

The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Shadow, by Mary White Ovington

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: The Shadow

Author: Mary White Ovington

Release Date: July 6, 2010 [EBook #33101]

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SHADOW ***

**E-text prepared by David Edwards, Mary Meehan,
and the Project Gutenberg Online Distributed Proofreading Team
(<http://www.pgdp.net>)
from page images generously made available by Internet Archive
(<http://www.archive.org>)**

Note: Images of the original pages are available through Internet Archive. See <http://www.archive.org/details/theshadow00ovinuoft>

THE SHADOW

BY MARY WHITE OVINGTON

AUTHOR OF "HALF A MAN"

**NEW YORK
HARCOURT, BRACE AND HOWE
1920**

**COPYRIGHT, 1920, BY
HARCOURT, BRACE AND HOWE, INC.**

**THE QUINN & BODEN COMPANY
RAHWAY, N. J.**

**TO
MY MOTHER**

CONTENTS

[PROLOGUE](#)

[I. THE PINES](#)

[CHAPTER I](#)

[CHAPTER II](#)

[CHAPTER III](#)

[CHAPTER IV](#)

[CHAPTER V](#)

[CHAPTER VI](#)

[CHAPTER VII](#)

[CHAPTER VIII](#)

[CHAPTER IX](#)

[CHAPTER X](#)

[CHAPTER XI](#)

[CHAPTER XII](#)

[II. KATHLEEN](#)

[CHAPTER XIII](#)

[CHAPTER XIV](#)

[CHAPTER XV](#)

[CHAPTER XVI](#)

[CHAPTER XVII](#)

[CHAPTER XVIII](#)

[CHAPTER XIX](#)

[CHAPTER XX](#)

[CHAPTER XXI](#)

[CHAPTER XXII](#)

[CHAPTER XXIII](#)

[CHAPTER XXIV](#)

[III. DICK](#)

[CHAPTER XXV](#)

[CHAPTER XXVI](#)

[CHAPTER XXVII](#)

[CHAPTER XXVIII](#)

[CHAPTER XXIX](#)

[CHAPTER XXX](#)

[CHAPTER XXXI](#)

[CHAPTER XXXII](#)

[CHAPTER XXXIII](#)

[CHAPTER XXXIV](#)

[IV. THE LIVE OAKS](#)

[CHAPTER XXXV](#)

[CHAPTER XXXVI](#)

[CHAPTER XXXVII](#)

THE SHADOW

PROLOGUE

When George Ogilvie, distinguished Judge of Palmetto County, Florida, read of the death in the papers—the quick death after the surgeon's knife—he felt glad and inexpressibly relieved. To play the part of avenger was sadly out of keeping with his gentle temperament. His wife could have done it without a qualm but since this was not permitted her she would in time have forced the role upon him. Fate, however, had taken her revenge without using him as her instrument, and the man who had brought disgrace into his home had slipped from the world honored by his associates, without visible taint upon his career. Remembering this, the Judge's sense of relief changed to a desire to play the familiar role, to sit himself upon the throne of justice and pronounce sentence upon this fresh-faced, laughing, persuasive criminal. Would he at the Most High Tribunal be given his full penalty?

But this autumn night, as the wind howled about the old house shaking the windows in their frames, as the rain tore the leaves from the branches and beat them upon the sodden ground, he almost wished the lad was alive again. He would then find some way to tie the loose, careless life

to the life that it had maimed, to the life it had brought into existence. In this driving storm of circumstance that a week since had hurled a human being out of the world and last night had brought a second to take its place, he found himself helpless. His long career, a career in which he had decided with quiet assurance the guilt or innocence of men and women standing fearful before him, was of no assistance. This was not another man's problem but his own. He poured himself a drink from the old, ruby-glass decanter upon the sideboard, and found his hand trembling so that the liquor was spilled upon the cloth. His head swirled with the swirling leaves that the rain tore from their sockets. All that he had believed and preached was taken from him by his own world's tragic storm.

In the south room, however, it was peaceful and quiet. The wind spent its strength in the north, and here one could listen to the creak of the chair as the old nurse rocked slowly back and forth. Near her, on the bed, upon her back, was a young girl. Her curling brown hair lay a braid on either side of her delicate face. Her eyes were closed, but not in sleep, for every now and then she would move her right arm as though to draw something toward her. At length, opening her eyes, and looking to the far corner of the room, she said: "Mammy, I want it."

The old colored woman left her seat and walked to where a cradle stood. "Not right now, lil' lamb."

"Why not?"

"It done sleep now."

The girl turned upon her side and, crooking her arm, rested her head within it. She listened, her brow slightly wrinkled, to the rain as it beat upon the roof of the gallery.

Presently: "Why doesn't it cry, mammy?"

"Ain't I tole yer, chile, it done sleep. Ain't I tole yer?"

Downstairs the man of the house had stepped across the hall and joined a little thin old gentleman who sat close to a blazing fire.

"Doctor!"

"Yes, George."

"Remember Lillias when you gave her to me, eighteen years ago?"

"What of it?"

"Nothing. How helpless she was. I reckon all baby things are helpless." In lowered voice: "That baby upstairs now. It seems worse being a girl."

The doctor made no reply, but crouched by the fire.

"It's up to us what their lives shall be, eh? Queen or beggar maid."

The man of the house looked forlornly at his silent visitor. "Have a drink?" he asked suddenly. "I'll get you one. Julia fixed it mighty well getting the servants out of the way, but it don't make for hospitality."

Turning on him, the doctor raised his head and said, querulously: "Stop talking, can't you, man, and think. What are you going to do?"

What was he going to do? He, Judge Ogilvie, did not know what he was going to do. He looked helplessly into his friend's eyes.

Rising wearily the doctor went toward the door.

"You aren't going?" the man of the house cried in alarm.

"Yes, for a little. I've other work to do."

"See here, don't leave us like this! Supposing anything happens."

"Nothing should happen; only remember she is very weak. I should fear a shock."

"But what are we going to do?"

"Talk with your wife." The doctor spoke with a note of command. "I'm not the one to say what you should do." He pulled on his coat and, turning, held out his hand to his friend. "I'll be back soon," he said more gently. "I'll be with you through the night."

Then he opened the door upon the howling wind and rain and was gone.

Judge Ogilvie walked back into the living-room to see his wife standing before the open fire.

She was a small woman, with a small, hard mouth. Usually it was firmly set, but to-night it trembled with her trembling chin. The judge noted that the old dress she wore, long discarded, was wet; that her hair lay damp against her forehead. Her hands, too, were wet, as she held them out to the flames.

"Where's the doctor?" she asked.

"Gone, for a little."

"And Lillias?"

"She has been quiet for some time. But you have been with her; you should know."

"No," the woman answered, "I have been acting for Lillias while you two have gaped and talked and risked her future with every hour. Something has been done."

"Yes?" The man of the house found his heart beating fast, but he put his question quietly, deliberately. "You have had many plans. Which have you used?"

"I've hidden it; hidden her shame. It can never cross her path in this world."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I've not committed murder." She clenched her trembling hands together. "Not that it mightn't be the best thing. But it's buried, buried. You will never see it again."

"Buried?"

"Buried from the world into which it was born. Hidden in the sure way that one in the South can hide. I did it myself," she went on in a whisper. "I put some money in its dress and carried it in my arms that no one might know. I went through the alleys over the slippery road. The blacks' cabin was empty, and I hid it on the bed."

"God! A white child! And you did this thing!"

The man of the house for a moment faced his wife as judge.

"Yes," she answered, looking full into his stern face. "I left it there. And I was right, I was right! You wanted to do something to hide the disgrace. You said you did, you and the doctor both. But you talked and talked, and sat here by the fire. Well, something is done now. We've saved our daughter from disgrace. Let the baby begin an outcast. It's better than becoming one at eighteen."

Then of a sudden her strength left her, and she fell, sobbing, into a chair.

"You'll tell her, George?" she asked after a few moments. "She will know it's for the best. But you are so quiet and gentle, and she must have no shock."

"Yes," he answered slowly, "she must have no shock, but she will mind very much. If she cries bitterly, may I bring it back?"

"No, no!" His wife faced him in arms again. And then, more quietly, "For her sake, no."

"For her sake," he repeated to himself, and left the room.

As he walked up the stairs a great dog rose from where it lay in the hallway and, following, rubbed his nose in his master's hand.

"Go back!" he commanded as he reached the door of the south room. "Likely you'll be a comfort later, but go back now."

He went to the side of the bed and found his daughter lying, her eyes wide open, looking out on the rain. He laid his hand gently upon her head and she drew it down and kissed it. She had always known that he would never fail her in his tender sympathy.

"The baby has slept a long time," she whispered. "Bring it to me, please."

He stooped and kissed her.

"It's a little girl, and it looks like you. It does truly."

He stroked her forehead again, but did not speak.

She roused herself and turned her head toward the dark corner of the room. "Bring it to me, mammy!" she called.

The old woman walked to the cradle and made as though to lift a child from the blankets, but her arms were empty.

"Bring it to me!"

"Lillias!" her father was at her side where she sat erect staring at the cradle. "Lillias, darling, your mother thought it best."

"Bring it to me!"

The old woman drew aside the blankets and showed an empty bed. "Chile," she moaned, "dis ain't my work."

There was a long silence; then the girl sank back in the sheets and turned toward the window. "You might have let me kiss it good-by," she said.

Her back was to them both and again she laid her head in the crook of her arm. Her breath came

softly, so very softly that what time it died away neither of the watchers knew.

But when her father again touched her forehead it was quite cold, and he felt as though another baby had been sent away to be hidden out in the rain.

I

THE PINES

CHAPTER I

In the far south of the United States, where through the winter months the sun holds in warmth the blue encircling sky, opening the buds of the roses in December, where palmetto and white sand meet deep green swamp and heavily scented magnolia, there flows a great river. From its narrow source it deepens and widens until toward the end of its course it becomes an estuary, and for many miles dwellers on one side can dimly distinguish the contour of the opposite shore. The dwellers, as it happens, are not many, and the little boat that makes its daily trip to and from the busy city at the river's mouth is not overburdened with freight or passengers. It zigzags from shore to shore, stopping at one port for timber, at another to land an itinerant preacher, at a third to receive a fragrant load of oranges or grapefruit destined for a market in the north.

Merryvale is one of the oldest and most important of its stops. As long as the state has had a history there has been a Merryvale living on the river bank. In the days when the alligators climbed up the long wharf to sun themselves, and the moccasins dropped from the overhanging trees into the stream, the Merryvales owned thousands of acres at the water's edge and other thousands back in the pine forests. Then there was a Merryvale in Congress and another in the State Senate, while scores of slaves tilled the land and tended the cherished orange groves. But with the passing of time the alligators slipped from the wharf, the moccasins retreated to where gunshots were less frequent, and vast stretches of pines and of river-front passed into other hands.

Nevertheless, in the year 1910, when Lee Merryvale came back from college, there was astonishingly little apparent change in the old estate. To be sure, the timber had been depleted, acres of pines had been shipped down the river to some sawmill; and, worse, noble trees had been gashed in the trunks, their lifeblood drawn from them, drop by drop, and then left to decay and fall. But the hyacinth still choked the river near its bank where the gaunt cows waded in to chew the tough leaves, and the great house at the front among the live-oaks and the little cabins in the rear among the pines held descendants of old masters and old slaves and viewed life in much the timeworn way.

You approached Merryvale, of course, from the water; only the ignorant newcomer drove or motored the weary miles along the sandy road from the railway station. The true approach from the city was up the wide river for some three or four hours to the Merryvale landing. Here, disembarking with a friendly good-by from the captain, you walked down the long wharf, and, turning to the right, followed a narrow path in the white sand until you came out upon the great house.

Unchanged since the first Merryvale built it many decades ago, it stands a beautiful mansion of cool, high-ceilinged rooms and broad hallways. Across the front, which faces east, are spacious verandas or galleries that protect the rooms from the summer heat and afford pleasant places to sun oneself on chill winter days. The kitchen and sheds, screened by hardy bamboo, are in the rear; but at the front, before the house, as far as the bank at the river's edge, is a broad open expanse that in the North would be a lawn, but that here is sand dotted with tufts of grass and strewn with fallen leaves. For the glory of the open space is the live-oaks. These immense spreading trees stand well apart with huge roots that twist along the ground to disappear in the sand, there to send out other roots whose hungry mouths drink up the hidden moisture. The leaves are small, a dark rich green; but neither the leaves nor the great trunks attract your gaze; you are fascinated by the bunches of white, fibrous moss that hang from each bough. On a still day they are motionless, but the slightest breeze sends them softly waving, and in a storm they swing back and forth, the wind tearing through their long, thin strands, dragging off a bit here and a bit there, but in the end leaving them still companions of the live-oak. Birds use the moss for their nests, and probably no child in the Merryvale household has failed at some time to fashion of the soft fibres a long white beard with which to make the magic change from youth to venerated age. On either side of the house, extending in both directions, are orange groves, and back of the groves comes the second world, the world of the black folk.

As the world of the rulers has been among the live-oaks, so the world of the workers has been among the pines. Back of the great house you come to the clearing dotted with cabins that belong to the period before the war, rough affairs of hewn logs, well-ventilated by their many cracks. Whether of logs or the more modern clapboard, they are all set on supports away from the earth,

and under their flooring hens with their chickens move about industriously scratching with their toes and penetrating the inhospitable-looking sand with their strong beaks. Occasionally a dog or a pig joins them and there is a general, but since they are all good friends, quite senseless cackle of dissent. Numberless weeds grow in the sand and flowers are about all the cabins; in the spring, violets and red lilies, in the summer, cosmos and zinnias, and the year through, red roses at the cabin doors.

Kindly monotony has been the keynote of Merryvale. To live on what you have, parting when necessary with a piece of timberland among the pines or a stretch of acres at the waterfront, this has been the history for many years at the great house. And monotony has triumphed, too, among the pines. After the war there were heart-throbbings and a sense of portentous changes; but when freedom had come and gone; when the Negro learned that he was still wholly dependent upon his old master, a liberated laborer but without the tools that made possible a new life, he turned to work again in his old surroundings at his familiar tasks. Industrious and ambitious colored fathers and mothers at Merryvale had been known to save enough to buy their homes; but their children, fed too by ambition, left them for the North. Thus Aunt Lucindy had a son who was head waiter in a hotel in Philadelphia, and Brother Jonathan's daughter made a thousand dollars a year teaching school in Washington. These depletions, so common in the country that pours her best stock into the city, held the settlement back. Altogether, the old place was full of pleasant, uneventful life touched with kindly decay.

And then Merryvale experienced a change. It came to black Merryvale first. In 1905 the colored school lacked a teacher and the colored Methodist church a preacher. These positions had been held by the same person who, to the lasting benefit of the community, was called to a wider field. Word came that the Church was sending a worthy and well-known brother who had filled a pulpit in a distant city, but whose failing health necessitated a change. With him was a daughter who would teach school. Then of an autumn evening the Williams family arrived and with them a multitude of envied possessions. Wealth entered the four-roomed cabin that was scrubbed with furious intensity before the white iron beds, the modern cooking-stove, the books—in all, a multitude of bewildering furnishings were placed within its walls. A period of whitewashing followed, of fencing in of chickens and garden, of trimming and pruning. It was as though some modern machine with its driving power, its whirring engine, had dropped into a medieval town.

Brother Williams was a feeble, kindly old man who preached but a short six months before death came and the Methodist church was again without a spiritual guide. After his death the preaching was by an itinerant, but by that time the church had lost its preëminent place in the community life. Salvation was taught indeed, but in a new guise and under a new roof, and the leader and prophet of the new gospel was the school teacher, Brother Williams' daughter Ellen.

Ellen Williams had been educated in one of the Negro colleges, founded shortly after the Civil War by northern philanthropy, and conducted by white women, and she had been filled with an unquenchable zeal to help her race. She went into this poor, remote country school with the zeal of the missionary to Africa; and if she was confronted by no wild beasts or savage chieftains she met with disheartening indifference, with envy and even with malice. But the true missionary burns with so pure a flame that she destroys in her bright fire the obstructions that are placed in her path. Moreover, she is made to rule and men and women obey, first critically, then enthusiastically, her decrees. There were mutterings at Ellen's demands. First the children must be washed beyond the strength and dignity of those who have to tote their every pail of water; then an unprecedented amount of needlework was needed to close up rents; and, last, they must forever give money, money that might go for whisky, for patent medicine, for the lodge or for the church, money needed to fill out the meager four months' salary by the county to the seven months demanded by the teacher as a minimum school year. Like all fanatics, Ellen saw one supreme duty—the bringing of education to the children of Merryvale. Other things, even preaching, might languish if this could be accomplished.

Ellen had her triumph at the end of seven months, when all the pupils of the school took part in the spring exhibition, from five-year-old Samantha Johnson who recited an evening hymn, to twenty-year-old Ebenezer, a half-witted youth and former laughing-stock, who displayed a beautifully woven basket that had already been sold for two dollars to some Rockefeller of the north, ("and the school is to have one dollar of it for books," the teacher said emphatically). The Negro parent is ambitious for his children, he looks forward with unfaltering hope to the recognition of merit that shall come when his boy enters the world and acquits himself like a man. And though the recognition be never accorded, though to the average American the Negro who is not performing humble tasks is a cross between an impudent upstart and a "nigger" minstrel dude, the parent hopes on until death comes and his son, like himself, turns for his hope to his offspring. Ellen had builded on this firm foundation of parental ambition, and after the first year she received the coöperation of the people among whom she had come to give her life. A few evil spirits mocked, but they did not affect the success of the Merryvale school. And indeed marvels can be accomplished in a small community where, day and night, one may keep watch over one's charges, and where the county superintendent is too indifferent or too lazy to interfere with suggestion or criticism. So Ellen, a modern in educational methods, with the zealot's untiring energy, taught her children to keep clean and decent, to work steadily and to relate their study to their daily life. As they learned to write they indited letters to absent uncles and aunts, and (the teacher was judiciously blind to this) begged stamps from old Mr. Merryvale. They did number work, counting their chickens and multiplying their eggs with sober intentness. When readers grew scarce they got the discarded newspapers from the great house, and the older boys

and girls began to watch the happenings in the outer world. They dug in the school garden and planted vegetables in gardens of their own. They even learned to cook and introduced new dishes into the limited regimen of their homes.

It would not have been possible for Ellen to have carried her school to the final triumph of the spring exhibition had she not been in touch with the college, as it was somewhat grandiosely called, at which she had received her education. Gifts of discarded blackboards, old but still useful maps, song-books, tools, many essentials to her undertaking, arrived at odd times on the river boat. Nor could she have kept always well and strong, neatly dressed and abundantly fed, had it not been for her mother's presence. Aunt Maggie, as Mrs. Williams was called, while not as energetic as her daughter was a capable woman who contributed her full part to the school's success. She earned more at laundry-work than Ellen could at teaching; and the two, by selling eggs and chickens and pork, by making jellies and candies for the hotel people four miles away whose laundry more than anything else kept them in funds, lived in decent comfort and put by for the future.

The second change that came to Merryvale dropped upon the great house. Five years after the Williams' advent, Lee Merryvale, only son of an only son, came back from college. He had made but two brief visits home since he had left to take up his freshman work, offering the expense of the trip as his excuse; and while his father missed him more with each year of slackened strength, he confessed that Lee made small demands upon his purse. He would write in affectionate and wondering solicitude that no land need slip from the estate to be converted into bank-checks, and would receive answer from his son that the college had given him a scholarship and that he worked in the summer months. It was wisest not to question but to wait until Lee returned to take up law, the traditional Merryvale profession.

With long explanations, with pacing up and down what remained of the old plantation, Lee Merryvale expounded to his father his ambition to become a grower of vegetables and fruits. In his summer months, it seemed, he had earned his way sweating on other men's farms, and he returned eager to bring life and prosperity to the old place. Other people were making money in his state, northerners of course, and why not he? He knew the secret of northern success—the careful oversight of workers and the willingness to pitch in and do things yourself. What if frost did come every few years and destroy all you had? You made allowance for that in your years of plenty. And so he argued, answering expressed doubts and unexpressed questionings, until at length his father answered: "How should I object when it will keep you by my side? You have your mother's energy."

Lee had only a few recollections of his mother, but one was a bright picture of a young girl with golden-red hair digging energetically at the roots of a rose-bush. It was pleasant to think that, like him, she had loved the taste of the earth and the fragrance of growing things. His ambition was to down all the scoffers along the river and in the city who thought his ambition a passing amusement, and predicted abandonment and a season of gaiety during the coming winter.

Of the other members of the two households there were, at the great house, Miss Patty, as every one called her, John Merryvale's sister who came to him after his wife's death; and at the cabin in the pines, Tom, the son of the household, a serious, reliable boy, deliberate to slowness.

And lastly, there was Hertha. Ellen had insisted when they moved to Merryvale that Hertha remain a second year at her college, and the girl stayed away for that time; but the next season, the year Lee Merryvale went North, she made her entrance, a girl of nineteen, into Merryvale life. It was a modest entrance and she played her part shyly in the background. Hertha bore no resemblance to her sister and brother. Among the cabins in the pines you noticed her tightly curling hair and deep brown eyes, but as she moved about the great house you saw her graceful figure, her slender feet and hands, her small head on its long neck, her delicate nose and mouth, her white skin. She was a good needlewoman, and Miss Patty quickly seized upon her as her maid, and, for a pittance, Hertha worked for her by day, while at night and on Sundays she joined mother and brother and sister in the cabin. "You's a contented chile," her mother used to say, "an' 'member, dat's a gift." She had not been so contented in the city where she spent her childhood, but this new world by the river touched her spirit. She loved the quiet days, sewing and waiting on Miss Patty whose indolence and advancing years made her increasingly dependent. She loved on Sundays to take walks with Tom through the woods to where the creek set in, black, mysterious, a long line of cypresses guarding the stream. She was contented with her home, and her mind sometimes wandered when Ellen talked in the evening of plans for the future. Ellen was full of plans, she lived not for to-day but for to-morrow, but Hertha lived in to-day. Life was not always pleasant, the autumn tempests that lashed the great oaks and uprooted the pines were terrifying, but there were more days of sunshine than of storm. Lee Merryvale might sweat over his orange grove and swear at his workers, Ellen might lead out the whole settlement in a mad orgy of whitewashing, but no one expected anything disturbing from Hertha. Tom, once, painstakingly reading through a collection of poems acquired by Ellen in her school days as a prize, found the lines that suited the lady of his home; for, to Tom, Hertha was not only sister but queen.

"And hers shall be the breathing balm,
And hers the silence, and the calm
Of mute, insensate things."

CHAPTER II

In a week Tom was going away to school. It should not come as a surprise, Ellen repeatedly told him, for she had from time to time apprised him of the approaching fulfilment of her plans; but Tom had rested, like Hertha, in the present moment, believing, too, that Ellen's plans might go astray. This, however, was little likely to take place, for in his older sister he dealt with a general, intelligent, resourceful, and with a contempt for the enemy, poverty. Her efforts had at length secured a scholarship, and four years of savings were to be expended for traveling and necessary clothes. The rest depended upon Tom who would be equipped to go out and do his share in gaining an education.

"Surely," Ellen said at the supper-table when the announcement of the final arrangements was made, "you know I'm right, Tom, and that a colored boy needs an education more than a white boy."

Aunt Maggie wiped her eyes. "We sure need Tom," she said.

The older sister looked around the table, at Hertha's sad face, at Tom's sullen one, at her mother's tears, and for a moment felt the severity of the coming catastrophe; but for a moment only. Emotion soon gave place to reasoned thought.

"Tom has a right to an education," she said solemnly. "If he doesn't learn a trade at school he never will learn one, and we shouldn't keep him here no matter how much we shall need him and miss him."

Aunt Maggie rose. "You don't know what it means," she said, "to part a mudder f'om her only son." Her rich voice sounded with a certain finality as though, while appreciating Ellen's power, she wished her to understand her responsibility. "You's taken a deal upon you'self." And she left her children and went into her room.

Tom and Hertha slipped out of doors. In time of trouble they always got away from the house, and now in silence they made their way to the river.

It was a hot night in late September with a wind blowing from the east. In the summer, unless held home by some imperative need, all the people of the plantation, black and white, came in the evening to the wharf to taste the fresh breeze. But the wharf was long and seclusion possible, so the two slipped to their favorite place at the far end, and leaning against a post dangled their feet over the water.

"If it would do any good," Tom said morosely, "I'd run away."

Hertha laughed.

"Ellen thinks she can boss the whole of us," he went on, "but the time am coming when she can't boss me."

"'Is,' Tom."

"Yes, ma'am."

Tom's speech was a queer mixture of good English acquired from his sisters, who had been drilled by northern teachers, and colloquial speech picked up from his surroundings.

"It does seem too bad," Hertha declared, "to leave just now when Mr. Merryvale has come back and you can have work with some pay."

"I ain't going for more'n a year," Tom declared.

"You'll be grown up by that time."

"I'm as tall as you now."

Hertha looked across the water into the deep, velvet sky, and thought of the long days in which she would have to go about her work without her baby. Tom was seven years younger than she and since his birth had been her special charge. Hundreds of times she had washed his face and his soft little brown hands to which the grubby earth was as dear as to the roots of a flower. She it was who had always shielded him from severity, finding many and ingenious excuses for him. He had grown up a quiet, serious boy of a meditative cast, and sometimes came out with unusual, even startling remarks. Tom's "thinking" was one of the jokes of the family. Hertha found it hard to imagine life without him.

"Do you remember," she said after they had sat silent for a time; "once I struck you?"

"Naw!"

"Of course you don't remember, you weren't more than three. We were out visiting at Aunt Mary's and I had dressed you for the afternoon. We were on the steps. I had some sewing and you slipped away and went off berrying. Oh, but weren't you a sight when you came back!"

Tom grunted.

"You came right up to me and leaned against my knee, not a bit afraid. I scolded and you looked

up and smiled. You were very little then, seems to me you weren't more than a baby."

"Yes?"

"I slapped you on your cheek!"

"Whew! I don't believe it would have killed a mosquito."

"You were so grieved! You looked at me as though I had bruised your heart. Your mouth trembled and you hid your face in my lap and cried."

"And then you took me in your lap and petted me and told me about the three little pigs and washed me and got me into another dress without Mammy's knowing!"

"You can't remember, Tom!"

"Yes, I can."

"I don't believe you were as old as three."

"Well," meditatively, "if I don't remember that time I remembers heaps of others like it. You never went back on me."

"Probably Ellen is right," Hertha remarked later, "she usually is, though I don't think it was worth while my spending that last year in school, I was so homesick."

"You can never tell about an education," Tom said, wise in another's case.

Behind them came the sound of conversation, broken occasionally by a boisterous laugh. Some one was thrumming on a banjo and now and then singing a few lines from a popular song.

"What do you reckon it'll be like at school?" Tom asked.

"Oh, doing things. First one thing and then another until you're so tired at night you fall at once to sleep and wake up and start to do more things."

"That ain't much different from home."

Hertha did not answer. She never disputed but she thought Tom would find a difference.

They looked out into the starlight. "I was thinking," the boy said, "you're like that star up there." He pointed to a planet, bright in the heavens. "That's like you, beautiful and alone."

"Well!" She gave his arm a little squeeze. "But I'm not alone and neither is the star. See the little stars about."

"They don't count."

They sat for two hours looking into the starlight, talking a little and dreaming a good deal more until, growing sleepy, they rose and went home.

"What do you two find to say to one another?" Ellen asked, not unkindly, as she met them on their return. But part of their pleasure in one another's company was that they did not need to talk.

The days before a long parting are always difficult. We see the inevitable before us, we try to adjust ourselves, we wait impatient and yet anxious to make each minute last, watching the closing in of time. Mammy got some consolation in looking over and over again her son's clothes that Hertha always attended to and kept in neat repair, and in cooking his favorite dishes. "After the feast he'll surely feel the famine," Ellen thought, remembering the scanty fare of her school days; but she tried in every way to be as considerate as she could, appreciating that she had brought a sorrow, though a necessary one, to the household. For Hertha, who had known a year's tragic homesickness, the future looked black for Tom as well as for herself. She dared not face it and lived each day trying to forget the dark hours that were to come.

Lee Merryvale had been genuinely provoked at losing one of his best hands. He talked earnestly to Tom, who sent him to Ellen, and after a lengthy but fruitless controversy with the older sister he turned to the younger one. "See here," he said to Hertha one day as she was arranging the living-room of the great house, "can't you keep Tom at home?"

"I'd like to."

"He doesn't want to go."

"It seems best," was all Hertha could answer.

"There isn't much in learning a trade these days. Everything is done in the factory. A carpenter doesn't make his doors or his sashes, his sills or his windows; he simply puts together other people's work. I can teach Tom a lot about orange-growing right here, and then he can go off if he wants and have a grove of his own and grow blossoms for his bride."

He laughed at his joke, but added seriously, "Why don't you keep him at home?"

"Ask Ellen," was all Hertha could answer.

As she went home that night Merryvale met her in the grove, and again held her in conversation about her brother until Tom himself came upon them.

"I'm trying to get your sister to persuade you to stay at home," said Merryvale, addressing the boy but looking at the girl. "You know you don't want to go. Why do you let a woman boss you?"

"Perhaps," said Tom cannily, "ef I let her do a big bit o' bossing now, I'll be rid of it fer good by-and-by."

"You mean you'll be your own boss when you get away? Don't you think it! They'll boss you every hour of the twenty-four at school. Better stay here and work for me."

"I like you, boss, all right," the boy answered soberly. Then, turning to walk away, he called, "Coming, Sister?" and Hertha went with him.

"Sister, rot!" said Merryvale impatiently, looking after them. "They adopted that girl. She never came out of that nest."

That evening, seated at the table about the large lamp, Ellen went over, not for the first time, Tom's school course, and explained from the catalogue the studies he was to pursue. His mother was all interest, examining the pictures depicting the boys at their various tasks. Hertha sewed at the flannel shirt that was a farewell gift and occasionally put in a word. Tom was profoundly silent. Except when questioned he refused to make any contribution to their discussion. "One 'ud think," his mother said at last, "as it was Ellen goin' ter school, not you."

"Why don't she?" was his sole answer.

Ellen looking into his sullen face was both indignant and troubled. Many colored boys, she knew, had walked hundreds of miles to secure entrance at this institution and, once admitted, had accepted privations without a murmur, intent only on gaining the power that comes through knowledge. Tom was to travel in comparative comfort, he would have money for his actual needs, and yet he did not wish to avail himself of this unique opportunity. It was not as though he were a stupid boy; he had done well for every one for whom he had worked. Evidently he simply did not wish to leave home.

The older sister rose and closed the catalogue. "It's time we all went to bed," she announced. "Tomorrow you and Hertha will want to have a long walk together, I know," turning to Tom, "and we'll have dinner when you get back; and then it'll be Mammy's turn to be with you."

She put herself in the background, genuinely anxious to do all she could to make endurable her immutable decree. Life to her was like a quilt made up of great, glowing patches, each patch an achievement; and if the weaving together of the patches brought with it pricks of pain they were essential to the completed whole. But Tom not only objected to the pricking, but had his own ideas as to the color and fabric of his quilt.

The next day found him with Hertha two miles down the river. It had been very warm in the pine country, and they had followed the open stream.

"I's gwine the way they all go," Tom said meditatively, looking to the north. "The brooks flow to the rivers and the rivers to the sea. Don't you want to go too?"

"I? No, indeed."

"I've been thinking, Sister, it must be mighty slow here fer you; and when I'm gone it'll be worse. Why don't you settle in the city this winter and go out to work?"

At Merryvale the city always meant the port, twenty-five miles away.

"What a strange notion, Tom. I'd be lonesome there."

"Oh, there'd be lots to do. Church every Sunday, and picnics, and excursions. You're so pretty, you'd be the best liked girl in the place."

Hertha laughed. "Now, don't you begin to plan for me! I like it right where I am at home."

"Most girls marry," Tom remarked after a few moments, "and so do most fellers. The boys round here ain't your kind. I don't wonder you don't notice 'em. But they's fine chaps down there," pointing down the stream, "lawyers, and doctors and teachers."

The girl looked at her brother a little curiously as though wondering if he meant more than he said.

"Well, this is the first time you've tried to marry me off! Mammy talks that way and Ellen wants me to choose a career, but I thought you loved Merryvale like I do and were only sorry to go away."

"It's natural for the human being ter marry," Tom went on sententiously. "Don't think I will though," he added, "Ef you marry you don't have a chance to think. Now it might be, jest as I was thinking something very important, my wife 'ud interrupt and have a baby!"

There was a finality in this remark that left them in silence, and dropping plans for the future they watched the light clouds gather in masses in the deep blue sky until it was time to start homeward.

When they were within a short distance of the great house, rain began to fall, and by the time they had reached the live-oaks there was a downpour.

"Come up here," Lee Merryvale called authoritatively from the porch.

It was the front porch and they had no thought of setting foot on it, expecting instead to run for shelter to the kitchen door. Hertha moved forward but Tom drew back until Merryvale again commanded them to come.

"You're wet," he said to Hertha as she stepped on the porch. And then turning sharply to Tom: "Can't you take care of your sister better than this?"

"I'm all right," Hertha said quickly, abashed at the importance given to her. "Come up, Tom," she said calling to him, but he remained standing in the rain.

"You can go home if you want," Lee Merryvale nodded his head toward Tom, "and Hertha can stay here until it stops. Don't you know we're sure to have a shower in the afternoon?"

"It arrived ahead of time to-day," Hertha explained. And then noting Tom on the wet sand, the rain beginning to soak through his coat, her motherliness got the better of her embarrassment. "Come up on the porch," she said coaxingly. "I'll run upstairs and get a coat I keep here for just such a time as this. I won't be a moment. Please!"

He mounted the steps to please her and then walked to the end that was furthest from Merryvale.

The white man sat down in a porch chair, threw his head back, crossed his knees, and began to smoke.

"You smoke, Tom?"

"No, sir."

"The first thing you'll do when you go to school will be to smoke; not because you like it but because it's against the rules. Break all the rules you can, my boy, and get sent home, for you're needed here."

"Naw," Tom replied turning at him and almost snarling, "I ain't no use."

Young Merryvale regarded the boy with some amazement, then noting the grimness of his expression, said nothing further. In a moment Hertha, wearing her long coat, came down the stairs and she and her brother went on their way.

Before he went to his room that night, Tom spoke a word alone with Ellen. "Don't let Sister grieve too much," he said.

Ellen looked at him sadly. "You put me in a very hard position, Tom. You make me seem almost cruel."

"Never mind about that. What's done can't be mended. But don't let Hertha grieve—not if you can help it."

He kissed his older sister good-night and went into his little room, there to sit upon his trunk and with his face in his hands bury himself in thought.

"Ef I was any use," he said, "Ellen couldn't drag me away; but I ain't the brother she needs."

He stepped up the gangway into the little boat the next morning like a man. They were all there to see him off: his mother wiping her eyes and telling him to be her good boy; Ellen, resolute, not giving way to her sorrow; and Hertha, his beautiful sister, waving her handkerchief, her lips trying to smile. He watched them until the boat was far out in the stream; and then, with a very sober face, took his seat where he could look ahead toward the nearing sea.

CHAPTER III

It was still early morning when the boat left the dock and the three women walked back toward their home after their good-by to Tom. No one spoke for a time and then Aunt Maggie said impressively, "Dere ain't no use in cryin' 'bout what yer can't help. Tom's gone, but maybe it'll make a man o' him; maybe it were best fer him ter leabe de women folk. Heah 'tis, Monday morning. Ellen, hab yer settle in yer mind which o' de boys gits de washin' ter my folks?"

"I suppose," said Hertha, "it will be either Thaddeus Jackson or Obadiah Thomas."

"It will be Thaddeus," Ellen answered. "He will do it all right, Mammy, because his father lets him save his money."

"I hope he isn't saving to go to school," said Hertha; and then, quite unexpectedly to herself, laughed. She had been living so many days weighted with sorrow that the sailing of the boat had come as a relief. There was no good, as her mother said, to rebel against the inevitable; and while she would miss her brother, who had grown to be a companion in thought and interests, and who yet could never outgrow his place as her baby, it could not be right to look upon his absence as a calamity like sickness or death. So she gave her little laugh and her mother looked at her with pleasure and relief.

"Dere goes Ellen," Aunt Maggie said, as her elder daughter went past them the sooner to get to her work. "You an' I believes as de door o' heben's open ter dem as walks slow. I's glad you kin laugh, honey. We ain't lose Tom fer good. An' soon de winter'll come, an' moe folks a-staying at de great house, an' den de summer an' de dear boy home ag'in."

Talking on in slow, comfortable phrases, stopping often to get her breath, Hertha's mammy walked with her among the pines to their tidy front yard where golden glow and asters told of the autumn.

"It seems later than it is, doesn't it?" said Hertha, "we've been up so long. I think I'll go to Miss Patty right now."

There were two paths to the great house. The well-traveled one led past a number of cabins, and ended near the kitchen door. It was the shorter but Hertha chose a more attractive way among the pines to where a cypress marked the beginning of the orange grove. She had taken this route long before Lee Merryvale's return; and while he had closed it generally to dwellers among the pines, Miss Patty assured her maid she could use it as much as she wished.

She had only walked a little way when she saw Merryvale himself examining his cherished possessions.

"Come over here, won't you?" he called out. "There's no one up at the house yet."

Hertha went shyly toward him. He was a handsome man with reddish gold hair, clear eyes, and a glowing skin. His hat was off, he wore a soft shirt with collar thrown open, and altogether looked an attractive combination of the farmer and the gentleman.

As she came up he said sympathetically, "You must be feeling pretty badly to-day at saying good-bye to Tom."

"Yes," said Hertha, and added almost confidentially, "you see, Tom's the baby. I took care of him when he wasn't any longer than that," indicating the length with her hands.

"You couldn't have been much longer yourself."

She shook her head smiling and then turned to go away.

"Can't we have a little talk?" he asked. "Don't run into the house such a wonderful morning as this. I say, what a day it is! A day for the gods—Zeus, Apollo, Diana—we ought to worship the sun!"

It was a wonderful morning. The newly risen sun sent its golden light through the grove, brightening the deep green leaves, showing the pale yellow in the ripening fruit; and then danced on to the river where it lay, a limitless mass of golden mist, upon the shining stream.

As Hertha stopped and looked out over the river, Merryvale stepped to her side. "You're as beautiful as a goddess," he said.

"Don't go, please," he cried as she moved away from him. "Stop and play! Let's play ball. The goddesses, you know, did that. Here, catch!" and he threw an orange into her hands.

He was so near that she could scarcely fail to catch it, yet it slipped from her grasp and fell to the ground where she picked it up, awkwardly enough, and threw it back again.

He had moved away from her but was quick to catch her wavering throw. "Better next time," he said.

She grew more expert, lost her shyness, and the ball flew back and forth until, squeezed too hard in the man's strong hand, it collapsed into a sticky mass of skin and pulp.

"It was extravagant of you," Hertha laughed, as she watched him wipe his fingers. "You wouldn't let any one else waste good fruit."

"It wasn't wasted," he declared, "it gave us a good time. Isn't that a worthy way to end life?"

She did not answer. The play over, she was self-conscious again.

"Try once more," he cried, picking another orange.

"No, no," she answered. "I must be going."

"You aren't needed yet."

"Yes I am, truly. Miss Patty is wondering why I'm not there with the hot water."

He tossed the orange, but she dodged it and ran through the trees. Pursuing her, in a few seconds he was at her side.

"Please don't go," he pleaded.

"I must."

"Well, promise you'll come and play again."

"Perhaps."

"Promise!"

"Perhaps," and she left him.

The blood was throbbing in his temples as he went back to his trees. He had admired her beauty from the time he had first noticed her, three months before, moving about his home. What must her father have been to have given her such poise, such a delicate throat, such a pure white skin! And her charm did not end with her face or her carriage. Her speech was that of the white girl, not of the Negro—careful speech, learned, as it happened, of her northern teachers. He had not encountered her often these summer months, for she was Miss Patty's personal servant and spent her days in his aunt's upper rooms or on the gallery; but he never saw her that he did not want to speak with her, to see the light come to her questioning face. She seemed to him in every way a lady. What was she doing living in a black woman's home?

The mid-day meal at the great house was stirred from its usual quiet by a discussion of the visitor who was expected by the evening boat. The Merryvales had never taken boarders, but from time to time they had staying with them what the English call "paying guests." Every winter, two or three northerners, visitors from the year before or carefully introduced by former visitors, came to Merryvale and made a substantial payment for the privilege of living in the old house. Usually these guests were elderly ladies, either unmarried or with busy husbands who could not take the time to accompany them, and they lived quietly on the place; taking little walks, knitting, playing cards, and occasionally going by boat to the city for a day's shopping. Miss Patty depended on them for her entertainment more, perhaps, than she was ready to admit. They taught her a new game of solitaire or a new way of making a baby's sack, and they listened, with every appearance of attention, to her innumerable tales about her family. To-day's arrival was a Miss Witherspoon, a friend of one of their pleasantest Boston guests, and everything was being planned for her comfort.

"Put my best linen on the bed, Hertha," Miss Patty said as she came upstairs after her mid-day meal, "and you can take your sewing to the gallery while I have my nap."

Hertha did as she was bidden, and, the guest-room in perfect order, went out upon the shady corner of the upper porch. A wind was blowing from the river, tossing the gray moss of the live-oaks, and brushing against her fingers the thin lace she was trying to sew upon a dress. It called her to play, pushed the little curls in her eyes, and spilled the spool of thread upon the floor. She laughed to herself as she picked it up, and then sat, her work in her lap, looking wistfully out into the swaying moss and the green leaves.

So the gods and goddesses played at ball. Which god was he? Apollo, of course, the god of the sunlight, the gold gleaming in his ruddy hair. What good times they must have had in those old days when no one seemed to be busy, when you might run through the meadows singing as you went, when no one minded if you danced in the moonlight and played in the morning. Why should you not do such simple, happy things!

She took up her needle again, and of a sudden thought of Tom going away alone. The remembrance of the boy's face held her to her task.

Along the lane came an automobile, its horn tooting as it bumped over the uneven road. Hertha started, and putting down her work watched to see the car stop in front of the Merryvale door. It was most unusual to have guests arrive in this fashion and at this hour. The men were not about; Pomona, the cook, was unequal to receiving such a visitor, so though it was not her specified task, Hertha, mindful for the good ordering of the house, went to the door.

Descending from the automobile was an alert-looking lady, neither young nor old, in a plain, good-fitting, tailor-made suit and small hat, with the business-like air of one who has done much traveling and is accustomed to finding herself in new surroundings.

"I am Miss Witherspoon," she said at once. "I had expected to arrive later in the afternoon by boat, but it seemed wiser at the last to come part of the way by train. I hope I am not inconveniencing you by my early arrival."

"It is no inconvenience," Hertha replied, "but I am sorry that Miss Merryvale is lying down."

"Don't think of disturbing her," the newcomer said. And then, smiling at Hertha, asked, "Is this another Miss Merryvale?"

"No," Hertha answered, "I am Miss Merryvale's maid."

She was quite accustomed to being taken for a white girl, and felt no embarrassment; but the same could not be said of Miss Witherspoon. That well-bred lady almost stared; and then, turning, dismissed her car and followed Hertha, who had laden herself with bags, to the bedroom.

"I hope everything is as you like it," the girl said to the "paying guest" who looked with approval at the cool room, high-ceilinged, with white walls, white iron bed and simple furnishings.

"Thank you," said Miss Witherspoon, "I am sure I like it very much; and really, I believe there is nothing I should like better than to lie down myself."

She smiled again at Hertha, this time the pleasant, patronizing smile of one who praises a good servant's work.

"I'll bring you some hot water," Hertha said.

When she had completed her arrangements for the new guest, she went back to her seat, and laboriously, intently, worked on the white muslin with its fine white lace.

There was a good deal to tell when she got home that night. Her mother wanted all the details of Miss Witherspoon's appearance, and after a lengthy description, ventured her opinion of the newcomer's laundry value. "I reckon she don' wear any o' dem crinkly gowns an' chemises dat you do up yoursel'. Dey matches de folks wid der money bangin' agin der knees in der petticoat pockets. Did she duck down, dearie, ter git her purse?"

"No, Mammy," Hertha answered.

"But she'll be de keerful kin', allus 'memberin' ter tak' off a white skirt if it begin ter rain, an' half de time dryin' her han'chiefs on de winder-pane. Dat's de kin' as comes here. It takes de hotel folks ter make a payin' business."

"She's younger than our boarders usually are, anyway," Hertha said. "Not that she's young but she looks so."

"Everybody looks young these days," Ellen remarked; "or if they don't they let you know they're trying to."

"Was dere laughin' an' carr'in' on at de table?"

"Yes, a little. Yes, Mammy, I think she's entertaining."

"Dat's good. I hope she 'spectin' ter stay de winter."

"I think not, Mammy. I think she's to leave next month."

"Dat's too bad. Ef I was Miss Patty I'd hab some nice gal or udder heah all de time ter keep Mister Lee company. If dey don't gib him a good time he'll up an' leab de family an' de orange an' grapefruit business. Dere ain't nottin' a boy needs so much as de right kin' ob a lil' gal ter play wid."

"You're to have Tom's room now, Sister," Ellen said as they started for bed.

Hertha expostulated. "You need a room to yourself, Ellen, I know you do."

Ellen knew it too, but she was desirous to give her sister everything within her power. "No, I'm all right," she said decidedly. "It's all arranged. Mother and I didn't say anything before because we wanted to surprise you. You've wanted, I know, to be by yourself, dear; and Tom would be glad to think you were in his room."

She showed her sister the little things she had done for her comfort, and with a kiss left her to herself. It had been a long day and the young girl went at once to bed and fell asleep. But after a little she awoke and lay for hours in the still heat of the night, living again the morning's happenings. She went over in her mind, her heart beating fast, the foolish little game that carried with it so much happiness. He thought her as beautiful as a goddess; and he had not said it cheaply as though she were some common, gaily daubed plaything that one dangled to-day to throw away to-morrow. His eyes looked honestly into hers. He was strong and capable, loving the fresh air and sunshine and the green trees. He was gentle, kind to the people here, kind to her. With her eyes fixed on the dim window square that saved the room from utter darkness, she dreamed of his near presence, feeling his breath upon her cheek, until, her whole body swept with emotion, she clenched her hands and pressed them to her lips to keep back the welling tears. For then came the dread reality: her color, her station, these two facts loomed above her, fell and crushed her with their weight. No young white man should choose as his companion a Negro servant. She must forget the morning playtime, and never commit the fault again. Striving to drive him from her thoughts, she made plans for the morrow—the finishing of Miss Patty's dress, the letter she would write to Tom. And, tossing on her bed, between her new-found happiness and her misgivings, she cried herself to sleep.

Is there any greater difference than that between night and morning? All the hobgoblins, the fears, the morbid misgivings disappear with the bright sunlight and the feel of cold water. As the fresh drops fell from Hertha's face she was sure she had misjudged the pleasant facts of yesterday. She coiled her hair that fell in little curls as the brush left its silky fineness, and hummed a song to her smiling face in the glass. Fastening the last hook of her blue cotton dress, the soft, gray-blue that she and Miss Patty liked, she went in to help the others with the breakfast, master of her fate. There was no hesitation in her step when, a little earlier than her wont, she turned toward the orange grove.

"Honey," her mother called after her. "Jes' ask Pomona ef she'll gib me her big stew-pot to-day. I's layin' ter make some jelly. An' don' work too hard. Dat ole black woman's allus tryin' ter git you ter do her work."

CHAPTER IV

"Good morning, Princess."

"Good morning." And then, shyly, "It isn't nice to drop from a goddess even to a princess."

"Wait until I tell you the princess that you are! You're Snowdrop who was given to the dwarfs to keep. You remember her, don't you?"

"I think she had a cruel mother who wanted to get her out of the way."

"Yes, but it was all because Snowdrop was the most beautiful woman in the world; no one else was half so fair. How was it? When the mother looked into her mirror and asked if any one were fairer than she, she saw Snowdrop's face. Of course, no woman could stand that, so she cast Snowdrop out and the ugly dwarfs took care of her."

"The dwarfs were kinder to her than her own people."

Merryvale, with a hasty glance at the girl, sensed the ugly reality of his story and, turning very red, began plucking the dead leaves from the nearest tree.

"It must be wonderful," he remarked, rather clumsily, "to be a new person every day. Who will you be to-morrow?"

"Miss Patty's maid." All her brightness had gone and she moved as if about to leave him.

"Oh, no," he exclaimed, "not that! Cinderella, perhaps. To-morrow you will be Cinderella before the fairy godmother came to take her to the ball."

"Yes, because nothing had happened then."

"Not before the ball, but after; the next morning when the prince searches with the golden slipper in his hand."

"If I were going to be Cinderella at all," Hertha was gently emphatic, "I would be at the ball itself, a beautiful ball in a long, golden room filled with lights and blooming flowers, where every one wore filmy silk dresses and danced to swaying music."

"You and I would dance together, you in soft blue silk, the color of the dress you have on, and I—what should I wear?"

"Pale pink satin," she answered, laughter in her eyes, "and your hair in long curls."

He chuckled. "What fools they must have looked, those Fauntleroy princes. I wonder if they ever did a stroke of work?"

"No, others planted while they picked the blossoms."

"There's a heap of that in this world, isn't there? Do you know," earnestly, "one reason I came home was because I thought I'd like to see a Merryvale digging his own garden."

"You do it very nicely."

"Thank you." He said this seriously, and then, realizing for a moment her station, turned away.

"What's this?" She was running among the trees; he dashed after her and in a moment had her cornered.

"The clock struck twelve."

"No it didn't! Truly it didn't. Besides, you're not Cinderella to-day, you're Snowdrop. You mustn't change parts as fast as that. It isn't Cinderella until to-morrow."

"I'm afraid I forgot."

"Of course you did. Come now, and play."

She shook her head, and then half whispered, looking wistfully into his face, "My clock is always striking."

They stood close to one another. The sun shining through the leaves on her young face showed all its beauty; the small mouth with its delicately curved upper lip; the line of hair over the forehead, two graceful curves that came together in a little peak; the deep, shining eyes that dropped now under his gaze.

"Just one kiss," he pleaded.

She shook her head, and he could see her hand clench as though to stop her trembling.

His own trembled as he placed it over hers and stood so close that, though he did not touch her, his presence felt like an embrace.

All the emotions of the night of which she had believed herself master returned, but with redoubled strength. Her whole self, the slender body, the delicate senses, the shy spirit that before had rested happy in the love of home and wood and river, was a wild tumult of passionate desire. To lift up her face and kiss him would be to enter through the golden gates of paradise. But while her heart beat so fast that the blood flooded her cheeks and she was Snowdrop no longer, she did not raise her head.

And then a cock that had strayed from its family among the pines and wandered in their direction raised itself upon its toes and began to crow.

They both started, the pink on Hertha's cheeks turned to lifeless white, and like a shadow she slipped away.

Merryvale stood motionless for a time among the trees. "You wouldn't think it," he said to himself, looking out upon the golden river, "but it's a black world."

"You're late," declared Pomona shortly, as Hertha entered the kitchen. The girl did not answer, but, glancing at the clock, saw that she was on time.

Pomona was not in good humor; indeed, Pomona's gloomy moods were frequent, and the household, to some extent, revolved about them. "I don't know what I should do without Hertha," Miss Patty was fond of saying, when Pomona was especially exasperating, "she is always the same."

But on this day, if Miss Patty had noticed, she would have found in her maid's manner a little trembling unquiet. She did not notice, however, being deeply occupied with Miss Witherspoon, who was proving a stimulating companion. The two had exchanged notes upon the subject of religion to find themselves in pleasant accord, and now were on that most dangerous ground, domestic service.

"You have a wonderful maid," Miss Witherspoon said, after examining the delicate, handmade waist which Hertha had just finished.

"Hertha is surely a treasure. But she likes it here, so don't, my dear lady, hope by offering her better wages, to entice her North."

"I had no thought of anything so basely ungrateful to you."

"Others have, then. But Hertha's not restless like that sister of hers, Ellen—though I'm sure they're no relation. I can't endure that girl. Her influence isn't good over my maid."

"Have I seen Ellen yet?"

"No and you won't see her about this place. She teaches in the colored school."

"How interesting! I shall have to go to her."

Miss Patty's face showed disapproval bordering on disgust. Miss Witherspoon was not the first of her guests who had at once expressed an interest in Ellen, and, later, helped on the already over-prosperous school. She turned the conversation back to her favorite.

"There are not many girls like Hertha to be found to-day. She has a natural aptitude for service, and her white blood makes her very intelligent. My cousin, Carrie (she died in Savannah two years ago), had a maid like that who was the most faithful creature—her constant nurse for fifteen years."

"Indeed!"

"I'm fixing to have Hertha with me for as long as I live."

"But don't you think she'll get married—she's so pretty."

"I hope not; I certainly hope not. I don't encourage her to go out to any of the parties with the rough boys and girls here. But she herself realizes that she's above them in station. No, Hertha will do much better not to marry. I can understand her falling in love with a colored man of her own complexion, but we haven't confidence in the 'yaller niggers,' as the darkies call them. They have the bad qualities of both races, you know; they're a thieving lot."

"Yes?" ejaculated Miss Witherspoon, and then, a little maliciously, "Does Hertha steal?"

"Hertha? Why, of course not!" Miss Patty looked very indignant. "Have you lost anything?"

"No, no," Miss Witherspoon answered quickly, anxious to make her question clear. "I only thought you said that all mulattoes stole."

There are few things more exasperating than to have one's generalities taken literally. Miss Patty felt provoked both for herself and for her maid. "Hertha," she explained, with some feeling, "is an unusual girl, with, I reckon, an unusual heritage. It is of benefit to her to stay here in private service with a lady. She is an affectionate child and a great favorite with me. As I grow older I hope she will want to stay and make life pleasant for me as I have tried to make it pleasant for her."

At that moment Hertha came to where they sat upon the porch.

"Haven't I, honey?"

"Haven't you—" Hertha questioned.

"Made life pleasant for you?"

"Oh, yes indeed."

"Miss Witherspoon was talking like she thought you ought to get married, but I told her you were happy here with me and not thinking of anything of the sort."

"No," Hertha said, "I'm not expecting to get married."

"I'd like to have you get your work and show Miss Witherspoon the dress you're making. She does her own sewing here as well as mine," Miss Patty explained as Hertha left, "and I'm as much interested in it as she is."

It was a long day for Miss Patty's maid, but when she was released she did not at once go home, but walked to the river bank and wandered a little time by the shore. Every one was within the great house, the twilight had come, and she could stop, as Tom loved to stop, and think.

As she went slowly along the path that she and Tom had traversed only two days ago, she felt as though it were she, not he, who had gone away from home and all its surroundings out to the open sea. Every landmark with which she was familiar was left behind, her reserve, her modesty, her pride. Two days ago she was anchored to her home in the cabin, to her black mother and sister and brother; they were first, supreme in her thoughts. She was attached to Miss Patty, who petted her and made her feel less a servant than a loved child. Two days ago as she walked over this path, she was at peace, and every murmuring sound, every flicker of sunlight, every sweet, pungent odor sank into her spirit, and held her, as she would have put it, close to God. Her religion, as she had unconsciously evolved it from the crude, but poetic gospel of the colored preacher, and from the commune she had held with nature, was harmony, the oneness of man's spirit with the eternal goodness. It had been largely an unconscious belief, born of her own tranquillity. But now the tranquillity was broken, and peace would not return. Shutting her eyes, she listened to the air singing in her ears; she tried to feel herself carried out of the turmoil of the morning into the tabernacle of the spirit.

But it was of no use. It was gone, home, work, religion. She had left the shore and was in a little boat, blinded by the spray, tossed on a sea of tumultuous desire. Tom, too, was out there somewhere on the ocean, but it was the same Tom who had walked with her Sunday. If their boats should meet, his and hers, he would not know his sister. She did not know herself, and stopped amazed to find that she was weeping.

A cow, wearied with her attempt to get some nourishment out of the tough hyacinth, moved out of the river, and, shaking the water from her wet flanks, started home. Hertha suddenly found herself hungry and tired and very much ashamed. The excitement that had brought the tears to her cheeks was gone, leaving a dull depression behind. She turned on her way, and as her mother's cabin came in sight, with a light in the window, for it was late, she felt relieved and safe. After all, nothing had happened, nothing. She was the same girl she had always been and needed only to forget the happenings of the morning.

Her supper tasted good, and when it was over she thought that she was ready to write a letter to Tom. The table cleared, however, and her pen in hand, she could not find a word to say. How could she forget those two meetings, the only events worth recording, of which Tom must never learn a word? So she bit her pen, and at length, at her mother's suggestion, postponed the letter to another day.

