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## CINDERELLA JANE

*by*

**MARJORIE BENTON COOKE**

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*Books by the Same Author*

BAMBI  
DR. DAVID  
THE DUAL ALLIANCE  
THE GIRL WHO LIVED IN THE WOODS

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**Cinderella Jane**

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**By MARJORIE BENTON COOKE**

Author of "Bambi," "The Girl Who Lived In The Woods," Etc.



**WITH FRONTISPIECE IN COLORS**

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CINDERELLA JANE

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## CHAPTER I

It was the Pageant of the Prophets which gave Jerry Paxton his first chance. There were several links in the primrose chain of fortune which led him from the first opportunity to the last. The first and most important may be said to have been Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon, who opened her house for a portrait exhibition. She had an eye for men as well as for art, so when handsome Jerry appeared, she annexed him. The second link was Jerry's sense of dramatic values, which made him play up to this somewhat elderly siren. The third was the gods, who had ever smiled on Jerry Paxton.

It was a season when all the society clubs and leagues were spending themselves and their money in lavish spectacles of all kinds. There were Balls of the Gods and Pagan Routs, Persian Ballets and Greek Friezes, personified by the very best people, and some of the second best.

Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon, who was socially elect, headed an eager and earnest group of ladies of her set, who desired to outdo all previous efforts in a mammoth affair, which would provide woollen underwear for the Belgians, or something equally practical and unpoetic. She happened to mention her dilemma to Jerry, as they sat at tea in Mrs. Brendon's drawing-room a week or so after their first meeting.

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"We can't seem to think of anything which has not been done," she complained. "We have people to be in the thing, people to produce it, people to come to see it, and all we need is——"

"Brains," said Jerry daringly.

"Have you any?"

"I have a couple of lobes."

"Have you them with you?"

"There is at least one in good working order, and at your disposal," he laughed.

"Think of something new for us to do."

"If I supply the idea, will you make me director?"

"We'll make you prime minister, court chamberlain, anything you like!"

"Good. The thing will be called the 'Pageant of the Prophets.'"

"What prophets?"

"The old Biblical ones, but we'll draw on the entire Bible for our characters. We will build a palace throne room, Pontius Pilate's perhaps, or King Herod's, very gorgeous and beautiful. We can have groups, and friezes, and scenes; the costuming has infinite possibilities. We can have music and singing pilgrims. We can have dancing Salome, with her dripping head. Oh! it will be one magnificent spectacle!"

"You are a genius!" cried Mrs. Brendon.

"Granted. Then what?"

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"We will have you do it all. You shall design the whole thing, and direct it. Draw your plans and submit your terms. You are elected right now."

"You are in earnest?"

"Never more so."

"Then accept my services as a poor return for your excellent tea."

"Nonsense. That is a pretty speech, but you have to earn your own living, don't you?"

"Alas, yes."

"Then there is no reason why you should donate time and brains for nothing. This is a business proposition. Will you take it?"

"With both hands and a grateful heart."

"You'll have to use both lobes of that boasted brain," she laughed. "What shall I be?"

"Herodias, beautiful wife of King Herod," said Jerry without hesitation. "We'll give you a costume that will dazzle 'em!"

"You shall paint me in it."

"Delighted."

"This has certainly been a lucky day for me. I'll call the directors in the morning, Mr. Paxton. We'll make our plans while you work out yours. Then we'll meet with you, and appoint our committees at once. Can you begin right away?"

"If I can postpone some portrait sittings. I shall do my best."

"If they are women sitters put them in the pageant, that will keep them busy. We must have you at once."

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"That's an idea. Au revoir. You have given me an eventful afternoon. My thanks."

As he walked down the avenue toward his studio, Jerry's mind was in a whirl. The tap of his feet on the sidewalk made a time: "If I put this through, I've arrived. If I put this through, I've arrived." It was dusk when he climbed to his quarters and he hummed as he went. He threw open the door and rushed in. The big room was dark, save in the far corner, where a lamp was lit, with the shade off, so that an ugly glare lighted the face of the woman who sat beside it, mending socks.

"Ah, Miss Jane Judd, is that you?"

"Good afternoon," she answered, not looking up.

Jerry sang gaily as he dumped his belongings on the divan. He lit a cigarette, and laughed aloud involuntarily.

"Have you ever had *delirium tremens*, Miss Judd?" he demanded. She looked up without reply. "I've got a case right now."

She went on with her work. He glanced at her, marked how the shadow from the lamp accentuated the bold modelling of her face, bringing out its mask-like quality.

"I suppose you don't deal much in emotions," he added.

She neither smiled nor answered. He laughed at the idea himself.

"Jane Judd, conversationally, you are about as satisfactory as 'a bloomin' idol made of mud.'"

"You do not engage me to talk," she answered, in a low rather dull voice. "You engage me to work."

"So I do, but some day I am going to pay you double rates for your thoughts. A silent woman is a menace. I'm afraid of you."

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A rat-a-tat-tat came on the door.

"Come in," called Jerry gaily.

An odd, boyish-looking girl stuck in her head.

"At home, Jerry? What's the celebration?"

"I've got a job, Bobsie, a big, cash-in-hand kind of a job, and I'm trying to raise a spark of human response in the frozen buzzum of Jane Judd."

"Oh, is this your Jane day? Hello, Jane," she added, seating herself comfortably. "Go ahead, Jerry, let's hear."

He told her the story, in some detail, with touches of his own. He was so boyishly elated over it that she was fired with some of his enthusiasm.

"But look here, Jerrymander, how about the big mural designs? How about my portrait? This pageant won't get you anywhere."

"Won't it? You should have heard me tell the Abercrombie Brendon that I would try my best to put off my portrait sitters. You, my dear Bobs, are my portrait sitters."

"It will ruin your winter's work. They'll pick your brains, that crowd, and take your time, and you can whistle for your money."

"I wasn't in kindergarten yesterday, Bobs. I know a thing or two about the dear rich. They will pay-as-we-go, one good big deposit down in advance."

"Get you all out of the work spirit—make you yearn for the flesh pots."

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"Well, Bobs, I never did choose a diet of figs and thistles."

"That's just the trouble with you. It's nip and tuck all the time between the artist and the senses, Jerry. That uptown crowd can ruin you for good."

"Dear old Bobs! If they ruin me, I'll come to you for a scourge. Let's go to Buffanti's for a celebration. We'll get Chat and Jinny for a foursome, what? Are the Chatfields at home to-day, Jane?" he added.

"Yes; I was there this morning," she answered.

"Come on, old wailing banshee!" he cried.

"All right; but I don't like it, just the same. This very night may mark the grave of Jerome Paxton, painter."

"Well, think up some jolly epitaph and we'll sing it in our cups. Don't dree, Bobs; you're as bad as Jane."

At his mention of her, they both glanced at the silent bent figure, so indifferent to their presence.

"Time to close up, Miss Judd; we're off to dinner," said Jerry.

She quietly rose and put away the mended things. She set things to rights, as noiseless as a wraith. The other two went on talking and laughing, until she came toward them in her hat and coat.

"What do I owe you?" Jerry asked.

"Just for to-day."

"I haven't any change. Can you let it go until next time?"

"No," she said simply.

"Well, old Shylock, here's five. Consider yourself paid as long as that lasts."

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"I don't wish to do that. I'll bring you change."

"Bother you, Jane Judd; what difference does it make whether you get it all at once, or in driblets?"

"Here, Jerry, I've got it even. You owe me," Bobs said.

"All right; much obliged."

Jane hesitated a moment, then took it with a bow, and went to the door.

"Good-night, Jane Judd," said Bobs.

"Good-night," the woman answered mechanically.

"Night," said Jerry, searching for cigarettes among his impedimenta.

"Queer creature, that," Bobs mused.

"What's that?"

"Jane Judd. What do you suppose she thinks of us all?"

"God knows, and I care as little as He does."

"I care. I'd like to know her. She's like steel, clean-cut, shining, efficient, silent, unbreakable."

"Is she? I've never noticed," said Jerry indifferently.

"She knows all our secrets, our economies, our loves, and hates. She mends us up, keeps us in order. Jane Judd is the law and order of our set. She glides among us, and we say everything we know before her, as if she were a wall."

"Gog and Magog! Do I have to listen to you ramble on about Jane Judd? She interests me about as much as a Wheeler and Wilson sewing machine. Come on to dinner."

Bobs rose and stretched herself luxuriously, with a yawn.

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"Man is the most incomprehensible animal evolved from protoplasm," she remarked.

"That remark doesn't seem to have any point, Bobs, but I suppose it has."

"Thanks. From now on, I suppose only Bible allusions will have point to you."

"Well, there's nothing Biblical about Jane Judd."

"Humph! She might be the dim and vasty void out of which creation sprang."

"Good Lord!" cried Jerry, turning out the light. He took her by the elbow and led her out, closing the door on that conversation.

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## CHAPTER II

Jane Judd, in her old brown coat and a hat of many seasons flown, walked slowly from Macdougall Alley toward the model tenement house where she shared a flat with a family by the name of Biggs, and had what is known as "light housekeeping privileges." The English of this elegant phrase was, that, before or after the Biggs family had disposed of its meals, Jane could slip into the kitchen and prepare her repast. She disliked the arrangement intensely, but on the whole she preferred it to any boarding-house which she could afford.

No matter how tired she was after her day's work in the various studios, she always enjoyed this walk home, with the misty lights, the far-distant vista of the sky at the street ends. She speculated about the people she passed; sometimes she stopped to watch the children shouting and playing in the streets. She never spoke to them but she knew many of them by sight.

It was in some such way she watched the artist folk who gave her employment. She wondered about them; sometimes behind her mask she laughed at their childishness.

Jane Judd's history up to this point has no more dramatic interest than the history of any drab woman of twenty-eight, picked out at random from the army of workwomen which marches daily to and from the factories and stores. [Pg 12]

She had lived in Warburton, a small New Jersey town, until she was twenty-two, keeping house for her father, who had a grocery store. He was her only relation. When he died she sold the store and came to New York to make a living. She was trained for nothing. She had had a High School education, which left her with a taste for books and a consuming ambition to write them. Being a dumb creature at best, she had never spoken of this dream to a human soul, except her mother. The town paper had published several of her stories, signed with a pen name, and she secretly cherished the idea that she had talent.

So when her release came, she did as so many girls do these days, she put her little all into her pocketbook and came to the big town to grapple with success. She applied at newspaper offices, at first, with her village paper clippings as justification. She admitted to such editors as she saw that she had no nose for news, but she liked to write stories, and thought maybe she could do special stuff. She was shy and frightened. Nobody wanted her.

She found a cheap room and gave herself a month in which to write short stories. With one new one, and two old ones worked over, she tried the magazines. It was a weary round with rejection at every point, while the reserves in her bank grew smaller and smaller. During the whole month she never talked to any one, and she knew a loneliness as bitter as pain. [Pg 13]

Finally, one day an editor of a magazine let her come into his office. He looked at her keenly.

"Miss Judd," he began, "I've read these stories of yours and I want to give you a bit of advice. Are you trying to make a living out of this kind of thing?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you do anything else to support yourself?"

"I don't know."

"Where have you lived?"

Jane told him.

"You're alone in the world?"

"Yes."

"Unmarried?"

"Yes."

"May I tell you quite frankly how I feel about your case?"

"I wish you would."

"You make the common mistake of thinking that anybody can write. Now, putting words together is not writing; making fine sentences is not writing; elaborating striking plots is not writing. Of all the arts, literature is the most exacting mistress. With some idea of the technique of painting, or music, coupled with a surface brilliance, you may paint or sing or play. With even less equipment, you may act; but to write, you must have lived, you must have suffered and known joy; you must be able to analyze people, to understand their motives, to love them. To write, you must have ideas and emotions. It is only when the sources of your own being run deep that you can bring up waters of refreshment for others." [Pg 14]

He stopped to look at the girl, whom he had almost forgotten. Her face startled him with its eagerness. Her eyes were shining and he found himself commenting, subconsciously: "Why, she isn't so plain."

"Yes, please go on," she begged.

"Well, granted that you have learned something of the motives, the passions, the sorrows that rack us humans, then you must also have your medium in control. Have you ever thought about words, how wonderful they are, how precious?"

She shook her head.

"Most people fail to. We think of the hackneyed old phrases we use in the mechanics of living, but words are like little creatures that march and fight and sing. They are like extra hands, and brains. Think of the power of them! All the passions wait on them; they bring despair, hope, courage, love; they are the golden exchange granted to man. Until you get this sense of the choiceness, the fragility, the power of words, you are not ready to transcribe your thoughts."

"But how can I learn about words?"

"Read the best books, get the feel of them. Study style, add words to your possession as a miser adds coins. Have you ever studied composition?"

"A little in High School."

"Frankly, I doubt if you can ever write. I see no gleam of a gift in these things you have brought me. They are sentimental and silly. But if you should want to learn something about this great art \_\_\_"

"Oh, I do," said Jane earnestly.

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"Very well, I will give you a list of books to begin with. You must get a position so that you can support yourself, then study when you can. Write all the time; get facility with words, then tear it up. Don't try to sell things. Begin to watch people; get abreast of events. Read the papers and the magazines in the library. Read Shakespeare, Fielding, Dickens, Thackeray, Bunyan, Meredith, Barrie, and Galsworthy. You might even try Shaw."

"Oh, I will!" cried Jane.

He laughed.

"I don't often inflict an hour's lecture upon unprotected young women, Miss Judd."

"I can't tell you how grateful I am. This is just what I needed."

"You get to work. When you are absolutely confident that you have got something good, come and see me again."

"Thank you, I will."

She went out in a daze. This talk was to change the whole course of her life, and she knew it. It was characteristic of her that she began at once. She answered an advertisement in the paper, inserted by a man named Jerome Paxton, who wanted a reliable woman to mend his clothes and do light work about the studio. She applied and he engaged her.

That was six years ago. From that small beginning she had worked up a clientele among the artists of the district, which kept her busy every day. She mended their clothes, cleaned their studios, cooked a meal if necessary, became, in short, an institution in the colony. As Jerry Paxton said; "Jane Judd can mend anything from a leak in a pipe to a broken heart."

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This was her life by day. Her real life began when the day ended. On this particular night, as on a thousand previous nights, she bought her supper at the butcher's and the grocer's, and climbed the many stairs to her home. As she struck a match to light the gas, there was a light thud on the floor and a purring.

"That you, Milly?" she asked.

The big cat purred loudly and rubbed against her skirt. She took her up and petted her a bit before she so much as laid off her things.

"I've got a piece of fish for you," she added as she put her coat and hat away. Milly, whose full name was Militant, constituted her entire family, and it was Jane's habit to talk to her continually.

"We'll hurry into the kitchen before Mrs. Biggs gets home to-night and get our supper out of the way," she said presently, and led the way down the narrow hall, the cat at her heels. She made her preparations quickly and deftly. Billy Biggs, aged eight, appeared as she was cooking.

"Hello, Miss Judd."

"Hello, Billy."

He was a very dirty and a very dull little boy, who wore his mouth open, and was mentally developed as far as his adenoids would permit. Jane tried to be interested in him, but failed.

"Wisht I had a piece of bread an' butter."

"All right, here it is. Your mother will be in, presently."

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"Our supper ain't as good as yours."

This conversation took place almost every night. As soon as she could she carried everything into her room. Then she and Milly sat down to the function of dinner. Milly sat on a high chair at one side of the sewing table, Jane at the other.

"Milly, you're a good, steady friend, but I just ache to have somebody talk back to me to-night. I



wonder how it would feel to go to Buffanti's with people you liked, to talk, and eat good food and listen to music."

Milly had no comments to make on the subject, except to claw her plate. Jane put a morsel of food there, which disappeared.

"I'll pretend I went with them, and put it into the story to-night. I know how they talk, Milly, and how they think, and how they act, but I want them to know how I think and talk and act. I'm sick of being alone, I want somebody——"

She broke off and hid her face in her hands. Milly scratched her plate significantly. It is the routine of life which helps us through the tragedy, always. At Milly's practical reminder, Jane replenished her plate with the scrapings from her own, rose, carried her dishes to the sink, washed them, and put them away.

Then she locked her door, got out her pen and her blank book, lit the student lamp, and sat down at her table. Milly sprang into her favourite chair and the pleasure time of the day came to both of them. The purr and the scratch of the pen lasted far into the night.

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## CHAPTER III

True to her word, Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon presented Jerry and his idea to her committee, and they appointed him Minister Extraordinary to the whole affair. He was to design the setting for the pageant and such costumes as he had time to do. He was to arrange and direct the tableaux.

There was a slight hitch in affairs, when Jerry presented his terms, but he was prepared for that. Mrs. Brendon sounded him on a reduction, but he stood firm, assuring her that he must be free to put all his heart and brain at their service. This was quite impossible unless he gave up all other work for the time being. If that was not entirely satisfactory to them, he would gladly withdraw. The interruption to his work was of considerable moment. Mrs. Brendon carried this answer back to the committee and they confirmed the amount, complaining bitterly.

Jerry was prepared for this incident. He also knew that in the end they would pay just what he asked—would pay anything to get what they wanted; and the particular thing they wanted now was a new way to dress up. None of them thought it was funny for the seemly old prophets to disport themselves at a ball, not until the newspaper wits began to point it out. But it never pays for the metropolitan dailies to be their funniest at the expense of the class which gives fifty-thousand-dollar balls, so the affair got under way with much advertising, and few jibes.

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Jerry, with his first check safely deposited in the bank, went merrily to work at his designs. He spent his days in the library, studying costumes, looking over old pictures, working at effects. He decided upon the throne room of King Herod as the big general background of the show. He planned a wide staircase at the back, where, on a platform like a landing, the tableaux should appear, after which the actors should descend to bend the knee to the king and queen.

The plans began to grow, and, artist-like, Jerry hurled himself into his work with abandon. He laboured early and late, until he was tired out, before the real task of rehearsing, readjusting human equations, and such problems had begun.

"Jerry, you goose, you act as if you had been engaged by the Crown Prince to stage the Coronation. This is nothing but ready money to you, why do you wear yourself out on it?" protested Bobs.

"I want it to be the biggest thing of the kind that New York ever had. I'm interested in it. When it's over I will go off somewhere and rest. Don't you worry."

"Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon will take you for a cruise on her yacht, maybe," she said bitterly.

"Well, why not? I don't hate her yacht. What's the trouble, Bobsie? Are you jealous of these ladies of the rich and great?"

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She blazed out at him.

"Yes, I am. What right have they to come down here, take you away from your work, pick your brains, wear you out, and then drop you when they've taken what they want? I hate them all!"

"Steady, old girl," said Jerry, putting a hand on each of her shoulders, and making her look at him. "For a penny, I'd shake you, Bobs! What do you think I am, a mechanical doll? Don't I have anything to say about what they do to me?"

"You think you do, but you don't."

"Don't you worry about me," he said shortly, and she knew he was annoyed. He went back to work on a costume drawing, and Bobs went out without another word.

"Damn," said Jerry softly. He worked rapidly for an hour. Then a movement in his bedroom startled him.

"Who's that?" he called.

Jane Judd came into view, a sock pulled over one hand.

"Did you speak?"

"Oh, Jane Judd, I forgot you were there."

"I went into the other room when Miss Roberts came."

He looked at her quickly.

"Quite unnecessary. Is there anything in that ice-box I could eat? I can't stop for lunch to-day."

She inspected his larder.

"I'll go get something," she said.

"Oh, don't bother. I'll do without."

Presently she started off, in hat and coat.

"Get enough for both of us, Miss Judd; I'll blow you to lunch."

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She made no answer, closing the door softly not to disturb him. Later, she laid the table, served a chop, creamed potatoes, a salad, and Turkish coffee. When she called him, he came, drawing-board in hand. She served him.

"Where is your place?" he inquired.

"I brought some lunch."

"You sit down there, and eat half *this* lunch. It's a grand tiffin. Where did you learn to cook, Jane Judd?"

She sat down opposite him, trembling in every inch of her body, but her face wore its usual calm.

"Women don't learn to cook; they just absorb it. I've always done it."

She went to the little stove to serve herself to lunch and when she came back he was studying his sketch while he ate. He scarcely noticed her. When she refilled his coffee cup he became aware of her again.

"Heard about this big show I'm getting up?"

"Yes."

"Interesting thing. How did you hear about it?"

"Everybody talks about it. I was at the Chatfields' yesterday. They were discussing it."

"Were they? What did they say?"

"I didn't listen."

"You mean you're not a sieve."

She smiled.

"By the Gods, I did not know you ever used a smile! What kind of person are you, anyway?"

She rose at that, as if to end the interview. He went back to his work.

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"Oh, I say, Jane Judd, I didn't mean to offend you, just when you had smiled at me for the first time in five years' acquaintance," he called out to her.

"All right," she replied briefly.

Jerry made a grimace and forgot her.

As work began to pile up; as this committee and that committee had to consult with him; as the costumers had to be argued with, stuffs selected; in fact, as the whole big machine began to revolve on Jerry as axis, he frequently sent out a hurry call for Jane Judd to get him some lunch or some dinner. He went on with his work while he ate, and never again did he try to pierce the subterranean depths of Jane's personality.

The last two weeks of preparation were hectic. Jerry's endurance was wonderful, but his nerves were worn thin. At the eleventh hour the costumers decided that they could not turn out the gowns for the "vestal virgins," on time. They broke the news to Jerry over the 'phone one frantic day when everything had gone wrong.

"My God! what am I going to do?" he burst out, as he hung up the receiver.

"What is the matter?" Jane asked.

He explained with an outburst of rage.

"Are they hard to make?"

"No, but they've got to be done day after to-morrow."

"How many?"

"Sixteen."

"If I could get a couple of women to help, I might manage it for you."

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"Jane Judd, do you mean it? Get somebody; pay 'em anything; but get 'em here and let's begin."

"Have you got the stuff?"

"No, but I'll telephone for it and get it here special."

"Go ahead. Don't forget thread and needles."

While he was telephoning, Bobs appeared at the door.

"Look here, Jane; Jerry Paxton is absorbing entirely too much of your time. I'm wearing stockings with holes in them."

"I was just coming to tell you that something has gone wrong with some costumes, and I've offered to get somebody to help me, and make them for him."

"Upon my word, is there anything else you can do for the pampered darling? Jinny Chatfield and I could help you."

"Thanks."

Bobs ran off to get her assistant, and when the stuff arrived Jane had three pairs of hands waiting for Jerry.

"Bobs, Jinny, I can't take your time like this, you old dears."

"Don't blather, Jerry; explain the design," said Jinny.

He laughed and held up a drawing which both women inspected.

"Heavens! I don't know how to cut that," exclaimed Bobs.

"No more do I," said Jinny.

"Let me look at it," Jane remarked, and they all waited for her comment.

"Does this hang straight, neck to hem?" she asked.

He explained it carefully to her.

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"I think I can cut it; then I'll pin it on you, Miss Roberts, and if it's right we'll cut them all at once."

"Heaven be praised for Jane," said Bobs.

Jane went to work. For the next two hours they worked over it, Jerry explaining, Jane executing. Jerry was nervous and spoke impatiently now and then, but Jane was calm. In the end the gown was cut and basted and hung on tired Bobs. Then Jane ripped it up, to cut all the rest by it, and real work began. Jerry had to go to rehearsal, so he left them hard at it.

"You've saved my life, you three blessed, stitching old Fates," said he.

"What more could any woman ask?" said Bobs.

To the astonishment of everybody, Jane Judd laughed at that.

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## CHAPTER IV

It is certain that Jerry drove those three women like sweat-shop slaves until the costumes were finished. Jane struck on the second afternoon.

"We must have our dinner sent in to us. I can't stop to get it," she said.

"All right; only for the love of the prophets, don't stop."

"How do you spell 'profits,' Jerry?" said Bobs. "It's outrageous for you to work us like this."

"I told you not to do it," he snapped.

"We've got a mortgage on you for the rest of your life," she laughed.

"Just so you don't foreclose now. You are perfect, white-winged seraphs to do this, and I will never get even with you."

The society girls, cast for the "vestal virgins," began to arrive at the studio to try on their robes. They seemed at a loss how to classify the three women, whom Jerry introduced as his friends. It was obvious that handsome Jerry was their idol. One girl especially amused them.

"So, this is where you live, Mr. Paxton?" she sighed. "How fascinating! I do adore Bohemia!"

"Yes? Well, just go into the bedroom and let Miss Judd help you put on the costume," he said hurriedly, not daring to look at his grinning friends. [Pg 26]

"Your bedroom!" said the adoring one, in the tone of a pilgrim at Mecca.

Jane followed her into the bedroom, while Jerry tried to quiet Bobs and Jinny. It was interesting to note how unobtrusively Jane had taken charge of the work. She cut, directed, and fitted the gowns. The others sewed seams.

The gushing girl talked about Jerry and his gifts.

"Isn't Mr. Paxton too wonderful? He's a perfect director. And handsome! I think he is the handsomest man in New York!"

Jane made no comment.

"Are you an artist, too?"

"No."

"You don't look like an artist. So this is where he sleeps. Don't you think it looks like him?"

"Not especially. Now let Mr. Paxton see that on you."

With blushes and smiles the "vestal virgin" presented herself to Jerry's gaze. His eyes sought Jane's, and were relieved to find an answering gleam of amusement there. When the girl was finally disposed of, Bobs said:

"Are all of them in love with you, Jerry?"

"Silly idiot!" was his reply.

"Jerry, the well beloved!" she scoffed.

"You're as silly as the rest of 'em, Bobs," he protested.

"Wait until the show is over and they really get after our Jerry," teased Jinny. [Pg 27]

"Rubbish! When the show's over, I'm through."

"What blessed innocents men are. He really believes that, poor dear," sighed Bobs.

"Talk on; talk on! Thank heaven, Jane Judd doesn't talk."

The day that the costumes were finished was the last the three women saw of Jerry. The prophets swallowed him up. He flung himself on his bed at all hours of early morning, after rehearsal. He ate where and when he could. Never had his powers been called on to such an extent. He had to deal with two hundred women. He needed the endurance of an ox, with the wisdom of a serpent. He met jealousy, anger, hatred, social politics, with the same genial tact. The women were crazy about him. He refused to referee any fight, and he had a committee select the chief actors in the drama.

The night before the performance they rehearsed until two in the morning. They were all to spend the day of the great event in rest. Jerry slept until early afternoon, then walked to the club to look over the ballroom for the last time. It was extremely beautiful, and he felt satisfied with it. At the top of a wide sweep of stairs a circular window showed blue, star-specked night beyond. It was against this background that the groups were to assemble. The effect of the costumes against the blue-black of the sky proved very successful.

It seemed to Jerry as he went out onto the street again that this pageant had absorbed his whole life, that he had thought in Biblical terms and planned for this all his days. He realized that new currents were astir in him, that new people were crowding in. To-morrow he must take stock of the whole experience, mark where he was going. [Pg 28]

He walked past Bobs's door, on his way to his own, and rapped. She called out and he went in. She was lying on a couch.

"What's up; anything?"

"I was knocked down by an automobile, that's all."

"What? How did it happen?"

She explained the accident, how she had refused to go to a hospital, and how some nice, strange man had carried her home and gone for the doctor. He, on his arrival, had ordered perfect quiet, said there was no real damage done, except to nerves. She raged at the idea of being interrupted in her work, and to comfort her Jerry suggested that he have dinner sent in for both of them, from a near-by café.

"Jane is here to take care of me, but you can have dinner with us."

"All right, if you'll have it soon. I've got to get into my leopard skin and get down there early."

"Go tell Jane."

He discovered her in the kitchenette, and delivered the message. She nodded. Jerry entertained the invalid until Jane appeared with food; then he hurried off to dress, promising to return later and display himself as David.

In half an hour the door burst open unceremoniously and Jerry came in. Both women exclaimed. He was David, the goatherd, clad in a skin, carrying his sling. His splendid body was revealed and led up to the boyish beauty of his head. He had let his hair grow a trifle long for the occasion, so that it curled as softly as a Greek god's. The way his head rose from his shoulders was thrilling. But this impression of splendid youth was dimmed by his evident distress.

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"This damned thing will be the end of me yet!" he cried. "The girl who was to be Salome has failed us."

"Jerry! What a shame!"

"Her mother is dangerously ill. Mrs. Brendon has just telephoned. She is trying to get a professional dancer. We've got to have *somebody* there. They're sending the costume here. Bobs, *you* could do it."

"Jerry, I can't stand up."

"Oh, Lord, there's Jinny. I'll get her."

He was gone only a moment.

"Nobody there," he groaned.

"They've gone out to dinner," Jane said.

"Jane, be an angel and go round the neighbourhood and try to find the Chatfields. I can't go round in this rig."

She hurried off. Half an hour later she came back, breathless and flushed, to find Jerry nearly beside himself with nervous excitement, and Bobs white as death.

"They aren't anywhere. They must have gone uptown to dine," she reported.

"Jane could do it," said Bobs.

Jerry looked at Jane, flushed, eyes shining. He had never seen her before.

"By the Living Light! Jane Judd, will you do it?"

"Do what?"

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"Be Salome in my show."

"Certainly not."

"But you've got to! Listen! Put on the costume, and do as I tell you. We'll cut the dance, so you won't have a thing to do but walk down a flight of stairs."

"Jane, you've got to do it," cried Bobs. "Somebody has got to help Jerry out, and you're the only one left."

"But I couldn't do it. I never was in a show. I would mix it all up."

"No, you wouldn't. The whole success of this scene is up to you, Miss Judd. Won't you *please* do it? We ought to be there in thirty minutes."

"Where's the costume?"

"Here. It came while you were gone."

Bobs sat up and began taking it out of the box.

"I can't do it, Mr. Paxton," Jane repeated.

He sank down on a chair, despair writ large. Bobs swung her feet round to the floor, and rose, but dizziness flung her back on the couch with a groan.

"All right," said Jane, "give it to me."

She picked up the costume and went into the bedroom.

"Get me in there, Jerry; I want to boss this," said Bobs.

He carried her into the bedroom, and left them.

"Take off your clothes, Jane, and let down your hair," ordered Bobs.

Jane, once having made up her mind, hesitated at nothing. She undressed quickly, and let down her mane.

"Lord, what hair!" cried Bobs. "Part it in the middle; make it into two braids and weave these jewels into it."

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After that they worked together in silence, except for Bobs's brief commands. She put Jane's make-up on, as the girl knelt before her. The costume was very beautiful, very daring.

"Have I got to show my skin there?" Jane asked.

"Yes. Your skin is good; why not?"

Jane frowned, but went on, getting the costume adjusted. When it was complete, headdress and all, Bobs sighed.

"You're all right," she said. "Come look at her, Jerry."

He appeared at the door and stared.

"Jane Judd!" he exclaimed. "Why, Bobs, she's great, she's wonderful!"

Bobs nodded.

"Come on," said Jane.

"Turn around," he ordered. "Do you know about Salome, Jane?"

"I am Salome, daughter of Herodias, Princess of Judea! Speak again, Jokanaan, thy voice is music to mine ear."

"What's this?"

"Tetrarch, I would that they presently bring me, on a silver charger, the head of Jokanaan," Jane cried softly.

Jerry look embarrassed.

"Oh, my word," laughed Bobs. "Cinderella quoting Oscar Wilde to her fairy godfather!"

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## CHAPTER V

During the ride in the cab, Jerry felt his first uncomfortable minutes with Jane. He did not know what to say to her. It overturned all his ideas of her to have her quoting Oscar Wilde at him. He would not have known that it was Oscar Wilde, but Bobs said it was. He had never really looked at this woman, who had gone among them all these years, and all at once to-night, she was beautiful! He was so upset by it all that for once he was silent.

Jane, who was not in the least embarrassed, came to his rescue.

"Tell me exactly what I am to do, please, Mr. Paxton."

"Well, there is a platform and a long flight of stairs leading down from it. The tableaux form on the stage and then dissolve and go down the stairs into the throne room."

"I see. Am I in a tableau?"

"No, you go alone. You appear with the head, on the charger, hold it up so they can see it, then you come down the stairs."

"That isn't hard. Then what?"

"You go to the throne, display the head to Herod and the Queen, and run off with it, stage right."

"Is that all?"

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"No, you come on later, during a dancing number, walk across and sit on the steps of the throne, watching the dancers. If that is too difficult, we could get you on before the dance begins."

"Why is it difficult?"

"You ought to rehearse walking in among the dancers, not to halt them, or run into them. The other girl had a good deal of trouble with it."

"Suppose you wait until after I come off with the head to decide whether I make that later entrance."

"All right. Have you ever been in amateur performances before, Miss Judd?"

"Oh, yes, in school."

"I cannot begin to say how grateful I am to you for helping me out this way."

"Better thank me later."

They arrived at the club, and pushed their way into the bedlam behind scenes. It was packed with excited performers, waiting to be made up, or just finished. Jerry was hailed on all sides with questions and anxious protests. He found a chair for Jane.

"Keep your wrap on; it is draughty here. I'll be back in a minute."

"Everybody except those in the first three tableaux clear out. We can't have this confusion. Quickly, please," he shouted.

He directed them into other rooms, with clear directions as to what they were to do, where they were to stay, until called for. The women all tried to get a few words with him, but he kept them moving. One royal creature, whom he addressed as Mrs. Brendon, appeared, swathed in sable. She spoke to him, caressingly, as a privileged intimate.

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"You're wonderful," he said to her.

"Did you get a Salome?"

"Yes."

"Professional?"

"No, sub-amateur."

"But, Jerry, in that important part——"

"Don't worry. She can do it."

"Has Althea Morton come yet?"

"I haven't seen her. Here she comes now."

A fair, lovely woman made her way toward them through the crowd. She was Naomi.

"I was just asking Jerry about you," the older woman said.

"My! but you are magnificent, Herodias," she exclaimed.

"Isn't she?" Jerry echoed.

"You are really perfect, Althea. Isn't she lovely, Jerry?" Mrs. Brendon responded.

Althea looked into Jerry's eyes, and blushed.

"Will I do?" she asked him.

"You are very beautiful!" he answered feelingly.

Jane heard it all, remembered their names. She suspected that Jerry's admission made the whole evening a success for Althea Morton. It interested Jane, and amused her a little, to see his power over women.

"Whom did you get for Salome?" Althea asked him.

"Oh, I want you to meet her. She looks great."

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He turned to find Jane almost beside them. He had not realized how near to them she sat.

"Here you are! Mrs. Brendon, this is Miss Jane Judd. Miss Morton, Miss Judd. If Miss Judd had not come to our rescue I do not know what we would have done."

The women bowed to each other, and Mrs. Brendon frankly inspected Jane.

"Very good of you, I'm sure. You look charming."

"Thank you."

"What dance do you do?" Miss Morton inquired.

"Mr. Paxton has cut the dance."

"How could he? Why, that was the only thing to the part."

"Unfortunately, I do not dance."

"Oh, everybody dances now. You could have faked it. Do you hear that, Mrs. Brendon, she isn't going to do any dance," Miss Morton said, turning away to talk to Mrs. Brendon.

Jane felt, what they intended her to feel, that she was not of them, however kind she had been in coming to the rescue. Jerry came up to them again.

"I must carry Miss Judd off to look at the stage," he said, leading Jane away.

"Doesn't Jerry look like a god?" said Mrs. Brendon, watching him. Althea nodded.

"Are you frightened, Miss Judd?" Jerry asked.

"No."

Jane looked through the curtains at the great hall beyond and exclaimed with pleasure.

"Like it?"

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"It's splendid."

"You can gauge the length of your walk. The music will follow you, until you're off."

"I understand."

The music began at that moment, and Jerry hurried away. Herod and his Queen descended to their thrones, amid great applause. The first two tableaux formed, appeared, descended. Jerry was everywhere. He came up beside Jane.

"I go next, then you come. There is the head. The platter is not heavy at all. Go out below the throne, nearest audience."

"All right."

His music sounded, so he sprang into his picture. He was greeted with prolonged applause. Jane caught her breath in short gasps, while she waited for her cue. The violin began a slow, sensuous strain. The stage manager came to her, with her props.

"Now, Miss Salome," he said.

She picked up the head.

"Here, this goes, too."

"No, I can't use that. I want just the head," she answered, and stepped into the oval, the gory head held high above her in both hands. She stood a second, while the applause burst, then she slowly turned to them, held the grisly head against her breast, and slunk down the stairs, panther-like, her hand caressing the dead face.

She was unaware of the audience until she reached the lowest step, then she swept them once in a swift insolent glance, held high the head, laughed, ran to the throne, saluted the King and Queen, then pressing her lips to the dead lips, she ran off.

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The applause was deafening, continuous. In the wings they tried to get her to go out and bow, but she refused. The sound grew more imperious, but she was firm. Mr. Paxton had not told her to take any encores. The applause intended for her nearly spoiled the Naomi tableau, a fact which Miss Morton did not forgive. The show went on.

Jane sat back with a sigh. Presently she saw Jerry come into the ante-room to look for her. He hurried over, when he spied her, and seized her hands.

"You played a nice trick on me! You were the best yet. Why didn't you come out and take your curtain?"

"You didn't tell me to."

"Oh, Jane, Jane, you bluffer!"

"May I go home now, or do you want me later?"

"I should say I do want you later. I'll give you the sign for your entrance."

He left her and she sat there a long time watching the others. One or two "fellow artists" congratulated her upon her success, but most of them just looked at her with interest. Finally Jerry came again.

"All right now. The dancers are just beginning. Slip around them somehow, get to the throne steps, and sit there watching them, until the show is over. Wait; now this is a good time."

She started on. At sight of her there was great applause. She wove in and out among the dancers, watching them superciliously, seeming at moments to be a part of the dance. She was every inch royal, and wicked. Before the throne she bowed low, then threw herself, full length, before it, her chin on her palm, her elbow on the throne step. While she languidly watched the dancing, the audience watched her.

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"I'll be damned," said Jerry, softly, watching her, too.

When the last tableau was finished, Herod and his women left the throne, to join the audience. Everybody in the crowd which surrounded them spoke to Jane, congratulating her upon her success. Mrs. Brendon, seeing this, presented clamouring admirers, always mentioning her as a great friend of Mr. Jerry Paxton's. On all sides they declared it to be the most successful pageant of the season.

"Who *is* Mr. Jerry Paxton?" people demanded.

"Don't you know him? Why, he's a genius! He's a portrait painter, one of the coming ones. I have commissioned him to paint me, in this costume he designed for me," was Mrs. Brendon's unchanging answer. Jane noticed that it always made an impression.

"Why, Mr. Christiansen, what are you doing here?" Mrs. Brendon demanded of a giant of a man who approached them.

"I came to see what you vandals would do to the prophets," he replied.



"We've done very well by them, don't you think?" she laughingly inquired.

"Some of them seemed to me a trifle decadent, I confess."

"The Old Testament is decadent, if you come to that."

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"So? Elemental, I should say, rather than decadent."

"What's the difference? They're both naughty."

He laughed and indicated Jane.

"May I be presented to Salome?"

"Miss Judd, this is Mr. Martin Christiansen," she said.

"You know your Oscar Wilde, Miss Judd," he said.

"Miss Judd substituted at the last moment," Mrs. Brendon said. "Wasn't it wonderful of her?"

"It was because I knew the Wilde Salome that I was able to do it at all."

"You are an actress?"

"Oh, no. I'm—I'm not anything."

"Excuse me; yours was the only distinguished impersonation to-night. You made these beautiful dolls worth enduring," he said in a low tone.

"Oh!" breathed Jane, looking at him directly, to be sure he wasn't laughing at her, then hastily gazing toward Mrs. Brendon, to make sure she had not heard him. But that great lady had swept on.

"Who is Jerry Paxton?"

"Every one asks that. Mrs. Brandon says,—" Here she gave so perfect an imitation of Mrs. Brendon's words and manner that Christiansen laughed heartily.

"So, he is a painter. I seem to remember him faintly. Is he a good painter?"

"I'm not a critic."

"You like him—the man, I mean?"

"Why—I don't know. I'm sorry for him, rather."

"He doesn't look an object to inspire pity, Miss Salome. He seems to be a brilliant sort of person." [Pg 40]

"Yes, I know, but he's so sort of unprotected, like a little boy."

"So that's why you're sorry for him? That's akin to saying that you're sorry for all men."

"I am, rather, and all women."

He looked at her keenly, and she gave him her eyes directly.

"You don't look a misogynist."

"I am tremendously interested in life, but I feel always a little sorry for all of us who are trying to live it. Don't you?"

