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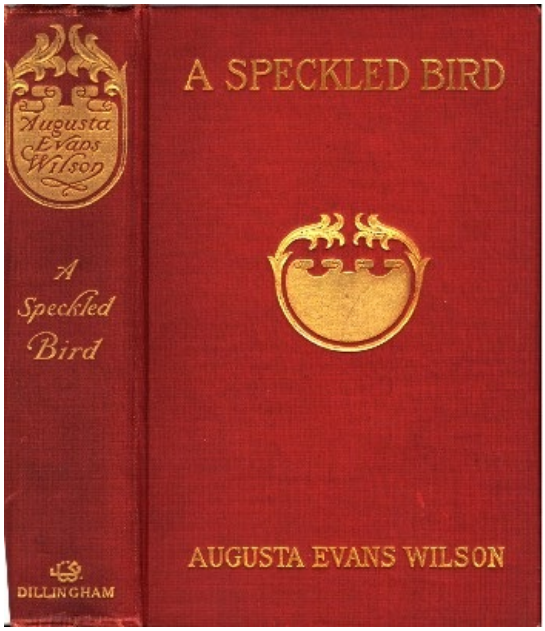

A SPECKLED BIRD

BY AUGUSTA EVANS WILSON

AUTHOR OF "ST. ELMO," "VASHTI," "INFELICE," "AT THE MERCY OF TIBERIUS," ETC.

"As a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her."

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A Speckled Bird.
Issued August, 1902.

To
MY KIND READERS
KNOWN AND UNKNOWN, WHO HAVE DESIRED AND ASKED
ME TO WRITE AGAIN, THESE PAGES ARE OFFERED
IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION OF VERY
LOYAL FRIENDSHIP DURING
MANY YEARS

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POPULAR NOVELS

A SPECKLED BIRD

CHAPTER I

"Grandma, who named me Eglah?"

"My cousin, Bishop Vivian, when he baptized you."

"Do you think he had any right to put such a label on me?"

"Certainly, because your father selected your name, and the bishop had no choice."

"It is so ugly, I never can like it, and a little baby that can't speak her mind ought not to be tied to something she must drag all her life and hate for ever and ever."

"Eat your breakfast, and try to be a good, quiet child, then your name will not trouble you so much."

"I never shall like it, any more than you do, and you know, grandma, when you call me your mouth twists like you had toothache."

"I was not consulted about your name. It belonged to your New England Grandmother Kent, and as it appears you belong only to your father, you were called after his mother. I heard him tell you it was the name of a queen—one of David's wives."

"Yes, but I found out she was not the head queen—just a sort of step-wife queen. Now if I could only be the pet queen, Sheba, I should not fret at all."

"The Queen of Sheba was not David's wife."

"You are all wrong about your Bible, grandma, because you are only a Methodist. David's Sheba was nicknamed Bath Sheba, for the reason that he saw her going to her bath-house, and she looked so pretty. I saw her picture in father's 'Piscopal Bible."

"There, there! Be quiet. Drink your milk."

Mrs. Maurice leaned back in her chair and sighed as she looked down at the fragile child beside her. The tall, silver coffee urn showed in repoussé on one side the flight of Europa, on the other Dirce dragged to death. Eglah could never understand how the strands of the victim's hair supported the weight of her form, and wondered why they did not give way and set the prisoner free. To-day she eyed it askance, then surveyed her own fair image reflected in the polished, smooth surface below the band of figures.

"Grandma, don't you think horses are much nicer for ladies to ride than oxen?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Then why did you buy ox riders?" one small finger pointed to the heirloom fetich.

"I did not buy the urn. It has belonged to your Grandfather Maurice's family for one hundred and fifty years, and was brought from Old England. Eliza, take her away. If she cannot be silent, she must go back and have her meals with you. It seems impossible to teach her that in the presence of grown people children are expected to listen."

Mrs. Mitchell came forward from a side table, lifted the little girl from her chair, and untied the ruffled bib that protected her white dimity dress.

"Now tell grandmother you are sorry you annoyed her, and if she will let you sit at her table you will be as quiet as she wishes."

"Ma-Lila, don't make me tell stories; she doesn't believe them, and I am so tired saying things I don't mean. I want to go back to the side table, where you are not always scolding me. Grandma, it will be peacefuller if I stay with Ma-Lila——"

"Hush! Come here."

Mrs. Maurice lifted the little one's dimpled chin and studied the fair face that had bloomed seven years in her lonely home: a winsome face cut like a gem, velvety-brown eyes, long-lashed, and the pure, pale oval set in a shining bronze frame of curling hair, all chestnut in shade, braided with gold when sunshine hid among the ripples.

"Kent! Kent—even her ears small as any other rogue's. She is her father's child."

"Is that a sin, grandma?"

Mrs. Maurice swiftly laid her hand over the uplifted, upbraiding eyes, to veil something in their depths that often disquieted her, and sought refuge in her habitual command:

"Take her away, Eliza."

Ringing the small bell close to the breakfast tray, the mistress took a spray of starry jasmine from the vase in the centre of the table, and as she turned away said to the grey-haired butler:

"Aaron, you will put a plate and chair for Miss Eglah at the side table until further orders. Tell Oliver I shall not want the carriage until four o'clock."

Unusually tall and very handsome was this stately widow of a Confederate general who had been slain during one of the fierce conflicts around beleaguered Richmond. No white hairs marred the glossy blackness of the thick coil half hidden under a snowy crêpe cap, and the brilliant blue eyes

were undimmed by tearful years of widowhood—a widowhood involving for her the full, sad significance of the sacred and melancholy term, an inability to forget, a despair of any earthly consolation, and a jealous reticence that denied all discussion of her sorrow, as she would have defended her dead from an alien's rude touch. To her, time had brought neither oblivion nor alleviation, only a sharpened sense of irreparable bereavement; and as one standing in an unending and hopeless eclipse, she accepted the gloom with a stern and silent rejection of all other lights when the sun of her life went down.

Anniversaries are electric batteries that thrill the domain of emotions, and one day out of every three hundred and sixty-five the strings of memory are keyed to their utmost tension, vibrating with an intolerable intensity that reddens the lips of old wounds and quickens dull aches to stinging torture.

This memorial morning Mrs. Maurice crossed the wide, vaulted hall, and passing through the long, pillared drawing-room, opened a locked door and shut herself in a darkened chamber to keep tryst with the sacred souvenirs that represented all she held dear. Raising the window, she turned the blinds to allow sunlight entrance into this silent reliquary filled with mementoes jealously guarded "in solemn salvatory": a heavy, square bedstead with twisted columns that upheld a red-lined tester whence embroidered draperies fell; a gilded swinging wicker crib, with baby blankets, rose bordered; a velvet easy chair, where a gentleman's quilted silk dressing-gown hung over the carved back, and his slippers lay beneath; a table heaped with a child's toys, books, and daguerreotypes of various sizes. On a leathern couch lay a folded Confederate uniform, and a man's straw hat, cane, spurs, and riding whip had been placed beside the faded grey coat. Over the old-fashioned, high marble mantel hung a portrait of General Egbert Maurice, clad in uniform, wearing three stars and a wreath on his collar, and holding his plumed hat in his right hand. At one corner of the mantel a furled Confederate flag leaned until it touched the frame of the picture, and from the marble shelf, where lay the general's sash and sword, hung the stained and torn guidon of his favorite regiment. On the wall opposite the fireplace the portrait of a lovely girl with an apron full of roses seemed to fill the room with radiance and color.

With a slow, caressing movement, Mrs. Maurice's slim white hand passed over the front of the smoking-gown, and fastened in a button hole the spray of fragrant, satin-starred jasmine; then, lifting the faded grey coat, she held it to her heart in a tight, straining clasp, as she seated herself on the couch, and her fingers lingered on tarnished gilt buttons and braid. Inside the uniform was pinned a parcel wrapped in tissue paper, from which she shook out a mass of yellowed lace, and as the filmy folds of an infant's christening robe swept across her lap, a subtle perfume of withered flowers like the breath of a rose jar stole over the room.

With dry eyes she looked long at one portrait, then at the other: the husband of her youth and the only child that had come as crowning blessing to a happy married life where no dissensions muttered, no discordant clash jarred the perfect harmony. As the dead years babbled, she listened now to echoes of manly tones, and now to a baby's prattling lisp, still dividing as of yore her heart's homage. When war robbed her of the husband who had never ceased to be tender lover, her only hold on life centred in their beautiful daughter Marcia, and the struggle to guard her and defend from confiscation and ruin the fine landed estate and large fortune left by General Maurice had served, in some degree, to lessen the tendency to morbid brooding.

To the truly typical Southern woman who survived the loss of family idols and of her country's freedom, for which she had surrendered them, "reconstruction," political and social, was no more possible than the physical resurrection and return of slain thousands lying in Confederate graves all over the trampled and ruined South.

No mourning Southern matron indulged more intensely an inexorable, passionate hatred of Northern invaders than did Mrs. Maurice, who refused to accept the inevitable, and shut her doors against agents of "union and reconstruction" as promptly as she would have barred out leprosy or smallpox.

Proud of the social prestige with which her Brahmin birth and stainless family record had dowered her, she wielded her influence in uncompromising hostility to all who advocated a tacit acceptance of the new conditions called "peace." The loss of negroes that abandoned several plantations would have materially impaired the Maurice fortune, had not the prevision of the general's commission merchant in a distant seaport induced the precautionary course of sending a portion of his crop of cotton to Liverpool early in the first year of the war, thus securing a large amount of treasure under the British flag, where (as the cotton factor wrote Mrs. Maurice a few years later) "'Union' thieves could not steal, nor 'reconstruction' moths and rust feed upon it." Out of the wreckage that succeeded the final catastrophe at Appomattox the family fortune of General Maurice emerged triumphant in proportions, and the minority of Marcia was a bulwark that defied successfully the numerous assaults of "loyal confiscators."

Sooner or later the *diabolus ex machina* confronts us all, and pierces at the one spot least guarded because deemed invulnerable. Mrs. Maurice's maternal pride was built on the shifting sands of girlish impulse and flattered vanity, and the crash showed her that somewhere at the cross roads she had failed to offer a black lamb in propitiating evil divinities—had left no morsel of meat for the sleuth-hounds of baleful destiny that suddenly bayed destruction to the last earthly hope life held for her. Reared in the semi-cloistral seclusion of a Southern girl's education in ante-bellum days, trained at home by governesses, and barred from society until she should have made the European tour for which her mother had fixed an early date, predestined Marcia went to her doom when at the house of a friend she met accidentally the recently appointed

Federal judge, Allison Kent—handsome, courtly, debonair, and wily.

Clandestine courtships rarely lag; hence this lover of forty years, dreading discovery and the prompt removal of an infatuated girl only seventeen on her last birthday, kept the mother in complete ignorance of impending calamity until the night before her departure for Europe, when Marcia fled with him to an adjoining State, where a justice of the peace made them man and wife.

In accordance with life-long custom, Mrs. Maurice went to her child's bedroom to kiss her good night, and on the pillow found a farewell note, praying for forgiveness, and promising to meet her at a town on the line of her journey. How the mother bore this shock only God knew; no eye but His watched during that long night, when her soul went down into a Gehenna of torture—when, alone in her crucifixion, she accepted defeat, and girded herself for grim endurance. As day dawned she unlocked her door, and summoning her servants, said:

"Miss Marcia has left me to marry a man who cannot enter my house. Take this note to Mr. Whitfield's residence at once; not to his office, to his house. Minerva, you will finish packing Miss Marcia's trunk, which must be sent to her. I shall make no change in my plans, except to take the noon train instead of the one at midnight. Ask me no questions. Send Mitchell and Eliza to me."

When her attorney, Mr. Whitfield, appalled by the stony white face that showed no hint of tears, no more trace of grief than the marble figure that supported the mantel at her side, essayed a few words of sympathy, she put out her hands with an imperious gesture.

"There is no comfort possible, and I need your help only in writing a new will. I start to New York at noon, so you have little time."

A few hours later, having seen only her pastor and her lawyer, she left her rifled home by a route that enabled her to avoid the town designated as a place of meeting. Across the girl's farewell letter, which was returned to "Marcia Maurice," she had written: "My only hope is that God will take me out of this world before I see again the face of the child who has disgraced the memory of her father and the name of her mother."

Eighteen months had been spent in Europe, whence she was most reluctantly recalled by the death of Robert Mitchell, the overseer and business manager of one of her plantations, who was killed by the explosion of a mill engine. His young widow, Eliza, had been sheltered and guarded in Mrs. Maurice's home when orphaned by the death of her father, a Methodist chaplain attached to General Maurice's command, and the intimacy of years was marked by unfailing kindness and confidence on the part of the benefactress, by profound affection and ardent gratitude on that of the destitute girl. The peculiarly harrowing circumstances attending her husband's loss had so severely shocked Eliza that Mrs. Maurice promptly removed her from the "overseer's cottage" to her own house, where she was nursed tenderly and skilfully in the room that before her marriage she had so long called her home. Loving Marcia very warmly, she had attempted to intercede with the indignant mother, and one of her letters had enclosed an appeal from the erring daughter. It was returned unopened, and accompanied by a very positive assurance that any future repetition would not be forgiven. Old friends gathered to greet the returned traveller, yet all intuitively avoided allusion to the domestic cancer that, despite her proud, silent composure, was eating the heart barred against sympathy. She learned from the newspapers that under the new Federal régime Judge Kent was temporarily Senator, and that after a season in Washington he and Marcia were living at a hotel in her own neighboring city; but as the latter had followed her husband into the Episcopal Church, no meeting occurred between parent and child. So complete was the estrangement, and so unapproachable the stern, silent attitude of the mother, that when Dr. Eggleston, the family physician, and Bishop Vivian, the favorite cousin, called early one morning on an urgent errand, both realized that they championed a forlorn and desperate cause in battling with this old lioness robbed of her young.

Instinctively she divined their mission as her eyes fell upon a letter lying on the bishop's knee, and her lips narrowed and tightened. Standing on the hearth with her arms folded, she listened quietly to her cousin's impassioned pleading for forgiveness and to the doctor's distressing presentation of Marcia's alarming condition, which he felt constrained to pronounce hopeless.

"Madam, if you deny her dying prayer, remorse will drive you to despair."

"She has been dead to me since the hour she deliberately deceived and forsook me. Kent's wife ceased to be my child when she insulted, disgraced, her father's name."

"Oh, Patricia, how can you hope or claim God's mercy for yourself if you refuse pardon to your repentant and unhappy daughter?"

A spark leaped into the cold clear eyes.

"For mercy I think I shall never need to plead, and when my God grants me justice I will try to be satisfied."

"Will you not at least read the few lines the poor child wrote while we held her hand and guided the pen? Oh, cousin, if you could see her now!" The bishop held out the letter.

"Because you are the bearer I cannot refuse you that courtesy."

She walked to the window and, holding the curtain aside, read the brief petition:

"My Own Mother:

"Let me come home to die. It will not be so hard if I can look into your face once more, and know that your dear hand will close my eyes as I go down into my grave. I shall see father soon, and if he could come now to my help, you know he would take me in his arms and lay me in my mother's lap. Be merciful to your poor, dying

"MARCIA."

Leaning eagerly forward, the two grey-haired men watched and listened for some relenting token; but after a few moments she turned toward a desk, and with no change in the frozen calm of her handsome face, she merely traced a word at the bottom of the page, handed it to the bishop, and left the room. "Come."

That night a cold waxen image of a boy whose soul refused to enter its clay tabernacle was laid for a moment in Eliza Mitchell's arms, to be kissed as only young mothers can kiss their dead first-born. The following day the hospital ambulance brought back on a stretcher the wan form of the erring daughter, who fainted from exhaustion as the bearers carried her into the home of her fathers. Three days later she died in her mother's arms, whispering with icy lips: "If my baby lives, keep her for my sake—for my sake."

So little Eglah Kent was given, when three hours old, to the care of the young foster-mother Eliza, and slept upon the heart that mourned for the lost baby boy. Since then seven years had passed, and to-day, as Mrs. Maurice caressed Marcia's lace christening robe, she put aside all that pertained to the girl's disobedience and elopement, and memory dwelt only upon the sunny time when her husband and daughter made home a heaven. Into the quiet room crept the whine of a dog scratching at the door. As she opened it, a feeble brown creature crossed the floor, crouched before the hearth, and, raising soft, tender eyes to the portrait of the general, barked once and beat the carpet with his tail, as if in salute; her husband's favorite pointer Hector, failing fast, but loyal and true as the heart of his widow.

CHAPTER II

Sharing in some degree that infallible instinct whereby lower animals interpret the character of their owners, young children are often as wise and wary as dogs and cats, and before Eglah could walk without clinging to Eliza's finger, she knew intuitively that her silent, watchful grandmother eyed her suspiciously, and that warm caresses could be expected only from her father and her young foster-mother. Profound and regretful compassion rather than tenderness filled Mrs. Maurice's heart, and she faithfully ministered to the infant's needs, as she would have pityingly warmed and fed some bleating lamb bereft of its dam by March snows. Since the little girl showed, except in form, no faintest trace of Maurice blood, her grandmother regarded her most sorrowfully—not as Marcia's baby, but as the living monument of a cruel and unpardonable injury inflicted by Judge Kent. Even in the cradle Eglah defied an authority supreme in the household.

"You must not say Lila, but Mama-Eliza."

"I won't! It hurths my tongue to say Elitha. I will say Ma-Lila."

The child's inherent antagonism made her a vexing embodiment of protest, an obstinate interrogation point punctuating the commands of this old-fashioned lady whose domestic canons belonged to an era when boys and girls were not considered "servile" because trained to answer their elders "No, sir," or "Yes, ma'am," and when after a meal in the sunset glow young human broods followed feathered folk to an early rest before stars spangled the sky. If among General Maurice's choice collection of thoroughbred game fowls, with yellow legs and bronze breasts, had appeared an uncouth mongrel pullet, dust-colored and blue of skin, his exacting widow would not have rejected it more summarily than did her proud soul repudiate the Kent scion whom she housed luxuriously because of Marcia's last prayer, but felt no more desire to caress than to fondle the bullet that slew her husband.

Judge Kent's official duties called him often from the city, and during his visits to his child Mrs. Maurice, if compelled to see him, maintained the reticent, frigid courtesy with which she had received him when he first crossed her threshold bearing his unconscious wife. He had never touched the slender white fingers that pointed to the staircase that day, and while she allowed herself no verbal expression of animosity, he was humiliated by the consciousness of her intense detestation. As Southern hostess in a typical Southern home, she fully realized *noblesse oblige*, and her punctilious observance of the etiquette of hospitality accentuated the position she assigned him—that of stranger within her gates. He had hoped the baby might bridge the chasm, but when he ventured to dwell upon his unwillingness to deprive Mrs. Maurice of this "sweet source of solace," she promptly dispelled his illusion.

"Make no mistake, Judge Kent. You leave the poor child here, and I retain her simply because her mother so requested."

Desiring to minimize sources of future contention, she had directed Mr. Whitfield to acquaint him with her will, whereby the entire estate would pass at her death into the hands of certain trustees, who, after providing a liberal annuity for Eglah and Eliza, should control absolutely all interests until Eglah was twenty-one years old, when a legacy of five thousand dollars would be

paid to Eliza. Should the little girl be removed from the care of her foster-mother, the annuity of the former ceased, and half of the value of the estate should be deducted from her inheritance; and if Eglah died before marriage, the homestead was bequeathed to childless Confederate widows of that State, as an Egbert Maurice memorial. Since General Maurice's last testament had left his fortune unconditionally to his wife, there was no appeal from her decision, and Judge Kent bore the keen disappointment with such semblance of acquiescence as he could summon, striving to veil his hatred of the woman whose contempt lay beneath her studied courtesy like an iron wall under a sheet of ice. An adroit and tireless schemer, he usually steered safely in the troubled political sea, and only once, in an unguarded moment, dared the current of Mrs. Maurice's convictions.

"If the people of the South could only reason from the analogy of history——"

He was silenced by the hand thrown up, palm outward.

"We have only the privilege of suffering and remembering. The grim analogy of Sicily under Verres suggests a rather painful parallel. For us there remains solely the grace of silence; and it were well if you, sir, could set me an example, when numbered among guests under my roof."

The voice was low, clear, steady, but the narrow lip arched, and the light in her blue eyes reminded him of the violet flame one sees flash up over a bed of hot anthracite.

Eglah was five years old when her father was called to Washington, and thence sent to Europe on a government mission, which he so successfully accomplished that on his return the governor of his native State appointed him senator to fill an unexpired term. Having proved a useful servant of the Administration, official influence secured his election and return to the United States' Senate two years later, and Mrs. Maurice welcomed any change that removed him from her neighborhood. His rare visits were festivals to his little daughter, and she revelled in the wealth of caresses, the endearing words, the prodigality of gifts that always characterized his brief sojourns. Thus were laid the foundations of an intense and absorbing devotion to her father that gradually became the dominant factor in her life.

"Nutwood"—the three-storied red brick house crowning an eminence shaded by walnut and chestnut trees—had been built in 1825 by General Maurice's father, and its pillared piazza running along three sides overlooked the city of Y——, two miles distant, where spires and factory chimneys lifted their lines against mellow western skies. On the first and second floors of the old mansion wide halls crossed at right angles, admitting breezes from every point of the compass, and so unusually thick were the walls that the nearly square windows framed in cedar furnished comfortable lounging seats. For many years this place had been famous throughout the State for its race-horses, game chickens, pointers, fox-hounds, and fine library, and the hospitality dispensed was peculiar to an era characterized by conditions that the Civil War annihilated. No invading army had reached the city of Y——, but raiding cavalry squads once completely sacked the Maurice plantations many miles distant in the river valley, and burned not only the empty gin house, but the commodious family residence often occupied in autumn. Prior to her departure for Europe Mrs. Maurice had rebuilt gin and warehouses, and erected a pretty four-room cottage comfortably furnished, which, with fifty acres of adjoining land, she gave as dower to Eliza when she married the faithful overseer and manager of the "Bend Plantations."

One sultry spring morning in Eglah's ninth year, she sat with Eliza in the "out-door schoolroom" where lessons were studied in warm weather. It was a cool retreat—a circular, latticed summer-house—overrun by yellow woodbine, honeysuckle, and a pink multiflora rose, all in full bloom, busy distilling perfume their satin lips offered in libation to the lazily wandering wind that caressed them. The pointed roof was rain proof, the floor tiled, and between the arched openings seats were fastened to the lattice wall. From the round table in the centre lovely views of shrubbery, lily-starred lawn, far-off grain fields, green pasture lands where cattle browsed, seemed set in frames of leafage and tendril that ran riot around the archways. A walk bordered with lilacs and azaleas led to the door of the conservatory, which flanked the long drawing-room; stretching beyond, one could see the wide front of the house, where no balustrade broke the line of white columns rising to the crenellated flat roof. Eglah sat with a geography lying open before her on the table, and her head supported by arms resting on the map, but once she turned a leaf, and the wind fluttered a letter many weeks old from her father.

"Are you ready to answer the map questions?"

"No, Ma-Lila. Why must I always answer other people's questions, when nobody answers mine? I will say my lesson when you tell me what 'scallawag' and 'carpet-bagger' mean."

"They are ugly slang words, and if I were you I should try to forget I ever heard them. Little girls have nothing to do with politics, and you have not told me of whom the Graham children were speaking at the party."

"Never mind about names. I looked in the dictionary, but could not find 'scallawag.' I know it means something horrid and vulgar and hateful, and I never will go to another party."

Eliza's reply was drowned by the scream of "King Herod"—a lordly peacock that had earned the title from his slaughter of young turkeys and chickens in the poultry yard. Now he trailed his feathers across the walk, came up to the summer-house, and uttered his piercing cry in quick succession.

"Something is going to happen. Uncle Aaron says it is a bad sign when Herod squalls at a door."

"Something happened a while ago, when a man rode up the avenue and tied his horse. Now he is leaving the steps, and Herod knows he is a stranger. You must not listen to superstitious foolishness from negroes," said Eliza, with a fine scorn of all but her own peculiar pet superstition, kept closely guarded in her heart.

Eglah shut the geography, propped her chin on her palms as her elbows rested on the table, and watched the beautiful bird preen his feathers.

"Ma-Lila, how old must I be before you will be ready to tell me why grandmother hates my father so?"

"Dearie, she does not 'hate' him, and you ought to try not to——"

"Don't tell stories, Ma-Lila, because I want always to believe everything you say—and—there! Listen to grandma's bell. Three rings; that is for you."

Eliza laid in her work basket the embroidered cambric ruffle she was hemming and, throwing her white apron over her head, went swiftly to the house.

Mrs. Maurice sat in the drawing-room, with two newspapers unfolded on her lap, but whether their contents annoyed or gratified her, the cold, quiet face gave no indication.

"Is Eglah ready to come and recite her lessons?"

"Not yet, madam."

"Put away her books; she will be excused from lessons to-day. Judge Kent has married again in Washington, and these papers furnish detailed accounts of the brilliant wedding reception. He has swallowed the gold bait of a widow he met in Europe. She is reputed rich, of course—a Mrs. Nina Herriott—and the bridal pair will go to England for the summer."

"Our poor baby! This news will break her heart," replied the foster-mother, whose eyes had filled with tears at thought of the child's suffering.

"Yes, she will grieve sorely, but better now than later in life. I have been pondering the best way to break the news to her."

"Let me tell her. I think I understand her disposition more thoroughly than anyone else."

"You fancy I do not comprehend my own granddaughter?"

"I beg your pardon, dear Mrs. Maurice. I mean only that I have watched all her little ways, and she feels less restraint with me than with you; but of course you must choose your own way in this matter."

"For us, this marriage is fortunate, and I rejoice at every circumstance that heightens the barrier between Judge Kent and me. He will never dare to disturb the child while I live, and brides are not importunate for the custody of step-children. Eliza, I never felt until to-day that Eglah is really Marcia's baby. She is a thousand times dearer to me now than ever before."

"Dear madam, I thank God for anything that will make you open your heart and take the precious child in. In many ways she needs tenderness from you, and especially since the children's parties she has attended recently, where rude things were said about her father. She has not told me all, but you know the damaging rumors about some of his decisions while Federal Judge in our State, and the Graham children, whose interests suffered through him, speak very bitterly of his career. Eglah has asked me many questions lately, which I always evaded, but she broods over this matter and is resentful."

"Poor little thing! Her father has lived on sour grapes so long, her teeth must inevitably be on edge. Henceforth she belongs to me."

"She is absolutely devoted to him, and it is distressing to know how her very heartstrings are tied around him. It amounts to idolatry."

"Yes, I realize that, and it will be a sad day for her when the glamour fades and she sees the ugly, deformed clay feet of her idol."

"It would break her heart."

"No. We both know sorrow does not destroy, and death is deaf to calls from crushed hearts. She will simply find herself chained to a galling sense of shame. These papers were brought this morning by a young man who impressed me as a thoroughbred gentleman—Mr. Noel Herriott, son of Mrs. Kent's first husband. He spoke kindly of his stepmother, and explained that, as he was passing through Y—— on his way west, Judge Kent had given him a card of introduction to me, and requested him to see Eglah, for whom he brought the package yonder on the window sill. I knew the poor child would be distressed at the news, and thought it best she should have time to recover from the shock before seeing him. He continues his journey by the midnight train, and I have invited him to return and take tea here, when Eglah can be introduced to him. Eliza, perhaps you are right; certainly you are more nearly her mother than any living being, and you will tenderly break the news to her. Carry the papers and the parcel and make her understand. After a while I wish to come out and join you."

In shaking and furling his rainbow train King Herod had shed a long feather. Eglah picked it up, and finding a knife in the work basket proceeded to sharpen the end into a pen, with which she purposed writing to her father. As Eliza entered and placed the papers on the table, the little girl looked up.

"Oh, Ma-Lila, you are crying! What is it? Not bad news from father?"

"My baby, your father is well and has sent you a present. Come to me, darling; I want to talk to you." She drew her to her lap and held her close.

"We know, of course, your father dearly loves his daughter, but he is often very lonely, and as he cannot have you with him, what would you think if you heard he had married a lady who would be kind and good to him? Don't you——"

"I know that would be a lie—a wicked lie! Why do you say such horrible things and hurt me so?" She threw off the clasping arm and sprang to the floor, stamping the tiles with her right foot.

"My precious baby, I would not hurt you for a million of dollars! You know your Lila loves you better than everything else in the world. I would rather hold my hand in the fire than tell you a painful thing if it could be helped. But somebody must speak the truth to you."

She knelt down by the indignant child and kissed her hot cheek twice.

"My darling, it is true—positively true—that your father was married some days ago. Now, you must not struggle to get away from me. Listen, and let me explain it all."

"Don't! I won't listen. I can't—wait—wait—" She went to the seat along the wall and threw herself face downward, crossing her arms over her head. She lay so still that a quarter of an hour later Eliza sat down beside her, and while her hand softly stroked the brown curls, she read slowly the description of church wedding and subsequent reception.

"My darling, you love your father so well you want him to be happy, and——"

"No, not with another wife, and away from me. I would rather he was dead—for then nobody else could claim him. Two wives! It is like having two Gods."

Taking the papers, she read the marked paragraphs, and though neither sob nor tear betrayed the intensity of her sorrow, one little hand caught at her throat, where a stricture seemed to stifle her.

"You must try to bear this trouble patiently."

"I can't. I would not bear it at all, if I could help myself. Now I am an orphan! An orphan!"

"Not while I live to love you. Look at this parcel, your father's present."

Eliza unwrapped the paper and took out an oblong gilded box, to which was fastened a card: "For our dear little daughter Eglah, with love of her father and mother." The child glanced at the handwriting and her eyes seemed almost to take fire. She snatched the box and threw it to the floor.

"It is not mine; I have no father and no mother. I have only Ma-Lila left!"

She buried her face in Eliza's lap, and hoping a burst of tears would relieve the strain, the nurse silently caressed her, waiting for the storm to break; but save the trembling of the figure no sign was given. After a while, Eliza whispered,

"Grandmother is coming down the walk."

Eglah started up as if electrified, and lifted the box from the floor, holding it against her breast. Leaning on her cane, Mrs. Maurice came to the table, sat down, and opened her arms.

"My dear child, come here."

Not an inch stirred Eglah, and Eliza gently forced her forward within reach of the extended arms. Mrs. Maurice leaned down to kiss her, but she turned her head away.

"My poor little girl, don't you know I love you?"

"Oh, no, grandma; you never did love me, and you never will."

"But I do, dear child. Kiss me."

"I don't want to kiss you any more than you want to kiss me. I understand exactly how you feel. You are sorry for me because you think father has treated me badly in getting married. But, grandmother, you need not pity me now, for I must make you understand that *my father always is right*. No matter what he may do, he has good reasons, and if I am satisfied nobody else can complain. I shall always know father is right."

The dry, white face was lifted proudly, and the challenging eyes met her grandmother's steadily, but the childish lips trembled and the hand clutched spasmodically at her throat.

A gush of genuine tenderness warmed the old lady's heart as she took the quivering fingers, spread them on her own palm, and touched the girl's forehead with her lips.

"'Loyal and true'—that is the Maurice motto. 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!' To-day we will have no lessons, and this evening Eliza shall dress you especially to meet the gentleman, Mr. Herriott, whom your father wishes you to know. Eliza, see that she has a warm bath, and put some orange flower water in her glass of lemonade."

In after years Noel Herriott often recalled that afternoon spent at Nutwood. The inimitable courtesy of the handsome stately hostess, the sweet countenance of the widowed foster-mother—whose anxious, tender gaze rarely left the white-clad child—the grave negro butler, wearing linen apron that matched his grey head, and the spacious old cedar-wainscotted dining-room where, on bare, polished mahogany table, the light of wax candles was reflected in silver dishes and candelabra, and glittered from heavy, antique-shaped, cut-glass bowls, while golden honeycomb and ripe strawberries mixed their fragrance with the breath of crimson carnations heaped in a Sèvres china centrepiece that once graced banquets at Trianon. Most vivid of all impressions, he retained the imperishable image of a beautiful girl, with singularly white cheeks and lustrous, shy eyes, glowing unnaturally from her fierce struggle for composure—a proud, sensitive face whose exquisite lines suggested rare old cameos behind cabinet glass.

Though the guest was a very young man, his quiet manner and perfect ease indicated thorough acquaintance with the most refined society, and despite her sectional prejudice Mrs. Maurice yielded to the charm of an unusually handsome personality and a conversation marred by no trace of egotism. The crocus light of after-glow still tinged the west, where the sickle of a new moon swung, when the visitor rose to depart.

"Miss Eglah, when I come back from New Mexico and Arizona, shall I bring you a Zuñi pickaninny or a Moqui pony?"

She shook her head.

"Since your father has stolen my stepmother, do you not think you might persuade yourself to accept me as a sort of half cousin or hemi-demi-semi-stepbrother, or any kind of a relative you may choose? I am quite alone in the world, and you are just the sister I should like to claim as my hermanita. May I?"

"Thank you, sir, I would rather not. I want only my father."

He bowed, and lifting her dainty little hand brushed it with his mustache.

"Mrs. Maurice, in saying good-bye, I must thank you cordially for the privilege of spending several hours in your lovely home, which illustrates all I have read of charming Southern life, and realizes completely my ideal picture of what your sunny land must have been in former years."

"Good-bye, Mr. Herriott. I wish you a pleasant journey. Nutwood is a mere shadow of old and happier days. Ichabod is printed all over the ruined South, and we live only to guard our graves."

CHAPTER III

The quiet, systematic routine of life at Nutwood was by no means cloistral in its seclusion, and though the term "house-party" had not yet taken root south of the Potomac, guests from various parts of the State frequently spent a week with Mrs. Maurice, and were entertained at dinners, luncheons, and teas with the lavish hospitality traditional in the family. Accustomed early to meeting strangers, Eglah was neither bashful nor awkward, but she understood fully that her father was unpopular in the social world around her, and she deeply resented an antipathy which, though never discussed in her presence, she felt it impossible to forgive or remove. The explanatory assistance of Minerva, daughter of the cook, had enabled her to comprehend all the unpleasant significance of "scallawag" and "carpet-bagger," and with the fervor of indignant loyalty she promptly espoused whatever cause her father was reputed to represent. Alert and *en garde*, she expected attacks, felt eager to retaliate, and consequently was often stung by the young people of her circle with whom she was no favorite. For many months after Judge Kent's second marriage, Mrs. Maurice yielded to a new and yearning tenderness toward her grandchild, whom she heartily pitied, but the overtures came too late; the plastic season had passed, the angles had stiffened, the childish heart had hardened hopelessly, and caresses that formerly might have won her love were received in cold, irresponsive passiveness.

Once she had gone under Eliza's care to spend Christmas in Washington, and though the pretty, gay, good-natured stepmother laid siege to the girl's heart and fondled and pampered her, Mrs. Kent knew from the defiant gleam in her watchful, jealous eyes that the daughter would never tolerate a usurper who sat on her own mother's throne and divided her father's affections.

During the following year, Mrs. Maurice was prostrated by an attack of pneumonia that resulted in heart weakness, from which she never fully rallied. The reins of household government slipped easily into Eliza's hands, and that reticent, faithful young woman proved worthy of the confidence so long reposed in her by her benefactress.

The last link in the chain of daily duties to which the invalid clung was her habit of listening to Eglah's recitations from text-books, but the hour came when she reluctantly laid down the self-imposed task.

"My dear, in future say your lessons to Eliza. I find I am not strong enough to be patient, and without perfect patience no one should attempt to teach. Go now and practise your piano exercises; it will not disturb me in the least."

She took into her own cold, beautifully shaped hand Eglah's slender, warm fingers, looked at them critically, and smiled as she drew them tenderly across her cheek.

"Kiss me, little one. Try always to obey Eliza, for she will never fail you when you need comfort, and in all this world nobody loves you as she does. Send her to me."

When the nurse came in and seated herself, darning gourd in hand, Mrs. Maurice was glancing over a blank book used for memoranda.

"Eliza, here are some instructions you must follow faithfully when I am gone. I have written them carefully, so that you cannot misunderstand. I leave nothing to your discretion, not because your judgment is defective, but simply for the reason that I desire my wishes executed exactly. It is an absolute condition of my will that you should have the personal care of Eglah until she marries. If she should be sent to a new-fangled college (one of her father's Yankee fads), you will board in sight of her; when she travels, you go with her. Nothing but her death, or marriage, shall separate you, and with this provision I can safely leave her. Egbert and Marcia will understand I have done what was possible for the poor baby. Proud little thing! she will be tortured indeed if ever the time comes when she feels ashamed of her father—and wily though he is, her eyes are keen. She is all Kent in appearance, except her hands and feet; they are dainty, beautiful, patrician, genuinely Maurice like my Marcia's."

She laid the book on Eliza's lap, motioned her away, and, turning her head aside, closed her eyes.

With the ebbing of summer tide her pulse waned slowly but steadily, like a star going down to the gates of the west. Leaning heavily on her husband's cane, followed by the aged pointer, the tall, wasted figure went to and fro through the old house, as one having packed and waiting for departure looks to see if aught has been forgotten; and over the pallid face with its cloud of black hair an exultant smile sometimes shone, as she realized how soon she should reclaim her treasures in the beckoning Beyond. It was an August night when the pilot's signal came, and swiftly and gladly she "crossed the bar." Eliza was aroused from a sound sleep by Eglah, who shook her.

"Ma-Lila, I am so frightened! I heard grandma call out 'Egbert!' 'Marcia!' Something had already waked me suddenly."

"Oh, dearie, you were only dreaming."

She sprang up and lighted a candle, but the girl clung to her.

"No, it was not a dream. I heard it clear and loud like a quick cry. I was so scared I waited a while, and then I went to her room—but she is not there! I could see the bed was empty, because Dinah had left the night lamp burning in the passage. What can it mean?"

"Grandmother is often restless, and goes out on the colonnade, where the fresh air relieves her oppressed breathing. No doubt she is there now. Baby, do not tremble so."

Clutching Eliza's nightgown, Eglah followed her to the sick room, which was unoccupied, and waking Dinah, who slept on a cot in the hall, they searched the entire length of the piazza, the foster-mother shielding the light with her hand. Turning to re-enter the house, they were startled by the howl of a dog, answered instantly by a scream from Herod, roosting on one of the arched chimney tops. Eglah was so terrified she threw her arms around Eliza, thereby dashing the candle from her trembling hand.

"She must be in the general's room, and old Hector is there also."

Swiftly they crossed the halls, and found a light shining through the partly open door of the memorial chamber. A candle burned low under the portrait over the mantel, and Hector, with his head thrown back against his mistress's knee, howled feebly. She sat in her husband's easy chair, her head pillowed on his dressing gown, where a fresh Cape jasmine gleamed, and over her lap flowed the yellowed lace of Marcia's christening robe, half hiding the baby shoes of white kid. She had laid one hand on the Confederate uniform folded on the couch beside her chair, and about the long, white fingers of the other were wrapped strands of vivid red seed-coral—the necklace and bracelets of her only child. Stern lines and shadows of sorrow had faded forever from the frozen face, where eternal peace set its blessed seal, and in the wide eyes fixed on her husband's portrait was the rapt expression that comes only with the lifting of the veil as the soul drifts through its windows of flesh. The icy shiver that runs across the world when day dawns grew into a windy gust from the west, extinguishing the fluttering candle flame and blowing the lace curtains out eastward like white sails bearing away the happy spirit to crystal seas. At the edge of the sky, where the morning star burned, a thread of orange glowed in the soft pearl grey of the new day, and only the crowing of the game cocks from their cedar thicket broke the silence that death consecrates.

CHAPTER IV

Were it possible to probe the recesses of cerebration by some psychological process as searching as the Roentgen ray, many strange beliefs would be dragged from secret chambers sedulously guarded, where mental fetiches are worshipped. Those who knew Eliza Mitchell well considered her a very pretty, dignified, reticent young widow, who won respect by her adherence to mourning garments—never laid aside after her husband's death; but her rigid observance of the strictest phase of Methodist discipline presented a certain austerity of character that appeared to rebuke quietly even the members of her own denomination who indulged in "the putting on of gold and costly apparel, and taking such diversions" as aforetime were considered appanages of the "flesh and the devil."

Keenly observant and silently contemplative, she had grown shrewd as a judge of character, and laid the tribute of her confidence at the feet of few; yet this little woman, eminently practical and rigidly orthodox in the faith of her father, had surrendered to one belief that dominated heart, soul, and mind—that ruled her absolutely, and that she jealously guarded from all but her God. Her most intense and precious conviction was that the soul created and intended for her baby boy, who never breathed, had been assigned to the body of Marcia's infant girl born a little later. She was assured that her child had never known life on earth, and had been in his coffin but a few hours when Eglah first opened her eyes. Souls never die. What of the soulless still-born? Would God deny any Christian mother reunion with her innocent baby in the world of spirits? From the hour that Marcia's wailing child was laid on Eliza's bosom she accepted it as an incarnation of the soul of little Elliot, adrift in space but housed at last in the form committed to her fostering care. Whether this phantasmal belief sprang from feverish conditions under which she first felt the baby's warm lips at her breast, Eliza never questioned; and as the years passed the conviction strengthened, until she easily explained all Eglah's waywardness by the hypothesis that a boy's soul fretted under the limitations of a girl's body. Ignorant of the complex elements that fed her devotion to the child, even Mrs. Maurice could not fully understand her idolatrous fondness, her perfect and marvellous patience that condoned all errors, and only Eglah could have told how often she was fondled as "my Elliot" when cradle songs were crooned in the sanctuary of the nursery. Notwithstanding Mrs. Mitchell was zealous in missionary work, and when she read her reports as treasurer of the "Hindustan" fund, she dwelt feelingly on the benighted superstition that worshipped idols and believed in transmigration of soul.

After Mrs. Maurice's death, Mr. Whitfield as administrator closed Nutwood, leaving Aaron and his daughter Celia custodians, and Eglah and Eliza went to Washington, where two small rooms were selected for their occupancy in the fashionable "apartments" leased by Senator Kent. His daughter now enjoyed every educational advantage that a governess for modern languages and a tutor for Greek and mathematics could supply, while teachers in the entire range of feminine accomplishments were eager to encourage cultivation of any special talent. In dancing and riding she was found surprisingly proficient, and as Senator Kent was desirous she should enter as early as possible a "woman's college" in his native State where one of his sisters was professor, the child was industriously coached to achieve this purpose.

Standing as it were on the rim of a new world, strewn with the flotsam and jetsam of shattered political, ethical, and domestic systems, where all nations and social conditions found representation, Eglah and Eliza confronted novel customs, strange beliefs, and cosmopolitan diction that clashed sharply on the conservative standards of old Southern usage. Tethered to the pivot of her Methodist discipline, Mrs. Mitchell swung around the narrow circle of conscientious orthodoxy; but Eglah made alarming excursions into ecclesiastical provinces, and their first serious altercation arose from the announcement that the girl had decided to join the class for confirmation in the Episcopal church where Judge Kent worshipped.

"Confirmation? Oh, no; you are too young to take such an important step."

"Now, Ma-Lila, would you say that if I asked to join the Methodist Church?"

"That would be different, because you know more about the Church in which you have been raised."

"I know the Episcopal catechism from cover to cover, and I like the service, and the choristers, and the candles used in some Episcopal churches, and——"

"Dearie, you merely want to follow your father, and, moreover——"

"Did not you follow your father? You are what you are just because your father was a Methodist preacher, and a chaplain who was killed bringing my grandfather off the battle-field. What are fathers for, if not to set us examples?"

"Do you forget your dear grandmother, and her love for the church you were christened in, and could you who owe her so much defy her wishes?"

"Grandmother is so glad to get away and be in heaven that she never will worry over me any more; and if I am only good enough to go where she is when I die, what difference will it make to her how I got there? Seems to me, Ma-Lila, all this strife over different faiths is as foolish as denying people their choice of routes when they go travelling in summer. If we have perfect right to trust our bodies to our favorite railroad, we ought to feel as free to take tickets for our souls on any line that leads to God."

Eliza took the girl's hands and pressed the soft palms to her own cheeks, as she said, in a voice that faltered despite her will:

"My darling, let us wait. Promise me one thing; do nothing for another year at least. For my sake, baby, I beg of you."

Eglah saw unshed tears in the black eyes that had always shone tenderly on her, and rising she stole one arm around the nurse's neck and kissed her unsteady lips.

"Please don't fret about it. You shall have your wish. Of course I will wait a year if you think it best; but you must help me, because somehow it is harder for me to be good here than it was down at home."

"It is a sacred promise you make me now."

"I told you I would wait. Did I ever deceive you? You ought to know me better than Mrs. Kent, and even she told father yesterday she had been trying to find out whether I had most talent for the piano or the mandolin, and she concluded I really had no talent for anything—showed only genius for telling the truth."

Thenceforth Mrs. Mitchell redoubled her efforts to control the spiritual aspirations of the girl to whom she had devoted her life, and the bargain she made with her conscience was that Judge Kent had the right to train and develop and decorate the body of his daughter, even along lines she deemed Philistine, but the immortal spark—the soul intended for her little Elliot—was immutably hers, to be saved eternally in the faith to which her own hopes were anchored. That night, when she had brushed and braided Eglah's golden-brown hair that no one else ever arranged, she suddenly caught the slim form in a straining embrace.

"God bless my Elliot—my own precious baby!"

"It has been a long time since you called me Elliot, and it sounds queer to give me the name of your boy. Why should you?"

"You are my boy, and my Eglah also; two in one, and my only joy in all the world. Don't argue, dearie; go to sleep."

She lifted her into bed and tucked the silk quilt carefully about her, as though crib days had not ended.

"Ma-Lila, if we should all meet in heaven—and I do hope that somehow I shall get there—I am afraid I shall feel puzzled to know who really is my mother, because it seems to me I belong more to you than to anybody else except father; but then grandmother will certainly be there, and she will carry me straight to that special spot—the heavenly 'west-end'—where all the Maurices dwell, and hand me over to her Marcia: the beautiful one I never saw, my own mother, who would not wait in this world long enough to look at me."

"Hush, my lamb! Good night."

In the adjoining room she sat down at a table where books were piled, and opening one read a marked passage:

"The story was told by the owner of a shop where was sold the amber-tinted syrup of malt given to young children when milk could not be obtained. A pale woman in white came very late for many nights to buy a cup of this syrup—*midzu ame*—but never spoke.

"One night, when she beckoned him to follow, he went with her to the cemetery, where she suddenly vanished in a tomb, and he heard a young child crying under ground. On opening the tomb there was found the corpse of the woman, and by her side a young infant smiling, who had been fed from a cup of *midzu ame* in the hand of the corpse. The woman had by mistake been prematurely buried. The child was born in the grave, and love—stronger than death—compelled the ghost to provide nourishment for her baby."

Eliza closed the volume and tossed it across the table.

"As if we needed old heathen Japan to teach us the length and breadth and depth and deathlessness of maternal devotion, when we know from the Bible that though God in heaven forsook His Son, the earthly mother clung to Jesus!"

It was an intensely cold, windless, brilliant moonlight night in January, two years after she came to live in Washington, and when the clock struck eleven she heard a quick but cautious step in the corridor and a slight tap at her door. Mr. Herriott stood at the threshold and beckoned her to the head of the steps.

"Is Eglah asleep?"

"I think she is."

"Come downstairs quietly."

In the lower hall, where the lights burned brightly, she saw that he looked pale and troubled.

"Mrs. Mitchell, a terrible blow has fallen upon us. Mrs. Kent went sleighing with some friends, and the horses became uncontrollable. The sleigh was overturned, and poor Nina, thrown against

a stone wall, was killed instantly. Will you do what is best when she is brought home? Don't rouse little Eglah. I am going to find Senator Kent, who is in committee meeting, and break the news as gently as possible. Poor, dear Nina! So merry, so kind hearted! Laughing and chaffing me for my awkwardness when I tucked the lap robe about her feet."

Once more death levelled a wall that in some degree barred Eglah from her father, and from that wintry night she dated the beginning of her happy reign over his undivided affection—a monopoly she had long coveted as the supreme privilege and crown of life.

CHAPTER V

"Has the success of the experiment justified the labor and enthusiasm you spent upon it?"

"Yes, Noel, the result far surpasses my hopes, and I am impatient for you to visit us, not only to understand fully the complete success of the work, but to receive the grateful acknowledgments of every member of the Order."

"Then you bar your doors against me, because any expression of thanks is annoying, and the great pleasure I gave myself in deeding the property to you would be marred. Remember, Vernon, I am not a well-rounded character, measured by your ecclesiastical tape-line, and one of my ugly angles is aversion to thanks. If you have drained the marshland and reclaimed the house from mildew and mice you have made your neighbors debtors."

"The same Noel Herriott of college days!"

"Only more so, if you please. Nothing human is immutable, and if a man does not improve he grows worse. By the way, is your reverence still 'Brother' Temple, or have you climbed the ladder of spiritual promotion?"

"I am always Vernon to you, but the world knows me as 'Father' Temple. When will you come to us at 'Calvary House' and inspect the rich harvest from the seed you sowed? I long for the one thing you have withheld—your deep, hearty sympathy in my grand and holy work."

"Meaning that nothing less than the three vows will assure you of my safety?"

"That is beyond all that I ever dared to hope, but your cordial approbation would cheer me more than the indorsement of any other man. Generous though you are in financial assistance, your mental attitude toward our Order is that of the smiling tolerance with which one watches a child building a house of cards."