"Honey-lamb," mammy said, "you' eyes look close ter tears. Don't you want Ellen to go wid yer down ter de dock? She jes' step out a minute ter see de Theodore Roosevelt Jackson baby, but she'll come ef I call."

"Don't call, Mammy; I don't want to go. Miss Patty kept me running all day and I'm tired. I'll stay here with you and read."

"Dar are de books, den; but you mostly knows 'em by heart."

"I suppose I do," Hertha said drearily.

She picked up *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*. Almost all the books in the Williams household had been bought of agents and paid for on the installment plan. There were volumes of universal knowledge and other volumes of the world's best literature—all eminently instructive, but none calculated to soothe an aching heart. Turning over the pages idly, looking at a picture here, reading a paragraph there, Hertha occupied a few minutes and then went to where her mother sat in her big, comfortable chair. Leaning over, she put her arms around the old woman's neck.

"Um, um," the mother crooned, patting the girl's hands.

"Sing for me, Mammy."

"You must git inter my lap, den. Reckon it'll hold a lil' flower like you."

"This is better." The girl knelt so that her head came on her mother's breast. "Now sing."

"What'll I sing fer yer?"

"Oh, anything. Sing 'Nobody knows de trouble I's seen.'"

"Laws, chile, does yer feel as bad as all dat! Poor lil' lily. An' you was lookin' a rosebud dis mornin'. Dey cer'enly don' know much 'bout carin' fer my flower up dar." Then, smoothing the girl's hair with her strong hand, she sang:

"Nobody knows de trouble I's seen,
Nobody knows but Jesus.
Nobody knows de trouble I's seen,
Glory Hallelujah."

The people at the great house were nervous, tiring; but mammy was restful like the deep, lower waters of a stream. Her mellow voice sang on:

"I know de Lawd, I know de Lawd,
I know de Lawd has laid his hands on me."

"De Lawd" came out in three long, rolling syllables, descending from the high call, "I know." Hertha found herself breathing slowly, quietly, her mother's hand smoothing her forehead and soft, curling hair.

"I was a wandering sheep——"

Mammy had slipped into a hymn that belonged to the church where for many years she had worshiped, proud in being the wife of the holy man who occupied the preacher's desk. She had sung all her children to sleep with this hymn.

"I was a wandering sheep,
I did not love the fold,
I did not love my shepherd's voice,
I would not be controlled.
I was a wayward child——"

Hertha rose from her knees. Quietly going into her mother's room, she turned down the bed, a task she performed every night for Miss Patty and her guests.

"Honey," her mother called, "what yer up ter?"

"Nothing," Hertha answered, "only fixing to do something for you and Ellen, and now I'm going to bed myself."

For a week she never let the thought of the morning's happiness take possession of her mind. It might press close, but it encountered a wall of resolution that held it back. She made her way to her work among the chickens and pigs through the pines to the kitchen door. Miss Patty liked to have her about, and when the work in the rooms was finished often called her to her side. She and Miss Witherspoon had taken to spending a part of their afternoons over a new and elaborate kind of embroidery, and Hertha was essential to Miss Patty's accomplishment. Indeed, after Hertha had counted stitches and drawn threads and outlined the pattern, Miss Patty's part became a last triumphant progress. During this period of the day, when the women were on the gallery, Lee would often join them. He and Miss Witherspoon found many things to talk about, for the Boston woman had a keen interest in this southern youth who had gotten the best out of his studies and returned ambitious to bring new life to his ancestral acres. "You're quite a missionary," she said once to his aunt's disgust. Lee might fuss about his trees if he liked, but business acumen was a little vulgar and at the least should be concealed, while criticism of the South, the suggestion that it was a mission field, was rank impertinence.

Sometimes Lee brought a book and read to them here and there, for Miss Patty did not care for a continuous story. One afternoon it was a poem written by a classmate who had died before his college days were over. Coming from one who left the earth so young, its promise of future endeavor, of service to humanity, made it a tragic little verse. Miss Patty wiped her eyes when it was over and called on Hertha to set her work right. During these times Lee never spoke to Hertha nor seemed to look in her direction, but he always knew when she had left the porch and rarely stayed long after her absence. Miss Patty felt pleased that her Boston guest was interesting her boy so that she had more of his company.

On Sunday Ellen proposed to her sister that they take a walk, and they went among the pines and dark cypresses, through the swamp, and by the black creek. It was hot and humid, the mosquitoes were annoying, and they were both tired when they returned to the cabin steps.

"I don't like this time of year," Hertha said when they sat down. "It's so silent. The birds ceased singing long ago; they only call to one another now."

"The mosquitoes haven't ceased singing, I notice," Ellen replied, laughing. "Now I like this time of year best of all. October means the beginning of cool weather and work."

When Hertha went to her room that night a little breeze greeted her as she sat down by her window. It was cloudy at first, but in a few moments the clouds broke and the moonlight streamed upon the dark trees and the white sand. She watched the moon sailing through the clouds, she smelt the roses by the porch, and the wall that her will had built against her sweet and rapturous thoughts broke down, and with a rush her spirit was swept with tumultuous love.

"Cinderella," Lee said to her the next morning as she turned into the orange grove, "you've been a shockingly long time coming."

"I know it," she answered, "but there were so many things to think of, sitting by the fire."

"Don't think," he urged. "I've given it up. Don't think, but live."

And this time she lifted up her face and, without a thought, gave him a kiss.

CHAPTER V

"Hertha," Ellen said the next afternoon, "have you any plans for the future?"

School had just closed, Miss Patty had given her maid an afternoon off, and the two sisters were walking together toward their home.

"Any plans?" Hertha was startled. "I thought our plans were made for good when we came here."

"I hope not!" Ellen declared decidedly. "I'm willing to work here now for next to nothing, but I shall try for a bigger job some day; and you, honey, you don't always want to be Miss Patty's maid."

"I don't know; why shouldn't I?"

"This is a dull life for you, Hertha. Sometimes I think we ought never to have come here."

"Ellen!"

"It's different for mammy and me; we're older."

"You're only four years older than I."

"I think that really I'm a great deal older than you. But I get so much more out of Merryvale than you do. The people who live in these cabins—well, they're problems to me, human problems that I'm trying to solve. There's hardly a home that hasn't in it some boy or girl whom I'm watching almost as though he were my child. I'm working for the children, Hertha, the colored children who will soon be men and women and who ought to have just as good a chance as white children in this world."

"They never will in America."

"I'm not so sure," Ellen answered.

They were walking in the pine region back of the river. To a newcomer many of the cabins would have looked untidy; the ubiquitous hog would have been pronounced a public nuisance, and the facilities for washing inadequate; but to Ellen the settlement in which she had been working for five years was a garden of progress, and if a few of the plants made a determined stand to remain weeds, she did not let them hide her numerous hardy flowers. In her heart she meant ultimately to uproot them. Old Mr. Merryvale would never stand for severity, but the next generation was at work upon the place and might be induced to aid her in exiling the degenerate few.

"I love it here!" Ellen exclaimed, stopping and looking about her. "I never worked in a school before where it was so easy to get at the people, or where the children seemed so anxious to learn. Do you know, I suppose no one would believe me if they heard it, but I'm glad that I'm colored."

"Why not?" Hertha asked sharply. "If you love your work and these people, why should you want to be white?"

"You know that's a foolish question," and Ellen looked sadly at her sister. "You know as well, better than I, the handicap of color. Haven't I seen you have to bear it? But still it's great to belong to a rising race, not to one that's on top and likely to fall."

"To fall? How silly."

"Is it? Well, perhaps it's improbable. But, anyway, that isn't what I started to talk about. I didn't mean to talk of myself, but of you. I'm afraid this isn't the right place for you."

"I love it here, too!" Hertha cried, showing more animation than was usual with her. "I like the country; you know I do. Why, I love everything about the place, all the flowers in our yard, the pigs, the chickens, the pines. I think it's the most beautiful spot in the world, and so does Tom."

She drew in a long breath and threw out her arms as though to take in the whole of Merryvale.

"That's all right, but you can't live just on flowers and views; you need people."

Hertha made no response, and they walked on for a time in silence.

"It's like this," Ellen continued. "You're a generation ahead of these cabins, and you don't enjoy the people socially who live in them. It isn't snobbish to say this; it's just true. You haven't a single friend here. I can't think what it would mean if you went away. It would be like losing the color out of the sky; everything would be dull gray. But if you ought to go, you ought, and I should help you."

"Haven't you made unhappiness enough, Ellen, with your plans, making Tom go, but you must get

rid of me too?"

"That isn't fair."

"That's what it seems like."

"Let's talk reasonably. Of course it isn't the same with you as with Tom; you're not a child."

"I'm glad you realize that."

"Why, Hertha, you're almost cross. Please let me explain what I mean. I'm glad you like it here, but we all have to look ahead, and I can't look ahead and see you a servant in a white man's home."

"Why not?"

"You're too refined, too delicate. You ought to enter the front door, and if you can't enter there, isn't it better not to enter at all?"

There was no answer.

"I know I've talked this way before, and I'll try not to do so again, but I want to make myself quite clear. It isn't as though I didn't believe in colored girls going into domestic service; I do. There are lots of people who belong at the back door, and it would be silly to deny it and to put them at work beyond their ability; but you're not one of them. Because Miss Patty is white is no reason that she should have a maid who has a better education and knows more than she does."

"Aren't you drawing on your imagination?"

"No, I'm telling the exact truth. Miss Patty is getting something she has no right to, and you're not getting your birthright, to be yourself, to develop the highest in you."

"What great talent have I neglected?"

Ellen threw her arm over her sister's shoulder. "You have talent, Hertha, you know you have, only you won't recognize it, but keep dancing attendance on that old lady. With a little instruction you would be a skillful dressmaker, an *artiste*, as the advertisements say. You sew beautifully and have lots of taste, and you've style. With such a gift in any large city you could surely get ahead. You could have custom, too, if you wanted, from our people."

"I don't expect to get ahead."

"But why?"

"I don't know." The girl stopped a moment and then said slowly, "I don't believe I've as much ambition as you. I don't like study. I hate the city, and I'm contented and happy here. When work is over I've you and mother to go to; I belong to you two and I don't want to leave you."

Her face was aflame as she said this, realizing that it was only a partial truth. Her deception made her angry, and she turned in retort upon her sister. "Why does it worry you so that I should love Miss Patty? Are you jealous?"

"You know as well as I do that it isn't that."

"It sounds like that to me. I like my work. Why should I accept a lot of responsibility, set up a shop, which I should hate, or go about making cheap gowns for stout black people when I can stay at home and wait on a sweet, refined person like my mistress?"

The "my mistress" was given with an emphasis that closed the subject. Ellen had said that her sister was not a child like Tom, and for the time at least she must accept the verdict against her.

"Well, chillen," their mother said as they came up to the cabin, "de best o' news, a letter f'om Tom!"

They both were upon her, but Hertha got the letter.

"Mister Lee were walkin' dis-a-way an' bring it ter me. It were kind o' him; he knowed I wan' ter see it mighty quick."

"How short!" Hertha said, reading it through rapidly.

Mammy was at once up in arms for her son. "What done you 'spec'? Dar's de paper civered. He tells 'bout de journey, an' what he gits fer his meals, an' how big de ocean look, an' how he can't rightly say no mo' 'kase de bell done ring fer chapel. Dat a heap, but it ain't much fer waitin' hearts."

"He doesn't say what studies he's taking," Ellen remarked when she had finished with the sheet.

"We're foolish, Mammy," Hertha exclaimed, seeing the disappointment on the old woman's face. "It's a dear letter, and it's Tom's handwriting—I'd know it in Timbuctoo. Oh, how I wish he were here!"

"You sho do, honey; but dere ain't no use in wishin'. Come, git yer supper an' den we-all'll jes' go down to Uncle Eben, an' Granny Rose an' de folks as ain't gittin' letters ebery day."

There was no need to go out. The news of the letter reached the settlement before sundown, and many were the visitors who came to see it and who departed to tell all and more than it contained. It was really a gay evening, and when the three women were left alone they sat up a little longer than usual talking about it.

"Everything all right?" Ellen asked as she kissed her sister good-night.

"Yes," Hertha answered, smiling; but when she was alone in her room the smile left her lips. Did Ellen suspect anything? Probably not, but how strange to have a secret from those at home.

CHAPTER VI

Never before did an October boast so many wonderful mornings. Sometimes it rained in the night, but the rising sun dispersed the clouds and brought a golden day to Hertha's world. And as she went about her tasks, her brief playtime over, she still sensed the fragrant orange grove and moved among the trees, her lover by her side. Deftly helping Miss Patty with her hair or dress, guiding Miss Witherspoon in her embroidery, cheering Pomona through an intricate dinner, his voice was in her ears and his touch upon her cheek. From morning until night was a lovely, precious, fearsome dream.

For there was reality in the dream that brought fear. Her lover wanted so much. She was content to stand on the threshold, but each day he asked that they might enter within the gates. It was hard to resist his pleading. If for a moment he had been rough, if he had endeavored to take by force what she hesitated to give, she could have resisted him; but his gentleness was his power. And each morning as she saw him leave her to go into the world of white men and women, a world as irrevocably closed to her as the world of light is closed to the blind, her fear took form. Would he remain faithful if she failed to give him all that he desired? If she dallied, if she strove to keep him at love's portal, some time he might not be there when she turned from her path to make her way among the orange trees. If that should happen, if he should neglect her, she would die of angry shame. Within her nature there was modesty and self-effacement, but also pride that could not brook a slight. She had never wooed; it had been he who had called, beckoning her from her place among the cabins in the pines. She had not given a glance or said a word to draw him from his favored place; he had come because he loved her beauty and her shy reserve. To hold him and yet not to sacrifice herself. This was the problem, when fear crept into her heart.

She had pushed it from her day after day, but she could not wholly ignore it; and this autumn morning as she sat in church, seemingly intent upon the preacher's word, she told herself that she must decide what she was willing to give. He had pleaded with her to meet him that night within the orange grove, promising to wait for her near the cypress where her world met his. His passion was in the ascendant; he begged her to trust him, to give herself to his keeping.

"An' de mantle ob Elijah was blue wid de blue ob de eternal heaben," cried out the preacher, "an' de linin' was rose wid de blood ob de Lamb."

Could she go? Why did the world give her such a terrible problem? Why, why was she colored! She felt a momentary revulsion to be listening to an ignorant preacher amid these clumsy black folk. It was wicked that a few drops of Negro blood forced her to this seat when she should be yonder with the white people where the clergyman read the beautiful service of the Church of England. Why was she not at Lee Merryvale's side? As Ellen had said, she was no maid; she was his equal, and only those drops of colored blood kept her here. No, not the drops of blood, but the hideous morality of a cruel race.

But the world was here as the white people had made it, and you had to accept it and then decide what you should do. Perhaps he was holding the hymnal now and Miss Witherspoon was singing with him from the same book. There would always be some one like that to come between him and herself. Always a white face, but no whiter than her own; always a world that claimed him and despised her. But if she gave herself to him, if she trusted that he would love and protect her as he so passionately promised; if she left mother and sister and brother for his sake; then no other face would blot out hers. What her life would be she could not picture, but it would not be a life without him.

The service over, she walked with her mother and sister among the cabins that Ellen so loved. The people standing outside their doorways were dressed in their best and a pleasant Sunday air pervaded the place. Every one was decorous, and yet with an undercurrent of jollity; for the sermon had stirred their imaginations, and ahead was a good dinner. Uncle Ebenezer talked with authority of Elijah and eagerly awaited the preacher's presence that he might discuss his theory of the color of the mantle of the prophet. "It were white as de wool ob de Lamb," he declaimed as he saw the man of God in his long black coat walking up to him. "Jes' riccolec', Brudder, de waters dat it smote apart an' dat wash it whiter'n snow." Aunt Lucindy was on ahead, a little boy's hand in hers, a waif for whom she was caring; for, though old and frail, Aunt Lucindy was always mothering some child. One of Ellen's pupils walked proudly at his teacher's side, carrying her Bible. "I knows what I's gwine ter be when I grows up, teacher," he said. "I's gwine ter be a preacher; I's gwine ter preach de word o' God." "I hope you will, Joshua," Ellen answered, "but remember you must first practise what you preach." "Yes'm, I know dat;" and then, proudly, "I's

practising ter pray an' holler right now. I can holler as good as Aunt Lucindy when she gits happy." Mammy had gone ahead to visit Granny Rose, who was too feeble to attend church. It was all usual to Hertha; she had seen such Sundays without comment all her life. She let the scene slip by as she tried to make her choice.

On one of the cabin steps sat an untidy, ragged girl who turned and went inside as she saw Ellen draw near. Maranthy, Sam Peter's daughter, was one of Ellen's failures. She was a bold, ignorant young woman of eighteen, who worked as little as she could and, brazenly open in her ways, strove to allure the growing boys whom their teacher was training in health and cleanliness and decent living. She looked maliciously at both the sisters as she went within her house.

Slipping away from her sister, Hertha sought one of the little paths in the sand that led toward the river. It brought her out behind the small, ecclesiastical-looking church at which the white people worshiped. Stopping to listen, she could hear Mr. Merryvale's voice through the open window reading from the prayerbook. Often the little settlement was without a clergyman and the owner of the place himself conducted the service. Now there was the rustle of people rising to their feet and the morning's devotion was done.

In the background where she could see, yet not be seen, Hertha watched the congregation as it emerged from the church. It was a small group—the Merryvales and some dozen neighbors from up and down the river. She knew them all, and yet this morning they took on sinister significance. The stylishly dressed women, the men in their well-fitting clothes, the gestures and modulations of voice, these were not of her world. As they went down the path she saw one of the women beckon to Lee Merryvale, who turned, all attention, to listen to what she had to tell him. With head bent toward his companion, he walked on and at a turn of the path was gone. Soon their voices, too, died away and there was nothing left but the empty path and the endless murmur of the wind among the pines.

Erect, head thrown back, hands clenched, the colored girl stood for a moment staring down the path. Her lips parted as though to cry out against the cruelty that denied her the right to walk among these white people, white herself, by the side of the man she loved. But no cry came, and presently her hands relaxed, her face resumed its pallor, and with drooping head she turned toward home.

Always quiet, at the afternoon dinner her preoccupation was so noticeable that her mother, the dishes cleared away, tried to draw her from it.

"Come an' sit wid me on de step, honey," she called. "You don' want ter go an' do mo' work like Ellen. I neber knowed a chile befo' so greedy. She can't help eatin' up oder folks' jobs. You come hyar an' talk ter yo' mammy."

"You talk to me," Hertha said.

"What woll I talk 'bout?"

"Tell me about it again. Tell me about how I came to you."

The mother gave a big happy laugh. "You allays likes dat story, don' you, honey? An' I likes it too. Reckon dis would hab been a poor home widout you was in it. Well, sit hyar an' I tell it ter yer, jes' as 'twas."

Looking down on the little garden, gay with autumnal flowers, Hertha took the step below her mother's on the porch so that she might lean against her. As she sat there, listening to the rich drawling voice, she rested as she had not rested before that day. With mammy one felt safe. Both she and Tom had noticed it.

"Well, honey, it were twenty-t'ree year ago las' September——"

"The twenty-ninth," Hertha interrupted.

"De twenty-nine. You' pappy, Ellen an' me, we gwine ter de church fer a celebration. We was spectin' ter git home early in de ebenin', but it done pour so we wait round till it were night. Den we see de rain weren't gwine ter stop, not fer t'ree 'fraid-cats, so we start off. My, how de trees shake in de roarin' wind. Ellen, she hung close ter daddy, an' once she give a lil' snuffle, like she want awful ter cry, but jes' wouldn't."

"I know," Hertha broke in, "Ellen is like that now. If I'd been there, I'd have cried and daddy would have taken me in his arms, wouldn't he?"

"I reckon so. You was a delicate chile an' dere weren't not'in' he wouldn't do fer you. But you weren't dere, an' we jes' push on till de house were in sight. We went in by de kitchen do' an' fer a space stan' by de fire, our coats drippin' pails o' water on de flo'. Den, when we was feelin' mo' like libin', I leabes de odder two an' goes inter de bedroom."

Hertha slipped up close.

"Dere was a candle burnin' on de dresser by de bed. I was all in a wonder! I neber lef' a light burnin' in my house when I gwine out, no, sir; I don' wan ter waste no candle grease. But dere was a lil' yellor flame shinin' straight up fer me ter see. I done look hard, an' rub my eyes, an' den I look down ter where it drop its light on my bed."

Mammy made a dramatic stop, and Hertha, ready with her part, gave the knee against which she

leaned an impatient shake.

"On de bed," Mammy went on, prolonging every word, "wid its head on my pillow, was a new-born chile. It were wrop in a sof white shawl, its tiny face turned ter de light. I bent ober ter look. It were fast asleep.

"I don' know how long I stayed watchin', but I heard daddy call, an' by-'n-by he come inter de room. He gib a cry an' dat wake de baby, an' it cry too. In course, dat bring Ellen, an' when she see de chile on de bed she jes' clap her hands an' call, 'It done come! My baby sister done come!'

"She were dat cute; wen' right up an' loosen de shawl an' croon an' croon till it stop its cryin'. Me an' my ole man jes' look; we couldn't do a t'ing, not at fust.

"Well, by-'n-by we send Ellen away ter de kitchen ter fetch some t'ings—she don' want ter leab dat baby, not fer an instant—an' we look at one anudder an' can't say nuthin'. Den I picks up de mite, taks off de shawl, an' foun' one lil' garment unnerneath. But fasten ter dat wee slip were a letter. We tear it open an' I reckon we both tremble. But we tremble mo' when we see what it hol'—ten ten-dollar bills! Dat were it, jes' one hunnerd dollars.

"Ellen come sidlin' back an' snuggle up close ter me where I hol' de lil' ting. She done see no money, but dat wouldn't ha' made no diff'ence. What'll a chile care fer such trash? She were all eyes an' heart fer dat bit er flesh an' blood.

"We took de baby inter de warm kitchen an' I gits Ellen ter hold it while I fin' her ole nursin' bottle, an' gibs de chile some food. My ole man move about restless-like. 'What yer mean ter do?' he ask. 'I mean ter feed an' clothe it,' I says. 'What else could I do?' He didn't make no answer, but sit down an' watch his lil' gal o' four croonin' to de baby in her arms.

"Sech a pretty baby! I done nurse a heap er babies, black an' white, but neber sech a pretty one as my baby. Jes' sof an' pink, wid sech deep eyes an' a mouf dat look like it couldn't hardly feed at its mudder's breast. Dere weren't nuttin' 'bout it ter make it seem right in a house whar black folks libed, 'cept de lil' curls on its head, an' dey mought er bin a white chile's.

"My ole man an' me, we set an' talk an' talk ater de baby been fed an' put ter sleep an' Ellen done shut her eyes at las'. We was honest folk, maybe we hadn't oughter kep' de baby?"

Mammy bent over to kiss Hertha. "But we did, you knows dat, chile, an' we ain't neber regret it. Dat chile's bin a blessin' eber since she open her eyes, lyin' dar in de candlelight. Dat chile were her daddy's delight an' her mammy don't know how ter go tru a day widoud her. An' as fer her sister, Ellen, she'd walk tru fire ter git her what she ought ter hab. She come into a poor home, sure 'nough, but she welcome ter all it hold."

Mammy finished her recital with a broad wave of the hand, while Hertha clasped her round the neck and gave her a hug that ruffled the pretty curls, the curls that alone linked her to the colored race.

"Now tell me about my name?" she questioned when they had settled back again.

"You asks dat, honey, an' de ain't nuthin' ter tell. Seems like I made it up, an' den agin, seems like it were meant fer Bertha, but kinder gentler an' deeper, same as you."

"You never heard any least thing about my people?"

The question was asked with a certain knowledge of the answer, and yet with a wistful interrogation. Never before had this foundling, dropped into a black preacher's cabin, desired so much to know something of the two lives that gave her birth.

"No, neber." Mammy's answer was final. "Dey gib yer a start an' leab de res' fer us. I used ter fear as some un ud claim yer, but I stop dat now. De pusson I fears is de man as my baby'll say yes to when he axes her ter be his wife."

"He won't come, Mammy."

"Quit yer foolin'!" The old woman laughed into the serious young face. "Don' I know how de fellers at school broke der hearts ober yer, an' out in de city you was de putties' gal o' de lot. I's feared sometimes dis ain't de place fer a young t'ing like you."

"I'm very happy here," Hertha made answer.

"I's glad o' dat. Ellen, now, she's t'inkin' as yer need company."

"I wish Ellen wouldn't worry over me."

"She ain't worryin', honey." The mother spoke soothingly, seeing that her remark had awakened annoyance. "She jes' wants yer ter hab what's rightly yours."

"I'm very happy," Hertha reiterated. "Only," she added, "I do miss Tom. He used to love to be on the porch with us Sunday afternoons, didn't he?"

"Yes, dearie."

"I think Tom's going to be a splendid man; you can always trust him."

"Dat's so, dat's so. An' dat's de bes' t'ing yer can say ob any man."

They sat together a little longer, the sun lengthening the shadow of the cabin upon the white sand, and then, with the coming twilight, went within.

CHAPTER VII

John Merryvale was growing old, people were beginning to say; and then would add that the world, when he should pass away, would miss an old-time gentleman. He was a tall, thin man, long of limb and deliberate of speech. The impatient northern guest who tried to hurry him with the mail could fidget to her fill without decreasing by a moment the time he chose to spend upon his task. He could not be hurried but he could easily be duped, and many of the acres that Lee Merryvale coveted, but saw in other hands, had slipped from his father's by reason of overconfidence in some speculator or old acquaintance. But, no matter how often he was imposed upon, he never lost his equanimity. The man who took advantage of him was not to be condemned; it was not his fault if he had not been born a gentleman; the overreaching tradesman was to be pitied. That he, John Merryvale, was to be pitied did not even enter his thoughts.

The Negroes of the place loved and looked up to him, and he on his part treated them as beloved children. When they were ill he doctored them; when they quarreled, he acted as judge, and, without the cost of a lawsuit, gave them more rational judgment than they would have obtained in a court. While bearing a large part of the expense of the Episcopal church under the live-oaks at the water's edge, he helped to keep open the Methodist meeting among the pines where his black children went on Sunday mornings. He looked askance at first at Ellen; and while he never grew to like her ways, believing that she put false notions of equality into the children's heads, he was just and admitted that she had improved the morals of the place. For himself, he should always look upon the Negro as the white man's charge and make every allowance for his wrongdoing. What would be a sin in a white man, in a Negro would be only the misdemeanor of a child. Once, when one of his Negro tenants murdered a black neighbor in a drunken fight, he urged the judge to show clemency, to make the sentence lenient. "Remember," he admonished, "this man is black, and it is not one-tenth as bad for a black man to do a deed like this as for a white one." This attitude did not prevent his treating with respect the Negroes, men and women, whom he knew both at his own place and up and down the river, and they in their turn loved to drop a word with him, and looked with affectionate regard upon the tall figure in its well-worn cutaway coat, its straw hat with the black ribbon, its big, comfortable collar. One might see him of a Sunday walking among the pines, inquiring for Lucindy or Rose or Ebenezer, as the case might be.

On this Sunday afternoon, while Hertha sat with her mother on the steps, John Merryvale was walking with his son in the orange grove. They had been examining the trees when two colored lads, dressed in their Sunday best, bowed in crossing their path. Lee nodded carelessly to the young men, but his father raised his hat. The son noticed it, and spoke, half jestingly, of this act of courtesy.

"There isn't another man in the state would do that, Father. A nigger's a nigger to the folk I know about here."

"I remember," his father answered, "the retort Jefferson Davis gave when questioned for returning the bow of a black man. 'I can't afford,' he said, 'to be less of a gentleman than he.'"

Young Merryvale was silent, wondering whether the day had passed of both the old-time white and colored gentleman.

"This is a beautiful tree," his father said, stopping to look with pride at a plant filled with fast ripening fruit. "It's bearing well this season."

"Yes."

"I cannot tell you, Son, how happy I am that you are redeeming these old acres."

"So you're converted," Lee said, with a bright smile.

"Yes, entirely. And the best of it is the realization that you are busy in your old home and do not stay in it merely for Patty and me."

"Oh, I couldn't keep away! This place grips me. It's well enough to go to New York for a month to study the market, but this is the land of my choice, darkies and all. I wish they could do a good day's work; but, then, I don't pay them for a day's work, white man's reckoning."

A few steps further brought them to the tree where he and Hertha had first played together.

The older man stopped again. "Why, here's a blossom at the end of a bough," he said.

"Yes, but don't pick it!" Lee seized his father's arm. "I've a fancy to keep it there—for good luck," he added, somewhat lamely.

Over the blossom, the previous morning, Hertha had bent like a happy child, blowing upon the petals and calling on them to open.

"Lee!" The young man started at his father's voice; there was in it a note of admonition, almost of severity. But there was nothing of severity in the words that followed:

"I wish I could express to you my happiness that this old home that my father and my father's father loved and strove to make beautiful will now be guarded by you. And you will do better with it than we did."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Lee said.

"Yes, this is a mere fragment that comes into your hands."

"A pretty good fragment, I think."

"Only a fragment. The acres stretching back through the pines should be yours, and other acres by the river's edge. I did not know how to use the place aright, but you will be wiser than I."

"Well, if I am wiser about such things," Lee admitted, "it's because the world is wiser to-day than when you took over the place. People have learned a heap of science since then."

John Merryvale did not heed this remark, but, turning his gaze from his son, looked away down the river. "I could not give you the heritage in land which should be yours," he said gravely, "but I hope I have given you a heritage of kindly relationship to those about you, of friendliness and honorable dealing."

"Indeed," Lee answered, "I know how you are loved and honored."

"And you, too, shall be honored by all on this old estate down to the humblest colored child. It is a great consolation to me," he went on, still looking away from his son and out over the water, "that the rights of the poorest black girl have been respected from my father's father's day through my own. There are no white faces among these cabins to tell of our passion and our shame. I think of this sometimes when I see that young servant of your aunt's. In her beautiful countenance is the sin and the disgrace of the Southern gentleman."

"Don't you believe," Lee answered sharply, "that her mother thought she was honored?"

"That's as it may be, but she was not honored, and her child was left to the chance care of a black woman."

"He was a beast who did that!"

The father turned at this heated speech to see his son, face flushed, anger in his eyes.

"If he took a responsibility, he had no right later to dodge it."

Lee spoke with vehemence. He had told Hertha that he had ceased to think, but in reality he was thinking, every hour of the day, of the thing that he was doing.

"Whoever started the damned business going," he went on, with an attempt at a laugh, "got America into a frightful mess. But some one did start it, and here they are, women—well, women such as you speak of, with all the instincts and the beauty of the white race. Don't you believe a woman like that would be happier under the protection of a white man who loved her than if she took up with some coarse fellow as black as her shoes?"

"No," John Merryvale answered, "the life of such a woman is the loneliest life in the world. She may not enter the white world and the black world casts her off."

"Aren't you mistaken?" The question came quickly, with an undertone of anxiety. "It seems to me that the black race must understand that there's nothing for it but to get whiter."

"There's nothing for it but to get blacker, Son. All, black and white, are learning to know this. Within its own circle it may build up a civilization that shall be a humble imitation of the civilization of the white race, a race that has had a start of thousands of years. We must be patient, helping when we can, not hindering."

Lee scanned his father's face, but could see nothing to show that he was thinking of any present issue; rather he was striving to express his belief on a vexed question that would trouble this country long after he was gone. Nor did he glance at his listener, but stood, a tall, thin figure in his long black coat, kindly, serious.

"It is a great problem, that of the two races," he continued musingly, "a problem that the South alone can solve, since we know the black man, his virtues and his limitations. He has come to us in his trouble and we have helped and advised him. That is as it should be, but increasingly he will have to live without our surveillance. For after all, no man is fit to be the master of another; and not even the gentlemen of the South were wise enough to be entrusted with the lives of other men. My father fought to perpetuate the peculiar institution of slavery, and as a boy I put a gun on my shoulder and went out in the last year of the war. We thought that we were right, but we know now that we were mistaken."

"Yes."

"Sometimes I am afraid that as the country develops, as industry increases, the friendly relations between the whites and the blacks will wholly cease, and each will go his way, regardless of the other. But that will never happen while you are here, I feel sure."

"Oh, no," Lee answered cheerfully, glad of the turn the conversation had taken, "I like the darkies all right."

"That is not enough." John Merryvale turned and for the first time looked straight into his son's face. "Men have stolen my acres from me, but I have stolen from no man. I have tried to do no one an injustice, honoring the least of His children. I have little to give you in money and in acres; but I can give you this: the assurance that I have wittingly wronged no man or woman. And I shall believe that when you stand here, your hair gray, moving with slow feet, you will be able to say to your son, 'I have wittingly wronged no man or woman.'

"It's getting late," he concluded, turning to leave. "I'll go to the house to see if your aunt is needing me."

Lee stood alone for some minutes under the orange tree. He ran his hand caressingly along the trunk as though he were touching something dear and precious. Then, with sober face, as slowly as his father, he walked through the twilight to the great house.

CHAPTER VIII

It seemed to Hertha as she sat at the open window after the others had gone to bed that it was the most beautiful night she had ever known. Utterly still, except for the eternal sound of the wind among the pines, it yet was full of music; for, borne on the breeze from the river, some one was calling, beseechingly, insistently, and she was answering in her heart.

The young moon was sinking in the west. She could not see it, but she could see the fleecy clouds that reflected its light. How lovely they were, moving wherever the light wind, high in the heavens, might desire. They had no will, these clouds, but were wafted into the shadow or the silvery brightness, living as they had the right to live, pliant to the spirit of the strong wind.

The house was perfectly still. The little watch that Ellen had given her when she went away to school told her that it lacked but a few minutes of the hour when he had called her to come. All day she had questioned and doubted and hesitated. She had asked her black mother to tell her the story of her adoption that she might surely guard her virtue and resist temptation; but now, looking into the night, she refused to believe that this was temptation, rather it was a glorious opportunity to give generously, without stint or questioning.

She slipped a coat over the white dress she was wearing, walked stealthily into the hallway, lifted the latch and was under the stars. No one had heard her, and she ran swiftly across the open yard, bright in the moonlight, to the darkness of the trees.

Standing in the gloom of the path and looking back at the cabin she hesitated. There were the roses by the porch and the goldenrod and aster, bits of bright weed, growing in the sand. Close to her were the chickens asleep upon their perches. She was leaving this friendly, familiar home to enter the white world; and to enter, not even at the kitchen door, but through a dark, hidden passage that no one but herself could tread. She did not want to say good-by. Doubting, she took a step toward the little house, and then the wind from the river blew in her face and she fancied some one called her by name.

No, she would not go back. His love lifted her above her home, above her doubting self, on, up to the clouds, the moon, to paradise. Love was an immense power that hewed its way through the routine of life. It was eternal, from the creation of the world.

The way was very dark to the grove, but overhead were the stars, and if for a moment she felt fear, she stopped peering through the trees to look to them for reassurance. There is no starlight so beautiful as that of the southern sky where the heavenly bodies are not cold, sparkling pinpricks, as in the North, but luminous globes that breathe a soft radiance to the warm earth. They are companions, and the slave who followed the North Star through the swamp and bed of the black stream must have felt warmed and comforted by its near and tremulous light, only later to see it grow distant and cold. So Hertha looked to the stars for light and courage and with pounding heart at length reached her trysting-place.

He had not come. It was the hour, she felt sure, for she had set her watch by the clock in the living-room of the great house. He had never been late in the morning. Perhaps Miss Patty had detained him, or his father; sometimes they sat up for a long time, though, she thought, never so late as this. But he must soon arrive when she would no longer be alone, but safe from fear with him.

Waiting, she cheered her heart recalling the many pretty things that he had said to her. Whether, knowing her station as a servant, he realized that she was happy to be wholly lifted from it, or whether he believed her really to be above any other woman, he never failed to call her by some new and lovely name. Yesterday she had been the good fairy who brought him her best gift in her outstretched hands. Though it was chill, she threw off her dark coat and in her white dress ran for a minute out beyond the cypress into the grove. She longed to dance, to sing, to call him to her in the stillness of the night. Moving a little among the trees and peering down the long vista of straight trunks and arching branches, within her heart she pleaded with him to hurry, not to let her stay here alone. But no figure came to meet her, only a firefly twinkled in the distance,

and above her head a mockingbird gave a sleepy chirp. The earth was asleep, breathing deep, fragrant breaths, wrapped in the soft air of night. She only was alert, listening, a vivid spirit of wakefulness in the deserted grove.

Returning to the gloom of the cypress she put on her coat and waited, slow-ticking minute following slow-ticking minute, until the young moon set and the chill wind made her shiver and crouch in terror and loneliness and miserable shame.

The night that had been so still as she crept back was full of evil noises. The sand crackled under her feet, and the twigs upon which she stepped gave a quick, explosive sound. Sometimes she imagined she heard people coming toward her and left the path for the trees, to wait in trembling terror until the fancied tread had died away. In one of these man[oe]uvers she lost her bearing and stood for many minutes close to the path, not recognizing it, terrified to go or to remain. And when at length she found her way again and walked ahead, her little mouth and childish chin working in a paroxysm of fright, a screech owl called and made her almost scream with terror. Then she pulled herself together. She and Tom had often listened to the owls and he had mimicked them. The thought of him gave her courage and she went on, trembling and determined, until the end of the path was reached and she could look upon the open yard and home.

Then she did hear people coming. Off to the right were voices, a girl's loud, coarse laughter and a man's rough tones. She crouched down that her white dress might not show among the trees. The figures came into sight, Maranthy, with old Jim, an ill-natured, ugly fellow, known to neglect his wife and children. The two walked boldly over the white sand, and as Hertha watched them the man caught the girl and hugged her hard. She laughed and swore, pushing him away, and then, with an animal-like motion, sidled up to him. Together they moved across the yard, his arm tight about her waist, while she, lolling on his shoulder and calling on Christ and God to damn him, gave him a smacking kiss upon the mouth.

The room was reached at last. Hertha tore off her clothes, slipped into her nightdress, and lay, a little huddled mass of shame and woe, upon her bed. Her feet and hands were icy cold, her teeth were chattering, but her brain was on fire. Pride and shame took equal possession of her spirit. She had risked everything, she had been ready to give everything, only to find herself despised. Ellen was right, her place belonged with her own race. She was black, and she must never again trust the white race that felt for her only an amused tolerance or scorn. She was black, and hers was the black man's table, the black man's home, the black man's burial-place. Never again would she think to enter the white man's world.

And the beauty of her love was wholly gone. The courage with which her lover had armed her had disappeared, and her affection, that had seemed to her something pure and delicate, almost holy, became a common lust that this man had awakened and then, disgusted at his choice of anything so cheap, had cast aside. Nothing was left to her of the glory and gladness of the morning.

But while shame and hurt pride swept over her, there came in their wake an inexpressible relief. She was safe from harm. She was not like Marantha but just Hertha Williams who had slipped out of her room to see the stars and then slipped back again. She was safe here, in Tom's room, at home.

Kneeling beside her bed she prayed for strength, strength to be good though she was young and pretty and colored. She could not see ahead, probably it would be wise to go away somewhere, she wished it might be near Tom—it was hard to be alone; but she must never again trust the white man's world.

Back in her bed terror crept over her once more and she shook with fear; but at length, in sheer exhaustion, she lay quiet, and when the first morning light entered the room it found her asleep.

CHAPTER IX

"Mercy on us!"

Miss Patty was overcome. She fell back in her chair, her hands trembling violently, her breath coming short and quick.

"My dear," cried Miss Witherspoon hurrying toward her and fanning her with the newspaper that lay on the table with the morning mail.

"It's incredible," the southern woman said. She picked up the letter she had been reading, scanned it a moment, and put it on the table again. Her companion, devoured with curiosity but strong in the belief that good manners required that she should show indifference, continued her ministrations for a few seconds and then turned to her own mail.

"You'll have to advise me," Miss Patty said tremulously, the letter wavering in her hand, her small head with its white hair shaking up and down as she talked. "Why should John and Lee have gone away this morning! I don't know what to do."

"If I can be of any service——"

"This letter is from an old friend, my dear, a very old friend. I haven't seen him for a long time—I'm such an invalid, you know—but he writes as an old friend should and asks me to break the news to the dear child as best I may."

"The dear child?" Miss Witherspoon echoed, interrogation in her voice.

"Yes, and she always has been a dear child; you know how I have cared for her and shown an interest in her. And to think that this should have happened! It's incredible."

"What has happened?" The northern woman's tone was peremptory. If she was to offer advice she would no longer be kept in suspense.

"Why, this amazing story. I should never believe it if it came from another source, but Bostwick Unthank is the best lawyer in the state. It is very considerate and polite, I must say, for him to write to me instead of to John, though Hertha of course is my maid—and then I used to know him very well indeed. But I can't believe it, I can't believe that such a thing could have happened."

Impatient at such incoherence and nervous garrulousness, Miss Witherspoon yet understood that something of vital importance was in the letter which Miss Patty waved back and forth, and unable longer to maintain her indifference she touched the old lady on the arm.

"Shall I read what your lawyer writes?" she asked, "or will you read it to me?"

"Oh, he isn't my lawyer," Miss Patty exclaimed, "I never had a lawyer in my life, I have never believed in getting into lawsuits. He's only an old friend. But his letter is of such importance that I will ask you to read it aloud to me. I want to be sure that I understand it."

Nothing could better have pleased Miss Witherspoon. She took up the typewritten sheet and in a clear, distinct voice began:

"BOSTWICK UNTHANK,
Attorney and Counsellor-at-law,
Jonesville, Florida.

"My dear Miss Merryvale——"

"How strange it seems," Miss Patty interpolated, "to have him address me in that formal way."

"It's a business letter," the reader explained.

"I know that," Miss Patty said tartly, "otherwise I should not have given it to you to read."

"My dear Miss Merryvale," Miss Witherspoon began again, "I am inclosing a letter to your maid, Hertha Williams, retailing to her an extraordinary piece of news. George Ogilvie, whom you will remember, I am sure, has died and in his will he leaves a small legacy to a granddaughter, Hertha Williams, the illegitimate child of his daughter Lillias who died two days after its birth. The birth was successfully concealed by placing the infant with a colored family. Evidently Ogilvie, at the last, felt unable to keep the secret for he leaves an account of the extraordinary proceeding, recognizes his granddaughter, and asks that she take the family name. It is likely to be a great shock to the young woman and I am inclosing the firm's letter to your care, knowing that you will understand in your great kindness how best to break the news.

"Believe me, Madam, with esteem,

"Your obedient servant,

"BOSTWICK UNTHANK."

As Miss Witherspoon put down the letter and looked at her hostess's shaking head she wondered whether the lawyer had made a careful choice in his method of relating the story to Hertha; and she resolved to take a part herself, if advisable, in the breaking of the news. While extraordinary, it was tidings that a colored girl might easily bear. Two legacies, one of money, one of race, were wonderful gifts. "Where is Hertha?" she asked.

"Ellen stopped in this morning to say that she had been awake with a bad headache and had then overslept. The dear child, she should have all her strength for this news."

"Did you ever hear of anything like it before?"

"No, no, it is most extraordinary, most extraordinary. I remember George Ogilvie well, a handsome man. His wife was a pretty woman with a small mouth. They said she spent every penny he had. She died two years ago. You may be sure *she* would never have allowed the story to be known."

"Hertha should have known it years ago."

"No, my dear, no." Miss Patty sat erect ready to dispute such a suggestion. Her voice quavered and her head had not ceased to shake, but she was alert to defend her conception of what was right and proper. "She should never have known it. This has put a stain forever upon her

mother's name."

"Her mother is long since dead," the northern woman answered sharply, "while the child is living. I can think of nothing more cruel than to save a daughter's honor by giving her infant to be reared by Negroes. It's frightful."

"I don't agree with you." Miss Patty was herself once more. "The whole thing is very sad and wicked, of course, but life among the Negroes is not frightful, they are the happiest people in the world. One day is just as good as another to them. If the sun doesn't shine this morning it will the next. Hertha won't know what trouble means until she becomes white."

"It's too bad, then, that you don't have more white children brought up by blacks," Miss Witherspoon retorted. "Why not give the poor unfortunates a fair chance in life?"

Sarcasm was lost upon her companion. "Grown-ups must take responsibility whether they like it or not," Miss Patty said sententiously. "Negroes are a child race and the white race must govern them. Hertha will be a grown person now, one of the ruling class, and seeing she's an Ogilvie it's likely she'll take easily to the position."

"Hertha has always seemed grown-up to me, too serious for her youth. She loves to day dream, but I don't believe she ever dreamed of anything so wonderful as this. What do you suppose she'll do?"

"Marry, of course, as every white girl should. The fact that you and I sent away our beaux makes us all the surer that others shouldn't. Her legacy should be a help in getting her settled."

"Now I hope she won't get married for some time."

Miss Patty was indignant. "And I hope she'll marry at once before she becomes too fond of her liberty. When she was colored it was different. I always discouraged, as you know, her going with the men of her race. Dear me, how mixed up I am getting. And she is really white! I shall have to remember that. Dear, dear!"

"Here comes Hertha now."

Looking up Miss Patty saw Hertha in her maid's dress, her cheeks a little whiter than usual, dark shadows under her eyes, but modest, quiet, standing in the doorway. "My dear," she began, and collapsed again.

Hertha ran to her all anxious attention. "Is it bad news?" she asked turning to Miss Witherspoon while she rubbed her mistress's hands.

"No, Hertha," was the answer, "it isn't bad news. It's about you."

The girl grew sick with fright. What had they found out?

"It's this," Miss Witherspoon said, pushing over the letter inclosed in Miss Patty's and addressed to the girl.

"What are you doing?" Miss Patty recovered at once when she saw her prerogative as vendor of news about to be destroyed. "Bostwick Unthank wrote to me that the shock might not be too great. Don't look at that letter, honey," turning to Hertha with deep affection and concern in her voice. "Wait till I've told you about it. It's from a lawyer, my dear, and it seems a little money has been left you. We don't know how much but it should be a little help, I'm sure."

"Who has left it?" Hertha asked.

She was tense with excitement, afraid. She could not dissociate this happening with the night through which she had passed. She dared not trust herself to tear open her own letter before these two women. Despairing, she turned to Miss Witherspoon who stood quiet, composed, just as one of her teachers would have stood at school. "Please tell me at once," she asked, "what this means?"

And Miss Witherspoon answered in a matter-of-fact tone such as a teacher might have used: "It seems, Hertha, that you are not colored but white."

The girl turned from one woman to another. "Don't mock me," she gasped.

"My darling!" Miss Patty held out her arms to her favorite. "There, dear, there, don't look so frightened, though I must say," glancing with scorn at her guest, "it would be enough to frighten any one into her grave to be told a piece of news that way. You are white, dear, and you have been left some money, and you ought to be very happy." And with many pats and kisses she told all of the story that she knew.

Hertha's letter was brief and ended by stating that she had been bequeathed two thousand dollars, and that, as all legacies left by the late George Ogilvie were to be paid at once, she was requested to come at her earliest convenience to the lawyer's office.

"What is she thinking about?" the two women asked themselves as the girl read her letter and said no word. But could they have looked into her mind they would have been perplexed to find an answer. Her brain was a blur of strange, magnificent impressions. A dying mother, an old man delaying restitution until after his death, money, freedom. As she looked down at her maid's dress, as she thought of herself last night crouched under the trees, she drew a deep breath. She

was white, of good name. No one should play with her again and throw her away. In the multitude of emotions that rushed through her being the one that held her longest in its grip was pride. No white man now should expect her to give everything and in return receive only humiliation. "I'm white, I'm white," she repeated over and over to herself.

"Two thousand dollars is a good deal of money to get all at once, Hertha—or Miss Ogilvie, as I suppose I ought to say," Miss Witherspoon remarked, more to take Hertha's mind from herself than anything else. "I hope you'll use it wisely."

"Some of it," Hertha replied, "belongs to Mammy."

"She'll never touch it," Miss Patty said sharply; and in this she prophesied aright.

Hertha rose slowly and went into her mistress's bedroom.

"What are you doing?" Miss Patty called out.

"Making your bed," was the answer. "And then, if you don't mind, I'd like to go home."

Calling the girl to her, Miss Patty rose and said tenderly, "You're your own mistress now and you mustn't think of work this morning. Pomona can come upstairs and put things to rights. This has been a terrible excitement for you, terrible! If only John and Lee were home. How could they go away this particular morning!"

"I don't see that that makes any difference."

"Yes, of course it does; one needs a man in a case of business. But sit down, dear, get your sewing and we'll talk about it." Miss Patty settled herself again. "To think that you're an Ogilvie! Almost as good a family as the Merryvales."

"Miss Patty, I'm afraid I can't sit down and talk about it now."

"Of course, you must be excited, though you appear wonderfully calm. Don't you want to lie down on my bed?"

"No, I think I want to go home."

"Very well, you'll want to tell your mammy. And then you can begin packing your things."

"Packing my things?"

"Of course. You mustn't sleep another night in a darky's house."

"Oh," Hertha gasped.

Until now she had been thinking of herself in her relation to the white world. The past night had racked her, body and spirit, and to-day had brought release. She was white, she was rich, she had a name. Now, at Miss Patty's words she saw that in the world she was to enter she must walk alone. Her mother, the only mother she had ever known, who had given her home and food and tender care, who had prepared her breakfast for her that morning, who had washed the dress she had on, who had kissed her when she went away and told her not to work so hard, that her mammy could always make enough to care for them both—this mother was a "darky" under whose roof she must not sleep again.

"I'm going home," she said; and without another word left them.

"Poor little thing," remarked Miss Witherspoon, "it's very grand to be white, but she will find it lonely."

"Perhaps at first," the other answered, "but she'll soon get used to things. When I was little I cared more for Lindy, our cook's little girl, than for any one else in the world. We two played together the whole day long. She was a dear child, with big soft eyes and a laughing mouth. What fun we used to have! And if we got into a scrape her mammy'd see to it that no one knew more about it than was good for them. I cried my eyes out the day my mother said I was too old to play with Lindy any more. For months I couldn't bear to go by a pine tree where we'd had our best times together. And when I'd see Lindy she'd look so wistfully at me! But other things came to fill my life and they'll come to fill Hertha's."

"It's not at all the same thing," Miss Witherspoon said, "you had your home."

"And Hertha will make hers. You shall see."

CHAPTER X

Hurrying past the kitchen and by the cabins, Hertha's mind began to work quickly. At first she had been too full of the remembrance of the previous night to recognize fully what had befallen her; but now, with a sharp delight that carried pain with it, she saw herself in the white world. She was so accustomed to the circumscription of the world of black people that only when freedom was granted did she fully realize her slavery. As the slave was bound to its master so she was bound to the Negroes, unable, except through deceit or sin, to leave their world. And

suddenly the bond was gone and she was free. With her little fortune she could go out into a marvelous new life without a thought of race. A white-skinned girl among black people, she had often winced at the coarse jokes or pitying remarks that had been made upon her appearance. White men had leered at her, and she had never known when she would be free from insult. But after to-day she would take the place that belonged to her. She would no longer be a "white-faced nigger," but Hertha Ogilvie—Miss Ogilvie, as Miss Witherspoon had said—the granddaughter of a distinguished southern judge.

As the Williams cottage came into sight, Hertha's thoughts suddenly changed and the white world slipped from her as she saw her black mother standing in the doorway. Running forward, she threw her arms about the old woman's neck and broke into passionate sobs, half of excitement, half of dread, but that to her mother meant only sorrow.

"Honey, baby, why you cryin'? Who hurt my baby? You ain't rightly been you'self, not since Tom lef'. Tell you' mammy, dear."

Her mother led her into her room, and there, as they sat together on the bed, Hertha tried to tell her story. She made one or two excited attempts, and then, pressing her hands together, said simply: "I'm white!"

"Oh, my Gawd!" her mother cried.

The two women stood up, the black one looking into the beautiful white face with its clear, dark eyes, its sweet mouth, its little trembling chin. As Hertha thought of it afterwards it seemed to her that her mother said good-by to her at that moment. Then the big, heavy mouth broke and it was the mother who was sobbing in her child's arms.

Hertha was a long time telling her story. When she described the little that she knew of her birth the colored woman cried angrily: "De dirty hogs! Dat's de way dey treats de black chillen—I allays knows dat—t'row 'em out fer us ter care fo'; neber a helpin' hand fer de chile o' der sin. But ter treat der own like it was an outcast, oh, Lawd." At the story of the will she grew much excited. "You's got some money, honey, I's glad o' dat. Seems like I can see you gwine away ef you's somet'ing dat's you' own." The suggestion, timidly given, that some of it belonged to her was received with regal anger. "You want ter pay me?" she asked. And Hertha's swift, tearful denial ended with a kiss and the agreement between them that that subject be forever closed. Her pleasure in the thought of the name Hertha was to bear was real indeed. "An' dere ain't no borrowed finery 'bout it," she declared in triumph.

It was a hard day. Hertha did not return to Miss Patty, and by the time afternoon arrived the news had spread, and neighbor after neighbor came to learn more of the amazing story. How the girl wished them away! She wanted to be by herself, to think what it all meant. Above all she wanted to talk to Ellen, to Ellen who had not yet come in and who might learn the story from some child. As soon as she could find a chance to get away, she ran from the cabins on through the pines to the school. Her heart beat violently and then stopped for a moment as she saw Lee Merryvale coming toward her. Turning, she hurried back to her home, entered her bedroom and shut the door. He would not dare to obtrude there.

"Hertha, Hertha darling!" It was Ellen who was knocking and in a moment she had her sister in her arms.

"I'm so glad for you, dear," Ellen said.

She had been told the story and was sitting very soberly by the window. "This colored world is too hard and ugly for you. I don't mind much because I'm so busy, but if I stopped to think about it I'd go half mad. I have felt that way for you at times. I want you to have everything that's fine and beautiful and you'll have a chance to now."

"I suppose white people have ugly lives," Hertha put in.

"Yes, but they have a chance for something else, while when you're colored you might have the genius of a Shakespeare but it wouldn't give you the opportunity to be a playwright. Or if you wrote a play, they wouldn't let you into the theater to see it. And it's just the same with everything else. You were shut out because you were black. But you won't be shut out any longer now; you're free and I'm so glad."

She showed her gladness by breaking down. Hertha had not seen her cry since she was a child. Even at her father's death she had kept dry-eyed while she comforted the others; but now she sobbed pitifully. "I'm glad," she reiterated through her tears. "I'd give my life for you, and I reckon that's what it'll be. It won't seem like living when you've said good-by."

"It's going to be awful," Hertha said choking over the words: "you've always advised and encouraged me, Sister. I wouldn't have kept on in school but for you; and now I'll have to go ahead alone. I feel lost."

Ellen, much ashamed of her emotion, dried her eyes. "I've done all I can, Hertha," she said solemnly, "after this you'll have to go alone."

A step was heard on the porch and a voice asked: "Is Miss Hertha there?"

"Yes, Mr. Lee," Mammy's voice answered; "Miss Hertha, she's right hyar. Was you wantin' ter speak wid her?"

"Tell her I came to fetch her up to the house. My aunt is expecting her."

"I won't go," Hertha whispered. "Tell him I won't go."

Ellen rose and left the room. Hertha heard her explain to the young man that the white girl could not go away yet. "She is very tired, Mr. Lee," she declared, "and wants to remain here at present."

Lee seemed to demur but after a few minutes he left the house.

When he had gone Hertha walked into the living-room. There was the familiar table, the straight-backed chairs, and the comfortable rocker; there was the reading-lamp with its green shade and the china with the pink flowers set upon the sideboard; there were the books upon the shelf; and yet everything seemed strange. Did her own thoughts give it unreality, her thoughts that roamed continually through the white world that she was soon to enter, or was it the two people whom she so loved who were already oddly constrained? "Miss Hertha," she had heard her black mother say—the mother who had cared for her, had fed and clothed her, had watched by her bedside in her illnesses. "Miss Hertha"! Was her home to slip from her like this?

"Ellen," she cried, "I shall have to go away before long, I know that, but don't push me out upon the Merryvales because I don't want to go."

"I'll do what I can," Ellen answered.

"Honey," her mammy exclaimed, "it don't seem like we could eber let you leab us. Dis home been you's mo'n our own. But you is white, now, baby, an' you can't be wid colored folks no mo'."

"Why can't I if I choose to?" Hertha asked, her mouth quivering. "I want to stay here until I leave. I have to visit that lawyer soon and get my money, and then, I suppose, I'll go somewhere up North. But while I'm in Merryvale I want to be with you."

"Baby, I's feared it ain't de right way."

"Have you had anything to eat, Sister?" Ellen inquired. "This must have been a terribly exciting day for you. I'll hurry and get supper."

Hertha rose to help but her black mother pushed her back into her chair. "You jes' stay hyar while Ellen an' me gits de t'ings."

"But I want to work," the white girl insisted. "I don't want you two to do everything."