"Yes, but I'm old enough to be sorry for us, and you are not."

"I'm rather old," she said; then, as he laughed, she joined him. She was nearer happy than she had ever been. She was having a real conversation with a man she liked.

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"In a queer sort of place, a tenement house down on—You ought to know who I am. I don't belong here at all," she added.

"So much the better."

"I came at the last minute, as Mrs. Brendon said, because Mr. Paxton couldn't get any one else. I'm just a sort of general housekeeper in the studios around the Square. I take care of artists."

"Studio mother," he smiled. "What else do you do?"

"I read a great deal, and I write."

"Now we come to the gist of the matter. What do you write?"

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"I don't know what made me say that. I never told that secret to any one before."

"Thank you. But writing isn't a crime. If it is, half of New York is in the criminal class."

"Please don't tell any one I said such a silly thing. What I do is just nothing."

"It's a secret. I promise. Where do you publish?"

"I don't publish."

"No? You're an author after my own heart. I'm a critic, you see."

"Yes, I know."

"Do you? You read me?"

"Yes, always."

"When may I come and see you?"

"You may not come, please. I—I must go now."

"I have frightened you away."

"No, I only stayed on your account."

"Let me take you home?"

"No, thanks. Good-night."

He took her hand.

"I warn you that I shall find you, Miss Jane Judd. I never lose people who interest me."

She pressed his hand, smiled, and left him. A few minutes later, as he was making his way to the door, previous to his own escape, Jerry came to him.

"Mr. Christiansen, I'm Jerry Paxton. Mrs. Brendon said that you had Miss Judd with you. I'm looking for her."

"She escaped. I tried hard enough to keep her, but she went home."

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"Went home?"

"So she said. Who is she?"

"Why, she's a girl who does things around the studios, I don't know her very well. She was good, wasn't she?"

"She was the only thing in the show; a most beautiful creature."

"Funny thing, we've never thought she had any looks."

"It isn't the obvious kind of thing that is fashionable now. Odd, haunting sort of face."

"One thing is obvious. Cinderella did not like the ball," said Jerry.

"Maybe it was the Prince she didn't like. Modern princes are so disappointing," grinned the big man, to the other's discomfiture.

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## CHAPTER VI

Jane went home in such a stir of excitement that she could not sleep at all. The pageant and her success were merely the background for her conversation with Martin Christiansen. He had understood her, he had admired her, not because she looked well in the costume Jerry had designed, but because she had done her part with distinction, as he said. It delighted her to remember how frankly she had talked to him, even though she knew he was a most distinguished man of letters, critic and essayist. She had been used, in her mind, to set aside the great as a race apart from other humans, like the gods, and yet she, Jane Judd, had talked freely with one of them, told him her secret ambitions. She spent the night in happy waking dreams.

But in the morning she laid them away, with her Salome costume. In her brown dress, with her hair combed straight back, she was plain Jane Judd again. She had promised to go to Miss Roberts in time to get her breakfast, and help her dress. On the way she determined that the part she had played in Jerry's show must make no difference in her relations with any of them. If Bobs or Jerry tried to express their gratitude by any increase of friendliness, she would show them that she did not want it.

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She came into Miss Roberts's studio with her costume in a big box.

"Is that you, Jane Judd?"

"Yes. Good-morning."

"Come here, quickly."

Jane hurried into the bedroom, in alarm.

"Sit down and tell me everything that happened last night. Was it a success?"

"Oh, yes. Everybody seemed to like it."

"Was Jerry repaid for his trouble?"

"I think so. I didn't talk to him about it."

"What did you think of Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon?"

"She is important, and has no manners."

"Did she snub you?"

"No. She wasn't aware of me. There was a Miss Morton, too, Miss Althea Morton, who seemed to be a great friend of Mr. Paxton's."

"Beautiful?"

"No, only pretty."

"Why didn't you talk to Jerry afterward?"

"I came home."

"Didn't Jerry look after you?"

"There was no need for him to look after me. He was busy. I just came home."

She began the preparations for breakfast.

"But Jane, did you get through your part all right?"

"Oh, yes."

"Did they like you?"

"I suppose so; they clapped."

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"Jane, you clam, I'll wait for Jerry's version."

"Um-m."

When Jane brought in the tray with breakfast, Bobs looked at her closely.

"Jane, how can you let yourself be so plain, when you know now that you're good looking?"

"It's better for me to be plain," she answered simply.

"Better? Why?"

"I like to be inconspicuous."

"Daughters of Eve! Jane, you're not human."

Jane made no answer. She went about her work, as usual, and Bobs's various efforts to draw her out were vain. In the afternoon Jerry arrived.

"Hello, Jerry," Bobs called. "Sorry I'm not up to piping. 'Lo, the conquering hero comes.'"

"How's your health?"

"Hang my health! How was your show? I can't get a word out of Jane Judd."

"Is she here?"

"Yes."

"She was the big hit of the thing. Miss Jane Judd," he shouted.

She appeared at the door.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Paxton. I have the costume in a box and I'll leave it at your studio."

"Why did you run away?"

"I had nothing more to do, so I went home."

"That line might be used as Jane's epitaph," laughed Bobs.

"But everybody wanted to meet you. I rushed about looking for you, until old Christiansen told me you had gone home."

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"Martin Christiansen?" inquired Bobs.

"Yes. Mrs. Brendon said he laid the praise on thick. Not often you get him to say a decent thing. He raved about Jane Judd."

"You *were* flying high, Jane," Bobs commented.

"I can never thank you enough. It was bully of you to do it, and you gave a great performance. Would you mind telling me where you studied acting?"

"I haven't studied it. I'm glad I didn't mix things up for you," she replied, and went back to her

work.

"I can't get her," Jerry remarked. "She was really immense, Bobs. Got more applause than any of them. Do you suppose she is an actress? Who the deuce is Jane?"

"I don't know and I can't find out. She is baffling. She will not talk about herself. I think she despises us all, rather. Think of knowing you were a beauty, and going back to looking as she does to-day. She says it's better for her to be plain."

"I don't know how her looks ever got by me. Old Christiansen sweetly suggested that it was because she was not the obvious type. He asked all about her."

"How exciting! Tell me about the whole thing, Jerry, from the very first."

He obeyed, making a good story of it, with thumbnail sketches of characters as he went along. Bobs was hugely amused. When he came to the supper which Mrs. Brendon gave after the performance to a chosen few, she interrupted him.

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"Who is Althea Morton, Jerry?"

"She's a great friend of Mrs. Brendon's."

"Are you going to paint her, Jerry?"

"Probably. I begin on Mrs. Brendon's portrait very soon, and several other commissions will follow, I think."

"I told you that they would get you, that crowd."

"Don't worry, Bobs. This is my opportunity and I am going to grab it."

"Good luck, Jerry. Morituri Salutamus."

"Don't be a bally ass, Bobs. I've got to have a tea for the dear ladies next week. Will you and Jinny take charge?"

"Yes, if I can get down the hall to your door. I'm all in bits to-day."

"We'll manage it. Friday is the day."

"Going to have Jane?"

"Of course. How could any one have a party without Jane?"

"Doesn't it complicate it somewhat that she appeared in the pageant as one of them, as it were? Wouldn't it make the dear souls mad to find her acting as waitress at your party? They'd treat her like a dog."

"I hadn't thought of that. Would she understand, though, if I left her out?"

"She'll understand. I'll keep her here for the day, on some pretext."

So it appeared that, whether she would or not, there had come a change over her standing in the artist group. When Friday came, and Jerry's party was in progress, she sat darning in Bobs's room, thinking it over. She was not indignant at the situation; rather, it amused her. A knock came at the door. When she opened it, Martin Christiansen stood there.

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"I want to see Miss Roberts," he began. "It is you, Miss Judd," he added delightedly.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Christiansen. Mr. Paxton is having a tea, and Miss Roberts is pouring it."

"I thought she was still invalided."

"She is better."

"But are you not going to the tea of Mr. Paxton?"

"No."

"May I come in?"

"Yes, of course."

She admitted him, and when he was seated, she went on with her darning.

"I did not suppose I should find you so soon. This is my lucky day, Friday."

She smiled at him.

"Do you live here?"

"No."

"What are you doing, may I ask?"

"I am darning the stockings of Miss Katrina Roberts."

"Why does she not darn her own?"

"It is incompatible with the artistic temperament," laughed Jane.

"Humph, I am not so sure. What do you think of the artistic temperament?"

"I think it's a good excuse for egotists."

Christiansen's big laugh boomed forth.

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"That's my own idea, too. Selfishness, bad temper, irresponsibility, all piled up at the door, with that label. Do these folk interest you?"

"Yes. They are very lovable. So gay or so sad. Generous when they have money; unconcerned when they have none."

"Do you write about them?"

"Sometimes."

"I'd like to see what you say."

"I do not write well yet. I am still amateur."

"How long have you been writing?"

"Five or six years."

"Were you in earnest when you said that you had not published anything?"

"Yes. I have never even offered anything."

"Why?"

She told him of her talk with the editor, when she came first to New York, of his advice, of his words of inspiration about the art to which she wished to devote herself. He listened with deep interest.

"Ah! that was good. That was sound idealism. And what have you done to prepare yourself?"

"Read much, tried to absorb the best styles; and I have written all the time."

"About what?"

"People."

"People you know, or people you create?"

"Both; but more of the ones I create."

"I wish you would let me see something. It would give me pleasure and it might help you."

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"Of course it would, but I wouldn't dare show you my things," she began.

"My child, the time comes when the artist becomes too self-conscious, with no criticism, no audience as corrective. Suppose we make a compact of friendship together; then we can freely give and take from each other."

A sudden mist clouded her eyes. She let him see it, in the direct glance she gave him. It touched him deeply, it suggested so poignantly the woman's loneliness.

"You agree?" he asked gently.

"Oh, yes."

"The World and his Wife are my acquaintances, but of friends I have few. Is it so with you?"

"I have none."

"How can that be? I feel that you would have a talent for friendship."

"I believe I would have. But I am poor. The things I might offer would not interest the people I know."

"But these artists—aren't they congenial?"

"Miss Roberts would be, but you see I occupy an anomalous position here. I'm an upper servant, who is no servant. True to my group, I have my class distinctions," she smiled. "Miss Roberts ignores them. She would be my friend if I would let her. Some of the others would, too, I think."

"Pride is one of the strongest traits in human character, and one of the least desirable; don't you think so? Pride of possession, pride of class, of birth, of accomplishment; why do we build up these barriers between us, when the whole process of life should be to break them down, to get closer to one another, to understand and help?"

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"You think pride is out of fashion?"

"Just that. We treasure so many outgrown virtues, which have become vices. Patriotism, for instance. The rulers of Europe crash half the world into war by decking out this old scarecrow. My country, right or wrong, better than your country: our citizens, better than your citizens."

What nonsense! Europe fights to protect the fatherland. What, in fact, is Europe protecting? The greed of kings for power and territory?"

"I know, and the people who make the war, and who gain by it, are never the ones who fight it."

"Exactly. An Englishman said to me the other day: 'The British Government's idea of the way for a rich Briton to be a patriot is to induce the poor men who work for him to go to war.'"

"It isn't much of a national virtue, if it is confined to a class," Jane agreed.

"It won't do. If I thought that nationalism would go on to the scrap heap, at the end of the war, along with the power of kings, I'd believe that the whole holocaust was purposeful, not accident."

"But what are you going to do with patriotism, Mr. Christiansen?"

"Make it over. You can't psychologize it out of us, even if we admit that it is bad. It is an instinct, woven of many other instincts—pugnacity, group loyalty, egoism. But we can substitute the bigger group for the smaller; we can grow up to an international patriotism that shall be as fierce as that we know now, one that will conserve instead of destroy."

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"But how can we educate people to your new sort?"

"They are educating themselves now. The capitalists and the workers begin to see that war does not pay. Women have always known it. When peace is declared we will organize that sentiment of intelligent selfishness into altruism."

"Can we make a new world, with only old human nature to build it with, do you think?"

"After all, old human nature is God-stuff, isn't it? We can do anything with it, if we can sweep out the old traditional beliefs, the bogus virtues, the Victorian moralities, and get a good twentieth-century fresh start."

"It frightens one, doesn't it? It's such a big job."

"So it is, and we can't more than start this afternoon," he laughed. "To come back to us, when may I have some manuscript?"

"I will choose some things to-night, thanks."

"Good. Here is a card with the address. Will you tell Miss Roberts that the man who picked her up after the accident came to inquire for her health?"

"She will be disappointed."

"As for me, I am well satisfied with the call I have made. I shall see you soon, my friend. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Jane.

Martin Christiansen startled pedestrians on the way uptown by the big boom of his humming, but in the shadowy studio Jane Judd sobbed her heart out for joy, because she had found a friend.

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## CHAPTER VII

The week after the pageant proved far from the rest time Jerry had planned. Every day brought him invitations. All sorts of new demands were made upon his time. In his hurried calls upon Bobs he tried to explain that this was a part of his job. He was playing the fish now; when he had them hooked and landed, he would be free.

"If they don't pull the fisherman in after them, into the golden, dead sea," she giped bitterly.

"They won't get me, Bobsie," he boasted.

Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon continued to act as his social sponsor. She wanted him in tow every minute. Jerry noticed that wherever she took him, by some strange chance, they came upon Althea Morton. He sat next her at dinner, at the opera; he danced with her, paid her compliments; but it began to dawn upon him that he was not doing the one thing Mrs. Brendon desired, making love to her.

Althea Morton was the most perfect type, physically, which American aristocracy produces. She came of good, old New York stock, somewhat emasculated from too much wealth, but still pure. She had been born into luxury. She grew up in it, without thinking about it. To have every taste in life gratified was as natural as breathing air.

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She had the usual so-called education of girls of her class. Fashionable school was followed by a year abroad, for French and music. She was protected always from any contact with the rude world; she was always spared the necessity of thinking for herself. It was perhaps not her fault that her advantages were such a handicap. The two main tenants of her creed, were, naturally enough, making the best of her beauty, and acquiring a proper husband.

It was her second season when she met Jerry Paxton. His good looks and his charm attracted her, as they did all women, so that little by little he came to hold a very special place in her thoughts. His sudden success with the people of her world set the final seal of approval upon him.

To be sure he had no money; he boasted himself an impoverished artist, but that only added to his attractions. She had plenty of money for them both, and to do her justice, money was so much a matter of course with her, that it never occurred to her that Jerry could really be poor.

She, too, was not unaware of Mrs. Brendon's intentions in regard to Jerry and herself, but she supposed that their constant meetings were prompted by his desires, rather than by Mrs. Brendon's passion for vicarious romance. Althea was happy, and willing to let events shape themselves as they would. This period of focussing Jerry's attention upon herself was exciting.

It was the second week after the pageant that Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon had an inspiration. It flashed upon her at a dinner party in her own house, when Jerry, Althea, a Mr. and Mrs. Wally Bryce, and the Brendons were present.

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"We're all tired to death from that pageant. Let's take the *Empress* off to Palm Beach, Crom, and have a few weeks' rest. Will you all come?" she asked.

"I'll come," said Mrs. Bryce promptly, "and so will Wally, if I have to drag him aboard in chains."

"Good enough, old girl, but what about the Stock Exchange?"

"It will be here when we get back."

"One of your partners said that Wally's week-ends began on Thursday and ended the following Tuesday. They'll never miss you, Wally," laughed Mr. Brendon.

"How about you, Althea?" his wife asked.

"I should love it."

"And you, Jerry Paxton?"

"I'm afraid you must count me out. You see——"

"I'll do nothing of the kind. You shall make studies for my portrait aboard the yacht and we'll stay out till you're ready to put on paint," the hostess remarked. "When can we start, Crom?"

"Day after to-morrow, if you like."

"What will you do with our chee-ild?" Wally asked his wife.

"Oh, bother! I forgot her. Isabelle is coming home to-morrow for three weeks. She got into a scrape and she's suspended."

"Bring her along," said Mrs. Brendon promptly.

"Bless you, I will. What a way to keep Isabelle quiet," said her mother.

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"What a way to spoil the quiet for the rest of us!" groaned her father.

"We'll troll her along behind the yacht, if she's a nuisance," Mrs. Wally consoled him.

So it was settled, so it happened. Bobs and Jinny Chatfield made satiric comments on the "Cinderella Man." Jinny laid a bet on Miss Morton's capture of him. He took up her wager, kissed them both good-bye, and left in high good humour for a holiday to his liking.

The yacht was a marvel of luxury. They were housed like princes, fed like kings. Two days out of New York they slid into sunshine and warm winds. Life was one long, delicious playtime. To Jerry it was perfect, until he began to realize the limitations of a ship, and one man's ability, when pitted against that of two women of decision.

Mrs. Brendon made good her promise to sit for studies for the portrait, but a few days out at sea were enough to convince Jerry that the price of his freedom was not the completed portrait of Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon, but a completed romance. It looked as if Mrs. Brendon would keep him at sea until he proposed to Althea.

Man-like, the thing began to get on his nerves. Man-like, he looked about for some feminine outlet for his feelings, and, as if for the first time, his eye fell upon Isabelle Bryce, the sixteen-year-old daughter of the Wallys. She was a queer, thin, brown little creature, with huge brown eyes. For the first few days he had scarcely seen her. She read, or stayed with the captain, or talked to the sailors. He found her squatted on deck, one windy morning, when the others were inside playing bridge.

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"Hello! Aren't you afraid you'll blow overboard?" he inquired.

"No, I'm not. You've waked up, have you?"

"Have I been asleep?"

"You haven't seen *me* before," she retorted.

"Well, I see you now. Do you know what you look like?" He smiled down at her.

"Yes. I look like a ripe olive."

"No. You look like a cricket. Are you always so silent? Don't you ever chirp?"

"Me, silent? I've given the Wallys the blow of their lives. They think I'm sick, I've been so good on this rotten cruise."

"What caused the reform—good company?"

"No. I'm getting ready to break it to them that I may not be taken back at that school. I got into the devil of a row."

"Did you? And they expelled you?"

"Suspended me until they decide. That's why I had to come on this jolly party."

"You don't like it?"

"Of course I don't like it. How'd I know whether you ever would wake up or not?"

"Did you want me to wake up?" he asked curiously.

"But, oui, aye, yah, yes, of course! You don't suppose I want to play with fat old Brendon, do you? Wally is a fearful bore, so there's only you."

"Poor little Cricket, she wanted a playmate," he teased.

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"She did! I can't rub my knees together and make a 'crick,' you know, so I had to wait till you came to. I'd have pushed you overboard, if it hadn't happened to-day. I'm so full of unused pep, I'm ready to pop!"

"Well, come on. I'm awake. Now what?"

"Let's warm up," she said, and was up and off down the deck in one spring. Jerry pursued. She raced around the whole deck twice, then waited for him to catch up with her.

"Puffing, Jerry? You're getting fat!" she jeered.

"You impudent little beggar. I'd like to shake you."

"Try it."

This was the opening mistake in what proved to be a perfect succession of diplomatic errors on the part of Jerry Paxton. It was as if the lid had popped off the cricket. She followed at Jerry's heels every minute. She sang, she talked, she whistled, she played tricks. She was the great, original pest, which no one could subdue, and Jerry laughed at her. Mrs. Brendon ordered her off when Jerry was working at the studies, but for the rest of the time she preyed upon them all.

Her father rowed her in public, one day, and lost his temper.

"Don't be a brat!" said he.

"It amuses me to be a brat," she retorted. "It amuses Jerry, too."

"It amuses nobody," said her mother.

"Jerry, *à moi; au secours!* Take your dying pet away before she's stepped on. The Wallys are hungry for cricket blood!" she cried, dragging Jerry up from a seat where Althea had him safely cornered.

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"Look here, kid, you've got to behave or they'll send you home," he said, marching her off forward.

"You're handsome when you're cross, Jerry. I adore you cross."

"Do you *want* to go home?"

"You're only cross because I made you ridiculous by dragging you away. You ought to be glad I saved you from Althea, the beautiful wax doll. Has she any works, Jerry? When I punch her she says 'Papa! Mama!' just like the other dolls."

"That will do. We will not discuss the other guests in this party," sternly.

"Don't expect me to have manners. I hate them."

"You rather bore me this morning," he remarked, and left her. She sulked the rest of the day, and waited her chance. The night was perfect, warm, with a full moon. Mrs. Brendon managed to get Althea and Jerry on the upper deck alone, while she guarded the others elsewhere. Isabelle had gone to bed with a headache, to every one's delight.

"Isn't this wonderful?" said Jerry.

"Yes," with a sigh.

"Why the sigh? Aren't you happy?"

"No. Everything seems so difficult here. We had such good times together in New York, but here



it is so forced. Besides, that dreadful child seems to interest you more than any of the rest of us."

"I only keep her off the rest of you."

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"But you laugh at her; you like her."

"She's an oddity. I confess she amuses me."

"She makes outrageous love to you."

"That baby? Good Lord! She's a little schoolgirl."

Althea laughed harshly.

"Surely you aren't jealous of her?"

"Why shouldn't I be? You spend all your time with her."

He leaned over and laid his hand on hers. She was really distressed, and Jerry could not bear to have people unhappy.

"My dear girl," he began. Then, at an expression which dawned on her face, he turned to look behind him. Isabelle, her hair flying, her robe floating behind her, her bare feet stuck into little mules, flew across the deck to them, and, as Jerry rose, fled to his arms, sobbing.

"Oh, Jerry, Jerry. I can't bear it!"

"Look here, Cricket, what's the matter?" he said, embarrassed at the scene.

"You hate me! I'll kill myself, if you hate me."

"Rubbish! I don't hate you except when you make yourself a pest."

The sobbing increased.

"Don't cry like that, child."

She clung to him, her head against his neck, as he bent over to hold her.

"Jerry, I'm s-sorry. P-please s-say you l-like me."

"Of course, I like you. Now, go to bed, like a nice girl."

"Not till you say you love me."

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"All right; I say it. Now trot."

"Say it so I can remember, Jerry."

"Cricket, I love you madly. Now hop."

"I came to save you, Jerry," she whispered in his ear, so Althea could not hear.

"What's that?" he said, loosening her arms.

"Carry me down, Jerry?"

"Nothing of the kind; you'll walk," he said sternly, and led her toward the steps.

"Jerry, they'll send you home if you don't propose to Althea pretty soon. Then we can go together," said the imp, as she left him.

When he went back to Althea she rose, and he saw how angry she was.

"How can you let that creature make you so ridiculous, Jerry?"

"I'm sorry she annoys you. She is a spoiled, neglected kid, but there's no harm in her."

"She's a disgusting little beast, and I think it is a perfect outrage that the Bryces have shut us up on a ship with her. I shall land the first minute possible, and go home. I don't intend that a miss in her teens shall insult me as she does the rest of you."

She went to her stateroom in high dudgeon, and from that moment Jerry was like a man in a nightmare. When he thought he was on solid land, he stepped off precipices. When he knew he was walking properly, he found himself skimming the earth two feet above terra firma.

When they finally put in at Palm Beach he improvised: a telegram calling him north at once. It was now a case of marry Althea or run, so, like "Georgie, Porgie, Puddin', Pie," he made a hasty exit.

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It was with a feeling of pleasant relaxation that he took the night train north. He went to bed early, and slept like an escaped prisoner. When the porter went through the car calling: "Telegram for Mr. Jerome Paxton," he came to, and sat up as if he had been struck by a mallet. He put his head out and called for the yellow envelope. Half awake, he read:

"Is Isabelle with you?—Wallace Bryce."

He called for a blank and wired: "Certainly not." Then, as his indignation at Wally had thoroughly

wakened him, he began to dress. What did Bryce mean by that ridiculous wire? Why in the name of mercy should that limb of Satan be with him? He supposed she was up to some of her tricks. He opened the curtains of his berth to make for the dressing room, when the curtains of the lower opposite were parted.

"What did you tell Wally, Jerry?" asked the Cricket, grinning.

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## CHAPTER VIII

Jerry stood a second in the aisle, speechless, and stared at the Cricket.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded finally.

"I'm going north with you. I told you I would."

"Get up and get your clothes on this minute," he ordered peremptorily.

"Not on your life, Jerry dear. I always lie abed late," she retorted, closing the curtains.

His first impulse was to jerk them apart, and set the rebellious imp upon her feet, but second thought convinced him that public opinion would be against that move. He hurried off to send another wire to Wally, phrased thus:

"Just discovered Isabelle on train. What shall I do with her?"

Then he made an agitated toilet and went back to his seat. The car was in that unspeakable state of vile air and half-dressed strangers which makes Pullman cars such a horror in the early morning. Jerry decided he could not bear it.

"Isabelle," he said, addressing the curtains, "get up and come to breakfast."

"I don't care for any breakfast, thank you, Jerry," she answered sweetly.

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He went to the diner with a sigh of relief. He tried to contemplate his situation calmly. The Bryce child had certainly scored. No amount of protesting would ever convince Althea Morton of his innocence, because she had warned him against Isabelle's wiles. He could count on Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon's championing. Certainly he had disappointed her, but she could not believe him such a cad as to have run off with the Bryce girl. He did not worry about the distracted parents. He expected them to be prepared for anything from their undisciplined offspring. He pictured them, sighing with relief, that she was off their hands and upon his!

The next thing was what to do about the predicament? Would he better take her off at Jacksonville and wait for her father to claim her, or should he continue his journey with her to New York? What could he do with her then? He decided to leave it to the Bryces; they would have to arrange the details. His belief was that Wally would follow to Jacksonville, on receipt of the second telegram, so that would mean only the delay of a day for Jerry.

On his return to the other car, Isabelle's berth was still occupied. He read his paper, spent an hour in the smoking-room. Still she did not appear. All the other berths were made up, and the usual curiosity centred in the one late riser. Jerry decided not to be present at her entrance so he betook himself again to the smoker and stayed until noon.

When he returned this time, she was up and properly ensconced among her belongings. She smiled exuberantly, as Jerry came toward her, the focus of all eyes.

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"Good-morning, Jerry dear. Isn't this jolly?"

"You ought to be spanked!"

"Oh, come off! Don't use that stage-father tone. I hoped you would be glad to see your little Cricket, Jerry."

"Well, I'm not."

"You may as well cheer up, because, glad or mad, you've got to see me."

"What on earth made you do such a crazy thing?"

"I couldn't stand it to be left alone with that dull bunch. I told you I'd come north with you, and I always do what I say I will."

"It must be comfortable to be so unhampered by consideration of others!"

"What others?"

"Your parents."

"Oh—they!"

"And me."

She considered that.

"You mean you don't want me."

"Certainly I don't want you. You have put me in a very uncomfortable position."

"I wanted to."

"What have I done to you, to make you displease me this way?"

"You've done enough," sullenly.

"What, for instance?"

"You've put a crimp in everything for me."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I thought we were good chums."

"I don't want to be your chum."

He looked at her, puzzled.

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"Look here, kid——"

"Don't you call me kid," she blazed.

"Let's talk this over calmly, just as if I were your big brother. Maybe there is something I don't understand about it. In the first place, how did you manage it? How did you get on the train without being seen?"

"I came aboard as soon as the car was opened, and went to bed. I tried to get your upper, but you had bought the whole section. I wanted to pop my head down and say 'boo' at you this morning. But I must have gone to sleep because I didn't know when we started."

"Did you have some money?"

"I touched Wally for some yesterday."

"Is your ticket for New York?"

"Yes."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"That depends on you."

"On me?"

"Yes, of course. Don't you see that it does? I left a note for mother, saying I had run away with you, so I think you'll have to marry me, Jerry."

He laughed outright, but one look at her face silenced him.

"I beg your pardon, but that strikes me as a little high-handed, your running off with me, like this, and then demanding that I marry you. Modern, but extreme, I should say. How old are you?"

"I am sixteen and a half," with dignity.

"Well, even at that advanced age we do make mistakes, and this is one of yours, Isabelle. I expect a wire from your father saying that he will follow us to Jacksonville, and take charge of you."

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"I'm not going back on that damned yacht!"

"My child, the decision as to your destination lies with your respected father. In the meantime, you must be starving, so we'll go to lunch."

Just then the porter came through with Wally's wire. It read: "Sorry. She's a devil. Take her to New York. Wiring head mistress of school to meet her there. Wally." The extreme concern in Jerry's face prompted Isabelle to read over his shoulder. Then she laughed gaily and defiantly. Jerry controlled himself, put the telegram into his pocket, and rose.

"Will you come to luncheon with me, Miss Bryce?"

She glanced at him speculatively.

"Delighted, Mr. Paxton."

For the rest of the journey, Jerry treated his companion with the most careful consideration. She tried in every way to break down this wall of formality. She sparkled at him, she teased him, she raged at him, she wept, but in vain.

"Jerry, *please* don't treat me like a lady," she begged.

"You've done nothing to deserve such treatment."

"You used to be so nice to me on the yacht."

"Because you behaved yourself like a kid, and knew your place."

"Did you like my behaviour on the yacht?" in surprise.

"No, but it was an improvement on this dime-novel, moving-picture heroine you're trying out now."

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"You're a fine movie villain, Jerry. You look as if you would pass me the poisoned bean."

Silence.

"Jerry, if you don't like any of my behaviours, why were you nice to me?"

"Because I thought you were a lonely little girl with no one to play with."

"I am that now, Jerry."

"Whose fault is that?"

"Yours."

He laughed shortly.

"You could play with me, very nicely, with no interruptions from the Wax Doll, if you'd only thaw. Couldn't you thaw a tiny bit, Jerry?"

He rose and departed to the smoking-room. When an hour had passed and he did not come back, she marched down the car and into the smoking compartment.

"Jerry, I'm going to sit in here with you men. I'm lonesome. I've always wanted to sit in here; it looks so cozy and smells so smelly."

The men laughed and rose to make room for her, but Jerry took her by the arm and piloted her swiftly forth.

"You'll have to smell it from afar," he said, and felt the grin of the men behind him. He was thoroughly irritated now.

"Execute me, Jerry, but don't look like that."

"Haven't you any instincts of breeding at all?" he inquired. "No nice girl does that sort of cheap, fresh thing. What do you suppose those men think of you? They do not consider you the least cute or clever, if that is what you intended them to think. Their main idea is that, if I am your guardian, I ought to lock you up until you learn some manners."

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"I wish you *were* my guardian, Jerry."

Jerry was actually worn out with annoyance, with weariness, with fury at Wally Bryce for not taking her off his hands. He looked toward his escape with anticipation, and he devoutly hoped that his farewell with Isabelle would be forever. They were due in New York at ten o'clock at night. As they sat, ready to disembark, Isabelle leaned toward him.

"Jerry, do you hate me?"

"Oh, no," casually.

"Will you ever forgive me?"

"You are quite forgiven."

"Have I spoiled the trip for you?"

"Oh, no. You have been most sprightly."

"Oh, Jerry!" she groaned, and relapsed into large-eyed, tragic silence.

In the station, on arrival, the most careful search failed to find the head mistress. Isabelle was perfectly unconcerned about it, but Jerry was far from it.

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked.

"Come along," he replied ungraciously, bundling her into a cab.

Arrived at the studio building, he hurried to Bobs's door and rapped. No answer. He tried again and again. He went to the Chatfields'; there was nobody there. Isabelle yawned. Jerry unlocked his own door and lit the light.

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"This is your place, Jerry?" she cried, and began a swift tour of inspection.

"You can turn in here for the night, and in the morning I will take you to the school."

"Where will you sleep?"

"At a club."

"And leave me in this spooky place alone? I won't stay."

"Don't you see that I cannot take you around town at this hour of the night looking for lodgings?"

"I'll go in the bedroom, and you can sleep on the couch. I won't stay here alone."

He went to the telephone and called a number. He sent a request to Jane Judd to come to the 'phone, on important business. Then he waited a long time.

"Who is this Jane Judd?" demanded Isabelle.

"She is somebody to stay the night with you."

"I don't want her. I hate her name."

Finally he heard Jane's voice.

"Miss Judd, this is Jerome Paxton. I hope you had not gone to bed. Oh, that is good. I am just back from Florida and I have to ask a very great favour of you. If I come to your house in ten minutes, will you see me, so that I may explain? Thanks."

He hung up the receiver.

"Now, you get to bed. I'll be back here in twenty minutes with Miss Judd, who will spend the night with you."

"Can't you stay, too, Jerry?"

"Don't be ridiculous!"

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He found Jane waiting in the lower hall for him. She was as calm and impersonal as if this were a usual occasion. He explained the situation.

"It's an outrage to ask you to do it, but will you come?"

"Certainly. Wait until I get some things, and a hat."

Presently they were on the way in a taxi. He inquired the news of the quarter. Bobs and the Chatfields had gone to Philadelphia for a month, possibly longer.

"I hope this girl will not prove a nuisance," he said, as they came to their destination.

"How old is she?"

"Sixteen."

They found her curled up on a couch, half dead for sleep.

"I thought you'd never come, Jerry," she cried.

"This is Miss Judd, who is good enough to stay with you. This is Isabelle Bryce, Miss Judd."

Jane nodded, and the girl stared rudely.

"I'll fix the bed for you. You must be very tired," said Jane kindly.

"You're all right now. Get a good sleep," said Jerry, picking up his bag to go.

"Oh, Jerry, don't leave me," cried Isabelle, clinging to him. "I don't want to stay with this strange woman. I want to go with you always, Jerry, because I love you so. Won't you take me, Jerry?"

"Don't be a little goose, Isabelle."

"Please don't hate me, Jerry," she sobbed.

"I don't hate you, when you're sensible."

"Won't you call me Cr-cricket, just once, Jerry?"

"If you'll be a good girl, and go to bed."

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"Kiss me good-night."

"I'll do nothing of the kind."

He loosed her clinging arms determinedly. He had a miserable feeling of Jane's amusement over this absurd scene, which she was overhearing. When he released her, Isabelle sank in a sobbing heap upon the couch.

"Miss Judd," called Jerry.

She came to the door, and only for an instant was there a flicker of amusement in her eyes.

"Come and take charge of this crazy kid," he said desperately. "I'll come over early in the morning."

He seized his bag and hurried to the door.

"Oh, Jerry!" wailed the heroine.

But the hero, red, furious, embarrassed, plunged down the stairs, three at a time, and pined for the sight of Wally, so that he might adequately record his feelings upon some member of the Bryce family!

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## CHAPTER IX

Jane's emotions, as she turned her attention to Isabelle, were compounded of amusement and sympathy for Jerry. She sensed how he, of all men, would hate being made ridiculous. She was destined to hear the whole story before she went to sleep, for Isabelle's pent passion had reached a climax where a confidante was a necessity.

She described the yachting party most cleverly. She enlarged on Mrs. Brendon's attempts to isolate Althea and Jerry, with her own introduction into the picture. She described her growing love for the hero, her determination to join him when he came north. She even admitted that she had wired the head mistress of the school not to meet them, because she thought that Jerry would then have to marry her to "protect her good name."

Jane struggled not to laugh; it was so poignant to the girl, and so absurd to her. She tried to soothe her, to change the subject, but in vain.

"Do you think he will marry me?" she demanded.

"I doubt it."

"Don't you think he loves me?"

"I'm afraid you're too young for this kind of thing."

"I'm not young. I'm nearly seventeen, and lots of girls love and marry before that."

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"Lots of other women are in love with Mr. Paxton, too," said Jane.

"You just say that to scare me!" cried Isabelle, and followed it up with much weeping.

Poor Jane endured a bad night, but as is the way with afflictions, it was finally over. Jerry arrived at nine, full of thanks to her, and carried the *enfant terrible* off to her school.

Jane hurried home, for this was to be a momentous day to her. Martin Christiansen had written that he was coming to see her at three o'clock in the afternoon, to talk over her work.

"Let me come to you in your own quarters, where you write and live, will you, my friend?" he had written her.

She had sent for him to come, and this was the day. She was not ashamed of the little room in the tenement house, where she had spent so many hours. She looked about it as she let herself in, trying to see it with his eyes—eyes used to beauty and comfort.

It was a square room, on the corner with two windows, west and south, hung with white curtains. It was small, but not cramped. The walls were calcimined white. The bed and dresser were white, as were the few chairs. A table, by one window, had on it a student lamp and neat piles of manuscript, while a dozen books were supported by book ends, against the wall. The rug was inexpensive, but dull in colour. It was scrupulously clean, and its bareness suggested deliberate asceticism rather than poverty.

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"We aren't ashamed of it, Milly," she said to the cat. "It certainly is not beautiful, but it's clean, and sort of self-respecting, and those are the virtues of our class. He will understand that. I do hope you will like him, Milly," she added.

She hurried with her luncheon, gave Milly a bath, made a careful toilet herself. The same dark dress to be sure, but little fine collars and cuffs were added, to take away its austerity. She let her hair coil itself loosely instead of screwing it back as she usually did. She made these preparations, not at the dictation of vanity, for she was singularly free from it, but from an instinct to make herself fit for what she felt to be a crisis in her life. Whether Martin Christiansen said good or bad really did not matter so much as the fact that she had come to this point of testing—this day of judgment.

While she waited for his coming she let her mind return to Jerry and his latest difficulty. She laughed aloud at the memory of the girl's passionate absurdity. She thought back to her own first romance, a mad infatuation for the little town beau, to whom she never spoke. Yet how he had filled her dreams, how she had planned her marriage to him, under romantic circumstances, just as Isabelle had planned hers with Jerry. Artist-like, she appraised this self-revelation of youth, in its pitiful, lovable folly, and made it her own. As for poor Jerry, he was evidently doomed to stumble from one love affair to another, until death withered his charms. Too much love; too little love; so life goes grinding on, like an endless film of the sated and the hungry.

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Milly jumped into her lap, purring.

"Milly, you're one of the Jerrys; you get nothing but affection. Is it because you demand it, or just because you are beautiful and people give it to you?"

She heard voices on the stairs, and opened the door wide, the big cat in her arms. Billy Biggs came first.

"Gen'l'mum to see yu, Miss Judd," he announced.

"Thank you, Billy. Welcome," she added simply to her guest. He took her hand in his cordial clasp, and looked his pleasure. He gave Billy a small tribute.

"You're a most excellent guide, my son," he remarked.

"I seen right away he didn't know this neighbourhood, Miss Judd, so I sez to him: 'What ye lookin' fer?'"

"Thank you much, Billy," she smiled, closing the door on his monologue.

"Is this your family?" he asked, laying his hand on Milly's head.

"Yes. Her name is Militant, but we call her Milly, as a sort of tactful evasion. Protects her with the neighbours, who are, on the whole, conservatives."

He smiled, laid his coat aside, and turned to look at her closely. She met his glance, flushing slightly.

"I have to get used to you at home."

He looked about him frankly.

"Yes, this is you—virginal, cloistered. Where did you get that Salome?" he inquired.

"I don't know. I understand Salome."

She sat by the window, where the afternoon sun came in, the big cat asleep in her lap. He drew a chair near her.

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"I'm enormously curious about you. Where did you come from? Who were your people? How did you get here?"

"It isn't a bit interesting. I was born in a little town named Warburton, in New Jersey. My father was John Judd. He had a grocery store and was a leading citizen. My mother was an actress."

"Ah!" said Christiansen.

"The company she was with went broke in our town, and she stayed on as cashier in Judd's store. He married her and I was the only child. She died when I was twenty; my father followed when I was twenty-two. I sold the grocery, paid the debts, and came to New York to be an author."

She paused and turned her slow, rare smile on him. She had the ability to sit perfectly still, her hands quiet in her lap. Christiansen marked the trait; valued it.

"What made you want to write?"

"I had always been a reader. I read everything in the Warburton Public Library, I think. When I was in High School I wrote some stories which the local editor published, under an assumed name. My mother thought I had great talent, and I was tempted to agree with her," she smiled.

"How long did your funds last, in New York?"

"Not long. I did not have much in the first place. I realized before the money was gone that I must take any job I could find. I was not prepared to do anything."

"Same old story. How did you get work in the studios?"

"Answered Mr. Paxton's advertisement. I've been there ever since. I didn't care what I did, just so I made a living. My real life is here, with my true work."

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"Just what do you do in the studios?"

"Anything—everything. Mend their clothes, clean palettes, sweep the studios, make curtains, look after them when they're sick, cook for them when they're busy."

"No wonder you know them so well."

It was his first reference to her work. She waited breathlessly, but he returned to her past again.

"Were you never tempted to take up your mother's profession?"

"No. You see, I had always been told how hard that life was, and I suppose I rather shared my father's belief that it wasn't respectable. Warburton found my mother its most interesting citizen, while it disapproved of her entirely. She was just a simple, frail woman, but to Warburton she was a brand plucked from the burning, and her past was never to be forgotten."

