encountered his concerned eyes bent upon her own, as they stood on the stairs of the grand-stand. Truthfulness was the atmosphere of the household, the truthfulness born of fearless affection and cordial sympathy of feeling, but now she used an evasion, almost for the first time in her life.

"It is Corrie who knows Mr. Gerard, Isabel," she explained, a trifle slowly. "You remember that race when he helped Corrie, last summer? To-day Corrie saw him playing ball, and brought him to meet us."

"Oh! Yes, I remember the race, of course; I was there. But I did not know Allan Gerard was—well, *looked* like that. How long will he be here?" [Pg 41]

"Papa and Corrie asked him to stay until the Cup race is over."

There was a pause. Isabel walked over to one of the long mirrors and studied her own vigorously handsome image, then turned her head and regarded Flavia with the perfect complacency and mischievous malice of a young kitten.

"Good sport," she anticipated.

Flavia carefully laid her brush upon the dressing table and proceeded to gather into a coil the shimmering mass of her fair hair. Suddenly she was afraid, quiveringly afraid of herself, of Gerard and the next two weeks, but most afraid of showing any change in expression to Isabel's sharp scrutiny.

III

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THE HOUSEHOLD OF ROSES

"If there is one thing meaner than another, it's *rain*," Corrie announced generally. "I'm going out. Won't you come, Gerard?"

"If rain is the meanest thing there is, it shows real sense to go out in it," Isabel commented, from the window-seat opposite. "That is just like you, Corrie Rose. When I ask you to take me out on a perfectly fair day, you won't do it."

"I?" stunned. "I ever refused——"

"Yes. Yesterday, when I asked you to take me just once around the race course, while the cars were out practising. You know you would not. If it is safe for you, it is safe for me. But never mind; your old pink car won't win, anyhow. He hasn't a chance with the professional drivers, has he, Mr. Gerard?"

"A chance?" Gerard gravely echoed. "Why, several of our best drivers are thinking of withdrawing, since he is entered, because they feel it's no use trying to win if he is racing."

"Oh, you're making fun! But I mean it; *I* could race that car he is so vain of, with my own little runabout machine."

Corrie dragged a mandolin from beneath his chair and tinkled the opening chords of a popular melody. [Pg 43]

"Get on your little girl's racer,
And I'll lead you for a chaser,
Down the good old Long Island course.
And before you're half through it,
Your poor car will rue it,
And you'll trade in the pieces for a horse."

The provoking improvisation ended abruptly, as Isabel's well-aimed sofa-pillow struck the singer.

"Do you call that a ladylike retort?" Corrie queried, freeing himself from the silken missile. "Tell her it isn't, Flavia."

"I am afraid," Flavia excused herself. "There are more cushions on that window-seat."

"It was a soft answer, at least," Gerard laughed. "And a good shot."

"Oh, I taught her to pitch, myself. Now I'm sorry," deplored her cousin.

"Too late," Isabel returned complacently. "I called that a cushion carom, Corrie. And my car would not fall to pieces. Flavia, he is feeding candy to Firdousi."

Flavia looked over with the warm brightening of expression Allan Gerard had learned to watch for when she regarded her brother, and which never failed to stir in him the half-wistful envy of the first day when he had seen her so gazing at the driver of the pink racing car. [Pg 44]

"If Corrie can teach a Persian kitten to eat candy, he probably can teach it to digest candy," she offered serene reply. "Besides, he loves Firdousi, as much as I do."

"I only gave him some fruit-paste to see his jaws work," the culprit defended. "He needs exercise. And so do I."

"Not that kind, yours work all the time. It is only an hour since breakfast and you have talked ever since," corrected his cousin.

"I haven't!"

"You have."

Corrie ran his fingers through his heavy fair hair, carefully set the purring kitten on the floor, and stood up.

"All right, if you say so," he submitted gracefully. "What you say, I stand for."

The argument was pure sport, of course. But with that last playful sentence, Corrie suddenly turned his dark-blue eyes upon Isabel with an expression not playful, as if himself struck by some deeper force in the words.

"What you say, I stand for," he repeated, and paused.

Flavia and Gerard both looked at him. All the fresh ardor of first love, all the impulsive faith of eighteen and its entire devotion invested Corrie Rose and illumined the shining regard in which he enveloped his cousin. There was in him a quality that lifted the moment above mere sentimentality, a young strength and straightforward earnestness at once dignified and pathetic with the pathos of all transient things that must go down before the battery of the years. [Pg 45]

It would have been difficult to encounter a more enchanting family life than that into which Allan Gerard had been drawn. The Rose household was as redolent of simple fragrance as a household of roses, in spite of its costly luxury, its retinue of servants and lavish expenditure. Thomas Rose's wealth had been made so long since, before the birth of the younger generation, that to one and all it was merely the natural condition of affairs, not in the least affecting them personally. Money was very nearly non-existent to them, since they never were obliged to consider its lack or abundance. They spent as they desired, precisely as they ate when hungry or drank according to thirst, without either stint or excess. It was Arcadian, it was improbable, but it was so. And the guard-wall that encircled their gilded Arcadia was a strong mutual affection not to be overthrown from without. Only by internal treason could that domain fall. [Pg 46]

It was not in one day that Gerard had come to understand this in its fullness; he had learned bit by bit. For there was nothing at all angelic about the gay family. But now he first realized, as he watched Corrie, that Isabel Rose was placed here by circumstance and not by fittness. She was too earthen a vessel, however handsome and wholesome, to contain that fine sun-shot essence distilled from the fountain of youth which her cousin poured out for her taking. Gerard knew it, as he saw her matter-of-fact acceptance of the gaze that should have moved even a woman who did not love Corrie.

Yet, they would probably marry one another, he reflected. There was nothing to interfere, if she consented. He felt an elder brother's outrush of impatient protection for the boy; involuntarily he turned to Flavia with a movement of regretful irritation at the folly of it all, a folly he divined that she also recognized.

Flavia met his glance, and read its impatience and regret. How she applied it was a reflection

less of her own mind than of Isabel's; she fancied Gerard jealous of this open wooing of the other girl, and mutely asking her own intervention.

That intervention was not easy to give. In spite of herself, the days with Allan Gerard had affected her so far. Stooping, she lifted Firdousi to her lap, gaining a moment before breaking the silence that had fallen upon the group. [Pg 47]

"Where are you going to take Mr. Gerard, Corrie?" she inquired. "Are not the possibilities storm-limited?"

"He isn't going to take him anywhere," Isabel calmly interpolated. "They are going to stay in and amuse us. At least, that is what I say, if he is going to stand for it. He said he would, but it's some large order."

Corrie threw back his head, all seriousness vanishing before his laughter.

"Just you let father catch you slinging Boweryese like that, Miss Rose," he begged, moving aside to stuff a handful of candy into either coat-pocket. "He loves to hear girls talk slang. But it *is* some classy order, all right, if you come to think of it; I guess I won't commence to-day. I'm going over to show the *Dear Me* to Jack Rupert, Flavia; he thinks he can tell me why her engine misses."

"In the rain, dear?" his sister wondered.

"Snips and snails and gasoline tales, are what little boys are made of," Isabel quoted derisive *Mother Goose*. "He won't melt; let him go. Mr. Gerard, you do not want to go out in a sloppy motor boat, do you?" [Pg 48]

"If you will forgive my bad taste, I believe I shall go with Corrie," Gerard deprecated, rising. He looked again at Flavia, but she offered no suggestion that he stay.

"That's the idea," approved the gentleman in question. "I'll ring for our raincoats."

There was a period of silence in the many-windowed, octagonal library, after the two young girls were left alone. Flavia continued to play with the drowsy kitten. Isabel, chin in hand, gazed across the rain-drenched window-panes, her full lips bent discontentedly. The first diversion was effected by the smart slap of a maple-leaf flattened against the glass by a gust of wind, directly across the watcher's line of vision.

"P.P.C.," interpreted Flavia, surveying the large pale-golden leaf, as it adhered to the wet pane opposite her cousin.

"Now, what may that mean?" Isabel demanded.

"*Pour prendre congé*, of course. Those are the farewell cards of departing summer. See her coat-of-arms on it: a gold-and-crimson sunset?"

Isabel eyed her companion with scornful superiority.

"You had better talk sense," she counselled. "That is a good stiff north wind blowing, and Corrie is just as reckless with his motor boat as he is with his car. He and Mr. Gerard are likely to be half-drowned—and I am glad of it." [Pg 49]

"Isa!"

"I am glad. It serves them right for leaving me at home and going off with that mechanic. I know why Corrie did it, too; he didn't want us to be together all day. He is jealous of Mr. Gerard because he likes me."

"Corrie does?"

Isabel launched a glance of malicious comprehension over her shoulder, smilingly meaningly.

"Oh, Corrie! Of course! But I meant Mr. Gerard. Anyone can see how Corrie hates to have him with me."

Flavia adjusted the blue-satin bow upon Firdousi's neck, saying nothing for a moment. She did not intend to put the question hovering at her lips, yet suddenly the indiscreet words escaped her:

"Then, you think Mr. Gerard is—interested in you?"

"Did you ever know a man to come here without being interested in me, Flavia Rose?"

The superb arrogance was a trifle too much to escape retort, even from the considerate Flavia.

"Well, there was Mr. Stone," she recalled, with intention. [Pg 50]

Isabel colored richly, her handsome light-gray eyes hardened. The recent episode of Mr. Ethan Stone had not been one of her triumphs in flirtation.

"He was almost as old as uncle," she exclaimed sharply. "He would have died of fright at the things Mr. Gerard and Corrie and I like to do, anyway, if he had stayed here. He was all nerves. So are you, for that matter. You are worried over Corrie now, you know you are."

Flavia never quarrelled; she had an abhorrence of scenes. But that did not imply a lack of capacity for anger. She rose, a straight, slim figure in her blue morning-frock, the kitten in her arms.

"If I were with him, I should not be worried," she stated with dignity. "I am never afraid when I am there to share what happens. I think I will go upstairs."

And she went, leaving the other girl to devise her own amusements.

In her own room, Flavia pushed aside the window-curtains to look out. In all the dripping landscape she saw no trace of her brother or their guest; the guest, half of whose visit was now past. The next day would be Sunday; one of the two weeks she had unreasonably dreaded was gone, already. Was she glad, or sorry? She did not know. But she continued to look from the window; there was indeed a strong north wind blowing, and Corrie, if not reckless, certainly used the least margin of safety. [Pg 51]

It was impossible to be more safe from drowning than Corrie was at that time. He was in fact on land as dry as the weather permitted, engaged in operating a small ciderpress for the benefit of himself and Gerard, at a certain old-fashioned farm where he was—as he himself explained—*persona very grata* indeed.

"They are used to me," he supplemented. "Wonderful what people can get used to, isn't it?"

"It surely is," Gerard agreed, from his seat on an overturned barrel. He contemplated interestedly the picture Corrie presented with his sleeves rolled to the elbow, his coat off and his bright hair flecked with ruby-hued drops of the flying liquid. "See here, Corrie, what are you planning to do with yourself?"

"Do? Meet Rupert and try out the *Dear Me*, of course. Why?"

"I didn't mean that way. College? Business?"

"Oh! Would you pitch over that tin-cup, please? Why, I am all through college." [Pg 52]

"Through it! Before you are nineteen?"

"Jes' so. Like to see the pretty blue-ribboned papers that prove it?" He sat down on the press, drying his face with his handkerchief. "You see, my father had tutors to lavish all their wisdom and attention on little Corwin B. Rose, and I never had to wait while the rest of a class ploughed along, so I got through the usual junk and was ready for college at fifteen plus. So I entered at New York, where I could drive back and forth from home each day, and finished up the college business. It was a nuisance and I wanted to get it over, so I hustled a bit. The classical course, you know, not the professional. I graduated last Spring, just before I met you at the twenty-four-hour race. You look surprised."

"I should not have thought it of you."

"You didn't suppose I could work?" The mischievous blue eyes laughed at him. "I can, when I have to. And studying doesn't hit me very hard, although I'd rather be out-doors."

"Not that, exactly. You do not look it," Gerard said slowly. He could not explain the effects he had seen left by college life with unlimited money at command, or how he was moved by their utter absence here.

Corrie gave way to open mirth. [Pg 53]

"What a compliment! My word! Fancy! Well, I can't help my face. Anyway, you think I look as if I could drive a car, so I'm satisfied. Do you know," his expression sobered as he leaned forward, fixing earnest eyes on his companion's, "I would rather be you, do what you are doing, than be or do anything else in the world. Of course, I shan't get the chance—probably I couldn't do the work if I did—but I should *love* it."

Gerard actually colored before that ardent admiration, taken unaware.

"Corrie Rose, you are given to the folly of hero-worship; and heroes are few," he accused sternly.

"I don't know about that, Mr. Gerard."

"I do. But, Corrie——"

"Present."

Gerard stood up, reaching for his raincoat.

"Beware of heroine-worship, it is *the* folly. When you find the real woman, get on your knees, where you belong, before a grace of God, but don't build shrines to an imitation."

Astonished, Corrie paused, upright beside the ciderpress, then smiled with a blending of pride and serious exaltation.

"No danger of that! I—that can never happen to me," he assured quietly. "I am safe-guarded from imitations, win or lose. I believe, if I am given to hero-worship, that I'm pretty good at picking the right subjects for it. Had enough cider?" [Pg 54]

"Too much, probably. If I am ill to-morrow, I shall tell Rupert that you poisoned me. Are you going around to pay the lord proprietors of the place for what we have consumed?"

"Who, me? If I did, Mrs. Goodwin might box my ears for the impertinence; she has boxed them before. I grew up around here, remember. The first acquaintance I made with this house was when I shied an apple at the family tabby as it sat sunning itself on the well-curb, and bowled it in. Naturally, I hadn't meant to hit it; the beast stepped forward just as I fired. I nearly fell in, myself, trying to get it out, but the well was deep and I couldn't raise a meow or a whisker. It was a fine November Sunday, I remember, and while I was busy the family drove into the yard, home from church. I bolted. No one saw me go, but by and by I began to remember all the yarns I ever had heard about people getting typhoid fever from polluted well-water, and to imagine that entire household dying on my hands. Remorse with a capital R! I felt like Cesare Borgia and Madame de Brinvilliers and the Veiled Mokanna all rolled into one. When I couldn't stand it any longer, I sneaked into Flavia's room at two o'clock in the morning, for counsel."

[Pg 55]

"She gave it?"

"She gave it. You can always count on Flavia. I can see her now, sitting up in bed with her hair braided in two big yellow plaits and her troubled kiddie countenance turned to me.

"'You will have to tell either papa or those people,' she decided, wise as a toy owl. 'And if you tell them, *they* will surely tell papa, so perhaps you would rather tell him yourself. But I am sorry, dear darling.'

"So I 'fessed up, after breakfast."

"What happened?" Gerard questioned.

"We drove over to the farm together, and father went in for a private interview with old man Goodwin. After which he, father, escorted me around to the well and informed me that I was to drink a cup of that water. Phew, I would rather have drunk hemlock! I wasn't much given to begging off when I got into trouble, but I tried that time, all right.

"'It's what you've left these folks to drink,' said he, standing with his hands in his pockets, looking at me. 'It would have been a lot more pleasant for you to swallow if you had owned up two days ago; just keep that as a reminder never to put off a thing you ought to do. Take your medicine, Corwin B.'

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"I took it. But it almost killed me." He shook his blond head disgustedly. "I told him I would probably die of typhoid, or something worse. He said we would chance it."

"Still, it was a chance, Corrie."

Corrie calmly fastened the last button of his raincoat.

"No, I guess not. You see, old Goodwin had told father that they pulled pussy out of the well ten minutes after I ran away, the first day. She was clinging to the bucket, pretty wet, but healthy and merry. Father told me the truth, before dinner-time; I didn't seem to care for luncheon, that day. Have you got a pencil? I've lost my fountain-pen again; that's the third I've bought this month."

Gerard produced the pencil.

"It was a rough joke on you, though," he commented. "Didn't you resent it?"

Corrie lifted his bright clear glance from his task of tearing a blank leaf from his notebook.

"Hadn't I earned it?" he asked. "Keep the lines straight, Gerard; my father never punished me in anger, nor unless I could first admit I deserved it and we could shake hands on it afterward. Of course, that sort of thing ended five years ago—there never was much of it—but there couldn't be closer friends than we have been, right through. We have kept each other's respect, we couldn't get along without it; and we expect a good deal of each other, too. I just don't want you to misunderstand."

[Pg 57]

He scribbled his signature across the bit of paper, and secured the legend to the ciderpress.

"There; now the Goodwins will know who has been here. Ready?"

"Ready," Gerard assented.

The rain had ceased; the vigorous broom of the north wind was sweeping the broken storm-clouds across a gray sky. The drive to the yacht club was accomplished pleasantly and quickly.

"I told Rupert to meet us here at noon," Corrie observed, when they stopped at the pier. "And I had lunch for three sent over, this morning. What a deserted old hole the club is in October! Hello, what—"

From beneath the tarpaulin cover of a long, polished motor boat moored in the wall-locked artificial harbor, a frowsy head had projected, to be instantly withdrawn into shelter at sight of the two young men. The genus of that head was unmistakable, the action significant. Both arrivals halted involuntarily.

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"Club steward?" inquired Gerard, with irony.

"Tramp!" flared his companion, recovering breath after the first shock of amazement at the audacity of the intruder. "A dirty, lazy hobo in my boat! Lying on my cushions, mauling my things, running my engine for all I know. Oh!"

"Hold on," Gerard advised. "Better investigate."

But Corrie was already at the edge of the pier.

"Come out of there!" he shouted imperiously. "Come out, I say, or I'll come aboard and throw you out. What do you mean by it? Come out, I tell you."

The head slowly emerged, a red head in need of combing; its owner rested his arms on the gleaming mahogany deck and turned a sullen, unshaven face on his challenger.

"Stand me a quarter, an' I'll beat it," he invited raucously.

"A quarter! You'll beat it without a cent and do it quick, or go to jail. That is my boat, do you hear? Come out. What are you doing there? Stealing?"

"Sleepin', if you want to know."

"I've got a right to know. Are you going to take your filthy self off my cushions, or am I going to throw you off?" [Pg 59]

"You?"

"Yes, *me*. Who do you think?"

The man measured his young antagonist with unhurried scrutiny, yawned, and ostentatiously settled himself in a position of greater comfort.

"You can't do it," he sneered. "Send a man."

The *Dear Me* was not anchored, but moored to the pier by a pulley and tackle. Before the diverted Gerard guessed his purpose, Corrie had hauled in the boat's bow by the running line attached and swung himself raging into the craft below. There was a choked oath, a sound of rending canvas, then the clatter and thud of combat in close quarters.

It was over before Gerard could do more than haul the reeling, water-drenched boat again within reach. A great splash, a cry changing to a smothered gurgle, announced a threat fulfilled.

"I don't want any help," panted Corrie, standing erect and dishevelled, fiery blue eyes on his floundering enemy. "He's had enough, I fancy. Here, the water is only five feet deep, you chump! Not that way! Throw me an oar, Gerard—he'd drown himself in a saucer. Here, catch hold, you. What's the matter with you?" [Pg 60]

"You pitched him into pretty cold water," Gerard reproached, between amusement and pity. "Got him? Look out! You'll capsize!"

Corrie had him, by the collar, and brought him to the pier, a streaming, shivering wreck.

"Man's size, am I?" demanded the victor. "Here, what are you shaking like that for? You'll kill yourself, man."

The captive looked at him, speechless, shuddering miserably in the boisterous rush of wind that wrapped his wet garments about him like a sheath of ice.

"You silly idiot," Corrie snapped impatiently. "Why didn't you do as I told you? Open the basement door, won't you, Gerard, while I bring him? We'll be sure to find a fire there. Are you going to come quietly, yes?"

The victim followed tamely to the lower part of the building, where Corrie threw open a furnace-door and installed him in the red glow of heat.

"Take off your clothes," he commanded. "Trying to get pneumonia, are you, so I will feel like a brute? Oh, I'll give you something to wear; I've got a lot of old duds in my locker here. What are you laughing at, Allan Gerard?"

"The responsible man's burden. Never mind me, go on with your rescue." [Pg 61]

"I should like to throw something at you."

"Haven't you got enough on your hands?"

The raillery struck some note in the man's pride. He looked from Gerard to Corrie, who was bringing an armful of assorted clothing, with a reawakening defiance not so much evil as primitive.

"You couldn't have put it over me so easy," he announced sombrely, "if I'd had the feed I bet you got this morning."

The garments escaped Corrie's grasp.

"Feed? You're hungry?"

"What you think I was sleepin' in your dinky boat for, if I had the price of anythin'? It had a

blanket in it an' was better than the open, that's why."

"Why didn't you say so," Corrie stormed at him hotly. "Get into those clothes and come upstairs. Or, no; I'll bring it down, stay there."

It was an elaborate lunch-hamper that presently was brought in and set down.

"Eat it," was the concise direction. "That vacuum-bottle is full of hot coffee; drink it. For Heaven's sake stop shivering—*why* couldn't you speak? Rupert is coming, Gerard. I heard the motor-horn down the road."

Gerard discreetly had turned his back to the scene, reading a last-season bulletin of yacht racing that was fixed to the wall at the end of the room. [Pg 62]

"You want to start?" he interpreted, as Corrie joined him.

"Well—I hope you won't mind, but I don't see how we can. I have got to stay here until that chattering, shaking——"

"Brimstone pig," supplied Gerard, with a recollection of the unforgettable *Mrs. Smallweed*.

"Thanks. Until he finishes and can leave, for the steward will put him out if he finds him here alone."

"That cannot be long."

"No, but," he hesitated, engagingly confused. "But we are miles from a restaurant, you know, and I had to feed him somehow, and there wasn't anything except our luncheon that I had sent over for the trip. So I suppose we had better drive home and get some eats there. It is a shabby way to treat you, all right, after bringing you out."

Gerard dropped his hand on the other's shoulder, his laughing eyes very kind.

"Corrie Rose, how many times a year do you throw your offenders overboard, and give them your own lunch to make up for it?" he challenged. [Pg 63]

There was no lack of perception in Corrie; he recognized both the innuendo and its truth.

"About every day," he confessed. "My temper slips. Everyone expects it of me, so it's all right. At least, it has been all right; I guess I've got to stop."

"Corrie, you did not believe me in earnest?"

"No, it isn't that." He shook his head as if to shake off a vexing thought. "I—it makes me feel like a brute to think I've been knocking out a half-starved man and throwing him into that water because he crawled under an old blanket in my boat for shelter. Why didn't I question him decently? I must put on the brake, or I'll spoil something without intending it."

Gerard opened his lips to deny the danger and recall the provocation received, but for some reason he did not analyze, closed them without speaking. The two stood together in silence for many moments, looking out at the gray-green expanse of tumbling water.

"I'll be goin'," the hoarse voice of the involuntary guest said, behind them. "Obliged for your feed."

There was a tentative quality in the statement, an attempt to carry off easily a situation capable of unpleasant developments, a studied ignoring of his captor's possible right to detain him. But Corrie swung around with a face of open sunniness that shamed suspicion, his hands in the pockets of his long overcoat. [Pg 64]

"Good enough! Did you find what you liked, or rather, like what you found?" he responded.

The hard face relaxed into a reluctant humor, the man looked again to assure himself of the inquirer's seriousness.

"The best ever," he essayed social graciousness. "I ain't left much. Your little caramels were fine."

"Caramels? Who on earth put in caramels? Armand must have lost his mind! What kind of caramels?"

"Wrapped in tin paper, they were, in a little tin box."

"Wrapped——Holy cats, Gerard, he has eaten the concentrated bouillon squares! They were not to eat, man; they were to be dissolved in a cup of boiling water, to drink."

"They tasted all right. I guess they'll go. I'll be movin'."

"Go? Well, I hope so; you must have enough concentrated beef in you to nourish an army. You are going, you say. Where to?"

"The big town."

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"What are you going to do when you get there?"

The man's dissipation-dulled eyes searched the candid face of the questioner scarcely ten years his junior, then he looked to Gerard with a confused and reluctant unease, as he might have

looked had Corrie been a young girl whose innocence he feared to offend.

"Aw, lots of things," he evaded, with a short, embarrassed laugh. "You don't want to hear me talk, mister. I'll get there, now I'm fed up."

"Do you want me to find work for you around here? I can."

"My jobs are a different kind, mister. I couldn't stay in yours."

Corrie brought his hand from his pocket.

"All right, as you like. Take this for good luck and we'll call ourselves even. Square, is it?"

The man took the bill awkwardly, his embarrassment deepened.

"You're square, sure," he signified.

As his slouching, bulky figure went out the door opposite, it crossed the small erect form of Jack Rupert, who entered.

"Us for home," Corrie greeted the arrival. "It is too bad to have brought you over for nothing, Rupert, but—what's the matter?"

The mechanic's countenance was a study in disgust, as he contemplated one of his polished tan boots, a high-heeled, ornate affair of the latest design labelled "smart." Off the race course and outside of hours, Rupert had one passion: clothes. [Pg 66]

"I ain't registering any complaints if the rest are satisfied," he acidly returned. "But stepping in a puddle of wringing rags that the town board of health ought to condemn for making a noisy demonstration ain't what I look forward to all day as a treat. As for going home, I'm ready, myself. The trip we're missing will keep awhile this weather. The water is mused bad and the only time I ever was car-sick was on the boat to Savannah."

"Did he spoil his pretty shoes?" Corrie teased, speculatively eyeing the heap of wet, unsavory clothing. "Never mind, Briggs shall make them good as new with his Transcendant Tan for Tasteful Tootsies; you haven't seen that darky of mine shine boots. I don't know what to do with those clothes, Gerard, so I think I won't do anything. Let's go home before we starve. Rupert, don't you approve of charity?"

"I ain't fitted to say; nobody ever showed me any. I always got exactly what I worked for, measure evened off and loose-packed. If I sneaked into somebody's boat-garage without an invitation, I wouldn't get a bath and breakfast and a greenback; I'd get ten dollars or ten days from the first judge in the stand. And so would you." [Pg 67]

Corrie paused, struck.

"I? Why?"

"You. Why? What's the answer? I don't know, but I know the type. You keep your score-card and watch it happen; you'll find you get just what you enter for. Nothing more *and* nothing less."

"Nothing more *and* nothing less," Corrie repeated, unconsciously exact. "Well," his dancing smile flashed out, "we don't want any more than that, do we? I'll be content with the life I earn."

"It's a good thing, for that's all we'll get," was the terse reply. "When some folks start to kick a brick wall, luck drops a feather pillow between. Other people stub their toes. I ain't crying bad luck, because I never had any; I'm just saying we'll stub our toes, if we kick the wall. We don't have to kick it."

"Rupert is a philosopher," Gerard observed, not mockingly or in ridicule, but as one stating a fact.

His mechanic nodded coolly.

"Calling names don't count. I've raced long enough to know a type of car when I see it, and I've lived long enough to tell a type of man. The way their heads set does it, maybe. Did you know the ladies were upstairs?" [Pg 68]

"The ladies?" echoed Gerard, surprised. "They came with you?"

"Not precisely, I guess I came with them. Miss Rose saw me starting and said she was coming over with her own little machine to see the launch off, if she could get her cousin to come, and they'd bring me. So she drove me over. I ain't used to that."

"Ladies?"

"Ladies' driving. My life's insured, so it was all right, though."

"Bully for Isabel!" Corrie approved, pensiveness cast aside. "Come up to them, Gerard. I hear her tooting for us with the horn."

From the little scarlet runabout—the largest motor vehicle Mr. Rose would allow his vigorous niece—Isabel and Flavia had descended.

"We came to see what you were doing," Isabel welcomed the group who issued from the clubhouse. "I don't suppose Flavia would have come if she hadn't been wondering whether Corrie was

drowning himself. Go ahead and start; don't wait on our account. But you had better eat your lunch first, if you haven't already, for you will have no time to eat in the boat on that sea." [Pg 69]

"We haven't any lunch," Corrie cheerfully declared. "I gave it to a tramp after I threw him overboard. You're just in time to take us home for luncheon and save our lives."

"You look as if you had been fighting," Isabel criticized, with a scornful survey of his attire. "You are all splashed with dirty water, your cravat is pulled crooked and your coat is torn. We saw your tramp; he passed us a few moments ago and we recognized your blue flannel suit with the *Dear Me's* insignia on the lapel. Mr. Rupert guessed what you had been doing, when he saw the boat all in disorder and the pier all wet. The man's hairy, dirty face looked horrid above your clothes."

"A contrast to my beauty, not so? Fix my cravat, please, ma'am; I can't see the thing. But his face wasn't dirty, for I washed it."

"Why should I fix your wet cravat? Hold my gloves, then. Where is your scarf-pin? Stolen by your tramp, I suppose."

Gerard had joined Flavia, but neither yet had spoken, watching the cousins. They had not the fluent familiarity of intercourse possessed by the two who looked and acted very like a pair of handsome boys. Moreover, Gerard distrusted himself, fearing to say too much, too soon. He was approaching Flavia carefully and delicately as a man striving to close his hand on some frail, elusive creature whose capture he scarcely dares hope possible. And she gave him no help. Her frank gentleness and impersonal cordiality gave neither encouragement nor discouragement, no foothold smooth or rough. [Pg 70]

The actual position he had never even conceived; the fact that she was completely unconscious of his desire to woo her. He had no way of knowing that it was his attitude toward Isabel she considered in all his words and acts, remembering her cousin's confident appropriation of the guest. It was of Isabel that she spoke now, while Gerard hesitated for the right word to offer the girl beside him.

"The roads were very wet and slippery," she remarked. "If Isabel were not a good driver, I think we would have found ourselves in a ditch. Indeed," her soft mouth dimpled into a smile, "once I thought we were in one. One wheel *was*. But we wiggled out again. Mr. Rupert wanted to put the chains on the wheels, but she said we did not need them."

The thought of Isabel over-ruling the judgment of his racing mechanic unsteadied Gerard's gravity. [Pg 71]

"A coarse masculine hand is needed on the wheel, to-day," he confirmed, with ulterior intention. "I believe we had better divide our party differently, on the way back. Let me drive one car and Corrie or Rupert the other. I'll promise not to take any ditches, if you consent."

"Great scheme," Corrie called, overhearing. "I'll take the red near-car home, Isabel."

"No, indeed," Isabel vetoed decidedly. "Mr. Gerard is going to take me home and I shall learn a lot from watching him drive. You can take Flavia in your roadster; Mr. Rupert will ride in the rumble seat."

Being a gentleman, Gerard compelled his expression to evidence pleasant acquiescence. But he was not soothed by the unclouded smile Flavia sent her designated escort.

"Corrie doesn't mind taking me, do you, dear?" she covered her brother's chagrin.

"I surely don't, Other Fellow," he heartily corroborated, coming across to his sister, although the change in his transparent face betrayed his discomfiture at the slight. "You and I have had many a good spin. In you go! Come up behind, Rupert; there is more room here than on the other machine." [Pg 72]

"I think Mr. Rupert would rather ride with us, anyhow," Flavia declared, her laughing eyes questioning the mechanic. "I fancied, once or twice on the way over, that he would have preferred to have you or Mr. Gerard driving."

"I ain't making any scornful denials," admitted Rupert, as he stepped in front to crank the motor for Corrie. "I've always looked forward to being killed in a larger machine, myself."

Isabel did not at once enter her own car.