"It ain't much we kin do," the old woman went on as though apologizing for the house, "not much fer an Ogilvie. Miss Hertha Ogilvie, dat's what dey'll call yer. Miss Hertha Ogilvie! Oh, my Lawd!"

Hertha rose from the seat into which she had been pushed and began to set the table. But while handling the knives and forks and smoothing the tablecloth into place, she found herself repeating, "Miss Hertha Ogilvie, *Miss Hertha Ogilvie, Miss!*"

How the white people had steadily refused to give her that title! No matter how refined she was, how well educated, since she had colored blood she must always hear her first name. But Lee Merryvale had said, "Miss Hertha," and Miss Witherspoon had said, "Miss Ogilvie."

"Sister," she said, turning to Ellen with attempted gaiety, "can't we have sugared sweet potatoes to-night to celebrate? You cook them so well. Just think, I'm going to have two thousand dollars. Isn't that rich?"

"It depends on how you use it," replied the always practical Ellen. "If you want you can get rid of it quickly enough; but I do hope, Hertha, you'll use some of it for your education."

"What do you want me to study?"

"You know what I told you the other day, but now you'll have a better chance of success."

"You mean dressmaking. I think myself I'll try stenography."

It was a wild statement, an exciting jump into an unknown business world.

"Why, Hertha," Ellen said in surprise, "I didn't know you had any bent that way."

"I haven't, but I believe I should like it. Stenographers work in offices, and have short hours and good wages."

"Not colored ones. Oh, I forgot." Ellen lost her composure, and to cover her slip went into the kitchen.

There was a knock and Mammy went outside to admit Mr. John Merryvale. He at once entered the room and seeing Hertha walked up to her and took her hand. "My dear," he said, "we have done you a great injustice."

"Yes?" Hertha said, questioning.

She was angry at his coming, but his kindly manner made it difficult for her to maintain her anger. He crossed over to where her mammy stood, saying gravely: "Aunt Maggie, it seems like you were the only one who did the right thing in all this tangle. You and your husband opened your hearts and brought up this forsaken child. You surely deserve your reward."

"I don't want no reward," the colored woman replied. "I had my reward every day dis chile lib. Wat you t'ink a lil' bread an' a shelterin' roof mean to yer when yer hab a lily like dis by you' side? An' oh, how is I eber ter git on wid her away?"

"I haven't gone yet, Mammy," Hertha said with an attempt at a laugh. "I'm right here."

"No, but I can't keep you no longer; you's crossed de line when you is Miss Hertha Ogilvie. You's gone across."

"Well, I'm Hertha Williams just at present, and I'm going to see how Ellen's sweet potatoes are getting on," and she left the room.

When she returned a few minutes later she found Mr. Merryvale seated in the rocker while Aunt Maggie stood by the table. He rose as she entered, a tribute he had never paid her before. The girl felt it acutely as the old woman had remained standing while the man sat. "White, white, white," she said to herself. "That's the way the people treat you when you're white. I'm white now, and they'll rise when I enter the room, and they'll serve me instead of my serving them."

"Supper is most ready, Mammy," she called out. "Ellen will bring in the potatoes as soon as you tell her to."

She tried to ignore their visitor, but he was oblivious of her attempt.

"Your mammy and I have been talking things over," he said, "and we think, Hertha, that it would be well for you to go home with me. I came to reiterate Miss Patty's invitation. Come and visit with us until you decide what you will do and whether you desire to go away to complete your education."

"This is my home." The girl's voice trembled despite her efforts to control it. "Mammy has told me she won't turn me out."

"Turn you out, my baby!"

"Yes, I'm the baby you took in, Mammy, and I want to stay on here now with you. Don't send me away! Ellen," she called into the kitchen, "come in, won't you?"

Ellen appeared at the doorway and all three turned to her expectantly: Mr. Merryvale, tall, quiet; Mammy, tearful, bewildered; and Hertha with the new excited look upon her face. "Ellen," she cried again, "don't let them take me from my only home!"

The colored girl put down the dish that she was carrying and said to the gentleman who stood looking at her so pleasantly and yet with such a gently persistent manner: "Hertha is very tired, Mr. Merryvale, I think she had better eat a little supper and then go right to bed. She looks like she hadn't slept a wink last night, and to-day's news is enough to get any one crazy! You'll excuse her, I know, if she doesn't go back with you."

"You're a right good woman, Ellen," Mr. Merryvale replied, "and likely you'll understand. We want Hertha to be with us very much."

The white girl moved to where Ellen stood and, clasping her erstwhile sister by the arm, pressed close to the strong figure as though nothing should draw her away.

"Hertha is over twenty-one," Ellen remarked, "I suppose that gives her the right to do as she likes."

Mr. Merryvale looked at the two young women and then addressed himself directly to Hertha. He seemed very impressive as he stood before her clad in his long coat. His voice was more serious than usual, and he spoke gently, with deliberation.

"Everybody in Merryvale has heard of your good fortune, Hertha," he said, "and I reckon the earth won't be a day older before everybody knows it up and down the river. It's a wonderful story and if you lived in the city the newspaper men would be rushing in and taking your picture, and they only know what foolishness they might say. For a little time you'll be a person of prominence. Now, I understand there isn't anything your mammy wouldn't do for you, but right now she can't help you, you need the protection of my home. Everybody's wondering if it's true, and asking themselves and others all sorts of questions. If you come with me the questions will stop, and you will be Hertha Ogilvie to all the world. Miss Patty would have come herself," he added, "but she didn't feel rightly that she could walk so far."

"Of course not," Hertha assented, her affection for her mistress at once asserting itself, "she never walks as far as this."

"Don't you think then that you had better come with me like a wise young lady? Mammy and Ellen will know that your affection for them has not changed, and they will be glad to have you escape any gossip or unkind talk. It isn't like we were strangers to you. You love my sister and she loves you and will be glad to advise you regarding the new place you will take in the world. Maggie," he said, turning to the older woman, "you understand, and I think Ellen is beginning to. I leave it to you both to convince Hertha that she will do best by coming with me. Your chickens look likely this year," he said with apparent irrelevance, "I'm going out to see them;" and with a slow step he left the room.

Ellen was the first to speak. "Look after the supper, Mammy," she said, "while Hertha comes with me." And she led the girl into Tom's bedroom.

"Is there a special reason why you don't want to go?" she asked; and then, as Hertha did not answer, in a lower tone, "Has it anything to do with Mr. Lee Merryvale?"

Still Hertha did not speak.

"Hertha!"

"Oh, you needn't worry." The girl looked up quickly. "Nothing has happened. Only," and she spoke with bitterness, "I found out he despised me."

"Well," Ellen observed after a pause, "you're a white girl now, you can despise him."

"Yes," Hertha answered, but her tone did not carry conviction.

Ellen looked at the delicate face, at the slender hands, at the shy figure, and swallowed hard. "Sister," she said authoritatively, "the time has come for you to hold up your head. You've got to make your own way. You'll be lonely and frightened and you'll miss home, but you've got to do it. As for Mr. Lee, I'm pretty sure he won't bother you if you let him see you don't like it. He'll have to take a little time to find his bearings, now he knows you're white."

"I don't want him around."

"If he wants to be around he can see you one place as well as another. You can't stay forever in these few rooms."

"Then you send me away?" Hertha turned to her former sister, her head up.

"You're going to your lawyer, you're taking the name of Hertha Ogilvie, you're coming into two thousand dollars from your grandfather's estate; isn't that so?"

"Yes."

"Then, Hertha, haven't you gone away already? You know the South. You can't be both white and black."

Hertha took down her hat from the shelf and put it on. It was a pretty white straw with a blue ribbon. She had trimmed it herself but the straw and the ribbon were a gift from Ellen.

"I suppose I may come back to pack up my things?" she asked angrily.

"Little sister, little sister!" Ellen cried.

Throwing off the hat Hertha flung her arms around her sister's neck. "Let me stay just a little longer," she beseeched. "Tell him I will come after supper. Tell him that I am too ill to come now but that you will bring me later in the evening. Let me stay and have supper with you and Mammy and then you may take me to his house. I'll go with you but not with him."

"Oh, you darling!" Ellen said, hugging her. "You're the truest! And I'm glad for you, I am, I am! You'll never forget, oh, I know you'll never forget! You know that black and white mean nothing, just nothing, that it's hearts and souls, it's whether people are mean or generous, whether they're kind or cruel, that counts. You'll never talk about 'cute niggers' the way the women do who come to my school. You won't think black people can't feel shame and mortification the same as white. You won't say the women are all immoral and the men are all——"

"Oh, Ellen," Hertha cried, "I've said good-by to Tom!" She sat down at the window and shook as though she were ill. "I can't help loving him most. I love him the way you love me; I took care of him when he was a baby."

"Yes, dear!"

"Go and tell that man that I'm coming by and by with you, and let me stay here a while alone."

It was dark among the pines, but the clouds broke and the silver moonlight greeted them as they turned under the live-oaks to Hertha's new home. For the first time since they had come to Merryvale and the great house they made their way to the front door. There, on the porch, they kissed each other good-by; and standing outside, Ellen saw Hertha Ogilvie, the baby that she had nursed, the child for whom she had made daily sacrifice, leave her in the darkness to enter the white man's world.

CHAPTER XI

"I never knew lawyers before to be so expeditious," Miss Witherspoon was saying, "I shall not talk again of the dilatoriness of the South."

"It has all happened very quickly," Hertha answered.

A week had passed since the receipt of the letter, and Hertha and Miss Witherspoon were sitting

together on the gallery while Miss Patty took her afternoon nap. The younger woman was sewing on some underwear but the older sat with empty hands, looking now at the girl, now at the landscape.

"You have been wise at once to bank your money, Hertha." Miss Witherspoon had started with Miss Ogilvie, but had slipped back into the familiar appellation. "You can draw it any time, but this way will make you careful."

Hertha smiled.

"I am glad that you have decided to accompany me and enter upon work in Boston. It seems a special providence that I should have come to Merryvale at just this time, when I can be of use."

"I'm sure it is fortunate for me."

"I have made all the arrangements that we spoke of, and I know that you will like the Institute. The course there in dressmaking is admirable. It's a little late to enter, but as a special favor to me you will be allowed to go at once into your class. I said that you were clever with your needle and could easily make up the lessons you had missed."

"I hope I can."

"Of course you can, my dear. You have only to exert yourself, and everything will go as it should. And about your board. I have written to Clay House, and they will take you in with their first vacancy. It is always so crowded. You see, it is the best place for working-girls in Boston for the money. You might have to share your room with some one but I don't believe you would mind that. A single room is seven dollars a week, but with another girl it costs only five dollars. You wouldn't want to start in spending more than that, I presume. You agree with me?"

If Hertha was in disagreement she did not show it in her face, but neither did she express approval of Miss Witherspoon's plans; she simply allowed the lady to talk on.

And she did talk on. She told Hertha about Boston, its streets, its public gardens, its library, its admirable educational facilities. Her knowledge of the city was prodigious and she apparently was on the boards of half its institutions. When she was through, for the time being, with Boston, she turned to Hertha's personal affairs. It had been arranged that the two should leave together in three days, going by train to New York and on to Boston. Miss Witherspoon had definite ideas of what Hertha would and would not need for the trip. She cautioned her at present against buying any clothes beyond absolute necessities. There would be time for that later. And from this she turned to the general question of expenditure. "Two thousand dollars, you know, Hertha, is a very small sum. You must not think of it in terms of principal but of interest. At five per cent it means only a hundred dollars a year, or a little less than nine dollars a month. Of course you cannot live on that."

"No, of course not."

"And while I approve an immediate expenditure for education you will need continually to remember that your little patrimony as far as possible should be kept intact. If you touch the principal try to make it up afterwards. It is a great comfort to have a bank account."

Miss Patty came in at this point, fresh and pretty from her nap, and took the comfortable rocker near Hertha.

"What is Miss Witherspoon advising you now?" she asked, smiling.

"To be careful of my money," Hertha answered.

"A great mistake," the southern woman said, rocking lazily back and forth. "I would advise your spending at the outset at least five hundred dollars for clothes."

"What!" cried Hertha.

"Yes!" said Miss Patty, enjoying the annoyance on Miss Witherspoon's face. "I don't approve of your learning dressmaking, you know, my dear, it will lower your station. Get a lot of beautiful clothes in New York and then let me persuade Cousin Sally to take you about with her this winter. I'm sure she would enjoy toting a pretty southern girl around and if she didn't have you married in six months she should never have been born in Baltimore."

"It sounds very attractive," said Hertha, smiling. She knew Miss Patty was only half in earnest and that she liked above all things to shock her northern guest. "But think how terrible it would be for her if I didn't marry and Cousin Sally was left with me and the dresses!"

"If you wanted to support yourself at the start," Miss Witherspoon said, exactly as though no one but herself had spoken, "you could take up operating work."

"Operating work?" asked Hertha.

"Yes, operating power-machines. Good workwomen begin at ten dollars."

"I like the sound of that," Hertha said with more animation than she had yet shown. "I always enjoy using a machine."

Miss Patty was genuinely horrified. "Factory work!" she cried. "Factory work for this child!"

You're crazy. It would ruin her social position."

Hertha was startled. It was hard for her to remember that being an Ogilvie she had a social position.

"Take my advice," Miss Patty went on, "and if you must work, get a genteel job. Why not go as a companion? Now I had a pretty little relative, Dolly Simmons, not exactly a relative but we were kin, her father's brother and my nephew's wife were cousins. The Simmonses never had anything, or if they did they only kept it long enough to lose it in a jack-pot, and Dolly had to support herself. She was a nice little child, with eyes like yours, and she went into a family as companion. It was in Chicago and the woman, she had an immense fortune, took Dolly with her to Palm Beach. There Dolly was a raving success, so much so that she had three proposals in one winter. The Chicago woman was quite nasty about it, jealous of course, and sent Dolly off, but not before she had captured a widower with five children and three houses, one in the country, one at the beach and one in St. Louis. That was doing well for a Simmons. How I wish," Miss Merryvale looked affectionately at Hertha, "that I had the strength to take you away and give you a season. I wouldn't be jealous, my dear, but proud of all your conquests. But I fear it's out of the question."

"Yes," Hertha made haste to say, "you couldn't possibly, though it is very kind of you to want to."

"It's hard your not having any near relations. I'd love to have you stay with me, but I can understand your leaving. You're white and you don't want to remain where you've been black. But when you get North, don't make the mistake of lowering your social position, Hertha."

Hertha made no response, and then Miss Witherspoon, who had kept silent as long as was humanly possible burst out: "It is natural that Miss Merryvale and I should not agree on this matter, Hertha, but as long as you are going to live in the North I want you to understand northern conditions. I really believe you will be more likely to marry and to marry happily if you think nothing about it. Take up work that interests you and that you can do well. When you can take care of yourself then you may accept the man who wants to take care of you."

"Well, of all the extraordinary pieces of advice," Miss Patty murmured. But at this point Hertha arose and announced that she was going to her room.

Once by herself she drew a sigh of relief. These two women, she feared, would drive her to do something desperate. She had at once accepted Miss Witherspoon's invitation to travel with her to the North and had been grateful for her suggestions as to her education; but she had not expected to have everything arranged before she set foot in Boston. She would have preferred to look about and to plan for herself. Of Miss Patty's scheming she gave no thought, she was not in a humor to consider getting married; but her future career did interest her and she could but wish that it did not have an equal interest for Miss Witherspoon. Would she want to be closely in touch with this energetic woman? She reminded her of a teacher she had had at school, a Miss Smith—also from Boston. Miss Smith, who was a terror to the idler or the dreamer, had never missed a day from her work for twenty-two years. Was Miss Witherspoon like that? She was very particular about her room. Would all the people in Boston be so thorough and so emphatic?

She bestirred herself for a few minutes and then sat down idly by the window. She could see the broad stream and against the sky was a line of birds. They were too far away at first for her to name them, but suddenly the sunlight glistened on their snowy wings and she saw that they were ibises flying south. In a little while she would be flying North. What would her welcome there be like?

Of one thing she was sure. She wanted with all the intensity of her nature to get away, to leave Merryvale and all its inhabitants, black and white. Why, there was no place to which she could go! To turn down the path to her black mother's cottage, there to find herself a stranger, was more than she could bear; she would not go again until she went to say good-by. But here at the great house life was always difficult. She wearied of Miss Witherspoon and even of her dear Miss Patty; they were so bent upon running her as though she were a private show. She liked Mr. Merryvale sincerely, but she often avoided him, for once he asked her to walk with him and on the way they met his son; and she was in terror lest they two be left together.

For it was the younger man who made life difficult. He would not give up trying to speak with her, while never for a moment would she permit him to see her alone. She had resolved upon this course the night that she had come into his home and she did not mean to swerve from it. If Hertha Williams had not been worthy of a lasting love neither was Hertha Ogilvie. She avoided him, and when he had written her put back the letter unread in his room. But as she saw him at table, his bright face looking all attention if she spoke the simplest word; as she was the recipient of every courtesy from him, when, with the others, they sat in the living-room; as she caught his eye, the rare times that she glanced up when he was near and saw the old look in his face; she feared she could not trust herself if he should speak.

A knock at her door. She did not open it but asked who was there.

There was no answer; and though the knock was repeated she made no motion to open the door.

No, she would not talk with him. He had despised her, and now, as Ellen said, she could despise him. There was tonic in the thought.

"Hertha!" a voice called.

She was standing at the window and despite herself looked down to where Lee Merryvale stood below.

"Come!" he cried.

It sounded like a command. She shook her head angrily and walked back into the room. This was persecution. There was no place for her. Mammy's home was closed and in this she must continually evade one of the household.

Another knock. This time it was Miss Witherspoon. "May I come in just for a moment?" that lady said.

Hertha smiled pleasantly but inwardly felt resentment.

"I want so much to let you know what I've been thinking about," Miss Witherspoon announced as she entered the room. "I've just remembered a nice old couple whom I haven't seen for more than a year who live only a block from the Institute. I believe they would be delighted to take you to board."

"Yes?"

"Mrs. Palmer Field. I remember her well now. Her husband at one time was a clerk in a bank, though I don't know what he may be doing at present. The last time I saw him he looked too old to be a clerk. Probably they would be very glad to take you in, and would charge you only a dollar more than at Clay House. And there is something, you know, in what Miss Merryvale says about your having some social life. They are quiet, elderly people who sometimes take a student to board. I'll write and tell them about you and see whether they will take you in."

"I would rather wait, Miss Witherspoon; we start North in a few days."

"It doesn't do any harm to write; then when we go to see them they will know who you are."

"Are you telling every one about me?" The question came with a touch of anger.

"Why, yes, what else should I do? You have to tell something of your past, and how much better to have it known so that there will be no questioning. I assure you every one will be most considerate. Your story, with the legacy left you, has a touch of romance; and what a pretty name, too, 'Hertha,' Is it German?"

"Perhaps."

"Please excuse me," the Boston woman said as she moved apologetically toward the door, "I shouldn't have come in for I know you're tired of all our talk, but I had a new idea and I wanted you to hear it."

She looked pleasant as she spoke and Hertha smiled back, but when the door was shut the girl threw herself face downward upon the bed. It was a new thought to her that people would know her story, and she resented it. It was partly to escape the story that she was leaving here, and now she was to be discussed and pointed at in Boston as the white girl who grew up among Negroes. Instead of escaping from her past it was to follow her into the land where she had expected to be free.

Another knock at the door. Hertha rose slowly, and without opening, called, "Who is it?"

"Jes' me, *Miss Hertha*."

She opened, to find the cook, Pomona, outside.

"Some one wantin' ter speak wid you, *Miss Hertha*."

"Who?" Hertha asked.

Pomona rolled her eyes and grinned. Her sides shook as though with repressed laughter. "I can' guess, honey, an' he don' gib his name."

"I won't see any one," Hertha said angrily.

"You's mighty hard on folks now you's white." Pomona did not go away but continued to stand in the door grinning at the girl who had recently been a servant like herself. "Ain't yer gwine ter do nuthin' fer him? Seems like ater all dat huggin' an' kissin' in de orange grobe——"

"Come in!" Hertha drew the woman into the room and shut the door behind them. Her face was drawn with fear.

"Don' you worry, chile," the black woman said kindly. "I won't tell on yer; but I's Mr. Lee's frien' an' I ain't gwine ter see him put about, not for no white-faced brat."

Hertha's eyes were very bright as she looked the big woman in the face. "Pomona," she said, "you must help me. Go down to him and ask him not to try to speak to me. Tell him that I ask him as a gentleman not to try to see me alone. I'm going away in three days, it isn't long for him to do as I ask. Go down to him, Pomona, and bring his answer back to me."

She spoke with such earnestness that the colored woman was impressed, and muttering, "I'll t'ink about it," turned to go.

Hertha ran to her and clutched her arm. "Do it for me," she whispered.

In a few minutes the woman came back. "He's gone," she said. "Went down de road an' he says ter tell yer he won't trouble yer agin."

Then she closed the door with much dignity.

Through the open window came a gentle rustle of the wind among the live-oaks. Hertha stood in the middle of the room, her head drooping, the shadows dark under her tired eyes. She felt utterly alone. The old world was lost to her and she had closed the door upon the new.

Going to the window she looked beyond the oaks and down the road, and in the warm afternoon light saw the man she loved slowly walking away. Moving across the room she put her hand upon the knob of the door; but after a moment's hesitation she turned back, a determined look on her face.

"Reckon I won't trouble him again," she echoed.

CHAPTER XII

In the dim twilight of a November morning, before the sun was up, a young lady stood outside the Williams' cabin. She wore a dark blue traveling suit and a small hat set stylishly on her curling brown hair. In her right hand was a little leather hand-bag and in her left a neatly rolled silk umbrella. Above her well-cut pumps were silk stockings. She looked surprisingly out of place, and seeming to realize it herself, she hastily lifted the latch and went into the house.

The table was set with three places; from the kitchen the steaming coffee-pot sent forth a delicious fragrance, while the scent of frying bacon mingled with the almost imperceptible odor of hot rolls. A big bunch of red roses lay by one of the places that was also graced by a cup decorated with pink and white flowers.

"Is that you, Hertha?" came a voice from the kitchen.

"Yes, Sister," was the answer.

Ellen appeared at the kitchen doorway and after a glance gave a little laughing bow, saying, "Good morning, Miss Ogilvie."

There are few people who look always the same; we vary in our appearance with a headache or a drop in the thermometer; but perhaps nothing is so quick to change our aspect as a reversal in our fortunes. Hertha had worn a pretty suit before, she had been well-shod, but never previously had she stood with such a quiet air of self-confidence. She blushed at Ellen's greeting, her head drooped, and she was Hertha Williams again.

"Oh, it's great!" Ellen exclaimed. "Don't droop your head. Think what a pity it would have been if Hertha Ogilvie had turned out to look like Minnie Barker!"

A picture of Minnie Barker, very freckled, with a snub nose, reddish hair and a shirtwaist that was always pulling up from her skirt at the back, came to Hertha and she laughed. Then sobering, she said, "I'm not going to any one who'll care. If I had a relative or two!"

"There are relatives and relatives," Ellen answered sagely. "This world is such a raffle you might not have inherited the right kind."

"It isn't likely," Hertha added, "that I'd have gotten another set as good as the first," and she smiled at her former sister.

"Good morning, honey," said Mammy, appearing with a plate of biscuit.

They joked a good deal during the meal to which Hertha had invited herself and which she had planned even to the guava jelly, slightly liquid, amorously sweet, which Miss Witherspoon assured her she would never get in the North. The meal over they went outside and the visitor stood with Mammy while she fed the scraps to the chickens, watching them peck and push at one another, each trying to get the best piece.

"Hertha," Ellen said hesitatingly, "there's something Mammy and I want to say."

Hertha shrank within herself. She was fearful when Ellen started in this serious tone, dreading too careful an analysis of their emotions. Understanding this the older woman spoke.

"Honey, dear," she said looking at Hertha with moist eyes, "you's gwine away alone, for we's alone ef we ain't wid some'un we lobes. I 'spects it gwine ter be mighty hard fer you, but ef eber you's discouraged jes' 'member dat here in dis lil' cabin dere's you' sister an' you' mammy, lobin' yer an' prayin' fer yer day an' night. You's close in our hearts, foreber and eber, an' we knows we's close in yours."

"But, honey, dar's anudder t'ing. Keep us in you' heart, but don' try ter lib in our worl', not at fust. It ain't gwine ter be so easy, allus ter remember as you's white. You can't fergit a lifetime in a day. An' it's mighty mean ter be swingin' fust on one foot, den on de udder, not knowin' whar you

stan'. When yer gits yer place firm in de white worl', den yer kin turn back ter look at de black. But not now, dearie, not now."

Hertha could not speak, but she nodded her head in acceptance of her exile.

"We don't need to worry," Ellen said with a laugh that had a sob in it. "We sha'n't have to wait long. You'll soon stand on both your feet."

"I ain't gwine ter de dock," Mammy announced when Ellen in a moment said it was time for them to leave. "I don't wan' no white folks starin' at me an' talkin'; I'se gwine to say good-by hyar in my home. Baby," turning to the child of her adoption, "you's so pretty-like, allus be good."

"Yes, Mammy," Hertha promised.

"Lay you' head on my breas'. Dere! Lil lamb, you's gwine out inter de worl' alone. But you know de way ter safety. Lobe de Lord Jesus. Don' never forgit Him fer a moment, but keep close ter His bosom."

On the dock Miss Witherspoon was fidgeting among the hand-luggage. She looked annoyed when Hertha came up with Ellen. "Oh, here you are," she said. "Don't you think you had better express this bag? No. Why not? But I thought I explained to you that you could express it on the train. However, it doesn't much matter. How many pieces of hand-luggage have you? Two? And you have two other things to carry, your hand-bag and your umbrella. It's always well to count the number of pieces you have and then when you get up from your seat you can go over them—one, two, three, four. Do you see? I'm sorry though that you didn't pack so that you could express one of the bags through."

Ellen looked on, feeling that she was only beginning to realize how much of tragedy there was in this good-by. Not even she had appreciated, until she stood there on the dock, how far removed was the world of white and black. There was something terrible and ridiculous in sending her little sister away with a stranger, and denying to her the right to know again the people among whom she had been reared and who had given her the training and the education that made it possible for her so easily to take her place in the white world. "Well, I'm mighty glad I was ambitious," she thought with a rush of pride as she looked at the well-bred, ladylike figure in its stylish traveling dress. "Supposing she'd been handed over to poor white trash!"

"Ellen," Hertha whispered, "I'm going to try to make something of myself but I'm more easily discouraged than you."

"You must be courageous, Hertha. Go ahead and do things."

"I don't know how to do that. But perhaps things will happen."

Miss Patty had said good-by at the house, but now Pomona came hurrying down with a basket of Japanese persimmons for the journey. With the bunch of red roses these made two more things not to be forgotten when you left your seat, and Hertha felt Miss Witherspoon look disapprovingly at them. Then with the rising sun the boat came toward them around the bend seeming, to the young girl who stood there, like some sea monster that would drag her away from everything familiar and carry her to an alien land. She grew almost sick with fear, but a glance at Ellen made her rally. A step up the gangplank and she had left the world of friends, of mother and sister and brother, of lovely skies, of beautiful trees, of mockingbirds and whistling quail, the world of long walks with Tom and of evenings out under the stars; the world that had been a world of rest and peace until Tom left it on this same boat less than two months ago.

"The porter has both your bags, I hope," said Miss Witherspoon anxiously. But it proved that Lee Merryvale was carrying them, and as she spoke he deposited them at Hertha's side. Then, taking off his hat, he said good-by. "I am coming North this winter," he remarked decisively, "and I shall expect to see you. I hope you'll enjoy going into a new land."

"I think I shall," Hertha managed to answer, and was grateful that he had not tried to shake hands. When he left them the moorings were cast off, and the boat turned out into the stream.

On the dock stood the Merryvales, father and son. A little way from them, by herself, was Ellen. Now they were going past the great house, the trees were tossing their mossy beards and from the gallery Miss Patty was waving to her. Cows grazed in the river, and high above a turkey buzzard soared, gazing down to find death on the earth. Then the river made a bend and the familiar world was gone.

Before she left the boat Hertha took out a letter from Tom and read it once again. Tom had shown his thoughtfulness in every line. There was no surprise in his receipt of the news and there was much gladness for her. "Sister," he wrote, "we are all in a cage, we black folk. It's a big cage, and we get used to it and have a good time in it, and after a while we don't much notice when we strike our wings against the bars. But it's a cage. Do you remember that funny, old white woman in the city who used to let us look in her room and see her family of canaries? They were breeding right there in her parlor, building their nests and bringing up their young. Those canaries were just as busy and as much taken up with their goings on as if they had been out in the trees. But they were prisoners all the same. Well, they've opened the cage door for you and set you free. It wasn't right for you to be shut up; it weren't meant for you. Now you're free and folks won't come just to play with you in your cage. I'm glad, Sister, and don't forget you're free."

"I wonder if I really am free," Hertha said to herself. "I'd like to find out."

The railroad journey was uneventful to Miss Witherspoon, but full of novelty to Hertha. Accustomed to the jim-crow coach, the Pullman with its comfortable bed, its luxurious dining-car, was a revelation. But she showed no sign of unfamiliarity and moved through the day, and even climbed to her high perch at night as though it were a usual routine. But all the time she was revolving a plan and wondering whether she would have the courage to carry it out. She had told Ellen that she could not go ahead and make things happen, but she felt that it was possible, if you did not like a thing, quietly to avoid it. The conception of freedom of which Tom wrote was taking a strong hold upon her. As she lay awake looking up at the lighted ceiling of the car, feeling the presence of the many people traveling like herself to the strange North, people who were now of her world, she grew impatient at the circumscription that was being prepared for her. The story of her life had been told to Miss Witherspoon's friends, Miss Witherspoon had planned her future, and she would be an ever pervasive factor in her life in the months to come. Hertha suspected that to be with her would be like going to school again. But the cage door was open and she might, if she had the courage, make a genuine flight, alone. Yes, alone. If she could not be with those she loved, she did not wish at once to link her life to some one whom she was growing to dislike, some one who intended to fashion the order of her ways. Why not slip away from this new chaperon who, after all, was only a chance acquaintance? So she reasoned as she lay awake at night, and as she looked out of her window during the day while the train swung steadily northward and prosperous cities, belching factories, well tilled fields, great barns, and spacious farmhouses whizzed past, her courage and her desire for adventure grew. She had money, she was white, she would learn what it meant to be free.

"We shall soon be in New York," Miss Witherspoon said on the second day. "We arrive, you know, at the Pennsylvania station and we take a taxi there for the Grand Central. I am sorry that I can't stop to show you New York, but I delayed my departure from Merryvale longer than I expected, that I might bring you with me, and it is imperative that I go at once to Boston."

"I certainly do not want to put you to any inconvenience."

Hertha's tone was polite, but at heart she felt angry. She wanted to see New York and her companion had killed all desire she might have had to see Boston. She was hot with excitement when later they drew into the station.

"What did you give your bags to another boy for?" Miss Witherspoon questioned.

They were in a crowd of people, hurrying off the trains. Miss Witherspoon had seized upon a porter to whom she had given her luggage, and, on turning around, had found that her companion had extravagantly engaged another.

The young girl murmured an unintelligible reply and her chaperon, intent upon getting a taxi, hurried on ahead.

"Let's not walk so fast," Hertha said to her boy, who answered, smiling, "Reckon you're from the South."

"Reckon I am," was the reply.

"Your friend's getting away from us!" he announced after they had moved slowly down the platform.

"I want her to."

Meanwhile Miss Witherspoon, reaching a taxi, had her luggage settled in it and then looked back for her charge, who was nowhere to be seen. Nervous, yet sure that Hertha would appear in a moment, she stood by her cab, refusing to get inside.

"I got ter go," cried the chauffeur.

"I've got to wait," said Miss Witherspoon emphatically, "until my companion comes."

Without a word the man drove off to take his stand in the rear of the line while another taxi swept up, gathered in a group of travelers, and went on.

"How provoking," Miss Witherspoon cried. She was separated from her luggage and from Hertha. Never was anything so stupid.

Suddenly some one spoke at her elbow. "The young lady asked me to give you this."

It was Hertha's porter, holding out a note.

Miss Witherspoon opened it and read the few words written in the girl's careful hand.

"Thank you so much for your kindness, but I have decided to stay in New York. I think I shall prefer to be where no one knows anything about me. I'm sorry I put you to so much trouble." And below, written more hurriedly: "Don't worry over me, and thank you again."

"Where did she go?" Miss Witherspoon asked the boy, who was watching her with interest.

"I don't know," he answered, "I put her on a street car."

"Here's your taxi again," called out the starter.

Miss Witherspoon was startled and indignant. She looked about as though hoping by some miracle Hertha would appear at her side. Then, appreciating the futility of attempting any search, she got into the taxi with her bags and, chagrined and disappointed, was driven through the crowded streets.

"What shall I say to them in Boston?" she asked herself.

II

KATHLEEN

CHAPTER XIII

Noise! Thundering, reverberating noise. Noise that never ceases, noise that deadens the brain and makes the hand jerk in response to the jarred nerves; always, day and night, throughout the length of the city streets, the clamor of inanimate things.

In the morning when Hertha slipped to her seat, the last but one in the fourth line, she started her own thundering whir. The forty machines, all going at once, sounded like nothing so much as the great beetles that flew about her southern home in the summer evenings. But the beetles came but rarely and went with the withdrawal of the lamp, while here in the workroom the drumming was incessant. Always it was hurrying her, calling upon her to make better speed, to push the white fabric more quickly than the needle might make a greater number of punctures to the minute; to hasten, though her hands trembled, and though the tension drew her mouth into a narrow line and brought her brows together in a frown.

When noon came and the whirring stopped, Hertha would look down the long line of beetle-beasts, for so she called them to herself. At length they were quiet. Surely they had had enough. For hours they had been devouring, eating up the muslin fed to them. No, rather they had disgorged; for the muslin was left, and with it thousands of yards of cotton thread that they had doled out through their small needle jaws. But their rest would be short and they would soon thunder tirelessly on again.

Usually she went out to her luncheon. The nearby restaurant furnished appetizing and inexpensive things to eat, but they were accompanied by a new and disturbing clamor. As she took her seat at one of the many long tables, she was enveloped in a sound of falling plates. Heavy china cup struck heavy china saucer and both struck the marble table. Knives, forks and spoons fell on platters, and platters fell on trays and slipped and rattled one against another. Little plates dropped on big plates and all went with a terrific smash into the dumb waiter; while from some inexhaustible source new knives and forks and plates came clattering up to take the places of the old.

"Butter cakes, please."

Hertha's voice was scarcely audible. As she ate, she listened attentively, hoping that for a moment the noise would cease; but it only varied in intensity, rising now to such a height that it seemed as if an avalanche of white pottery was falling into space; again dropping to a steady, clanging sound of utensils taking their appointed places. But no one but herself seemed to notice, and the men and women about her ate on diligently, silent for the most part, concerned only with securing needed nourishment in a short period of time.

The noises on the avenue down which she walked to and from her home were not wearying like those in the shop and the restaurant, for they came and went. The silent moving motors had their horns that gave warning with a silly, childish squeak or with a deep note as hoarse as a frog's. At the corner where she turned east to go home a policeman was stationed, and she enjoyed waiting for the sound of his shrill whistle. But the avenue left behind, the way was less pleasant. Three busy thoroughfares must be crossed without the policeman's aid, the last a dirty boulevard where heavy trains crashed overhead and surface cars clanged swiftly by. She would stand waiting on the sidewalk until a friendly cart from a side street opened up a path of safety that brought her a little breathless to the opposite walk.

Now she was almost home—the second door, three flights up, and then restful quiet. Kathleen, her new friend, with whom she had come to live, was away, and with windows closed she would sit in the front room, quite by herself, her hands in her lap, enjoying the silence. Later, dinner over, she would take up a novel, one of the books she had always wanted to read, but could not afford to buy, that here in New York any one might have at the library for the asking. Immersed in *Lorna Doone*, she forgot the pounding machines and the clattering dishes and was very happy; but when the book was put away and she lay down to sleep, through the open window the world of tumult came back again.

"Why do men invent so many things that make a noise?" she would ask herself. She had heard city people when they came to the Merryvales' complain bitterly to her of being wakened in the

morning by the cock's crowing; but she had not made the cocks, and, moreover, they did not crow all night. Here in her room, however, near the ugly boulevard of the East Side, the man-made cocks never ceased to crow. The trolley cars were the most aggressive; their wheels ground on their axles and jarred upon the rails; they stopped with a loud jolt, and with another jar and jolt were off again. They were always jerking, Hertha felt. Overhead the elevated road vibrated to the heavy cars that moved over its rails day and night. You heard the coming train a long way off. First, a gentle, rumbling noise that you might imagine to be the sea; then a louder and louder roar, and, finally, a crash as the long line of cars rushed past. Sometimes she was sure they would sway too far and fall thundering into the street. And hardly had their sound died away when a second rumbling would be heard and another train come tearing after its fellow, or a third dash by from the opposite side.

After a time the clamor ceased to be incessant. Trains followed at longer intervals, and would-be street car passengers waited for some minutes at the corner. But in these intervals there was always upon the street the sound of footsteps. And long after midnight, if Hertha awoke from her troubled sleep, she heard the tread of feet. Sometimes they were slow and hesitating, sometimes swift and hurried, oftenest a steady, quiet step. Where do all these footsteps lead, she thought. What were the people doing who thronged the elevated railroad, crowding one upon another so that it was difficult to breathe if one pushed one's way among them? And the surface cars were filled with a hurrying crowd, while underneath the city the subways carried their millions of women and men. Was there any need of moving about so much? It might be necessary to travel to and from your work, but why go on and on? Supposing all these cars should stop suddenly, should cease their jar and clang? There would still be the footsteps in the street, for man was always moving, some way, somewhere. Had not Tom moved? And now she, too, was moving, to the whirl of the machine, to the crash of the advancing train, moving through the new, clamorous world.

"And you didn't sleep well last night, darling," Kathleen said to her as she came in to breakfast. "Your eyes are looking tired this lovely morning. I'm thinking the trains kept you awake. Don't notice them. They'll go on and never once jump the tracks, but make big profits for their owners and a fine place to hang on the strap for you and me. You'll soon be used to the clatter. Once I heard it, but now I don't mind it any more than I do the sparrows. Take a help of the oatmeal, and tell me what you'll like for dinner, for I'm staying home to-night."

CHAPTER XIV

Hertha, when she slipped from Miss Witherspoon's charge, experienced no difficulty in finding a suitable dwelling place in New York. She had not studied for years in a school conducted by northern teachers without learning of the philanthropies that were showered upon people in the North. The Young Women's Christian Association was for just such girls as she, and therefore, under the direction of a friendly policeman, she soon reached headquarters and was given temporary shelter. As she walked about in the comfortable rooms, luxurious in her eyes, she felt that she had indeed entered the white world, her lawful heritage; and if it was hard to lose all family ties—mother, sister, brother, swept away as though in some swift disaster of nature—on the other hand, life of a sudden had become strangely simplified. How easy it was to move through the world if you were white! She had always been conspicuous, a mark for astonished comment when with her black brother and sister, for whispered commiseration when working out in service. Now no one could comment at all. She was like every one else. She need not shrink if she were rudely treated, she might answer back; no longer must she "keep her place," hers was the place of the dominant race. When she remembered her lover, her cheeks flamed. No need to fear that she, a white girl, would ever again think to give herself without exacting a full return.

But what should she do? She was young and white and had something less than two thousand dollars to her credit at the bank; moreover, she had stored in her mind a multiplicity of suggestions to be turned over and reviewed as she made her way through the streets or lay in her bed at night. Had she gone to Boston with Miss Witherspoon, she would at once have used a fair share of her fortune on her education; but, perhaps because she had cut loose from old plans, she rejected the taking up of dressmaking. She inclined to stenography and typewriting; but Ellen, who knew her better than any one else, had looked surprised on learning that she considered this means of earning a livelihood. She knew she was no scholar, and a chosen career that involved the swift jotting down of the ideas of others, later to be transcribed in black type on a white sheet from which a misspelled word shone with hideous clearness, might end in disgrace. So stenography was set aside.

Equally she was sure she would not take the advice of Miss Patty. To be a companion was the highest position that could have been reached by Hertha, colored; but it was menial service to Hertha, white. She had renounced a sheltered home; now that she was in the North she meant to live a new life of freedom.

After three days of happy wandering about the city and of careful consideration of her personal problem, she made a practical decision. Her legacy was small, and for the present she knew too little of the life about her or of her own ability to risk spending it upon an education. The operating work of which Miss Witherspoon had once spoken lay along the line of her natural

aptitude. Why, then, not try it? If you were a good workwoman, it paid well. She was in a mood for the unusual, and therefore, under the guidance of the efficient and business-like Association secretary, she found herself, a week after her arrival in New York, doing her part in manufacturing muslin shirtwaists.

Kathleen she had discovered herself. She could not remain long at the Association, since the rooms for permanent guests were occupied; and with a list provided her by the secretary, she went out one afternoon to secure a suitable boarding place. The first and only house she entered was in charge of a thin, meager woman, the type of Miss Witherspoon, but with a more domineering manner and a flatter bust. The room for rent had a red carpet which smelt moldy, and brilliantly painted blue walls. Hertha hated it at once, but with difficulty succeeded in leaving without renting it, so persistent was the person in charge. Indeed, she only escaped with the proviso that she might look in again.

Once in the street, her confidence returned and she resolved to have nothing to do with this or any other cheap boarding place. In so immense a city it must be possible to find an attractive home.

She looked no further that day, and in the evening, standing in the office, she saw a large, fine looking Irish woman come up to the desk. Laughing and talking to a friend, her cheeks pink with her exertions from the gymnasium, her gray eyes glowing, Kathleen seemed the exact opposite of the disturbing landlady of the afternoon. "I know I'm bothering you, Miss Jones," she began, addressing the secretary, who was insignificant beside her, "but it's what you like. You couldn't be happy if you didn't have a dozen girls wanting you at once. What I'm after is some one to share my flat with me this winter. The boss has sent my brother to Chicago, where they need his work more than they do here. Hard luck for me, for he was bringing in a good wage! And now I've a little flat and only myself in it. Is there any girl here, do you think, would like a bedroom and the use of a kitchen and parlor? I'd let her have it for fifteen dollars a month."

Hertha was standing at the end of the desk, quite by Miss Jones's elbow. She expected that the secretary would introduce them, but instead Miss Jones looked down, moved some papers, and handed an elaborately ruled card for Kathleen to fill.

The Irishwoman took it up clumsily. "You fill it in," she said. "It's Kathleen O'Connor, 204 East 8th Street, fourth floor. I'll be home to-morrow night to any one who comes."

When she had gone Hertha asked for the address, explaining that she would like to see the room.

"Would you?" Miss Jones questioned, looking her over as though to place her again. "I thought of you, but did not know whether it was what you desired. It's rather a poor neighborhood, and yet it costs as much as a better one. Kathleen is Irish, you know. She only comes to the gymnasium, and she's irregular at that. She's a sort of nurse; not trained, of course, but good of her kind. Take the address; it's near your work, and if you like—" and her voice trailed off as she turned to the next girl who came to her for guidance.

Hertha did "like." She went to Kathleen's the following evening and settled the bargain with a week's rent in advance. She liked the rear alcove room with its iron bed and fresh cover; and, though it was dark, it opened with wide doors into the parlor. "For the both of us," Kathleen explained, "unless you're wanting to go straight to bed and then it's yours." The parlor had little furniture—a plain table, two straight chairs, a comfortable rocker and a couch with a Bagdad cover. Kathleen had a small bedroom opening into a court; but the attractive spot was the kitchen. It faced the south and its two windows were filled with red geraniums in full bloom. The walls were light buff, the kitchen table was covered with a white oilcloth, and the wooden chairs were painted like the wall. For convenience, it was beyond anything Hertha had ever known with its gas stove, its hot and cold water for sink and tubs. She remembered the thousands of pails of water that her mother and Ellen had carried during the years she had been with them, and the millions of pieces of wood that Tom had piled up and brought into the kitchen. Getting meals and washing your clothes here would be fun, not work.

"I can make corn bread for breakfast," she said to Kathleen confidentially, as they looked into the closet with its wealth of pots and pans, spoons and egg beaters, skillets and toasters—more kitchen utensils than Hertha had imagined any one could own.

Kathleen regarded her quizzically.

"When do you go to work?" she queried.

"At eight o'clock."

"That's better than it used to be, but if you make corn bread it's likely it will only be for a week. Then you'll be so tired when you wake that the best tasting food in the world won't equal an extra nap, cuddled under the clothes, with the sure knowledge that it's wrong. It will be oatmeal cooked the night before and warmed up, and coffee made the way that's quickest, and a slice of toast, maybe, from the bread bought of the baker. You can boil yourself an egg, but they put the price on eggs up every winter to pay for the chemicals they use to keep them young."

"How about Sunday morning?" Hertha queried.

"Sundays you won't be getting up until it's time for dinner."

And while Kathleen's prophecy was in part true, while the increasingly cold weather and the hard hours made the morning nap imperative, Hertha did more for their little home than her companion had expected. She made curtains for the windows; she bought occasional attractive magazines; she framed a striking picture taken from the Sunday supplement. It was a landscape by Inness of great trees with heavy foliage, the clouds massed as though about to break in storm. Before a month was over the tenement rooms took on a deeper look of home.

The life within the rooms was very quiet. Kathleen's work made her hours most irregular. As an "experienced nurse" she was rarely on a case for more than two or three days and nights, so poor were the people among whom she worked. She had no diploma and was not recognized by the profession. During one year of her hard life she had acted as nurse in a woman's prison, but the time had never come when she could afford to go into a hospital. "And now it's too late; I'm too old," she would explain, "and besides I haven't got the education. Schooling don't go with starting in at the mill with your dresses at your knees, and your hands so little you can hardly manage the machine." Her hands were still small and well formed, and she had a pleasant touch. She was skillful at massage, and in the winter season had a few society women whose surplus flesh she vigorously rubbed off and whose faces she smoothed into comparative youth. Leaving the sumptuous house of some wealthy woman, she would hurry to a dark room in a tenement, where the cold and poverty made her eyes flame with anger, to spend the night by an ailing child, ministering with patience and even merriment to its many wants. And as her life carried her from one extreme to another, so she herself varied in mood, from the smiling, youthful looking woman whom Hertha had seen and loved from the first to an intense, angry iconoclast who found life for the many both cruel and unjust. She never ministered and brought to health the one ailing without remembering the ten others who were needlessly suffering and whom she could not aid. "I know that my work is nothing but putting courtplaster on a cancer," she would say to Hertha savagely as she came back from a home where she had coaxed the growing boy back to life, to see him in his convalescence go out to a ten-hour day of racking work. "I ain't fooled, though. I done what I could, but why won't his father fight for better hours and living conditions? He sits there and lets the boss use his boy worse than he'd use a machine. He's got the backbone of a chocolate éclair, that man." And then she would take up a copy of the daily "Worker" and become absorbed in the vision of the successful class struggle and a world set free.

"What shall we have for dinner to-night?" she had smilingly asked Hertha. "Shall we celebrate together with an Irish stew and ice cream and then go to the movies?"

"But this is your evening for the Y. W. C. A.," Hertha answered.

The smile left Kathleen's face. "I'm through there," she said. "It's not for me."

Hertha wanted to know more, but she was reticent with questions. As it happens, however, the silent person learns more of another's life than one who shows a voluble sympathy, and Kathleen was soon telling her friend that all girls' clubs and Christian Associations were nothing but charities; that she could have nothing to do with a charity herself, and that, had it not been for a moment's temptation, offered by a friend, she would never have entered the class. It was the exercise that she needed and the marching to music had been the best part. "And it's grand," she explained, "if only for an hour a week to be living as the Lord intended you with your legs apart." But this morning she had been giving massage to a rich uptown customer. "And after I had pommeled off the two pounds she'd gained at a twelve-course dinner the night before, she begins to tell me of her charities. 'I like best to help the working girl,' she says, 'and I gave my mite to their new building, but I'm troubled at the obstinacy of the young women in refusing to become servants. They have a false pride in the matter.' I kept my mouth shut, for I couldn't afford to lose a good customer, but I was that mad to think I might have been taking money off her as a gift that I stopped in at the office and told Miss Jones I should quit. 'Is that so, Kathleen?' she says quietly. 'It is for you to decide.' And then she asks: 'And how is Miss Ogilvie?' She always calls me Kathleen. Not that I mind it, but I'm fifteen years older than you, and Miss Jones needn't 'Miss Ogilvie' you to me. I don't wonder she does, though, for you wear your clothes as though you had always lived in a palace, and you speak like a princess."

"Don't be foolish," Hertha said, and then laughed—an odd, short laugh in which Kathleen joined, though as it happened she did not understand the joke. "Let's have the stew, only don't put quite so much onion in it, and we'll get the ice cream on the way home."

The stew was delicious and Hertha enjoyed it, while Kathleen consoled herself for the loss of the extra onion by a plentiful use of condiments. "I've just a good plain appetite," she explained. Then they went out into the noisy street to the theater where they sat in the orchestra and Hertha felt like a queen. In the South she had been only a few times to some cheap playhouse where she had been repelled by the vulgarity of the people and the performance; but here in New York the comfortable theater, darkened now, the music, the quiet audience, filled her with happy anticipation. She squeezed Kathleen's hand as the picture of a lovely young girl in gingham dress and pink sunbonnet flashed upon the screen, and the story began.

It was one of the fifty-seven varieties of moving pictures, all of which, Kathleen knew, were canned in the same syrup, but which to Hertha were freshly sweet. A beautiful girl, a pink sunbonnet, a young lover, blossoming apple trees. A coal mine discovered under the apple boughs. A cruel father and separation. The girl in a gilded palace registering despair. The lover seeking fame and gold. A titled villain mocking the girl's pure love. The villain's machination, the lover tied to the railroad track, the train dashing to within two inches of its victim. The escape, a night in the woods, the friendly beasts. The disclosure. "I love you still." The villain's contrition.

His death. The coal mine exhausted. Soft music, two lovers and one kiss. Blossoming apple trees and the pink sunbonnet again. Far in the distance the sound of wedding bells. Then sudden darkness, and The Best Flavored Chewing Gum thrown upon the screen.

Hertha's heart beat fast during the whole of the story and she felt wave after wave of pleasurable excitement. It was so sad and yet so beautiful. The only thing to temper her enjoyment was Kathleen, who would laugh in the wrong places. When the hero and heroine were in great danger, Kathleen showed no apprehension. She chuckled at the approaching train, and gave little grunts of amusement when the villain threatened the girl. The only thing she seemed to care for was the bear who gave the boy shelter in his cave for the night. "The dear!" exclaimed Kathleen.

"But it's so improbable," Hertha whispered as the piano played Nevin's lullaby while the bear rocked the youth in his arms.

"Not half so improbable as the rest," Kathleen whispered back. "You can trust the brutes to do the right thing enough sight better than the men."

As the light went up Kathleen yawned.

"Haven't we got our money's worth of romance, infant?" she asked. "There's a meeting on Peonage to-night at Cooper Union. Let's go there."

CHAPTER XV

They walked briskly down lower Broadway to where Grace Church lifted its delicate spire into the night, the electric light from the street casting long shadows upward on its white stone. Once or twice Hertha from pure pleasure gave a little skip as they went along.

"I don't know how it is," she said confidentially, "but I never felt so well before in all my life. You'd suppose I'd be tired from my work."

"That will come later," said Kathleen dryly. "Now you're living on the strength you've put away in your long country life."

"I think it's the air," Hertha went on. "It's such wonderful air to breathe, it's like—well, it's like food when you're hungry. It's fresh and cold so that you can taste it."

"It's too cold for that thin suit of yours, I wouldn't wonder."

"I'm not cold in the least. Perhaps I have a lot of warmth stored up in me; but I promise if it gives out to buy a new coat."

"Like that, now." A young girl passed them clad in brilliant scarlet. Her face was painted to match her coat; her hat was the latest extravagance in fashion, immensely brimmed, with a feather that, extending beyond the broad wake of black velvet, swept against Kathleen's cheek as she passed. "The dirty style!" Kathleen said indignantly. "Who knows what germs she hands out every day. The city government ought to forbid the wearing of them feather dusters; at any rate, on public highways."

Hertha smiled and presently slipped back into her thoughts, recalling the story she had just seen and going on with it, which was a way she had; but Kathleen watched the people. The men strolled along, all alike in derby hats and readymade clothes; while the women took little steps in high-heeled shoes, and talked shrilly, striving to be heard above the city's tumult. They used the slovenly street vernacular which scores of nationalities have helped to produce, contributing nothing from their own wealth of speech but changing consonants, slurring vowels, making at length of the beautiful English tongue an ugly, degraded thing. "Aw, I say, gimme dat!"

Kathleen prided herself upon her speech. She was born in Ireland, though she had little recollection of the fact, having arrived at the port of New York while taking nourishment at the maternal fount. "And it was you was screaming and beating me with your little fists, mavourneen," her mother used to say, "when I was making shift to button up my dress decently and carry you down the gangplank." She kept something of the richness of the Irish speech that had surrounded her in her childhood, despising the slang that with many an emigrant takes the place of a language. She might make a slip in grammar, but she never wittingly misused a word. Hertha's ladylike talk with its soft accent was a delight, and a little warm wave of pride swept over her as she looked at the girl walking by her side and remembered that she had chosen to come to her home.

"Just here to the left a step, dear," she said, "and we'll be out of the cold."

The air within the large, ill-ventilated hall could also be tasted, but no one could truthfully describe it as cold and fresh. It took the vitality out of Hertha, leaving her both tired and sleepy; but to Kathleen it was the breath of a new life. Moving amongst her fellows, nodding here, whispering a friendly "Good evening, comrade," there, she found the seats that she wanted, and, leaning well forward in her chair, gave herself to the discussion.

The address of the evening was over, but the speaker, a small man, ill shaven, with a sallow skin

and sharp features, was answering questions. To Hertha he was a familiar and an unpleasant type of rural southern white, and she paid him little attention, slipping back into her dream story which had already reached the point where the beautiful and still young looking couple were being presented with sturdy grandchildren. To the audience, however, the meeting was growing in interest. Some one from the floor was casting doubt upon the picture the southerner had presented, suggesting that poverty in the country, in a warm climate, could not equal the severity of poverty in a northern slum.

As the speaker rose to reply his eyes shone with excitement. "Have I exaggerated the suffering of the country?" he asked. "Let me tell you of just one tenant farmer, and, remember, there are hundreds of thousands like him. He's a decent man, uneducated, but kindly, who, when I saw him, had a wife and ten children; the oldest was fifteen. There wasn't one of them that was clothed, not really clothed. One had a coat, another a shirt, two out of the ten had shoes. The girls went in rags, folks' left-over clothes that had been worn out years ago. But it was the woman who was the pitifullest. She looked like she had never had an hour's rest since she was grown, and I reckon she hadn't. It was the business of the landlord to keep her busy. She had to have children to help work the place, and she had to work herself to keep from being turned out of house and home. There was a baby dragging at her skirt, and it was put the one down on the bed and set the other to watch it, while she went into the fields. Her face was so thin her eyes stood out like a bird's, and her cheek was the color of an old shuck of corn. I haven't seen an old man or an old woman in this city walk with the weariness that she walked out from her broken down cabin to make her crops.

"At noon there was nothing to eat in the place, but in the evening the man went down to the store and came back with a bit of cornmeal and a few slices of bacon. The children fell upon it like starving dogs. Perhaps the woman got some, but I didn't see her.

"I talked with her when night came on. She wasn't but thirty-three. In the last five years she told me she hadn't had a new thing to wear. She hadn't been anywhere, not to ride in a buggy or on a train. She hadn't felt well, she told me, not really well, since her first child was born.

"And there was that family held there, as I've been trying to explain to you," he pounded his fist on the table, "held in the peonage that's slavery. There aren't any debtors' prisons to-day with walls about them; but there're millions of debtors' prisons, little sordid cabins on little plots of land, that are locking tired slaves within their bounds to-day."

The man sat down and Kathleen was on her feet. "Break the walls down!" she cried. "Take them our message as workers to break down the walls and join in the social revolution."

There was loud applause and Kathleen dropped back, her face flushed, her gray eyes gleaming.

The meeting over, the Irishwoman was the center of a group of excited talkers. Hertha slipped into the background and watched the people gesticulating and arguing. There were a few burly Irish among them, men in the building trades, who found a chance to laugh in the midst of their debate; but the majority were spare, hollow-cheeked Jews; tailors, small tradesmen, lawyers, eager, often aggressive personalities. The women were in the minority, and offered a contrast to the girls Hertha had seen at the theater or parading the street. They were all simply dressed, usually in white, somewhat mussed shirtwaists, with cheap, ill-hanging skirts. Men and women, however, despite their shabby clothes, were all intensely virile spirits to whom the story of the evening had been a living fact; not a tale to weep over and forget, but a truth to grip and to remedy.