"However tentative my opinion relative to the scope and permanence of your religious movement, you cannot doubt that I earnestly desire the success to which the sanctity of your motive entitles you. Partial as I am to gymnastic methods, I allow no athletic feats in my mental processes; I neither run nor leap to conclusions, and you must give me time. You and I always approach vital questions by different paths: you lean generally to collectiveness; I usually prefer the slower leverage of individualism. You are burning the candle of life at both ends, and trying to realize your noble ideals; I plod far behind, with only a feeble taper and indulge no higher hope than to idealize my realities."

"When will you come to the lovely home you have given us? There is one room we have called 'Founder's,' and set apart for you; and, Noel, no sun sets that has not brought us to our knees in prayer for you who made it possible for us to own a chapel. When shall we welcome you?"

"Not now. I must go home, where matters need attention. Strange, is it not, that the magic of a name should outlive all it represents? That lonely old stone house staring at its shadow on the lake has no vital element of home except my horses and dogs, and one Maltese cat that sleeps in my arm-chair. When Nina married Senator Kent the last thread that tied me to anything like domesticity snapped, and I followed my bent and prowled from land to land."

"Why do you not marry some sweet, gentle woman and settle yourself?"

"Scarcely the advice one might expect from the priestly Father of an Anglican celibate order. Has your creed narrowed to such alternatives? Either a cell at Calvary or the snare and disillusions of marriage? Unfortunately for me, women have exerted only a traditional influence on my life. My own young mother died before I could remember her, and I was consigned to tutors when I should have been trundling hoops. I went early to college, and after father's second marriage was rarely at home; hence my acquaintance with women in the home circle is nebulous and legendary. As a boy I disdained sweethearts; as a man they disdain me. The only woman I ever really cared for would no more marry me than a stone slab in a cemetery; so, with many thanks, I cannot utilize your counsel, and it only remains for you to keep a cell for me at Calvary. Some day at eventide I may creep in, and you will kindly shrive and bless me."

Mr. Herriott had been leaning back in his chair, with his hands clasped behind his head, and when he rose he towered six feet two inches, smiling gravely at the upturned face of Father Temple, whose sombre clerical habit contrasted vividly with the white yachting flannels worn by his friend.

"Ah, Noel, what a Viking you look! Save prize fighting, is there anything in the realm of athletics you have not accomplished?"

"I fear you would not compliment me with even that civilized exception if you had seen a skirmish, minus weapons, that I had with a hairy, tattooed Dyak in a Borneo jungle where I hunted orchids. Vernon, if you trained your muscles more, and let up a little on your soul, allowed it a breathing spell, you would not look so flaccid and anæmic. Don't prefer monkish Latin to Juvenal: *mens sana in corpore sano*! You observe, respect for your Reverence prevents my offering you the Rabelais parody. Come, dine with me to-night."

"No, thank you. I am to give a brief 'retreat.' Tell me about my cousin Eglah; you crossed the ocean in the same steamer."

"You have not seen her?"

"For a few moments only. She is a beautiful girl."

"What remains to be said—since you accord her the mantle of beauty, whose folds, broader even than charity's, hide all defects? Where shall I begin? Being her cousin, you must know what I have merely heard: that she swept through college like a southern tornado—or should I have said like a meteor?—carrying off the honors, and was the youngest graduate who had ever turned the heads of the spectacled lecturers. Yet it appears she values her trophy merely because her laurels pleased her father, at whose feet she sits in adoration. In her physique, gymnastic training leaves nothing to be improved; she won badges, and can hold her own at basket-ball, tennis, rowing, and swimming. Is not the catalogue complete? So much for mental attainments and physical perfection, but in the domain of womanly emotions she is simply an unknown quantity—a latter-day sphinx, fresh and fair before drifting desert sands deface her. If a lover should ever win her heart he will certainly be entitled to it, by the supreme right of discovery. Her affection for Judge Kent absolutely rules her, and in one respect she is unique, she is as utterly incapable of flirtations as an unfledged owl."

"On account of the family connection you have been thrown so intimately into her society that I hoped you could tell me something of her religious tendencies."

"I am such a confirmed tramp that my visits to the family have been brief and interrupted by long absences. Eglah always appealed peculiarly to my sympathy because of the pathetic antagonism of her environment. Your cousin, Judge Kent, was very much disliked at the South, where sectional political rancor was, is, and will be rife, and his child suffered keenly on that account. When she came north to live, her social surroundings were even worse, because she furiously resented every reflection upon the people of the South, where the Maurices were conspicuous in war records. Her efforts at loyalty all around the circle have not made smooth sailing for her, and her motives were doubtless complex. You are curious about her 'religious tendencies'? If you are wise you will not stir any Calvary leaven into the pure sweet flour of her soul, unless you covet war *á outrance* with that nondescript personage Mrs. Mitchell—an anomalous blend, alert as a lynx, wary as a fox, stealthy as a cougar—who serves Eglah in divers and sundry capacities: an amalgamated foster-mother, housekeeper, maid, companion, chaperon, and confidante. She is a Simon-pure puritan, prim as Priscilla, and her processes of reasoning are quite as broad as the edge of a razor. That she viciously opposes all forms of 'ritualism' I happen to know from listening to a discussion between her and Eglah, in which the whole bundle of dogmas was thrashed out, from 'historic episcopate' and 'confession' to incense, candles, and 'reservation of the sacrament.' What a pile of chaff they built! Eglah's appreciation of sensuous beauty and classical music inclines her to gorgeous vestments, jewelled windows, and the rhythmic chanting of choristers that lift their chins like Raphael's cherubs, but Mrs. Mitchell finds in the severe simplicity of her own tabernacle an added sanctity, and your Calvary House will be to her that of Rimmon. In Rome Judge Kent had a touch of fever which frightened Eglah into telegraphing for me at Basle, where I was attending a scientific congress, so we came home together."

"If Eglah's enthusiasm could be aroused in our mission work, she would wield an incalculable power for good."

"Vernon—pardon the lapse into argot—'don't!' Let the child pick her own way to peace. She is not addicted to enthusiasms: one attack long ago destroyed her susceptibility to subsequent seizures; she can be enthusiastic over only one teraph—her father. Must you go? Wait a moment. Friendship is frank, and I am sorry to see you losing the vigor that in college days distinguished you. Fast less, and sleep more. Come home with me and hunt and fish and row, and let other people's souls enjoy a vacation."

As they shook hands Father Temple asked:

"And what have scientific congresses done for your soul, Noel?"

"Drawn me closer, I hope, to the Creator whose subtle and inexorable laws are best revealed to the faithful student that fearlessly analyzes His universal work. The sole aim of scientists is 'to admit nothing false, and to omit nothing true.' Vernon, have faith in me as of old, and keep a cell whitewashed for me at Calvary House. Truly—

> "So many paths lead up to God,
> 'Twere strange if any soul should miss them all."

With his hand on the stair rail the minister paused and looked back.

"One thing I wish to ask is whether Eglah had any special admirers abroad? American heiresses are attractive."

"She had as many beaux as she chose to permit. Two attachés of American legations were particularly attentive, and a handsome English naval officer whose father is a duke will doubtless cross the ocean to renew his acquaintance. Possess your soul in patience. Her heart is as sound asleep as when she dreamed in her crib, and the man who wakes and wins it will travel no macadamized road. Before Lent she will be in New York for a week, and when Congress adjourns the family will come to me on the Lake for a visit."

Given a man of thirty-three, unusually good-looking, possessing by inheritance a large fortune, dowered with infinite leisure upon which no professional duties laid intrusive claim, handicapped by no church obligations, and the world assumes that he has inevitably run the gamut of those iniquities set by Satan as snares for the idle rich. Intensely virile as was Noel Herriott, his polished placidity of manner and courteous conservatism masked in some degree the strength and tenacious obstinacy of a character that presented enigmatical phases to those who knew him best. Heredity and education had combined in kneading him physically, mentally, and morally along rather peculiar curves during the plastic period of boyhood, and the finishing touches that determined the mould came from his parting interview with his Presbyterian father, when Fergus Herriott sent him away to college.

"My son, God gave you a remarkably fine body. Neither neglect nor abuse it, but be sure you master it from the start, else you will be the slave of your own flesh. Bad habits are the leeches that would suck a Hercules to effeminacy. Steer as clear of the sins labelled "Thou shalt not" as you would of that leper island down in the Pacific. The ten commandments are equal links in the moral chain, and it is no man's privilege to pick and choose which he will break or which he will keep; because if he violates one, it is merely a question of temptation, necessity, and opportunity when he will transgress all. If he bears false witness and lies, he will steal money as he filched character; if he covets his neighbor's wife, the time comes when he murders her husband. *Falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus.* You are going where you will hear much fine talk about 'lofty, broadening, philosophic ideals' and 'progressive, altruistic standards of humanitarianism and honor.' Now mark you, God's laws are not 'progressive,' they are absolutely fixed, and when you are as old as I am you will have learned that 'man's honor,' unless based on them, is merely a sliding scale set up on a quicksand. My boy, try to lead such a clean life that when the mirror of records is held up to you in the final judgment you will not squirm and want to look the other way; and now, my last word is, you had the great misfortune to lose your dear, sweet mother in this world—be sure you deserve to find her in the next."

During the journey to college he found in his well-filled pocket-book a folded sheet containing additional memoranda in his father's cramped, old-fashioned writing.

"Be honest first, then generous—never wasteful. Pose on no pedestals and you will escape falls. Avoid priggishness, which is detestable mental dry-rot; and flee from cant, the convenient domino of hypocrisy. Cultivate genuine sympathy for all suffering humanity, and remember that a man's safest companion is his own conscientious, incorruptible self-respect."

Doubtless in the years that followed Noel realized that indeed

> "Souls were dangerous things to carry straight
> Through all the spilt saltpetre of the world;"

but that he succeeded fairly well might have been inferred from a certain scar on his throat, received while chastising two of his classmates who had caricatured him in doggerel under the title of "Sir Dandy Galahad." Misled by the quiet reserve of his manner, and an inborn courtesy that made him as good a listener as talker, strangers never suspected the existence of a temper fierce and, when fully aroused, well-nigh implacable. In his third collegiate year the death of his father left him untrammelled in the selection of a profession, and soon after he entered into possession of a fortune so large that its golden key would have opened the door of almost any career he might have chosen. His mental trend was toward scientific studies, and his dominant scheme of investigation embraced the elusive problems of anthropology. His individual and favorite hypothesis involved the genesis of aboriginal American man, and to secure all prehistoric and especially pre-glacial data he had attended post-collegiate lectures at several European universities, supplemented by sojourns in Central America, Pacific Islands, and British North America.

Since the death of his stepmother, Mr. Herriott had established temporary headquarters in New York in "apartments" not far from the old Herriott house, which by provision of his wife's will was now the property of Judge Kent. While the family of the senator usually remained in Washington, Eglah and Mrs. Mitchell frequently spent a week in New York, and on such occasions, if Noel chanced to be in the city, they relied upon him to serve as escort when needed. That he had successfully run the gauntlet of Eliza's years of cautious, suspicious observation, and finally commanded her admiring confidence, contributed in some degree to the easy *camaraderie* maintained between Eglah and himself: on her part a genuinely trusting friendship, pure and simple; on his that cool, watchful quietude that holds in leash the one deep passionate love of a strong nature and a lonely life. From the day he first saw the little quivering white-clad girl standing in the sunset glow that flooded the fragrant, flower-filled dining-room at Nutwood, he

had opened the empty temple of his heart, and where no image dwelt—save the memory of his father—he lifted this child to a pure altar, and offered silent homage.

CHAPTER VI

"Of course, Mr. Herriott, you are vastly amused by my ambitious pretension."

"Why Mr. Herriott? And why assume amusement which I certainly have not expressed?"

"Not verbally; but I quite understand that look in your eyes, when by sheer force of will you hold your lips from smiling. Only courtesy keeps in check your contempt for our 'higher education.'"

"Eglah, be a little more just in your generalizations. If the education be really 'higher' and thorough, no reasonable man could afford to disparage it. You have spent the morning over volumes of tedious statistics, extracting figures on *ad valorem* and 'specific' schedules that only a custom-house clerk or a tariff expert could utilize by eliminating nonessentials and compiling valuable tables. Why waste this perfect day over metric puzzles—dekameter, hectoliter, myriagram?"

"Father wished the exact figures, and to work for him is my greatest pleasure."

"Do not confound motive and accomplishment. Your father's secretary would have collected the statistics in half the time and in a more satisfactory form, simply because he has been trained for such search, as dogs are taught to hunt truffles."

"Mr. Metcalf was needed in Washington, and as father has tried me sufficiently to trust the accuracy of my work, he asked me to make this investigation while I was in New York. Mr. Noel, to help him even in trifles is my very life; he is my world, my all."

Mr. Herriott lifted his hat and bowed.

"Your devotion is beautiful and sacred, and Judge Kent should feel proud of the list of rivals he so successfully defies. Perhaps it has not yet occurred to him that in chaining yourself to his library desk you are restricted to sawdust diet."

"Varied now and then, you must admit, by banquets of opera, germans, receptions, teas, theatre parties, and the embassies. When I was working so hard at college I looked forward eagerly to 'coming out,' as to a magical door that would swing suddenly open into a wonderful world, where, because of new conditions, I should become a different person, and shed my girlish ideas as serpents slip their skins; but since the 'open sesame,' and I have 'arrived,' I seem to have lost nothing of the past, and my old, tiresome self is tyrannous as ever."

"Is social life in Washington disappointing?"

"That is scarcely the right term. Life is certainly very brilliant, and gay and panoramic, and I enjoy music and dancing, and some dinner parties; above all, I find keen pleasure in following a spirited debate in the House, or listening to speeches in the Senate, but sometimes I catch myself wondering if this is indeed all—the veritable kernel of society, politics, diplomacy, or merely the shell partly cracked. Life here and in Washington does not seem so absolutely real as it was at home, at Nutwood."

They were driving in Central Park, and Eglah shared the front seat of the trap where Mr. Herriott held the reins of his spirited horses, and brought them down to a steady, rapid trot. It was a cold but sunny day in February, and as he laced his way in and out of the stream of vehicles, he and his companion were the theme of much comment from the passing throng. Fastidious in the matter of clothes, he was always remarkably well dressed—a fact accentuated by his unusual height and erect carriage—and at the two fashionable clubs to which he belonged he was generally regarded "as all around, the best looking member." The dark steel-blue grey eyes—with no hint of yellow—which his Scotch father gave him, lost something of their penetrating brilliance under the long jet lashes that, with black brows and thick clustering hair, his mother had contributed, and his naturally clear olive skin had been weather-tanned in various climates to a browner tint. In profile his face resembled a bronze medallion, and when he smiled his well-cut lips, that in repose seemed ominously thin, showed curves of rare beauty around a faultless set of teeth. The sun of prosperity had ripened and mellowed his manhood, and, as yet, no acid of cynicism had invaded his nature.

Gowned in a fur-trimmed cloth of hunter's green, Eglah wore a velvet toque of same hue, that failed to conceal the mass of golden-brown hair burnished by sunshine into the similitude of a white-oak leaf dyed in autumn. Under delicate, level brows, her large dark eyes—*chataigne* in some lights, almost black at times—were set rather far apart in an oval face whose exquisitely clear, pure pallor was stained only by the healthy rich red of slender lips, that had a treacherous trick of quivering when any strong emotion stirred the deeps of her heart. By the accepted canons of art and cultured taste her form and features had been adjudged "beautiful," and some great-grandmother of the far South had dowered her with a peculiar grace of movement—not languid, nor sinuous, nor Delsartian—a natural idiosyncrasy that made the manner of her steps, the lifting of head and motion of hands, unlike other women's. Only one gift—most potent of all—

had been withheld from her birthright: she was absolutely devoid of personal magnetism, and her habitual cold indifference approached haughtiness, that the world resented. A certain aloofness of manner hedged her around even in the midst of the social whirl, and though in conversation the lovely eyes appeared to meet frankly those confronting hers, people were vaguely conscious that some veil was rarely lifted from their soft, shining depths.

Sudden congestion in the line of equipages, stretching far ahead, had caused a temporary halt, and when the knot dissolved, and the impatient horses sprang forward once more, Eglah said:

"I thought you loved good music too well to lose last night's opera treat, and until the final act I expected you."

"Shall I flatter myself that even in the midst of the select party occupying my box you really missed me?"

"Certainly I missed you—all the more because some of them chattered, and you would have hushed the tattle."

"Am I so successful in the rôle of ogre as to over-awe my guests in an opera box?"

"Your quiet way of setting an example of good breeding is sometimes contagious among thoughtless people."

"My lucky star is surely ascending: you have paid me two compliments, and I am puzzled to know whether I shall be expected to balance my account at *ad valorem* rates on the basis of your assessment or mine?"

"Oh, you and I established free trade long ago, and I can always tell you the truth without pausing to weigh words as do legation attachés, and as father does when wily lobbyists intercept him on his way from committee rooms. Mr. Noel, had you any special reason for absenting yourself? The lovely lilac orchids were, of course, far more ornamental in your empty chair, and you must not think me lacking in appreciation because I am so tardy in thanking you for them."

"An unexpected change in the date of a lecture given by one of my friends kept me away, when I had hoped to join you. As I had promised to attend, there was no alternative when a belated note informed me that last night had been selected for its delivery."

"Tell me about it."

"If I should so afflict you, most certainly you would vote me a bore, or fall asleep in self-defence."

"When you say that, you know curiosity always covets the forbidden."

"At your peril then! It was a monograph on the autochthonic origin of American races, and by way of ornamentation bristled with such graceful trifles as cephalic index, *brachycephalic*, and *dolichocephalic*, and was sprinkled with the curry of *Votanic* legends, and choice tid-bits from the Quiché *Popol Vuh* and from *Codex Chimalpopoco*! Sounds spicy, doesn't it? Piques your appetite for a larger slice?"

"No, thank you. Yet you preferred that tiresome jargon to listening to a superb tenor solo?"

"In a way—yes. We all ride hobby-horses from the nursery to the cemetery, and it is merely a question of individual taste what blood strain or pedigree we choose. My racing stable is not so generously supplied as yours, which embraces colts of various breeds: reports of fisheries commissions, bounties, American tonnage from 18— to 18—, and a vast——"

"Sarcasm does not fit you becomingly, Mr. Noel; it hangs askew, like a clown's cap on a cowl. What have you registered your own special toy, that you canter so vigorously around the world? Is it called ethnology, or totemism, or anthropology?"

"When I have finished trying all its gaits, and find the sum total satisfactory, I shall label it, and fit a comfortable side saddle and introduce you formally. Now, Miss Kent, come to confession. Did you see the list of passengers who arrived on yesterday's steamer from Liverpool?"

"I did not."

"Can you recollect a certain prophecy I made at Cowes, anent a handsome naval officer who entertained us at luncheon on his father's yacht?"

"Cassandra was a woman, and men should not trespass on the one feminine right of 'I told you so,' that has descended to us intact from Hecuba's daughter. But, Mr. Noel, if you mean——"

She turned and looked up into his eyes.

"Yes, I met him this morning at the club, where Ogden introduced him, and I saved him a useless journey to Washington by telling him you were here for a few days."

"I can only say I am sorry to hear it."

"While he is in New York I must, in part, return the hospitality shown us, and your father will pay the remainder of the debt in Washington. I have arranged a dinner for this evening, and later we shall see 'Hamlet,' then a supper afterward at Delmonico's. Will you join us at the theatre, if I call for you, bringing Mrs. St. Clair as chaperon?"

"Thank you, I much prefer not to be one of the party; besides, I have a previous engagement. I am going with my cousin, Vernon Temple, to a meeting of shop girls, a sort of night school established by some of his lady friends."

"What class does he teach?"

"I believe he 'talks' now and then on 'feminine arts,' and to-night there will be a lecture on lace making and tapestry guilds, illustrated of course by a sketch of the inevitable Matilda and the indestructible 'Bayeux.' I am trying to classify this new cousin, who seems to me a queer blend of mediæval monk, pre-Raphaelite reformer, and socialist. He is altogether unlike any one I ever knew, but his beautiful, sad face reminds me of a picture I saw in Munich—a young priest administering the viaticum to his dying sweetheart, whom he forsook for holy orders."

Lowering his eyelids, Mr. Herriott glanced keenly at her.

"You find Temple wonderfully magnetic at times?"

"Scarcely that. 'Magnetic' implies so much and really explains so little. When I see his ceaseless struggle to keep the heel of his spirit on the neck of his flesh, it suggests a fanatical rebellion against that equipoise God saw fit to establish. Like Joubert, 'he seems to be a soul that by accident met with a body, and tries to make the best of it.' My cousin Temple is fond of you."

"Despite much difference of opinion on many questions, our friendship has survived the 'storm and stress' period, and I honor a man whose battle cry for humanity is:

> "'Make trade a Christian possibility,
> And individual right no general wrong.'

Have you noticed the expression of Mrs. Mitchell's face when they happen to meet?"

"Haven't I! It is too funny to see her narrow her eyes and look at him as if he were some unclassified beast whose method of pouncing on his prey had not yet been warningly advertised. She is convinced he is an ecclesiastical infernal machine trying to wreck our family orthodoxy. I asked him——"

She stopped suddenly at sight of two gentlemen approaching on horseback, and Mr. Herriott smiled, as he whispered:

"Lo! the second son of a duke!"

CHAPTER VII

In a quiet and unfrequented cross street—equally remote from the thronged thoroughfares of trade and from fashionable avenues lined with palaces—stood the low and unpretentious Chapel of St. Hyacinth, marked by neither spire nor belfry. The old stone front receded sufficiently from the pavement to permit a short flight of shallow steps that led to an arched door in a pillared portico with a cross on its pointed roof, which hung over the entrance like a sullen, frowning brow. A northeast wind came fitfully in hissing blasts, dashed with fine sleet; but when Eglah passed through the swinging inner door a warm atmosphere spiced with resinous incense infolded her as in a fragrant mist, through which glimmered brass lattice screens, rows of tall candles, the gilded carving of the white altar, laden with lilies, and the marble statue of the Virgin, at whose snowy feet a red light burned in a silver lamp. On each side of the wall below the brass lattice that barred the chancel was a "confessional" of dark wood surmounted by a cross, and the clustered lights in the centre of the concave ceiling formed a crown.

On the right and left of the altar the white surpliced choristers filled several seats, and the quivering thunder of the organ ceased suddenly, as if to listen to the marvellous voice of the boy soloist, that swelled and rose as if the singer felt himself "hard by the gates of heaven." A slender child of ten years, grasping his music with waxen hands almost infantile in size, while his head, covered thickly with shining ripples of golden hair, was thrown back, and his blue eyes almost purplish, like a periwinkle, were raised in contemplation of the crown glowing above him. The colorless face was delicate and beautiful as if wrought out of ivory, and a certain pathetic sadness of expression inherent in fragile childhood was for the moment dominated by the radiant exultation of his wonderful eyes, that seemed made to dwell between the wings of a seraph.

Father Temple left the altar before which he had knelt in prayer, and advancing to the steps of the chancel, stood with one hand on the brass railing and briefly explained his unexpected presence. A telegram had summoned the rector of St. Hyacinth's to the deathbed of his father, and the request to officiate in his absence had been received too late to permit the preparation of a regular sermon; hence the patient indulgence of the congregation was invoked for some desultory remarks which might not prove entirely fruitless. After a few exordial sentences, he repeated slowly the opening ten verses from St. John xv., and waited a moment.

"For text let us consider: 'I am the true vine,' said our Lord, 'and ye, my brethren, are the branches.'"

Then followed a recitative of various selected passages from the "Sermon in the Hospital," in

tones so musical and liquid, and with a repose of manner so profound, yet full of subtle magnetism, that his audience gazed in sympathetic wonder at the slight figure clad in the sombre habit of his order—at the thin, pallid spiritual face where large, deep-set black eyes burned with the preternatural light of consecrated but consuming zeal. The folded arms attempted no gestures—what need, while that rhythmic wave of sound flowed on?—until the end, when the clasped hands were lifted in final appeal:

"... the Cross of Christ
Is more to us than all His miracles.

Thou wilt not see the face nor feel the hand,
Only the cruel crushing of the feet
When through the bitter night the Lord comes down
To tread the winepress. Not by sight, but faith,
Endure, endure—be faithful to the end."

Unconscious of his movement, and irresistibly drawn, the young soloist sitting in the front row of choristers had risen, and leaning far forward, looked up into the face of the priest, like one mesmerized, his parted lips trembling in a passion of ecstasy. Then the organ boomed, and the boy fell from paradise and joined the choristers chanting as they marched away behind the uplifted cross.

A lady stepped into the aisle and touched Eglah's arm.

"So glad to see you here, Miss Kent. Shall always welcome you to my pew. What a delightful elocutionary *tour de force* Father Temple gave us! He would make a fortune on the stage of secular drama."

"Yes. Fra Ugo himself could scarcely have been more impressive when he talked to the sick and dying on hospital cots. To my cousin Vernon this world is only a hospital of sick souls. Mrs. St. Clair, I should like to meet that little boy who sang so beautifully. Can you help me?"

"Very easily. Come back with me now to the vestry and we may find him. Did you notice how that lovely boy seemed almost hypnotized?"

Only two of the larger choristers lingered, chatting with the choirmaster, and as they turned toward the rear stairway leading to the street, Mrs. St. Clair exclaimed:

"Mr. De Graffenried, stop the boys. We want to see the soloist. Call him back."

"Madam, I think he is still in the chancel."

Lifting the velvet curtain that concealed the altar from their view, she beckoned Eglah to her side.

Father Temple had been detained by one of the church-wardens, and as he turned to hasten away the boy, standing near, caught the black skirt of the priest.

"Please, sir, may I speak to you?"

"Certainly. I am glad to be able to thank you for the music to-day. Your solo gave me great pleasure."

"I could have done better, but my throat is sore; it bled just now. I told nobody, because I am the only one who can reach that high C, and so I tried not to fail. I want to ask you how I can learn all the words you spoke? Oh, if I could, I would set them to a chant; they would lift my heart out of me if I could sing them."

"You shall have them. What is your name?"

"Leighton Dane."

Father Temple took his tablets from an inside pocket and made an entry.

"Where do you live?"

"Oh, a long way off. Far down in East —— Street; but, please sir, if you would leave the poetry here, I could get it at next rehearsal."

"My little man, how do you know it is poetry? The words do not rhyme."

"Rhyme? I do not understand that word—but I feel poetry. I always know it by the way my blood beats, and the little shiver that runs down my back, and the joy that makes me cry sometimes."

"I will send you a printed copy, in care of the rector. Dear child, God has given you a wonderfully sweet voice, and I am glad you use it in His service."

He laid his thin hand on the boy's golden head, and smiled down into the wistful blue eyes, where tears glistened.

The childish fingers, holding two snowy spikes of Roman hyacinth, were lifted and placed on the priest's hand, pressing it timidly against his curls.

"Thank you, sir. Please take these. They smell like the heavenly gardens, and I have nothing else

to give."

"Were they not on the altar?"

"Yes, I slipped out two from the cluster there."

"Then they belong to God. By what right do you touch sacred gifts brought to Him?"

"They were mine. I bought them last night and laid them yonder when I came to-day—and God can spare just two, when I have nothing else to pay you with. Did you—oh! did you think I—stole—them?" A sob shook him, and tears followed.

Father Temple stooped and drew the little white-robed form to him, pressing the head against his breast.

"Forgive me, I did not quite understand; and I am sure the dear Father knows what is in your grateful heart. God bless you and keep you. I shall put the hyacinths between the leaves of my Bible."

Eglah stretched an arm across Mrs. St. Clair's shoulder and dropped the curtain.

"Come away. Some other time I may talk to him, not now."

The following day Eglah returned to Washington, and two hours before the departure of the train she drove to Twenty-third Street, where she and Mrs. Mitchell usually made their purchases of damask, ribbon, and lace. While the latter bent over boxes of wools and crochet cottons, Eglah seated herself at the handkerchief counter. When she had selected the desired number, the saleswoman filled out her index sheet and rapped sharply with her pencil.

"Cash! Here, cash!"

Several minutes elapsed.

"These cash boys are so tiresome. Cash, cash! I had to report one last week. Cash—here he comes at last. Now, do hurry up; you are a regular snail."

In the boy who hastened away Eglah recognized the soloist of St. Hyacinth's, and noticed a bandage around his throat. When he came back with the parcel and counted the change into the palm of the saleswoman, Eglah touched his arm.

"I heard you sing yesterday, and want to tell you how much I liked your voice."

"Thank you, ma'am, I——"

A spell of coughing interrupted, and she noticed how wan and weary he looked, and how heavy were the greyish shadows under his lovely eyes.

"I am afraid you are not well to-day. Are you an orphan?"

"Oh, no. Mother is living, and she says a mother is worth forty fathers."

"Will you tell me her name, and where she lives?"

"Mrs. Nona Dane, and she has the glove counter at ——, Fourteenth Street."

At this instant the floor-walker strode forward, and a frightened expression crossed the boy's white face as he turned quickly, but Eglah laid a detaining hand on his head as, rising, she confronted the floor-walker.

"If he loitered it is not his fault; I kept him. If he missed a call I am to blame. Good-bye, Leighton; shake hands. When I come back to New York I hope to hear you sing again at St. Hyacinth's; and if I miss you here, I shall buy elsewhere."

His hot fingers quivered in her clasp, and, pressing a folded bill into his hand, she joined her foster-mother and left the store.

"What a frail, beautiful boy, and what genuine golden hair! Looks as if it had been dipped in a pot of gilt. Dearie, don't you think it a shame these young children are chained up in stores when they ought to be romping and playing ball?"

As their carriage turned from Twenty-third Street toward Broadway, that always crowded angle was even more than usually thronged, and during the brief pause Mr. Herriott came out of Maillard's with a box of bon-bons.

"I am just going to the ferry to wait for you. Are you not too early, or has my watch gone astray?"

"Come with us, Mr. Noel, we have ample room. Yes, it is early; but of course at the last minute I must needs shop on the way."

As he seated himself in the carriage he handed a package to Eglah.

"The latest Paris 'Revue,' and your favorite *marron glacé* and chocolate."

"Thank you heartily, for both. I wonder if I ever shall cease to be a spoiled child—in your eyes?"

"Whatever you may be in my eyes, you certainly will always remain."

"How discouraging, that you should feel quite hopeless of any improvement in me. Driver, I wish to stop in West Fourteenth Street, at ——. Gloves, Mr. Noel, always gloves."

"Will you bet a pair of best driving gauntlets that I cannot tell you exactly why you go there to-day?"

"Certainly; silk-lined, fur-tipped gauntlets. I told you my errand was gloves; pray what other reason?"

"You are going to get a glimpse of 'Juno.'"

"Juno? Nearly everything comes to New York sooner or later, but really I never imagined she could step out from the books of mythology. I hunt no goddess. When you pay your wager, be sure to select delicate fawn color, that will match my spring jacket."

"The debt is yours. Confess, Eglah—honor bright—you are curious about the woman who sells gloves in Fourteenth Street."

"I will present to you a witch's skirt, cap, and broomstick. But why 'Juno'?"

"The matter was thrashed out at the club last week, where Vandiver told us some artist had compared her to a print of the Ludovisi Juno hanging in Goupil's window. Hence her elevation to Olympus."

"Then you know all about her?"

"On the contrary, I never saw her; but she seems to be the magnet drawing people to——just now."

The carriage stopped, and Eglah walked into the department store.

"Come in, Mr. Noel, and pick out your gauntlets."

"Not to-day. Juno indulged in tricks that made even Jupiter keep one eye on her wiles, and I shall merely admire at a safe distance."

In front of the glove counter half a dozen women clustered, and on the outside of the group three men lounged—one evidently a foreigner, with bushy beard, coarse, hairy hands, and furtive eyes, small even behind very large spectacles. Among several busy saleswomen it was easy to discover the centre of attraction—a finely developed form, tall and graceful in every movement, and a face of surpassing beauty, lighted by dark violet eyes, flushed with the glow of perfect health, and crowned by a braided mass of glittering yellow hair heaped high on a shapely head, that held it as an empress wears her tiara. In its vivid coloring the face suggested a tropical flower, but, looking closer, one thought of a frozen tulip under a sheet of ice, so hard was the cold gleam of the defiant eyes and the proud compression of red lips that had forgotten how to smile, that seemed never to have known curves of tenderness. While Eglah waited, the foreigner leaned across the counter.

"Some black silk gloves. Number eight and a half."

"In the next room. Men's department."

"You got the papers for the league?"

"Yes, that is all arranged. Meeting will be at ten o'clock to-night. You can't talk here."

He touched the rim of his hat and walked away, and she looked toward Eglah.

"Grey kid gloves, stitched with white silk."

"What size?"

"Five and a quarter."

The voice had a sharp metallic ring, with an impatient inflection, and as she turned, lifting her arms to a box on an upper shelf, all the lovely outlines of her figure were shown most advantageously, and Eglah glanced over her shoulder at Mr. Herriott. He was watching the woman behind the counter with an intensely curious expression, as though disagreeably perplexed. She found the desired number.

"Shall I stretch them?"

"No, it is not necessary."

"Do you wish them fitted on your hands?"

"I will not give you that trouble. What is the price?"

"It is part of my business to fit them. Two dollars and a quarter. Here, cash!"

Eglah's desire to mention the chorister of St. Hyacinth's was quickly extinguished by the pronouncedly repellent bearing that plainly proclaimed all intercourse must be restricted to the business of the counter, and as she returned to the carriage, Mr. Herriott said:

"Well, you college girls are nothing if not severely classical, so I presume you will offer a ewe

lamb, all garlanded with willow and dittany, and prinked out in pomegranate blossoms, on the Junonian altar."

"I am glad Jove tied her hands and hung her up above the earth and below the heavens, with anvils on her ankles, where she could do no more mischief. That goddess of yours has the most cruelly cold, hard face I ever looked at, and yet—in a way—so beautiful. Evidently she has not even the shadow of a soul—must have given it all to that angelic boy? What is her history? Of course she has one."

"It has been said happy women have none, and in this case adversity must have curdled very early the stream of her youthful joys. Vandiver investigated her—from a distance he says, as she froze him when he attempted acquaintanceship. He has a protégé in the constabulary who learned through police channels all that she will allow to be known of her life. Some years ago she drifted here from the far West—part of the human flotsam annually stranded in this city, and she found work in a cloak manufactory. Later she incited a strike among the cloak cutters, which resulted disastrously for the workers, and when all the strikers submitted, she alone was refused re-employment, and doors were closed against her. She secured a position in a large bric-à-brac establishment, but when a valuable antique vase disappeared, she was suspected and arrested. While in prison a day and night awaiting trial, the vase was found in a pawnbroker's shop, and the colored porter of the bric-à-brac dealer acknowledged the theft. The firm very honorably made ample public retraction of the unjust charge, and endeavored to compensate and appease the injured woman, but she shook the dust of the house from her feet and betook herself to Brooklyn. Recently she accepted her present place."

"Do you mean to imply that she is—is—Bohemian?"

"That depends upon your interpretation of a very flexible term. I am told she conducts herself with strict propriety, reports Mr. Dane dead, and receives attentions from no one; but she is avowedly a socialist of the extreme type: belongs to labor organizations, attends their meetings, makes impassioned addresses, and, in fine, is a female Ishmael whose hands are much too pretty for such savage work. Did you notice an odd-looking, shambling man with preposterous spectacles who spoke to her? He is an agent of a band of Russian Nihilists seeking aid from sympathizers here. She is reported as possessing some education, advocates 'single-tax' and all the communistic vagaries that appeal to the great mass of toiling poor, the discontented and morose, as colored balloons captivate the fancy of children at a circus door. She frequents a hall down on the East Side, where at night the clans of the disgruntled assemble, and long-haired men and short-haired women—who absolutely believe that the only real 'devil is private property'—denounce wealth and preach their gospel of covetousness. Here we are at the ferry, and just in time to meet the boat."

CHAPTER VIII

Distinctly a *poseur*, Senator Kent had studied his physical good points with sufficient attention to establish the habit of exhibiting them advantageously, and to-night, as he leaned back in his easy chair, persons who knew him well understood that the fine leonine head was always turned adroitly to the right because a defect in one drooping eyelid found semiconcealment in the shadow of nose and brow. Political and financial prosperity had prevented or erased the lines that usually mark countenances of men of his age, and his smooth, handsome smiling face seemed to defy and rebut the testimony offered by grey hair and white mustache.

Suave and conciliatory, tactful yet tenacious of purpose, a carefully cultivated air of frankness ambushed subtle craftiness that rarely failed to accomplish schemes which the unwary never suspected. Unhampered by scruples, he had scaled the heights of success, climbing the ladder of cautious expediency, and claiming allegiance only to principles and policies that beckoned from the rung just above his head. Proverbial good nature, voiced by a musical, hearty laugh, won him social popularity, and even in congressional debate he never laid aside the polished armor of imperturbable courtesy. Despite the keen scrutiny of Eliza Mitchell during many years of intimate association, his character had remained a baffling enigma, and her suspicious distrust was allayed, in some degree, by his genial equanimity and amiable abdication of control in domestic details. That he wore a mask she had always believed, yet it fitted so perfectly she could not penetrate the steel mesh, and in no unguarded moment had its springs loosened.

The luxuriously furnished library was bright and warm with fire glow and gas light, and sweet with the breath of white azaleas heaped in a pale-pink bowl on the low mantel shelf. Only the click of the typewriter disturbed the stillness until Eglah rose from the instrument, covered it, and numbered the written pages, arranging them in a sheaf.

"All ready now, father, and Mr. Metcalf can incorporate these tables in the report you will need to-morrow. Do you wish to verify the figures?"

"Not necessary, my dear. You are usually accurate."

"Thanks for the sugar plum. You know exactly how sweet is your praise."

Coming forward, she sat down on the carpeted foot-board attached to his reclining chair, leaned

her head against his knee, and stretched her fingers toward the fire. He laid one large dimpled hand on her shoulder, and she turned her cheek to touch it. After the lapse of some minutes the clock struck, and Eglah sprang up.

"Barely time to dress for the Secretary's dinner! Has the carriage been ordered?"

"Yes. I can doze a while longer, as I have to change only my coat, vest, and tie."

"Eglah, do you need my help in dressing, or will Octavia suit you best?" asked Mrs. Mitchell, who sat at a small table near the hearth, matching silk squares for an afghan.

"You can revise me finally, and punctuate me with additional pins when I come down. Don't let father oversleep himself."

Senator Kent straightened the folds of his padded dressing-gown, and through half-closed eyes watched the small hands hovering over silken scraps, and wondered, as he had often done before, what manner of man could have been the "overseer" husband for whom this grave, pretty, reticent, demure widow still mourned in black garments, relieved only by narrow white ruches at her throat and wrists.

The clock ticked softly, and the senator seemed asleep, when the ringing of the door bell roused him. Some moments passed before the library door opened and a servant entered.

"A note, sir. It was laid on top of the bell knob, and the messenger did not wait, for I looked up and down the street."

"Evidently of no importance, else the delivery would not have been so careless."

He lazily took an envelope from the silver salver and held it up.

"Senator Allison Kent,
Washington, D. C.

"*Strictly Personal.*"

Both the address and contents were type-written.

Intent on her patchwork, Eliza was bending over a mass of scarlet satin ribbon, when a strange sound startled her: not a cry, nor yet a groan—an anomalous smothered utterance of pain, as from a strong animal sorely stricken.

He had struggled to his feet, and the large, heavy body swayed twice, then righted itself, and he stood staring blankly at the red lily dado on the opposite wall, as though their crimson petals spelled some such message as foreshadowed doom to Babylon. One hand crushed the letter into an inside pocket of the dressing-gown, the other clutched his mustache, twisting it into knots.

The swift, inexplicable change of countenance could be compared only with the startled alertness of a drowsing fox when his dim, snug covert echoes the first far-off blast of the coming hunter's horn. In every life some alluring vision of Arden beckons and beguiles, and to this successful man, basking in the golden glamor of a satisfying attainment of his aim, came suddenly an ominous baying of the bloodhounds of retributive destiny.

"You have bad news, Judge Kent?"

He made no answer, and she seized his arm.

"What is the dreadful news that distresses you?"

As he turned his eyes upon her, all their light and color seemed faded to a dull glassiness, and his voice shook like a hysterical woman's.

"News—did you say? No—I have received no news. None whatever."

"Then what ails you? I shall call Eglah."

She turned, but he clutched her skirt.

"For God's sake, don't ever tell her! Why grieve the child? The truth is—" He caught his breath, and a sickly smile showed how his mouth trembled, as he swept his hand across his brow.

"You are sick?"

"Oh, yes—sick; that is it exactly. Sick—sick indeed. Some oysters I ate, and cheese; later I very foolishly drank ale."

"Then, sir, you must go to bed, and Eglah will send an explanation of your unavoidable absence from the dinner."

Upstairs a door was opened, and a sweet, girlish voice trilled two bars of a Venetian barcarolle.

Judge Kent threw out his arms appealingly.

"I must go to-night. For God's sake, don't let her know anything! Say nothing. I shall tell her I was a little faint from indigestion. Vile compound—oysters, ale, Roquefort! Promise me to hold your tongue; not for my sake, but hers. I am obliged to attend this dinner, and it would spoil her

evening if she knew how deadly sick—I—really was a moment ago. Promise me."

"Very well. I suppose you know best what concerns you most. I promise."

"You are the only woman I ever knew upon whom I could rely to hold her tongue. Now, quick as you can, bring the decanter of brandy to my room. Amuse the child with her frills and finery while I dress. I must have a little time."

When she carried the brandy to his door, the hand that grasped it was icy, and the other tugged ineffectually at his white tie.

Humming her boat-song, Eglah trailed silken draperies down the winding stairs and into the library, where she courtesied low to Eliza and swept her train—like a peacock's plumes—up to the grate, putting one slippered foot on the brass fender.

She was gowned in green crêpe of an uncommon tint, that held multitudinous silvery lights in its crinkled texture, and when she moved they glistened and played hide and seek in the clinging folds. Around her fair, full throat a rope of emeralds coiled twice.

"Am I all right—ready for publication and criticism? The damp weather makes my hair so curly I can scarcely keep it in line. Ma-Lila, the clasp of my necklace feels a little rickety, so I must ask you to move it around in front, and cover it securely with this."

She held out a diamond butterfly, and Eliza fastened it in the gold-wire links of the emerald chain. As she settled the jewels in place, she stooped and kissed one lovely white shoulder.

"Solemn little mother! I know exactly what you are thinking. That I am as frivolous a creature as grandmother's heirloom butterfly? You should not lose sight of the psychic symbolism of this much slandered and despised insect. Little white butterflies whose wings are all powdered with shining star-dust are the souls of babies——"

"Pagan nonsense that I won't listen to. Moreover, you ought to be ashamed to jest about your immortal soul as if it were yours exclusively—to play with as you would a ball."

"You darling Puritan! If you do not unlace yours it surely will smother. Really, I thought it was orthodox to believe that in the very last analysis and final adjustment of personal property one's own soul was one's solitary chattel that defied and survived the confiscation of death. Motherkin, don't scold! Kiss me good night, and help me with my cloak, so that I shall not muss all this lace jabot. Is not father ready?"

Eliza laid her long, white velvet cloak around her and tied the ribbons under her chin.

"What keeps father so long? I heard the front door bell ring; is there a visitor?"

"No visitor. Only some document left for the Judge. He is dressing."

Eglah went to the door of an adjoining room and rapped.

"Father, we shall be late. Unpardonable, you know, at a formal dinner."

"Almost ready. Old men need more time for repairs than young beauties."

When he came in, walking briskly, with his overcoat on his arm, Eliza saw that he had rallied surprisingly. Brandy reinforced his nerves, and the cautious, defensive tactics of a lifetime availed now to readjust and restore his equipoise of manner. A flush showed on the full cheeks, and his eyes shone like those of a cat in some dim corner.

"Inexcusably late, father! What can we say?"

"Come, my dear; leave that to me. I shall simply apologize by telling the truth—a spell of indigestion delayed me, but I felt sure one of the Secretary's famous cocktails would rejuvenate me."

Women, secure in their heritage of personal charms, resent as the most unpardonable of affronts to their mental acumen explanations that do not explain, and Mrs. Mitchell was thoroughly exasperated by the flimsiness of the deception which she was expected to accept with unquestioning credulity. Silence under strenuous conditions she could have condoned, because it left her the resource of conjecture; an honest confession of vitally grave business complications she would have regarded as confidential, and loyally held inviolate, but "oysters, ale, and Roquefort" was a stinging challenge to her feminine intuitions. Judge Kent's arrested assertion: "The truth is—" recalled Mrs. Maurice's estimate of his veracity when she had applied to him the sarcasm: "He holds truth too precious to be wasted on everybody." That he cowered under some unexpected blow she was quite sure, but her solicitude included him only as his interests involved Eglah's welfare, and any intimation of coming disaster fluttered this foster-mother, as the faint, grey shadow of a hawk high in the heavens startles a hen into signalling her brood. Ignorant of the quarter whence trouble might approach, how could she shield Eglah, whose safety had been committed to her guardianship? Had she the right to discover the contents of a note that "contained no news"? Did his falsehood entitle her to pry into his correspondence? All the smothered distrust of years was acutely intensified, and she rose and walked to his room. A bright light shone through the transom, but when she turned the bolt she found the door locked. During her residence in the house this precaution had never before been taken, hence she knew the note had not been destroyed. Returning to the library, she rang the bell, and the butler

responded promptly.

"Have you locked up the silver? Bring me the key. Close the house for the night. Judge Kent will be out late. Tell Octavia to have good fires upstairs, and then she need not wait for Miss Eglah, as I shall sit up till she comes; and, Watson, you can go home. Should the front door bell ring, I shall be here."

More than once she had suspected that the senator was interested in financial speculations, and, though Eglah's fortune had been carefully tied up beyond his reach, she began to fear he might by some devious process jeopard it. "Hypothecating securities" was a bristling phrase she had never quite comprehended, but it symbolized an ogre she must outwit.

In one corner of the library stood a tall, brass-mounted chiffonier filled with papers, and above it hung an engraving. Behind, and entirely concealed, was a door opening into a small bathroom that formed an alcove in the senator's apartment. After an hour had passed, Mrs. Mitchell placed her shoulder against the chiffonier, that rolled easily on its castors, and she slipped behind it. There was no key in the lock, but a slender steel bolt slid horizontally under her hand, and the door opened a few inches only, barred by a table, which she succeeded in pushing aside. Lifting the portière inside, she entered the sleeping-room, and found the *robe de chambre* hanging over the back of a chair. The pockets were empty, the drawers of the bureau locked, but under the pillow on the bed she thrust one hand and drew out the object of her search. It contained neither date nor signature, and was type-written in purple ink on thin paper bearing no water-mark.

> "A friend to you and to yours believes it a genuine kindness to inform you that the identity of 'Ely Twiggs' has been discovered, and hopes an early knowledge of this fact may be useful to you."

She replaced the note beneath the pillow, returned to the library, and rolled back the chiffonier. After all, she had ended her quest in a cul-de-sac. Turning the gas jets low, she sat watching the blue flicker that danced like witch-lights in the grate, and once she smiled at her own discomfiture, realizing that her attempt was futile as would be the trial of a Yale key to open a "combination" vault lock, the arrangement of which was unknown. Keenly alert, she heard the rattle of the night-latch, the closing of the front door, and, after a moment, Judge Kent came slowly into the room. At first he did not notice her presence, and in this brief unguarded interval she saw the countenance without its habitual mask—a face gloomy, perturbed, unnaturally flushed, with restless eyes gleaming like those of a jaded, hunted forest animal.

"Ah—Mrs. Mitchell! Sitting up for Eglah? Didn't she tell you she was going from the dinner to the cotillon? Herriott will see her home. It is a shame to have kept you up, but girls are so thoughtless."

"Eglah is never that, and I knew she would be late at the cotillon. I waited downstairs solely to see you."

"Very kind, I am sure; but I feel much better, thank you. Indeed, I may say I have fully recovered from that sudden, intolerable spell of nausea. You are very good to worry over that little attack, but pray think no more about it. I shall abjure Welsh rarebit and oysters in future. At my time of life, pneumogastric nerves get their innings."

Brightening the light in the gas globe over the mantel, she approached and confronted him.

"Judge Kent, I am not 'worrying' over the condition of your digestive organs, but I do feel deeply interested in the nature of the trouble that has come upon you so unexpectedly, and I cannot sleep until I tell you what I have done to-night. Whatever injures you wounds Eglah, and solely on her account I felt justified in taking a step that no weaker motive could have sanctioned. I sat up to tell you that when I found you would not trust me with the truth, I hunted it by reading the note that fell this evening like a bombshell. I have no hesitation in confessing the fact. I am here for that purpose."

She set her small, white teeth grimly and clasped her hands behind her.

He looked down at her, as a mastiff at a barking pug, and, throwing back his head, laughed heartily, clapping his hands softly.

"Bravo, Methodist burglar! You seem an expert, and find locked doors no barrier. What would Eglah think of your breaking into my room, and into my correspondence?"

"Shall we ask her? Only my promise not to mention this matter to her prevents me from telling her as quickly and frankly as I have told you. May I speak to her?"

"Madam, you possess an arsenal of mental reservations, and I doubt whether you can keep a promise."

"I can be silent against my will, and even in defiance of my judgment. Try me."

"Then consider yourself on probation. Where is my hoax of a note?"

"Under your pillow, where you left it."