"I can't fasten this glove without taking off the other, and then I can't fasten the other without taking off this," she complained. "I really believe——"

So, the last the three in the departing roadster saw of the two on the pier, Allan Gerard was engaged in buttoning Isabel's glove, while her wind-blown veils fluttered across his shoulders and her flushed, provocative face bent over the task beside his.

IV

ISABEL

Isabel, in the clinging knitted coat that displayed every attractive line of her athletic figure, her cheeks reddened by triumph and the salt wind, her gray eyes lifted in challenging coquetry, was a sufficiently pleasant sight to dispel mere vexation. And Gerard had no right to feel more than annoyance at a disappointment of which she supposedly knew nothing.

"I ran away with you because I didn't want to ride home with Corrie," she confided, when the last button-hole was achieved. "You don't mind—much?"

"I am overwhelmed by the honor," Gerard assured. He was neither surly enough to refuse the light play to which she invited him, nor anchorite enough to be insensible to the flattery of being sought. "But how did Prince Corrie offend his sovereign lady?"

"Oh, that would be telling! You know, we are *not* engaged."

"Not yet?"

"Not at all. And the last time we were out alone together, he—he asked me to see if the oil was running through that little cup on the dash." [Pg 74]

"And then?"

They were in the car now, Gerard behind the steering-wheel. Isabel leaned down to touch her fingers to the dash, turning her vivid-hued, consciously alluring face across her shoulder to the companion so close beside her, the auburn curls tumbled about her forehead and her mouth tempting as a small scarlet fruit.

"And then, we were like this when—guess what Corrie did?"

It was not in the least difficult to guess what the enamoured Corrie had done. But Gerard shook his head, schooling his mirthful eyes.

"I could not, possibly, Miss Rose. I am very dull."

"Well, what would *you* have done?"

"I? I should have shut both eyes and recalled St. Francis' rules of deportment."

Isabel straightened herself, leaning back and folding her hands in her lap.

"That's what Corrie did not do," she stated. "So I will not ride with him. It was bad taste."

"I imagine Corrie found the taste most pleasant."

"Oh!"

"Have I guessed wrong?"

"You said that you were dull, Mr. Gerard." [Pg 75]

"Then the guess is wrong. Poor Corrie!"

She shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"You think a great deal about Corrie."

"Yes. We are friends," Gerard quietly answered.

She was clever enough to recognize the bar he set to flirtation with the woman loved by the man he gave that name, and she regarded the obstacle as a challenge. She was not sufficiently old or fine to realize that such bars are not crossed by such men. If Gerard had loved her or believed she might love him, he must have left his friend's house; as Corrie would have left Gerard's in like case. As a matter of fact, Gerard was perfectly aware of the immunity of both parties and that Isabel was merely seeking temporary diversion—experimenting with the possibilities of her own heady youth.

A forking of the road supplied a new subject for discussion.

"Turn to the left," Isabel directed, sitting erect.

Surprised, Gerard checked the machine.

"We did not come that way, Miss Rose."

"Of course not; you came by the long route, past the Goodwin farm. This is a better road."

"Better?"

She followed his gaze down the vista of slippery, rut-grooved mud, and colored. [Pg 76]

"A shorter road, then," she amended petulantly. "I am sure I don't care—go the long way if you wish. The storm is blowing back again, but I can stand the rain."

Gerard hastily turned into the wretched travesty of a road.

"I beg your pardon; I only wondered if you were quite certain of the route," he apologized.

There ensued a period of silence. The little car slipped and wallowed through sliding mud and

yellow puddles.

"I hope you do not drive here, yourself," Gerard observed.

"Do you think I should be afraid?"

"I think you might have serious trouble. There is a deep ditch on either side, while the road is both narrow and slippery."

"I can drive anywhere. Ask Corrie."

"I suspect he is a biased judge. But I should not have believed he would let you drive here."

"He—I never did except in dry weather. I knew *you* would not mind any road and could drive in anything, so it did not matter."

"Please consider the compliment more than appreciated, mademoiselle," Gerard smiled. "There is going to be a splash when we strike that puddle ahead; had you not better draw in your frock?" [Pg 77]

She caught her white serge skirts around her and shrank nearer to her companion with a gurgle of dismayed laughter.

"Let me get in the middle. Uh, what a muddy swamp! Oh—my face!"

In fact, the water had splashed as the car struck the pool where a rain-swollen brook had overflowed the road. As Gerard turned to the girl, she lifted a face sprinkled with drops which she strove to remove with her handkerchief.

"Is it off?" she questioned. "Please look carefully. *All* off?"

He was obliged to scrutinize the handsome countenance offered for inspection at close range.

"A trifle of mud, still," he admitted.

"Where? Here?"

"No—more to the left. Beneath the eye—the other eye."

"This place?"

"Not quite."

It was incredible, the length of time that small spot evaded Isabel's questing handkerchief, and the futility of Gerard's directions. He was obliged to halt the car, at last.

"A little higher—not so much. There! No, not so low." [Pg 78]

With a gesture of mock despair, she gave him the fragrant square of linen.

"Wipe it off," she requested resignedly. "I can't motor all over Long Island with a dirty face. There is no one in sight for miles; wipe it off and never tell."

"I am very clumsy," he demurred.

"Well, it can't be helped."

Gerard might have echoed the exclamation. But he accepted the handkerchief and deftly, if with inward embarrassment, removed the stain from the ruddy cheek presented.

"It can't be off, Mr. Gerard?"

"Pardon, it is gone."

"You hardly touched it," doubtingly.

"If you could see——" he began in defense of his work.

"Look once more."

He obeyed, impersonally and coolly.

"Nothing, indeed," he asserted.

She glanced up at him through her long lashes, and flung herself back in her seat.

"Thank you. Shall we go on?"



"WIPE IT OFF," SHE REQUESTED RESIGNEDLY, "WIPE IT OFF AND NEVER TELL"

The operation and the drive that preceded it had occupied considerable time. It was an hour since the party had separated at the yacht club's pier. The brief interval of comparative clearness had given place to dark skies across which the capricious wind herded masses of gray cloud. And presently several drops of rain fell and trickled down the wind-shield of the car.

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"Hurry," Isabel urged, sitting up with renewed animation. "It is going to pour."

"The little machine isn't capable of much hurrying on this road," Gerard regretted. "She hasn't any speed, of course. How far have we left to go?"

"A long way, seven or eight miles. We haven't passed the country club, yet."

"But Corrie drove over in an hour!"

"With his big car, yes," she retorted. "Perhaps this was not the best way, after all. But it would take longer to go back, now, than to keep on."

This was obvious. There was nothing to do except force the skidding, panting automobile to maintain its best gait.

They were destined to lose that race. As they came opposite a low brick building set amidst rolling green slopes and stretches of flag-dotted turf, the storm overtook them.

"Up the driveway," Isabel cried. "We can just make it. This is the country club—we'll 'phone home where we are staying."

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Gerard sent the car up the wide gravelled path. An attendant was waiting to receive them, another assumed charge of the automobile, and Isabel's escort found himself standing beside her on the veranda with rather confused ideas of how the affair had been accomplished.

"Koma says there is no one else here," she informed him. "We have all the place to ourselves. How it rains!"

It certainly was raining, raining violently and steadily, a gray downpour from a gray sky. She paused to look before continuing.

"I'll 'phone to Flavia, first of all. I can see we are going to have a long wait. Koma will get us the best luncheon he knows how. Aren't you hungry? I am. Come in."

Gerard uttered some reply. He was profoundly vexed at his situation, without being able to blame himself for it or to fix any actual fault upon Isabel. She had already turned away to enter the hall, and presently he heard the tinkle of the telephone bell, followed by her high-pitched voice.

"One one seven? Martin, I want Miss Rose. Yes, it is I. Oh!—We're at the country club, Corrie. No, we didn't get lost; we just chose that road.... Not a bit, it was good sport. We're having luncheon together, here, and then I suppose we will play billiards until the rain stops. Tell Flavia not to worry; we'll get home by dinner-time, and we're enjoying ourselves.... Not wet, just splashed. Mr. Gerard spoiled a handkerchief drying me, that's all the damage. Good-by."

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She reappeared on the threshold, complacently satisfied. She had removed her hood and veils, shaken her ruddy hair into becoming disorder, and knew herself at her best.

"You are enjoying yourself, aren't you?" she demanded.

"Certainly," Gerard responded, without enthusiasm.

"Why not come in, then? Which do you like most to commence a luncheon—Blue Points or little clams? Corrie and I quarrel over that every time we are out together. He is as obstinate as, as—Corrie!"

"Clams," said he, at a venture. He had a vague recollection of seeing Corrie dismiss oysters with scorn, and he felt viciously contrary.

"Why, so do I," agreed Isabel winningly. "Let us order some."

One cannot be disagreeable to a young girl under one's care, who also is in a sense one's hostess. [Pg 82]
The luncheon was sufficiently gay. The rain fell incessantly, beating against the diamond-paned windows, gurgling down eaves and gutter-ways.

"We should have sailed home in the *Dear Me*," Isabel declared. "I am sure there is enough water on the roads. Why did we not think of it?"

She detached a chrysanthemum petal from the vase of blossoms central on the table, and dropped it into her finger-bowl, watching the agitation of a diminutive scarlet-and-black beetle perched upon the sinking leaf.

"An execution?" Gerard inquired.

She raised her eyes, pouting prettily, and nodded.

"I hate those bugs," she explained. "Ugly animals! We put them in and wager a box of bon-bons on how long they last. If it is still alive at the end of five minutes, I lose. If it is drowned, I win."

"Does Corrie play that game with you?"

"N'no. Corrie doesn't like it. He will step off of a sidewalk into the mud to avoid treading on a cricket. Do you suppose I never play with any one except my cousin? Will you try this wager? *You're* not silly?"

"I will, if I may. If that lady-bug is alive five minutes from now, I win? No other conditions?" [Pg 83]

"None," gleefully. "Take your watch. You'll lose, he's weakening now."

Gerard leaned across, lifted the struggling beetle upon his finger-tip, and restored it to the safe refuge of the chrysanthemum bouquet.

"I believe he will live some time," he soberly predicted.

The girl stared, frowned, and laughed.

"No fair! No fair! That's not the game, Mr. Gerard."

"No? Then I will send the bon-bons."

"Chocolates."

"They shall be chocolates."

"And I may put back the nasty beetle?"

"On no account; I have ransomed him."

"Oh, very well," she shrugged, rising. "I'll take refuge in billiards for the next game. Corrie taught me to play, but I can beat him, now."

"Perhaps he doesn't watch his game when his opponent is his cousin."

"Why, what else should he watch?" she wondered, arching her brows a trifle too innocently.

"I cannot imagine, if you do not know," Gerard dryly responded, and held open the door for her to pass out.

In the billiard room, Isabel rolled her sleeves above her elbows as a preliminary measure. [Pg 84]

"I haven't had that off for a year," she confided, indicating a flexible platinum and turquoise bracelet encircling her firm, sun-browned arm.

"You are fond of it?" her companion inferred. "It is a beautiful bit of work, indeed."

"I like it well enough. That isn't the reason, though. You see, it locks, and after Corrie put it on my arm he kept the key. He says he will give it to me on my wedding day. But it isn't worth that."

"Worth——?" he questioned.

"Getting married. Will you play me even?"

"Pray fix any odds you choose, Miss Rose. How many points does Corrie usually give you?"

This time Isabel's stare of surprise was genuine.

"I meant, how many points should I allow *you*," she corrected arrogantly.

"Oh, pardon me!" he submitted. "Suppose, in that case, we play for an even score."

The storm did not abate. The wind drove the rain before it in glistening gray sheets, the steady drumming of the downpour accompanied the click of meeting ivory balls and the occasional speech of the players. After a time, a deep-belled Mission clock in the hall struck four.

A sharp, incredulous cry from the girl rang out, after an interval of silence in the room.

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"Why—why, you've won!"

"So I have," acknowledged her antagonist. "Shall I apologize?"

Isabel started to speak, and checked herself. She had been chiefly intent upon her own accomplishment, and Gerard's playing was of a deceptive leisureliness and tranquillity.

"How many did you make in that last run?" she asked, finally.

"Only seventeen."

"You can't do it again."

"One never can tell."

"Play," she defied.

Gerard glanced hopelessly at the streaming windows.

"It is growing late," he demurred.

"Not late, yet. Besides, we can't go out in that weather with an open automobile. They know at home where we are."

They did; that was precisely the core of Gerard's exasperation and unrest. What impressions would this tête-à-tête afternoon convey to Corrie? And what would Flavia think of her guest's guardianship of her cousin? He picked up his cue with enforced resignation.

The clock had struck the half-hour, when a long blast from an electric horn pierced through the clamor of the storm.

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"Another motor-party caught out," Isabel hazarded, her tone decidedly cross. She was losing again, and she did not like the experience. "Your play. You seem to find it more amusing to look out the window."

Gerard was spared reply. The billiard-room door was pushed open by the Japanese steward and a figure in gleaming rain-proof attire appeared on the threshold—the figure of a chauffeur, cap in hand.

"Lenoir!" Isabel exclaimed.

The chauffeur saluted.

"Mr. Rose sent the limousine to convey mademoiselle and Mr. Gerard," he informed them, in his precise, Parisian-flavored English.

"My uncle is home?"

"I had just driven Mr. Rose home from the city, mademoiselle, before he telephoned to the garage that I should come here."

She tossed her cue upon the table, recklessly scattering the balls, and turned toward the door.

"Bring our wraps, Koma," she bade. "We had better go."

Gerard contemplated Lenoir with marked kindness.

"It's a bad day to be out," he commented, in following Isabel from the room, and passed into the chauffeur's hand a gratuity out of all proportion to the occasion.

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"Yes, sir," said Lenoir, demurely.

The drive home was short and uninteresting. On the veranda of the Rose villa Corrie was waiting to meet the returning two, upon the limousine's arrival.

"Well, of all the slow traveling I ever saw, this is the limit," he greeted them derisively; "From noon until five o'clock! Fancy!"

"Never mind our driving; we have had a fine time," Isabel retorted, with pettish tartness.

"Yes, ma'am, no doubt. I wouldn't have interrupted, myself. It was father who did it, when he came in. He said you'd want some dinner to-night."

He smiled at Gerard as cordially as ever, but there was a wistfulness underlying his expression that inspired the older man with a hearty desire to shake Isabel Rose. She could watch her young lover's emotions with the same diverted interest with which she had watched the struggles of the tiny black-and-scarlet beetle drowning in her finger-bowl.

"I wish you had been with us, Corrie," was all Gerard found to say.

Through the parted curtains, the library presented such a graceful interior study as certain French artists have delighted in drawing. In the octagonal, book-lined room of rich hues and soft lights, Flavia and her father were seated together; busied in pleasant comradeship at the table whose polished surface was littered with letters, books of household accounts, and all those dainty metal and crystal trinkets the jeweller conceives necessary to the writer. Evidently they had found refreshment desirable, for a diminutive tea-table still stood near Flavia, while a pushed-back chair beneath which a young Great Dane hound lay asleep indicated that Corrie had been one of the group.

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"Back, are you?" Mr. Rose called cheerily, to the two in the hall, leaning back in his chair to view them more easily. "When I heard where you were marooned, I guessed it was about time for a rescue. You children oughtn't to try roundabout country roads with a storm blowing up."

"Mr. Gerard wanted to go that way," Isabel alleged, with perfect assurance. "I told him to do as he chose."

That distortion of facts was too much to be endured, with Corrie listening and Flavia a witness. Gerard's chivalry momentarily lapsed and he struck back with all the effectiveness of superior experience.

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"Yes, certainly," he confirmed, carefully distinct. "I naturally wanted to get Miss Rose safely at home as soon as possible, and since she said that road was the shortest route, I took it, of course."

"The *shortest*?" Corrie echoed, astounded. "The——"

He broke the speech in time, hastily discreet. Isabel crimsoned hotly; the glance she darted at her late escort was not dovelike. It was Flavia who brought relief to the situation, as usual.

"These Long Island roads are outrageously misleading," she offered light suggestion, rising with a smiling gesture of excuse to her father. "Isa and I often lose our way when we drive out together. Don't you want to change your damp things, dear?"

"Yes," assented her cousin, sullenly. "It's time to make ready for dinner, anyhow."

Corrie held aside the curtain for the girls to pass out. His blue eyes were dancing in pure mischief and relief. All the household understood Isabel's propensity for flirtation—and its utter lack of significance. If she had detained Gerard, not Gerard her, her lover-cousin had no ground for especial apprehension.

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"Punk weather," he commented, coming back.

"Dullest I ever experienced," supplemented his guest decidedly.

Mr. Rose set a paper-weight on the letter open before him, and lit a cigar.

"We were discussing the buying of another automobile, Gerard, when you came in," he imparted. "Come sit down for half an hour before we dress—we not needing so long as the ladies for it—and give us your advice on the choice."

"And I'll give you one of my monogram cigarettes," volunteered Corrie, slipping a hand affectionately through Gerard's arm. "Oh, no—I don't smoke them, but I like to carry them. And when you want something extra fine, you ask Corwin B. Rose for one of his smokes. Let's sit here, together."

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V

THE VASE OF AL-MANSOR

On the threshold of his father's model garage Corrie stopped, surveying the scene presented in the centre of the huge, lofty stone room, bare except for the five automobiles ranged around and their countless appurtenances disposed upon walls and shelves.

"Excuse me, but when did you two last wash?" he jeered.

The two men beside the Mercury racing car looked up at the figure in the sunny doorway.

"I don't care to try to prove that I ever did," returned Gerard. "The evidence is against me. But Rupert had his beauty bath this morning, all right. You're looking rather disarranged, yourself; perhaps the course was a trifle dusty."

They laughed silently across at one another. The trim garments of all three men were gray with dust and oil, their faces were streaked and spotted with the caked road-soil. There was little difference in color between Gerard's brown ripples of hair, Corrie's blonde locks and the black head of the mechanic who bent over the motor.

"If this is practice work, *what* is the race going to be like?" speculated Corrie, dragging off his gauntlets. The recent speed-exhilaration was still heavily upon him; as with his sister, the darker shading of brows and lashes always gave his fair-tinted face a warm vividness of expression. "The

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course is in fierce shape, already. I say—why did you especially warn me that the road wouldn't be fit for fast going until to-morrow, then get out in your own machine and break all practice records for the fastest lap? Trying to keep me out of your way, or to break your neck and Rupert's?"

"The first, certainly," Gerard asserted. "Really, I didn't mean to do any speeding to-day, Corrie, but when I saw the white road ahead, I—think something slipped."

"You're a cheerful hypocrite, all right. Here, catch, baseballist!"

Gerard retreated a step and deftly caught the dripping missile as it hurtled across the garage.

"You ought to wring out your league sponges," he reproved. "Thanks; I was wondering how I could take this face into the house, unless I got Rupert to turn the hose on me. You see, I might meet some one."

"You'd meet Flavia," Corrie declared, busying himself with his own ablutions. "She's out there in the flowing arbor, sewing some gimcrack thing and pretending she hasn't been worrying because I was out on the course. She comes downstairs every morning to see me start—you know that—and then sits around all day watching until I come in again. None of that for Isabel; she's a sport." [Pg 93]

Gerard shook the water from his thick hair and finished the perfunctory toilet without replying. But as he passed Rupert, he dropped a light hand on the mechanic's shoulder.

"When you marry, Jack Rupert, will the girl be a sport?" he questioned.

"My wedding cards ain't paining me bad just now."

"Well, but suppose the case."

The black eyes lifted for a moment from the task in hand.

"I guess I'd be sport enough for one house," Rupert impassively pronounced. "I hate a crowd."

Gerard nodded to the boy across the garage, his face gleaming into mirth.

"Coals to Newcastle," he signified. "Everyone doesn't like to live shop."

There was the splashing thud of an overturned bucket. As Gerard passed out the door, Corrie overtook him. [Pg 94]

"Gerard," he panted, "Gerard, you said that purposely! You meant to tell me that—that Isabel—that you——"

Gerard regarded him quietly, a little smile curving his lips.

"You meant to tell me that I needn't worry about you and Isabel; that you've seen I want her, and you won't cut in? You meant that?"

The smile crept to Gerard's eyes, but he remained mute. With a quick breath Corrie grasped his companion's hand and squeezed it ardently.

"You're *big*, Allan Gerard. And kind. For I've been watching, these ten days, and you could get her if you tried."

He turned back into the building before contradiction was possible. After a moment, Gerard went on down the path between the althea bushes.

The "flowing arbor" of Corrie's description was a decorative masterpiece of Mr. Rose's own design; a large, pink marble fountain, surrounded by a pink-columned arcade strewn with rugs and cushions. Whatever its architectural faults, it was a fairy-tale place of gurgling water and soft shadows, shot through with the tints of silver spray, rosy stone and deep green turf. Flavia was seated here, in the summer-warm sunshine of early October that had succeeded the storms of the previous week, a long strip of varicolored embroidery lying across her lap and the overfed Persian kitten nestling against her light gown. [Pg 95]

"Corrie is home," Gerard announced, pausing in one of the arched openings. "But I suppose you saw him come in, from here."

The young girl lifted to him the frank welcome of her glance and smile, with their pathetic shade of hostess dignity.

"I saw you both come in," she confirmed. "One sees a great deal from this watch-tower. But it is good of you to tell me; you know how glad I am when he is back. Will you not rest before you go into the house? Corrie always comes here first; to gather strength, he says, to climb the terrace steps."

"I am not fit," he deprecated. "I would soil your purple with my dust and poison, your Venetian atmosphere with gasoline fumes."

"Corrie does it."

"Corrie is privileged. The first time I ever saw you, you were watching Corrie. You made me feel that I lived in a barn."

"A——"

"A blank, impersonal, vacant set of rooms. A house where, if I were brought in on a shutter, there would be no one except the undertaker to pull down the shades." [Pg 96]

Flavia winced, shocked out of her calm.

"Please do not! I—please do not say those things."

"There, you see. I do not even know how to talk to you properly. It doesn't worry me to think about just dying and I forgot that other people dislike the subject. Now, it was living that made me envy Corrie and feel melancholy."

Flavia drew the silk thread with slow accuracy. Her pulses were commencing to beat heavy strokes, she dared not raise her troubled eyes to the dominant, self-possessed man opposite. There was a pause.

"In novels," Gerard mused, "when a man sees the woman who locks the wheels of his fancy, he drops everything else and follows her until he gets—his answer. But in real life we're pretty stupid; we let circumstances interfere, or we don't quite realize what has happened to us, we don't do the right thing, anyway. Sometimes we're lucky enough to get another chance. If we do ——"

The gush and ripple of the fountain, the rustle of the broad-leaved lilies as the changing breeze sent the spray pattering across them; filled pleasantly the lapses of his leisurely speech. Flavia was acutely conscious of his steady gaze upon her bent head, and the unhurried certainty with which he was moving toward his chosen goal. Only, what was that goal? She remembered Isabel's sureness of her own attraction, Isabel's deliberate monopoly of Gerard's attention whenever possible during the last ten days, and Corrie's assertion that his cousin was "just the kind of girl Gerard would like." Yet, he was saying this to her, Flavia. And suddenly she was almost sure of what she never had dared imagine. [Pg 97]

She had no thought that Gerard might be hesitating in uncertain humility before the delicate maidenhood that invested her like a fine atmosphere forbidding approach. She was not even dimly aware that her averted face controlled to soft impassivity, the intent gaze on her work which veiled her eyes beneath their heavy lashes, the regular movement of her slender fingers as she sewed, conveyed an impression of unmoved serenity that might have quelled a vainer man than Allan Gerard. Yet it was so, and he temporized; not knowing that for her there were three people in the arcade, the third Isabel, and not daring to continue his broken sentence.

"I have been wondering if you ever translated your name," he remarked, when silence verged on embarrassment. "I have wondered many times if it were just chance that called you so." [Pg 98]

"My Mother was Flavia Corwin; I am named for her. What does it mean?" she answered, surprised.

Just for an instant she looked at him, and in the one encounter of glances innocently undid all her reserve had built up. Gerard's color ran up under his clear skin like a girl's, brilliant-eyed, he took a step into the arcade.

"It's too late in the season to tell you out here," he demurred. "I'll send you the translation this evening, if I may. There's something else I'd like to tell you, but I've got to find some civilized clothing, first. Essex lost his head for approaching the Queen in his riding-dress, and I'm risking more. I——"

"Hurry up, you two!" hailed Corrie's injured voice, the ring of his step sounded in the stone arcade. "It's six o'clock now. Come on in."

"I'll come," Gerard answered the summons, again his warm, sparkling gaze caught and held Flavia's as, startled, she raised her head. "I was telling Miss Rose that I must get rid of this road dust. But I wasn't thinking of eating, then."

Scarlet rushed over Flavia's face and neck. As Corrie took gay possession of Gerard and bore him off, she sank back in her chair, winding her fingers hard into the embroidery. Not the omnivorous Isabel's, this! There was nothing to fear, ever again. She had the perfect certainty that Gerard would complete that purpose of his the next time they met. And they would meet in an hour. Suddenly she caught up the drowsy kitten and hid her face against the soft living toy. [Pg 99]

They did meet in an hour, but it was on the way to dinner, and the exuberant Corrie held the reins of conversation.

"I've discharged Dean," was his first announcement. "Take those oysters away from in front of me, Perkins; I want my soup right now and a lot of it—about a gallon. Never mind anyone else; I haven't had anything but sandwiches since breakfast."

"Discharged your mechanic one day before the race?" marvelled Gerard. "What will you do?"

"Oh, I'm going out to the garage after dinner to hire him over again. He's used to it. Now, I suppose that if you fired Jack Rupert, you'd never see him again."

"I certainly would not."

"Well, that's the difference. I'm afraid of Rupert, myself. Dean hasn't any dignity."

"Neither have you," observed Isabel biting. "You're worse than Dean. I saw you kick Frederick the Great all across the veranda yesterday, then lead him around the kitchen and feed him porterhouse steak." [Pg 100]

"That was remorse," Mr. Rose suggested, coolly amused. He looked across at Gerard, as at the only other grown person present. "You'd best take a porterhouse steak to Dean when you go, Corwin B. It's a fine temper you've got."

"All right, sir, if you say it. I guess Dean would eat a porterhouse, if he isn't a Great Dane puppy. But I saw a man to-day in a temper that makes anything I ever did read like a chapter from Patient Griselda."

"He must have been a lunatic," Isabel kindly inferred.

Her cousin put his elbows on the table and contemplated her with mock reproach; looking rather nearer his sixteenth year than his nineteenth in this mood of effervescent gayety. Ever since his interview with Gerard, in the garage that afternoon, his high spirits had been unquenchable.

"You're cross, Isabel," he stated frankly. "Where did you get the grouch? That's a stunning purple frock you've got on."

"It isn't, it's mauve," corrected Isabel, but she smiled and smoothed a chiffon ruffle. "Who was your man, then, Corrie?" [Pg 101]

"He was the French driver of the Blulette car, and he came into the judges' stand to make a complaint against another fellow who wouldn't give him the road. Kept getting in front, you know, whenever the Blulette wanted to pass, and cutting it off so it had to fall behind. He was in a French calm, all right, and I don't wonder. But I don't believe anyone could really carry it through, could they, Gerard?"

Gerard roused himself from his study of Flavia, as she sat in her ivory-tinted lace gown at the foot of the table, her small head bent under its weight of gleaming fair hair. The massively handsome room, with its rich hues of gilded leather, mellow Eastern rugs and hangings, carved wood and glinting metal, enchanted him as a background for her dainty youth as if he had never seen it there before or might again. It was difficult for him to look away.

"Carry it through?" he repeated. "Of course, easily."

"Not with some drivers! Not with me!"

"Why not?"

"Because I wouldn't stand it. Because I'd drive through the car ahead if it tried to keep me back. Oh, I'd have them out of my way—you're *laughing* at me, Allan Gerard!" [Pg 102]

Gerard was certainly laughing, and the others with him.

"If I were Dean, I wouldn't wait to be fired, Corrie; I'd resign," he rallied. "Some day I'll challenge you to a game of auto tag, and show you that trick."

"You can't; I'd get by," Corrie retorted, his violet-blue eyes afire with excitement.

"Instead of you two fighting about that nonsense, you might take me around the course in one of your cars," Isabel remarked gloomily. "I've asked you often enough."

"You'll not do that," Mr. Rose pronounced with decision. "It's not fit and I won't have it. And I'm tired of hearing you sulk at Corrie and Gerard because they've got the sense to say no. You'll keep out of the racing cars and off the race track, my girl. Flavia, if you don't make your brother stop eating nuts, he'll be ashamed to meet a squirrel in the woods."

There was open mutiny in the glance Isabel darted at her uncle, but she said nothing. Mr. Rose was not contradicted in his own house by anyone.

"Nuts agree with me, sir," Corrie protested, aggrieved. "Besides, I feel as if I had to celebrate somehow; I have had such a bully day." He leaned back in his chair, turning to Gerard his gaze of shining acknowledgment and measureless content. "I don't think I ever spent such an all-round good old day, just all right all through. I shall have to tie a gold medal on the calendar, or mark it with a white stone, or—" [Pg 103]

"Or drop a pearl in the vase of Al-Mansor," Gerard suggested. His own feelings were not very far removed from Corrie's, that night.

"What is that?" Isabel questioned. "I never heard that story. What is the vase of Al-Mansor?"

"A legend of the days of the caliphs. If you care about it, some day I will find a copy to send."

"Some day! I want to hear it now."

"Tell us, with all the trimmings," Corrie urged, "No sliding around the flowery parts and cutting scenes, but the full performance. Flavia loves that sort of thing, too; she and I grew up on the Arabian Nights and Byron and Irving. We dramatized 'The Fall of Granada,' for the toy theatre, but Bulwer was dead, so it didn't matter."

"Perkins, up in my den you'll find a five-pound box of Turkish Delight, sent to-night from the candy shop; bring it here to help the Oriental atmosphere." [Pg 104]

Flavia looked up, and Gerard caught her eyes, no longer quite untroubled before his own.

"What a set of comparisons to face," he deprecated. "Shall I dare it, Miss Rose?"

"Would you leave us to suffer all the pangs of unsatisfied curiosity?" she wondered. "To dream all night of elusive pearls that disappear in their vase as Cleopatra's in her goblet of vinegar?"

Mr. Rose took a cigar and a match, nodding humorously at his guest.

"You're in for it," he signified. "Better get it over."

"And no cutting," exacted Corrie, *sotto voce*.

"Very well, then; pray imagine yourselves in the bazaar, and remember this isn't my fault," Gerard submitted. He paused, assembling his recollections. "On ascending the throne at Bagdad, in the full noon of the glory of the caliphs; it is told that Al-Mamoun, the son of Haroun-al-Raschid, the great-grandson of Al-Mansor, received from the former vizier a small golden vase.

"'Lord of the East, newly-risen Sun of the true believers,' said the vizier, 'your great-grandfather of venerated memory caused to be made this vase, proposing to place therein a pearl for every day of perfect happiness he should pass. And when he received the vase from the goldsmith, he complained that the vase was too small. But, alas, the mighty Al-Mansor died without ever putting in a single pearl, for the day when the vase came home he learned that his loved sultana plotted against his life.' [Pg 105]

"'After many years, in his turn came to rule your illustrious father, Haroun the Wise, and took the vase. He, the great king, who never travelled without a hundred scholars in his train, who built a school for poor children beside every mosque, he the magnificent in war and peace, in all his long reign enriched the vase by two pearls; the day of his coronation and the day of his death; the day before he saw Marida the Beautiful and the day he forgot her forever. Now, Commander of the Faithful, according to my charge I deliver the vase to you, with hope that your joys may exhaust the sea of pearls.'