"Was your father in love with her, or was it the romance of her profession which attracted him?"

"Father was very religious. I think he married her to save her soul. He was as kind to her as he knew how to be, but he never understood her."

"And you?"

"I loved her and took care of her. She was my child from the time I was a baby. I acted as interpreter to my father, whom I understood, too, in a way. He was a dour, silent man, but just."

"I get the picture of both of them," he nodded.

"Can I write?" she demanded bluntly.

"How long have you been working at that desk?"

"Five years."

She drew a big packing box from under the bed. It was full of manuscripts. He looked at it with deep interest.

"You've told nobody, offered nothing for sale in those years?"

"Not since my first editor, who gave me such good advice."

"It is incredible."

"Is the time wasted?" she asked.

"No. Work is never wasted, and of course you are destined to write."

"Am I?" she cried. The quality in her voice, of rapture and strain, made him look at her.

"My child, how you care!" he said, laying his hand on hers.

She nodded, with wet eyes.

"I have been profoundly interested in the things you gave me to read. I want more, much more. There are certain undoubted qualities—an astonishing vocabulary, a fine sense of words. You are a *gourmet* for choice words, rich words, words fat with meaning. You've a pretty good sense of form. I can fairly analyze your literary diet. 'Ha, now she's devouring Molière,' I would say to myself, or, 'she's overeating the Russians.'"

Jane laughed happily.

"As a specialist, I must say that you are overfed and undernourished. You read too much and live too little. You look out on life from this white cell. Do you see what I mean?"

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"Yes, yes; but what can I do?"

"We must do something. The true artist speaks for the age in which he lives. There is no room for the ascetic point of view in our world to-day—this is a world of the senses. Like it or not, it's true. We measure all pleasure, all experience, by their æsthetic or emotional value. We go back to the very sources of art to find a fiercer reaction. We have Piccabia, Matisse crudity gone stark; we have dissonance in harmony—DeBussey and Strauss; the Russians with their barbaric dances. We have the Irish renaissance in drama, going back to the peasant for primitive emotions. We have the bloodiest war in all times; we are primitive savages in our greed for lust and power, just as we are supermen in devising ways of exquisite, torturing death for our enemies. We are the age of the senses, my friend; we brook no denial of the flesh and its appetites."

"I understand what you mean; I know it to be true; but how can I have a part in life, when perforce, I am just an onlooker?" she asked earnestly.

"We will find a way. We must open the door of the nunnery, and lead Sister Jane into the world of deeds, of fight and lose, heartache and some rare joys. Do you want to come, Sister Jane?"

She turned her head and looked into space beyond her window before she answered.

"I shall miss the sanctuary, the quiet, and my holy saints," she said, her hand sweeping the books, "but I want to come out; for a long time, Mr. Christiansen, I've wanted so to come out."

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"Good. We will begin with your worldly education to-night, dear saint. We'll go to Polly's for dinner, and thence to a meeting at Cooper Union, where I am to speak. Will you come?"

"Oh, yes," she cried excitedly. "It is so wonderful to have a friend and go off for dinner and talk. You're the first friend I've ever had," she added shyly.

"That's a responsibility," he answered, "but I like it. I must set you a high standard."

"You have. I wish I could give you something to make you happy, in exchange."

"I am a *gourmet* of people, as you are of words, Jane Judd. You give me a rare treat, a new flavour. Come, get your hat, child, and let's be about your living!"

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## CHAPTER X

With Bobs and the Chatfields away, and his uptown friends believing him to be off on a cruise, Jerry settled himself to long-neglected work, but nothing went well. He was out of work habits, he missed his intimates, he descended into the depths of discouragement and despair.

It was on a day of gloom within and gloom without that he set every canvas in the studio in a row before him. He went slowly from one to another and studied them all. Into this funereal stock-taking Jane entered. The deep distress on his face stopped her.



"What's the matter, Mr. Paxton?"

"Jane Judd, why do you suppose I ever thought I could paint?"

"Has anything happened?"

"These have happened! Look at this collection of wax-works! Bad drawing, no style, paint put on with a squirt gun."

"There is nothing like taking a good square look at what you have been doing, to make you mend your ways," she said, but he was not listening. He was enjoying his despair.

"I'll smash the whole lot of them. I never want to see them again!" He struck a wet brush across the nearest one, but Jane seized his arm.

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"Don't do that."

"I can't live in the room with them."

"All right. Send them up to the storage room."

She began to move them off and stack them against the door. Jerry threw himself down on the couch, moodily. He scarcely noticed when the janitor, answering Jane's summons, carried them all off to the top floor.

"Now you've got a clean slate you can begin again," Jane said, and went about her work.

"I shall give it up. I'll never paint again."

She made no comment, but she smiled to herself. She knew "her children," as she called them.

"Can't you stop fussing around, and come and talk to me?"

"I have work to do."

He came to the door of the bedroom.

"What work?"

"I'm going to clean this room."

"Why do you bother with us, Jane Judd?" he inquired.

"I have to make my living."

"But you can do *anything*."

"Go away, now, I'm going to make a dust," she smilingly suggested.

He obeyed, but she heard him walking the studio, up and down. Presently he came to the door again.

"Couldn't you find something to do in the studio? I'm so desperately lonesome to-day."

Her own heart had prompted that phrase too often to let her smile at it.

"All right, in a few minutes. I'll find some mending to do."

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After a while she came into the studio, and sat down by the big window, her sewing basket beside her. Jerry watched her quiet directness of movement. He noted the straight line of her back, the bend of her dark head outlined against the gray sheets of rain outside. Her sombre gown was relieved by a splash of red, gold, and blue Chinese embroidery, which she was mending.

"I'm always wondering lately, what you are thinking about, Jane Judd," he said.

"At this moment, I am thinking that it was careless to let this beautiful thing be torn."

"I didn't mean to intrude."

She bowed without reply.

"I'm going to make a study of you. It's interesting, that gray window, the rain and all."

He set up an easel and got a board ready.

"I've never known anybody to be as still as you are. It's a positive talent.... There's no sense in your doing your hair that way. Ever since the night of the pageant I have wondered how you could bear to make yourself plain. How can you?"

"My looks don't count. I have no time to spend on myself."

"Holy Ananias! hear this woman! Is she human?"

She smiled, not looking at him, but lifting her head and smiling into space. They were silent for a while. She felt his complete absorption in his work, this big little boy who half an hour earlier had sworn he would never paint again.

"You're work atmosphere for me, Jane Judd. I should engage you by the week, to just sit in my [Pg 85]

studio. How would you like that?"

"I would not consider it, thanks."

"Why not?"

"I have many things to do."

"I think being inspiration to a painter would be more desirable for a woman than just looking after studios."

"I think doing her own work, whatever it is, is the most important thing for a woman."

"Heavens! Jane Judd, are you one of these 'woman's rights, right or wrong' preachers? You aren't a suffragette, and a freewomaner, are you?"

"Yes."

"Have we nourished a bomb in the studios all these years? Don't get me started on the woman question. I'm a regular cave man."

"All right, I won't get you started."

"It was a great mistake to begin giving woman an education. It has messed things up dreadfully."

"For women, you mean?"

"No, for men."

"Oh."

"You don't think that matters?"

"Not especially. The progress of the world is what matters, isn't it? Change is always uncomfortable."

"You've got everything to gain; we're the only losers, so no wonder you're reconciled to it."

"No, we'll all gain by a fairer adjustment. It is just as uncomfortable for women, now, as it is for men. After all, how can it help but be, since we live our lives together, since our main interests are one." [Pg 86]

"But we aren't going on living together! Men are getting sick of it. If women don't let up on these demands we are going to stop marrying them altogether."

Jane tried not to laugh.

"What about the demands men have always made on women?"

"Those were natural demands."

"Habitual, you mean."

"We can run the world very well indeed without this army of half-baked females, thank you."

"Can you? That's an interesting discovery. What method have you invented for populating the world you can run without us?"

"Don't talk about it. It always makes me mad!"

"All right," Jane agreed sweetly.

"I suppose you pride yourself on keeping your temper."

"No. But people who have anything to win never profit by losing their tempers."

"You don't look like a female freebooter. You're the arch-type of womanly woman. At this moment, you look like the priestess of the home."

He wondered at the slow flush that came up over her neck and face, the strange yearning look that was gone before he half saw it. He painted on, speculating about her, while Jane fought for composure.

In the weeks since her first visit from Christiansen, a new world had opened for Jane, a new infection swept through her blood. Cooper Union had opened up one field, Union Square another. She had joined a class in New York University for a historic study of Woman, her biologic and economic aspects, her accomplishments and her ambitions. She talked to people everywhere, these days. She made friends with a group of girls in the class, and invited them to her room. [Pg 87]

Once a week, or oftener, Christiansen took her somewhere with him, to hear some music, to see a play, or to meet some interesting people. Their friendship had developed until it was the very centre of her life, but it brought with it the usual toll. It loosed all the wants of her nature; needs and demands she had not dreamed of sprang into being, into urgency. She wanted love, children, a mate. The old intellectual satisfactions were gone, swept away on the tide of these new emotions.

No thought of Martin Christiansen entered her head, in this relation. She thought of him as one

of the gods, high above, upon remote peaks, descending now and then to help and inspire some stumbling mortal, even as he had rescued her. She knew him as the perfect friend, and as such she valued him.

It was the confluence of all these causes which made her drop her mask for a second, when Jerry called her high priestess of the home.

"I had a letter from the Bryce Cricket to-day. She sent her love to you," he said, changing the subject.

"Thanks. She writes you, does she?"

"Yes, the little idiot."

"Are her parents back yet?"

"They all come next week."

"You begin the portraits then?"

"I suppose so."

"Miss Morton is very lovely, you will like painting her."

"Women are a great bother, Jane Judd," he sighed.

"Like men."

He laughed at that, and stood back to view his work.

"This is good. It has a sort of haunting quality, that is yours."

The door was flung open, and Bobs rushed in.

"Jerry, you are home!" she cried, both hands out.

"Bobs! Welcome back! My eye, it's fine to see you. I nearly died of loneliness."

"Did you? Did you miss me?"

"Rather. Ask Jane."

"Oh, good-morning, Jane Judd," Bobs said.

Jane greeted her, rose, gathered her things, and went into the bedroom.

"Jerry, how well you look. Did you have a good time?"

"So-so."

"You came back sooner than I expected you."

"Yes—I wanted to get to work."

"Are you engaged to Miss Morton?"

"Nonsense! Of course not."

"Oh, I'm so glad," with a deep sigh.

Jane passed through on her way out, nodding good-bye to them.

"How was the Philadelphia show, Bobs?"

"Good. I got a first."

"What? And you stand here babbling about my doings when you got a first? Why, bless your old heart, I'm crazy about it!" he cried.

She came and put her two hands on his shoulders, looking into his face.

"Are you glad, Jerry?"

He put his hands over hers.

"I'm delighted. I'm proud of you."

She leaned her forehead against his coat. He felt her body shake, as she tried to swallow the sobs.

"What is it, honey-girl? What is the matter?"

"Oh, it's nothing. Only I'm so glad you're pleased, and so relieved you aren't engaged to Miss Morton."

"Bobs, you goose——"

"I just couldn't stand it, Jerry, to have you married to just a rich woman."

"I'm not going to marry any rich woman, Bobs, you can count on that. They are all too full of

themselves. The only woman I shall ever marry will have just one career."

"What, Jerry?"

"Her career will be Jerry Paxton! Selfish, if you like, but that is the only way I can ever get away with matrimony. I don't like marriage, I hate being tied down, you know how I hate it. If I married a woman with a career of her own, with the independence and egotism which come to women with careers, why— Lord, Bobs, I'd end by murdering her!"

"You're the most selfish human being in the world, Jerry!"

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"No, I'm like the majority of men, only I say it out and the rest keep it dark."

"But you can't pick out the person you intend to love, Jerry. It doesn't happen that way. Love gets you, torments you, numbs your brain, upsets your mind."

"He won't get me, Bobs. I'm on guard."

"Some of us go on guard too late, Jerry."

"Look here, old lady, it isn't like you to talk this sort of stuff. Buck up! Love isn't life; it's just one incident of it. Work is the real thing, you and I both know that, and matrimony plays the devil with an artist's work, so it's not for us."

"Jerry, you—you beast!" she choked, and ran out of the room.

He stood where she left him, startled, sorry, angry. Bobs, his old pal, his fellow worker; he loved her dearly. He would not hurt her for the world, nor would he marry her. Must he always be in this tumult, this state of unrest? What was there in him which gave all the women he knew the idea of his pursuit of them? How was he to guard against this misunderstanding of his motives? A portrait painter could not manage a love affair with every woman who sat for him.

This was the culminating moment of his weeks of loneliness, his discouragement about his work, his fury at having constantly to extricate himself from tender situations which he did not make. Bobs's revelation made him feel a brute, a cad, but he could not marry Bobs; he did not want to. How could he protect himself from himself?

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With an apologetic tap at the door, Jane entered. "Sorry, I forgot my bag," she said.

He confronted her squarely, looked her in the eyes and spoke, almost as if driven by some power not himself.

"Miss Jane Judd," he said earnestly, "will you marry me?"

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## CHAPTER XI

Jane stood, perfectly still, facing him for a good second.

"What did you say?"

"I am at the mercy of things, I need a wife. I want you," he answered incoherently.

"Why do you want me?"

"Because you are able and quiet, because you're work atmosphere, because you are the kind I need."

"You know nothing about me, Mr. Paxton," she said quietly.

"Are you married?"

"No. I mean you know nothing about my thoughts, my interests, my views of life."

"I don't care what your views of life are. I know you don't talk about them all the time. I've known you for five years, and I ask you to marry me."

"You think I can protect you from the other women; is that it?"

"I didn't mean to say——"

"Let us be quite frank about it."

"That's partly it," he admitted. "How can I get anything done——"

"You think I could make you comfortable? Look after the studio, attend to the meals and other details which annoy you."

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"You're used to doing that," he said.

"Quite so. And what am I to get out of this bargain, Mr. Paxton?"

He stared at her a second.

"Marrying me is not exactly a step down for you, socially," he said.

"That does not interest me especially, but I admit it. Is there anything else?"

"It would mean freedom from work, it would mean that you would have a home and be supported. It would mean leisure, and a chance to improve yourself. I think it would be a mighty good thing for you."

She smiled her disconcerting smile.

"You are taking a risk. You don't know me at all. What you want is a dumb wife, and, if you remember the play, she was not at all a comfortable possession."

"I'm taking no greater risk than you are."

"Oh, yes. I know you. I've studied you, off and on, for five years. You have barely looked at me. Think of Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon and Miss Morton. Would you be apologetic for me with them?"

"Not a bit. I saw you handle them at the pageant."

"And the studio crowd? Remember I've been a sort of servant to them."

"They're all good sports. They all know you, and what you are. We can count on them."

"I have no family. Have you any relations?"

"No."

"I think we ought to face all the possibilities."

Jerry felt a trifle uncomfortable. If he had counted on any "King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid" scene, it had not worked out at all. He seemed to be defending himself to Jane, while she conducted the interview. [Pg 94]

"You don't dislike me, do you?" he asked.

"No. But I think we would better keep sentiment out of the matter, don't you? It is, after all, a business arrangement, of so much for so much."

"I thought maybe you were hurt because I did not protest some affection for you."

"Oh, not at all."

"I'm afraid I've done it very badly."

"No, on the whole, I think you've done it very well. The main thing is that we should both understand perfectly. My contention is that I understand it better than you do."

"I understand that you do not think much of me or the idea," he said impatiently.

"On the contrary, I think highly of both. I only suggest that you ought to know more about my ideas and ambitions."

"I'll take them on faith, Jane, if you will take me so."

She hesitated a moment; her heart was suffocating her. Here was her chance, here was the open road to experience, possibly romance. Should she enter? Dared she risk so much on one throw? Christiansen's words came to her: "Come, child, let's be about your living."

"Thank you, Mr. Paxton, I will marry you," she said to Jerry.

"Good. I hope you may never regret it," he answered earnestly. [Pg 95]

"I hope the same for you," she flashed back at him.

"When will you—when shall we do it?"

"Whenever you like."

"To-day, now. Let's get it over so I, so we, can settle down. Will you marry me to-day, Jane?"

She gasped, then spoke quietly.

"I am ready."

"Good! That's what I like about you, Jane, no shilly-shallying, just going straight after things."

"Will you remember that if you find me going after things you do not approve of?" she smiled.

"Let's go get a license. Do you mind a justice-of-the-peace ceremony?"

"No; I prefer it."

"Bully for you. Where's my hat?"

"In the bedroom closet."

"How the deuce did it get in there?"

"I put it there. You kicked it under the couch when you were inspecting the pictures this morning."

"Was that this morning? It seems years ago," he said. "Jane, you won't make me keep my hat in that closet, will you?" he asked, when he came back with hat, stick, and gloves.

"I shall not marry you to reform you," she answered.

"Come on, then, if you're ready."

They went to the City Hall, talking of all kinds of irrelevant things. They were an incongruous-looking pair, the striking, smartly dressed man, and his working girl companion.

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"I suppose this is the kind of thing they talked in the tumbrils," he said suddenly.

"Are you frightened—shall we go back?" she asked.

"No. I'm only joking."

When they were getting the license, Jerry said to her:

"How old are you, Jane?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Is that all? I thought you were older than that."

During the rest of the arrangements, and during the brief ceremony, they exchanged no words at all. Of the two, Jerry was the more nervous. When they came out into the sunlight of afternoon, he gave a deep sigh.

"That's over," he said.

"It was rather like any business deal, wasn't it? I opened a bank account once. It was rather like that, even more impressive," she said coolly.

"That is about what we have done, isn't it? Opened a sort of mutual bank account?"

She nodded.

"That's what we think we've done," she amended.

"Have we had any lunch?"

"No. But it must be three o'clock. We can let it go.

"I'm famished, and you must be, too. Let's go to the Brevoort and have a wedding breakfast, isn't that what they call it?"

When they were seated at a small table, by the window, and he was inspecting the menu, he said:

"I don't know any of the things you like to eat, Jane. Do you want to order for yourself?"

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"I would like roast chicken, a salad, and something sweet."

"Coffee?"

"Yes, thank you."

Jerry ordered wine. When it was brought, served, and the waiter gone, he took up his glass, and leaned toward Jane.

"To our experiment, Jane Paxton!"

She flushed, took up her glass, and touched her lips to it in silence, because she could not speak.

"Do you feel married to me, Jane?"

"No," she answered, smiling.

"How shall we announce it to the studio crowd? Shall we have them all in to-night, and get it over?"

"No. I'd rather meet them one at a time, if you don't mind. It will get about soon enough, and I don't want any fuss."

"All right. Suit yourself."

"I wish you would tell Miss Roberts first, Mr. Paxton."

"Call me Jerry. Why should I tell Bobs first?"

"She is such a good friend; she would want to hear it from you."

"I'm not so sure about that. We'll see. Are there some best friends you have to tell?"

"Only one—Martin Christiansen."

"Christiansen—the critic fellow?"

"He is my only friend."

"You've got good taste in your friends, Jane. He is one of the most sought-after men in this town. I suppose you know his story?"

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"No; I am not in his confidence."

"Hasn't he told you about his wife?"

"No. I did not know he had one."

"That's rather queer, isn't it, if he's such a good friend?"

"I think not. Our relation is intellectual, not personal."

"Jane, you don't believe in platonic friendship, do you?"

"Certainly, between some types of men and women."

He laughed, and shook his head.

"The story is that his wife is a nervous wreck, who lives in hospitals. They say that he was deeply in love with her, that he has always been true to her."

"Yes, he would be that."

"Great chap. I'm afraid of him, myself. He doesn't think much of me, I imagine."

"We have not spoken of you," she said simply.

After their late lunch, they took a taxi to Jane's tenement. There, she told her news to Mrs. Biggs, and explained that she was taking a few things for the night, that she would come the next day to dismantle and move her belongings.

Some inexplicable instinct had made her ask Jerry to wait in the cab. Alone, she let herself into the white room. Milly followed her with loud purrings. She took her up, held her close, while she looked about at the familiar surroundings.

"Milly, Milly, what have I done?" she whispered. "I'm frightened at myself. I want to come back."

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She set herself deliberately to collect her things, hoping to control a climax of emotions with accustomed commonplace actions.

"Milly, we are not making a very good showing with a bridal outfit," she said chokingly.

Mrs. Biggs, panting with curiosity, came in with offers of help.

"Look after Milly, will you, Mrs. Biggs? I may leave her with you for good."

"Don't he like cats?"

"I don't know."

Jane put on her best black dress, with the white collar and cuffs, and piled her hair softly at the back of her head, as her only concession to the new situation.

"Why, Miss Judd, I should say Mrs. Paxton, ye look real purty. I didn't s'pose it was in ye."

"Thank you, Mrs. Biggs," Jane laughed.

She bade good-bye to her landlady and Milly, and hurried downstairs.

"I hope I didn't keep you waiting too long, Mr. Paxton."

"Not at all. Why wouldn't you let me go up and see your room, Jane?"

"I don't know," she answered.

As Jerry let them into the studio, he turned to her.

"Welcome home, Jane."

"Thank you," she said, her heart beating high.

"Couldn't you say, 'thanks, Jerry?'"

"Thanks, Jerry," repeated Jane slowly, and with feeling.

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## CHAPTER XII

The weeks that followed her marriage were so difficult, so complicated for Jane, that she sometimes wondered how she could have blundered into such a labyrinth of problems. Not that she regretted it, but she was forced to ponder it. Jerry was the least of her troubles, for having married her for practical reasons, he took her for granted and made no fuss. But big friends were

not so simple-minded.

The very night of their wedding day Jane induced him to go to Bobs with their news. He protested, tried to get out of it, but in the end Jane prevailed. What happened in that long conference in Bobs's studio, she never knew. She thought she heard sobs, and her heart ached for the girl. When Jerry came back, his face was white and drawn, but his relief was obvious. They did not speak of the matter then or ever.

The news of their marriage went through the studios like wind, and a veritable babble of gossip and discussion was loosed. Some of the neighbours were outraged at Jerry's performance, some of them were amused, but after the first shock had worn off, they all accepted the situation.

"After all, he might have married a chorus girl, or a rich fool, instead of old Jane. We all know her, and we're used to her. I think he showed unexpected good sense, for Jerry," was Chatfield's comment.

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On one point they all agreed, that it was incredibly good management on Jane's part to have legally attached the fickle Jerry.

Jinny Chatfield led the way, by giving a studio supper in honour of the bride and groom, inviting the entire artist colony.

"Have you anything to wear?" Jerry asked Jane, when the invitation arrived.

"No."

"You must have some clothes, and the proper kind of clothes. I made a good thing out of the pageant, so we're flush now. I will design some gowns for you."

"Oh, don't bother. I can buy some things that will do."

"You must get over that idea, Jane. As my wife, you must look like something; you must have style, and charm."

"Those were not on your list of wife requirements," she said. "I cannot produce either quality."

"Oh, yes, you can. I'll put my mind on it," he said, finally, and he did.

For several days he studied her, as he studied a portrait subject. He marked her good lines, decided about her colours. He made water-colour sketches of the costumes, enjoying himself thoroughly. Jane evinced so little interest that at last he exploded about it.

"Don't you care how you look?"

"I don't, myself, but your wife will care, from this time on."

[Pg 102]

"Don't you like these things?"

"I think they're beautiful, only I can't see myself in them, somehow."

But Jerry persevered. He bought stuffs, he took them with the designs, to a skilled woman, to be carried out.

Jane went to fittings uncomplainingly, with Jerry in command, and in due time the gowns came home. He had, in the meantime, bought her hats, furs, and all the niceties of a woman's wardrobe. She protested at his lavishness, and submitted to his excellent taste. But when the final purchase was delivered, Jane said to him:

"Jerry, I thoroughly appreciate these lovely things you have given me, and I promise you to give my appearance the most careful attention. But I wish, please, that you would agree to give me a monthly allowance for my needs and desires."

"Oh, you needn't worry about money, Jane. You'll always get it when I have any. When I'm broke, we'll neither of us have any," he laughed.

"But I want to know just what I can depend on. Of course, that would be contingent upon what we have."

"What's the difference whether I give it to you every month or not?"

"It is the difference between my being a self-respecting partner, or a dependant."

"Rubbish! Sounds like woman's rights. For heaven's sake, don't be a woman's righter, Jane."

"You agree to an allowance, then?"

[Pg 103]

"I don't see why I should. I must say, I think I have been pretty liberal so far——"

"You miss my point. I admit your liberality, and appreciate it, but slaves and servants are dependent upon liberality. It does something to your mind, you must see that."

"I'm hanged if I do."

"You must take my word for it, then, that no marriage can be built on such a basis."

"But I don't agree with you."



"Very well, then, I must take up my work in the studios again."

"What?"

"I must be independent, I must know where I stand."

"You mean to say that you would go about cleaning up studios? My wife cleaning up studios, to pander to this whim?" angrily.

"It isn't a whim, it's a principle. No kind of work can hurt my self-respect, but I want to be regarded as a partner, Jerry. If it is what you used to pay me, by the week, for keeping the studio clean, and your clothes mended, that is enough. But I must know how much it is, and when I get it."

"This is degrading, that's what it is! You don't trust me, that's the long and short of it."

"Oh, yes, I trust you more than you do me, apparently. If I had the money, and had married you, I should give you a check book on our joint account."

"That's nonsense, Jane. It's this modern stuff you've picked up in books. I loathe the new woman with her platforms and her freedoms. Don't begin to feed me up with that stuff."

[Pg 104]

"You think it over calmly, Mr. Paxton, and you'll see it is only fair."

It was the night of the Chatfields' party, so she left him and went to dress. She took more pains with herself than she had ever taken before. She tried to do her hair as Jinny Chatfield did hers, because she had heard Jerry admire it. She put on the soft, beautiful underthings with unexpected pleasure in their daintiness.

She wore a peacock-coloured evening gown Jerry had designed for her, long and soft and wonderful in colour. It brought out her dark hair, her big eyes, heightened the whiteness of her skin. It emphasized a certain stateliness in the woman, akin to the stateliness of the bird whose plumage they had copied. Jane was surprised at herself. She felt that she looked a different person, she hoped the new self was Mrs. Jerry Paxton, and that her husband would be pleased with her.

In the absorption in her toilet she had entirely forgotten their late discussion. Her side of it had been without heat, so when she stepped into the studio, she was surprised to see Jerry's furrowed brow, as he strode up and down the floor. She did not speak, trying to get his point of view in the matter, so that he was abreast of her before he saw her.

"Good Lord!" he said, "I believe you *are* a beauty, and you've been keeping it to yourself all the time."

She smiled, used to his swift changes of humour.

"Walk off, let's get the effect of you."

[Pg 105]

She moved down the room slowly, embarrassed.

"You're great! You'll be a sensation. I'll paint you in that. Look here, you can have the check book to-morrow. I don't know what all the fuss was about, but you're beautiful, and you ought to have what you want."

She slowly shook her head.

"Anything the matter with that?" he cried.

"You're only giving me a bigger present than before. It isn't that you recognize my—my equality."

"For a silent woman you can stir up more words! Don't you want the check book?"

She came to him, laid a hand on his arm, as a mother might reassure a sullen boy.

"Yes, I do want it. Thank you. Now, shall we go?"

Jerry was right: Jane was a sensation at the party. There is nothing that can rally artists to a standard like beauty. She was too observant to be unaware of her effect, too simple to take conspicuous advantage of it. She was just the gentle rather elusive Jane they had all known, only smiling and responsive now, where before she had been silent.

The main surprise was the effect upon Jerry of her unqualified success. He was all possessive male. He acted the devoted husband, played up to the situation in his best manner. Jane found it deliciously amusing.

It would all have gone off with *esprit*, and less embarrassment than Jane had foreseen, except for one unexpected guest. About midnight, when the party was in full swing, the door opened and Martin Christiansen appeared. He was greeted with shouts of welcome on all sides, but Jane's heart stopped beating.

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He had been out of town at the time of her wedding and since then, fearful of dead words laid out in ink, she had waited for his return to explain, possibly to justify, her position.

"I came back to town to-night, and found your note," he said in hearty greeting to Jinny. "You bid me to a wedding feast and omit the magic names."

"How absurd of me. It's Jerry; Jerry and Jane. Mrs. Paxton, this is Mr. Christiansen," she added, leading him to Jane.

His face went slowly white.

"Mrs. Paxton?" he questioned.

"Mr. Christiansen and I are friends," Jane said, with dry lips, giving him a limp hand.

"Not very good ones, I fear, since I hear this news of you so casually. My felicitations, Mrs. Paxton," he added. "Where is your lucky husband?"

"Right at hand, thank you. How are you, Mr. Christiansen? I hear that you and my wife are old friends," said Jerry jocularly.

"You are a very fortunate man, Mr. Paxton; I congratulate you," the big fellow answered.

The gaiety began again, the moment was passed. At the first opportunity Christiansen came to Jane's side.

"Where can we talk?"

"There is a balcony at the end of the room. Let us go there."

[Pg 107]

He followed her. When they were seated, in the half shadows, he leaned to her.

"What has happened to you?"

"Oh, please understand! It means so much to me to have you understand," she said tensely.

"Of course, I shall understand. Now——"

"I didn't write to you because I felt I could not explain in a letter. I was waiting for you to come home so we could talk it out."

"I see. When did it happen?"

"Two weeks ago."

"You love him?"

"No."

"Why then——"

"Do you remember my saying I was sorry for him—wanted to mother him?"

"You married him for that?"

"That was what I could bring him. I married him because I wanted to begin living. When he asked me, I hesitated; it seemed such madness. It was your words which spurred me on: 'Come, child, let's be about your living.' I am about it now, Mr. Christiansen."

"Child, child, what have you done? Does he love you?"

"No; he wanted me for protection against other women."

"Beast!"

"No, no. We started in, open-eyed, neither of us sentimentalizing the situation. If you examine motives, his were as good as mine."

"You are happy?"

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"N—no, but I'm thrilled all the time with a sense of doing, living, being!"

"And the work?"

"Laid aside for a time. But when I get back to it, I shall come like a Greek, bearing gifts!"

"Does he know about your work?"

"No. I felt he might laugh at me. I offered to tell him all about myself, but he did not want to hear, so I let it go. I have thought since, that I should have made him listen."

"How did he happen to offer you this bargain?"

"I think I came upon him in a climax. You see, Mrs. Brendon wanted to marry him to that Miss Morton, with or without his consent. He has never said this, but I have gathered it. Then on the cruise, a sixteen-year-old girl became infatuated with him, and ran away to come north with him. I think he has had some complication with an artist girl since he came home. It really is hard on him, because he doesn't seem to do the courting."

"And you married him, knowing this?"

"I married him because of it."

"But don't you see the danger of that nature, unless it is held by love or passion?"

"Yes."

"You hope to hold him by one of these?"

"I hope to hold him by being what he needs."

"Dear Saint, it's what he *wants*, not what he needs."

"I know Jerry very well. I feel sure I can manage him."

"And you? What are your chances of happiness?"

"Happiness is always a chance, isn't it? I've played for a big stake, but I'll stand by the risk. My days are full to the brim, with new problems to meet, new questions to answer. You must not worry about me, dear friend," she concluded, her hand on his. [Pg 109]

"Not I. You're on the high seas now, but I trust you absolutely, Captain Jane."

"Hi, there, Bride, are you lost in the cedar chest?" called Jerry from below.

"No, we are just coming down," she answered.

"When may I come to see you?"

"Come to the studio to-morrow afternoon. We can have an hour alone, if you come at three. Jerry has a model."

"I will be there."

He took her hand, as she passed him, and laid it to his lips.

"Here's to your deep draught of life, my adventuring one. Bitter or sweet, drink it to the dregs; that's what we are here for!" [Pg 110]

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## CHAPTER XIII

The week after the Chatfields' party, the Abercrombie Brendons and their guests returned to New York and Jerry was promptly summoned by his erstwhile hostess.

"We've got to have those people down here to tea, Jane," he said, impatiently, looking up from the note, as they sat at breakfast.

"What people?"

"Mrs. Brendon, Miss Morton, and the Bryces."

"Oh."

"I must play up and get those portrait orders."

"Besides, they are your friends. When shall we have them?"

"I would better see Mrs. Brendon, break the news to her of our marriage."

"Jerry, you haven't told her?"

"No. Waited till she got back."

"She won't come to the tea."

"Why not?"

"She'll be so angry that her plans for your marriage have miscarried."

"What do you know about that?" he inquired.

"I know."

He laughed and the subject was dropped. That afternoon he went to pay his respects to the great lady. [Pg 111]

"Jerry, you wicked boy, why did you run away?" she said to him.

"Wait. Hear the worst, then empty the vials all at once. I'm married."

"You've married somebody?"

"I have."

"Who is she?"

"The girl who played Salome in the pageant."

"You were in love with her at the time! Were you engaged to her then?"

"No, we had no engagement."

"I think you behaved very badly to Althea and to me."

"Dear lady, how?"

"You led her to believe that you cared for her."

"On my solemn honour, I never made love to Miss Morton."

"You acted it, then. She got the idea, and so did I."

"I acted with her as I do with any woman I like."

"You admit you liked her?"

"I like to look at her, she is beautiful."

"Has this girl you have gone and married any money or position?"

"No."

"You've made a great big fool of yourself, Jerry Paxton, if you want my frank opinion. The Morton millions would have been no drawback to an artist of your tastes."

"I haven't the faintest reason for believing that Miss Morton would have accepted me, even if I had proposed to her." [Pg 112]

"Well, I have," snapped Mrs. Brendon.

"I'm very sorry you think so badly of me. Your friendship and kindness have meant a great deal to me, and I am deeply regretful if I have forfeited them."

"Who said you'd forfeited them? I say I arranged a splendid match for you, and you wouldn't do your part. You are a fool, that's all."

"Granted. Now, when will you and the rest of the cruising party come to tea and meet Mrs. Paxton?"

"I don't want to meet her. I'm furious at her."

"You won't be when you know her. Nobody would be furious, and stay furious at Jane."

"Althea won't come and see you making eyes at her."

"I shall ask her anyway. What day suits you, or don't you want to come?"

"Of course, I want to come. I'm curious about the woman. Say Wednesday at five. Now, when are you going to begin work on my portrait?"

"We'll make an appointment for next week, if you like."

"Jerry, we nearly died of laughter over your letters about the Bryce child. You sounded so noble and so furious. Has she gotten over her trouble?"

"She still writes to me. They ought to shut that child up, right now, for the rest of her life," he said.

Half an hour later he left the lady in a very good humour and he decided that he had handled a difficult situation with some finesse. He reported to Jane, who made no comment. She wrote the invitations to the others, at his suggestion. She included Christiansen and some of the artist set. [Pg 113]

"I shall ask Miss Roberts to pour tea," she said.

"Good idea. Don't believe she'll do it, but you might try."

She went to Bobs's door, that very minute, and knocked.

"What is it?" ungraciously from within.

"It's Jane. May I come in?"

She opened the door and entered. Bobs sat at work. She just looked at Jane, the same look of intense feeling which she had turned on her since her marriage.

"I wish you would not hate me so," Jane said directly. "We missed you out at the Chatfields' party, and ever since."

"I've been ill."

"Will you come and help us entertain Jerry's uptown friends on Wednesday? We both want you so much."

"Oh, I can't."

"I'm sorry. Jerry wants you, and I need you," she said, turning to go.

"I'll come," said Bobs.

"May I look at your work?" shyly.

"You won't like it."

Jane came to stand beside her, looking at the small figures already modelled in plaster.

"What is it?" she asked.

"It is called 'Woman.' I am trying to express the progress of woman through the happy ages," laughed Bobs harshly.

In the little model the figures of the women leaned on each other, hand on shoulder, as they groped. Woman, the pack animal; woman, the slave; woman, the mother, dragged by many births; woman, old, bent, heavy with age. [Pg 114]

"What do you think of it?" sneered Bobs.

"I think it is wonderfully done, and bitter, bitter, bitter."

"It's truth; of course it's bitter."

Jane turned and left her without another word. She felt that a terrible thing had happened to the girl's soul. She hated Jerry for his careless blundering.

"Will she come?" he asked, on her entrance.

"Yes."

"Good for you, Jane."

That evening a veritable trunk of flowers, with a note, came to Jane from Mrs. Brendon.

"Very pretty of her. Don't you think so?" Jerry said.

"Yes."

"She's quite important, you know."

"You mean she is distinguished?"

"Distinguished? No. I mean she is Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon."

"She is rich?"

"Also powerful, which you may not despise. She can be very useful to us."

He was irritated at Jane's lack of social consciousness. She had no idea of any desirability in Mrs. Brendon's patronage. She was as unmoved by this important occasion as if the Chatfields were coming to tea. She made every preparation for the comfort of their guests. The studio was delightfully immaculate, with Jerry's flowers everywhere. She made the sandwiches herself, chose the French pastry with care. [Pg 115]

"Wear the gray and flame gown, will you, Jane?" Jerry said to her, when she went to dress.

"Certainly."

He fussed about nervously, until she reappeared. She looked her best. This gown of flame-coloured chiffon, veiled with chiffon of deep gray, was one of Jerry's masterpieces.

"You look like the leading lady, Jane," he said approvingly.

"Thank you. I hope I can play it."

Her calm was not entirely genuine. She did not in the least care, for herself, what impression she made upon these people, but she realized how much it meant to Jerry. He had been in a nervous stew all day.

Bobs came in at five, very set of face, and ill at ease. Jerry greeted her over-enthusiastically. Jane saved the situation.

"Jerry, you know how to dress her," Bobs remarked.

"Funny we never noticed her points."

"I did."

Christiansen and Mrs. Brendon arrived together. Jerry met them at the door and led them to Jane.

"We have met before, Mrs. Paxton," said the great lady amiably.

"I remember," Jane replied.

Christiansen smiled into her eyes, as he took her hand. [Pg 116]

"How do you get Mr. Christiansen here, Jerry? He shuns my parties," Mrs. Brendon complained.

"It is Jane's charms, not mine," laughed her host.

"Ah," said Mrs. Brendon, inspecting Jane again.

The Bryces and Althea came along shortly. Mrs. Bryce was very cordial to Jane, Althea very patronizing. Wally, after one look at his hostess, lost his head at once.

"You're a dear to ask us to your party, after the trouble that awful child of ours gave you," said Mrs. Bryce to Jerry.

"She is a handful. Jane had her overnight."

"You poor soul!" exclaimed Wally.

"I liked her. She was so absurd, and so pathetic. Her positiveness is a real talent," said Jane.

They all laughed at this, except Althea, who faintly smiled. Bobs was ensconced at the tea table and the party broke up into smaller units.

"The last party Paxton gave was pleasanter than this," Christiansen whispered to Jane. "Are things going well with you?"

"If I get through this *début* without mischance, I'm safe," she answered gaily.

"Mrs. Brendon is on Jerry's side, but the Morton is aggrieved. Don't be too tender with her."

"These are charming quarters, Mrs. Paxton, perfectly charming," said Mrs. Brendon effusively.

"Don't you find it a trifle crowded?" asked Althea sweetly.

"No. I had only one room before I married," replied Jane.

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"Oh, did you? How could you manage?" said Miss Morton, conveying pity for the poor in both tone and glance.

"Some of us need a dozen costly rooms for our background; some of us bloom radiantly in one tiny chamber," said Christiansen.

"Are you a poet as well as a critic, Mr. Christiansen?" she asked tartly.

"Mrs. Paxton inspires unsuspected gifts," he retorted.

Althea managed to get Jerry into a corner, where she gave him a bad half hour. Jane was glad to be rid of her. She quite enjoyed the others. She almost disgraced herself, when she heard Bobs giving Mrs. Brendon an elaborate and fictitious biography of their hostess. On the whole, the party went off very well.

"Mrs. Paxton, your husband is to begin my portrait next week, so we shall see something of each other at my sittings," said Mrs. Brendon, at parting.

"Do you paint here?" asked Althea.

"Yes," said Jerry.

"Can't you begin on mine next week, too? I could come the days Mrs. Brendon does not come."

"Better wait until we are through with hers."

"No. I want to begin at once."

"Besieged! What a life these portrait painters lead," cried Christiansen.

"Mrs. Brendon comes Monday at ten. Will you come at the same hour on Tuesday?"