His eyes twinkled, and his voice shook as with suppressed laughter.

"A woman's curiosity cost us Eden. My dear little lady, what did you discover in my anonymous

letter?"

"That 'Ely Twiggs' is a terrible menace to your peace of mind."

"Would you like a translation of that ugly occult phrase? It is merely a telegraphic cipher. You have conjured up a malignant chimera; rest assured it is only a dingy red-paper balloon, with a flickering taper inside. Good night. Pray allow no compunctious qualms to disturb the peace of your Methodist conscience."

"No church is responsible for errors of its members, and I wish I could believe it possible that your Episcopal conscience will allow you a night of refreshing sleep. For my dear child's sake, I hoped you would confide in me, and I regret that you withhold the truth. Good night, sir."

"Little foster-mother, remember your promise."

He held out his hand, but she declined the overture and walked away.

"My Methodist promise will bear any weight laid on it."

Without premonition, a sudden storm had swept over the city that night, and at two o'clock, when Eglah and Mr. Herriott went down the steps to enter their carriage, the stone pavement held tiny pools and rills of water.

"Wait, Eglah, your slippers will be soaked."

"I can run across on tiptoe."

"You shall not! Permit me."

He stooped, lifted her from the lower step, and placed her on the cushioned seat.

"How strong you are!" she said, laughing, as he entered the carriage and sat down opposite, not beside her.

"Physically—yes. If my force of will equalled my nerves and muscles, I should be a much happier man."

"Infirmity of will? You,—the most obstinate man I ever met! How little you know yourself!"

"You are so sure you read me aright, perhaps you understand why all the strength of my manhood has not saved me from staking my earthly hopes on a venture that may be fatal. Can you explain?"

"Is it some scientific scheme? Some theory that may prove a delusion?"

"It is simply the possibility that the woman I love will not give me her heart. Eglah, I have been patient. I wished you to see and know other men—to form your own ideal, to compare me with some more brilliant and attractive—before I asked for your love. Since the day I first saw you—a grieved child—at Nutwood, my heart has been entirely yours, and all my future is gilded with the hope of a home in which you will reign as my wife. I bring you the one unshared love of my life. May I have the blessed assurance that you will accept it?"

For some seconds Eglah neither moved nor spoke; then she slipped down on her knees and laid her head on his hands, that were folded together.

"Mr. Noel—dear Mr. Noel—I will never marry. Only one man in all the world is necessary to my happiness, and he is my father. What you tell me now is a surprise—a painful surprise to me—because I never thought of you as of some who flattered and even some who have asked my hand. You were always my best friend, my wise, sympathetic companion, and I never could think of you as desiring or needing any woman's affection. You have seemed unlike other men I meet in society, and I believed you cared most for books and scientific experiments, though I thought you always felt a very kind, friendly, brotherly interest in me. Oh, I am so sorry you have uttered such words to-night! You must know I am not like other women in our circle, and I have no intention of marrying. If I should select any man to love it might be you, because I respect and trust you so profoundly; but that could never happen to me. What have I inadvertently done to make you misjudge my feelings? You must forgive me. I never suspected."

As she pressed her face against his hands he felt her lips trembling, and his struggle for self-control was short and fierce. After a moment, he raised and replaced her on the seat and sat beside her.

"I can reproach only myself for a delusion that costs me more than you will ever know. In my loneliness the dream was so beautiful. I could not resist its fascination. Dear little girl, you are the only one I ever wished or asked to be my wife, and because you are so precious to me I will not surrender my hope, unless you force me. Remember the long years I have waited for you. In time, perhaps, you might learn to care for me. May I entreat you to try?"

"Mr. Noel, I trust you, I admire you—in a way I feel attached to you—but I must tell you the truth. I shall marry no one, not even you."

"Then I shall never repeat my folly. Be sure I will vex you no more; but there is something you can do to lessen my pain. If trouble or disaster or sorrow overtake you, will you promise to confide in me, to allow me to share it, as if I were indeed that elder brother you have tried to believe me?"

"Yes, Mr. Noel. After father I will always turn next to you, and you must not condemn me because, unintentionally, I have been so unfortunate as to hurt you."

"For several reasons I wish your father to know at once all that has been said to-night. He is aware of my intentions, and kind enough to approve them. One final request I trust you will not refuse me. The visit to my house on the Lake has been definitely arranged, and I particularly desire that no change of plan should be made. Henceforth no word of mine will ever recall this interview, and during your stay under my roof I assure you no allusion to my dead hopes shall annoy you. Trust me, and come."

The carriage stopped at Senator Kent's door. As Mr. Herriott led her up the steps, she noticed he barely touched her arm, and when he rang the bell she caught his hand between both of hers.

"Dear Mr. Noel—you do forgive me?"

A neighboring lamp shone full on his handsome face, pale and set, and a sudden consciousness of the unusual charm of his noble personality thrilled her. Withdrawing his hand, he held it behind him, and, as he looked down at her, his lips twitched.

"You have done me no wrong by simply following the true, womanly dictates of your pure heart. Marriage without genuine love is a degradation to which you could never stoop. I will love you always, always; but I find it hard to forgive myself for making utter shipwreck of a man's dearest aim in life. Good night."

As Mrs. Mitchell opened the door, he turned away and went swiftly into the street.

"Eglah! What is the matter? You are crying."

"How can I help it when I have hurt the noblest man in all the world—except father? My one true friend, who never failed to be good to me!"

"You have refused to marry Mr. Herriott? My baby, you will never find his equal. Your father can scarcely forgive this defeat of his pet scheme, dating from the time you were ten years old."

CHAPTER IX

"Herriott, I owe you an apology for coming so late, but feel quite sure you will pardon a delay that was unavoidable. I have kept your dinner waiting half an hour."

"No matter, provided you bring an appetite that can defy overdone fish. I am glad it is only delay, and not total failure. Vernon, you look so spent, may I venture to offer your reverence a tonic—club-labelled 'cocktail'? It is the best antidote I dare suggest for the slow method of suicide you have adopted."

"Thank you—no."

"Then come in to dinner."

"I wasted the whole afternoon trying to find a boy down on the East Side, but when at last I reached the house I was told he had moved from that neighborhood. He is a soloist at St. Hyacinth's, and I had promised him a booklet."

"Leighton Dane?"

"Yes. What do you know of him?"

"That he will sing no more at St. Hyacinth's. Henceforth his solos belong to choirs beyond the stars. The boy is slowly dying of consumption."

"When did you see him?"

"A few days ago. He is at No. 980 —— Street, Brooklyn. Your cousin Eglah asked me to keep an eye on him. Poor little lad! His battle with pain and loneliness is pathetic, and I rather think the end is not far off."

"Loneliness? Who takes care of him?"

"His mother is away all day at her work, but an old German and his wife living on the same floor of the tenement look after him as best they can."

"Could you deliver the book to him?"

"If you wish it; but why not make another effort to see him?"

"My hands are so full. In two days I must run down to Washington, and then back home, where I am needed. How luxurious your quarters are! Less like a bachelor's den than one would expect."

"Next week I give up these rooms, and when I chance to be in the city shall live at the club."

"Is not this decision rather sudden?"

"No. For some time I have contemplated another expedition to Arizona and Montana, in quest of prehistoric records needed for an anthropological paper that Professor De Wette asked me to contribute to the next volume of Reports."

"What date have you fixed?"

"About the middle of July, immediately after the visit to 'Greyledge,' which Senator Kent and Eglah have promised as soon as Congress adjourns. I am sorry you could not arrange to join the small 'house party,' and rest yourself by fishing in the Lake, instead of the turbid pools of humanity."

"What about Calvary House? We expect you there."

"That pleasure must be deferred; but I have thought a good deal about your need of more ground there, and believe I have found just what you want. Come into the library, it is cooler, and I have some papers for you. You know the Ravenal lands—some twenty acres—lie across "Tangled Brook," west of your lines. The property was sold recently by the trustees and my agent bought it. Now you can easily bridge the stream, using the foundation of the old paper-mill dam, and by extending your fences cover the whole. I know the old farmhouse was burned years ago, but those pasture lands are fine, and that hill sloping south will make a good vineyard. Here are all the papers, and my deed to the Brotherhood. Stop! No thanks, not a word, or I cancel the transfer. Some day, when I visit you, I may not be welcome, because I promise you now, if your stewardship does not suit me and things seem mismanaged, I will most certainly turn you all out."

Father Temple laid the bundle of papers on the table and grasped Mr. Herriott's hand, pressing it warmly, but something in the bright, steady grey eyes warned him to attempt no verbal expression of gratitude.

His host lighted a cigar, and drew from a stand near his elbow a portfolio tied with purple tape.

"Does your reverence ever waste time now in sketches and water-color?"

"Life is far too strenuous for such trifling."

"How do you know that some day you will not be required to dig up that buried talent and answer the charge of neglecting to bring in the expected interest? Nature intended you for one of her artistic interpreters, and if you had been loyal to her commission you might rank to-day as R.A. Last summer I was searching an old trunk for a college text-book, when I happened to find some of your drawings, that were packed by mistake with my luggage in the bustle of leaving the university."

From the pile of loose sheets he held up one, and, after a moment's survey, in which he turned it at various angles, he handed it to his guest.

Father Temple was leaning back in a cushioned arm-chair, and against the violet velvet background his pale, placid, scholarly face was sharply silhouetted. Listlessly raising the sketch sidewise, so that a gas jet on his left shone upon it, he looked at it. The profound repose that habitually rested on his countenance broke up swiftly, as a sleeping pool shivers when a stone is hurled into its motionless depths. His lips whitened, and he laid the paper as a screen over his eyes. Mr. Herriott crossed the floor to the door of the dining-room, and, loitering deliberately, ordered coffee. When he came back, followed by a servant bearing coffee and liqueurs, the priest was standing at an open window, and in the clenched fingers of the hands clasped behind him the sketch quivered as though shaken by the wind.

"Close the door, Hawkins, and when I want you I will ring. Come, Vernon; I remember your fondness for coffee, and this is good and piping hot."

The thin figure in the girded cassock shook his head and leaned out of the window, staring up at the golden stars throbbing above the roar and din of the crowded street.

After some minutes, during which the host rattled cups and glasses, Father Temple walked up and down the room, then came back to the table. The despairing sorrow in his deep, soft eyes made Mr. Herriott rise instantly.

"Vernon, have I wounded you by my reminiscent babble of college days?"

Without a word, the arms of the priest were lifted to the man towering over him, and he laid his head on the shoulder of one who had never failed him.

"Temple, forgive me, dear old fellow, if I have broken rudely into some sacred, sealed chamber."

"You have done me a priceless kindness in restoring my picture, but with it comes the hour of humiliation I always knew must sooner or later overtake me. Noel, your good opinion is so

precious to me I shrink from losing it. I have dreaded your condemnation next to that of my God. You always trusted and respected me, even in what you deemed foolish monkish extremes, and yet—and yet——"

"Sit down, and pull yourself together. You have fasted and prayed your starved nerves into a fit of womanish hysteria. I am no father confessor for you, and if you are not the true, loyal man I have believed you all these years, then, while you are under my roof, I prefer not to find out that you are a hypocrite."

He pushed his friend back into the easy chair, and handed him a glass of chartreuse, but it was put aside.

"Noel, you must hear me. After the first bitterness I shall feel relieved that you know literally all I can tell, and then you will understand many things in my life. To-day I am what I am, simply and solely in the hope of expiating the sin of my youth. Noel, the sin of my youth found me out early, and this life I lead is an attempted atonement. Do you begin to understand?"

Mr. Herriott held up the sketch, and, as he struck it sharply with his fingers, his face darkened.

"Whose portrait is this?"

"The woman—the young girl—whose life I blighted."

"Good God! Blighted? Is your villainy so black?"

"I am Father Temple, vowed to celibacy, and somewhere in the wide, cruel world a wife and child of mine may have gone down to perdition because I was a coward—a vile coward, too base for a brave man to recognize. I knew you would despise me, and I kept silent as long as I could. Do you wonder?"

Mr. Herriott stood over him like an avenging Viking.

"You betrayed a woman? Wife, or victim of——"

"Both. I married and I deserted her."

"The marriage was legal—no swindling sham?"

"Legal in form, though I was a minor and she a mere child."

"And you ensnared her deliberately, intending to——"

The priest sprang to his feet and his eyes flashed.

"I loved her, and married her secretly, and intended no wrong; but before I could publicly claim her—before I was of age and dared to face my father with the fact of my marriage—I lost her. She disappeared as completely as if the ocean rolled over her."

"Is this the unvarnished truth? There is nothing worse, nothing more heinous than what you have told me?" Mr. Herriott breathed quickly, as his keen, cold eyes searched severely the wan face before him.

"I have told you the whole, bitter truth."

"Then I have not entirely lost my friend. Now sit down; begin at the beginning of this black business, and let me try to share your load of trouble. Don't hurry—be explicit. Keep back nothing. If you intended no wrong, there must and shall be found some way to right it."

"Too late! If you take a white flower and inhale its perfume, and then carelessly drop it where hurrying crowds are sure to trample it into the dust, what hope that, search as you may, you will ever find it, or, finding it, be able to restore the torn, soiled, ruined petals? Wherever she is, no matter what she has become, what sin and shame stain and defile her, she is my wife. I swore before God I would take her for my wife, 'for better, for worse,' and though it is my fault—and mine only—that I did not publish the marriage, I have kept my vows, and am dedicated to life-long celibacy. My boyish cowardice—what awful shipwreck it has made of two lives! You want the details? It is a shameful story, but not long. In the early summer of my nineteenth year I spent vacation in the far Northwest, at an advanced army station, Post ——, where father was in command of his regiment. Hunting was fine but dangerous, as Indians on the frontier were ugly just then, and several tribes were painting for the war path. One hot afternoon, tramping back to camp with my rifle on my shoulder, I went down a steep, wooded hill to drink at a spring, and as I parted the thick growth I saw a cow chewing her cud, while a bare-footed girl stooped and milked into a cedar pail. She sprang up, much alarmed, and stood against a glowing background of scarlet rhododendrons. Her calico bonnet had fallen off, her sleeves rolled up showed her white, dimpled arms, and all over her head and shoulders the gold-colored hair was twisted into little curls and waves and tendrils that glittered like gilt wire. As she stared at me with large purplish-blue eyes, her bright red lips trembled, and—" He paused, and involuntarily wrung his thin white hands.

"I had seen handsome women, and many lovely girls, but never so exquisite a creature as this, and from that moment I lost reason, prudence, everything but conscience, and my heritage of honorable instincts. Nona Moorland was the daughter of a teamster attached to father's command; a brutal, rough man, whose second wife—a selfish, jealous virago—made the step-

daughter's life a cruel burden. They occupied a log cabin just outside the Post parade grounds, and the girl was never allowed in sight of drill lines except when under convoy of the stepmother she assisted in carrying to headquarters the freshly laundered clothes of the officers. Having been forbidden, under threat of corporeal punishment, to speak to or be seen with any soldier, save in her father's cabin, she was terrified at the danger of a discovery of our acquaintance; hence our interviews were secret, and adroitly arranged to elude suspicion. Her extraordinary personal beauty and gentleness of deportment more than compensated for illiteracy and humble origin, and after a few days I planned a clandestine marriage, to which she readily assented. The Post chaplain had made a pet of me, because I aided him in some botanical and geological tramps close to the frontier, and finally he consented to help us, provided his agency was never betrayed. We both swore we would not divulge his name or knowledge of our scheme, and so one starry night he and Hill, a private soldier who went as witness, stole out, and met Nona and me in a dense grove of trees near Moorland's cabin. There we were married according to the ritual of the Episcopal Church. I was not quite nineteen, she a slender girl just past her fifteenth birthday. Under the quiet stars that shone as our altar lights, we took solemn, life-long vows as husband and wife, and there, when a written certificate had been given to Nona, we all joined hands and pledged ourselves in the sight of God to keep the secret until I was of age, or thought it prudent to publish the marriage. To her I meant no more wrong than to myself, and kept to the form of law, knowing we were minors, and that no license legalized the ceremony which I believed and argued the Church sanctified. You knew my father sufficiently well to remember how terribly stern he was, how morose he often seemed, and I dared not defy him. For three weeks life was a brief vision of heaven to Nona and me. She was so lovely, so tender, so humbly conscious of her social inferiority and lack of education, so fired with an ambitious zeal for culture and improvement to fit herself for the circle where Colonel Temple's son was born to move. Then the bolt fell. A courier from the nearest telegraph station brought news that father had been promoted, was ordered to Washington, and would soon go abroad on some military commission. I begged to spend the remaining days of my vacation at Post ——, but was sharply refused, and all things were ordered in readiness for our departure next day at sunrise."

Some overwhelming memory arrested the narrative, and Father Temple held the portrait sketch toward the light. Then he crossed his arms on the table and bowed his face upon them. The room was very still, and there seemed suddenly a startling insistence in the harsh sound of an organ that began to grind out "O promise me," on the pavement below. Mr. Herriott threw down a coin, closed the window, and resumed his seat.

"Noel, you must think me weak and unmanly. You are so strong yourself, you can scarcely——"

"Strong? I think if I had to carry your burden I should go out and hang myself."

"That last interview is a perpetual nightmare no noon sunshine ever dispels. Nona was frantic at the unexpectedly sudden separation, and she clung to me like a drowning child; but by degrees she accepted the inevitable, and her trust in me was supreme. She would be patient, and study books the chaplain would provide, and rely on him to forward her letters, and receive and find means to deliver mine. A full moon showed me her tearful face when we stood up to say good-bye. Oh, beautiful, tender, devoted, and pure as any lily God ever set to bloom in a wicked world! As I took her in my arms, she kissed me repeatedly, and I felt her lips tremble on mine as she sobbed:

"'No matter what happens, you must trust me as perfectly as I trust you. If we keep true to each other, all the world can't part us long.'

"That farewell vision abides with me—sleeping, it walks as a living presence through my dreams; waking, it thrusts itself between me and my God; and when I kneel before the marble image of the Mother of my Lord, her holy face is hidden by that of my fair, sweet young wife. It has become an obsession from which I cannot escape. After I went east, two letters reached me; then, in the late autumn when father had sailed, I was stricken with typhoid fever, that kept me prisoner for three months, and the inflammatory rheumatism that followed it so completely wrecked me, I was carried to the country home of an aunt in Massachusetts, in whose care father left me when he went to Europe. In my convalescence I wrote repeatedly under cover to the chaplain, signing only my middle name, Pembroke, but heard nothing until the next June. While still on crutches, I went for a day's visit to college to collect and pack my belongings, and there I found one dusty, mislaid letter from Nona, full of sad forebodings. The chaplain had wandered too far away to a mountain range, accompanied only by an orderly, who reported on his return that his companion had been scalped by Indians while he was examining some rock ledges, and that he had barely escaped by desperate riding. A cavalry troop, sent out to recover the body and avenge the death, was ambushed in a wooded defile and four troopers were killed, among the number Hill. The letter had been written in January—five months before. Both witnesses of our marriage in the grave! Anxiety and distress brought on renewal of rheumatic fever, and I was crippled in hands and feet for six terrible weeks. One day, as I was trying my ability to walk about the room, a delayed letter was forwarded from college—the last I ever received from Nona. Her father had died very suddenly from congestion of the lungs, and his wife returned immediately to her family in Arkansas; but because of my poor Nona's condition, which had subjected her to severe abuse and horrible accusations, the stepmother had cast her off, refused her recognition, and abandoned her. Because she refused to divulge the name of her husband, her declaration that she was a wife only increased the torrent of insults that swept her beyond the pale of respectability. She wrote that one friend—the only person who believed her assertion that she had been lawfully married—was just then leaving the Post for his old home, his time of service

having expired, and he had kindly carried her in a covered wagon to a small village some days' travel east of the Post, where he found shelter for her until after the birth of her child. She begged I would send money to pay her board and also to enable her to travel east and live near me, because she was so terror-stricken among strangers. The same day my father summoned me to Europe, having decided I should attend lectures in Germany and at Oxford. By express, I forwarded the money to Nona, in accordance with her directions—"Care of Delia Brown, Thompsonville, —— Territory"—and I wrote her, explaining all the circumstances, assuring her I would join her as soon as I could travel, and that henceforth we should never be separated. A few hours later I was laid up with a severe relapse, and when, finally, I started west in September, I was still so lame any movement was torture. At last the stage coach put me down at the cluster of log houses called Thompsonville, and by the aid of crutches I found my way to a low, dark cabin of two rooms, where Delia Brown made a scanty living by washing and ironing for men attached to a party of prospecting miners. She was a gaunt, sinister looking woman from Maine, with small, deep-set, faded yellow eyes that bored like a gimlet, and as she took a pipe from her ugly bluish lips and greeted me my heart sank. Where was Nona? Gone—with the man who brought her there, and who 'paid well for her keep.' When? Several weeks ago. Did she receive my letter, and had the money reached her? Yes, the money had been delivered to her—Delia Brown—and she had given it to the woman Nona, in the presence of one Josh' Smith. My letter had seemed to terrify the woman, and as soon as she knew I was coming she went away suddenly, saying she was going to New Orleans, and she and the man could take care of the baby. What was the man's name? He called himself Lay' Walker, but she doubted 'if he was not somebody else, and folks had their suspicions about the whole affair.' The baby boy was four months old when the man and woman took it away, but it was 'such a poor, puny, ailing child it had little chance to live.' What I suffered then only God will ever know, but faith in Nona sustained me while I went from cabin to cabin, receiving on all sides confirmation of Delia Brown's statements from women who had met her, and also from the mail and express agent—Josh' Smith—who assured me he had delivered the letter and package of money addressed to Nona Moorland, care of Delia Brown, to the latter, and exhibited her receipt. Lay' Walker was described as a very 'handsome Spanish-looking young fellow,' and he and the woman seemed fond of each other. He spent his money freely on her, and talked about Florida and banana growing, and said they wanted to get to New Orleans, where his friends had a schooner running in the West India fruit trade. After an exhaustive search, I made my way to New Orleans and engaged police assistance, but no clue could be found. Then I arranged advertisements to run six months, and went on to Pensacola and to Tampa. I advertised in two Florida newspapers, asking Nona Moorland to write to me, care of my father's lawyer in Boston. No response, no word, no hint ever reached me. When December arrived and I had no tidings, I deposited money in a Boston bank to the credit of Nona Moorland, and leaving instructions that all mail matter should be forwarded promptly to me, I sailed for Europe, shattered in body, almost hopeless, and the tortured prey of remorseful regret at the awful consequence of my midsummer madness."

A nervous shiver seized him, and he lifted the chartreuse to his colorless lips.

Mr. Herriott's sinewy brown hand closed over the cold white fingers half hidden in the folds of the black cassock.

"And the woman, Delia Brown? What became of her?"

"How should I know?"

"There lies the crux of this dreadful entanglement. She duped you."

"Possibly. When I left Thompsonville she was preparing to remove to Maine, where she had relatives. I doubted her as long as I could; but nearly eleven years of cruel silence have slowly destroyed every vestige of hope, or of faith in Nona's loyalty. Understand, I do not accuse her—I dare not—I accept the blame. The fault was mine; she was an innocent, ignorant child, and what she considered my heartless, wicked desertion has thrown her into the jaws of destruction. If her soul is lost, God will require me to answer for the ruin—and that is the bitterness of my intolerable life. The immortal soul of my wife, of the mother of my child—a homeless, nameless, fatherless waif! I hold marriage indissoluble by human enactment, and while Nona lives I regard her as my wife, no matter what she has become, no matter into what shameful career she may have been driven by my cowardly course of action. When she believed I had abandoned her, the poor girl doubtless grew desperate. What I have told you is known only to my confessor, to the Superior of our Order in England, where I took my vows, and to my father, to whom I promptly confided everything when I joined him in Germany just before his death. That he refused to forgive me you will readily believe. This sketch you have restored to me was enlarged from one I made at Post ——, and its loss greatly grieved me. Oh, Noel, stinging memory is more merciless than sharp-set hair shirts that fret the flesh. When I see happy mothers and children, their laughter smites my heart like an iron hand; and while I minister to the suffering outcast little ones in pauper homes, my bruised soul seems to hear the accusing, piteous cry of my own forsaken, lost lamb—thrown out to hungry wolves."

CHAPTER X

Sabbath quietude had laid a finger on thousands of metal lips that screamed the song of labor on

other days, and the great city seemed almost asleep as Mr. Herriott entered his carriage at ten o'clock and gave the order, "Brooklyn—Fulton Ferry." After a restless night, spent in searching an old diary for dates and notes, he had gradually untied some knotted memories—vague and conflicting—and straightened a slender thread that might possibly guide to the identification of an elusive personality. On the seat in front of him a basket of purple grapes added their fruity fragrance to the perfume of a bunch of white carnations, and during the long drive the expression of perplexity which had knitted his brows relaxed into the alert placidity that characterized his strong face.

Summer heat, blown in by a humid south wind, touched the sky with an intense blue, against which one long, thin curl of cloud shone like a silver feather, and Brooklyn parks and lawns shook their green banners of grass blades and young, silken foliage. In the middle of a block of old brick tenement houses, Mr. Herriott entered an open door, where two children fought over a wailing black kitten, and went up the inner stairway to a narrow hall, on which opened several doors bearing cards inscribed with the name of occupants of the rooms. At one, labelled "Mrs. Dane," he rapped. It was opened partly, and held ajar.

"Well, who knocked?"

"One of Leighton's friends. Can I see him?"

"Not to-day. He is not well enough for visitors."

"May I come in and see you?"

"Why should you? What do you want?"

Before he could reply, a weak voice pleaded:

"Please, mother! It is Mr. Herriott: let him in. He has been so good to me—please—please!"

"If I do, you are not to talk and bring back that spell of coughing."

The door was swung fully open, and Mr. Herriott confronted "Juno."

"You are Mr. Herriott, as I supposed. Walk in, and excuse the confusion of the rooms. I was up all night, and have not put things in order."

She wore a dark skirt and white muslin sacque, loose at the throat, ungirded, and the sleeves were rolled up, exposing the symmetry of her dimpled white arms. A rich, lovely red stained her lips and cheeks—perhaps from embarrassment, probably from the heat of the oil-stove, on which, evidently, breakfast had been recently prepared. She pointed to an adjoining room, where Leighton lay on a cot close to the open window.

"Oh, sir, are they really for me?" as Mr. Herriott laid the basket and flowers beside him.

"Look, mother! Grapes, grapes! And the smell of the carnations! Was there ever anything so sweet? I don't know how to thank you, sir. I wish I could say something, but when my heart is full I just can't tell it."

His little hot hand caught Mr. Herriott's, and the thin fingers twined caressingly about it.

"You are not to thank me, and you must not talk. Remember, that was the condition upon which I was allowed to see you. Eat your grapes while your mother tells me about you."

"You will spoil him. I can't give him such luxuries as hothouse fruit and flowers, though now and then he has his bunch of violets."

"When was the doctor here?"

"Friday. He changed the medicine, but I can see no benefit as yet."

"If you think it would not tire him too much, I should like to take him out for a drive."

"Thank you, but I could not consent to that."

"Why not? The fresh air is balmy to-day, and would do him good. I have a carriage at the door, and if you are unwilling to trust the boy with me, I should be glad to take you also. May I?"

Her blue eyes glittered and her lips straightened their curves.

"Most certainly not."

"Pardon me, madam; my interest in your child——"

"Does not justify a man of your position in taking a 'department store saleswoman' to drive on Sunday through public places."

"Perhaps you are right. Then I shall efface myself promptly, and you and Leighton can keep the carriage as long as you like."

"Such favors I accept from no man."

"Not even to help your sick boy?"

She put her hand on the child's shining curls, and a world of tenderness glorified her velvet eyes.

"Not even for my very own baby could I incur such an obligation."

"Smell them, mother—like spice! Don't they make you think of the carnation garden in San Francisco, where Uncle Dane used to carry us?"

"How long ago was that, Leighton?" asked Mr. Herriott, watching the woman's face.

"Oh, it was when I was a little chap and wore frocks."

"Were you born in San Francisco?"

"No. He was born in —— Territory."

"Mrs. Dane, can you tell me what became of the artist Belmont?"

"Why do you ask me that question?"

"In order to get an answer. He painted your face for his 'Aurora,' and the picture was photographed."

"Yes; I needed money, and Mr. Dane permitted him to come to our house for the sittings. That was my first and last experience as a model."

"I have met you before."

She straightened herself, and answered defiantly:

"Probably I have sold you gloves, or socks, or handkerchiefs—certainly not the right to meddle with my personal affairs."

"I went with a San Francisco friend to see a night school for women, which his mother had established. You were there."

"Yes, I was there two winters. Now, sir, have you a police badge hidden inside your coat? Are you playing reporter—disguised as a benevolent gentleman—hunting up the details of last night's meeting and riot at Newark? You know, of course, that I made a speech there?"

"Indeed? I had imagined you sat up all night with your sick boy."

"There is a strike on down there, and I spoke against arbitrating labor grievances, and against the ghastly sham of getting the rights of the poor from a picked judge and a packed jury. Bombs and boycott make the best mill for grinding out justice to starving, over-worked men and women."

"How long have you been an 'anarchist,' or perhaps you prefer the term 'socialist'?"

"From the day I was sixteen years old, and learned how rich men trample and betray and despise and insult the ignorant, helpless poor."

"It must have been a terribly cruel grievance that transformed into a fury one who was intended for a loving, gentle woman."

She laughed, and her beautiful teeth took hold of the glowing under lip.

"Grievance? We all have one—we are simply born to suffer, as to breathe—but the unendurable the unpardonable comes from the grasping, murderous, fiendish selfishness of rich men. You have been so kind to my boy, I have tried hard to believe genuine benevolence—what you are pleased to call 'Christian philanthropy'—inspired your visits to him during my absence, but you are all alike—you gilded society sultans—and you come here with some cowardly design carefully smothered under flowers, fruit, and candy. So, Leighton, make the most of to-day, for we will see no more of your Mr. Herriott."

"Madam, I shall be as frank as you have shown yourself. There is one woman in this world whose wishes rule me absolutely, and because she requested me to see your child now and then, I have come several times, until my sympathetic interest equals hers. With your career in New York I am acquainted. For your radical views and utterances I have neither respect nor toleration, yet, if you will permit me to explain, there are reasons that lead me to believe I can do you a very great service."

"I am not in need of service from any man. Your formula has not even the ring of originality; I have heard such sickening reiterations of it from false, bearded lips."

"That you have been a cruelly wronged woman I feel assured, but I am equally certain that your worst enemy was no man—was one of your own sex. For your own sake, will you answer two questions?"

"For my own sake, I distinctly refuse to be catechised by impertinent strangers."

"Oh, mother; please mother! He has been so good to me, how could he mean harm to you? Don't worry her, Mr. Herriott. She can't abide men; they fret her, and she hates them—unless they are starved and ragged. Please let her alone, and look at my doves. They come for the crumbs on the window sill. See! Here is a new one, pure white. Mother, scatter some bread on the sheet and they will come in."

She sprinkled some scraps of cake close to his pillow, and, after a little coy skirmishing, the

pigeons fluttered in to the feast; but just then a spell of coughing shook the fragile form on the cot, and with a flash and whirr the flock vanished. Mrs. Dane lifted the boy and fanned him, wiping away the moisture that beaded his clustering curls, and Mr. Herriott piled the pillows and cushions behind his shaking shoulders. When the paroxysm ended, and Leighton lay wan and spent, the visitor leaned over him.

"I should like to do several things for you, but your mother will not permit me. Miss Kent wishes you to know she remembers you with interest, and hopes to hear you sing again. The stranger who preached at St. Hyacinth's has not forgotten the poem he promised you, and will bring it soon. I saw him last night. Now, I must say good-bye for to-day. Don't try to speak, I understand everything."

Silently Mrs. Dane followed him to the door. Across the threshold, he turned and lowered his voice.

"A sea voyage is the only thing that will prolong his life. With your consent, it can be arranged at once."

She shook her head.

"Madam, I find I must revise my ideals of maternal devotion. You punish your innocent child for the sins of those who blighted your youth? You harangue a rabble in favor of 'justice' and deny it to a dying boy."

She caught her breath, leaned against the wall, and covered her face with her hands. When he saw it again the color had ebbed, the lovely eyes were darkened by unshed tears, and the lips were beyond her control.

"My baby—my fatherless little one! Ever since he was born I have struggled so hard to keep his mother's name clean—his mother's name, all he had—clean and beyond reproach! Do you suppose that now, at the last, I would put myself under obligation to a rich man? We may die paupers, he and I, but when we go to the Potter's Field—the only undisputed land labor can claim—we go free, honest, and unblemished, and if there was a God, I could hold up my baby and demand why He had cursed us both in our innocence."

"I am sorry that the circumstances coloring your life have destroyed every vestige of confidence in man's honor, yet I have no alternative but to accept your decision, and I wish you good morning."

He lifted his hat, and had gone half way down the stairs, when she followed and touched his sleeve.

"I did not thank you for much goodness to my child, but I do want to say I am not ungrateful; only I have had so little to be thankful for, I don't quite know how to phrase gratitude. The world has been so hard to me I am suspicious of every rich man in your social circle. You see, my face has handicapped me always——"

She set her teeth and struck one palm resentfully against her cheek, and the passionate, pent-up cry of years of suffering broke through the next words.

"Yes, my face has been my curse, and it was the steel trap that snapped chains on me when I was only a child. Kindness to my Leighton is the one thing that touches what is left of my heart; and how do you suppose I can bear now to listen to his sobbing yonder, because he thinks I have rudely driven you away? Oh, my pretty baby! My own beautiful little one! Cast out, with only his girl-mother to fight for him against this cruel world! And now if I lose him, if my all is taken away from me——"

She wrung her hands, and the blanched face was upturned as if challenging her God.

"Madam, I understand fully, and I intend to help your boy; but be sure I shall visit him when you are absent. Tell him I shall come, with your consent, while he is alone; and some day I think you will trust me, even despite the fact that I happen to have money. Good-bye."

He held out his hand, but she seemed not to see it, and as she turned and walked wearily up the steps he went down to his carriage.

CHAPTER XI

"Miss Kent, it is quite evident that you do not approve of us."

"Will you be so kind as to explain to whom 'us' refers?"

"Our great social world, including government, congressional and diplomatic circles, club life, and all that 'progress' stands for. Instead of moving abreast with the 'advance' current, you have drifted aside into an eddy as contracted, as pitiably narrow as—pardon me, we emancipated new women dare now to speak the brazen truth—as narrow as the hands and feet you Southerners boast as sign of aristocratic blood."

Eglah lifted her grey-gloved hand, examined its outlines critically, and placed it within a few inches of the broad, thick palm which Ethelberta Higginbottom had laid on her own lap as she sat in the gallery of the Senate chamber.

"Thank you very much, Miss Higginbottom. It is traditional in my family to admire slender fingers, but we are not so intolerant as to deny others the privilege of occupying as much space as their digits can cover, and we never brand people as absolutely disreputable because they wear number six shoes and number seven-and-a-half gloves. If degrees of latitude determine the height of insteps, what manifest injustice has been meted out to longitudinal lines that you Westerners so proudly claim? Probably you have forgotten that my father is from New England, and he owns a silver caddy—two hundred years old—that was empty at one time because 'fish drank tea in Boston harbor.'"

"Oh, but your mother was Southern and you represent not heredity, but sheredity, a sociological factor of immense potency, which must be reckoned with, let me tell you, in the near future, when women fully emancipated come to enjoyment of all the rights so long withheld from them. Then mothers, and not fathers will wield the destiny of this great country; and already female colleges are fast spreading the blessed gospel of free and equal rights. Last week some one asserted that you were a graduate of —— College, but I contradicted it flatly, as impossible and absurd."

"I am sorry I do my dear *Alma Mater* such lamentable discredit; but, unfortunately, we were not taught to wear our diplomas on our hats as advertisements of scholarship."

"You certainly amaze me!"

"Perhaps you will excuse my frankness in assuring you that sensation at least is mutual."

"With your educational advantages, to lock up your mind in a stockade of provincialism! Desectionalize yourself!"

"May I ask whether you spell your last verb with an x or a ct? I should prefer first to ascertain which process is demanded of me."

"Your Southern bigotry is a mill-stone around your neck. The very word 'emancipation' is a red rag to old slaveholders and their progeny. You never can forgive us for breaking the shackles of groaning millions held in bondage."

Eglah laughed.

"Pardon me, but it certainly is ludicrous that one possessing your 'broad culture and desectionalized' horizon of thought should really believe in that old worn-out 'raw-head and bloody-bones' figure of speech which has done duty so long. It surely is entitled to decent interment where all dilapidated scarecrows cease from troubling. We Southern people no more want our negroes back as slaves than you desire the return of hordes of Indians whom you so completely dispossessed of their native lands in your 'wild and rapacious West,' and whom a 'white, fatherly' government is rapidly reducing to extinction by its beneficent agencies. The white South is 'emancipated' from the moral responsibility of elevating the black race now so happy in 'national' tutelage, where their guardians taught them the system of bookkeeping and all the subtle processes of the 'Freedmen's Bureau.'"

"How lonely you must feel in Washington. You have no more regard for the rights of your own sex than for—" She stammered and coughed.

"Indeed, I have the most affectionate and jealous regard for every right that inheres in my dower of American womanhood. I claim and enjoy the right to be as cultured, as learned, as useful, and —if you please—as ornamental in society and at home as my individual limitations will permit. I have no wrongs, no grievances, no crying need to usurp lines of work that will break down the barriers God set between men and women. I am not in rebellion against legal statutes, nor the canons of well-established decency and refinement in feminine usage, and, finally, I am so inordinately proud of being a well-born Southern woman, with a full complement of honorable great-grandfathers and blue-blooded, stainless great-grand-mothers, that I have neither pretext nor inclination to revolt against mankind."

"Miss Kent, you have rather pretty eyes, but you are so steeped in Southern—what do you call it —*dolce far niente*, or *laissez faire*, or semi-stagnation of soul that you are too lazy to open them wide enough to see the thrilling vista of woman's triumph that illumines——"

"Thank you; my much flattered eyes are sufficiently open at this moment to perceive the behavior of that nondescript creature in feminine garments who is flirting so undisguisedly with Senator Smallweed yonder, on your right; one of the early emancipated—an advanced lobbyist."

"You mean that piquant, charming little Mrs. Morrison? Dear soul! She is a pathetically tragic object lesson. Had to get a divorce from a brutal husband and become a bread-winner. Why should not women lobby? They are so nimble witted, nature fitted them admirably for such work."

"And gave them the adroitly nimble fingers to fit the pockets they pick."

"That is some cowardly man's cruel slander. My creed is always to defend my own sex; it is only Christian charity and genuine feminine justice."

"Provided it be not merely lax morality. Sometimes the distinction is not clear to very 'advanced,' zealous people."

"At least your father does not share your narrow harshness. He and Mrs. Morrison are quite 'chummy,' and I happen to know he sees her often."

"How could he avoid it? Shoals of sharks swim in Washington, and since your friend belongs to the 'emancipated' variety, doubtless she indulges an 'elective affinity' for the largest senatorial prey in sight, and hungrily shadows him. Yesterday that 'Bison Head' bill she is working for came to grief in committee, and will be buried to-day. Even sharks occasionally miss a meal."

"Oh, you are not up to date! Before the decision was announced one of the committee weakened, asked for reconsideration; another hurried meeting was held last night, and the bill will not be reported this session. Not killed you understand, just tenderly pigeon-holed, securely wrapped up in parliamentary camphor to scare away opposition moths, and allowed to sleep while its pretty guardian angel has another session in which to smooth the way for its final passage."

At this moment a messenger boy brought a note to Miss Higginbottom, and Eglah rose.

"You do not suspect who the *weakening* member was?"

"If I cared to ask, I dare say your fair *divorcée* friend would be able to enlighten me, but the petty political schemes engineered by lobbyists do not interest me."

"One moment, Miss Kent. You did not come to my *musicale*. I have only one olive twig left. We entertain a few friends to-morrow night in honor of a famous Western woman, who will lecture next season on 'Civic Problems,' for the purpose of raising money to build a vast, up-to-date club temple, where women can proclaim their views on female right to suffrage and expansion. May I have the pleasure of presenting you?"

"You are very kind, Miss Higginbottom, but as we leave Washington at the end of the week, I regret that I shall not have time for any new engagements. Pray accept my thanks for several courtesies."

"I used to wonder why you are so unpopular, but it soon ceased to be a mystery, and it will be no sacrifice to you to give up Washington, in retiring from public life. When Senator Kent formally resigns—as is the burden of a little bird's song that utters no false notes—he will, doubtless, consign you to a more congenial circle of friends."

"In saying good-bye, I shall find some solace in the assurance that at least you will not mourn inconsolably because of my final departure. Please present my best wishes to Mrs. Higginbottom, who has shown me much kindness, and whom I may not be able to see again. Good-bye."

She stood a few seconds, smiling mischievously into the florid face of the large-featured woman of most certain age, whose light-yellow eyes flashed back unmistakable malice, then, amid the roar of applause that greeted the peroration of a white-haired senator in the chamber below, she quietly stole out of the Capitol, and sought a favorite corner of the Smithsonian grounds.

Walking slowly, she asked in a spirit of self-chastisement why she had allowed waspish stings to provoke a retaliatory tone, at variance with that cool repose of well-bred urbanity and imperturbable courtesy on which she prided herself; and was not the condescension of retort an unladylike and mortifying weakness?

Now and then come radiant days when a noon sun shines hot, and no faintest film flecks the stainless blue, yet one grows vaguely conscious of waning brightness, and gradually the horizon blanches to a deadly grey, while leaden clouds creep into view like spectral fingers of some vast hand groping across the sky to smother the sun. Shadows projected by the invisible unnerve natures that fearlessly face tangible, well-defined danger, as 'the sallow, weird light preceding an eclipse is more menacing than its total darkness, where friendly stars still shine.' For Eglah, the clock of fate had begun to chime that *mauvais quart d'heure* which Mrs. Maurice had known would inevitably overtake her, and the preliminary whirring of the hidden cogs had found her unprepared. Blind faith in her father's sagacity, political steadfastness, and incorruptibility, had built a pedestal from which he smiled down benignantly upon her, making life a festival; but when the needle of doubt pricked the fine veil love spun across her vision, and she dared allow herself to question, a shivering and nameless dread shook her happy young heart, as unexpectedly blighting as a shower of sleet on an August passion-flower. When Jove nods his worship wanes.

Since the night of the cotillon, several inexplicable circumstances, comparatively slight yet cumulative, had perplexed this fond and loyal daughter, who began to find the maze of Senator Kent's political methods too tortuous for her exploration.

Startled by his abrupt reversal of judgment on more than one important question involving party allegiance, she had sought an explanation, which he laughingly evaded, and, when she pressed the matter, his avoidance was marked by an irritability of speech and gesture hitherto unknown in the domestic circle. The undisguised graciousness of his demeanor toward Mrs. Morrison had surprised and annoyed her, and she was painfully astonished by his efforts to conciliate Senator Higginbottom, who belonged to the opposite party, and was a loud, aggressive, and hirsute apostle of the silver gospel so dear to his constituency, and so conducive to his individual interest as a mine owner. Mrs. Higginbottom, a plain, kind-hearted, motherly old woman, who knew much

more of sheep-shearing and beehives than of fashionable etiquette and diplomatic technicalities, Eglah had found it possible to receive cordially, but the daughter, Ethelberta, was an intolerable offence to all her feminine instincts, and when Judge Kent insisted, with some asperity, that the "Higginbottoms must be cultivated," the ordeal of playing hostess to this "advanced and emancipated new woman" proved peculiarly unpleasant. A certain watchful restlessness in her father's manner did not escape her notice, nor the recent accession of sphinx-like non-committalism in Mr. Metcalf, and she pondered uneasily a question of Mrs. Mitchell's:

"Dearie, did it ever occur to you that in some way Judge Kent seems rather afraid of Mr. Herriott, or perhaps I should say is always so guarded in his presence?"

"Never! Impossible and absurd. He has supreme confidence in him, and once, not long ago, he scolded me sharply because I could not consider him head and shoulders above all other men."

The session of Congress was within two days of its close, and that morning, as Senator Kent rose from an untasted breakfast, he astounded Eglah and Eliza by the ejaculation, "God knows, I shall be glad to get out of this grind!"

Fearing sickness had robbed him of his appetite, Eglah followed him to the library, but he waved her back.

"Metcalf is waiting to show me a paper, and I must not be interrupted. My dear, my time is not my own—even for you."

Hitherto she had never been an interruption, and it seemed as if some iron door was shut suddenly between her life and his. "The Bison Head" purchase bill, for which Mrs. Morrison flitted to and fro, had been fought by Senator Kent in committee room, where the contest was close, but Senator Higginbottom was chairman, and when Miss Ethelberta announced that a member had "weakened" and the bill might be saved by postponement, Eglah knew who had changed front, and she began to realize how ancient pilgrims felt when, at Delphi, the oracle said no to-day and yes to-morrow. Idolatrous habit was strong; the pedestal trembled, but it was a far cry to its overthrow, and she wrestled stubbornly to defend inconsistencies that humiliated and staggered her. Time, the master magician, would perhaps show her the Senator's reasons woven into a crown of laurel—as unexpected as the garland of glowing roses that spring out of a naked sword blade, at the gesture of a juggler. To-day she recalled her grandmother's softened face with eyes of tender compassion on that morning when the news of the second marriage had been brought to Nutwood. After all, was there just cause for the old lady's contempt and aversion, and were the rumors rife in Y—— shadows of grim and disgraceful facts that must cling to her father's name, fateful as the philter of Nessus? The thought stifled her, and she put her hand to her throat with the old childish habit that always betrayed intolerable pain. She could not go home—must not meet Eliza's eyes until she strangled this crouching horror. Through the Smithsonian she wandered, apparently examining its treasures, but now she saw only the pitying countenance of her grandmother, and now the malicious triumph in Miss Higginbottom's eyes, as she exulted in some impending misfortune. "Formal resignation"—adumbrated by more than one innuendo—portended the summary collapse of a political career that she had believed would culminate in elevation to a Cabinet seat during the next administration. For her, obstinate confidence was to-day the sole refuge, and she set her teeth as she verified Mrs. Maurice's prediction: "'Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.' My own father cannot betray the faith of his loyal child."

Dreading Eliza's scrutiny, it was with a feeling of temporary relief that she recollected an engagement to attend a "lawn party" held that afternoon at a residence whose owner was laboring to raise an endowment fund for a local charity. When she reached home, a change of costume gave time to marshal all her defensive forces; and, as she came downstairs to join her waiting chaperon, Mrs. Mitchell forbore to comment on the unusual color that burned in her cheeks.

"Little mother, don't sit up for me. I promised Mrs. Ellerbee to assist at the flower table, and may be kept late. Be sure you get your beauty sleep."

Dinner was delayed an hour beyond the usual time, but Senator Kent did not appear, and as such deviations from domestic rule had recently occurred often, and were explained by congestion of business at the Capitol, incident to approaching adjournment, Mrs. Mitchell took her meal alone. It was prayer-meeting evening at the Methodist Church in her neighborhood, and, after the exercises ended, she walked home, took up a magazine, and tried unsuccessfully to read. The political atmosphere was so charged with electricity that she felt a crisis was imminent, and only the extent of the storm was conjectural. How much Eglah suspected the foster-mother merely surmised, because some inexplicable barrier seemed, within the past fortnight, built up to limit their free interchange of thought. It was a sultry, sombre night; city walls and pavements sent up their garnered heat in quivering waves, and the stars were blurred and faint as they retreated behind a dim haze that was not mist. At eleven o'clock the street corner light showed her Senator Kent walking rapidly. She went into the dining-room to arrange the salad and cold tea he always enjoyed after missing his dinner, and while he lingered in the hall Eglah returned. She was bare-headed, very pale, and her lips fluttered, but a brave, tender smile lighted her eyes, and she put her arms about his neck and kissed him twice.

"How tired you poor national Solons must be! But I know one whose day's work is not yet ended, and who must pick a whole flock of crows with me, right now. Why did you change your vote on

the 'Bison Head' purchase?"

"Who says I did?"

His face was deeply flushed, but he laughed and pinched her white cheek.

"The chairman has a daughter."

"A leaky gossip. Congressmen ought to be bachelors or childless widowers; but then, my dear, how could I possibly exist without you?"

"Father, what induced you to favor a measure you have condemned so emphatically?"

"Several good reasons I am much too tired to discuss. Don't forget your Emerson, who says 'a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen,' and remember, also, 'a wise man sometimes changes his mind, a fool never.' The bill will not be reported till next session, and conditions alter, so *après moi le déluge*!"

She walked toward the dining-room, and on the threshold Eliza saw her put both hands to her throat. Drawing her breath quickly, she turned back and threw her arms around him.

"Oh, father! Was it kind, was it merciful to let me learn by chance from strangers that you have determined to resign your senatorship, to end a glorious career in which you know my dearest hopes and pride centre?"

For a moment he made no reply, only clasped her closely, pillowed her head on his breast, and kissed her cold cheek repeatedly.

Then he spoke in a husky tone, as a nervous surgeon might, uncertain of his own diagnosis.

"My darling girl, I confess it was a cowardly dread of the pain I knew my decision would cause you, and I very weakly put off the evil day as long as possible. Immediately after adjournment I intended to tell you all the plans that seem best for our future, and did not anticipate this premature disclosure, which is presumptuous impertinence in its author. In quitting public life even temporarily, my brightest compensation is the prospect of spending my time in the sweet companionship of my precious, incomparable daughter. Forgive your old father the arrant cowardice of keeping silent for a few days."