"Hearing, Al-Mamoun fell into profound musing.

"'Vizier,' he said, 'I cannot mark the day I began to reign, who loved my father and take his place with tears, and the day of my death no man knows. But, by the favor of Allah, I will add one pearl to the vase while I live.'

"The next morning many workmen came to the palace. Around the fairest part of the garden they reared a lofty wall, within its circle they placed everything which the king might desire. On the day appointed, in that spot assembled his favorite musicians, the scholars in whose conversation he most delighted, the captains whose faces reminded him of victories and the poets whose words fell like drops from the spring that bubbles before Allah's throne in Paradise. Only, because women had troubled the days of Al-Mansor and Haroun, no woman was admitted. [Pg 106]

"With pomp, music and rejoicing, Al-Mamoun moved at sunrise to the garden of delights that was to shelter him from the world for one day. But, as his foot touched the threshold, a great cry of lamentation went through the palace.

"'What now?' demanded the king, halting.

"A guard of the serail answered, his brow in the dust:

"'Lord, the sultana has drowned herself in the Court of Fountains, because of grief that your day of perfect happiness could be passed without her.'

"Then Al-Mamoun drew back his foot and returned to the palace, knowing that from him the golden vase would claim no pearls."

"That is all?" Isabel asked expectantly. [Pg 107]

"What more could there be, mademoiselle?"

"There might be a moral," Corrie suggested, leaning his folded arms on the table, his interested eyes fixed upon the story-teller.

"When I read the Arabian Nights, I found out that Oriental tales have no morals," dryly observed Mr. Rose. "A man who had been brought up with the Blarney Stone for a teething-ring once sold me an unexpurgated edition de luxe, with illustrations, so I ought to know."

"I never saw it, sir!"

"No, Corwin B., you did not. You can if you want to, by coming down to my office, where it is still lying in the packing-box it came in. I don't think you want to. Gerard's story isn't there."

"Its moral seems to be that women are a nuisance," Isabel commented, her manner injured.

"That would not be a moral, it would be a falsehood," Gerard demurred. "No, I fancy the moral might be, do not challenge Fate to a duel. Are you considering our nonsense, Miss Rose?"

"I was thinking of the story," Flavia amended. "I was wondering if the kings would not soon have filled the vase had they been content to mark each happy hour, and whether a wise treasurer of happiness would not find a vase filled with seed-pearls where they found a vase empty."

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"Exactly! You have found the secret, no doubt. Moral: do not ask too much."

"A day too much?" marvelled Corrie. "Why, I expect a lifetime!" He flung back his head, looking around the smiling circle. "Well, why not? What's a lifetime, anyhow? Not half enough to get all the fun there is in living, as long as you do no harm by it. And who wants to do any harm when there is so much else to do? Not anyone in his right mind. Anyway, I've got to-day's pearl canned, and *it* can't get away. And I can think of lots of others I've had, if I could go back for them."

"Shall I guess the name of Al-Mansor's vase?" Flavia asked, as she rose. She was smiling, but her cheeks were flushed and her serious eyes caressed her brother. "It was Memory, I think. And, no, Corrie, the pearls put there cannot be lost."

The extreme warmth of the day had continued into the evening. As Isabel followed Flavia across the hall, Corrie overtook his cousin, wound a scarf around her bare shoulders and lured her out on the veranda. She yielded not unwillingly, contrary to her recent custom of neglecting him, and they disappeared together. Any such latent project of Gerard's was prevented by Mr. Rose's mood for chat, a mood not usual for him.

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"You are not looking much like the driver I met on the way home, to-day," he informed his guest, surveying Gerard quizzically, when they were established in the drawing-room. "But I didn't recognize my own son, for that matter. He don't seem like mine, when he's out in those goblin clothes driving like Satan in a hurry. It's sensible enough for you, being in the automobile trade, but for him it's just fool play."

"He does it a little too well to call it that," Gerard returned seriously.

"Yes? Well, I've got money enough to pay for it—although it's the most expensive game he's found yet—or for anything else he fancies. I've told him to amuse himself for a while. He is too young to settle down to work, when there is no need for it. I never had any playing time, and I want to see him have his. And he has earned it, too; I suppose he told you he was through college?"

"Yes, and amazed me."

"He knew it had to be done, so he did it quickly and without any nonsense. It's an old theory that given liberty and money, a boy will go to ruin. I never believed it; I don't yet. And I never saw why I should make my son a different set of living rules from those I make for myself. Of course, I don't mean there was no law in the house; I don't think I spoiled Corrie. But I've left him pretty free, only bidding him keep straight. That I must have, and he knows it. He has got to keep straight."

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A sudden grate like metal on metal roughened the deliberate speech with a suggestion of grim inflexibility. Flavia lifted vaguely startled eyes to her father.

"I don't believe you need to worry about that," reassured Gerard smiling. The echo of Corrie's fresh young tones was in their ears, as he disputed with his cousin, outside the windows at the end of the room.

"I guess not. He's too much like his mother." Mr. Rose dropped his hand on Flavia's, as she sat in her low chair beside him. "And she was what they call an aristocrat, nowadays, but I called a lady when I married her. Old family, gentle breeding, the society end, and good looks like my little girl's that seem too fine to touch; she had all and everything except money. And I gave her that."

Flavia leaned nearer to her father with the caressing confidence in mutual affection which marked all the household intercourse and pervaded the gorgeous pink villa like an actual fragrance of atmosphere.

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"I gave her that. She liked to spend it. Not," his keen eyes suddenly sprang challengingly to the other man's, "Not that she married me for money. Don't think it. My wife loved me. I guess I struck her family like a cyclone; I was self-made and used to my own way, at thirty, and not uglier than my neighbors. Mrs. Tom Rose was a happy woman, until she died, when Corrie was two years old and Flavia four." He rose brusquely and crossed the room. "You don't smoke, Gerard? I always spoil a cigar when I talk."

"I don't unless there's something wrong," Gerard answered, tactfully casual. "A cigarette helps, then. But everything is very right, now. You know, these races are my holidays, although they are an important business feature, too. My factory affairs keep me hard at work most of the year. Then in the intervals I am designing and having constructed a genuine racing machine of my own, much more powerful than the ninety Mercury I'm driving now. I'm not an idle citizen, really."

Flavia's head drooped lower. He was telling her father these things as part of that steady purpose whose object she felt herself; she knew it, clairvoyantly acute.

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"You get a lot out of living," commented Mr. Rose, coming back to his seat. "You enjoy it, I'm thinking."

"Yes, I do," Gerard replied candidly. "Why not?"

"You're right. Now, I want to tell you about a deal I put through in the Street, to-day."

Flavia moved to the piano and began to touch the keys. She knew there would be only men's talk for a while, and from this place she could watch Gerard unseen. In all the previous days she had avoided this, refusing to take cognizance of the physical beauty upon which Isabel dilated, half-unconsciously defending herself from an undefined danger. She commenced to play pastel-toned bits of Nevin and Chaminade, her clear eyes delighting in free vision.

Out on the veranda, Corrie was sustaining a defense of his own. Upright against a column, scarlet with determination, Isabel pursued the wilful desire she had voiced at the dinner-table.

"That Frenchwoman was around the course with her husband, yesterday," she urged. "Other women have done it before. Why won't you take me?"

"You might get hurt. Father never would let you."

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"He needn't know, stupid. You don't want to, that's all. I'll ask Mr. Gerard; he'll like to take me."

The poison had been drawn from that sting, but Corrie winced, nevertheless.

"I *want* you, Isabel. I love you."

"You're a boy; I'm a year older than you."

"Eleven months!"

"Anyhow, I'm a woman. I do what I choose, while you're afraid to move for fear uncle will catch you. What would he do, ferule your little palms?"

Furious, Corrie sprang across and dropped his hands on her shoulders with the freedom of their life-long intercourse.

"I'd like to ferule yours," he gritted between his set teeth. "I'm as much a man as you are a woman. You haven't any *sense*. And there's no use of your dangling after Allan Gerard, for he don't want you—he said as much. I'm going in, and I won't take you around the course."

Gasping, Isabel let him reach the French windows of the drawing-room before recovering herself. Then she rushed in pursuit, tripping impatiently over her long chiffon skirts.

"Corrie—wait! Corrie!"

He turned sullenly, secretly aghast at his own temerity. But Isabel laid her hand on his sleeve without anger.

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"You're more man than I thought," she breathed. "I always liked you better than anyone else, anyhow. Corrie, if you'd take me around the course, early in the morning when no one here knew, I believe you'd be almost grown up enough to—to—be engaged."

"Isabel!" he cried, fire kindling in his face. "You would? You would?"

"If I get my ride——"

He seized her, boy-clumsily, and boy-like lavished his impetuous kisses.

"You'll get anything," he promised, half-choked by excitement. "And everything. Oh, Isabel!"

Flavia's delicate music flowed on and on. Before Mr. Rose had finished his discussion, Corrie and Isabel entered the room, and the evening ended without any possibility of Gerard's resuming the theme commenced in the fountain arcade.

When the group separated for the night, Corrie detained his sister at the foot of the wide, gleaming stairs.

"Don't rise early in the morning to give me my coffee, Other Fellow," he said. "I shan't be starting for the course at the usual time. I have been working pretty steadily and I need to rest for the race itself, day after to-morrow."

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She leaned across the bannister to him; the two young faces framed in young ripples of bright hair resembled each other very strongly in their twin moods of exaltation and radiant, half-incredulous happiness.

"You do not feel unwell, dear? You have not driven too much?"

"Not a bit. But I'm sleepy," he caught a frond of a tall Madeiran fern that was placed in its jardiniere on the step opposite him, winding the satin-green strip over his finger, "honestly, all in with sleepiness, and I'm going to sleep to-night as if it was the last quiet night's sleep I'd ever get. See you to-morrow, kid sister."

"Good-night, dearest."

So, since she was not to give Corrie his morning coffee, she would not give Gerard's to him or see him until his return from the race course. As a matter of course, it was not to be contemplated that she should rise at dawn for a tête-à-tête breakfast with the guest, at this period when all the fine elements that composed their relation hesitated at the point of crystallization. But she scarcely regretted the postponed interview. It would be better to meet each other differently, at

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more leisure. He would come again to the fountain arcade, where she watched for Corrie's return.

When Flavia reached her own room, there stood on her dressing-table a long silver-paper and filigree box. Wondering, she raised the lid, to be met with a gust of exquisite perfume and confronted with a mass of frail yellow roses, lovely with the quaint, virginal beauty of suggestion that separates them from all their other-colored kin. Across the glistening petals lay a cover cut from a pocket dictionary, bearing written upon it one sentence: "Definition of the meaning of Flavia Rose."

She laid her head beside the flowers, gold upon gold. She, also, the fancy came to her, had placed this day in the vase of Al-Mansor. But the day to come outshone it, as a rosy pearl one merely white.

"To-morrow," she whispered to herself. "To-morrow."

VI

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WRECK

Gray, sluggish, slow in coming and sullen of aspect, a reluctant dawn succeeded the night. A wet mist clung everywhere in the windless atmosphere, muffling sound as well as light. There was not even a servant stirring in the Rose house, when Gerard descended the dark stairs and went out into the chill, damp park.

In the garage one bright point shone out; under a swinging electric lamp Rupert was preparing his machine to go out, a solitary figure in the expanse of wavering shadows and dim bulks.

"Where are Rose and his man?" Gerard questioned, as he came across the floor.

His voice rolled startlingly loud in the lofty, echoing room. Moving to reply, the mechanic let fall a tool and the crash repeated itself sharply from every stone arch and angle.

"Rose won't be out at the course till late; I guess our peaceful life ain't what he's used to, exactly. He 'phoned over last night to Dean, who's sleeping yet."

Gerard nodded, eyeing the Mercury racer with affectionate attention.

"All right, is she?" he asked.

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Rupert straightened himself and proceeded to close the hood.

"I ain't supposing we'll need to be towed," he conceded sarcastically. "But I'll put in a rope, if you're worried bad, and take my copy of *Motor Repairing at a Glance*."

"Do," Gerard urged. "I'd like to have it found on you, Rupert. Start her up, then, if you're ready."

He crossed, with the last word, to the shelf where lay his racing mask and gauntlets. The melancholy drip from moist eaves and trees, the dreary half-light and heavy air had absolutely no depressing power upon his flawless nerves and vigor of life. By the open door he paused to look out, unconsciously clasping his hands behind his head with the leisurely grace and relaxation of one who found pleasure in mere movement.

"There'll be a wet course," Rupert's muffled tones came from the opposite end of the room.

"Well?" Gerard queried lazily. "What of it?"

There was no answer. Instead sounded the click of moving throttle and spark, and the place burst into thunderous tumult; violet flames darted from the exhausts and enfolded the hood of the vibrating car as it moved forward to its master's side.

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"I don't like this morning, and I don't like this course," stated Rupert, sombrely definite, through the roar and rattle of irregular reports from the cut-down motor. "But I guess I've got to stand for them. Anyhow, I couldn't have a classier Friday-the-thirteenth emotion equipment if I had been to a voodoo fortune teller who had a grudge against me. What are we waiting for?"

Gerard lingered in taking his seat, his amazed eyes travelling over the small, discontented dark face of his companion.

"Something's wrong, Rupert?"

"I ain't saying so—yet."

The driver's own expression shadowed slightly; he looked again and more searchingly at the other. In common with most men who had lived in the tense atmosphere of the most dangerous form of racing yet evolved, he had witnessed more than one case where a presentiment did not fail of fulfilment. Irrespective of whether catalogued as coincidence, occult foresight or absurdity, the facts did exist, occasionally to be read in the prosaic columns of a newspaper, more often lost except in camp annals. He knew, and Rupert knew, of a mechanic who suddenly refused absolutely to go out with the driver by whose side he had ridden countless miles, having no better reason than a disinclination for the trip. And they both had seen the substitute who took his place

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brought in dead, an hour later, after his car's wreck. A widely-known victor of many races, one of Gerard's close friends, had come to shake hands with him in a state of causeless nervousness that would have shamed a novice, just before starting on the ride from which he never returned. The price of debate is too high to argue with some things; Gerard temporized.

"I don't want to take you out feeling like that. Give yourself a day off," he suggested. "I'll find one of the factory men to go out with me for the morning's practice."

"Who's crazy now?" inquired his mechanic acidly, and flung himself back in his narrow seat.

The Mercury slipped through Mr. Rose's winding drives, plunged into the sandy Long Island road, and sped lurching toward the course.

There was nothing dull or depressing about the starting point, at the Motor Parkway. Before the busy row of repair pits throbbed and panted some of the cars, surrounded by their force of workers; in other camps the men stood, watch in hand, timing the machines already out. Reporters vibrated everywhere; surrounded by an admiring group, two world-famous French and Italian drivers were pitching pennies for the last cigarettes from a box of special brand. Only the tiers of empty seats in the grand-stand and the absence of spectators in fields and parking-spaces distinguished this practice morning from the actual race. [Pg 121]

There was a general movement of greeting as the Mercury rolled in and Gerard sprang out at his own camp.

"Where's your pink pet, Allan?" called a driver, from the starting line. "What's up—mornin' air too crude for millionaire kids?"

"He *isn't* up," was the blithe reply. "Never mind Rose, he's coming; tell me where you got your five-cylinder machine, Jack."

"A late Rose, eh? Oh, I've got six cylinders here, all right, but I daren't run on all of them now for fear my speed would make the rest of you quit, discouraged. I'm goin' to make your yesterday's record look like a last year's timetable, this mornin'."

"You look out that you don't break your neck. Rupert says it's a hoodoo day. We don't want you in the hospital twice this season."

"Is Rupert sad?" questioned the big blonde pilot of the neighboring camp, leaning over the railing. [Pg 122]

"I ain't been so near it since I put my foot in a hole and sprained my ankle ten minutes before the start, when I was racing with Darling French at Philadelphia," admitted the mechanic. "It hurt me fierce."

"Your ankle?"

"No, seeing him start without me."

"Say, Gerard, there's your pink Rambler," a distant voice signified.

About to send his car forward, Gerard paused to glance over his shoulder, and caught the pink flash behind a row of mist-draped trees edging the cross-road. Sudden mischief curved his lips, his amber eyes laughed behind their goggles.

"Tell Corrie Rose I'll give him that game of auto tag, if he happens along while I'm on a straight stretch," he called across to one of Corrie's men, by way of farewell.

A little breeze stirred the mist, as the Mercury shot down the course; the gray light was brightening by slow gradations.

There was small probability that Gerard's car and the rose-colored machine would soon find themselves together on the twelve-mile circuit, allowing for their difference in starting time. But as the Mercury turned into the straight stretch of back road, on the second time around, there sounded a sharp report, the car staggered perilously, and a tire tore itself loose from a rear wheel to hurtle, a vicious projectile of rubber and steel, far across the stubble fields. Reeling, but held to its course by the driver's trained hand, the Mercury slackened its flight and was brought to a stop. Rupert was already leaning over the back, dragging free a spare tire; Gerard slipped out of his seat. [Pg 123]

For experts the task was not long. A white car thundered past the workers, leaving a swirl of dust and flying pebbles, its mechanic turning to survey the halted Mercury. As Rupert swept the last tool into its place with precise swiftness, the throbbing of a second motor drifted to them, a pink streak darted around a distant curve.

"It's Corrie," identified Gerard. "Get in, Rupert. If he wasn't forced by his money into the amateur ranks, that boy would make some of us work to keep our laurels, all right."

The panther-agile figure swung into place beside him.

"I ain't a market gardener," Rupert drawled, fitting one small foot in a strap support, as the car leaped forward. "But I guess those plants ain't apt to flourish in too rich soil."

The Mercury did not gather speed too rapidly, rather it lingered until the pink car bore close [Pg 124]

down upon it.

"How near?" suddenly demanded Gerard, above the noise of the motor.

The mechanic reconnoitred.

"Hundred feet," he made report.

"Wave to him."

Rupert raised his hand obediently. The Mercury sprang ahead under Gerard's touch, and with an answering roar the rose-colored machine sped in pursuit.

There was no doubt that Corrie understood the play; nor that his car was easily capable of passing the sixty-mile an hour gait now held by the Mercury. But he was not allowed to pass. Each time he essayed it, the other racer swerved in front and cut off the road.

It was as dangerous a game as could well be designed, had either driver been less skilled, but it was safe enough now. Gerard was laughing as he drove, when the first tiny missile rattled against his car.

"He's pitching spare bolts," shouted Rupert, at his companion's ear, himself grimly amused. "Peevish, ain't he?"

Gerard nodded, and crossed the narrow road with an unexpected turn that drew a baffled explosion from the checked car behind. A brass nut smacked the Mercury's gasoline tank. It was not difficult to imagine Corrie's excited tempest of defeat, to those who knew him. [Pg 125]

"The turn's ahead—we'll call it off there," Gerard answered mirthfully. "Give her some oil."

The two cars were rushing down the last half-mile of straight road. Rupert was stooping to reach the oil pump when the pink car made its final attempt to pass and was again forced back, but across his outstretched arm he glanced up to Gerard, and glimpsed the last flying missile as it came.

"*Duck!*" he shouted harshly, "Look out——"

There was no time for action. As Gerard turned his head, the heavy steel wrench struck him below the right temple. Even Rupert's swiftness was too slow; the driver fell forward across his steering-wheel before the mechanic could snatch it from the inert grasp. With a lurch the speeding Mercury caught in a rut, swerved from the road and, leaping a yard-high embankment, crashed through a row of trees to roll over and over like a broken toy, scattering splintered wreckage over the farmhouse enclosure beyond.

The light breeze of half an hour earlier had freshened and gained strength, the pale-gray sky was changing to delicate blue. When the horrified knot of reporters and motor enthusiasts from the nearby Westbury corner swarmed into the orchard to join the pale-faced farmer already there, the sun emerged brilliantly from a bank of clouds, glinting across the heap of twisted metal and the still figure that lay beneath it, illumining the dishevelled, gasping mechanic who struggled dizzily to rise from where he had been flung to safety, fifty feet from the wreck. [Pg 126]

It is difficult for any group of men, however willing, to work without a leader. While the inexperienced rescuers stood hesitating on the verge of action, Corrie Rose in his pink racing costume sprang up the bank, his blue eyes burning in his white face, his lips stained with blood where his teeth had bitten through.

"Get those logs, over there," he commanded savagely. "The car's got to be jacked up. Hurry up—do you want him to die under there? *Jump!*"

His fiery energy ran through the men with a vivifying shock. Torpor transformed to animation, the grim work was attacked. Under Corrie's brief orders they scattered in search of the logs, a telephone, and such aid as the place afforded. The farmer's wife assumed charge of the semi-conscious Rupert, for whom no one else had time. [Pg 127]

Into the prim, staid country parlor they carried Gerard, fifteen minutes later, and laid him on a horse-hair couch under a square-framed lithograph of *The Trial of John Knox*. A plush photograph album was jostled on its marble table by the driver's shattered mask and a glove upon whose wrist still clung and ticked his miniature watch, the flowered carpet was trampled under the heedless feet and streaked with dull red here and there.

"They stopped here yesterday for some water," sobbed the mistress of the house hysterically. "Oh dear, dear! Pitching apples across the yard at the little dark one, he was, and both of them making fun."

The rattling explosions of a motor cycle sounded from without; the first of the emergency surgeons to arrive ran up the steps and into the room, stripping off his coat while appraising with keen eyes the unconscious patient.

"Get out, everyone," he directed concisely. "Here, I want a helper—you, Rose?"

Corrie, on his knee beside the couch, looked up and dragged himself erect. Gerard's face was no more drawn and colorless than his, but he answered to the call, as half an hour before he had answered the demand of the situation for a guide. [Pg 128]

"I'll help," he consented, his voice hoarse. "I deserve it."

Before the surgeon's imperious gesture, the rest of the men were retreating to leave the room, when those nearest the door were suddenly thrust back. Staggering, furious passion blazing in his scratched and pain-twisted face, Rupert burst across the threshold.

"Alive?" he hurled the fierce question. "Alive? What?"

"Yes," snapped the surgeon. "Cut this sleeve, Rose—gently! Clear out, you; the ambulance men will take care of you when they get here."

Rupert's haggard black eyes embraced the scene, and encountered Corrie.

"You——" he snarled, choking, and whirled to face the witnesses, extending one slim shaking hand toward the workers beside the couch. "Here, I ain't supposing but that most of you are chasing headlines for paper rags—print down that Allan Gerard was killed by that man. I'm saying it; Gerard cut him off from getting past, and he pitched a wrench that knocked him out. Go down to the course and you'll get the wrench to Missouri you, on the road. Rose knocked out Gerard and our car ran wild." [Pg 129]

The concentrated vehemence and force of the arraignment stupefied even the reportorial instinct. Dazed, the hearers stared from the mechanic's tattered, accusing figure to the pale young driver who offered neither surprise nor defense, but went steadily on with his unsteady task.

"He wrecked us——" Rupert made a limping step forward. "Well? Did you guess I was reciting this to put you to sleep? Why ain't you taking him out of here? Put *his* mechanic through the third degree and get his story—who nailed you fast here? Why don't you *move*?"

The scissors slipped tinkling to the floor from Corrie's grasp. Livid with wrath, the surgeon stood up.

"Get out, all, and take that maniac with you," he stormed. "Not a word; I don't care if Rose has murdered all Long Island, he's some use now. Clear out and leave this room quiet. Quick."

He was obeyed, the nearest men drawing Rupert into the retiring group, and the door closed.

Outside, the reporters became themselves. While ambulances dashed up, motor cycles, official cars and private vehicles arrived to halt around the little house, the Mercury's mechanic was hurried apart and his story coaxed from him in detail. [Pg 130]

The last automobile to come up, an hour after the accident, was a gilt-monogrammed foreign limousine. From it descended a gentleman who, after a comprehensive glance over the disordered, crowded orchard, crossed straight to where Rupert sat hunched on a kitchen chair opposite the shattered car.

"Rupert," he appealed, catching the mechanic's shoulder. "Rupert, what's been happening here?"

Very deliberately Rupert lifted his dark face, its grimness not lessened by flecks and bars of court-plaster; across the apathy of physical exhaustion his black eyes gleamed vivid, hard resolve.

"Your son's finished Gerard, Mr. Rose," he stated, monotonously explicit. "He slipped his temper and fired a wrench at Gerard for not giving him the road. It hit him, and we ran wild without a driver till we struck here. Ask him—he's in there with what's left of Gerard—why he's sent Dean where he ain't to be found, if I'm lying."

Mr. Rose released Rupert's shoulder, both men equally oblivious of the pain his grasp had inflicted on bruised flesh and muscle, and turned his gray face to the surrounding group in dumb quest of confirmation. Then, moving stiffly, he walked toward the house. [Pg 131]

There was an authority in his bearing that gained him unopposed entrance. In the hall, nauseating with the ominous odor of antiseptics, he was met by one of the doctors.

"You can turn my house into a hospital," Mr. Rose said briefly. "I want Gerard taken there instead of to your places. You can have all the money you like."

The man looked at the card presented, his professional impassivity flickering, but shook his head.

"He would better not be moved at all, sir; at least, not to-day. He can be asked, if you wish."

"He is conscious, then?"

"Just about," he shrugged, reaching for the door. "Here, if you care to go in."

The room was glaring with light, the lace curtains were dragged wide apart from the windows and the shades rolled high. Idle now in the presence of more skilled attendants, but recognized as one who had earned the right to be there, Corrie stood near the foot of the improvised bed, leaning against the wall with his fair head slightly bent. At the sound of the door he turned that way, as Mr. Rose stopped on the threshold. [Pg 132]

The snapping latch, or some more subtle influence, aroused someone else. Slowly Gerard's heavy lashes lifted, and he saw father and son looking at each other across the parlor strewn with the

tragic litter of the last hour's work. There was nothing to interrupt the triple regard; it endured long, with steadfast intensity.

In a corner two surgeons were holding a subdued consultation, a third was busied at the marble table, the attention of all fully engaged.

"Put a pillow under my head, someone," suddenly bade the shadow of Allan Gerard's voice, across the hush. "And give me a cigarette."

There was a startled flurry in the room. Familiar enough with the last request from his masculine patients, the man at the table took a case from his own pocket and, lighting one of the cigarettes, stooped over the bed.

"Keep your grip on yourself," he approved brusquely. "But don't move."

It was in his left hand that Gerard took the tiny narcotic, his right arm and shoulder were a mere bulk of splints and linen bandages.

"Thanks," his difficult voice spoke again. "Now open that door and let everyone in—I want to talk to them." [Pg 133]

"Mr. Gerard!"

His clear eyes, dark with suffering but absolutely collected, met the surgeon's.

"I've got to talk to them, doctor, and I may be out of my head or in a box, to-morrow. Let them in—the reporters, I mean."

The listeners gazed at each other, a shock ran through the group. Every man there knew Rupert's story of the accident, every man guessed that it was Gerard's own version that was to be given now. Someone offered Mr. Rose one of the horse-hair chairs, during the moment of rearrangement before the youngest of the doctors left the room. Only Corrie remained unmoved, not changing his position or looking at Gerard. There was a certain dignity of utter quiescence in his pose that comprehended neither defiance nor submission, but a strange, aloof patience.

The representative reporters from the city journals filed in, avidly expectant. With them came two officials of the racing association, and a metallic-eyed man whose plain clothes were contradicted by the badge visible under his coat. There was silent orderliness; the grim significance of the room, the presence of the watchful surgeons, the central figure of the driver so well known to all of those who entered, were subduing to the least sensitive. Nor was the effect less hushing because of that other driver who attended in the background, the strong sunlight shining on his glistening pink garb and still face. [Pg 134]

Gerard let fall the hand holding the cigarette, when the company was complete, and slowly turned his brown head on the pillow to face them.

"You newspaper men have been first-class to me for a good while; it's my chance to reciprocate now," he asserted. "Well, I'll give what copy I can. I know you want it, boys—you've often been after me for less."

The familiar gayety rippled above his aching effort of speech, his will locked to composure each rebellious line of expression. No one stirred in the room.

"I wish it were a better yarn. But when two tires blow out at the same time, while a car's turning ___"

This time, there was a general sigh of quick-drawn breath. Mr. Rose stood up.

"When two tires let go, at ninety miles an hour, there's apt to be a wreck. I——" his lashes fell wearily. "I couldn't hold the machine to the road. The shock broke my control—there's no one to blame but me——" The cigarette crumpled in his clenching fingers, his straight brows knotted. [Pg 135]

"Gerard," burst forth the racing official, excitedly urgent in his suspense. "Your tires wrecked you? That's your last word? Gerard, if you can speak, do!"

The amber eyes re-opened in answer, to meet the fixed gaze of the eager men who waited opposite.

"Yes," gasped Gerard, casually definite. "What else? Corrie, leave me your smokes, they're a better brand——"

If there had been any doubt left the witnesses, that comrade request beat it down. The surgeon flung out his hand in a sweeping gesture of dismissal, as he sprang toward his fainting patient. Gerard had finished.

Mr. Rose went out with the other men. Some of his florid color had come back, he walked more firmly and his face had relaxed to naturalness. On the narrow porch the referee from the racing association held out his hand with frank congratulation.

"Glad poor Gerard set matters right before they got any further, Mr. Rose. It sounded nasty, for a while. The mechanic struck his head in the upset, I fancy; I've seen a man run half a mile across country, crazy as a loon, after being pitched out on his head in a sand-bank. They'd better get Jack Rupert into bed and keep him quiet; he'll wake up to-morrow sane as ever. Nice way [Pg 136]

your son took it."

"Oh, Corwin B. is straight," declared Mr. Rose, proudly self-contained in his relief. "I guess there wasn't much need to worry about that part. I'll wait here and take him home with me, now; he's had about all of that room he ought to stand, fond of Gerard as he is."

"He looked done up, yes. Well——"

A long shout sounded down the course, a clamor of excited speech. A troupe of men appeared, running toward the house in the wake of a chauffeur who held up some object that glittered in the sun.

"I've got it!" the leader called ahead. "I've got it where he said, beside the road!"

The thing in his hand was a small, heavy nickel wrench. The men on the porch and the men in the yard stared at each other, mute. After a moment Mr. Rose drew out his handkerchief, passed it across his forehead and lips, then went down to his limousine, got in and sank back against the cushions.

"Home," he issued his order.

"Mr. Corwin is not coming, sir?"

"Home."

VII

[Pg 137]

"THE GREATEST OF THESE"

It was nearly two hours after the Mercury car had crashed into ruin under the aromatic apple-trees, before knowledge of the disaster came to Flavia. Breakfast was over, at least the breakfast of Mr. Rose and his daughter; no other member of the family had appeared. A maid reported that Isabel had ordered her horse and had departed on an early ride to the neighboring golf club, where she was engaged to play with an equally athletic college girl, that morning. There was nothing to disturb the customary pleasant routine or to suggest uneasiness. At the usual hour Mr. Rose left for the city; he was on his way to New York when he first caught the rumor that sent him instead to the farmhouse at Westbury.

Flavia, roseate, softly irradiated, moving in an atmosphere of undefined expectation as difficult to breathe calmly as the rarefied air of a mountain-top, had held herself to the accomplishment of her daily charges. She was seated at her little white-and-gold desk in her white-and-gold study, setting the household affairs in order for the day with the dainty precision of all her methods, when Isabel came into the room and stopped upright and rigid, near the door.

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"You had better hear it now," the younger girl dully announced. "There has been an accident on the course."

Flavia's hands flew over her heart, the room blackened.

"Corrie——" she gasped.