"Come up to the platform with me, Kathleen," one of the women said, "and meet the comrade from the South." Kathleen started to go, and then, glancing back at Hertha, who had dropped into a seat, shook her head. "No, I'll be off with my friend," she answered, and the two made their way out. A few minutes' walk in the reviving air brought them to their home.

"Goodness," Kathleen exclaimed, as she took off her coat, "we forgot the ice cream!"

"Never mind," Hertha answered, "it's cold for ice cream. Sit down and I'll make some cocoa," and she started to walk into the kitchen.

Kathleen followed her. "I'll make the cocoa myself."

"No you won't," Hertha declared. "You got the dinner and it's my turn now."

She put a big apron over her dress and went quietly about her work. Kathleen, as she sat watching, felt a little tightening at her throat, so rarely did any one do her a service. She was a strong, capable woman, the eldest in the family, and it had naturally fallen to her to wait upon others. At eight her father had been killed in an accident, and the mill, not satisfied with his life, had dragged the loved school books from her hands and, opening its cruel door, held her from sunrise to sunset amid dirt and turmoil performing stupid, monotonous tasks. She had nursed her mother during her last illness, two weary years of suffering. Brother and sister had accepted her sacrifices, enjoying the education that she had been denied, receiving her ministrations thoughtlessly and as thoughtlessly giving nothing in return. She could never remember when either of them had waited upon her, had made her a cup of tea, had so much as hung up her hat and coat. Feeling herself the stronger, she had always waited upon others, and now for the first time, in this gentle, ladylike girl whom she had known less than a month, she had found a helpmate, one who showed her sympathy and consideration.

The cocoa was hot and foamy and delicious. They drank it sitting each at an end of the table with its white cloth that stood between the two windows.

"You're a smart young lady," Kathleen announced. "Who taught you to cook so well?"

"Oh, I just picked it up."

That was all the answer. Kathleen had already noticed that she received short replies when she questioned Hertha about her past.

"I can't keep that poor woman out of my head," Kathleen went on after a pause. "Here am I sipping this elegant drink, and she without a crumb in the house."

"What woman?" Hertha asked. "Oh, yes, I know," guiltily. "You mean the woman the man told us about? But you don't know what may have happened. Perhaps she has all she wants now."

"Perhaps she has, in heaven."

"Oh, you can't tell. Lucky things happen sometimes."

"Do they? I've mostly seen unlucky ones. But luck is a poor thing for any of us to be counting on."

"I don't know, I've been lucky, very lucky."

"Have you? When?"

"Well, once, down South, not so long ago. And I was lucky when I met you."

"Indeed it was I had the luck then."

"Indeed, I had. If you could have seen the awful room, Kathleen, that Miss Jones sent me to look at! In a cheap boarding house, and with a landlady who looked as though she would cheat you half the time and scold you the other half."

"That would have been a happy home to return to when you'd been out at night to see two lovers parted only to meet again! Now, sit where you are. The cook doesn't wash the dishes."

"No, but she dries them," Hertha said decisively; and together they cleared away the things.

"I'd give a penny to know your thoughts," Kathleen remarked as she wrung out the dishcloth and hung it up to dry.

Hertha did not answer. She was pulling a leaf from the geraniums, crushing it in her fingers. She had left the lovers of the play and was back in an orange grove, her own lover close to her side. "You are Snowdrop of the fairy tale," he was saying. It had come true, she was Snowdrop, and yet of her own will she had destroyed the fairy tale. Whom might he not be making love to now? All at once she felt homesick and very tired.

Perhaps Kathleen a little guessed her thoughts. "It must be slow enough for you here with nobody but an old maid around like me. I wish I knew a fine young fellow to ask to dinner on Sunday."

"Ask Billy," Hertha said, looking up. "I'm sure it's time for him to come and look after the flowers."

CHAPTER XVI

William Applebaum, or Billy, as Kathleen called him, was a short man, stockily built, whose little length of limb and small hands were overtopped by a large head that commanded attention. It was well shaped, with an abundance of blond hair, a straight forehead, clear blue eyes and a fair, healthy skin. His mouth and chin were too small for the rest of his face, but he wisely concealed them with a beard which, as time went on, he kept closely clipped.

His grandfather, of whom he was justly proud, had been a revolutionist in Germany, in 1848, one of the band that strove bravely, but unsuccessfully, to bring political democracy to the Fatherland. Young Wilhelm was imprisoned for his activities, but he made his escape, and in a series of perilous adventures, in which his daring was only equaled by his good luck, at length found himself in America. There he settled in a small town in the Middle West, married, and brought up a family; and in his old age found himself with a son William and a grandson of the same name, living in the town of his adoption.

Those who love to dwell upon the past are grateful for any audience, and the grandfather, harking back at the end of his life to its one dramatic happening, was happy in the garden, working among his bright shrubs and clambering vines, or of a winter night seated by the ugly but heat-giving stove, to tell his always attentive small grandson of his great adventures. It would be, "Billy, I never hear a knock like that at the door that I don't remember the time I was drinking a glass of beer at the back of the house and the police knocked at the front and spoke my name." Or, "That's a strong grape-vine, Billy, growing against the arbor, and I like to see you climb up and get the fruit for us; but would you have been able to climb down the vine that saved my life

the night I left prison?"

The story that Billy liked the best was the one where his grandfather—he must think of him not as gray-haired and rheumatic, but as a swift-running, strong youth—hid in a cart filled with hay. He lay close to the bottom, scarcely able to breathe for the seed about his face, jolting to the town on the seacoast. Suddenly there appeared the always pursuing soldiers. They came up, and the captain, staring suspiciously at the cart, called upon the driver to stop, and ordered the men to probe the hay with their bayonets. The soldiers reached over and jabbed again and again, going down deep until they touched the floor of the cart. But they found nothing and at length, turning about, put spurs to their steeds and galloped away. "When we reached the coast, and my good friend and comrade unloaded his hay, I lay there safe and sound," the old man would end impressively. "For it was not always the floor of the cart that they touched, but sometimes the board that I had put above my body as I lay huddled against the planks."

But while the first William had showed an adventurous spirit, the third of the name was content with a quiet and orderly existence. His grandfather became an intensely patriotic American, who fought through the Civil War, and to his death never voted any but the Republican ticket. To do otherwise would have seemed to him to doubt his adopted but intensely beloved land. He was impatient of any criticism of America. "It is only those who have fled from a despotism," he would say, "who can appreciate the United States." And so his grandson had taken things much as they came, and had done nothing more startling in his life than at twenty to come to New York where he found better opportunity for advancement than in the town of his birth. He obtained a position as bookkeeper, and for fifteen years, with absolute regularity, appeared at eight o'clock in the little stationer's shop, tucked among the great office buildings on the downtown street, to remain until half-past five when, with equal regularity, he returned to his well-kept boarding house, his only home in New York.

His annual vacation of two weeks for some years was spent in his western town, but marriage and death broke up the home there, the house was sold, and those remaining to him moved to the Pacific coast. After this, he rarely left the city, staying to care for the flowers that in the summer his landlady allowed him to plant in her back yard—though they were a trouble Monday with the wash—and to play long hours on the piano that stood against the wall by the further window in his south room. Sometimes he went for a day to a beach, but night found him in his bed at home. Vacation over, he was quite ready to take up work. His German singing society was the greatest excitement in his methodical life, and if the chorus master assigned him a solo part, never an ambitious one, he practised at home night after night, his pleasant bass sounding through the old house.

He was just the sort of man who should have married; but whether he was held by a romance of the days before he left his western town, or whether his elderly landlady, knowing that she could not have him herself was yet successful in guarding him against all comers, it was certain that he had made love to no woman since he had come to the great city, until, at thirty-five years of age, he met Kathleen. Then the pleasant clerk of precise ways, whose sentiment had been satisfied in singing "lieder" and watering tender plants, was consumed by a great, unselfish passion. His life no longer moved about his books in the comfortable cage in the stationer's shop, nor about the boarding-house room in the quiet street, but day and night it found its happiness, its sorrow, too, and unrest, in the life of a woman.

It was at the bedside of an acquaintance, a clerk whom he had met in his work, that he first saw Kathleen. The sick man lived in a dingy, furnished-room house; and as William Applebaum mounted the stairs, noticed the dust in rolls against the wall, smelt to-day's dinner and yesterday's, he found himself extremely sorry for his sick friend. What must the end be if the beginning was like this? Then, fumbling in the dark to find his way, the knob on which he had hesitatingly put his hand was pulled from his fingers, the door opened, and a large, comely woman, in a nurse's blue dress and white apron, stood before him.

"Is Mr. Saunders here?" he managed to ask.

"Indeed he is," was the answer, "and likely to remain here for some time. Will you come in and speak to him?"

"If I may."

Mr. Saunders proved to have typhoid fever, not a severe case but a long one, and Kathleen nursed him with Billy as her faithful assistant. "Mr. Applebaum is too long a name for so short a man," she explained to him. "But it's Billy all right with that beard." It was after this that he kept his beard closely clipped. He shared many a night's work with her; and long before Mr. Saunders was well, William Applebaum was at the feet of the lady of his choice.

If she knew it, she gave no sign. But as the sick man grew better and was able to sit in a chair, propped up with pillows, she stayed on in the evenings after her assistant came to relieve her, and the three visited together. Then Kathleen would regale them with stories of her work and of her plans for the future. She was always going to do something different, but always something held her to her present task. Just now it was a brother who needed her to keep house for him. When she was free, however, she meant to buy a horse and cart, to stock it with goods, and drive across the continent as a peddler. They were two evenings filling that cart, and Mr. Saunders was each time so exhausted with merriment that he slept all night without waking. "I may never buy the cart," she once said confidentially to Billy, "but for many a year it's been a good stock in

trade." Again, she meant to save enough to go to Paris where they were always wanting American nurses and paid fabulously for them, and where she could work for a year; and then, on the proceeds, travel for the rest of her days. And where to go? That brought up endless suggestions and much useful information. After Mr. Saunders, who had gone once to South America as a salesman, had explained to her the ways of the insect life of the tropics, and his experience with snakes, she struck out everything south of thirty degrees of the equator. She could be as merry as a child in runabouts; but when the occasion came for discipline and serious work the men dared not jest with her, fearing the set look that came into her face.

Mr. Saunders got well and went back to his work, but before that time Mr. William Applebaum had asked Kathleen to be his wife.

"Marry an Appletree," she said, "you must think me Eve herself."

She always refused to give him a serious answer. "She had no idea of marrying any one. She had enough to do taking care of folk who took such ties upon themselves. And, if she did marry, did he suppose she'd choose a little man with a head on him like a comic supplement? Did he think he'd like to be a good husband sitting up nights for her, waiting patiently till he heard her footfall on the stair? As for wanting a home, she'd had more than enough home in her life. Caring for her own had worn her to the shadow she was, and it was a blessed comfort to be a free woman."

The last of Kathleen's rejoinders contained something more than mockery. She had had her share in the rearing and supporting of her kin, and this winter with Hertha was proving a beautiful respite. Had her lover been of a jealous disposition he would have disliked the southern girl who occupied so strong a place in Kathleen's affection, but he was devoid of pettiness. For a year he had unavailingly striven to win his goddess, but there were more years in the calendar; and though he received nothing in return for his unstinted affection and admiration, his love did not take from him the right to give.

He came regularly to see Kathleen of a Sunday, to dinner if she were gracious enough to invite him; if not, then in the afternoon, when once in awhile she would go out with him to dinner, and to a meeting afterwards. Sometimes it would be at the forum at Cooper Union, sometimes in a liberal church, but always the great problem of the world, the relation of labor to capital, would come under discussion. Then Kathleen would sit tense in her seat or lean forward to make sure that she caught each of the speaker's words. She would grunt with disgust at the rank conservatism of an argument; or again, applaud with all her might the denunciation of oppression and greed. The man at her side would watch her, filled with admiration at her splendid spirit, but himself moved not at all by what he heard. Only, occasionally, he would be almost angry at the invective hurled at the capitalist class, and had once said as he went out, "If the dirty Jew didn't like America he might go back to Russia on the first boat, and the country be all the better." Kathleen was furious at this heresy, and they walked the streets for an hour afterward discussing the sins and virtues of America. It was then that he told her of his grandfather, and she listened with enthusiastic interest to the recital of the revolutionist's political activities and his escape. "But what did he do after he got here?" was her question, and when she learned that he had then sat down and worshiped the land of his adoption, she lost interest. "His light burned out in his youth," was her comment. William Applebaum, third, for the first time resented her speech, and told hotly of the Civil War and of his grandfather's part in it. He won Kathleen's favor by his defense of his hero, and she never again spoke in any way but appreciatively of his revolutionary forbear, but she showed no greater favor to him.

When she took the flat on East Eighth Street, he made shelves for her at the two south windows and brought to her kitchen a wealth of potted plants. The delicate flowers died, for the Irish woman was very forgetful of them; and then, with sorrow at his heart for his cherished slips, but with no word of blame, he filled up the ranks with hardy geraniums that neglect could not kill. Attracted at the outset by the gay window shelves, Hertha soon assumed all care of the flowers, much to their profit; and on the Sunday after her night's outing with Kathleen, when she had secured an invitation for him to come to dinner, looked with some pride at the objects of her care.

"I'm glad I remembered to move this new fern last night when it was so cold," she said to Kathleen as she worked among the window plants. "Mr. Applebaum will see that I didn't forget what he told me. And, oh, Kathleen, let me set the table, I like to."

"And you know how," Kathleen added, and left her task. "There's many an uptown mistress, Hertha, would say that it was wrong for you to be manufacturing shirtwaists, when she needs you to wait on her table. I can just hear her telling you, 'Leave the factory, my child, and come to me where you will have easy work, (only fourteen hours a day) and a good home. (Her son will likely make love to you and you'll be sent from the house in disgrace.) Leave your coarse companions and learn the ways of a lady, (only you have them already).'"

"Oh, stop, Kathleen. Let me finish with the dinner, and you put on that fresh waist I ironed for you. It's on your bed."

Kathleen went into her room to her perspiring work,—it made her hot to get into even the simplest dress,—and while struggling to hook her skirt over on the left side, she heard her lover's knock and Hertha's cordial greeting.

"More flowers, Mr. Applebaum? A begonia? We used to have those at home." Then the voices fell away into the distance as the speakers went into the front room.

"If this dinner is good, Billy," Kathleen said, when they were all three seated together about the kitchen table, spread with their best linen and china, "it's all Hertha's doings."

Hertha smiled but shook her head.

"Miss Hertha did her part, Kitty, I know," the guest made answer, "but the mashed potatoes are yours."

"And lumps in them at that! I've not much patience with potatoes or the world; but if you're liking them, take some more."

They all took part in clearing off the course of meat and vegetables, and then Hertha served a dessert of her own making, a fluffy-looking pudding of orange and custard and meringue.

"And did you think I cooked this?" said Kathleen. "Come now and own up that in cooking the South beats the Irish."

"The Germans are good cooks," said Hertha. "Perhaps Mr. Applebaum will cook the dinner for us some day."

"A man cook the dinner?" the Irishwoman said in astonishment; and with a touch of resentment, "That's a woman's work."

"Don't men cook here?" Hertha asked. Then, turning to the man present, "Don't men cook in Germany?"

"Miss Hertha," Mr. Applebaum made answer, "I don't know any more about that than you do. I've never been to Germany and my mother was an American who asked me only to make the fire and bring in the wood."

"You can take it from me," said Kathleen, "that the women do the cooking and the housework. Did you ever have a man cook for you?"

"Yes," Hertha answered, "my brother."

"Just like a nigger," commented Kathleen.

There was an awkward silence broken by the Irishwoman's muttered, "I beg your pardon."

Hertha looked straight at the begonia in the center of the table. How could she have said anything so stupid! Hertha Ogilvie had no brother. Now she would have to begin making up a story, lying about things. She ought to appear very angry. Imagine a white girl hearing her brother called a nigger and not resenting it; but again, imagine Hertha Williams sitting by the fire and warming herself and denying her brother Tom.

"I don't know why American men should not cook," William Applebaum at length broke in with his deep, pleasant voice. "The greatest chefs in the world are men. I wish, Miss Hertha, you would let me turn cook like your brother and show me how to make this pudding."

The meal finished, they left the dishes to be washed later and went into the front room where William Applebaum admired the picture which Hertha had framed.

"Yes," Kathleen said, "Hertha is spoiling me with her pretty rooms and her good things to eat. I've not been to my Socialist local for a month now. It's so comfortable here the nights I can be home."

"We went out last Thursday, Kathleen."

"You're right, we did. And you should have been with us, Billy. Such a talk as we heard of the poverty in the South."

"Perhaps Mr. Applebaum would have preferred the movie," Hertha said mischievously.

She was quite herself again, and curled up on the cot, her back against the wall, was prepared to watch the two in their talk, for she knew well enough that she would soon be forgotten. Kathleen had given the armchair to her guest and sat erect in her straight seat. Her soft white shirtwaist set off her fresh cheeks, her gray eyes, her large but sensitive mouth. But she had no thought of her appearance, she was prepared to be serious.

Her guest stretched in comfort in the big chair, his handsome head thrown back, his lighted pipe in his hand as he blew the smoke from between his lips. He would have been greatly pleased if Kathleen had chosen to tell of the moving pictures, but he saw at once that this was not her mood.

"I wish I had been with you at both places," he said courteously, with a little touch of formality that the Irish girl ridiculed and the southern girl liked. "It must have been like going to the theater and seeing both a comedy and a tragedy, only in that case they usually put the comedy last."

"That may be what they do at the theater but it isn't what they do in life."

Kathleen was ready to talk. She sat in her chair and told the story of southern peonage and wrong.

Hertha, who had failed to listen at Cooper Union, was moved in spite of herself at the tragic tale as it came from Kathleen's lips. It was the same in all essentials, but vivified by a rare imagination and a compelling sympathy. The Irishwoman became herself the thin, yellow, starved mother dragging her steps from her unlovely home into the hot, relentless fields.

"Have you ever seen anything like that?" William Applebaum asked of Hertha when the story came to an end.

Hertha hesitated as she answered. "No, I don't think I have. I lived much of the time in the city. I haven't known about such things." She thought of Ellen as she spoke, and was sure, had she been there, she could have talked intelligently about peonage and poverty among white and black. She remembered that Ellen used to say the Negro never fell as low as the lowest white. "Those are the folks," she added, "that we call poor white trash."

Her friend flared up at her. "Yes, and why are they trash? Because you treat them worse than slaves! You hold them in debt, steal from them with every piece of bacon or cup of meal they buy from your store, work their children when they should be at school or playing out under the blue skies; and then you live in idleness and sneer at the trash that done the work of the world for you."

"Miss Hertha doesn't sneer, and neither do I, Kitty, but I think you're talking of an exceptional case. At any rate, as I have seen things in the North and West, I've found that it was the fault of the man if he didn't live decently in the world, and keep his woman that way, too. Why didn't this woman's husband pay off his debt and go to another farm?"

"For the same reason likely that his children won't. Because he was starved and worked until all the life was squeezed out of him."

"Well, it's not that way in the North."

"Isn't it? Haven't I seen the tenement child sewing on the buttons to pants, and coughing fit to send her in a few years to heaven—for if those babies that have no chance in this world don't have one in the next, there's no God."

"And I've seen things, too, Kitty. I've known a good many families that were down and out, and it's always been one person of the lot who's been to blame. If every one did his share, kept sober, worked hard and saved money, he would get out of the tenement. When the family doesn't do better, when it keeps staying in the dirt, it's because there's a father perhaps who only works three days in the week and gets drunk the other three, or there's a son who can't find the right job, a round peg in a square hole. There's somebody who doesn't do right and keeps the family back."

"And do you mean to say that rich folk aren't like that?" Kathleen was growing very angry. "And yet I'm noticing they're not starved for it."

"If they're rich it's because they're industrious. My grandfather used to tell me that America was the land of opportunity, and that it rested with the individual whether or not he made a success."

"Oh!" Kathleen rose. She looked as though she could personally assault the little man. He in the meantime had resumed his pipe and was talking in a pleasant, matter-of-fact tone.

"Of course, I'm not denying, Kitty, that there are wrong things that ought to be remedied. That case in the South, now. It's very hard. Of course, the children should have schooling, and if the Blair Bill for federal aid to education hadn't been killed, they would be having it to-day. My grandfather used to say that this put back the South fifty years. But given an education, it's a fair field and no favor for the growing boy in the United States."

"I don't know how far back your Mr. Blair and his education may be, but he can't be as far back as you are, Billy, with your fair field. Fair indeed, with two per cent of the people controlling the wealth of the country!"

"Those figures are exaggerated."

"Indeed, they are! It should be one per cent and it will be that soon."

"But suppose for argument that it is. Don't they control it for good?"

"For good! And every night you see the bread line for a block down the Bowery?"

Applebaum laid down his pipe and spoke with emphasis.

"Oh, I've no sympathy with that. Those are just bums, nothing else. They wouldn't do a day's job if you gave it to them. They don't mean to work. All they want is a bite and a drink and a dirty hole to sleep in until they can get the drink again. They ought to be forced to work. The trouble is the men don't have to work long enough. With their eight-hour day you see them in the saloon before they go to work getting a drink. And they're after it again when the day's work is over or some other foolishness."

"You fool!" Kathleen said, her eyes blazing, and she lifted her hand as if to strike him.

He seized it in his own and carried it to his lips.

"I'm wise enough to love you, Kathleen."

Hertha found this an excellent time to slip from her seat and into the kitchen. When she came back the two were seated as before, but talking of indifferent things, and the light had gone out of Kathleen's face.

CHAPTER XVII

It was Saturday evening and early December. Kathleen was away for the night on a case, and Hertha, after a dinner alone, decided to go to the library to secure a book to read on Sunday. She was quite accustomed by this time to going out in the evening by herself; yet it always seemed a little an adventure, the streets were so gaily lighted and the people so many. She put a raincoat over her suit for the sky was lowering and there was a chilliness in the air, a harsh feeling that made her shiver and turn gladly, her short walk over, into the warm, brightly lighted reading-room.

Accustomed all her life to having few books about her, with no opportunity for individual choice, she made mistakes at first amid the plethora of volumes that the city offered. It had been disappointing, for instance, to reach home in the evening to learn that *The Four Georges* was not about four little boys or to find out that *Sesame and Lillie* had nothing to do with flowers. But part of the stack was open, and she soon found what she desired and drenched herself in the world of romance. Under the guidance of the librarian she read two novels of Dickens, and carried home and returned with suspicious swiftness one each of Scott and Thackeray; under her own guidance she became intimate with the heroines of those best sellers that a conscientious library board permitted upon the open shelves. Rather to her relief the librarian this evening was very busy and she went at once to the open stack.

It was with a guilty feeling that she habitually walked past the rows of history and travel. Ellen would have stopped here, she knew, and have carried home volumes telling of Europe and China and India and other lands unknown to Hertha even by name. Tom in her place would have asked for Livingstone's *Travels in Africa*, a book he had always wanted to own. She hoped they would surely have it in the school where he was reading or studying that night. Well, Ellen was industrious, and Tom liked to stop and think; but she, Hertha, never had cared for heavy reading—except poetry, and poetry belonged under the pines or by the river, not in noisy New York. So excusing herself, she reached the jaunty, attractively bound fiction and joined the large group of borrowers who were intent on securing a thrilling story for the morrow.

"Excuse me, but do you know anything about these books?"

She turned to see a young man at her elbow. He was tall, not in the least good-looking, with a long, thin face, a small mouth and a sharp nose. His eyes, however, were attractive—deep blue with long lashes like a child's. He was dressed in cheap, conspicuously patterned clothes, and his gay necktie bore a large scarfpin. She hesitated to answer, and yet there was a tone of entreaty in his voice that gave her confidence. She felt sure that he was from the country and was floundering about amid this multitude of volumes as she had floundered a few weeks ago. He should, of course, consult the official-looking librarian seated at her desk whose business it was to instruct newcomers, but the newcomer is the one who instinctively avoids the official class. Glancing down she answered shyly, "Very little."

They were between two stacks, and looking along the line of volumes, Hertha saw a familiar title and took down *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

"Have you read this?" she asked.

"No, ma'am," was the answer.

She smiled at the "ma'am" for it reminded her of home. "I feel like you'll enjoy it," she ventured.

"There," the young man cried, so loudly that a number of borrowers turned to look at them both. "I knew the minute I set eyes on you that you were from the South!"

Hertha was very much annoyed. This forward youth was making her conspicuous. Leaving him she went quickly to the reading-room, and seating herself at a table took up a magazine. In a few minutes, however, she saw him at her side.

"I didn't mean to make such a noise," he said in a peculiarly penetrating whisper, "but what the dickens do you do after you find your book?"

It is always a pleasure to be placed in the superior position of an imparter of knowledge, and Hertha, unbending from her dignity, found herself whispering instructions.

Once put on the right path, the youth showed no further shyness, and was soon talking familiarly with the librarian who equipped him with a card.

"It's all hunky," he explained, coming back to Hertha. "She gave me the book and as long as you think it's good I'm going to read it through. I'm not much on reading," he added as though apologizing for his new taste. "Never entered a library before, but there ain't such a lot to do of a Sunday."

Hertha nodded but did not look up, and after some minutes of aimless wandering the young man went out.

She found herself thinking of him after he had gone. His type was not unfamiliar. The tall, lank figure, the yellowish skin, looking as though indigestion lurked around the corner, the hard, narrow mouth—white men like this had been customary figures in her Southern life. They were the sort who monopolized four places in the train, lolling back on one seat and putting their feet up on another. More than once, on a street car, she and Ellen had been obliged to stand when such a man, quite oblivious of whether or not he usurped the jim-crow section, had taken his lazy comfort. But a person of this type would be courteous to a white girl, would be glad to sacrifice his pleasure to do her a kindness. She had recognized at once that he was from the South, and her speech had proclaimed to him her birthplace. But what if he had seen her when she was colored? She found the blood rush to her face at the thought. Then, remembering Mammy's injunction, she grew calm again. It was for her to-day, in New York, to live only in the white world.

Going to the shelves she selected a book to take home, and then as the librarian was making ready to close, pushed at the outside door, which was a little stiff in opening, and walked into the street.

Into the street? Oh, no, into Heaven!

Everywhere about her white crystals were falling through the air—on her hat, on her coat, on her upturned face. As she looked overhead they came in multitudes, like a soft curtain. They made a carpet at her feet, and as far as she could see down the street they dropped one after another, millions upon millions, shimmering golden in the light of the lamp.

It was a miracle of beauty. Here in this ugly city, where she had missed the clean sand and the growing flowers, from the very heavens had come a sacred robe, for were not the angels clothed in white? And the robe was covering the world. The gray stone stoops were shining, and on each bit of cornice or projecting woodwork was a line of light; and she was moving through it; feeling the soft flakes encircle her, stepping as lightly as she could that she might not crush the lovely things that had come straight from God.

That night, as she flung open her window, for the first time she heard no sound. The jolt and jar of the street car, the rumble of the elevated, fell upon deaf ears. All her mind was in her eyes that watched, with ever-growing reverence, the falling flakes of white. And as she slipped into unconsciousness her last thought was of the heavenly city that would be building throughout the night.

"Be sure to put on your rubbers, Hertha," said Kathleen the next morning.

"Why," asked Hertha, "is the snow wet?"

"Is the snow wet? Is the sun hot? It's a mercy you didn't take your death of cold last night, wandering around with your face turned up to the sky, and the snow falling about you! Put on your rubbers, darling, just as though it were rain, for it may turn to that before the morning's over."

Hertha did as she was bid and returned for general inspection. Freezing weather had begun to exhaust her extra supply of warmth, and she had purchased a heavy coat of soft brown material trimmed with brown fur and with a fur muff to match. A little brown hat with a red quill had been another recent purchase. She had dipped into her bank account to get these things and had feared that Kathleen might think it extravagant—she was sure that Ellen would have—but Kathleen had silenced any misgivings.

"Spend your money when you have the chance," she advised, as Hertha began to speak apologetically of her expenditures. "The poorhouse at the end is a pleasanter life than scraping and denying yourself all along the road. And you can't be a brown fairy with a quiver of a smile on your lips and a glint of sorrow in your eyes for many years more. The sorrow or joy will get the better of you, and that's the end of youth."

"You haven't lost your youth, then."

"Oh, be off with you! You're going to church?"

"Yes, but I'm leaving early to see the snow."

"If I hadn't been up all night I'd go with you too, but it's a morning when bed can't be resisted. So good-by, little brown angel, and come back for a homely dinner of corn beef."

Few people had passed since the snow had ceased falling and the sidewalks were still beautiful, one side dazzling white, the other luminous purple in the shadow of the walls. Anxious not to miss any of the spectacle before the city made for its destruction—some boys were already shoveling the snow into the street—Hertha hastened to the open square on one side of which stood her church. Tall English elms with nobly branching limbs stood out against the clear blue sky; and the bushes, bared of their leaves, bore on each twig a mass of crystal flowers. She moved in and out among the paths, crunching the snow beneath her feet, now circling the dismantled fountain, now walking through the broad gateway only to return again. Looking at the church clock she found she had still half an hour left to enter into the treasures of the snow.

As she stood in the sunlight by the park bench she became conscious that some one was watching her. This, she had learned, was one of the distressing features of city life; only at a shop window could one stop to gaze without being conspicuous. Provoked at the sense of interruption she started to walk away.

"I beg your pardon."

Turning she saw the young man of the evening before. He looked almost attractive in the daylight in his soft hat and dark overcoat, the winter cold bringing a little color to his face. His deep blue eyes were clear and friendly, and she felt sure from his manner that he meant no impertinence.

"I beg your pardon," he said again, "but I noticed you here in the early morning looking at things and I thought they might be as strange to you as to me."

"I have never seen the snow before," said Hertha.

"There, I was on to it, all right. Do you know what it's like," he went on, "all this snow? It's like a field of cotton with the stuff lying around in heaps, but with some bolls still sticking to the plant. Look at it there on that bush. The Bible says 'white as wool' but I say, 'white as cotton.'"

Hertha looked down at her feet which were beginning to feel cold, and struck one against the other; but while she did not speak she did not go away, and the young man still tried to make talk.

"It certainly is a pretty day," he said desperately.

Then Hertha looked up and laughed. She had not heard that greeting since she left home.

The young man laughed back heartily, even noisily. He was delighted at his success.

"Won't you tell me your name?" he said pleadingly. "Mine's Brown, Richard Shelby Brown's the whole of it, but Dick is what everybody uses at home. I come from Georgia and that's the best state in the union except yours. I'm working as salesman with a wholesale firm over on Broadway not far from here—I'll show you the place if you'll walk over there. I'm twenty-five years old and I don't drink, brought up prohibition and won't touch the stuff. Now, please, it's your turn. Won't you tell me your name?"

Hertha still stood hesitating, pushing one foot over the other, clasping her hands together in her muff and striving to decide in her mind what to do. She looked so shyly pretty that the young man watching her, his heart in his mouth, felt that the sentence would be beyond his deserts if she sent him away. Yet he would have gone without question, so much a lady did she seem, so far above the social circle attainable by Richard Shelby Brown. She in her turn was thinking it would be easy to go and escape all questionings; and yet easier to let him have his way, at least to recognize him, not continually to pass him if they met; and easiest of all just to stand there, looking down at her muff or up at the church and the white clouds piled back of it; and then, at length to say, still not looking at him, "My name is Hertha Ogilvie."

"That's a lovely name, and Georgia, too. You came from that state, didn't you, Miss Hertha?"

"No, my family came from Florida."

"That's queer, for it's a Georgia name."

"Didn't any one ever leave Georgia for Florida?"

She was looking up at him now, her brown eyes shining, a little smile on her lips.

"I can't conceive it," he said in a loud, jovial voice to hide his own embarrassment. She was far above him, he felt sure, in birth and breeding. "It's a fine name, I know that. I wish we could find we were kin."

"Everybody is kin in the South," she said decidedly, anxious to leave the subject of family. And then, pointing to the gate, asked, "What has that boy trailing after him?"

A little boy of about eight, in shabby coat and broken shoes, had come into the park and, behind him, drawn by a rope, was a sled. Stopping a moment to survey the ground, the boy lifted the sled, ran a few steps, flung himself upon it, and coasted along the path, slowing down close to where they stood.

Dick Brown looked at the youngster as he lay happily sprawling on his stomach, and then turned to Hertha. "And I've lived for twenty-five years without a chance at that!"

"It's never too late to learn," she suggested.

He thrust his hand in his pocket and pulled out a nickel. "Say," he said, calling to the boy who was starting off, "Gimme a ride!"

The youngster grinned derisively. "What 'er givin' me?" he asked, and slid away on the path.

Brown ran after him. "I'm giving you this," he answered and produced the nickel.

This altered the situation. The boy looked a little doubtfully at his sled and at the tall young man beside him, but, financial gain outweighing distrust, he took the money and handed over his property. "Go a little easy," he said, "it ain't yer size."

The man from Georgia eyed the bit of board on runners and then looked down at his long overcoat, his gloved hands, his highly polished shoes. Suddenly he felt very foolish. He glanced up at Hertha who was standing some rods away watching.

Moved by an impulse of mischief, she ran over to where he was. "I'm waiting to see you do it," she said. "It's perfectly easy, isn't it?" turning to the boy.

"I bet you two are dagoes," the youngster said by way of answer. "Dagoes don't know any more about snow 'n the fleas they bring wid 'em. Say, mister, this sled ain't your fit. Why don't you give your girl a ride?"

"Will you?" said Dick Brown, glowing with pleasure at the suggestion.

The park was filling up. Ahead on the path were two girls, one not more than a baby, clad in so many jackets that she looked like a little ball, sitting upright on a sled, which her little sister, in red coat and white hood, was pulling. She same running down the path, steering with accuracy and care.

"I could do that all right," Brown said with assurance. "Won't you try?"

"Oh, no, I couldn't!"

"Please do," he pleaded.

There were only children about, and, to Hertha, Dick Brown himself was beginning to seem just a big boy. The intoxicating air and the dazzling snow were breaking down convention and leaving her quite gay and daring.

"Well, just a little way," she said curling herself up on the sled.

Dick at once took off his overcoat and wrapped it about her, tucking it well under her feet. To her expostulations he paid not the slightest attention.

"There you are, all right," he cried joyously, and ran with her down the path.

The owner of the sled followed after, steering occasionally from behind when expert skill was needed, or firing a snowball at any boy who got in the way of their triumphal progress. It was glorious sport, and there was no knowing how long it might have continued had not Dick Brown, careless in his growing skill, looked away from duty for a moment and striking an obstacle in the path, rolled Hertha into the snow.

Protected by his great coat she was entirely unhurt, both in person and in dress and she found herself laughing immoderately as he helped her up; but he was prostrate in his contrition.

"I'm the stupidest hill billy in Casper County," he said. "I'd like to kick myself. Are you sure you aren't hurt?"

"Of course, I'm not! The snow is as soft as a pillow. Don't mind, please, Mr. Brown, we've had such fun."

"Have you? I have, but I wouldn't have dumped you out that way, not for a hundred dollars."

"You could have done it for five cents."

The snow was brushed from her dress and she was standing, her muff pulled over her arm, settling her hat in place.

"It's not quite straight," he said and moved as though to put it right for her.

She drew back, indignant. Was he going to be fresh and spoil everything after their jolly time together?

"Excuse me!" he grew red with embarrassment. Here was a girl with whom evidently he must never practise the code of manners agreeable to the girls at his own home. He added somewhat lamely, "It's all right now."

"I'm glad," she was her shyest self again; "and now good-by."

"You won't let me take you home?"

"I'm not going home," and she held out her hand.

He shook it heartily. "I mean to read the book through," he declared.

"I think you'll like it. Good-by."

"Good-by."

Watching her walk across the park and down the street until the little hat with its red feather was lost to sight, Dick Brown saw before him many evenings spent in a public library reading-room. He had been lonely since he had come, four months ago, a stranger to New York. It was not his first experience away from Casper County—a year of business in Atlanta had proved a preface to his New York position—but he had never before been in a city quite without home acquaintances. New York was a fine place for movies and restaurants, for walks up Broadway, a cigar in your mouth, watching whisky and petticoats, spool cotton and the latest leg show, wink their merits at

you overhead; but it was poor in nice girls. There were plenty of the other kind. He felt disgust as he remembered with whom he had already chaffed and dallied, but only by chance would he be likely to meet such a young woman as Hertha Ogilvie. Setting his hat firmly on his head and pulling on his gloves, he said to himself that he was glad she was so careful but that he must find some way of breaking through her reserve.

A snowball struck him in the neck, and turning he found his new boy acquaintance grinning at him. Here was a time to take off, not to put on, the gloves. Stripping himself of impediments, he entered upon his first snowball fight to emerge wet but triumphant.

Hertha walked west for a few blocks, then north, then back to the east again. She meant to go to church, but she did not mean that Richard Shelby Brown should know where her church was. As she hurried down the street, all aglow once more, she felt girlishly happy. It came upon her quite suddenly that she had rarely been happy like this before. Her life at home, at school, with Miss Patty, had brought her quiet content; the hours with her lover which were slowly receding from her thoughts had stirred her passion; but save with a little boy like Tom she had never played as she had played this morning. In the South there was rest and passion, the warm breath of the refulgent summer; but in the North, there was cold, tingling air, and jolly times. It was a place in which to work hard; but also a place to play in, to go coasting, to run, perhaps to dance.

She looked so young and sweet when she entered her church that the woman at the end of the seat into which she was ushered smiled at her; an unholy liberty in New York.

"All ye snow and hail, praise ye the Lord, praise Him and glorify Him forever!"

She found it in her prayerbook, and all through the service, through the Te Deum and prayer and litany, she was entering into the treasures of the snow.

That night the thermometer rose twenty degrees and the next morning there was only a dirty gray slush upon the street.

CHAPTER XVIII

New York had been preparing for Christmas. From all over the world beautiful things had poured in at her docks and stations to be distributed among her stores and shops. From the great steamers that came daily to her ports, from the trains that snorted up to her depots, were unloaded cases filled with garments of every texture and color; rich silks; fanciful ribbons, undergarments far too lovely to be hidden, that later would shine resplendent in shop windows. Household possessions came; graceful vases; plates of china rimmed with gold; many-hued glass; tables and chairs with slender fragile legs; soft, sumptuous rugs; heavy figures in white marble. Out of the boxes came gay and intricate toys; dolls of varied ages but all newly born; brightly illustrated picture books; tinkling music boxes. The shop windows each day, in number beyond number, recorded the multitude of possessions that make up the life of civilized man.

These possessions, however, were to be found in the city all the year, though they grew more lovely and numerous at holiday time; but as December advanced the trains brought in the special harbingers of Christmas. From Maine came the fir-balsam, most fragrant of trees, some tall and thickly boughed, others a child's measure in height; ground-pine and laurel were brought from nearer by; while holly and mistletoe traveled up from the South. All stood in display upon the sidewalks in both the poor and the resplendent sections of the town.

When the noon hour came, and, seated by the machines, the other girls opened their packages of luncheon and ate and visited with one another, Hertha went out to walk. She did not spend more than ten minutes in the clattering restaurant, but hurried on to the great department store where the wealth of the world was on exhibit. There she would wander each day, sometimes in toy-land, sometimes where the pianos were playing or the victrolas singing, sometimes among the lovely dresses or under the great rotunda where the silks shone in rainbow colors. At first she was fearful lest she had no right to examine these wonderful things that she could not purchase, but she soon found that no one was troubled by her presence. Once in a while she would buy a little candy or a picture card to feel the importance of a customer, but the very multiplicity of the things about her and the simplicity and narrowness of her own life made expensive purchases incredible. She smiled sometimes as she thought of Miss Patty's suggestion of a large expenditure upon clothes. The soft blue evening dress with the touch of yellow at the neck would have become her; but Miss Patty would have recognized as soon as she, that there was nothing in her present life to claim kinship with the gown. To have worn it, or a cheap imitation of it, to some dance-hall would never have entered the head of either of them. Whether wisely or not, she had chosen the position of a working girl in this, her new life, and the doors of social intercourse that might, as a student, have been ajar had she gone with Miss Witherspoon, were now closed.

Nevertheless, the splendor of the shop did make its impression upon her and she felt that her aristocratic lineage became her as she walked among its beautiful and costly things. "Now remember," she would say to herself each day as she entered, "you are Hertha Ogilvie, Miss Ogilvie of Florida. Your grandfather was a distinguished judge and left you money, and after his death you came to New York to live." So far, so good; but she must have a fuller story if she were to satisfy the natural questions of her friends. Kathleen had respected her reserve, for which she

was most grateful, but if she saw Richard Brown again, and accepted him in her life, he would want to know a great deal. Southern folk were always talking about personal affairs with a kindly, active curiosity, and there was little hope that a short sojourn in the North would cure any one of them of such a trait. Yes, she must build up an unreal past in which she moved among strange people, a white child unknown even to herself. To have told her life as she had lived it, with its strange and dramatic change from one race to another, was repugnant to her. It was partly to escape the curious glances, the whispered remarks about her appearance—"Yes, one could see she might have been taken for a Negro, that curly hair"—the inquisitive questions regarding her bringing up among blacks, that she had turned from the Boston world that Miss Witherspoon had prepared for her. But Hertha Williams found it difficult to create a life story for Hertha Ogilvie and to carry it through its normal vicissitudes and adventures for twenty-three years. It was repugnant to her to conceive and carry out a lie; and as she walked down one long aisle and up another, she had an annoying way of forgetting her grandfather and the many years she had lived with him (she made no effort to visualize other relatives) and of recalling her own black people at home.

They should know, these dear people whom she could not forget, that Christmas found her alive and well, but she would send no address and would receive no welcome word in return. That was what they had meant. Hertha Ogilvie's two feet were not yet planted firmly enough in the white world for her to return, even for a short time, to the black. So on a little card that showed a cottage standing in a field of snow, she sent to foster-mother and sister her greeting of love and her assurance of health and happiness. To Tom she sent a top, his favorite toy. He had been famous at spinning his top, and it was pleasant to send him a child's gift. And when she had dropped both card and toy in the box at the post-office she turned away winking the drops from her eyes.

William Applebaum at this time was a great comfort. He was a whole Christmas, in himself, for he loved every custom associated with the day, German, English, American, and carried them all to Kathleen's home. With Hertha he hung up wreaths of holly in the four windows, and two days before Christmas he appeared carrying a ten-pound turkey. "I bought it myself," he said, as Kathleen glared as though she thought it might have come from the Salvation Army. "I wanted to make sure of my dinner here, and if Miss Hertha will let me, I'll cook it under her supervision." On Christmas eve, which happened to be Sunday, he took them to a concert given by his choral society, and leaving them in the best seats in the house, went upon the stage and sang the choruses in *The Messiah* with a rapture of happiness and good-will. When the two women returned home, after saying good-night to him at the door, they found within a little tree, not four feet in height, but set out in the regalia of the season, tinsel, cornucopias, candles, and at the top a golden star. They lighted the candles and sat for a time in their radiance until Hertha declared that they must be blown out that they might be lighted again to-morrow.

"He's a good man," Kathleen said as she examined the little gilt toys on the boughs, "but he lacks vision."

Christmas morning was lowering, but after she had tidied up her room, Hertha went out to church. She walked through the park, a gray and cheerless place to-day, and felt aggrieved that no one was there to meet her. There was, of course, no reason why she should have thought to see her new acquaintance, but she had half expected it both Sunday and now and his absence was a disappointment. And at the library, while she had scrupulously kept to her usual routine, visiting it neither more nor less than usual, she had not seen him either. Her life, whether set in the South, where roses and purple clematis were blooming now over the doorways, or in the North of gray clouds and snow, was just a place into which people entered for a time to play a part, and, at the end of the act, went out and left her to finish as best she could alone.

Once within the church, however, with the organ pealing out the music she had heard the night before of the shepherds keeping watch over their flocks, she ceased to feel aggrieved and with deep emotional happiness entered into the service. As Hertha Ogilvie she had at once gone to the Episcopal Church. To enter its portals and take part in its ritual seemed to her as much in keeping with her new character as sitting down at table with white men and women. But her nature so swiftly responded to beauty, there were so many sensitive chords of the spirit that vibrated to the chant of the service, or to the moments of silent prayer within the darkened church amid the multitude of throbbing souls, that she grew to love the church of her adoption. "How glad I am to be white," she thought as she stood up and heard the *Te Deum* ring through the softly lighted spaces. "And yet how queer it is to be glad, for I've always been just the same."

The snow began to fall at one o'clock, and when Applebaum appeared for dinner at three (he had not been allowed to help in its preparation) he made much ado of standing in the hall and shaking off the flakes.

"I especially ordered a white Christmas for you, Miss Hertha," he called as he stood in the open doorway.

She smiled in reply and asked him to come in.

"Could I have a word with Kitty?" he stammered.

Leaving him still in the hall, clutching nervously at his umbrella, she went into the kitchen and sent out Kathleen.

Applebaum was much embarrassed. "Would you mind, Kitty?" he said. "There's a little boy

downstairs that was in the street a minute ago, yelling loud enough to drown a whole orchestra because they were taking his mother away to the hospital. He was pounding and kicking the doctor until I promised him a turkey dinner, when he stopped as if his mouthpiece was broken. Do you mind if I bring him up?"

"Why, of course not," she answered, "it's only you that would mind, for you're not used to children."

When he appeared in the hall again he was accompanied by a singularly unattractive boy of eight with a colorless face and incredibly dirty hands.

"We hadn't time to fix up," Applebaum said with forced cheerfulness, endeavoring to make proper connections between a very shabby pair of trousers and a soiled shirt. "There, that's better."

"Come this way," Hertha called, and to the surprise of the others the boy followed her down the hall into her bedroom.

Getting some hot water, she helped him roll up his sleeves and then, handing him her soap, told him to wash.

At this point he shook his head vigorously. "I can't, Miss," he explained; "it would chap 'em. Yer don't wash yer hands in winter."

"Just try," she suggested.

With a great splash he plunged in his hands, found the warm water pleasant, the soap agreeably slippery; and while he scowled as he rubbed, under Hertha's silent supervision, he made a thorough job.

"Now, look," she said when he had finished with her towel.

The boy looked down and out beyond his coat-sleeves, where once there had been black, were now white, astonishingly white, hands. They gleamed against his dark trousers. Slowly a smile spread over his face as though he were welcoming back summer friends.

"Tom could never get a result like that," Hertha thought as they walked into the kitchen together. She placed the lad at Kathleen's left where he watched voraciously the carving of the deliciously browned turkey. He grabbed at the first plate, which, nevertheless, went on its way to Hertha. But when the second turned not to the left but to the right and landed in front of Applebaum, his anger rose.

"Damn you," he said, grabbing Kathleen by the arm, "gimme something to eat!"

In a flash she had boxed his ear. "Keep your mouth shut," she commanded, "if you want to get anything in it. No wonder your poor mother's in the hospital!"

The boy sniffled a little, but remained silent. When he received his portion he fell upon it voraciously, swallowing potato in gulps, tearing at bones, and cleaning the plate of its last drop of gravy. This accomplished (it occupied not more than five minutes) he seized his cap, ran from the room, leaving the doors wide open in his flight so that they heard the front door slam, and rushed into the street.

Hertha looked at the empty plate. "I've seen hungry boys before, but never one so hungry as that," she said.

"Poor little kid," said Kathleen, "and he missed his pudding!"

"You weren't pitying him a while ago." There was reproach in Hertha's voice.

Kathleen made haste to explain. "That was the only language he knew. I done that or he would have had us in hell in a minute. Perhaps you could have managed better," she added, almost humbly, "you got him to wash his hands."

Applebaum had risen from his place while they were talking and had taken away the boy's plate. The exit of his unsightly, bad mannered guest was a great relief, and he now sat down and attacked his food with interest. "We have fed the hungry," he said solemnly from the depths of his plate.

Kathleen flew at him. "And so that's why you done it! I was wondering you were so thick with the kids all of a sudden. You wanted to ease your conscience on Christmas day! Well, you're in it now with the Bowery Mission and the Salvation Army and Tim Sullivan and you can enjoy yourself. Charity to-day is on the job."

"Why not say the Christmas spirit?" he made answer. "I meant it kindly."

A lovely look came over the Irish woman's face. All her irritability vanished, and, smiling at them like some strong saint, she lifted her coffee cup. "To the Christmas spirit, then, and may it stay with us all the year round."

"Hertha, here, is the Christian," she said later, when they were all comfortably seated in the front room, "she goes to church more times than I can count."

"It's a good habit for a woman," Billy retorted. "What did they preach about this morning?"

"I hardly know," Hertha answered. "The sermon was very short, but the service and the singing by the choir boys was most beautiful."

"And the priests in their robes and the altar with its candles and the incense," Kathleen added.

"Oh, we are not High Church like that."

"Why not do the whole thing if you're about it? I wouldn't stop at one gown, I'd have two, a dozen for the great events, and as many candles as the rich could pay for. But what is there in it all for a hungry heart?"

"I remember once," Kathleen continued, a look of sorrow coming into her gray eyes, "going to church of a Palm Sunday. I had broken from the faith since the priest went against me and the girls in my big strike, but I thought of how my father and mother, if they'd been living, would have asked me to go, and I went to please them. I'd hardly entered the door, though, when the smell of the incense and the sight of the priests' rich robes sickened me. I thought of the lowly Nazarene who had not where to lay His head, and it seemed to me that I must scream; so I left and walked down the street, and across the way I saw another building, with a plain entrance, and over the doorway the words 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.' 'I don't know what it may mean,' I thought to myself, 'but that must be the place for me.' So I went inside and sat at the back against the wall where no one saw me.

"There was a pleasant looking man on the platform, dressed as he would be dressed to go into the street, and he was telling the meaning of Palm Sunday. It was when our Saviour was coming into Jerusalem riding on an ass, the people following Him. But His followers all being poor, like Himself, had nothing to give, so they tore the leaves from the palm trees as He rode by and threw them in His path, their only offering. And as I sat there and listened, and heard of the hard road that the poor must tread, something broke in my heart and I leaned against the wall and sobbed."

Hertha was deeply moved. "Where did that man preach, Kathleen?" she asked.

"It was a long way from here, darling, and likely as not they've thrown him out of his church by this time. He was too good to be let long to do as he liked."

"Oh, Kathleen, Kathleen!"

"Well, well, I mustn't be making remarks like that on Christmas. Has Billy told you the story yet, Hertha, of how his grandfather fought in the German Revolution and made his escape from prison?"

Their visitor left early, and for a time they worked together in the kitchen clearing away the things. This task done, Kathleen brought out her Christmas cards and gifts and looked them over, commenting on this or that friend or patient, while Hertha sat quietly by, her hands in her lap. The day had brought her no remembrance save a gift from Kathleen.

"There's one thing I do love about you, Hertha," her friend said, "you're not always fidgeting; you know how to rest."

"Yes. It's been a real vacation for me, these two days."

"Still it must be hard not to be home at playtime."

Hertha remained silent.

"I'm not asking questions, dearie," her friend went on. "It's for you to talk or not, as you wish. But sometimes when we're by ourselves we want to speak and yet we don't know how. If there's anything you'd feel like saying, I'd keep it to myself. I know," looking closely at the young girl, "you've heard nothing at all from home."

It was very quiet. As Hertha sat looking at her hands in her lap, she heard the clock tick and smelled the fragrance of the geranium blossoms. She was struggling with a desire to get up and, throwing her arms about her friend's neck, tell her her whole story. Hating deception, fearing that she could play her part but poorly, she wanted above everything else to do as her friend asked and reveal what was close to her heart. But reticence and, too, a feeling that she must keep to the plan that she had formulated, held her back. So she only said in a half whisper, "I am very much alone, Kathleen."

"I'm knowing that, darling."

"I never knew my father or my mother. I saw more of my grandfather than of any one else. But he died last summer and left me with a little money, only a little, and I came to New York."

"You've no sister to turn to?"

"No," very slowly.

"You said you had a brother once?"

"Yes, but he's a long way off. I don't see him any more."

"That's a lonely way to be. And is your grandmother alive now?"

"No." Then, with a touch of petulance, "I didn't like her much."

"But you're grieving, dear, I can tell that; and it's not for the dead, but the living."

"Perhaps."

"Is it some man now that you're needing?"

"No," Hertha said with a little laugh that ended in a sob, "it's not a man, Kathleen, it's my black mammy."

She put her arms around her friend's neck and kissed her good-night; and then went to her room, her head erect, her carriage that of the granddaughter of Judge Ogilvie. She had taken the first step and the next would not be so difficult. But Kathleen, out in the kitchen, shook her head and looked mystified.

CHAPTER XIX

The "Imperial," to which Hertha went every morning, was a high-grade shop. The large room in which she spent forty-nine hours a week was as clean as a conscientious scrubwoman could make it; the ventilation was not bad, and few of the workers were obliged to use artificial light. At rare moments of interruption, when stopping to catch a bit of thread or to adjust a piece of trimming, Hertha would look about at her companions bent over their machines, one running a tuck here, another attaching the lace to the muslin there, and would marvel at their dexterity and at the speed with which the finished product came out ready to go to another room to be pressed. Later she might see it at a department store, thrown over a show figure, and priced at \$5.65 or \$3.95, according to the day of the week. They were pretty shirtwaists and she took a pride in her part in their production.

By January the trade became brisk. Orders for "Imperial" waists were shipped to-day to give place to new orders to be shipped to-morrow. The girls were paid by the piece, and were, for their own interest, likely to work as fast as they could; but foreman and manufacturer were continually calling for greater speed. The exigencies of the trade—capricious changes of style, a keen competition among the manufacturers—created a period of swift production to be followed by a period of unemployment. Now, in midwinter, work was speeded up; and, bending over each whirring machine, was a taut, tired girl whose one thought, if she thought at all, was of the signal that should come at last to tell her that this day's work was done.

Hertha never became accustomed to the daily speeding. Not only did her body rebel against it, but her spirit refused to accept its sacrilege. She had always enjoyed making clothes, seeing a garment grow under her fingers. No matter how simple the article might be at which she was at work, she had felt the satisfaction of the creator when the final stitch was taken and the parts had become a useful whole. But now nothing grew; everything was made artificially by a series of explosions as they made puffed rice. At her machine she ran row after row of small tucks, fashioning the shoulders to give fullness to the bust. It was a graceful pattern, but if she stopped a moment to think of it she lost money for her employer and for herself. Her mind must be concentrated on her machine and on the goods that she fed it with the constant suggestion of hurrying, and again hurrying, and under the accusing eye of the foreman hurrying yet again.

Among the few American girls who worked at the shop was one Annie Black, who lived in a suburb. Annie seemed always to be running to and from trains. Her life on the road bore a striking similarity to her life at her machine. She rushed in the morning to get the 6:59, which, if it were on time, got her in and at work by eight. By shortening her noon hour she could just catch the 5:51 train for home. But if the 6:59 was late, then it was futile to attempt to make up lost time and she must work until nearly six and take the 6:41 back to a late dinner. And as her trains moved so moved her machine with its girl engine driver impatient for each run to be over and done.

We all love to make things, and the tragedy of the modern factory is that it denies this joy to the worker. Within the great buildings that we see from the street car window or that we flash by on the railroad train, men and women are not fashioning shirtwaists or shoes or automobiles; they are not seeing one out of the million things of man's creation grow beneath their touch; they are performing a series of motions for which they receive remuneration. The swifter and more accurate the performance of these motions the better the pay; but of the finished product they have neither knowledge nor thought. At ten years of age, with needle or wheel, they are better, more intelligent creators than at thirty, when, with fagged brain, they mechanically add their part to the multitude of parts that make up the factory product. At ten they take joy in the thing they have made and may sell it for a nickel or a kiss; at thirty they have but one desire, to dispose of their part of the product as dearly as they can. For, as they have no part in the creation of the whole, so they have no share in the intricate ways of business that make possible the factory's life. They are only tools like the machines they operate, to be used by the few, the creators, who, like the gods themselves, conceive and command.

At the Imperial shop most of the girls were Jewish. Annie Black and half a dozen other young Americans sat by themselves at a north window and when luncheon time came rehearsed the very lively happenings of the night before over their indigestible food; but the other girls were Russian Jews and spoke in Yiddish. Hertha was glad to have been seated with the latter group,

for from the first she liked them better than her compatriots. Her shyness, coupled with her dislike of the vulgar, kept her from making any acquaintances among the American girls, but she sometimes regretted that the barrier of language separated her from the Jewish. Some of them were, to be sure, foolish and vain, but the majority were serious, and a few appealed to her sense both of decorum and beauty. These girls had broad foreheads and wore their dark hair parted and drawn down over the upper part of their ears. Their deep brown eyes had long curling lashes. They carried serious looking books to and from their work. She often wondered what they were talking about when they got together at luncheon, and she always smiled when she passed them to go out at noon.