She clung to him like a frightened child, and he felt her trembling as one in an ague.

"Why must you resign? Why step down when you have a right to expect the new administration will offer you a place in the Cabinet? Why? Don't keep back anything from me now."

"My love, I don't wish to distress you; I shrink from exciting any alarm, but you certainly have a right to the truth. My health does not permit the amount of canvassing work that I believe will be required for my re-election, because our State legislature will be much divided this presidential campaign over vital issues, both local and national. As my term expires soon, I think it best to resign now, and avoid grave complications that threaten our party organization in the State legislature. Recently I have had premonitions that drove me to consult Dr. McLemore, and he advises me to withdraw from active political life, at least for a season. He believes complete rest and freedom from public responsibility are all that my health demands. I did not wish you to know this, but you are such an inquisitive monkey, such an arbitrary minx, that nothing less than the whole truth will satisfy your exacting reason. Now kiss me, my pretty chestnut burr, and let us pick no more crows."

"You have been ill, and we—I—never suspected it?"

She caught her breath spasmodically, stifling a sob. Her father glanced significantly at Eliza, who stood beside the table, lifting a pitcher of iced tea that clinked against its sides in her nervous grasp.

"I see Mrs. Mitchell—always admirably reliable—has kept her promise to me. Now she can tell you I had a very severe attack the night we were so late at Secretary P——'s dinner, and you could not understand my delay in dressing."

"Ma-Lila! You kept me in ignorance of father's danger, when you should have warned me?"

"Your father positively forbade any mention of the matter to you, and as I never saw or heard of a recurrence of what he assured me was merely the result of imprudent indulgence in oysters, cheese, and beer, I had no excuse for disobeying his command to keep silence."

The little woman's eyes sparkled, and an involuntary curl of her lip did not escape Eglah's questioning sorrowful gaze.

"Come, my dear, do not quite strangle what is left of a very tired old man. Now that explanations are completely over, I feel as happy as a boy just returned from the dentist's where he left an aching tooth; and since you know absolutely all that can be told, I should like some tea dashed with cognac, for I have had a hard, tedious day."

He unwound her arms, patted her head, and took his seat at the table.

Eglah squeezed a lemon into a goblet of tea, Eliza stirred the mayonnaise, and Judge Kent helped himself to an anchovy sandwich, while he asked whether they had heard the sad news of the

sudden death of a popular attaché of one of the legations, who had been killed an hour before by the accidental discharge of his own pistol. Heroic efforts were made by all to avoid the disturbing theme upon which the Senator had peremptorily rung down the curtain, and to relieve the tension the trio separated as soon as possible.

How much of the perfunctory explanation either woman credited neither could determine, but each refrained from probing the other, and both endeavored to bridge the crater by that golden silence that knows no pangs of regretted speech. Lying wide awake, Mrs. Mitchell noted the slow passage of the heavy hours, and day was just below the eastern sky line when the sudden shrill trilling of a canary in the adjoining room told that some restless movement of Eglah's had aroused it. Eliza longed to go and comfort the suffering girl, but every heart has a sanctuary which not even the tenderest affection should dare to violate, and the subtle sympathy of the overseer's wife taught her love's duty was to guard, not force the entrance. After a few moments, Eglah opened the door and came on tiptoe to her bed.

"What is it, dearie? Nobody can sleep on such a suffocating night."

She sat up and put one arm around the white figure, which, instead of yielding to her clasp, held back straight and stiff as steel.

"I thought I heard you stir, else I should not have ventured to disturb you. Ma-Lila, the thought of father's ill health weighs terribly on my heart. Will you please tell me the nature of that attack which you both kept from me? What were the symptoms?"

"He had been dozing in his chair, and quite suddenly sprang up, pale, and evidently much agitated. I wished to call you, and urged him to abandon the idea of leaving the house, but he insisted I should not give you even a hint, and asked for the decanter of brandy, which he was sure would relieve a severe fit of indigestion caused by imprudence at luncheon. He went to his room, and when he came out you saw no sign of serious indisposition."

"He had been annoyed by no visitors?"

"He had seen no one but Watson and myself."

"Do you think there was heart trouble that night? Tell me frankly."

"Yes, most certainly there was; but, my baby, heart trouble comes from various causes, and I really do not think your father's physical condition justifies any serious uneasiness. He is evidently alarmed, but nervous strain and mental worry are sufficient to produce all his symptoms, and you will find that retirement from congressional complications expedites recovery in such cases."

The girlish form relaxed, and a hot cheek was pressed against the foster-mother's face.

"Don't comfort me with false hopes, unless you are sure I am unduly frightened."

"Listen to me. I am absolutely certain that Judge Kent's health need cause you no alarm in future. Now, shake off that nightmare, and go to sleep like a good child, or I will certainly dose you with bromide."

She kissed her softly, and with an arm about her waist led her back to her bed.

"Ma-Lila, I want to forget the last three weeks. Won't you help me?"

CHAPTER XII

"What is the urgent necessity? I have just held my afternoon mission service, and I am very tired. Noel, why are you so insistent?"

"Perhaps it has been borne in upon my 'subliminal consciousness' that if you wait too long you may possibly regret it. Once or twice I have found profit in following a rule my old nurse taught me when I wore kilts: 'Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day.' No 'dæmon' squats at my ear, and I claim no mantic illumination, still I should be glad to know you will make that visit at once."

"You fear the poor boy is dying?"

"Not immediately, but he appears hopelessly ill, and needs all the kind words you may find yourself better able to utter than any one else. Moreover, it would be well that you should see his mother, who is away at work during the week, and as you expect to leave the city so soon, this will be the most suitable opportunity for you to meet her at home. Poor, fierce, bitter soul! She has no milk of human kindness left; it soured and has become acrid—intensely mordacious."

"She belongs then to the unhappy class of frail women who go swiftly to utter wreck in all large cities, where sin is arrayed in rose color and gilt. Strange that the boy of such a creature should remind one of the infant St. John or a seraph of Angelico's."

"Some fragments of her history lead me to believe that she is as trustworthy and pure as any woman to whom you preach. Her morality is beyond cavil, but theoretically she seems to have

gone wild among the hedges and ditches of socialism."

"You consider her a conscientious, good woman?"

"As far as I can ascertain she lives irreproachably, bar associating with anarchists. I surmise some man has treated her cruelly, or she thinks so, and now she——"

Mr. Herriott rose, looked at his watch, and laughed.

"Temple, do you recollect one summer night under the elms, when rehearsing for the Greek play, Prescott Winthrop declaimed the herdsman's message from the 'Bacchæ,' and emphasized the portrait of Agave in the frenzy of the *Thiasus* strangling a calf and fondling a wolf's whelp? To-day Leighton's mother recalled that scene, but she is not dancing to meet Bromius—only hunting revenge on all mankind. Ah, you are going? I suggest a cautious approach. Leave the carriage out of sight, and boldly flourish the promised book as an open sesame. You of the cassock clan enjoy privileges denied to us, the ungirdled sons of Belial. After all, you may prove the *deus ex machina*, and through the poor little lad may be able to lay a healing touch on the mother's sick soul. Come to my rooms after your visit, and we will say good-bye until I get back from my long jaunt."

An hour later Father Temple made his way into the tenement house, through a noisy mob of children romping on the pavement, and when he entered the narrow hall outside din was conquered by the deep, swelling music of "Quis est Homo," wailing from a violoncello held between the knees of a man sitting half way up the stairs, a thin, stooping old figure with shaggy grey hair, and bearded as a Welsh harper. The priest ascended, and the musician edged closer to the wall to allow him passage way, but he merely nodded his bowed head, and the solemn strains rose and fell like the sobbing moan of waves settling to calm after lashing blasts. Father Temple lifted his finger.

"Mrs. Dane lives on the next floor?"

"Go ub. She vill see no briests, but her door is oben for de child to hear de music he loves. Dear leedle boy is sick, and my cello sounds more better here dan closer."

He shut his eyes and continued playing. Opposite the undraped west window of the room above, an alley stretched, making clear pathway for the sinking sun that poured a parting flood of radiance into the apartment, and upon the cot where, propped up with pillows, the boy clasped his arms around his knees, and listened, quiet and happy. Between cot and window his mother sat, facing the back of her chair, on top of which she rested one arm, leaning her brow upon it, while the other hand, lying on the cot, slowly stroked Leighton's bare feet. Having washed her hair earlier in the day, it was now brushed out over her shoulders to dry in the sunshine, and the bright mass of waving tendrils seemed to clothe her with light. On the floor were scattered several newspaper sheets—"The Chain Breaker"—and across her knee lay an open copy of "Battle-cry of Labor." Only the mellow voice of the cello sounded, and the room was sweet with the breath of Mr. Herriott's white carnations nodding in a blue bowl on the table. Standing a moment at the threshold, Father Temple's eyes fastened on the veil of golden locks falling to the floor, and his heart leaped, then seemed to cease beating as he recalled a vision of the far West, where just such glittering strands had been twined around his fingers.

"Oh, my St. Hyacinth's preacher!"

At Leighton's glad cry his mother raised her head, started up, and, moving forward a few steps, swept back her hair, holding it with both hands. Before her stood the tall, thin figure in the long, black habit of his Order, cord-girded at the waist; with a soft wool hat and book in one hand; a clean-shaven face, pale, sensitive, scholarly, and suggestive of "lauds and prime," of asceticism without peace, and of brooding regret.

He recognized every line in her lovely features, from the large pansy eyes and delicate, over-arching brows to the perfect oval molding of cheek and chin, and the full, downward curve of scarlet lips. Love is so keen of vision it pierces the changes wrought by ripening years, and he knew the dear face. She did not suspect, love had been dead so long, and she had buried all tender memories in its neglected grave.

"I am surprised a Romish priest wastes his time coming here, and I have no welcome to offer you, because I wish no visitors."

With a swift movement he closed the door, dropped hat and book, and came close to her. The sudden glow on his cheek, the light of exultation in his sad eyes transformed him.

"Look at me. Don't you know me? Look—look!"

Eye to eye they watched each other, and at the sound of his deep, tender, quivering voice recollection smote hard upon her heart, and a vague, shivering pain drove the blood from her face, but she fought the suggestion.

"You are unknown to me."

"I am Vernon Pembroke Temple, and you are Nona, my wife! My Nona—my own wife——"

Words failed him, and he held out his arms. She recoiled, throwing up her hands with a gesture of loathing, and stood as if turned to stone, so strangely hard was a face where eyes kindled and

burned with the pent hatred and scorn of long years of sore trial.

"You had not sins enough to sink your soul without adding hypocrisy? A preacher! A priest! Cowardice, perjury, moral leprosy, skulking under a long cloak as black as what is left of your vile heart!"

Each word fell like a red-hot flail, but he did not wince, and neither father nor mother heard the low wail from the cot where childish arms covered a face white with horror.

"You think, you believe I intentionally and pre-meditatedly deserted you, and in your ignorance of facts you certainly had cause to despise me, but——"

"Think—believe! As if it were possible to doubt the villainy planned! The crime you so carefully committed against a mere child, knowing she was a helpless victim, believing she could never redress her awful wrongs. As if you had set a trap and caught an innocent, happy bird, and then broken its wings and tossed it to screaming hawks! Coward—coward as you always were—how dare you face me?"

"Nona, dear Nona—" He put out his hand appealingly, but she struck it aside with stinging force, and stepped backward.

"Out of my sight, or I call the police."

She pointed to the door. He turned, locked it, put the key in his pocket, and his eyes steadily met the challenge in hers. The banked, smouldering fires that flashed up must burn lower before he could plead. So they stood: he flushed, smiling, happy; she shaken by a tempest of rage that blanched her to a livid pallor and set all the glittering rings of hair quivering, as if innumerable golden serpents coiled and uncoiled around her trembling form.

In the pause he lifted the hanging ends of the knotted cord.

"Do you understand what this habit means?"

"Don't I? A holy cloak to hide every sin that makes this world a hotter hell than even God could fashion—if God were possible. You drape it over the ten commandments, blotting them out, while you sing psalms, and rob the toiling poor, and ruin young lives, and murder innocent souls. Oh, yes, to my sorrow, I understand all it means!"

"It means my consecration to celibacy when you fled from me, and I had exhausted all efforts to find you."

"Celibacy! Celibacy! I needed no nunnery to help me keep clean and pure, but you ran behind monastery walls to protect yourself from retribution at a wronged woman's hands. Coward from first to last! When I fled from you? You must indeed be possessed of the devil to dare such language to me."

"Nona, there has been some awful mistake——"

"Yes, a mistake that I was not scalped, or that a merciful bolt of lightning did not strike me dead that day—that cursed day—when first I set my eyes on your false, treacherous face! If you could only know how I hate, despise, utterly despise the bare thought, much more the horrible sight of you!"

"No wonder, since circumstances were apparently all against me at——"

"Circumstances are no shelter for honest, honorable men, if there be any left; and the hard, bitter, murderous facts of your shameful life would find you out if you dodged under the very throne of the God you blaspheme by professing!"

"Will you listen to the truth?"

"You could not speak it if you tried. I listened to you once too often, and you wrecked me, and I am no longer a fool."

"Why did you leave Thompsonville after you received my letters, and the money I sent you, and when you knew I was coming there to take you away with me?"

For an instant she looked at him with startled curiosity, then laughed hysterically.

"I left Thompsonville because you wrote no letters, sent no money, and took no notice of my frantic appeals for help in my hour of horrible trial. A sick woman with a frail, feeble baby, facing starvation, abandoned, slandered, and trampled in the mud, I could only snatch at the hand held out to me by the one man I have found honest, honorable, loyal, and true, as he was pitying and kind."

"But when I reached Thompsonville Delia Brown told me——"

Her scornful laugh drowned his words.

"'When you reached Thompsonville' in your dreams—after a night's carousal at college! Even a congenital idiot would sicken at that."

No shadow of impatience crossed his happy countenance; the intensity of her scoffing bitterness was part of his punishment—the harvest that sprang from his own sowing—and he must not

complain until she understood fully.

"I can prove that I went to Thompsonville, and I have the sworn testimony of Delia Brown that she delivered into your hands my letters and the package of money I sent to her care through the express agent. On a scrap of paper I have also a receipt in pencil from you to Delia Brown."

She shook her head and smote her palms together.

"Forgeries one and all. I would not believe you on your oath, unless the grave yawned, and Leighton Dane—dead six years—came back as witness in your favor."

"'He was the handsome Spanish-looking man' Delia Brown told me stole my wife and child and disappeared suddenly—going to Florida or Cuba to grow bananas—when you heard I was coming to Thompsonville?"

"He was a good old man, my father's best friend, who took his place as teamster—and when I was literally driven out of the cabin one rainy night by my stepmother, he was the only human being who believed I was not vile. He pitied me and carried me in one of the Government wagons to Thompsonville, and paid my board until I was able to earn my bread by helping Delia Brown wash and iron. His term was expiring soon, and when he started back to his home in California, he came by to see if I needed anything.

"Finding I was ill in body, distracted in mind, desperate, because I knew then I was utterly deserted, and had no hope of help, he offered to carry me West and protect me on account of his friendship for my father. Oh, bless him—for ever and ever! He made an humble little home for us, and shielded and respected me, and pitied and believed in me with all the strength of his great, true heart, and was a second and a much better father to me in my shameful desolation and helplessness. He adopted me and my baby, and when he died he left his small savings to us; and so I named my outcast little one Leighton Dane for the one loyal friend who helped me to feed and clothe him when his own father rejected and abandoned him. I had no proof except the certificate you made me swear I would conceal for two years, and your ally, the devil, worked well for you when the mice nesting in my trunk cut it into shreds while I was ill. The chaplain and Ransom Hill were dead; I had none to speak for me; but Mr. Dane believed my words, and he put his big hand on my head and comforted me.

"'Poor little girl, don't worry; just be easy in your mind, for I know you are telling the truth. I know you are good as your own baby, and if every mouth in America swore against you I would trust you as I always trusted my own mother.'"

A mist clouded her eyes, as dew softens the tint of a violet, but she clenched her hands, and bit her lip hard to still its tremor, adding with sullen emphasis:

"In all these black years the one star of comfort I can ever see shines in the assurance that the only truly good man I have found, who knew me well, respected and trusted me as he did his dead mother."

"You never saw or heard of the advertisements I published in various papers, asking you to inform me where I could find you?"

The contempt in her ringing answer stung him like a whip-lash.

"People who are neither 'lost, strayed, nor stolen' spend no time hunting for imaginary advertisements that never go to press."

"You shall read them in the papers with their printed dates. Copies have been filed and preserved with reports of unsuccessful search from chiefs of police in Louisiana and Florida, whom I paid to hunt for some trace of you. They are deposited in a Boston bank, with a sum of money placed to your credit—all to be delivered to the order of Nona Moorland Temple. Write to Noah Giles, cashier of Orchard Street Bank. I will telegraph, vouching for your right to the tin box bearing your name, and in two days you shall possess absolute proof that I am not the hardened scoundrel you think me. Weak, rash, cowardly I certainly was, but as God hears me, never forgetful, never unfaithful, never intending the wrong for which you have suffered so frightfully."

The gaze of each fastened on the other, neither had noticed the cot or its occupant.

Leighton slipped slowly down till his feet touched the floor, and he clung to the mattress for some seconds, measuring the distance to the pair standing in the middle of the room. Weak from emotion that almost overwhelmed him, he felt his limbs would not support him, and, gathering his cotton nightgown about him, he sank on his knees and crawled noiselessly forward. Between father and mother he crouched, then laid his head against the feet of the priest and feebly raised his arms.

"My father——"

The sight, and all it implied as judgment of evidence in defence, drove her to jealous frenzy, and she sprang forward as a panther leaps to succor her young.

"Don't touch him! Don't you dare to lay your finger on him! You have no more right to him than to an archangel! He has no father, has only his downtrodden girl-mother. Don't you dare to put your sacrilegious hand on his holy head. He is not yours!"

With his right arm he held her back, as she stooped to snatch the boy away, and, kneeling, he

passed his left hand under the prostrate form, gathered him close to his breast, and looked up smiling into her eyes.

"Not mine! If I am not his father—who is?"

"He is mine, solely mine; body and soul, he belongs only to me! Before he was born you turned us adrift in the world to perish, and now that for ten years I have worked day and night, fought for bread and shelter, carried him on my bosom, slept with him in my arms, you—who robbed me of everything, even my good name—you dare—dare claim my outcast baby! I would rather shroud my darling than hear him call you father."

Leighton's arms stole round the priest's neck, and his tangled yellow curls touched the dark head bent over him. Father Temple kissed the little quivering face, strained him to his heart, and the long-sealed fountain broke in tears that streamed upon the clinging child.

"My baby, my son, my own lost lamb, for whom I have searched and prayed—God knows how faithfully, how sorrowfully—all these long, dreadful years!"

As she stood above them, barred by that tense right arm, noting the tight clasp of the thin hands locked behind the father's head, an impotent rage made her long to scream out the agony that found no vent save in a rapid beating of one foot on the bare floor—much like the lashing tail of some furious furred creature, crouching to spring, yet warily hesitant.

Father Temple's outstretched hand caught a fold of her skirt, and with it a strand of floating hair.

"Nona, my wife—my own wife——"

She twitched her dress from his grasp and shook it.

"I am not your wife! Thank God, I am no man's wife! I am free as I was before you came—an everlasting blot between me and the sunshine. I kept my promise to you. I set my teeth and was silent under a fiery storm of slander and foul accusations that blistered my girlish cheek with shame, but I waited till the years you named had passed, and you had reached your majority, and plucked up courage to face your father, and had a legal right to ratify what the Church sanctioned through the chaplain. Then I told my only friend all the facts. I ceased to hope, because I had lost faith, but Mr. Dane pleaded for you: 'Wait one year more, give him the last chance to do right.' He wrote to a friend in the old regiment and inquired about all the officers, and his answer told us that your father was in Europe, and that the major thought you were with him. Then I laid my case before one of the human vultures that batten on the wreckage of broken vows—a lawyer, expert in snapping matrimonial chains. He sent you all the necessary notices—sent them to your college address, the only one I could give him. Very soon the decree of absolute divorce was rendered, and I dropped all right to a name I had never publicly claimed—cast it off as gladly as I would some foul garment worn by a leper. Free—free to live my life as I pleased; Mrs. Dane and her boy Leighton—free to go wherever I wished, after death took the only real protector I ever had. And I chose, for my baby's sake as well as my own, to lead the hard life of a working woman, but clean, and honorable, and innocent as that of any abbess safely stored away from temptation behind brick walls and iron gates, and though my own little one may well be ashamed of his father, he will never need to blush for his mother when the peace of death hides her from an unjust and a cruel world."

Sunshine had vanished, the room was darkening, and the last glow from a topaz band low in the west flickered over the woman's head, as she swayed in the wave of passionate protest that rocked her from all trammels of control. There was a brief silence, broken by a strangling sob and cough, and over the breast of the priest's cassock a warm red stream trickled. He rose quickly with the boy in his arms and carried him to the window.

"Nona, a hemorrhage!"

"Lay him down. If you have killed him, it is the fit ending of all my wrongs at your hands. Now stand back! Back! Do you hear—you curse of my life!"

She sponged the child's face, laid a wet compress on his throat, and kept one finger on his pulse, not daring to give medicine while the narrowing red stream oozed more slowly. She lighted a lamp, flew into a recess near the stove, and came back with a hypodermic syringe.

"Now, mother's man, don't flinch."

Pushing up the sleeve, she injected a colorless fluid into his arm, held it some seconds, and laid her lips near the puncture. Then with one hand she held his head raised slightly, and with the other sponged the lips until the flow ceased and the gasping breath grew easy.

"Swallow your medicine slowly, don't strangle. You must lie perfectly still. Mother's own little man needs to go to sleep now and forget all he has heard to-day."

Father Temple had fallen on his knees at the opposite side of the cot, clinging to one of the boy's hands, and suddenly the child turned his head and looked imploringly, first at father, then at mother. Both understood the mute prayer in the beautiful, tender eyes. A quavering sound—part sob, part cough—made their hearts leap.

"I never will be fatherless any more. So glad! Don't leave me, father."

"Leighton, you shall always be fatherless. This man can be nothing to us. Because of his deceitful

promises I suffered the disgrace of smarting from a horse-whip laid on my shoulders when one night I was driven out of my father's cabin by his wife, and to shelter myself from sleet and rain crawled into a covered wagon and slept on hay and corn, until Uncle Dane found me there, and had mercy on me. I owe to this priest every sorrow and trouble that have darkened my life and yours. All these years we have had only each other, and you must understand your mother is the one who has the sole right to your love. My darling, you and mother can be happy together, and we need only each other."

She struggled for composure, but there was an ominous pant in her veiled voice.

"I want my father! Oh, I want him—I—want him!" Tears glided over his cheeks.

She leaned down, snatched Leighton's hand from the priest's clasp, clutching it between both of hers, and turned her blazing eyes upon the kneeling man.

"Will you go now? Have you not done harm enough to satisfy even you? These are my rooms, and I will tolerate your intrusion no longer. Remember, my decree of divorce is absolute, and it secures to me the custody of my child."

"I recognize no validity in divorces, and the law cannot annul a ceremony performed outside of its restrictions and requirements. Because we were minors we invoked the aid of the Church, and our vows before God can never be cancelled by any civil statute. Except as a solemn, sacred rite, there was nothing in our marriage to legitimize our child. This is my son, not by license of law, but because we swore fidelity to each other 'until death do us part,' and called God to witness; and no human decree can rob me of my child—since you dare not name any other man his father. I defy you to lay your hand on his innocent head and question his legitimacy, which inheres only in a ceremony no civil law sanctioned. Months of tedious and well-nigh fatal illness delayed my return to you, and during my delirium your letters were mislaid. When at last I accidentally recovered two letters, and went on crutches to bring you back with me, you had disappeared. All the proofs of my search shall be laid before you, and though I do not wonder you grew desperate and cast me out of your heart as unscrupulous and treacherous, the facts when investigated must convince you I have kept my vows as faithfully as you kept yours. I felt that somewhere in the world my wife and child were adrift, through my folly, my cowardly fear of my father, and, broken-hearted and conscience-smitten, I confessed to the Superior of my Order in England at that time, that I desired to live a celibate in expiation of a rash act in my boyhood, which separated me from the wife I still loved. I took my vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity with the explicit understanding that they did not absolve me from my marriage vows, should God mercifully permit me to find my family. I hold supreme the oath I took under the stars at the Post, and second in sanctity my vows before the altar in our chapel. For the awful consequences of my boyish weakness I accuse only myself, and if it be part of my punishment that I have lost irrevocably the affection and confidence of the mother of my child, then, at least, there remains for me the comfort of finding my boy, from whom I will never again be separated; and to him I must atone for years of unintentional neglect."

He saw that his appeal was futile as the leap of a wave that breaks and sinks in froth at the foot of basaltic cliffs, and the joyful light died in his eyes when he began to realize that wishing to believe the worst she would never accept proofs offered in exculpation.

"Nona, try to forgive me, for the sake of our son, our own beautiful, innocent boy."

There was no answer but the steady, quick tapping of her foot on the floor, and her defiant face showed no more softening than an iron mask.

Leaning forward, he kissed Leighton's tearful cheek, and despite his effort to control his voice it trembled.

"My precious child, I thank God I have found you! Between your mother and me you must not attempt to judge now. She has suffered terribly on account of mistakes I made, and she certainly has the best right to you and to your love. It is painful for her to see me, and I cannot blame her, but some arrangement must and shall be made by which I can come often and be with you without intruding upon her. She will select and name the hours when my visits will give her least annoyance. Good night, my son. To-day I am happier than I have been since I kissed your dear mother good-bye."

He tore a blank page from Ugo Bassi's "Sermon," wrote a few lines, laid the paper near his wife's hand, and went out, closing the door very gently.

"The hemorrhage was not all blood. I think an abscess has broken, and it may save his life. He must have a change as soon as it is safe to move him; but at present it might be fatal. Your money and his in the Boston bank will make him comfortable, and unless you use it I shall be obliged to interfere. Let the doctor decide where and when the child should go. To-morrow at two o'clock I wish to come here, but you can easily avoid seeing me if you so desire. May God soften your heart towards your unfortunate but faithful husband."

When Father Temple entered the Herriott library, Noel rose from a desk where he was sealing letters and put out both hands.

"Herriott, most blessed of friends! How can I ever thank you?"

"You have found your wife and child? Thank God! I could scarcely wait for the good news I was

sure you would bring me."

His eyes were misty, and the grip of his hands was harder than he knew as he drew the priest to a chair.

"Dear old fellow, it has been rather too much for you. Brace yourself with this mixture. I had an idea your Reverence might need a tonic, since 'after the manner of men, you have fought with beasts at Ephesus.' Drink it! Your spiritual superior would advise it if he could see your face."

"Tell me, Noel, how you discovered Nona."

"I saw her at the glove counter where she is employed, and was puzzled by her resemblance to a face I had admired in San Francisco. I heard out there that some mystery hung about her, but no hint of any impropriety on her part. Such delicacy of features and perfect coloring are rare, and faces so beautiful etch deep on one's memory. Belmont painted her as 'Aurora' in his group, and gave me a photograph of her head; but he spoke of her with respect, and commented on her proud prudishness in refusing to sit in his studio. You recollect Sidney Forsyth? He carried me to a 'night school' for working girls, established by his mother, and there I first saw 'Aurora,' hard at work in the bookkeeping class. He admired her extravagantly, and told me that despite her girlish appearance she was a widow with a child, and lived like a nun in the very small cottage of an old uncle. Last summer, in hunting through a discarded trunk hastily packed at Oxford while you were on the Continent, I found among several sheets from your portfolio that water-color sketch, and it revived my old suspicion that some early tragedy had driven you into cloisters. Sooner or later one finds on almost every man's road through life the sign-post, *dux femina facti*, and I stumbled against yours when I had ceased to conjecture your motive for a course that astounded your friends. Last night, after you left me, I verified a few dates in my diary, and to-day's visit to Brooklyn made it absolutely certain my identification was correct. I congratulate you, and am heartily glad that I helped to flush your family covey."

"Congratulations sound grim after all I passed through to-day. Did you ever dream you were dying from thirst, and just as you stooped to drink the spring vanished? I have realized that tantalizing vision. Nona will never forgive me, never accept my explanation, never believe my statements, never tolerate the sight of me. She hates me with an intensity that is sickening, and because the child is mine she would rather see him in his coffin than in my arms. She hugs to her heart the conviction that I am utterly vile, because she wants to believe the worst, and furiously rejects any attempt to prove that I am not a doubly dyed hypocrite and villain. You have been so loyal a friend, I should like to tell you all that occurred."

When he finished a detailed recital of his interview, he leaned back, sighed heavily, and closed his eyes.

"I knew you were going into a fiery furnace, for, from what I have heard and seen of your wife, I fear she is one of the few inexorable women, impervious to reason, to passionate pleading, to the most adroit cajolery. The hotter the lava, the harder when it cools. Will you permit me to offer a suggestion?"

The priest raised his haggard face and laid his hand on Mr. Herriott's knee.

"I shall be grateful for advice which I sorely need just now."

"You have found the missing, but if you are not wide awake and cautious you will lose them again, and permanently."

"What do you mean?"

"You told her you would go back to-morrow at two o'clock? I rather think you will not find her; she will have vanished forever."

"Impossible! The child is too ill to be moved, and she would not risk the danger to him."

"In her present mood nothing is impossible, and she would dare death if it were necessary, in order to thwart you. She belongs to more than one society of communists, and the freemasonry in operation is marvellous. There are places in this city, in Chicago, and in several New Jersey towns where she could disappear as successfully as in a Siberian mine; and you must keep in touch with your beautiful boy, who is much too fine a porcelain vase to be filled with the vitriol of socialism. Before you sleep to-night ask the police department to set a special watchman in sight of that house, with instructions to report to you any indications of intended removal."

"Then I must go, although I do not share your apprehension that Nona would rashly risk the boy's safety. Noel, I owe you so much—and for such various benefits—I am simply bankrupt in expressions of gratitude; but at least I can pray God to grant you your dearest desire in life, be that what it may."

He rose, and Mr. Herriott walked with him to the front door.

"Temple, write me fully all that you know I shall wish to hear. Let me help you in any way possible to secure a change of climate for your little St. John of the gilded locks. Early to-morrow I go home, and in a few days your cousins from Washington will be my guests. Are you quite willing Eglah should know the complications surrounding you at present?"

"Tell her everything, and do not spare me or suffer her to blame the innocent victims of my

rashness. Some day Eglah may help me to soften my Nona's heart. When and where may I hope to see you again?"

"Very soon I start to Arizona for a short stay, thence to the most northern of the Aleutian Islands, where I expect to find Eskimo cliff-dwellers, and later to the region northwest of Hudson Bay. Be sure to write me, and Vernon—pardon my perhaps unjustifiable insistence—don't fail to secure police surveillance before you sleep."

When the door closed, Mr. Herriott wrote a telegram to the physician who attended Leighton, walked to the nearest telegraph office, and heard his message click over the wires.

A few days later he was not surprised to learn that only the sternly positive interdict of the doctor had frustrated an attempt to remove Leighton from Brooklyn at ten o'clock on Monday morning.

CHAPTER XIII

The first view of "Greyledge" suggested a stone crazy-quilt, so multitudinous were its angles, so incongruous its medley of styles; but examination showed architectural strata superimposed in such trend that the paradoxical dip had uplifted the oldest to the crest. Three stories, *échelon*, looked as if they had frozen in dancing a minuet, each receding yet rising, and when, as a bride, Nina Herriott stepped out of her carriage, she gayly made three very low bows to the dwelling that appeared courtesying to welcome her. The long first story was a piazza or loggia, with wide, round arches upheld by double shafts, closed in winter by glass doors and storm shutters, in summer noons sheltered from the glare of sun-smitten water by white and blue awnings. No railing divided it from the broad stone terrace just below, overhanging the lake that mirrored its carved and fluted balustrade where vine-fringed vases glowed with flowers for three months of each year. At the north end of the arcade, a round tower, rising one hundred and fifty feet, held a lamp with brilliant reflector that shone far out over the apparently shoreless lake on moonless and stormy nights, and at the south corner one of several flights of steps led to an arched and domed pavilion where boats were moored.

The second floor flowered into bay windows, mullioned and diamond paned; and the third might have slipped from some Swiss hillside, so full it seemed of small balconies, sharp gables, dormers, and deep recesses, and the steep roof that crowned the whole overhung like an Alpine hat the frivolous impertinence of trefoil and stained glass. Rains had bleached and snow storms pumiced the stone walls to a smooth, cool grey, silvered in spots by films of lichen, while on two turreted chimneys ivy had braved ascent to weave a cloak of glossy green across the sombre smoke stains garnered during many generations. The most elevated portion of the composite structure had been built on the side of a rocky hill, at some distance from the lake edge, and gradually the declivity had been graded for the later additions that finally advanced until they could see their own irregular façade reflected in the water spraying their foundations; consequently the floors were on different levels, and one went up and down short flights of steps to reach apartments in the same story.

Herriott tradition claimed that early French pioneers had here destroyed an Indian fort, and that their rude hunting lodge was succeeded by a missionary station, where a semi-circular excavation in the rock had served as oratory; in proof whereof an old wooden cross, partly gilded with tarnished, tattered gold leaf, still hung in the small stone cave that once echoed the antiphony of Latin chants, and held forever in its mossy crannies subtle, spicy survivals of sanctifying incense. Sheltered on the north by hills, clothed with vineyards along their southern face, the courtyard and shrubbery nestled close to the rocks, but eastward stretched wide fields and level meadows bounded by dense woods rising on steep uplands, blue in the distance; and south lay a garden of olden time, with primly boxed beds, walks hedged with lilacs, snow-balls, glistening rhododendrons, and masses of roses that ran riot to the foot of a high enclosing stone wall, where a shining mantle of ivy climbed to match its verdure with the velvet of hills that here circled like a clasping arm, reaching from far-away forests to the lake margin. The courtyard was so nearly on a level with the rear of the house that only three shallow steps were needed for entrance, and at this spot the range of color had been exhausted by masses of lilies, irises, peonies, and foliage plants—so brilliant that in the summer sunshine benignant nature seemed to have paved the place with a flawless prism.

On the morning after the arrival of Mr. Herriott's guests, breakfast had been served on the long, arcaded piazza, where stood three circular tables, each bright and fragrant from central piles of flowers and fruit. At the middle one Mr. Herriott sat with Eglah and Judge Kent, around that on his left were Miss Katrina Manning—an aunt of Noel's mother—Professor Cleveden, and Eliza Mitchell, and grouped at his right were Beatrix Roberts, a cousin of Miss Manning's, Dana Stapleton of New York, and Roger Hull, the young congressman from a northwestern State, whose devotion to Eglah had long been undisguised.

It was a cloudless summer day, and the crisp wind from the west drove the crystal water of the great inland sea into ruffles of foamy lace against the stone face of the terrace. If she had floated down from a Fragonard panel, or stepped out of a Watteau *clavecin*, Miss Manning could not have represented more picturesquely a dainty type of the long by-gone. Low in stature, slight and graceful, this airy old lady, with silver hair piled high on her head, where jewelled side combs

held her curls close—habitually wore grey silk or velvet, and her bright, restless round eyes increased her likeness to a bird, hence Noel's pet name was "Auntie Dove." Her gowns were many years behind the reigning mode, and she shook her voluminous skirts in indignant scorn of close-clinging garments then coming rapidly into vogue. When her favorite young cousin Beatrix plucked up courage to denounce "antediluvian fashions," the grey old dame seized her by the shoulders and shook her till her teeth chattered.

"Trix, you are an impertinent minx! My gowns are decent and fit my morals, and I would as soon change the cover on the Manning family Bible. You young people have no longer any sense of proportion; your skirts are so skin-tight you might all be 'artist's models,' and your manners and your disgraceful slang are about as unlaced as the bohemians. If your refined grandmother Manning could move in her portrait frame, she would most certainly turn her back to you and her shocked countenance to the wall."

To-day she lifted her tortoise-shell lorgnette to examine the rather unusual pattern of Professor Cleveden's black onyx sleeve buttons, which represented tarantulas with prominent diamond eyes.

"Noel, are we all permanently arranged in trios? Because, if so, you have been cruelly unkind in condemning the professor to sit next to an orthodox old woman who knows no more science than a blind kitten, who is no bugologist, no apostle to moths, and who bitterly disapproves of crucifying butterflies on pins."

"Aunt Trina, you will not be allowed to monopolize each other, no matter how earnestly you both may desire to do so. Shall we change groups once a day, or at each meal, in order that the collective wit and wisdom may be impartially distributed?"

"I suggest that all names be deposited in a box and that we draw for places," said Mr. Stapleton, fearful of losing his neighbor, Miss Roberts.

"Dana, what a rash challenge to chance! She can be spiteful, that classic, grinning old jade, and might roll up three women to one table, leaving a solitary charming belle—presumably myself—to the tender mercies of five furious men. Fancy the impotent wrath of the beauless trio robbed of their legitimate prey! Noel, do not risk any such dire disaster, but try the democratic plan of rotation in office, whereby I shall afflict each of you for only a few hours of my term. What delicious apricots! Surely old Amos Lea did not grow them?"

Miss Manning held up a twig on which twin, luscious apricots glowed.

"They were ripened by the hot suns and spiced by Pacific breezes in lower California, where I have a friend who now and then sends a hamper from his fruit farm. Beauties, are they not? My old gardener Amos, jealous of the fame of his own orchard, snorted contemptuously and assured me they tasted like stale sawdust."

"Does he still employ David, St. Paul, and the prophets as proxies to curse his enemies?" asked Professor Cleveden, helping himself liberally to cherries.

Catching sight of Eliza Mitchell's rebuking eyes, Mr. Herriott laughed.

"Yes, he sternly restricts his imprecations to Biblical quotations. When I was a boy I ruined some very rare tulips by setting mole traps in the border, and in his rage he called on 'fat bulls of Bashan' to gore me. Years later I imported a stock of pigeons, and when they literally devoured his early crop of sweet peas, he seized me by the coat collar, showed me the havoc, and shouted, 'May the Angel of the Lord chase you and your devilish English thieves.' He has tyrannized over us all so long, that his wrath knew no bounds when my amiable young stepmother, who desired some alterations in the hothouse, defied his arguments and wishes, and insisted on an annex for orchids that necessitated the removal of his pet carnations. Whereupon, raising his hand, he shook it furiously and hissed: 'Madam, you have done me much evil. May the Lord requite you according to your works!' With tears in her eyes Nina fled to my father."

"A grumpy curmudgeon is old Amos Lea, but his religious convictions are so earnest that I would sooner house a swarm of wasps inside my vest than tread on his Baptist toes. He objects strenuously to my association with Herriott, having overheard some of our heretical geologic discussions as we strolled through the gardens, and he eyes me as if I were the foul fiend at Herriott's heels, prodding him downward with a pitchfork. I wish that somewhere in the great outside world I had such a loyal, godly friend to pray for my soul."

"Dear me! I thought you scientists disdained such a superstition, and that you had reduced souls and minds to mere 'reflex sensory' action, and 'cerebral sinuosities,' and 'psychoplasm,' and 'inherited instincts,' and deposits of phosphorus?" interjected Miss Roberts, as she dipped her jewelled hand into her finger bowl to bruise the lemon blossoms.

"My dear young lady, pray do not join the multitude in stoning the prophets. If there be ghosts—blessed are the grammarians who invented a subjunctive mood—those of martyred students of science will one day haunt you, more terrible than 'an army with banners.' Herriott is a much more attractive target than I—younger and handsomer—why not call him into the witness box and swear him on the case of souls?"

"Trix, there is no need to pester yourself about Noel's soul. Old Amos Lea made sure of his safety when he baptized him the second time. Noel, tell her about it. How your poor father laughed that

day!"

"Being a rigid Baptist and an elder, Amos scouted my Presbyterian christening as totally inadequate to neutralize what he considered my unusually large share of original sin, and as his wife, Susan, was my nurse, they began to grieve over my reprobateness as soon as I was old enough to lay claim to moral responsibility. When I was about sixteen I was out yonder on the lake fishing. Two friends were with me, and we all swam well, or thought we did. A sudden squall capsized the boat, and I was caught and held under it in such a way that I could not extricate myself. The boys hovered around, trying unsuccessfully to help me, but just then Amos kicked off his boots, plunged in, and swam to the rescue. He was strong as a whale, raised the end of the boat with his shoulder and dragged me out. I was slightly stunned, and he swam with me into shallow water, where he could stand up. Then he lifted me horizontally, as if I had been a baby in long clothes, and repeating with triumphant fervor the baptismal formula of his Church, he immersed me so thoroughly that I regained consciousness, and he turned me over to Susan and hot blankets, as a 'brand snatched from the burning,' and properly baptized."

Removing the ice from the yellow heart of his melon, Judge Kent glanced around the table.

"Owning such a paradise as this home, do you not all share my amazement that Herriott can prefer to shut it up and wander contentedly over the continent, searching its rough crannies—Labná, Mitla, Casa Grande, and where not—for what he pedantically calls the 'primeval anthropological nidus'?"

"Oh, bless you, Senator Kent, it is just in his blood, and he can no more keep still than a flea can stop hopping. His father was a surveyor—civil engineer—always roving, and Noel is exactly like him; which none of you will doubt when I assure you his mother really was an absolutely beautiful woman. He is a hopeless tramp. He gravitates to the wildest places of creation, as you and Mr. Hull to the cultivation of votes, and Dana to Wall Street kites, and this insecticide professor to picking the lock of God's workshop when He has closed the door and gone to His seventh day rest."

"Aunt Trina refuses to believe that my ambition to become acquainted with our prehistoric family relatives is a laudable method of climbing the genealogical tree. She is not enthusiastic on ancestry."

"That depends, my dear boy, on the 'strain' you are hunting. If the first hatching of brown skins in that 'primeval nidus' of your dreams had only been as wise and prudent as modern cattle and horse raisers, and fixed rules of pure-blooded pedigree, we might not fear to grope backward lest we find only 'grades' in our family group. Now, climbing a genuine, decent, civilized ancestral tree is much better sport than twisting up slippery totem poles with a coyote, or a coon, or a vulture perched on top, as head of the family."

"And, pray, what of the sacred menagerie of heraldry? The quadrupeds, birds, flowers of armorial blazonry—all that makes heraldic pomp picturesque—are but survivals of primeval totem symbols throughout the world. Auntie Dove, your book-plate and your family seal bear a leopard couchant, very dear to your orthodox, patrician heart, and some day your hereditary pet beast may have glared down upon a Tlinkit teepee."

"Marriage is the only cure for Herriott, and it would effectually tether him," said Mr. Hull, keeping his eyes on Eglah.

"It appears that you have carefully avoided taking your own prescription," answered his host.

"It is by no means my fault. Though futile, my efforts have been heroic."

Professor Cleveden leaned forward.

"You good people do not understand how deeply Herriott is imbued with the conviction that contemporary 'differentiation' is not a synonym for desirable advancement. The complex, hybridized, neurotic creature he meets in society does not always impress him as vastly superior to the primeval female type, and you may all expect that whenever matrimonial shackles restrict his pasturage, which will not be *in Wyandot lines*, he will be hobbled by 'some savage woman' whose accomplishments are limited to the slim schedule set down by that jilted cynic of 'Locksley Hall.' The 'new woman' incites us to pray fervently for swift reversion to type. Now, Miss Manning, I am sure you are preparing to tell me that——"

"That of course in such matters tastes differ, and not one of us feels disposed to deprive Professor Cleveden of his coveted female simian companion; but, as Noel never has had a flirtatious 'Cousin Amy' to rub him the wrong way, he has no provocation to present to me a squaw as my great niece."

"It is very evident the professor viciously remembers his own 'Amy,'" said Miss Roberts, who was watching keenly for some manifestation of consciousness in Noel and Eglah.

"Miss Beatrix, no scapegoat 'Amy' bears away my sins of temper, because, as a naturalist, I am unalterably opposed to the marriage of cousins. I never owned but one sweetheart. She took my unfeathered young affections into her tender hands when she was only ten years old, and so carefully has she preserved them that after twenty years of married life she remains my charming sweetheart—my pearl of womanhood—the supreme joy of my existence. She is the one priceless fossil in my collection, guarded with jealous watchfulness, because she no more resembles the

new feminine type than a snowy dove a blind, broken-winged, snapping hawk."

"When I marry, my ambition will soar beyond being bottled in alcohol or boxed in sawdust or cotton wool, like a centipede or a cracked egg of the great auk. I should imagine that men who spend their work days among musty, stuffy fossils would rather enjoy the variety of an up-to-date, cultivated wife who kept in touch with social tides and currents. Now, Mr. Herriott, you who prowl about laboratories and museums until you understand their dreary jargon as fully as you do leading a german or playing polo, ought to be a wiser umpire than this one-sided shut-in scientist, who prefers dry bones to living pink flesh."

"In the first place, Miss Beatrix, I must, in the absence of Mrs. Cleveden, protest against her husband's classification of her as a fossil. She is alive to her finger tips with enthusiasm for his work, in which she is his ablest assistant, and knowing something of his charming home life, I consider him the most enviable man of my acquaintance. We who are not so fortunate in the matter of sweethearts, must content ourselves with the best available substitute; and you know, 'if one cannot have what one loves, one must love what one has.'"

"A defence of fickleness quite unworthy of you; and moreover, Noel, utterly untrue, for of all people in the world you are the very last to surrender anything you really want."

"Aunt Katrina, would you have me spend my life wailing for the moon?"

"Pooh! You are not so fatuous as to want to drag a surveyor's chain across its cold chasms and jagged heights; and after a brief study of your frozen charmer you would turn your telescope on something accessible and more valuable. Miss Kent, do you consider Noel a fickle person?"

Eglah looked up, and, meeting the eyes of her host, they both laughed.

"Certainly not. His life-long devotion to you ought to shield him from all suspicion of inconstancy."

"Aunt Trina, she is not an impartial umpire. The first time I saw her, a little girl wearing a snowy muslin with blue ribbon bows on her shoulders, we entered into a compact, adopted each other as half-brother and stepsister, and now in supreme trust we form a sort of mutual aid, mutual defence—on my part, admiration—association. If she saw fifty fatal flaws in me she would loyally conceal them from you, who are such a terribly severe censor."

"Herriott ought to go into politics; don't you think so, Miss Manning?" asked Mr. Hull.

"By no means. I prefer he should keep his hands clean."

"Senator Kent can tell you, madam, that we do not all dabble in mud or pitch."

Mr. Herriott leaned forward, and spoke more quickly than usual.

"She is afraid I might not swell the class of distinguished exceptions which you and Senator Kent represent. Aunt Trina, may I trouble you for a second cup of coffee and an extra lump of sugar?"

Beatrix had completed her inventory of Eglah's points of attraction, and now, as her eyes rested on the graceful figure daintily gowned in lilac muslin, the result annoyed her.

"Miss Kent, has your college training fitted you to believe all the marvellous tales these two wise scholars tell us; as, for instance, that this lovely spot—this suburb of paradise where we are sitting—was once buried for ages under ten thousand feet of glacial ice?"

"I am sorry to confess my course of study carried me only far enough to see the border land of a kingdom I never expect to explore. Unless one specializes, four years at college make no experts. You might as well ask a butterfly to classify all the blossoms it hovered over, or measure the depths of glaciers."

The professor pushed aside his cup, and looked at her.

"And why not? It can teach us infinitely more than its human, club-crazy sisters. My dear Miss Kent, we who are in bonds to science exact great accuracy even in the selection of metaphors, and you will pardon me if I rise to defend the usefulness of butterflies. On top of Mount Washington survives a colony of butterflies found nowhere else south of Arctic snows and ice; descendants of a family which retreated with the great glacier that once overflowed New Hampshire and left only the pinnacle of Mount Washington uncovered. When the *Œneis* household moved back to Labrador and Greenland, these silk-winged stragglers, flirting in corners, were abandoned by their chaperons, and for thousands of years their progeny have flitted around that stone crest to show us the depth of the glacier."

Professor Cleveden adjusted his eye-glasses and moved his chair so as to look straight at Miss Manning, who at once put up her lorgnette to probe his gold spectacles.

"Are you an enthusiastic club-woman?"

"Why don't you ask me if I approve of perjury, arson, and poisoning?"

"My dear madam, did I not hear you last evening quoting the sonorous periods of Mrs. Helen Phædra Swan Hall, whose mission seems to be the emancipation of her sex from bondage to God as well as to man?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Cleveden! It was I who asked Mr. Hull to explain the bill she is trying to have introduced in Congress. Cousin Katrina thinks all such advanced women should be locked up as lunatics, but she is too extreme and hopelessly narrow for this generation, while I like to keep up with the procession. Do tell us about this prophetess."