"No; Mr. Gerard. He is alive, that's all I know."

The scent of the yellow roses Flavia had put in her hair dilated to a stifling heaviness that hindered breath; she covered her eyes with her small cold fingers, seeking the dark, mute under torture. He was alive—that niggard concession was made to Allan Gerard, whose rich fullness of vigor and dominant presence last night had seemed the one firm reality in a world of pleasant vagueness. Weak, conscious of nothing but what her inward vision showed, she lay in her chair; questioning no more, making no sign.

Suddenly Isabel, the self-assured, evenly poised Isabel, was on the floor at her cousin's knees, burying her face in Flavia's pale-yellow dress and sobbing in frantic hysteria.

"Flavia, Flavia, I can't bear it! I am afraid, I am afraid—if he should die——"

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Shocked back into strength, Flavia bent over her, soothing and caressing with soft touches and inarticulate phrases of affection.

"Hush, dear, hush! Put your head here. Let me call Martha; you frighten me, Isabel!"

The tempest did not last long. As abruptly as she had lost self-command, Isabel regained it. Rising to her feet, she swept back the disordered auburn curls from her flushed face and stood silent beside the desk, in a state approaching exhaustion. She was wearing a dark riding-habit soiled with dust and stained in several places with oil or grease, her high-laced boots were scratched and sand-covered. But Flavia was beyond notice of costume and saw only her cousin's sullen misery of expression.

"Dear, you loved him," escaped her, in her double compassion for the woman whom Gerard had not chosen.

Isabel's gray eyes were crossed by a spark.

"No—I *hate* him!" she flared viciously. "What did he do it for? He had no right. He, he—" She pressed her drenched handkerchief hard against her lips. "Corrie, poor Corrie—"

Flavia shrank, commencing to tremble before a looming premonition of something still worse to be endured. [Pg 140]

"What of Corrie? Isabel, what?"

"You will hear soon enough," she assured bitterly. "I've said all I can. No—don't ask me, don't follow me. They will tell you downstairs. I'm going."

Downstairs, meant the servants. Flavia Rose was, above all things, maiden-proud; as Gerard's fiancée, as Gerard's wife, no cost of pain or humiliation would have kept her from him. But she was neither. She had only her own interpretation of his mirthful glances and graceful speech, only a few yellow roses to hint that he did not regard her as the most casual of friends. Suppose she had been mistaken, suppose he had meant only courtesy to a hostess whose youth exacted gallantry?

Isabel had gone. Flavia turned her face to a diminutive mirror lying among the trifles on her desk. Could she go down to the curious servants so—pale, quivering and emotion-spent? Even as she looked into her own reflected eyes, the tears at last overflowed.

It was half an hour later before Flavia, quiet, dignified and only betrayed by her absolute pallor, trusted herself to descend the stairs.

The Rose house was too near the race course, too intimately concerned in the drama, for the information she sought not to be already rife gossip there. When Mr. Rose came home, near noon, he had little left to tell his daughter except Gerard's condition and his defense of Corrie. [Pg 141]

"Then Corrie did not hurt him," she grasped the exquisite relief.

Mr. Rose shook his head, reluctantly discouraged and discouraging. He had not gone to the city during those intervening hours; he never, then or afterward, spoke of where he had been or what he had felt.

"There was the wrench," he heavily reminded her. "And where has he sent Dean, who must have seen all that happened and could have given Gerard's mechanic the lie? I've not seen Corrie except across the room," the recollection of that ghastly room broke the speech. "We have got to wait until he comes home to answer."

Flavia slipped her hand into his, nestling to him, and he put his arm about her. Both were remembering Corrie's brief, simoon-hot tempers, his hasty tongue and ready hand—and swift repentances. Had an occasion come when the repentance was too late, too vain! And what repentance! To the sister who knew with life-long knowledge the ardent, passionate Corrie, his young rigidity in honor and high pride, his tenacious affections, this menaced downfall was almost as appalling as his death. She thrust the possibility from her with revolted condemnation of herself for crediting this libel, this slander of her brother. What had he ever done to justify such a belief? [Pg 142]

"Papa, he could not!" she defended. "Corrie could not. Not, not *Corrie!*"

"I hope not, my girl."

Something in his tone, some quality she did not recognize, brought her gaze to his face with a fresh dread. What would it mean to Thomas Rose, if this were true of his son? And what would the change in Thomas Rose mean to Corrie?

The early autumn dusk had fallen and the lamps were lit, when Corrie came home. The routine of the household had gone on through the long day; under the eye of convention, Flavia and Mr. Rose had dressed for dinner and now sat together in the drawing-room, each holding an unread book. But at the closing of the outer door both started erect, pretense forgotten.

"Corrie!" his father summoned. Not Corwin B.; by a trick of usage the nickname had become formal, the formal name a playfulness not to be spoken now.

Corrie came quietly between the velvet curtains. He still wore the pink racing costume, its hue in marked contrast to his worn young face. That one day had drawn white lines about his boyish mouth and set black circles under his blue eyes. As if feeling himself on trial, he stopped just within the room and stood with the quiescent endurance that he had shown in the farmhouse parlor and which sat so strangely upon him. [Pg 143]

"First—Gerard?" required Mr. Rose hardly. "You've been there?"

"Yes, sir. They say he will live."

"Live! What—"

"They say he will never drive again."

Flavia cried out faintly, grasping the arms of her chair, and there was a pause.

"I've heard Rupert's story, and I've heard Gerard's," slowly pronounced Mr. Rose. "I haven't heard yours, yet. Nor I haven't learned that anyone has. What wrecked Gerard's car?"

There was no answer. Corrie's breathing quickened slightly, but he neither moved nor spoke, nor lifted his eyes to the two who watched him. After moments, Mr. Rose put out his hand and pushed away a tinted electric lamp from which the light fell too strongly on his face.

"Rupert isn't lying," he asserted. "He might be crazy. If he is, say so. I saw your nickel wrench picked up, myself, and a dozen people along the line saw you and Gerard racing just before the smash. Where is your mechanician, Dean? What has he got to say? It looks bad, your hiding him." [Pg 144]

"He was not with me," Corrie replied, his voice oddly smothered.

"Not with you? Rupert talks of seeing him beside you in the car."

"Rupert is mistaken. Dean was not yet out at the course and I started alone. Ask the men at my camp and the race officials; they will tell you that I took out my machine without a mechanician."

"Then Rupert is crazy? Gerard told the truth? Speak out! Are you afraid or sulky?"

This time the lash took effect. Corrie moved sharply and spoke.

"I am not going to talk," he declared definitely. "Nor ought you to ask it of me, sir. If you don't know how I loved Allan Gerard, if you can't feel that I would rather have killed myself than hurt him and would have turned my car against a stone wall sooner than see to-day, there is no use of my saying it. I don't care what anyone thinks or says. I stood the worst that can come to me when I helped his surgeons to-day and heard him clear me—I'm going to my room; you needn't fear I'll run away." [Pg 145]

Mr. Rose was across the room before his son could leave it, gripping the satin-clad shoulder.

"You'll keep what Gerard lied to give you," he promised with inexorable menace. "And that's what is left of your reputation. You'll neither run nor skulk in your room; you'll go dress for dinner and come down here and eat it. We'll have no scenes. The medicine you have got to take is nothing to the black dose Gerard has to swallow."

"Papa!" Flavia appealed, unheard.

"Yes, sir," Corrie answered simply.

On the wide landing of the staircase Flavia overtook her brother. There was just one thing she could say to him, must and would always have to say whatever his faults or the rest of the world's condemnation.

"I love you," she panted, clasping her little hands around his arm. "Corrie, it is hurting you so! I love you, let me come."

Under the soft hall-lights he turned to her, blue eyes meeting blue eyes; then for the first time in their lives he took her in his arms with a man's touch and kissed her.

"You stick close, Other Fellow," he said unsteadily. "I'm pretty lonesome; you're a help. But don't come now." [Pg 146]

Pretty lonesome. Yes, that expressed the atmosphere of aloofness, the air of being suddenly walled around and set apart, that now marked the impulsive and social Corrie. It was with him when he came down to the dreary dinner, an hour later.

The one who failed to play out the wretched farce of customary life was Isabel. She kept her room, alleging illness, and did not appear to lend aid to the evening which the three spent in silent endurance of one another and their own thoughts. The very surroundings insisted on the image of Gerard; a book he had been reading lay open on the table, the music he preferred was waiting on the piano rack. At nine o'clock, unable to bear more, Flavia rose, hurriedly pleading fatigue. Corrie also rose with her to retire, or to escape.

"Wait," his father bade, at his movement, laying down a newspaper. "You will not be out with your automobile, to-morrow."

Corrie looked at him without rebellion or surprise, unflinching from the decision.

"I shall never drive a racing car again, sir," was his quiet statement. [Pg 147]

And only Gerard could have gauged what that renunciation cost his fellow-driver.

Gerard, at that hour, was not conscious of many things. The night that was long at the rose-colored villa, was longer yet in the little farmhouse. But when the first pale light of dawn made the parlor windows grow into glimmering squares of gray, the patient suddenly spoke out of what was rather stupor than sleep.

"And the greatest of these is charity?" he said strongly and clearly.

The nurse hurried to his side, but it was many moments before he again aroused and asked for Rupert.

"Now, and alone," he insisted, when she demurred, urging rest.

Even in his helplessness he was compelling. The nurse went in search of Rupert, who had kept vigil in the kitchen, scoffing at the suggestion of bed while that battle was being waged in the

other room.

Gerard turned his fever-burnished eyes upon his small mechanic's sullen face, when that visitor entered. Both men understood perfectly well the contest of wills about to ensue. Both were coolly determined and prepared with the fine weapon of mutual knowledge of one another. [Pg 148]

"There's a silver case on the table; get me a cigarette and light it, will you?" requested Gerard, in his low, unsure voice.

Rupert complied. He had not altogether escaped, himself, with mere scratches; he limped as he came across to place the cigarette in the languid fingers.

"I guess there ain't any special need to ask if it's hurting bad, when you're wanting these dopes," he drew grim inference. "Here."

"It is, all the time. Thanks. I didn't bring you here to talk about that, when you should be asleep, though. Rupert, no more is to be said about Corrie Rose. There has been too much of that already, I can see."

Rupert's black eyes hardened and narrowed to lines of glinting jet.

"I've got the truth stripped down to running facts, carrying no trimmings, and I'm demonstrating it to everybody I meet," he imparted dryly. "And I mean to keep on. I know what you want, all right, and I ain't intending to do it. Let him stand for what is coming to him."

Gerard lifted his cigarette, seeking the narcotic smoke. His superb vitality and undrained youth had turned upon him like traitorous servants upon a fallen master, denying him surcease in unconsciousness and holding him as a sensitive instrument for pain to run its gamut upon. [Pg 149]

"Why?" he queried.

"Because I want to see him get his. You don't? I do. I guess my say goes, this time. I ain't enjoying being sore wherever I ain't worse, but I'd go out and take another smash like we had to-day to see him wearing zebra clothes in a jail. Missing that, I'll make that pink millionaire palace red-hot and get him ruled off every race course in the country."

"Rupert——"

The mechanic's gesture cut off protest.

"There ain't any use! I mean it."

"You liked Corrie——"

"I ain't noticing it, now. When you were behind the steering-wheel, your say so was what happened—if you'd said to light the gasoline tank, I'd have struck a match. That's business. This ain't. Rose stands for what he did, for I'm free to put it through."

"Very true; I am helpless," Gerard acquiesced, his white lips compressed, and averted his head on the pillow.

Checked, Rupert stared at the other with many shifting expressions twitching his own angry dark face. [Pg 150]

"Do you know what the doctors say?" he demanded, at last. "Are you knowing, when you ask me to let Rose off, what he's done to you?"

"Yes," was the laconic answer.

There was no retort to that all-sufficient brevity. None was attempted.

The windows had gradually paled from gray to white, streaks of gold caught and reflected in the glass panes as the sun drew up above the horizon. All night the air had been filled with a steady murmur and dull flow of sound, unobserved because of its very continuity. Now, across the hush of the sick room unexpectedly crashed a roar of rapid explosions, growing thunderous as it approached nearer; cheers of joyous excitement pealed from many throats. Gerard started, his eyes blazing wide.

"The race," flung the mechanic bitterly. "It's on."

Gerard slowly raised his left arm and dropped it across his face as those who yesterday were his mates rushed past the house. With the movement a spot of crimson sprang into view against the linen swathing his shoulder, enlarging ominously, but even the alarmed Rupert knew this was no time to summon doctor or nurse, whatever the physical cost. [Pg 151]

"Don't you think?" Gerard presently asked, quite gently and naturally, "that I've got enough to stand, Rupert?"

The sound that broke from the vanquished mechanic was less cry than curse.

"I'll shut up!" he cast his submission before the victor. "I ain't going to lie—I'd choke—but I'll hold my tongue. Don't ask more or I'll take back that. You've got me down; I'll shut up."

AFTERMATH

The newspapers were mercifully brief upon the subject of the unsupported accusation brought against Corrie Rose, although diffuse enough in accounts of the much-known Gerard's disaster. The driver's own explanation of his accident was accepted; his attitude towards the young amateur fixed the attitude of the public. Moreover, Jack Rupert was stricken suddenly dumb; no reportorial blandishments could obtain from him, on the second day, so much as an admission of the charges made by him on the day previous. Rupert surrendered like a gentleman: he laid down all his weapons. Dean's appearance at his usual duties and explanation of his absence from the pink car quashed the last rumor, for the finding of a wrench beside a motor course meant nothing, considered alone.

The first things for which Mr. Rose looked each morning were the daily papers. After which, he invariably shot a glance of blended relief and smarting humiliation into the wide, earnest eyes of Flavia, as she sat opposite him behind the gold coffee-service, and addressed himself to his breakfast. He never looked towards his son at that moment, nor did Corrie ever break the ensuing silence. The change that had fallen upon Allan Gerard's life was scarcely more absolute and strange than that which had come upon the Rose household of innocent ostentation and intimate gaiety.

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But the greatest outward alteration was in Isabel. Flavia and Mr. Rose maintained the usual calm routine of events at home and abroad, Corrie rigidly obeyed his father's command to live so as to provoke no comment. But Isabel's boasted, perfect nerves were shattered beyond such control. She moped all day in her own room, rejecting Flavia's companionship, and fled from Corrie with unconcealed avoidance. Nor did she improve, as the days passed, but rather grew worse in condition.

It was in the sixth week after the accident whose echoes threatened to linger so long, that Isabel entered her cousin's study, one afternoon.

"Flavia, I am going away," she abruptly announced. "Mrs. Alexander has asked me to go South with Caroline and her, you know. Uncle says I may do as I like, and I am going. I can't bear it here," her full lip quivered.

Flavia turned from the window by which she had been standing, catching and crushing a fold of the drapery in her small fingers as she faced the other girl.

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"You mean that you cannot bear Corrie," she retorted, in swift reproach. "You treat him—*how* you treat him! You hardly speak to him, you hardly look at him. Oh, you are cruel, you will not see how he suffers for one moment's fault."

Isabel grasped a chair-back, commencing to tremble.

"I can't bear to stay," she repeated hysterically. "Don't talk to me about Corrie."

"I never will again," Flavia assured, pale with extreme anger. "Yet you might remember that he loves you; a little kindness from you would help him so much. Do you know where he spent yesterday? He was out in his motor boat; out in November with a north gale blowing, alone in that speed-boat that is half under water all the time. You do not care, you have no pity."

"I—"

Flavia imposed silence with a gesture, herself quite unconscious of how overwhelming was this contrast to her usual gentleness.

"He has done wrong—you have nothing to give him but more punishment. Yes, go away, that is best. But he would have been kinder to you, Isabel."

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Isabel let go of the chair, her gray eyes dilating unnaturally. Her gaze dwelling on Flavia, she slowly retreated a few steps towards the door, then suddenly turned and fled, leaving no answer.

With her going, Flavia's passion died, something like fear taking its place. That was what Corrie had felt, reflected Corrie's sister; a sweep of flame-like anger that blinded judgment, a slipping of self-mastery that loosed hand or tongue. Only, she had not wanted to hurt Isabel, that was a point she could not conceive reaching, herself.

When she had somewhat recovered, Flavia went to find her furs and outdoor apparel. She knew where Corrie had gone; she would meet him and herself break the tidings of his cousin's coming departure. He would be walking; he had not touched an automobile since he left the seat of his pink racer to rescue Gerard from beneath the crushed Mercury, and he had no patience with horses.

It was on a bleak, sandy stretch of Long Island road that she met Corrie, a solitary figure against the flat landscape as he came towards her. At sight of her little carriage and the cream-colored ponies he himself long before had taught her to drive, he stopped, his boyish face brightening warmly.

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"Other Fellow," was all he said, when she leaned towards him with her unaltering love of glance and smile.

There was no need to ask where he had been.

"How is Mr. Gerard, dear?" she ventured, after he was seated beside her and they had commenced the return.

"Better."

"You go there every day to ask?"

"Every day."

"And, he——"

"He has seen me every day, even the worst. He talks about politics, the aviation meet, the motor magazines,—about everything except himself or me. It is his right arm, now, the other hurts are almost well. To-day I met the doctor, going out as I was coming in. I asked about him——"

Flavia raised her eyes to meet his, shrinking from the verdict that speech must establish beyond the refuge of doubt. Very gently he laid his hand over hers upon the reins and brought the ponies to a standstill.

"Do you remember this place, Flavia? Well, all that is over for him."

Beside them sloped away a brown, frost-seared field; in its centre still showed the outline of a baseball diamond, with the bags forgotten at the bases. Flavia's heart contracted sharply, the reins escaped her grasp. For the moment memory and vision fused; she saw the straight, slender pitcher poised with arms raised above his brown head, saw his laughing glance go questing down the field, and the swift, graceful movement that launched the ball with unerring unexpectedness. And because she could not speak without inadvertently lashing Corrie, she sat mute.

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She did not know how long it was before he spoke, with the new steady seriousness so strange to meet in him.

"Where are we getting to, Other Fellow? Because we have got to get somewheres, you know; we don't stand still. Gerard will go away to his own home, soon. You and father and Isabel and I can't just sit here looking at each other, like we've been doing."

Gerard would go away, soon. That was the sentence that gripped Flavia. Go, without seeing her, without pursuing the purpose he had shown her in the fountain arbor? It seemed so impossible that the thrill that shook her was not of fear, but of startled expectancy. Yet she answered Corrie with scarcely a pause, and with all tenderness.

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"Dear, Isabel will not be here, for a little while," she told him, hesitatingly. "She is going South with Mrs. Alexander and Caroline. She, she needs the change."

"That's good," he approved. "She will be better off, away from here, and you will be better for her going. She worries us all with her fidgets."

Amazed, Flavia turned in her seat to regard him.

"Corrie!"

"You thought I would mind?" He smiled whimsically. "Flavia, I've had a lot of nonsense knocked out of me. It took a bad shock to cure me of Isabel, but I'm well. There's nothing left of that. In fact, I feel all full of holes where ideas have been jolted out of me—I feel rather empty."

The beautiful foreign motor car had stolen along the road so silently that neither brother nor sister perceived its approach until the grind of applied brakes sounded beside the stopped carriage.

"I should have supposed that there'd be views in the countryside more pleasant to this family than that field," caustically observed Mr. Rose. "You can take the machine on home, Lenoir; I'll drive with Miss Rose."

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He descended, the chauffeur stooping to open the door, while Corrie and Flavia looked on, too much surprised to find reply.

"Keep your seat," he curtly ordered, as his son rose to yield the place beside Flavia. "I'll get up here. Drive ahead, my girl."

He took the rear seat of the little carriage, resting his arm on the cushioned back so that his strong, square-set head was between the two who sat in front. The automobile obediently sped on, and only the beat of the ponies' hoofs interrupted the chill afternoon hush for the first half-mile.

"It's a long time since I found out that you had some points that I didn't just understand, Corrie," Mr. Rose stated, his matter-of-fact accents carrying a deliberate finality. "I didn't wonder, nor I didn't try to force you to fit my pattern; we were solid friends and I was willing to take on faith your ways of being different. Once in a while I'd bring you on the carpet when you got across the line, not often. You were given about everything you wanted and only told that you must keep straight. You haven't done it."

An odd shiver ran through Corrie, but he said nothing.

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"This isn't a theatre; there won't be any talk of cutting you off with a shilling or any other kind of

child's talk. What we have got to do is to make the best of a bad thing. You will have to go away for a year or two, keep apart from automobile racing and automobile people, and live gossip down. Poor Gerard did his best for you—God knows why—but there are rumors whispered around yet. It would have looked like running away to go before; now, Gerard is out of danger. Well?"

"I have been thinking that I should like to go away for a time, sir," Corrie answered, gravely self-contained.

"Very good. To speak out, it will be better for our future living together if you're not in my sight for a while now. If we stay housemates, there is likely to be another kind of a crash, and two crashes don't mend a break. You'll have all the money you want and I don't care where you go or how much you spend. Just put in a year as well as you can, until we all settle down and go on again. We have got a lifetime before us to get through."

After a moment Corrie quietly took the reins from Flavia; blinded by tears, she was letting the ponies stray at will. [Pg 161]

The brief November day was ending; it was dusk when they reached the house, and perhaps none of the three were ungrateful for the shadows which veiled them from one another. On the veranda, Corrie detained his sister, allowing Mr. Rose to enter alone.

"I'm not coming in just yet, Other Fellow," he said. "Ask father to excuse me from dinner; I have an errand that cannot wait. I don't want you to worry about me or to be unhappy. I did a lot of thinking yesterday, out in the speed-boat by myself; I know what I am going to do and that I will put up the best fight I can. Go help father; don't fret over me."

He kissed her soft mouth with the man's firmness so different from his former casual caresses, and went down the broad steps, walking across the lawns in the direction from which they had just come.

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THE HOUSE AT THE TURN

Dinner at the Rose house took place about two hours after the corresponding meal occurred at the farmhouse near the Westbury Turn. So while Corrie was walking through his five miles of desolate, dark road, the evening became well under way in the country parlor; sick-room no longer.

There had been changes in the room since Gerard's occupancy of it. Bright rugs and coverings mitigated the severity of the horse-hair furniture, a couple of easy-chairs stood there like velvet-clad cavaliers in a Puritan meeting. If the hues ran to vivid scarlets and unexpected contrasts, why, Rupert had done the shopping and had consulted his own taste. In the midst of his artistic work, that one-time mechanic and self-installed nurse of Gerard's was now seated beside a red-shaded lamp, engaged in reading aloud to his companion from a classic found on the family book-shelf.

"Thaddeus, his eyes cast down, glided from the room in a gentle suffusion of tears," he concluded a paragraph, and broke off, stunned. "Gee! And I was understanding that was a man! I ain't qualified for the judges' stand, but—did you ever strike this joy-promoting endurance run of language before?" [Pg 163]

"Once. I didn't have you to read it to me, or I would have enjoyed it more," Gerard returned, stirring in his arm-chair opposite the ruddily glowing German stove. "Don't you want to give me a cigarette; I haven't had one since noon."

He was thinner and still colorless, otherwise there was little to show what the last month and a half had meant to Allan Gerard. Except when he rose or moved, the inert uselessness of his right arm was not obvious. And however hard the battles and rebellion he inwardly had passed through, tone or expression carried no outward intelligence of past conflict as he smiled across at his entertainer. Gerard possessed in full measure that Anglo-Saxon reticence which abhors the useless display of emotions. Rupert balanced the volume upon his knee and proceeded to comply with the request, twisting his dark little face sardonically.

"When I was racing with Darling French," he reminisced, "we gave out of oil, once, on a practice run across country. There was a house by the busy curb representing itself as the only one combination garage and grocery store, so Darling contracted for a can of warranted cylinder oil in a speed dash that left the man all used up and rattling mad. Being in some haste, we didn't look up that can's inner life, but chucked the stuff where it would do the most good." [Pg 164]

"Poor quality?"

"I ain't saying so. The complaint wasn't quality, it was kind. That can surrounded the finest brand of Koko Korn syrup, extra rich. They had to knock down our motor with a set of cooking utensils, and the man who did the job said it was a candied peach."

Gerard laughed.

"Well?" he anticipated.

"Here's your smoke. Well, that type of literature makes my thinks-motor feel as if molasses was being poured into it for lubrication—it sticks. Will you take it hard if I raise my voice over the sporting page of the evening paper, instead?"

Gerard nodded consent, but checked the reply on his lips, listening. The outer door had opened and closed, someone could be heard speaking to the mistress of the house.

"Corrie Rose!" he marvelled.

Rupert carefully laid *Thaddeus* on the table and stood up, straightening his small, wiry figure.

"I'll crank up and run out," he observed nonchalantly. "Signal when you want me back."

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There was no need of explanation; since the day of the Mercury's wreck, Rupert had never voluntarily remained in the same room with Corrie or had exchanged speech with him. The two passed at the doorway, now, with a curt nod on the part of the mechanic in response to the visitor's salute.

It was not a heartening reception, nor could Gerard's cordial greeting lift the shadow of it from Corrie's expression. That long solitary walk had left his young face drawn with a white fatigue not physical. But his eyes did not avoid Gerard's, and for the first time he spoke of the subject always present in the minds of both.

"You ought to hate the sight of me worse than Rupert does," he abruptly opened. "But—you don't. I don't know why, but you don't."

"No, I certainly do not," Gerard confirmed, his grave eyes on his guest.

Corrie rested one hand upon the narrow mantel, looking down at the fire-bright squares of the stove. He still wore his gray overcoat and held his cap, as if prepared to accept dismissal.

"You understand how easily things can go wrong," he said. "I never used to understand that, but I do now. You have seen drivers go wild in the race fever, more than once. We have both seen the nicest, sweetest fellows curse and strike their mechanics because of a lost minute, seen men whose nerve never balked at a risk sit down and cry like girls when their car went out of a race. There is a mark on my car now where Ralph Stanton once scraped off the paint in passing because I was slow in getting out of his way. I suppose you judged mine such a case and forgave a moment's insanity. No one else ever will. You," his violet-blue eyes suddenly sought the other man's, "you won't think I am trying to excuse any such thing as was done to you or to justify my part."

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"No," Gerard answered, compassionately translating the last weeks' writing on the candid face. "I am not likely to think that, Corrie. But do not give me credit not due; I am not unusually forgiving or wise, it is, indeed, merely that I understand fairly well. And when one understands the other man, there seldom is anything to forgive."

"Thank you. It's because you always understand one that I've come here to-night. I, I guess I've about realized that I'm not quite nineteen years old yet and pretty much a fool. I don't suppose anyone ever meant better than I did, or ever did worse at it. Gerard, my father has sent me off. Oh, not like that!" as the other man moved, startled. "I mean, he has told me to go away for a year or two, anywhere I like, until people forget. He says he doesn't want to see me for a while. No one does, except my sister. There is no one on earth for whom I care who looks the same as before at me except her, and you. I'm sent off to live alone and I have never been alone in my life. I'm afraid of myself, sick, afraid to be alone—take me with you."

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"Corrie?"

The boy's impetuous gesture interrupted.

"Don't say no! It ought to kill me to look at you, it almost does, but it's worse away. Let me go where you are going, let me work in your factory, if it's at shovelling coal. Don't send me off alone with more money than I can spend and nothing to do with myself. I can't stand it—I'd go under! You would better have let Rupert send me to prison for wrecking your car. I've tried to stand what seemed up to me, but I'm near my limit. Gerard, help me see it through."

There was a quality of desperation in the appeal that was like a clutching grasp. Gerard felt his own nerves draw tense while his answer leaped to the present and future need.

"You are the exact man I want at the factory, Corrie," he assured, with all steadying naturalness and calm. "Take off your overcoat and come sit down; you are not going right out again. I've got work for you that will keep you guessing, as Rupert says. Let me see, it's eight o'clock and you walked over; I'll wager you have had no dinner."

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"I don't want anything," Corrie refused, his face averted, his fingers gripping the mantel-shelf until his nails showed white from pressure.

"All right; I do. I declined my coffee and some of Mrs. Carter's ambrosial apple pie, this evening, and I have been repenting ever since. You are a fine pretext for having them brought in to us now. Besides, I shall have to keep you in good shape if you are going to help me put through a scheme of mine. Of course, I am not altering my plan of living merely because I have got one arm to use in place of two. I have to have some things done for me instead of doing them myself, that's all. I need you," he paused, and lifted to his companion the cordial brilliancy of his smile,

"and I am glad to have you, Corrie."

When, an hour later, the guest rose to depart, Gerard detained him for a final word.

"One thing before you go," he said, with a quiet force of command that belonged to the other Allan Gerard whom Corrie had not yet encountered—the master of many men and affairs, instead of the racing driver and social playmate. "We will not speak again of the subject we have concluded to-night. I do not wish the accident to the Mercury recalled or discussed between us, ever. We are beyond that. Good night; I suppose you would rather start with me, day after to-morrow, than alone, later?" [Pg 169]

Long afterward Gerard came to remember that straight glance of utter helplessness and struggling confusion from Corrie's tired eyes.

"I, I can't *think*," confessed Corrie Rose. "I'm in too deep to find a way out. I—my head—" he pushed back his heavy fair hair. "Yes, I'd rather start with you, if you will let me. Tell me whatever you want of me, Gerard; I'll always do it. Good night."

The closing of the outer door was the signal for Rupert's return to the parlor.

"Your time on the track is up," he reminded, "and you need your sleeps."

"I am not sleepy, Rupert. We will go home to the factory, day after to-morrow, and continue work on that special racing car of mine. Corrie Rose is going to drive it when it is done, since I cannot."

The mechanic slowly stiffened. [Pg 170]

"Not precisely?" he refused credence.

"Oh, yes; for practice and testing, at first, and racing later. Until it is built I shall put him in training on one of the ninety Mercuries. He doesn't yet know anything about it, himself, and he isn't going to be told until I am ready. You are going to ride with him and break him in. He has to be taught a good deal to change him from a clever amateur to a professional driver."

"When I sit in a car beside Rose, it'll be because I'm taking him to be lynched," Rupert explicitly set forth.

"Really?"

"Yes, dearest."

Gerard rested his head against the cushioned chair-back and met the inflexible black eyes with the cool, mischievous resolution of his own regard, saying nothing at all.

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SENTENCE OF ERROR

It was nearly twelve o'clock, that night, when Corrie arrived home. Flavia ran down the wide staircase to meet him, finger on lip; a childish figure in the creamy lace and silk of her negligee, with her heavy braids of shining hair falling over her shoulders.

"You are so late," she grieved. "And so cold! Come near the hearth—papa is in the library, still."

Corrie allowed her small urgent hands to draw him towards the fireplace that filled the square hall with ruddy reflections and dancing shadows. He was cold to the touch, ice clung to the rough cloth of his ulster, but there was color and even light in the face he turned to her.

"It *is* snowing," he recalled. "But I'm not cold. I am going to bed and to sleep. I want you to sleep, too, Other Fellow, because the worst of it all is over. I don't mean that things are right—they never can be that again, I suppose—but I see my way clear to live, now."

She gazed up at him attentively, sensitively responsive to the vital change she divined in him. Before he could continue or she question, Mr. Rose came between the curtains of the arched library door, a massive, dominant presence as he stood surveying the two in the fire-light. He made no remark, yet Corrie at once moved to face him, gently putting Flavia aside. [Pg 172]

"I am sorry to be so late, sir; I have been arranging for my going away," he gave simple account of himself. "I should like to leave the day after to-morrow, if you do not object. I am going to stay with a western friend. I know you would rather not hear much about me or from me for a while, but I will leave an address where I can always be reached."