"Yes," she said, and laughed. "Good-bye, Mrs. Paxton. So nice to meet you."

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Jane bowed silently. Adieux followed and their voices trailed off down the hall.

"Damned snobs!" remarked Bobs.

"I thought they behaved very well," said Jerry haughtily.

"Thank God I don't have to cater to them. You were just right, Jane. Kept them where they belonged."

"I'm afraid I was a failure. They didn't seem real to me. They were like people on the stage. I couldn't talk to them."

"You were all right. They were crazy about you," said Jerry.

Jane laughed at that and startled them both. She laughed so rarely.

"If I were Mrs. Jerry Paxton, I'd tell 'em to go plumb to ——. He could just manage them himself."

"Free woman!" taunted Jerry.

"You were a dear to come. I know it bored you," Jane interrupted.

"You didn't need me," said Bobs, as she left.

Jane sighed, and went to the dismantled table. Jerry, idly smoking, watched her.

"Where did you get the grand air, Jane?"

"Have I it?"

"You certainly have. It's a great thing for a beginner.... Two portraits, and of those two women. It is a very good start indeed, Mrs. Jerome Paxton."

"I'm glad."

"Do you want to be rich, Jane?"

"No. I think it hampers people."

[Pg 119]

"How?"

"Things collect and get to be important. Possessions smother you. Oh! no, I should hate to be rich."

"Jane, I sometimes feel as if I had married a female Bernard Shaw!"

Again she laughed, and he noticed it was a pleasant sound.

[Pg 120]

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## CHAPTER XIV

The day of Mrs. Brendon's first sitting began a new era for Jane. As soon as the studio was in order, on the morning she was expected, Jane appeared in hat and coat, ready for the street.

"Aren't you going to stay to receive Mrs. Brendon?" Jerry asked, faintly aggrieved.

"Why, no. It is scarcely necessary, is it? I have some other things to do."

"Just as you like, of course."

She nodded to him, and went out. Once on the street, she drew a deep breath, and turned her steps into an old and frequent walk, across the square to the crooked street, where grew the model tenement, where Jane Judd had spent her nights for so many years. She climbed the stairs gaily, and found Mrs. Biggs at home.

"I got yer letter," she said, after a cordial greeting, "and I ain't done nuthin' to the room, just like you told me."

"Thanks. I mean to keep it for awhile, Mrs. Biggs, to store some of my things in. I want a place of my own to spread out in. You see, our flat is mostly studio, and Mr. Paxton's things take up all the room."

"Sure. Awful messy, ain't they, them painters?"

"You can't expect them to paint and be neat, too. How are you and Billy?"

[Pg 121]

"All right. We miss ye like anything, Miss Judd, I should say Mrs. Paxton. You never was much of a talker, but we got used to you, an' it seems real lonesome without ye. Milly misses you awful."

"Where is she?"

"Out on the fire-escape, in the sun."

She opened the window and urged Milly in. Jane spoke to her, but Milly showed no signs of recognition. She permitted Jane to pet her, and when she started for the old room, the cat followed, out of habit.

Inside the room with the door locked, and Milly in her old accustomed chair, Jane laid off her things and looked about her fondly. She threw open the windows to let in the air and sun. She dusted, sat down at her desk, filled her pen, and drew the old notebook to her.

For a while she did not write, she just sat and contemplated. It seemed years instead of months since she belonged here, in this cool, white, impersonal place. She had grown used to warm harmonies of colour in her surroundings, but it seemed to her that she could never create there, she needed this space, and peace. For days she had felt the urge to write, and the thought of this haven of hers had been always in her mind.

She had not told Jerry of her determination to retain her old room. It needed so much explanation, so much self-revelation, which she was not prepared to give him yet, nor he to accept. Meanwhile, when he was busy with his great ladies, she could slip away to her own work.

She drew the page nearer and began to write.... It seemed five minutes later that Mrs. Biggs knocked at the door.

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"One o'clock," she called.

"Oh, is it? Thank you," answered Jane, like one coming out of a trance. In ten minutes she had locked her door, hurried away, elate, happy. Mrs. Brendon had departed, carrying Jerry off to

lunch. They had left a note for her. She was glad to be alone, and she hummed softly as she laid out her slight meal. Bobs came in.

"All alone? Where's Jerry?"

"Gone to lunch with Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon."

"Jane, don't you let him do it. I tell you, it is the beginning of the end for you, if you let him go about with these women alone," she said hotly.

"They would have asked me, if I had been here. I was out."

"Don't you stand for it, Jane!"

"After all, it is a part of Jerry's business."

"Jerry's business is to make women care for him. It is very dangerous business and apt to be bitter for his wife," said Bobs.

"I think I understand his temperament and his temptations fairly well, but I prefer to trust him."

"You'll regret it, mark my words."

"Sit down and have lunch with me. There isn't much to tempt you, but I'd like to have you."

"Thanks, I will. I get blue these days. I'm all off my form."

"You take such poor care of yourself. Meals when you remember; no exercise, just work."

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"I wish I could work myself to death. I'm sorry I can't."

"Do you sleep well?"

"No."

"How is 'Woman' coming along?"

"Very uneven. Some days good, some days awful."

"Come over to Union Square with me this afternoon. The I. W. W. people are going to explain the Paterson strike."

"Are you interested in the Paterson strike?"

"Yes, because it affects so many women. I'm deeply interested in woman's industrial fight, aren't you?"

"I used to be. But what's the use? Woman is trying to fight her way against the two strongest forces in the world, first, Nature—her own damnable, emotional impotence—second, Man, the cave-dweller."

"You think men don't want her to advance?"

"Man wants things to go on as they did a hundred years ago; woman, the dependant, the begetter, the chattel."

"Not all of them—"

"Well, we won't get anywhere until men are with us, and help us, and that's—never!"

"It's too late to say that. We're started, we are far on the way, we've got to convert them."

"Have you tried your hand at converting Jerry?" Bobs laughed. "I advise you not to try. He once put it all into a phrase— The woman I marry must have only one career—Jerry Paxton."

Jane made no comment.

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"They don't know what we're talking about; they don't want to know. They refuse to admit what education and economic conditions have done to us. It means a readjustment. It's uncomfortable. They won't have it."

"It's human nature to fight change, but change takes place every second, just the same," said Jane.

"I hope change breeds a brand of us without sex instinct before I come again," said Bobs, and went away.

Jane sat still where she had left her for several minutes. She was weak, as if she had looked on at a fellow creature bleeding to death. When she went out later, her thoughts were still full of Bobs and how she could help her. It was part of her problem now. If Jerry's careless philandering had thrown all the forces of the girl's nature into panic and revolt, surely it was a part of the new woman-thought in the world that Jerry's wife should work for her restoration.

Daily visits to her secret room followed. Jerry was absorbed in his work, restless and overwrought when he had leisure. They lived like two ghosts, passing to and fro, each unaware of the other.



Mrs. Brendon and the Bryces both entertained at dinners, in honour of the Paxtons. Jane went through both ordeals with credit, looked handsome, and was much admired. Jerry complimented her on the way home from the Brandons', and inquired if she enjoyed it.

"Not much. They never seem to talk of things that interest me."

"What does interest you?" he asked curiously.

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"All the big, vital things that are going on in the world."

"What kind of things, Jane?"

"Well, the problems of labour, of women, of education, of international politics. Scores of things that these people seem unaware of."

"They talk about the war enough."

"No, they merely tell their opinions, their heated antipathies toward the belligerents."

"What did you touch old Brendon up on? I saw him raving at you."

"I said I thought trusts were dangerous and lawless. He got very excited defending them."

"But, Lord, Jane, he's head of heaps of trusts."

"I can't help that."

"Did you tell him why they were dangerous?"

"I tried to. I said that powerful boards of directors authorized cruel and unlawful things to be done, which no individual would do, no matter how rich and powerful he might be."

"Jane, Lot's wife never gave him more of a turn than you've given me! I didn't know you thought about this sort of thing. What did Brendon say?"

"He treated me like a naughty child."

"Must have given him some shock! Go easy, Jane, for the right hand of Brendon is going to sign the check that starts the house that Jerry builds," he laughed.

For a day or so after that talk she found him looking at her with a sort of wondering scrutiny.

"Both Mrs. Brendon and Miss Morton think it is queer that you are never here when they come," he said one day.

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"I hope you explain to them that I am busy in the morning."

"But what on earth do you do?"

"Oh, there are lots of things to do," she smiled.

When the portrait of Miss Morton was finished, she sent out cards for a huge tea, at which it was to be exhibited. The day the picture was to be sent away, Jerry came upon Jane inspecting it.

"Do you like it?"

"I think it looks just like her."

"Thanks. Said to be desirable in a portrait. You don't care for her type?"

"She looks like a calla lily."

"But that is ugly."

"Oh, no. It's pure, white, cold, ecclesiastical. Many people admire them."

"Do you think it is good painting?" he inquired.

"I know very little about painting," she evaded.

"We must begin your art education, Jane."

The day of the reception, Jerry took luncheon at the Morton house, and spent the early afternoon directing the proper placing for the portrait. He called Jane on the 'phone, explaining that he would not have time to come to the studio for her, and asking her to meet him at the tea.

Unfortunately for Jerry's plans, just as Jane had completed her costume for this most distasteful party, Martin Christiansen arrived, and in the joy of seeing him, she forgot everything else.

"It is good to see you," she said.

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"And you. But you are very gorgeous," he added, with the tribute of his eyes. "How does life run these days, Jane Judd?"

"Full to the very banks. I'm at work again."

"Good. But not here?"

"No. I kept the old room at Mrs. Biggs's. I go every morning while Jerry is at work."

"He asks no questions?"

"None so far."

"Admirable husband! And what is the opus?"

She began to outline the idea of a sustained piece of work, based on her own experience and thoughts. She told her plot dramatically and well. To any one who knew her as the silent Jane, this pulsing creature would have been a marvel. There was something in Christiansen that gave her tongue. She was at ease with him, sure of complete understanding.

They argued, they planned, they debated points of psychology, they were perfectly absorbed and unaware of time. Into this meeting came Jerry, angry as he could possibly be at Jane's defection, but infuriated when he saw the cause.

"Jerry!" she exclaimed, at sight of him.

"Don't let me interrupt you, pray. Good-afternoon, Mr. Christiansen."

"But the tea isn't over?"

"Naturally. It is after seven."

"I had no idea it was so late," said Christiansen, rising. "Have I kept you from some social duty, Mrs. Paxton?"

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"No doubt she was glad of an excuse," laughed Jerry forcedly.

"Miss Morton had a tea to exhibit Jerry's portrait. It was dreadful of me to forget," she said earnestly.

"The fault is entirely mine, the apologies must be mine, Mr. Paxton. I have kept your wife so besieged by my talk that she has had no chance to escape."

"No matter at all, I assure you," said Jerry.

Christiansen made hasty adieux.

"You must believe that I intended to come, Jerry. You see I am dressed for it."

"It was a trifle embarrassing when everybody asked for you."

"I am so sorry."

"You may not be interested in my work, or my friends, but, as my wife, you certainly must show them some respect," he stormed.

"I hope I have shown them every respect," she began.

"Not at all. You've run away every time a sitter has appeared in this studio, and now you have deliberately insulted Miss Morton."

"Oh, Jerry, that's not fair. It was an accident."

The telephone rang.

"There she is now. What do you expect me to tell her?"

"Whatever you like. I should tell her the truth."

He answered the call and explained at great length that Mrs. Paxton had been suddenly taken ill, in the afternoon, and could not come out. She was covered with chagrin at missing the tea.

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"Nice fix to put a man in," he began again.

"Jerry, I cannot be nagged. I have told you the truth. I am sorry I offended you and your friends. Let's not discuss it any further, please."

"We might discuss Christiansen possibly. The fascinating gentleman who makes you forget time, and obligations to your husband."

"You were rude to him."

"I don't care if I was."

"But you expect me to be courteous to Miss Morton."

"That's a different matter."

"I do not find it so. If I am polite to your friends, I expect you to be the same to mine."

"I won't discuss it with you," he interrupted her. He took his hat and banged out of the studio.

Jane thought it over for a few moments. Then she, too, put on her things and went to the Brevoort for her dinner. The waiter bowed a welcome, and led her to the table where Jerry sat.

"Oh, no," said Jane to the waiter.

"For heaven's sake, sit down!" growled Jerry, rising.

Althea Morton sat at a near-by table, with a party of friends!

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## CHAPTER XV

The unfortunate dinner at the Brevoort, where Jane had accidentally joined her husband, only added fuel to his rage. It was obvious to both of them that Miss Morton thought that Jane had merely refused to come to her tea. Her cool nod of recognition, and her scornful glance at Jerry made that point exceedingly evident.

It was perhaps characteristic of Jerry, that it was not so much anger at Jane for being so fascinated by another man that she forgot to come, as it was indignation at her public affront to his *amour-propre*. This reception was his first conspicuous success since the pageant. He was aware that Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon, acting as press agent, had played up his supposed romance with the mysterious and beautiful creature who had acted Salome. He knew that curiosity about his wife, and speculation about Miss Morton's attitude toward that lady, had been much more potent factors in attracting the big crowd which marched through the Mortons' house, than any ardent desire to see his portrait of the daughter of the house.

If Jane, quite unconsciously, had become the Hamlet of the feast, it was a little too much to have her forget to appear! He had explained her absence until he was hoarse. Miss Morton, with raised eyebrows and suggestive tones, had repeated over and over, that for some reason, Mrs. Paxton had not appeared. She planted the seed most delicately, that Mrs. Paxton had not come because it was Althea's portrait, and Althea's party. Jerry felt that she was taking advantage of the situation, but he could think of no way to turn the trick against her, unless Jane came to his rescue.

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Later, in the restaurant, she had gloried in her suspicion. Jane had looked much too well, too handsome, to have been the victim of a late indisposition.

For the first time, Jerry faced the fact that he had married a personality, not an automaton. The silent, efficient, machine Jane, of the old days, was not the real Jane at all, or else matrimony had changed her completely. He felt aggrieved. He could not see how he could have made such a mistake. From his present point of view, in fact, his marriage seemed to him like some fantastic act of a man in a fever. Had he, in order to protect himself from Bobs and Althea, married a woman more complex than either of them?

He began to wonder why he did not attract Jane? All his life women had liked him, responded to his boyish charm and his handsome face. He could not remember that she had once looked at him, as a woman admiring a fine, bra' lad. She showed no interest in his career, either. He had taken her from a life of drudgery, given her ease and his name. She might at least have devoted herself to his interests. He could not spell her out. She besieged his thoughts; he was never free from her.

He made up his mind to show her his displeasure at her ways. So he spent as much time as possible away from the studio. Mrs. Brendon's portrait was finished and displayed in her drawing-room. This time Jerry escorted Jane himself. She was a great success; her gracious but impersonal manner interested people. She was indifferent to their likes or dislikes, yet not rudely so. Mrs. Brendon was impressed with her and told Jerry so.

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"She can be a great social success, Jerry."

"She can, but she won't. It bores her."

"What if it does? Has she no consideration for your career?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"We must make some plans to really launch her. Abercrombie says she has brains."

"No use making any plans for Jane. She makes and breaks her own," said Jerry.

It was an aggravation, the way she failed to follow up social opportunities. He complained to her about it and she announced herself absolutely ready to do anything he desired which would help his career.

"You can see that a portrait painter has to cultivate the people who have portraits painted, can't you?"

"Wouldn't you be freer to work out your own ideas, to develop what is really yours, if you did some other kind of painting, Jerry?"

"Yes, and we would be living in a garret."

"But I wouldn't mind that at all, if it meant that you were growing."

"I suppose you've been talking to Bobs."

"No. I don't discuss you with people, Jerry. But I think your friends do feel this about you, that this is the line of the least resistance for you, that it may end in your destruction as an artist." [Pg 133]

"I am perfectly competent to decide about my work without the advice of my friends. I want ease, luxury, and beauty. I'm sick of grubbing in this little studio. I'm going to get out of it, and soon, too. I've got two orders from the Brendon portrait. Next year I'll raise my prices, and after that we'll see."

Jane sighed, but made no answer.

After this talk, which irked him more than he cared to admit to himself, he was much away. In the tender care of Mrs. Brendon and Althea he sailed and soared into the most ethereal social circles. He tead, and lunched, hither and thither, always on business, as he told Jane. He even went to a dinner or so, to which she was not invited, "to try to pull off an order."

If she resented his desertion, she never showed it by a glance. In fact, she had dropped back into the silent, brooding Jane of the days before he married her. He came and went with as little comment as in those days. But she went with him, in his mind. He promised himself that, as soon as this campaign for orders was over, he would take time to cultivate Jane, to learn to know her true self. He was becoming a trifle afraid of her judgments.

As for Jane, she saw, understood, and accepted the situation. After her one protest against his prostitution of his talent for "a handful of silver," she let the matter rest. She meant to bring it up again, however. [Pg 134]

His absence from her gave her unrestricted time for her own work, which she felt was progressing finely. She had many long consultations with Christiansen, sometimes at the studio, sometimes in the Park where they went to walk. He encouraged and stimulated her.

Bobs acquired the habit of dropping in on Jane, in her free hours. Jane suspected that a deep pity for Jerry's neglected wife was the reason for her attention, but she welcomed her cordially, and slowly a sure friendship began to develop between them. There was an honesty and simplicity in the two women which made them akin. By mutual and unspoken consent they never discussed Jerry.

They had long talks, they went about to exhibitions together, where Jane profited by Bobs's knowledge of art. She had set herself to some sort of study and understanding of painting, with the shadowy thought that she might be of some help to Jerry some time, if she understood his medium. She read the books prescribed by Bobs, she saw all the permanent exhibitions, and found with the new knowledge a deep pleasure. Bobs often berated her for her taste, but admitted she was an intelligent pupil.

"You've got the instinct, Jane, you ought to create something."

"Maybe, some day," Jane evaded.

As spring came on, Jane felt terribly dragged. She noticed it first by the difficulty she had in getting upstairs to her workshop. Several breathing spells were necessary, and a brief rest on the bed, when she finally arrived. Then came long brooding spells, when she sat motionless at her desk, feeling that all the forces in herself, in nature without, were focussed within her own being. The work went slowly, and unevenly. [Pg 135]

It was in April that Jerry, watching Jane clear the table one night, saw her go suddenly white and sit down quickly. He went to her hastily.

"What is it, Jane; are you faint?"

"Yes. Jerry, we are going to have a child."

His face went as white as hers; then the alarm, the protest registered there, found expression.

"You don't mean to say——"

"I wanted it to happen. It is one of the responsibilities of marriage."

"But can't you see, we can't afford children yet?"

"We should have thought of that sooner."

"How can we have that happen, in this little, crowded place?"

"Large families are raised in half the space, Jerry."

"But this is my workshop," he began.

"Jerry, when I found, after our hasty marriage, that you expected me to accept all the responsibilities of marriage, I made no protest. This is another of the responsibilities we both share. I expect you to make no protest."

"I beg your pardon, Jane. I know I'm not taking it very nicely, but it is about as upsetting as anything could well be."

"It was to me, too."

"I suppose you do get the worst of it, hang it!"

Hands in pockets he paced up and down the studio.

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"What are we going to do? We'll have to move, of course."

"I think not. Not at present anyway."

"When does it happen?"

"In October."

"You've seen a doctor?"

"Yes."

"Look here, Jane, why couldn't we find you some nice place in the country, where you could be quiet, have plenty of out-of-door exercise, and all that? You could go at once and I'd run out for week-ends."

"No, thanks. I prefer to stay here. After all, I shall not be in your way now, any more than I have been before."

Something in her tone made him wince.

"Jane, my dear, I'm sorry. I've been a brute."

"Please don't sentimentalize over me, Jerry. I'm glad this has happened to me. Whether you are glad or not, I must have your help. It is your child as well as mine. I cannot be put off in the country, out of your sight, because I'm ugly. I have a right to your consideration, but I want nothing more."

There was no sign of hysteria, just the quiet, simple statement of her case. In spite of his distress at her news, he admired her more at this moment than ever before. He drew a chair near her and sat down.

"I understand. Will you tell me what plans you have made, or thought of?"

"We could afford a little cottage in the country, for the summer, I think, with a servant. If we went in June and I stay until I go to the hospital, we could live inexpensively; you could paint, or go about among your friends."

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"I think that is a good scheme. We can begin to look for such a place at once, if you are able."

"Certainly. I'm perfectly strong."

He held out his hand to her.

"Forgive me. Count on me. I want to do my part."

"I think that's only fair," she answered, and she laid her hand in his.

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## CHAPTER XVI

The search for the place in the country proved to be rather jolly. They would start off early in the morning, sometimes with luncheon in a box, more often depending upon the chance inn to supply their wants. Jerry found Jane a comfortable companion. If it suddenly rained, or if they were late getting lunch it never made any difference to her, and he was ashamed to admit that it did to him. She showed a sort of heroic disregard of any physical disability. She walked for miles and refuted any suggestion of weariness. He admired this in her as extravagantly as all æsthetes admire Spartan qualities.

Jane, on her side, delighted in Jerry's whole-hearted boyishness. He was like a kid on a holiday. He would have taken every house they looked at, regardless of size or rent, if she had not prevented him. Some feature about each one seemed to him irresistible.

After weeks of prowling in all directions out of New York, they found *it*. On the Sound, in Connecticut, they discovered a little Colonial house, all shut away, in its own grounds, by high hedges and iron gates. A charming, many-windowed little house it was, and Jane's heart went out to it. It answered almost all of their requirements as to space and equipment.

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"This is it, isn't it, Jane?" Jerry asked her.

"It's more than we intended to pay."

"Oh, well, I expected to pay more than we intended to. You like it, and I can paint here, so let's settle it."

"I should be happy here; this house speaks to me," she said.

So it was decided that it was to be theirs from June to October. They chatted happily over it all

the way back to town. These summer excursions had brought them closer together than ever before, but with the summer plans settled, and Jane apparently the same as ever, Jerry fell back into his habit of playing about with Mrs. Brendon and Althea.

Jane went almost daily to her workshop. She did not always write; sometimes she sat and made baby clothes, thinking long, long thoughts. The room soothed her like a cool hand. In the afternoon she rested, and often she and Bobs went for a walk together. She told no one of her hopes.

Martin Christiansen had gone away on one of his frequent journeys and she missed him. He was the most stimulating influence in her mental life, and she begrudged his absences. He wrote her sometimes, wonderful letters, strong and full of flavour like his own personality.

Bobs turned off the avenue one day, just as Jerry stepped out of Althea's motor. She deliberately waited for him to overtake her.

"Hello, Jerry."

"Hello, Bobs."

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"Why doesn't she bring you to your own door? It's an outrage that she makes you walk two blocks."

"Oh, I still walk a little, just out of regard for my figure," he said, nettled at her tone.

"What on earth do you see in her, Jerry?"

"She's a very attractive woman, my dear. Also her motors and her opera box are very comfortable. Also she makes a fuss over me every minute. I don't get that at home, you know. Even you get your claws ready when I appear!"

"Jerry, you're an awful cad!"

"Thanks."

"What do you give her to pay for these comforts?"

"Oh, I keep her vanity fed, that's my part."

"What kind of lap dog are you, Jerry, a spitz?"

"You can't talk to me like that!" he said angrily.

"I'd hate to tell you what I really think of you, and what all your old friends down here think of you, if calling you a lap dog offends you."

"The virago is not a becoming rôle, Bobs," he said, and left her.

He was so angry that he breathed hard. He didn't care what she thought of him, or what any of them thought but he was furious that she had spoiled his mood of exhilaration. He had just gotten a portrait commission from one of Althea's friends, at a luncheon, and he felt that the world was a ball for his tossing.

"What's the matter with Bobs?" he asked Jane that night.

"Is something the matter with her?"

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"She's as bitter as an old scold," he complained.

"I think she has been deeply hurt through some late experience," Jane replied. He glanced at her quickly, but her eyes were on her work, so he detected no sign that she knew what that experience was.

In late May Jane's preparations for their hegira were completed. The first day of June they moved to the country. It happened that the spring was late so that the early flowers and the June roses all came along together. They found the gardens a riot, with crimson ramblers running over the hedges and a Dorothy Perkins trellis in full flower.

"It really is enchanting," Jerry exclaimed as they drove up to the door.

They found everything in readiness. Windows were open, beds made, flowers in the vases, logs laid on the hearth. Mrs. Biggs and Billy were installed in charge of the kitchen department.

"Oh, Miss Judd, ain't it grand in the country?" cried Billy.

She nodded and patted his shoulder. When his mother called him away she said:

"I hope you won't mind Billy."

"Mind him—why should I? You get such strange ideas of me."

Days of perfect weather followed, when the garden and the sea called every moment.

"It is only by sheer force of will that I am getting our belongings unpacked," said Jane, as they lingered after lunch on the veranda.

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"Hang our belongings! Get your hat and come for a ramble. This day is a gift, it will never come again."

She picked up her hat and staff.

"Lead off," she smiled.

"Ten minutes for my cigarette," he begged.

She stretched out on a *chaise-longue* in sheer physical delight.

"I feel like a turtle, a slow, lethargic turtle," sighed Jerry. "Why do mortals waste time in work, when Nature offers this nirvana?"

"It wouldn't seem nirvana without work."

"Jane, you have a practical turn of mind. You do not relax into the proper state of nature, naked and unashamed."

"If I were any more relaxed mentally or physically than I am at this minute, I would fall to pieces," she answered lazily.

"Jane, I am really getting to like you very much," he said, his eyes upon her fine repose.

"Is that luck, or a calamity, I wonder?"

"Jane Judd, you ungrateful feline, come along to the sea. I may push you in for that remark."

So it happened that because of their absolute isolation and dependence upon each other, they began to be acquainted. Only a few of the summer people had arrived, so they met no one on their walks. To Jane it was a time of great peace. She was doing her work now, when she merely kept herself in health. For the rest, life hung suspended, until October. Jerry was happy, a charming companion. As she wrote Christiansen: "Life is wonderful to me now. I am like the bee, garnering the very heart of summer days, flowers, and sunshine, to put into my work." [Pg 143]

Jerry began to paint her in the garden where she spent many hours at her sewing. Sometimes they talked, sometimes they were speechless. When she sat for a long time silent, and he spoke to her, she lifted eyes to him with an expression which he could not fathom. He knew, though, that it was something elemental, primal; that if he could catch it on his canvas, every man and woman who looked at the picture would get that thrill which it gave him—would know that they had glimpsed woman, the creator.

"Jane," he said one day, "you're so comfortable."

"Am I?"

"I think that's why I married you."

"So many men marry for that reason."

"Jane, Jane, how you do prick my bubbles of conceit. They snap around me all the time."

"It's quite unintentional," she smilingly protested.

"So much the worse. Just how conceited do you think me, Jane?"

"I've known one man *more* conceited."

"Jane, did I say you were comfortable?"

"I don't want to be *too* comfortable. That's dull, don't you think?"

"Don't worry about being dull."

She sewed for a while, and he painted.

"You're getting very handsome," he remarked casually.

"Why not? I'm well, and so content." [Pg 144]

"Are you contented, Jane?"

"Like a cat in the sun. I have a saucer of cream three times a day, and a coloured ball to play with."

"And only a puppy, named Jerry, to bother you?"

"I don't mind him. I just stretch and yawn when he barks at me," she laughed.

"I'll paint you with long slits in your eyes, if you don't look out," he threatened.

One day Jane spoke of Bobs and her hope that she would come and stay with them.

"Ask her by all means, but I doubt if she will come. She has it in for me."

"She needs rest and normal living. She's all nerves on edge. She's done a big piece of work, enough to wear any one out."

"She has lots of talent."

"She has genius, Jerry."

"I wouldn't go that far."

"I would. Martin Christiansen says this 'Woman' group is a masterpiece. He ranked her with Manship and the best of the young sculptors."

"What do you know about young sculptors?"

"Not much. I've been studying sculpture this winter, especially the moderns, with Bobs."

"What do you think of them?" he asked curiously.

"They interest me extremely. I supposed that I did not respond to sculpture, but these modern men are expressing thought, not merely form. I have spent hours with the Rodin figures at the Metropolitan—hours of refreshment."

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"Is Christiansen going to make a critic of you?"

"No. He couldn't. I have no critical sense at all. I only respond to the things I understand, or the things I vision spiritually, without understanding."

"Have you interested yourself in painting, too?"

"Yes. Bobs and Mr. Christiansen both say that I react to the right things for the most part. But I'm hopeless when it comes to some of the old masters. Rubens, for instance. How I do hate his obese people! I don't care how well he can paint, because I hate what he paints."

"There's hope for you, Jane, if you admit at the start that you are a heretic."

"I have to tell the truth. I am not clever enough to bluff."

"So you think that Bobs is a genius."

"Yes. I feel that she has the divine fire."

"Has she sold anything this winter?"

"I think not."

"How does she get along?"

"Borrows the rent, eats around with anybody who has food. When she sells something she will repay it two-fold."

"Poor old Bobs! Ask her down by all means."

"She's splendid, I think."

"But you wouldn't like to live as she does."

"I would not care, if my spirit were growing as hers is."

"You'd miss your cream, Kitty, and your sunny garden."

"Yes, but the whole world would gain by my loss."

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"I wonder if that is a comfort?" Jerry mused. "Somebody ought to marry Bobs."

"She has the usual woman's excuse for marrying."

"What is that?"

"A lonely soul. I suppose men have it, too—a sort of isolation within the race, a pining to be set free from the torment of solitude. Bobs has an exceptional nature, so she is more than usually at the mercy of suffering; her needs are intensified."

"She has all sorts of ideas, you know, about freedom in love, the right to motherhood, and all the rest of it. That's what's the matter with her; she's got a lot of crank notions that won't work out."

Jane laughed.

"What's the matter?"

"I was wondering if you had considered Bobs's ideas seriously enough to damn them so finally."

"No, I haven't. I have no patience with them."

"'Where ignorance is bliss,' says Jerry!" Jane teased.

He was putting away his painting things, from which he looked up and flushed.

"Look here, Jane, don't treat me like the little boy who upset the jam!"

"Don't talk like him, then, little boy Jerry," was her smiling answer.

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## CHAPTER XVII

In July the Paxtons were asked to spend a week with the Abercrombie Brendons, at their country place. One of the guests was to be a woman who wanted her portrait painted, because she admired Jerry's portrait of Mrs. Brendon so extravagantly. Jerry read the note, which Jane passed to him, at the breakfast table one morning.

"How do you feel about it?"

"Would you mind if I stayed here? Bobs could come and keep me company."

"You look all right, if that's it."

"I'll go, if you think I should, Jerry."

"I don't see why you should, if it would bore you. I don't want to go myself, I like it here. Suppose you write her that you don't feel up to it, or have some guests, but that I will come. I'd like you to go with me," he added.

"Thanks. I'm better off here."

It was settled that way, and in due time Jerry departed, and Bobs arrived.

"My-o-me, but this is Paradise, Jane Judd, after the hot streets of New York," sighed Bobs, as they walked in the garden the night of her arrival.

"I could hardly bear to think of you in that studio these days. It must be an oven, with all that skylight."

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"I've been too busy to notice."

"Too busy to eat, too, I judge by this thin hand," said Jane, patting the hand on her arm. "I'm going to give you such a dose of rest and fresh air that you will protest."

"Have rest and air done it to you, Jane? You have a sort of radiance about you."

"It's the moonlight," Jane smiled.

"How do you manage it, Jane?"

"Manage what, dear?"

"To keep your balance all the time? Not to be bowled over by your own emotions?"

"I know a man who said to me, 'I find it necessary to cover my troubles with a protective coating, a something of my mind that prevents them from poisoning the whole internal atmosphere.' There is some quality of mind and heart that does this, just as the healthy blood does it for the germs. It does not kill them, but it cuts them off from poisonous contact."

"I don't know how to get this spiritual antiseptic. Would your friend give me the formula, do you think?"

"I think we all have to work out our own, Bobs."

They paced the little garden paths in silence for a time.

"You've helped me, more than any one, to get through the most difficult period of my life, Jane."

"I'm glad, dear."

"You're a good soldier; you stand up to things. I'm ashamed to whimper to you about a bullet in my heart."

"It helps some people to whimper, Bobs. It helps me not to. It's nothing to my credit, and I shall think no less of you, if you let go, give way to it, submit to a surgeon. Then we can build new tissue."

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"I'm all right, Jane, I'm building now."

"Isn't the garden fragrant to-night?"

"It's like distilled peace. Have you and Jerry been happy here?"

"We've enjoyed it very much. Jerry seems contented. He works and swims and loafes. We take long tramps in the woods, and up the beach; it is pleasant."

"Why didn't you go to the Brendons', Jane?"

"I preferred you to the Brendons; there's a compliment."

"Is Miss Morton to be there?"

"I suppose so."

"Don't you care, Jane?"

"My caring would only complicate it."

"Is Jerry glad about the baby?"

This was the first mention of the subject.

"We don't speak of it."

"When is it to be, dear?"

"October."

"You're happy about it?"

"Utterly."

Bobs squeezed her hand.

"You don't mind my speaking of it?"

"No. I hoped you would. Somehow it is hard for me to talk of it."

The week was gone, as if by magic. Jerry wired he would stay on a few days, which grew into a second week. Jerry's second wire announced that Mrs. Brendon and Miss Morton were motoring him home. Would Jane put them up for over Sunday?

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"Don't you do it, Jane," urged Bobs.

"Of course, I must do it," she replied, and wired her invitation. "You must stay, Bobs; it will support me."

"I'll stay, then. Is there room?"

"They can have the big guest chamber, it has two beds."

"R-r-r!" barked Bobs.

The motor party arrived on Friday, in time for dinner. Jerry was not at all delighted at the sight of Bobs, and she took him up on it instantly.

"Didn't expect to see me here, did you, Jerry?"

"Delighted, I'm sure."

Bobs laughed and joined Mrs. Brendon and Althea, who were complimenting Jane on the house and garden.

"Like a toy place, isn't it?" said Althea.

When they had gone to their rooms to dress, Jerry said to Jane:

"Couldn't you get rid of Bobs?"

"I urged her to stay."

"But those women are not used to one room," he objected.

"It can't hurt them for two nights, Jerry."

"I hope you didn't mind my turning up with them, like this."

"Not at all, if they can put up with our simplicities. Did you have a good time?"

"Fair. Landed the portrait order."

"That's good."

"How did you and Bobs get along?"

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"Famously. Doesn't she look well? She has slept out of doors, had breakfast in bed, a swim and a tramp as appetizers. She looks like a brown boy."

"And you?"

"Fine."

"I hope Mrs. Biggs won't clatter the dishes at dinner," he said.

"Don't worry, Jerry."

"God speed the day when we can have a butler!"

"Don't listen to him, God," said Jane promptly.

He laughed and went to dress.

They dined on the veranda, with a wonderful sunset in process. Mrs. Biggs was so terrified at the thought of serving Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon, that Jane had engaged Dahlia, the coloured utility woman of the settlement, for the days of the house party. Even Jerry had to admit that the dinner was good and well served. Jane was very stately in the long, straight robes he had designed for her. Bobs displayed her ready wit for their amusement. Mrs. Brendon was genuinely entertained,

but Althea was on the watch every minute. Not a glance exchanged between any of the three escaped her. Mrs. Paxton's condition had given her a shock. She had come to the house with the deliberate intention of finding out what her power was over Jerry. She could not believe that he loved Jane, and yet a year of untiring effort on her part to intrigue him had accomplished nothing.

After dinner they wandered about, watching the moonrise. Jerry and Miss Morton strolled to the gate, then beyond. The three women sat on the veranda. Mrs. Brendon made herself most agreeable. She spoke of Jerry's career with enthusiasm.

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"Artists need advertising just like anything else," she said. "Once you get people to talking about so-and-so's delightful portraits, his fame is made."

"I wonder who press-agented Sargent," murmured Bobs. "*We* all think it is a crime for Jerry to give his time to these portraits," she added.

"You don't like his portraits, Miss Roberts?"

"I think a portrait by Jerry Paxton, savin' yer prisince, is a brilliant, shallow *tour de force*. He's got the clever knack of making people look patrician. It is the most flattering thing a portrait painter can do to you."

"Bobs, behave yourself," said Jane. "This is one of her hobbies, Mrs. Brendon; don't listen to her."

"I'm sure you think your husband's portraits are wonderful," her guest reassured her.

"I'm no critic," Jane evaded.

"Hypocritttt!" Bob hissed in Jane's ear.

Eleven o'clock came but no sign of the other two. Bobs yawned openly; Mrs. Brendon stifled hers.

"Where do you suppose they have gone?" she said finally.

"Maybe they're gone off in the motor boat."

"I'm for bed," said Bobs.

"Let us all go," Jane suggested.

"It's outrageous of Althea!" exclaimed Mrs. Brendon.

"Isn't she always outrageous? That type so often is," remarked Bobs ingenuously.

They went to their rooms. At midnight Bobs went to Jane's door.

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"I could kill him!" she said.

"Wouldn't do any good. Go back to bed and go to sleep," Jane ordered.

About half-past one Jerry appeared. He explained that they went off in the motor boat, and it broke down. When they finally landed, Althea slipped and turned her ankle.

"I had the devil's own time getting her home," he said crossly. "I'm sorry to waken you, Jane."

"No matter."

The next morning Miss Morton was unable to leave her room. She refused to see a doctor, she needed only to keep off the foot. Jerry explained the situation elaborately and Bobs laughed. Mrs. Brendon, having had no sleep, was brief and to the point in her comment. Jane was calm as a May morn.

The invalid was carried down to the veranda for luncheon. She was a bewildering vision in lace and pink bows, stretched on the *chaise-longue*, with Jerry in close attendance. Mrs. Brendon napped all afternoon. Jane and Bobs went for a walk.

Sunday followed with apparently no improvement in the wounded member. It was evident that Miss Morton's visit would be prolonged.

"Jane, she has no more a sprained ankle than I have!" said Bobs.

Jane smiled.

"Your patience makes me mad! She's only doing it to annoy you and annex Jerry."

"She can't annoy me," said Jane.

Mrs. Brendon left Monday morning. Miss Morton decided she was not so well, and kept to her bed. Jerry read aloud to her.

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It was Wednesday that he came upon Jane alone.

"Jane, for God's sake, go talk to her. I'm nearly dead."

"All right. Go off for a walk, and get some exercise."

She went to the veranda, and drew a chair near her guest.

"Where's Jerry?" demanded the lady.

"He's gone for a tramp."

"With that Roberts girl?"

"Probably," lied Jane.

"I can't endure her."

"She is my best friend," Jane said shortly.

"Do you like it out here?"

"Very much."

"Must be awfully dull for Jerry."

"Oh, he manages to amuse himself."

"It always seems so dreadful for a great artist to be handicapped by poverty, a family, and all those things."

"Most great artists have been so handicapped, I believe."

"But Jerry always seems like a prince...."

"Oh, were you speaking of Jerry?"

"He should come into a fortune."

"I believe he had the opportunity," said Jane, and regretted it the minute it was out of her mouth.

"You don't like me, do you, Mrs. Paxton?"

"I trust you have not found me lacking in hospitality?"

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"Oh, you've been hospitable enough. I suppose it is natural that you should not care for me much."

"Why natural?"

"Jerry and I have been together so much. I'm afraid I've kept him away from you."

"That would not have anything at all to do with my liking or disliking you," said Jane, looking directly at her.

"Why do you, then?"

"I don't really dislike you. I'm sorry for you. It is always pitiful to be the last of a type, like a lone Indian among civilized whites."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"There is a new kind of feeling among women of brains in the world to-day, a sodality. You may not have heard of it. No woman with self-respect sets herself to hurt another woman, not even to win a man they both care for. I belong to this new group, Miss Morton. That is why you are able to take advantage of my hospitality."

"You fool! Don't you know Jerry cares for me?" cried Althea, sitting up, white with rage.

"That doesn't interest me," replied Jane.

Whereupon a miracle occurred. Miss Althea Morton threw aside the silken coverlet, swung her feet to the floor, and walked quickly into the house.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

Althea's departure was attended with some disturbance. She demanded a cab instantly, and cab stands do not grow on country roads. Jerry was taking full advantage of his freedom, and stayed away two full hours. Jane sat on, calmly sewing, where Althea had left her.

"I think I must have offended Miss Morton," she said, when Jerry came in.

"How?"

"I found her arrogant and a trifle insulting, so I told her what I thought of her type of woman."

"Ah.... Where is she?"