"Her husband was a mild man, reputed a faithful husband and a devoted father, but the female comet he was yoked with indignantly spurned such slavish rôle as wifehood and maternity involved, and she ranted around clubdom and through the press, striving to enlighten the world, until, finally, she determined to break her domestic chains and shake off all impedimenta of marriage obligations. Having deliberately selected as successor a friend whose opinions proved quite as lax as her own, she promoted an intimacy that resulted in accordance with her scheme. Then she suggested divorce to Hall, who very naturally assented with alacrity. When he promptly married the woman chosen, Mrs. Helen Phædra Swan gladly abandoned all care of her own children to the new wife, washed her hands of maternal responsibility, and proclaimed herself free to work for the rights of woman and the enlightenment of the world. Soaring eagles scorn to perch at one man's hearthstone, and behold the comical climax of her flight above the laws of decency and good taste. She has swooped down on a new husband, and, for a season at least will call herself Mrs. Helen Phædra Swan Butler. Such, Miss Roberts, is your 'prophetess.' Having heard that the pet theme of her present lucubrations is the 'ideal education of children,' I suggested to my own connubial serf, my 'true love,' that the study of the views of this experienced seeress might assist us in the training of our one ewe lamb, our old-fashioned little maid, and the reception of my proposition was of a nature conjugal loyalty forbids me to describe. Mrs. Helen Phædra Swan Butler is merely a degenerate imitation of the Amazons, who changed their husbands annually and deserted their children. A survival of polyandry, if you please. Formerly women looked sternly and sorrowfully from their lofty pure plateau upon polygamy and bigamy as the horrible heinous luxury of wicked, despotic men; now they are stepping down into the mire, claiming equal rights in sin, and the emancipated new female clamors for easy divorce and the freedom of polyandry. In other days, before 'higher education, club-culture, and female rights' had abolished home life, domestic sanctity, and fireside *lararium*, all good women held Clytemnestra the infamous archetype of feminine depravity, but the doctrine of 'equality' lowers the old high standard, and the new code reads: 'She had as good a right to Ægisthus as Agamemnon to Chryseis.' As if the gods failed to overtake both in their sins."

Miss Manning rang a silver bell, and, rising, tapped the professor's arm with her lorgnette.

"Yet you have the audacity to ask me if I condone creatures whose real aim is to reverse God's decree of the sexes? Trix thinks I should like them locked up in insane asylums? By no means. I should prefer to see all such 'removed' by the methods you men employ when brutes become afflicted with rabies and glanders. I am an old woman, Mr. Cleveden, but I do object to the way in which you 'scientists' dispense with conventional verbal draperies in discussing some questions. After all is said, I presume that 'truth' you are worshipping must wear clothes, and there is no need to confiscate her garments. Moreover, you are not to believe for one instant that Miss Roberts means half of the idiotic rubbish she talks. Girls nowadays think it *chic* to affect fads, but Trix is no more a 'new woman' than I am a winged saint. Noel, what is the order of the morning?"

"The senator and the professor wish to fish; Stapleton and I are bound to the stable and kennel, and later to the billiard table to settle an old debt; Mr. Hull, Eglah, and Miss Beatrix will go out on the launch, and the phaeton and your ponies will take you and Mrs. Mitchell to see the finest views of the lake and hills."

"I much prefer to see your dogs and watch your billiard game, if I may," said Miss Roberts, picking from the table vase some scarlet poppies that she fastened in her belt.

"Miss Manning, do come with us on the lake; the day is so lovely." Eglah laid an appealing hand on the grey silk sleeve, and Miss Katrina's keen eyes softened.

"You are very good to want a crusty old woman as ballast, but I am not fond of the water. The wind is no respecter of grey hairs, takes such impertinent liberties with my maidenly curls, and, beside, if an accident should occur I can swim only as far as a cannon ball might, and of course in an emergency Mr. Hull would devote himself exclusively to saving me, hence you would probably drown. Thank you, Miss Kent, but Mrs. Mitchell and I shall do our best to strangle time till luncheon."

During that long drive Eliza was kept constantly on guard, parrying questions that betrayed an earnest curiosity relative to Mr. Herriott's standing in the senator's family; and she readily divined that Eglah was considered a formidable obstacle to a marriage long desired between their host and Beatrix Roberts, the youngest of several unmarried daughters whose father was Miss Manning's second cousin.

"And why do you think Noel will never marry?"

"Of course, madam, I can only conjecture; but from what I have seen of Mr. Herriott, I think he is very happy as he is, and if he desired or intended to wed any one, he would scarcely be so eager to renew his travels in distant lands."

"And Miss Kent? Lovely, refined-looking woman, but cold as a frozen mill pond. We hear she has had some fine offers. The world wonders for whom she is waiting."

"As far as I know, she is absolutely indifferent. For her father she has a peculiarly strong and

tender affection, and I shall be very much surprised if she ever marries."

When she returned to her own room, she felt that she had stepped down from the witness stand after an adroit cross-examination, in which she had maintained her non-committal rôle. As the pleasant days passed, she and Judge Kent watched their host, hoping for some manifestation of tenderness, or pique, or consciousness of past suitor-claims that might portend possibility of renewal. No faintest evidence of other than calm, friendly, hospitable interest rewarded their scrutiny. If it were indeed complete surrender of hopes once cherished, would there not have been traces of disappointment, some bitterness, some cloud on face and manner?

Although she was unusually free from coquetry, Eglah was too familiar with the moods of rejected lovers not to observe the exceptional demeanor of the master of Greyledge, and his cool *insouciance* would have perplexed her had she not recollected his assurance that no word of his should ever recall the painful interview in the carriage. She noticed that he never touched her arm or hand if it could be avoided, and, if he really cared for her society, why did he invite Roger Hull to his house and afford him every opportunity to monopolize her? The weather continued favorable; the guests could not fail to regret the approaching end of their visit, and Mr. Herriott seemed unusually happy, yet he had abstained from being alone with Eglah.

On the last day, at the close of dinner, the host proposed that coffee and cigars should be served on the terrace overhanging the water. The afternoon had been hot and sultry, and the full moon rose out of a tawny haze that smouldered at the horizon but silvered and glistened as the light swam through. Eliza stole away to pack the trunks, and Senator Kent, the professor, and Mr. Hull strolled up and down smoking, while Miss Roberts and Mr. Stapleton followed Mr. Herriott to the pavilion, where he unlocked a boat and fitted the oars. Miss Manning's favorite anisette had accomplished its mission, and her white head was bowed on the billowy lace fichu that covered her neck. Noiselessly Eglah slipped into the loggia, down the steps leading to the garden beyond the courtyard, and ran along a walk, dark under dense overhanging boughs. For a little while she must be alone to ponder the first really stern words her father had ever spoken to her. They were writing letters in the library that morning, when Senator Kent turned to her.

"My daughter, I must tell you that I am watching very impatiently for the announcement of your acceptance of Herriott."

"Father, you will never hear it."

"I distinctly refuse to believe you will persist in defying my wishes. Hitherto you have very sweetly yielded to my guidance in all matters of importance, but if you obstinately and foolishly thwart a cherished plan that concerns me more deeply than you know, you will forfeit my forgiveness."

"I will never marry a man I do not love——"

"No silly rodomontade, if you please, my dear. You quite understand my wishes."

"Father, even if my own feelings had changed sufficiently to induce me to give him a different answer, I am absolutely sure Mr. Noel will never renew his offer; and this fact is most welcome, because it removes all possibility of my obeying you. You must see that he is now simply my friend."

"Then you have only a short time in which to recall him. Women whistle lovers back as easily as traps catch mice. It depends solely on you, and I warn you now of bitter consequences unless you comply with——"

Miss Roberts and Mr. Stapleton entered the library, and Eglah retreated to her own room. During dinner Eliza and Mr. Herriott noticed the unusual flush on her cheeks, the strained, restless expression of her eyes; but neither had opportunity for questioning, and, shielded by general conversation, she escaped comment. Sitting opposite at table, her father had once looked steadily at her.

"Eglah, you chance to have the fruit I covet close to your hand. Will you peel me a peach?"

The garden walk she had followed divided, and into a narrow path she plunged, finding a resting place on a miniature rockery covered with fern and periwinkle. The night was so still she could hear the dip of oars as the boat left shore, and far away the throbbing of a steamer whose lights flashed across the foam as it sped onward. With her face in her hands, Eglah recalled Eliza's exasperating question: "Why was Senator Kent afraid of Mr. Herriott?" Was he? What could be the nature of the trouble concealed? If Noel were cognizant of impending misfortune she felt absolutely sure he would never consent to precipitate it. Because she could share her perplexity with no one, her habitual repose of manner forsook her. In the unexpected rift between her father and herself she dispassionately canvassed the possibility of an available bridge, and, feeling confident no second proposal would be made by Mr. Herriott, she rejoiced in the belief that his silence would effectually bar compliance with a command she entertained no thought of obeying. She saw that he had deliberately surrendered her, and, unlike most women, she was profoundly glad. Now and then, when he looked unusually handsome in his yachting suit, and again in full evening dress, presiding with ease and dignity at his table, Eglah compared her host with his guests, with some brilliant men she had met in Washington and New York, and always he seemed aloof and superior as an ivory image among terra-cotta figurines. Conscious that his serene self-poise sprang in no degree from personal vanity or pride of wealth, she admired his

physical perfection, and wondered why all his excellences had no more power to stir her heart than a stained-glass saint in a cathedral window, or a flawless head of Hylas. At such moments she decided God had designed her to be only a daughter, and wifehood had no alluring charms, no rosy glamour.

Out of the dense shadow behind the mound of periwinkle came a sudden rushing sound, a sharp bark, and the large collie Pilot sprang over a stone wall and bounded up to the rockery. A moment later Mr. Herriott whistled, vaulted over the same wall, and stood peering into the clumps of shrubbery. Eglah patted the dog, hushed him in a whisper, and shrank closer to the ground.

"Eglah! Where are you? Eglah!"

The dog barked, and his master came forward.

"How could you suspect I was here?"

"I have a Turk's nose for perfume. I am partial to prussic acid odors, and no heliotrope blooms on this side of the garden. Who dared send you to Coventry? For what are you doing penance, here in the dark?"

"Simply enjoying the delicious, perfect peace that surrounds this special nook like a velvet mantle. Were you hunting for me?"

"No. I supposed you were in the loggia. I went for a few minutes to the small house beyond the wall, where Amos and Susan live. She has been sick several days, and nothing appeases her wrath if I neglect to say good night to her. One of her childish whims is that I shall crack her almonds and filberts, and yesterday when I demurred and turned the nut-crackers over to Amos she shed tears, declaring his hands were not always above suspicion, and that as she had performed this service for me before I was promoted to trousers and vests, I owed it to her now since she has lost her teeth. By jumping the fence, this is the short cut from her house to the courtyard."

"Susan was your nurse?"

"Yes, since I was a year old, and she has been very faithful to my family."

"I should like to see her."

"Then you shall make her a little visit to-morrow morning, but she can never see you; she is entirely blind. Eglah, come out of this damp corner. The moonlight is brilliant, and there is a beach-walk I wish to show you."

As she rose and shook her draperies, he walked in advance, saying over his shoulder:

"You would not accept my arm, for I am sure you need both hands to guard your lace and silk frills from thorns and twigs. Here is the garden boundary. Take care not to trip crossing this stile; come on, only three steps. Now look at that sickle of the beach, with its long row of silver poplars outlining a frieze around the land side of the curve. Once in a furious gale that drove a steamer ashore—just beyond the point—I watched those distracted trees toss their whitening leaves, as though hands in prayer, and they lean always inward, shivering with prevision of wrecks."

Over the burnished lake a full moon shone, and here and there a sinuous ripple flashed like a fiery serpent as it glided to land, then slipped back, while across the waste of water floated the tinkling of Beatrix's mandolin and the tenor voice of her escort. Mr. Herriott took off his hat, and when he turned suddenly to his companion she noticed a brilliant smile on his face.

"Dana is very happy to-night, and I am glad to carry away the pleasant consciousness that I have done everything possible in smoothing the path to his heart's goal."

"You believe he will win her?"

"I certainly hope success for him. Her heart is already his, and, if he can only be patient, she must ultimately yield."

"You think that in such matters persistency is invincible?"

"On the contrary, many Jacobs never win their Rachels; and my prediction fits only the lovers out yonder. Aunt Trina will wail and invoke all the Manning family ghosts, but the pretty hand of Miss Beatrix will follow her heart."

Looking up at him, she admitted that in personal charm he surpassed all men she had ever met, but into this verdict entered no emotional element sufficiently strong to shiver the crystal calm of her heart, and she found it difficult to identify this handsome, placid, smiling countenance with a white, drawn, twitching face whose keen pain had recently wrung tears from her in Washington.

The unusual flush had faded, leaving her cheeks cool and stainless as the petals of a white rose, and the restless spark in her eyes had been extinguished by drops that were never allowed to fall. Mr. Herriott had studied her face too many years not to detect the new strained expression, the compression of lips that would quiver, and all his jealous surmises focussed on one dread—Father Temple.

"Shall we walk on slowly? Not far off is a seat. I have been wishing for a quiet, uninterrupted talk

before we say good-bye for an indefinite period, and this is my last opportunity. Eglah, when did you hear from Vernon Temple?"

"I cannot recall the exact date, but it was several weeks ago. We do not really correspond, and his occasional notes are so impersonal that in replying I sometimes feel as if I were addressing an abstraction. At first he interested me extremely, but one cannot easily maintain his mystical elevation of spirit."

"I thought you were really fond of him."

"Knowing as you do that I have absolutely no faculty for growing fond of people, I am surprised you should have made the mistake. He enlisted my interest in some of his benevolent schemes, especially a 'sisterhood' for care of infirm indigents; but father has no sympathy with Vernon or his vocation, and, therefore, I have been less impressed."

"At one time you were extravagant in praise of his 'saintly, magnetic face.'"

"So I possibly am, or have been, about several fine pictures of handsome, bleeding flagellants and tormented martyrs, but I should prefer not to hang them permanently in my dining-room."

"Do you know anything of your cousin's early life, or of the reasons that induced him to join his 'Order'?"

"Nothing whatever, except that while at college he was ill, and one of father's sisters had him removed to her farmhouse, where he remained for months before he could discard crutches."

Mr. Herriott stopped and turned towards her. Holding his hat behind him, he leaned forward and scanned her closely.

"Vernon is a married man, and his wife is living."

"Is it possible! If any one else had told me, I should doubt it. I am sure father knows nothing of the wife. Where is she? *Cherchez la femme* is rarely a satire."

In the flood of moonlight her fair face—expressive only of surprise—showed no vestige of emotion that could disquiet him, and so intense was his relief that for a moment he dared not trust his voice; then he put on his hat and whistled to his dog. As they walked slowly along the margin of the lake, he told her briefly the history of Father Temple and the recent discovery of his wife and child.

"Thank you for telling me such pleasant news. I am very glad poor Vernon will have that angelic boy to comfort him—but 'Juno'? So beautiful, so hard, so bitter! How can any meek priest ever hope to manage her?"

They had reached the point of the sickle, and looking back the swelling curves of wooded hills, masses of glossy shrubbery, the irregular profile of the house, outlined by its twinkling lights, and the vast shimmering mirror of the great lake, all lay bathed in liquid gold. Somewhere in a neighboring copse a bird, disturbed by the dog or misled by the splendor of the night, twittered, and then, to reassure his brooding mate near by, broke into a rapture of song. Clasping her hands behind her head, Eglah lifted her face to listen, and Mr. Herriott watched the moisture glisten on her lashes.

"Sweet as any aubade of the olden time, under olive and ilex, is it not?"

For a moment she did not reply, then, with a sweep of her arm toward the house on the rocks, she said:

"So beautiful, so full of peace—of such profound repose—how can you—why will you leave it?"

"Because I do not forget '*le repos est une bonne chose, mais l'ennui est son frère*.' I love and enjoy my home, but I prefer not to stagnate. Garnering the bright and charming memories of the past few days, it can never again seem quite as lonely as I have sometimes found it. I am glad you have met Professor Cleveden, who is one of my best friends. His domestic relations are so happy, and so perfect in their adjustments, that no forlorn bachelor, once admitted to his home, could escape pangs of envy. His wife is literally partner in his joys, sorrows, studies, and diversions, and their only child—the 'little maid' Violet—is spelling in the alphabet of science. Cleveden swears she shall be locked up in his laboratory, safe from the social microbes that he fancies infest the atmosphere of female clubs and 'emancipated women.' Some day I hope you will meet Mrs. Cleveden. She is very beautiful and gracious, though he assures me he has one grievance against his 'sweetheart,' and Patmore expressed it:

> "'Her manners, when they call me lord,
> Remind me 'tis by courtesy;
> Not with her least consent of will.'"

"Father distrusts the professor, and cautioned me not to discuss any religious questions, because he considers him a brilliant casuist."

"Cleveden has one apostle whom he follows at all hazards—simple, stern, scientifically established truth—and to him the natural laws are as sacred as those Moses brought directly from the same God who framed them all. For mere dogma in science or religion he has no tolerance, and I shall never forget the profound emotion with which, in a lecture, he quoted:

'These sciences are the real steps in the great world's altar-stairs that slope through darkness up to God.' Revealed religion lets down a ladder from heaven; natural sciences are the solid rungs by which men like Cleveden build and climb. Side by side these ladders rise, never crossing at sharp angles, both ending, resting at the feet of God. Up one spiritual faith runs easily; along the other some souls of different mould toilsomely ascend, each and all seeking and finding the same goal —the eternal Ruler of the universe. Cleveden scoffs at nothing but shallow shams, and we have heard him repeat passages from Job and David, then declaim from the Iliad, and declare that as between the thunder roll of Hebrew and Greek, the latter was as the rustle of rushes in a summer wind to the pounding of Atlantic surf on rock-walled shores."

"Nevertheless, father regrets that you cling to such an unsafe guide."

"He is worthy of my trust. Conscientiously hunting only for truth, he admonishes his students:

> "'Hath man no second life?
> Pitch this one high!'

"To a young man groping in the mist of agnosticism, he repeated the declaration of one of the most subtle scientific thinkers of this century: 'That he had scrutinized every agnostic hypothesis he knew of, and found that they one and all needed a God to make them workable.'

"I wish I could respect myself as I respect and honor my friend. Eglah, knowing your reticent nature, I am perhaps presumptuous in taking a rash step. There is some trouble that annoys you. Before I go away for such a long, uncertain absence, will you trust me? I may not be able to remove the burden, but I should be glad to share it. Can you tell me what distresses you?"

She looked at him steadily, then away at the brooding water, where voices of the night had begun to croon.

"Mr. Noel, let us go back; the boat is at the terrace."

When they reached the stone stile, she said:

"Do you know why father resigned the senatorship?"

"He has not confided his reasons to me."

"Having known him so long, should you think that his state of health demanded such a step?"

"His appearance at present does not indicate any cause for alarm, and you ought not to conjure a spectre with which to frighten yourself."

"His physician did the conjuring."

She sat down on the stile, and in her strained, sad gaze he measured the depth of her disquietude.

"Mr. Noel, if you know any outside circumstances that appear to necessitate or warrant this sudden abandonment of a brilliant senatorial career, I beg you will be once more your old, kind, candid self and tell me. If I understood I could bear it better."

"You think your father is perfectly well?"

"I cannot see the change he insists has overtaken him of late; can you?"

"Yes. Within the year his nervousness and want of equipoise have been apparent, and when the newspapers stated that his 'medical adviser' had recommended rest and Aix-les-Bains I was rejoiced. The atmosphere of Washington is the worst possible for him. When do you sail?"

"On the twenty-fifth."

"Mrs. Mitchell accompanies you?"

"Of course. You scarcely understand what all this means to me. I have no life outside of father's. His political future is my sole horizon. To help, follow close, watch his ascent, was my world. This sudden, inexplicable surrender, this stepping down and back into obscurity and inaction leave me no foothold on coming years, and I feel adrift. Mr. Noel, would it be unreasonable for me to hope that when father returns in vigorous health a Cabinet seat or a foreign mission might be offered him by the Republican party he has served so long, so faithfully?"

The wistful pathos of uplifted eyes that searched his stirred all the tenderness of his nature, but he allowed himself no manifestation.

"If you anticipate such reward for your father, and then lose it, disappointment would intensify the annoyance. By dismissing the expectation, the charm of surprise will be added to the value of promotion. You have passed the age of soap bubbles, and ought to know that upon political preferment no man can depend with certainty, especially in a republican country."

"I shall not, will not, accept defeat. I must be patient until next year, and then, somehow—in some way—we shall recover our kingdom. I am so proud of father—ah, so proud!"

She rose, and he put out his hand to assist her, but she crossed the stile without touching his fingers, and they silently approached the courtyard.

At a late hour, when the party dispersed, Judge Kent was the first person who reached his own room. Soon after, Eglah tapped at his door. As he opened it, a flood of light streamed over her cold, proud face, and his keen gaze seemed to probe her soul.

"Well?"

She shook her head and stretched her arms towards him.

"Father——"

He laid a finger heavily on her trembling lips, then turned her around, pushed her gently but firmly back from the threshold, and locked the door on the inside.

The remaining hours of the night Mr. Herriott spent pacing slowly the beach-walk, realizing anew the hopelessness of any change in conditions that barred him from his heart's desire, and the wisdom of his determination to travel as far as possible. The moon, magnified by mist into a vast sphere of silver, swam in the west, tipping each wavelet with a glittering fringe, and now and then crooning whispers of the great expanse of water seemed to swell and fill the echoing hollows of the brooding night.

The intense bitterness of Mr. Herriott's reflections crept into his voice.

"Loyal soul! Nobody can help her now. Rude winds have blown wide the guarded gate of her temple, and she will spend her life on her knees, trying to regild the clay feet of her one image."

CHAPTER XIV

"My son, Leighton Dane Temple, I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Other than baptismal drops fell on the boy's head, as with unsteady lips and brimming eyes Father Temple bent over him; and the hand that administered the rite clung tenderly to the damp curls. The room was very dim and still, the atmosphere heavy with the breath of tuberoses clustered on the pillow, and the figure sitting at the foot of the cot with her arms folded, manifested by sound or motion no more interest than a stone image. On the mantel shelf was the tin box bearing her name, and many days before letters, newspapers, and money had testified to the truth of her husband's statements, but to its contents she made no allusion, allowed none. Their estrangement was too complete to be bridged even by words when avoidance was possible. Occasionally, as he entered or left the room, she acknowledged his salutation by a slight inclination of her head; but usually sullen silence and apparent unconsciousness of his presence showed how bitterly she resented a presentation of facts that pleaded his exculpation. She hugged her wrongs, and any attempt to minimize his guilt infuriated her. Her ruined life was an acrid dead sea, into which no sweetness could fall, and she clung to its most loathsome aspects with a grim stubbornness unnatural and incomprehensible in women of a different type. The boy's death had seemed imminent more than once, and though he rallied again and again, the sands were surely near the end, running low.

Two weeks after his baptism, Father Temple secured for him and his mother rooms at an old farmhouse on Long Island, not very far from a railroad village.

To the weary child, sick of city heat, city din, and all the complex elements that make tenement life an affliction to sensitive natures, there seemed a foretaste of that heaven to which he was hastening, in the cool, vine-laced porch where wrens nested, the elm-shaded yard, blue with larkspurs, and the green-carpeted orchard of low-spreading apple and towering cherry trees, that formed a quivering loom of boughs casting gilt network of braided sunbeams on purple heads of clover. Outside the picket fence that enclosed the fruit trees a meadow rolled seaward, and in one of its deep dimples a small clear pond shone like a mirror whereon an enormous willow trailed its branches and watched itself grow old. Across this meadow ox-eye daisies ran riot, so densely massed, so tall, they seemed great stretches of snow, and only when the wind swept them into billows were green stems discernible.

Father Temple had found convenient quarters in the neighboring village, and each day he walked to the little farm, where the feverishly bright eyes of the boy glowed with more intense brilliance at his approach. Leighton's sensitive nature responded to every spiritual appeal his father attempted, as though some subtle, dormant chord of sympathy once set in vibration would never cease to thrill. Sometimes, watching the happy, rapt expression on her child's face as the priest read or talked or prayed with him, a jealous rage seized the mother, shaking her into fierce revolt, and she shut her eyes, set her teeth, put her hands to her ears, and mutely fought down her fury. On such occasions, conscious of her suffering, he shortened his visit, carrying away an accession of heartache over the utter hopelessness of any form of reconciliation.

On the morning of the anniversary of his marriage, as he walked along the lane leading to the farmhouse, a flood of reminiscences drowned all the intervening years, and once more he stood under the stars at the Post, holding Nona in his arms. Could she forget the date? Would the sweet, warm wind of tender memory fresh from the happy day their love had sanctified, breathe no melting magic on her frozen nature? Until recently he had shared the current belief—"*tout*

comprendre c'est tout pardonner"—because of the limitless, patient, condoning affection inhering in true wifehood, but the teamster's daughter was a law unto herself, and taught him that some women, who love most intensely and faithfully, forgive not at all.

As he entered the sick room he detected in Leighton's usually gentle voice a note of fretfulness. His mother stood beside the bed, holding a cluster of daisies, which he had rejected.

"My darling, I gathered them where they grew finest, and these are as pretty indoors as out on the meadow."

She laid them beside him, but he turned his face away.

"There's father! He will understand."

She moved away to the window and stood with face averted. Father Temple took the child's outstretched hand.

"Father, why can't I be carried out yonder, where the daisies are spread like sheets? I want to lie down a little while, and feel them cover me, and listen to the bees—and out there I can breathe easier. Mother will not let me, says I might catch cold; as if the sunshine could make me worse. Why can't I go?"

"My son, I fear you had a bad night, and your mother is a better judge than I, because she never leaves you. If she approved, I would gladly take you to the daisies."

"She refused to move me down here, but you brought me."

"It was the doctor, not I, who induced her to consent."

"Oh, I want to go where the daisies are calling me! Don't you see how they turn and beckon and ——" His feeble voice broke in a sob.

"Mother's man must have his milk punch," said Nona, going into the next room to prepare it.

Instantly the boy whispered:

"Father, pick me up, and carry me; quick!"

After a moment Father Temple went into the adjoining apartment. His wife stood shaking the milk into froth, and her glance slipped from his face with no more evidence of recognition than if she had looked at the wall.

"Nona, there has been a dreadful change since yesterday. The time will soon come when you can find comfort only in remembering you denied him nothing. Well wrapped up, a few moments in the sunshine will not harm him."

She passed him without reply, and when the milk punch had been given, she stooped suddenly and kissed her child twice. His wasted arms crept feebly to her neck.

"Please, mother—the daisies."

"If I let you go a little while, you must not ask to stay."

She buttoned his flannel dressing-gown about his throat, wrapped him in her shawl, and put on his little grey cloth cap.

Taking a light blanket from the bed, Father Temple lifted the emaciated form, cradled him tenderly in his arms, and bore him across the orchard. The mother preceded them, opened and closed the gate, and, when they reached the meadow, she withdrew to the brink of the pond, sat down under the ancient willow, and locked her hands in her lap. Close by, on a knoll, the blanket had been spread; Leighton was laid upon it, and feebly stretching his arms drew the daisies over him until they veiled the shrunken figure, and only the wan face and golden curls were visible. In a pale-blue sky the sun shone hot; white butterflies swam lazily to and fro, like drifting blossoms from interstellar gardens; a sheep bell tinkled now and then, and from the south, a freshening wind bore echoes of the ceaseless chant of the heaving sea.

Out of the flowery coverlet Leighton's hand stole, feeling for his father's fingers, and a happy light shone in the boy's violet eyes, but his breathing had grown quick and painfully labored. Suddenly he struggled up, leaning against his father's shoulder.

"What ails the sun? Mother! Where's mother?"

One of those swift, ghostly fogs that spring without warning from the ocean was sweeping inland, and as sunlight smote the advancing pillars of mist it seemed transmuted into battlements and towers of some city of silver. Strained maternal ears had caught the boy's faint cry, and Nona knelt, clasping him close, resting his head on her bosom. His wide and wondering eyes were fixed on the strange, shining wall drawing swiftly nearer.

"The gates of heaven! Mother, mother——"

A moment later the chill waves of mist flowed over them, blotting out the sun.

Under that grey pall, daisy-dotted, the blue eyes closed; the pure, lovely face, still smiling, lay white against his mother's cheek.

Not always comes imperial death as pacificator; now and then the flame of vengeance leaps through the shroud of shadows, and sometimes open graves typify wider, deeper chasms that know no closing. There are natures who prefer total surrender rather than any sharing of that which they hold dearest; and of such was the pallid, dry-eyed mother, lying hour after hour on the bed where her fragile boy slept his last sleep.

His head rested on her right arm, and with her left hand she had drawn his icy fingers inside her dress, trying to warm them on the breast where in infancy they toyed. Since the moment she had snatched him from the meadow couch of daisies and borne him unaided to the farmhouse, no one was allowed to touch him, and the angel who called and guided the young soul to God was more welcome than the human father daring to claim him. During the long night of her last vigil, the priest, pacing an adjoining room, wondered at the stern repression of her grief; and only once, through the half-open door, came a frantic cry, ending in a low, quivering wail.

"Mother's man! Mother's own pretty—pretty—darling baby! Oh——"

An hour later, when he ventured to re-enter the room, he knew the one passionate outbreak signalled her final surrender. She had lifted the little wasted form from the bed and laid him in a coffin resting on a low table; covering all but the delicate, chiselled face and shining hair with a thick shroud of daisies.

Now, with hands locked in her lap, she sat leaning her head against the coffin. Tears he could not repress fell as the father bent down to the casket, but she put her arm across it, barring him.

"Don't! You must not touch my baby."

Sinking to his knees he put his hand on the fingers lying in her lap.

"Oh, Nona! Eleven years ago to-night!"

She pushed his hand aside, and when he bowed his head on her knee, she moved her chair back to avoid the touch.

"My wife——"

"No. I am no man's wife. I can't forget, and I don't wish to forgive, even if I could. I want you to understand that I would rather see my darling where he is than have him live for you to come between us. The Nona you knew died ten years ago, when insulted, and slandered, and despised I washed and ironed for money to clothe and feed my little fatherless one—my own beautiful little baby."

She laid her hand on the cold head and fondled the golden rings of hair, but no moisture dimmed the large, mournful eyes that defied her husband's pleading.

A moment later she added, in a stinging tone:

"After to-morrow you will have no excuse to intrude upon me; with a childless, hopeless, desperate woman you can meddle no more, and I shall contrive to save myself the intolerable sight of your face. In your tin box you will find the money I have not touched, but the papers I burned to-night; because in the grave—my baby's grave—certificates of legitimacy are not required. I wish no record retained of any association or tie with you, and henceforth I want to hear neither from nor of you. For ten years what heart I had left beat only for my baby, and his precious little hands will always hold it tight in his coffin. After to-morrow my work waits for me, and your path and mine will cross no more."

Up and down the room Father Temple walked, striving to master his emotion. Pausing in front of her, he asked very tenderly:

"May I know where and what is the work my son's mother has selected?"

"It is everywhere; the struggle of the poor to loosen the strangling clutch of the rich on their throats; the cruel war which will end only with the downfall of aristocrats, when millionaires will be hunted like other criminals, when cowardly sons of rich army officers can dare to marry publicly the daughters of their regimental teamsters, and when a pure woman, because she is pure, will be as much respected as a crowned head. You preach 'he that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord.' We have a different doctrine, a broader gospel. When justice reigns there will be no poor, no hoarded surplus of dishonest riches, no 'benevolent fund' doled out by 'philanthropic' pharisees to the workers whose labor created it. In that day, no poor girls in reeking tenements will be goaded by the sight of fashionable society women, who drink, and smoke, and gamble, and loll half clad in opera boxes, and hug their lap dogs and their lovers instead of their children. In that day society lines will vanish, and only two classes exist—workers and drones, governed by beehive laws. To aid in this is all I care for now—all that remains for me—and my work will be well done."

She had spoken in a cold, defiant tone, keeping her eyes on the coffin and her fingers on the child's curls, but after a moment a spasm of anguish shook her mercilessly, and, rising, she pointed to the door, saying, between strangling sobs:

"Leave me, and shut the door. I have all I can bear now. Leave me alone with my little one."

CHAPTER XV

Aix-les-Bains proved a successful prescription, and Judge Kent declared himself cured; but two silent women knew he could obtain only a modicum of sleep, and noted the fact that when the daily mail—nervously expected and handled—had been scanned he grew gay and chatty. After sixteen months on the continent, he settled for a while at Taormina, and here his companions were surprised to learn that his business agent had sold every foot of real estate he owned in America, including the Herriott house in New York, and the old homestead built in an elm grove among the bleak, stony hills of New England.

"Father, when was the house in Thirty-eighth Street sold?"

"Soon after we reached Aix."

"And you never told me?"

"Why should I? Herriott might cherish some sentiment about it, but the matter touched you in no way."

"At least I should like to know who bought it."

"Herriott. While at Greyledge I told him it would be on the market, and he instructed his agent to make the purchase."

"Had I known in time, Mr. Whitfield might have invested some idle money. I like those cool, big, old-fashioned rooms."

"I entertain no doubt that sooner or later they will be yours. Mrs. Mitchell, may I trouble you for the 'Figaro' at your elbow?"

"Who owns the old homestead that has belonged to some Kent for two hundred years?"

"The town has grown until it needs a juvenile 'reformatory,' and one is now in course of erection where my old barn stood so long. A better site could not have been found, or one more vigilantly patrolled by orthodox puritan ghosts."

"Have you no regrets when you think of strangers possessing the little family burying ground where some of your ancestors long ago crumbled to dust?"

Eglah lifted her hand to brush away an orange petal that drifted down to the velvet collar of his coat, and Eliza knew that the perpendicular line between her brows indexed profound dissatisfaction.

"Regrets are unprofitable, and what remains of my life must pay dividends. My dear, will you kindly hand me my match box?"

"Then you are homeless?"

Smiling blandly, he bowed to her.

"I trust not, while my daughter owns thousands of acres of the finest land in the South."

"Do you forget how often you have declared you would never again live south of Washington?"

"I forget nothing, but circumstances are not as fixed as parallels of latitude, and changed conditions demand readjustment of plans. Irrevocability travelled into limbo with ancient Medes and Persians, and after the first of May I hope I may count upon the traditional hospitality of Nutwood. You are of age, and have the right to occupy it."

Slowly but steadily the barrier between father and child had risen and strengthened since the visit to Greyledge—a wall as of crystal, which she could neither level nor penetrate. Close to him, having him apparently within touch, yet conscious always that a transparent obstacle divided them. To the cause of estrangement he never referred, even indirectly, and he was neither irritable nor stern, but mercilessly cold and punctiliously courteous. Why he had selected Taormina in preference to Palermo was known only to himself, but one morning Eliza and Eglah saw a letter postmarked Catania, and both recognized Mr. Herriott's peculiarly bold handwriting. Judge Kent read it, returned it to the envelope, which he put in his pocket, and unfolded a New York newspaper. Mrs. Mitchell moved away to a distant window, carrying her embroidery frame and silks, and Eglah opened the piano and played softly two of Chopin's *nocturnes*. In the mirror opposite she saw that her father was listening, beating time with the index finger of his right hand. When she ended and approached him, he shut his eyes and hummed the final bars.

"Father, why did you come here for so long a stay?"

"It is convenient to Catania and on the road to Messina."

"You knew that Mr. Herriott expected to be there?"

"I know that he has a scientific friend there who is an expert in all that pertains to seismology, and that he wishes Herriott to see his seismographs."

"That fact should in no degree influence our movements."

"Speak solely for yourself, my dear. I particularly desire to see Herriott before he starts from Tromsö on his trip to the midnight sun."

Leaning forward, his fine dark eyes fixed on hers, he lowered his voice.

"A separation of eighteen months must have brought you to a realization of your blind folly, and it is necessary that you should have an opportunity to retrieve your error. Herriott comes to-day."

"A lifetime—a thousand years would make no difference with me. I am glad to know that he will never ask me a second time to marry him, and if he should, I could not, and I would not. Oh, father! Put that idea out of your mind, and give me back my own place in your heart."

She came close and tried to embrace him, but he held her back at arm's length.

"I love only those who obey me; and defiance I never forgive. Until you come to an appreciation of your duty as regards my unalterable wishes, I must request you not to touch me, not to expect any notice from me, except such social courtesies as one cannot avoid."

"I am the price of something Mr. Herriott alone can sell you? What is it you wish to buy?"

"Your future happiness, and my peace of mind."

"Distinctly, I decline to be sold."

He smiled, put her aside, drew his chair out upon a balcony, and resumed reading his newspaper.

The conversation had been inaudible to Eliza, but, putting out her hand, she rose quickly at sight of a white face where the large eyes glowed as on the memorable day in the pavilion at Nutwood.

Looking steadily before her, Eglah passed into an adjoining room and locked the door. Some hours later she laid a note on Mrs. Mitchell's lap.

"I am going to sit a while in the old Greco-Roman theatre. I shall come back when I am tired. Please ask no questions."

Through one of the arches, built twenty-three centuries ago, she looked out, wondering if any change could enhance the charm that lay like a magic mantle over the visible world. The purple sea broke in a tangled fringe of silver on the curving beach, Ætna, snow hooded, rose a vast altar far away, with thin, tapering feather of smoke floating as incense from its Plutonian cavern; and gaunt, gnarled olive orchards made a luminous grey background for pink plumes of almond trees, scarlet pomegranates, rose oleanders, and orange and lemon groves white with bloom that fell like a fragrant shower on crimson tulips and waxen cyclamen. In the witchery of her surroundings, thronged with beckoning spectres of Greek, Roman, Saracen, and Norman legends, Eglah had hitherto been able to forget on this spot all but the entrancing beauty of the wonderful old cliffs; yet this afternoon sombre shadows seemed to shroud a smiling sea and land, menacing as the smoking mountain that cast its perpetual challenge to a sapphire sky.

The vague anxiety, the tenderly regretful pain long gnawing at her heart, had given place now to angry indignation, and a humiliating consciousness of her father's persistent and increasing desire to barter her, body and soul, for something that Mr. Herriott possessed. Not his great wealth, her own fortune was sufficiently ample; not his social influence, since political aspirations had come to an untimely end; there was no animosity to be conciliated, no strained personal relations existed, only a mild friendship manifested by occasional correspondence. Her conjectures ran around a baffling circle marked only by the starting post, "what?" "why?" Nemesis is not always so intent on pursuit of the culprit that she can forego the parenthetic pastime of striking at the innocent who may chance to stand between, and Eglah had begun to entertain a bitter resentment against Mr. Herriott—the only visible factor in her father's alienation—despite her firm conviction that he would never, by a renewed proposal, smooth the way to a consummation of the desired sale.

The strong sense of dispassionate justice on which she prided herself upbraided her sharply, but the intolerable disappointments of the last eighteen months shook her from the calm, cool heights of impersonal reasoning. As she leaned her bare head against the pillar of an arch through which presageful Greek chorus chants—ages ago—had drifted away to sea, her upturned face was shown in clear relief, like ivory features on a dull-red background. Gowned in grey cloth, she had clustered lemon blossoms around the cameo fastening her belt, and across her lap lay a branch of acanthus, its pale, delicate lilac flowers springing among the curved, glossy leaves.

From a neighboring angle in the portico, to which Mr. Herriott had noiselessly ascended, his eager, hungry eyes watched her, studied her, and through a mist of unconquerable tenderness he noted the changes time had printed on the frank, fair face—so much older, so pale, so hard, so sullen rather than sorrowful. The light of youthful hope in her lovely eyes had been driven away by some ugly fact always confronting her, and the sensitive lips were set tight, stern, pitiless. Who or what was the Gorgon that had frozen the exquisite face he loved so passionately? More than grief was written there, and he who had so long interpreted its phases read the dominant emotion, indignant protest against some wrong. Over the crest of Ætna the sinking sun hovered, and in the wonderful radiance, that seemed woven of vast rainbows into some celestial garment for sea and land, Mr. Herriott came out of his niche and stood before her.

"I am very glad to see you here, Eglah. It seems so long since we parted at Greyledge."

He held out both hands, and, without rising, she put up one of hers, but he saw the swift frown, the undisguised annoyance his presence caused. There had been no opportunity for fastening a mask, or forcing perfunctory smiles, and upon her frank truthfulness and scorn of dissimulation he relied implicitly. Very tenderly he covered her cold fingers with his warm palms, and, as she withdrew them, he seated himself on a stone at her side.

"Who has put me in your black books? Not a word of welcome for a travel-weary vagrant starving for friendly recognition?"

She looked coldly at him, but something in his fine, magnetic eyes, his caressing tone, touched her into self-reproach.

"If ever you should get into my black book, you will have put yourself there. Mr. Herriott, I am very glad to see you looking so remarkably well."

"Have I so many grey locks, to warrant my promotion to Mr. Herriott?"

She glanced at the silky black head bent toward her.

"Not a white hair visible. Your promotion comes by brevet, in honor of perfect behavior as well as additional years. Of course you have seen father?"

"No, I met only Mrs. Mitchell, who told me you had gone to watch the sunset, and I knew this must be your coign of vantage."

"This is not your first visit?"

"No. The island attracts me more than any other part of Italy, and justifies what has been said: 'Sicily is the smile of God.'"

"Then surely His frown must be Ætna—'the pillar of heaven, the nurse of sharp, eternal snows.' A few moments ago it was dazzling, now how grim and sombre it looms, and that wavering jet of smoke crawls against the purple sky as a dying candle flame flickers over the head of a corpse. I sometimes wonder if God——"

She had lifted the acanthus spray and touched it with her cheek, and her eyes followed the ascending smoke which suddenly glowed from crater lights beneath as sunset splendors faded; but the sentence was not finished, and her lips paled. Turning toward her companion, she smiled.

"You have been feeling the old earth's pulse while she was in an ague?"

"Yes. On the surface our ancient mother appears so absolutely in repose, and yet, when we get down nearer her mighty heart, we find the earth is never still; it trembles and thrills ceaselessly. This was my first view of the seismic pendulum records, in a subterranean vault that suggested the workshop of Hephæstus."

"I should think you would tire of wandering about, and prefer to go home."

"If I had one, doubtless I should; but roof, walls, and fields and gardens do not exactly constitute the home that would content me."

"Mr. Noel, you are wedded to science, and nothing else will ever satisfy you."

"Yes, I am very faithful to my vast spouse, and I find her loyal. She never flirts, never is inconsistent or petulant; when I work hard she smiles divinely, and, like that other sorceress of the Nile, 'age cannot wither her nor custom stale her infinite variety.' Domesticity is not one of her charms, hence hand in hand we roam the world, making a perpetual bridal tour. No connubial quarrels disturb our sweet repose, even when I write to you, her only rival; but if I grow indolent, or over wise or conceited, she simply lays her great finger on her lips of stone and turns her huge planetary back upon me. Now, Eglah, you are due in the confessional. Why did you fail to answer my letter from Fort Churchill, Hudson Bay?"

"Because it contained no address, and to reach you seemed as uncertain as mailing a letter to that wild new comet pious people are praying will not make a carrom with earth and moon and sundry stars. Have you heard that Beatrix and Mr. Stapleton were married in November?"

"Yes, I received a long wail from Aunt Trina, in which she came as near boxing my ears as intervening distance permitted. Dana and Trix will be as happy as a pair of Java finches in a gilt cage."

"I imagined that Miss Manning's objection arose solely from the fact that the cage was not gilded."

"Wall Street is a wonderful matchmaker, and smiled on the lovers. Sometimes Hymen corners stocks, and Dana's kite was lucky."

Having learned from Judge Kent that Mr. Herriott had assisted Mr. Stapleton in financial matters, Eglah smiled, and the old look of kindly trust came back to her eyes as they steadily met his.

"What a treat it would be to read Miss Manning's letter!"

"Because you think my ears deserve boxing, and you enjoy seeing justice meted out? How unkind to your faithful old friend! Nevertheless, I would lay the letter before you, but it is in my trunk at Brindisi, where I am due to meet Chalcott for the next steamer to Cyprus. Chalcott has questioned the accuracy of statements relative to the recent excavations there, and wants local data, and as he is also at odds with Schliemann over the Troad, we go there to debate the claim of Hissarlik *versus* Bunárbashi."

"I did not know you were so deeply interested in classical archæology."

"I am not, and it does not attract me; but it is a special line of study with Chalcott, who wishes me to accompany him, not as co-worker, but merely as a friend."

"You prefer Hopi and Haida legends, and 'Walam-Olum,' and 'glacial moraines,' and 'kettle holes'? You see, as an old friend, I thought it really my duty to read those two reports you sent to father."

"I dare say you found them very tiresome; but pre-glacial conditions and anthropological problems appeal powerfully to me. In tossing up balloons we do not all select the same color."

"After burrowing in the Troad, where next?"

"Tromsö, Hammerfest and the midnight sun. We shall have a pleasant party: two Americans, a German professor, an English scientist, and a Russian astronomer. I must go on to Brindisi to-morrow, but I could not resist the temptation to see you and spend a few hours."

"It will be a long time before you reach home?"

"So long that I have fixed no date for return."

The unmistakable expression of relief that crossed her face was not lost upon him, and involuntarily he clenched his right hand resting on his knee.

"Eglah, your countenance is honest as your heart, and you are not glad to see your old friend. May I ask why?"

Without hesitation she looked at him frankly.

"To-day something annoyed me very sorely, and I came here to fight it out alone. I fear I have at times the temper of a Tartar, and the evil one possessed me at the very moment you appeared and spoke to me. Just then nothing would have given me pleasure, but your patient courtesy makes me ashamed; and now, Mr. Noel, you must believe me when I assure you I am heartily glad to be with you, and hear of your various expeditions."

Smiling cordially, she held out her hand, but he took no notice of it, and for a moment his eyes rested on the sea, where a freshening wind crimped the long swells of water dyed by the after-glow into the gold of a daffodil. Turning, he bent over her.

"May I ask you a question?"

"Certainly, if I may be allowed discretionary powers as regards answering. I do not think Mr. Noel could make an unkind inquiry, or that he would distress me in any way."

"Am I responsible for the annoyance you referred to?"

Keen as was his gaze, she did not waver.

"Personally it was impossible that you could have been responsible. When it occurred you were in Catania."

She saw that he was not satisfied, and, rising, put on her hat.

"We must go back; father will have so much to talk over with you. Please carry my acanthus; I shall make a sketch of this spray, it is so laden with blossoms."

In silence they walked some distance, and rather suddenly she exclaimed:

"I must have been rude indeed, when you, so generous and kind, will not forgive me. Mr. Noel, I am not quite my old self, and to-day have felt at odds with the world. Father's incomprehensible retirement from public life grieves and perplexes me, because his health is perfect, and I cannot patiently accept the forfeiture of all my hopes for his political future. Without his knowledge, I wrote early in the new Administration to two prominent officials, close personal friends of the President, and asked their influence in securing a foreign ministerial position for my father. With elaborate circumlocution they expressed regrets, and 'tendered kindest remembrance and best wishes.' I presume it is wise to wage no war with the inevitable, but I simply cannot reconcile myself to the most bitter disappointment of my life. You see, I trust you so entirely I am opening my heart to you, that you may quite understand I did not intend to show any lack of cordiality to you."

He laughed, and tapped her shoulder twice with the acanthus spray.

"With all my heart I absolve you. Rude you could not be, and I trust the time will never come when I deserve to be treated less cordially than in the past. When do you go back to America?"

"In May or June. Ma-Lila will stay away no longer; she is so anxious to look after her little fifty-

acre farm."

"In the South, of course?"

"Yes; it is a corner of one of the 'bend plantations,' and with a new, pretty cottage, well furnished, grandmother gave it to her as a bridal present. None of us can ever forget that her father was killed while bringing my dying grandfather off the battle-field."

"Has Judge Kent decided where he will live?"

"He has sold the old homestead in New England, and we expect to settle down in the only remaining home, Nutwood, which, in accordance with grandmother's will, we now have the right to occupy. Until this year the trustees controlled and closed it."

"Do not forget that whenever you and your father wish to visit New York the house in Thirty-eighth Street will be entirely at your disposal—at least for a couple of years. A telegram to my old butler Hawkins will always insure a comfortable reception. Here comes the Judge. How remarkably well he looks."

Very late that night, when adieux had been spoken and only father and daughter remained in the small salon, Eglah rose, and they looked steadily at each other. In her dark brown eyes two defiant stars glowed, but the clear, sweet voice was low and tender.

"Father, after what was said this morning, I of course can only wish you good-night. Your conditions make it impossible for me to attempt to kiss you, and until you choose to remove the embargo, I certainly shall observe it, in accordance with your orders. Good-night, dear father."

He bowed as if to a duchess.

"Good-night, Eglah."

When Mr. Herriott went down the steps leading from the Kent apartments to the street, Mrs. Mitchell beckoned him into a niche between two stone pillars, and said, almost in a whisper:

"Excuse me, sir, but will you tell me what is behind this trouble between Eglah and her father?"

"She says it is the result of his refusal to re-enter politics."

"Exactly; but what is behind his refusal? She is fretting herself ill, because she cannot find out. Ever since our last day at Greyledge they have been estranged. This morning, when your letter arrived, something very unpleasant occurred; and you see Eglah is not like herself."

"My letter was a most innocent paper bomb—the mere announcement that I intended to stop here a few hours on my way to Messina. It contained absolutely nothing more, and you must have mistaken the cause of her annoyance. Perhaps you wish to intimate that you think my presence enhances the trouble, whatever it may be? I shall be glad to have you speak frankly."

For a moment she was silent, but she patted his coat sleeve approvingly.

"Mr. Herriott, she is all I have in this world, and I can't see the child breaking her heart over Judge Kent's selfish secretiveness. There is something about him I do not understand, and I thought you might be able to explain it to me."

"As you have known him so much longer and more intimately than I, it seems probable that you can estimate him accurately without my assistance. Mrs. Mitchell, it will be a long time before I see any of you again, and going so far away, I shall remember with great pleasure that our dear Eglah will have you always at her side, in dark and stormy as well as sunny hours. Good-bye; my very best wishes for you all."