It is not infrequently disconcerting to be taken promptly and literally at one's word. Moreover, Corrie looked very young and pathetically tired, with his wind-ruffled fair hair pushed back and in his bearing of dignified self-dependence. A quiver passed over Mr. Rose's strong, square-cut countenance, his stern light-gray eyes softened to a contradiction of his set mouth.

"I'm not in the habit of saying things twice," he curtly replied. "I gave you leave to go when and where you pleased. To-morrow I'll fix your bank account so you can draw all the money you like."

"Thank you, sir," Corrie acknowledged.

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"You've no call to thank me," his father corrected. "I guess that when I own millions you've got the right to all you can spend. It won't help anything for you to be pinched or uncomfortable. I've no wish to see it. I am going to take your sister to Europe for the winter, as I told her this evening, so we ourselves leave soon after you. Try to keep straighter, this time."

There was no intentional cruelty in the concluding sentence, delivered as the speaker stepped back into the inner room, but Corrie turned so white that Flavia sprang to him with a low exclamation of pain.

"It's all right," he reassured her. And after a moment: "Flavia, I am going with Allan Gerard, to work under him and help him in his factory."

"Corrie?"

"I have been with him to-night. I don't want father to know this because he wouldn't understand; he might even forbid me to go. Unless he forces an answer, I shall not say where I am to be. But Gerard said I must tell you everything and write to you often—I would have done that, anyhow. You won't mind my going away, now, when you know I am with him?"

She comprehended at last the change in him, the change from restless uncertainty to steady fixity of purpose, from an objectless wanderer to a traveller towards a known destination, comprehended with a passionate outrush of gratitude to the man who had wrought this in a generosity too broad to remember his own injury. The eyes she lifted to her brother's were splendidly luminous.

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"No," she confirmed, in the exhaustion of relief. "I can bear to let you go from me, if you are to be with Mr. Gerard."

They nestled together—as each might have clung in such an hour to the mother they had left so far down the path of years—on the hearth from which one was self-exiled and the other about to be taken.

"Do you remember the story he told us?" Corrie asked, after a long pause. "About that Arabian fellow's vase and the pearls, you know? I—well, I meant what I said, about expecting to have lots of days like that, pearl-days. I couldn't see any farther than that! Yet that night—I don't expect now, what I did then; I've lost my chance for it. But I would like to do something for Allan Gerard before I die. I'd like to make all my pearls into one, and put it into his vase. Instead, he is doing things for me."

Her clasping arms tightened about him. Heretofore she always had turned a steady face to her brother, sparing him the reproach of grief, but now she helplessly felt her eyes fill and overflow. One comfort, one hope she had that he did not share. If he went with Allan Gerard, and if Gerard took home the wife he had seemed to woo, brother and sister would not be separated. Flavia Gerard would be in Allan Gerard's house, where Corrie was going.

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Had Gerard thought of that, also? Dared she tread on this nebulous fairy-ground? Dared she lead Corrie to set foot there, with her?

"Dear," she essayed, her voice just audible, "dear, has Mr. Gerard ever spoken to you of me?"

Surprised, Corrie looked down at the bent head resting against his rough overcoat. Himself a lover, he yet had not suspected this other romance flowering beside his own; he did not guess the obvious secret, now.

"Of you? Oh, yes; he asks if you are well, each day. He never forgets such things. Why?"

She had no answer to that natural question. In spite of her reason, Flavia was chilled by the flat conventionality of Gerard's apparent attitude, as represented by those formal inquiries. Almost she would have preferred that he had not spoken of her at all; silence could not have implied indifference.

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"Nothing," she faltered. It clearly was impossible to speak as she had imagined. "Only, as his hostess, and your sister, I fancied that he might—"

"He wouldn't say that sort of thing to me, Other Fellow. No doubt he will come to pay a farewell call before he leaves. He isn't very fit, you know; he hasn't been out yet. He *must* be at his western factory this week, he said, or he wouldn't try to travel."

Her color rushed back. Why had she not remembered that? Why should he speak of her to anyone, since to-morrow he would come to see her? To-morrow? The clocks had struck midnight, to-day they would see each other.

"It is late," Corrie added, as if in answer to her thought. He sighed wearily. "You are tired, I suppose we both are. Come up."

He passed his arm about her waist, and they went up the stairs together, leaning on one another. But Allan Gerard was a third presence with them, and in their sense of his guardianship brother and sister rested like children comforted.

The following day was one filled with an atmosphere of disruption and imminent departure. The very servants caught the contagion and hurried uncomfortably about their tasks. Corrie's preparations were unostentatious, but Isabel's agitated the entire household. Also, Mr. Rose

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issued his instructions that Flavia should be ready to start for France on the next steamer sailing. The house that had been rose-colored within and without was become a gray place to be avoided.

Flavia thought all day of Allan Gerard. She knew her father went in the afternoon to pay him a farewell visit, she knew Corrie was with him all the morning, and when each returned home she suspended breath in anticipation of hearing the step of a guest also—the step of Gerard coming towards the goal which he had half-shown her in the fountain arbor. But Corrie and Mr. Rose each entered alone.

Nevertheless, she chose to wear his color, that night; the pale, glistening tea-rose yellow above which her warm hair showed burnished gold. He must come that evening, if at all; she would be truly "Flavia Rose" to him.

She was standing alone before her mirror, setting the last pearl comb in place, when her cousin came into the room.

"You look as if you were happy enough," Isabel commented fretfully. "I don't believe you care at all about Corrie's going away. Of course you don't care about me. What are you putting on that old-fashioned thing for?" [Pg 178]

Flavia gravely turned her large eyes upon the other girl; the unjust attack fell in harsh dissonance with her own mood of hushed anticipation. She could not have robed herself for her wedding with more serious care and earnest thoughtfulness than she had used in preparing to receive Gerard to-night. This was no time for coquetry; as he came for her, she would go to him, she knew, without evasion or pretense to harass his weakness. She shrank, wincing sensitively, from this rough criticism, but every member of the family had learned not to reply to the new Isabel's peevish tartness.

"It was my mother's," she explained, to the last inquiry, tenderly lifting the long chain of pearl and amber beads ending in a lace-fine pearl cross. Never could she attempt to tell her cousin the blended motives from which she had chosen to wear this rosary. "And her mother's and again her's. It is very old Spanish work. Shall we go down?"

"What for? It is not time for dinner. Oh, Martin told me there was a messenger waiting to deliver a letter, just now, as I came here."

The color flared up over Flavia's delicate face. [Pg 179]

"A messenger, Isabel?"

"Yes, who would not send up his message. I told Martin that we would ring."

Flavia slowly wound the chain around her throat. There was no escape from Isabel's insistent companionship, she realized.

"Ring, then, please," she requested, and passed into her little sitting-room, beyond.

Isabel followed curiously, ensconcing herself in one of the easy-chairs and idly twitching blossoms from the hyacinths in a bowl near her. All day she had been especially nervous and irritable, her least movements were characterized by an impatience almost feverish.

The messenger who appeared on the threshold was Jack Rupert, not in the familiar guise of the Mercury's mechanic, but Rupert at leisure; a small, immaculate figure as New Yorkese as Broadway itself. The movement that brought Flavia across to him was impulsive as a confident child's and accompanied by a candid radiance of glance and smile flashed straight into the visitor's black eyes. She had no attention to spare to the fact that Isabel also had risen.

"You have been so good as to bring a message to me, Mr. Rupert?" she questioned happily.

"I ain't denying it was a pleasure to come," he made gracious reply, with his slight drawl of speech. "I've been given this to deliver to Miss Rose, from Mr. Gerard, under orders to bring the answer back unless it was preferred to send it by Mr. Rose, junior, to-morrow." [Pg 180]

"This" was a letter. As Flavia held out her hand to receive it, Isabel reached her side and seized her wrist so fiercely as to bruise the soft flesh.

"It is mine!" she panted. "Give it to me—it is mine!"

Flavia stood still, looking at the other girl with slow-gathering, incredulous resentment and wonder.

"Yours? You expected this from Mr. Gerard, Isabel?"

"I—no—yes—Corrie warned me he would," Isabel stammered. "You shall not read it, Flavia Rose, you shall not! It is for me, for me—no one must see it."

She was trembling in a vehement excitement half-hysterical. Very quietly Flavia disengaged her arm from the grasp holding it; for the moment Isabel's touch was loathsome to her.

"For whom is the letter, my cousin or me?" she asked the bearer.

"I guess there ain't any answer; I don't know," avowed Rupert, troubled and hesitant. "I was sent out to report to Miss Rose." [Pg 181]

"But you, yourself, for whom did you suppose it?"

"I ain't certain I did any supposing. Mr. Gerard began it after Mr. Rose had been with him, yesterday, and it took from then till to-night to finish."

"It is *mine*," Isabel reiterated passionately.

The scene was utterly impossible, not to be prolonged. It was the strong, cool determination inherited from Thomas Rose that held Flavia equal to the demands of her mother's bequeathment of reticent pride.

"Pray give the letter to my cousin," she requested, her calm never more perfect. "I am sorry to have confused so simple a matter. She will of course recognize for which of us it is intended."

But she meant to see the letter. Even as she watched Isabel snatch the surrendered missive, Flavia told herself that this sentence of error could not be accepted without sight of the letter. Moving with deliberate stateliness, she crossed to a chair near a small table and sat down, taking up a book. She was conscious that Rupert watched her, and she would make no sign that might constitute a self-betrayal when recounted to Gerard if she were indeed so pitifully wrong and he had from the first chosen her cousin. What she was not in the least aware of, was the inevitable impression made upon the mechanician by the dazzling little room and her central figure of gold upon gold and pearl-and-amber, and by her still, colorless face set in all this sheen and lustre. Had he been as dull as he really was acute, this scene could not have been made casual to him.

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Isabel's shaking fingers shredded the envelope in extracting the sheet of paper, her eyes scanned the page avidly. The result was unanticipated; there was a sharp cry, an instant of indecision, then as savagely as she had claimed the letter she sprang to thrust it into the startled Flavia's lap.

"I can't do it! Flavia, I can't see him—I can't bear it! Tell him no—to go away—it's all over, now."

The desperate terror and dread of the cry charged the atmosphere of the room with vibrant intensity. Flavia caught the letter.

"I am to read this?" she demanded.

"Yes; read it, help me."

Isabel had seen and still claimed as hers the message. Yes, and had expected it, so that there must have been other communication between her and the sender. The conviction of her own utter mistake struck Flavia down with a force that crushed reason under feeling. She was physically giddy as she unfolded the page.

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The writing was uncertain and angular; different indeed from the firm smooth script that had accompanied the box of yellow roses in giving the "definition of the meaning of *Flavia Rose*." The mute evidence of that difficult left-handed task pierced the girl who loved Allan Gerard, before she read the words.

The letter commenced abruptly, without superscription.

"I think you will know how hard it is for me to speak to you calmly, even this way, across this distance, remembering how we last met. To you I can confess what I could to no one else, since there is now an end of concealment between us; that is, that Allan Gerard is so weak as to feel shame at being a cripple. So much so, that the idea is intolerable of first remeeting you amidst your household's pitying curiosity. I never used to know I had a personal vanity; I fancy it is not quite that, but rather the humiliation of the man who has always been well-dressed and who suddenly finds himself sent into public sight in a shabby, tattered garment. I had accepted my physical conventionality as part of my social equipment. I do not say this in reproach to anyone or to affect you; I am perfectly sure that you will not offer me the last insult of supposing so or of answering me from that viewpoint. I say it only to excuse my very great presumption in asking you to drive with Corrie to the little railway station, to-morrow morning, to take leave of him—and to tell me whether I am to come back. I want you to see me as I am now, before you determine. Perhaps, left to my own impulse of shielding you, I would have gone in silence, but justice is higher than sentiment; you have the right to hear what I must say and to answer it as you will.

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"I am going to do my best for Corrie, whatever happens. Please trust me so far, and if I have offended or seemed to fail in this letter, remember my past months in excuse.

"Allan Gerard."

Flavia laid down the sheet of paper. In that moment she suffered less from the destruction of her own happiness than from the destruction of Gerard's. This cry out of his anguish to the one for whom alone he had broken the stoical muteness in which he had wrapped his endured pain of mind and body, this self-revelation that was the difficult baring of a heart not used to show itself and avowal of weakness at the core of so much strength, drew from her an outrush of maternal protectiveness that rolled its flood above personal grief. If she could have sent Isabel to him, then, an Isabel worthy of the high trust and pathetic dignity in humility of that letter, she could have accepted her own sorrow. But she knew Isabel Rose, knew the vanity of that hope even as she tried to realize it.

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"You know what Mr. Gerard wishes to say to you, to-morrow?" she asked composedly. If the composure was overdone, it was the error of a novice in acting.

The other girl shrank back.

"Yes—I—"

"Then, why do you not answer him? Surely, if you expected him to write this, you must answer him."

"I will not!" Isabel cried loudly and rebelliously. "I will not go, I will not see him hurt like that and hear him, hear him——" she broke off, fighting for breath. "Tell him to go away. I can't help it now, I can't see him. It's all over!"

This was the woman Allan Gerard had chosen, Flavia thought in bitter wonder; this self-centred, hysterical girl whose love could not survive the marring of her lover's outward beauty. Isabel could not bear to go to him; the irony of it sank deep into the girl who could scarcely bear to stay away. But Flavia turned to the mute Rupert, holding her dignity steadily above her pitiful confusion of mind, striving, also, to ease this blow to Gerard, who was so little fit to receive it.

"Pray inform Mr. Gerard that Miss Rose is unwell and hardly able to answer his letter now," she directed. "I hope she will be able to accompany Mr. Corwin Rose, to-morrow morning, as he suggests." [Pg 186]

"No!" Isabel denied.

"I'll report, Miss Rose," Rupert asserted with brevity.

The keen black eyes and the deep-blue ones met, and read each other. Flavia took a step forward and held out her hand.

"It is not probable that we shall meet again, ever. Thank you," she said.

It would not have been possible to bribe Rupert into silence, but Flavia had done better. She knew, and the mechanic knew, as he touched her soft fingers, that he would keep to himself the knowledge that she had elevated to a confidence—the knowledge that she loved Allan Gerard, and was not loved in return.

So it happened that when Rupert returned to the Westbury farmhouse, he literally repeated Flavia's dictated message and contributed nothing of additional information or detail—except that he made one dry comment before retiring for the night.

"There's just one of the Rose family that ain't got any yellow streaks," he volunteered.

"Who?" was asked absently. [Pg 187]

The response to his letter had left Gerard paler than usual and very grave. He did not recognize in it the Flavia he knew; the girl who had watched her brother with such rich lavishness of affection, the girl whose most innocent eyes had held the possibilities of all Corrie's ardent young passion without his impulsive faults, and whose warmth of nature had drawn him as a fireside draws a wanderer. He would not doubt her for such slight cause, he would wait for morning and her further answer, but he felt a premonitory dread and discouragement. He had expected so much more than he would now admit to himself. He even had thought vaguely, unreasonably eager as a wistful boy, that she might come to him with Corrie that evening, that he might see and touch her.

"The lady you didn't write to," answered his mechanic. "Good night."

The next morning Corrie Rose went to the little railway station, alone.

XI

GERARD'S MAN

The hard, glittering macadam track that swept around the huge western factory of the Mercury Automobile Company and curved off behind a mass of autumn-gray woodland, was swarming with dingy, roaring, nakedly bare cars. The spluttering explosions from the unmuffled exhausts, the voices of the testers and their mechanics as they called back and forth, the monotonous tones of the man who distributed numbers for identification and heard reports from his force, all blended into the cheery eight-o'clock din of a commencing work-day. Three brawny, perspiration-streaked young fellows were engaged in loading bags of sand on the stripped cars about to start out, to supply the weight of the missing bodies, and whistling rag-time melodies to enliven their labors.

In the shadow of one of the arched doorways Corrie Rose stood to watch the scene, drawing full, hungry breaths of the gasoline-scented, smoke-murked air. There was more than frost this December morning; ice glinted in the gutters and on the surface of buckets, the healthful lash of the wind flecked color into the men's faces as they pulled on heavy gloves and hooded caps. The spirit of the place was action; the lusty vigor of it tugged with kindred appeal at the inactive, wistful one who looked on. [Pg 189]

The heavy throb of the machinery-crowded building smothered the sound of steps; a touch was necessary to arouse the absorbed watcher.

"You've been here for almost a week, Corrie. Don't you feel like getting to work?" queried

Gerard's pleasant tones.

The boy swung around eagerly.

"Yes," he welcomed. "Give me something to do, anything."

Gerard nodded, his amber eyes sweeping courtyard and track until, finding the man he sought, he lifted a summoning finger.

"Have someone bring out my six-ninety, Rupert," he called across. "Right away." And to his companion, "Get into some warm things; you will find it cold, driving."

Corrie stiffened, flushing painfully and catching his lip in his white teeth.

"Gerard, you mean *me* to drive?"

"Of course."

"I shall never drive a car again."

"You will drive the six-ninety Mercury for six hours a day, every day," Gerard corrected explicitly. "Until I get the big special racer built, and then you will drive it. You are going to work into the finest kind of training and drive until you can drive in your sleep. Too bad the winter is shutting in, but that will not stop you any more than it does the testers. In fact, driving in the snow is good practice."

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Helpless, Corrie looked at the other man, his violet-blue eyes almost black with repressed feeling.

"Gerard, you must know how I want to; don't ask me! You know how I ache to get ahold of a wheel, but I've forfeited all that."

"You have placed yourself in my factory, under my orders," Gerard stated, with curt finality. "While you are here you will do what I tell you to do, precisely as does every other worker; precisely as does Rupert, for example, who is really tester at the eastern plant and ordinarily works under its master, David French. I have decided to give you a branch of the work that I once planned to do myself and now cannot. Go into the office and put on your driving togs."

"I ain't expecting to shove this ninety through a letter-slot," remonstrated caustic accents from across the busy courtyard. "Move over, girls, you're crowding the aisles! Say, Norris, this ain't a joy-ride down Riverside Drive, it's a testing run; reverse over there and take about six more satchet-bags of mud-pie aboard where your tonneau ain't, before you start. Don't it hurt you bad to hurry like that, you fellows?"

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There was a drawing aside by the cars opposite a wide door, and the machine guided by Rupert rolled through, winding a devious course toward where its owner waited. Without a word, Corrie turned and went into the office.

Gerard remained still, following with his gaze the approach of the beloved car he would drive no more, until it came to a halt before him.

"If we're going out, I'll fetch my muff and veils," suggested the mechanic, leaning nearer.

"Thanks, Rupert. I am going with Rose, myself, this first time. You can be ready this afternoon, though."

Rupert's dark face twisted in a grimace, his black eyes narrowed.

"We're laboring under some classy mistake," he dryly signified. "I was inviting myself to go with you. As for Rose, he and I won't perch on the same branch unless we get lynched together for horse stealing—and you know how I don't love a horse."

The amusement underlying Gerard's expression rippled to the surface.

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"All right," he acquiesced. "Detail someone else. But, Rupert——"

"Ma'am?"

"I think you will race next spring as Corrie Rose's mechanician."

Their glances encountered, equally cool and determined.

"I'll take in washing with a Chinese partner, if you and Darling French throw me out," assured Rupert kindly. "Don't worry about my future like that."

And he slipped across the levers out of his seat, eel-supple, as Corrie issued from the office.

There was a mile loop of the perfect macadam track circling the factory buildings, then the way ran off into the country roads, inches deep with heavy sand, littered with ugly stones, rising over and pitching down steep grades where holes and mud-patches abounded. Over this the new Mercury cars were driven at top speed, each one reckoning many miles before the makers allowed them to be clothed with bodies and gleaming enamels and to be sent to the purchasers. No flaw escaped unnoticed, no weakness passed. Jaws set under their masks, keen eyes on the road and keen ears listening for the least false note in the tone-harmony of their machines, the sturdy testers drove through a day's work that would have prostrated the average motorist. Out among these men went Corrie Rose, more self-conscious than he had ever been on race track or

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course.

"I never had a ninety before," he confided to Gerard, as they finished the mile circuit. "A sixty was my biggest. She's, she's a *beauty!*"

The car slammed violently off the macadam onto the sand road, skidded in a half-circle and righted itself with a writhing jerk.

"Mind your path," cautioned Gerard, in open mirth. "This isn't a motor parkway. Hello!"

One of the smaller cars was coming towards them, limping back to the shops with a broken front spring. The man driving it touched his cap to Gerard as they passed, swinging one arm behind him in a significant gesture and shouting a warning concerning the bridge ahead. Corrie checked his speed, and barely skirted the deep washed-out hole that had caused the other machine's disaster.

"There was rain yesterday and freezing weather last night," Gerard communicated, at his ear. "Now it is beginning to melt again and playing the mischief with the roads. There is a right-angle turn coming." [Pg 194]

Corrie nodded, fully occupied. His blood sang through his veins, his fingers gripped the steering-wheel lovingly; he was revelling in the speed exhilaration he had never expected to feel again. The driver who hoped for no such commutation of sentence watched him with quietly sad eyes; eyes in which no one ever was allowed to surprise their present expression, least of all Corrie Rose.

Near noon a tire blew out. Gerard sat on the side of the Mercury and gave bits of ironical advice to the worker while Corrie changed a tire alone for the first time in his life. Corrie bore the teasing sweetly, even when a tool slipped and tore his cold-sensitized fingers.

"I know," he deprecated. "Dean always did it and I just helped. I never did anything thoroughly; an amateur isn't a professional. We would have lost time by that in a road race."

"You will learn. Rupert and I used to do it in two minutes from stop to restart," Gerard returned. "There—gather up your tools; we will go home to luncheon."

"To the factory, first?"

"No. Go slowly and I will show you a short cut."

But Corrie was not in a mood to go slowly, so that they almost missed the driveway that branched from the macadam track to curve around into a park set thickly with fragrant cedars, central in which grove stood the quaintly stiff house of dark brick and stone. [Pg 195]

"Run around to the garage," Gerard directed. "Since you will want the car all the time, you might as well keep it here and use the short cut out to the road. I will get out here and go into the house."

Corrie obediently bent to his levers.

"All the time?" he repeated, with an indrawn breath of reluctant ecstasy. "All the time!"

As Gerard turned to the house, a small figure advanced to meet him.

"We've sent out a gang to massage some of the freckles defacing the speedway," Rupert informed him. "Briggs chugged in with a broken spring, Norris side-wiped a fence, and Phillips fell into a hole without publishing a notice, so that his mechanic got off over the bonnet and broke his collar-bone. That ain't testing cars, it's promoting funerals. It's easier to motor into heaven on that road than to drive a camel in New York. What?"

"Yes, have it put in order, of course. I supposed that Mr. Dalton would attend to the matter, since I was out. Rupert, who is the sharpest-tongued, most cross-grained and least ceremonious mechanic we have?" [Pg 196]

"I am," was the prompt reply. "Were you wanting me?"

Gerard looked at him and laughed.

"You have ruled yourself off the list of eligibles," he declared. "I want a man to ride with Corrie Rose."

"Oh!" ejaculated Rupert. His malicious, shrewd face gained comprehension. "Oh! Well, I ain't boasting, but I could do that job up pretty fine. Failing me, Devlin is the nastiest thing on the place. You couldn't pat his head without pricking your fingers."

"Very well. Tell him to report to Rose hereafter,—and do not tell him much else. Let all the men know that Rose is training to take my place in the racing work, but do not let them know anything about his millionaire father or his share in the Cup-race affair."

Rupert directed his gaze towards the inert right arm hanging by Gerard's side.

"Your place," he echoed. "Are you giving in without putting up a stiff fight?"

Gerard's chin lifted, his eyes sprang to meet the sharp challenge of the mechanic's. [Pg 197]

"No. The fight will soon be on. Are you going to be my second in it?"

"I'm guessing I'll be there when you look for me."

Their eyes dwelt together for a long moment.

"I should like the men to treat Rose as they do each other, so far as possible," Gerard casually resumed his original theme. "It will be good for him. He needs roughing!"

Rupert ran his fingers through his crisp black locks, wheeling to depart.

"He'll slip control and run wild," he predicted, grimly vicious. "He needs the training you're planning for him, all right, but he ain't got the stuff in him to stand it. He'll slip control—here's hoping he smashes himself this time!"

Gerard moved his head in disagreement.

"Wait," he advised. "You once said he could not last out a certain twenty-four-hour race."

"He didn't."

"He finished in third place."

"Because you helped him through, that's why. He didn't have to do it alone."

"He doesn't have to do this alone, either," reminded Gerard.

Rupert looked at him, then walked away, every line of his body reiterating the prediction he could not sustain argumentatively. [Pg 198]

It was half an hour later that Corrie came into the room to join his host, carrying a letter in his hand.

"It is from Flavia," he volunteered. "She promised to write as soon as they got across, but she did better; she wrote this on board the steamer so that it was all ready to send." He sat down in his place and rested his arms on the table in the boyish attitude so associated with the massively rich dining-room of his father's house and the light-hearted group who had gathered there. "It was like her to do better than her word,—she doesn't know how to do less. One, one can tie up to *her*."

Gerard continued to gaze out the window opposite, his expression setting as if under a sudden exertion of self-control.

"I—well, I was always fond of my sister, but one learns a good deal more of people when things go wrong than when they just run along right. She asks me about you, how you are now."

"Miss Rose is too kind."

Some quality in the brief acknowledgment compelled a pause. The once self-assertive Corrie had become acutely sensitive to any suggestion of rebuff or disapproval. He could not in any way divine this rebuke was not for him, or know of the bruise he innocently had touched. [Pg 199]

When the first course of the luncheon was served, Gerard came over to his seat and opened a new subject with his usual kindness of manner. It was a curious fact that, although Gerard had felt the awakening of love for Flavia Rose from his first glimpse of her, he never had aided Corrie for his sister's sake. Even when he had dragged himself from the overwhelming blackness of pain and the numbing effects of anæsthetics to defend the driver whose foul blow had struck him down, it was of Corrie alone he thought, not of Flavia, Corrie whom he had shielded from disgrace and open punishment. Man to man they had dealt together, no woman, however dear, entered between them. So when Flavia had seemed to fail her lover, again the separateness had held and Gerard never even imagined visiting her desertion on her brother. He had not resented Corrie's natural speech of her, now, but he could not listen to it; not yet.

"You will find your regular mechanic waiting for you when you go out again," he observed. "You can learn much with him, if you choose, Corrie, although he is no Rupert. Take your machine where and how you please; it is all practice. I will see you again at dinner, unless you grow tired before then and would like to come up to the draughting-room to meet my chief engineer and designer." [Pg 200]

Corrie looked down, crumpling a fold of the table cloth between nervous fingers.

"Gerard, do they know?" he asked, his voice low. "I mean, how you were hurt and what Rupert accuses me of?"

"Certainly not. You are no one to them but my new driver."

A still ruddier color tinged the young face, the fair head bent a little lower.

"That is all I want to be, ever. Thank you, Gerard; I'll make good."

XII

THE MAKING GOOD

Corrie did not slip control during the weeks that followed. There was no running wild to record. At first he used to come in from his driving reddened by more than the cold wind, and there were rumors current of certain vigorous word-duels between him and his sullen assistant, Devlin. But he never complained to Gerard or exhibited any smart of excoriated vanity. The testers accepted him as a little more than their equal, after watching him drive, and he gladly met their comradeship with his own. It was very easy to like Corrie; soon he was surrounded by friends.

Only Jack Rupert never spoke to him. The thing was not done obtrusively, but it was done. He never openly slighted Corrie Rose or showed him discourtesy, he simply failed to come in contact with him. And Corrie tacitly accepted the situation, avoiding the inflexible mechanic, on his part. So winter shut in, with blizzards that frequently drove everyone off the roads until snow-ploughs and shovels had accomplished their work. Then Gerard would summon Corrie to the inside of the huge, reverberant factory, where amid its lesser brothers the Titan racing machine was slowly growing to completion; the Titan of Gerard's past speed-visions, the dream-planned car that was now for another's control. He taught, and Corrie learned hungrily.

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It was in February Corrie first noticed that Gerard and Rupert simultaneously disappeared for an hour and a half every morning. No one knew why, or had interested enough to speculate, it seemed. Gerard always sent Corrie off on some duty, at that time each day, and only accidental circumstances awoke the young driver's attention to a custom without an explanation.

Of course, Corrie asked no questions. He was not temperamentally curious and he was well-bred. But, returning unexpectedly to the house, one morning in early March, he passed Rupert going out and realized himself encroaching on the tacitly established period of retirement. Sobered, half-doubtful of his course, he ran up the stairs, and in the upper hall came suddenly upon Gerard leaning against the wall.

"Gerard!" Corrie exclaimed; goggles and gloves fell to the floor as he sprang to his friend. "Gerard, you're ill? Let me help you—lean on me! I'm strong enough to *carry* you."

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"It is nothing," Gerard panted. "I tried to come after Rupert in too much of a hurry, that's all. I remembered something I had forgotten to tell him. What are you doing here? I sent you out."

Once Corrie would have flashed hot retort to a reproof certainly undeserved, not now.

"I am sorry; I didn't understand," he apologized. "You never said I *must* stay out. Let me help you, get you something."

"I know; I'm unreasonable!" Gerard straightened himself. "Never mind me, Corrie; I am all right now."

He was white with a singular pallor that Corrie was too inexperienced to recognize, but he smiled reassurance to his assistant and himself led the way to the room opposite.

"There is some dose in the glass on the table," he indicated, finding a chair. "I might drink it, if I had it here. And, don't you want to get me a cigarette?"

In silence Corrie complied with the requests. Beside the slight, colorless Gerard, he radiated vigorous health and that scintillant freshness drawn from days passed in sunlight and sweet air, but his eyes at this moment held a desperate anxiety and unrest that left the advantage of contrast to his companion's clear tranquillity of regard.

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"You are getting worse," he declared abruptly. "There is no use of trying to spare my feelings, Gerard; instead of gaining, you are losing strength."

"I beg your pardon; I am getting better," Gerard corrected with perfect assurance. He put aside his glass and leaned back in his chair. "You do not in the least know what you are talking about. Since you are here, we might get a bit of business done that I had meant to leave until you came in to luncheon. You understand that the formalities must be preserved; are you willing to sign one of our regular driver's contracts, to drive for the Mercury Company this year, and for no one else?"

"I will do," said Corrie, "whatever you want. Is this the paper?"

He took up a pen and, still standing, wrote his name across the foot of the document, the other man's attentive gaze following his movements.

"Is that the way you sign legal papers, Corrie, without reading them?"

The blue eyes gave the questioner one expressive glance.

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"You gave it to me," was the answer.

Gerard contemplated him, then drew another printed sheet from a pile on the desk and pushed it across.

"All right. I want you to sign this, too," he signified.

As carelessly as before, Corrie set down his signature and turned away from the half-folded page.

"I came back early because I had a letter from Flavia," he explained. "I wanted to answer it right away. She says that father doesn't intend to come home until autumn. I don't believe she likes it much, but of course she wouldn't tell him so. He has enough to stand."

Gerard drew the two papers towards him and put them into a drawer. It is hard to be consistent; the temptation of seeing Corrie read Flavia's weekly letters had long since vanquished the resolution of the man whose love for her seemed to himself to illustrate that the economies of Nature do not include human passion. Corrie found a willing, if mute, listener to all confidences in regard to his sister.

"She has never told Mr. Rose that you are with me?" Gerard asked, to-day.

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"No," he responded, surprised. "Oh no! She promised me that, the night before I left home."