"In her room."

"But how did she get up there?"

"Walked rapidly." She smiled.

"Jane, you don't think the foot was a fake!" he protested.

"What's the difference? It's well now."

"What is she going to do?"

"She demands a cab. Billy ordered one from the village."

"I'd better go up to her, hadn't I?"

"As you like."

"After all, she is our guest."

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"She was the one who forgot that, Jerry."

At that moment Miss Morton appeared, dressed for the train. She walked on to the veranda, entirely forgetful of the injured foot. Her face was very red indeed, her expression neither lily-like nor ecclesiastic.

"I suppose she has told you her version of the story," she said angrily.

"Mrs. Paxton tells me that you are angry, but I could have seen that for myself."

"I want to speak to you alone."

"I prefer that we should talk here."

"I certainly shall not talk before a woman who has insulted me. She called me a savage!"

"Did I?" said Jane, lifting her head in surprise.

"Do I understand that you are going to town?" Jerry asked.

"Yes. You will have to go with me. I can't manage alone, with this foot."

"You seem to be doing very well. I'll put you on the train and wire for them to meet you. I'm sorry, but it is impossible for me to go to town this afternoon."

Bobs sauntered up.

"Hello. Why, what's happened to the invalid?"

"I'm going to town," snapped Althea.

"Are you? What a pity! We shall miss you! You have added such a feminine touch to Jerry's harem."

"I can imagine how much you will miss me, Miss Roberts."

"Oh, I was referring to Jerry. I used the editorial 'we.' Your foot seems to be all right. Such wonderful air, here. Going to town, too, Jerry?"

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"No."

"Ah, that is good news. Life is dull without the men, is it not?"

No one answered this. Jerry was driven to asking about her bags.

"The Biggs child carried them down."

"What a treasure is our Billy," said Bobs. "Considering his adenoids, he almost thinks. Fancy his carrying down bags; so sweetly thoughtful."

"Here is the cab," said Jerry, desperately, as it rattled up.

"Do I have to ride two miles in that?" gasped Althea.

"Why not walk? The roads are not very muddy," Bobs said.

"Good-bye, Miss Morton," Jane remarked casually.

Althea nodded, in silence, but Bobs seized her hand and wrung it feverishly.

"Good-bye. You've given us all *such* a good time," she cried wickedly.

Jerry fairly pushed Althea into the surrey to cut short this painful interview. They rattled off down the road. Bobs did a war dance with whoops, which were plainly heard by the departing ones. Jane laughed.

"Bobs, you were wicked."

"How did this luck befall us, Jane?"

"I stood all I thought necessary from the lady, and then I rose and smote. I disliked doing it in my own house, but it had to be done. She got up in a rage and walked upstairs."

"After being carried down this morning by gentle Jerry! Thank the Lord you've got a temper, Jane."

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"Poor Jerry; it made it difficult for him."

"Poor Jerry nothing! He's as glad to see her go as we are. He's had enough of her, Jane."

"That was my plan."

"You mean you stood for her, just so that he would get too much."

"It was only to-day that I found out he had had enough."

"Jane Judd Paxton, you female Machiavelli!"

"It would end in 'a' in the feminine, wouldn't it?" Jane laughed.

"You're a wise woman. I dote on your sagacity."

"Be nice to Jerry to-night, Bobs. Don't tease him."

"Oh, I won't hurt your little boy."

But Bobs was not to be restrained. After dinner she heaved a deep sigh.

"How dull it is without our Althy. She did add so much to the general conversation."

"We probably did not interest her enough to make her talk," Jane said, quick to the rescue.

"What would she be interested *with*, Jane?"

"Bobs, what will you take to let this subject drop?" said Jerry.

"What do you offer?"

"How about the study I am working on now?"

"Must see it first."

"You shall, in the morning."

"I'm free to-night, then?"

"As you are strong, be merciful."

"You don't deserve it!"

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But she did drop the subject. She asked Jane about Christiansen, and if he was coming to see them.

"I haven't asked him yet."

"Wish you would have him while I'm here. I'm crazy about him."

"Ask him, Jane," said the chastened Jerry.

"I will," she said.

It was characteristic of both of them, that she sent a wire to him next day, asking him to come, and he arrived on an evening train.

"Have you ever had so prompt a guest?" he laughed, as he and Jerry came out of the woods, toward the house. He took both her hands, with cordial friendliness.

"It was such luck that my wire found you," she beamed on him.

"I tried to put him in the hack, Jane, but he would walk," said Jerry.

"Of course I would walk. What a charming place," he added.

"We love it," said Jane. "Ah, here's Bobs."

Bobs strode up the road, bare-headed, swinging a stick, like a boy.

"Well met, Atalanta," he called, going to meet her.

"Hurrah for you! Did you meet the invitation on the way out?"

"I started before I read it through," he laughed. "It's good to see you looking so well."

"It's air, and Jane; mostly Jane. Long ago Jerry made an epigram about her. He said: 'Jane can mend anything from a leak in a pipe to a broken heart.'"

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They all laughed and Jane turned to Jerry saying curiously:

"Did you say that?"

"I think, with you, that it is too good for me, Jane. But I am more convinced of its truth every day."

"Why not? There must be healing presences, since there are disturbing ones," Christiansen suggested.

Martin was in fine fettle, and from the moment of his arrival, he surcharged the group with his vitality. Even Jerry was aroused by it, and as for Jane, he looked at her and listened to her as if to a stranger. Evidently she and Christiansen were on terms of easy friendship and understanding. It gave him a queer sensation to think of Jane taking a man of Christiansen's distinction as a matter of course. More startling was the fact that Christiansen waited for Jane's opinion as if it were the crux of the discussion.

Until late into the night they talked about ideals in art. Neither Bobs nor Martin showed any surprise at Jane's able expression of her thoughts on the subject, but to Jerry it was a revelation. She had a directness of attack upon an idea which he knew to be characteristic of her, but it suddenly piqued his interest.

"After all, the art ideal is the personal ideal done large," said Christiansen. "The artist can express only such truth as is the content of his own heart and mind."

"That's like your modern ethical religion; it puts it all up to you. God doesn't have to do a thing," protested Jerry.

"God has to be, just as truth has to be. That is the most important thing, isn't it?" Jane asked him. [Pg 162]

"That's it, Jane. Art is only the expression of God and truth. It is only the big soul that lets them seep through and take form, without being eaten by the acid of personal failings. If you are bitter, or abnormal, or degenerate yourself, God and truth come through, marked second class."

"It puts a tremendous responsibility upon the artist, as Paxton says, but why should he shirk it? He is the priest of his gift, he must do some penance," Christiansen said.

The summer morn was on its way before they went to their beds.

"Your friend Christiansen is a real person, Jane," Jerry said.

"*Our* friend, Jerry," was her answer. [Pg 163]

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## CHAPTER XIX

A long, rainy Sunday inaugurated Christiansen's visit. A cold, damp fog blew in off the Sound, and an open fire proved a comfort. Jerry went off to paint, Bobs disappeared, and Jane found herself alone with Christiansen, in the first intimacy they had known for months.

"How goes the adventure?" he asked.

"Merrily."

"You are glad you started on it?"

"Oh, yes."

"You would be," he granted.

"Why would I be?"

"You belong to the 'Friends of Fate,' as some poet called them. Some of us struggle against Fate, some of us make it an ally. You would do that."

"But Fate, so far, has been my friend."

"Those long lonely years of work by yourself?"

"But I needed them. I learned everything of value that I know, during those years."

"You see, I spoke truly," he smiled, nodding at her.

"You meet life that way, too," she said.

"I've met it all ways, my friend, fighting, acquiescent, not always with valour. Now I have come to a time when I depend upon an armour, which fends off outside troubles, but also keeps in those I already have." [Pg 164]

"No one could understand human beings so well, could possess your fierceness and your mercy toward them, without holding the key to suffering."

"Wise Jane Judd," he smiled. "I have had a long journey with Fate. For twenty years I have been paying for youthful folly. Do you know about me, Jane?"

"Jerry told me that you are married, that your wife lives."

"She has moved from one sanatorium to another for twenty years, Jane."

"How dreadful, my friend."

"I go to see her when I can. I have been with her this summer. It is like visiting some little girl I knew when I was a lad.... I wanted you to know."

"Does she suffer?"

"Apparently not. She just is, that's all. No past, no future."

"But your past, your future, Martin?"

"I can have none," he said steadily.

"Did you love her very much?"

"I suppose so, as a boy. What does a child of twenty know of love? She was eighteen when we ran away. After about five years this malady developed, a sort of melancholia at first, then a kind of mental vacuity for all these many years."

"It's unfair; it's cruel!" she cried.

"So it is. There have been times when I have cursed God in fury, but after all it is not left us to choose our own tests. If Fate were only kind, we would not need to woo her. Perhaps I needed my hard years as you needed yours."

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"I can't believe that, but I know what they have made of you—what I have reaped from them."

He laid his hand on hers for a second.

"Thank you, Jane. You've been a little flowering place for me, of repose and peace. Tell me about the work."

"It grows in plan, but not in execution. I lie abed until noon, these days, and I spend the time thinking about the book. I make notes; sometimes I write a chapter. But I feel that when my baby comes I shall suddenly enter a new world, I shall know such wonderful things to put in my book."

"Assuredly. You could not plumb the one greatest spiritual and physical experience without your eyes being unsealed to all the fundamental verities."

Jane rose, and turned a canvas, which leaned against the wall, into the light, where Martin could see it.

"Do you like this?" she asked.

He looked at it silently for several moments.

"Jerry has sensed it, too," he said. "This is a fine thing—his best."

"He can paint, if I can get him away from those portraits."

"It's a cursed thing for an artist to be clever. He would better be mediocre. It's your husband's curse. He may have a big gift, but if his cleverness is the thing the rabble want to buy, and he sells it to them, his gift is doomed."

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"Who's doomed?" said Jerry, coming in, glowing from his long tramp in the rain.

"You are, if you paint Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon, when you can do this," Christiansen answered.

"You like that?"

"This has feeling and excellent painting. It is real, vital, fine."

"I felt I had something there."

"You've got a pretty knack with pretty ladies, but don't let it ruin you."

"Pretty ladies pay, it might be added, and we need the money just now."

"Face the truth, then. Swear to yourself this is a temporary aberration, and be true to yourself, Paxton."

"Well, if I don't turn out to be my own best self with Jane, and Bobs, and now you after me, I haven't any best self! My own opinion is that I'm probably a rotten second-rater."

"Not even the greatest artists are first-rate all the time, Jerry," Jane urged.

"That lets me out, then," he laughed. "I got some nice effects out there in the fog; it's a soaking white blanket down on the beach."

"You didn't see Bobs?"

"No; is she out? You two been gabbling all morning?"

"Yes, we've had a fine gabble," laughed Christiansen. "I'll put on a mackintosh and go in search of your Miss Bobs."

Jerry went to the door with him, and Jane stole off to her room. She did not want to talk to Jerry just then; she wanted to think over all the things she and Martin had said to each other during those friendly hours.

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Out on the muddy road, Christiansen strode along at a great pace. He wanted to be alone, to think out his chaotic thoughts. He had come to the Paxtons' with no idea at all that Jane was to have a child, and the knowledge had come to him with a shock. He had long since admitted to himself that he was more interested in Jane's development, in her search for expression, than he had been in anything for years. He liked the quality of her mind; he thought her possessed of that rare gift, a sense of style. She had absorbed the masters, yet was no pupil of any of them. He was convinced that she had a future, and it was of this he was thinking when he exclaimed at the announcement of her marriage, "Child, child, what have you done?" The baby would be another fetter, and she must be free to work out her artistic salvation. It might be years before that freedom came. Would her gift grow richer, or die for want of use?

"How can we expect to manage it?" he growled into the fog.

"What?" said Bobs, at his elbow.

"Wraith, where did you drop from?" he demanded.

"Out of the fog to answer your question. What was it?"

"How can a woman be an artist and a human being at the same time?"

She peered at him before she replied.

"She can't. She can only be them in relays. Artist awhile, human awhile. Living takes too much from her. Loving, wiving, mothering are too devouring. Men manage their part of it, but women cannot; that is my decision." [Pg 168]

"You think she must choose between them?"

"No, that is too big a price to pay for either."

"How, then?"

"She must have both some of the time, neither all the time."

"But isn't that increasingly difficult with a man to consider, possibly a child or two?"

"Difficult? Do you think there is anything more difficult than being a woman to-day? I don't," she answered bitterly.

"The most difficult thing I know is being a man."

"Why do we bother with it at all, when just a little plop out there in the fog would end it?"

"Would it, though?"

"Don't you think souls are ever allowed to rest? Do they plunge us into some new form the minute we leave the old?"

"It's the doubt about it that is salutary."

"If you go out, you're a coward. If you stay on, it's because you're afraid to go out," she cried.

"Even so. Therefore you come to grips with life, and prove yourself a good soldier."

"Like Jane," Bobs said. "Isn't she fine?"

"She is a very rare human."

"She's the best friend I ever had."

"I think I can say that, too," he said.

"Does she understand your problems just as she does mine?" [Pg 169]

"Yes."

"You remember the hymn that talks about 'being at rest in God?' That's the way I feel about Jane."

"You should do a study of her. You owe us Jane's broad, God-like beneficence to offset your 'Woman.'"

"I am going to do her, as soon as I grow up to her."

"That's a tribute to our friend."

"Aren't those fog shapes startling?" she said, pointing with her stick. "No wonder the soldiers saw miracles on the field of Mons."

"But the real miracle that happened there, they did not see," he answered.

"What was that?"

"The Christmas truce in the trenches was the miracle of our times—the great hope of our future. If men can respect one another as enemies, instead of hating one another, some day we may have an end of war."

"I cannot dream nor philosophize war out of life, Mr. Christiansen. If it is not between nations, it will be between classes. If it is not for booty, it will be for survival. How can we hope to do away with it?"

"By another miracle, already begun—a sense of brotherhood in the world of men. If, even in the trenches, men clasped hands on Christmas Day, and gave the enemy Christmas greeting; if only a few employers lead off with a coöperative ownership; if only a few workmen in the unions meet the employers in fairness, it means that the day of universal amnesty is not a dream."

"You dear, big believer in miracles!" she scoffed.

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"Poor little cynic, snarling at the heels of truth," he retorted.

The heavens opened at that moment, and the rain descended with midsummer violence.

"Shall we run for the woods?" he asked.

"No, I like it," answered she, lifting her face to the torrent.

So they ploughed through the mud puddles, and arrived home, wet through, but tingling with racing blood and clear brains. As Bobs ran through the hall on her way to her room, she called to her hostess:

"Jane, let there be tons of food!"

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## CHAPTER XX

Summer reached its crest and started down the hill toward autumn. Jerry went to town and spent a week trying to find a larger studio for them, which made some concession to Monsieur Bébé. He suggested that Jane summon Bobs for company, in his absence, but she preferred to be alone. He left, weighed down by her advice not to be extravagant, not to take the first thing he looked at, to inspect her list of necessities before he decided on anything. She begged him to let her go with him, but he stoutly refused.

"Don't worry. I'll be as wise and wily as a real estate agent," he said as he left her.

She determined not to worry about it, but remembering his sudden enthusiasms during their spring house-hunting, she was not at rest in regard to him. She put it out of her mind as much as she could, and gave herself up to the complete enjoyment of being alone. Before her marriage, companionship had been her ideal luxury; now, solitude had taken its place.

She enjoyed the long, languorous days, abed until noon, in the garden or walking to the beach after luncheon, working at the book, at will, free to consider only herself and her pleasure. Every day she painted a new future for her baby, endowed him with new qualities. Sometimes he was a painter, sometimes a great writer, always he was of the elect.

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Mrs. Biggs and Billy were distressingly attentive at first, thinking her lonely, but she managed to dispel that idea. They left her to her own devices during the day, but at night, when Billy was in bed, Mrs. Biggs would come to sit with Jane for a talk. She was a cheerful, philosophic sort of person. Jane liked to hear her ideas. Both she and Billy adored Jerry. They asked for daily news of him, and looked forward to his return.

"My! but wasn't you in luck to pick up a husband like Mr. Paxton?" she said, over and over.

"Yes, I was," Jane would admit.

"When I think of you, settin' alone, night after night in that white room, which never was cheerful to my thinkin', and now bein' the mistress of this grand, swell place; it's like one of them fairy-book stories."

"It is strange, isn't it, Mrs. Biggs?"

"There's nobody gladder fer you than me. Billy and me has had a grand time out here this summer."

"You've made it so comfortable for us, and we've enjoyed having you."

"Are you goin' to stay a long time in that hospital where you're going?"

"No, only a week or so."

"What is that thing you're going to have?"

"Twilight Sleep."

"I never heard tell of that before."

"No, it is rather new with us, Mrs. Biggs."

"The poor will never get it; it's just for the rich, I guess."

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"On the contrary, the East Side Jewish Maternity Hospital experimented with it before any other hospital in New York."

"It's got to be free before we get it. The men wouldn't spend a cent to get it for us. They think sufferin' with children is a part of our job."

"We have to educate them out of that idea."

"I'd like to see you do it!"

"Begin with Billy, Mrs. Biggs. That's the way we must go about it—catch them young."

"Billy's got a real tender heart, mebbe he would understand, but Lord! the most on 'em!" She lifted her hands in a gesture of hopelessness.

The letters from Jerry were full of discouragement. The weather was hot, the city dirty, all the studios for rent had none of the things they required. Babies were not supposed to live in studios. He was tempted to try for a regular apartment for the family, and get a small workshop for himself. What would Jane think of that idea?

She wrote to him to use his own judgment in the matter. She thought it might prove a good plan to have the studio separate from the living quarters; certainly it would protect his work. She reminded him of the many failures in the spring, before they found what they wanted, so he must not be downhearted. Should she join him? She was perfectly able to come. He wired her:

"Stay where you are. Heat awful. On track of good thing. Jerry."

He was gone two weeks, then he appeared out of the woods one evening, unannounced. Jane was on the veranda and saw him coming. [Pg 174]

"Jerry!" she called in welcome as she went to meet him.

"Hello, Jane. How are you?"

"Fine. My child, but you are hot and tired!"

"I are! Never spent such an infernal fortnight in my life."

"Poor boy! Go get into a cold bath and I'll tell Mrs. Biggs to hurry the dinner."

"Good work. I've got it, Jane," he called back, as he ran upstairs, three at a time.

When he came down, fresh and immaculate in white clothes, she realized that she was glad to see this handsome human, who in some strange way was joined to her.

"Have you been lonesome, Jane?"

"Not very. I rather enjoyed it. Everything, including Billy, revolved around me as the centre of the universe."

"I've had a report from Billy. He sat outside the bathroom door and shouted in the news. Funny kid."

"You've had a tiresome time, Jerry."

"Yes, but I've got the nicest place in town, Jane."

"You didn't take an Upper Fifth Avenue house, Jerry?"

"No. I took a stable down on Washington Mews, and it's a peach! Belongs to an interior decorator, who is going to California for a year, and it's got every living thing we need. Air, sunshine, plenty of rooms, servants' department, baths, big studio, everything."

"But my dear, doesn't it cost a fortune?"

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"A little more than we planned, but if I speed up a bit, we can swing it all right."

"Jerry, Jerry, I knew I ought to go with you. How much is it to be?"

"Never mind that. I took it; I've signed the lease. All you've got to do is to enjoy it."

"Tell me about it."

He began to describe it, enthusiastic as a boy, dilating on this and that convenience or luxury. He described its comfort, and made her feel its charm.

"How you do love to have things right," she exclaimed.

"Of course, don't you?"

"Yes, but I don't actually have to have it to my heart's content, the way you do. When do we move into our Arabian Nights' dream?"

"While you are in the hospital, I'll move all our old sticks into the storeroom of the new place, and you can go right there, with the baby."

"It is good of you to do it all, and plan for my comfort this way, Jerry."

"You won't need to call me a slacker again, Jane, if I can help it. Do you think you will like the place?"

"I'm sure I shall, if it does not involve you too deeply, Jerry."

"Oh, no, we'll manage it easily."

All during dinner and most of the evening he talked about that house. Jane forced herself to equal his enthusiasm, to put out of her mind the thought that she and the child were adding another link to the ball and chain around Jerry's ankle. She feared that they had mortgaged his whole future, with an impossible rent, and yet she could not bear to seem to criticise his decision, nor dampen his ardour. She spent a good part of the night planning how she could come to the rescue with her own work. She must find a market as soon as possible. [Pg 176]

The few weeks that were left to them of the summer were very pleasant. They had made some acquaintances in the colony, and joined in the more informal summer festivities. Jerry painted and loafed, seemingly quite contented. Jane marvelled at him sometimes, remembering the restless spring days in town.

The Brendons were off on a cruise. Althea was not mentioned between them. The Bryces motored out for lunch one fall day. They reported the Cricket immured in a summer camp for girls.

"Our one idea is to keep her off of us," said Wally.

"She's not a bad kid, if she'd had any training," Jerry remarked.

"Thanks, Jerry, we'll discuss that with you ten years from now," retorted Mrs. Wally.

Jerry blushed at that. He never thought of the baby as having anything to do with him—it was something belonging to Jane.

September grew cold and a trifle dreary.

"I'm glad we're going to town to-morrow. I hate the country when it's got the blues," said Jerry.

"I'm so reluctant to leave that I haven't thought about the weather."

"I suppose it isn't a very pleasant prospect for you," he said, uneasily, in the first reference he had made to the coming ordeal. [Pg 177]

"I wasn't thinking of that, either. I was just remembering the summer in this dear place. I've never been so happy anywhere."

"Haven't you, Jane? I'm glad. Sometimes I feel as if I had gotten you into an awful scrape, in marrying me."

"You didn't get me in, I walked in."

"Eyes open, Jane? Did you know the kind of man I was?"

"Yes."

"You haven't regretted it?"

"No."

"Thank you."

"And you, Jerry?"

"I'm glad we did it, Jane."

"In spite of everything?"

"Yes. Now that I'm getting acquainted with you I realize what a crazy thing it was for me to suppose I knew you."

"That was partly my fault."

"I think we hit it off as well as most of them."

"I suppose so. Is there anything that you very much want which I fail to give you, Jerry?"

"I don't think of anything, Jane."

She knew the minute she had put the question, how futile it was. She had impulsively sought an answer on one plane, and he was speaking from another.

"I may die, Jerry. I would like to think I had made you comfortable." [Pg 178]

"Jane, of course you're not going to die, and you've made me more than comfortable," he cried, with feeling.

The next day they left the house, in a burst of autumn warmth and glory. The asters and the fall leaves were flaunting their gay colours in the garden, and the vines on the walls, freshened by late rains, fluttered in the sun.

"Oh, Jerry, I wish it were spring!" cried Jane, in her one protest at the crisis she was facing.

He caught it in her tone, and felt the first conscious sympathy with her. He drew her hand through his arm, and led her to the gate to wait for the cab.

"A month from to-day, Jane, maybe we'll be glad it is winter."

"Yes, yes, of course, we must be," she said, getting herself in hand.

He looked at her tenderly, and Jane knew that, if she let go her control and sobbed out her terror to him, he would be her slave—her master. She made her choice then. She knew that she yearned for something to sustain her, which she had not. She even dreamed of what the loyal devotion of a man like Martin might mean to her in such a moment, but never once did she blame Jerry that he did not fill her needs.

"Maybe they aren't my needs; maybe they're the needs of my whole sex. How could he supply that order?" she mused, smilingly, as they rode off in the cab.

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## CHAPTER XXI

Jane endured three nervous days at the hospital before she was ill. Jerry was in and out all day, and Bobs and Jinny Chatfield spent much of the time with her. She was grateful to them, but secretly she wished they would not fuss over her. She had wanted to crawl away into this quiet place, to get this ordeal over by herself.

She was interested in the hospital régime, which was entirely new to her. She liked the smooth efficiency of it. Quiet nurses coming and going, doctors padding silently up and down the halls. She had an agreeable nurse, who answered her questions intelligently. She developed an interest in the cases about her.

Her room looked off over the Hudson, and she spent hours watching the boats. She learned the hours of the Albany boat, and often she laughed at the tugs, they were so like pompous little men. She spoke to Bobs about it one day.

"The river has just as individual a life as Broadway, and the boats are so like people."

Bobs smiled at the idea.

"I'm glad you've got something to amuse you. You must be nearly wild with this waiting."

"Oh, no. I have lots to mull over in my mind. I visited my neighbour yesterday, and saw her new baby. Bobs, women don't realize yet what Twilight Sleep is bringing to them. It is one of the biggest discoveries of our age."

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"How, Jane?"

"Don't you see what wide-reaching results it may have for us? If we are relieved of the nervous shock and agony of birth, if the dread of this ordeal is lessened, that alone is important. But it will mean everything to the woman with a job, or the mother with other small children dependent upon her care."

"You mean her escape from the shock and pain?"

"I mean that she gets up, in two or three days, in almost normal health, instead of lying by for weeks."

"But your labouring woman gets up now in two or three days, doesn't she?"

"Yes, but look at the results. Talk to the doctors at the free dispensaries about what it does to them. I honestly believe that those two German doctors in the Black Forest have done more to free women than any other single agency of our times. I'm so glad to live now, Bobs, to be part of this wonderful century, to take advantage of its big experiments."

"Jane, the way you eat up the experiences of life is amazing to me!"

They both laughed at that, and veered off to Bobs's impressions of the stable Jerry had rented. He had taken her over it, to help him in some decisions.

"Bobs, the truth, now. Is it a wild mistake?"

"It's perfectly charming, but it looks a bit plutocratic from my humble attic point of view."

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"It will probably ruin him to keep it up."

"He has it all planned. I never knew Jerry to be so sane. He says he has several portrait orders now, and more coming."

"Just when we wanted to get him away from portraits. Oh, Bobs, life gets so complicated, and mixed up," mourned Jane.

"Don't I know that? You can't have babies for nothing in these days, Jane. He must have known

that."

"But he didn't want to have any. This is my baby, pure and simple, and I really ought to pay for having it."

"You ridiculous person! I think you're paying your share. Jerry will be mad about it, when it's here. He's the kind. I know plenty of them. They make me furious, but they're all right in the end."

"I wish he didn't have to see it until it was two years old. I've seen some of the tiny ones, Bobs, and they're awful."

The next day Jane's time came. She asked them to telephone for Jerry, and when he arrived she seemed to find comfort in having him beside her. They talked and he read to her until she could not listen any longer. Just before she had her first hypodermic she turned to him.

"Stay with me, Jerry."

"Of course."

"If anything happens to me, let Bobs take care of the baby."

That was her last conscious sentence, and her next was: "Can't you hurry it up?" Then she vaguely saw the doctor giving something in a glass to a haggard-looking man, who sat by the bed. She finally made out that the man was Jerry. She heard the doctor say that he would be all right, so she went to sleep in peace. [Pg 182]

Seven hours later she opened her eyes. It was night. The nurse was bending over a bed in the corner. Her mind went back.

"Is that Jerry?" she asked.

"It's *little* Jerry," the nurse said, and lifted a swaddled bundle and brought it to her. She looked at it long and seriously.

"You're sure that's mine?" she said.

"Very sure."

"Take it away, please."

"It's a grand baby, Mrs. Paxton."

"Did my husband see it?"

"Not yet. The doctor put him to bed."

"Don't let him see it. Keep it covered up."

"But he'll be wanting to see his son."

"Not till he's better looking. It would be an awful shock to Jerry to see it now."

Then she went to sleep again. When she woke, Jerry was beside her.

"I'm sorry he's so plain," was her first word.

"He's a fine boy, Jane," he said, with a gulp.

Two days later, when Bobs was admitted, Jane confessed to her her shortcomings in the new rôle.

"I didn't do it right at all, Bobs."

"Why not?"

"In books and plays the mother always says, 'My baby, my own beautiful boy,' when they put her infant in her arms. The father always says, 'little mother!' You know, you've seen it in pictures. Well, *I* said: 'It's ugly, take it away,' and Jerry lied to comfort me." [Pg 183]

Bobs and the nurse laughed at this tragic tale.

"I like him better than I did at first, though. He has nice hands," Jane admitted.

Bobs inspected the hero again.

"I think he's a duck of a bambino," she said. "He looks quite human."

"Well, I should hope so," said his mother indignantly.

"This room looks like a garden, Jane."

"Isn't it lovely? Jerry is beggaring himself. All the dear people in the studios, the Brendons, even Althea, sent a tribute. And Martin sends flowers every day. I find I love being a part of this smooth mechanism. I like the things the nurse feeds me, and my importance. I'm ruined, probably."

Jerry came in.

"Hello, Bobs. Doesn't she look fine?"

"She does."

"Did she let you see the exhibit over here?"

"I forced her to, the unwomanly thing. She derides his manly beauty."

"He'll be all right when he grows up to his skin," laughed Jerry. "Talk about the Magic Skin, he's got enough for a fat man. It took some ingenuity to get it wrinkled up all over him, so he could carry it."

"You unfeeling parents! I hope he hears every word you say, and turns against you in your old age."

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"We feel that he is interesting, but not beautiful, don't we, Jane?"

She nodded, smiling.

"I shall repeat this to you at times when you are doting on his looks."

"We'll take your dare, Bobs. Say, Jane, when do you want to see Christiansen? He asked me when he could pay his respects."

"Let him come to-morrow, Jerry, at five."

"'Tis done. Ever see such a model husband, Bobs?"

"I invite you both to come to-morrow at five."

"Let's take her up, Bobs, and watch our Martin pin a rose on handsome Jerry."

Jane sat in the early dusk the next evening and watched the lights come out along the river banks, and twinkle on the boats. Martin was announced, and she went to him, hands out, face shining.

"But it is a miracle!" he exclaimed. "You are well, and beautiful again. Where is this mythical child?"

She laughed and led him to the bed where the baby lay, wide-eyed, inspecting the brand-new universe.

"This is Martin, my son. I want you to be friends," she said softly to him.

Martin bent to insert one forefinger in the tightly closed fist.

"How do you do, my lad? I greet you to this planet."

The baby looked at the source of the big voice. Then an infantile spasm crossed his face.

"Ha! he laughs at our planet! He knows Venus, perhaps, or Mars."

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"He looks as if he had known the jungle. He's like a wise little old monkey," laughed Jane.

"So he is. That always fascinates me about the young of our race, they seem to hook us on to our past, to our blood brothers Babu and Mowgli, the Manling. You remember how Whitman said it?"

"I am the acme of things accomplished, and I an encloser of things to be.  
Long I was hugged close, long and long.  
Immense have been the preparations for me,  
Faithful and friendly the arms that have helped me.  
Cycles ferried my cradle, rowing and rowing like cheerful boatmen—  
For room to me, stars kept aside in their own rings,  
They sent influences to look after what was to hold me."

He spoke the words softly to small Jerry.

"Yes, yes, that's what I've been searching. It is splendid to be a part of the great processes of life!" said Jane, head high, eyes shining.

"Even so, my friend, I have come to congratulate you upon your valour, and your achievement."

They sat for an hour, talking earnestly.

"What now, comrade? A rest for a year or so, until the youngling is on his feet?"

"No, no. I am bursting with new ideas for the book. I shall finish it this winter, Martin."

"Not too fast. You have crowded the big experiences into this year, indomitable Jane. 'Easy does it,' as the old proverb says."

"I have gobbled them down, but I will digest my big experiences slowly, I promise you. I am full of life and vigour and passion for work. This year ought to bring a big harvest."

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"Your book is in my thoughts a great deal. I have spoken of it to a publisher friend, and he wants to see it. He will appreciate its quality, I know. It will not be a 'best seller,' Jane."

"Of course not. I don't want it to. I suppose my public is like the baby. I shall get acquainted with it, after it is born, and love it. But just now my mind is full of saying what is in my thoughts—in my heart."

"You will get the audience that belongs to you. 'I know my own shall come to me' is true between author and audience."

"I haven't told Jerry, yet."

"You are still shy about it?"

"No one knows but you."

"That fact may lead me on over to posterity. It may be my one claim to fame."

"You're making fun of me, Martin!"

"Well, here, we can't have that," said Jerry, coming in briskly.

"Here you are," said Jane, patting the hand he laid on her shoulder.

Christiansen shook hands with him.

"Again my congratulations."

"Thanks. It's a pretty fine exhibition, isn't it?"

"It is—the best you've made," replied Martin, joining in the laugh.

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## CHAPTER XXII

Jerry made the most careful plans for the transfer of his family to the new studio. He was like an eager little boy in his anxiety to have Jane see and approve the home he had chosen for them. It was a bright, late fall day, with sun and clear brisk air, when they started downtown, with the trained nurse in charge of baby.

"I feel as if the river had become my friend. I shall come up often and visit it," Jane said as they turned off Riverside Drive. "My! how many people there are and how they hurry," she added.

"Back in the world again, Jane. Are you sorry?"

"No. Glad. I feel like a dynamo, waiting to blow off."

After awhile they turned into Washington Mews and drew up before the stable, with its box trees and its window hedges, its quaint little windows, and brass door-rail.

"Here we are!" cried Jerry.

"Oh, Jerry, it is adorable!"

"Wait till you get inside."

The door was opened by a middle-aged woman.

"This is Anna, who is to look after us, Jane."

"Good-afternoon, Anna. I am glad you're here."

"Yes'm. I'm here. Oh! ain't the baby sweet?"

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A little, square hall welcomed them, with a reception-room at one side and white stairs leading up to the second floor. It was done in pale yellow and Chinese blue and led directly into the great studio room which was beyond. It was a noble room of great size and distinction, with one whole wall of glass, the opposite one containing a fireplace which held six-foot logs. It was decorated in shades of brown, with the most daring use of colour—orange, black, blue, and yellow. A balcony swung over half the room, with a magnificent Chinese coat hung over the rail.

"Jerry, it is perfect!" Jane exclaimed.

"Isn't it ripping? I wish we could buy it."

"It's wonderful enough to me to rent it. Let's go upstairs."

Above, there were several bedrooms, a dressing-room, and baths.

"This is the sunniest room, so I allotted it to his Royal Nobs," Jerry explained.

"How clever of you to have his bed ready."

"Oh, Bobs did that. This is our suite."

"Jerry, are we really going to live here?"

"We are! I'm so glad you like it. I could hardly breathe for fear you wouldn't," he said excitedly.



"How could I help liking it? It is beautiful!"

They went over it from top to bottom, discovering new joys. Anna displayed her department with pride. Also her bedroom, light and attractively furnished, with a bathroom off.

"I think we are going to be very happy here, Anna."

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"Yes, ma'am, if I can suit you."

"I think you can. Come up and see baby in his new bed."

That night at dinner, Jerry smiled at her over the candles.

"Isn't this fun, Jane?"

"It's like a dream, Jerry. I'm afraid I'll wake up."

"We can give some real parties in this place."

"We must have all the studio crowd in for a house-warming," she answered.

Bobs and the Chatfields came in, during the evening, to wish them welcome. Bobs slipped off upstairs to see baby, and Jane followed.

"I see your fine hand in many things provided for our comfort and pleasure, dear."

"Oh, I just looked after things a bit. Doesn't he look like a kitten, all relaxed and soft?"

"He is a wonderful possession," Jane said, with so much feeling that Bobs dared not look at her.

Life in the new home fell into its wonted routine. They became accustomed to the new luxuries with the usual ease and celerity. The baby's régime was, for the present, the nurse's affair, except for certain essential contributions on Jane's part. Jerry's sittings began, so Jane took up the old habit of running away to the white room at Mrs. Biggs's, as soon as the house and her son were started on the day. She had three full hours, all her own, and she gloried in them.

She attacked the book with fervour. But as she read over the completed chapters, she found no trace of her present self. It seemed dry, too analytical, too intellectualized.

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"What has happened to me?" she asked herself. "Something has opened up in me like sluice gates. I feel that I want to deluge the whole world with feeling, with happiness."

True to her instinct, she began to work over the whole book. For the first time she wrote with abandon. The chapters came hot, fluid, swift. She marvelled at her speed, and with difficulty she dragged herself out of her work-trance to go back to her small son.

For two weeks she wrote at white heat; then a crisis arrived. She realized that they could not afford to keep the trained nurse any longer, and her departure meant the loss of Jane's freedom. She thought about it a good deal, pondering a way to work it out. Anna proved a treasure; she marketed, cooked, served; acted as major-domo over the whole establishment, but she could not add baby to her duties. She did not want to confess about her work to Jerry yet, and at the same time she knew she simply could not be interrupted now.

"Jerry, the nurse leaves to-morrow," she said to him.

"Too bad we can't afford to keep her on."

"I was wondering. Your model comes about eleven, doesn't she?"

"Usually."

"You don't often go out before that, do you?"

"No."

"Would it make any difference to you if I took my time off from eight to eleven, after baby's early feeding, and would you sort of look after him, if he should wake up before I get back?"

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He stared at her.

"You mean you intend to turn out to walk or shop or whatever you do, at eight in the morning?"

"Yes. I have to get up early on baby's account anyway."

"But, Jane, I don't know anything about kids. If he cried, I wouldn't know what to do."

"I could show you. It is my job the rest of the twenty-four hours, you know."

"I suppose it's only fair, but...."

"I think you ought to learn what to do for him, just as I did. I might die or get hurt."

"Don't be silly."

"Is it a bargain? Will you take a three-hour period?"

"On your responsibility."

"Oh, no; it must be on yours, Jerry. If you don't do a whole-hearted job, I can't trust you. He is our baby, you know—not mine."

"All right," he sighed. "When do I begin?"

"To-morrow. Come up now, and the nurse and I will show you how to manage him. He almost never wakes up," she reassured him.

The next day they inaugurated the plan. Jane had an early breakfast, before Jerry was up, bathed and fed baby, and left him asleep on the balcony. Then she fled to her haven, worked until a few minutes before eleven, when she went back to the studio. From then until lunch time she could revise, or work over her first draft, but for the first process, she still had quiet and her own free soul.

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The first few days the scheme worked beautifully. The fourth day, Jerry Jr. awoke at nine-thirty, and all efforts to induce him to sleep, on the part of his parent and Anna, were in vain. Jane found Jerry pushing the baby carriage up and down the studio furiously. He was hot, flushed, and mad.

"Oh, did he waken?"

"Did he? He's been acting like the devil for hours."

"That's too bad."

"Where do you go for all these hours, Jane? You can't walk all this time."

"Have I ever asked what you do with your time, Jerry?"

"I don't expect you to do my work."

"Do you feel that you are doing my work when you share the care of our baby for three hours a day?"

"It's no man's work, pushing a baby carriage."

"If you feel demeaned by looking after our son, I shall certainly not ask your help again."

"It's no fun, trying to keep him quiet."

"No. I've discovered that."

She took their protesting offspring upstairs without more words. But the next day she did not go to her work. When Jerry finished his late breakfast, he found her in the studio.

"You still here?" he asked.

She nodded cheerfully.

"Aren't you late getting off?"

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"I'm not going out."

"Why not?"

"I thought we decided that yesterday."

"I didn't know we decided anything."

"You were very definite in your complaint that I shirked my duties upon you."

"Can't Anna take care of him in the morning?"

"No. She has all she can manage."

"When are you going to get your exercise?"

"Naturally I cannot take any, unless I push the baby carriage."

"Good Lord! Go get your things on. I'll watch him."

"Thank you, Jerry, but I cannot accept sacrifices. It must be your job and mine, and nobody abused."

"I thought it over last night. I agree. Your job and mine; nobody abused. Now, scat."

"Much obliged, Jerry; that's fair and square."

This time the agreement held. Jerry learned to handle the occasional outbursts of his son without calling for help. In the meantime Jane's work was growing. Martin Christiansen returned after a month away from town, and Jane sent him a dozen chapters of the rewritten version. It brought him to the studio, post haste. Jerry was painting, so they sat alone in the reception-room.

"But, Jane, what has happened to you?" he demanded.

"Life, experience, marriage, baby; all the big things have happened to me since I began that book. I'm only just beginning to be *me*, Martin."

"I was astonished, Jane! It was as if sunshine suddenly played over a gray room. The room was

charming, well appointed, choice, but a trifle cold. But now, you've let the sun into it. It's warm, it's human, it's home." [Pg 194]

"That's what I want you to feel. I'm just as new-born as baby. I had to write it all over, to bring me up to date. I feel so young—younger than I ever felt in my life. Of course, youth must be a state of mind, since I find mine when I'm almost thirty."

He smiled his appreciation.