He understood most thoroughly. Eglah's struggle to receive cordially an evidently unwelcome visitor had pained him inexpressibly, wounding his pride even more than his heart, and since his absence contributed to her peace, he resolved that henceforth she should know no disquietude. If, despite his efforts to surrender, he had cherished a faint, unacknowledged hope, he strangled it effectually now, and in after years he thought of Ætna only as a monument whose shadow lay ever across the acanthus-covered grave of his last beautiful illusion.

Longer than usual Eglah knelt beside her bed that night, and when she rose, Mrs. Mitchell, waiting to brush out and braid her hair, noted in the pale young face traces of mental wrestling.

"Little mother, does God answer your prayers?"

"Not always in the way I may have wished, but when they are denied I seem to receive instead an increased assurance that He knows best; and as to a child crying for sharp-edged tools, His refusal springs from omniscient mercy."

"Do you think Mr. Noel is really a Christian? Father believes him a mere rationalist."

"His is such a fine character, only Christianity could have moulded him."

"I wish I knew whether he prays every night."

"Why?"

"If he does, his prayers and mine must clash like crossed swords before the Lord, and Mr. Noel is

better than I, and deserves to receive that which he wants most; but he will not—he shall not!"

"Eglah, dearie! The Lord alone will decide."

"No. If we are free agents, human will can not be coerced by Him who gave it. Even our great, dear, good God cannot give him what I pray he will be denied. Never—never!"

"For what is he praying?"

"A razor—that would cut his fingers—so he must not have it. Now, lest you should 'imagine vain things,' I wish you to know that Mr. Noel has not renewed his proposal of marriage, and I hope never will. It is only just to him that you should fully understand he is now no suitor. He is simply my loyal, noble friend, in whom I trust implicitly. Good-night, *Madrecita*."

CHAPTER XVI

It had been a cold, cloudy January day in one of the great northern cities, and with night came flurries of snow that powdered telegraph wires and danced like thistledown around the corners. Two and a half years had elapsed since the angel of death stooped to swing his sickle in the daisy meadow on Long Island, and in a low, wide basement room, fronting the street, Mrs. Dane sat at her sewing machine, hemming a child's check aprons piled on a chair. The apartment was plainly but comfortably furnished, and filled now with the pungent odor of ginger, cloves, and cinnamon from a pan of small cakes on the top of an oil stove. The gas jet above her heightened the metallic lustre of her abundant hair, and deepened fringy shadows cast by her thick, dusky lashes. Upon the beautiful face time had softly pressed its velvet palm, smoothing the angles of bitterness and wrath that had been intensified by the struggle with her husband, whom she now believed she had eluded forever by removing to another city. On the broad windowsill at her right stood an oval, brass filigree frame holding a photograph of Leighton in his chorister vestments, and in front of the picture a dozen violets filled a wine-glass. As she finished and folded an apron, leaning forward to place it on the chair, her glance fell on the photograph, rested there, and the ocean of the past moaned, surged, broke over her. Despite her persistent scoffing moods, she had found it impossible to forget the few lines Father Temple had repeated with a faltering voice after the grave closed over the sweet young singer of St. Hyacinth's. They haunted some chamber of her defiant soul, and when she gazed at the holy face of her boy they stole out and whispered:

> "Another lamb, O Lamb of God, behold
> Within this quiet fold,
> Among Thy Father's sheep
> I lay to sleep!
> A heart that never for a night did rest
> Beyond its mother's breast.
> Lord, keep it close to Thee,
> Lest waking it should bleat and pine for me."

A rap on her door recalled her, and she swept one hand across her misty eyes.

"Come in."

A man of middle age, low in stature, and muffled to the chin in a handsome overcoat, stood, hat in hand, at the door.

"Mr. Coolidge, I am surprised to see you, and you have made a mistake in coming to my lodgings. I will not ask you to be seated, because I do not wish to receive you."

"But, madam, no other way of communicating with you seems possible, as correspondence has certainly proved disastrous. That note of Mr. Cathcart's, which you saw fit to send to his wife, ploughed up more trouble than a ton of dynamite, and his few remaining grey hairs will disappear before the end of this fracas. Talk about savage wild beasts, and claws, and paws, and fangs, but you women can trump them every time when the game is cruelty, and you want to get even with some man. Poor Mr. Cathcart! I don't hold him a saint, but I must say you misread his note and misjudged him."

"Did you see the note?"

"After his wife received it? No, but he told me exactly what it contained, and why he was obliged to have the meeting secret."

"Written by a millionaire to his poor typewriter, it was an insult, and as such you would have hotly resented it if your sister stood in my dependent position."

"You have not an idea what he wanted to say to you when he asked you to return to the office after every one had gone. He has found out that you have great influence with Max Harlberg, and that you belong to several 'Unions,' and he wished to pay you handsomely if you would persuade Max to agree to arbitration and not call a strike. Since he learned you are a power among these men who are causing us so much trouble, he is anxious to conciliate you, and fears your resignation will increase the difficulty of a settlement."

"He sent you here to offer this explanation?"

"Yes, Mrs. Dane, and I can vouch for its truth."

"Mr. Coolidge, you have always treated me with respect and courtesy, and I have no desire to be rude to you, but I am sorry you came to offer so shameful a bargain. I believe in 'unions'; they became necessary when vast consolidations of capital began to strangle small corporations, and laborers learned that only by a united front could they expect living wages. You magnates of 'trusts' are responsible for 'unions'; you set us the example: when capital bands, labor is forced to organize in self-defence. You of the caste of Dives sowed dragon's teeth, and now the abundance of your crop appalls you? We of the Lazarus caste see hope ahead; the day is coming when we shall have an honest and fair and permanent adjustment on the Karl Marx basis of 'plus value,' and then every mechanic in your shops will own an interest in the car he builds in the ratio of the hours he worked on it. Heart and soul I am with your motormen and conductors, your carpenters and machinists. Their cause is just, and, if I can help them, all the bonds and all the gold your company hoards in its vaults cannot buy me."

"At least you might persuade Harlberg to consent to arbitrate the differences. The men would have an equal chance with the company."

"Arbitration wolves have left no lambs silly enough to bleat their grievances. Two years ago the strike was settled on a basis almost fair to your employees, and in six months the provisions were nullified by changes made possible when non-union motormen were brought here. Max cut his eye teeth then, and now he has a winning hand."

"You think a strike inevitable?"

"I know it, and rejoice that the company will smart for its grinding, inhuman treatment of men who have endured it for the sake of wives and children looking to them for bread. Because you and Mr. Cathcart and Mr. Hazleton and your board of directors have ample fortunes, you see no enormity in requiring men with large families to work twelve hours, exposed to rain, sleet, sun, and if, overcome with fatigue, they fail to awake in time to report for duty at the exact minute your schedule demands, they are 'laid off for three days' as punishment. No day of rest to spend at home; nothing to anticipate but the ceaseless grind, grind—worse than that of driving wheels and pistons in machinery, which are allowed to stop and cool on Sunday."

"If you return to your desk to-morrow Mr. Cathcart says he will double your salary."

"Tell him to divide the extra pay among the needy grey-beards limping around the cars and shops. I will never work in his office again."

"You are very unwise, Mrs. Dane, and since you sympathize with the men, you ought not to lose the opportunity to prove yourself their friend at court. Moreover, in rejecting a larger salary you are laying up a store of regrets."

"Make no mistake, Mr. Coolidge. You rich often force us poor to suffer severely, but we seldom 'regret,' because that implies error on our part. We are bitter under the pain, but we do not regret the course of duty to ourselves that brought down the lash."

"Is it true that if the railroad men's strike is declared the telegraphers' and typewriters' unions will order a sympathetic strike? You seem to have begun in advance."

"I think not. Two nights ago, at our meeting, I urged the members to abandon the idea, though Harlberg was present to insist upon it. A 'sympathetic strike' is only sentiment running riot, and special class suffering alone justifies revolt. Altruistic theories of reform and abstract justice ought not to tie up public systems and precipitate armed conflicts. I have learned that for us 'strikes' are fearful catastrophes—social earthquakes so far-reaching in consequences that you opulent dwellers on a serene plateau, immune from disaster, can form no adequate estimate of the ghastly wreck wrought in substrata of the laboring class. Especially ruinous is the strain on our women. The men are excited, goaded, kept on the *qui vive*, held to the front by magnetic leaders—but the waiting women and children! Cold, hungry, terrified, huddled in helpless idleness, expecting any moment to see husband and father brought in on a shutter—buried in the 'potter's field' if he dies, sent to prison as a 'riotous lawbreaker' if he lives—these are the saddest features of bloody struggles that the outside world never sees. Instead of 'sympathetic strikes,' far more useful sympathy should be shown by other unions working full time steadily and sharing their wages with those fighting for violated rights against the encroachments of combined capital. That is what I intend to do."

"Have you accepted another position as typewriter?"

"Not yet; but many ways of earning my bread lie open before me. I never resign from my sewing machine, and I learned embroidery at a convent where royal orders have been filled."

"Making check aprons will not pay room rent."

Gathering the little garments in her arms, she rose, her tall, graceful figure clearly outlined by her mourning dress, and her eyes sparkled.

"Do you remember old Silas Bowen?"

"I do not."

"Your corporation memories, like your consciences, are sieves. One day, while arranging a trolleywire, a tall post behind him, decayed at its base, fell, and crippled him. He lost a leg, and all the fingers of one hand. Your company paid the surgeon's bill, and Bowen was sent adrift without a cent. He sued for damages, and the jury gave him what he asked for. You appealed the case, and a Hungarian pedler, who hated him vindictively, swore that Bowen was so drunk he could not understand warning shouts that the pole was shaking, and that he was falling when the post toppled and struck him. You won, and he lost by perjury. He is able to do little, and has nine children. His wife and oldest daughter launder laces and fine muslins, and these aprons are for the youngest—twins, one of whom has spinal disease and will never walk. Mr. Coolidge, I have rather liked you, because I found you always a gentleman, but my patience is exhausted, and, as I shall never work again for your company, there is no reason why you should prolong your visit."

"Nothing can change your mind in our favor?"

"Nothing."

"I wish the whole confounded, sickening business could be ended. Of course the company will win. New men will be at the barns and power-houses early to-morrow, prepared to run the cars, and the court will enjoin strikers from active interference. At the first shot the militia will be called out to take a hand, and then the poor devils running around like blind adders will be slaughtered. You women ought to stop it. Some of you firebrands will land in jail."

"Jail sounds dreadful, but after all it is not so bad; has its perquisites that wealth furnishes. I tried it once. The rich, old Jew who arrested me for stealing a Satsuma vase was so terrified when it was found where a negro porter had pawned it, that he sent his superb carriage and horses and liveried coachman to carry me from jail to my lodgings. It was my first and last ride on satin cushions. Good-night, Mr. Coolidge."

When the door closed behind him, she counted the spice cakes into a paper bag, placed it in the bundle of aprons, and wrapped the whole in a square of oil cloth. Pushing her hair back from her brow, she drew a black veil closely around her face, tied the ends under her chin, and put on her long waterproof cloak, lifting the cape over her head, where she fastened it with a safety pin. Under the grey overhanging folds of the cape the fair, cold face looked serene as a nun's. Extinguishing the flame of the oil stove, her eyes rested a moment on the picture of Leighton, then she lowered the gas jet at the machine, picked up the bundle, locked the door, and dropped the key in her pocket as she went out to the street.

The snow fall was light and intermittent, but now and then the crystal facets glittered in the vivid bluish glare of quivering electric globes.

Three hours later Father Temple, passing through the city on his way south, stood, valise in hand, on a street corner, waiting for a downtown car, and fearful he might miss the train where his sleeping berth had been engaged. No car came from any quarter, and he walked on, hoping to be overtaken. Soon a steady, rapid tread of many feet sounded from the rear, and a squad of police dashed past him.

"What is the matter with the cars?" he shouted to the hurrying column.

One man looked over his shoulder.

"The strike is on. Street car track torn up."

In a marvellously short time the crowded pavement became a dense mass of men and women struggling slowly forward; then a dull, deep, sullen roar, that shook windows and doors, rolled up to the starless sky where snow feathers fluttered. A woman screamed:

"The brutes are firing cannon into the poor strikers!"

"Not much! Some devilish striker throwing a bomb," answered her husband.

Father Temple, finding progress impeded, stepped down into the street and hurried on. At the end of the next square the hospital ambulance clattered by at emergency speed, and behind it another detachment of police at double-quick step. The street was bare as mid-desert of vehicles, save those from hospitals, and down the double railway track flowed a human stream, panting to reach the fray, eager to witness the struggle as old Romans who fought for places under the *velarium*, and shrieked "*Habet!*" Two officers on horseback galloped by, and then came reports of shots, followed by the wild, thousand-throated whoop and hoot of maddened men drunk with hate and fury. At the intersection of three streets, where a small park lay, the strikers had massed the cars from every direction, shut off the current, cut the wires, and taken their stand. Expecting trouble next day, the company had prepared guards and provided extra police protection for their barns and power-houses, where a few non-union men had been secured, but the strikers frustrated these plans by refusing to run as directed to the defended terminus. Where the line of clustered cars ended on both tracks, iron rails had been torn up and piled across the road bed, and here, in front and rear, motormen, conductors, carpenters, machinists, and linemen were massed, stubbornly defying all attempts to repair the tracks or move the cars.

A half hour before Father Temple reached the outskirts of the crowd at the square, a woman had elbowed her way to the front car and sprung upon the platform. Just below her Max Harlberg was distributing pistols to a group of men, all gesticulating angrily.

Clapping her hands to arrest attention, Mrs. Dane called:

"Silas Bowen, if you are here, answer. Silas Bowen!"

"Aye, aye! Silas Bowen is here to hurry up Judgment day for the hounds that have dodged it too long."

"You must go to your wife; she needs you. The tenement where you live burned down to-night."

"Let it burn! I hope the old rat hole isn't insured."

"But your wife is frantic, and wants you at once; and one of your children is hurt. Silas, do go to them, I beg of you. I have the helpless boy and the burned girl at my room, and your wife is there."

"I have waited too long for this picnic to turn my back just as the music begins. I am in for my share of the fun to-night, and kindling wood will be cheap to-morrow. When the devil's pay day comes for the boss, I mean to see the count."

Leaning over the dashboard of the car, Mrs. Dane watched for an opportunity, and snatched from Harlberg's hand the pistol reserved for his own use. Holding it above her head, she cried:

"Friends, fellow-workers, listen a moment! You are striking for the right to live like human beings, not beasts of burden; but be careful, be sure you do not put yourselves in the wrong by rash violence. If strife comes, let your oppressors start it. Personal attack is not your privilege, but defence is your right. Stand here quietly, shoulder to shoulder, cool, steady, and keep non-union traitors at arm's length. We who are working will see that the pot boils for your families; but, men, I beg of you, attempt no violence; because, if the first shot comes from us, the end will be we shall all drop from the frying pan into the fire. The police are bloodhounds wearing the collar of rich corporations, and the courts are butcher pens, where 'fighting strikers' are slaughtered. When rifles are fired into your ranks and bayonets thrust into your bodies, then—only then—must you remember 'blood washes blood.' Oh, men, be patient! Max Harlberg, don't forget that you are responsible for what may happen now. These men have obeyed you—have followed you like sheep to the edge of a precipice. Don't drive them with the butt of a pistol to leap to ruin. Counsel no bloodshed, no rashness, no wreckage."

A feeble cheer rose, smothered by a grumbling growl.

The wind had blown the cape back to her shoulders, and the folds of black veil banding her head slipped down, restraining no longer the ripples of hair curling above her temples. Leaning over the dashboard, one hand clutching the collar of Harlberg's overcoat as she talked rapidly to him, she resembled some gilt-headed figure carved at the prow of a vessel, always first to front tempests.

Just then a solid column of policemen charged the strikers, forcing them back almost upon the pile of rails near the foremost car, and following the line of lifted and revolving clubs, Mr. Cathcart and his superintendent, Hazleton appeared. Hisses, jeers, oaths, and a prolonged howl greeted them, amid which paving stones smote the heavy clubs that swung right and left like flails, and Harlberg sprang to the iron controller, leaped thence to the roof of the car, and shouted his orders to the strikers on the ground. Wounded, bleeding men were trampled by the swaying mass as it surged forward, staggered back, panting, cursing, hooting; then, in quick succession, three shots rang out.

A moment later Mrs. Dane laid Harlberg's pistol on top of the controller stand, and, as she stepped down from the platform to make her way home, something hurtled through the air and struck between the spot where Mr. Cathcart stood and the iron dashboard of the car. In the blinding glare of the explosion two strikers and a policeman were seen to fall, and when the roar and sharp shivering of crashed windows ended, a sudden hush fell upon the multitude.

Father Temple had slowly forced his way along the outer edge of the quivering throng and reached the centre of the square, where in summer a fountain babbled. Some one behind grasped his cassock.

"You are a priest? For the love of God, come to a dying man! Come back."

Death had sounded a temporary truce, and for some moments only whispers passed trembling lips, but the strikers still guarded the rails. Mr. Cathcart wiped off the dust thrown into his face by the explosion, bared his grey head, and lifted his hand:

"Men, don't you think you have worked mischief enough for one night? Eight dead, and only God knows how many wounded! That is an ugly bill the law will surely make you pay. You heard those three shots fired into the air? It was a signal for the armory; the troops are now coming. Who will feed your babies when you are bayonetted?"

A mounted policeman spurred his horse close to the president.

"The soldiers are hurrying down."

The leaders recognized the futility of continued resistance, and, as they slowly fell back from the track the police were in undisputed control of the cars when the hurrying line of soldiers reached the square.

Father Temple and his unknown guide paused beside a stretcher. Two men wearing the Red Cross badge bent over it.

"Stand back; here is a priest."

Both rose, and pointed to the sheet covering a motionless figure.

"Too late. He is dead."

Then one added, as he touched Father Temple's sleeve:

"You might be of use over yonder, where a woman is badly hurt. They are waiting for an ambulance to move her."

When Max Harlberg ordered the retreat of the strikers and jumped from the roof of the car to the pavement, he caught sight of a huddled mass on the step near the motor controller, and simultaneously he and Mr. Cathcart approached the spot.

Mrs. Dane had sunk down in a sitting posture on the step, and her head rested against the shattered edge of the dashboard, her face tilted skyward, where two stars blinked feebly through thinning snow flakes. Blood dripped from the right shoulder, and behind one ear a red stream dyed her golden braids, but the blue eyes were open, and her limp hands lay in the crimson pool deepening in her lap, where the waterproof cloak held it.

"My God, it is my typewriter! Hazleton, Hazleton! Telephone for an ambulance. Hurry! I knew she was mixed up in this deviltry, but didn't think she would actually come to the front and take a hand."

"She did not. She came here hunting Bowen, whose family was burned out to-night, and she had taken some of them to her room. His wife has spasms when she is worried, and was screaming for him, so Mrs. Dane was begging him to go back with her. She wanted a peaceable strike—urged us not to begin any fight—and she snatched a pistol out of my hand. Can't you speak to me, Mrs. Dane? Where are you hurt worst?"

Harlberg stooped to lift her, but Cathcart held him back.

"Stop! You must wait for the doctor. She might bleed to death if you moved her. A pretty night's work in a civilized city! Lord, how I wish all you anarchists had one neck! So Silas Bowen has paid her liberally for helping his family! He threw that bomb—aimed it at Hazleton and me, and when it exploded she was struck by something. Leather-headed, black-hearted scoundrel! The police have just marched him off, and the infernal fool ought to be hung from the first lamp-post."

An ambulance came up at a gallop, and while the surgeon sprang out and hurried toward the group, Father Temple stepped forward. As the electric light shone full on the upturned face and the wide, fixed eyes, a cry broke from the lips of the priest, who tried to thrust all aside.

"My Nona! My own pansy eyes!"

The surgeon pushed him back.

"I must have room to examine her. Help me lay her across the platform. Here, you! Are you her brother? Take her firmly by the shoulders, so; steady, lower her head."

"She is my wife."

What was done, and exactly why, none but the surgeon ever understood; those who looked on knew only that jagged cuts were sprayed and closed and bandaged; that the lovely hair was shorn away from a wound at the back of the head, and hypodermics inserted in the arm.

No word was spoken until the stretcher was ordered close to the car platform, and the patient was lifted tenderly and laid upon it. Then the thin, shaking hand of the priest clutched the doctor's sleeve.

"I have the right to know exactly what you think."

"Then I must be frank. She has received probably fatal injuries to spine and brain, and paralysis has resulted. Whether the paralysis will be permanent I cannot say now, because the extent of the shock has yet to be determined."

"She is not entirely unconscious."

"I am sure she is. On what do you base your opinion?"

"I know too well the expression of her eyes, and it changed when I spoke to her."

"Her tongue is certainly paralyzed, and she can move neither hand nor foot."

"I do not wish her carried to the charity hospital, though doubtless the treatment is the same. Please take her to the Mercy Infirmary, and will you be so kind as to let me sit close to her in the ambulance?"

Keenly the doctor scanned the convulsed face, where overmastering emotion defied control.

"Your wife, you said? My friend, don't you think it time you laid aside your disguise? Priests are not—in this country—given to acknowledging their wives so publicly. It may be all right, but your

marital claims and your clothes don't seem to fit."

"I am not a Romanist. I belong to an Episcopal celibate Order, and my superior understands and directs my movements. If you knew everything you would pity me——"

The surgeon took off his hat, bowed, and waved him to a seat in the ambulance.

In after years, when Father Temple's dark hair had whitened, and vital fires were burning low, to the verge of ashes, he looked back always with supreme tenderness and immeasurable joy to the days that followed the strike, as after some tempest lulls one watches the unexpected lustre of an after-glow where it glints over the wreckage wrought, and waves its banners of gilded rose between vanishing storm clouds and oncoming night.

In that small room at the Infirmary reigned profound quiet, broken only by the low voices of two wise-eyed, tender-handed, know-all, tell-nothing nurses, whose ideals of absolute obedience to staff orders were as starched as their caps and collars. They shared the doctor's opinion that the patient was conscious of nothing, because she neither flinched nor moaned when her wounds were dressed, but the watcher who spent part of each morning beside the bed knew better. Waiting one day until the nurses left the room, he drew from his pocket a photograph of Leighton, leaned down, and held it close to her. The half-closed eyes widened, brightened, and, after a moment, tears gathered.

He laid the picture against her lips and left it on her breast.

With that fine instinct which inheres only in supremely unselfish love, he fought down the longing to fondle her, allowed himself no approach to a caress, remembering that his touch was loathsome to her, and in her present helplessness would prove a cruel insult. He accepted as part of his punishment the fierce trial of bending so close to the precious face her hatred denied him; and only once, when the nurse laid the patient's hand in his, while she tightened a bandage and gave a hypodermic, he bowed his face upon it and kissed the palm.

Sometimes for hours she kept her eyes shut; again, for as long a period, she would not close them, and though her gaze, never vacant, wandered from face to face, it held no inquiry, no sadness, no meaning save of profound introspection, of some subtle mental readjustment; but only a deep, slowly drawn sigh of utter weariness ever crossed her pale lips, from which the blood had been drained. Father Temple felt assured that as she lay motionless, fronting eternity, her self-communion was profound and calmly searching; and ceaselessly he prayed that God's mercy might comfort the brave, lonely, helpless soul.

One morning the nurse reported that during the night Mrs. Dane had moved her right hand and arm, but the improvement did not continue, and while at times fully conscious, her vitality was evidently ebbing, and the pulse began to fail. She had never spoken, and the doctor said she never would. Standing outside the door, Father Temple waited one noon to hear the physician's report. As he came out he put his hand on the priest's shoulder, and answered the mute appeal in eyes that were wells of hopeless grief.

"Don't leave her. I have asked the matron to let you stay now. We have done all we could, and she does not suffer. She may slip away at any moment."

The room was very still, and sweet with violets which Father Temple brought daily. The muslin curtain had been looped back to admit light that fell full on the pillow where lay the beautiful head, shorn of a portion of its golden crown. Her features were sharpened, and the eyes seemed preternaturally large above dark, deep shadows worn by suffering.

The compassionate nurse withdrew, closing the door noiselessly. With locked hands the priest stood, looking down into the whitening face which the fine chisel of pain had reduced to a marvel of delicate perfection, and when her long, brown lashes slowly drooped, he fell upon his knees and prayed, his head bowed on the bed close to her pillow. In the agony of his petition one passionate, broken cry rolled through the solemn silence.

"Lord, visit upon me the punishment of her unbelief! Let me suffer all—everything—because through me she lost her faith. Spare her pure, precious soul and save her! Oh, God, mercifully receive and comfort her dear soul, for Christ's sake!"

Some moments passed, and while he knelt, his crucifix pressed against his breast, he felt a cold hand laid on his bowed head and a faint effort to pat it. In the wonderful blue eyes a new light had dawned.

"My darling Nona, will you forgive me? You cannot speak, but, oh, try—try to press my hand! Have pity on me!"

He had risen, and her hand was clasped in his, as he stooped over her. Feebly the icy fingers contracted in his palm.

"Vernon, I have forgiven everything. I could have spoken after the second day, but I was not ready. I wanted to be sure this was the end. So much to count over. Vernon, I was too—too—hard—on you—but——"

Breath failed her, and she gasped painfully.

"My wife, my darling wife! Tell me you are not afraid now."

She looked steadily into his eyes, and after a little while there came, brokenly, an echo as of a voice drifting away into immeasurable wastes.

"I go to my long sleep—no bad dreams. Too tired—to be afraid——"

A moment passed, while she struggled for breath, and over her face stole a smile.

"If it—is—something—else—better, my baby will be—there—my—baby——"

He felt a tremor in her fingers, as with a long, low sigh the frozen lips closed, but the calm, brave gaze did not waver.

At last, after long years, it was his privilege to hold her to his heart and kiss down the stiffening lids that veiled forever the smiling pansy eyes.

CHAPTER XVII

For political rancor time is not an emollient panacea. Sectional hatred bites hard on memory, as acid into copper, and the perspective of years of absence failed to alter in any degree the rough angles, ugly scars, and deep shadows that characterized the people's portrait of Judge Kent. Impotence to correct intensifies public sense of wrong, and compulsory submission to injury borne silently garners bitterness which in actual strife would effervesce. Only those who lived in the Southern seaboard and Gulf States during the long, stinging years that followed the surrender at Appomattox can understand why the names of Grant and Sherman stirred little enmity, when compared with the unfathomable execration and contempt aroused by the civil Federal vultures that settled like a cloud over State, county, and municipal treasuries. The battening of this horde soon reduced Southern finances and credit to a grewsome skeleton. In that stifling Ragnarok, family estates feudal in extent were seized as "abandoned lands" and parcelled out to freedman, who had been enticed to abandon them in order to succeed their masters in ownership. "Patriots are paupers now," was the grim proverb current among Confederates, and the very few who showed conditions bordering on comfort were, in public estimation, required to "stand and deliver" an explanation of the fortuitous circumstances that saved them from the general ruin.

Judge Kent's judicial career had been disastrous to the interests of many throughout the State, and among the legions who improved their fortunes by coming south to "reconstruct and to dispense justice," he was especially detested by the citizens of Y——. To Eglah, his insistence upon returning to Nutwood was explicable solely on the hypothesis that speculative reverses had demanded the sale of his own property and swallowed the result; hence his resources were exhausted.

Recollection of slights, insinuations, invectives, and jeers that had imbittered her childhood did not lend beckoning glamour to the home-coming; and without the powerful protection of Mrs. Maurice's presence she suspected she was making a social plunge with no net spread to succor. Deliberately and systematically she planned the gradual renovation and, to a limited degree, the refurnishing of the beautiful old house where it now seemed her future must be spent. A new close carriage and stylish trap were shipped in advance, and Mrs. Mitchell went down to superintend preparations for occupancy of Nutwood, leaving Judge Kent and his daughter to follow a week later.

Old Aaron was stooping badly and stiff with rheumatism, but refused to relax his grasp on the butler's reins; Celie maintained her iron sway in the kitchen; her two daughters were eager to discharge the duties of housemaids, and Oliver, hopelessly bed-ridden, claimed that his son had the best right to succeed him as coachman.

When, on the morning after her arrival, Eglah entered the cedar-panelled dining-room, and seated herself at the head of the table, where glittered the tall, silver coffee urn with Dirce and her beast in bold relief, she almost expected to see her grandmother's face reflected there as in days gone by, and involuntarily looked over her shoulder with a telepathic impression that behind her chair stood the stately, old, crêpe-coifed dame disputing usurpation. Judge Kent drained his second cup of creamless tea, held up the thin, fluted china to examine the twisted signature of the manufacturer, listened to its protest as he carefully thumped it, and pushed it aside.

"Eglah, I do not like the room where I slept last night, and I wish a change made to-day."

"Why, father? I selected the handsomest room in the house for you. That has always been considered the best—set apart as the guest-chamber."

"Well, as I am not a guest, I have no desire to appropriate the perquisites. I prefer the room opening into the library."

"Not my grandfather's room—not where grandmother hoarded sacred—" She paused, and the silver fruit knife, with which she peeled a peach, clanged sharply as it fell.

"Exactly. I mean the museum of rebel relics. I wish them removed at once, and my own things unpacked and arranged there."

"Father, it was grandmother's expressed wish to keep that——"

"It is rather late to evoke sentiment in her behalf. She left nothing undone to hamper, annoy, and inconvenience us, and——"

"Father! *De mortuis—!* Although I am her grandchild under protest on her part, she gave me her estate, and the one room she loved ought to be reserved just as she wished."

As she leaned to the right of the urn, to look squarely at her father, her face was close to Mrs. Mitchell, who noted its pallor and an ominous curve in the thin lips. Judge Kent beat a muffled tattoo with the prongs of his fork on the handle of a spoon lying near. He smiled, eyed her fixedly, and inclined his head in dismissal.

"It is not a question for discussion, but a simply imperative matter of obedience to instructions. I must have the change made at once, and if extra help is needed Aaron will see immediately that it is secured."

From the bowl of flowers in the middle of the table he selected a sprig of ruby stock-gilly, inhaled its fragrance, fastened it in his coat, and strolled out on the front colonnade.

Over the girl's white face flowed a deep, dull red, and for a moment her slender hands covered it. Then she touched the bell at her left, and smiled bravely at the butler who answered it.

"Uncle Aaron, put a pitcher of tea on the ice, so that whenever father needs it I can have it cold. Tell Ma'm Celie I have not had such a good breakfast since I wore short skirts and my hair down my back. Her coffee was perfect, the waffles and beaten biscuit the very best I ever tasted, and the brain croquettes could not be improved."

"Yes, Missie, she thought she would please you. She don't forget how you loved waffles and honey when you used to wear bibs and set in your high chair."

Having invested all in a teraph of fine gold, its votary sees with vague uneasiness a gradual dimness blur the sheen, and when, under friction, the gilt surface melts away and only corroding brass remains, the shock is severe. However slow the transformation, the final disillusion is not softened.

Standing in the memorial room, with her arms resting on the mantel shelf, Eglah looked up at the frank, noble patrician face of General Maurice, until an unsuspected undercurrent of pride and tenderness suddenly surged at the thought that his blood ran in her veins. Whatever ills might overtake her, no bar sinister could ever mar, no breath of blame could cloud the lustre of this side of her family shield. Studying the portrait above her, and that of her lovely young mother on the opposite wall, she began for the first time to take possession of her Maurice birthright, conscious that here her pride could never drag anchor. The room that from her nursery days had always been Marcia's remained unoccupied after her death, and to this apartment Eglah and Eliza removed every cherished object Mrs. Maurice had stored in her husband's old study, arranging pictures, books, furniture as she had left them. No word of comment passed the locked lips of either woman, but, when all had been adjusted, Eglah fastened the door and handed the key to Mrs. Mitchell.

"You know she preferred 'Grand Dukes' and Cape jasmines, so we will keep some in front of the portrait, and once a week we must see that no dust collects here."

In the future, stretching before the young mistress of Nutwood gleamed two goals—friendly, social recognition of her father, and the compilation and publication of a volume containing a sketch of his career, written by herself, selected speeches delivered in Congress, and certain judicial decisions relative to Confederate property, individual and corporation, which had tarred him heavily throughout the State, where they were promulgated. To the attainment of these aims she purposed to devote her energies, believing that the accomplishment of the biographical scheme would inevitably remove the barrier of estrangement that had shut her from her father's confidence.

After a week spent in looking over Nutwood, visiting Mrs. Mitchell's home and inspecting the condition of gin houses, mills, fences, and cabins on the plantations, the appointed day arrived when Mr. Whitfield came with books and a large tin box to give a detailed account of his stewardship.

Eglah noticed that while he held and pressed her fingers cordially, he merely bowed, and seemed not to see Judge Kent's proffered hand. After the interview she understood, when Eliza told her that during the period *habeas corpus* was suspended by Federal authority the husband of Mr. Whitfield's only sister had been imprisoned for "treasonable language" by the desire and co-operation of Judge Kent, and that distress of mind and anxiety on her husband's account had precipitated the death of the wife before his release from jail.

Thin, wiry, grizzled, keenly alert, the lawyer's light-blue eyes dwelt chiefly on the girl's face, save when her father asked a question or a fuller explanation of some statement. Now and then Judge Kent, watchful but studiedly debonair and suave, glanced over a paper, and once he challenged the accuracy of a computation of interest, which on revision proved correct. They were grouped around an oval table in the library, an open tin box in the centre, flanked by two ledgers and piles of papers, and Eglah sat close to Mr. Whitfield's right, while her father took his place immediately opposite her.

She leaned a little forward, her arms crossed on the mahogany, and looked up steadily at the lawyer, but when he offered a paper for examination she smiled and shook her head.

"You must perceive the farcical futility of talking business to such an inexperienced girl," said Judge Kent, stretching out his hand to take a bundle of stock certificates his daughter had motioned away.

"Really you surprise me, because, from all we have heard of her college training, I was prepared to find Marcia's child an expert."

"Father knows I can calculate interest, and that I understand bookkeeping, but he would be ashamed of me if I suspected or hunted for errors in the accounts of a friend who for so many years has kindly guarded my financial interests."

The lawyer patted her hand and smiled.

"That sounds like your dear mother, and I am glad you have her low, clear voice, like the melody of a silver harp string; but your father is quite right in urging careful inspection of matters that have been so long intrusted solely to me. Now, I believe we have gone over the important points, except that railroad muddle, which is still undecided. I brought suit over a year ago, and as the new branch and spurs run through the middle of one of your best cotton fields on Willow Creek plantation, I hope the next term of court will give us a satisfactory settlement. Boynton is a good overseer—not a graduate of a college of technology nor an agricultural chemist, who knows from looking at the soil the exact day when the Noachian flood left your lands dry, nor is he a new-fangled 'manager,' but he is just an overseer of auld lang syne; a trifle lax, but our old-fashioned plantation rules are dead as Pharaoh, and he winks at lapses he cannot prevent. However, he keeps the repair machinery busy on fences and stables, the negroes like him, and you will find your leases and contracts all signed properly. Of course you are aware your grandmother left instructions that when you married, or as soon as you were twenty-one, $5,000 should be paid to Mrs. Mitchell. I consulted the bishop, and we thought it best to defer this matter until her return to America, but it should not be delayed longer, and here is the check, which you can hand to her. With the payment of this legacy her annual allowance ends."

Eglah opened the table drawer, drew out an envelope, and laid it before him.

"Enclose, address, and seal it. Before you leave the house, please deliver it to her."

"Have you any questions to ask? Do not hesitate, if there is anything else you do not understand, anything you wish to know."

"Absolutely nothing, except an adequate way of thanking you for all your patient goodness. If you can explain how I shall accomplish this, you will increase my huge debt."

Judge Kent rose and smiled benignly.

"Eglah, I wonder it has not occurred to you that a proper recognition of the value of Mr. Whitfield's services ought to involve a willingness and effort on your part to relieve him entirely of the burden of responsibility he has borne so long, and which, under my guidance, you are quite capable of assuming. You are of age, and the trusteeship should end at once."

For fully a moment she pondered the suggestion, then laid her hand on the lawyer's arm.

"Tell me frankly whether you prefer to surrender the management of our business affairs? Irrespective of my individual feeling, your wishes alone must decide the matter, and you can best determine if the tax upon your time is too onerous."

Mr. Whitfield drew the tin box before her, and pointed to a large envelope marked "Last Will and Testament of Patricia Maurice."

"I imagine you scarcely comprehend some of the conditions that place me in a peculiarly embarrassing position. Here is the will of your grandmother; I preserved for you the original draft in her handwriting. The last page bears upon the question under discussion. Read it now, and then, whatever your wishes, I individually shall obey them."

Judge Kent seated himself, lifted the decanter in front of him, and filled a glass.

"Meantime, will you join me in a glass of sherry?"

"No, thank you; my doctor restricts me to claret."

Very slowly Eglah read the broad sheet, and her countenance changed, clouded, as she betrayed her annoyance by taking her under lip between her teeth.

"We beg your pardon, Mr. Whitfield; we had entirely forgotten that clause. Unless I marry, your trusteeship continues until I am thirty years old, should I live so long."

"Not necessarily mine. I can resign, or death may release me, but some other person would be required."

"A most unjust and absurd provision," said the judge, draining his second glass, and striving to conceal his remembrance of the fact that Mrs. Maurice had expressly forbidden his connection with the trusteeship.

Mr. Whitfield smiled.

"We lawyers all know testators use only their individual standards of justice, wisdom, and fitness."

Eglah had folded the paper, replaced it in the envelope, and turned to the lawyer.

"It appears that if for any reason you should relinquish this responsibility, your successor is already appointed, and in that event I should become practically the ward of the Chancery Court, which never resigns, never dies."

She looked straight into her father's watching eyes, and continued slowly, distinctly:

"I shall not marry. Your stewardship, dear Mr. Whitfield, involves some additional years of trouble for you, but I am so deeply grateful to you, I shall certainly try to cause as little annoyance as possible."

A shutter swung open, the sun flashed in, and she crossed the room to exclude the glare.

Returning, she paused behind her father's chair, put her arms around his neck, and interlaced her fingers. Without an instant's hesitation he elevated and shook his shoulders so decidedly her hands fell to her side.

"Sit down, my dear."

He built a pyramid with his plump, white, carefully manicured fingers, and the brilliant eyes he fixed on the man beside him held a challenge.

"If the sanctity of wills were not debatable, our profession would be barred from browsing in rich pastures of litigation; and 'undue influence,' fostering injustice, has bred strife since its innings as far back as the wrongs of Esau. As sole heir to the Maurice fortune, my daughter can follow her individual wishes and judgment concerning the management of what is indisputably her own, since there could be no family contestants."

He bowed to Mr. Whitfield.

"Judge Kent, if Eglah so decided, there would be, on my part, no contest."

"You are both mistaken. There would inevitably result a destroying contest, with my conscience and my self-respect."

Mr. Whitfield caught his breath as he noted the transformation of the girl's face into a blanched, stony mask. Carefully replacing every package of papers in the box, she looked under the table to be sure none had fluttered to the floor, turned the key in the brass padlock, and pushed the box toward the lawyer.

"Mr. Whitfield, I have several times regretted that this inheritance was left to me; to-day I deplore it. While I gratefully appreciate your wise and faithful guardianship, I confess I very naturally feel sorry my own dear father cannot manage my affairs; but I believe that all wills of sane persons should be held sacred—absolutely inviolable. If the Maurice estate is mine, it is on specified conditions that I would no more break than the ten commandments. I shall not marry; therefore the trusteeship must continue until I am thirty, and of all men in the world, except my father, I certainly prefer you should retain it. Only in strict conformity to the provisions by which I inherit will I remain at Nutwood or spend its income; but my father's opinions and wishes are very dear to me, and since he objects strenuously to some of the conditions which naturally wound him, I intend to leave to him the decision of the rejection or acceptance of the inheritance. Grandmother declared that if the terms of trusteeship were violated, it was her wish that I should receive merely the annuity allowed me since her death, and that her entire estate—including Nutwood and the plantations—should be given in perpetuity to childless widows of Confederate soldiers in this State; women whose husbands and sons had been lost in defence of the South. That you as trustee might not contest a flagrant violation of the will is merely an expression of your personal reluctance to chide me publicly; but it is a dubious compliment to any sense of right and justice. Now, father, shall we relinquish the estate to the widows and find a home elsewhere? Sometimes I think it would be best for us in many ways, but you shall decide. Shall we go or stay?"

Steadily she faced him, cool and firm as a granite gargoyle, but his nostrils flared, his teeth gleamed under his grey mustache, and, tilting back his chair, he laughed unpleasantly.

"My dear, histrionism is not becoming to you—especially without chiton, diploïdion, and fillets. Either your Alma Mater is weak along lines of elocutionary training or you do it so little credit you never earned your diploma. Your pretty little prologue is as preposterous as the senseless limitations you are embracing so dramatically; but you are now fully of age—except in Mrs. Maurice's opinion—and since the inheritance is yours, not mine, you must accept the consequences of your own tragic avowal and tie up your hands for some years to come. At least I can congratulate you that all responsibility devolves upon so astute and experienced a trustee as Mr. Whitfield, who will watch over your interests till silver threads adorn your locks and you wear spectacles. Since this matter is settled, be so good as to spare me any—Come in, Aaron. What is it?"

The butler had knocked twice, and now beckoned to some one behind him.

"A boy with a despatch."

The messenger held up the yellow telegram.

"Senator Allison Kent."

Very deliberately he wrote his name in the receipt book, pausing to trim the pencil tied to it; then, bowing to Mr. Whitfield, "With your permission," he opened the envelope. Eglah saw his face flush, and he coughed twice in a peculiar way she knew indicated deep annoyance.

"Any answer, sir?" asked the boy.

"Yes, but you must wait for it."

He took up a pen, drummed with fingers of his left hand on the table, and rose.

"As I find it necessary to consult a record before replying to this telegram, I must beg you, sir, to excuse me. I hope you will have time to enjoy some of our fine fruit to-day."

At the door he called to the butler, standing in a side hall.

"Aaron, order dinner at three o'clock, and the trap at four. I must take the 'cannon-ball train.'"

He and the messenger disappeared, and after a moment Eglah withdrew her eyes from the vacant chair opposite, and turned to her guest.

"I think you brought some papers you wish me to sign. May I do so now?"

"When you have examined them, they must be signed in the presence of a notary public, whom you can find at my office, or, if you prefer, he shall come here."

He laid a roll of type-written documents on the table and rose.

"Shall I leave the box with you for to-day?"

Impatiently she pushed it aside.

"Take it away—keep it. I hope I may never set my eyes on it again."

The brooding shadow on her pale, rigid face made the lawyer's blue eyes cloudy.

"Dear child, I have always been the intimate friend of the Maurice family. I loved your sweet, young mother, and I hope you know I am willing to help you in every way possible, and that you will not hesitate to call upon me."

"Thank you. I am so sure of your sincerity, I shall begin at once to ask your counsel. There are social complications that make a pleasant residence here problematical, and consideration of the course most expedient for me to pursue leaves me in doubt and perplexity. I have thought of opening the house and grounds two weeks hence, in order to celebrate my father's birthday by a *fête champêtre*, to which every family inscribed on grandmother's visiting list should be invited. I prefer to throw rather than pick up the gauntlet. You thoroughly comprehend the situation, and I should like your advice."

"Wait a while. Go slowly; social wounds do not heal by first intention. Be chary of invitations, and do not hunt for challenges. Hold your own firmly, but courteously, and in time I think you will win. For your father's sake, try to conciliate the members of his church; they are an influential social factor here. Mrs. Maurice's old friends will rally around 'Marcia's baby,' and you must be patient. Later, when sure of your ground, you can give all the festivals you like without receiving an avalanche of 'regrets' that would easily paper your hall. My wife and the girls will call at once, and I hope you will come to us just as often as possible; but whenever you wish to see me, drive down to the office, or write me, as, for some reasons, it is advisable I should be here very rarely. Dear child, while your features are like your handsome father's, you resemble your mother in many ways, and I am glad to find you have the crystal conscience and flawless instinct of honor that all men reverenced in General Maurice. Good-bye. I have overstayed my time. Tell Boynton to bring up the two horses I had broken and trained for your saddle. One of them, the bay, took blue ribbon at the State fair last fall, and there is no better stock south of Kentucky."

She walked with him half way down the hall, and they shook hands.

"Good-bye, Mr. Whitfield; thank you for many things. You will find Ma-Lila in the dining-room, and whatever you think she ought to know of to-day's interview, I prefer you should tell her. She is indeed my second mother."

After a while she went slowly to her father's room. The door was half open, but she paused and knocked.

He stood looking over an old account book, and, without glancing up, said fretfully:

"Well, what is it?"

"Father, I came to pack your valise."

"It is already packed."

"May I come in? I want to tell you——"

"No. You will say nothing that I should wish to hear."

"Will you allow me to see the telegram which I fear annoys you?"

"The ashes only are at your service—all that remains of it."

"Tell me, at least, why you are going, and where?"

"First to Washington. Elsewhere as circumstances may direct."

"Please let me go with you——"

"Most certainly you stay where you are."

"Father—my father!" She advanced toward him, but recalling the shudder with which he had shaken her arms from his shoulders, she stepped back to the threshold.

"Oh, father, you are cruel! You know you are breaking my heart!"

The sob, the passion of pain in her voice, smote and hurt him sorely, but he did not falter an instant.

"In breaking your will, your heart may be healed."

He had not looked at her, and all the while the index finger of his right hand moved up and down columns of figures, searching for some item, which was finally found and marked. Leaning against the door, she watched him until Aaron rang the dinner bell.

"Father, may I drive you to the station?"

"No."

"Then I prefer to say good-bye here, as I am going to my own room."

"As you please. Good-bye, Eglah."

"I wish I could share this trouble, whatever it may be that calls you away; but since you elect to condemn me to the torture of suspense, I have no alternative but to endure it as best I can. Good-bye, my dear father."

She held out both hands, but, instead of approaching her, he opened a glass door leading to the colonnade and disappeared.

The velvet, paternal touch caressing her tenderly from the days of her babyhood had, during the last two years, stiffened, hardened into a steel gauntlet, strangling her.

The betrayal of his selfish and unscrupulous desire to violate the provisions of the will had painfully startled and keenly mortified her; but the barb that sank deepest in her sore, aching heart was the realization of her father's deliberate plan to humiliate and punish her. Was his persistent effort to force a marriage with Mr. Herriott based on the determination to hasten her unlimited control of her grandmother's estate? Until now, this explanation had not occurred to her, because the clause binding her to the trusteeship—which rankled ceaselessly in his mind—had made no impression on her memory. Maturely she deliberated, weighing the past in the light of the new supposition, but this solution was rejected as inadequate. In view of Mr. Herriott's indefinite absence and studied silence, her father's obstinate adherence to his matrimonial ultimatum remained inexplicable. That day ended her overtures for reconciliation; and she laid the ax to the root of her olive tree.

The next morning was Sunday—the first after their return—and she ordered the carriage.

"Little mother, I am going with you to eleven o'clock service, and I am sure you understand it is a tribute of respect to grandmother, that after many years of absence I attend first the church she helped to build."

Curious eyes watched for Miss Kent in another church, where her father had worshipped, and carried her mother, and when, daintily robed in white, Eglah walked with the overseer's wife along the Methodist aisle and sat down in the Maurice pew, a sudden mist blurred the vision of many in the congregation, and old Dr. Eggleston wiped his spectacles and whispered to his wife:

"Poor Marcia's baby! I can never forget her pitiful little wail for an hour after she was born. Ah, her face is like a lily just lifted, hunting for its God."

Henceforth social lines were indicated by an apparently trivial distinction; the small circle that in former years received Judge Kent, and the strangers and new residents of Y—— spoke of the mistress of Nutwood as Miss Kent; but to the mass of old families she was always "Marcia's child," or "Mrs. Maurice's granddaughter."

Very few typical Southern homes, representing wealth, liberal education, and cultured artistic taste when 1861 dawned, have survived the jagged wounds of war, the still more destructive bayonet-loaded harrow of "reconstruction," and the merciless mildew of poverty that tarnished ante-bellum splendor.

Nutwood escaped comparatively intact, because, while the owner lived, her revenue—drawn in part from European investments made early in the war by friends in London—enabled her to

maintain and repair the property until her plantations could be readjusted under the new régime; and, after her death, the managers of the estate had jealously guarded it from the inroads of decay.

Outside conditions, social and domestic, had changed utterly; new canons prevailed, new manners of strange laxity rolled over former dikes of purity, refinement, and decorum; but the turbid tide of up-to-date flippancy broke and ebbed from the tall iron gates of the old house on the hill. Here decadence was excluded, and one coming into the long-closed mansion inhaled a vague haunting aroma, as if old furniture, glass, china, books, paintings, and silver had been sprinkled with powdered sandalwood, lavender, and rose leaves that blended with the subtle pervading atmosphere of hereditary racial pride.

It resembled other homes in Y—— as little as some gallery of brilliant, glaring impressionist pictures suggests a cabinet of exquisite miniatures, rich mosaics, and carved ivory, where the witching glamour of mellowing centuries hovers.

Eglah found only two scars of time. The conservatory was empty and closed, and in the rear of the house several rows of low brick walls showed where formerly stood what Mrs. Maurice called her "grapery," a sunny spot enclosed with glass, alluring to her grandchild, who had climbed a step-ladder to reach shouldered clusters, as large as her head, of translucent, golden *Chasselas*.