"Yet, living so close in thought with your father as she does, I should have fancied——"

"That she couldn't help telling him? I don't know who started that story that women can't keep secrets." Corrie laughed mirthlessly. "From what I have seen, they can keep quiet a secret that would tear itself out of any man I ever met, if the wrench killed him."

He unclasped the heavy fur coat he still wore and pushed it aside from his throat with an impatient air of oppression.

"But Flavia could not hurt anyone, and she knows that would hurt me," he added, more gently.

Flavia could not hurt anyone. Allan Gerard considered that statement, not so much in bitterness as in a wonder that made all life uncertain. He recalled the fountain arcade of rose-colored columns and delicate lights, the sweetly demure girl who waited there for her brother, and her last brief glance of virginal candor and innocently unconscious confession. Flavia could not hurt anyone. Yet she had dismissed the man who loved her, without even granting him the poor alms of courteous sympathy, had left him to learn her decision from her silence. Long since, he had decided that he had been condemned as the cause of her beloved brother's downfall, and now he again excused her hardness to himself as a result of her over-tenderness for Corrie. Either that, or he himself had somehow failed, in some way had been found lacking.

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He never did Flavia Rose so much wrong as to suppose her affected by the physical injury he had suffered. If she had loved him, no such change could have come between them. He knew that no marring of her beauty would have had effect upon his steadfast love for her, and he rated her far above himself in all good things.

It was quite a quarter-hour before Gerard looked up and saw that Corrie had remained standing by the table in an abstraction complete as his own, lips pressed shut and straight brows contracted. Startled out of self-contemplation, the older man leaned forward to give his aid to a moment whose bitterness he divined.

"Corrie, take off your furs and come to luncheon," he directed, crisply energetic. "You have got to take out the Titan for its first run, this afternoon."

Effectively aroused, Corrie swung around.

"The Titan?" he echoed. "To-day?"

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"Yes. Come on."

In the thin, clear March sunshine, two hours later, the Mercury Titan rolled out onto the mile track, shaking earth and air with its roar and vibrant clamor. The force of testers and factory operatives crowded about, busy men found time to cluster at the buildings' doors and windows in keen interest.

Opposite Gerard and his little staff, the men who had designed and evoked the winged monster, Corrie Rose was in his seat, flushed with excitement, but collected and at home in the powerful machine which he was to be the first to test and master. "Until you give it to its racing driver, let no one except me take it?" he had begged of Gerard. And Gerard had given the promise, smiling oddly.

But if Corrie was eager for the start, his mechanic palpably was not. The place beside the driver remained vacant until the last moment, when the reluctant Devlin slowly climbed into it.

"Devlin is nervous," Gerard gravely commented, to his own one-time mechanic. "He is a very good factory man, but this is too big work for him. If they were going on a longer trip, I should not like to send Corrie out with him."

"I ain't denying anything," snapped Rupert, scowling after the departing car as it leaped for the open track like an animal unleashed.

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That first afternoon's trial of the Mercury Titan proved it much faster than either the track or road would stand. Also, Corrie Rose was proved fully capable of handling his wheeled projectile. When he came in, at dusk, the testers regarded him with unconcealed respect; there was genuine admiration mingled with the congratulations offered him by the car's designers. He had become, after Gerard, the most conspicuous man in the great automobile plant.

Devlin crawled out of his seat and complained of nausea.

On the third day of practice, when Corrie brought the car back to the factory at noon, Rupert suddenly walked up to him and broke the silence of months.

"What's the matter with your fifth cylinder?" he demanded.

Amazed, Corrie slipped off his mask and turned his fatigued face to the questioner.

"I couldn't help it," he deprecated, quite humbly. "Devlin was too busy holding on to do much, and I was driving."

Rupert darted a glance of blighting contempt at the sullen Devlin, and walked away.

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Gerard had not seen the episode, nor did it reach his ears. But he was chatting with Corrie, late on the same afternoon, when Rupert emerged from the factory and thrust an overcoat at the young driver who stood beside his car.

"I ain't hanging out a diploma," he stated acridly, "but this ain't summer by some months and you're qualifying for a hospital—which I don't guess is what you were brought here for."

"Thank you," faltered Corrie, and wonderingly put on the garment.

Gerard continued to survey the machine before him, not a flicker crossing his expression or betraying consciousness of any unusual event. Rupert's swift look of blended defiance and embarrassment directed towards his chief glided off an impenetrable surface.

Corrie followed with wistful eyes the mechanic's return to the building.

"I knew a West Point fellow, once, who had been given the 'silence' treatment—I used to wonder why he minded so much," he laughed, apropos of nothing, but his voice caught.

It was the first time Corrie had ever admitted knowledge of Rupert's ostracism of him, or revealed how deeply the hurt had been felt. Gerard laid a caressing hand on his shoulder, wisely saying nothing. After a moment Corrie grasped the Titan's steering-wheel and swung himself into his seat behind it, but paused before summoning Devlin to start the motor, and rewarded Gerard's tact by another impulsive confidence, spoken just audibly:

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"I miss my father all the time. I think I always will. And I would miss him most if he came home and I had to live along side of him. He—well, he stays in Europe. I'll put up the car for the night, if you're ready to have me; it's getting pretty dark to run any more."

"The car is in your hands; put it where you please, when you please," responded Gerard; that mark of trust seemed the only comfort he could offer, then; he was too fine not to ignore the other issues.

XIII

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THE TITAN'S DRIVER

There was a letter for Corrie in the evening mail, next day. At least, there was an envelope containing a gaudy picture-postal. It was at this last that Corrie was gazing, when Gerard came to remind him that dinner waited, and of it he first spoke.

"It's from Isabel. I—she need not have sent it!" He abruptly pushed the card across the table toward Gerard and turned away to complete his preparations.

"A postal?"

"Oh, yes. She used to be fond of writing long letters, but she has quit the habit. Flavia tells me she has not received but three postal-cards from Isabel since they parted, although they used to be such chums."

"I am to read?"

"If you like."

The red and green landscape represented, libellously, the Natural Bridge of Virginia. Across the glazed surface ran a few blurred lines of script:

"Dear Corrie:

May I marry someone else, if I want to, or do you say not?

I.R."

Gerard laid down the card and regarded, troubled, his companion's straight shoulders and the back of his erect head, the only view afforded as Corrie stood before his mirror employing a pair of military brushes upon his unruly blond hair.

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"I did not know that the affair—that matters were so far arranged between you and your cousin," he said.

He spoke with hesitation, uncertain of how to venture upon a subject never before broached between them, yet feeling speech tacitly invited. In the stress of his own suffering at the time following the accident, preoccupied by the witnessing of Corrie's hard punishment of dishonor and grief and his struggle to fall no lower under it, he had forgotten that the boy-man also had to bear the loss of the girl upon whom he had spent his first love. For it required no deep insight to recognize that Isabel Rose was not the type of woman who is a refuge in time of disaster.

But the embarrassment was his alone; Corrie answered without confusion:

"We were engaged, yes. But that is ended. She had no need to write. She might have known, or have taken it for granted."

Gerard studied the view presented of his companion, striving to draw some conclusion from pose or tone. He had no mind to have his work of months marred and his driver distracted by an interlude of useless sentimentality; the temptation to congratulate Corrie upon his freedom from an unsuitable marriage was almost too strong. But what he actually said was quite different, and escaped from his lips without consideration of its effect.

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"I should not have supposed your cousin had so fine and strict a sense of honor."

The oval brush slipped through Corrie's fingers and fell to the floor, rolling jerkily away with the light glinting on its silver mounting in a series of heliographic flashes. The owner stooped to recover it, groping for the conspicuous object as if the room were dark instead of flooded with the brightness of late afternoon.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "What did you say? Her sense of honor——?"

"I beg your pardon," Gerard promptly apologized, aware of worse than indiscretion. "I, really, Corrie, I hardly realized what I was saying. Certainly I did not mean that the way it sounded. I only intended to say——"

What had he intended to say? What could he substitute for the spoken truth that would not wound the hearer either for himself or for the girl he loved?

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"I only meant," he recommenced, "that her asking your formal release showed a careful punctiliousness not common."

Corrie had recovered his brush, now. He laid it on the chiffonier before answering.

"How do we know what is common? What is honor, anyway; what other people see or what you are? I fancy she wouldn't have written if she hadn't been sure of what I'd say," he retorted, with the first cynicism Gerard ever had seen in him. "She likes me to take the responsibility, that's about all. Well, I've done it. Did you say I was keeping dinner waiting?"

This of the once-adored Isabel! However much relief the older man felt, there came with it a sensation of shock and regret. Had Corrie lost so much of his youth, unsuspected by his daily companion? Where were the old illusions which should have blurred this sharp judgment? He made some brief reply, and presently they went downstairs.

The dinner was rather a silent affair.

"Do you want to drive me into town?" Gerard inquired, at its conclusion. "I find that I must see Carruthers before he leaves for the East, and he is stopping at the Hotel Marion. If you are tired, I will get my chauffeur."

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"I should like it," Corrie exclaimed, rising eagerly. "I'll get the car. Your car?"

"I should think so. I am not exactly anxious to drive into town with your racing machine, although we have got to make fair time in order to catch him before his train leaves."

Corrie laughed, turning away.

"I'll make the time, all right," he promised. "Your roadster isn't so pretty slow, considering. I'll be at the door in three minutes."

He was, driving hatless and without a motor-mask in the fresh spring air.

"No overcoat?" Gerard disapproved. "What would Rupert say?"

Corrie flushed like a complimented girl; that the mechanic should have admitted him to any intercourse, however cold and slight, moved him so deeply that even Gerard's allusion was too much.

"I have it with me; I don't need it," he evaded hurriedly. "Ready?"

"Ready."

The car sprang forward.

The yellow country road merged into macadam, the macadam into asphalt. They were in the city, presently, slowly rolling through streets filled with playing children who garnered the last daylight moments. On one corner a hand-organ was performing, and the group disporting itself to the flat, tinkling music broke apart to shout after the car, waving grimy hands.

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"Hello, Mr. Corrie!" one shrill voice came to the motorists.

The driver lifted his hand in salute, glancing at his companion with a blended mischief and diffidence so delightful, so much like the old merry Corrie Rose, that Gerard laughed in sheer sympathy of pleasure.

"They seem to know you, Corrie?"

"They do. At least, what they call knowing me. You see, I blew out a tire here, on the way home after you sent me in to the postoffice, last week, and about three dozen kiddies gathered around

to watch me change it. Bully little frogs; they nearly lost all the kit of tools trying to help me. And talk! So I—well, I gave them all a spin about the square, in blocks of as many as could hang on at a time, and I set up the ice creams all around. It seemed my treat. You don't mind? I suppose they *are* full of germs and want washing, but I just remembered they were kids."

"I certainly do not mind," Gerard assured. He wanted to say something more, but found his thoughts singularly inarticulate. There was a certain verse commencing with "Inasmuch——" that he would have quoted to Corrie, had they been of any blood but the reticent Saxon. "They remembered part of your name," he added instead.

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"That was all I told them. The Hotel Marion?"

"Yes. Speed up all you dare, our time is short."

The time was indeed short. As they came down the avenue, Gerard uttered an exclamation, catching sight of a man who descended the hotel steps toward a carriage.

"Cross the street! There he goes. Quick, or we'll lose him! Cross over."

He was promptly obeyed. The car shot across the street regardless of traffic rules, and was brought shuddering to a halt beside the left-hand curb. Gerard sprang out and went to join the man who had stopped beside the carriage to wait for his pursuer.

Left in the car, Corrie took a leisurely survey of the street, preparatory to withdrawing from his illegal situation. But it was already too late. Even while he looked, a blue-garbed figure appeared around a corner, perceived the south-bound automobile beside the east curb and marched upon the offender.

To some temperaments there is an undeniable exhilaration in conflict. Corrie puckered his lips to a soundless whistle, settled back in his seat, and waited.

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"What are you doing over here?" the officer challenged, arriving. "Don't you know how to drive? You're under arrest."

"What for?" Corrie asked unmoved.

"What for? How did you get a chauffeur's license? For driving on the wrong side of the street, of course."

"I'm not driving."

"Don't be funny, young fellow! For stopping on the wrong side, if you like it better, then."

"I'm not stopping."

"You——?"

"I am stopped. You did not see me do it. I might have come out of one of those buildings, or have come up on one of those sidewalk elevators, for all you know. You can't arrest me for something you didn't see me do, man. You wouldn't if you could; I can see you have a sweet disposition."

The officer stared, and took a more careful survey of his antagonist.

"You're no chauffeur, I guess," he pronounced dryly.

"Well, I've got a license."

"That may be. Anyway, chauffeur or college student, you can't stay here with that machine."

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"You want me to leave? Certainly, officer, I always obey the law. Here comes my friend; I'll go now."

The policeman's face relaxed into a sour smile, the nonsense snaring him into unwilling participation.

"Do," he recommended. "The minute your wheels move, you will be driving on the wrong side of the street and I will pull you in."

"When I drive on the wrong side of the street, go ahead and do it. Are you ready to start, Gerard?"

Gerard, who had come up in time to hear enough, had interpretation been necessary, put an additional argument into the man's hand before entering the car.

"My fault, Johnston," he stated, with the quiet serenity of one certain of his ground. "You know I am not a law-breaker, I fancy; this was a case of necessity."

"It was your friend, Mr. Gerard——"

Corrie reached for a lever, smiling ingenuously across as he interrupted to reply.

"The rule says to keep to the right, officer?"

"Sure."

"Well, I am left-handed, that's all. Now look at this."

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This was the execution of a movement that sent the automobile rolling backwards.

"You see, I go north on the east side," the driver called, while the machine slid away. "All right, yes? Nothing in the rules about which end first you drive your car? No? I thought not. Good-by."

The car was at the corner, rounded it, and darted away in the customary method of straightforward progression.

"But if this had been New York, I would be in jail," Corrie added placid commentary, when security was attained. "I know all about it; I was arrested in Manhattan, once, for driving without a license number displayed. The cords must have broken and have let the number-plate fall off. Much that policeman listened to me. He ordered Dean into the tonneau with Flavia, stepped up into the seat beside me and ordered me to drive to the nearest police station."

"What did you do?"

"I drove. It cost me twenty-five dollars, a week later, and I had to 'phone for the family lawyer with bail to keep me from spending that night in a cell. Father——"

The stop was full. Gerard turned his attention to the street traffic, giving his companion liberty to evade continuing the theme. The evasion was not made. [Pg 222]

"Father," Corrie resumed, clearly and steadily, "gave me this diamond I wear, when I told him, so that I might always have something with me to give as a bond for reappearance instead of having to be locked up until I got help. He said one might be caught without one's pocketbook along, but not without one's ring. I have never taken it off since."

There was a change in his tone that Gerard had heard before, and never had succeeded in analyzing; not the change from gayety to gravity, although that was present, but some more subtle alteration that stirred the hearer to a strange, illogical sense of discomfort and failure on his own part. The feeling was transient and most unreasonable; common-sense swept it aside almost as it was formed. He said nothing, nor did his companion speak again.

The sunset glow and color were gone, but the delicate after-light still remained as a luminous presence in the land when the automobile entered the boundaries of the Mercury Company's property. There was a gate before the private road to Allan Gerard's house. When Corrie halted the car there and descended to open the way, a ragged, unsavory figure rose from the grass before him. [Pg 223]

"I'll open it, mister," the man volunteered. "Never mind it," as Corrie felt in his pocket for coin. "I want more than that. Forgotten me, have you?"

Astonished, Corrie scrutinized him, seeking the recollection implied.

"You're the man in the *Dear Me!*" he identified suddenly. "The man I threw overboard."

"Ah! You're it." He drew nearer, blinking intelligence. "I served you a square turn for your grub and clothes, too. Get rid of your friend; you an' me has got to talk."

Before the bearing of confident familiarity, the unclean personality and significant smile, Corrie slowly stiffened in rigid distaste.

"What do you want to say to me?" he demanded curtly. "What do you mean by serving me a square turn? Speak out. There is nothing concerning me that my friend doesn't already know."

The man projected his unshaven chin, cunningly interrogative. The intervening months had altered him, not pleasantly. The tramp of the *Dear Me* had been unattractive; this man was repellent.

"Is he on to what happened on the day before the last Cup race? Given him the inside story of that, have you? Or was he there?" [Pg 224]

The pause was not noticeably long.

"He is Allan Gerard," said Corrie, his voice suppressed. "Say what you wish."

"I saw you ridin' past without a hat on, a while ago, an' I knew you. Want? I want you to stand somethin' for me to live on, Mr. Rose, you bein' a millionaire. I was on the spot after the smash an' heard the talk an' saw your wrench picked up. You'd treated me right, so I just lifted a bunch of tools from one of the machines standin' empty, an' sprinkled them around that twelve-mile race track. The newspaper fellows found the things, too, an' kind of thought less of findin' the one where you smashed Mr. Gerard. One fellow help another, eh? No use of goin' to Sing Sing, neither."

Corrie's movement was swiftly accurate and uncalculated as the leap of some enraged primitive creature. His ungloved fist struck with an impact sounding like the slap of an open hand, and flung the man crashing through the hedge of lilac-bushes to roll over and over on the ground, clutching blindly at the turf strewn with broken leaf-buds.

"Corrie!" Gerard cried stern warning, too late, starting from his seat. [Pg 225]

Corrie swung about, his blue eyes blazing in his flushed face, his lips parted in a scarlet line across the white gleam of his set teeth.

"If he comes near me again, I'll *kill* him!" he panted savagely.

"It seems to me you have done enough of that sort of thing, already," Gerard retorted, equally angered.

The biting reminder was not premeditated; it leaped out of brief wrath and all the aching memories stirred by the episode. But it was none the less effective. Gerard himself did not realize how effective until he saw all the color and animation wiped from the young face and saw Corrie put his hand across his eyes.

"Corrie!" he exclaimed, cut deeply by his own cruelty, amazedly furious with himself. "Corrie——"

Corrie had turned his back to him, not in offence, but as a woman would cover her face. He answered without moving.

"It's—all right. I understand; it is—all right."

Gerard left the car, more humiliated in his own sight than he ever had been in his life. For the moment his own lack of self-control loomed larger than Corrie's, past or present. [Pg 226]

"Corrie, I said what I did not mean," he appealed, laying his hand on the other's shoulder. "Forgive me. Don't take it like this!"

Corrie slowly turned to him.

"There isn't anything you can say to me, that I can complain of," he checked apology, quietly serious. "It is all right, of course. I—no one can understand just what it was like to hear him talk that way to me, no one can, ever. But I should not have struck him."

The expression in his eyes as they encountered Gerard's was not of remorse or shame, or resentment, was not any mingling of these, but simply of utter loneliness patiently accepted. Gerard stood back in silence, helplessly aware of having inflicted a hurt no contrition could heal.

The man was sitting up, dazed and bruised, his stupid gaze following his assailant. To him Corrie went, dragging forth a handful of paper money.

"Keep away from me," the victor cautioned with harsh dislike. "I mean it. Here, take this and go. I'm giving it to you because I knocked you down and not because of anything you claim, understand."

The man grasped the money eagerly, peering up with more admiration than sullenness.

"You've got a good punch, mister," he conceded. "I'll get out. I wouldn't have come, only I thought you'd really done what they said, that time." [Pg 227]

Corrie drew back sharply, staring at the other. His right hand was cut and bleeding from the blow he had dealt, red drops trickled and fell as he stood, but he did not seem aware of the fact, either then or when he turned away to take his place at the steering-wheel. Gerard took the seat beside him without comment; he fancied he could imagine very exactly what Corrie Rose, gentleman, was enduring.

But whatever Corrie had to endure then or at any time, he was quite masculine enough to hurry it out of sight. At the house, he turned to Gerard his usual matter-of-fact glance.

"I will put the car in the garage and go over to the factory for a while," he said. "Mr. Edwards was going to examine that throttle which jarred open—on the Titan, I mean—so it would be ready for me to start early to-morrow. I told him I would be over, this evening."

"As you like. But do not stay too long; the house is lonely without you. And, do something for that cut hand, Corrie, or it may make you trouble."

They looked at each other.

"Thank you," acknowledged the younger. [Pg 228]

The Titan was ready next morning, as due, and the early start was made.

The great machine had run for several days without especial incident, but this morning Devlin's nervous incompetency manifested itself in a new direction. He forgot to fill the oil-tank of the car he served as mechanic, before Corrie took it out. One of the testers drove into the busy courtyard, about ten o'clock, shouting the information that the Titan was stuck eight miles out on the back road and Rose wanted the emergency car to bring him oil.

Sardonic of eye, caustic of tongue, Rupert himself attended to the carrying out of the request and watched the rescuing car depart on its mission. Half an hour later the Titan rolled past, missing fire and running with a sound like a sick gatling gun. Bare-headed and without his mask, Corrie was driving with one hand and striving to aid his mechanic's efforts with the other, as they swept around the mile track. In gritting exasperation Rupert stared after them, then snatched up a red flag and ran to the edge of the road.

Gerard, notified of trouble with the big car, arrived from his office in time to see the Titan halt, flagged, and the lightning strike Devlin.

"Get out," snarled Rupert, his dark face black with scorn, swinging one small arm in a wide [Pg 229]

gesture. "I ain't had any explanation of what you're doing behind anything except a baby-carriage, and I don't want it. Get out and don't come back. Quick!"

Dazed, Devlin obeyed. Rupert dragged open the motor's hood, busied himself for thirty seconds and crashed the metal cover shut again. As he flung himself into the seat beside the stupefied Corrie, he first caught sight of Gerard standing on the stone portal.

"Better send someone to hold down the yard," he sharply advised. "I ain't going to be there. What?"

Corrie had sufficient presence of tact to send the car forward without pause or comment, not daring to look at his new companion. But he gathered a jumbled view of Gerard's mirthful face and of Devlin standing sulkily at bay before his grinning mates.

When the Mercury Titan returned from its morning's work, it was running with the velvet purr of a happy tiger, the flames from its exhausts shimmered in the violet tints of perfect mixture, and the indicating dial pointed to the fact that Corrie had found some stretch of road where he had passed the hundred mile an hour gait. [Pg 230]

"She's in exact shape," approved Gerard, who had come out to meet them. "Good work, Rupert."

Rupert turned a hard dark eye upon him.

"I ain't pining for this," he signified measuredly. "But there's something coming to any decent car, and this one's suffered cruel."

Gerard nodded.

"I have been wondering where I could find a mechanic fit to race with Corrie this season," he confided, nonchalantly serene.

The double bombshell dealt full effect.

"Well, rest yourself," urged Rupert tartly, leaving his seat. "I'll do it. I know I'm a liar, I guess, but that won't hurt my work none."

"Race?" gasped Corrie. "Race? *I!*"

One rebel vanquished utterly, Gerard surveyed the other, preparing for his first conflict with the new Corrie Rose he had himself created; the Corrie Rose who in his twentieth year was a full-grown man.

"I have had you and the car entered for the Indianapolis meet, next month," he announced; "after that we are going to Georgia, then down to try the sea-beach along the Florida shore, where you can let out all the speed the machine has got. Of course you will race. What else have you been training for?" [Pg 231]

Corrie's full red lips closed, his blue eyes braved Gerard's.

"I will not. Gerard, I cannot. To go back as the millionaire amateur of the pink car, to stand the toleration of the professional drivers, who cannot really handle their machines better than I can mine, to know that the story of how you were wrecked is being whispered after me—I'm not big enough to face it all! I might be challenged and sent off the track, for all I know."

"You will not go back as an amateur," Gerard corrected. "You are entered and registered as a professional automobile racer, enrolled on the books of the A.M.A., under their protection and subject to their rules and authority for the future. You will find your certificate of the fact lying on your table. Yes, I did it without consulting you. You signed the necessary papers yourself, without reading them, and you cannot undo this without a formal resignation—unless you contrive to get yourself suspended."

Corrie's fingers gripped the wheel, the varying expressions changing his face like storm-swept water, while the hunger of his gaze besought Gerard. [Pg 232]

"You—it's *true*? Gerard, you've done *that* for me? They, the A.M.A. officers, they accepted me?"

"Yes. Once for all, there are no whispers connecting you with my accident. That matter is dead. You go back to the racing as a recognized driver in the employ of the Mercury Company, I acting as your manager and Jack Rupert as your mechanic. Do you think it probable that anyone would credit the idea of trouble between us, Corrie?"

"Give me a moment, or I'll lose the only honor I've kept," said Corrie Rose, and turned away his face. "I shall do whatever you bid me, of course."

XIV

VAL DE ROSAS

On the day that Corrie in his American home consented to drive the Mercury Titan through the racing season, Flavia and Mr. Rose arrived at the tiny Spanish village of Val de Rosas—arrived, not so much through design as through the bursting of a tire on their motor car. [Pg 233]

"It seems as if the name of the place might be one of our lost titles," observed Mr. Rose idly. "And there is the castle to match, on the hillside. Come stroll through the town, my girl, while Lenoir repairs damages."

Smiling, Flavia stepped down beside him, throwing back her silk veils and lifting her fair, almost too delicate face to the Andalusian sunshine. After her stepped a great dog, with the sedate, matter-of-course bearing of a constant attendant.

"I wonder who lives in the castle," she responded to his mood of playfulness. "*Our* castle. We should dispossess them."

"Lets," proposed her father.

There was an inn in the village, kept by a ravishingly plump landlord of sixty who wore a short velvet jacket. He informed the travellers that the diminutive white castle was not only vacant, but to let, being the property of a mad Englishman who had bought it to live in while writing a book, and having finished the book had departed. Mr. Rose regarded his daughter speculatively.

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"We have been going from one place to another for five months, and we have got to put in six more," he said with brief decisiveness. "I mean to stay on this side of the water until fall. Do you want to try living here for a while, or would you rather keep moving?"

"Let us stay here," Flavia voted eagerly. "Dear, I am so tired of hotels."

Mr. Rose studied her as she stood, slim and frail, before him, her large eyes fixed on his.

"I guess we are tired of more than that, you and I," he pronounced. "But I'll run up and see if the place can be made fit to live in. You had better rest here, in the shade; Frederick will take care of you and Lenoir is within call. Here, señor, set a chair here under these trees."

She moved to the seat placed for her by the deferential host, and watched her father's departure up the winding road. They were both thinking of Corrie, lacking whom all places were blank, with whom, in one winter's enthusiasm, they had studied this soft Spanish tongue they now used without him. They had planned a trip to Puerto Rico, then, that never had been taken. But Flavia also was thinking of Allan Gerard—Allan Gerard, who loved Isabel and for whose sake Flavia carried a double sorrow, his and her own. As he had found excuses in his mind for her apparent failure of him, so she on her part never had blamed him for what she considered her own misunderstanding of his purpose. They were not given to the small vice of ready condemnation. There is no comfort in blaming the one loved, where the love is great.

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A murmur of wondering dismay aroused Flavia from her musing, a sound scarcely louder than the murmur of the bees busied among the heavy waxen-white lemon-blossoms overhead. She lifted her chin from her hand, and saw a brown-haired, brown-skinned, brown-eyed girl standing on the path, gazing at the huge dog that barred her passage.

"Pray do not be frightened," Flavia begged. "Come here, Frederick! Indeed, he is only a young dog and very gentle."

"He is very large, señorita," the girl smiled, half-reassured, half-fearful. "He bites, no?"

"No, indeed. See."

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"He loves the señorita. That does not surprise," with Latin grace of compliment.

Flavia smiled, too, drawing the Great Dane's bulky head against her knee.

"I love him, perhaps."

"One sees it, since he voyages with the señores in that splendid automobile, where a man might find place with joy."

A wistfulness in the comment moved the listener to give explanation, almost in apology for lavishing upon an animal what might have rejoiced a human being.

"He is my brother's dog. But my brother went away, and the poor dog grieved for him all the time, except with me. I could not leave him to fret, without either of us, so he came abroad, too."

"Across the ocean, señorita?"

"Across the ocean. From America."

The two young girls considered one another in a pause full of cordial sympathy. Different in race, station and experience, the bond of maidenhood drew them to each other with delicate lines of mutual comprehension and accord.

"It is the dog's name which is on the great silver-and-leather collar, or the name of the señorita?"

Flavia's small fair hand guided the plump brown one tracing the legend upon the massive band.

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"*Federigo el Grande, que pertenece á Corwin Basil Rose, Long Island,*" she translated.

"Don Corwin—that does not say itself easily!"

"We called him Corrie."

"Ah, that I can say; Don Corrie."

The soft household name sounded yet softer in the Andalusian accents. Flavia looked away, feeling her lips quiver.

"Will you tell me your name?" she asked, by way of diversion. "Mine is Flavia Rose. Perhaps we shall see more of each other, if I stay here and you do also."

"I am called Elvira Paredes, señorita. And I shall be here—I cannot go for so long, so long, perhaps never."

Flavia leaned forward, her clear eyes questioning.

"You want to go away? To leave this place for some other?"

The confidence came with an outrush of feeling, a wealth of expression and expressive gestures.

"Señorita, to join my betrothed. Ah, there never was one like him, so beautiful, so brave, so constant like the sun in rising! You cannot know. No one can know who has not seen it. And sing! Under my window he would sing until the birds would hush, hush to listen. I have no marriage-portion, I who am an orphan living with the sister of my mother's cousin. Not for that did Luis hesitate. But the time came when he must do military service; serve in Morocco, señorita, serve among savages who would torture him! And to come back poor as he went. So he left. Far away he journeyed, to New York, which is in America, to find peace and make a home."

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"Where you will go to him?"

"Señorita, we hope it. He works, I wait. We write long letters. But it is three years. It costs much to cross the ocean, and one grows old." The brown eyes looked the tragedy of hope deferred.

"For men must work and women must weep—" The old refrain came to Flavia. But not this woman, not if her American sister could prevent. And the preventing was so easy! She drew the girl down on the seat beside her, impulsive as Corrie could have been.

"Listen, Elvira—I may call you Elvira? Let me help you. I have so much money, so much more than I can spend, and I am not very happy. Let me think that I have given you what I cannot have; let me send you to Luis. My father will tell us how, he will arrange everything so that you will not have to trouble at all. We will send a message to Luis so that he may meet you."

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"Señorita!"

"You will let me? You will not say no? Why, Elvira!"

The girl dropped her face in Flavia's lap and burst into hysterical tears, covering her hands with kisses.

When Mr. Rose returned, half an hour later, this time in the big automobile whose rushing passage stirred whirlwinds of dust on the age-old road, his daughter met him eagerly.

"Papa, I want to send Elvira Paredes to America, to her fiancée. She is a kinswoman of the innkeeper, here. Will you arrange it for us? I think she would be frightened if you sent her by first-class, but second-class would be very nice. She knows how to go in the train to Malaga, if you get the ticket, and ships sail from there, do they not? Oh, and would you cable to Luis Cárdenas, in New York, so he will know she is coming? I will find the street and number from Elvira."

His children long since had trained Mr. Rose to be surprised at no charming vagaries. He contemplated Flavia, amused, and well pleased with her animation.

"Found something to play with, eh? Very good, we will fix it. But your Elvira will have to wait until I get an answer from her lover through the cable company; I'm sending no girls to New York without knowing they'll land in the right hands. Now, I believe that house up there will suit. We'll have some luncheon and then drive up for you to see it. I like the place, myself. It opens well."

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It opened well, if the happiness of Elvira Paredes was a good augury.

"All the rest is from my father," Flavia said, in parting from her. "But take this from me, to wear or for a marriage portion, as you choose."

The gift was a sapphire ring slipped from Flavia's slim finger.