"Certainly, wise woman, youth has nothing to do with time. It comes to some of us young and to some of us late. When it comes to us at thirty we are lucky, for by that time we know how to value it. The old saying that no actress under thirty is a good Juliet has true psychology behind it. She has only just gotten far enough away at thirty to analyze youth, to dramatize it, get at the heart of it."

"My youthful vigour is such, Martin, that at this rate I shall be through by Christmas," she smiled.

"How do you manage—small infant, house, gifted husband, and secret career?"

"I have health, brains, and a most sensible husband. He helps with the baby."

"You mean it?" unbelievably.

"Certainly. While I work, he watches son; while he works, I watch son."

"But he doesn't know about your work."

"No. But I convinced him that it was fair to divide the responsibility a little."

"I'd no notion that he had modern ideas on this subject." [Pg 195]

"He hasn't. He is the most anti-feministic, 'woman's-place-is-in-the-home' enthusiast you ever heard preach."

"But he practises Ellen Key!"

"Oh, well; who ever held a preacher strictly to practice?" she laughed.

"And we men go on believing that the serpent actually fooled Eve, back there in the Garden!" laughed Martin Christiansen. [Pg 196]

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## CHAPTER XXIII

The studio house-warming was a great event, in artist circles, and inspired Jane to announce a day at home.

"Jane, what has come over you? I used to think, when we lived in the old studio, that you were the most indifferent person, socially, that I ever met," said Jerry.

"I apologize, Jerry, but you've got to get used to a new me. I want people to come here; I want them to think it is a happy, refreshing place to come to."

"Jane, have you any regular seasons for changing personalities? I have gotten used to two totally different beings since I have known you, and now you present me with a third!"

"Like being married to a chameleon, isn't it?"

"No, for a chameleon takes its colour from its surroundings, but you don't."

"No; I take the colour of my interior," she laughed.

"You'd better see a doctor if your interior changes colour every few months."

"I've had all the big experiences of my life in the last two years. Of course I'm not the same person. If marriage and motherhood leave a woman unchanged, she is made of marble, or tin."

"You even look different, Jane." [Pg 197]

"Why not, if I *am* different?"

"You are beautiful and spirited. You used to be a trifle cold."

"You think I'm more human now, Jerry."

"You've come to life, Jane. Whom are you going to have at your parties?"

"All sorts, uptown people, downtown people, the ones who do things and the ones who buy things."

"Sounds good. Do I officiate throughout the ceremony?"

"Of course, Jerry. I couldn't do it without you."

"Why not?" curiously.

"You have the real gift of making people happy; I'm only the assistant."

"Jane, do I make *you* happy?" he asked suddenly, directly.

She looked at him seriously a second before she answered:

"I don't know— I hadn't thought about it."

"Don't you think it's important to be happy, Jane?"

"Why, yes, but I think it just happens, doesn't it? You cannot make it happen. It is like courtesy, or spirituality, it results from everything in you, your whole habit of life and thought."

"Does it? I thought it was something you went after, and got," said Jerry.

"Like a box of sweets," she smiled.

"Like a box of sweets, and then you ran the risk of stomachache."

"I call that satisfaction, not happiness."

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"What is happiness to you, Jane?"

"A miracle," she evaded.

From the very first, the days at home were a success. It is difficult to say just what constitutes hospitality. One hostess accomplishes it without effort; another, with the same material equipment, fails utterly. Jane managed it. There was an air of distinction, which in no way interfered with the comfort and informality of her guests. At most studio teas, people smoke, and loll about, but there was no hint of Bohemianism, in that sense of the word, at Jane's parties.

Mrs. Brendon always came, bringing her friends with her. Martin Christiansen brought all the distinguished men and women who came to New York during the winter to the Paxtons. It was noised about that you always met famous people there, so the popularity of the stable-studio was established.

One afternoon found an English poet, a French actress, and a prominent opera singer among their guests. Jerry watched Jane handle them with interest. She took them as a matter of course, saw that they met the people who would entertain them. She treated them like human beings, not like exhibitions.

"Bobs, Signor Travetti desires tea and amusement," she said, presenting the famous tenor.

"I guarantee the first, because Mrs. Paxton supplies that, but the second...." she lifted despairing eyes.

"I take ma chances," laughed the man, dropping into the chair beside her.

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"Jerry, come and look after Mademoiselle de Monde," Jane said to him.

"What shall I talk to her about?"

"About herself. Make love to her," ordered his wife.

"Madame Paxton is verree beautiful, verree *distinguée*," his companion said, as Jane swept away from them.

"She is," said Jerry, with conviction.

Mrs. Brendon arrived shortly and he joined her.

"Jerry, how do you get all these people here?"

"I don't know. They can't possibly come for tea and cakes, so it must be Jane."

"She is a wonder! Did you know all this about her when you married her?"

"Certainly," lied Jerry.

"Everybody admires her. Is that the English poet over there?"

"Yes, there are heaps of celebrities here to-day. I will gather in some for you," he laughed.

Just then Althea entered the room and he almost lost control of his features. He saw her swift glance of appraisal as she went to Jane, who greeted her as if they had met yesterday.

"What a beautiful studio, Mrs. Paxton," she chattered to cover the embarrassment of the moment.

"Yes, we like it. Jerry, here is an old friend of yours," Jane said.

"How do you do?" he remarked.

"How do you do, Strange Man?" she exclaimed.

Jane moved away.

"It's beautiful, Jerry. You *are* getting on."

"Yes, thanks be."

"I hear of these teas of yours everywhere."

"They are Jane's teas; I have no credit for them."

"I suppose Mr. Christiansen supplies her celebrities."

"Is he a celebrity agent?"

"He knows everybody, of course, and his devotion to your wife is the talk of the town."

"Mrs. Paxton seems to act as a magnet to celebrities. She needs no assistance," he said, ignoring the end of her remark.

"How fortunate!"

"Are you having a good time this winter?" he asked, to change the subject.

"I should think you would scarcely ask me that."

"Why shouldn't I ask you?"

"You know how miserable you've made me."

"I have? What are you talking about?"

"Everybody talks about it."

"About what?"

"The way you dropped me."

"But I didn't; you dropped me."

"No one believes that. They think your wife is jealous and made you give me up."

"I don't know what you mean by 'give you up.'"

"Last winter and spring you were always with me."

"I'm awfully sorry if I damaged your reputation in any way."

"It isn't only my reputation you damaged, Jerry."

"Look here, Althea, this is foolish kind of talk for us to be indulging in. There was never anything between us but a mild flirtation, and we both know it." [Pg 201]

"How cruel men are!" she replied tragically.

"Aren't they?" he laughed. "You ought to get them all transported to Mars; then you would have a perfect world, for woman's delectation. You know Mr. Chatfield, don't you, Miss Morton? Chat, she holds a brief on man's inhumanity to woman. Jane is calling me, so I leave you as my proxy. Defend us, Chat!"

He bowed and sauntered off. As he came to the tea table Bobs remarked:

"I see dear Althy is with us. Some nerve—what?"

"Oh, no—a forgiving nature. You never did her justice."

"Go bring her over here. I owe her one or two."

"No, thanks. I don't want to turn Jane's party into a battlefield."

"Never fear. Althy is for trench warfare, she never fights in the open."

"Admire her, don't you, Bobs?"

"Vawstly!"

He moved on to another group, chatting for a few seconds. Then he joined Jane, the poet, and Christiansen, who were in earnest discussion. Jane was speaking.

"I think poetry is like religion, we must get it back into our lives, as a working principle, before it can count with us again. Both have grown so stiff with tradition and Sunday usage that we must work them into the very stuff of our lives to make them real."

"Yes, that is just the case, Mrs. Paxton," the poet agreed. "There is an outcry against the modern, radical poet, but it is because the dear Philistine forgets that Shelley's message and work were as advanced in his time as ours are to-day." [Pg 202]

"You will find Mrs. Paxton an omniverous reader of poetry," said Christiansen, "a reader with the appreciation of a poet."

Jerry moved on, irritated in some subtle way at what he named Christiansen's showman manner of exhibiting Jane's good taste. Couldn't the Englishman find out that she had some ideas without

Christiansen's help? He, her own husband, had never heard her speak of poetry. How did Christiansen know so much of her interests?

The more he thought of it, the more it annoyed him. Christiansen's manner with Jane implied a life-long intimacy. What, in point of fact, did he, Jerry, know about Jane? He had never asked any questions about her people or her past, and she had vouchsafed no information. How did he know when or how she had met this man, what he had been to her? In the haste of their mad marriage, it had not mattered about her past. He intended that she should have only a future with him. He smiled grimly at that. It looked now, as if he might have only a future with Jane!

But after a year and a half of marriage, what did he know about her? About her thoughts, her interests, even her habits? Where did she go on these daily, three-hour absences. Did she meet Christiansen then? He thrust the idea out of his mind to find it tapping for admission again. What kind of egotist and fool had he been, not to learn to know this woman with whom he lived? There was not a person in the room who did not know her as well as he did. Bobs knew her better. He went over to the table, where she presided.

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"You look as if you'd rather eat me, than amuse me," she remarked.

"Bobs, would you consider Jane an intellectual woman?" he inquired abruptly.

"Intellectual? Let me see. She is the best-read woman I know. She's a shark on modern poetry; she has a sound acquaintance with the principles of art; she's seen all the pictures and statuary in New York, and has ideas about them; she has looked into the labour question for women. I might not call her intellectual, but I'd call her up-to-the-minute in modern thought."

"Good Lord!" said Jerry.

"Oh, you don't know the first living thing about Jane. The baby knows more about her."

"You needn't rub it in."

"She's the biggest person in this room, is Jane."

"What started you on this Jane worship, Bobs?"

"Something happened to me that knocked the very foundations out from under my life for a while," she answered him directly. "I would have killed myself if it had not been for Jane."

"Did she know what was the matter with you?"

"Yes, but she pretended not to know whom it was I cared for."

"She knew that, too?"

"All the time. She never forced anything on me, she just stood by, and helped me weather it. Last summer she put the finishing touches on my cure. I love her as I never loved any human being."

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"I didn't know about this."

"Of course not. You were too busy with Althea to notice what Jane was making of the pieces you had left of me. Sort of poetic justice, after all."

"Good heavens, Bobs, don't!"

"Not just the place to discuss our stormy past," she laughed.

Some one demanded tea, so Jerry escaped. He felt as if he had spent the afternoon gathering information about Jane, focussing his entire attention upon her. He had discovered his wife to be a strange and rather powerful personality, reacting on all the people about her, including himself.

He did an odd thing, then. He could not have explained the impulse to himself. But he left the party and walked upstairs into the nursery, where Mrs. Biggs guarded his son. The baby was awake, and Jerry sat down beside him, staring into his face, trying to penetrate through him, into the depths of that opaque being who was his mother.

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## CHAPTER XXIV

Jerry's awakening to Jane, as a personality to be coped with, brought with it a trail of perplexities. He had taken her for granted for so long that it was uncomfortable to get re-adjusted to her. He found himself gazing at her, when they were together, as at some stranger.

"Jerry, is anything the matter with me?" she asked one evening, finally aware of this scrutiny.

"No, of course not; why?"

"I find you staring at me so strangely all the time I'm with you. It makes me self-conscious."

"I beg your pardon."

"Is there something you want to ask me?"

"Has it ever occurred to you that we knew nothing at all about each other when we married?"

"Yes. That was one of the nicest things about us. We took each other for what we were, at the time, and asked no tiresome questions."

"Haven't you any curiosity about my past, Jane?"

"No. I married your present; I'm not concerned with anything else."

"That isn't a bit feminine."

"Then it must be masculine, so we agree on the stupidity of historic autobiography."

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"I'm beginning to be interested in your past, Jane."

"Very masculine!" she retorted. "No use, Jerry; it's over and done with. I'm not even interested in it myself."

"Communicativeness is not a vice with you, I may say."

"That was why you married me, if you remember. You spoke of it specially the day of the wedding. I warned you then that 'the Man with the Dumb Wife' had a bad time of it, both while she was dumb and when she was not!"

"A reasonable amount of confidence between husband and wife is desirable, don't you think so?"

"I can't say that I do. Who is to decide what is a reasonable amount—the confidant or the confider? No one can be trusted to say just enough; I like reserve better, myself."

"Do you advocate our not talking at all?"

"Oh, no. About opinions, ideas, facts, by all means let us have an exchange—not personal history—soul deliveries—they take away all the mysteries."

"I suppose that is why I feel sometimes that I am married to you, but that you live in Mars."

"Poor Jerry! Would you like a babbling, cozy, confiding little wife?"

"I don't know that I'm quite up to the mysteries, Jane."

"Would you like to end our experiment, Jerry?" she said quickly.

"No; of course not. What put such an idea into your head?"

"I'm quite sure that I do not give you all you want, in our union."

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"Oh, yes, you do, Jane," he said soothingly.

"I give you all you asked for when we married, but no one stands still; new demands grow subconsciously. So it has been with us."

"You mean I don't give you what you want?" he inquired.

"No."

"You want to end it?"

"No."

"What then?"

"If we have the intelligence to realize the situation, we must be able to meet it."

"But how?"

"I don't know yet. We must both consider it deeply."

With this, she closed the interview, and he felt as baffled as when he began it.

He went on with his study of her. She filled his mind. In the nursery she was a happy, twittering, foolish mother, adoring her baby. With him she was now a gay, bantering companion, now a dweller in Mars, with no apparent connection with the earth. With Christiansen she was a sexless challenge, calling to his mind with hers. Bobs transformed her into an affectionate big sister, interested in the doings of all the studio friends. He no sooner collected the data of one rôle, than she assumed another. Yet with all those ties, she kept an independent aloofness. Jerry felt that, any day, she might tie baby to her back and go forth, leaving them all, without a look behind. He decided that this was the secret of her fascination for them.

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The more he thought about her, the more he wanted to know about those unaccountable mornings, what she did, where she spent her freedom. He decided to strike, in his position as assistant nurse, to see if that thwarted her sufficiently to bring a protest. He, therefore, announced that business would take him out of the studio in the early mornings for a week.

"Too bad to spoil your outings," he added.

"Oh, it won't. I'll arrange somehow."

"Those sacred mornings of yours cannot be interfered with, can they?"

"No."

"Why don't you invite me to walk with you some morning?"

"It's more important that you should look after baby."

"Thanks."

"After all, you've never shown any uncontrollable desire to walk with me. Before baby came you always walked alone."

He carried out his plan, with much discomfort to himself, for he hated early rising, but the ruse gained him nothing. Mrs. Biggs arrived and took his place. Not so much as a day was lost to Jane. By the end of the week, his irritation and his curiosity had grown to such a size that he was persuading himself that he owed it to himself to know where she went. After all she was his wife; he had a right to know what she was doing. So for two mornings when Jane went to the tenement room to write, Jerry sauntered along far enough behind her to escape detection. Both days he saw her disappear up the tenement stairs, and half an hour of waiting did not see her come down again. But Mrs. Biggs was at the studio. What could Jane be doing in that building?

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The third day he was rewarded for his trouble. Shortly after she had entered the building he saw Christiansen arrive. He evidently whistled up the tube, for she came down at once and they went away, talking earnestly. Jane seemed excited. Jerry rushed around the corner and up the block. At the next crossing he came sauntering toward them.

"Oh, Jerry!" said Jane, surprised but unembarrassed.

"Good-morning, Mr. Christiansen," said Jerry shortly. "You're an early riser."

"Yes."

"Do you, like my wife, take your exercise at this hour?"

"Sometimes. I exercise all day. I always walk."

"Mr. Christiansen is going with me to do an errand," Jane said.

"Don't let me detain you," Jerry remarked.

"We *are* in rather a hurry," said Jane unconcernedly.

They went on their way, leaving Jerry to a fine, old-fashioned, male rage. Here was a pretty how-de-do, where his own wife cavalierly dismissed him to go off with her lover. There was no shadow of doubt in his mind that Christiansen was in love with Jane, although, in spite of all the evidence, he could not reconcile it to himself that Jane was in love with Christiansen. But the tenement house, the rendezvous; what did it all mean? Then he went back home and ascended to the nursery.

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"Has Mrs. Paxton a key to your apartment, Mrs. Biggs?" he inquired casually.

"Yes, sir. She has to have it to get into her room there. We keep it under the mat."

"Her room?"

"Yes, sir. Didn't you know she kept her old room with me? Oh, mebbe I shouldn't ha' told ye, sir."

"Oh—I suppose she must have told me; I've just forgotten it. Do her friends go there? She's never asked me."

"Oh, no, sir; nobody comes there. A gentleman used to come, but that was before her marriage."

"Big man, gray-black hair?"

"Yes, sir, that's him."

"Baby been asleep all morning?" he forced himself to ask, casually, as if the other conversation was purely incidental.

"Yes, sir. He's a fine sleeper. My boy Billy, now—he was a poor one for sleep." Mrs. Biggs's reminiscences were addressed to space, because Jerry had not heard them. He walked downstairs and paced the studio, trying to make up his mind what to do; whether to bide his time, or to have the whole matter up for discussion the moment Jane returned.

He thought some of going to Bobs for advice, but he gave up that idea. He was so upset that he telephoned his model and broke the appointment. His mind was chaos; groping in it brought up nothing.

After what seemed an eternity of time Jane came in. He heard her stop in the hall to look over the mail. She glanced into the studio, expecting to see him at work.

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"Hello, Jerry; model late?" she inquired.

"She's not coming."



"What a bother!"

"Will you come in here a moment, please?"

"Can't now; I hear baby crying."

"Baby can wait."

"No, my dear, time, tide, and baby cannot," she laughed and ran upstairs.

He felt this to be absolutely brazen. He could hear her upstairs laughing and talking to Mrs. Biggs and small Jerry, together with his son's crows of delight.

"Come on up, Jerry; he's awfully jolly this morning," she called over the balcony to him.

"No, thank you," he replied formally.

It added fuel to his blaze that she should take his acquiescence in the situation as a matter of course. He gloomed on for half an hour. Then she appeared with the baby. Jerry pretended to be engrossed in a magazine, and only glanced at his son when she presented him.

"Father is not hospitable this morning, Jerrykins," she remarked, and began a tour of the room, explaining everything to him as they reviewed it.

"This is the latest work of thy respected father, O bald one. Dost like the lady?" Small Jerry yawned and Jane laughed.

"Does art bore thee, my son? That would be a blow to thy humble parents."

The monologue went on and Jerry could have screamed with nerves. When she stopped behind him and remarked:

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"Upside down, Jerry? Is this some new mental discipline?" he rose, flung the magazine across the studio and himself out of the door.

Jane looked upon this exposition of temper with some amusement and no concern.

"My son, can you ever grow up to be as little a boy as your father?" she asked smilingly.

When Mrs. Biggs came down she stopped at the door.

"Has he gone out?"

"Who? Mr. Paxton? Yes."

"I blabbed about the room."

"I don't understand."

"He ast me if you had a key," she went on, repeating the conversation, verbatim.

"Oh!" said Jane, a light beginning to dawn.

"I could ha' bit my tongue out...."

"That's all right. I may have forgotten to speak about the room; I don't remember."

"I thought mebbe he was mad. Men are so queer about things."

"No, he wasn't mad, I'm sure. It's all right, Mrs. Biggs. Nine o'clock to-morrow."

"Yes'm."

So that was why Jerry was under a dark cloud. He resented the secret about the room in the tenement.

"Jerrykins, I wonder if thy great-great-great-granddaughter will be able really to call her soul her own. Jerry could have a whole series of workshops, of which I knew nothing, and consider it his business only; but if my soul has one unexplored corner—my body one unexplained resting place—I am no true wife! The times, my son, are *always* out of joint," she added with a sigh.

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Jerry stayed away all day and telephoned he would spend the night at the club. He came in the next morning just in time for his model, to find Jane coming in, too.

"Good-morning, Jerry," she said cheerfully.

"Good-morning."

"Hope you had a pleasant party."

"I did not."

She went upstairs and he into the studio. But at luncheon she precipitated the storm.

"Mrs. Biggs says you asked her if I had a key to her flat?"

"I did," defensively.

"Why not ask me, Jerry?"

"You were off with Christiansen!"

"But I came back in half an hour. Your impatience might have kept until then."

"May I ask why you find it necessary to rent a room in that tenement house?"

"Am I on the witness stand, Jerry, or is this a friendly interest in my doings?"

"I have a right to know why you have such a room."

"What right?"

"The right of your husband!"

"I don't know the sources of that right, Jerry, but I question it. The rights of a husband and wife, it seems to me, must be agreed on between them. I have never demanded an accounting of your time, or where you spend it."

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"That's a different matter. A husband has his honour to look out for."

"Honour is the common possession of the husband and the wife, as I see it, Jerry. She looks after it, just as he does."

"When a woman keeps a room and receives her lover there, it's time her husband looked into it."

Jane's face seemed to contract with the control she put on herself.

"You must explain that, Jerry."

"I saw Christiansen go there this morning to meet you."

"Jerry, you were spying?"

"It's my business to know, I tell you. Christiansen has given himself airs around here long enough. He can't make love to you...."

To his utter silencing, Jane laughed. Not bitterly or angrily, but just amusedly.

"Jerry, if it were not so ridiculous, it would be insulting! The idea of Martin Christiansen loving me is so absurd as to need no denial. We have had not one second of sentiment between us. He has never been in my room at Mrs. Biggs's since I married you. As for the room, I keep it as a place to go to work, to think, to be by myself. I pay for it myself; it is my office, if you like—my studio. If this information is a trifle disappointing, Jerry, after the fine melodrama you seem to have worked up, I'm afraid it's your own fault," she said, smiling, and walked out of the room.

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## CHAPTER XXV

It seemed to Jane that this frank, entirely truthful explanation settled the matter of the tenement room once for all. But alas! Jerry did not look at events with the simple directness which characterized Jane. He believed that she spoke the truth, as far as she knew it. But it was outside the laws of human possibilities to Jerry that a man and woman could have such obviously intimate relationship without sex attraction as its cause and excuse. The whole thing smouldered in his mind.

He began to wonder whether Jane had felt jealousy when he had spent so much of his time with Althea Morton, before the baby came. He could not recall the least sign she had ever made of distress or protest. He determined to find out if she could be made jealous. It was his only weapon, so far as he could see. After much consideration, he asked Althea to sit for him, as model for a picture. She accepted with avidity, and the time was set in the afternoons, when Jane was about. Jerry saw to that.

"I've just got an order for a picture from the New Age Club," he remarked at luncheon, breaking a long silence.

"Oh, Jerry, now nice; I'm delighted."

"It's to go over the fireplace in the living-room."

"Good. I'm so glad; it's a big step forward, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's a good thing."

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"Have you decided on the subject?"

"Yes—sort of enchanted Maeterlinck forest with Melisande coming through the trees."

"Charming. Did you choose it?"

"No, the committee decided on it. I shall begin at once."

"Who will you have for Melisande?"

"Althea Morton."

"Of course; she will be fine. But will she pose?"

"She will," he replied with what he hoped was a mysterious smile. It was a trifle annoying to have her so pleased with the arrangement. "I'd be obliged if you would occasionally show yourself while she is here," he added.

"I will, if I'm at home. There's no disguising the fact, however, Jerry, that my absence causes no acute pain to Miss Morton."

"That's not the point. People talk," significantly.

"Let them."

"That may be your idea, but it's not mine."

"Jerry," she laughed, "this must be a new leaf! I'll look in on Miss Morton if you like, to see that the proprieties are observed."

When the sittings began, Jerry manœuvred constantly to have Jane about. There was no use trying to make her jealous, if she was not there to see the provocation. Besides, Althea needed a check, if they once began a flirtation; nothing would please her so much as annoying Jane, he knew that instinctively.

But Jane was enough to drive a machinating husband to despair. She was casual in her greetings to Miss Morton, discreet about entering the studio during posing hours. She always announced herself, so that it was impossible to be caught in a compromising position, or even a tender glance.

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"For goodness' sake, Jane," he complained, "don't act as if she were posing for a nude. Walk right in when you want to come into the studio."

"I only come, by request, on behalf of the proprieties, you know. I don't wish to embarrass Miss Morton by seeming to protect her from you, Jerry."

"You act as if you thought you'd find me kissing her!" he exploded.

"You're welcome to kiss her, if it gives you pleasure and she does not object," replied Jane.

"Jane Judd, haven't you any sense of proprieties?"

"Yes, real proprieties, not surface trifles."

"You call kissing Miss Morton a surface trifle?"

"Distinctly; don't you?"

"I'd be interested to hear what you call the real proprieties," he said satirically.

"If you loved Miss Morton deeply and continued to live with me, I should say that the proprieties were outraged. That's a question of human relationship, you see. But kissing a silly woman who invites you to kiss her—pooh!—what's that?"

"I trust you don't pattern your own conduct on that belief?" hotly.

"I'm not a silly woman, little boy Jerry. I don't invite people to kiss me, because I don't like being kissed," she laughed.

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Bobs came in for some tea and interrupted them in their enlivening discussion. When Jerry went out of the room, Bobs said to Jane:

"Is Jerry trailing that Morton woman again?"

"He is painting her, as Melisande."

"Do you have to have her here all the time?"

"I don't see much of her. Poor Jerry has her."

"Poor Jerry likes her. Just when you begin to think that women are getting somewhere—being something fine and busy and loyal—then you run into an Althea, and smash goes the dream!"

"Dear, we can't change our natures in one generation, nor two, nor three. When we come back a few centuries from now, think what splendid creatures women will be!"

"Lord, Jane, I don't want to come back!"

"I do—just to see my twenty-fifth great-granddaughter!"

"What gets me is that a man with brains like Jerry can endure that old sex stuff! Flattery, sentiment, adoration—bah!"

"Men can't change in a minute either, Bobs!"

"To live with a woman like you and waste one minute with Althea—well—it's weak minded, that's what it is."

"Most men don't want heroic qualities to live with, Bobs. They haven't even sensed this comrade idea of ours yet, the majority of them. They still like mastery, special privilege, their own code; after all, they're human!"

"I'm sick of 'em!" Bobs remarked.

"Bobs, you're too big a woman to let one man set you against all men. That isn't fair. We can't be against them, dear. We're just human creatures here in this complex world, trying to make life bearable—to make it constructive; we have to do it together, in affectionate fellowship." [Pg 219]

"Give me time, old, wise Jane! But scold me and teach me, too. Let's go play with Baby."

"Baby's a man!" teased Jane.

"Bah!"

These were days of almost breathless anticipation for Jane. Christiansen was taking her to his publisher friend on the unfortunate occasion when they had encountered Jerry. The book had been in the firm's hands ever since. It seemed to Jane an eternity, in which she had not even Christiansen's encouragement, for he had disappeared on one of his frequent absences. He was at the sanatorium with his wife, Jane supposed. She went to her desk, in the white room, every morning, just the same, working over the notes for a new story which had been knocking at the door of her brain for a long time. The theme had sprung full-armed, as it were, from some remark of a character in the other book; she found that it had been developing all the time since its inception in that busy forge, the subconscious mind! The central character was a woman of a type unfamiliar to Jane, and yet, in the necromancy of imagination, she found she knew this girl like a twin soul. How she looked, what she thought, how she felt—it was all there in Jane's consciousness. It kept her mind off the fate of the other book to work at this new one. So she began it. Her habit of work stood her in good stead, and during her morning hours she actually forgot that her chance was being cast in a publishing house, on the Avenue, by a group of men she had never seen. Sometimes she despaired, other times she had full confidence. But if it came to pass that she should find a publisher and an audience—that she should be permitted to make, as her contribution, these transcriptions of life which joyed her so in the doing—could she ask one thing more of the gods? [Pg 220]

The envelope with the imprint of the arbiters of her fate was brought her by Anna one afternoon as she sat in the nursery! Jerry was out and the house very still. She held the letter in her hand—her heart beating so that she could scarcely breathe. It seemed as if all those years of patient labour stood before her in a row, asking her to read their sentence, yet she did not break the seal.

"Baby boy," she said unsteadily to her son, "shall you care whether your mother is a woman of letters? Will you love her as well as 'just mother'?"

He smiled his ready smile at her. She made him happy; he was ready to admit that. With an unsteady hand she opened the letter and forced herself to read:

"My dear Mrs. Paxton:

"We have taken rather more time than usual for the consideration of your book since it is a first book of a new author. We were so anxious that the fact that Martin Christiansen had brought you to us should not influence our judgment, that we subjected your work to a most rigorous examination.

"We are happy to say that we think you have written a book of rare distinction, of clear thinking and sure character building. It will give us great pleasure to publish it in the list of our spring books. We do not hope that it will be a 'best seller,' Mrs. Paxton, because in this country, artistic distinction, alas, is not an easily marketed commodity; but we consider it a privilege to have our imprint on a book of this quality." [Pg 221]

"Will you come in at your convenience to sign the contract?"

"Most sincerely yours, etc."

Jane laid her head against the foot of her son's bed, so deeply moved that she could not stir. Her joy was so great that it flooded her with a sense of consecration to a higher task. It was a fine devotional moment, to be put beside the other great moment of her life, when her son was laid in her arms.

She thought of Jerry, then; what it would mean to him. She would not wait to give him the book, she would share the precious secret with him this very day; it might be like a new marriage sacrament between them.

Then came the realization of Martin's joy at her fulfilment. She hurried to the telephone and called his club, leaving an urgent message for him to come to her if he should come back to town during the day.

She ran upstairs again to Baby, and explained it to him, every step of the long way to now. She laughed and made merry as she talked and Baby gurgled his appreciation. Then they discussed the future. She built up dreams of success and fame that rivalled even the visions that had come

to Baby on his journey out of nowhere to here.

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She heard the bell ring below and she flew downstairs, reaching the door almost as soon as Anna, in the hope that it was Martin.

"Oh, Jerry, I thought you were Martin!" she exclaimed.

"Sorry to be such a disappointment."

"Oh, you're not; I want to see you, too."

"Much obliged."

He went into the studio and she followed.

"I'm sorry I've irritated you Jerry, but I'm terribly excited, and not quite myself."

"What's happened?" quickly.

"The biggest thing that ever happened to me—next to Baby."

"You're in love with Christiansen!"

"Jerry, you foolish thing, no! It's something I've done."

"Go on. I'm prepared for the worst. Have you gambled away all our money, or have you killed somebody?"

She faced him, her eyes anxiously seeking his.

"Jerry, it's a serious thing. I've wanted to tell you for a long time; it may make a big difference in our life together."

"Jane, what is all this?" he demanded curtly.

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## CHAPTER XXVI

Jerry sat down on the couch, by the fire, and Jane stood looking down at him. She was trembling at the excitement of the moment.

"We haven't talked much of our inner selves, Jerry, and it's a little hard to begin—especially as this goes away back to the beginning of the time I came to the studio. Did you ever wonder why I took the work you offered?"

He nodded. She interested him now. She stood in that still way of hers, with the folds of her dull, blue gown hanging straight and close. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes shining; she was like a crystal ball which centred all the light and feeling in the room.

"I had to make a living so that I could go on with my real work, so I took the first thing that offered."

"What was your real work, Jane?"

"Writing. I always had a consuming desire to write—to express myself. I've always been rather silent—spoken words are so dangerous—but written words, they're like winged birds that I nurse in my heart. When I free them, they fly so far, so sure."

She stopped suddenly, aware that she had never spoken freely to him. His attention was concentrated on her.

"My mother thought I had a gift when I was a girl; no one else knew of my ambition. But when my father and mother were dead, I came to New York, with almost no money and some funny, childish little stories, to make a great name for myself."

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She laughed at that, but it hurt Jerry. He did not smile at all.

"Almost the first editor who saw me told me I had no talent. He said I must take a position that would support me; then I might write until I learned how."

"So you took my job?"

"Yes; it was all I was fitted to do. It didn't matter what I did, anyway. My real life was at night, when I wrote."

"What did you write, Jane?"

"Everything. Stories, essays, poems, tons of things."

"Where did you sell them?"

"I didn't sell them. Nobody ever saw them—not until Martin came."

"How did he know about them?"

"I told him, that first night I met him, at your pageant. He asked me what I did and for some reason I told him. He asked me to see some of my things and he liked them, rather, only he saw that I needed to live—that I could not really write if I sat outside of life and speculated about it. He literally opened up a new world to me. He took me about, to the theatre, to hear music. He got me interested in the big problems of now; he made me hungry for all the experiences I had been starved for."

Jerry leaned out toward her.

"That's why you married me, Jane?"

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She turned and looked at him, as if he were calling her out of a trance.

"Yes, that was why. I wanted a child," she said simply.

Jerry threw himself back on the couch and laughed at that—laughed stridently.

"Do you mind, Jerry?" she asked in surprise.

"Mind? Oh, no! It's amusing to hear that you've been gobbled up, as a possible experience, a stimulus, as it were, to a lady's literary expression. I really owe you to Christiansen, don't I?"

"Does it seem a meaner motive than yours, in marrying me, Jerry?"

"Go on with the story," he said, ignoring her question.

"There isn't any more. Martin advised me, criticised my work, helped in every way. This winter I have finished a book."

"Finished a book? Why, when did you do it?"

"Mornings—on my mysterious errands that vexed you so. I kept my old room at Mrs. Biggs's, and went there to work."

"Oh!" said Jerry, with colour slowly rising.

"Yes; simpler than you thought. The day you met Martin and me, he was taking me to a publishers' office. This is their letter to me."

She gave it to him and he read it through carefully. When he looked up she saw that he was excited.

"Do I congratulate you? Is that what a man does who suddenly finds himself possessed of a wife with a well-developed career?"

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"I'm sorry you hate it so, Jerry."

"Hate it? Not at all. But it is a bit upsetting to know that you've been fooled about some one for years."

"I offered to tell you, the day we were married, but you refused to listen; you said you would take my ambitions and ideas on faith, if I would yours."

"Well, but I didn't know you had a secret like this up your sleeve."

"I risked your secrets, too, Jerry."

"There's nothing for me to do but to get used to it. I suppose you can't be induced to give it up now."

"Could you be induced to give up painting?"

"I'm not a married woman with a child."

"But you are a human being, with something to express, aren't you?"

"I suppose so."

"So am I. Being a woman, the fact that I am married, that I have a child, gives me more to say. Everything that enriches my life makes it more impossible for me to be dumb. Isn't that true with you, too, Jerry?"

"It's different with me; creation happens to be my job—my livelihood."

"So it must be mine, some day, although that isn't the ideal way. Earning a living by some other means, or having it provided and then creating what your spirit urges you to do, that's the ideal."

"But you had that before you married me, according to your story."

"Yes. But I had nothing vital to say."

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"But if I provide the vitality and the livelihood," bitterly.

"Jerry, that is the only unfair and unkind thing I ever heard you say."

"I'm sorry, Jane, but all this is rather a blow, you know. I don't believe in women having careers after they are married. I always said I would never marry a woman artist."

"Granted that you have been deceived in me, Jerry. Whether that is your fault or mine is of no importance. Have I made you a reasonably satisfactory wife, considering the kind of marriage we made?"

"I suppose so."

"No, that's not fair. Do I make your home comfortable?"

"Of course."

"Do I protect your working hours?"

He nodded.

"Do I nag or ask questions, or complain about things?"

He shook his head.

"Am I extravagant?"

"Good Lord! Jane, you're all right, but this is only the beginning. This is your first picture on the line," he said, holding up the letter.

"I know that there are many ways in which I fail as a wife—ways in which we are not harmonious—but that shield has two sides, Jerry, and my belief is that, since we did what we did, we can't expect perfection in our life together. We have to face certain grave lacks, and make the best of what we have."

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"I suppose that's fair."

"We've got a difficult situation on our hands. I don't know whether it would be easier or harder if we loved each other. But all I ask of you is to go step by step with me in the matter, and try to keep an open mind. Don't talk about my career; I don't want a career. I just want to say what I think and feel, as my contribution. I want to do it, so that it does not take an iota of my time or interest from you or Baby; is that unreasonable?"

"It sounds all right."

"But, Jerry, you mustn't begrudge it to me, like that! Can't you just say to yourself: 'Now this isn't working out any theory; it hasn't anything to do with feminism; it's just a knot for us two to untie?' We've got to keep our tempers sweet and our minds aired to do it, Jerry, but won't you try it out with me?"

"It sounds easy and reasonable to you, Jane, but what you're asking me to do is to shed all my inherited ideas and my own convictions on this subject of woman's function and place."

"My dear, inherited ideas ought to go; they're not worth giving storage room, and convictions that are change-proof are dangerous possessions!"

"That's your point of view!"

"It is yours on most subjects. If you prove to me that it is not your point of view on this subject, I shall certainly respect it, and also try to change it."

"You don't leave me any alternative," he said, veering from the point. "You spring this thing on me, and say: 'Now—make the best of it!'"

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"I'm sorry you feel that way about it. There is, of course, a perfectly obvious alternative—that we should separate."

"You mean you would go that far, rather than let this writing business go for a few years until Jerry is five or six?"

"I can't get into your mind when you hold it shut, Jerry. I've put every effort and hope of my life into laborious toil for seven years to prepare myself for this work. You speak of 'this writing business' as if it were some whim of the moment. It is serious, Jerry. I believe in myself. I have something to say that no other human being in the world will say, and I've learned how to say it. Other women, similarly equipped physically, might have produced Jerry, but no other woman could have produced that book."

"Then you think the book is more important than Jerry?"

She kept her control with difficulty; he was so wantonly hurting her.

"I think I am here to produce both. One is the child of my body and one is the child of my spirit. They are equally important to me; they are inevitable."

"I can't understand you, Jane. I thought your love for Jerry was the one passion of your life, but that doesn't sound like it."

"We are what we are, Jerry; you can't push back development. I can't unmake you as artist any more than you can unmake me. The only difference is that I don't want to."

"You knew what I was when you married me."

"But how am I different from the person you married, Jerry? I'm what I was yesterday; nothing has changed in our lives; we will work and play and eat and sleep to-morrow as we did yesterday; why do you feel so upset about me?"

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"But can't you see that you're a stranger to me? You aren't the kind of woman I thought you were!"

"But do you think I'm a less desirable companion because I've proved that I have a gift that you did not suspect? I am adding something as a contribution to our common life, not taking anything away."

"That's still to be proved."

"Why, no, Jerry, it has been proved! I've been proving it ever since we married. The only difference is that yesterday you didn't know it—to-day, you do."

"It's my knowing it that makes the difference; you said yourself that it might make a difference in our life together!"

"Yes, but I meant a change for the better. I thought you might be a little proud of me—that I'd won a long, hard fight—that you might hold out your hand to me and say: 'Good for you, Partner; now we'll march along together with a new, common interest!'"

"I'm sorry to be such a disappointment, Jane. I'm not playing up at all, but this thing has knocked me over. I've got to think it out." He fumbled for his words.

"Of course, that's what we must both do."

"I do think it's great that your book is accepted," he added lamely.

"Thank you, Jerry," she said, and turned to go upstairs, but not before he had seen the tears in her eyes—the first tears he had ever seen Jane shed.

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## CHAPTER XXVII

A fairness of judgment was so essentially a part of Jane's equipment that she forced herself to be Jerry for the next few days. She knew him so well, she knew the way his mind worked, because she brought to bear not only her experience in living with him, but her imagination, too. She felt for his distress, even while she marvelled at it. She tucked away for future use this revelation of the diametrically opposed methods by which men and women attack problems. Had it been a more tangible thing, Jerry would have faced it more sanguinely, but in this realm of intellectual mazes and psychological reactions where she lived, poor Jerry was lost. He groped about, perplexed, indignant.

Two days after her confession about the book, he took up the matter again.

"Now that there is no more secret about your writing, can't you manage to do it at home?" he said.

"The point is that I do it better away from home. There is no place here where I can be safe from interruption. The telephone rings, Baby cries, I cannot concentrate."

"I do my work here."

"Yes, I admire your concentration very much, and envy you it," she said.

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"I must say, it isn't always convenient for me to stay in all morning, because somebody has to watch the kid."

"I'm sure that's true, because I so often want to go out for things in the afternoon. As soon as we can afford it we must get a nurse for him, so that we both will be freer."

"After all, the baby is your first duty."

"If your present arrangement is a canker in your mind, Jerry, we must change it, of course. I have greatly appreciated your fair-mindedness about it."

"If I paint in the afternoon, I often have things to attend to in the morning."

"I've never known you to go out in the morning on business, Jerry."

"I have more to attend to than I used to."

"Very well, I will arrange it."