One night, early in January, she got into conversation with one of them as they left the factory. It was Sophie Switsky, a small, thin young woman of eighteen whose dark hair and eyes made almost too striking a contrast to her white face. "I go with you?" she had asked, looking up at Hertha as they went out into the rain, "I go under your umbrella?" Hertha had said "yes" eagerly, ashamed not to have offered shelter herself. Then, looking down at her companion's feet that were rapidly becoming soaked, she asked, smiling, "You didn't think it would rain when you left home this morning?"

"No," Sophie answered, without the smile that is as much a part of the American greeting as a handshake. "I did not to forget. All the money I have I save for my brother in Lithuania to bring him here to me."

"Yes?"

"Then I must keep money for the summer when we shall have no work."

"No work?" Hertha questioned.

"Did you not know? This trade is very bad, very bad. In the winter we work like the slaves and in the summer no work. And before the work will stop we sit in the room and wait and wait to see if we will be needed for the day. Sometimes we sit for one week, two weeks, and only work a day; we cannot tell."

"Why don't we work all the year through, but have shorter hours, and not speed?" Hertha asked.

"The trade is like that," Sophie Switsky answered wisely. "People want everything the same time, made the same way. Then the fashions change, and people throw away all that they have and buy again."

"How silly," Hertha thought to herself. The ways of trade seemed to her lacking not so much in humanity as in ordinary common sense.

Their way lay along the same streets until they came almost to Hertha's door when they said good-night, Sophie refusing to allow her new acquaintance to go further. "It is nothing to get wet," she averred, "I used to it;" and she hurried on, mingling so swiftly with the crowd that thronged the Bowery that Hertha soon lost sight of her small figure. She felt attracted to this young Jewish girl, and yet she half feared that she, too, like Kathleen, had a vision, and she questioned whether she desired another friend who wished to change the world.

And yet, when she had finished a supper alone and had dropped wearily into a chair by the lamp, she found she was almost ready for a world-change herself. She was too tired to care to read, too tired for coherent thought. In her head buzzed and hummed and roared the machines of the shop and every now and then her whole body twitched convulsively. Outside the rain beat steadily upon the pavement. It was a night like this, she remembered, that she had been carried, a little new-born baby, and placed on mammy's big bed. Who did such a thing? Not her young mother who had died so soon after her birth. Not her grandfather who in the end had given her his name. Was it her mother's mother who had tried to hide the family shame? She shrewdly suspected so. Well, she had not succeeded, for here was Hertha Ogilvie, after all. It was not so easy to hide a white child, not so easy to stifle the spirit of remorse.

As she sat in her chair, her eyes half closed, she found her thoughts, as so often happened, drifting back to her home among the pines, to the cabin with the white sand at the doorway and the red roses clambering over the porch. Instead of coming home to this empty flat, Ellen and her mother and Tom were on hand to welcome her. They helped take off her things, they dried her shoes, they gave her hot coffee to drink. Was it foolish to have gone away to enter the life of this ruthless city that held you in a mad whirl of work for half the year and for the other half left you to starve; this city in which there was no time for a pleasant homecoming and an evening meal together; this city in which you met a friendly face and lost it again in the great crowds that swarmed in millions over the miles of narrow streets? Her head drooped as though nodding yes to her questions, and her eyes wholly closed.

But just then the doorbell rang.

CHAPTER XX

It was the bell of the outer door, and Hertha went to the kitchen to push the button that released

the latch. Who could be coming to see Kathleen, she thought, on such a wretched night? Of course, some one who needed her services as nurse; and, going into the hall, she opened the outer door of the flat the better to guide the stranger upstairs.

"May I come in?"

It was a very wet figure that stood before her clasping a hat in one hand and in the other a large cotton umbrella that dripped puddles of water upon the floor. The question was asked in a jovial tone, and yet the man's attitude betrayed something like timidity.

"Certainly," Hertha answered. "Give me your umbrella; it's very wet."

"No, tell me where to put it; you mustn't get any of this rain on you," and Richard Shelby Brown followed Hertha as she led the way into the kitchen.

Together they put the umbrella into the washtub where it could drip harmlessly, and then, divested of his coat and hat, the young man went with his hostess into the front room where she insisted that he sit close to the radiator to get dry.

When she had seated him to her satisfaction and was back in her chair by the table there was silence. Now that Dick Brown's bodily wants were cared for, Hertha began to question herself how he had ever gotten there, and to wonder whether she should not be angry with him for following her uninvited to her home. But she was too homesick, too much in need of companionship, not to feel a little pleasure in seeing him, his long legs tucked under his straight chair, his thin face making a grotesque silhouette against the window shade. He was certainly homely and a pusher, just an ordinary "hill billy," as he had described himself. She decided that since he had come uninvited he must begin the conversation.

Dick Brown, as though appreciating his position, opened his mouth to speak and then sneezed—not once, but a number of times.

"You've taken a cold already," Hertha said sympathetically. "You shouldn't have come out to-night."

"No, I haven't, indeed I haven't. I'm just getting over one."

"How long have you had it?"

"About a month."

"I believe you got it that morning in the park. You shouldn't have given me your overcoat."

"That had nothing to do with it!" Brown spoke with a kindly bluster. "Nothing to do with it. Don't you think that for a minute. You see, after you left, I got playing with the kids and they squeezed snow down my neck and I lambasted them and we had a grand lark. It was mighty fine, but I learned that snow melts and then——"

He sneezed again.

"It was too bad," Hertha exclaimed. "It's so hard to be ill away from home."

"I reckon it is! Your meals set down by the side of your bed, the gruel cold and full of lumps, no one to growl at when your head aches and you can't go to sleep! It's a mighty poor state of things."

"I'm afraid you were pretty sick."

"Just missed pneumonia."

"You ought not to have come out to-night." Hertha spoke with emphasis.

"Oh, I'm all hunky now. I've sat in the library most every night since they let me out. Wouldn't they grin at home if they saw me fooling this way with books! Why, I know more news out of the magazines this month than all of Casper County ever knew since the first moonshiner set up his still! I'm reeking with information. But I bet you're reading one of those three-volume novels they tell about that last a year. I couldn't wait any longer, so I came to headquarters."

"How did you get my address?" Hertha had not meant to ask the question, but it slipped out unawares.

"Don't make me explain, please. It's against all the rules and regulations and the librarian only told because at times I'm a beautiful liar."

His thin face, looking thinner than ever from his sickness, wore a worried expression, and one of his long hands moved nervously against his side. At home he was accounted a confident youth who could grab up a girl and swing away with her a little faster than the next man, but here in New York he was off his ground. Moreover, this very pretty young woman with her aristocratic ways gave him no help, but sat quite silent as though questioning what right he had in her home. Awkwardly he rose and played his last card.

"I've a letter I want you to see," he said, "it's from my mother. I wrote and told her about you and how I hoped we'd get acquainted, only New York's such a big place a girl has to be careful. It ain't much like our country towns in Dixie, is it? Anyway, she wrote in answer, and here's the

letter. You can read it, postmark and all. Seems like it was written for you."

He handed the letter to her with an attempt at self-confidence; but she took it with so serious a face that, saying nothing further, he stood, almost humbly, awaiting her decision.

Hertha read the letter through. It was badly written and showed more than one lapse in spelling. Two pages were filled with admonitions to keep sober and serve the Lord; the third contained bits of local news: Cousin Sally Lou's visit, the number of partridges Uncle Barton had brought in for dinner. But on the last was the message that was doubtless meant for Hertha's eyes. "The young lady, from all you say, must be mighty grand, but she needn't be afraid of you. You weren't one to hang round the station every evening, or to steal out nights with the fellows to get whisky. You've been a good son, Dick, and every mother can't say that. Look at Jim Slade's mother, now ——" and the letter ended with an account of Jim's latest escapade.

Hertha handed it back with a pleasant smile. "It reads just like the South, doesn't it?" she said cordially. "Down there we know every little happening, while in New York you have to tell a story to learn where I live."

The young man laughed noisily; his relief was great.

"You're right, all right," he said, sitting nearer her. "It's like one big family down there, and if a visitor drops in there ain't a person in town from the Baptist preacher to the poorest nigger who won't have the news. Are you a Baptist, Miss Hertha?"

"No, I'm an Episcopalian."

"Whew! We only know 'em by name our way. It's Baptist or Methodist with us, with once in a while a Christian place of worship. Ever seen a revival now?"

"Yes."

"Have you? I wouldn't have supposed that an Episcopalian would so much as go to one. But it's a wonderful sight, don't you think, when the sinners come to the penitent seat? I've seen 'em, big men, crying like babies. And then the preacher with his great voice calling 'em to repent and showing 'em the way to righteousness. And out from somewhere a woman'll start a song, perhaps 'Rock of Ages,' and the whole room'll be full of the sound of the hymn."

He grew eloquent as he spoke, picturing the scene he knew so well. In his narrow life the church and its emotional appeal had occupied an important place. He wanted to tell her that he had been among that group kneeling in repentance, that he was a sinner saved by grace; but there was an aloofness about her that kept him from going further. He could not guess that she had wholly forgotten him, and was sitting in a bare room where the dim lamp lighted a multitude of black faces; where the cries of "Amen" rang from the penitent seat, and where the black preacher, the only father she had ever known, called upon the Lord to give to His children mercy and forgiveness. Her visitor had never listened to such a revival as she!

There was a long silence. Then Richard Brown strove again to make conversation.

"The niggers, now, they're a worthless lot, don't you think?"

Hertha started nervously. "I don't think so," she said.

"Don't you? I suppose you've had 'em in your family for a long time—old mammies and uncles. They don't grow that kind round our way, only a lot of worthless coons that won't do a lick of work unless they're driven to it."

"There's the funniest nigger minstrel show at the Hippodrome," he went on, "you ought to see it. Greatest thing out. There ain't anything much funnier, anyway, than to see a black buck dressed in a high hat and a pair of fancy shoes, opening his frog mouth and singing a coon song. Mighty funny songs they've got there, too. Wish you could hear one of them."

He wanted to ask her to go to the show with him the next week, but she looked further removed from him than ever. Had he said anything to warrant it he would have thought that she was angry; but that could hardly be the case. She just wasn't his kind and he had better accept the fact and go home. But as he sat crossing and recrossing his knees, wishing inexpressibly for the relief of a smoke, her face in the lamplight was so lovely that he shut his teeth and resolved to hang on.

Then a sneeze came to his relief, a big-throated sneeze, followed by a second and a third.

"Oh," Hertha cried, rousing herself, "aren't you warm enough? Perhaps it's warmer in the kitchen."

"Don't bother."

"It isn't any bother. I often sit there."

He followed her into the bright little kitchen, hoping that in a new environment he might be able to break through her reticence; but Hertha herself helped him.

"I'm going to make you a cup of cocoa," she said. "You're cold and you need something to warm you up."

Beyond allowing him to light the gas stove, she refused all assistance, and as he stood watching her go through her deft movements, measuring, stirring, and at last pouring a foaming liquid into their two cups—for to his delight she was to share the meal—he was more attracted and yet more puzzled than ever.

"You cook mighty well," he said as she poured the hot cocoa.

"I'm used to doing little things about the house," she answered. "Before I came here I was a companion in a family."

The statement was made on the spur of the moment, but as Hertha thought it over she was delighted that she had been able to say something that opened up a way to live in the past without embarrassment, almost without falsehood. To conjure up the world of white people in her grandfather's home had been beyond her power; even in her thoughts she had stumbled in her endeavor to climb the ladder that led to their eminence. But as a companion in the Merryvale household she was in familiar surroundings.

Richard Brown on his part was a little disappointed. He had been dreaming of a princess in disguise and he found only a poor relation. In the large families of the South there were sometimes girls like this, though when they were so pretty they usually soon married, girls who had to do the odd tasks, give up the good times, go to live with some distant cousin or aunt as the case might be. That sort of thing made a girl shy and quiet. For the first time that evening he felt at ease.

"I bet there ain't anybody in New York can make cocoa to beat yours," he declared emphatically. "I never liked the stuff before."

"I should have made you coffee," Hertha said regretfully. "I forgot, because coffee keeps me awake."

"Does me, too." He was ready to agree with anything. "Now, down home, tramping through the woods, I could drink a dozen cups a day. But it's different in the city."

"Were your woods pines?" she asked, "and were there streams with cypresses by the banks?"

Here at last they had found a meeting place, a common ground. If she would not play or laugh with him, they could wander through the woods together, tasting the tang of the evergreen or watching the buds burst on the wild plum. Drawing his chair a little forward, he hugged his knee and sang the song of the country of his birth.

Outside the rain splashed upon the street, making great puddles at the crossings, the wind blew fiercely down the narrow roadways and shook the windows in their frames; but within the little tenement the southern boy moved without a cloud to shadow him through the playtime of his years. Sometimes it was winter and he was among the hills trapping birds and shooting rabbits. Again it was early spring and with rod in hand he trailed the brown stream until the trout rose and brought him all attention to the game they played that through his skill ended in death and victory. Or it was summer and too hot to walk, but glorious to gallop in the early morning over the rough road and down the hollow to where the brook broadened into a swimming-pool that called him to bathe in its reviving water. Again he moved among the woods in autumn, hunting, but not too intent upon his game to fail to find the nuts scattered upon his path or to stop and, putting his hand in a hole of a decaying tree, bring out a blinking, monkey-faced owl.

"Why, it's half past ten," he cried, looking at the clock on the shelf above the stove. "I must go, for we both have to work to-morrow."

He ventured this at a hazard, but she did not contradict him.

"Your coat is quite dry," she answered, feeling it as she came to take it from the hook where it hung.

They stood in the narrow hallway and as he swung the coat upon his high shoulders he was a little awkward and brushed against her arm. She laughed away his apology, but he felt this slight contact as something tender, exquisite. As he opened the door he could only mutter an embarrassed good-evening.

"Thank you for coming out in the rain," she said, "and you mustn't take cold or I shall think you ought not to have risked it."

"I'm tough." He moved out onto the stair. Wasn't she going to ask him to come again? "By the way," he called out, "I've read *Sherlock Holmes*. It's great!"

"I'm glad you liked it," she replied, "and I'll try to find another good story for you next Saturday evening."

He went away rapturously happy in having won the chance to know so beautiful a southern girl. Whether she lived as a worker in a tenement or as a companion in an old family mansion, she was the most refined person he had ever met and he planned great days when they should be together. The rain fell unheeded. Despite the bright light from the electric lamp, he walked into a deep puddle, drenching his feet and ankles and splashing his best clothes with dirty water. Oblivious of such trivial happenings, dreaming of the future, counting the evenings to Saturday night, he reached his home, where, lying down to sleep, the lady of his heart followed him in his

dreams.

Hertha, as she washed the cups and tidied up the kitchen, was happy, too, for a time, recollecting with pleasurable excitement the look of admiration in her visitor's eyes. But shortly her cheeks grew hot with anger at him and at herself. He had insulted the colored people, "her people," as she had so recently called them, and she had said no word of protest. If she could not talk, she argued to herself, she could refuse to see this young man again. It was men like this who stole the Negro's crops, who kept their children in ignorance, who even broke down jail doors and lynched black prisoners. Why had she ever allowed herself to be kind to such a man? Then as she looked about her, as she seemed to see Dick in the chair by the table, she smiled a little. Probably it was foolish to get so excited on the matter. Mammy's last instructions were not to try to stand in two worlds, and if the white world showed more indifference, more antagonism to the black than even she had expected, she was in it and it was as well to know it as it was. In her loneliness she taught herself to believe that she had a right to become acquainted with this southern youth, but she resolved firmly not to let him have the conversation all to himself if he should again broach the Negro question. However bashful she might be, it should be possible for her to utter some forceful word.

CHAPTER XXI

With the coming of February, speeding did not stop at the "Imperial," while overtime crept in. Owing to rush orders the girls found themselves working half an hour or even an hour over the usual time to close. The 5:51 train became a thing of the past with Annie Black and she bemoaned it bitterly; but Hertha noticed that while there was complaint among the American girls and much grumbling over unfairness and meanness, it seemed to end there, while with the Jewish girls some plan was afoot. Seated, together at the luncheon hour, their eyes shining, a slight touch of color in their cheeks, a number of the more serious, with Sophie Switsky at their head, talked of something beside their feeling of fatigue, the forlornness of a cold dinner, or the loss of an evening with a gentleman friend. One day, coming in earlier than usual from luncheon, Hertha found herself drawn into the circle while Sophie explained the meaning of the conference.

The shop must be unionized. Only by this means was there any hope for justice. Without the union to back them, the employers could treat them as they pleased, could confer or withdraw favors at their pleasure. But with the union behind their demands this overtime work would cease and they would secure a better wage. Did Hertha not think the conditions abominable?

Hertha felt embarrassed. To these girls the trade which they worked was their one means of livelihood; they were intense in their attitude toward it, while to her it was only a step to something more, she did not yet know what. She regretted the long hours, but they would not last for many weeks, and as long as she could endure them and make good pay she had not thought of change. Richard Brown, whom she was seeing a good deal of now, urged her to drop the whole thing; but since he knew nothing of her affairs she took his advice lightly. Her little legacy kept her for the time in safety, but Sophie Switsky in her old dress with her wet shoes, sending money to her brother and striving to save for the summer, was not safe. Any day she might face starvation.

"I don't know about these things," Hertha stammered in answer to the question put to her.

"What's doing?" Annie Black asked good naturedly, coming over to them; but before she could receive a reply the signal came to turn to work again.

"I see there's a strike in the 'Parisian,'" Kathleen said the next morning as she scanned the paper. "Perhaps you'll be going out before long; you aren't organized."

"Kathleen," Hertha questioned, "do you believe in the union?"

"Do I believe in the union? Do I believe in God? There, don't be shocked, but there's something tangible about what the union done for me; while, when my sister Maggie broke her arm, just as Johnnie came down with the measles and her husband lost his job, I had to live by faith—and that's a poor thing to fill an empty stomach."

"Please talk sensibly," Hertha said.

"Am I not? I'm only saying that the ways of the Almighty are mysterious while the ways of the union, if you believe in the man who keeps the cash box, are clear and plain. The union is the only thing that stands between the working girl and starvation and sickness and sin. Don't forget that."

There was no laughter now in Kathleen's voice and her eyes glowed with emotion as she looked across the table at her questioner.

"We aren't unionized, Kathleen, but the 'Imperial' is one of the best shops in the city; all the girls say so."

"Then you're living on the work others have done and not doing your part. In sweat and suffering some union made the standard for your shop."

At work much the same talk was in the air. When luncheon came Annie received the answer to her question and learned of what was on foot. For some weeks Sophie and her colleagues had been working upon the other Jewish girls striving to win them to unionism. Now they were ready to turn to the Americans.

"We must join the union," Sophie called out in her clear if broken English. "See how we work long hours, and when the rush is over, no work. And if we say anything we lose our job."

"Shut up, then," said Annie crossly.

She looked about nervously, but as the foreman was absent, proceeded to enter the debate.

"It ain't so bad here," she announced. "There's lots worse shops in New York, Sophie, if you don't know it."

"That's right, Annie," one of her companions chimed in, "I got a lady friend works in a bum shop. You can smell the place before you come up the stairs."

"Sure," echoed another, "this ain't a bad shop; the boss is good to us."

"Good?" Sophie cried indignantly, "I do not call it good. We work and the boss pays us as small as he can."

"Listen!" Annie put down the pickle she was eating and proceeded to instruct the foreigner. "You don't know as much about America as I do, Sophie; you come from Russia where people are slaves. Yes, I read about it in the Sunday paper. But here in the United States every one is free. We don't need unions. If I don't like this shop I can up and go to another. There's nothing to stop me, and if you don't like it you can go, too."

"And if the boss don't like it he can fire us all!"

"Ain't he the right? He pays us. But sure he won't fire us if we stand by him. My father's worked for thirty years with the same house. You bet he don't get fired, and he don't belong to no union either."

Annie was very much in earnest. In her heart she felt intense disdain for these foreigners who came to her country and tried to lead her and other girls into a betrayal of their employer's trust.

Sophie had no idea of being worsted, but her position was difficult. She must try to convert the ignorant mind that felt itself superior to her, and she must do it with an imperfect knowledge of the tongue in which she spoke.

She made a brave attempt. In a torrent of broken English she explained the class struggle and the necessity for organization. She put before the girls the helplessness of the individual worker and her inability to bargain. The whim of a foreman or forelady, a day's sickness, a slackening in the trade, and she might be thrown out on the street. She made them all remember the uncertainty of obtaining work, the days of going from shop to shop, the long hours waiting on the chance of being taken on, only at last to return home disconsolate! She pictured the boss living in luxury while the girls who created his wealth were without proper clothes or food; and yet when they demanded a further share in his prosperity, that but for them could never have existed, he sneered as though they came for charity. Then came her picture of organization: the individual impotent, the mass of individuals, each helping one another, a mighty power that could grapple with the employer and force from him a generous wage. She told them of their trade as it had been in the past, of the battles that the workers had fought to secure for them their present measure of freedom. She decried Annie's free America. If America were free it was because there had been brave men who had overthrown England's tyranny and other brave men who had fought to free the slaves. And with her queer little accent she quoted, "Who would be free, himself must strike the blow."

Unquestionably she overawed her audience. Annie and her companions found her knowledge embarrassing and a little humiliating. They had all been to grammar school, Annie herself had recited a poem once before her class, but she had never looked upon knowledge with much zest and she found it difficult to follow Sophie's arguments. But when one of her companions asked, rather sheepishly, what it meant to join the union she was on safe ground.

"It means twenty cents a week of good pay out of your envelope," she declared with emphasis, "that's what it means, and you can bet your life you'll never get a penny of it back!"

For the next few days the girls marshaled their forces at noon and debated the union shop; at least, the Jewish girls debated while Annie and her friends gave that answer, so exasperating to the serious thinker, the retort irrelevant. Nothing so hurt the earnest supporters of organized industry as the way the Americans made a joke of it. "Of course Sophie wants us to join," Annie remarked once, not ill-humoredly, "it's up to her to bring in members. Didn't I see her going away last night with the organizer, an *all-rightniker*, sure enough?"

Sophie was enraged at the personal motive ascribed to her, but still more at having a devoted and unselfish union man called by a name used to describe self-seeking climbers. "He's not like that," she said indignantly, "he would to help us. I only talk with him to learn what to do."

"Well, find me a good looking man who can speak English," Annie went on, "and who'll take me to the theayter, and I'll go out on your strike," and she turned to receive reassuring smiles at her

repartee and to start on a new piece of chewing gum, for there was little time when Annie was not in some fashion exercising her jaws.

Watching the two girls, one wondered whether in another generation Sophie would resemble Annie; there seemed little reason to believe that Annie would ever resemble Sophie. Annie was a loosely put together girl, with nondescript features and an air of good-humored carelessness. An unkind critic would have described her as common. She meant to have a good time when she was young and perhaps to marry later when the good time was over; that is, if marriage would assure her an easier life than the one she now led—otherwise she would have nothing of it. She had seen her mother burdened with many children and she did not mean to follow her mother's example. Long hours were disagreeable, but it would be more serious if the moving picture show across the way from where she lived were to close its doors; that indeed would have aroused her righteous wrath. Under her father's tutelage she had grown to believe that an organization of girls was unfeminine, and she enjoyed ridiculing Sophie's serious arguments and her picture of the coming day when the worker should own the product of his toil. If the Jewish girl, however, had made a personal appeal, if she had begged her to join the union not for a principle but as a favor to herself, Annie would have walked to headquarters and have put down her twenty cents; for she was a spendthrift by nature and cared less for twenty cents than Sophie did for one.

When the crash came it was a dramatic one. The "Parisian" girls had been out for two weeks, the strikers demanding better pay, while the employers tried to carry on their business with unskilled hands. Sophie reported the situation each day at noon, and urged upon the "Imperial" girls to stand by their striking sisters. Save with her own small group, this argument missed fire. Nevertheless, the most of them were interested in the struggle at the "Parisian" shop and watched hopefully for the triumph of the strikers. On a Thursday morning in February, as the girls began their work, the keener ones noted that there was a difference in the stock. To Hertha it meant nothing, but to Sophie it was portentous; and at noon, contrary to her custom, she rushed out into the street. A few minutes before the noon hour was over she was back again.

"Girls," she cried, hurrying into the room, "see, they give us scabs' work!"

Standing by her machine, she waved her unfinished shirtwaist as though it were an enemy banner. "It's 'Parisian,'" she cried, "there were not enough scabs to do it in their own shop and so they sent it here! We are breaking their strike, their strike for better pay!"

She spoke in Yiddish and the Jewish girls followed her excitedly, expressing indignation at her news.

"We will strike, Sophie," her friend, Rachel, said. "We cannot do work like this; it would be wicked."

Sophie again waved her enemy banner. "Will you be scabs?" she called out, this time in English. "Do you not see? This is not our waist; it is the 'Parisian.' I see the girls; they are downstairs, and they ask us to stop, to stand by them as sisters."

"What's all this noise?" cried the foreman sternly as he entered the room. And then without waiting for a response, though it was a few minutes too soon, he threw on the power.

Sophie, Rachel, and a dozen other Jewish girls stood excitedly in the aisle, failing to go to their seats.

"Get to work!" the foreman called above the din. Then thinking it advisable to consult with a higher authority, he left the room.

In a moment Sophie had thrown off the power.

"Sisters," she cried, "down below are the 'Parisian' girls, waiting for us. Will you be scabs? Will you take their work?"

"We'll pull down the shop," came from her adherents.

"No, you don't," came from Annie Black. "Those 'Parisian' sheenies can stay out if they want for all me. I stop here."

"Oh!" Sophie cried. "Shame!"

She was a little figure, thin, underfed, but with the soul of the fanatic gleaming from her deep eyes. Having known oppression in the land of her birth, she recognized it in the land of her adoption. Poverty was not something to accept as the beggar accepted his dole, nor was it something to struggle against alone. It was a grievous disease that the body politic might cure if only those who suffered courageously battled for health. Before her was the vision of a world set free, and for the moment at least there was to her no sacrifice in accepting hunger and cold if such privation might bring a step nearer the freedom that she worshiped. Only a few of the girls understood her call, but none doubted her sincerity.

"See!" she said, drawing an imaginary line with her foot upon the floor. "All who will not be scabs, all who will not take bread from the mouths of others, come to me, cross the line!"

A number of the Jewish girls rose and walked to Sophie's side. Some went with heads erect, eyes shining, exultant, as though drawing the fine breath of freedom. Others moved slowly, hesitatingly, sometimes casting angry looks at Sophie as though they wished to disobey her call

and yet dared not stand out against her. "You go?" asked the girl at Hertha's right.

The call had been so sudden that Hertha, accustomed to taking her time before making any decision, had not moved. The voice at her side aroused her to do her part. Sophie was looking entreatingly in her direction; and with the realization that her choice one way or the other was of little personal moment, she rose from her chair and, saying quietly to her seatmate, "I think we ought to go," crossed the line.

Her stand, little as she appreciated it, had its influence. She had represented the aristocracy of the workroom. Had she been arrogant she would have been hated, but her uniform gentleness coupled with her refined face and graceful carriage, had made her a romantic character about whom one might weave tales of former greatness or unrequited love. That she should join the labor movement, linking herself with the despised foreigner, made a dozen of the doubtful follow in her lead.

"You come, too?" called Sophie to the few remaining Jews and the group of Americans.

"No!" cried Annie, "we ain't no dirty sheenies. We stand by the boss!"

"Scabs! Scabs!" Sophie hissed the word between her teeth. "Dirty scabs!" and with a swift movement she flung the power on again. "Keep on, you dirty scabs," she yelled, and, gathering her followers about her, rushed from the room.

Below stood the "Parisian" girls, and as the strikers appeared, hastily wrapped in their outer clothing, some with hats awry, others with coats flung over their arms, they gave cheer after cheer.

"We knew you'd pull down the shop, Sophie," a big, handsome Jewess cried, grasping the fragile strike-breaker by the arm. "We knew you'd never let the boss keep you working at our leavings."

"Girls," called out another of the leaders, "this is the fourth shop to go out this week. We'll win. Hurrah for the 'Imperial!' We'll win."

"Move on!" a policeman said sharply, pushing his way into the crowd. "What are you doing blocking the street this way? You girls should be at work!"

"We're on a strike," Sophie replied, "we go to Union Hall."

The officer watched them as they moved from the factory building, muttering to himself that they were sure to make trouble striking at the height of the season.

Hertha, though she tried to slip away, found herself caught up by the crowd. She was embarrassed and conscious that they were all the source of amused comment on the part of the spectators. Talking excitedly in Yiddish, the "Imperials" swung into line with their "Parisian" sisters and all started a triumphant progress down the avenue.

"Sure, you was fine," Sophie said to Hertha.

The little Jewish girl had grabbed her new recruit by the arm and with glowing face was leading her along the road to organization and industrial battle. There would be days and months ahead dedicated to the struggle to secure a better wage. The time was momentous, the opening of a great conflict. But to Hertha the time was auspicious for slipping away from these noisy working girls. She had given up her job at their call but she had no thought of following them in their struggle to get their jobs back again. Yet here she was on the avenue in a crowd that was attracting attention from the many passers-by. Supposing Richard Brown should see her or one of the nice people who bowed to her at church! She tried to make her escape, but it was as impossible to get from Sophie's grasp as from the clutch of a small and very friendly bear who had tucked your arm in his. So down the avenue and across into a side street she was swept with the eager, excited band of strike-breakers to Union Hall.

It was a small hall and crowded before they entered it. Confusion was piled upon confusion. Hertha, dropped for a moment by Sophie, who turned to speak to her organizer about whom the girls had joked, started at once to leave the building, but, half lifted off her feet, was forcibly pushed into a seat between two workers. Here she was compelled to remain while a man with a long, dirty beard addressed the meeting in an unknown tongue. So many people were moving about and talking in the rear of the hall that, it seemed to her, even if she had understood Yiddish, she would not have known what was being said. But occasionally the woman at her left would interpret. "He tell you to get a card. Give name. See?"

There was nothing to attract her in the crowd, now that she saw it assembled in this ill-smelling place. She thought the men rude and she wished heartily to get away. But she was wedged in her seat and must remain until time brought release. For a few minutes, however, when Sophie Switsky was on the platform, Hertha listened with attention. Not that she understood the words—Sophie used Yiddish—but emotion may transcend and illumine any speech. Here stood a working girl, young, almost childlike in appearance, whose face and tragic tones told of a willingness to die if need be for a cause. Watching her, for the first time since she had joined the crowd of strikers, Hertha forgot herself. For a little she felt her heart beat in sympathy. But with a sudden shock self-consciousness returned. Sophie had beckoned her, asking her to come to the platform. "Tell what you did!" she called out, smiling. "Some understand the English." The southern girl shook her head and when the woman at her side tried to help her to the aisle, gripped her seat

with both hands. The horror of being made conspicuous swept over her again, and she sat with burning cheeks until Sophie mercifully went back to her Yiddish and left her alone.

The speeches were at length over and by dodging and doubling, running from one "Imperial" girl only to have to run from another, Hertha escaped from Union Hall leaving no trace behind. Home at last, she looked with dismay at herself in the glass. The red quill was gone from her hat, her curly hair was tumbling about her face, her coat was a mass of wrinkles and she had caught her sleeve upon a nail and made a bad rent. In a minute, however, she laughed. Freedom had come to her. She would no longer spend her days in a noisy room bending over a machine. She could mend the rent and press the coat and there were other quills to be had in the shops. Life was before her again to do with as she pleased. She recalled Sophie's dramatic cry. "Those who will not be scabs, cross the line!"

"That's the second time I've done it," she said to herself.

CHAPTER XXII

Hertha and Kathleen were estranged. From enthusiastic, joyful praise at her courage and pluck in leaving the shop, Kathleen had changed to tiresome nagging because her friend would not picket. Seated opposite her at table in the evening by the lamp in the front room, the Irishwoman, once a successful, aggressive labor leader, would explain, sometimes impetuously, sometimes with slow emphasis as if to a child, the ethics of the strike. To go out, she declared, was but the beginning; the end was the winning of better conditions in the trade. What good was it that all these young strikers, many of them supporting mother or sister or brother, should lose their jobs, unless they might obtain them again under better conditions than before? Was it likely that the manufacturer of "Imperial" waists would go about asking his girls to return to him? Could not Hertha see that these workers were engaged in a desperate battle for better working-class conditions that, with good generalship, might result in victory; but that without sacrifice and heroism, and forgetfulness of self, would end in disastrous defeat? Then she pictured the defeat; the homes without food, the drawn, girlish faces, the bitter disappointment as the shop took on more and more scabs and continued to manufacture its goods. If the talk were in the morning at the late breakfast in which Hertha was reveling, it was, "There they are, dearie, out in the street in front of the building you left, waiting for you to come and help them in their weary work." Or if the hour were evening, "And to-morrow, mavourneen, I'll be getting a fine breakfast for you with a cup of coffee and the bacon with the egg the way you like it, and you'll go to your sisters who are doing their duty as pickets, trying to keep the scabs from taking their jobs."

But Hertha would not picket. She said little in response to Kathleen's explanations, her pleading or her upbraidings. It had never been her way to talk. Probably what Kathleen said was true but she was not going to picket. She loathed it from every point of view held up to her. She could not go to a girl whom she had never seen before and ask her not to take her job. It would be impertinent and rude and lastly ridiculous, for she was very glad that she had left the "Imperial" shop. Nor could she walk hour after hour up and down the street always keeping in motion lest the policeman call out at her that she was blocking the way. She shrank at the thought of the hundreds of eyes that she believed would be cast upon her. No, she would not picket.

Moreover she was beginning to think for herself. As Sophie Switsky had explained the ways of trade the whole thing was silly. She could not accept the ethics, or lack of ethics, in the relation of the worker to his task. That against which she rebelled the girls accepted as inevitable. She was glad to be out of the "Imperial," not primarily because of its hours or its wage but because she hated to be worked like a machine. The months of tortured speeding had made her detest the sight of a cotton shirtwaist. But the girls were picketing, not for a sane and attractive task but only for more money. When they got more they would work faster than ever with tired backs and straining eyes. She was sick at the thought of it. In her room at home doing her neglected mending, drawing the needle in a leisurely way through the cloth, she wondered whether all the girls in the city worked as they had worked at the 'Imperial' and if so whether any of them lived to become old? Well, the subject was beyond her fathoming. She had touched the labor world and now was well out of it. Had she gone on longer her back would have become tired, her eyes have smarted, her body have weakened under the unnatural strain of production demanded by the changing fashions. Life was before her again, and of one thing she was sure, she had closed the factory door.

Despite all her reasoning, however, there was a faint possibility that Kathleen might have put her on the picket-line, at least for a day, had Hertha as in the beginning of their acquaintance been quite alone, but Richard Brown was calling assiduously and his influence was not one that encouraged martyrdom. Thus on the Saturday morning after nine days of happy idleness when Kathleen was awakening in her an uneasy sense of her obligation to her little sisters (that name always brought up a picture of Ellen battling for her through heat and cold), a note from Dick, inviting her to go to the opera with him that evening, blotted out the little sisters and the cold. She told Kathleen of the invitation only to receive a lecture on the inequalities of this world. Hertha felt aggrieved. Certainly she had waited many years for this, her first opera, and she believed she had a right to it when it came.

It was not far to the great department store where she had wandered for many noon hours, and,

with a sense of delightful importance, she entered the shop and purchased a shirtwaist—not of cotton like those she had helped manufacture, but of filmy silk. This, with a pair of white gloves, cost a week's earnings, but life to-day was not measured by wages. At home again, she got her own luncheon, for Kathleen was away for the day, and spent the afternoon in bed, dozing and day-dreaming and dozing again. She felt that she understood why rich people were lazy, but wondered whether an afternoon in bed would bring happiness unless many other afternoons and mornings had been spent in difficult toil.

"Gee," cried Richard Brown as, seated by him in the balcony of the opera house, she took off her hat and coat, "I ought to take a back seat to-night and get one of those swallow-tailed fellows downstairs to come up here by you."

Hertha smiled a negative to his suggestion, wishing nevertheless that his taste in neckties was a little less flamboyant and that he did not talk so loud. She determined however not to notice these things, and they discussed,—she, gently, he, with jovial outbursts,—the building, the audience and the opera that they were about to witness. Dick had bought the libretto, "Il Trovatore," but neither of them knew what was before them. He had seen a musical comedy or two but she was ignorant of every form of operatic music. Reading the plot to her companion she found him chagrined that he had come to a tragedy. "Shucks!" he exclaimed when she had finished, "I thought I was bringing you to something funny." Her assurance that this would be interesting and that she liked a sad story brought back his spirits. He chaffed her about her dress and her new gloves, until she was glad when the overture began and they were silent. And her heart gave a great bound of excitement when the curtain rose and she saw the courtyard of the palace with Ferrando calling to his men.

A first opera or a first play is a memorable event and those are fortunate whose introduction to the stage is neither trivial nor coarse. "Trovatore" might have grown a little threadbare to some in the audience, but to one it was a revelation of splendid scene, of exquisite melody, of the actor's art. That all this panorama of beautiful color and costume, of count and troubadour and lovely lady, should be gathered together under this roof was wonderful; but that it should be set to such harmony, that human beings clad in kingly robes should sing such heavenly music, was a miracle. Hertha's eyes grew big and her whole being responded to the story that was taking place before her on the spacious stage.

"Deserto sulla terra."

Her love was calling to her, across the continent, across the whole world, telling of his longing to see her face, his passionate desire to hold her in his arms again. She heard him in every note of the wonderful song, and when the voice ceased and the audience began to applaud, she woke from her dream of his presence with a start of shame that turned to anger as she heard the frantic clapping and saw the actor drop his part and bow to the audience. To her it had been reality, but to these people it was only beautiful singing. But the applause stopped, the play went on; and Hertha, watching through Leonora's eyes, saw the fate of lovers whose station in life is not the same; saw the count, glowering, hateful; heard Leonora plead for the gipsy's son; and in a passion of excitement, watched the curtain drop upon the two men with swords drawn, upon the woman lying senseless on the ground.

"Some girl," said Dick when the lights came up and the people, ceasing their close attention, settled themselves more comfortably in their seats. "But the guy playing the banjo, I could give him points. If he doesn't want to die of apoplexy he'd better drop whisky and take to riding horseback."

"I say, won't you talk to a fellow?" he asked at the intermission between the third and last acts. "You just sit with your head buried in that book and all you'll say is how it's going to end. It sounds pretty crazy to me, burning the wrong baby! But of course, they must do something to make a story. Don't you want to go out into the hall and walk?"

It was the second time he had asked her, and she could not well refuse him, so, together they joined the throng of richly garbed men and women who promenaded up and down the corridor. She felt poorly clad as she noted the wonderful evening dresses of the women. Here were gowns such as she had seen on the figures in the department store, rainbow colors and with them thin lacy black and soft cream and ivory white. The people indeed seemed very like a show, a line of models moving up and down that they might be viewed each by the other; it was only when Dick, to hide his shyness at the strange scene, talked loudly and familiarly, that their amused glances made her appreciate they were fully alive.

"I'd like a gown like that," she said to Dick in a confidential tone as a pretty girl went by in a soft filmy blue silk.

"Shall I ask her for it?" He turned as though to stop the gown's owner.

"Don't be silly," was Hertha's sufficient answer.

"That's a grand fellow walking with her," Dick announced. "He might be a colonel out of uniform, but the girl isn't in it with you."

"Well, you needn't tell every one your opinion, please."

She blushed as she spoke for they had attracted the attention of the people about them. A middle-aged gentleman, whose seat she knew was behind Dick's, was smiling and she quite erroneously

believed was enjoying her discomfiture. "Let's go back," she suggested, touching Dick lightly on the arm; and the youth, happy at even so slight a sign of favor, and anxious to do her least bidding, returned with her to their seats.

"You aren't going back to your old work again, now are you?" he asked.

"No."

"I was thinking, if you want to take up stenography, I know the best school in town. It's across the river, a mighty nice place, where you'll meet a good class of girls. It don't cost such a lot, and you can enter any time you want."

"Yes?"

"And there's something I want to talk with you about. It's really important. Won't you take a walk with me to-morrow?"

"I don't know, I haven't much time. You see, I want to go to church in the morning and I'm going out to dinner at night."

"Who are you going with?"

The question was asked with some imperiousness.

"With a friend."

"A gentleman friend?"

Defiantly. "I don't think that is anything you need to know."

"Oh, of course it's none of my business, you needn't tell me that. But say, won't you go out first with me? I'll be around at two o'clock and bring you back by five or six. That'll be in time for your little dinner, won't it now?"

"Perhaps so."

She buried herself again in her libretto. "Mr. Brown," she said after a minute. "Listen to what the last scene will be. It's a horrid dungeon, for Manrico and his mother are in prison. As she lies there on her bed she thinks of the mountains where she was born, and that she and her son will go back there together and live in peace. When she sings it, just think about the hills in your own home."

He looked at her in some surprise. "I will," he said, "just the way you say, and about my mother, too. It all seems real to you, don't it?"

"Very real!"

"Somehow it hasn't to me. I can't seem to think of people standing up and singing this way if they've anything to tell. It takes so everlastingly long. Just suppose that when I went to business to-morrow I should throw my hand out like this," with a broad, forward gesture that barely missed the head of the lady in front of him, "and sing:

Oh, Mr. Weinstein, it's nine o'clock, sir,
Oh, don't you want me to walk down the block, sir?

And then he'd answer with his arms folded like this:

Oh, Mr. Brown, get on to your job——

And there'd be some swearing in the last line. If you want to get anything over you've got to drop the poetry business. It isn't real like a play. Will you go with me to a play next week?"

"Thank you ever so much, but——"

"Oh, drop the 'but.' I'll get the tickets Monday. We'll go to something jolly."

"I shouldn't enjoy it as much as this. This is the most beautiful, the most wonderful thing, I've ever seen."

Dick flushed with pleasure and settled in his seat as the curtain rose upon the last act.

Even he was moved by the *Miserere*, and when the dungeon scene was reached he whispered, "Golly, I like that, I've heard it on the hand-organs. I never guessed though that it was about the mountains." He started to hum it but Hertha gently silenced him, and he was quiet and attentive until the curtain went down.

"Your first opera, young man?" said the middle-aged gentleman from behind, whom Hertha had noticed smiling at them.

Dick was helping her with her coat, and he answered as he pulled up her collar, "Right you are! I'm just that much of a jay."

"Come again," the man said cordially as though the place belonged to him.

Hertha started to express her gratitude as they stood outside her door but Dick waved it away.

"You're the one who's been good," he said, "and I bet no one ever thought it was your coming-out party. I'll be here to-morrow at two; so long," and he was gone.

The next day found them together again walking across the Brooklyn Bridge.

"Ever done this before?" asked Dick.

"No," answered Hertha, "but isn't it wonderful?"

"You bet! Say, you're a good walker, though. I reckon you've walked a lot."

"Yes, I've often walked of a Sunday afternoon."

"Who with?"

"My brother."

There was a defiant tremor in her voice. Ever since her slip with Kathleen she had made up her mind that her past life should include a brother.

"Oh, if you've got a brother," turning on her abruptly, "why don't he take care of you?"

"He's too young; but anyway I wouldn't let him. I mean to support myself."

"Oh, I say, Miss Hertha, don't feel like that! Don't get like these modern girls up here who won't even let a man pick up a handkerchief for 'em. That isn't the kind of girl a man likes."

"Isn't it?"

"No. A man likes a girl he can help over places, whether they're out walking together just for the day or for life."

"I suppose you think a man never wants to be helped."

"Yes, he does, lots of ways. They're no end of ways a woman helps a man, to keep him straight and all that." He reddened a little. "But he ought to do the hard work, all the dirty jobs, and it's a dirty job going out to earn your living. And if it isn't dirty, it's too hard. Women ought not to have long hours like men. I bet your brother's reckoning on caring for you when he gets old enough."

Hertha was silent.

"Isn't he?"

"I reckon he'd like to."

"You let him then. Only likely you'll be married long before that."

They reached the end of the bridge and were rushed along in an elevated train until they got out at Prospect Park.

The March day was clear and almost warm, and as they walked down a pleasant path by the lake, Hertha was sure that she saw signs of the spring. Buds were swelling, the willow trees showed faint touches of yellow, while on a bare elm tree branch perched a bluebird.

"How lovely it will be here later," she said.

"There, that's exactly what I want to talk with you about," Dick Brown exclaimed. "Isn't this a lot nicer now than off the Bowery?"

The girl glanced at him questioningly.

"It's going to be mighty hot where you are as soon as summer comes. I'm right sure of it. And noise! Think of the noise when you have to sit with your windows open. Now, over in this part of the town it's always quiet, and there are trees and pleasant places to go for a walk. Won't it be bully here when spring comes! There's a robin, see him? And the folks say the flowers in the park are great; some of the bushes will be bright yellow, and then will come honeysuckle and no end of things."

"What are you driving at?"

"Just turn down this path, won't you? There's a little summerhouse at the end where we can sit down and look out over the lake."

They reached the summerhouse and by a bit of good fortune found it empty. The artificial pond was very muddy, and to two young people from the country the set, pretty outlook was a poor substitute for the coming spring by the woods and streams at home. But a substitute may be better than nothing, and as with hungry eyes they viewed the brown water and saw the sun glowing on the trunks of the bare trees, they felt refreshed and nourished. For the first time since Hertha had met him, Richard Brown was ready to sit quite still, looking into the treetops and beyond to the blue sky with its floating clouds.

At length he turned and told her what he had done. It seemed an old friend had turned up for a week in New York, and introduced him to a southern woman who had a house at the park's edge and who took a few boarders. She had not been especially successful with her rooms, and partly to help her, partly because he'd hated his stupid hall bedroom ever since he'd been sick in it, he

had moved over here. It was a good way from work, but that didn't matter. There was rapid transit, and it didn't hurt him to stand up a few minutes night and morning. It was a lot better than living in the noisy, ugly city that they had just left. Mrs. Pickens, his landlady, was the nicest person to cheer a fellow up, and care for him if he needed it. It was a pleasant house with good board, the sort of cooking you got at home, plenty of gravy on your meat, beaten biscuit for breakfast, and the best coffee in the city. She had a room left to rent, looking over the park where you could see the trees. She would enjoy to meet Miss Ogilvie, and if Hertha would go there this afternoon, just look in and see what the house was like, she'd be doing a favor to everybody. Of course she needn't decide now, but wasn't it worth considering? And he was sure he had found the best school at which she could study stenography and shorthand, only a few minutes in the cars from here.

So he talked, and Hertha, looking out over the lake to the tall trees, watched the purple grackles flying back and forth and wished that she did not have to decide so many things.

Was Dick Brown growing to be fond of her? She hoped that he was not, for he was the last man in the world for whom she could ever care. But if he really was learning to love her, what a nuisance to live in the same house with him; how demanding he would be, and how she would have to plan to get rid of him! No, it would be far better to stay on in the noisy little tenement with Kathleen.

"And I've one more thing to tell you, Miss Hertha," Dick said as though he believed it would be wise to change the subject. "My boss says that he's going to send me on the road this spring."

"On the road?"

"Yes, to sell goods. It means an advancement. Aren't you glad for me?"

"Why, of course, if you're glad."

"I'm glad of anything that means more money. Up here in New York that's the one thing to have. If you haven't money you'd better get up and go home. Look at those men at the opera last night! Why, they can give their women anything, all the music they want, silk clothes and pretty slippers, and automobiles to ride home in. It's slick here if you've plenty of cash, but it's bum if you haven't. So I feel fine to think there's going to be more cash for me."

They left the summerhouse, and retracing their steps walked out upon a pleasant street where Dick led the way up a stoop, and pulled out a latchkey.

"I didn't say I'd go in," Hertha exclaimed.

"You aren't coming to look for a room if you don't want it," Dick pleaded; "but please come in and see Mrs. Pickens. She's admiring to meet you."

He swung open the door and before Hertha had made any decision she found herself in the hallway, with Mrs. Pickens, who had been watching for them from the window, holding out her hand.

Dick's landlady was a small woman of about fifty, with blonde hair that was fading in color, and a complexion from which the color, if there had ever been any, had fled. Her eyes no longer looked bright, but her smile was cordial and kindly, and her voice almost caressing as she gave her greeting.

"Dick tells me that you came to the city this autumn to make your way. It's a big place, isn't it? Sometimes I feel like I never want to go out in it again. I took this house here so as to be near something green and quiet; but after I got settled, do you know I missed the noise!"

She led Hertha into her parlor, a singularly ugly room, the floor covered with a series of brightly colored, cheap rugs, the walls decorated with colored lithographs that might have been bought by the dozen at some store, so little did they show any individual taste. And not only did every variety of color leap up from the floor and shine down from the walls, but the furniture also was bright, the wood a high varnish in imitation of mahogany, the upholstering in gay green with lines of yellow.

"I like this room," Dick said emphatically as he seated himself; "it's so jolly. Now there's a picture for every season of the year. The Spring's right over your head, Miss Hertha; apple blossoms and a pretty girl sitting under the tree. And there's Winter in the farther corner with the snow on the ground like we found it that Sunday morning. It's fine to have a lot of stories like this hanging on the wall. And Mrs. Pickens is better than any story, the way she looks after us. There aren't many here. Only old Mrs. Wood and her daughter and me, and I hope you."

He had chosen the largest chair, crossed his legs, and looked quite at home. Mrs. Pickens, beaming at him from the other side of the room, evidently made much of her one masculine guest. Hertha could see him as he would come back from work at night, loud-voiced, a little domineering, wanting attention, demanding that every one laugh at his least joke. Decidedly, she would not leave Kathleen.

"Won't you show Miss Hertha your vacant room, Mrs. Pickens?" Dick said as, leaning back in his chair, he stroked the gleaming knob at the end of the arm. "If you'd just look at it, please?" he added, changing his tone to one of entreaty as he addressed Hertha.

"I should be glad to," Mrs. Pickens answered. And Hertha, not wishing to be rude, followed the

woman upstairs.

When she turned into the vacant room on the second story at the back, she gave a start of surprise. Nothing could have been more unlike the many-hued parlor that she had left. Here was simple furnishing, a white bed and plain white chairs, a soft gray rug, white curtains, no color save in the pretty flowered paper that covered the pictureless wall. A vacant lot in the rear gave an outlook across the next street to the park, where a long line of trees would soon begin to show their first blossoms.

"I don't wonder you're surprised," Mrs. Pickens said, "after the parlor. Don't imagine that this house is my taste. I rent it from an agent, and am not responsible for anything in it, good or bad. My theory is that the couple who bought the furnishings settled upon a simple method of suiting their diametrically different tastes. One took one half of the house and the other the other, and made a dwelling that's part an installment plan furniture shop and part a hospital. I was sure you would like the hospital, just as I knew our friend Dick wouldn't. Sit down in this chair, won't you, while I run off a minute to see whether I can do anything for Mrs. Wood. Her daughter is away and I promised I'd look in during the afternoon."

Left to herself Hertha did sit down, and looking out of the window upon the pleasant landscape, tried to make some decision. A moment before she had definitely put aside any thought of staying here; but the lovely room, the cordial greeting, the sense of companionship, made her hesitate. After all, it was nice to have a man to go out with once in a while, and it had been very lonely often at Kathleen's. This was a second turning point in her life. Her legacy was almost untouched since she had drawn upon it to come North, but it would be used lavishly if she decided to devote some months to learning a profession. To enter upon a new career was a great venture, and it might be that it would more easily be carried out if she were in new surroundings, under unfamiliar conditions. Looking out into the street and on to the treetops beyond, or glancing around the pretty room, thinking of Kathleen and her kindness, of Dick and his devotion, of the perversity of both of them in not understanding that there are many times when one wants not to talk but to sit silent; feeling suddenly a great homesickness for a Sunday afternoon out with Tom, strolling quietly, dreamily, among the pines; uncertain yet expectant, Hertha sat and meditated, letting her thoughts wander, while Dick crossed and uncrossed his knees in his big chair downstairs.

CHAPTER XXIII

"Well?"

"I said I'd let her know Wednesday."

"Good! You'll say yes, I bet you will. And you'll go to the theater with me Monday."

"No, not Monday."

"Tuesday, then."

"No, I don't want to go this week. Good-by."

"What do you mean?" Dick looked with amazement at Hertha's outstretched hand. "Think I'm going to bring you here and then leave you to go back alone?"

"I don't need you. I know the way from here and I'd rather go alone."

"Say," said Dick much perturbed, "what have I done?"

"You haven't done anything, but I want to go back by myself. All I have to do is to change when I'm over the bridge. I'll let you and Mrs. Pickens know when I decide."

She pushed her fare in at the ticket-window, moved through the turnstile, and without looking around hurried down the platform and boarded the incoming train. Dick, deciding that this was a time to let a girl have her own way, however foolish it might be, turned back to his home and indulged in delicious thoughts of the future with Hertha each morning opposite him at table and each evening going with him somewhere, it mattered not where, so long as they were together.

What to do? What to do? The bumping cars gave no answer to the riddle. To go to this new home or to stay in the old one? How could she decide which was best when there were advantages and disadvantages in both? It was a nuisance to weigh and balance. Perhaps the suggestion she had made in talking with Ellen was worth something. She could not go ahead and plan things, but if she waited things would happen. She had not planned the strike but it had relieved her of overtaxing work; she had not thought of moving but Dick Brown had, and unquestionably he had found an attractive home. Probably he was right, too, regarding the business school. Why not let other people do the planning and fall in with their schemes if they seemed good? If there was anything odious it was having to make changes, but if a change were made for you, you might accept it as the easiest thing to do. And yet she did not want to leave Kathleen.

But Kathleen did not help her case as she and Hertha and William Applebaum sat together at the little dinner that had so disturbed the mind of Richard Brown. It was a usual enough affair, at the

French *table d'hôte* that they all three liked, and Madame and her daughters waited on the table and saw to it that the meat and vegetables were upon hot plates and the salad upon cold ones. But this evening, Hertha, tired from her previous night of excitement, without an opportunity to rest after her outing with Dick, found her Irish friend's propaganda regarding capital and labor wearying and even unkind. Applebaum, appreciating her fatigue, tried to turn the conversation into indifferent channels, but Kathleen would not be moved from her course. She had learned that the girls were in danger of losing their strike, that the "Imperial" was succeeding in securing reliable non-union help, and she longed to send Hertha out to redeem the situation. Perhaps her confidence in her new friend was excessive, certainly she exaggerated her activity at the walkout, but she knew that a shy, attractive girl, without ambition for position, could sometimes wield a greater influence than the best organizer. Only the shy girl would so seldom use her power.

"A strike," she said, putting down her soup-spoon, "a strike is the one power the lords of the universe, meaning the capitalists, leave us. They can take away fresh air and sunlight, they can rob us of our childhood like they done me when I was a little girl in the country up-state, but they can't make us work. If I stop, and the rest of the workers stop with me, it's starvation for the world until we start to work again."

"Did you live in the country when you were a child?" Hertha asked, interested at once.

"That I did," Kathleen answered.

"Didn't you love it? The sky is so big in the country—you get such miserable smoky patches here—and there are great stretches of earth. You feel like running with your arms thrown out and singing; and while you're feeling the air and the sky and the big things you look down at your feet and see the little spring flowers."

"Is it like that?" asked Kathleen. "Do you know I hardly remember it."

"Did you leave when you were so young?"

"Eleven."

"But, Kathleen——"

"The sky and air and flowers were dear where I lived, they were only for the rich. For a little girl like me, who slaved in the factory from sun to sun, they were luxuries that came Sundays and holidays and that she was too weary to enjoy."

"At work in the factory at eleven?"

"I worked when I was eight. I remember how my teacher looked when she met me one Sunday and asked why I didn't come to school. I told her my mother had put me to work in the cotton mill. 'It's a sin,' she said and the tears in her eyes. And then she went on to tell how I was her best pupil, and my mother must leave me with her. But that was all come of it, just words. Words from her and the mill for me."

Hertha was silent; but she pictured a little girl, with clear gray eyes and bright hair, holding her thumb tight on her book while she read from its pages, or playing tag at recess; and again, sober, tired-eyed, walking slowly in the twilight back from the factory to her home. "I didn't know such things happened in the North," she said.

"They don't now, thanks to the unions. To-day's children have a better chance than I had. But that's why the sky and flowers aren't so close to my memory as the walls of the spinning-room and the whirring bobbins."

"Do eat your soup, Kathleen," Applebaum said, looking from his empty plate. "It's quite cold."

"Well, if it's cold I won't bother with it. Yes, Miss Marie, you can take it away. And who's that coming in? Major Hayes, I do believe! Come over here and sit with us, Major. It's a long day since you've been here."