"It resembles the eyes of the señorita; may they always be as bright and clear," fervently returned Elvira, who was an Andalusian and therefore a poet.

"That cost some money, when I bought it," Mr. Rose practically observed, from his seat in the motor-car. "Tell her not to flash it in New York, alone, if she wants to keep it. You can put that into classic Spanish for me, my girl."

That was the beginning of an interlude whose placid monotony was tempered by much equally placid incident. The Americans liked the village, and the village rejoiced in the Americans, so that they came to know each other very well. More than once Flavia thought of the legend of Al-Mansor, and that if one of these days could be deemed happy enough to record by a pearl, the vase could be filled with the gem-chronicles, so much alike were the weeks.

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For the white castle on the hill kept its visitors, and so it happened that the summer most

crowded and busy of any Corrie ever had known, slipped drowsily by in drowsy Val de Rosas for the two most interested in him.

He never told Flavia what he was doing. The new Corrie Rose was more considerate than the self-centred thoughtlessness of youth had permitted the boy Corrie to be. He would have remembered her anxiety for his safety and dread of danger for him, of himself, but his silence was further impelled by Gerard, who had pointed out—in a few brief sentences that avoided Flavia's name—the responsibility she must feel in keeping such a secret from her father. But, because it was so difficult to write to his "Other Fellow" without telling her all, Corrie's letters came with greater intervals and were less in length.

"I am still touring with Gerard," he wrote to Flavia, in the last note of his that came to Val de Rosas. "Don't mind if my letters come slower, please; I am pretty busy. I guess you will understand what it means to me when I can say that I am doing some work for Gerard and that he calls it good. I wish it cost me more to do. I hope father is well; you didn't say, last time. Keep on writing often, you know, it's the next thing to seeing you." [Pg 242]

He wrote that note the night after he broke a track record in California, wrote it on the chiffonier of the hotel bedroom while making ready to attend a motor club dinner at which he was to be chief guest in honor of the day's event. Four weeks later Flavia read it, under the flowering almond trees that surrounded the house so closely as to overhang the balcony on which she sat. Read it, then kissed the careless, boyish *Corwin B. Rose* that slanted crookedly across the foot of the page. Holding the letter, she sat quite still.

From the room within drifted the voices of Mr. Rose and the mild Father Bartolomé, between whom the last months had established a cordial basis of esteem. The village priest had dined with them; it was in deference to his presence that Flavia wore a gown whose lace collar came up to her round chin, and now had left the two gentlemen to after-dinner conversation instead of herself entertaining her father. She had the sense of being horribly alone; her longing for Corrie became physical pain, so that she crushed the letter in her fingers, catching her breath with difficulty. Close to one another they always had been, still closer together trouble had drawn them, but now half the world stretched its empty spaces between. The impulse that goaded her was to cry out to her father that she must see Corrie—to take her to him—yet she did not speak or move, resolute in endurance. To make that appeal to her father would be to separate Corrie from Allan Gerard, she knew, to bring her brother back to the atmosphere of constraint and reproach to escape which he had left the rose-colored Long Island villa they called home. [Pg 243]

"Taxes are taxes," Mr. Rose's raised accents set forth. "Governments have to be maintained. If the tax collector is due to-morrow, Val de Rosas has got to pay up."

There was a murmured reply in the softer tones.

"No money?" the American echoed. "I suppose I could guess that." There came the crisp sound of parting paper. "Now, if you will make a figure for the total, Father, I'll give you this check to pay for the whole thing. I've lived in this town five months, and I like the people—it's my treat. No, I haven't counted the chickens and measured the houses, but I can see the amount isn't exactly ruinous. Now, we won't talk any more about it; here you are." [Pg 244]

"Señor Rose," solemnly said the old man, with inexpressible dignity and authority,—Flavia heard him rise,—"this will be repaid by the One to Whom you lend through the poor—repaid to you, and to your daughter."

There was a moment's pause.

"You might include my son in that; I've got one, you know," suggested Thomas Rose, carefully casual.

Flavia covered her eyes, and the tears trickled through her slender fingers.

When the moon was up and the pant of a distant motor announced that the guest was being conveyed to the village by Lenoir and the big automobile, Flavia went in to her father. Both of them maintained their usual composure, as they smiled at one another across the room, but the young girl's extreme pallor was not to be disguised when she came into the light. Mr. Rose looked at her, and continued to look.

"You're not well, my girl," he asserted, concerned. "Never mind drawing that curtain; come over here. Don't you think it's time to tell me why you sent off Gerard? I know how hard it must have hit him, when he was down already, and I've felt sorry often enough, but a man has to take a woman's answer and I've said nothing. But I believed at home that you liked him, and I believe you have been fretting ever since." [Pg 245]

Flavia grasped the heavy curtain, gazing at him in an utter confusion of thought that amounted to actual giddiness.

"I—I sent away Mr. Gerard?" she marvelled.

"Who else? Or if you accepted him, why was I not told?"

"Will you tell me what you mean?" she asked brokenly.

"Mean? I mean that the last time I saw Allan Gerard alone, on the day I met you and Corrie

driving home together, he asked my permission to propose to you. I rather guess that hour with him didn't make me very easy on Corrie, although I was given no cause to be otherwise by Gerard. Gerard said frankly that he wouldn't have offered you such a wreck as he felt himself, much as he loved you, if he had not gone so far before he was hurt that he had no right to leave in silence. He said that as a matter of honorable justice he must lay the decision before you and abide by your will. Very quiet, he was—I told him that I would rather give you to him than to any other man on earth, and I meant it."

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The room blurred before Flavia's dilated eyes.

"You never told me! Papa, you never told me!"

The passionate cry of grief brought Mr. Rose to his feet.

"Told you? Gerard was to tell you. I wanted to carry him home with me that afternoon, but he refused. In fact, he was not fit, nor I either, to stand any more sentiment just then. He said he would write and ask you to see him, if you cared to have him speak or come back at all. That trip West he had to take. Didn't he write?"

She saw the softly-lighted little room at home where Jack Rupert had come to her, and Isabel's suffused, desperate face as she snatched the letter from its owner. And as a pendant picture she saw the bleak, solitary railway station in the gray December morning, where Gerard, ill and reft of his splendid strength, had waited alone for the girl who did not come.

Mr. Rose reached her as she swayed forward.

"Take me home," she gasped, clinging to him with small fierce hands. "I never knew. Dear, take me home."

The next morning they left Val de Rosas.

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It is a long journey from Andalusia to New York. But it was on the morning they boarded the ocean liner that Mr. Rose purchased a New York journal—and met a news item that gave him material for thought during the rest of the trip. The item was on the sporting page, and stated that the Cup race course was now open for practice; among the first of the cars to commence training being the Mercury Titan, driven by Corrie Rose—one of the cleverest young professionals in America, whose work with the Mercury Company's special racing machine had given the greatest satisfaction to its owner and designer, Mr. Allan Gerard.

There was no longer any cause for concealment. When Mr. Rose carried the journal to Flavia, she told him quite simply to whom Corrie had gone in his exile and what she knew of his life with Gerard. Of his racing she herself had been left ignorant; she could guess whose forgiving tenderness had spared her that anxiety.

"You are not angry with Corrie," she ventured, before her father's knit brow and squared jaw. "You did not forbid him to race or he would not have done so, I am sure."

"No, I did not. I didn't think I had to," was the dry response. "Angry? He and I are past that. The days are gone when we used to have our differences and shake hands on them. We'll get along together quietly enough, I dare say."

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"Now, I would rather you said you were angry," she grieved.

Thomas Rose thrust his hands into his pockets, looking down at the newspaper page. He had altered during the last year in a way difficult to characterize. It was not that he looked older or more hard, there was no bitterness in the strong face, but he looked like a man who stood in the shadow instead of in the sun.

"So would Corrie, I fancy," he said heavily.

Corrie's sister folded her hands in her lap.

"Is there no chance if one falls once?" she rebelled in futile reproach. "He was so young, he has suffered so much—can he never pay?"

"I'm not much of a reader, as a rule, but I did a good deal of it at Val de Rosas, this summer," Mr. Rose slowly returned. "And a line from an Englishman's work stuck in my memory. He said that tears can wash out guilt, but not shame. I can give Corrie all I've got, I have always been fond of him and I am yet, but I can't give him my respect. It was a shameful thing to strike down an unprepared man from behind, because he was losing in a game. Some things can't be paid for, because they are not bought and sold. Of course he will have every chance possible. He isn't what I supposed; well, there is no use of complaining, we will make the best of what he is. I sent him away while we settled down to living on the new basis; I guess we are as ready to go on, now, as we ever will be."

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"If he heard you say that, I think he would die," she stated her hopeless conviction.

"People don't die so easily, my girl. I tell you he and I will get along well enough. Pass me those books over there."

Flavia obeyed, having no words. Mr. Rose sat down and compared the date of the steamer's probable arrival with that of the Cup race.

THE STRENGTH OF TEN

It had required more than eloquence or tact, it had required actual compulsion to bring Corrie Rose back to race at Long Island. All his successful work, all the cordiality that met him wherever he went, and the temptation to essay new conquest, failed to overcome his repugnance. But he could not defy Gerard.

"I don't see how *you* can bear to look at the place," he had flung, in his final defeat.

"My dear Corrie, I am not any further from that here than there," Gerard had quietly replied.

Corrie understood, and submitted dumbly thereafter. And, in spite of himself, his first day's practice on the course swept everything aside except eager exhilaration. He was too superbly healthy for morbidity, too masculine for continuous dwelling in memories; if Gerard had not been very certain of that fact, he would never have brought his ward there. When Corrie was driving, Corrie was happy. He drove with a sober intensity of devotion, his passion was serious, whereas Gerard had raced fire-ardent and won or lost laughing.

There was a small hotel near the course which the motor-men had made a rendezvous. Here Gerard established his party, during the two weeks of practice work. He did not choose to have Corrie in New York, although Rupert chafed and he himself was obliged to go in to the city frequently, at considerable inconvenience. [Pg 251]

On the last afternoon before the race, he returned from such a trip, and arrived before the hotel just as Corrie rolled up with the Mercury Titan and halted it opposite him.

"It's five o'clock," the driver explained, stilling his roaring motor and leaning out. "Everyone is coming in, to get ready for to-morrow."

There was little trace left of the petulant, gaudily dressed boy who a year before had driven the pink car, in this serious young professional clad in the Mercury's racing gray and bearing the Mercury's silver insignia on his shoulder. The bend of his mouth was firmer, his dark-blue eyes had acquired the steady, all-embracing keenness of Gerard's—the gaze of all those men with whom the inopportune flicker of an eyelid may mean destruction. He was clothed with his virile youth as with a radiant garment, as he smiled across at Gerard.

"Yes, get some rest; you will be out at dawn," approved Gerard, coming closer. "Where is Rupert? What is the matter, Corrie? You look disturbed." [Pg 252]

"Rupert got off at the corner, back there. I suppose if I look rattled, that *he* is what is the matter. He——" Corrie suddenly dropped his face in his folded arms as they rested upon the steering-wheel, his shoulders shaking.

"He? How? He has been talking to you?"

"He sure has been talking to me," Corrie affirmed, lifting his laughter-flushed face. "When I think that he once gave me the silence treatment! His tongue would take the starch out of a Chinese laundry and make a taxicab chauffeur feel he couldn't drive."

"You do not let him talk to you when you are driving!"

"Oh, when I am driving he is the perfect mechanic. He wouldn't open his lips if I hit a right-angle turn at ninety miles an hour or disobey if I told him to climb out and cut the tires off the rear wheels. No, it is when I am not officially driving that he gives me some remarks to study about. Good pointers, too! I like it, really. I only wish," his expression shadowed abruptly, "I only wish I didn't have to remember that nothing could bring him to shake hands with me."

"Corrie——" [Pg 253]

"I know—I beg your pardon for speaking of that to you. But, Gerard," he bent to grasp a lever, "I'd take what you got last year, I'd consent to be picked up dead from under my car to-morrow, if I could that way buy one hour to stand clean before you and Jack Rupert. That's all—don't think I want to flinch, please. If you will go on in, I'll put this machine away and be back to dinner in fifteen minutes. I see Rupert coming to help me, now. We're starved to death and some tired. By the way, George shouted over to me that he would be in as soon as he got the Duplex canned for the night, and to order a few dozen eggs and a couple of hams fried for him. Would you attend to it on your way in?"

"I surely would," Gerard answered, the great gentleness of his tone mating oddly with the light words. "What do you want ordered for yourself?"

"Anything, and plenty of it."

Gerard did not smile as he went into the building. He too would have given much to spare Corrie Rose the memory of that October morning's fault. From all punishment except that memory he had sheltered him, further aid no one could give. But because he loved Corrie, he climbed the hotel stairs in slow abstraction and failed to perceive the limousine that came up before the Mercury Titan, and stopped. [Pg 254]

He was standing by a table in the empty parlor of the hotel, when the door opened, and closed. Thinking some other guest had entered, he did not turn from the letters he was reading, nor was there any further movement or demand upon his attention. That which slowly invaded his consciousness was a summons more delicate than sound, a faint, distinctive flower-fragrance that proclaimed one individual presence. Flavia Rose was in the room; he knew it before he swung around and saw her standing there.

The shock that leaped along his pulses was less of hope than of renewed pain.

"Miss Rose!" he exclaimed.

She moved a little forward. Against her dark velvet gown, under her wide velvet hat, her soft, earnest face showed whitely lustrous and irradiated, her beautiful eyes dwelt on his.

"I never knew," she said, her clear voice like rippled water. "Your letter, the night before you went away, never came to me. I never knew you had sent for me, until last month."

The movement that brought Gerard across the room was as nakedly passionate as the incoherent simplicity of her speech.

"You never knew? Flavia, you would have come?"

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"I would have come; I wanted to come long before, while you were so ill——"

They had waited a year on the verge of that moment; it was enough to touch one another in this security of understanding. There was no question between them, no doubt, now that they saw each other face to face; all their world flowered into light and fragrance, present and future one dazzling marvel.

But at last they drew slightly apart, gazing at each other with an incredulity of such happiness, both Flavia's little hands held in the firm clasp of Gerard's left. And then gradually awoke amazement that they could ever have been separated, who were so closely bound together.

"My dear, my dear, you knew I loved you," he wondered. "How did this happen to us?"

"How could I know? You had never said it."

"Did I need to? I thought the very stones in the fountain arcade must have seen it. And I trusted Rupert with the letter; he said he had given it to you, he even brought an answer."

"Do not blame him," she quickly defended. "He told you that he had given it to Miss Rose; he meant to Isabel, who claimed it."

"Your cousin? What had I to do with her? Why should I have written to her? Have written *that*, Flavia!"

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The tears rushed to her eyes.

"Your letter—Allan, if I had known that message was for me, I would have gone back with Rupert to you that evening. But Isabel took it, for some reason she expected a message from you, that night. I have not been able to understand that, although I have tried ever since papa told me, last month, that it was I whom you chose. She spoke of something Corrie had said. I—I think she believed you did care for her more seriously than she had meant you should. She was so very sure the letter was for her—and you did not call me Flavia once."

"I had no right, I dared not. Dear, I had had a bad month; I did not remember that any Miss Rose but you existed. I used to close my eyes, when things were worst, and see your eyes against the dark. There were days when I did not see much else. But they were not so bad, no day ever was so bad as the morning Corrie came to the station without you. Forgive me, I hurt you!"

She shook her fair head, wordless. Quiet from the very vehemence of feeling that possessed them both, Gerard stooped and kissed her.

"Will you marry me soon, Flavia? After this race, when Corrie can be with us? Let us waste no more time apart; I have wanted you so long, so very long."

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The lovely color flushed her transparent face, but her fingers clung to his.

"All the way home from Spain, I have been remembering that I really was betrothed to you this whole year," she answered, not turning from him the innocent candor of her clear gaze. "Before that, before I knew the truth, I used to think how strange a thing it would have been if you had died in the accident and I had lived all the rest of my life believing myself promised to you, when in fact you had loved Isabel, not me. I used to think, often, of that first day when I fell on the stairs at the Beach race track—when you caught me and held me close to you—and how you would never again hold me like that or miss not doing so. I am quite sure that no one ever was wanted so much as I have wanted you. It may not be right to tell this even to you, but it is true. And I will marry you whenever you ask, Allan."

Allan Gerard, man of the practical world and the twentieth century, went to his knee on the floor of the hotel parlor and hid his face against her hand.

The room was rosy with the glow of sunset, when someone discreetly knocked. In response to Gerard's invitation to enter, the door opened and revealed the wiry, jersey-clad form of Rupert on

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the threshold. Grimy yet from his recent employment, he was engaged in deftly winding a strip of antiseptic gauze around his wrist while he spoke.

"I ain't one to invite li'l' Artha' Brownskin to meet the A.M.A. on Sunday," he began discontentedly, and broke off at sight of Flavia.

"I don't need to introduce you to Miss Rose," smiled Gerard. "What have you done to your wrist? Much?"

"Scratched it threading my sewing-machine; I'll be able to sit up in bed to-morrow," reassured the mechanic, his acute black eyes travelling from the young girl to his chief. "I didn't mean to run into this camp without being signalled. As I was saying, I ain't one to promote trouble, but there's a gentleman downstairs who's calling off our race."

"*What?*"

"Mr. Rose is explaining to our driver that he ain't fit to be allowed on a race course. And no one's opposing his remarks any."

Gerard divined the situation.

"Go down," Flavia begged, as he turned to her. "I have been selfish to keep you here; I might have known! But I saw Corrie just for a moment, then father sent me to you. Go to Corrie; Mr. Rupert will bring me." [Pg 259]

"I can guess that I'm a fierce bad postman," Rupert dryly acknowledged. "But I ain't likely to confuse ladies on the way downstairs. You're sure needed below."

In the empty paved space before the hotel, the Mercury Titan still reposed its massive bulk, with its driver in his seat, his fair head uncovered in the pink-and-gold light and his face turned to the man who stood beside the car. There was neither heat nor resentment in either Mr. Rose's expression or his son's as the older man came over to shake hands with Gerard. Corrie did not move; his left arm was thrown about the neck of the huge dog reared up beside him against the machine.

"I'm glad to see you looking so well," Mr. Rose briefly greeted. "I have been talking to Corrie, here, while we waited for you, Gerard, but this thing won't do."

"What won't do, Mr. Rose?" Gerard questioned, equally matter-of-fact.

"You know, and Corrie knows. I appreciate the way you have stood by him and the way he has kept to his work—I'm proud of it—but this isn't a question of how any of us three feel. I am sorry to hurt him, but we have got to face facts. A man who loses his temper is not fit for certain places; a race track is one." [Pg 260]

"The Corrie Rose whom I know and who trained under me is fit for any place," Gerard gravely maintained. The work of months was on the verge of loss; he gauged very exactly what this sentence would result in for Flavia's brother.

Mr. Rose glanced towards his son; if his powerful, square-cut face was inflexible, it was without hardness.

"Gerard, I am sorry," he repeated. "It's like you to overlook what happened to yourself and try him again; he and I have got more to consider and to be responsible for. He might race straight for years, yes, forever; but his temper might slip him to-morrow. I know he means right, but it can't be chanced. I'll risk seeing no more men picked up as you were. Corrie, whenever I've said must—that hasn't been often—you've answered. I think you will now. Get off that machine and come home with me, my boy; we will try a fresh start, you and I."

Corrie stirred slightly; even his lips were gray and dark circles appeared suddenly stamped beneath his eyes. He offered no defence or demur, but before his movement could spell obedience Gerard had sprung across the intervening space and dropped his left hand on the driver's arm, forcing him to retain his seat. [Pg 261]

"Stay there," he commanded curtly. "You are my employee, under contract to drive my cars this season; if you break your signed agreement I will bring you up before the A.M.A. board and have you suspended for unprofessional conduct."

Corrie gasped as from a dash of cold water in the face, the rough tonic effectually bringing him out of his daze of habitual submission.

"Mr. Rose, this is not sentiment, but business," Gerard continued in his usual tone. "Corrie is not racing to-morrow for the first time, or for the fifth or sixth, this season. He is the cordially liked and respected comrade of his fellow-drivers—there is not one who would not laugh in your face at the idea of fearing to have him among them. I tell you, for the rest, that any other man on the course might let his nerves trick his self-control; Corrie Rose never will. I know him, now, better than you yet can. But," he snatched a rapid survey of Corrie, then lifted his hand from the other's arm and drew back, "he is not a child; let him decide." [Pg 262]

"Corrie——" his father recommenced, his voice choked.

But Corrie had found himself. He laid one firm, gauntleted hand on the beloved steering-wheel

and turned to Mr. Rose the serious countenance and steadfast eyes of the new Corrie of the Mercury's making. With the other hand he pressed the dog's great head closer to him; perhaps only Allan Gerard saw and translated the pathos of that unconscious gesture.

"I would do anything else, sir," he stated simply. "But Gerard has stayed by me through the worst time I will ever have. I know—you gave me money; but he helped me *live*. Afterward I will do whatever you bid me, now I cannot leave him without a driver on the eve of a race. All the more," his speaking glance went to Gerard, "all the more I must stay, because he would rather hold me strictly to a business contract than remind me that I owe him anything or that it is through me that he is not driving this car himself."

There was a moment of absolute silence. Then the rustle of soft garments came with Flavia's swift crossing from the doorway where she and Rupert had witnessed the contest. Straight to the side of the gray machine she went, and clasping her little hands over her brother's arm, raised to him the high trust and unchanging love of her regard.

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"Dearest, I hope you win, to-morrow," she said bravely and sweetly. "But kiss me, Corrie, and come home afterward. We need you, papa and I—and Allan."

"Other Fellow," he thanked her, under his breath, and leaned down to give the caress.

Gerard and Mr. Rose were looking at each other.

"You win," conceded the older man, without rancor. "I hope we are not sorry. Bring him to the house after you get through, to-morrow, I guess we'll be a family party."

The snorting uproar of an arriving racing car crashed across reply.

"Hey, Rosie, did you rope those hams and eggs?" blithely shouted the masked driver, checking his machine. "If you didn't, I'll hook a wheel off your cart to-morrow when I pass you. Why haven't you canned your car yet? Oh, excuse *me!*" perceiving Flavia.

"I roped them, George," assured Corrie. "I'm coming in, now."

Rupert advanced to the front of the Mercury.

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"You're giving orders," he signified to his driver. "Do I crank?"

The slight episode was the fitting period to Gerard's argument; he gave Mr. Rose his fine, cool smile to point it.

Frederick the Great did not go home to the pink villa. Not even Flavia could win him from the master he had refound. So it happened that when Gerard went to Corrie, after midnight, he discovered his driver seated beside an open window in the drab, cheerless hotel bedroom, his arms folded on the sill and the dog's head resting on his knee.

"Corrie, do you know it is past twelve o'clock?" he exclaimed, purposely authoritative in spite of his aching pity. "I saw the light over your door and came in to give you what Rupert describes as a calling down. How do you expect to be up fresh and fit for a race at dawn? You go to bed, young man, where I sent you two good hours ago."

"I am going," Corrie replied, without turning. "I'm—all right. Gerard——"

The pause was so long that Gerard came quietly over and put his hand on the other's shoulder, waiting.

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"Gerard, do you remember what Rupert once said, in the yacht club where we fed the tramp, about my getting just what I earned and that no luck would soften my brick walls? And I said I was content because I meant to earn what I wanted. I didn't know what I was talking about, but he was right. I'm not complaining, you know; it's fair enough. No, don't answer yet; that isn't what I meant to say."

The dog moved restlessly and whined, nestling closer to the master he loved. Corrie dropped a hand to the animal's neck.

"This good old chap and I will go to bed, presently. We've got to win, to-morrow; it's the last time. Gerard, did you ever read a poem Flavia and I used to like, I wonder? About a man having the strength of ten, because his heart was clean? Do you believe it—I mean, that a man can stand more if he knows he is right inside than if, if he could not think that?"

"Corrie, yes, I do believe it. But there are few stainless Galahads. Strength and rightness do not depend on the past, but the present. The finest strength I have seen, has been in men who, who ——"

The intended conclusion died on his lips, before he found words to soften its intrinsically harsh implication. Corrie had turned to him a glance so clear, a face so startling in its white resolution and dignity of fearless candor, that Gerard drew back with a sensation of rebuked presumptuousness. What he had offered as a consolation suddenly loomed as an insult.

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"Thank you," said Corrie, quite simply. "You're awfully good to me, Gerard. I don't know why I

said all that—I, I guess something slipped. Good night; Fred and I will get some sleep. It's a short night, anyhow."

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XVI

THE WHITE ROAD OF HONOR

The ruddy dawn that flushed along the edge of the east illuminated a vast, waiting multitude. For its twelve miles of twisted length, the narrow ribbon of the Cup course was walled in on either side by the massed people and uncounted hundreds of automobiles. The neighboring States, the great cities of New York and Jersey, the countrysides far and near had emptied their motor-car enthusiasts and sport lovers into this strip of Long Island, for to-day. Laughing, eating picnic breakfasts, laying wagers and preparing score-cards, the crowd swayed tiptoe on the keen edge of expectancy; while up and down the course drove and pushed the hurrying hundreds who had not yet found satisfactory place.

As the dawn brightened into full, golden October day, the crush became greater, the haste and anticipation more intense. When a spluttering roar announced one of the arriving racers, the press would open, cheering, to leave his car passage and close in behind him with boisterous comment and criticism.

"That was the six Atlanta, Louis driving, wasn't it, Dick?"

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"Rub your eyes, you're asleep yet—that was the Mercury, Rose up. Can't you tell a peach from a lemon? Quit shoving, there!"

"Bet you ten a foreign car wins."

"Take you. It'll be the Blulette or the Mercury. Get back, here comes another. They start in twenty minutes."

Opposite the grand-stand the excitement was greatest, but most orderly. Around the row of repair pits men ran in and out, hovering about their cars with solicitous final attentions and eager encouragement to the smiling drivers. The first machine was already at the starting-line, ready as an arrow on the cord, its pilot smoking a cigarette and chatting indolently with the official starter.

"I drew second for you, last night," Gerard reminded his driver, leaning against the Mercury to look up at him. "Of course, you have your numbers on. You will have to get into line in a moment; don't you want to get out and move about, first? You are going to have six or seven hours' grind."

"I'm rested best right here," responded Corrie placidly. He nestled himself more snugly into his seat and proceeded to fasten on the mask and hood that quenched his blond youth into kinship of blank identity with every other driver on the course. "The crowd is pretty thick; I hope they get the people off."

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"The police are clearing the way, now. Corrie——"

The thunderous voice of the car from the next camp interrupted speech as it went past them.

"Good luck, Rosie! I'll leave your rear wheels alone," shouted its driver. "By-by, Allan."

"If he's worried bad about his, I'll lend him a safety-pin from my shirtwaist," drawled Rupert, lounging up, hooking his own mask. "I ain't muck-raking, but he broke his rear axle at Indianapolis, last month, and lost two wheels."

"Corrie," Gerard pursued, "you are to bring yourself back safely. I do not want any victories at the price of your wreck. Remember that I am responsible for your being at this work, and remember Flavia."

"If I wreck my car there won't be *any* victory," Corrie practically returned. "Besides, I have got Rupert with me to be looked after; if I were making a speed dash by myself I might take a chance or two. You never let me out alone. It's all right. They are signalling."

Rupert sprang into his seat like a rubber ball, bracing one small legging-clad foot for support; not the least of a racing mechanic's arts being that of clinging at all times to his reeling post of duty. Gerard held out his hand for Corrie's parting clasp, then exchanged a warm grip with Rupert. Between the driver and mechanic who were to play the perilous game side by side, there passed no such friendly touch. Gerard never looked at the watching violet-blue eyes of the third man during that farewell ceremony.

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"Take care of yourselves," he bade.

"It's a nice morning for a ramble," observed Rupert. "Don't worry, love, we'll be in to tea."

The Mercury Titan rolled into place in the line of flaming, panting machines. The driver of the first car threw away his cigarette and sat up. There was a pause while the group of officials poised, watches in hand, the people rose, then the starter leaned forward and the first car sprang from the line.

Amid the gay tumult of music and cheers, Corrie waited the half-minute interval, his eyes on the

counting official, his hand on the lever, until the starter's hearty clap fell on his shoulder with the word:

"Go!"

With an explosive roar the Mercury shot across the line and rushed, gathering speed in long leaps, down the white course. Under the first arched bridge, out of sight it flashed, followed by an answering roar from the countless throats of those between whose dense ranks it sped. [Pg 271]

Gerard moved back a few paces. He had become rather pale and grave; his gaze remained fixed on the distant arch through which the Mercury had vanished, nor did he turn to watch the sending away of the other nineteen racers.

The touch laid on his sleeve was feather-light.

"I could not stay away," pleaded Flavia, beside him. "May I watch Corrie with you, Allan?"

He wheeled eagerly, catching her retreating hand before it escaped from his arm.

"I know why Corrie calls you 'Other Fellow,'" he welcomed. "It is because you always know the right thing to do."

They looked at each other in the morning brightness, revelling in the fresh wonder of mutual possession.

"This is hurting you," she grieved. "I saw you before you did me, when the cars started—you were thinking that last year you yourself would have been there."

He checked her with the warm brilliance of his smile.

"Not of myself," he denied. "If there was anything to regret, do you think I could remember it since I have you? No, I was thinking that Corrie is barely twenty, that I had trained him and sent him out there in that machine in defiance of his father's wish—in fact, I believe I had an attack of remorseful panic." [Pg 272]

"You did it for Corrie," she gave swift comfort. "Can you suppose that papa and I do not understand that? You could have found drivers already skilled, for your car; instead you troubled to take him and make him what he is now. He is so different from the desperate boy we left, Allan. Whatever happens out there to-day, you have done the best for Corrie."

The feverish activity of the camps was swirling around them. Gerard gently drew the young girl to the place where his private roadster waited, somewhat aside from the centre of action, and put her in the scarlet-cushioned seat. After her paced Corrie's dog and took its place beside her in stately guardianship.

"You can see everything here, and it is not so rough for you," he explained. "Flavia, a year ago I bought this, when I bought the yellow roses on the night before my last drive. Will you let me take off your little glove and put it on your finger, now?"

Her lashes sparkling wet, Flavia bent to him, and in the face of crowds and camps Gerard set his ring on her hand. [Pg 273]

Men were leaning over railings, holding ready watches open. At the repair pit next but one to the Mercury's, the mechanics and men in charge had drawn together in whispering groups.

"Car coming!" the word passed suddenly from lip to lip.

On the summit of the white hill a mile distant, a red signal flag went up. A dark shape darted up over the rise, glanced with incredible swiftness down the incline, disappearing momentarily behind the packed angle, then again shot into view and sped past the grand-stand like a humming projectile; the driver a fixed statue of concentration on the road before him, the mechanic half-turned in his seat to watch for cars behind.

The place burst into uproar.

"Number two! Number two first!"

"Mercury leads!"

Horns were blown, handkerchiefs waved, the applause breaking out anew as a second car rushed past in hot pursuit of the flying Mercury.

"Three! Number three!"

"Oh you Blulette!"

"Here comes another—get back!"

Flavia stooped from her seat.

"Allan, that was Corrie—where is the car that started before him?"

"Tire trouble, perhaps. You are trembling, dear! Let my chauffeur take you home and wait quietly there until I bring Corrie to you after the race." [Pg 274]

She shook her head.

"No, please no. Here I can see him each lap and know he is safe so far. Let me stay."