Jane spent an hour rearranging the household schedule, so that Anna could replace Jerry in the morning. Baby slept nearly all the time she was out, so it was just a matter of having some one within call, in case he waked. Good-natured Anna agreed to the new scheme and the next day, as Jane started off, she remarked to Jerry:

"There is no need of your staying in any more. Anna will look after Jerry."



"Very well," he said coldly.

So far as Jane knew, he never went out on the urgent business. After a late breakfast he read his paper in the nursery, just as usual, and little by little Anna faded out of the picture, and when Baby waked up, he and his father had a fine romp until Jane's return. They never mentioned it again and she smiled to herself at his calm assumption that he was free to come and go, so he stayed. If only she could make him apply that rule equally to both of them!

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The contract on her book was signed and the advance paid her. It marked the first goal in her path. It seemed to her a big sum, ignorant as she was of the standards in her new market. Her first impulse was to hurry to Jerry with her prize and display it, but something held her back. He had not asked anything about the book. He had not asked to read it, he had not mentioned the contract or its terms. His silence hurt her deeply, so she kept her own counsel. Jerry was having great difficulty in getting his money for the last portrait he had painted, of the impecunious wife of a rich man, and the family funds were getting low, so it was with joy that Jane nursed the knowledge of her own reinforcements.

Chance played into her hands, for Jerry, always careless in regard to money, drew a check and was promptly notified by the bank that their account was overdrawn.

"Have you been drawing out any unusual amounts at the bank?" he said testily, after reading the letter.

"No."

"Damned cashier must be wrong."

"Why?"

"Says we're overdrawn."

"Let's look at the check book," she said.

Inspection showed that the cashier's statement was accurate.

"Very awkward. I can't pry a check off of Mrs. Beaufort. She's got to cheat it out of old Beaufort somehow, she tells me. That New Age Club check isn't due until the picture is installed."

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"It's all right. I'll deposit the advance on my book."

"The what?"

"I got an advance from the publishers on my book."

"Well, you're not going to put that into our bank account."

"Certainly I am; why not?"

"Because I can support this family without it."

"Jerry, that is a very ungracious remark."

"I can't help it. You do what you like with the money you make, but you're not to help support me."

"Does it occur to you that I feel just the same about it? You've been perfectly fair about money ever since we agreed to both draw from one common account, but you can't deprive me of the pleasure of contributing to that common account. Why, Jerry, it's the only fun of making it!"

"You put it away for Baby, or do anything you like with it, but I can't stand your paying household bills with it."

"You are practically saying that I cannot do anything I like with it."

"Good Lord! There's no pleasing you!"

"I don't want you to please me. I only want you to admit that it is our house and our baby and our money, and I feel just as much pride in doing my part toward joint expenses as you do. It's my right to share it, when I can, as well as my greatest pleasure. Put yourself in my place and you'll see it."

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He heaved a deep sigh of outraged manhood without any other reply. Jane promptly deposited her check, and his only comment was a silent one. He used what money he had sparingly and drew no personal checks while her money was being used. When Mrs. Beaufort's check finally arrived he said sardonically:

"Here's my little contribution to the family resources. Not so big as yours, but still perfectly acceptable."

"Jerry, Jerry, it isn't that you are jealous of my work and my pay that makes you so bitter against them?"

"Jealous?" he laughed, "not at all. It is no doubt a safeguard to have a rich wife."

But that controversy was ended, because when his check was deposited there was no more

chance for mine and thine, so the subject was never opened up again.

These days of Jerry's irritation were difficult to bear, but Jane controlled her temper, knowing that only her cool head and judgment would carry them through this crisis.

Bobs came in to dinner with them one night in the thick of the difficulty. Jerry was sarcastic and bitter at the expense of women, so that finally Bobs turned on him.

"What's the matter with you, Jerry? I thought matrimony had tamed you!"

"On the contrary."

"Come on up to date, Jerry. It's lonesome back there where you are."

"He isn't back there at all, Bobs; he walks right along abreast of his times, in actuality, but he insists that he is still in the past," said Jane, laughing.

"Jane knows all about me," he said jeeringly.

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"She ought to—she has to live with you."

"Have you heard our latest news?" he inquired.

She shook her head.

"New genius in the family."

"You mean Baby?"

"Oh, Jerry, please," said Jane.

"No; Jane."

"I've always known Jane was a genius," said Bobs.

She looked at Jane, saw her distress, and flew to the rescue.

"Has she put something over on you, Jerry?"

"Yes, she's written a book."

"Written a book?" said Bobs, in italics.

"I intended not to tell any one until it was published, but since Jerry has seen fit to tell...." Jane began, flushed and angry.

"Jane! how wonderful! What is it about?"

Jane shrugged her shoulders.

"Jerry, what's it about?" Bobs demanded.

"I don't know—I haven't read it."

"Haven't read it? Why not?"

"She hasn't asked me to."

"Why, Jerry! I thought you didn't want me to," exclaimed Jane.

"Let me tell you one thing, Jane Judd, I'll not leave this house until I have a copy in my hands. I'd rather read a book by you! Why, Jane, you old sphinx, how could you do it? Tell me the whole thing."

"She won't tell you a word. I had to drag it out of her," Jerry remarked.

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"Very well, you tell me," Bobs ordered.

Jerry smiled.

"It's quite a drama. The first act set is little town. Heroine in pigtails, yearning with ambition to be George Sand or George Eliot or some of the great female scribblers. Encouraged by doting mother, she writes essays on Spring. Act two, plays in the great, cruel city. Heroine, orphaned and penniless, comes to fight for fame. Like the poor match-girl, she knows hunger and cold, while she peddles her works—in vain. Am I accurate, Jane?"

"Quite," she said calmly.

"She is forced to take a mere job to buy food. Enter a brilliant but impoverished artist, with the job in his right hand. Heroine toils by day that she may create by night. Midnight oil, cold tenement room, you know. Abraham Lincoln stuff."

"Jane, while you were working for all of us, did you write, too?"

Jane nodded.

"Don't interrupt, Bobs. Enter hero—a great critic—a literary light. Reads heroine's work—hails her genius of the age—rushes her to publishers, who press gold upon her and accept her

immortal opus!"

He paused to inspect Jane, who smiled at him.

"Go on with act three. That's only two acts," cried Bobs.

"Act three isn't written yet. It develops story of insignificant husband, formerly brilliant but impoverished artist, and the child."

"Well, well, well!" said Bobs. "I never was so excited. I always knew you'd create something, Jane, and now...." [Pg 238]

"May I call attention to her other creation—Mr. Jerry Paxton Jr.?" said Jerry.

"He's important, but anybody can have a baby and so few people can write books!" said Bobs.

"You women! I reverse it! Anybody can write a book, but so few women can have a son like Jerry. That's the set of volumes I wish her to complete."

"No, no more human volumes, Jerry, until we have ample means. Printing and binding and bookshelves are so costly for human volumes. Besides, one must be so careful what one writes in them."

"I suppose I have something to say about that," he said angrily.

"Certainly. I supposed I was expressing your conviction, too, Jerry, that only the best that love can give, only the largest opportunity, could excuse bringing children into the world."

Bobs looked from one to the other of them, trying to analyze Jerry's anger.

"Jane's right. Most parents would have a hard time defending themselves, if their children came to them with the question, 'Why did you do this to me?'"

"You talk an awful lot of nonsense, you two," said Jerry, flinging out of the room.

"What's the matter with him?" Bobs asked.

"He's bitterly opposed to my writing."

"He's jealous; I know him."

"He doesn't think it's that. I only just realized to-night that he was hurt because I hadn't offered him the book. I was hurt because he didn't ask for it," she added. [Pg 239]

"Men are a trial!" Bobs said, and dismissed them for the more congenial topic of the book. They talked it over for hours, and when Bobs left she had a typed copy in her arm. She called a good-night to Jerry, who came downstairs and tried to be agreeable. He insisted on walking home with her. While he was gone, Jane pondered deeply, and came to a decision. When he returned she was still in the studio. She had a pile of manuscripts in her hands, and she came toward him.

"Jerry, would you—will you read it?" she asked him gently.

"Thanks. I was going to ask you if you had a copy," he replied with effort.

She smiled a good-night and slipped off upstairs to bed. At three o'clock she woke to see the light still shining in the studio. She went to the balcony and looked down. Jerry sat, under the light, reading absorbedly, with sheets of script scattered about him like a troubled sea. [Pg 240]

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

Jane lay awake until she heard Jerry tiptoe up to his room, in the early morning. It gave her an excited sense of satisfaction that, however much he opposed her confessed profession, the thing she had created held him spellbound. The artist in him could not withstand good workmanship. Or perhaps he found her ideas interesting. She could scarcely wait until morning to hear his verdict—and at the same time she dreaded it. She was tempted to go to his room now, and demand it, so that she might sleep.

She had suffered deeply through his facetious recital of her story, it was not until she understood that he was hurt by her neglect to offer him the book that she could force herself to forgive it. How they stumbled about in the dark, missing each other! Was it so in better regulated marriages? Did men and women really ever truly understand each other?

Jane pondered the question as to whether the initial dissimilarity between them was being widened by the engulfing current that was sweeping woman on so rapidly into new waters of unrest. If this storm was carrying her into any more than a temporary separation of interest from man's, then it meant destruction and the need of rebuilding. Men seemed to be blaming women with the unrest in the world to-day. Jerry voiced a grievance against them as trouble makers. It was like blaming the sea for its attraction for the moon—accusing the sun for sailing through its orbit. A force—generated who knows how or where?—had been set in motion. Call it education, industrial and economic freedom, or what you will, it had happened. Women could not start it— [Pg 241]

could not stop it. Nor could men.

Ours is an age of conflict, of rapid change, taking place in our knowledge and all about us. The conflict is psychological as well as material. Take one small detail of our machinery. In Jane's own lifetime had come a total revolution in man's method of transportation. Subways, elevated trains, automobiles, aeroplanes. How swiftly must the individual readjust himself. He has within him, intensified, the struggle and the discoördination which is taking place in the large social group. He has to meet the crisis of accepting daily new truths, while he is bound, even tortured, by traditional convictions.

It was because the Jerry type of man did not see that this discoördination ramified into every corner of our lives—that it is religious, social, political, as well as material and domestic. But boy-man that he was, he recognized it only where it struck home quickest to him, in his sex life, in his marital relations. He could not realize that this was not the basis of the whole unrest and therefore to be laid at woman's door—that it was only reaction from an universal discoördination.

She had tried to work this out in her book; she had striven with all her power to get above this seething, boiling, electrified whirlpool that we call life, to find purpose in it—direction and ultimate calm. She wanted to drive home her conviction that, whether we swim with the torrent or against it, we must do it together—men and women—adjusting and readjusting.

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Dawn came. She heard Anna stirring below, before she dropped asleep. Jerry was still asleep when she left the house. She was relieved that she did not have to meet him, in the disorganized condition of mind and body in which she found herself after her sleepless and perturbed night. She took a brisk walk before she went to her work, and compromised by setting herself to revision rather than creation.

When she came into the nursery on her return, she found Jerry there. At sight of her he put the baby down quickly on the bed, and came toward her, with a look on his face she could not fathom.

"Jane, why, Jane...." he began and stopped. He held out his hand and she laid hers in it, while he still stared at her in the most intense way.

"I can hardly believe it—I couldn't lay it down."

"I'm so glad. I came and peeped at you at three o'clock and I was so excited that I couldn't sleep any more after that. I wanted so to know what you thought about it."

"I almost came in to wake you up, but I thought I'd just take the rest of the night to think it over."

"You—liked it?"

"No. I think you've done it wonderfully. I couldn't believe that you could do it," he broke off. "I suppose the whole truth is that I don't know you at all, any more than if we met last night."

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"Oh, you know some of me, Jerry. You couldn't know what I kept secret."

"How did you learn all that, in that book?"

"Well, I've read a great deal of other people's wisdom. I've lived and watched and studied people. I don't know; how does any artist acquire what he gives out? It's like breath, you inhale atmosphere outside of you, make it part of your blood and tissue, exhale it something quite different—essentially yours!"

"And I've been living along with you, just thinking you were any woman."

"I am—just that—and I've written the story of any woman in the world to-day. Why didn't you like it, Jerry?"

"Because I don't like what you say—we've gone over it so often."

"It wasn't convincing to you, then?"

"I don't know. I was mainly interested in how you were doing it. I'm going to read it again and see if what you say is really sense."

She laid her hands on his shoulders.

"Jerry, promise. Read it with an open mind. Pretend you haven't any prejudices in the matter and give me a chance."

He laughed, then sobered quickly.

"This business is terribly upsetting, Jane. I'm all in. I'm going for a walk before lunch. By the way, the announcement is in the morning papers," he added as he left.

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She seized the *Times* and ran through the book advertisements. There it was:

"'Wisdom Hath Buildded Her a House,' by Jane Paxton. A remarkable book by a new author, ready May 15th."

She read it over and over with a beating heart. She carried it over to Baby and showed it to him. He reached for it, with apparent interest.

"Sonny boy, this is about your little sister. She was born of your mother, just as truly as you were. Will you love her and be proud of her? She already knows and loves you."

The telephone called her and Martin's voice answered her question.

"You've seen the announcements?"

"Yes, yes—and you?"

"I've only just read it. I'm so thrilled—I feel as if I could sing or cry."

"Dear child! I could not come to tell you my congratulations, because I must go away again this afternoon, so this is my compromise."

"I never was so happy, Martin."

"Oh, that is right; I'm happy, too, and I prophesy again a fine future for you, Jane Judd."

"My dear master!"

"Master? Humph, not I!"

"I told Jerry. He read the book last night."

"Oh? What does our Jerry say to that?"

"He's very upset. He hates careers for married women—he doesn't want me to have one—but he sat up all night to read the book."

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Martin's laugh interrupted her.

"Thank Heaven, his artist instinct is quite unrelated to his mind!"

She laughed at that.

"He is impressed with my artistry but he dislikes my ideas."

"Dear soul, you've got a problem there, but I know your faculty for solving them."

"It's easier in books than in life, Martin."

"Yes, but the satisfaction is greater."

"I'm so used to the thought of my work, that I had never foreseen what a bomb it would explode among my family and friends."

"Well, here's to a big, public explosion and subsequent fame. My thoughts will be with you."

"Thanks, dear friend, come back to us soon."

Bobs arrived, breathless with haste, at this moment.

"No sleep, nor food, nor work in my house since I got home last night!" she cried.

"Bobs, you dear."

"Jane, you...."

Then without rhyme or reason, she flew into Jane's arms, clung to her, weeping bitterly. Jane held her close, her own eyes full of tears. When Bobs found her composure she held her friend away from her, and looked into her wet, tender eyes.

"You've said it all, Jane, like a prophet among women. I've learned it, and my soul has dried up with bitterness, but you've kept sweet. The world will listen to you—even men will listen," she said.

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"Bobs, you dear old fraud, such loyalty and devotion and character as yours do not grow out of a soul-soil of bitterness. You've helped me with that book almost more than anybody else."

"How, Jane?"

"By being a good soldier!"

"Jane, I haven't cried in years and if you say another word like that, I'm going to cry again."

Jerry came in and Bobs turned to him her tear-stained face.

"Have you read it?"

"Yes."

"You know what you've done, then?"

"What I've done?"

"Yes. You've married a woman and an artist, so much bigger than yourself, that you've got to spend all your time growing big enough to live with her!"

"Oh, Bobs, dear. You must forgive her, Jerry," Jane protested.

He shook his head slowly and said with a sort of solemnity:

"I know she speaks the truth!"

"Jerry, don't!" Jane exclaimed in distress.

"I've got to see this situation and you and me from all sides now, Jane. It means too much to us all, for me to go on blundering with my eyes shut."

"It must be my eyes that are shut, because it seems so simple to me; we know the truth about each other now and I've come one step nearer to you, by reason of my art."

"I hope so, Jane," he said earnestly.

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## CHAPTER XXIX

With the early spring Jane's book made its bow to the world. It had been widely advertised by the publishers and had the advantage of a conspicuous loneliness, since most books are brought out in the fall. The author was sorry when her work was actually in its final form, because she had so enjoyed the novelty of its various processes. The galley proof and the page proof interested her intensely; the choice of an illustrator seemed a momentous question of great import. The colour of the binding, whether the lettering on it should be gold or black, these details delighted her.

But the day came when a huge package arrived with her twelve copies allotted by the contract. She sat on the floor and looked over every copy, patting the covers, gloating over the beauty of the book. It was an experience she was never to repeat in all the freshness of the first time, and she drained it of sweetness.

She showed one to small Jerry, who approved it. Then she indicted one to Martin and sent it by messenger to his rooms, although she knew him to be still out of town. She wrote Jerry's name in his and put it on his dressing table. She carried one to Bobs herself.

So much for her own immediate and tangible result from her long labours. She had expected just such pleasure from it—but the surprising thing was the intangible effect, which she had not counted on.

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Dinner and tea invitations flooded in from all sides, her own days at home became crushes. Everybody she knew talked about this book as if it were the only book ever written. The critics, worn out after an arduous season of more or less mediocrity, welcomed this new author because she had freshness; she piqued their tired faculties.

The newspapers and magazines sent people to interview her; one of the papers made much of her appearance in the Pageant of the Prophets—her romance with Jerry. They ran a reproduction of one of his portraits, not being able to get a photograph of Jane.

"I get a little ad. out of this, Jane," Jerry said, as he handed her that account.

"I don't like the publicity part," she sighed, and added as she read, "Oh, this is ridiculous, I won't have it."

"My dear, you'll find that advertising is the most important thing in art these days. This kind of thing is nuts and ale to your publishers."

"But, Jerry, how can it be? All this silly, untrue stuff about my private life."

"That's what they want. The D. P. care much more for your private life than it does for your work. The more they know—or think they know—about it, the more willing they are to buy what you have to sell."

"It's disgusting; it debases art."

"So it does; it also popularizes it."

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"I suppose that is what we want, isn't it—a democratic art?"

"Yes, if artists are to live. But it has to be spoon fed, with a rich sauce of personality to get it down their throats," he grumbled.

"But my book isn't the popular kind—only a few people are going to read it—so why do I have to go through this cheap advertising? It will disgust the people who might read me, and the people it might attract will never read me."

"Don't expect the advertiser to have any judgment, Jane. All kinds of soap and all kinds of books are alike to him."

"Dear me, it is discouraging."

Mrs. Abercrombie Brendon insisted upon giving a dinner for Jane, with fashionable and literary folk asked to meet her. She found herself a celebrity of sorts, complimented and deferred to. It amused her greatly, but the most interesting thing was Jerry's attitude. His early resentment at

her conspicuous new position had resolved into a semblance of pride in her triumphs. The night of the Brandons' dinner she continually was reminded of his attitude the first night he introduced her as his wife, at Jinny Chatfield's studio party. Then, as now, he had paid her court, possessed her, exhibited her.

Jane took her new position calmly. Her sense of humour saved her from any undue inflation of values. She accepted the comments of those who pretended they had read her book—relying on an outburst of adjectives to protect the falsehood—as sweetly as she did the over-serious consideration of some of the others.

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"A masterly handling of the woman question, Mrs. Paxton," said the man who sat next her at table.

"I wish we might call it the human question; it is yours as well as ours, you know," she answered.

Her partner quoted the remark for weeks following the reiteration—"that brilliant Mrs. Jerry Paxton said to me the other night at dinner...." etc.

It is of just such trifles that reputations are built, the right word here, an exclamation there, and the thing is done.

"Well, Jane, you're a success as a celebrity," Jerry remarked on the way home.

"It is pleasant to have people friendly, but it is amusing to have them make such a fuss, isn't it? You've always known you were the kind of person you are; it seems strange that you have to do a special, conspicuous thing to get people to see it."

Jerry laughed.

"You ungrateful wretch," he exclaimed. "I don't believe you care a rap about this part of your success."

"I don't; I hate it. I'd like to slip away and not hear any more about that book. I loved writing it and the making of it, but this fol-de-rol seems so childish."

"Mrs. Brendon would like that 'fol-de-rol!' She thinks that dinner was a brilliant event."

"It was sweet of her, of course."

"You get more of an enigma to me, Jane, as time goes on. You haven't one iota of personal vanity. Now, I love every ounce of success I can get. I'd like to be perpetual guest of honour. I want all the pomp and circumstance I can manage. That's how vain I am."

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"I understand it, in you, Jerry, but I seem to be entirely different."

So sensitive was Jerry to public opinion that by insensible degrees he drifted into an acceptance of Jane's new position. He deferred to her opinions, he even referred to her work.

"What are you busy with now, Jane?" he inquired.

"I'm working out an absorbing situation," she answered, and outlined it to him. He was interested and they discussed it for some time. "It's all I can do to tear myself away from my desk these days; I feel as if I just must have more time."

"Can't we manage with lunch later?"

"No, not if we get you ready for a model at two. I can't seem to get off any earlier in the morning."

"Why not?"

"Well, I have to do the ordering and get Baby bathed and off to sleep."

"Can't Anna do that?"

"No, she can't order, and I don't want her to bathe Baby."

"I might manage the ordering for a week or so, until you get the story along past the climax."

"Jerry! would you?" she exclaimed.

"Why not? I'm here all morning—might as well."

"You dear! That would give me a half-an-hour earlier start."

"Anybody who can get up in the morning, and go at her work the way you do, ought to have a free rein."

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"Morning's my time, afternoon is yours; we're very well suited to each other in some ways, Jerry," she laughed.

"Where's Christiansen these days?" he asked.

"He's out of town—with his wife, I suspect."

"Poor devil! It's hard lines, isn't it?"

"Yes, but Martin is one of the few who are big enough to suffer."

"How do you mean?"

"So many people are so selfish and small-minded that they can only cry and protest against afflictions, but there are some who welcome the bitter with the sweet—who grow big and fruitful with sorrow. Martin is like that. I think him the biggest man I've ever known," she added simply.

The studio crowd arranged a party in the Chatfields' studio which Jinny called a "coronation" in Jane's honour. It was to be a surprise and they told Jerry the details and gave him orders about getting her there, with no suspicion of the real nature of the event.

"It's sweet of you, Jinny, but Jane won't like it," he said.

"Yes, she will! Every woman likes to be made much of. She made her other *début* in my house and I want her for this one. We're so proud of her, we don't know what to do, Jerry!" she answered feelingly.

"All right. I'll get her there at nine o'clock, but I've warned you!" he laughed.

As it was, he had a great struggle to get Hamlet to the feast. Jane was too tired to go anywhere, she said, and they could go to see Jinny any time. Then when he had finally induced her to go, she could not see why he insisted on her wearing her newest frock. [Pg 253]

"Oh, I just like you in it and none of them have seen it. Suit yourself, of course," he said.

So with a sigh, Jane arrayed herself. Jerry thought she had never looked so well, with a deepened pallor of weariness and faint blue shadows about her eyes.

When they arrived at the Chatfields' the big studio room was empty, but in one end of it was a huge throne on a dais. Their host received them with great dignity and to Jane's astonishment drew her hand through his arm and led her to the throne.

"Sit there just a minute, Jane," he urged.

"But what for? What is this?"

He almost pushed her into the chair of state and the moment she was seated, music struck and a procession began of all the artist folk. They wore paper caps and robes and they approached the astounded Jane, who would have fled, had Chatfield not prevented. A page bore a crown of laurel leaves, which the head chamberlain set upon her head with appropriate ceremonial words. Then the various officials of her court presented her with the insignia of her royalty—a great pen, a huge key to her counting house—an exquisite gauze veil, the cloak of imagination was laid about her shoulders. Then a beautiful handmade book, entitled "The Coronation of Queen Jane the First," in which were all the names of her subjects, was offered. [Pg 254]

Bobs, dressed as Ariel, brought her a crystal globe and explained in charming verse that she was to gaze into it and see life, know the powers of the air, follow the trail of the sun and moon into the realm of universal knowledge, whither she was to lead her subjects.

Jane's first feeling was one of protest as the position was forced upon her, but the spontaneity of their tribute, with its friendly impulse, melted her first embarrassment into gratitude and affection.

When they ended the ceremony, by singing "Auld Lang Syne," she was near to tears.

"Speech! Speech!" they cried, and she rose at once.

"My good friends, I feel sure that your acquaintance with the Cinderella story of plain Jane Judd will excuse Queen Jane the First for lack of royal words of thanks, but I am both touched and grateful, because you are the oldest friends I have in New York, and many times in the years back of us you've proved yourselves the truest.... Couldn't you let Jerry finish this speech? He makes so much better ones than I do!"

"No, no; down with the men!" cried Bobs.

"Long live Queen Jane!" shouted the host, and on the wave of sound that followed Jane floated into her own, in their world of dreams and visions and struggles, where she had for so long a time been a silent onlooker. [Pg 255]

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## CHAPTER XXX

These days of stress, mental upheaval, and emotional unrest were having their effect upon Jerry's work, as well as upon his mind. He painted with a veritable fury. Melisande in the wood became the outlet for his surcharged feelings. Jane came upon him, one late afternoon, after Althea had gone, studying his work from every angle.

"Jerry, do you realize how this grows? I find it absorbing to watch."

"Do you, Jane?" gratefully.



"It has been like a miracle, like spring. First the bare outlines; then came the trees, sky, earth; then branches, clouds, the grass; then a sweep of colour, soft as a May wind; then you did something to it that made it a place of mystery."

"Does it have all that for you, Jane?"

"Yes, and more. It has the proof of my belief in your power."

"Why do you hate the portraits so?"

"Because they are not you—they are things to sell. You are clever enough to make people look as they want to look, not as you know they are."

"Heavens, Jane, that would ruin us!"

"There, you've said it. We are prostituting your soul to pay our rent."

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"It's just a crutch, Jane. I'll discard it as soon as I can. Don't take it too seriously."

"I can't help it. You see, I take the creative instinct seriously; it is our share of Godhood."

"I know, but all of us have to pot boil."

"Not all of us."

"You chose manual labour instead, didn't you? But we aren't all made of the stuff you are, Jane."

"It isn't that. It is only that if you worship Godhood, even in yourself, you cannot prostitute it."

"But Baby and you and I must live. Doesn't the motive make any difference, to your mind?"

"We don't have to live in this house with those things about us."

"Yes, we do. The very wells of my soul dry up in poverty and ugliness. I'm not a genius, Jane, I'm only just a talent."

"When I am doing my share, you will be freer to grow, Jerry."

He made no answer to that. He began to put away the canvas.

"Won't you leave it out? Martin and Bobs are coming to dinner, you remember. They would enjoy seeing it."

"Better wait until it's finished," he said, but left it in easy reach.

Bobs arrived early to see the baby put to bed. She adored him, even to his mother's entire content. She referred to him as His Majesty, brought him gifts, surrounded him with adoration and incense.

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"Great excitement in my shop to-day," she said, when they were down in the studio, waiting for Martin. "I got a commission for a fountain to stand in a public square in Columbus, Ohio."

"Good work, Bobs, we'll crack a bottle on it to-night and celebrate your luck," cried Jerry, wringing her hand.

"I am delighted, dear," said Jane. "Any plans for it?"

"Not yet. I'm in that agonized state of groping for the idea. You know—something inside clutching in the dark, darting here and there, trying to get hold of things that slip away. No torture like it."

"Also no satisfaction like the minute when the idea comes, like the night-blooming cereus, in the dark."

"Yes, that's the fun, and later, examining the leaves, the blossom, the calyx, the stem, saying to yourself, 'Why, of course, how else?'"

"Queer, isn't it, how it comes to each one of us differently—one plant for you, another for me, and still another for Jane," Jerry remarked.

"That is why it seems to me so important to cultivate your own, it is so essentially yours," Jane said, in her serious way.

"Yes, if you don't forget that, at a big flower show, you may be a violet in the chrysanthemum exhibit," Bobs teased.

Martin came in, on the laugh that followed.

"This sounds like a happy party," he remarked, as he greeted them.

"Bobs has an order, and she is exuberant," explained Jerry.

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He proceeded to offer her various ridiculous suggestions as to fitting subjects for the fountain. They all went into dinner, laughing. But Jane's observing eye marked signs of weariness and feeling in Martin's face. He was his usual, spontaneous, interested self to the casual onlooker, but in moments when the others were talking, she caught him off guard, mask down.

Bobs and Jerry fell into a discussion over a line which Bobs quoted from Jane's book.

"But I don't agree with Jane's hypothesis, that every life is an end in itself, because it cannot be lived again: that the personal reaction to life, expressed in art, is of value, because it is individual."

"What is the individual's value, then?" Bobs demanded. "Yours, for instance?"

"I'm part of a whole. I'm an eye or an ear in the big organism. My job is no more important than—nor as important as—the function of the leg, or the arm."

"Then you think it is just accident that you happen to be the eye?" Martin inquired.

"Yes."

"I think you've been trained from the beginning of the world to be the eye," Jane said. "I believe your personality to be an asset that will never happen again, that you must live the fullest, freest life possible, so that you may be a normal, clear-sighted eye, and see truly."

"It puts a whole new emphasis on the individual, doesn't it?" Martin mused.

"It seems to me slightly lacking in a sense of humour, but that is not an unusual fault in women, I am told," smiled Jerry tolerantly. [Pg 259]

"We think that is a fault of men," said Bobs. "Nobody with a real sense of humour could go on raving against women in careers as you do, Jerry."

"What has my sense of humour got to do with my objection to women with careers?" testily.

"Everything. If you had such a sense you would see that you are only concerned about the women who are getting into *your* career, the arts. It's the painter, the sculptor, doctor, lawyer, actress, opera singer, whom you want to rush back into the home. You don't bother about your cook, or your laundress, and all the women who serve you, staying in *their* homes."

"That's different."

"How is it different? They are made to stay at home, and bear children, according to your idea. Why shouldn't they be allowed to do so, and carry out Nature's intention?"

"They should, ideally."

"But in the world of fact, Jerry, women never have been devoted to this 'highest function' solely," Jane remarked. "They have always done their half, and more than half of the physical labour of the world, and borne the children besides."

"Under primitive conditions, maybe."

"But why should we suddenly limit her in the field of industry? Why suddenly decide that she is fit only to bear the young? Why shouldn't she go into new industries, if the old ones are taken from her?" [Pg 260]

"Because she upsets all the relations of life if she pushes into industries where men naturally excel her."

"What are the industries where men naturally excel women, Paxton?"

"In labour requiring physical strength, and professions requiring great mental facility, like politics, government, diplomacy."

"Wait a minute, Jerry. What about the women in Europe at this very minute? They man the factories, till the soil, work the mines, make ammunition, run cars, motors, trucks; they are being sucked into all the industries of the world, and they are making good," cried Bobs.

"This war in Europe reduces those countries to the early stages, to rebuilding, reconstructing. It sets men and women back on the same plane of coöperative labour which exists in new settlements. But if this had not happened to us, I think we would have seen a marvel happening among women. Who is to say that, with this increase of machinery to replace man, with a lessening demand for bulk and strength, the sex with the greatest muscular fineness, the preponderance of brain and nerve tissue, would not become the one especially fitted to do the work of the future?" Martin said.

"You must admit, Jerry, that we've had no training in politics, government, and diplomacy," Jane objected.

"You all get away from my objection, that it upsets all our human relationships. What else is making all this domestic unrest, this increase of divorces? It is woman getting out of the home."

"Jerry, *have* you read my book?" demanded Jane. [Pg 261]

"Let me answer that," said Martin. "Woman in the home or out of it, is only one manifestation of our social rebirth. In a world of environment changing hourly, the individual must change hourly, too, or lose his social value. Now, the real tragedy of modern life is not that woman is changing more rapidly than man, but that in our confusion, it is the most advanced type of woman who marries the most antiquated type of man, or *vice versa*. Ages of social evolution may lie between them."

"There you are, Jane; he has put our problem in a nutshell. You have married the most antiquated type of man," laughed Jerry.

"What does it matter whether men do this better, and women do that better? The thing is to add to the general store of wisdom of the race; we all have to pour in our share. A hundred years from now it will look as if each contributed about equal amounts, won't it?" asked Bobs.

"What about this enmity between men and women?" Jerry asked.

"Men don't want us to get their jobs. They won't see the true situation, and they blame us," Bobs answered; "that makes enmity."

"And women are superior, satirical, mad at us," he retorted.

"But you want to marry us, in spite of it, Jerry, so nothing interferes with our 'sacred function,' as you call it," Bobs laughed.

"There cannot be sex war, Paxton. That need is the very ground work of life. The mating instinct is not affected by a change of labour for either sex. Mother Nature sees to that," Martin said.

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"The gist of all you are saying is, that we need a new kind of marriage, a new kind of family, a new kind of parents, and a new kind of man. We've got the new kind of woman."

"We've got the new man. Why, Jerry, you're one of them," said Jane.

"I? Good Lord!" he exclaimed, and the discussion ended in laughter.

Talk drifted far and wide, as it was wont to do with these four friends. Jane persuaded Jerry to show them his picture, and they discussed it, methods of work, kinds of inspiration, all the questions of the creative process which forever intrigue artists.

It was eleven o'clock before Bobs rose to go. Jerry insisted upon walking to her studio with her, and Jane was glad of her opportunity to have a few moments alone with Martin. As the door closed on them, she turned to him.

"Martin, my friend, has it been an unusually trying visit for you?" she asked gently.

"Yes. My freedom has come to me, Jane."

"You mean she has gone?"

"Yes, poor soul, two days ago."

"Martin, I am glad, glad for you both."

She held her hands to him impulsively and he laid his eyes against them in silence.

"Has it hurt so deeply that you cannot be glad, Martin?"

"Jane, what does it mean to me now? I've borne my slavery all these years without groaning, but my freedom has come too late."

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"Martin, what a thing to say! Freedom can never be too late."

"Can you say that to me, Jane? Jane! Don't you know how I love you—how I want you—how deeply I need you, my beloved?"

"Martin!"

He swept her into his arms with swift passion. She lay perfectly motionless against his breast for several seconds, with his cheek against her hair. Then she slowly released herself, laid her palm against his face, and looked into his eyes.

"Forgive me," he whispered.

A sound caught her attention. She looked up, and past him. Jerry was standing in the door of the studio.

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## CHAPTER XXXI

"Come in, Jerry," Jane said quietly.

He obeyed her, his face so white and set that he looked years older, like a stranger who had accidentally come in upon this, the most vital moment of her life.

Martin turned at sound of her words, with a sigh that was almost a groan. Jerry came across the long studio to them, looking at Jane. He stopped, facing her, still gazing at her.

"I have just told Jane that I love her," Martin said presently. Jerry nodded. "I think you ought to know."

"I have known it for some time," Jerry replied.

Martin shook his head.

"You could not have known it. I have only admitted it to myself in the last few days—since my freedom came."

"Your wife is dead?" Jerry asked quietly.

"Yes."

"What do you want me to do, Jane?" Jerry said.

"I want you to believe what Martin said—that he never knew he cared until now—that this hour brought the first word of sentiment between us. That it was an accident—an explosion. You do believe that, Jerry?"

"If you like."

"It is the truth."

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"Don't let's talk about the truth of what has happened or what has not; the only question is: what are we to do?" Jerry cried sharply, like a man keeping difficult control of himself.

"I'll go," said Martin.

"No, you'll stay. Jane may need you," Jerry said.

"Very well. I am at her service entirely. I wanted to spare you," Martin said.

"You're a little late in considering me, Christiansen!" bitterly.

"Jerry, don't you see this is not anybody's fault? Martin didn't mean it to happen; I didn't mean it to; certainly you didn't. Can't we be quite patient with each other and try to get it straightened?"

"I'm trying to be patient, Jane, but I'm not a saint, and by God! the thing I want to do is to kick him, so don't begrudge me a few words; after all, you are my wife; this is my house, he has outraged my rights."

"Jerry, you haven't any rights in me or in our home apart from *our* rights. Won't you understand that your honour is my honour, that only in so far as we let it get smirched can it be smirched."

"I can't match words with you, Jane. Say what you want and let's get through with it."

"Paxton, your wife has given me no reason to believe that my love is of any importance to her. Couldn't we...?"

"I'm not here to interrogate my wife, nor ask for any justification of her feelings. I only want her to decide what she wants me to do."

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"Jerry, what do you want to do?" she asked him.

He hesitated several seconds.

"If you love him, I want to get out of your way as soon as possible," he answered.

"And if I do not love him?"

"Then I want him to get out."

Jane went over to the window and looked out into the early evening for some moments. The two men scarcely stirred. Then suddenly, as if something snapped, Jerry laughed.

"It's just like Candida, isn't it?" he said bitterly. "You, poet, must offer her high moments, and I, the dull husband, must offer my need of her!"

"Oh, Jerry, don't," said Jane, coming to him swiftly.

"Then for God's sake, put us out of our misery, Jane."

"I can't! I can't decide like this. It isn't fair to any of us. I don't know what I think—I'm all a seething misery of emotions and terror. I've got to have time. I've got to do it alone," she said breathlessly. "Can't you understand, Jerry? Martin's love is the biggest thing that has ever been offered to me; it is his whole being; I can't decide about it so!"

"What about my love?"

"You never offered me your love, Jerry; I have never known it for a moment since I married you."

"But we've lived together—we've had a child."

"I know; it never seemed sin to me, because I did not know what I was desecrating. Now I know that my soul received nothing from my senses, gave nothing to them, that is why I have been so unsatisfied."

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"And our boy?"

Jane groaned in anguish at that thrust.

"That isn't fair, Paxton," Christiansen protested.

"It's none of it fair, if it comes to that. I'll take such advantage as I've got, rely on that."

"You love her, too!"

Jerry made no reply to that. Jane stood, her hands over her face. Then she spoke quickly.

"I want you to let me go away for a little, all by myself, with only Baby. I want you not to know where I am— I want to feel absolutely alone to work this thing out in my mind. Will you agree, Jerry?"

"How long will you be gone?"

"Not long. I promise to come back the minute my mind is made up."

"All right, if I have your word that you'll come back," said Jerry.

"Why, Jerry!" she exclaimed.

"I'm rather fond of the Bald One," he explained, using their love word for the baby.

She caught her breath for a second with the pain of it. Then she turned to Christiansen.

"You agree to this, Martin?"

"Yes."

"Then I will go in the morning. When I come back I will send for you."

"Thank you," he said, his eyes shining upon her.

He held out his hand and she laid hers in it. He lifted it to his lips. Then he turned to Jerry.

"I wish you would let me shake hands with you, Paxton."

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Jerry hesitated a second, then he took Christiansen's hand and the big man went out.

"Thank you, Jerry, that was big of you," said Jane.

He smiled faintly and she saw how the last hour had deepened the lines in his face.

"You will want to make the preparations for your journey to-morrow. Can I do anything?"

"I'll tell you if I think of anything. I must decide first where to go."

"If you take Baby, you will need Anna, won't you? I'll get my meals somewhere else. I may even go stay at the club."

"That's very kind of you, Jerry. If Anna went with me, I could get Mrs. Biggs to look after the studio and cook for you, if you did want to stay here for a meal occasionally. Would you like that?"

"Yes, that's all right."

All of the next day Jane was busy with her preparations. She summoned Mrs. Biggs by telephone, announced the plan to Anna.

"But ain't this a bad time to travel with the baby?"

"No, I think not; a change will do all of us good."

"Mr. Paxton comin'?"

"No, just we three."

"Who'll take care of him?"

"Mrs. Biggs."

"Oh, her!"

Anna departed to attend to her dinner and Jane went into the nursery to lay out her son's travelling outfit. He was awake and crowing lustily. Presently, as she selected or discarded small garments, Jerry came in and went to the cradle side. Small Jerry lifted his voice in greeting and displayed his entire smile.

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"Hello, old man," said his father.

Baby gurgled back.

"All right for me to take him downstairs with me, Jane?" he asked.

"Of course. Take a blanket along in case it's cool down there."

She watched Jerry's deft handling of the baby as he wrapped him and tucked him into his arm. There was a mist in her eyes as he went out, and she dropped her hands in her lap, with the question as to whether she was doing the right thing. Was she being unfair to Jerry? Should she give it all up—stay where she was—let well enough be? Then she thought of Martin—of the rights

to her consideration which his great offering made for him; she thought of her own rights—what it would mean to her to know a great love—to love greatly. Little Jerry's shrill cry from below brought her back. Her first impulse was right, to get away from all the things that pulled upon her—to see the horizon on all sides—to think to that line.