An old man, walking slowly but with a soldierly bearing, came to where Kathleen sat. He greeted her quietly, responded silently to her introduction of Applebaum and Hertha, and, taking the fourth place at the table, applied himself assiduously to his dinner. Hertha welcomed his advent as relieving her of Kathleen's labor talk. He sat at her right, and she noted his thin, aristocratic face, his high forehead and long straight nose, his clear blue eyes and soft white hair. She thought him the handsomest old gentleman she had ever seen—a little like old Mr. Merryvale but with more of wisdom and worldliness. There was little talk for a time, only Applebaum occasionally making pleasant if unilluminating remarks on the day's happenings; but with the coming of dessert and coffee Kathleen took command of the conversation and resumed her charge. The Irishwoman, true to her race, was always ready for a fight and could never see when she was beaten.

"We were talking of factories and unions before you came in," she said turning to the Major. "Miss Ogilvie here went out on strike not long since, the 'Imperial' shop. She led the girls out ——"

"I did not," Hertha interrupted.

She was angry that Kathleen should represent her as doing anything so aggressive.

"Well, you helped to, I'm proud to say. But I was telling them how I worked in the mill when I was a kid. I was starting on the story of my first strike, and I leading it, when the sight of you put it out of my head."

"Tell it to us all now, Kitty," the Major said.

It was a pleasant time to hear a story. The room was quiet, for most of the diners had left. Madame sat at the desk in the corner counting her receipts, while a couple of elderly men in the middle of the room played at dominoes. There was an air of homelikeness about the place. Major Hayes and William Applebaum, lighting their cigars, leaned back in their chairs to listen, while Hertha sipped her coffee that she knew she should not drink, and looked with apprehension, but with admiration also, into Kathleen's face. What wonderful gray eyes this Irishwoman had, and how whole-heartedly she flung herself into whatever she had to say! She was like a bright beam of sunlight falling suddenly into a dull room; or, again, like a flash of lightning that carried with it an ominous rumble of thunder. The world would be a wonderful, sublimely happy place when it let the sunlight triumph in lives like Kathleen's.

"I was eleven years old," she began, "when I led out the spinning-room in the factory up in the hills in this glorious old state. We were all a lot of children, some bigger than me, some smaller, and we worked from sun to sun. For wages, we had none, not that we ever knew, and I doubt if our fathers or mothers ever saw a penny from us, for what with the rent and the bills at the company store, it's little money they ever handled. But every morning we went into the huge building that shut out the world from us and turned our red lips white, and every night we came back, the boys too tired to throw stones at a stray hen.

"Well, one day when we started work we found a new foreman. The man before him had been a decent sort of chap, rough after his fashion, pulling our ears maybe to make us work faster, or batting a boy over the head, but with a heart in his body. But this morning he was gone, and in his place a great giant of a creature named Hicks who roared at us in a voice that made our hearts jump. Not but what we was always ruled by terror. It was do as you were bid or death, and no incarnation, but forever and ever annihilation. But Hicks was the very ogre of the story book, and we expected to hear him call out any minute:

"Fee, fi, fo, fum,
I smell the blood of an Irishman!"

And make a pounce on one of us. And we weren't mistaken, for soon the pounce came.

"It's hard work in the spinning-room and I wonder now how such children as we ever managed to do it at all. I suppose our strength and power, that ought to have gone out into lessons at school, and learning to keep house at home, and baseball and fishing and swimming, went into watching the spools as they whirled on the spindles or keeping our eyes open to catch the broken threads. How I used to see those spools, hundreds there were that I took care of, twirling around and around before my eyes when I'd lie down to go to sleep! Some of us was quicker than others, but to do the work right we needed to keep together a bit and it was when Jules Claire, a little French Canadian, got ahead of us at doffing time, that trouble began.

"Jules was a born Frenchman. There was a gesture in everything he did, and he couldn't live without showing off. He was the fastest worker in the room, and when we were taking the full spools off and putting the empty ones on, one child one side the frame, the other the other, Jules must go ahead of his mate. We tried to stop him for we didn't want the foreman to think we could all work at that pace, but he was an artist and must do things his own way. So he hurries down his line, his little hands moving like lightning, and when he comes to the end, and we still plodding, he jumps on an empty truck and stamping with his bare feet, gives himself three cheers.

"Then the ogre sees him, and the great hulking sneak jumps on the boy, clouts him over the head, and kicks him with his boot. All he saw was an idle child. The little fellow was too surprised to cry. 'My God,' he whispers coming to me, 'did you see dat?' 'I did,' I answers, 'and you got what was coming to you for going ahead of the rest!' But while I said it I laid my plans, for there was fire in my heart.

"There's one way a child can always leave her place whether at the mill or the school and that's by asking for a drink of water. The good Lord must have made the little ones so dry that they would be sure of moving about once in a while during the long day. After a time, when Hicks had us whiter than the cotton we was working on, I got permission to get a drink. That meant I must go through another room to where the bucket of water was. After I'd drunk my fill I walked back, and there were the two girls in charge of the warper looking out of the window, the machines going merrily all the while. They glanced around at me and then turned to the window again, and just then I slipped my roller-hook into a nice place in the machinery where I thought it would do me some good, and, as innocent looking as a cat that's stole the cream, went back to the spinning-room.

"It isn't but three or four minutes before one of the two girls come to the old ogre to say something's wrong with the machinery. The man gives an oath and leaves us. I knew he'd be some minutes finding the trouble, and I began talking to my mates. There was a big window near where I worked that looked out on an embankment, and one by one I called the boys and girls to me, and explained that we must go on a strike. We oughtn't to work for a man that beat and

hollered at us the way Hicks did. 'Twas the time now to show our strength and get out of this dirty hole.

"I don't remember my arguments very well. I think they were somewhat hurried, with one eye on the window and the other on the door where the ogre might come back. But the children got into the spirit of the thing, and it was jump out of the window and the strike was on!

"Jules went first. We made him, but he was game for it anyway. And then the rest of us dropped down the few feet on the grass and away to the hills at the back of the town.

"Ah, that was a great day! I can see it now! The apple trees were in blossom and the grass was thick with violets, while in the woods were frail blue and white flowers. Everything smelled of the sunshine and the fresh earth, and we little white-faced youngsters swung in the trees, and picked the flowers, and played tag, and called and shouted to one another. Some of the boys gathered stones and made a barricade and when any one from the town came to get us, he was so pelted with rocks that he beat a quick retreat. So we played on through the long spring day, while in the spinning-room the spools twirled round and round, and the cotton tangled and knotted and broke, and enough damage was done to take days to set right again. It was a great time! But every day must come to an end, and the sun went down on our day, until at last, tired and rosy and hungry we turned with lagging and timid steps toward home."

CHAPTER XXIV

When Kathleen ceased speaking there was a little murmur of applause throughout the room. Every one had been listening—Madame at her desk, the men at their table, their dominoes dropped from their hands, Marie in the doorway. Kathleen's own guests had been wholly absorbed. To all, from this time, child labor would no longer be an academic question but a vivid reality.

The Major was the first to break the silence. "That was a fine tale," he said, bowing gravely to the story-teller who sat opposite him, her cheeks rosy with excitement, one hand drumming the Marseillaise on the table cloth. "Thank you for letting me hear it."

"I told it for Hertha," Kathleen said pointedly.

"Yes?" The Major looked at the southern girl, not for the first time that evening, and was struck anew by her beauty and her repose. While evidently embarrassed, she said nothing in reply to Kathleen, but sat, a quiet listener, her hands in her lap. The city, he realized, had not yet taught her to think in flashes or to move in jerks.

"What has Miss Ogilvie to learn from this strike?" the old man asked. "Didn't you tell me that she had already led one out?"

"Led it out only to leave it," Kathleen answered vehemently. "The girls are in the street now working to keep their clothes from being snatched off their backs by a lot of dirty scabs."

Seeing that an explanation was demanded of her, Hertha turned to the Major and said with a blush, "I am not willing to picket." Then, with more animation in her manner, she questioned her friend. "You didn't tell us how your strike ended. What happened after the children went home?"

"Well, I'm not saying how their fathers and mothers took it, but they won at the mill all right. The ogre was given another job."

"I'm glad of that," with a pleasant, propitiatory smile; "I was afraid you had only won a holiday."

But Kathleen would not be cajoled. "No, indeed," she answered; "we got our rights by standing out for them."

"Don't be a fool, Kitty," the Major remarked abruptly.

Kathleen looked at him, bewildered and aggrieved. Formerly he had been her champion when in this same room she had been attacked by bourgeois guests armed with conventional arguments. Then he had spoken more bitterly than she and had been placed by her among her revolutionists. For him to turn upon her now was not only unkind but treacherous. What did she know about him after all, she thought? Only the common talk of this place where he was accounted one familiar with strange lands who could speak in any tongue that sounded over Madame's tables.

"You're an old man, Major," she said a little stiffly, "and I was counting you a good comrade. Maybe you'll show me the folly in saying that you get your rights by standing out for them."

"You didn't get your rights," was the blunt answer. "When you led the children out you merely exchanged one foreman for another a little less brutal. You did not win the sunshine and the fresh air for every day."

"But that has come now," Applebaum said.

Leaning back in his chair, smoking a good cigar, the younger man had listened tolerantly to the talk. He spoke now, not to defend Kathleen who, he knew, was a captain in dialectics where he

was a cabin boy, but to sound his note of confident optimism.

"The good time has come to more children than formerly," the Major answered, "but those who can really bask in the sunshine are few."

"They are very many." The young man spoke in a cheerful, assertive manner. "And the others will later receive their due. We must wait for the slow processes of evolution."

He looked about the company, his pleasant mouth smiling, his eyes shining good-will; but when his glance encountered the Major his countenance dropped. That former soldier eyed him as he might in the old days have eyed a sentry caught asleep at his post.

"The slow processes of evolution," the Major said, contempt in every drawing word. "Did man wait for the slow processes of evolution that you are so glib about, when he invented the machinery that sucked up and still sucks up the life of the child? If you're not incredibly ignorant you know that man does not leave nature to go her slow way, but makes changes with the rapidity of lightning. Two things, though, never change," lifting up two long fingers, "poverty and greed."

Applebaum put down his cigar, his face flushed with anger; but, looking across at Hertha, his brow cleared. She was smiling at him—a grateful smile—as though to thank him for drawing the fire from her quarter. Kathleen, too, had a relieved expression upon her face. Girding up his loins, he decided to continue the discussion though he might later be forced to retreat. It was scarcely a fair fight when one of the contestants had the handicap of venerable age.

"Surely," he said augmentatively, "times have improved with some rapidity. There are fewer of the poor and oppressed than there were one hundred years ago."

"How do you know?" the Major asked.

While Applebaum drew breath to summon his facts in proof of progress, the Major answered his own question as though his opponent were already disposed of.

"Small thievery is controlled," he said; "held in check better than formerly. Sturdy beggars are not so often seen in the market-place. But these men rarely stole from the poor. Your powerful thief, however, never had so good a chance as to-day. There's no government he cannot buy, and our rapid means of transportation make it possible for him to gather a harvest from more fields than were gleaned by his cleverest and most rapacious predecessors."

"But, granting for the sake of argument that he may not always get his money honestly, doesn't he give a fair share of all he gathers to the poor?" Applebaum asked.

"To the producers, you mean, the men who made his wealth? Not such a noble portion as you might think. I was in India once, during a famine. Children lay dead by the wayside, their thin little arms stiff at their sides. At night when you went by a native hut you heard a baby sobbing as it pulled at an empty breast, or you listened to that saddest cry in the world, a mother wailing for her dead child."

"Bad crops?" Billy questioned.

"Thievery!" the Major answered in a tone that made Madame jump at her distant table, while the three immediate listeners felt as though a bomb had exploded. Then in a quiet, matter-of-fact voice, as though narrating a commonplace: "Down at the coast I saw ships laden with grain for England, loaded by those people who you feel give a fair share of what they gather to the poor."

"That's like the English!" Kathleen cried, her Irish blood asserting itself. "They're the oppressors of the world!"

"Nonsense," the Major retorted, "you don't know what you're talking about. When the English conquered India the natives exchanged one master for another, that was all. If the native princes and rajahs stole less than the British, and I don't know that this was the case, it was stupidity not kindness that kept them from making a complete job."

"I don't believe they were such hypocrites as the English," Kathleen muttered.

She felt much aggrieved. Customarily she held the floor and her listeners either contented themselves with silent dissent or uttered short, ineffectual protests. To-night a friend, a revolutionist like herself, characterized her ideas as foolish and nonsensical, while the audience she was accustomed to routing looked on delighted at her discomfiture. She was mistaken in her interpretation of Applebaum's feeling. He was grieved that any one should show her rudeness; but Hertha, it is to be confessed, was pleased at the turn events were taking. She looked at the Major for another broadside, but to her surprise, he nodded acquiescence to Kathleen's last remark.

"You're right about that," he said, "though hypocrisy isn't English, it belongs to civilization. When you do wrong and know it, but desire to go on in wrong-doing, if you are a savage you continue without apology. If you are civilized you begin the process, the slow, evolutionary process," nodding his head at Applebaum, "of deceiving yourself. It's a process that takes longer with some than with others, but after a while wrong becomes right in your mind and you can do evil from the highest motives. And after you deceive yourself you deceive others, using good people for your tools. The devil always chooses the best people to do his work."

"And isn't it because of this," Kathleen rushed in, believing that she would secure recognition at last, "that we're fighting in the unions and in the Party [there was but one political party to Kathleen] to down the oppressor and to take possession of the earth?"

"Whom are you going to do it with?" the Major asked dryly. "Why do you think one set of men will be better than another? It's all right for you to try, but you will never succeed. Just when your impetus is at its best, rapacious leaders will appear and steal all that you have given your lives to gain."

"There is no animal so easily deceived as man," he went on. "Stupidity," and he looked hard at Applebaum, "is the most noticeable of human traits. You can trap a man with a piece of tainted meat that a wolf would despise. Give him a symbol, it matters not what—a delphic oracle, a church, an empire—and he will rally to the call of greed and fight its battles manfully. With the cry of victory on their lips I could, and have led native troops to destroy their own homes."

"Oh, Major dear!" Kathleen cried incredulously.

"Of course they didn't know what they were doing," the old man said. A smile lit up his face and in a moment he looked so handsome and venerable that two of his listeners, at least, forgot his rudeness. "Most men do not see the end of the road. My father was a soldier and sincerely religious. He thought when fighting in the service that he was bringing Christ to the heathen; but when he got home and read of his achievements he found that he had only forced China to trade in opium."

William Applebaum could no longer keep silent. "Why will you show only the rotten side of things?" he asked, real passion in his voice. "All wars are not actuated by greed and all men are not dupes. My grandfather fought here in this country. He was a colonel and he battled to free the slave."

"Yes?" said the Major. He turned and looked at Hertha. "You're from the South?"

She nodded in affirmation.

"I heard it in your speech. Now how many colonels might there have been in your family?"

"More than I can count," Hertha made answer, smiling. But the smile was not for him but for her own cleverness.

"You hear?" the Major turned to Applebaum. "And those young colonels fought with the same ardor, the same unselfish courage as your ancestor, though he battled for freedom and they gave their lives that men might go on buying black people as they bought horses and sheep."

Applebaum looked indignant but made no further attempt at an answer.

"It's a strange world!" The old man spoke now more to himself than to the others. "I have known men of every color and caste, I have eaten the coolie's rice and slept in the black man's hut, I have been a commander and ruled my kingdom, but everywhere life looms the same. Nature makes a few leaders and of these the crafty and unscrupulous become the lords of all. First they win to their side those of ability, giving them high places. Next they turn to the stupid, and in the name of God show them how to do the devil's bidding. And last they find a few whom they cannot down or deceive, men who see goodness so clearly that nothing can blind them to its light, and these they imprison or kill. It's a simple method and has been practised since the caveman drew his gods upon his cavern walls. Man has a finer mentality than the beast, and he uses it to give this wilderness of beauty that we call the earth to the few. Why, the foxes have holes——"

He stopped, ashamed of his emotion, and as he stopped looked into Hertha's face. He had aroused her attention by his words upon the Negro and she was following him now, eagerly, questioningly. Was this terrible thing that he was saying true? Would Ellen's and Kathleen's dreams remain always dreams? Would the few forever bruise the hearts of the many?

"What are you thinking about?" the Major's tone, though kindly, held a command. He had ceased to be interested in his other listeners, he knew their types too well; but this silent, beautiful girl piqued his curiosity.

She on her part felt impelled to answer him. The picture had flashed before her eyes of other Sunday evenings with her colored father reading from the New Testament as they sat about the table at home. She could see his finger moving slowly down the page.

"Don't you believe," she questioned the old soldier, "that the meek shall inherit the earth?"

He answered gravely: "That was the prophecy of a noble youth, whose life was soon blotted out. But before his day a wiser man, wiser because he lived in a kindlier state that permitted him to grow old, said the same thing. But even he was killed at last, since there is nothing so hateful, so much to be feared, as a wise and gentle life."

Hertha's brow clouded, and dropping his irony the Major went on gently:

"Before he died, however, this old man, in talking with his friend, pronounced his golden rule: 'We should never repay wrong with wrong nor do harm to any man no matter how much we may have suffered from him.' But mark Socrates' wisdom. 'I know,' he added, 'few men hold or ever will hold this opinion.' That was over two thousand years ago, my dear, and you see the meek have not inherited the earth. They still drink the cup of hemlock or are nailed upon the cross."

"Don't!" Kathleen cried. She was shaken by his speech and the tears were on her cheeks. "Major, dear, I'm not meek. I'm fighting with my comrades for the new world. What is there for me?"

"Defeat!" the old man answered gravely, shaking his head. "Defeat. And yet, there will be the joy of battle, and who knows but that the struggle is better than any possible heaven of achievement? But for your friend," and his face lightened as he looked at Hertha's appealing beauty, "for her there is the joy of youth." He rose and addressed himself directly to Hertha. "My child," he said, "don't let them make you picket. Get all the joy you can out of life. Dance to beautiful music. The springtime is coming, play with your mates. Grasp whatever of happiness you can, and, above all, keep out of the conflict. Don't forget, keep out of the conflict."

With a nod of good-by he picked up his hat and coat and left them.

"Kitty," William Applebaum said as he bade her good-night, "don't believe that terrible man."

He was standing in the hall of the flat. Hertha had gone to her room and quite evidently Kathleen was impatient to have him leave.

"Oh, shut up," was her answer.

"But I mean it," Applebaum went on earnestly. "What does he know about life? Just because he's traveled, why should you think he tells the truth? He's irreligious and he's unwholesome. I hate that kind of thing, it's the talk of the devil."

Then, to Kathleen's utter amazement, he kissed her. He had never been so daring before and, overcome by his temerity, he rushed down the stairs. But before she had closed the door he called back, "Don't believe anything he said except about the joy of youth." And then the outer door slammed.

"Good heavens," cried Kathleen, "did that red ink claret go to his head!"

Hertha was so tired that she went at once to her room, but the coffee that she had taken kept her long awake. Since the night before she had experienced a series of vivid impressions; the music of the opera with its passion of love and tragic sorrow; the home she had visited that afternoon, its white bedroom looking out into the trees that would soon be green; the great stone towers of the bridge from which hung innumerable threads of steel; and, last, the little table with Billy opposite and this strange old man reciting his doctrine of eternal defeat. "Keep out of the conflict!" That was what he had said. That ought not to be a difficult thing to do. When she was colored she was in the conflict, a part of the great problem of an oppressed race. But to-day she was white and free; and since this was so, and she could go where she would, was it not foolish to stay in this atmosphere of turmoil, of noisy street and strenuous talk? She shut her eyes and tried to think of quiet nothings, and after much tossing she dropped off to sleep.

She was awakened by a bright light in her room. "What is it?" she called sitting upright in bed.

"It's me, dear," said Kathleen coming to her.

The Irish girl was dressed and had her hat and coat on. "I'm called on a case," she explained, "way up in the Bronx. It's pneumonia and I'm afraid I shan't be home for some days."

"Oh," Hertha cried, in real distress, "why must you go now? I want you myself."

"You're not sick, are you?"

"No, but I'm worried. I wanted to talk with you."

Kathleen sat down by the side of the bed. "I'm sorry that I've bothered you so, Hertha," she said in her pleasantest voice. "There's something in what the Major said to-night. You're young and it's not for me to push you into anything just because I think it's right. You ought to be your own judge. Perhaps you'll soon decide on a new trade and the factory will drop out of your life."

"Yes, Kathleen," Hertha said hesitating, "I am thinking of something new. I believe I'll study stenography."

"That's a good trade if you've the education, and I don't doubt you have. There's many in it, but not many like you."

"Mr. Brown has been looking up schools for me."

"Has he?"

There was silence. Kathleen had not taken a fancy to Mr. Brown.

"The school that he likes the best is in Brooklyn, and——" Hertha swallowed hard. If she were going to say anything it must be now. "To-day I looked at a room over there, near the school."

"In Brooklyn, good Lord! Why, nobody goes to Brooklyn except to be buried! You can't mean Brooklyn! What do you want to be leaving here for anyway?"

Kathleen got off the bed. As Hertha remained silent she moved out of the little alcove. "Of course, if you're wanting to go, Hertha, it's not for me to keep you."

"I want to talk with you about it. I haven't decided yet, and I don't want to leave you, but there're so many things to think about."

Hertha's voice was plaintive, for she was almost in tears.

"I suppose it's that long-legged southern chap. Well, if it's a man trying to get you away, there's no hope for me. But how you can like that thin-nosed, sallow-faced son of a snuff-dipping mother is beyond me."

Kathleen did not see Hertha's flushed cheeks, but she felt her silent protest. Remembering the words of the Major, the call of youth and springtime, she went back and again seated herself by Hertha's side.

"It's a shame they should be calling me out to-night and you and me needing a long talk together. But that's my life and perhaps it's lonely here for a young girl like you."

"I am lonely," Hertha declared, "when you are away."

It was the first time she had confessed to her dislike to be so much by herself. And while she said it she knew that though she might be timid at being alone she minded more being unable ever to get away from people. If she went to a boarding-house, perhaps she would never be really alone. The memory of the Merryvale household and its paying guests came back to her, and she tried to recall whether the northern women who stopped there were able to secure the privacy that she craved.

"With the summer, dear," Kathleen was saying, "I'm not likely to be away so much and there's many good times we could have together. Away to the country, perhaps, for a Sunday, or down at the beach where the waves knock you off your feet one second and pound the breath out of you the next."

Hertha gave a little rueful laugh. "That must be jolly," she assented.

"And as for business schools that will fit you for a job in two months or two days, according to the cash you've got, there's as many of them in New York, I'll be bound, as in Brooklyn. You don't have to cross the river to go to school."

"No."

"I asked Billy to bring one of the fellows who works where he does around with him next Sunday. He's a nice little chap, though he doesn't know a mockingbird from a jack rabbit."

"I don't have to have young men around. I'm not going because of Dick Brown."

"Oh, so it's settled then. Well, I wish you good-by."

The Irish girl rose and stood stiffly by the bed.

"It isn't settled," Hertha cried, "I can't settle things quickly. Oh, I do wish everything wasn't so difficult."

"I must be going," said Kathleen. "Good-night."

Hertha dragged her friend toward her and threw her arms about her neck. "If I do go to Brooklyn," she said, "I can still see you sometimes, and you'll come to see me."

"There was a New York man once, Hertha, and he had two daughters, one lived in Australia and one in Brooklyn, and he made one visit in his life to each."

"That's silly!"

"Perhaps. But it's a big city, and if you leave here and go to foreign parts of it, I'm afraid it's good-by."

"Well, it isn't good-by for me, wherever I go." Hertha kissed her friend and held her close. "It's never going to be good-by like that. I love you, Kathleen."

The older woman returned the embrace. "Play with your mates!" she heard in her ears. "Grasp whatever of happiness you can."

"Have you money?" she questioned.

"Yes, enough for my education."

"Oh, how will I ever get along with you away!"

And with this cry Kathleen put out the light and went away to a difficult and sorrowful night.

When she returned on Wednesday evening, snatching a few hours from her harassing case, she hurried up the stairs and into the front room. One glance told her that her friend had left. The framed picture was there and the curtains that Hertha had bought and made herself. On the table was the magazine out of which she had read a story the week before; but the room was desolate, for in the alcove all the little things that belonged to a young girl's dress were missing. The stiff, unnatural order of bed and bureau mocked the looker-on. Going into the kitchen, Kathleen saw a letter addressed to herself, but she made no attempt to read it. Warily entering her bedroom, she changed her gown and more warily returned to cook her dinner. The water hissed at her in the kettle as she set her solitary place.

"Why does everybody leave me just when I've learned to love them?" she asked herself. And,

receiving no answer, she sat down in the rocker by the red geraniums and buried her face in her hands.

III

DICK

CHAPTER XXV

"What shall we do this evening?"

"I shall be studying."

"Oh, rot; don't work so hard."

It was morning in mid-May and Dick Brown was standing in the hallway of Mrs. Pickens' boarding-house, his hat set back on his head, turning for the last word with Hertha before he left for his day's task. It was a grief to him that they did not leave together; but, though she finished breakfast when he did, and had but a few minutes leeway beyond his time of departure, she was never ready when the minute came that he must go. So he stopped this morning to ask his question, knowing the answer, since he had received it the night before, but anxious to hold the young girl in conversation before he turned into the engrossing world of business that drove her from his thoughts. And yet, even when he was most concentrated on some perplexing detail associated with the handling of fancy trimmings, she would be back in his mind, far back where he might not turn to her and yet where, when the hour came that released him from the bondage of the city's trade, she was present—her brown eyes, to his fancy, looking at him with more favor than they had yet shown.

"Well, good-by," he said, grasping the doorknob.

"Good-by," she answered, and turned upstairs to her room.

Whirled through the city and over the bridge, Dick tried to obliterate the image of the girl he loved and to turn to schemes of business. He was well aware that he had not yet caught her fancy, that she was not in the least in love with him, but he reckoned on his staying powers and on the fortune that some day he meant to lay at her feet. Any one so alone in the world as she, and she seemed singularly alone, must need a protector; and if he could only be patient and work diligently the time might come when she would accept a home filled with every conceivable thing to use, lovely as the "House Beautiful" rooms exhibited in the department stores, and where, when she had wandered through the many chambers and corridors, she would accept the man who stood upon the threshold eager to bring this, and more, of comfort and luxury and watchful care into her life. So he sat tense in his seat (he sometimes got a seat going in to his work) and began with resolute will to ponder the problem of business success. And as he pondered his face took on a shrewd and calculating expression at variance with his youthful frame and his bright, speckled necktie.

At noon he went into a restaurant frequented by many business men of the neighborhood and was greeted by an elderly gentleman at a table near the doorway who invited him to sit down. Like the firm for which he worked, this man was a dealer in trimmings, and Dick was elated at such a sign of favor. Perhaps it might lead to an opportunity for advancement. He took his place with some embarrassment, however, not knowing whether this were an invitation to luncheon or only to a seat in which to have a friendly chat. Believing it wiser to assume the latter to be the case, he picked up the bill of fare and said in a loud voice, "I reckon you've ordered your grub."

Mr. James Talbert, whose modest sign on Broadway shone conspicuous among the plethora of foreign names, smiled good-humoredly and answered: "Not yet; I'm planning to order yours with mine. I don't have a young man fresh from the Sunny South to dine with me every day."

Richard Brown laughed hilariously to hide the hurt to his pride. It was not the first time that it had been conveyed to him that he was fresh.

A weary, indifferent waiter received the order, and in a short time they were engrossed in disposing of an excellent and hearty meal.

As he became less absorbed in his chops and *sauté* potatoes, Dick looked about the room filled with tables where busy men were intent on fortifying themselves with food before they went back to their engrossing work. He noted their faces, their figures, and guessed at their professions. The tall, thin young fellow ahead was a clerk like himself—he could tell by the way he was trying to joke with his waiter. There were newspaper men back of him; it was easy to determine them by their talk about this or the other "story." Moving down the aisle and returning his stare was a young, black-haired, dark-eyed Jew thrumming restlessly with his fingers. In business for himself, Dick guessed, and calculating on to-day's gains and to-morrow's expenditures. The young

southerner wondered whether he would ever be able to do this, whether the day would come when he would have a business of his own.

"Chops all right?" The older man broke the silence.

"Hunky. See that fellow over there?" Dick pointed to a somewhat soiled, slouchily dressed youth who had taken a seat near them. "That's the way we look where I come from, only a heap more good-natured. Something like a mule, though, slow and kind of set-like; we could kick if it was worth while throwing out our heels. There ain't much hurry there, except if once in a lifetime you want to catch a train. Yes, and there's the factory, that's speeding up the folks."

"Miss it?" his companion asked.

"The way we do things, you mean? No, sir! I wouldn't go back, except for a vacation, not if you gave me a present of Casper County on a golden tray. I like it here; it's a race."

Dick spoke with emphasis and then took a great mouthful of food that required his full attention.

"Country boys are apt to feel that way." Mr. Talbert looked gravely at the young man before him. "The city would never grow as it does if it wasn't fed by country stock, strong young fellows who have worked out of doors and laid up energy to be exhausted later within the great buildings down town."

"I can't say as I ever did much work." The young Georgian grinned as he recalled his boyhood. "But I played a heap and made enough trouble for the neighbors to win me a gilt-edged certificate in cussedness. Business is a sort of play, I reckon, and the biggest daredevil comes out ahead."

"It means taking risks."

"Do you think," Dick asked, his cheeks flushing as though he expected to be guyed for his question, "that a fellow can come to New York any more without a penny and end a millionaire?"

"They're still doing it." The business man eyed his guest with evident interest. "But the number gets smaller all the time. It's a little like telling every boy that he can become president, this poor-man-to-millionaire business; nevertheless," looking intently at his listener, "it can be done."

"Honest Injun?" The joviality left Dick's face, though he tried to put it in his voice. His thin mouth was tightly drawn and the hard lines were accentuated about his deep blue eyes.

"Honest Injun." Mr. Talbert was amused again. "But don't forget the secret. Always look out for yourself. Don't think about the other fellow, for if he's a good business man you can count on it he isn't thinking about you."

"Listen!" Dick leaned forward. "I'm meaning what I say. I've got to get rich. It ain't for myself; it's for a girl, a girl that ought to have the best of everything in New York."

For the first time during the meal he spoke in a low voice, but with an intensity that drove the smile from his companion's face. With elbows on the table, his head resting on his hands, he looked into the older man's eyes as though he hoped by searching long enough to learn the secret of success that he saw about him in this great city—the success that moved outside in silent limousines, that inhabited beautiful houses filled with skilled servants, that sent its women and children, now the warm weather advanced, into other beautiful houses by the sea. In the Sunday supplements of the great papers he had seen pictures of these homes and of the women who dwelt in them. There was not a face among the many that belonged more truly in such surroundings than the face that he looked into at his boarding-house table every day. And among the men who had won this success were some, he knew, who had started as poor as he. He asked only to be told their secret.

Mr. Talbert did not smile at the mention of the girl as Dick feared he would. Instead he looked sympathetically at the long face before him.

"A girl's a good thing to work for," he said. "It keeps a man thrifty and sober. I'm not an expert on getting rich, for such money as I have was mostly made by my father before me. But I take it if a man is young and strong and has an aptitude for his profession, he can still get what he wants in these United States. But he's got to want it more than anything else in the world, more than leisure or friends, more, perhaps, than honor. He's got to carry his work with him, study it in the evening, dream of it at night. He's got to live poor before he can live rich. He must be able to use men for his own aims. He must skin or he'll be skinned. See here, Mac," clutching at a man who was passing, "come and give your advice to youth."

A large, comfortable looking gentleman stopped at his friend's bidding and looked quizzically at Dick as they were introduced. He would not sit down, and as the others were through their meal Talbert settled his account and they all stood for a moment together.

"Have a cigar?" offering one to Dick.

"I think I won't," Dick answered. "Perhaps that's one of the things to go slow on, eh, if I mean to succeed?"

"Yes, when it comes to buying them yourself; but never refuse a gift," and his new acquaintance thrust the cigar into the young man's hand.

"Here's an emigrant from the State of Georgia," Talbert said, turning to his friend, "who is bent on becoming a millionaire. He's got health and determination; all he asks for is advice. What's yours?"

"David Harum's golden rule," was the answer. "Do unto the other feller the way he'd like to do unto you, and do it fust."

They made their way past the waiters bearing their trays gleaming with straw-colored cocktails, bright with fruit, pleasantly odorous with freshly cooked meats and vegetables, on out into the street. The older men continued to explain the road to success in kindly speech, their tone and bearing at variance with the harsh gospel which they preached. Dick listened eagerly, as eagerly as he had once listened to the gospel of the evangelist at home. And as he shook hands and left them, he walked up Broadway feeling a strange elation. His hand went to his pocket for the cigar he usually smoked at this time, but, recalling himself, he put it resolutely back. He would live meagerly to-day that he might have a plethora in a golden to-morrow.

The soft May air blowing on his face recalled to him his southern home. He had been poor down there, and yet not poor in comparison with his neighbors. His father had owned hundreds of acres of miserable soil on which his tenants had planted cotton and reaped scanty crops. He recalled those tenants—sallow, ill-fed whites, shiftless blacks. Their cabins reeked with dirt and were always cluttered with children. The men were continually in debt, and while his father got from them all he could, being accounted a hard master by his neighbors, Dick knew that there was little enough that any one made. It had been a good thing when his mother had sold some of the property. Had it not been for their timber they would have known real poverty. He felt a sudden revulsion for his old home, its sordidness, its slow piling of penny upon penny with no greater outlook upon life than a new rifle or a Victrola in the best room. There was no game worthy the name to be played down there, only a monotonous round of stupid covetousness. Here the play was difficult and the stakes big.

He held his head very high that afternoon, and fairly touched the clouds when, before he went home, he was informed that he would again be sent for a short time upon the road. His first trip had brought in good results and he was to be entrusted with a better circuit and to receive a slight increase in salary. He felt grateful for the advancement, and then, recalling the advice of noontime, put this thought from him. If he were getting more money it was because the firm thought he was worth it, and that they must pay more or lose him. Therefore it was to his own interest, while serving them, to be looking for advancement. In the autumn he might seek a job with Mr. Talbert.

He was enough of a boy still to buy a box of candies to take to Hertha. Calculating that his luncheon had cost him nothing and that he would begin at once to save by smoking only one cigar a day, he spent a dollar on his gift, and with it tucked under his arm moved among the seething mass of faces, mysteriously upborne, on bodies with arms and legs, that stampeded the Brooklyn train. Once hanging to his hardly secured strap, contrary to the advice given him, he let the work of the day drop from his mind and fell into a day dream of a home of his own with Hertha as its queen. And as he thought of her, of her lightly poised head, her softly curling hair, her delicate hands, the minutes flew by and he was quite unconscious that he was standing amid a crowd of people, the women swaying on the straps to which they clung, one of them falling regularly against him at each station, the men endeavoring to read their newspapers while they balanced themselves with each recurring jolt. He was moving on as the train moved in a swift passage through time, stopping now and again at some well-marked station along the happy road of life.

As he neared his stopping place an old question came to perplex him. Who was this girl whom he so deeply loved? Ogilvie was a fine sounding name, and any one could see that she was descended from people of note. But he was curious to know something of her kin and of her early life. It was of no use to ask his mother or any of the folks at home. As he had once put it to Hertha, they were "hill billies," far removed from her progenitors. Mrs. Pickens had confessed ignorance when he had questioned her. The one person who could tell him anything he dared not question. There was something in Hertha's reserve that he was forced to respect, and yet he often wondered that any girl should be so wholly alone. She seemed to receive no mail. More than once, since she herself had first spoken of him, he had alluded to her brother, only to be met with a shy silence. He had never before known so silent a girl, or one, too, whom it was so difficult to interest. Sometimes when he recalled the Rosies and Annie-Lous at home over whom he had lorded it with the high hand of the best-known fellow in the county, he wondered that he should be so engrossed in one who was evidently indifferent to his advances. But he was keen enough to see that, like his coveted riches, the needed effort to gain her affection added to the intensity of his desire. But he did wish, as he clutched the candy to his side, that she would treat him a little better. They did not seem to be as near one another now as they had been in the winter when she was living with her Irish friend.

Nothing was solved as he ran up the stoop of Mrs. Pickens' boarding-house and put his key in the latch, but he was rewarded with a bright smile when, looking in at Hertha's open doorway, he tossed the box of candy on her bed. He was never invited over the threshold of her bedroom, though it was beyond his code of etiquette to understand why. In his mother's home the living-room contained the largest bed in the house, a massive affair with a variegated cover that every visitor was called upon to admire. But he had learned from experience that if he entered Hertha's room she shortly left it, and so, accepting her word of thanks, he went to his own quarters to

make himself ready for dinner.

At eight o'clock, when Hertha was poring over a page of shorthand, vainly endeavoring to read the business letter from "Jones Brothers" to "Smith and Company," she heard a knock at her door. Opening it, she found Dick outside.

"I told them you didn't want to be disturbed," he hastened to say in answer to her look of annoyance, "but Mrs. Pickens and Miss Wood want you to come down and make a fourth at bridge."

"Get Mrs. Wood," Hertha made answer, "you know I can't play."

"Neither can she," Dick replied cheerfully, "but she don't know it. However, she won't," he added, "we've asked her."

Hertha looked at the page of wavering marks and hesitated.

"Oh, come along," Dick pleaded. "Do it 'to oblige Benson.' Mrs. Pickens has left a bunch of southern newspapers, just come in, to amuse us, but she wants you."

It was a standing joke in the household, the love its landlady bore for local southern news. A corner of her room was stacked with such weeklies as "The Cherokee Advocate," "The Talapoosie Ladies' Messenger," over which she would pore, reading the births and deaths, the marriages and divorces, the lawsuits and business tribulations, the receptions and engagements of the southern world as though each community were her own. "They're my novels," she would retort when Dick jeered at her fondness for these local sheets. Hertha appreciated her unselfishness in joining the game, and, obeying an impulse to have a good time, flung down her textbook, picked up her box of candy and, accompanied by Dick, went downstairs.

The young man was elated. At Hertha's request he placed the candy in the center of the table and seized upon her as his partner without permitting the question to be decided by cutting the cards. For this Hertha was grateful, since she knew little of the game and was confident that she would spoil the good time of either of the women should they have to bear her mistakes upon their score. Of Miss Wood she stood much in awe. That lady was an assistant secretary in an Association for Improving the Condition of the Destitute and knew a prodigious amount regarding poverty and crime. She played her cards as though solving one of her, day's cases. Mrs. Pickens had played to oblige too often to have any feeling of the importance of the game. To Dick, cards were a matter of luck; his failures were always attributed to poor hands, and with Hertha opposite him he cared little whether he ended in a pit of defeat or on a pinnacle of success.

"I wish you wouldn't talk so much about above and below the line," Hertha said, as they started upon a new rubber.

"Why?" Mrs. Pickens asked.

"Because it's in shorthand, and I want to forget the old stuff. All the sense of a sentence depends upon whether you're above or below."

"It's much the same in bridge," Mrs. Pickens made answer. "Now don't make it, Dick, unless you have the cards."

It was before auction bridge when the dealer's position was an important one.

"I'm not reckless, am I?" Dick asked, appealing to his partner. "I'm as careful as a donkey walking by the side of a precipice."

"Just about," said Hertha, laughing.

Forgetful of the game, he looked at her as though he would devour her.

"Perhaps you will decide on something," Miss Wood remarked sarcastically, "or let your partner."

"Make it, partner," said Dick, but Hertha, frightened at the opportunity, threw down a good hand.

Certainly her partner never lectured her upon her poor plays. He was quite indifferent when she took his Queen with her King, and when in a burst of adventure she doubled her opponent and lost four tricks he proved to her that she had done exactly right. This disaster made her cautious and in the following hand, with four aces, she made it spades and scored eight points instead of a grand slam. When the modest figure was placed below the line her partner cheered her for her success.

"Really, Miss Ogilvie," Miss Wood said, "if you want to learn bridge you must not think that a make like that is good. It is quite wrong."

Hertha laughed acquiescence. She was having a good time and enjoying Dick's ridiculous talk as hand after hand he kept up a stream of comment. Mrs. Pickens laughed with them, but the fourth member of the party became angry.

"This is not bridge," she said, her hands shaking as she picked up the cards dealt her.

"Ain't it?" said Dick good-naturedly. "Well, it's fun, anyway."

He took an unconscionably long time to decide on the trump, clutching his cards tightly, and wrinkling his forehead in imitation of his indignant opponent.

"Oh, do make it something!" Mrs. Pickens urged him.

"Very well, hearts!" cried Dick, "Hearts, the best suit in the pack."

He broke into exaggerated praise of the quite ordinary hand Hertha spread out for him. He loved the careful way in which she put each card in sequence.

"The King of my suit!" he cried. "Didn't I know you had it! Saw it with my poker eye. Ever play poker, Miss Hertha?"

He had asked the question before, and she did not trouble to answer him. Not that he cared whether he was answered or not. He felt elated at his day and at the evening that was bringing him such good fortune.

Talking steadily as he threw down his cards, he won a finesse, for by this time Miss Wood had lost all track of the game.

"What did I tell you?" he cried to Hertha boisterously. "This is the time we're going under and over both. Just you wait. Count the tricks! One, two, three, four, five, six—only four more and the rubber's ours. Watch me now! Just watch yours truly haul in the goods. Watch me——"

"Oh, stop talking, Dick," said Mrs. Pickens good-humoredly, "and play."

She was very fond of this southern lad, her one man boarder, and was quite ready herself to frolic. But, seeing the thundercloud on her partner's face, she endeavored to bring some seriousness into the occasion.

"Well, here goes!" cried the young man. "My trump card!" and he flung down the ace of hearts.

The deuce, tray and four spot fell upon it.

"One, two, three, four!" he called out. "Kiss the dealer!"

Leaning far over the table, his lips came within an inch of Hertha's own.

She drew back, blushing crimson, her body stiff with antagonism. Mrs. Pickens, to relieve the situation, put her arm around the youth's neck and, drawing down his head, gave him the asked-for kiss. But she could not resist murmuring, "A poor substitute."

"Three tricks more," Dick called, and dashed through the hand.

He won the game and the rubber, but he had reduced his partner to a state of frigidity excelling even Miss Wood's. "We won't play any more," she said to that lady, "I know you are tired at our noise." And with a general good-night she went out of the room, leaving the box of candy behind her.

Miss Wood added the score conscientiously, pronounced her partner and herself the winners, professed indignation at Dick's offer to pay anything he might owe, and, accompanied by Mrs. Pickens, left the young man to himself.

Richard Shelby Brown looked across the table at the empty chair and deliberately kicked himself. "What a mutt I am," he thought. "But if she were a princess, born with a lot of knights bowing before her all day long, she couldn't hold her head any higher." Then he pulled the cigar that Mr. Talbert had given him out of his pocket, struck a light and began to smoke. And as he sniffed the delicious fragrance and blew rings into the air, as he looked about the room at the bright pictures all descriptive of gaiety and happiness, he grew less disturbed and gradually regained his self-possession. One could never tell what a girl liked, but surely she must find it pleasant to know that a man wanted to kiss her. Had she slapped him on the face, as Annie-Lou would have done, he would not have minded. But she had blushed, and, oh how beautiful she became when the color rushed into her face! Tilted back in one chair, his feet on another, he puffed at his cigar and puffed again, and smiled gently, thinking of the princess in her room and of the palace that he must hasten to build.

CHAPTER XXVI

There was no question that Hertha Ogilvie was not making a success at stenography and typewriting at the excellent school which Dick had found for her. Among the thirty-odd pupils who had entered in February, only two were as far behind as she. And though her teachers, who liked her for her good manners and quiet speech, were ready with encouragement, assuring her that the moment would come when, with unexpected rapidity, the light of understanding would shine amid the darkness of insignificant lines and dots and she would forge ahead, she herself did not believe in the miracle. This was perhaps her greatest handicap—distrust in her ability blocked her road. An ever recurring sense of stupidity kept her repeating the same tasks without progress, until, filled with disgust, she threw her books aside, declaring that she would give it up and take to sewing again.

This was her mood on the Saturday afternoon following the game of bridge, when, dropping her work, she went into the park with Bob Henderson, her next door neighbor and devoted companion. Bob was the oldest of four children, though but six himself, and when his mother could spare him from the home tasks that were already piling upon his small shoulders, he liked best to go with Hertha among the trees to the lake where every day there was some new interest. This afternoon it was a brood of ducks that were taking their first bath. And while Hertha sat on the grass he wandered along the shore, throwing in bits of bread and sometimes laughing softly to himself.

The afternoon was full of golden lights, the warm sun bringing a feeling of happy drowsiness. School was forgotten and the southern girl basked in the languorous fragrance of spring. Life had begun again for the world. Across from where she sat on a granite stone a little white butterfly lighted and slowly folded and unfolded its wings. It quivered on its resting place as though not yet accustomed to flight. The buds on the azalea were slowly opening. Everywhere life was close to fulfilment and yet as though waiting for some final word from sun or earth.

"Please come here, Miss Ogilvie," Bob called, running up to her. "Look at this bird. I bet it's broken its wing."

A white birch hung over the path by the water's edge and beneath it, on the smooth asphalt, fluttered a little bird, brilliant with black and orange markings. It hopped away as they approached, but made no flight, and as they followed they could mark each splotch of black and white and orange.

"What is it?" Bob asked eagerly.

"I never saw it before," Hertha said. "I think it belongs up in the treetops."

Bob eyed the broken wing. "It was some boy," he said admiringly, "that could hit such a little thing with nothing but a stone."

"Was that how it happened?"

"Sure. I've seen the boys throwing stones up the trees, but it ain't often they bring down a bird."

Making a tremendous effort, the bird flew on to a low branch of the birch. Amid the young green leaves its dress of orange and black showed gayer than ever. It reminded Hertha of one of Ellen's children, a little girl with shining black face and bright black eyes, who used to wear as a kerchief her mother's bandana. She was like a bird herself, swift of movement, trilling with song.

"It was a mean thing to do," Hertha cried indignantly as she watched the warbler flutter and fall to the ground again. "Why couldn't they let it stay in the tree top? I suppose the boys think it's fun to bring it down with a stone."

"Sure," said Bob cheerfully.

"Don't you do it," his companion commanded. "Can't you see how it hurts? It's crippled through no fault of its own."

"What do you think'll happen?" Bob asked, a little anxiously. Hertha's tone was making an impression on him.

"I'm afraid it will die. Any animal can seize it now."

"I tell you what." Bob's face brightened. "I'll catch it and put it in our old canary cage. Our bird's dead now, and we can feed this and hear it sing."

He crouched to make a sudden spring, but Hertha held him back. "Don't!" she said.

"Why not?" Bob asked, straightening up.

The girl found it hard to give her answer. "See how it's trying to get away," she said at last. "I believe it would rather live a few hours free, in the sunshine, than to be caged for life."

"I'll give it some crumbs, anyway," said Bob, and, strewing bread along the path, went back to his more engrossing ducks.

The bird of the tree tops refused the bread of grain and, making a tremendous effort, rose to the birch tree again and moved among the leaves, its black head bobbing about hunting for insects, its free wing fluttering with pleasure. "What a comfort it is," Hertha thought to herself, "that it lives only in to-day."

Becoming weary of his ducks, Bob joined his companion where she sat on the grass, and leaning up against her asked to hear about Tom-of-the-Woods. Tom was a wonderful boy who lived in the forest, eating roots and fruit, for he would not kill any living creature. The berries that he found and the oranges that he plucked from the trees were finer than any other oranges and berries in the world. Tom made his house out of palm leaves tied together and set up on shoots of bamboo. He did not use it much, however, for at night he loved to sit under the stars listening to the screech owls and the toads and the little four-footed creatures that came out of their hiding-places when the sun went down. It was then that he talked with the rabbits and the great white owl, the wisest bird in the world. Tom went to the city and purchased a top that he could spin so fast on the sidewalk that it disappeared. How he got it back he never told, but it was always there

in his pocket whenever he came to town. It was a long, comfortable story, without plot and with little incident, the kind of story that you could begin and leave off at your convenience. But before Bob was half tired of it, some one called out "Hallo," and Dick appeared coming along the path toward them.

"Glad I found you," he said gaily, and then, turning to the little boy, "Your mother says it's time for you to be trotting home."

Bob viewed the newcomer suspiciously. It was not his first experience in having Dick interrupt when he and Miss Ogilvie were enjoying a good time.

"Very well," said Hertha, rising, "we'll go home together."

This arrangement was not in the least what Dick desired, but he said nothing and the three walked slowly away from the lake to the park's entrance where Bob's house could be seen across the broad street.

"Say," Dick whispered, "let the little fellow go and come out rowing with me."

Bob heard and clutched Hertha's hand tight.

"I'm going on the road Monday," Dick added.

Bob only clutched the harder and tried to drag his friend across the street.

Realizing the need of strategy, Dick put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a dime. "Run over and get yourself a soda, sonny," he said; "I bet you know the way."

Bob's hesitation was short. "Sure," he replied after an infinitesimal wait, and dropping Hertha's hand dashed across the street. They saw him enter the friendly drug store and then, at Dick's earnest pleading, they walked back along the path that they had come.

It was a day for dreaming, for lightly putting the oar in the water to withdraw it again. On the soft wind, from the bushes, white and purple and golden, from the new buds of the resinous trees, came a fragrance, sweet and pungent. Rowing beside the west bank, the boat kept in shadow, but beyond this restful line of dimmed light the sun danced upon the water, the ripples streaming with silver and gold. The late blossoming trees still stood tall, dark, with naked limbs, but the drooping willow gleamed pale yellow, and the maples and elms were dropping their small blossoms to stand clothed in summer green. Robins called to one another across the lake, busy carrying bits of grass and twigs to make their nests. Her hat off, Hertha sat in the stern of the boat, sometimes trailing her hand in the water, her head bent as she watched the trickling drops, again sitting erect gazing among the trees and out to the sky beyond.

"Thinking about home?" Dick asked, and she nodded and smiled.

"Let's visit the garden," she suggested, when having rowed the length of the lake they returned to the landing.

There was a riot of flowers in the great stretches of the formal garden, but the girl leading, they made their way to the pansy beds. Deep, velvety purple blossoms nodded up at them; soft blues and lavenders, streaked with deeper blue and purple, touched plants of glowing yellow. Hertha bent and began to talk to the nodding heads as though they were children.

"They're more alive," she said to Dick, apologizing for her childishness, "than any flowers I know."

He entered her conceit. "There's a lot of difference among them, though, don't you think?" He bent over with her to look closely. "The blue ones don't look like they were blue at all; but that dark lady down there, for instance, she hasn't enjoyed her dinner. Perhaps last night she had an overdose of dew."

"I'm afraid the expression is chronic," Hertha answered gravely.

They wandered on where bushes of spirea grew on either side the path—"Bridal wreath, don't they call it?" Dick asked timidly—on among the tall hickory and chestnut trees; then up the hill to the rose garden, the green buds of the newly trimmed plants beginning to show touches of color, and down again to the little valley where the mischievous bronze baby, standing in the water surrounded by his guard of spouting turtles, clutches a duck that pours out a constant stream of sparkling drops into the pool below.

"How does any one think of such things?" Dick asked gazing with admiration at the miniature fountain.

"It seems to me easy enough to think of them," Hertha answered. "But how does any one make them?"

The sun was low as with reluctant feet they turned homeward. Dick had been quiet, in touch with the beauty about him, the right companion for a dreamlike afternoon. But the springtime had its present call to him, and as they neared the end of their walk he could not forego a word.

They had come upon a sunny strip of path and Hertha, slipping off her coat, threw it over her arm.

Dick took it from her. "Let me carry it, dear," he said.

It was the first time he had dared thus to speak to her, and his breath came quick.

Awakening to find her dream was over, Hertha drew away from him.

"I know I have no right to say anything, Hertha," he went on, "I'm poor still, but I can't go away again without telling you a little of what I think of every minute of my life."

The broad path had many people upon it, the most of them, like themselves, on their way home. Hertha looked about as though asking him to say nothing then, but the young man continued in a low voice:

"I haven't anything to say but what you know and every one else knows who sees you and me. I love you like I didn't believe any one could love another. I don't ask for anything but to work for you, hoping some time that you'll take what I have to give. It just about kills me to see you worrying about your work or money. It's for a man to do that. Don't worry, dear," he said the word again, almost in a whisper, "we can walk along together. Let me carry the things."

"No!" Hertha said in a whisper. "Seems to me like it was meant I should carry them alone."

But she did not take the coat from him when they reached the house, letting him take it to her room. He laid it on her bed and at once went out, without glancing her way, but when he turned to her at dinner where she sat beside him he could see a troubled look in her eyes. He felt as though he had stirred the waters, just a little, as he had stirred the lake with his oar that afternoon.

CHAPTER XXVII

The look of happiness on Dick's face made Hertha pass a restless night. She tossed for a long time on her bed, and only fell into a deep sleep by morning. And from this she was awakened by a vivid dream. She was back in her old home among the pines, and never in her waking hours had she seen the cabin more clearly, its log walls, the weeds growing out of the white sand. And as she saw her own home, she saw, too, the home of the whites with its overhanging vines and its broad balcony. In her dream she moved through one and then another, but each room was deserted and empty. She ran among the pines and under the live-oaks, draped with their fringe of swaying moss, but on all her way encountered no human being; only against the blue sky was a long wavering line of birds. The loneliness overwhelmed her, it bore down upon her like a physical weight, until, struggling against the feeling of oppression, she awoke into the hot morning, threw off her blanket and raised herself on her pillow the better to breathe.

As she dressed and thought of her dream, she was overcome with remorse. If the homes were empty, it was because she had made them so. Their life was in her thought, and she had deliberately thrust them far back in her mind. Her lover, whom she tried hard to despise; Miss Patty, who had shown her so many kindnesses; her mother and sister and brother—the command to her heart had been that they should be forgotten. Standing before her mirror and coiling her hair, her hands shook as she thought of the death of her past. And she resolved that before long, when she could reach a decision as to the present, she would bring at least some of the figures back to the empty rooms.

The time had come, she told herself, to determine upon her next step. It was neither kind nor right to play month after month with a man's affection, allowing him to spend money upon her, to grow daily to care more for her, if she was sure that she could never care for him. She sighed a little at her conscientiousness, for Dick, when he kept where he belonged, was a pleasant adjunct to her life. And her second decision must be in regard to her profession. If she could not do better at stenography, she must cease to spend her income trying to master the subject. It would never do to stay on here exhausting her legacy fruitlessly. She turned from her mirror to her desk and took up a calendar that hung above it. To-day was May 22. School would be over on June 24. The day after that would be Saturday. Putting a circle around the date, June 25, she determined in her mind that she would at that time definitely decide on her next step. This resolution taken, she was genuinely relieved, for she knew that, as she would have obeyed such a mark at school had it meant the handing in of a problem or a written paper, so she would obey it now in her difficult life. It was with a feeling of righteous satisfaction, as though the decision had already been reached, that she went down to breakfast.

Dick was late and she slipped out of the house before he saw her. Her day's plan was made, and for the first time in some weeks she went to New York and back to her own church. In Brooklyn she had looked in upon one ecclesiastical edifice after another to be dissatisfied with each, and it was with a feeling of rest and happiness that she returned to her first church home. But though the music was as beautiful as always, there was no one there to remember her, and she went out a little lonely.

Her cheeks were pink as she climbed the three flights and knocked at Kathleen's door. Kathleen had not been cordial to her since her defection. But Hertha, who gave her affection to few and who, finding it hard to give, found it equally difficult to take away, had sought her old friend more than once, ignoring Kathleen's refusal to cross the river. It was some weeks now since they had

had a chat together, and as she stood outside the door the young girl found her heart beat fast in hope of a cordial welcome and perhaps a dinner at the little table with Billy sitting between them. If Kathleen would only invite her to dinner, she would help to get it.

The lower hall door had been open and she had no intimation as to whether or not Kathleen was home. Her knock brought no response. Thinking that her friend might return shortly, she sat on the stairs and waited until one o'clock had passed and she felt sure that Kathleen was out at work or dining elsewhere. She was miserably disappointed and wished that at least she had her old key and might enter and look in at the rooms. Probably the flowers were wilting, needing, like herself, a friend. With a white face and drooping mouth she turned downstairs.

An ice cream soda at a drug store is not a sufficient Sunday dinner and it was with a feeling of faintness, a desire to eat her meal alone and sulk if she wished, that Hertha sat down at the supper table.

"Hallo," Dick called out from his seat as she slipped into hers, "where did you get your Sunday dinner?"

"In New York," was the answer.

"You missed a peach at home. A fried chicken peach with corn fritters. I can taste it now!" And Dick ostentatiously smacked his lips. "What did you have?" he asked.

"Nothing especial."

"Well, you missed it."