Two cars thundered past, struggling desperately for place. The noise of the excited people overwhelmed all conversation and left the two lovers silent. From time to time a telephone bell jingled across the tumult, blue-uniformed messengers hurried here and there. But when the last of twenty cars had passed, the twenty-first not appearing, there fell a lull and men settled back to wait for the second lap.

Five minutes passed, ten. The red flags went up again; two speeding shapes topped the rise and plunged out of sight.

"Two and three!"

"The Blulette—no—Mercury leads still!"

Excitement flared high as the two racers reappeared. But as they swept down the straight stretch, the mechanic of the Mercury raised his arms above his head in warning, the car slackened speed and drew to the side of the course. As the Blulette machine fled past him, Corrie brought his car to a halt opposite the judges' stand, leaning toward the official who sprang to his side.

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"The America's off the second bridge—send the ambulance to the road below," he called, his ringing voice penetrating bell-clear through the heavier sounds.

Before his grim message was fairly comprehended, he had slammed into a gear and was off to regain the sacrificed moment.

There was a brief flurry in the official stand. One man seized the telephone while another went slowly to the lost car's camp. From lip to lip the news went.

"Harry was married last week," observed an oil-smeared mechanic, touching his cap to Gerard in going by. "I guess there's no show after that tumble; Rose might as well have saved his time."

"There is more than one prize in a contest," Gerard disagreed, meeting Flavia's awed eyes. "Corrie Rose may win better than a gold cup."

"Corrie—?" she faltered.

"Corrie has given his leading place and one of his hoarded fragments of time—these races are won or lost by scant minutes—for the bare chance that his report might send aid to the injured men a little sooner than if that task were left to the frightened witnesses of the disaster."

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Flavia's small head lifted proudly, bright color flashed into the countenance whose loving faith had never failed Corrie in his hours of disgrace.

"I wish papa had seen," she longed wistfully. And after a moment: "You yourself have done the same; he told me so, once. Now you have taught him to do what you never can do any more, poor Allan."

A curious expression crossed Gerard's mobile face; hesitation and doubt blended with a luminous radiance shining from some inward thought that leaped up like a clear flame. He moved as if to speak impulsively, but Flavia had turned to watch the approach of a rushing car, and he remained silent.

In the next hour, the Mercury passed the grand-stand five times; sometimes alone, sometimes the quarry of a coursing group of speed-hounds whose flaming breath was close behind, sometimes itself curving around some slower rival amid the wave-like succession of cheers. The bulletin-board showed Corrie running in third place when he passed for the sixth time, with Rupert stretched along the edge of the car to relieve his cramped limbs in an ease that suggested imminent death by falling.

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The seventh time the Mercury did not come around. Gerard, who had been in front, returned to Flavia with his steadying reassurance.

"Tire trouble, no doubt," he told her. "He is due to have some; his luck has been astonishing in escaping it so far. He is driving to win; no car ever held the lead from start to finish."

Flavia folded her hands in her lap, not trusting herself far enough to reply. Gerard studied his watch in silent calculation, as the minutes ticked past.

"It must have been two tires," he at last hazarded. "When one blows out while actually on a turn, the other is almost certain to follow. Of course, they might have engine trouble."

A French car rolled up to its repair pit, stopped, and suddenly burst into flames. There was a wild scramble among its force of attendants, a rush with fire extinguishers and pails of sand. Before the danger was realized, it had ended and the mechanics were at work upon the choked pipe which had sent the car to its camp.

"Oh!" gasped the young girl, rising.

Gerard stopped her, pointing to the white hill. The roar of an approaching car filled the air; as

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Flavia looked, the Mercury shot past, running faultlessly, but carrying two spare tires where she had started with four.

"They will be in, next lap," Gerard predicted. "Rupert won't want to run with only two extra tires on board, and I don't think Corrie will overrule him."

He went forward to give some directions to prepare for the flying visit, Flavia watching. She made no demand for attention, no betrayal of feminine timidity to hamper this man's world into which she had been brought. Men looked curiously at the delicate, serious girl who sat so quietly in the Mercury camp, but gradually the information crept out that she was Rose's sister and Gerard's fiancée, so that wonder became merely admiration.

True to expectation, the Mercury halted before her repair pit, on the next circuit.

"Cases," commanded Rupert, tersely, out of his seat before the stop. "Move quick! Who's nailed fast now?"

The slur was undeserved; the waiting tires were flung on and secured by hurrying hands.

"Drink it," Gerard ordered, thrusting a cup at Corrie, as that young driver leaned wearily back. "I don't care whether you want it or not." [Pg 279]

"It's the people," Corrie explained, his blue eyes seeking Gerard's across the goggles. "I don't mind anything else. They're over the course so you can't see ahead. Jim hit a woman, on the back stretch, as we passed."

He put the heavy china cup to his lips, but dropped it with a crash to seize his levers as Rupert bounded in beside him.

"Have the people cleared off," he petitioned over his shoulder, while sending his car forward.

Gerard went to the judges' stand.

Corrie Rose was not the first or only driver to complain of the packed course. The Mercury had scarcely departed when the Marathon car came in, its experienced and steel-fibred pilot on the brink of nervous breakdown.

"I won't drive if the mob isn't put off the road," he defied his manager. "I've killed a woman back there—do you hear? A *woman*! There are women and kids right against the wheels on the worst turns. Get 'em off!"

The Marathon force flocked around him in consternation, while his manager ran to the judges and the owner of the car implored and adjured the recalcitrant driver to go on without further loss of time. But it was Gerard who saved the situation for his rival. [Pg 280]

"It's all right, Jim," he called across, issuing from the official stand and comprehending the deadlock at sight. "You only broke her leg—a telephone report came. Go on; everyone's with you, man!"

The Marathon's mechanic, wise in knowledge of his pilot, at this juncture leaned over and thrust between Jim's lips a lighted cigar.

"Buck up! We're losin'," he urged roughly.

The driver's teeth sullenly clamped shut upon the strong tobacco; he slammed viciously into a gear and hurled his machine down the course before the startled camp realized its victory. The stop had lasted exactly three minutes, but it cost the Marathon its hope of the race.

The morning advanced, gaining in sun-gilt beauty. In the next hour four racers were taken from the contest, three by mechanical difficulties, one as the result of an accident that sent both driver and mechanic to the hospital. The Mercury continued to run steadily and evenly, keeping a consistent pace.

"How much longer?" Flavia anxiously questioned, once. "Do you think everything can stay right to the very end, Allan?"

Gerard laid his warm left hand over her cold one, as it rested on the cushions, his loving eyes caressing her. [Pg 281]

"Two hours more, my Flavia. Most surely I believe everything can stay right; why not? Remember Corrie delights in this. He is happier now than when he is what we call at rest. If," again that singular expression of blended shadow and inward illumination rose over his face, "if I were to be made myself and wholly cured, it would not change Corrie's position in Corrie's eyes. I cannot help him there in that hard part, but I have given him a way to forget for a while."

Her soft mouth bent grievously; Flavia's attention was effectually distracted from contemplation of her brother's bodily peril.

Gerard turned aside. He had heard the reports arrive of one accident after another, he saw driver after driver come in gray-lipped and savage under the strain of racing on the crowded path, and he knew what Flavia did not—that this was proving the most disastrous affair ever held on the Cup course.

"I don't mind risking my own neck, I'm used to that," gritted an old-time comrade to Gerard, during a pause for refilling tanks. "It's the people under foot; — them! Haven't they any sense? Jim's Marathon hit a man, ten minutes ago; he's still driving, half crazy, because he can't stop. *Damn* the country police!"

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"Rose——?"

"Rose is changing tires at the Westbury turn. I'm off."

That bit of news spared a bad quarter-hour to the two who loved Corrie.

Gerard was at the front of the camp, watching for his car, when he felt a hand lain on his shoulder.

"Some racer just went off the turnpike into the ditch," Mr. Rose's subdued tones informed him. "Where's Corrie?"

"Safe; changing tires on this side of the turnpike," Gerard gave quick assurance. "It's not he. But this has been a bad day; I'm not surprised that you couldn't keep away from here."

"I couldn't keep away," Mr. Rose assented heavily. He drew out his handkerchief and passed it across his forehead, damp under the line of reddish-gray hair, pushing open his overcoat with the abrupt gesture that was also a habit of his son's. "I've had a hell of an hour where I was, Gerard. This morning I got a letter from my niece, Isabel. It seems she is married and her husband made her write it."

The two men looked fully at each other; some quality in Thomas Rose's expression communicated its white reflection to Gerard's changing face.

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"He never did it—Corrie, I mean. Gerard, Isabel Rose threw the wrench that struck you and wrecked your car, last year. He's been shielding her. God, how I've ground it into the boy!"

There was a tall pile of spare tires beside them; on it Gerard put his hand, steadying himself against the shock that was less of surprise than of poignant self-reproach for his own failure to divine this open riddle. In that moment of final understanding, he knew that he had seen the pitiful truth rise to the surface of Corrie's blue eyes a hundred times, and had left its appeal to die out, unanswered.

Far down the course a ripple of cheering started, running nearer in a wave of gathering volume. Out around the curve swooped a gray streak, fled toward the camps, was opposite, and past. The Mercury was unleashed and hunting down its lost lead in the fastest speed of the day.

Mr. Rose brought his eyes from following its flight to meet Gerard's gaze.

"You remember how Isabel nagged him to take her around the race course in his pink machine," he reminded. "I forbade it and thought no more about the thing. Well, she got him alone—you know, I guess, that he was wild with boy's near-love for her and would have let her drag the heart out of his body—and she got his promise to take her around once. She worked the plan all out; Corrie started without his mechanic, and she waited for him a mile down the course, dressed in her riding-habit and wearing a man's cap and motor-mask. She figured that no one would notice her much on the road and Corrie could drop her off after making the circuit, just before he reached the camps, so that he would come in alone as he started and no one would be the wiser. They were just a couple of fool kids on a kid lark."

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A yellow car roared to a stop beside them, interrupting clamorously. From his seat its mechanic fell rather than stepped.

"He smashed his wrist cranking her," the driver raged. "Someone else—quick!"

A blue-clad factory mechanic flung himself into the vacant place, bare-headed, without coat or mask.

"Here's my chance!" he exulted. "Go on, I'm it."

The car leaped out, no second wasted in parley. Men gathered up the injured mechanic and hurried him away. Mr. Rose looked on as if at a stage scene which did not interest him, and dully resumed his narrative.

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"It worked all right, Gerard, until they met you on the back stretch and you challenged Corrie to race. He didn't want to, with her along, but she devilled him to go on, and he did. I can guess it went to his head, having her beside him. When you began cutting Corrie off so he couldn't pass by, he caught the joke right enough. She says he was laughing when he began to pitch odd screws and bolts at your car—he was never angry for a moment, just playing, as you were. But she was all excited over losing; when she saw he had both hands busy and you were forcing them back again, she snatched something out of the open box Corrie had got the bolts from and threw it at you, herself. She didn't know what she had thrown or done, until she saw you fall stunned across your steering-wheel and your car plunge off the road."

"I might have known," said Gerard, and turned his face to the course he did not see.

"*You* might have known!" flared Mr. Rose. "What was the matter with *me*? Hadn't I lived with Corwin B. Rose since he was born and never had seen him cheat or play foul, win or lose? He was

straight, always. I should have known when he wouldn't talk—he never was afraid to speak out and take his licking. Oh yes, I belong to the brutal common people and Corrie wasn't brought up by moral suasion; he had more than one flogging before he was fourteen and we called him a man. And he never lied to dodge one. I went back on him; he never did on me."

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The gay tumult of the tensely-strung multitude was in their ears, the band-music crashed blatant aid to the excitement. With a humming purr and rush the Mercury car shot past again, followed by the long roll of applause.

"We're leading by a minute and a half," one of Gerard's men triumphed, running past on some errand. "Oh you Rosie!"

"He stopped his machine as soon as he could, and put Isabel out," Mr. Rose continued sombrely. "She says herself that she was scared sick and begged him to save her. I can guess that part. Anyhow, he told her to go home and say nothing, that he would take care of her. He did. If it hadn't been for your protecting him, that morning, he might have ended in State's prison. I don't suppose she would ever have cleared him if she hadn't fallen in love with one of those Southerners she has been visiting, and blurted out the truth when he proposed, the other day. He put her in a buggy, drove over to the nearest clergyman, and married her then and there; then gave her paper and pen and made her write the whole story to me. He is a gentleman; he'd stand with her for whatever she had done, but he would not stand for her leaving Corrie to bear her blame. I'll make it up to him, yet!"

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"Does Flavia know?" Gerard asked.

"I gave her Isabel's letter on the way across to you."

Flavia was sitting in the car with her wet handkerchief clasped in her folded hands, her veils drawn across the hushed beauty of her face. As Gerard came up, she bent to him.

"Corrie," she breathed. "Corrie, to do this! I am proud and glad and humbled. How could he, how could he?"

"He has more courage than I," Gerard gravely acknowledged. "I could not have done it. A superb folly, unjust to himself and us. He might safely have confided in his father or me and have trusted Isabel to our care."

"Allan, she had his promise to tell no one and she held him to it. She was ill and hysterical with terrified shame; Isabel never could endure to be found at fault even in little things. She was not bad or wicked, but just a coward."

"She found strength enough to watch Corrie under torture week after week," he retorted, his golden-brown eyes hardening to agate. "If I had been killed under my car, Flavia, do you realize that Rupert would have brought your brother face to face with the electric chair? And Corrie would have shut his lips and endured it all. Don't ask me to pity Isabel Rose—I've lived this year with her victim."

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Trembling under the control forced on herself, Flavia slipped her hand into his.

"I know, Allan, I know. Yet she did suffer to see his suffering. In her letter, she says that Corrie came to her at dawn, the last morning we were all at home, and called her out into the empty hall to beseech her for permission to tell you. He had not been to bed that night, at all. She never afterward forgot his desperate, worn face and that memory finally drove her to confession. But she refused him. He did break down then, and flashed out at her that he must and would tell you the truth, when he left her. Of course he did not do so. Allan, she declares that he then told you, that she knows it because you wrote to her that evening about your accident and said you would take care of Corrie whatever happened."

"I!"

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"Your letter to me. She had been insane with dread all day, believing Corrie would fulfil his threat to tell you his innocence, and when Rupert came she saw only that idea confirmed. She knew of no relations between you and me. She thought only of herself."

Gerard looked at her, having no words; presently he sat down on the edge of the car at her feet, and they continued silent, hand in hand. Mr. Rose had found a camp-chair in the shadow of a wall, and sat watching the race in grim quiescence.

When the last hour of the contest was reached, it was noted that the Mercury car had suddenly slackened its pace. The difference in speed was not great; the car was running faultlessly, but keeping a slower gait. The men in the Mercury camp clustered together, waiting and discussing.

The car came around on the next lap with the condition hardly improved. Rupert was neither watching behind nor busied with his usual duties, but sat erect in his seat with one arm around Corrie's shoulders, apparently talking in the driver's ear, head bent to head. Neither glanced toward the row of repair pits or the grand-stand, as they passed between and on out of view. Gerard's brows contracted sharply; he uttered an excuse to Flavia and went front.

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"Morton's giving out, too," the manager of the next camp imparted confidentially, joining him. "The road-bed is rotten, the men say. Ten feet of it caved in at one turn. Too bad!"

"Rose had no sleep last night," Gerard briefly excused his driver.

"God, how I've ground it into the boy," Corrie's father had said; and Gerard could have echoed the cry, looking back at what he had meant for kindness.

The moments dragged, the next scant quarter-hour stretched long. But at last the Mercury's vibrant voice rolled down the white road, approaching. Up to her camp the car sped, and stopped.

Before the halt was effected, Rupert had snatched off the driver's suffocating mask, leaning over him.

"Oil, gas," he demanded generally. "Jump for those tanks, *quick*. Here, Rose——"

His white, fatigue-drawn face bared to the fresh wind, Corrie tried to speak, but instead let his head fall forward on his arm as it rested upon the steering-wheel.

"Rose, you low-down quitter, you punk chauffeuse!" Rupert stormed at him. "You going to chuck up a won race? You mollycoddle——Water, you fellows——can't you even wait on a real man? Here, Rose, you ain't anything but a fake!" [Pg 291]

He carefully splashed the water over the boyish forehead, streaks of grime trickling over them both.

"Fill the tanks," Corrie gasped, lying passive under the rough treatment. "I'm ready to go on—tell me when."

Gerard was beside the car.

"Corrie," he began.

Rupert unexpectedly flamed out at him across the prostrate figure:

"Let him alone! He ain't a Sandow and the driving's hell. He's going on, I tell you. Here, Rose, get some class into you, what?"

But Gerard had a better tonic than cold water or stinging abuse. He silenced the mechanic with a glance and laid his hand on Corrie's arm.

"Corrie, your cousin has told us the truth," he said. "We know, now, who caused the wreck of my car last year."

Corrie started so violently as to overturn the jug in Rupert's hand and send its contents over them both, his avid blue eyes flashed wide to Gerard.

"Isabel——?" [Pg 292]

"Isabel has told us that your companion threw the wrench that struck me, and why you bore the charge. You stand cleared."

Corrie slowly drew himself erect in his seat, brushing the water from his eyes and pushing back his wet clusters of fair hair. It was not so much color as vital life that flowed into his face, mechanically he reached for his mask.

"Thanks," he answered. "I can drive, now."

"Tanks full," shouted a score of voices.

Men scattered from around the car's wheels in expectation of the start, Gerard stepped back. But Corrie turned in his seat and held out his hand to the speechless Rupert.

"You heard—now do it," he required.

Still dumb, the mechanic dragged off his glove and gave for the race's finish the hand-clasp that he had denied for its start.

The Mercury sprang from her camp with a roar of unloosed power and speed-lust. Car and driver splendid mates, they fled in pulsating vigor down their white path where the sun was shining.

During the rest of the hour, people stood up in seats and automobiles, watching the Mercury Titan. Not before had they witnessed driving like that, never again could the driver himself equal that inspired flight. [Pg 293]

Just sixty-nine seconds ahead of his nearest rival, Corrie Rose brought his car across the line. As he halted the Mercury before the judges, the people burst out over the course and overwhelmed the victors. Music, clicking cameras, cheers and congratulations—the current of gayety swirled around the winning racer. The first to grasp Corrie's hand was the official starter who had sent him out six hours before, the second was the driver of the barely-defeated Marathon. After that, there was no record possible.

It was some time before Corrie and Rupert could be rescued from the enthusiastic press of admirers. When at last the Mercury came over to its own camp, Gerard was first able to bring Flavia to her brother.

Stiff, weary and dishevelled, Corrie descended from his car, tripping impatiently over the flowers someone had placed in it. There was a perfunctory quality in the tenderness with which he kissed Flavia, as there had been a restive haste in his acceptance of his present ovation. Now, he turned

his candid eyes full to Gerard's, baring his inmost need to the one who always understood.

"I want my father," said Corrie Rose.



THE PEOPLE BURST OUT OVER THE COURSE AND OVERWHELMED THE VICTORS

Very lovingly Gerard put his arm around the slim shoulders and drew his master-driver to a tent behind the repair pit, there left him to enter alone and went back to Flavia. [Pg 294]

"I put twelve ham sandwiches and my will in the locker, there," he found Rupert sweetly explaining to the young girl. "I guessed I'd have use for one or the other by this time. And I guess I guessed right. Oh, no—I'll be able to take my regular nourishment just the same, when we get back; this won't count. I," he sent Gerard a glance of saturnine intelligence, "I've got myself all tired out here lately trying to keep on disliking Rose."

"Allan, have you thought that we are going home?" Flavia asked, lifting her happy face to her lover, as he stood over her. "*Home*; papa and Corrie, and you and I, who were so far apart."

"I have thought that you would put on that lace frock you wore the last evening I saw you there, only this time you will come where I can touch you. Shall I tell you what you looked like that night? You were a golden rose in a sheath of snow, quite out of reach. And you played your dainty music so calmly and smoothly, while I was on fire and seeing rose-color as I listened to your father's stories. I was like poor Cyrano de Bergerac: I had gazed so long at your sun-bright little head that when I looked away my dazzled eyes still saw gold." [Pg 295]

Her red mouth dimpled into soft mischief and daring.

"Shall I tell you what *I* saw while I was playing, Allan? I watched you under my eyelashes—this way—and I wondered whether anyone else ever looked quite so nice even from behind, and, and what it would be like to touch your crinkly hair with one's finger."

"Do it now!"

She declined with an eloquent gesture. Around their enclosure the vast crowds were streaming back to New York, the course was filled from edge to edge with a solid procession of homing automobiles of every type and age. Amid noise and congestion and merriment, Long Island's guests were tramping out.

But comparative quietness had descended upon the row of pits when, half an hour later, Mr. Rose and Corrie strolled casually up to join the other two members of the party.

"I don't know how long you propose to stay here," observed the senior, tolerantly. "Lenoir is waiting with the limousine, and it strikes us it's about time to start for home."

"Chilly wind blowing, too," Corrie suggested, his hands in the pockets of his long gray motor-coat. "Fancy Lenoir lugging this old coat of mine around in the car, Other Fellow, until now. It's a wonder the butterflies haven't eaten it—moths, I mean." [Pg 296]

Gerard and Flavia exchanged a glance of infinitely tender comprehension of these two.

"I want to show you all something, first," Gerard detained them. "We don't want to take any worries home that we can leave here. Give me that ball of tape you put in your pocket this

morning, Corrie."

Astonished, Corrie obeyed.

"Hello, Rupert!" Gerard sent his clear voice across to where that black-eyed mechanic leaned against the Mercury Titan, a hundred feet away. "Catch!"

Rupert promptly turned. The improvised ball in his fingers, Gerard slowly raised both arms above his head in the old graceful gesture, his brilliant amber eyes smiling at his companions, then launched the sphere straight to its goal.

It was not Flavia who found overtaxed nerves give way.

"Gerard! *Gerard!*" Corrie's cry rang out; he sank down on a camp-chair and covered his face.

Alarmed and remorseful, Gerard sprang to him.

"Corrie—don't take it like that! It is all right; I've been fighting for this ten months under a French surgeon's orders." [Pg 297]

"You never told me. Oh, Gerard, Gerard!"

"I did not want to tell you until I was sure the cure was real and permanent. And I was not sure until I met the surgeon in New York, yesterday."

"You could have told me last night. I might have been killed to-day and *never* have known."

Gerard exchanged with Mr. Rose a glance of very sad understanding, a mutual acknowledgment of mutual error.

"Would you have driven the Mercury to-day against your father's wish, if you had known that I should be able to drive my own car next year? I think not. If you were to be taken from me and this life, I wanted you to take with you the memory of this race instead of the humiliation of a withdrawal. And I believed that I was dealing with an unsteadied boy who needed the sharp tonic of work and danger—ah, Corrie, forgive me!—instead of the strongest man in endurance I ever knew. But I would tell no one else until I did you, although," he turned to the radiant girl, "although it was hard not to hold out both hands to Flavia."

She put her hands in both his, then, and felt them close on hers for all time. [Pg 298]

"Rupert knew," Corrie presently divined, as the unsurprised mechanic lounged toward them.

"Yes, Rupert knew," Gerard confirmed. "He helped me go through the treatment each day. One reason I did not tell you what we were doing, was that the process was not very pleasant, and it used to leave me rather upset and sick for a while—you caught me too soon after it that morning you signed the contracts. Don't wince; *you* had nothing to do with my smash."

"But I blamed myself, always!" Corrie stood up, thrusting his hands into his pockets and squaring his shoulders with the sturdy responsibility so easily read now. "I had no business to take Isabel there, and I put the mischief into her head by pitching bolts at you. She couldn't tell it was in fun. I—I would rather have known you'd get well, Gerard, than have known I was cleared."

"Didn't it ever occur to you, Corrie, to blame *us*, when we were so ready to convict you and pass judgment?" countered Gerard.

Checked, Corrie surveyed the three with the ingenuous astonishment of a new point of view.

"Blame you people?" he marvelled. "Why, when I thought what a low brute you had every right to believe I was, I used to feel like thanking you for staying in the same room with me. I—Well, I guess it's time to go home, isn't it? I'll leave you to start." [Pg 299]

"Leave us?" exclaimed Flavia.

"You'll make a line for that limousine right now, Corwin B.," pronounced Mr. Rose, with the familiar easy mastery that was a caress.

His son laughingly shook his fair head.

"No, thanks, sir. I'm going to drive the Mercury Titan home and put it in the garage. Unless," he looked over his shoulder, "unless Rupert is afraid to trust himself to ride with a punk chauffeur and a no-class fake?"

"I ain't real nervous to-day," drawled the mechanic graciously. "Nor I ain't supposing but what you're entitled to a chauffeur's license, Rose."

XVII

[Pg 300]

THE END OF THE ROAD

In the golden afternoon sunlight, when tree-shadows stretched long and velvet-soft across the lawns and terraces of Mr. Rose's park, amid all October's blending fragrances and mellow tints, Corrie Rose came home. After all, it was Jack Rupert who put the Mercury Titan in the garage, opposite the house Corrie; yielding his seat to his mechanic.

"I believe I'll let you take her around; I want to go in with my people," the driver explained. "You might as well get established here, you know, since you are going to stay some time. I," it was so long since anyone had seen that teasing mischief sparkling in Corrie's unclouded eyes, "I have grown so used to your gentle, winning ways that I don't know how to get along without you, Rupert."

Rupert settled himself in the great machine, regarding his companion with dry intelligence.

"I've got more respect for your morals than I had, Rose, and less for your sense," he issued final judgment above the clamor of the motor, before sending the car away.

"Right again," Corrie agreed. He turned and looked up at the house.

[Pg 301]

The three from the limousine were waiting for him upon the columned veranda. Weary, stiff and aching from long exertion, soiled with the dust of course and road, Corrie, victor of that day and of many days, climbed the broad rose-colored steps to them. There was nothing adequate to say, had they been a demonstrative family; as it was, no one considered speech. But at the open door Corrie stopped, turning his bright, clear glance to his father. And Thomas Rose closed his hand on his son's shoulder, so that they crossed the threshold together.

Gerard detained Flavia a pace behind.

"When I see you in the lace gown, I am going to kiss you," he stated firmly. "I do not care how many people are present or where it is. So you had better come down early to the fountain arcade, where I have pictured you more often than you will ever know. Will you, flower-lady?"

"Perhaps," she doubted. "If I think of it."

"Heartsease for thought," said Gerard, and kissed her dimpling mouth.

On the stairs a few minutes later, Corrie overtook his sister and caught her in his arms.

"I need a bath and some fresh rags and—well, everything," he laughed. "I'm not fit to touch—do you mind?"

[Pg 302]

She clasped her arms around his neck, nestling her soft cheek against the rough, grimy cloth of his driving-suit.

"I love you! Oh, my dear, my dear, if mamma had lived, this year could never have happened! Not to you, nor to me."

He looked into her upturned face, realizing with her the difference that might have been wrought by a mother's clairvoyant tenderness and the link of a wife's understanding between her husband and her children. No, without this lack in the household the year's deception could not have endured. If the chain of Roses had not once been broken, it could not have come so near this later destruction.

"Flavia, you know I feel how good they have all been to me? You know what nonsense it was for Allan—he tells me I can't call my own brother 'Gerard'—what nonsense it was for him to suggest that I ever could blame anyone but myself for what I had to stand?"

"I know you feel it so, Corrie."

"Then, I want to say there was only you, Other Fellow, who *never* hurt or made it harder."

"Even—Allan?"

"I think there never was a man so generous as Allan—but, only you. I," he drew a breath of inexpressible content, "I see a bully good life ahead, but I don't see any woman in it, unless I find one like you. And from what I overheard Allan saying, just now when I passed you both at the alcove, he's secured the only perfect angel-girl—"

[Pg 303]

Laughing, warmly flushed, she put her hand across his lips.

But it was that evening, in the glowing richness and repose of the dining-room in the pink marble villa, now reinvested with the dignity of a home, that the core of the late situation was touched.

Once more Allan Gerard was intent upon the study of Flavia's young beauty as she sat near him in the lace gown, this time with his ring flaunting conquest on her fragile hand. Mr. Rose was leaning back and idly watching the ice dissolve in his glass, when Corrie broke the pause, resting his arms on the table and lifting his gay, mirthful face to the man behind his chair:

"Take away those oysters, Perkins! I want my soup right off, and a lot of it. I'm about starved—"

He stopped, himself struck by the words.

The evoked recollections of that last dinner together were too much. Mr. Rose carefully put the glass down, his strong jaw setting. Flavia's large startled eyes flashed wet as they went to her brother.

[Pg 304]

"Corrie, Corrie, I can understand how you began," escaped Gerard impulsively. "But how could you carry it on month after month?"

The ruddy color ran up to Corrie's forehead, he looked down at the table, sobered.

"It didn't take me long to see I made an awful bungle of things," he confessed, half-shy and hesitant. "And it got worse and worse as I saw what I had done to you people. Yet I'd given my word. I guess you'll understand a lot more than I can say; as Allan will understand, now, why I couldn't help knocking down that tramp who wanted money because I belonged in prison and wasn't there. It was all too much for me to think out! But—isn't there something said about a fellow who puts his hand to the plough not taking it off? I used to say that over to myself, when—well, at night, for instance. I might have been a chump, but it seemed up to me to keep on with the work I had started, and—and not to flinch."

"Dear, if you had only spared yourself what you could," Flavia grieved. "You could have said it was an accident, at least; that you never meant to hurt Allan." [Pg 305]

Corrie's violet-blue eyes laughed out of their eclipse and sought his father.

"Not much, Other Fellow! No tricks for mine; I had to tell just the truth or shut up. No, sir, whatever he *looked* like, Corrie Rose had to plough a straight furrow."

"Straight furrows lead home," said Allan Gerard, not sententiously, but musingly.

He also looked toward Mr. Rose, and the senior nodded slow agreement.

"They do, Gerard. And we get more, sometimes, than we've any right to expect from anything we give. Where we spent this summer, Flavia and I liked the people. What we did for them didn't cost us much; we were not looking for any returns. But the news of it got out, somehow, and was cabled to New York days before we arrived here. One of the journals got the story and worked up a Sunday article about what an American millionaire had done for Val de Rosas, and interviewed a certain Luis Cárdenas and his wife, Elvira, whom Flavia had brought together—it seems they are happy and prospering well, my girl—and printed the whole thing along with a photograph of Corrie in his racing clothes, as my son. New York papers go everywhere. The Southerner whom Isabel was in love with brought that article about her family to her, as an excuse for an early call, the morning he asked her to marry him. She says, herself, it was the picture of Corrie in the motor dress she last had seen him wear on the day of the accident, that broke her up so, and when her lover proposed she told him the whole truth. If I hadn't paid the taxes for Val de Rosas, Corrie would have been bearing a false charge yet." [Pg 306]

The silence held many thoughts; a silence broken by Corrie himself.

"To-morrow we'll write a jolly note to Isabel," he affirmed contentedly. "She doesn't need to worry on her honeymoon, poor kid; she has squared up. There doesn't seem to be any need for anyone to worry, ever, while they're trying to keep straight, since the scheme is a Square Deal, you know."

The two older men exchanged a glance.

"I guess some of us need more than a square deal, Corwin B.," his father pronounced. "But it's all right; we get that, too."

THE END.

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Transcriber's Note

The frontispiece was moved to the relevant location ([Page 293](#)).

Hyphenation has been made consistent.

Quotation marks were added or removed to standardize usage.

Spelling was changed on possible typographical errors (crysanthemum, boquet, Pittsburg, circumstancial, and villian.)

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