The piles of Baby's things were ready and she went to her own room to sit down in the dusk and decide where she should go. She did not know many places about New York, the summer places she and Jerry had considered would be too bleak and dreary now in the late winter. She thought back to the New Jersey towns she knew as a girl. There was one holiday she specially remembered, spent in Lakewood, with a maiden lady, Miss Garnett, who owned a little house and took people to board. She had never thought of it in years; the woman might be dead now, but she would try it anyway. She would like that cottage better than a hotel. She wired, asking a return wire at once.

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The more she thought about the place, the more she decided that was where she would go. It was near New York and yet she could be alone there. She remembered walks and woods. She called the station and learned about trains. Then she set herself to her own packing. Once she stole out to the balcony and looked over. Jerry was singing "Ride-a-cock-horse," and little Jerry was trying to carry the tune with the strange noises he used in self-expression. They were unconscious of an intruder, so Jane slipped away again.

Shortly she came downstairs in her hat and coat.

"Jerry, do you suppose you and Anna could get him to bed to-night? I have some errands."

"We'll manage," he answered. "Can't I do anything for you?" he added.

"No, thanks. I'll be back at dinner time," she replied.

Jane finished her errands and dropped in upon Bobs for a little visit.

"Baby and Anna and I are going off for a little outing to-morrow. Look after Jerry a bit, will you, Bobs?"

"Sure. But where are you going?"

"It's a secret."

Bobs's eyebrows went up, but she said nothing.

"Didn't you ever want to get away from every living soul you know and think your own thoughts for a whole week?" demanded Jane.

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"Often. Usually my crises come when I'm too poor to go anywhere, though."

"Jerry is generous with money, so I can go."

"Does he understand this—need?"

"I think so."

"Well, good luck to you, dear. Be careful of our child and get your think out," laughed Bobs as Jane left.

She would have marvelled had she seen her guest stop by the studio, where she and Jerry had begun their experiment, and lay her head against the door for a second, like a troubled child against its mother.

Life was so simple then, when she had accepted Jerry's wild proposal; it had grown so complex now, so woven of her own and other people's heart strings.

When she arrived at home she found big Jerry beside little Jerry's bed, one small hand clasped about his father's forefinger, while big Jerry sat very still for fear of waking him. Jane smiled at them.

"It won't wake him, see," she said, and slowly loosed the tiny fingers.

When Anna came up and announced dinner, she told Jane in delighted detail how Jerry had put the baby to bed. He refused to let her touch him, he had done it all himself.

"It tickled the baby!" she laughed, as she went off to her kitchen.

Later, at the table, they both fought off any return of emotional topics.

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"Do you know when you leave?" he asked her.

"Yes, at ten."

"You will let me get you aboard the train?"

"We would appreciate it very much, thank you, Jerry."

"Shall I tell people you've gone for a visit?"

"Yes. I told Bobs."

"Is Mrs. Biggs coming?"

"Yes. She'll be here when we go. I invited Billy to come, too."

"That's right. Quite like old times."

"You must go about with your uptown friends and be very gay, so you won't be lonesome."

"I'll manage."

"I hope the Melisande picture will not be installed before I get back. I want to see that," she said.

"I'm nearly through with it, now."

"It's your best work, Jerry. I know it is going to be a success for you."

He smiled mirthlessly.

"Do you remember what I said on our way to be married?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know why I remember it—wasn't so very brilliant—but it comes to me. I said: 'this is the kind of thing they talked in the tumbrils.' We always face our crises with platitudes, Jane."

"Don't most people, Jerry? It's the child in us clinging to what we know, I suppose."

"As the Bald One clings to my finger!"

She nodded and rose.

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"I still have packing to do. If you'll excuse me, I'll go right up."

"Good-night, Jane," he said steadily.

"Good-night, and thank you, Jerry."

"For what?"

"For understanding."

"But I don't. I don't understand anything about you. I don't know why you're going any more than I know where—but I'm trying to see that that doesn't make any difference, that it's your right to see this through your own way."

"Jerry, that's better than understanding, that's faith," she said softly, and left him pondering.

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## CHAPTER XXXII

Before Jane went to bed a telegram came from Miss Garnett saying she would take them, so she had no need of anxiety on that score. The morning proved gray and cold. Breakfast was a silent affair.

Baby was the only cheerful member of the party which started for the station in a taxicab. He was so absorbed in the experience in hand that he provided a topic of interest.

"He's keen on taxicabs; this is his second one and see how he takes to it!" said Jerry.

"Mebbe he's going to be a 'chauffer,'" suggested Anna.

So with trivialities they managed to keep up appearances until Jerry was to leave them.

"Will you write to me, Jane?" he asked, bending over her.

"No, but I will send for you the minute I am sure of myself. We shall not be far away and we are to be comfortably housed in a place I know, so don't worry about us. Have a good holiday and forget us, Jerry."

"That's a good idea," he remarked.

He kissed his son, shook hands with Anna. Then, as the engine bell sounded, he laid his hands on Jane's shoulders and looked into her eyes for a long second. Then he was gone. He left in Jane's mind an impression of an appeal he would not let himself make in words.

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They found Miss Garnett's cottage just as Jane remembered it. There was something soothing about going back to it, as if she had slipped out of the years that had come since, into that other girlish self. She recalled her mother's pleasure in the holiday. How she wished that her frail spirit might come to visit them, and fall victim to small Jerry's charms.

Even Miss Garnett looked the same. She was the sort of dried-up creature which shows no age. She did not remember Jane, but she was interested in the baby. They were the only boarders, as it happened, so no one could be disturbed by the boy. They had two big, sunny rooms, with the balcony out of one of them, on which Jerry Jr. could sleep. It was comfortable and independent,

the two things Jane desired.

The first day was spent in getting unpacked, settling Baby's routine. Jane gave her full attention to all these practical details before she so much as let her mind wander toward the problem she had come here to consider.

With the second day their régime was inaugurated. Late breakfast for Jane, an hour with Baby, bathing him herself, playing with him in the sun. A long walk while he slept. Leisurely luncheon—more Baby—a rest for all of them; then more walk, with Baby in his carriage, or a drive. It was not until she had been there several days that Jane remembered about her book. She smiled at the thought of how tremendously important it had seemed to her only a week ago to have a book published, and yet for days she had forgotten it.

"Living, living is the important thing," she said aloud, with the swift after-thought that it was Martin who had taught her that philosophy, Jerry who had given her the thing itself. [Pg 276]

She went over every minute of her life with the two men, for in her thoughts they occupied places side by side. Her first reaction against her marriage with Jerry had passed. She saw it clearly as practical and unlovely but not as sin. Passion had had no place in her experience or her thoughts at the time of her marriage; it had certainly not been the moving force for Jerry, either.

She felt that Baby justified her somewhat. She had refused none of the responsibilities imposed upon her by her union with Jerry.

But, on the other hand, as she had said to him before Martin, her soul and her senses had found no common speech.

Intellectually she examined herself in relation to Jerry and found herself guilty. She had kept secret, between herself and Martin, the really big impulse of her life. Through a childish fear of ridicule, she had deliberately shut him out of the inner chamber of her thoughts and hopes. Was this fair?

To be sure, he had not shared with her his inner thoughts and ambitions. He had not sought to bring her into any closer mental relationship with him. Was he, too, held back by fear of her laughter?

When she looked into her mind, it was flooded with Martin. He was in every nook and cranny of it. He invaded it like an army with banners. Her whole growth and development had been so accelerated by him that it seemed as if she had stood in one spot always until he arrived. No wonder she had not turned to Jerry for companionship when she had been swallowed up, as it were, in the microcosm which was Martin Christiansen. [Pg 277]

But when it came to the world of the senses, she had spoken the absolute truth when she told Jerry that she had never once thought of Martin with sentiment—in the ordinary sex sense of that word. He was master-counsellor, god, but never man-mate. So the moment of his passion had come upon her like a lightning flash, rending the heavens, levelling her house of life to the grounds, leaving her naked and terror-struck.

With the shock of it had come a vision of what love might be. With it had come a pitiless revelation of what her union with Jerry was. It was this cataclysm of her whole world that made her run away into solitude to try and get herself together.

She tried again and again to reconstruct the scene with Martin—to try to recapture her sensations of the moment she was in his arms. Had it been rapture, or only surprise? Had it been a surge of gratitude to him because he loved her? After all, he was the first man to say his devotion to her. Jerry had made no protestations of love; she had expected none. Were not her feelings, at the moment, those of any woman when she is told for the first time that she is loved?

She thought of herself as Martin's wife, living with him in all the daily intimacies of marriage; she found that her mind, here, turned swiftly away to their mental association. It was always Jerry she saw shaving, Jerry she heard singing in his bath. She could not manage the transfer successfully at all, she found. [Pg 278]

Then she tried to conceive of her life devoid of Martin. If she were still married to Jerry, and Martin was gone for good, what then? It seemed like saying "could you be comfortable without your right hand?"

Some days she bitterly regretted the death of the unknown Mrs. Christiansen which had precipitated this climax. It was so much easier, the old way, with Jerry and Martin both in her life. Again she was glad it had all turned out so, glad that Martin loved her, wanted her. Glad that she had to face a decision about Jerry.

There was one unescapable knot, no matter how she untangled the skein. She could not argue away the baby. He constituted Jerry's biggest hold upon her. For if Jerry had not given her love, he had given her something in its place which had aroused the one great passion in her nature. She loved Jerry Jr. with every throb of her heart.

Wasn't this mother love enough? It had filled her life so far. It was, with Jane, fierce and absorbing. Man and woman love had so many elements, so many complexities, such possibilities of tragedy and sorrow. Would she not better cling to what she had and let the rest go by? So she told herself one day, only to cry out the next: "No, no; that is the old nun Jane! I want it all—all."



Divorce was ugly to her. She forced herself to vision all its details. Explanations to their friends—arrangements about the child. She computed its effect upon little Jerry, torn between loyalty to his father and his mother, spending his time, now with one parent, now with the other. Growing up to a contempt for marriage, perhaps, or worse yet, contempt for his mother and father who publicly admitted their failure to keep their contract.

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She tried to get Jerry's point of view in the situation by reversing it. Suppose that Jerry had told her that he wished his freedom, in order to marry Althea. How would she have met that demand? It gave her a pang to think of going away, with Baby, to some strange place, to try to make a new life for themselves. There would still be Martin in her life; who would be left to Jerry, if she left him? Would he turn to Bobs, who still loved him? She knew he would never succumb to Althea's plans. Would Martin's love for her, and her love for him—if she did love him—make up for all this havoc?

Could she, by any process, so divorce herself from old habits and associations as to decide this step with reference to her one self only? She had been saying to herself for years that she had a right to every rich experience life could offer, she had been greedy for more and more. But was there such a thing as continence? In order to get away from that despised word "self-denial" she looked upon the thing as a matter of spiritual health. If overeating was destruction to the body tissue, was greediness for experience also destruction to the soul stuff?

Day after day she pondered these questions as she tramped around the lake, or as they drove through the still, silver-gray forests, where the only hint of spring was an occasional whiff of arbutus as they passed. Jane found great peace and help from those straight, slim trees. They were so unfettered, so upstanding, so sure. She repeated over and over:

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"Hast thou ne'er known the longings—  
Ambitions vain desires—  
The hope, the fear, the yearning  
Which mortal man inspires?"

She gathered into her being all the calm of Nature, strength from her out-of-door life, wisdom out of silence and Baby's talk, but yet she could not bring herself to send for Jerry. She knew that both of these men were suffering, as they waited for her answer; she wanted not to hurt them, and still—she hesitated.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII

When the train pulled out which carried his family into unknown country, Jerry turned across town, determined to walk back to the studio and get to work. He had scarcely closed his eyes the night before, and he felt all edgy. Exercise and hard work was his prescription for himself. He set off at a good pace, through a part of town he was unused to, hoping that it would divert his thoughts. He made himself look at the shabby old shops he passed—at the people on the street. He searched all their faces for traces of such experiences as he was sampling, but they were usually vacuous or hardened or only worried. He wondered if his face mirrored his misery.

Jerry was a stranger to defeat. His life had been a happy-go-lucky affair. Since the death of his parents, when he was a little boy, he had known no acute sorrows. To be sure he had been poor, but he had not minded that especially. The very small inheritance, left by his father, had barely met the demands of his art education. But youth and health and enthusiasm were his, and such success as he had achieved came easily and naturally. So he had grown accustomed to believe that destiny held in store for him pretty much what he wanted.

His marriage with Jane, entered into on the impulse of the moment, was characteristic of the way his life had been ordered—or unordered. He had drifted along, taking what he wanted with a sort of unconscious selfishness as a central motive force. This was poor training for disappointment or tragedy.

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Arrived at the studio, he tried to paint, but he could not put his mind on his canvas, so after an hour of labour lost, he gave it up. He wandered about the empty house, where every spot, every room, spoke of Jane and the baby. He could not bear it. He went to the club for lunch, but the men at his table poked fun at his gloom so he left them in a rage. He went to some picture exhibitions he had been meaning to see, but they bored him. He dodged a fellow artist or two, because he didn't want to talk. He tramped up the Avenue and through the Park.

Finally he gave up fighting his thoughts, he let them come. He had gone over the scene with Christiansen thousands of times. Sometimes it ran off in his mind as it had really happened. Sometimes he fell upon his enemy and beat him, sometimes he even killed him, but always the scene was dominated by Jane, who, for the first time in his acquaintance with her, was deeply moved, shaken to the very depths of her being. He realized it fully; it was the thing that frightened him. Jane was so sure, so true to herself. If, thus aroused, she saw her relation to Jerry in a new light, nothing on earth would keep her from severing that relation. It must be that she loved Christiansen, for he, Jerry, had never roused her so.

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He thought back over the years, from the time she had applied to him for work, up to now. The

years of the silent, mysterious Jane, coming and going like a silhouette against the screen of the studios. Her quiet sense of power had been like a pillow for them all to rest on. What a fool he had been not to see that power like that generated itself and spread like electricity.

He went over the weeks before the pageant, when he had forced her into a more personal relation with him. He recalled the really deep impression she had made on him, on all the audience, the night of the pageant itself.

For the first time he deliberately analyzed the motives that finally ended in his proposal to her.

"Anything she does to me now serves me right!" was his final comment on himself.

He laid aside any suggestion that she cared for him when she married him; he knew she did not. In fact, it was her indifference to him, her elusiveness, which had roused his senses—which had driven him to try to reach her by clumsy physical means—but he had failed.

Jane said that she had met Christiansen at the pageant for the first time, but was that the truth? Had he played some part in her life before that? Was it probable that a man like Christiansen would have been attracted solely by her performance of Salome—into such quick intimacy as theirs? Suppose he, Jerry, had been used as a cat's-paw between them. He flagellated himself for that suspicion. It was contemptible in the light of what he knew of Jane.

Could poverty have driven Jane into marriage? She had lived for years on what she made, apparently. She had no relatives, nor dependents. Besides, he thought she would have disdained surrender, on those grounds. It was a deeper reason than this, as she had said. [Pg 284]

Worn out with his unusual self-scrutiny, he left the Park and went to call on Mrs. Brendon. She was at home and welcomed him gaily. He explained that Jane and the baby had deserted him and that he was a lone bachelor in search of friends and comfort.

"Which means you're a wolf in sheep's clothing," she laughed.

"I feel like the sacrificial 'lamb,'" he replied, and marvelled that he could talk so lightly.

"Well, there is nothing so good for husbands, I contend, as a dose of absence. Men need unsettling, they get so ruddy. Business, club, home, ditto, ditto, ditto."

"I suppose it's also sauce for the goose?"

"Oh, yes. I hope Jane will get a beau and flirt with him abominably."

"Can you think of Jane flirting?"

"No, that's why I think she needs it. Jane takes life too seriously."

"It's rather a question about which is the better way to take it, don't you think?"

"Life? Not a bit. Take it any way you like, but don't take it hard."

"I find I get a trifle bored with those of us who take it too lightly."

"That's a Janeism, Jerry."

He laughed at that. She ordered him home to dress and back for dinner, and he accepted gratefully—glad of anything to kill time and keep his mind off of his troubles. [Pg 285]

He sat next Althea at dinner, and, for once, she failed to reproach him for past misdemeanours and devoted herself to being agreeable. Several parties were planned on the spot, and Jerry joined in with enthusiasm.

"It is nice to see you enjoying your vacation so much," Althea remarked.

"A broken heart worn on the sleeve is a sad sight, you know," he replied.

He plunged with desperation into such diversion as his uptown friends offered. He knew what was ahead of him in the night hours spent in the studio. The first week passed somehow. His friends said Jerry had never been so gay and such good company. Jerry could barely remember where they went or what they did.

Bobs came in one night in the second week, about six o'clock, as Jerry was deciding where to go.

"Hello, Jerry."

"Hello, Bobs."

"Got a date?"

"No. I was just trying to make up my mind what to do."

"I've invited myself to dinner. Let's get Mrs. Biggs to fix us up something and have it here."

"Don't you want to go somewhere, where it's gay?"

"Noisy, you mean? No. Can't you stand it here?" she added.

"It's awful, Bobs," he admitted.

"I'll go talk to the Biggs; you light the fire and mix the cocktails," she ordered.

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When she returned, he was lighting candles, brushing up the hearth, and generally playing host.

"All's well, steak in the ice box, and plenty of other things. Jane ordered things kept ready for you all the time, it seems. Just like her, isn't it? I never knew any human being take so much thought for others as Jane does."

"Yes, she does."

"I don't wonder you miss her."

He lifted such tragic eyes to her, that Bobs was startled.

"I've got to get used to missing her, Bobs," he said slowly.

"What do you mean?"

"I think I'm going to lose her," he broke off, unable to finish.

"You mean Jane has left you—for good?"

"She's gone to decide whether she will or not."

"Jerry, what's happened?"

"I've just got to talk to somebody, Bobs. I'm nearly crazy with this thing."

"Go ahead; I'm safe."

"Jane doesn't love me; you know that, just as I know it."

"Well, she's been a good wife, hasn't she?"

"The best. But there's somebody she does care about."

"Martin Christiansen?"

"You saw it, too?"

"No. I was only afraid of it. They had so much in common. He gave her all the consideration you did not."

"Oh, I know I've got no chance with him, but it doesn't make it any easier!" he cried.

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"How did you know about it?"

"They told me. Jane called me in—said there had been an accident—that he had told her he loved her; she was all to pieces. I could see it, I never saw her so upset."

"Poor Jane! But why did she go away?"

"She said she had to be alone, to make up her mind what she must do."

"How like her!"

"So she took Baby and Anna and went somewhere— I don't know where."

He dropped his head into his hands, and Bobs said nothing. Her instinct was to comfort him, but she fought it down.

"I've been in hell, Bobs," he groaned.

"So has Jane, and so has Christiansen," she exclaimed.

"I know—I know."

"You can't go on forever, Jerry, and escape."

He looked up at that.

"Your marriage to Jane was the most selfish, cowardly thing any man ever did, and you've got to pay for it sooner or later!"

"Why, Bobs, I...."

"Don't let's talk about it. I know you, Jerry. I know why you married Jane, and you never gave her part of it one thought. If she's found a great, big, fine man, like Christiansen to really love her, I hope you'll stand out of the way and take your medicine, like a man."

"I didn't force her to marry me! What did she do it for?"

"That's her affair, but now the point is that she has lived up to her contract like a soldier. She's borne the slight you've put on her without one protest. She's a magnificent, full-grown woman, tied to a selfish, old-fashioned, little boy-man, and it's ridiculous."

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"I think I get your estimate of me accurately."

"It's time for you to take stock, Jerry. You've had the opportunity of your life and you haven't

made good. You don't understand Jane, nor appreciate her, nor care anything about her."

"That's a lie, Bobs; I love her better than anything in the world!"

Jerry's voice rang out in the big, still room like a rifle shot. Bobs stared at him, and his eyes blazed back at her. She rose and went over to him and held out her hand.

"I beg your pardon, old man; I had no idea you cared."

He wrung her hand for a second, and turned away from her.

"I wish you could help me a little to understand her," he said huskily.

"With all my heart, Jerry," she answered.

She took his arm and led him over to the couch, where they sat down side by side.

"I know we started out wrong. Everything you say about the way I married her is true. I guess you know as well as any one what a selfish brute I've always been."

"The thing is, how can you get Jane back?" Bobs broke in quickly.

"I haven't a chance in the world, Bobs! I know what kind of a chap Christiansen is. What hold have I got on her?" [Pg 289]

"Little Jerry."

"Oh, but that isn't fair," he said in the very words Christiansen had used.

"We're dealing with facts now—not philosophy. Jane loves that baby better than anything in the world; that is the only thing you've got to work on."

"How can I work on that?"

"You've got to win her love, Jerry."

"But what is there for her to love in me?"

"You've got to make something."

"But, Bobs, she's deciding it now. It's too late for me! I've lost my chance. I tell you if she walked out of here, with the Bald One, and went away to marry him, I don't think I could bear it! Just as Jerry Jr. and I were getting to like each other! I gave him his bath the night before he went away, Bobs, and he liked it."

Two big tears ran down Jerry's nose and dropped off into his lap, but he paid no attention to them.

"Maybe she'll give you time, Jerry. I think she ought to have this chance to be alone and decide, but she may not decide to do anything right away."

"Bobs, you know Jane will do it right off, the minute she decides, whatever it is. I know it, too. No, I guess you're right; I've had my chance and I've missed it. I'll pay for it the rest of my life, I know that."

"I'm sorry, old man; we all get it sooner or later," she said. [Pg 290]

"Oh, Bobs, I understand now. Forgive me," he said brokenly, turning to her.

Billy Biggs came in with a "scuse me." He came to Jerry and offered him an envelope.

"For you, Mr. Paxton," he said.

Jerry tore it open, read it, gave it to Bobs.

"Good God!" he said, and started off upstairs, as fast as he could run.

Bobs read and re-read the message. Then she went to the kitchen.

"Put some dinner on for Mr. Paxton at once, Mrs. Biggs. The baby is sick and Mrs. Paxton has sent for him. He's going on the 7.30 train."

"The baby! Oh, Miss Bobs!" began Mrs. Biggs, but Bobs was gone.

She ran up to Jerry's room, where he was hurling things into his bag.

"Your dinner is on the table. Go eat it. I will pack the bag. You must keep up your strength, Jerry. You may be up all night."

"All right," he said, and obeyed her.

Half an hour later she saw him off.

"Good luck, old man."

"I'm afraid to go, Bobs," he said brokenly, "but it's something to do! Good-bye. God bless you."

"And you, and Jane, and Baby!" she cried after him. [Pg 291]

## CHAPTER XXXIV

It seemed to Jane that the world was a great void, filled with the strangled breathing of the baby. Since the first swift descent of danger she had worked mechanically, under the doctor's orders, without sleep, with no attention to the food which they forced her to swallow. Her muscles obeyed the orders of her brain, but her subconscious mind spilled over into her consciousness every minute of the time, and a dreary monologue repeated itself interminably:

"Why did I bring him here? Why did I risk his life this way? For my own selfish purposes, and now God will punish me. He will take him away. I shall have killed him—little Jerry." Over and over it ran, the same words, the same aching accusation. With a reversion to the old, avenging God of her childhood, she foresaw quick doom for sin.

Jerry Jr. had never been ill before and Jane was unprepared for the suddenness of the seizure. A strange doctor had to be summoned, Anna's terror quieted, a trained nurse sent for. Things had to be done quickly for the need was immediate. The baby had evidently taken cold—it had gone into membranous croup before they realized that he was really ill.

Miss Garnett and the doctor were kindness itself, but it seemed to Jane that she was as alone with Nemesis, as if she were lost in the desert. The first day, and part of the second, the doctor insisted there was no need of alarm, but the afternoon of the second day the breathing grew more and more difficult. Then Jane wired for Jerry. [Pg 292]

As she waited for him, she tried to think how he would feel toward her, if his son were sacrificed. She thought of the night before they came away—how he had bathed him and said his good-bye to him. He was just beginning to take an interest in him, to be proud of him. And now! She fought down the desire to break into hysterical weeping. She must spare him that, at least.

When, finally, he came into the room, her tragic face drew him to her swiftly. He took her cold hands for a second, with a low word of greeting. Then he went to the baby's bed and bent over him.

"Poor little chap!" he exclaimed, as he looked at the fevered, panting atom of humanity. He asked the nurse quick questions. Jane sat still as a graven image.

"I asked Doctor Grant to come on the next train, Jane. I thought we'd better have him, because he knows Jerry's constitution best."

"Oh, Jerry!" she said, out of her agony.

He went to her and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Don't be discouraged, Jane; we'll pull him through, he's strong."

"No. I've killed him, Jerry."

"Nonsense! He ran the same chance in New York. Now tell me about it from the beginning."

His matter-of-fact tone steadied her. She told him the details from the first and he listened intently, nodding as she talked in an undertone not to disturb the child. It was such a relief to share the present responsibility with Jerry, no matter how she reserved the initial responsibility for herself. The thought of Doctor Grant's coming brought hope. He had taken care of Jerry Jr. since his coming; he knew him thoroughly—understood. If anybody could do it, he could thwart God. [Pg 293]

Jerry Jr. began to cry. The pitiful wail of sick babyhood. It was agonizing to hear him. Jerry went to him and spoke to him. The baby turned bright eyes upon him, and a smile that was a spasm of pain followed.

"Let me take him up. I know I can help him get his breath," he said to the nurse.

"No, I think you'd better not move him," she said.

"Well, I can't stand here and see him suffer like that," said Jerry. Deftly and with infinite tenderness he lifted his small son, blankets and all, holding his head up with one hand. He walked slowly up and down the room with him, talking to him.

"Look here, old man, this is no kind of welcome to give your daddy! Can't you brace up a bit and manage a smile? Your old pal, Doctor Grant, is coming along presently and he'll give you a pill that will make it all right."

The baby was quiet, watching him, but still that awful gasping for breath went on.

"Ride-a-cock-horse to Banbury Cross," big Jerry began softly. It seemed to Jane that she was smothering. She went out on the balcony outside the room, where that mocking song came faintly, punctuated with Baby's cries for help. [Pg 294]

"God, if you'll let him live till Doctor Grant comes, I'll expiate!" she said over and over.

Presently she heard the distant train, that was to bring her messenger of relief, whistle in the

station. After what seemed aeons of time a cab rattled to the house. A quick, alert step came up the steps. She made a supreme effort at self-control and went back into the room to meet him.

One look at Jerry and the boy—a nod to Jane—then his hat and coat were off and he had small Jerry in his hands.

"You want me to take charge here?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," Jane murmured.

"Who is the doctor?" he asked the nurse.

She told him.

"Send for him, please."

She went out to obey.

"Now, Mrs. Paxton, details, please," he said, making tests as he listened.

Jane told him quietly. The nurse returned saying the doctor would come at once. He asked her many questions, and before she had finished answering, the other doctor had arrived. A consultation followed.

"We may have to resort to a tube, but in the meantime, we'll try something else," Doctor Grant explained to Jane and Jerry. "Suppose you go out on the balcony for a little; we'll call you if there is any change. So many of us are disturbing to him, I think."

[Pg 295]

"All right," said Jerry, laying his hand on Jane's arm.

"Is there any hope, Doctor Grant?" Jane asked.

"He's a sick baby, but I've had them worse off than that. You go out there and make up your mind that Baby is going to get well," he answered.

Jerry led her out into the semi-darkness of the upper veranda.

"I can't sit still, Jerry; let's walk."

"All right."

His hand grasped her forearm, slipped through, until it found her hand. She clung to him with a force that hurt. In silence they walked up and down, up and down. When they passed the windows and the light struck across Jane's face, Jerry thought he had never seen such anguish in a human countenance. He could not bear to look, it was as if he were gazing into something not intended for eyes to see—something primal, savage, terrible which only God could endure. He knew she was on the rack, yet he could not comfort her. He knew that his own grief would be acute if his son was taken away, but he foresaw it would be nothing to the agony of this mother. "Oh, Mary pity, women—" came to his mind, with an overwhelming realization of the pathos of life. This groping of human creatures toward—what? All bound together in strange, even accidental, relationship; held in bondage by affections, instincts, passions; fighting free—going on—but where? Bobs's terrible sculpture of "Woman" stood out before him, and he understood. He looked into the hearts and souls of Bobs, of Jane, even of Althea and himself, in this sacrament of emotion he was drinking.

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Jane's consciousness was like the shifting, fever-haunted dreams of a drug fiend. She was numb, like a lump of stone. She saw things tugging at her—devils. They burned her with torches, but she did not feel anything but this ache of loss. A figure hovered, gray, indistinguishable; she thought it was remorse, or perhaps death, waiting. Suddenly it looked at her and she saw it was Christ, gazing at her with accusing eyes, yet full of sorrow. She groaned, and tried to pray, but her tongue was dead. Visions that had come to her, in sleep, before the baby's birth, came again, to mock her. She knew herself condemned to walk for years this lonely road she was traversing. Always at the end, she must turn and go back looking for little Jerry who was lost. She could hear him crying—she knew he needed her—but she could not get to him. Something seemed to walk beside her—she could not remember what it was—it clung to her and she to it. Out of the horror she turned her head to the light which struck across her husband's face.

"Oh, Jerry!" she sobbed.

"Steady, Jane, steady. They have to hurt him a little, dear."

"Jerry, talk to me. I'm afraid of my thoughts," she whispered to him.

He saw she was nearly beside herself, so he forced himself to tell her all the trivial happenings since her departure. Stories about Billy Biggs, the conversation at one of the Brendons' dinners, the account of the Bryce child's latest escapade. He heard his voice going on and on, he saw Jane's frantic effort to listen to him, yet he knew that his real self was indoors with those low-voiced men, who were trying to hold the fine, silken thread of life in their sensitive fingers.

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Presently Doctor Grant stepped to the door and spoke to them. Jerry's hand led Jane toward him. They were like very little children stumbling to him for help. He seemed so steady and sure.

"We're going to put in the tube. Don't be alarmed. It isn't too painful, but I wanted you to know."

He turned back into the room. Jerry put his arms about Jane, but to his touch she felt like stone. She did not cling to him—she leaned on him, stiff and cold. It seemed ages that they stood so, punctuated by one scream of pain from Baby, then silence! Jane shuddered and Jerry's arms tightened. The night and the busy village below were blotted out. They two stood together in a chaos of pain.

Doctor Grant's touch dragged Jerry back.

"Bring her in now and let her look at him," he said.

"Is he dead?" Jerry whispered.

"No—he is asleep—it's all right."

Jerry watched the perspiration run down Doctor Grant's face unnoticed by him.

Then he gently loosed Jane, turned her, and led her in to the bedside.

Little Jerry, still flushed, but at peace, lay breathing gently. The nurse and the doctor smiled at them.

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"Wonderful operation of Doctor Grant's. Never saw it better done," said his colleague.

Jerry nodded, but Jane paid no attention to any of them. She laid her hand on the Bald One's damp forehead, she lifted his hands one after the other, adjusted the covers, mechanically. Then she lifted an age-old face to them all.

"God heard me," she said, and slipped into unconsciousness.

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## CHAPTER XXXV

For several days Jane lay in her bed, looking like a wax woman, too weak to lift her hand. Doctor Grant ordered her to stay just where she was until she wanted to get up.

"She's the kind that goes through hell without flinching, and collapses at the sight of heaven," he said to Jerry. "Keep her quiet; it's a complete nervous collapse, but she's got a fine constitution and she'll come around quickly."

The baby was improving as rapidly as he became ill, so Doctor Grant left on the night train, promising to come back on Sunday.

The trained nurse looked after Baby, while Anna took care of Jane. Jerry went from one bedside to the other. His happiness and relief were so intense that he was a most cheerful companion. Jane could not respond, but she liked to hear him humming about, and making jokes about the things he tried to persuade her to eat. The second day he carried the baby around nearly all the time. The small tyrant was not content unless he had his amusing parent at hand. Jane watched them, smiling faintly with a sense of peace and gratitude that was like music.

Jerry's new tenderness for them both was very sweet. He had never shown it before. He was always kind, because he liked people about him to be comfortable, but this was quite different. He sat beside Jane and tried to coax her to eat. He searched the town for delicacies to tempt her. When she could not sleep at night, he came to her bedside and talked to her by the hour. He had a way with pillows, and nice hands which mesmerized her into relaxation. He never was tired, nothing was too much trouble, and he took it as a matter of course that he should do just what he was doing.

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Doctor Grant's week-end visit found the baby almost well again, but Jane lay where she had fallen. She was content to be still. He had a long talk with Jerry about her, suggested that he might be in for a long siege, explained that if he wanted to go back to New York to attend to his affairs, Anna was capable of taking charge, if the nurse stayed on another week.

"I think I'll go back with you then, and finish up some things I have on hand. I can come back later in the week," Jerry said.

So it was arranged. Jane agreed indifferently, nothing mattered much. But after the two men had gone she found she missed Jerry as she never had before. She thought about him a great deal in the aimless fashion which was all her mind could manage.

She could not make out just what had happened to her, but it seemed as if her whole being had suffered such anguish the night of Baby's danger that she had been paralyzed since, was incapable of feeling anything more. She wanted Jerry Jr. where she could see him, but she rarely spoke.

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The installation of the picture at the New Age Club detained Jerry in town a day or so, and arrangements for a spring exhibition of portraits, which he had been invited to make, held him up until the end of the week. He was impatient to get to Lakewood, but he knew these things must be attended to, for the expenses of the doctors and nurse would be heavy.

He arrived in Lakewood on Saturday, at noon, and hurried to the cottage. He had had reports

daily by telephone from the nurse, but he was surprised when Jane came toward him with the baby in her arms.

"Good work!" he cried, hugging them both. "You're better, Jane?"

"Yes."

"You're as white as a cloud, but it's becoming."

She flushed at that, gave the baby to him, and turned away hastily, on some pretext. A fine romp of the two Jerrys followed.

"The Bald One is outgrowing his title, Jane; he's getting quite a respectable wig."

"Yes—isn't it too bad."

"I don't know, Jane. Our æsthetic ideals are such that a bald child of eight or ten would not be considered beautiful."

"Do you think he looks well, Jerry?"

"Yes, fine. He's all right. Terrifying, the way the little wretch gets sick and well. Jane, my dear!" he added, for she went so white at his words.

"I can't get over it. If I think back to that night I almost die."

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"Let's forget it, dear; it's over, and we're all here together. Perhaps a little more together than we ever were before," he said, with his first reference to the situation.

"You were wonderful, Jerry. I did not know how strong and tender you could be."

"Christiansen called me up, Jane."

"Yes."

"I told him you and Baby had been ill, that I had been with you. He felt that he must see you, too."

"Well?"

"I told him you were here."

"Oh, Jerry!"

"He is coming to-morrow."

"I can't see him. I can't stand any more emotion just now," she said anxiously.

"Jane, do you care for him so much?"

She closed her eyes, a second, without replying.

"When to-morrow?" she asked finally.

"In the afternoon," he said.

They did not speak of it again, but something had happened to their new-found oneness. They both tried to be perfectly natural and at ease, but the ghost of Martin was in the room.

The next day he came. He was all concern at Jane's white face. He knew in a second what a crisis she had passed through, and so he made no least reference to anything that had gone before, anything that was to be. He was dear, big Martin, delighted with the baby, courteous to Jerry, at ease in the midst of their self-consciousness. So in the end he dominated the scene.

[Pg 303]

Jerry and Anna took their small charge for a drive, leaving Martin and Jane alone. As they departed, Jane was filled with terror. She was so afraid of emotion.

"Jerry is an enemy to be proud of," said Martin.

"Jerry is a fine man, Martin," Jane answered.

He looked at her long, holding her steady eyes with his.

"You have suffered much, beloved," he said softly. "I did not come to intrude, or to demand an answer. I came because I had to know what had hurt you."

"I thought I had brought Baby here and risked his life. If he had died, I should have died, too," she said simply.

"I know. Let us not speak of it at all. Let's talk of the new book."

"The new book? Why, Martin, I had forgotten!" she exclaimed.

"Dear child," he said tenderly, "they have been deep waters!"

"The book—is it selling?" she asked.

"Yes. They told me they had good news for you."

They drifted off into talk of other things, new books, a new opera, a poet he had met. It was as if



he took her into the arms of his spirit, and there she was at rest. The time flew as it always did when they were together. Jane felt the call back to life and work, the stimulus of his vitality.

Before the others came back, Martin pleaded an engagement in town, and the necessity of taking a train at six o'clock.

"Good-bye, my Jane. Whatever comes, I shall understand."

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When he was gone, Jane lay on the couch they had placed for her on the balcony, looking up at the sky, and let her thoughts take shape. They flew swiftly, clearly. How Martin understood her; how tenderly he had protected her against himself—against herself. He had given his thoughts, his vitality, his devotion; he had asked nothing. There was an understanding friendship between them that was the communion of spirits. If only he had not loved her! Or was this, that they had, love? If it was, must she give it up unless she married him? She felt that she could not give it up. It was and always would be a part of her. If this was love that she felt for Martin, why did she not long for the closer union of marriage with him? Was it that she feared what marriage might do to this relation of theirs? Did it mean that she did not love him, since she felt that marriage was not necessary for the perfection of their oneness? Of course the materialistic would scoff at the idea of the marriage of minds. But she knew that Martin had impregnated her spiritual being with the germ of life as truly as she felt her book to be his child. She wondered whether Jerry would understand that.

"Asleep, Jane?" his voice said.

"No."

"Sorry I missed Christiansen; I meant to see him off. Anna has our supper ready in here by the fire. And the Bald One sends a message of urgency."

She rose and came in, laying her hand on his arm, so that he went with her to the baby's room.

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"Too bad he's gone, he couldn't wait," said Jerry, as they bent over their sleeping son.

"Isn't he perfect, Jerry?" she said with feeling.

"He's A No. 1, Jane," he answered.

They went to their supper. They did not talk much. Jane was thoughtful, and Jerry respected her mood. Later, while he was smoking on the balcony, he called to her to come and see the moon. She went out, and gazed up at the white disk of radiance.

"Jerry, go get that old driver we have, and take me through that park in this moonlight," she said.

"Are you in earnest?"

"Yes."

"But you aren't well enough."

"I am well. Please, Jerry."

"All right. Wrap up well," he said, as he left her.

Presently he was back with the old, high-backed victoria, and they started. As they went into the gray forest, it was all silvered with moonshine until it looked as lovely as a poet's mind. Jane shivered. Jerry put his arm about her, and held the robe up close to her. She settled herself against him, and at his smile, she groped for his hand.

"Jane, Jane, don't!" he whispered. "I can't stand it for you to be kind, if it's...."

"If it's what?"

"The end, Jane. I feel as if my life was all over if you go. I never knew what you meant to me until—that day. But now I know. I love you so that I want you to be happy, no matter what it does to me."

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"Jerry, what is love?"

"I don't know, nobody knows. The people who feel it don't know and those who never felt it, don't know. Why, Jane?"

"Because I've always supposed it was some great surging passion that swept you out of yourself and made you a different being. I thought you'd know the minute it came—the minute it died."

He leaned toward her to look more closely into her face.

"If that's the way love is, I've never known it. But if it is something sweet and poignant that binds you to somebody, something all woven of common experiences and habits and needs; if it means something to lean on when you're in trouble and to be happy with when you're glad, why then...."

"Why then, Jane?" breathlessly.

"Then at last, Jerry, I know love."

His arms tightened about her, her head slipped to his shoulder, and they kissed each other—their

betrothal kiss. Jerry said nothing, but when Jane's hand went to his cheek, she felt hot tears there. After a long while he spoke, humbly:

"Jane, are you perfectly sure? Martin Christiansen is a wonderful, rare man, and I'm...."

"You're my man, Jerry. I wish we could have him for our friend, but...."

"We will, dearest, if he'll take me, too."

"He will understand, as God would," she said softly.

"Jane, how can you be so wonderful, and want to belong to me?"

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With such foolish tenderness of belated courtship they drove through the silent radiance of the wood. The arbutus scent was intoxicating, and the night sounds were mysterious. They were silent, happy. As they came out of the woods and on to the open road again, Jerry heaved a deep sigh.

"Jane, heart of me, I feel as if all the problems in the world were settled for us!"

She looked up at him, and shook her head, smiling.

"Dear big, little boy-husband, our problems are just beginning. We're looking at them squarely for the first time!"

"But we're looking at them together, Jane."

"Yes, thanks be to love! Jerry, my husband, what a world! I want to cry out, with a loud voice, I want to praise the Lord, with trumpets and with shawms!"

So these two, in goodliest fellowship, turned their faces toward their new day.

**THE END**

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