"I suppose I did," said Hertha, with more than a touch of crossness, "but that doesn't prevent my eating my supper."

"Indeed you are not seeing that any of us are helped," Mrs. Pickens cried, calling Dick's attention to his duties at the head of the table, and Hertha soon found herself making the best of the left-overs of the previous meal.

No one seemed in good spirits. Mrs. Wood told them all a half dozen times that her head ached, and her daughter showed on her face that she had heard the same tale at regular and irregular intervals during the day. She looked more than ever as though she wished she were a man, a desire that was rarely absent from her thoughts. "A man," she was wont to say, "is not expected to earn the family income and also be a companion and nurse, and if by any chance he did take all three positions he would make sure to be paid well for them." Mrs. Pickens was tired, she was always tired on Sunday, it being the maid's easiest and her hardest day; and Dick was disgusted that yesterday's happiness had been spirited away with the morning. So the conversation lagged and only as the meal was almost concluded did it take an unexpected and exciting turn.

It was Miss Wood who began it. "You are from the South, I think, Miss Ogilvie?" she said, addressing Hertha.

"Yes," answered Hertha.

"So am I," called out Dick.

"I am aware of that fact," Miss Wood went on in anything but a cordial tone, "but I wished to ask Miss Ogilvie's opinion on a certain question. I was reading in a magazine to-day," she looked across at Hertha, ignoring the young man at the table's head, "in an article by a southern physician, a man, I understand, of some note, a very sweeping statement. In writing of the Negroes he said that he was confident there was not a pure colored woman in the country above the age of sixteen."

Mrs. Pickens choked over her bread and butter. She had not been brought up to discuss sociological questions and she deeply disapproved of the way Miss Wood frequently introduced them, especially at meal time. Last week they had been treated to a shocking tale of reformatories, but this was the first time they had been drawn into the social evil. Looking at Hertha, she expected to see her with drooping head murmuring a gentle nothing. But she was mistaken. The southern girl's face was on fire, with anger, not shame.

"It's not true," she said.

"And I say it *is* true," cried Dick, bringing his fist down on the table. "That doctor knew what he was writing about. It's damned true, every word of it."

He gulped as he realized he had been guilty of swearing, but Miss Wood, who was in control of the conversation, paid no attention to him. "I am interested in what you say," she went on to Hertha, "for it agrees with my own impression. I have not met many colored people in my work, but I have had a few cases among them, and while I have seen degradation it has not seemed to me any greater than that among the whites of the same class. Such a sweeping statement as this is unjust."

"It's wicked," said Hertha, addressing Miss Wood. Despite every effort at control, she found her chin trembling and her voice shaking a little. "I have known many colored women, servants and teachers, and I know they were pure and good."

"You were fooled," Dick cried excitedly. "That doctor knew what he was talking about. A nigger

wench is always rotten. Why, every southern man knows it."

"Indeed?" Miss Wood looked at him for the first time.

"Dick!" said Mrs. Pickens, in real consternation at the turn the conversation was taking. "You should not talk like that. You owe us an apology."

"I didn't start the subject."

"That's quite true," his landlady replied, "and we'll drop it."

Dick was still defiant. "I'm sorry I swore," he said, speaking more quietly, "but it's a swearing subject. And I won't be picked up as meaning what I didn't intend. A man needn't be rotten to know what a woman's like. And the nigger women are all the same. They don't understand what it means to be pure. And I tell you, the men are worse. Why, every white woman down South's afraid of them. And good reason, too. It ain't safe for them to go out alone at night. Some places it ain't hardly safe day or night. If we didn't string up a black buck every now and then for an example, we'd never be safe. They're a bad lot, the whole crew of them, and they're getting more blasted impertinent every day."

He brought his fist down again and faced them all, his mouth set in its narrow, ugly line, his eyes hard as steel.

Miss Wood smiled over at Hertha. "I'm glad you don't agree," she said.

She was genuinely interested in the subject, and she also rejoiced in showing Richard Brown at a disadvantage. It was her earnest hope that he would not win so attractive a girl as Hertha for his wife.

"No!" said Hertha, "I don't agree." She was close to tears. Unless she told her whole story, nothing that she might say about the Negroes would count, and she was not prepared to tell her story. But her heart was hot with anger, and turning to Dick for the first time in the discussion she cried out, "What do you know about it? You're nothing but a cheap Georgia cracker!" and with this retort rose from the table and hurried to her room.

"Dick, how could you?" Mrs. Pickens asked when the two were left alone together.

"I didn't begin it," he said again.

"No, but you certainly went on with it. How can you expect a girl like Hertha to like you when you talk so coarsely and say such terrible things? She was right, anyway; I'm a southerner and I don't believe such a sweeping statement as that."

"Well, I do," said Dick emphatically, back at the dispute again. "I'm not a nigger lover." He wiped his face with his handkerchief and, getting up, began to pace the room. "That stiff old maid with her darned talk makes me want to kill somebody."

He stopped in front of Mrs. Pickens and took up the subject again. "Haven't I known the niggers? They worked my father's land, when they didn't loaf and get drunk. Pure women! Every mother's child with a different father! I know 'em. Ain't I seen 'em, the splay-footed, stinking devils!"

Mrs. Pickens looked at him, surprised at the intensity of his feeling. She had taken the black people all her life as a matter of course, accepting their failings and shortcomings, never questioning their inferiority, but also never questioning their good qualities and their value in the world in which she was reared.

"I think you ought not to talk that way about any human being," she said gently, "and on Sunday, too."

"They ain't human," Dick declared, and then added sulkily, "anyway not more than half human."

"You don't believe," Mrs. Pickens spoke a little hesitatingly, "you don't think, Dick, that they're our brothers in Christ?"

"No," he roared in answer, "they're no brothers of mine, the dirty, big-lipped, splay-footed bucks. What are you giving me? Want me to take 'em into my parlor, marry 'em to my sisters——"

"Oh, come!" said Mrs. Pickens, with a little laugh, "I'm a southerner, you know! You don't have to talk that stuff to me."

"Well, and ain't I a southerner? No, I'm nothing but a cheap Georgia cracker, that's what I am. But I ain't a nigger lover, anyway. Pretty way to talk to a feller, ain't it, now?" he said, facing Mrs. Pickens, the anger dying in his eyes.

"It was very unkind; I don't wonder you're angry." Then she added, looking keenly at him, "If she thinks that way about you, why don't you give her up?"

"Oh, don't say that!" The lad's whole appearance changed, his mouth softened, the tears started to his eyes. He gripped the table and looked at his woman friend as though she had struck him a blow. "I couldn't stand that. I love her so."

"But you know, Dick," there was a teasing smile on Mrs. Pickens' face, "an attractive girl like Hertha is sure to have a lot of beaux, and she can't marry all of them."

"There isn't anybody else; you can see for yourself there isn't anybody else. I've got to have her. I'll go to the devil if I don't!"

He was so changed, so shaken with feeling, that Mrs. Pickens took the hand that hung by his side and patted it. And then to her amazement and her happiness, for it was good to mother this long-legged piece of masculinity, she found the boy kneeling by her side, his head buried on her shoulder.

"I suppose," he said, looking up after a minute and blinking, "she had an old black mammy that took care of her and loved her and that she loved. Perhaps," contemptuously, "she played with nigger babies when they were cute and small. Nigger babies can be awful cute."

Mrs. Pickens smoothed his ruffled hair, but said nothing.

"Well, I'm a Georgia cracker," he declared next, with desperate calmness, "and she's right in thinking I come cheap."

"She didn't mean it like that!"

"I don't know what she meant," he went on wearily. "I don't half understand her. The only time we get along together is when neither of us says a word."

Mrs. Pickens laughed, and Dick, rising sheepishly to his feet, walked to the open window. When he turned back he seemed his usual self again.

"I'll be out of the way soon enough now," he said. "I'm off on the road to-morrow."

"Yes, dear."

"You couldn't go to her room by and by, could you, and tell her I'm sorry I made such a rumpus?"

"Of course. And I will say, Dick, that I think this time she is as much to blame as you. You only ran down the darkies, but she——"

"She lambasted me, all right. I know I'm not her kind. But what does she think she's going to get?" His anger flared up again for a moment. "Does she expect to find a prince in that precious school of hers? Or perhaps she thinks she'll meet him when she goes to work in Wall Street. That's so, she might, and he'd fall to her, all right."

He grew jealous at his picture and fear overtook him; for as Mrs. Pickens had said, there was more than one beau for a pretty girl, and Hertha was more than pretty—she was a woman whom a man could not forget.

"I've got to have her," he said, looking beyond the reach of the room out into the space in which Hertha's self stood out before him. "I can't see anything without her. You're mighty good to me," he added as he turned to go, "it was a lucky day when Jim Watson steered me up these steps."

"I haven't done anything," Mrs. Pickens made haste to answer, "but I promise after this I'll do what I can."

At ten o'clock she knocked at his door. He opened to her at once, and, seeing his face drop, she knew that he had hoped for a word from another visitor.

"You'll see her at breakfast, Dick; that's all I could get for you. I think she's more hurt than you or I can understand."

Dick sat at his open window until midnight, and tossed on his bed for a long time after that. He remembered the afternoon of yesterday when together they had sat in the boat and had walked among the flowers, quietly living in the spirit of the spring. And now, to-night a thunderstorm had come and drenched them both! He liked his imagery, and, tired of cursing himself, turned over at last and went to sleep.

She did appear at breakfast the next morning dressed for her school, and looking as she always looked, quite composed and very lovely. But when at the door he stopped to say good-by, she, for the first time, went out and walked to the car with him. All the way he did not say a word, so fearful was he of uttering the wrong one. They stood on the corner, both silent, till her car came in sight.

"I hope you'll have a pleasant trip," she said, holding out her hand to him.

"Thank you," he answered, shaking the hand limply.

So fearful was he that he would offend her by holding it a moment too long that he scarcely grasped it at all. But, save for this slight error, certainly on the safe side of the account, he behaved with the utmost correctness. She boarded the car and passed from his sight. But to the inward eye of memory she stood, illumined with the golden light of a lover's worship, aureoled, winged, a creature for the heaven of the enraptured gods.

CHAPTER XXVIII

It was a great relief to Hertha when Dick went away. She had been indignantly angry at his railing against the colored people, "her people," as she had so lately called them; and, added to her anger, was a sense of impotence, of inability properly to answer him. Sometimes she almost believed that it was her duty to tell the whole family the story of her life—only thus could she convince them of the virtue of the Negro. But she shrank inexpressibly from such a revelation. To tell of the goodness of her colored mother meant that she must also tell of the sin of her own mother, a sin accounted so great a disgrace that it was hidden at the cost of a white child's racial integrity. They would enjoy the story, she had no doubt. Mrs. Pickens would love it as pure gossip and Miss Wood would enjoy it equally, though she would cover her pleasure with the veil of the interest of a sociologist. To talk about herself was always repugnant to Hertha, and to speak to these new people of her past was becoming unthinkable. The man she meant to marry should know of it, but she pushed all thought of marriage from her life.

Dick's words, however, rankled daily, and while it was a futile pursuit, destined in no way to help to install the Negro in his rightful place in Mrs. Pickens' household, she spent many hours picturing the Georgia boy's childhood and contrasting it unfavorably with her own. He had told her something of his home, she had seen one of his mother's letters, and she made what was in reality a fairly shrewd guess at his former surroundings. When a little girl she had lived near a white family that counted itself of importance, but whose standards she despised. These people occupied a long, low house, devoid of paint or whitewash, with broken steps from which the railing was long since absent. The rooms of the house opened upon a porch and near the steps was a table with a pitcher and bowl. It was the washroom of the home, and at noon especially it was amusing to watch the men come up and with much spluttering pour water over their faces and run their wet hands through their hair. Ablutions were performed here day and night. The rear of the house was ill-kept and dirty, and once, when Tom brought home a bright piece of rug, thrown out on the dust heap, Mammy rebuked him sharply and burned the offending rag in the stove. The men of the house had been rough and unmannerly and the ugly, sallow women had dipped snuff and looked like slatterns. Probably Dick's sisters (he had told her he had two older sisters) were sallow, with straight thin hair and shrill voices. If they did not dip snuff, they certainly chewed gum, a practice in which Dick himself indulged. "Cheap white trash, dirty white trash," this would be the best word her mammy could say for such people, except perhaps after a good meal or an uplifting sermon when she would admit that they "hadn't had advantages."

And yet it was the memory of her colored mother and not the word of apology from Dick or of excuse from Mrs. Pickens that brought Hertha to the car that Monday morning. Ellen, she felt sure, would have rejoiced at her retort, thrilling with pleasure at it, but Mammy would have been grieved. "Don' make yoursel' cheap, chile," she had once said in rebuke to Ellen, after her daughter had broken out in fierce and angry attack upon a stupid father whom she could not persuade to do his duty by his children. "Keep you' temper. Bad manners carry you back on you' path." Hertha knew that she had not kept her temper, and in recognition of the training from a gentle teacher reared in a school whose doors have long since closed, she made her gesture of apology. But her resentment against the "cheap cracker" was slow in dying out, and she rejoiced as she moved about the house that he was absent from it.

She and Bob became greater friends than ever and took many walks in the park, watching with happy interest the change from spring to full summer. On a Friday afternoon of the week that Dick had left she went to the great department store in New York where she loved to make her few purchases to buy a top for Bob, partly on Bob's account, partly because she herself enjoyed the outing. It was late in the season for tops, but in the interminable story that meandered on through the pleasant paths they traversed in the park Tom-of-the-Woods was spinning his top and Bob wanted a new one of his own. So, in no hurry over her purchase, lingering to look at the lovely silks and satins in the great rotunda, Hertha at last found herself in the basement and, appealing to a floor walker, was directed to the fifth floor where tops were to be found among the toys. She pushed her way into the elevator and, standing well in the rear, waited while the other customers got out one by one until, left alone, the boy at the wheel called out "Fifth floo', upholstery, curtains, toys."

When she was new to the city she had looked curiously at the dark faces of the men who ran the elevators, thinking that some time she might see one that she knew. But this had never happened and she had ceased to expect it. There was no mistaking, however, the pleasant drawling voice, the long drawn out "toy-ese" that came from the man at the wheel. Impetuously moving forward and grasping his arm before he had time to open the door she drew him around to her and cried out "Tom!"

"Yes'm," he answered, looking at her with a serious smile.

He had changed, but for the better, she saw that in a flash. His mouth was more firmly set, about his eyes was a more determined look. He was still a boy, but was fast gaining the outlook upon the world of a man.

"Tom!" Hertha cried again, "what are you doing here?"

She held his arm in hers. "Let go, Hertha," he said in a tone of command, "I must open the door."

She loosed her hold and he drew the door open, but no one entered and they shot on up again.

"How far do you go?" she asked.

"To the eighth."

"Well, stop here!" They were still alone, moving on above the sixth floor. "Stop here, Tom, between these floors, please, please!"

Her voice was full of emotion and he turned his wheel and stopped at her bidding. He had seen her when she entered and his surprise was not great like hers. That she was a beautiful young woman, taking her place in the white world, was what he had expected. He felt pride in her pretty dress and graceful carriage; but he recognized her aloofness, her position with the dominant race. Now, however, as she grasped his arm and greeted him with the old, bright, comradely look, for a moment he felt himself her boy again.

"Why aren't you at school?" she demanded.

He was recalled to his position by repeated clicks of his indicator. "You know, Sister," the name slipped out unawares, "I can't explain a thing like that between two floo's with the bells ringing for me above and below."

"Then come and explain it to me to-night. You must, Tom. I'll do something desperate if you don't come."

Her face was aglow with excitement, her eyes shone and she gripped her silk-gloved hands together.

Doubtful whether he should obey her, he still could not resist her pleading. "All right, I'll come," he promised and sprang the car upward.

They had another moment alone when she slipped her address in his hand and described rapidly the way to reach her home. "Now I know you never broke your word," she whispered as she stepped back in the basement again.

Fearing that the slight delay she had caused in the running time of the elevator might arouse some criticism, she summoned all her courage, drew herself up with a more impressive air than she had ever yet assumed, and addressed the starter.

"I was glad to recognize that elevator boy of yours," she said with condescension, "he comes from my home town."

"Yes, Madam," the man answered.

"He is thoroughly trustworthy," she went on, "I know, for he has worked in my family."

"I thought he was a good boy," the man said, bowing to her, "but we are always grateful for further references."

Hertha nodded and made her way out.

It was not until she was almost at her doorstep that she remembered that she had failed to buy the top.

"I'm glad I didn't tell Bob I was getting it for him," she thought remorsefully, "but how should I remember it when I met Tom-of-the-Woods himself!"

During dinner, Mrs. Pickens, as she looked at Hertha from time to time, sitting silently in her place, thought she had never seemed so lovely. Too often of late she had been worried and tired; to-night her face expressed a glad content, her pale cheeks were pink with color, and every now and then a look of expectancy came into her eyes. Something had happened, of this her landlady felt sure, and she regretted that she was going out and could not properly interrogate her pretty boarder.

We love to speak of the maternal instinct, counting it an attribute of every mother who looks down upon her new-born child; yet in the eyes of many women the madonna look never comes however many children they bring into the world. But Hertha was of no such stock. Her mother had turned toward Death when the gift that she had brought into the world might no longer rest in the hollow of her arm. To her daughter, life glowed purest when looking into the eyes of a child. And in the care and companionship of the first baby that she had carried—a squirming lump in its little white frock, its brown feet kicking futilely against her body, its brown head resting upon her shoulder—she had begun to be about her motherly business. It was the madonna look that Mrs. Pickens saw in Hertha's eyes, the look of pride that her baby was growing up as he should, and of intense anticipation at the talk that she would have with him again.

But when the dinner was over, when Mrs. Pickens had gone out and the others had retired to their rooms, a worried expression came into Hertha's face. She was in the North where color prejudice was not extreme, but she was also in a southern home and she could not decide in what spot to meet her visitor. As she sat in her room she half laughed, half cried over it. Probably in all the house there was no one who, if she explained the situation, would not be glad to have her receive a visit from a boy who had lived in her home town and who could bring her news of her old friends there—such old friends—whether he were black or white. And yet in the whole house there did not seem to be a proper spot in which to receive him. From the kitchen, presided over by a cross and busy white cook, to her bedroom, where only if he were a servant he might enter, he had no rightful place. And in the street or the park—she gasped at the thought of what others would think. There really seemed no possible number of appropriate square feet, except perhaps

in the hall.

Eight o'clock found her in the parlor, the lamp sending a circle of light from the round table in the middle of the room, the last glow of twilight entering through the long windows. Hertha sat at one of them watching the passers-by, eager and anxious, her heart swelling with love for her old home and for the people there for whom she was hungry, hungry as a baby is hungry for its mother's breast. The rooms of the cabin, empty in her dream, were all inhabited now, the door wide open, Mammy moving about washing the dishes, Ellen at work setting up sums for her children at school. Outside the chickens were pecking amid the white sand. The chords of memory were ringing louder and louder, ringing with an intensity that came from their long suppression, calling up pictures of the past, striking now a note of happiness, more often a deeper one of pain. The life of the last nine months was disappearing, drifting into a mist of nothingness, and Hertha Williams was sitting in Mrs. Pickens' boarding-house parlor, watching for a substantial earthly presence out of the life of the past.

"Miss Ogilvie," a voice said from the hallway, "there's a colored boy downstairs who says he's got something for you. He says he's Tom."

"Tom!" said Hertha with a start. Her surprise was no dissimulation. She had surely expected to see him before he entered the house and she could scarcely believe he was really in it. "Why, yes," she stammered, "if it's Tom he's from my old home. Tell him to come up here."

"Tom," the cook called as she went down the stairway, "the young lady says you're to come along." And with this invitation she went back to her work.

Hertha, as she stood there in the parlor, her hands on her boy's shoulders, looking into his face, his good face with its serious forehead, its kindly mouth, believed that even Dick, were he there, must cease his nasty screeching about niggers and see that boys were boys, black or white, and that here was a young American of whom to be proud.

"Oh, Tom," she said as she sat down, and looked at him where he stood in front of her, "You're so good to see!" And again, "Oh, Tom, it's so good, so good to see you!"

"Now you've got to take that chair and tell me every bit of news," she announced when she had stared her fill.

"Reckon that would take quite a space," he answered cheerfully.

"Sit down," Hertha commanded but with a quaver in her voice.

"Oh, I couldn't sit down," Tom answered in an argumentative way. "I's clean forgotten how. I stand so long in the corner of the car, with one hand on the wheel like this," imitating his position in the elevator, "and one arm going out like this," opening and shutting an imaginary door, "that I reckon I'll soon be doing it in my sleep. It ain't natural for an elevator boy to sit."

Hertha's mouth drooped, and yet her heart glowed at her boy's thoughtfulness. From his entrance at the basement door until he left she knew he would look after her and see that she suffered nothing from his presence in her white home.

"Tell me first if they're all well?" she asked.

"Yes'm, they're doing nicely. Mammy's been ailing some this winter, Ellen says, but she's a heap better now."

"What's been the matter?" Hertha questioned sharply.

"Oh, just ailing," Tom said vaguely. "There ain't anything rightly the matter."

"But she's better now?"

"Oh, yes, and Ellen's had a good year at school and the hens are laying. Mammy told about the eggs they had for Sunday breakfast."

"Truly?" Hertha said. "What Sunday?"

"Last Sunday," Tom answered and drew a letter from Ellen out of his pocket.

As he read her all the homely news of the school and cabin her eyes filled with tears though she did not let them fall; only when he was done she asked for the letter and received it.

"And now," she demanded, turning on Tom with a show of severity, "what are you doing in New York? Don't you know you ought to be in school?"

"Yes'm," he answered, shifting his weight from one foot to the other and smiling ingratiatingly.

"What's happened?" Hertha's voice changed from one of severity to one of curiosity.

"Well," Tom made answer, "it weren't such a great show there, so I up and left."

"I didn't suppose you'd do such a thing! What was the matter anyway?"

"They was always rushing a feller. They didn't give yer any time to think."

"Tom!" Hertha broke into laughter, such peals of laughter that the cook, back in the kitchen, listened and smiled as she wrung out her dishcloth, glad that her favorite in the house, who never

made a mite of trouble, was having a good time.

"It weren't a bad place," Tom went on, indulgent to the school, not wishing to do it an injustice, "there's some as likes to jump about like a chicken with its head cut off, but I like a chance to think. You'd have found it right pretty, Hertha—a river not so big as ours but full of lights at sunset. The trees were fine, too, with bigger leaves than we have, and when winter come it was white with snow."

"Oh, I know about that," Hertha interrupted. "I was out in the first snowstorm this winter, and on a sled, too. Did you go coasting, Tom?"

"No, ma'am!" His negative was emphatic. It precluded the possibility that even, for a moment, he had indulged in such a pastime. And after the spoken word he shook his head some seconds in further denial.

"It were this-a-way," he went on, "they thought as there weren't a minute of the day that a feller could have to himself. I reckon they do that way in the army, an' we wore army clothes—play clothes though, for we didn't have no guns. You'd get up in the morning after a cat-nap, an' go about your tasks till breakfast, and when you'd eaten that up an' more too, there'd be drill and lessons and Lord knows what all, I can't remember such a long while as this. But by and by there'd come a minute when the bell didn't ring and a fellow would think he could stop to study something. Perhaps he'd sit on a bench and try to figure out what was in his mind when an officer'd come along and call out, 'What you doing?'"

"And I know what you'd say," Hertha cried, interrupting him. "You'd say, 'I was thinking——'" imitating his drawl.

"Yes'm. And then he'd say, 'Get up, man, and go to work. This ain't no place to think.'

"Well, it was like that all day. I went into chapel, a mighty fine building, you could put most of the cabins at home in it without crowding, and I sat down there alone on the back seat, jes' studying the world here an' the world ter come. I hadn't been there a minute when the Captain comes up and says sharp-like, 'What you doin' here?' 'Jes' thinkin',' I says. 'Can't have that,' he says, 'this ain't no place to think. Go to work!' I walks down under the trees at sunset an' watches the pink turn into soft purple, studying ter find the first star, when some one comes along and calls out, 'Get up, man! Don't sit still like that. Go to work!' At night, when every one's in bed, I thought they'd let up, so I looked out the window. The moon was sailing past the stars, you know, and I was studying it out the way we used ter, and thinking, thinking—But, Lord, 'What you up at this time of night for, boy?' 'the officer asks, tapping me on the arm. 'Jes' thinkin',' I answers. 'You can't do that here,' says he, 'no time for thinking. Go to bed!' So then I studies how to come to New York and after a while I gets here."

Tom finished his recital and smiled down at his listener.

"But Tom," Hertha asked, "wasn't Ellen terribly disappointed?"

"She's reconciled," he said dryly.

Hertha thought of Ellen and the wreckage of her plans, and surmised that there must have been a stormy period before reconciliation.

"It seems strange, Tom," she said at length, "that you should be here in New York alone."

"I ain't alone," he replied, "not exactly alone. I's boarding with a lady from the South."

"Why, that's just the way it is with me," Hertha said. "Isn't that odd!"

"Do you get enough to eat?" Tom asked.

"Plenty. Don't you?"

"Oh, I suppose so," the boy said tolerantly. "It stand ter reason city folks can't feed you like they do at home. When you have to put down a nickel or a dime for every mite o' food you buy, for every pinch o' corn meal, and every orange, it comes hard to set much on the table. And if a feller goes out to one o' these restaurants to feed, why before he's reached the pie, if he don't look out, he's eat up his day's wages."

"Eaten, Tom."

"Yes'm, eaten."

"I do hope you aren't going to be careless in the way you talk, Tom. I hope you haven't learned a lot of new slang."

"Yes'm."

"You look well, anyway!" Hertha said, surveying him carefully.

She was pleased not only at his good health, but at the way he dressed, the evident care he had taken to be neat and cleanly. Her pride in him grew for she could see that he had improved as he had taken on responsibility. Evidently it had thus far worked well for him to break loose from his women folk and school and to shift for himself.

"What you doing, Hertha?" Tom questioned.

She told him a little of her life, her pleasant room upstairs, her work at stenography. But she preferred to listen, and before long he was again the chief talker, retailing every bit of news, no matter how trivial, that had come in the letters from home. Her eagerness was so evident, and her happiness in seeing him so apparent, that Tom wondered to himself why she had never given them the chance to communicate with her during the months she had been away. As though she sensed his question she said, hesitating, the blood rushing to her cheeks:

"You mustn't think I didn't want to hear from everybody; I did so much. And I sent them cards at Christmas that I was well. Were you at school then?"

For answer he drew from his pocket her gift, and spun the top a moment on his sleeve when it fell to the floor. Hertha picked it up as she had picked up so many of his toys and put it in his brown hand where it descended to his pocket again. She was standing now, looking into his face. "Mammy told me," she said, "not to try to live in two worlds, not until I was sure fixed in the new one and," shaking her head, "it takes a long time to get fixed. But that wasn't the only reason. If I'd written and they'd answered—it's such a little place, sometimes not half-a-dozen letters in the post office—why, every one in Merryvale would have known where I was."

She hesitated, blushing, but she had said enough. The look of anger on the boy's face recalled suddenly to her remembrance the Sunday that they had stopped on the porch of the great house and Lee Merryvale had tried to send Tom home alone. Did he guess the shame of the weeks after his departure, weeks that all her pride had not been able wholly to push from her memory? She shrank at his rough answer.

"You're right," he said. "I's glad you won't have nothing to do with that skunk."

There was a rush of feet on the kitchen stairs, and Bob surprised them both by plunging into the room.

"What are you doing up so late?" Hertha demanded, but Bob did not hear her.

"Miss Ogilvie," he said, all excitement, "the cook told me that Tom is here."

"Yes," Hertha answered, and then with a gesture of introduction, dropping into the phraseology of home said, "Bob, meet Tom."

The little boy showed a moment's surprise, then accepting the race of his hero, Tom-of-the-Woods, as a simple fact, asked eagerly, "Did you bring your top?"

Tom, surprised at this greeting, brought out the top again.

"Come along," Bob cried, and leading the way they all three went out of the house down the stoop.

"You must do awfully well," Hertha whispered as under the street lamp the hero of her story began slowly to wind his string.

"What you been giving him?" he asked, nodding to the little boy whose gleaming blue eyes and intense interest in the proceedings augured more than the mere pleasure in seeing a top spin.

"I've just been telling him a few things," she answered lightly.

She stood on the steps and watched with delight Tom's careful choice of the best spot on the pavement for his spin and smiled to see the two boy-faces, one so pink and white, the other so brown, each intent on the business in hand.

It was a queer trick. Despite the many times Hertha had seen it, she was never quite sure at what moment the top, spinning at a marvelous pace, was caught up by the spinner to disappear in his pocket. And if she felt the illusion, despite her familiarity with it, there was no question but that Bob in the dim light, looking for the miraculous, found it. He regarded Tom as a magician and only hoped for some new manifestation of his power when he straightened himself up and stood before them.

"I must go now," he said.

He looked up at Hertha who stood on the step above him.

"Tom," she said, trying to delay him, "do you go to church?"

"Of course!"

"To Siloam?"

"How'd you guess that?"

"It's the biggest church in town."

Tom smiled. "I reckon you know'd I wouldn't go to any but a big one while I was about it."

"And when you write home tell them all about me, won't you?"

"Yes."

"And we won't lose track of one another again."

He did not reply to this, but with a smile for her and a nod to Bob, walked with his slow, steady gait down the street. Hertha stood by her doorstep fearing to go farther, but Bob tore after his hero and with short, trotting steps that sometimes became a run, accompanied him to the street car, watching as he was carried away out of his sight.

When he came back he found Hertha standing just where he had left her.

"Say, Miss Ogilvie," he questioned, "is it staying in the woods so much makes him black?"

"Why do you ask!" Hertha said sharply; "don't you like him the way he is?"

"Oh, I don't care," Bob replied in a catholic spirit; and added meditatively: "In the Arabian Nights all the genii are black."

CHAPTER XXIX

There are some who make decisions with the sure swiftness of a sensitive film, one moment a blank, the next, by a flash of light, a picture, incisive and clear. Such people, though they may make their share of mistakes, lead on the whole a comfortable existence. But there are others who, like the southern girl occupying the second-story back-room of Mrs. Pickens' boarding-house, find it difficult to determine for themselves the course which they shall take. And to these who wander in the valley of indecision the right path to follow becomes daily more obscured. The more they question the more they are beset with obstacles, mists gather about them, and some have been known to wait in hesitancy, until, without having tasted of adventure, they find that their day is done.

Hertha, however difficult decision might be to her, had determined not to be in this latter group. When her school work was over, she had resolved to settle upon her future; but in the days that followed Tom's visit, when with her lover away there was a chance to stop and think, she had to confess to herself that the paths down which she looked were none of them to her liking. And yet she must apparently choose one of two alternatives or else after seven months of trial start in again with lessened fortune, without a profession and alone.

As she sat at her books late one afternoon, endeavoring to indite a business letter she looked up to find Miss Wood standing at her open door.

"Excuse me," Miss Wood said, "I know you are at work but I wanted to leave you some of my roses. One of our cases—a woman who got into trouble—brought them to me from the country to-day. She did the sensible thing (so few will) and went away with her child to work at domestic service; and now she can come in for the day and leave me something as lovely as this." And she held out a spray of rambler roses.

Hertha took the gift with a shy word of thanks, and after placing the flowers in water invited Miss Wood to sit down.

"No, I'm not going to interrupt you," the older woman said.

"You aren't interrupting," Hertha answered. "Especially," she added, "as I want very much to ask your advice."

To be asked to assume the role of adviser is the most subtle of compliments; and Miss Wood, while murmuring that she feared she would be of little use, took Hertha's rocking-chair by the window and proceeded to look self-conscious, as though she might thus exude wisdom.

"Do you think," Hertha asked, sitting on the little straight white chair opposite Miss Wood, "do you think that it needs any special talent to be a stenographer?"

She put her question hesitatingly, playing the while with her hands, a habit that had lately come to her with the city's insistent hurry and nervous demand for quick thought. Her day at school had been a hard one and only a walk with Bob had brought back courage to face life.

"I certainly think," Miss Wood answered, "that there are plenty of stenographers in New York to-day without talent. I've had some of them work for me."

"Yes," said Hertha with a little smile, "but you wouldn't want me to be that sort!"

The assistant secretary of the Association for Improving the Condition of the Destitute had her share of humor. Smiling back at her interlocutor she proceeded to give Hertha's question the thought it deserved.

"Where do you feel that your talent falls short?" she demanded.

"Oh, everywhere," Hertha answered vaguely, and then added, "it's all so confusing, especially when you have to hurry."

"You haven't been at work long enough to be speeded," her adviser answered. "Perhaps they aren't teaching you well."

"The others get ahead." In the answer lurked a hint of tears.

"I don't believe, then," Miss Wood said, weighing her words carefully, "that you will want to be a stenographer; that is, a stenographer whose whole time is taken up with typewriting and dictation. But you can be a secretary with only moderate skill at stenography if you have other qualifications."

"Probably I haven't got them," Hertha murmured.

"I know you have some of them." Miss Wood became emphatic now, she felt on safe ground. "You have an attractive personality. Why, I should try you in my office, if I had one of my own, the first minute I saw you! You would be courteous to all who came in, and discreet; you wouldn't talk about your employer's business when you went home; and," looking about her, "you are orderly. Oh, you have many qualifications." The last words were vague but Miss Wood left her listener cheered and with returned self-respect. Especially was Hertha pleased that a woman, not a smirking man, expressed a desire to employ her if given the opportunity.

Unfortunately, the next day, in her tussle with a business order, she made such a hodge-podge of words that her teacher laughed. That evening she knocked at Mrs. Pickens' door.

She was welcomed cordially to a comfortable seat while her landlady hastily gathered together the bunch of newspapers that she had been looking over and threw them into a corner.

"What have you been reading about to-night?" Hertha questioned. "A young woman who doesn't know her own mind?"

"I reckon there're plenty of that sort," was the answer, "or if they do know what they want they'll never get it. I just read a modest advertisement in which a refined young woman, graduating from a school of stenography, says she wants a position with an agreeable gentleman. Hours short. How would you like that now?"

"I might like it, but I reckon after he tried me with one of his letters he wouldn't like me."

"Nonsense, then he wouldn't be agreeable."

Hertha was silent, and Mrs. Pickens, seeing that she was in no mood for banter, asked sympathetically, "You're mighty tired, honey?"

Her voice with its southern drawl reminded Hertha poignantly of her mammy. She longed childishly to put her head on the older woman's shoulder as she would have put it on her colored mother's, and be comforted. But she remained in her seat and answered with the single word, "Discouraged."

"It's too hot to work," Mrs. Pickens said soothingly. "I've managed myself to-day to spoil ten pounds of perfectly good fruit."

"What a shame!" Hertha was alert at the disaster. "Why wasn't I here to help you! I know how to cook."

"You're a clever girl. You know the things you ought to know which is a lot more than I do, having been spoiled in my youth. And the things you don't know aren't worth worrying over."

"I don't seem to know how to earn my own living."

"Let some one, who wants to, earn it for you then."

In the silence that followed Mrs. Pickens devoutly hoped that her bluntness had not hurt Dick's cause.

"Of course I can support myself," Hertha said at length in a low voice, "I have already been a companion. I would rather do that again than just to marry for a home. How do you know you are going to like the home you get? If you're a companion you can leave it, but if you're married you're expected to stay on no matter how much you may hate every step you take and dread the thought of to-morrow!"

"Of course," Mrs. Pickens made haste to say, in some consternation, "you mustn't marry if you feel like that!"

Hertha's voice was hardly audible. "I don't feel that way about Dick to-day, but I don't know how I might feel to-morrow."

Her valley of indecision was black indeed; but Bob came to say good-night and she forgot it for a time in her happiness with the child.

June flowered with tropical luxuriance in the city park. Wonderful blue lilies, that Cleopatra might have inhaled for fragrance, floated on the little pond by the side of their less foreign white and yellow neighbors. Roses of all varieties and color grew in straight lines in the Italian garden. Rhododendrons massed the hillside, gorgeous rose color, and honeysuckle and sweet-smelling shrubs lined the paths or clambered over the rustic arbors. There were times when Hertha, country lover that she was, sighed at the studied prettiness of it all and waxed weary at the constant stream of people who never gave Bob or herself a chance to be alone, but it was much better than the view of the East-side elevated; so, though she had made no friend whom she loved as she loved Kathleen, she did not regret her change of residence. But during each day, in the

outing that she allowed herself, far back in her mind, whether feeding the ducks and goldfish or retailing a new phase in the history of Tom-of-the-Woods, there was a sense of irksome responsibility, of the necessity shortly of deciding upon the next step in life.

"I had a letter from Dick to-day," Mrs. Pickens announced to Hertha one evening in the third week of his departure.

She had not mentioned him before, except casually, since the night they had talked in her room.

"What does he say?" Hertha asked.

They were sitting out on the stoop, for the evening was a warm one.

"Oh, nothing very much," Mrs. Pickens answered, "chiefly joking about the dreadful food he gets and how glad he will be to come home."

"Men do care a lot about what they have to eat."

"They surely do. I suppose it's partly because after their work they're hungry, really hungry, and food tastes good to them. I work, too, but when I've been over this house, from top to bottom, and seen that Mary doesn't spoil everything she puts her hand to, I haven't the least desire for my dinner."

"You take it all very hard," Hertha said.

"Do I? Well, I suspect that's because I am incompetent, like Mary, and it makes me nervous and doubly anxious over everything."

"That's the way I feel in class."

Mrs. Pickens glanced anxiously at the young girl noting how fragile-looking she had grown in the past weeks.

"You seemed so well when you came here," she said, "and now you are certainly thin. I hope it isn't my incompetence that has brought the change about."

"You know it isn't," the girl answered.

There was a pleasant silence in which neither felt the necessity of speech and then out of the fast approaching darkness Hertha asked: "Have you spent the most of your life in New York?"

"No, I only came here after my marriage. My life has been an ordinary one. A quiet girlhood, fifteen years of perfect married life, and now, a common struggle to keep from being despondent and to make both ends meet. The best for me is done."

"Fifteen years wasn't very long, was it?"

"One way it seems about fifteen minutes but another way it seems an eternity. It was all my life—I'm only existing now. And do you know," speaking in a low voice into the twilight, "I've never said this before, hardly to myself, but I came very near not marrying my husband. I was young and not romantically in love. He was ten years older and that seemed frightening. If it had not been for my mother, who appreciated him better than I, I doubt if I would have accepted him. Afterward, when we had lived together for months and I had given my whole heart to him, I used to waken in the night and shake with horror at the thought of what I might have lost. When I realized what we would have missed without our life together, I would grow chill with a perfectly unreasoning fear."

"I asked him once if he had ever questioned that he wanted me," Mrs. Pickens went on, "and he laughed and said not since the first May morning when I came to church in a blue gown and sat across the aisle from him. He surely knew his mind, but that's often the difference between men and women!"

Another silence and then Mrs. Pickens went within.

Hertha lingered trying to conceive of a love that had in it no romance and yet blossomed into passionate devotion. And as she strove to imagine such a condition, as she called up Dick's image and saw him playing with her in the snow, sitting by her at the opera, rowing with her in the park, her brain proved for a time obedient; and then the air was suddenly filled with the scent of orange blossoms.

"Oh, it's no use," she said despairingly, "I can't decide." And then in a tremor of excitement and determination, "Next Sunday I mean to have one more talk with Tom."

CHAPTER XXX

The usher at Siloam Church gave a second glance at the very pretty girl whom with considerable ceremony he escorted to a seat. He did not for a moment think of her as white, else resisting her request to remain in the rear he would have placed her in the front pew; but he recognized her as a stranger and wondered as he continued his duties where she might hail from, and whether she

might not be persuaded to regard Siloam as her future church home.

Hertha, her curly hair pushed well about her face, sat in the corner of a seat and scanned the congregation for Tom. She saw him after a few moments in the middle of the center aisle, his forehead knit a little as he followed the service, his whole posture one of comfortable repose. He was enjoying his Sunday rest and, as a preacher's son should, found the church a natural place in which to make himself at home. Hertha thought she heard his voice as the congregation sang the Gospel hymn, and so happy was she watching him that she looked sideways slyly to his seat as with bowed head she listened to the prayer.

"Bless all Thy people, Lord," the preacher was saying, his rich, powerful voice filling the great church like the notes of the organ. "We ask Thy blessing upon us in this our hour of worship. Bless those who live in our midst and those who have come from afar. May they be guided by Thy voice and profited by Thy holy word. Bless all those who are in any ways in affliction or in distress. Send them Thy heavenly light that shines in the eternal brightness of Thy countenance and make plain to them the way of salvation."

"I have come from afar," Hertha thought, "and I surely need guidance." And in reverent attitude she strove to secure the blessing of which the preacher spoke. But the church with its dark-faced congregation recalled her past, and the past brought continually back to her her present problem. She looked over toward Tom and smiled to think that the boy, who when a baby, she had hushed as he lay cuddled up to her in church, should be one to whom she went for counsel. She only dimly realized that to her he was not only her brother, but also the member of a race that she understood better than she as yet understood the white race of which she was now a part. Before the service was over and the preacher's voice gave its last "Amen," she found that the familiar scene, the religious phraseology with its well-worn metaphor but also with its vivid beauty, stirred her to tragic homesickness and brought the hot tears to her eyes.

"Tom!" She had slipped from the detaining hand of the Missionary Sister, a large middle-aged woman who welcomed her effusively to the church, and stopped her boy as he reached the door.

He looked at her in astonishment. "There ain't nothing happened?" he asked in alarm.

"Oh, no," she answered, laughing nervously and moving to one side to let the people pass. "Only that I need to talk with you."

"I don't know where we can go." He stood perplexed, his forehead drawn in thought. His first alarm over it seemed to Hertha that he did not wish to see her and she was hurt to the quick.

"We can walk in the square."

Tom shook his head.

"Yes we can!" she declared, the tears in her eyes. "We've often walked out together." The service with the memories that it called up had shaken her. She had felt her lips trembling more than once this morning and now a rebuff was hard to bear.

"Jes' wait a minute," Tom said. "I'm thinking."

The familiar phrase sent back the tears and brought a smile. Realizing that she must bide her time and confident that Tom would find a way out of any difficulty she stood aside, watching the congregation as it stopped to speak with friend or neighbor or went quickly on its way.

It was the first time she had been to a Negro quarter since her advent to New York and in a short two hours she was wholly at home. Happy in the welcome that came from one after another in the congregation, her loneliness disappeared, and she returned "good mornings" without embarrassment. Before Tom had finished his thinking, two little brown-skinned girls, whose spotless white dresses and gaily flowered white hats were not more fresh and bright than their shining faces, made friends with her. They stood, one on either hand, fingering her dress, and the younger, who was an alert child, asked more than one pertinent question. "Where you run to, chillen?" their mother demanded as she came up, and the soft dialect made Hertha feel as though the query had been addressed to her. As the little girls moved away she turned the question over in her mind, asking it of herself. In these seven months since she had closed the door upon the colored world what path had she taken, down what road had she been running, with whom had she stopped to talk on her way? Naturally mistrustful of herself, she began to question whether she had done any better than one of these children who stopped with her for a moment and then ran on to some new happening.

"I bin fixing to stay here," Tom said coming up to her after a few minutes' absence. "The sexton, he's a friend of mine, and if I lock up after me I can stay right on in the church."

It was a pleasant place to stop for a talk. The windows were open, the air was fresh, and though this auditorium was far larger and more sumptuous than any they had been accustomed to in their childhood, it seemed a natural and good spot for a sober chat.

"Perhaps I'd better tell you about everything that's happened," Hertha declared as they sat down well at the front. Tom nodded assent, and she began her narrative, haltingly at first, but, as she went on, filling it with incidents of her life with Kathleen, her work in the factory, and her decision to move and to study a profession. On her failure to do good work at stenography she laid much emphasis and ended by asking for advice regarding the best way to earn her living.

Tom looked at her soberly and yet somewhere back she felt that there was a hint of a smile.

"You haven't told me about your feller," he declared after she had finished.

During her recital Hertha had been looking straight ahead at the pulpit with its reading-desk and red plush cushion on which rested a huge Bible. Now she turned in her seat and addressed herself directly to Tom.

"What do you know about him?" she asked.

"Nothin'," Tom replied, the smile that Hertha had felt in the background coming to the surface. "It wouldn't be anything but natural if you had a dozen. But Bob told me you had one."

"Bob! How did you have time enough to exchange confidences like that?"

"There weren't any exchange. Before he'd finished the car come. I reckon he was planning to have me give a wave of my hand and send the feller off the earth. What did you give him, Hertha? The kid thought I was a magician."

"Oh, I just told him a story," Hertha answered vaguely, "and used your name. But what did Bob mean? Didn't he like Dick?"

"Jealous, I reckon."

Hertha laughed. "Well, I'll tell you about him," she declared, "I was coming to him when I spoke."

Playing with her handkerchief, her mouth trembling sometimes as she talked, she seemed to Tom both nervous and tired. He had not thought she could so lose her old serenity. But he listened attentively as she told of her meetings with Dick in the library and at the park. As her story continued he grew to like the young southerner for his considerate and unselfish devotion. Looking at Hertha's too slender figure and at her restless hands he felt, as Dick so often felt, that she was not one who should be forced to battle with the world. And he knew, as Dick could not know, her utter loneliness. When he learned that the man was from Georgia he was not altogether unprepared for the close of Hertha's story, the quick breath and furious blush that came with the halting effort to tell of her lover's attitude toward the colored race.

"Oh, I can guess," he said tolerantly, coming to her rescue. "I've heard that kind of man talk. Colored folks are all niggers to him and he ain't got no use for 'em. But lawdy, that don't amount to much."

"But I think it does, Tom," Hertha said tremulously. "When he talks like that, I hate him."

"Have you told him about yourself, Sister?" Tom inquired.

He spoke low, almost in a whisper, looking about him.

"No," was the answer.

"Wouldn't it be easier?"

"Perhaps." And then with a touch of annoyance, "You know how I hate to talk."

"But I wouldn't marry him——"

"Of course!" Hertha stopped playing with her handkerchief and clasped her hands together. "If I decide to marry him of course I'll tell. But I haven't decided, I can't seem to decide!"

Tom looked at her flushed face and said in his slowest, most comforting tone: "What you got to hurry for? Can't a man wait for a girl to take her time? He ain't worth much if he can't."

"But don't you see," Hertha said excitedly, "I can't wait and wait, I've got to decide what I'm going to do. If I have to support myself all the rest of my life I ought to know whether I'm going to be a secretary or not. And then it's easy enough to say to take your time about deciding whether you like a man, but Dick Brown keeps taking things so for granted. And then, just when he seems quite nice, he'll break out with something about the 'niggers' that makes me so angry I can't bear to speak to him again."

"That ain't the worst kind though." Tom spoke with emphasis, a grim look settling about his big mouth. "You can face the one that hates you. The worst is the skulking kind that looks sweet and friendly and acts the devil behind your back."

Again Hertha heard him flay the man to whom she had so unreservedly given her love, and again she shrank from his bitter words. But sitting there in the church, with the homely symbols of religious life about her, with the sun streaming through the crude stained-glass windows, she saw clearly the danger and the sin from which she had escaped. And she saw too that Tom, her young but manly brother, would hate with an animal-like intensity the man who should dare to do her an injury. She listened with deepened respect to what he went on to say.

"You can't make a Georgia cracker like Negroes, Hertha, not if you was to work on him all your life. If you find you get to love him, tell him everything and then let it drop. There ain't no good in going over things. Up here in the North nobody thinks much about folks' past, they're too busy. If he's good to you, and works hard and plays square, there ain't no need for you to worry because he can't see like you do. He ain't good enough for you, of course. No man is. But a husband ain't

to be judged by his opinions on the race question."

He touched her arm gently in a caress. "It has to be good-by, Sister," he went on, "the white world don't meet the colored world to-day. Look at this church here. It's close to white folks' homes but no one ever thinks to come in to worship. I've sat here and thought of it many times. We ain't really men and women to them. I reckon they don't think we're children of God."

"That's it," Hertha cried, "and how could I live with any one who thought that?"

"They all think it," Tom answered.

"No, they don't," said Hertha angrily; "my teachers didn't at school."

"They were women," Tom replied. "Women have more religion than men."

He rose from his seat and stretched himself, his long arms extended, his short coat-sleeves revealing a great expanse of wrist and hand.

"What are you growing so tall for?" Hertha asked, looking up at him.

"I reckon I have to." He dropped his arms to his sides. "It's a mistake fer it takes a lot of coat and pants to cover me, and in the bed the sheet don't come up high enough and the blanket's forever slipping by on the floor."

"Oh, you'll get sick," his former sister and nurse cried, looking so troubled that Tom had to laugh.

"Don't you worry," he answered, smiling down at her, "I've had such a good bringing up that I can't go wrong now, not anyways."

Nothing that he could have said would have meant so much. She accepted his words in their fullest meaning and felt uplifted, comforted. Whatever she might make of her own life, she had helped wisely to mold his. If she never saw him again she would know that her influence would stay with him to the end, blossoming in honorable thoughts and kindly deeds.

"And so you advise me to marry?" she said, rising too and trying to speak with a laugh.

"No, ma'am!" with decision. "I ain't advising you to marry. I's just advising you not to give up marrying."

"Well," with a little shrug, "it amounts to the same thing."

"What you got to hurry for?" Tom returned to his old charge.

"If I don't decide I can't stay where I am. There is Miss Wood one evening telling me to go on with my work—she loathes Dick—and Mrs. Pickens the next telling me to accept a good husband. That's what it's like when Dick's away, and it's a million times harder when he's around. I'll move if I give him up.

"I met an old man this winter," she went on, "a friend of Kathleen's. He had a terrible philosophy, everything was going to the dogs. You'd have thought that the world would never get any better. But he said one thing to me. He told me to dance and have a good time and to be sure to keep out of the conflict. That was the way he put it, 'Keep out of the conflict.'"

"That might be good advice if you could."

"I suppose you could," Hertha said slowly, "if you made up your mind to; just to have an easy, comfortable time. Now Kathleen was always in the conflict. She was trying to change the world, to change everybody—at least everybody who was poor. And here I can't decide what to do with my own life."

"It's a heap easier," Tom remarked meditatively, "to run other folks' lives than it is your own."

They had walked down the aisle to the corridor and now stood by the closed door.

"I haven't made my mind up yet about marriage," Tom said. "It's a great risk, it sure is. I was reading the other day about trial marriages. Seemed like that might not be a bad idea—each agree to try each other out for a time and then if things suited, match up for good."

"Where did you read that?" Hertha asked, curiosity surmounting disapproval in her voice.

"In the paper," was the all-sufficient answer. "It were only a suggestion."

"Was, Tom."

"Yes'm."

"I'm afraid it's a suggestion that most people would think wicked," she gave a resigned sigh, "like divorce. Well, I'm glad we had this talk."

"So am I," Tom made hearty response. "And that wasn't a bad idea, Hertha, to keep out of the conflict."

"There's one thing I want you to promise me," the girl's thoughts turned from herself to her old home. "I want you to promise to let me keep in touch with you. You're nearer than the folks down South. Promise that you won't go away without my knowing."

"Sure," he answered.

"And one thing more, if you hear from them at home that any one is ill, or that they're going to move, you must let me know. I mean to write to them before long, I'm going to settle a lot of things in my mind when school's over, but I rely on you to let me know the news."

"Yes."

"It's a promise?"

"Yes, Hertha, it's a promise."

She put her hand in his to say good-by. "You're my boy, you remember." There was a world of gentleness and love in her voice. "Do you know, I told Kathleen and then Dick that I had a brother, a little brother who was in school."

"I's feared you shouldn't have said that, Hertha."

"I had to have some relatives, didn't I? And I just naturally had you. And we'll never forget one another. And I tell you," looking with wet eyes back down the long aisle of the church to where the Bible lay on the reading-desk, "I know what heaven's going to be like. It isn't going to have any golden streets. Think how horrid and hard and glaring they'd be! It will have spreading trees and flowers, lilies and asphodels and green grass—yes, and white sand; and I engage you now to go out walking with me the first Sunday."

The tears were in his eyes as well as hers. "I'll love to be there waiting fer you, Sister," he answered.

She gripped him in her arms for a moment and then with a gulping sob opened the door and went out into the street.

CHAPTER XXXI

"Keep out of the conflict!"

This admonition ran through Hertha's mind as she went to school Monday morning. She saw herself standing at the little table in the restaurant with the cynical old major looking at her kindly, admiringly. The conflict to which he had alluded had been that of the working-class, but his words might include all battle whether of labor or of race. If she married Dick she would be out of the conflict, out of the eternal worry of earning a living. But she would also be out of the conflict of race, forever removed from the life that had been hers such a short time ago. If she accepted the love of this young man from Georgia with his talk of "black wenches" and "buck niggers," she accepted complete ostracism from her past. And not only ostracism,—she had grown to realize that this was likely whatever course she chose,—but the past that had meant so much, that had helped to make her what she was, gentle-mannered, deft, well-educated, this past she must see despised. Dick might forgive those years but only if she would forget them. He would be ambitious for them both, and she must blot from her mind everything that touched upon the shocking disgrace, for so he would account it, of her world until eight months ago.

Sophie Switsky was in the conflict still, battling with the oppression that centered about her whirring machine. Kathleen was in it, demanding sunshine and health for the many in poverty. But if Hertha Williams married a Georgia cracker she left her conflict, turned from the battlefield into a place of quiet and safety. Ellen had predicted that when her sister went into the white world she would never join in the coarse abuse of the colored race; but if she married Dick she tacitly linked herself to these cruel lies. She abhorred the thought, and yet, all the morning, on her way to work and seated in the ill-ventilated classroom, she found the major's advice buzzing through her head, "Keep out of the conflict! Keep out of the conflict!"

In the afternoon, walking in the park with Bob, a new idea occurred to her. Why not, when school was over, try for a position as nursery governess? Such a place would be a grade above anything open to Hertha Williams, since as a governess she would not be a servant but would be received at her mistress's table. Loving children, inclining, too, to an outdoor life, she might in this way secure a summer in the country and postpone her final decision. Tom's comfortable advice to take her time remained with her, offering encouragement to this new plan. But the difficulty in the way of securing a position, the unfamiliar machinery of employment bureau, of advertisement, made her hesitate. It would mean publicity, the answering of questions, the entering of a new and perhaps unfriendly home. She who hated change ought not to have to make her way in an unfamiliar environment so soon again.

"Tell me about Tom-of-the-Woods," Bob demanded after she had been silent for many minutes.

"No," Hertha answered.

"Aw, come on," Bob said. "Tell about the night with the owl."

"Not now!"

"Aw, come on. That's the part I like best. I bet he could see in the dark like a cat. Couldn't he

now? Couldn't he see everything just the same, night or day?"

"There are the ducks!" Hertha cried, and hurried him to where the birds paddled in the lake and gave entertainment enough to push Tom-of-the-Woods into Bob's limbo of forgetfulness if not into hers.

The week went wearily on. The warm days were conducive to idleness and in her discouragement Hertha worked erratically, studying far into the evening one night to drop her books entirely the next. On Thursday as she sat in her room looking idly at the sunset light as it faded from the sky, Mrs. Pickens knocked at the door.

"May I come in?" she asked. "Don't make a light," as Hertha having given her a seat started to strike a match; "it's pleasant to talk in the dark."

The two sat near one another looking into the trees.

"I'm thinking of a plan for the summer." Hertha was the first to break the silence.

"Not one that would mean leaving here, I hope?"

"It would mean leaving here. If I needed it would you give me a recommendation as a nursery governess?"

The question was utterly unexpected, and Mrs. Pickens answered with a jest. "Certainly. Shall I count Dick as the babe whom you have been teaching?"

"I wish you wouldn't think so much about Dick!" There was irritation in the girl's tone and dropping her banter Mrs. Pickens gave assurance of her willingness to be of any service. "I suppose you want me to speak for your character," she went on, "and I can certainly answer for your disposition. You're the easiest person to get along with I ever met. But Bob's mother is the one to testify to your ability with children. You've been a godsend to her this spring. How the child has waked up. He's much brighter and more interesting than before you came."

Stirring a little in her chair, leaning against the window to look out into the approaching night, Hertha made no answer to her friend's praises and seemed to have forgotten the request that she had just made. After a little she said slowly, "I had a brother——"

"*Had* a brother? Why do you speak in the past? Nothing has happened to him, has there?"

"No, oh, no, but Bob makes me think of him when he was little, when he belonged to me. A little child belongs to you. Partly for that reason I'd like to be with little children."

"I'll do what I can to help you, but why not get references also from the South?"

The question was asked hesitatingly and with no small amount of inquisitiveness. The mystery of Hertha's past, that mystery that so deeply interested Dick, was growing in importance to his landlady. Perhaps this evening in the friendly dark she might be able to probe it. Despite her hope, she expected some monosyllabic reply followed by a silence that would prevent a continuance of the subject. She was totally unprepared for Hertha's frank answer.