No strange new element invaded dwelling or grounds; the same brown hand that gave her "hot-water tea" when she sat in her high chair now placed her chocolate before her, and she missed only old Hector, who had followed his master to happier hunting grounds, and King Herod, gone, doubtless, to share the punishment of his namesake. The thoroughbred horses and silver-grey Jerseys were fine as she remembered them, and though they now seemed smaller, the white game fowls were as beautiful as of yore, when she toddled after her grandmother to feed them in the enclosure to which they were restricted.

Years had made no alteration, save that a fond, trusting child came back a sadly anxious woman, fronting the world with calm defiance, but shivering silently under a numbing shadow of brooding dread that time might deepen, but could not dispel.

CHAPTER XVIII

After prolonged residence in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Washington, New York, and continental Europe, it was inevitable that returning absentees should find the restricted environment of Y—— stiflingly provincial; and, despite the rapid growth of the town, consequent upon construction of new railways and erection of furnaces and cotton mills, its limitations were apparent. There was no lack of individual brains or culture, but Eglah missed keenly the effectively massed mental activity that shrewdly focussed all lights on national questions, political policies, and diplomatic legerdemain in Washington; and especially the stimulating intellectual ozone, the sharpening friction of perpetual debate in congressional circles. An exalted official career at the Capitol lured her like a baleful witch, and transition from brilliant public life to comparatively secluded domesticity in a Southern country home strained her patience.

Gentlemen who composed the most fashionable club in Y—— gave an elaborate german to welcome the chatelaine of Nutwood. The small Kent coterie invited the judge and his daughter to several dinners, that were promptly repaid, while, now and then, Eglah was requested to appear at ladies' luncheons, and to assist at five o'clock teas; but more and more she realized and resented keenly that among the proud old families she was tolerated simply because of the powerful hereditary Maurice prestige. Noting the social discrimination against her father, and in some quarters the far from fervent, though courteous acceptance of herself, her few invitations to Nutwood dinners were confined to those who had welcomed him to their board and fireside. By degrees an element of haughtiness, at variance with her youthful grace and beauty, invaded her manner, and her frigid politeness hastened the diminution of the circle revolving about her, and reduced social hospitalities to merely formal visiting. Complete abandonment of the contemplated *fête champêtre* resulted from the arrival of the mail one morning, three weeks after Judge Kent's return from Washington—a journey to which no one ever alluded.

Leaning back in her low wicker rocking-chair, in a shaded angle of the colonnade, Eglah listlessly watched Eliza's white Angora cat, stretched on the floor and following with avid green eyes the coquettish manœig;uvres of two brilliant red birds that flashed from a tangle of Belgian honeysuckle vines—brocaded with pale-pink satin clusters—to the quivering covert of a neighboring acacia, swinging its long, flowery fringes of vivid yellow.

Of the town, nearly two miles distant, church spires and factory chimneys were visible; but beyond the roaring river and far away, rose against blue sky a battlement of hills, tapestried with that tender, purple mist woven only in the loom of distance. With less than usual interest, Eglah began to examine the papers and letters lying in her lap. One heavy envelope contained samples of sprigged muslin for curtains; in another, that was so light it seemed empty, she found a newspaper clipping carefully folded in a blank sheet of thin notepaper.

"Special Correspondence.

"Washington:

"From a source always well informed and usually accurate, it has been whispered that the sudden change of policy in a certain senator—whose resignation surprised his congressional colleagues—finds explanation in the menaced divulgement of some damaging facts connecting the ex-senator's votes with crooked syndicate dealings in the West. How this record was unearthed is not yet known, but it is rumored a blondined Circe of the lobby Ææa used her knowledge of it quite successfully in furtherance of the Bison Head bill that hung so long in committee room, and also to secure the senator's resignation in favor of a rival candidate for whom she shows deep sympathy. Her threat to place her information at the service of the approaching Legislature of the incumbent's native State hastened his resignation some months prior to the expiration of his term, and he promptly 'left his country for his country's good,' to recuperate in foreign lands. Truly, 'God's fruit of justice ripens slow,'—but fate takes care to shake the tree. Now and then we have proof in public life that '*Dieu paie, mais il ne paie pas tous les Samedis.*'"

The name of the paper did not appear in the clipping and date and signature had been erased. The envelope bore postmark of a Colorado town, and the address was type-written. It was not from the State represented in the Senate by the Hon. Rufus Higginbottom, but Eglah's intuitions assured her the extract had been sent by the hand of Miss Ethelberta. Doubtless it had appeared while they were in Europe, but whether the press circulated it freely she was now barred from investigating.

A moan she could not repress escaped her usually well guarded lips, and she shivered as if a freezing wind swung her to and fro.

A stealthy hand creeping around the dial had reached that predestined hour she so vaguely dreaded, and its strokes sounded the knell of her life's dearest hope.

Was it merely a party libel—one of the scandalous personalities used in retaliation for some stinging blow her father had dealt Democracy—a foul partisan aspersion such as political opponents hurl with shameful recklessness?

Two years ago she would have hurried to her father for denial, and published proofs that his hands were clean; but to-day, for some moments after the shock, doubt seemed the only land of promise where she could dwell with any semblance of peace. Looking back over all that made their last two months in Washington so painful to her, recalling the inexplicable nervousness that was invariably exhibited when American letters and papers reached them at Aix les Bains, she connected incidents that formerly had no visible relation, and filial faith began to rock and drift from its life-long moorings. Yet with obstinate tenacity she swung back to the only comforting supposition—that political hatred and the unscrupulous ambition of a rival candidate had combined to fabricate this atrocious calumny. Were it possible for Judge Kent to vindicate himself, why had he failed to do so promptly in print? Again and again she read the clipping, carefully committing to memory the entire article, and when quite sure it was literally indelible, she tore the paper into innumerable fragments and tossed them to the wind singing through the venerable tree tops.

A different nature might, perhaps, have utilized the printed statement as a bridge over the chasm gaping between her father and herself, but intense pride and yearning love prompted her to shield him from the great shame of knowing she had read the blistering libel. That the burned telegram related to this publication, was an explanation of his reluctance to acquaint her with the contents, that appealed now to her tenderness, and her eyes softened in a passionate longing to throw herself into his arms, as in happier days.

Doubtless the press in Y—— had copied this assault upon his political integrity, his many enemies were gloating over it, and henceforth she would make no attempt to level the bristling hedge of social distrust. As one who snatches from the grave some beloved dead, and battles in frantic hope of resuscitation, she grappled closer, to warm at her heart the wan, fading remains of loyal filial confidence. It was an hour of exceeding bitterness, of intolerable humiliation, but undaunted by the severity of a blow smiting her where most vulnerable, she girded herself to struggle in defence, faintly cheered by a vague yet obstinate hope that in coming years her Biography might avail to rehabilitate the character so unjustly assailed.

Before her lay isolation, hidden heartache, the silent surrender of her dearest ambition, and the acceptance of life robbed of all rosy plans.

Remembering how firmly Mrs. Maurice's slim hands had held the reins of government, Eglah followed precedent in all details of domestic management that did not conflict with her father's wishes. While he had amused himself with viticulture and the erection of new glass houses, she was interested in extending and refitting the conservatory, but Mrs. Mitchell's frequent and increasing sojourns at her small farm, many miles distant, disquieted her foster-child, who finally rebelled.

"No, Ma-Lila, it is out of the question. I can not let you go and spend a week. What do you suppose would become of me? You may as well stop packing your trunk."

"O, dearie, you are perfectly well, and your father is always here. It is March and I must go."

"Yes, I am fortunate in having father, but I want to keep you where I can touch you whenever I wish. Ever since I could crawl you have slain my bugaboos, and as I have not outgrown the cowardice of covering my face with the sheet, I find the sight of that prim black head of yours is necessary to my peace of mind. I am jealous of that little den down by the old mill, and if you will sell out and give it up I should be glad to pay double its value. Then you could buy bonds and cut your coupons, and keep your hands white and soft as they ought to be, instead of delving with butter, eggs, honey, and pickles."

"Sell Dairy-Dingle! I would almost as soon sell my husband's grave. Dairy-Dingle, where I had my two years of heaven on earth? When I go there I want to kiss the doorstep where my Robert and I used to sit when his day's work was ended, and in the starlight we listened to the mocking-bird singing in the locust thicket all overrun with red and yellow woodbine. Just now I am obliged to be there to see about the lambs, and to be sure of the settings of eggs for the Plymouth Rocks, and Black Spanish."

"How did the lambs contrive to live all those years when you were away, keeping me in order?"

"Poorly enough, I have not a doubt, judging from the looks of the flock. Ever since I received that letter from Robert's youngest sister, Judith, asking me to help her educate as a civil engineer the boy she named for her brother, I have felt the necessity of increasing the income from my place in order to furnish the required funds. My Robert's namesake shall have the college training he wants. Drought cut off my corn last year, and later rain floods stained my cotton."

"Then let Mr. Boynton manage your place, as he does ours, and you stay here, while I hand you a check for what the boy Robert le Diable may need."

"Thank you, precious baby, but that would be outside charity, and he and Judith are proud. Besides, in working and denying myself there is such a sweetness, such a comfort in helping, as if it were serving my dear dead to aid those he loved. Mere money is not worth half as much as the affection that goes with it, and the labor that earned it; but, my darling, you can't quite feel as I do."

"No, I do not understand. Sometimes I wonder if I am not like a doll stinted in her quota of sawdust; and I am sure my heart is too small, or too cold, or too wicked, to hold more than two persons. I love only father and you, and where you are concerned I shall never be of age. Women who outgrow the need of their mothers repel me, like museum 'freaks.' You must not go away so often, because I miss you, and this is an opportune time to tell you that at the back of my head lurks an ugly mental scare-crow that if at some crisis of my life you happened to be absent, I might go daft and scuttle the ship. Remember, you promised grandmother you would not leave me."

Prescient shadows darkened her appealing eyes, as she bent to press her cool cheek against the rosy one of her companion, and drew her out upon the wide, latticed piazza at the rear of the house.

"She asked that I should stay with you until you married, or were twenty-one years old; but, my baby, I need you far more than you need me. You are my heart, and you know it; and I shall be away from you as little as possible; nevertheless I must not neglect my own patches and pastures. By the by, that Jersey heifer you gave me ought to be registered. What would be a pretty name, easy to call? One that matches her in beauty will be hard to find."

"Her profile entitles her to a classical name, but the appropriateness of its significance must be observed. As 'Hecuba' she would feel in duty bound to add nineteen to your herd."

"No, indeed. That is a mouthful of stuttering ugliness."

"'Persephone' rolls softly, like the long swell of a foamless wave settling to rest—but then you could expect no pearly horned progeny, and she might spend her days lowing for her mother. The prettiest short names are already in the herd books. 'Antiope?' She would not take good care of her calves. You don't like mythology because it is pagan, and when I pleaded with you that your cat should be 'Hebe' you turned up your little nose and labelled her 'Delilah.' Such a consistent saint! You prefer Old Testament wickedness to heathen purity. Suppose you compromise on 'Doucette,' and then you can feel sure she will neither kick nor gore."

"If that is the best you can suggest, I shall just suit myself and call her Patricia of Nutwood."

"*Madrecita*, you can not. It is pre-empted. The mother of our herd was imported from St. Helier by my grandfather, when she was only eight months old, and he registered her in his own herd book, 'Patricia of Nutwood.' Mr. Boynton showed me an old leather-bound copy last winter, when I signed several transfers."

"Then the next best for my brown satin beauty is 'Noela,' in honor of Mr. Herriott."

"I am racked by jealousy that you should overlook the liquid brevity of 'Eglahtina' or 'Eglahkentana.' Let us sit here on the steps, where we can enjoy our leafy canopy. Could anything be more beautiful?"

She threw back her head and looked up. In front of the steps two lines of very old elm trees marked the limits of a walk leading through the "back yard" to the vegetable garden. On each row, planted opposite, white wistaria had been trained so carefully that as the lower lateral elm

branches were cut away to keep the arch intact, the vines climbed higher until now, the top boughs of the trees having met, all along the walls and across the pale-green dome of elm leaves swung long, drooping spikes of snowy bloom, amid the olive-tinted wistaria foliage.

"I never saw anything so lovely in Italy," said Eliza, stroking Delilah, and straightening the blue bow on the cat's neck.

"We came too late last spring for the bloom, and we have not seen this living ceiling for so many years. When I was at college I used to shut my eyes and recall it just as we left it. My little 'sundown supper' table on the square of matting yonder, you sitting on the bottom step crocheting mats, grandmother, so tall and thin, walking up and down the side flower garden over there, gathering rose leaves for the big blue china rose jar in the drawing-room, old Hector following her like a lean shadow, and King Herod spreading his tail till I threw him bread crumbs. How often I longed for one of my 'sundown' suppers—my bowl of hominy and cream, my cup of milk, the tea cakes and ginger pone, and blackberry jam. The smell of cloves and cinnamon, and the taste thereof!"

Watching her face, relaxed in dreamy retrospection, Mrs. Mitchell asked:

"Where is Mr. Herriott?"

Without removing her eyes from the long wistaria plumes waving overhead, she answered in a colder tone:

"When father heard last, he was in Norway, but since then I read an account of a dinner given to the party of which he was a member, by a geographical society in London."

"You have received no letter?"

"None recently, and I do not expect any."

"Because you do not deserve any. I am so disappointed in him."

"In what respect? I imagined that in your eyes, as in father's, he was simply perfect."

"He is capable of something far better than lounging through life with his hands in his pockets, and loafing around the world. If he could only have the good luck to lose his money, he might accomplish what God makes such men for."

"He is not an idle tramp. He is kept busy dancing attendance on his exacting bride."

"Bride!" exclaimed Mrs. Mitchell, with such startling shrillness that Delilah sprang out of her lap and surveyed her with astonishment.

"Not a bride of pink flesh, on whom he can bestow collars of diamonds, but an old dame of hoary locks, whose harsh jargon he considers musical, and who, having taken his purse and tied him to her apron strings, drags him from the bowels of the earth to the mountains of the moon, amusing him with photographs of microbes and eclipses, and with prehistoric skeletons that her relentless horny claws have stolen from their lawful graves. Long ago he was wedded to 'Science,' and of course he keeps his bridal vows."

"I am sure you do not fully understand him, and I wonder he did not marry Miss Stanley; she is so lovely, and he certainly admired her."

"She is indeed a luscious beauty, and attracted him, but if he really had any serious intentions, I think she lost him that night when the alarm of fire emptied the theatre. Ours was a proscenium box in the second tier. Eleanor Stanley had dined with Captain Sefton's sister, he was her escort, and I went with Mr. Herriott. Of course you know all about the horrible tragedy, but I never told any one what preceded it. Toward the end, and while the curtain was down, Captain Sefton so far forgot himself as to repeat an unpardonably *risque* story of a smart set leader, at which Eleanor laughed heartily. I stared at my bouquet of orchids, and lifted them to shield my face where I felt the blood. Without moving an eyelash Mr. Noel sat like a sphinx, looking steadily at Eleanor, then took my opera glass and watched a party of pretty girls in the dress circle. His face was as absolutely impassive as one of the masks frescoed on the ceiling. In the middle of the next and closing act, a scream from the rear of the stage startled us, and almost simultaneously two of the ballet girls rushed from behind the wings, with fire blazing in their short, gauzy skirts. One ran to the corner of the stage just under our box, and the actors fled from her. Mr. Herriott put his hand heavily on my shoulder.

"Do not move an inch till I come."

He snatched his overcoat and my velvet opera cloak, stepped on the railing of the box, measured the distance with his eye and leaped down. He struck on his feet, and staggered, but the next instant he reached the girl, who ran shrieking up and down, caught her, threw my cloak over her head, pressed her to the floor, covered her with his overcoat, and rolled her over and over as if she were a ball. Of course she was horribly burned, but she lived. The other poor creature kept her hands before her face as a screen from the flames, missed her footing, stumbled over the footlights and fell among the orchestra chairs. The musicians smothered the flames, but she died after two hours of torture. Mr. Herriott's gloves saved his hands, but one wrist was badly blistered, and his mustache singed. When we were going home I told him how enthusiastically Eleanor admired and praised his bravery, and that she declared she would strive to win his

affection were he not so 'goody-goody'; she feared he would expect her to be equally pious. A queer expression I could not understand crossed his face, and when he spoke his voice was stern:

"'I am not pious; more is the pity! At least I am too honest to accept praise I do not deserve. Please be so kind as not to refer again to this evening, several surprising incidents of which I shall be glad to forget.' A few days later he sent to replace my scorched velvet, that gorgeous ivory satin opera cloak brocaded with lilies in silver, which father and you wished me to accept, and I based my refusal on his request, as the mere sight of it would inevitably remind him of a night neither of us wished to recall. Look yonder."

"Yes; there must be a picket off that white game yard fence, for I am positive I fastened the gate this morning. Run on ahead and open the gate wide, for when they are driven back they never can find the crack where they came out. That white rooster is all ruffled up for a fight with the red one. Scare the hens back and stand on one side."

When the fugitives had been shut in, the two women stood admiring the flock.

"Dearie, do you know how old these chickens are? Forty years before railroads were built in this state, your grandfather brought them in a champagne basket on the top of a stage-coach from somewhere in Maryland, and the person who gave them to him had imported them from England forty years before. Think of it!"

"I do, with astonishment difficult to express. More than eighty years old, and no sign of decrepitude in crowing, fighting and laying eggs! Little mother, what are *tarrididdles*?"

Laughing, she put her hands on Eliza's shoulder and shook her gently. The little woman pinched her ear.

"Don't talk slang to me. You know I did not mean these very identical fowls are those that came in the champagne basket, but the original trio, two hens and a cock, were kept in a separate yard, and so the stock has remained pure game for more than forty years. They are such beauties, and to the last day of her life your grandmother was so proud and fond of them. One morning when we were feeding them she told me how General Maurice had laughed over the cunning of one of the negroes whose duty it was to attend to the fowl yards. The general had promised a setting of eggs to a friend in a neighboring county, and ordered the man to bring him one dozen perfectly fresh. The negro protested against a violation of the rule that no one else should own the white games, so that if stolen they could be traced. His master insisted, and when the eggs were handed to him he packed them very carefully in cotton, to prevent jostling, and sent them to his friend. Some time afterward, a letter reached your grandfather, informing him none of the eggs had hatched, and he called the man and read the letter to him.

"'Narry aigg hatched? Well, I made sure they couldn't, for I am 'sponsible for keeping dem chickens safe at home and I 'tends to my bizness. You see, marster, I knowed you was in a mighty tight fix, 'cause natchelly you hated to say no when Dr. Glenn axed for 'em, and most natchelly you didn't want our yaller-breasted, brass-winged white games crowing in other folks' yards, and so I just pintedly shuck 'em and shuck 'em like thunder, till they was foamy enough for Celie's omlet skillet.'"

CHAPTER XIX

If owners of old manorial houses kept frank and faithful log-books, strange domestic records might now and then be read, rivalling in tragic incidents those of passing ships. Conspicuously infelicitous was the stream of events beating against Calvary House and reducing an ancient, broad estate and handsome three-storied brick residence to a few impoverished acres, and a rambling structure partly destroyed by fire, and wholly abandoned to vacancy and isolation in consequence of grewsome gossip. During eighty years the proprietorship had been vested in only two families, totally unrelated; in the first, the reckless extravagance and unbridled careers of four beautiful women depleted the domestic coffer, necessitated the sacrifice and sale of the property, and drove a weakly indulgent father to suicide. In the second the vices of sons plunged the widowed mother into melancholia and an insane asylum.

From time to time portions of land were sold to enable the boys to continue their wild carousals. Fratricidal strife ensued, and one brother spent the dismal residue of his days in the penitentiary, expiating the murder of the other. The vicious round of horse-racing, cock-fighting, fox-hunting, gambling and drinking once madly run had ended in the final wreck, and what remained of the estate fell into the hands of Mr. Herriott's father, whose agent held the mortgage. Sufficiently grim was the foundation of facts; yet still more appalling the superstructure of neighborhood traditions, and the ghoulish tales of superstitious servants. Venerable trees, whose sheltering arms might have veiled the ruin, had been over-grown by mistletoe, until very few survived to stand guard, and when a hunter crept with his pointer through broom-sedge waist high all over the lawn, his cigar spark set the whole aflame, and only two fine old oaks close to the house were left as sentinels. Later, a lightning bolt destroyed one; two years after, an equinoctial gale blew the other half across the mossy roof. Stark, weather beaten, its broken windows like eyeless sockets in a skull, the old house, dumb in desolation, stood in dire need of the mercies of bell, candle, censer, and aspergill to exorcise its garrison of unholy spectres. Five years after the place

had been given by Noel Herriott to the "Brothers of the Order of Calvary," lime, paint, wallpaper, patient toil and a wise appreciation of the adaptability of angles, corridors, dormer windows and verandas, in architectural alterations, had transformed it into a quaintly irregular but picturesque structure. Outside mouldy walls were curtained with ampelopsis lace, while from a circular belfry between the original square rock chimneys, a deep-toned bell swung below a tall gilt cross, and uttered its holy message of peace to a troubled and tragic past. The basement had been converted into a refectory, kitchen and store room, the large apartments were partitioned into individual cells, and an infirmary; and the long drawing-room became a chapel, with a small oratory adjoining. Here a pipe organ sounded through the arch leading into the chapel, and over this opening a purple curtain fell when service ended. Beyond and in line with the oratory, a one-story wing with a wide cloistered piazza looked toward the rear of the house, and held a sacristy; then three small chambers fronting the vine-draped cloister behind whose arches paced, book in hand, fathers, brothers and lay brothers.

In the early stages of the era of renovation the place had resembled an industrial farm rather than a religious retreat; but gradually, as orchard and vineyard were replanted, gardens outlined and cultivated, a solemn, peaceful silence enveloped Calvary House, broken by no ruder sounds than Angelus, chants from the chapel, low-swelling organ tones, and that peculiarly sweet, thrilling threnody of hedge sparrows moaning in a ragged thicket of very old lilacs. Along the front of the sloping lawn a fence divided it from the turnpike leading into the city, and over the wide wooden gate sprang an arch bearing in black letters, Calvary House, and surmounted by a cross. From the gate latch swung the porter's bell.

Since the day when, standing at an open grave close to Leighton's mound in Evergreen, Father Temple had read the committal service as his wife's coffin was lowered, and pronounced the farewell benediction, the springs of his busy life seemed to have broken. Max Harlberg and the few who had followed the hearse, stole away, leaving the priest on his knees. Later, as stars came out to guard the hosts of sleepers, a watchman found him prone on the damp mound, and in a heavy stupor. An ambulance carried him to the nearest hospital, where he rallied slowly from an attack of pneumonia that left his lungs too weak to permit the possibility of preaching, and the doctors warned him a year's rest was imperative. Engagements for "missions" and "retreats" were cancelled, and his superior summoned him home, but after a few days advised him to go South and visit his relatives in Y—— until the winds of March had blown out their fury. On his return, still thin and wan, he resumed his duties, and from Prime to Compline missed no service. After Vespers, the tolling of the *De Profundis* bell called all to their knees in silent prayer for the dead, and his bowed head was always the last lifted. How much penance was self-imposed none knew, but a change had come into the habitually sad face; keen mental strife, devouring anxiety, were at an end, and the large dark eyes told of an inward patience that was not yet peace, of an acceptance of the verdict that his life spelled hopeless failure. So marked was the alteration in figure and features, that one sunny day at Calvary House, as Mr. Herriott grasped his hand, he was painfully startled.

"Vernon! You are little more than a holy shadow! If starving is the regimen prescribed here, I do not feel tempted to tarry even for a day."

"Noel—God bless you, dear old fellow! At last you have remembered us, and how well you look! The bare sight of your superb strength is tonic. Come into the chapel. Terce bell is sounding. After a little the Brotherhood will greet you."

Under the guidance of Father Superior Elverton, a gaunt man of unusual height, with the ascetic jaw of a Trappist, and dreamy eyes mystical as Hugo of St. Victor, Mr. Herriott was shown fields, garden and buildings, and after dinner in the refectory, where, in honor of his presence, conversation was allowed, he asked the privilege of being left alone with Father Temple. It was a warm day, and drawing chairs to a shaded recess of the cloister, Mr. Herriott said:

"I am so glad the weather favored me to-day for this visit. It will rain soon."

"No; look at that deep blue, clear sky. I see no prophecy of rain, but you have tried so many climates, doubtless you are weather wise."

"If a man who has slept often in tents, open boats and on the bare ground learns nothing of nature's atmospheric signal code, he is far below savages in intelligence, and more ignorant than brutes. You of the shut-in clan are not skilled meteorologists, but time is too precious to be wasted in idle weather chat. Vernon, there is much I should like to know, yet I shrink from questioning you. Many letters have been lost, and my home news came in snatches, sometimes with no connection, no coherence. I have thought of you constantly, and now what you are willing to tell me of all that has happened since we parted in New York that Sunday night, I shall be glad to hear."

Leaning his elbow on the brick base of an arch and bowing his head in his palm, Father Temple narrated the circumstances that attended the death of his wife and son, withholding nothing. His muffled voice was steady and passionless, as if reading from the breviary, and when the face lifted it showed only the quiet hopelessness in eyes of one going back over a battle-field where all that was cherished went down.

"Thank you, Temple. It might have been worse, and at least you must be comforted in knowing that at the last she relented and did you justice."

"The last has become first. All that preceded it I have cast away, and that final hour of

forgiveness, that touch on my head—that feeble clinging of her fingers—is what remains of my past life—what sustains me for the future."

"Try to avoid morbid retrospection. Your expiation has been so complete you have no grounds for self-reproach; you are still a young man, and your life work is ahead of you."

The priest threw out one hand, and his trained tone broke suddenly.

"Expiation will never end while I have breath to pray—not until the same grave that holds my victims covers me. You can not understand, because you know no more about love than the rubric! If you had ever felt your wife's lips on yours, or the clasp of your child's arms, and heard his glad, tender cry of 'father!'—you would realize that no expiation could be sufficient, if your hand had smitten them to ruin."

"Perhaps I do understand the torture more thoroughly than you imagine, and you must allow me to say that were I as sadly circumstanced as yourself, I should set my back to the past, and resolutely hunt for sunshine in coming years. Deliberate, intentional villainy was never your sin, and for a foolish boy's rash haste you did everything possible to atone. I shall be sorry to see you so unmanly as to sink down in the mildew of an abject melancholy. Your surroundings invite morbid memories, and just here, Vernon, let me say I do not like your refectory. It is dark, damp, mouldy, and you must make a change. I should enjoy breakfasting in the catacombs quite as much. Ask your superior to estimate the cost of building a refectory on this floor, say to the left yonder, and perhaps the matter may be arranged satisfactorily. Another bell! What office comes next?"

"That is to notify us 'free time' is over for the day. We have an hour in which to employ ourselves without direction. Below the vegetable garden Brother Theodore comes from his pet strawberry bed, and over yonder, what looks like a huge black bird with flapping white wings is Brother Aristide dusting the leaves of his grapevines with some insecticide powder. He came from Burgundy, and believes that ledge behind the line of cherry trees lying south-southeast will give him Chambertin equal to the best in Côte d'Or. You see even here each trundles his recreation hoop once a day."

An east wind had spun fine silver cloud lines curving across the blue, clustering, widening into two vast, fleecy pinions that were floating slowly to the gates of the west. Despite sunshine, chilliness edged the air, and Father Temple coughed hoarsely.

"Your reverence should not stay here next winter. It is too humid. As the crow flies and the wind sweeps, the Atlantic can not be more than twenty miles away, and when northeast gales howl from Barnegat to Hatteras, this is no sanatorium for you. If you have no special preference for tuberculosis, and have not vowed slow suicide on that altar, I should be glad if you would select some other mode of exit when you finally say good-bye. Consumption robbed me of my father—I hope I shall not lose my friend also thereby."

The priest smiled, and laid his thin hand on his companion's knee.

"In many characteristics we differ so widely, I have often wondered that you care at all for me."

"You were so honest and fearless and manly when we met at college. You showed such genuine pluck in that hazing scandal, so much quiet, heroic magnanimity when the official investigation followed. Vernon, for God's sake, wake up! You have talent; don't doze like a toad under a stone wall. Come out of shadows that paralyze you, and try to make your mark in the world of letters. I do not wish to change my——"

He paused and frowned. A flush tinged Father Temple's sallow cheek.

"You do not wish to consider me unmanly now?"

"That is exactly it, and if you force me to do so I swear I never will forgive you. Don't brood and mope. Go back to Plato and Horace—they are the best brooms for cloistral cobwebs—and promise me you will not stay here next winter."

"My cousin Allison Kent and Eglah insist I shall spend December and January with them, in Y——, and since I am forbidden to preach at present, I may accept the invitation. I was there on a brief visit several months ago."

"Tell me about them. It has been long since I heard directly."

"The judge has grown extremely stout, and says he enjoys the lazy leisure of Southern life among the opulent, but he seemed restless and abstracted, and was often absent on fishing excursions. Eglah perplexes me. She is graver, more reticent, and far more beautiful, but reminds me of a person walking in troubled sleep, determined, yet vaguely apprehensive. At times it occurred to me that her relations with her father were not as tenderly cordial as I remembered in the Washington life; he never caressed her, and she seemed in a certain degree aloof, but her careful deference in manner and speech was exquisite. She told me his retirement from a senatorial position was the supreme disappointment of her life, and her chief solace now is the preparation of a volume of his speeches, prefaced by a biographical sketch she intends to write. I think her father is very unpopular with the majority of old families in Y——, who will never forgive his course while Federal judge, and as they represent the best social element, conditions beyond her control have embarrassed Eglah, but she gives no hint and fronts the situation with admirable

cool calmness."

Leaning back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head, Mr. Herriott seemed to watch the narrowing circles of a hawk beneath which three frantic pigeons dashed aimlessly round and round, and in the final swift swoop one white bird disappeared in a vanishing brown shadow.

"You have lost a pigeon."

"We have none. The lay brothers complain of their depredations in the garden, and sometimes trap those that belong in the city, but they are always carried off and set free."

"Vernon, why does not your cousin Eglah marry Roger Hull? He is as nearly worthy of her as any man she will ever meet; he is eminently good looking, bright, a spirited debater, and as it is said he carries the votes of his district in his vest pocket, he has an assured political position where she could gratify her ambition. If he lives he will sit in the Senate. He was very devoted in his attentions. Is he still loyal?"

"No. I hear he is reported engaged to a pretty girl in Washington, whose father is a naval officer. Certainly Eglah does not lack beaux. She has very fine horses, rides daily, and one of her most frequent escorts was a Dr. Burbridge, very handsome and a specialist in neurology. I don't know Hull, but he has been twice to Nutwood since Eglah came back from Europe, and Cousin Allison said that she froze him so completely on his last visit that he gave up the chase, and consoled himself with a more responsive charmer. If political life allures her, Hull certainly offered an attractive opportunity, but I am sure her father did not favor that suit, and as her ambition was more for his preferment than from any personal fondness for a congressional career, she will soon cease to regret, and find contentment in her lovely surroundings."

"I am afraid not. Pardon the simile—but take a thoroughbred filly raised and trained on the race track, and when she is champing her bit, trembling for the signal to start, lead her aside, shut her in a pasture, fasten her to a plough trace, or harness her with a mule on the other side of a wagon-tongue, and do you wonder the load comes to grief, or the furrows are crooked when she sees the racers flash by, and hears the rush of hoofs, the roar of cheering thousands? Eglah knows what she wants, and disdains compromise. The present environment suits her as little as a stagnant millpond would a yacht cup challenger."

"I wish she could marry happily, but the day I came away we stood at the front steps and I told her I hoped I might have the privilege of performing the ceremony, if during my life she consented to make some man happy. The judge laughed and tapped me on the shoulder. 'I will see you get that wedding fee. When you are needed I shall telegraph you.' She stepped a little closer to him, put her hands behind her, and looked at him with strange intentness; then turning to me she said, with singular emphasis: 'I shall never marry. As I have been baptized, only one more ceremony can be performed for me, and if Ma-Lila does not insist upon a Methodist minister, I promise that you shall pronounce 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust'—when mother earth takes me back to her heart.'

"Just then Mrs. Mitchell dropped her basket, and the clatter of keys and scissors broke the strain, which I could not understand. But Eglah's eyes recalled something I have not thought of for years. Do you recollect a picture of the Norns we saw that summer we walked through Wales?"

"Three figures, one veiled? We could not find out who painted it, but I never shall forget the wonderful eyes of Urd."

"They looked at me again that day in Nutwood. The expression was as inscrutable as the smile of Mona Lisa—not defiance, nor yet renunciation, neither scorn nor bitterness, but deathless pride and a pain so hopeless no sound could voice it."

There was a brief silence, broken by the muffled chanting in the chapel, and Mr. Herriott's hands were gripped so tight behind his head the nails were purple, but his face showed no emotion, and when he spoke his tone betrayed only quiet sympathy.

"For many years I have associated her with a passage in Jeremiah: '*As a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her.*' Poor little speckled bird, beating out her life. Battling alone against a host of hawks is dreary work."

"I suppose you are going to Y——?"

"No, I must get back home. I have been away too long. My poor faithful Susan is dead."

"I hope you are tired of globe-trotting, and ready to anchor yourself at your own fireside."

"As yet I have made no definite plans; have been considering two recent offers. One is the presidency of a great railroad system—a position I might possibly fit myself to occupy if I went into the machine shops and roundhouses and worked hard for the next five years. It happens that the shares and bonds of one short but very important line which my father practically owned when the middle West was comparatively undeveloped, have appreciated enormously, and now that road is the link absolutely necessary to the contemplated consolidation of a new route that will touch the Pacific. I cabled my refusal to sell out, and the next bait was the presidency. Mr. Stadmeyer and I have controlling interests and our views accord. Two days ago we had a meeting, at which I declined office, and we leased our road for thirty years. That relieved me from one horn of the dilemma; the other still threatens. A Polar expedition will be ready next

year, and I have been asked to take a place aboard ship."

"Noel, I beg of you, dismiss that thought. Of all scientific follies, that Pole-hunting mania is the wildest, the most indefensible. To add your bleaching bones to the cairns heaped on the eternal ice altar of Polar night is no ambition worthy of you. Don't think me childish, but the sight of you is such a comfort I could not bear to have you risk your life searching for mares' nests so far away."

Mr. Herriott laughed—a genial, hearty, deep-chested sound rarely heard in cloisters.

"Get rid of that cough, and I will take you along as chaplain to christen the Pole—presumably it is pagan at present. I wish you would go down to New Mexico or Arizona and make a sensible effort to build up your constitution, which seems suing you for damages. Leave medicine and the breviary in your cell, and lie under the stars and inhale that wonderful, healing air. When you wish to pray go down into the Grand Cañon, you will find you can succeed without needing a book to help you. In that sky verily 'the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handiwork.' Mission work, and to spare, would interest you at a Moqui Pueblo, and I can recommend one whose primeval, idyllic repose dwells in my memory like an eclogue of Virgil's. It is spread over the crown and sides of a precipice where terraces tilt their outer edges upward to prevent water from draining the little gardens. Masonry-lined cisterns gleam under moonlight like molten silver, sheep and goats bleat in their stone enclosures, a frieze of kids runs below the cornice of brown cupids drowsing on the wall, and all about the mesa a pink cloud of blooming peach trees and a yellow mist of acacias. Weigh this cure scheme, discuss it in Sanhedrim, and if you think favorably of it let me hear from you before October, as I have several friends among ranchmen, and some of the Moquis have not forgotten me."

"Do you intend to settle down now at your lake-shore house?"

"Yes, for the present. I have been invited to write for two scientific magazines, and one of the subjects suggested rather appeals to me—a comparison of the fiords of Norway with those of Alaska and British Columbia, but I have not fully decided. However, I am committed to help Chalcott verify numerous citations from Strabo's tenth book, relative to Crete, and I must brush up my classics. Chalcott is sanguine of 'great finds' around the site of ancient Knossos in the near future. He has been stung by the Pelasgian bee, and I have promised to hunt and copy some passages from Strabo."

He took his hat from the floor and rose.

"Now I must say good-bye to father superior and the brethren."

"We hoped you would spend at least one night with us, in the room we have named and set apart for you."

"I must get back to Philadelphia in time for a meeting to-morrow of stockholders and directors of our railroad. Mr. Stadmeyer requested me to attend, though he is really our watchdog. Don't delay the refectory improvements, and since you are all so good as to give me a special penitential apartment, I wish you would brighten it up with a cheerful paper, and allow me the privilege of sending some human derelict to anchor here in peace. God knows, there are fleets of souls adrift, and I should be glad if, for my sake, you can tow some into the snug harbor of my cell, until the day comes when my sins culminate and force me here for penance."

When the two walked down to the outer gate, the contrast between the virile athlete and the shadowy black form of the priest was pathetically vivid.

The busy shuttles of the east wind had spread their cirrus laces even along the western horizon where the sun had vanished, and the sky was one huge arching shell enamelled with mother-of-pearl, as the cloudlets burned in the after-glow.

"Vernon, don't look back. You have balanced your books with the past. Dear old fellow, I wish to think of you as fulfilling the rich promise of our college days."

"Assure me you will give up that Arctic whim. The thought of it distresses me."

"Do not worry about me. The expedition could not be ready to start for at least a year, and by that time I may not need to go. Sir John Franklin's ghost may chat with mine and tell me all the secrets of the Pole, which doubtless he discovered when Arctic ice claimed his body."

He laughed, they shook hands, and parted.

At a bend in the road he turned, looked back and waved his hat to the watching figure standing under the gilt cross, and silhouetted in sharp lines against the opal dome of the west.

CHAPTER XX

"Little mother, the weather is so lovely I really ought to drive with you to Dairy Dingle, instead of letting you go in that dusty, stuffy car; but you will not wait, and you know I have promised to go to the club german to-morrow night."

"I shall get back in time to help you; the train is due at 7:10. Your dress is already pressed, and ribbons and lace sewed on, but as you have not worn it, I want to be sure about the hang of that skirt. Your sash——"

"Your train is ready to start. Good-bye, Ma-Lila."

"Good-bye, dearie. I wish the club house and Dr. Burbridge were in Jericho! Then you could go with me."

Mrs. Mitchell kissed her companion's cheek and hurried to the car platform, where she paused a moment, looking back at the girl seated in her trap, balancing her lace parasol.

"Are you going directly home?"

"No. I shall call to inquire how Mrs. Whitfield is to-day, and as the bishop has come home from Florida I must congratulate him on his restoration to health. Bring me some titi blossoms."

The bell clanged, the engine puffed, and the train disappeared around a curve. An hour afterward, in front of the post-office, the mail for Nutwood was brought to the trap. Eglah took two letters addressed to herself, and placed the remainder with papers under the cushion of the trap seat.

"Oliver, stop at Holmein's garden. Then go on home and give the mail to father. If he has not returned from fishing, be careful to lay letters and papers on the library table in front of his chair. I shall walk from Holmein's."

The grounds of the florist were nearly a mile from the gates of Nutwood, and on a new street-car line extending to a park that overlooked the river. From Holmein's the broad, sandy road ran straight through thick woods to the avenue of the old house on the hill. Having secured a bunch of double white violets, Judge Kent's favorite flower, his daughter walked homeward. Ivory thuribles of magnolia and bay swung their fragrance up and down the nave of ancient pines, and the profound repose, the silence as of primeval wilds was broken only now and then by the antiphonal plaints of doves lamenting on the lofty green pine cornices, or a low preluding chord, as fingers of the wind touched the leafy pipes of the forest organ.

Many months had passed, and the procession of the seasons brought no comforting element to brighten the monotonous life that so severely taxed Eglah's patience. A card and dinner party on Judge Kent's birthday had pleased him for the moment, but while he praised the menu and decorations, no relaxation of chill politeness rewarded her. Only one *al fresco* festival was held. When nuts were ripe in autumn the young mistress had invited the children belonging to Sunday-schools and the orphan asylum in Y—— to come one afternoon to Nutwood and gather chestnuts and walnuts. In the grove long tables held refreshments, that were served by Eglah and Eliza to the hungry throng, and for the first time since the war hundreds of happy little ones raced and shouted under the ancestral trees. Several plank seats remained as souvenirs of the occasion, and to-day Eglah turned away from the avenue, and sat down between two young chestnuts. At her feet was a miniature doll house of walnut shells built to amuse a flaxen-haired tot who shrank tearfully from the sharp pricks of chestnut burrs, and begged for a "truly fairy tale."

Now Eglah was reminded of the wide, curious eyes raised to hers when she had repeated:

"I fancy the fairies make merry,
With thorns for their knives and forks;
They have currants for bottles of sherry,
And the little brown heads are the corks.
A leaf makes the tent they sit under,
Their ballroom's a white lily-cup;
Shall I know all about them, I wonder,
For certain, when I am grown up?"

Laying her flowers beside her, she broke the seal of a letter from Mrs. St. Clair, postmarked New York, and after a moment the sheet fell into her lap. Raising it, she read a second time:

"We are so shocked and grieved to find that Mr. Herriott is actually going on that North Pole expedition we thought he had abandoned. He has been much fêted since his return last year, and all of our set are heartily sorry to give him up. Some of us believe you could put a stop to this nonsense, if you would only come to your senses, and use your influence. The idea of such a man going into the grewsome business of eating blubber and seal, and possibly Eskimo dog steak! Hunting a graveyard among hummocks! I suggested to him that a better plan would be to go down into a cold-storage vault, throw away the key and slam the spring-lock door. Then we should be allowed the consolation of covering him with flowers."

She replaced the letter in the envelope, and fell into a profound revery. If Mr. Herriott sailed away and never returned, her father could no longer cling to his sole condition of reconciliation. Years ago her own responsibility had ended, and even had she desired to reconsider the proposal of marriage, no opportunity to do so had been given her. She had not seen Mr. Herriott since that afternoon in the old Greco-Roman theatre. Two kind, brief, merely friendly letters had reached her, followed by a box containing for herself some fine Oriental embroideries, and an exquisitely carved ivory triptych; for Mrs. Mitchell a copy of a quaint circular picture in the old Byzantine style, representing a group of young lambs asleep around the standing figure of the child Jesus,

whose body rayed light, as in the "*Notte*," one little hand extended over them, while he looked up to an angelic guard only dimly outlined by the gleaming tips of hovering pinions.

If Mr. Herriott never returned? Her eyes filled with unshed tears. For so many years he had been her devoted and loyal friend, and she honored and trusted him supremely. Never to see him again would grieve her deeply, but she felt assured he no longer loved her as formerly—that sincere friendship was the only sentiment he now entertained. Were his heart still hers, could he have maintained the total repression that marked recent years? He had given his word not to refer to a matter that distressed her, but when men really loved, such compacts were forgotten, and it must have been easy for Mr. Herriott to keep his promise of absolute silence.

Gathering up her flowers, letters and parasol, she walked slowly across the lawn and reached the house by a side door, without meeting any of the servants.

On the library table lay Judge Kent's unopened mail; hence she knew he had not yet returned from the fishing trip on which he started at daylight. Over the door opening into his adjoining bedroom a heavy portière of crimson plush usually hung, but a few days previous winter draperies had been replaced by Madras curtains that resembled stained glass. Lifting this summer portière, Eglah went into the bedroom, filled a vase with water and arranged the drooping violets on her father's bureau. Only during his absence did she ever come into this apartment, so long her grandmother's reliquary, where the girl seemed always to see old Hector crouching against his dead mistress, and that white face, whose fixed blue eyes pierced beyond the orange dawn and fronted God.

The memory of her childish terror on the night of Mrs. Maurice's death haunted the room, despite her effort to dispel it, yet to-day she sat down on a lounge and re-read Mrs. St. Clair's letter. If her father knew of the contemplated Arctic journey, he had given no hint. Perhaps the vessel had already sailed. Then at last she could find peace and reconciliation. Possibly Mr. Herriott might change his plans. If ever he renewed his offer would she—could she yield to her father's wishes? She set her teeth.

"Sell myself—even for father's love? Never!"

It seemed cruel that some misfortune to her best and dearest friend should offer her sole channel of escape, and after a while she made deliberate choice.

"Come what may, I pray no harm will overtake Mr. Noel. I would rather continue to fight and suffer than know he was lost; and surely God will watch over him."

Some moments passed while, forgetting to remove her hat, she sat tapping her knee with the letter. Then heavy footsteps rang on the bare, "dry-rubbed" floor, and Judge Kent's voice sounded through the library.

"Take that arm chair, Herriott. Eglah is in town, but she will be at home soon."

"I am glad to have an opportunity to talk to you in her absence. I have not come here voluntarily; necessity drove me. My mission now is so distressingly painful that could it have been avoided I should certainly not be here. To shield Eglah from annoyance I would undertake anything but neglect of duty. Of course you know the deplorable matter to which I allude?"

Every word came distinctly through the lace-hung doorway, and Eglah rose, reluctant to overhear that which it was evident the speaker wished withheld from her; but an overmastering desire to understand once for all conditions that had so long perplexed her, coerced her to remain. There was grave trouble, and she must suffer later—why not now? A full comprehension was the first step toward defence.

"I am surprised that you should intentionally embarrass me, but I suppose you refer to the United States and railroad bonds that were hypothecated. I knew you had redeemed them, delivered them to the college, and I hoped when I parted with the house in Thirty-eighth Street that I could turn it over to you in part payment of that bond business; but an unfortunate venture reduced me to such urgent need, I was obliged to take the money you offered through Trainem. Don't interrupt me—now you have forced me to speak, I want no renewal of this matter. Except the trustees and their attorneys, no one remembers the unjust clause in your father's will that Nina should have the New York house and certain stocks outright, but only the interest on those bonds which at her death should belong to the Presbyterian College. Munificent provision for the widow of a reputed multimillionaire! Since you have so kindly and generously recovered the bonds and delivered them to the trustees, I see no necessity for this revival of so disagreeable a subject, and certainly no propriety in dragging before Eglah what does not concern her. The trusteeship under which her own estate is held at present, prevents my using any part of it to repay you, as I would do most gladly, were it possible."

"Had you not forbidden an interruption, you might have spared yourself an unpleasant retrospection, as I earnestly desired to assure you at the outset that you are entirely mistaken in my purpose. I had no thought—no intention, of alluding to the subject of the bonds, which is even more disagreeable to me than to you, but since you have brought it up, while I decline to discuss my father's will, you must permit me to say that the course I pursued was prompted solely by my affection for Nina, and a desire to protect her innocent name. Hence as regards the bonds you owe me nothing."

"Do you doubt they were hypothecated with her consent and desire?"

"Judge Kent, you must pardon me if I ask you to dismiss issues long past. I am here for a far graver and more imperatively pressing matter. It seems hard indeed that I, who have accepted and enjoyed your hospitality—I, who for many years have known that my heart dwelt upon your roof—should be the unfortunate agent forced to bring grief and trouble to your hearth. I suppose you suspect to what I refer?"

"No. I have so many enemies, and such an infernal succession of bad luck, I never know where a bomb may burst. I haven't an idea what you are driving at."

Mr. Herriott walked twice across the floor.

"Do you recollect Edward Hunt?"

"Yes. A cross between a fox and a blood-hound. He was a cousin of yours. I gave hearty thanks when I heard he was dead."

"Allow me to correct you; he married a cousin of my mother's. Of course you recall his connection with the syndicate that secured congressional grant of lands in the West, which subsequently proved so valuable. You were a member of the Senate committee that reported favorably, and doubtless you recollect all that passed between you and Hunt at that time."

"Good God! When the grave closed over him, I thought that syndicate business was screwed down in his coffin."

"Judge Kent, I would give my right arm if it could be shut in there. Do you recall a time in Washington, the night of Secretary D——'s dinner, from which I carried Eglah to a cotillon? Early in the evening you received an anonymous warning that the personality of 'Ely Twiggs' had been discovered. Accidentally the truth came into my possession. I sent it, that you might prepare any defence you deemed advisable—and I was unwilling you should suspect I knew the facts. The cashier of that western Pentland Bank was Duncan Keith, whom I knew when I was a boy, and when the bank failed, he and the bookkeeper disappeared, after destroying the books; at least the president and teller so stated at the examination held by directors and stockholders. Edward Hunt was a director, and defended Keith. He always contended that the president and teller had conspired to throw the guilt on an innocent man. Leaving his son with the boy's grandmother in Ohio, Keith fled, and was reported somewhere in South America. One night in Geneva, where I went to attend a scientific congress, a blurred sheet was brought to me at the hotel.

"'Your old friend Duncan Keith is dying. I am an innocent victim. Come and take my message to my boy in Ohio.'

"The shoemaker who brought the note piloted me to his shop, where in an attic room I found poor Keith. He was sinking fast, but begged me to do him the only favor this world held. He insisted I should watch over his son, whose grandmother had recently died, and the boy had now no relations but an aunt, a sister of Keith's wife. With his last sobbing breath he swore to me he was innocent. He declared the charge of embezzlement was untrue; that his individual account was short only eight hundred dollars, overdrawn with the knowledge and consent of president and teller, who denied their sanction when the crash came, and charged him with theft and forgeries he had never committed. As security for the money borrowed, he had given a mortgage on a small piece of land, but to avoid mortgage tax it had not been recorded, and could not be found. Fear of prosecution and inability to establish his innocence against the united persecution of bank officials had driven him from the country. Part of the records he preserved and carried away, but he needed an important link, the stubs of a certain check book, and some bank drafts returned from London. His health failed fast, and confined to his room, he had abandoned all hope, when one day he received a package addressed in Edward Hunt's handwriting. It contained not only the stubs, but checks and two receipts establishing beyond doubt the guilt of the president, teller, and two other persons. Poor Keith! On his narrow bed he had a tin box under his elbow, and he laid the key on my knee.