"You can see," the girl said, "that I have no connections now in the South. No one writes to me."

"Yes?" Mrs. Pickens ventured. Her voice was tender, sympathetic, trembling with curiosity.

Hertha said nothing further but looked out where the lamps had been lighted and glowed golden against the deep trees. Fearing lest she might lose the confidential talk she was expecting, the older woman continued gently: "I've often wondered what separated you from your people. Do you want to tell me what it was?"

"Some one's sin."

The words were spoken into the night. The girl did not move her head as the older woman, with a cry, came to her.

"Your birth?" she whispered.

In the darkness Hertha nodded assent.

"Oh, my dear," stroking the soft curly head that was turned from her. "And you didn't know your people?"

"No, I was brought up among strangers."

"They were not kind to you perhaps?"

The head that Mrs. Pickens was stroking turned instantly from her touch and a voice said with a note of anger, "Not kind? They were heavenly kind. They did everything they could for me."

"You must have loved them then?"

"Of course, I loved them. I loved them better than any people in the world."

"Then you have some friends in the South whom you can turn to now, haven't you?"

The question was asked in a bright voice as though hoping to bring something of cheer to the

listener.

But Hertha with a shake of her head turned away and again looked into the street.

"Have you quarreled? Somehow I can't think of you as quarreling, but I know how clans battle in the South. Did something occur to make you angry before you left? If that's so, you'll soon make it up and everything will be right again."

Hertha breathed fast. "I can't see them any more," she whispered.

"Tell me why. Perhaps I can see some way to make things right."

"You? Why, it's people like you and Dick who separate us!"

"What do you mean?" The woman rose and in the darkness tried to peer into the girl's face. "What have Dick and I to do with it?"

She groped for some clue to this enigmatic statement. What a ridiculous thing to say. What indeed had she and Dick to do with it? What unless that they were southerners? And then there flashed before her eyes a paragraph in one of the southern newspapers that she was always reading, a half-dozen lines telling of a girl hidden among the Negroes, later to receive money and a name. She saw the column in the paper, at the top of the page to the right, where the extraordinary story stood. She had a poor memory but some things she visualized unconsciously but unforgettably, and this had been one. She could see every word now, as though she were reading it, except the name.

"What have Dick and I to do with all this?" she repeated with an attempt at a laugh. "We don't believe in separating families. But it wasn't your own family of whom you were speaking, was it? Didn't they do anything for you?"

"Yes," Hertha answered. "When my grandfather died last October he left me two thousand dollars."

"Ah!"

That was all. The southern woman stood clutching a chair, her head reeling, the floor seeming to move beneath her feet. She was face to face with the incredible tale that her memory told her she must credit as the truth. The mystery then that surrounded Dick's princess, his beautiful lady to whom he gave his humble devotion, was humiliating and sordid. Disgrace, hidden by a life among Negroes. Worst of all, the smut of the blacks upon her since she desired to be with them again. This was the reason she had been so angry at Dick when he had raged against "niggers." She had lived with them in their dark alleys, she had eaten and slept with the kinky-haired slave-race!

Slowly feeling her way past the dainty white bed, Mrs. Pickens reached the door. Her hand was on the knob when Hertha struck a match. Suddenly the room was flooded with the yellow gas-light, blinding them both. The older woman put her hand over her eyes to shield them from the glare, and then resolutely drew it away and stared into Hertha's face. She expected to find some change, some sign of those former detestable surroundings. But in the bright glow of the light the girl was more exquisite than ever. She tried to speak, to announce that she knew the truth, but she could not charge this aristocratic-looking young woman with the disgrace of having lived with "niggers." Without a word she turned the knob and left the room.

Hertha looked after her, startled. She had meant to tell her whole story, but something in the silence that had followed her answer to Mrs. Pickens' last question frightened her, and too timid to speak further she had sought the comfort of the light. Then she saw her landlady, a strange, disgusted expression on her face, her nostrils distended as though detecting some distasteful smell, turn away and leave her alone.

The girl went to the window and pulled down the shade. Turning to the mirror she looked at herself in the glass. The face that looked back at her was thin and white, with sad lines about the dark eyes, but it was familiar, the same face that Mrs. Pickens had seen since she had come into this home. What was there that should make this woman gaze at her with repugnance and then go away? She pressed her hands upon her waving hair. Had she guessed something worse than the truth, something that Hertha herself had believed the truth until a short time ago? Did she think she was a Negro? If she thought that! Leaving the mirror the girl seated herself in a chair and wearily reached out to the table for the book that she was studying. But before touching it she drew back and with a gesture of pain turned and looked across the room to the closed door. A chair stood near the doorway and leaning against it again she saw her landlady, her hand gripping the back, her every feature breathing disgust. She could not rid herself of the figure, it would not leave the room. And worse, shadows were gathering about it, black shadows from which the figure shrank. They moved restlessly about, these shadows, by the door and by the bed. They stood dark in the gas-light—black faces with big, clumsy lips! black hands with red palms; heads with black, woolly hair. Shutting her eyes, she summoned all her strength to efface with life's reality the phantoms of a white world's hate. She saw her old friendly home, her mammy, Ellen, Tom. She looked into their kindly faces and touched their hands. Then with a start her eyes opened and the shadows gathered about the figure at the door.

There were noises in the room—big, deep voices, calling from between thick lips. From heavy throats came coarse words and now and then a grating laugh. The figure shrank again and gripped harder at the chair.

Why was the room so close? She had not closed the window when she had lighted the gas. But the air was full of odors, thick odors, that stifled. The figure drew back, its face drawn with disgust, trembling at contact with the fetid smell.

In her chair at the table Hertha shrank within herself. She drew up her feet, crouching against the cushions. Were they coming to her, too, these figures? She called on them to leave her, but they came on. With staring eyes she implored them to stop, to pass her by, but they only leered and drew the closer. And as they came she shrank back further in her chair.

Then for the first time in her life she felt shame at her uprearing. The home that had been sacred to her, her refuge, was defiled. The black faces danced before her eyes and she cowered, the coarse voices called and she pressed her hands over her ears. The thick odors enveloped her, and her face changed, her nostrils quivered, and with a movement of disgust she dropped her head upon the table on her outstretched arms.

In the meantime, within her room, Mrs. Pickens restlessly examined her piles of papers, seizing and discarding, searching feverishly for a date until at length, on a yellowed sheet, she found what she sought. The incredible was true. There was the forgotten name, "Ogilvie!" Viewed in print, after an hour's reflection, the story was less horrible than when it had flashed upon her in Hertha's bedroom. A judge for a grandfather was an alleviating circumstance. But the reality was bad enough. That the girl still clung to the Negroes was the worst feature. Common sense must soon show her, however, both the wickedness and the folly of such an attitude. She put the paper carefully away, resolved that Dick should see it when he came back home.

CHAPTER XXXII

"Dick!"

It was Friday afternoon. Hertha had returned from school, her books on her arm, happy in the realization that in one week vacation would be at hand. She had no idea that she should find Richard Brown standing in his doorway, smiling at her.

Never had he seemed so bright and attractive. He had taken off his business clothes and wore a white flannel shirt and white trousers. He looked a young happy boy, and was indeed supremely happy to be back and with her again. "Dick," she had cried and started to shift her books that she might hold out her hand. But before she could accomplish her purpose he had her in his arms. Only for a moment; so swift a moment that she could not draw away or resent it, her surprise was too great.

"I didn't do anything," he cried quickly, "I reckon we were both startled. My, but it's good to be back home! Here! let me take your books. Ain't it hot though! The first hot weather I've struck yet. Makes you think of the South only they can't get it as warm down there as up here where the sidewalks are baking all day. Guess what I saw this noon? A boy frying pancakes on the pavement. Just dropped the mixture on the hot stone and in a jiffy the cake was done, nice and brown and crisp around the edges. That beats it our way, don't it?"

He spoke with reckless extravagance, anxious to retrieve any mistake he may have made, looking at her in the meantime with devouring eyes. There was nothing that he missed, and though he did not speak of it he cursed inwardly the work that made her pale and thin and that he believed had caused the harassed expression in her face.

"You look mighty well in your new clothes," Hertha said, relieving her embarrassment by surveying with exaggerated approval his white apparel.

"Do I? Glad you like 'em. I found some of the fellows were going in for them and I thought I would. I mean to dress better anyway. A man on the road ought to have the latest thing in style and know how to carry it, too. I've improved in neckties, haven't I?"

"Indeed you have. I wish you'd give me that splotchy one. I hate it."

Going to his bureau Dick secured the offending tie and handed it out to her.

"What are you going to do with it?" he asked curiously.

"I'd like to burn it in the kitchen stove, only up here there aren't any stoves where you can burn things up. I'll have to use it for patchwork."

She smoothed the glaring red and orange silk in her hand and then, with Dick carrying her books, went to her room.

As he turned to go, nodding to her from her threshold, she again spoke of his suit. "You're ready for tennis. The men dress like that when they play here in the park."

"Do they? I'll have to play then. Don't know a thing about it, do you?"

"No, I never had a chance to play games."

"Neither did I. They didn't go in for that sort of thing where I came from. But it's never too late to

learn. Can't we get a net and play this summer?"

"Perhaps."

Though she only said "perhaps," her face brightened and she looked with pleased expectance at this young man who had brought so much happiness and jollity into her life. Since she had sat on the sled and let him draw her over the snow in the city square, he had given her many gay, entertaining times.

"I'll get some rubber-soled shoes," she called out, "and you must get some too."

Brushing her hair and changing her gown need not have made her hot, but when she had finished dressing, her face was flushed and she sat down trembling. She had slept but little the past night, but more serious than lack of sleep was her new sense of shame. Of a sudden to-day in the classroom she found herself asking what the girls would think if they knew that she had a black mother, that she had eaten with her, performed for her myriad services? What would they think if she told of her black sister who for years had paid her way to school? The white world's phantoms were clouding her spirit, turning her affectionate gratitude into shrinking fear. They were standing between her and a past that she loved. And as the black shadows followed her to her work so she found them back in her room. She dreaded to look toward the door.

The trees without beckoned, and walking to the open window she looked across the street. The familiar scene brought calmness and resolution. She would tell Dick everything. No matter how difficult or humiliating it might be, it would be better to tell him herself than to try, as she had tried last night, to relate her story to some one else. And she must share her secret. She could not stay another night in this house without the comfort of self-revelation. Otherwise the shadows would drive her to sickness and despair. Dick loved her, and love carried with it sympathy and compassion. For the first time her heart warmed at the thought of his protecting affection; and with her resolution firmly taken she walked steadily, head erect, through the doorway out of her room.

It was a gay dinner-table. Mrs. Pickens, who had been constrained in her manner toward Hertha at breakfast, dropped her reserve for the time being and entered into Dick's raillery. Miss Wood was in good humor, and Dick was bubbling over with entertaining stories. He was interesting, too, in describing the country through which he had passed, and made vivid to them the small town up-state with its shaded streets, its growing shops, its dingy hotel and execrable service. The young commercial traveler had become very discriminating in regard to rooms and meals.

"Most of the waiters," he explained, "know only about ten words of English nowadays. You're lucky if you strike one who knows twenty. Once in a while I'd get a darky and you bet I was glad! Sambo's the boy for me! Serves your meals all right and sense enough to laugh at your jokes. We always got along fine."

He did not look at Hertha as he said this, but he hoped that she received it in the spirit of goodwill in which it was given. He was friends to-night with all the world.

They lingered long over the meal, and when at length they rose, Dick declaring that he could eat no more, the long twilight was almost over.

"Shall we sit on the stoop?" he asked, and Hertha nodded assent. Mrs. Pickens went out with them, and for a few minutes the three remained together, watching the people who came and went on the broad sidewalk, saying little, feeling much. Then Hertha rose and Dick with her.

"I'm going to say good-night to Bob," she explained to the young man, "and then don't you want to come down and we can take a walk?"

It was the first time, in all their acquaintance, that she had taken the initiative in anything they did together, and Dick's happiness was so great he could only awkwardly nod in assent as she moved away.

"I've been seeing 'em," he said as he watched the bright spot her white dress made down the street, "girls and girls; and there isn't one that could sit in the same room with her without looking like two cents! Why, they aren't in the same class. They aren't on the earth with her, they're just things fluttering round!"

He stopped and waved his hands at the utter futility of language as a means of expressing his admiration. "And she's as good——"

"Dick," Mrs. Pickens interrupted, "don't count on her too much."

She was becoming excited now that they were alone together, and wanted to tell the story that, for the past twenty-four hours, she had been turning over in her mind, aghast at its sordidness, yet fascinated by its extraordinary novelty. The words were on her lips that should reveal Hertha's birth, but her instinct as a story-teller held her back. It was too wonderful a tale to be spoiled by a hasty recital. Later, this evening perhaps, she would retail it with proper deliberation. But her few words had roused Dick's jealousy.

"Why can't I count on her?" he asked sharply. "Has any one been around?"

"No, it isn't that. I've something important to tell——"

"Then I'm going to count on her," interrupting savagely. "I won't stop counting on her till she's

my wife or some other man's—and if that happens he'd better not come near me! But, shucks, what's the good of talking! What's she looking so tired about? She mustn't work so hard. Why don't you stop her?"

"She's been speaking, Dick, of taking a place this summer as nursery governess. It would give her a chance to go into the country."

"What!" The young man's voice was excited and angry. His good manners forsook him and he spoke to his landlady as though she were a servant. "Don't you let her do that, do you hear? She needs a vacation and I won't have her going away."

"Really," Mrs. Pickens answered with asperity, "you speak as though I had authority over her. I'm not her mother—far from it!"

"Oh, damn!" and he turned to move away.

His utter ignorance coupled with his rudeness, made his companion, despite her well-laid plan, cry out, "I've something for you to see; it was in one of my newspapers. It concerns you and you ought to know. It's about——"

"Put the old thing in my room," he called back as he walked down the street.

Watching his fast disappearing figure, Mrs. Pickens decided that was just what she would do. He should read the tale for himself, and she would then have the privilege of giving him advice and comforting sympathy. She would put the paper where it would greet him when he returned. She went within, very much excited, and upon his cluttered bureau, with his traveling case tumbling its contents over the fresh linen cover, she laid the important sheet. That it might at once convey the desired news she marked the paragraph with a pencil lying at hand. "Will he mind so very much?" she asked herself. "It's all in the past." And then, expectant, hoping that in the end all would come out right with the young people, she left the room.

Dick, for his part, as he walked off forgot his landlady in his dismay at the thought that Hertha might go away. He had made so many plans for those vacation days! He was hot with disappointment when a stumbling step made him glance down to be soothed by the sight of his white flannels. The remembrance of Hertha's half promise to play tennis made him believe that no governess' place was yet secured, and he resolved to buy a net the next morning that they might that afternoon start in to play. They would play Sunday, too, if she desired. The devil might get him for a Sabbath breaker for all he cared! The grim imagery of his religious teaching came to him and he pictured Hertha and himself, tennis rackets in hand, dragged down to the fiery pit. Then he smiled whimsically. His Georgia home with all its crudities, its rough, unpainted houses, its poorly tilled fields, its ignorant, frenzied religion was immeasurably far away. Turning to the present and its shining hope he followed his lode-star down the street.

CHAPTER XXXIII

It was the first hot evening of summer. Families were sitting on door-steps and verandas breathing in the night air as it came up from the city's baking streets, hoping for a refreshing ocean breeze. But no breeze came, the leaves on the trees hung motionless, and the smoke from the chimneys moved in a straight line upward. Dick found Hertha alone on the stoop with Bob, and man and boy exchanged pleasantries, the latter exhibiting much pride at his ability to make jokes. To Dick's surprise Hertha was the first to make a movement to go. Kissing the child good-night, and laying her hand for a second on Dick's arm, she walked with him along the street. Bob, though disconsolate, made no attempt to follow them, knowing that with growing darkness it was wisest for him to be inconspicuous, a small figure in the shadow whom parents might forget and fail to send early to bed.

The two figures whom his eyes followed did not go back toward their home but crossed the avenue at the entrance to the park. They walked very slowly, stopping as they reached the first group of trees. He wondered what they were saying. Perhaps Miss Ogilvie was telling Dick one of her stories.

What she was saying was this: "I've something to tell you about myself but I don't know how to begin."

Dick's heart leaped at this sign of confidence. "Begin anywhere it's easiest," he said, "and don't begin at all unless you want to."

"I do want to. At least I think you ought to know. It isn't fair to you not to tell."

"Fire away then," Dick cried cheerfully. "I hope it means that there's something for me to do. Isn't there a cruel father who needs to be hunted in his lair, or an unforgiving sister who is as ugly as you are beautiful whom I can melt with my pleadings? Don't have a fortune anywhere for I want to do everything for you myself."

"No," Hertha said, making a vain attempt to laugh, "there isn't anything like that."

"Whatever there is," Dick's voice trembled in his earnestness, "it can't make any difference to me."

I couldn't love you any more, and there isn't any possible thing that could make me love you less."

His shaking voice and the intensity of his speech made Hertha unconsciously draw away. Always hurt by his passion, she stopped for a moment wondering if she were not making a mistake, if she should not leave before it was too late with everything unsaid. But as she looked down the long street the loneliness of a life by herself made her keep her resolve. Holding herself tense she walked quietly by the man's side.

They were under the arc-light that flooded the entrance to the park. Large trees rose about them, their branches meeting overhead. To the right and left small paths wound among the shrubbery to disappear in the darkness. The air was sweet with the fragrance of syringa and honeysuckle and of the fresh, warm earth.

"Shall we walk a little way?" Dick said. "It's jolly hot, isn't it?" fumbling at his stiff collar. "Girls have the bulge on a man this weather when it comes to clothes."

Hertha had intended going to the lake, but the way looked so lonely, so apart from the city lights and sounds, that she shrank from taking one of the paths. "Don't you want to smoke?" she asked. "I'd like to talk with you when you're enjoying your cigar."

The young man laughed and started to comply with her request, but for the first time that evening a breeze sprang up and extinguished his match. With an exclamation of annoyance he moved out of the light into the shrubbery searching in his pocket for a second match. Hertha still stood in the broad light of the road.

Meanwhile, from his vantage ground at home, trying to guess at their possible talk, Bob kept watch, deciding in his mind that what they said was probably not worth much as Miss Ogilvie kept her best stories for him. He had learned from Dick that she had never once told that young man of Tom-of-the-Woods. As he sat meditating he noticed a boy hurry up the street from the car-line below, who, as he came under the near light, proved to be none other than Tom-of-the-Woods himself. With a jump of pleasure, forgetting that he was in hiding, Bob left his perch and ran out with a greeting.

"Hello, Tom!" he called.

Tom looked at the little boy for a moment in perplexity, and then without answering started to walk past.

"Want to see her?" Bob asked cheerfully.

Tom stopped. "Yes," he answered.

"I can tell you where she is," Bob went on cautiously. "What'll you give me if I let you know?"

"I'm in a hurry," Tom said. "Don't fool."

"Gimme your top?"

Tom thrust his hand in his pocket and brought the top out. Grabbing it with one hand, Bob pointed with the other. "See her over there?" He indicated the white figure across the street. "That's her. Say," he called after Tom as he dashed away, "will it vanish for me?"

"Bob, come to bed," came a man's voice from within the house, and, accepting the inevitable, Bob went within.

Tom had hurried across the street. He was the bearer of bad news and had no thought for anything but the white figure ahead to whom he must bring sorrow. Running to where Hertha stood in the bright light he touched her on the arm saying gently, "Sister!"

The girl started back with a cry. The sight of her brother, here in the night, unnerved her. Was he God's messenger, come out of the shadow of the past, to stop her in the path she was about to take? The thought rushed through her mind as she gave her startled cry.

Then behind her came a sound like the bellowing of some wild creature, and Dick flung himself upon the Negro. With a blow he struck the lad to the earth, and holding him fast beat him fiercely.

"Let him alone," Hertha cried, pulling with all her might at Dick's arm. "He did me no harm!"

The man never heard her. His eyes bulging, his breath coming quick, he pounded the prostrate boy with a fury that made Hertha cry out in horror.

"What's up?" A group of men came running in from the street. "What you got?" one demanded. "A nigger? Gimme a turn at him."

Moving a moment from where he bent over Tom to turn to his questioners, Dick gave the lad a chance to wriggle from his grasp. In an instant the black boy was on his feet and running from his enemy into the darkness of the park.

"Catch him," Dick cried, leaping up and calling on the others. "Lynch the nigger!"

The men, there were a dozen by this time, scattered among the trees, Dick leading in the pursuit. Some ran from curiosity, interested to learn the turn events would take; others were bent on

executing vengeance. None of them listened to Hertha who in her sweet, light voice was reiterating that the boy had done her no harm.

It was very dark away from the lamp and Tom, who had dashed down one of the paths, turned among the trees and slipped along close to the bushes. He knew nothing of his way but he hoped in the obscurity to elude his pursuers until, weary with their search, they should turn back. He cursed himself for having brought trouble upon Hertha. "If I can just hide for a space," he thought, "I reckon they'll all go away, and she won't be bothered no more." And crouching under a great bush filled with snow-white blossoms he waited for the men to pass.

It would have turned out as he desired had not his first pursuer been a man from Georgia to whom a hunt for a Negro's skin was as justifiable as a hunt for the skin of a rabbit. And Dick's fury was at its height, for he had seen Tom touch Hertha's arm. He bent to the ground, deaf to everything but his work, and slipped among the bushes until he found Tom crouching close. Then with a great cry he sprang on the boy again.

His grasp slipped and Tom was up and on once more, but this time men closed in about him to the right and left while Dick bellowed behind. Running on ahead as fast as his strength would carry him his foot slipped, and he fell headlong on the path close to the lake. Before he could rise Dick was striking him cruelly in the face.

"Come on, boys," he cried, "somebody get a rope. We'll string this damned buck on the nearest tree!"

"Let him alone," came Hertha's voice as she ran toward them through the trees. "Let him alone."

Her call only infuriated her lover. Turning upon the black boy he kicked him with his boot; and as though he could not wait for the rope for which he had called, encircled his neck with his hands as though to strangle him.

Then Tom uttered a cry. It was the first sound he had made, a broken sob, uttered unconsciously as the hands closed about his throat.

To Hertha it was the cry of the baby who had been hers to tend and keep. She saw him running to her along the alley in their old home, his lip bleeding where a white boy had thrown a stone. She held her arms out to succor him, and, a child herself, caught him to her heart and wiped away his tears. Stretching her arms out again she prayed that she might help him now. And suddenly, like a bolt from heaven, the word came to her that should bring his release. She cried it at once, loudly, shrilly. "He's my brother," she called. "He's my brother, he's a right to speak to me!" And then, on the still hot air, "I'm colored, I'm colored!"

Dick's hands relaxed and fell to his sides. The men moved away, one of them saying with a laugh, "Beg pardon, lady, the joke's on us." Tom, unconscious, lay close to the lake on the pathway.

Out from among the trees, like a spirit in her white dress, Hertha moved straight to Tom. Sitting beside his inert body she lifted his head upon her lap. There was no light near, and she peered anxiously into his dark face. Her hand, moving over his forehead, found a gash, and with her handkerchief she wiped away the blood. He was so very still, his head hung so lifelessly, that in fear she sought his temple and to her infinite relief found the pulse throbbing. Caressingly she smoothed his soft, velvet cheek.

"Want this?"

It was one of the men who brought her water from the lake in a paper cup. She thanked him and wetting her handkerchief continued to wipe the ugly wound. The man turned and went on his way.

Across the path, a long, thin, shadow-like figure, stood Dick. He had not spoken or moved since Hertha had lifted the black boy's head upon her white dress. He was so still she might have heard his breathing had her thoughts been anywhere but with her charge. Now, when they were left alone, he spoke.

"So that was your secret, my fine lady!" His bitter sneer hissed itself into the night. "You're a grand lady, you are, and I'm only a Georgia cracker!"

Stepping forward he bent down and tried to peer into her face. It was so dark he could see little, only that she was watching for a movement of life from the form whose head lay on her lap.

"Damn you," he cried furiously, his passion triumphing over his sneer. "You damned white-faced nigger, I'll teach you to lie to a white man. You hear me? You've had your play with me, and by Christ, I'll have mine now."

She was as silent, as motionless as the senseless figure of the boy whom he had felled. The very stillness startled him and fumblingly he struck a match.

A circle of light surrounded her and he saw that they were close to the lake where she so often walked with Bob. The light glowed on the clear, white bark of the birch tree. It fell, too, on her face. Her head was raised now and she looked at him, her eyes and mouth infinitely sad. With a little gesture of her hand in dismissal, she said softly, "Go away, please." And then forgetting him in her anxiety, she dropped her eyes upon the wounded boy.

The match went out. All Dick could see was the bowed figure, the head bent low as a mother

bends to look at her infant. He strained his burning eyes, striving in the darkness again to see the white face, the curling hair. Then with a cry of pain as pitiful as that Tom had uttered he turned and ran, stumbling on the roots hid in the grass, tearing his clothes upon the bushes, ran blindly amid the dark, overhanging trees until he found himself in the light of the city streets.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Kathleen was standing by her kitchen-stove looking with disgust at the eggs and milk that she had been trying to persuade to become a custard but that had resolved themselves into whey. The heat had been so great she had delayed her cooking until a late hour, and now it was past time to go to bed. With a gesture of resigned despair she walked across the room and threw the mixture into the sink.

"It's a drear world," she remarked grimly.

Going to her window she looked out into the night. There were lights still in a number of the flats. She could discern children sleeping on the fire escapes, and among the sounds that rose to where she stood was a man's harsh, drunken voice and a woman's higher, scolding tones. "'Tis a night when eyes will be blackened," she said to herself, "more than kitchen-stoves. Let's pray the grown-ups have it to themselves and don't waken the kids."

In the midst of her reflections the bell rang. With another sigh of resignation she punched the button that released the lower latch, and going into the hall threw open her door to greet her evening visitor.

Some one was coming up the stairs quickly, excitedly. She could hear short, swift footsteps on the treads, running through the hall to hurry up the stairs again. Some urgent call she presumed—a baby fighting for entrance into this world, or a sick child weeping to leave it. Instinctively drawing herself up for service, Kathleen stood ready to answer whatever call might come. The hurrying steps faltered a little at the third flight as though halted by overpowering weariness, but in a second they came on fast again. She could see the figure now—a girl, hatless, coatless, in a white dress. A moment, and she was looking into Hertha's upturned face.

"Let me in, Kathleen," the girl cried.

The Irishwoman's greeting was instant and affectionate. Any harbored resentment vanished as she saw that her visitor was in trouble, needing her help. Had Hertha come richly dressed, breathing prosperity, she would have received scant welcome; but now she was led into the kitchen, her hostess talking affectionately.

"It was this very evening, dearie, I was thinking of you when the custard went back on me. If my old lodger was here now, I says to myself, we'd be eating custards as smooth as Father McGinnis when he comes asking for ten dollars for the church. Sit down in your old seat, it's missing you."

But Hertha did not sit. She had heard nothing of Kathleen's welcome. Standing by the table, her head thrown back defiantly, she cried in an excited voice, "Keep me here to-night and I'll be out of your way to-morrow."

"It's for you to stay as long as you like," her friend answered.

She was shocked at the girl's appearance. During their months of separation she had often thought of her as she had moved about the kitchen, calling up the pleasant picture of a daintily dressed young woman, quiet in her movements, smiling upon her as she put the last touch to the table before their meal. She had never seen her untidy or seriously perturbed. But this figure before her was a distorted image of its former self. The hair was rough and loose, the dress had dark stains, the hands were soiled. And in the white, thin face were both anger and fear. "Don't touch me," she said, as Kathleen went toward her. "Listen to what I'm saying. I am going South to-morrow, with my brother. You know I said I had a brother. He is hurt, in the hospital, but they'll let him go with me to-morrow."

"Then he's not badly hurt," Kathleen said soothingly, "if they'll let him go so soon."

"He is badly hurt," Hertha cried, her voice sharp and hoarse. "But he's going with me to-morrow. We must go. My mother is dying."

A vivid remembrance of Hertha's avowal that her mother had been dead for many years flashed through Kathleen's mind.

"Yes, my mother," Hertha said, noting the look of bewilderment. "My mother, my own mother. Don't you touch me," her voice rose to a scream and she pushed her friend back as she approached her. "You don't want to know me, you don't want to be near me. I'm colored!"

With a sob Kathleen drew the girl close in her arms. The body she clasped was tense as steel, but regardless of resistance she held the slender form close, kissed the cold cheek, touched with her lips the soft hair and little ear. With her strong, capable hand she caressed the girl's small head and kept repeating, "My darling, as though that mattered!" and "Why should you be thinking anything of that!" and "As if that mattered, mavourneen!"

Hertha, still tense, lifted her face. "Don't try to comfort me," she said. "I don't ask for any one's pity. You mustn't say what you don't mean."

"What do you take me for?" Affectionate indignation was in Kathleen's speech. "What sort of devil would I be if I cared for a thing like that! Now don't fret any more, darling, but sit down while I make you a cup of tea."

Hertha did not move from where she stood, but gripped her friend, a hand on either shoulder, looking into her face. And as Kathleen looked back she felt as if the gleaming eyes, utterly sorrowful, were searching her very soul. Cursing herself for her former selfishness, she prayed that her heart might be read aright that the love which overflowed it for this friend whose hidden sorrow she had never understood, might shine now in her face. She said nothing, understanding that Hertha sought for an avowal deeper than words.

Evidently she found it. Dropping her hands she sat down in the chair which Kathleen had placed for her. "I believe you," she said solemnly. "And now I'll tell you the whole truth. I'm not colored, I'm white."

Through the hour that passed in the hot little kitchen Hertha told her story, Kathleen experiencing every emotion from incredulity to overmastering indignation. During the recital the narrator herself was strangely aloof, speaking as though she were an onlooker anxious to retail correctly each point but indifferent to the effect she was producing. She sought neither advice nor comfort. Her hard, steady tone, never varying in pitch or intensity, gave the impression of one with whom something was completed, finished beyond possibility of change. At the last, when her listener carried out of herself with anger at the attack upon Tom indulged in fierce invective, she relaxed a little, and spoke more naturally as she described her strategy and its success. But to Kathleen's words of admiration, to her condemnation of her lover, she paid no heed.

"Tom came to tell me Mammy was ill," she ended. "She was ill this winter but they didn't know what it was. Now she has had another stroke and may not live until we get there. Tom and I must go to-morrow, even though he is so weak. He's her only son."

"How will you go?" Kathleen asked.

"You'll lend me something to wear, won't you? I shan't need much."

"Of course," was the swift answer. "I wasn't thinking of that."

"You mean how shall I travel? I shall travel in the jim crow coach with Tom. He's my brother, you know, I'm colored."

She spoke in a hard, emotionless voice. Perplexed, Kathleen smiled up at her.

"Oh, I mean it," the southern girl said, straightening in her chair. "I'm going home. I shall never be white again."

"Dearie," the Irishwoman replied, "you talk as if color were a state of mind."

"Isn't it?" Hertha asked.

Rising from her seat she went to the sink and turning on the faucet got a drink for herself. As she put down the glass she looked at her hands. "This is Tom's blood," she said, washing them under the running water. "White people are so brave! They never strike any one weaker than they! Why, Kathleen, he's just a little boy. It isn't long since he was in short trousers. I know, I made them for him."

She wiped her hands clean and stood looking beyond Kathleen into the world of men and women. Speech, usually so difficult, came to her in gusts of words, thoughts that clamored for expression, the pent-up thoughts that for many years had been pressing against her heart.

"White people are wicked. Not you, Kathleen, you are good and that's why people laugh at you and scorn you. They hate goodness. It is the way that old man said at the restaurant. People, white people, are cruel. They care only for themselves. What did they do for me in this world? They threw me out to die. I wasn't worth an hour's care. And the men, men who've said they loved me! Loved! They saw color in my face and they played with me or despised me. And they say they're so good!" The bitterness in her voice was pitiable. "They're always saying they're so good. They write about it and preach about it. We black people, we are bad. We are immoral and common and cheap. Well, I want to be with bad people. I've been with good people as long as I can bear. I want to be with bad people again."

"Don't go on so, dearie," Kathleen said, anguish in her voice. "Rest and see what to-morrow will bring. You'll kill yourself if you go on like this."

"Good!" Hertha cried again with infinite scorn. Then as though a sudden thought came to her, her whole manner softened. "I'll tell you who is good,—my mammy. She took me in. She didn't question whether I'd grow up pretty and clever, or ugly and dull. She took me in her arms. She's like that. She isn't thinking about herself, she's thinking about others. She don't care if they're black or white. I know, oh, I know. And if she dies before I get home I'm going to die too!"

Suddenly her strength gave way, her indignation, her angry pride. "And I was trying to be white," she moaned, "I was trying to be ashamed of her." She flung herself into her friend's arms, the

tears streaming down her cheeks. "I was trying to forget."

Then Kathleen came into her own. Soothingly, caressingly, she got Hertha out of her white dress with its bloodstains into a loose one of her own. She brought water and a towel and washed her face. She brushed back her tangled hair. And all the time she talked, sympathetically yet cheerfully, with rare tact turning the girl's attention from her own sorrow. Hope emanated from her kind face, from her running speech; until at length Hertha found herself sitting in a chair sipping a cup of tea, and smiling a little uncertainly at some odd remark.

"It's so good to be here," she said, looking with deep gratitude into Kathleen's face. "When I had to leave Tom, I hurried to you. I knew if you were home you'd take me in, but I was afraid you'd be caring for some one else. I was frightened to ring the bell."

Her friend smiled benignantly.

"It's just the same as ever, only prettier. You've been doing a lot of housecleaning."

There was a smart look about the place. The chairs had a fresh coat of paint, the oilcloth on the table was white and new, and every bit of metal was polished, from the knob on the oven door to the faucets at the sink. The agate tea-kettle was gone, its place taken by one of shining aluminum. At the windows the flowers blossomed with lovely profusion, geraniums sharing the boxes with trailing green vines and marguerites. Even the floor had shared in the general sprucing up and shone with paint and varnish.

Taking in the many changes about her, commenting on this and that, Hertha suddenly rose and going to a shelf above the stove, took down a pipe. She turned it in her hand and said with a trembling little smile, that would have been mischievous if it had had the strength, "I wouldn't have thought it of you, and you so young. Wait till you're an old woman."

Kathleen was too happy in her friend's returning brightness to be able to retort. She could only answer, looking very foolish: "You've taken a glance about the room and can see for yourself what's happened. I was that lonely after you went away I hadn't the will to deny him. He came in one day with the license in his pocket, and nothing for it but we must go to the mayor to be tied together. So I put on my hat and went with him."

"I am so glad!" Hertha's eyes shone with unselfish pleasure. "I liked him very much. But where is he?"

"In your old room, darling, sleeping as quiet as a baby. He goes to bed each night at half-past ten and at eleven he's breathing as regular as if there was never a care in the world. He wanted me to live in his place, but when I caught a sight of his landlady's face I brought him here. It would have been strychnine in my tea if she had had the chance, she was that fond of him."

"I don't wonder a bit."

Kathleen's kimona trailing behind her on the polished floor, Hertha walked about the room, examining each newly acquired article. "How pretty and shipshape everything looks!"

"Wait till you see the parlor with the piano!" Kathleen's raillery could not conceal her pride. "We have music every night from half-past eight to half-past nine precisely. It's his daily practising. But we go by the clock these days!"

"You like it," Hertha declared, "I know you do," and she received no denial.

Tucked in bed in the room that was once Kathleen's, her hair lying, a braid on either side of her face, she looked younger and more childlike than when she had lived here, months before. But only for a minute. Away from the brightness of the kitchen the harassed, frightened look returned. Her sorrow rushed back and clutching her friend's hand she held her to her side.

"I must be up early, Kathleen, to go to the hospital. Will you lend me a hat?"

"That I will."

"And an old coat? I'll send it back to you."

"Anything I have."

"Oh, Kathleen, do you think I'll get there in time? Shall I be too late?"

"There's the best of chances. Old folks have more strength than we give them credit for. Probably she'll be better again."

Hertha still clutched her friend's hand. "Do you remember the old Major, Kathleen, when he told me to keep out of the conflict?"

"Indeed I do. Wasn't he cross that evening!"

"I tried to follow his advice. I wanted not to fight, just to let things go the easiest way, but I couldn't."

Her friend, looking at her, thinking of the past and of the days to come, of the loneliness of a life among the whites and the tragic circumscription of a life among the colored, could find no comforting answer. She was face to face with a harder problem than any she had tried to solve.

The machine, sucking the vitality of the child; the long day of toiling men and women; fierce, relentless competition; there were tools with which to battle against these; she had used them and in the end she and her comrades would conquer with them. But where were the tools with which to fight the base cruelty, the cheap conceit that left a boy on a hospital bed to-night bruised in body and spirit, and sent this gentle girl to her half-crazed with grief and pain? In the church? The persecutors of the black man were the pillars of the church. In the state? When the Negro was beaten or shot or lynched the state winked slyly at the white offender. In the working class? They were brothers of the blacks when they were hungry. An advantage won and they, too, persecuted the weak. Where then were the tools? Where, unless with the black men and women themselves; but if they took them up how unequal must be the battle!

"I couldn't keep out of it," Hertha said again, a quizzical look coming for a moment to her face. "I wouldn't picket, you remember, but that wasn't my conflict. It wasn't mine until it came to Tom."

Kathleen kissed her. "You'll get a little sleep now."

"I'll try, but I don't mind lying awake with you and Billy near."

She said the name shyly, looking with questioning glance as if to ask whether her welcome would be a cordial one when her friend's husband knew her story.

"He'll be glad to see you! He's been blaming me in his heart for staying away from you, though he'd never say a word of blame aloud. His welcome is right here. And you'll admire the flowers. I don't half appreciate them. Indeed, I've reason to be jealous of you, that I have."

"You are so good, Kathleen!"

It was two o'clock when Kathleen closed the bedroom door, leaving her charge at length asleep. But she did not herself seek rest. Filling the washtub, she plunged Hertha's white dress in the water and worked furiously to obliterate the dark stains. When it was cleansed and pressed, the torn places mended with her irregular stitches, the first light of day had entered the windows and the flowers were turning to the light. Tired, but with no desire to sleep, she set the table for breakfast and then at last went into her room. There on the bed lay her husband, resting quietly, utterly oblivious of all that had happened beyond his bedroom wall. As she looked upon him a beautiful smile came over her face. It was well, she thought, that some could sleep while the eternal battle waged. Without them the world would be bare, ugly, bereft of the fragrance of the flowers. Taking off her dress she lay down for a few minutes beside him, not sleeping, thinking of plans for the day before them, vigilant at her post in the darkness and in the light.

IV

THE LIVE-OAKS

CHAPTER XXXV

The afternoon sun shone obliquely through a window in the Williams' cabin, striking the foot of a bed where it played upon the faded colors of the patchwork spread, bringing out in sharp outline the rectangles of calico with their once gay figures of blue and red and yellow. It moved on from the bed across the rag-carpet to the washstand with its pitcher and bowl, its crocheted mats of white cotton, to end its journey in the somber wood of the cabin wall.

The rest of the room was in shadow, the dark face of the old woman lying under the patchwork spread looking still darker against the white sheet. It was an immovable face, with closed eyes and set lips; conveying no sense of life save in the irregular breathing. The strong body that had lived its years of active service, moving through this room on its familiar tasks, was still, its heavy limbs stretched in rest.

Beyond the light, in the quiet of the shadow, Hertha sat in a low chair by the bed. It had been her place since she reached home the day before. Through the darkness and the light she had watched the still figure, waiting and hoping for a look of recognition. But the heavy features had remained immovable, no shadow of understanding had entered into the deep eyes.

The warm, moist air of the southern summer, fragrant with a multitude of flowers, stirred the curtain and lightly touched the girl's face. In the drowsy heat of the afternoon she relaxed her vigil and, her eyes closed, slowly slipped into the dream world, not wholly leaving the world about her, never quite unconscious of the figure at her side.

As with closed eyes she drifted away from the present a song was blown down from the North, blown from the great theater where Billy had taken Kathleen and herself on Christmas eve. "He was despised and rejected." The words chanted sorrowfully through the window, filling the homely room with their pathos. The voice was soft and tender as though itself "acquainted with grief," and without, the pines, too, sang, through their thousands of tree tops, "despised,

rejected"—whispering the words as the wind moved their myriad leaves.

Then of a sudden a trumpet called, the walls of the little room fell, and light—magnificent, terrible—streamed through the place. It glowed triumphant about the bed, it moved among the cabins, their walls glowing like brass, it touched the pines and their countless needles became each a golden point of radiance. And through the dazzling light sounded the great chorus, blared by the trumpets, sung by a thousand resinous strings, chanted by multitudes of voices:

"King of kings and Lord of lords!"

The glory of the light, the majesty of the music enveloped the dreamer, caught her up in a cloud, and bore her through the great spaces of the universe. She moved along a radiant stream of splendor that pulsed with triumphant harmonies. Voices and instruments sang to the heavens in hallelujah. She left the earth, its narrow leagues measured in clay and dross, and touched the world of heaven.

There was a slight sound in the room, the gurgling of a half-uttered word, and Hertha was back in the cabin, the single line of sunlight shining through the small window.

Mammy was smiling at her from the bed, a happy smile as though laughing a bit that she had caught her baby napping. And Hertha answered with a child's smile of recognition at being home close to its mother again. She slipped her hand into the black one lying on the bed by her side. Holding it close she drank in the look of deep, unstinted love on the dark face. Then the cloud of unconsciousness moved like a mask over the heavy features and the light of life was gone. But to the girl the room was again illuminated with the golden radiance of her dream. Again the trumpets blared, the drums beat. She heard the requiem of the despised. From across the deep spaces of the universe voices sang to her of the poor in spirit. The great majestic syllables throbbled through the little cabin, carrying their triumph to her listening heart.

CHAPTER XXXVI

It was twilight, and Ellen was sitting on the porch for a little space to rest and think. Since her mother's death, three days before, there had been no opportunity for rest or for thinking. The neighbors, kindly but garrulous, had been at the cabin at all hours. Their enthusiasm for ceremonial, their effusive religious expression, had made the past three days wearying and difficult. But the last rites had been performed and the house among the pines was at length peaceful and still. As she idly watched the long shadows cast by the setting sun she felt her mother nearer to her than when, with Aunt Lucindy mourning, she lay panoplied in death upon the bed.

Tom joined her and took his seat on the step below. "How do you feel?" he asked affectionately.

"All right," Ellen answered, "and you?"

"I'm all right now."

They had spoken in low tones and Tom asked in a whisper, "She's asleep?"

"Yes, she was so worn she's slept the whole day through, like a baby."

"I 'most wish she was a baby again," Tom ventured. "We-all had good times when we was children."

The virtuous retort regarding a life of service that Ellen would have given a year ago died upon her lips. During the months of their separation she saw that Tom had grown fast in stature and understanding.

"Seems sometimes," he went on in his meditative way, "as if the world'd be better if no one was allowed to grow up. But there's some as can't help it. You couldn't keep them little children, not if you put a hundred pound weight on their heads."

There was a sound from the room within. "I'm coming out soon," a voice said, "and I'm hungry enough to eat two meals in one."

When to the satisfaction of both she had accomplished this feat, the three went to the porch again and sat together in the starlight.

Thus far they had exchanged no word as to their future; there had been no opportunity for the privacy of confidence. Now it was possible to talk into the night without interruption. But the quiet about them, the sense of rest after the days of sorrowful turmoil, the nearness of their grief, kept them for some time bereft of words. It was Ellen who first took up the thought in all their minds.

"We shall have to leave the home here now," she said. "There's no one but me left, and I've a position waiting for me any moment that I say I'll go."

"Where?" Hertha asked, startled.

"In Georgia. Augusta Fairfax, you remember Augusta, don't you, Hertha? She was in the class below me. Such a bright girl! She's started a school by herself and wants me to join her. It's in the most godforsaken spot in the United States, not a bit like this, one of those places where the whites hate schools and want to keep the Negroes always ignorant. They make everything as difficult as possible for Augusta, but she has more pluck than all the white folks in the county. Her scholars are all ages, she says, from four to forty. They're ignorant of everything that they need to know and their knowledge of the things they ought not to know is prodigious; but they've the one thing essential, a desire to improve. Augusta is bound to succeed if the whites only give her time."

"They may lynch her first," Tom suggested.

"They don't often lynch women," was Ellen's answer.

"You aren't going to a place like that?" There was alarm in Hertha's voice.

"Why not? Life isn't worth much to black people unless they're doing hard, absorbing work. Tom was saying just now that we ought all to stay children, but there are some of us who have to grow up."

"I wasn't just thinking of colored folks," Tom struck in. "I was thinking of everybody."

"I reckon I know what you were thinking of, that picture in our old Bible with the little child leading the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the calf and the young lion. You used to love that picture. Well, I hope for that day; but in the meantime here are all these Americans making laws to keep colored children so that they won't know enough to do anything but lie down and be eaten. The prophet didn't mean to have the lamb stay with the wolf if the wolf was only prepared to gobble him up!"

Ellen laughed at her own conceit. "Augusta and I aren't lambs," she announced, "or kids either; and we're both from the South and have a little sense in our heads. She's made a start, but she needs some one with her for she's dying of loneliness. I've often thought I'd go there when I was no longer needed at home."

"Could I go too?" Hertha's voice was almost inaudible.

"You, dear? I don't believe we could have a white teacher. The white people wouldn't stand for it."

"I wouldn't be white," Hertha answered. "I'd be colored."

Ellen turned and kissed her. "I know what you did for Tom. If I worked until I was a hundred in the meanest spot in the Union I wouldn't be doing as brave a thing as you have done."

"Amen," Tom said.

"Oh, no!" Hertha gasped a little at their praise. "I was only too thankful I had the wit to think of what to say in time."

She leaned over and stroked Tom's head, touching gently the wound that was healed now. "I'm tired of the white world. I'd truly like to go with you, Sister. Couldn't I?"

Ellen was slow in giving her answer. "It wouldn't be possible," she said at last. "I want you more than I can ever say, but it wouldn't be possible. I'm not young or good-looking, and Augusta is blacker and homelier than I. But you, if you came with us, it would be like putting a jewel in a room with thieves."

In the silence that followed Hertha felt that her sister had again pushed her out of her home. And this time there was no sense of excitement, no wonderment at what the future would bring. She had entered the white world and knew it now. Before her was a second exile, a second effort to make her way among strangers; she believed a second failure. As she looked into the night with dimmed eyes she knew that Augusta Fairfax, in her rough cabin among hostile people, was not so lonely as she.

"What are you going to do, Tom?" Ellen asked.

"I haven't made up my mind yet," he answered. "Maybe I'll stay here for a while, get work somewhere about, an' maybe I'll go back North. There's a heap o' things to do in New York. General utility man, now, that's a good job sometimes. I had a friend last winter as worked in a house that was run by a lot of girls. He had the time of his life! The girls was all of them at work, in charities and hospitals and I don't know what-all societies. At night he'd wait on table for dinner, after he'd cooked it, and learned more'n he'd ever learn if he stayed in school all his days. He could talk like a book, that man could. And the girls, they got to relying on him for all sorts o' little things a man can do about a house. It's a nice way for girls to live, a lot of 'em together. I reckon a job like that might be fun."

Though he did not look at Hertha she understood his thought for her and felt comforted.

"There ain't no use in hurrying," was Tom's final comment. "If one thing turns out not to be wisest you can try another. As for me, if I ain't needed for anything else, a colored boy can always get an elevator job."

He rose to his feet giving a prodigious yawn. "Time for me to go to bed."

Hertha rose too and stood beside him. "You can have your old room now," she said softly.

"That ain't my room no more, Sister," he answered. "I give that room to you. I'm doin' fine at Aunt Lucindy's. Don't you fret." And with a good-night he left them.

Hertha watched him until he was out of sight. "He's the dearest boy in the world," she whispered to herself. "The dearest." Then, with a heavy heart, she turned to go in.

"Don't go to bed yet," Ellen called. "You can't be sleepy. Come, honey, sit here and talk."

"What about?" Hertha took her place by Ellen's side.

"What about? Why, about everything that's happened. I haven't heard yet of a thing you've been doing."

"I haven't succeeded at anything."

"I'd rather decide about that."

And so looking out into the starlight, haltingly at first, Hertha told the story of her eight months' absence. Ellen was all questions, interested to learn about New York, full of curiosity regarding the factory and the school, anxious to hear each detail of the many happenings. Her enthusiasm warmed the narrator and before she was through Hertha had given a full account of her city life.

"How wonderful!" Ellen said when it was finished.

"There's nothing wonderful about it," Hertha replied, despondent again. "I've come back with nearly half my money gone and have failed at everything."

"You haven't failed at all," was Ellen's emphatic answer. "Of course it might have been better to have gone with Miss Witherspoon and have done the thing she planned; study dressmaking. But you didn't, and it's wonderful the way you made your way alone. Of course, Mammy and I couldn't help worrying—New York was such a big place for you to be dropped down in without a friend—but we needn't have feared."

Amazed at this unexpected praise, Hertha let her sister go on.

"It must have been great working in a factory and going out on strike! And Kathleen, I should love her! And if you didn't like stenography probably you got a good deal out of the course though you don't appreciate it now. You and Tom don't make plans but I notice you have all the experiences. I'm so proud of you," Ellen ended. "I reckon quiet folks have got more in them, more real character, than talkative ones like me."

"Don't!" Hertha clutched her sister's dress and hid her face on her shoulder. "Don't say that! If I'm good it's only chance——"

She stopped and in the silence that followed it would have been hard to have told which heart beat the faster.

"Sister," Ellen whispered. "What happened? I wish you'd let me know, it's better than guessing. You said, before you went away from here, that he despised you. What was it? I don't like to believe he's bad, he's been so good to Mammy and me. Really good, not patting you on the head the way his father does. Mammy got to relying on him. And he's made it so easy and pleasant for me at school it's one reason I ought to go away. I need a harder job."

With all her thought of herself, Hertha could not help smiling at this Hercules who must always move to a "higher and harder" task.

"He tried to get news of you when he went to New York. He told Mammy he meant to bring some word, but he couldn't."

"That's partly why I didn't send you my address."

"Oh!"

Summoning all her fortitude, Hertha did tell of the gay mornings and the dark night.

Ellen listened quietly, showing neither dismay nor astonishment. Life as she had seen it was a grim affair, and she had known fear for this young girl at her side. But she judged by accomplished facts rather than by fearsome thoughts or self-accusation. When Hertha had finished she spoke in her matter-of-fact way:

"I'm so glad you told me, for I must say, Hertha, you haven't shown much common sense. Why, Lee Merryvale's the one man in the world you can trust. You know that he resisted temptation. It isn't likely that the Lord'll lead him down such a difficult path again."

"You mean——" Hertha cried excitedly.

Ellen went on: "As to his not caring for you—if you'd seen him wandering around this place as I have, looking like a dog that's lost his mistress, you'd understand he isn't the sort that changes his mind every few weeks. He was worried sick when he couldn't find you in New York. We were all frightened, I'll confess now, but he was the worst. I've seen him digging in his garden, hour

after hour, or working among the trees, acting as if he hadn't a friend in the world. I'm not excusing anything, don't think that, but I do believe in giving people credit for what they are and in understanding when they turn from wrong and do right."

Suddenly her matter-of-fact mood changed. With a sob she took her little sister in her arms and kissed her again and again: "Don't say it was chance!" The tears were on her face. "I don't believe in chance. The Lord was watching over you all the time."

CHAPTER XXXVII

Hertha slept through the quiet night without moving but awakened with the birds at dawn. The first low twitterings fell upon deaf ears, but as the sounds grew brighter and more numerous, as one singer after another joined in the chorus, she moved lazily and opened her eyes.

"Come to me, come to me," the red bird whistled; and his mate answered with a call of sweet compliance. "See what I'm doing, hurry up, hurry up," cried the mockingbird, repeating over and over his song of welcome.

Rising from her bed, Hertha went to the window. The soft, dim light of dawn gained minute by minute in radiance as she stood looking out upon the familiar world. Beneath her window grew white lilies, wafting her with their fragrance. Violets, red roses, pink phlox, nodded their heads in greeting. The tall pines murmured a good-morning, and overhead stretched the great vault of sky each moment losing its depth of blue, its stars imperceptibly fading from sight. Every sight and sound and odor breathed the joy and hope of the dawning day.

When she had taken her fill of deep breaths of the summer air she turned back to her room. On the floor were her two bags with which she had started on her journey eight months ago. Kathleen had gone to her Brooklyn home, packed and sent them on to her. They had arrived yesterday, but she had left them untouched, dreading to look at the contents. The morning however brought courage, and kneeling on the floor she took the larger of the two and pressed the lock.

Out tumbled slippers and underclothes, books and hairpins, dresses and handkerchiefs. Hertha shook and folded and put away until suddenly she stopped to see her calendar at the bottom of the bag. Staring up at her were the days of the month of June, and around the figure 25 was a carefully drawn circle, a circle inclosing this dawning day.

This day she was to make her decision. So she had willed it. The date, marked by her hand, stood in confirmation. After looking for a few moments, she pressed her lips firmly together, and then in her old, deliberate, tranquil fashion washed and dressed. In her drawer, carefully laundered and folded away,—her mammy's work she knew,—was her blue maid's dress. She drew it out and put it on.

The rose of the sky was not more pink than her cheeks when she opened the door and walked out on the sand. "What are you doing here, I'd like to know?" A wren called above her head so fast and so scoldingly that she started in surprise, only to recognize an old friend. He cocked his tail and trilled and sang as though indignant that any one in the house should be up as early as he. And as he sang other birds sang with him, the light grew in the east, and morning came to the world.

With steady, unhesitating tread she walked through the pines along the path to where the cypress marked the turn into the orange grove. Then for a moment she stopped, because, despite her will, her breath came in short gasps. Passion swept over her. The months in the city, the strife and tumult, the struggle to guide her unwilling heart, were blotted from her life. Now was reality, and the world held nothing for her but the pines through which she had passed and the world of the great house into which she would turn. Yet how could she know he would be in his old place to greet her? Perhaps it was too early. Perhaps he had ceased to work as formerly among his trees. Perhaps—anything but that she had been right and her sister wrong in her judgment of him. All her old doubts rushed back. Her knees shook and she put her hand upon the cypress for support. Indecision was with her again. She hated herself for her surrender.

And then in a moment, the sunshine, the fragrant air, the chatter of the birds, brought back her faith. She felt the joy of the morning, the courage of the coming day. With a prayer that was a call to him she left her boundary line and turned into the orange grove.

There was change about the place. The same trees were there, but to right and left land had been cleared for cultivation. A garden must have flourished by the water's edge for there were signs of hills of peas and beans such as furnished winter produce for the stores that she had seen in New York. Some one had been very industrious, working hard to make fruitful the earth.

She took a step forward and saw the worker spraying the budding fruit. His hat was off, his red-gold hair in tumbled mass, his clothes soiled with dirt, he himself frowning with intentness. She watched silent, motionless, as, in complete unconcern, he moved about his work. Suddenly something went wrong, he dropped his tool and looking up saw her standing among his trees.

In a second he had dashed across the space between them. "Cinderella," he cried, holding her

close, "Cinderella, I searched the world over for you. I hunted day and night but there was no fairy godmother to help me."

"Perhaps she called me back," Hertha whispered, "I think she called me back." And then lifting her head and looking into his face that glowed with love, she gave a sigh of happiness. Her valley of indecision, she knew now, was passed. Content had come to dwell within her heart.

They talked and laughed and played with each other among the fragrant trees until the sun rose high above the broad river; then, his arm about her shoulder, he led her to the great house. On through the orange groves, where the heavy scented blossoms shone in the deep green leaves, on along the path by the river bank, the cows munching the blue hyacinth, on to where the gray moss swayed from the live-oaks. Away from the cabins and the dark pines, from the circumscribed life, from the narrow opportunity. Away from the sorrow of the oppressed into the open spaces of freedom and power.

On the steps of the great house stood old Mr. Merryvale and behind him Miss Patty, worried that Lee was so late this morning. As Hertha moved toward them she saw the life that glowed before her, a life filled with affectionate, reverencing love. She saw herself the favored daughter in this beautiful old house. She heard the cry of childish laughter rippling through the rustling trees. Sunshine and gaiety, happy friendships up and down the river, bright days at home among the orange trees. Life abundant, limitless in glowing promise.

But as she moved through the sunshine to the broad steps of this stately home her thoughts went back to the dark pines, the home of her past, and a throb of pain smote her heart. For on ahead, through the long, happy years, she saw a black shadow, a shadow of man's making, lying beside her path.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SHADOW ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE

THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE

PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase "Project Gutenberg"), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even

without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is

owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.