"'Noel, I am honest as you are, and I want you to help my boy clear my name. All the proof is in this box. Will you keep it safe until Duncan is twenty-one, and then give it to him, and explain my enclosed letter of instructions? I tried to write my wishes to you, and that letter also is in the box. If I had not heard you were here, I should have asked our consul to send the box to you. Noel, will you help my son? I don't ask you to prosecute, or take any part; I only beg you to guard these proofs till he is of age. Will you promise me now, in God's sight, to keep these papers safe, and put them into no hand but Duncan's?'

"I took the box and put my hand on his, already cold and damp in death.

"'*So help me God, I will guard the papers, and give them only into Duncan's own hand.*'

"I sat with him until the end. Five hours later, at two o'clock, he died. Only God knows how bitterly and ceaselessly I have rued that rash promise now goading me to a step I would almost rather die than take. When I accepted the trust, I knew absolutely nothing of your connection with that bank, or of the transactions by which you came into possession of stock and shares in the land company and bank, all standing in the name of 'Ely Twiggs,' the dividends of which were always sent direct to London, and receipted for by 'Ely Twiggs's' agent, who reported him travelling in Egypt. 'Ely Twiggs,' as far as my information went, was associated solely with the syndicate's work in Congress. I made no examination of the proofs until very recently, because the appointed time had not arrived, and since I looked into that box I have not had one moment's

peace. The array of evidence, strengthened by two of your own letters, rests the culpability on the president, the teller, Marsden and yourself. You must know how it pains me to lay this matter before you, but it is necessary you should understand the facts."

His voice wavered, and again he walked the length of the room.

A deep, quivering groan came from the depths of Judge Kent's chair, and leaning across the library table he poured out and swallowed a glass of brandy.

"The imminence of this misfortune is what appalls me. Duncan Keith will be twenty-one years old in less than a month, and as I sail so soon with the expedition, I am now on my way to place the box in his hands and explain his father's wishes. I may never come back, and I must execute my trust now, especially as the poor fellow is not in good health."

"My God! You can't mean to tell me you intend to arm him and my enemies with documents that will disgrace me?"

"Not if it were possible to avoid it without breaking my oath. I have pondered, I have passed sleepless nights trying to devise some method of shielding you; but unless I lie to a dead man who trusted me, I am compelled to deliver the box."

"Noel, for God's sake be reasonable! Don't sacrifice me to maudlin sentimentality. You pretend to love my innocent child, and yet pursue a course you know will break her heart, as well as mine?"

"Judge Kent, for her sake I would do anything—save dishonor myself."

"Then you have ceased to love her!"

"No; I love her, and I always shall, until she is some other man's wife. I gave her my whole heart when she was a mere child, and she is still the one woman in all the world who holds it in her dear little hands. To shield her from this terrible sorrow, I have thought you might go abroad at once, and keep American papers out of her reach for a while. Duncan will probably move promptly in exonerating his father's name; there will be, of course, a nine days' sensation, then matters will settle; a later stratum of news will press it out of sight, and Eglah need never know."

"Could not the boy be influenced to sell the papers and drop it?"

"Certainly not by me. Do you think it possible I could insult the dead by helping to undo what I swore to aid his son in accomplishing?"

"But you swore in ignorance of facts learned since."

"No, only in ignorance of the personality of some who contributed to Keith's ruin. I am the most unhappy poor devil on earth, but no honorable alternative is allowed me, and to-night I go on to Duncan and deliver the box. I must meet the vessel which touches at Sydney, Cape Breton, on the 15th, and I have no time to spare. I shall come back this afternoon to see Eglah and say good-bye, and I can only hope that after calm consideration of all the circumstances embarrassing me, you will not censure me for a deplorable course of action which my sense of honor makes absolutely imperative."

Judge Kent sat facing the Madras drapery towards which Mr. Herriott's back was turned, and at this moment a glass door leading to the colonnade opened; the draught of air blew the curtain into the library, and the Judge saw his daughter slip quickly from his bedroom. With a vague hope of gaining time, he said unsteadily:

"I am so stunned, I am not myself. That you should sweep me and mine to destruction seems incredible; but, nevertheless, will you stay and dine?"

"No, thank you, Judge Kent. It would be painful for both of us. Later, I must see Eglah once more."

In crucial hours, when some crisis wrecks plans, landmarks, life-long aims, the brain works with preternatural clearness and celerity. Through the torturing ordeal of that half hour Eglah had listened, numb with shame and horror. The world seemed to have dissolved in a night that could know no dawn; yet, groping in this chaos, two desperate resolves nerved her.

She would secure that box of papers, no matter at what cost. Her father should be saved from disgrace, and he should never suspect she knew his guilt. She must see Mr. Herriott before she saw her father. Swiftly she matured her resolution; then an unusual glitter came into her lovely soft eyes, and she sat down between the chestnut trees and waited.

At a quick stride, Mr. Herriott descended the avenue until nearly opposite the seat, and she rose and walked toward him.

Their hands met in a tight, clinging clasp, but for an instant neither spoke. He noted that the blood had ebbed from her lips, and that she was frightfully pale, but the eyes lifted to his glowed unnaturally.

"I intended coming back later, to spend an hour with you and say good-bye, as——"

"Never to say good-bye again! You shall not leave me."

She drew him down to the seat beside her, and he smiled at the imperious tone, so suggestive of

her childish days.

"You do not understand conditions, unless—When did you see your father?"

"Not since last night. He went fishing at daylight."

"Then you do not know that I came to bid you farewell before sailing for the Arctic circle?"

"Yes. I have not seen father to-day, but this letter from Mrs. St. Clair arrived by the morning mail. Mr. Herriott, I am the most miserable woman God ever made, and I want to turn to you now, but I scarcely know just how to do so. Once—that night in Washington—you said you would never change, that you would always love me; but I have no right to expect after years of absence—" She paused and the frozen face crimsoned.

He caught his breath and leaned toward her.

"I love you now as I loved you then. My heart has always belonged to you. If you doubt it, you wrong me."

"Then, Mr. Noel, do not leave me. If you go away now you will break my heart."

He rose and looked down at her, wondering at the desperate appeal in her eyes.

"I do not understand, because I long ago ceased to hope I could ever be essential to your happiness. I am obliged to leave here to-night; but if there is any service I can render before I sail from Sydney, on the 15th, I am sure you know how very gladly I should help you. If, as you say, you wish to turn to me, I beg that you will do so at once. Why are you miserable?"

She covered her face with her hands.

"If you love me, will you abandon this expedition for my sake?"

"I cannot now, it is too late. My word is pledged by cable, and the vessel is on the Atlantic. Eglah, I dare not hope that you have learned to care; I will not delude myself. Don't torture me by vague suggestions that half madden me."

He sat down beside her, painfully perplexed.

Her hands fell into her lap, clutched each other, and when she spoke it was in a shuddering, broken whisper.

"Then, if you must go, take me with you till you sail. We can be married to-night."

For fully a moment his eyes, amazed, incredulous, searched hers; then he surrendered himself to a measureless exultation.

"My darling—my own proud darling!"

He drew her close, and she felt him tremble as she hid her face against his shoulder—felt his lips on her neck, on her bare, quivering hand that he held pressed to his cheek.

"I know it is selfish to permit you to bind yourself to me on the eve of a perilous journey from which I may not return, but after so many long, hopeless years the temptation is more than I can resist. I can have you, my darling, for only a few short days, but the happiness of a lifetime shall glorify them. To-night I must go to Ohio, to close up some business with my ward, Duncan Keith; then on to Greyledge for two days before starting for Cape Breton. Why did you not give me this precious intimation earlier? You have always known what you are to me. Was it the news in Mrs. St. Clair's letter regarding my departure that pleaded for me in your proud, stubborn heart?"

"I never realized until to-day how much I need you. Mr. Noel, this has come upon me so suddenly I am stunned. Give me a little time—till my mind clears. Let us see father at once; there are so many things to be arranged if—if——"

He bent to kiss her, but with one shaking hand she softly turned his face aside.

"Not yet, please—while I am Eglah Kent."

Her arms stole up around his neck and her strained voice broke.

"I am so unhappy; I seem to be in a horrible, strangling dream. Be patient with me. You are the only one in all the world who can comfort me, and I am looking to you now as—I once looked to God."

Holding her in a close clasp, he felt her quivering from head to foot.

"Sweetheart, don't tremble so. Trust me, darling, and love me, and no home in the wide universe will be so happy and blessed as ours. Ours! The word holds heaven. Are you cold, that you shiver so constantly? Come into the sunshine."

Pacing up and down the colonnade, Judge Kent watched them approaching. He looked worn, hunted, and a sickly pallor marked his usually florid face. Before Mr. Herriott could speak, he was startled by a strange hysterical sound from Eglah; not a cry, not a sob. As she looked at her father, her face lighted with a marvellous, yearning tenderness, and she sprang into his extended arms.

"Father, you will love me now! Kiss me, kiss me. Hold me tight—take me back to my place in your heart."

Only he could hear the low ripple of broken words, and his tears dripped on her face as he pressed his lips to hers.

"Herriott, what does it all mean?"

"That I am the happiest, proudest man on earth. Coming here to say good-bye to my sweetheart, I shall carry my wife away with me."

"But she cannot go to the North Pole, and—you may not survive the dangers."

"When I know she is waiting at home for me, do you suppose all the ice in Greenland could shut me away from her?"

"God bless my daughter! How shall I live without her?"

"We are never to be separated. Mr. Herriott could not wish anything so cruel."

She rose on tiptoe, put a hand on each wet cheek, and kissed her father twice.

Mr. Herriott looked at his watch.

"Eglah has consented to be married to-night, and my train leaves at eleven. There are several important matters to be arranged, and I should be glad to know her wishes."

She rang the bell, then stepped to his side and slipped her hand in his.

"Father's rector is absent, and I wish Bishop Vivian to perform the ceremony; he loved my grandmother, and she loved him."

Aaron appeared at the door.

"Tell Oliver to bring the trap around as soon as he can. Father, you must go in with Mr. Herriott. Mrs. Whitfield is sick, but I want Mr. Whitfield and Lucy and Dr. Eggleston and his wife to be here. If you wish any others, invite them. Mr. Noel, what hour?"

"I suggest not later than nine."

"My dear Ma-Lila will never forgive me. She is away."

"Where? Could not a telegram reach her?"

"No, she is in the country, two miles from a station. She left me only this morning, and will be so grieved."

"How far away?"

"Fifteen miles by carriage road, twenty by rail. There is the trap. Father, I am going upstairs now; and, if you please, I want to be alone till—till—till—" One hand clutched her throat, and she looked appealingly into Mr. Herriott's eyes.

He smiled, stooped, and pressed to his lips the slender fingers he held.

"Set your mind at rest about Mrs. Mitchell. She shall be here, if I have to send a special for her."

When explanation and instructions had been given to Aaron and Minerva, Eglah went upstairs and locked herself in the room to which had been removed the furniture and portraits Mrs. Maurice held sacred. Up and down she walked, feeling that an iron band was throttling her. She and her father were drifting out to a black gulf of humiliation—of hopeless disgrace—and only that box of papers could rescue, anchor them in safety. Mr. Herriott loved her so devotedly, she believed that when she was his wife he would yield the papers in answer to her prayers. If he refused? She recalled the ring of indignation in his voice when her father suggested bribing Duncan Keith. Marriage would give her immediate control of her estate, and surely her fortune could purchase the papers from the boy, when in her presence Mr. Herriott delivered them to him. If all efforts failed, she would go down to ruin knowing she had left nothing undone to save her father, and now, at last, she had regained her place in his heart.

The price? Her face burned, and she wrung her hands. After to-night's ceremony, could she ever again respect herself? When Mr. Herriott knew, would he despise her? Family portraits on the wall caught her glance. Did the stainless Maurices, and her own young mother, watching from the Celestial City, see all the burden of shame settling down on her shoulders? Would her grandmother's cold, proud blue eyes look "I told you so," or soften in tender pity for "poor Marcia's baby"? Public disgrace over which so many would gloat, to escape such infamy was any price too dear? The price—herself?

Three hours later she saw her trunk carried downstairs. When the clock struck eight, she was dressed for her wedding. The gown ordered for the club german was a trailing, ivory *crêpe de Chine*, and where lace ruffles met on the corsage she fastened a spray of white lilac from the bouquet Mr. Herriott had sent. No gleam of jewels marred the white perfection of face and figure, but her dilated eyes burned like brown agates when the light smites them. On the dressing-table lay a note for Mrs. Mitchell.

"My dear, sweet little mother: The crucial hour came, and you were away. I may have scuttled ship, but I did what seemed best. Some things you cannot understand now, but I know you love me too well to distress me with questions—when I ask you to trust me. Pray for your

"BABY."

As the clock struck half-past eight, Eliza ran up the steps and into the room, holding against her shoulder a branch of titi pearled with bloom. At sight of the extraordinary loveliness of the figure standing as if frozen, she burst into tears.

"My beautiful—my baby! What does all this mean? Your father has forced you to——"

"Hush, hush. My father was as much astonished as you are. I feared you could not come in time, and here is a note, in which I said all that I can tell you. Don't scold me, and don't cry; wait till I am gone."

She gave her the note and kissed her cheek, where tears were streaming.

"Oh, my baby, give me the positive assurance that this step is voluntary—that you love Mr. Herriott."

"Entirely voluntary. My supreme wish is to go with Mr. Herriott. He is the noblest man in all the world."

"Yes, but you have not just found that out; you have always known it. Now, do you love him? I am afraid you do not; and, my baby, marriage without loving a husband is——"

Eglah laid a hand over Eliza's lips.

"Father is coming for me. I want to wear some titi, because you brought it to me. Pin two clusters under the folds of lace here, just over your baby's heart. Now, kiss Eglah Kent good-bye, and leave me with father while you take off your hat and dry your eyes."

"My dear, are you ready?"

"Wait a few minutes for Ma-Lila. Father, if I can not persuade Mr. Noel to abandon his journey, you must be sure to meet me when he telegraphs you and leaves me. I am inexpressibly unhappy, but if you will forget the last three years, and love me as in the dear old days, it will comfort and gladden me."

The clock chimed nine. Near the foot of the stairway Mr. Herriott waited, and when he came forward the almost unearthly beauty of Eglah's face made his heart throb with vague apprehension. It wore a rapt expression of supreme exaltation, as if a somnambulist walked with eyes fixed on some goal beyond a yawning black chasm.

Drawing her arm from her father's, she stepped to Mr. Herriott's side and laid her hand in his.

CHAPTER XXI

The fast vestibuled train, forty minutes late, swung northward at a speed that kept the car in a quiver. There were few passengers, asleep in their berths, and Mr. Herriott had secured the drawing-room. It was new, luxurious in appointments, and to the end of the brass rod supporting the lamp in the centre he had fastened a great sheaf of white carnations, sent by Mrs. Whitfield. Closing the sliding door that opened into the sleeper, he sat down beside the figure clad in a dark-blue cloth suit.

"I am so insanely happy I dare not pinch or shake myself, lest I should wake and find it only a heavenly dream."

He took one of her remarkably beautiful hands, which he had always admired, and where he had placed a broad, heavy band of gold four hours before. Spreading the cold fingers on his warm palm, he lifted them against his cheek, brushed them with his mustache.

"Lovely little snowflakes; how long I have coveted their touch! And now they are absolutely my very own. Mine forever."

She had been leaning back, but straightened, braced herself, and her breathing was deep and rapid.

"Mr. Noel, do you really love me above everything else?"

He laughed so heartily that she saw the glitter of his fine teeth.

"Do I love you above everything else? You elusive witch! If you will withdraw the embargo of your request—'not yet, please'—I can soon convince you."

His handsome face, radiantly happy, bent close to hers, but she shrank away from him.

"I am your wife now, but——"

She paused, with a strained look in her eyes.

"Yes; my own precious wife at last, thank God!"

"There is one, only one proof that will convince me I am really first in your heart. Give me at once the box of papers that incriminate my father."

He dropped her hand and rose.

"It is hard, indeed, when a man must refuse the first request of his bride; but, my darling, I cannot dishonor myself. Such baseness would not prove my love; and it would inevitably arouse your contempt."

She had risen, and as they faced each other under the lamp the swaying carnations almost touched his glossy black head.

Lifting her tightly locked hands in entreaty, her voice vibrated like a lute string rudely swept.

"Don't, oh, don't break my heart! Help me to shield my father from shame, and I will bless you as long as I live. I am so wretched—the world is going to pieces—and I am clinging to you as the one rock of safety, the sole refuge that will not fail me. If you ever really loved me, oh, Mr. Noel, have mercy on me now!"

His face hardened, and, unwilling to trust his voice, he shook his head. She staggered as if from a blow, but after a moment her cheeks flamed, and banked fires glowed in her dilated eyes.

"Eglah, when did your father have the cruelty to tell you about the papers in my possession?"

"He never told me. He does not suspect I know, and he must not find out I am aware of their existence; because I could not bear that such an additional sorrow should overtake him. My father! It is your will and purpose to ruin him in his old age?"

"Only Judge Kent and I were cognizant of the existence of that box. May I ask how you obtained your information?"

"I was in his bedroom next to the library when you and father came in. The door was open, and through the thin curtain I heard every word—every cruel, horrible word, that cut my heart like a dagger. At first, when you spoke of not wishing me to know, I felt I had no right to listen, but some things had long perplexed me, things that father would not explain, and I determined to make an end of mysteries."

All tenderness had vanished from his set face, and his blue-grey eyes watched her much as a judge might a witness on the stand.

The train had entered a deep, rocky cut, and the clattering roar sounded a verbal truce. When it rushed through a meadow, Mr. Herriott put his hands behind him.

"I must have all the truth now. If you had not overheard that conversation, you would not have waited for and intercepted me in the grove?"

"Certainly not. I wished to see you at once, and before I met father."

"Your terrible distress and agitation were solely on his account, and not because of my approaching journey?"

"Yes, for father's safety. I was grieved to hear you were going so far away, but, Mr. Noel, father is my all. When I learned of the exposure threatening him I think I must have gone mad, or I should not have made the ghastly mistake of believing you loved me well enough to help me save him, and——"

She paused, silenced by the flash in his eyes, the white fury of his face.

"You proposed our marriage solely to find an opportunity for getting possession of the papers?"

"Yes, that was my object. I thought you would not deny the prayer of your wife."

"You have come to my arms with no more love in your heart than when you refused me years ago?"

"Yes. In a way I have always been attached to you; I honor, and admire, and trust you fully, and of all men I hold you first—but love! God help me! Perhaps in time I may learn."

"You considered yourself the price of the papers, and felt assured I could not refuse to sell? Any man who held them could own you body and soul! Any clodhopper, lout, any libertine, any moral leper could own you for life, in exchange for the papers! You, my white-souled, proud, sensitive, ideal woman, for sale! For sale!"

The red spots in her cheeks deepened, and a defiant ring steadied her trembling voice.

"As you are the only person who could yield me what I sought, you are the one possible purchaser. But there was an additional reason for my becoming your wife. My grandmother's will requires the estate she gave me kept in the hands of a trustee until I am thirty, unless I marry. In that event I come into immediate unrestricted possession, and I thought if you denied my prayer I would be financially able to buy the papers when you delivered them in my presence. That is the

one hope that stands now between me and despair—a hope made possible by and based on my marriage. There was no other door of escape from ruin, and so I sold myself to the one man whom I have always honored and trusted—who I believed would be patient with me. Yes, I sold myself. That you would be deeply aggrieved I knew, because I intended you should learn all the truth to-night. The horror, the hot shame of the last few hours you will never, never understand."

"There was, however, solace for you in the possibility that Polar perils might speedily cancel your matrimonial bonds? At least that is one hope I can share with you."

Swinging around a sharp curve, the car lurched violently, and she staggered. He caught her arm and led her to the seat, where she leaned her head against the panel and shut her eyes. Singularly beautiful was the proud face wearing the pathetic seal of mental suffering, but, as he looked down at her, no pity softened the gleam in his eyes, and his hands clinched in his struggle for self-control.

"To-night I have learned how a man feels when an angel he worshipped from afar stooped from her heights, led him up, up to the open gate of heaven, and, just as he was entering, the same angelic hand dropped him into hell. When I had abandoned all hope of winning you, the suddenness of your surrender made my head reel. I was amazed; but the possibility that you deliberately planned to deceive me no more occurred to me than would an insult to my dead mother. For me you have embodied all that I hold pure, lofty, refined, admirable in womanhood. I was fastidious, but you filled my ideal, and I trusted you almost as I trust my God. You have wronged me doubly—in the loss of yourself, but far worse in the destruction of my belief in the incorruptibility of some women; sooner or later all are for sale.

"If I had sailed away before seeing you at Y—— I should have carried an unsullied, a perfect, sacred memory of you to light the long Arctic night. God knows I would sooner have died there than realize you cruelly, deliberately deceived me. You thought you were buying the papers; but, as they will not be delivered, the trade is off. You cannot get possession of what you purchased, and the price paid I here return to you. You have no papers, and I have no wife. Without value received on your part, I have no right to you, and we stand now just as we did before that marriage ceremony, which has proved a mere commercial mockery. I abhor shams—above all things sham marriage. All or none. Only very strong, deep, tender love justifies a woman in giving herself away. Otherwise the relation degrades her; she is little better than an odalisque; and such I decline to see you. For me you have no love—never will have—and as regards my own wishes, your duplicity has effectually slain what once warmed my heart. After a few days, relief for both of us will come in separation. If I never return you will escape much annoyance. When two years elapse, the divorce court cannot refuse to give you freedom from nominal bonds, and then you will soon forget that you were ever—even in name—my wife."

She had grown ghastly pale, and her lips fluttered. In the brief silence a sick child's fretful cry rolled through the adjoining sleeper, then the train thundered into a tunnel.

"Mr. Herriott, I am so utterly miserable cruel words, even from you, no longer have power to wound me. I—" She laughed nervously, and sat upright.

"My worse than useless appeal to your mercy reminds me of a picture of the Deluge I once saw, when I was a happy child. A drowning woman clung to the edge of an open window in the ark, begging succor, and Noah leaned out and pried off her grasping hands, smiting her back into hungry waves. I shall obey your wishes, Mr. Herriott, in all but one step you have suggested. I do not believe in the validity of divorces. Vows made to God can never be cancelled by civil processes. A consecrated minister is not a mere notary public to attest signatures to a deed. My marriage is forever sacred as my baptism; my covenant in His sight, in His holy name, stands always—'till death us do part.' You shall be as free as you wish. You need never see me again, but so long as I live I intend to hold myself your wife."

"Will you do me the kindness to hand me your ring?"

She drew it from her finger and held it toward him. He turned it slowly, smiling bitterly.

"You have not seen the inscription. 'Till death us do part.' The sight of it must be an unpleasant reminder, and I hope and ask that you will never wear it. As a worthless symbol of what no longer exists, allow me to throw it away."

"Just as you please; only remember you have no right to do so, it is mine. If it were cast into the ocean, I should never cease to feel its sacred clasp on my finger."

He laid it on the seat beside her, and she replaced it on her hand. He looked at his watch.

"It will soon be daylight. I am going into the smoking car. Perhaps you can rest. Shall I send the porter?"

"No. I could not sleep."

He went out, closing the door carefully.

With a smothered groan she sank back, and beat her palms against each other. Humiliated, sorely wounded, yet indignant—almost hopeless, but defiant—she stubbornly refused to despair until she had exhausted every means at her command.

After a while she knelt down and prayed God's help in her mission to save her father. She never

knew that the door had glided noiselessly half way in its groove and that Mr. Herriott stood there to ask if she needed anything. He saw the figure bowed in prayer, and stole away as softly as he came. The strain was telling upon her quivering nerves. Hysterical aching in her throat, parched and dry, was almost intolerable, and the swaying carnations so burdened the air that when she rose her head swam.

After an hour she struggled to her feet. If she had some water it might cool her throat. From her satchel she took a cup, opened the door, and, supporting herself by one hand on the wall of the car, she walked down the narrow passage, where she knew the water-tank stood near the porter's seat. Before she reached it she saw Mr. Herriott leaning sideways against the glass door opening on the platform. Just then the brakeman raised his lantern, and the flash showed a hopelessly sad face sternly set under the close-fitting travelling cap. As she turned back, he saw her and advanced.

"What do you wish?"

She held out the cup.

"Some water, please."

She reeled, clutched at the wall, and for an instant everything spun round. He placed her in the porter's folding chair, and when he held the cup to her mouth saw that her teeth chattered. She drank spasmodically, and a long, shuddering sigh drifted across her white lips.

"You must lie down and rest. The porter will arrange your berth."

She shook her head and rose.

"You cannot walk alone; lean on me."

"Yes, I can help myself now. I was thirsty and dizzy."

She drew back, but he put his arm around her, holding her firmly against him, and placed her on the seat in the drawing-room. She pointed to the carnations.

"The perfume is overpowering. I can't reach them. Please take them out."

Lifting an arm he snapped the string.

"Like every other souvenir and symbol of to-night, they are simply sickening."

Raising the window he threw the flowers into a river across which the locomotive was cautiously feeling its way. He opened his own satchel, leaning against hers on the opposite seat, took out a silver flask, and poured some ruby, aromatic liquid into the cup.

"You are sadly spent; take this."

"No, I do not need anything more."

"You must. It is merely a mild cocktail."

"No, Mr. Herriott, I prefer not."

"A few hours ago did you swear to obey me? Drink it."

She hid her face in her hands and shivered.

"Eglah, try to control yourself."

"Please don't take any trouble on my account; just leave me alone with my torturing forebodings. No one but God can help me now. The sight of me is painful to you, and I shrink from annoying you. Mr. Herriott, please leave me to myself."

He sat down beside her, the cup in his hand.

"To-night you have made me suffer more than you will ever understand—you have hurt me beyond all possibility of healing—and, perhaps, in the terribly sudden overthrow of beautiful hopes you had called into existence, I may have seemed harsh. If so, you must pardon any desperate words my torture wrung from me. Poor child, you have sorrows enough without any additions from my hand. I cannot trust myself to talk to you; my temper is sometimes beyond control, and you have bruised my heart so sorely I am not sure of self-command. Poor little girl! Do me the favor to drink this, because I ask it."

He held the cup to her lips and she drank. He took a pillow from the opposite seat and put it behind her head.

"If you need anything you have only to open the door and I shall come."

"Mr. Herriott, there is but one thing I shall ever ask you to do for me. The ring you placed on my finger I took off at your request. Here it is. With your own hand put it back where it belongs, and it will be there when I die."

She held out her hand with the ring in her palm. He looked at her intently, and his lips tightened.

"Repeat a mockery? A shameful farce!"

He lifted the glittering circle, tossed it up twice, struggling with the impulse to hurl it through the window, then suddenly slipped it on her finger, dropped her hand, and, picking up his satchel, left her.

Would the night never end? If Duncan Keith refused to sell? She thought of quiet, lovely olive-clad plains in Sicily, with pergolas cool in green shadows of vines, where they might retreat from disgraceful publicity. Mr. Herriott scorned, repudiated her, and henceforth she could devote herself entirely to tender care of her father. Ambition and hope were dead, but was there any anæsthetic to still the burning stings of memory? She went to the opposite seat and rested her head against the open window. A thin, sallow, fading old moon hung like a spectre in the sky where the morning star lighted the way for the coming new day, and the dew-sprinkled air swept in, spiced with waves of aroma from a blooming vineyard.

Hamlets, meadows, fields, bridges, the looming shadow of a wooded mountain fled past as the train rocked, hummed, and flew on. Looking up at the quiet heavens, Eglah lifted her hands and heart in passionate appeal.

"Dear God, have mercy upon us! If I did wrong, forgive my sin. Help me now to save my poor unfortunate father, and I will strive to be a better Christian all the remainder of my days."

At eight o'clock a waiter brought her breakfast. Later, when Mr. Herriott came in, it was evident he had mastered himself; the fury of white heat had chilled to cold steel. He was very pale, and an unusual rigidity locked his features.

"You must be very tired of this close place, and I am glad we shall change cars. It is a fine day, and the scenery along the route will interest you. Here is our train. Give me your wrap and satchel."

The change was into a parlor car with fresh, linen-covered revolving chairs, and wide windows framing lovely spring pastorals—sheep on a green hillside, cattle knee deep in rock-bedded crystal streams, and everywhere the busy bird world nest building.

Eglah drew a deep breath of relief, and, as Mr. Herriott pushed a hassock under her feet, she looked up at him.

"Thank you. Will you be so kind as to tell me when we shall reach the place where your ward lives?"

"I think the train has about made up lost time, and we are due at Woodbury at half-past six. It is not on the trunk line, and we take a narrow gauge just beyond Carville."

Both wound their watches, and then, liberally supplied with magazines and papers, settled comfortably in adjoining seats. She was the only woman in the car, and a dozen men were scattered about, a few playing cards, some dozing, others absorbed in newspapers.

Mr. Herriott sat in front of his companion, his chair turned half around and toward the window. After a time he took from his satchel a folded chart and note-book. Spreading the former across his knees, he appeared oblivious of all but the lines and figures, yet the angles in his bronze face did not soften. Eglah had taken off her hat, hoping to ease the teasing pain in her temples. She rested her head against the back of the chair, and held up an open magazine, but no page was turned, and as she laid it in her lap she shut her eyes.

Her thoughts drifted to a small villa near Messina which Judge Kent had expressed a wish to occupy because he chanced to see it in a rosy mantle of almond blossoms. Mr. Whitfield would attend to estate matters, and Boynton could be trusted to manage the plantations, though they were miles apart. She could do as she pleased now with her money, and if she failed in her mission to Woodbury she would ask her father to take her abroad at once, until Mr. Herriott returned. During that time public discussion of "Ely Twiggs" would end, and probably she need never come back to America. Mr. Herriott evidently wished her out of his life, forever out of his sight, and certainly he should be gratified. Her father could not suspect her reason for going to Europe; he knew how to keep newspapers from her, and as he did not dream she knew the dreadful truth, they might resume the dear old life. So profound was her revery that she had unconsciously opened her eyes, and they looked out, seeing, not the farms and forests gliding by the window, but the sapphire sky, the purple sea, the snow of lemon groves, the red glow of oleander-walled gardens, and the silvery grey-green olive orchards where she might hide her father from shame, herself from the withering scorn of Mr. Herriott's cruel eyes.

Glancing at her over the top of the lifted chart, his attention was arrested by the intense abstraction in which she was plunged. Her extreme pallor was relieved only by vivid color in her delicately curved lips, and under the eyes bluish circles told something of her suffering. He thought of the haunting, wonderful eyes of Urd, and bit his lips as he watched her; so pathetically hopeless, yet unwaveringly proud was the pure face he had loved long and passionately.

The door behind them opened, and a naval officer entered, carrying in his arms a crying child about six months old. The bundle of muslin and lace squirmed and struggled as the man strove to pacify it by beating a tattoo on the window, dangling his watch close to the baby's eyes, and bouncing it up and down. He walked about, sat down, laid the infant face downward across his knees, trotted it, patted it, but with no quieting success, and, when the engine blew long and loud for a bridge crossing, the frightened child screamed distressingly.

The officer rose.

"I am sorry to annoy the passengers, but the nurse has been taken so ill she cannot hold her head up, and as the boy cries to go to her I was obliged to bring him in here. He never saw me until last night. I was on a cruise when his poor mother died."

Once more he essayed to whistle, and swayed to and fro with a rocking motion, but finally desperate, he turned to a young man in a neighboring chair, who was smiling over a cartoon in "Puck."

"Sir, would you do me the great kindness to hold him just a moment, while I get something from his nurse?"

"All right, I will try; but I happen to be a bachelor, and I never held a baby in my life. Come on, little man. Some day you surely will make a star screamer in opera. Now for it, sonny."

He held out his arms, but, as the father attempted to transfer the boy, the sight of another strange face increased his terror; the little hands grasped the officer's beard, and the baby shrieked in protest.

Eglah rose and crossed the car.

"He is accustomed to women; perhaps I can quiet him. Will you allow me to try?"

"O, thank you, madam!"

She took one little hand, caressed it, toyed with the fingers, and cooed as only women can. After a moment the child ceased crying, and when very gently she took it and laid it up against her shoulder the little creature nestled close to her. His suspicion, however, was not entirely allayed. Suddenly he lifted his head, stared curiously into her face, and when she laid her cheek on his, wet with tears, he seemed reassured and clung to her, his lips touching her throat.

The young man leaned over and whispered to a friend in the chair before him.

"He shows good taste in picking his nurse. Is not she a beauty? I have been watching that handsome couple, and things are not serene in their camp. I was near him in the smoker, and his face looked like a brownstone statue with live wild-cat eyes."

Eglah walked slowly up and down the aisle, humming low and very softly Kücken's "Schlummerlied." Now and then the child sobbed faintly.

The officer came back with a bottle of milk, but, as he hurried forward, Eglah shook her head. After a little while the exhausted baby slept soundly.

"Madam, I cannot thank you sufficiently for your goodness. I will relieve you now, and I trust the passengers will excuse the annoyance."

"Let me keep him a while; he still sobs now and then, and if moved might wake. A good nap will quiet his nerves."

"It is too great a tax on you, madam."

"When I am tired, I shall bring him to you."

"In a half hour we get home, and since you are so very kind, I will help the nurse arrange luggage for our station."

Eglah went back to her own chair, and holding the little creature with her right arm softly patted him with her left hand. At every motion the wedding ring flashed like a dancing demon in Mr. Herriott's watching eyes.

"Poor little chap. Did you mesmerize him?"

"I think there is telepathy in great trouble. He feels intuitively that some one else is suffering torture, and 'a fellow feeling' drew him to me."

She avoided looking at him, and her eyes followed the evolutions of a flock of white geese holding regatta in a pond close to the railway track.

After some moments, she cautiously and tenderly laid her muslin-clad burden in her lap, and smoothed out the long lace-ruffled robe. With a start one little hand was thrown up, but she caught and held it. He was a handsome boy, and when she untied the lace cap, too tight at his throat, his fluffy yellow locks enhanced his beauty.

The sight of the baby fingers clinging to the hand where the gold band shone renewed the struggle Mr. Herriott was trying to crush.

Leaning toward her, he said:

"Last night, at your request, I stifled my repugnance, and did what I deeply regret. To-day I must ask you for the only favor you can ever grant me. Give me back my ring."

There was an angry pant in his voice that made the words a demand rather than request.

"Mr. Herriott, I am sorry to refuse any wish of yours; but I cannot."

"I want it."

She looked steadily at him.

"So do I. When I die it will be where you placed it; but in the coffin human covenants end, and I will order it sent to you by those who lay me in the grave. My ring is the badge of my loyalty—not yours. You are as free as you wish to be, but when I meet my God He will know I kept my marriage vows—always."

"And the supreme vow was to love me!"

From the fury in his eyes she did not flinch.

"Yes, I intended to keep all. I thought I might learn to love you; and that you would be patient with me. I wanted to love you, and, as God hears me, I meant to spend my life trying to love you."

Unable to restrain words he was unwilling to utter, he sprang up and took refuge on the front platform.

A prolonged whistle of the engine announced the next stop, and the baby awoke with a startled cry, just as his father entered, followed by the nurse, a middle-aged woman who looked too ill to stand. Eglah rose and laid the child in her arms.

"Madam, I am deeply grateful for your courtesy and goodness. I intended handing my card to your husband. Permit me to lay it on his chair."

"I was glad to have your pretty boy. It was a welcome incident in a very dreary day. Good morning, sir."

Mr. Herriott did not return until the second call for luncheon sounded through the train. He took her hat from the brass hook and held it toward her.

"I dare say you are sufficiently weary to welcome luncheon."

"Thank you, but I want absolutely nothing. I hope you will go without me."

He went out, but not to the dining car.

An hour later, when he came back, she had crossed the aisle to a vacant chair, raised the window, and, with an arm on the broad sill, rested her head there. She did not notice his entrance, and resuming his seat he opened a magazine.

Above the line of brass lattice that held packages, hats, and umbrellas ran a panel of mirrors, and in the section over his head was reflected the face and figure directly opposite. For the next hour he held the magazine open, but his eyes never left the mirror. Twice she looked at her watch without raising her head, and from the tense, strained fixedness of her features he knew she was nerving herself for the ordeal at Woodbury; the final effort in her father's behalf, which he felt assured would prove futile. Conflicting emotions shook him, but nothing availed to abate the rage of his disappointment.

The train slowed at the entrance to a large town, and as the station platform filled with curious faces peering into the car windows, Eglah went back to her own seat.

A moment later the door was thrown open, and a boy wearing the uniform of the telegraph company shouted:

"Is Mr. Noel Herriott aboard? Message for Mr. Noel Herriott!"

"I am Mr. Herriott."

He went forward, signed his name in the receipt-book, and opened the envelope. He stood with his back to Eglah, and remained so motionless that she was seized by an apprehension some evil had overtaken her father. Just as she rose he turned and approached her.

"Has anything happened to father?

"This is not from the South. It does not refer to him. We may have to stop here. Keep your seat till I ascertain positively."

Very soon he returned, followed by a porter, who promptly collected satchels and magazines.

"I find I must wait here until two o'clock in the morning."

"Why delay reaching Woodbury? I beg of you let us hasten on."

"There are reasons necessitating it that will be explained later."

She had drawn back, but he took her arm.

"The train will move in a moment, and unless you wish to go on alone, we must be quick."

He assisted her into an omnibus, where several passengers waited, and they were driven to a hotel. Mr. Herriott ordered two rooms, and at the door of one said:

"I must see that the trunks are brought at once. I need mine."

Throwing aside her hat, Eglah began to pace the floor. His countenance had undergone a marked change—subtle, inexplicable—and an indefinable dread caught her heart as in a vise. It seemed to her that an hour passed before he tapped at the door, and she could scarcely articulate,

"Come in."

With a square package sealed in brown paper under one arm, Mr. Herriott entered, closed the door, and deposited the bundle on a small table. From his vest pocket he drew the folded telegram and gave it to her.

> "Woodbury, 3 P.M.
>
> "Duncan Keith died two days ago. Wired you at New York Club. Everything attended to here. Will meet you at Carville at 8 P.M.
>
> "HERMAN MARTIN."

Her wide, terrified eyes gazed into his.

"What does it mean for me—now?"

"It means that probably some guilty bank officials will go 'unwhipped of justice.' Duncan's father had no relatives in America. He was a poor stowaway lad from England, and since the grandmother's death his son, Duncan, had only his mother's sister, Mrs. Martin. I could not hear from Duncan, to whom I wrote twice last week, and this telegram is an answer to one I sent Martin, telling him I could make only a very brief stop at Woodbury to-night. I have done my duty. I have kept my word. The prosecution of the guilty does not devolve on me, and Martin will never consent to undertake a suit for libel. It would involve money which he does not possess, and responsibility he will not dare to assume. Your father's letters, and the vouchers for large sums of money sent to 'Ely Twiggs,' are in a separate envelope. I shall burn them now, before I deliver the box to Martin."

She sprang forward, her hands on his shoulders, her lips quivering like rose-leaves in a gale.

"Do you mean it? Will you save my father?"

He took her wrists and held her away from him.

"Death saves him; certainly not I."

"No more sorrow can ever come to him?"

"Not from this box; and none through me."

The revulsion overwhelmed her. She sank back, and when he caught her and put his ear to her mouth he could not hear her breathe. He lifted and laid her upon a sofa, and stood looking down at her. So pure and white, so helpless, so beautiful! Legally his wife, but never to be his.

Dipping a towel in water he bathed her face, sprinkled it. The icy hands he chafed in his broad, warm palms, and as his fingers touched the wedding ring he ground his teeth. When her breathing grew stronger, he rose, relinquished her hands, and after a moment she opened her eyes.

"I thought you college-bred girls too well trained to faint."

She sat up, half dazed, and the water dripped from her hair.

"I never fainted before; something smothered me, and everything turned black. Mr. Herriott!"

He had gone to the table, but turned, and looked at her over his shoulder.

"Mr. Herriott, did not you say father was safe from shame and sorrow?"

"In a few moments he will be."

He opened the tin box, selected a small bundle of papers in an envelope marked "Ely Twiggs," and drew some matches from his case. In the grate he burned them one by one, then relocked and tied up the box.

"Eglah, what a pity Iphigenia did not know favorable winds were already blowing at Aulis before she yielded herself to her father's sacrificing hands! Poor Duncan had been dead twenty-four hours when the bishop performed that nuptial farce. If Martin's telegram had been forwarded, you would now be happy at home. I find it necessary to change my plans somewhat. I can spend but a single day at home, and, instead of going directly thence to Boston, shall make a few hours' stay in New York to see my lawyers."

"To alter your will? You need not. I have more than I require, and if I were a pauper I should never accept a cent from you. There is only one thing you can ever give me, and that I must want as long as I live."

He was walking slowly up and down the floor, his hands behind him, and paused beside the sofa.

"What is it?"

She pushed back the damp rings of hair, and lifted to his, pleading eyes pathetically sad.

"Your confidence—your old faith in me."

"Confidence! It lies with love in a grave so deep there can be no resurrection. The world is full of women—lovely, luscious women. Of fair flesh there is for most men no lack; but I wanted, I hungered, I longed for only one pair of dimpled arms folded about my neck, one woman's divinely tender eyes answering all the love in mine, one pair of proud, pure, sensitive, beautiful lips seeking and clinging to mine. Voluntarily you gave yourself to me—your precious self—and when bewildered with happiness I caught you to my heart, you stabbed me. I was mole blind, but sharp clipping has rid me of my cataracts. Let us make an end of this dismal farce. All my life I have fought my infernal temper, and now it has me by the throat. It will take an Arctic winter to cool the hot fury that possesses me; and because I must not speak harshly to you, I wish to ask if you will allow me to leave you here? I can telegraph your father to come at once."

For a moment wounded pride stifled her; she shrank as from a blow, and red signals swung back into her pale cheeks.

"As you please, Mr. Herriott. It is more painfully embarrassing for me to force my presence upon you than for you to endure the sight of me for a few hours longer. If you prefer to leave me here instead of at the place selected and designated before I left home, of course I shall submit. We have not many friends, and father's enemies will gossip over the fact that I was sent home before you sailed from Boston. This, however, is a minor matter in comparison with the fear that the change you suggest might lead father to suspect I had learned the object of your visit to Y——. Life will be unendurable to me if he finds out that I know the contents of that box. I would rather die than have him believe all the horrible facts are in my possession. For his sake I——"

"For his sake you would go down into Hades!"

"Where else am I now? What ordeal more fiery than last night and to-day? I know now that I did wrong, but the awful ruin seemed so imminent I fled through the only door of escape that appeared possible. I am punished, and I deserve all I suffer. Leave me here, or anywhere else, as you find most convenient and most comfortable for yourself."

"Pardon me. Of course your wishes determine the matter. I suggested the change, thinking that as your sole object in making this journey was to secure the papers, you would find it a relief to return as soon as you were sure of their destruction."

He wrote a few lines in his note-book and held it before her.

"Would this be entirely agreeable to you? 'Judge Allison Kent: Duncan died two days ago. I burned the "Ely Twiggs" papers to-night. Never mention them to Eglah. She wishes you to meet her in Philadelphia Saturday.'"

"Thank you; that is what I prefer. When you come back——"

"I hope never to come back. I will not lead a sham life, and I will not live under the same roof with one who, to please her father, tried to love me and found she could not."

"When you come back I shall try to be in Europe, and you may rest assured of no intrusion. My marriage gives me control of my own estate, and now I wish to know the amount it cost you to recover the bonds you delivered to the college."

"You must excuse me if I decline to answer. That matter concerns only Nina and myself. What I did was solely for her and my father."

"I shall find out, and send a check to your lawyers."

"My lawyers know absolutely nothing about it, and as your father must not suspect you heard the conversation, you will scarcely ask him. I have some letters to write, memoranda to arrange for Martin, and several telegrams to send immediately. Our train starts at two A.M., and you can get a sound sleep, which you sadly need. I ordered your dinner sent here. Do you wish your trunk?"

She shook her head.

"Try to get a good rest. You will be called in time for the train. I have papers to prepare that will keep me busy until then. Eglah—poor little girl—"

She looked up at him defiantly, but the peculiar expression in his brilliant eyes she could not understand.

He caught his mustache between his teeth, picked up the tin box, and left her.

CHAPTER XXII

The weather had changed. After rain a keen north wind curled the waters of the great lake into wreaths of foam, breaking against the terrace, and the old Scotch clock in the lower hall struck midnight as Mr. Herriott's carriage drew up before the open door of his house. When he stepped to the ground a wild uproar of rejoicing dogs greeted him, and it was some seconds before he

could rid himself of caressing paws. He assisted Eglah out, and turning toward the light met Amos Lea.

"Why, old man! It was kind of you to sit up for us. You should be asleep in your bed. Here is Mrs. Herriott. You saw her one summer."

The gardener held out his rough, hard hand, and she laid hers in it.

"Welcome home, madam. I hope you will be good to the lad; he will always do right by you."

Mr. Herriott laughed as he led her up the stone steps.

"Amos, you can not lecture her as you do me."

The housekeeper and one of the maids came forward for wraps and satchels.

"Mrs. Orr, Mrs. Herriott is very tired. Did you receive my telegram from Carville?"

"Yes, sir; the blue room is in order; bath, fire, supper, everything all ready."

Drawing Eglah's arm through his, he ascended the wide oak staircase, saying:

"I had it papered and arranged especially for you that summer you came for a few days, and since then no one has been allowed to occupy it."

At the landing he called over the railing:

"Mrs. Orr, as it will be late when the trunks come, do not send up Mrs. Herriott's until morning. She needs rest, and I do not wish her disturbed before she rings her bell."

On a table drawn near the fire in the "blue room" a decanter and glasses glittered in the glow from an open hearth. Mr. Herriott poured out some Tokay.

"I am sorry I could not make your home-coming less dismal; but for you the worst is over, and, if you please, we will not refer to it again. To-morrow I shall be engaged with two committees, one relating to a scientific scholarship I wish to establish, and my time is so limited I can be with you very little. The necessity for going via New York, where I must stop, shortens my stay here; and I am compelled to allow some margin for delay *en route* from Boston to Sydney, where the vessel is due on the fifteenth. This is not exactly a 'loving-cup,' but you must join me."

He touched her glass with his, and a deep undercurrent of suppressed emotion surged through the quietly spoken words.

"Complete oblivion of all that has distressed you during the last forty-eight hours. Put me entirely out of your thoughts, and remember that now you can be happy with your father."

He emptied his glass and replaced it on the salver.

"No. I would not forget it if I could. I pray God that you may escape every danger; that you will come back in safety to your home; and while I may never see you again, I hope to hear you are far happier than I could ever have made you."

She sipped the wine, put it aside, and continued:

"You can not understand the utter ruin of hopes, ambitions, beliefs, that heretofore made my life worth living. In the awful wreck one thing survives—my faith in you, who walk always in the light of 'the high white star of Truth.' I honor and I trust you now as I never did before the ordeal of the last few hours. The fault was mine, not yours; and as I deserve, I wish I could bear all the pain, all the consequences, of my desperate rashness. You do not understand what I suffer."

She stood with her hands folded on her breast, so close to him that he noted how wan and drawn the young face had grown, how measureless the misery in eyes peering hopelessly into futurity.

"At least I fully and sorrowfully understand one thing—you know no more about love than that baby you nursed on the train."

In avoidance of his cold scrutiny, her strained gaze had wandered to the frieze of silver lilies on the wall, but now she looked at him.

"Mr. Herriott, you may be sure that when you go away and leave me forever, I shall never learn."

There was a sudden glint in his eyes, like a blue blade flash, but after a moment he listened to the clock, and turned away.

"Good-night. Get all the sleep you can. You will need it for your journey South to-morrow."

He closed the door, and she heard his quick step ring down the long stairway; then the joyful bark of the dogs told he had left the house.

She was an unusually healthy woman, and, impatient of the teasing pain in her temples, shook out her heavy coil of hair. She walked from door to fireplace, from bed to bathroom, up and down, around and around, too restless to lie down, dominated by a strange feeling she made no attempt to analyze. As the clock struck four, she still walked to and fro, never suspecting that Mr. Herriott stood in the hall, close to her door, listening to the slow sound of her feet on the polished oak floor, fighting down his longing to enter and take her in his arms.

The "blue room" looked out on the sickle-shaped beach and upon the lake, and when the sun rose above cliffs at the rear of the house, the racing waves leaped, crooned, flashed in golden light.

Looping back the lace draperies at the window, Eglah stood watching the flight of a loon, the quivering, silver flicker of ducks' wings against the pale pink sky-line, the gliding of a sloop with sails bending like a huge white butterfly balancing over some vast blue flower.

Walking slowly up the beach, Mr. Herriott was approaching the stile, and with him the collie Pilot, the Polish wolfhound Tzar, one on each side, and the wiry black-and-white Skye terrier Snap wriggling in front. At the stile Amos Lea sat waiting, and master and gardener talked for some minutes.

After a little the latter rose, put one hand on Mr. Herriott's shoulder, raised the other, and turned his rugged face toward heaven.

Eglah knew he was praying for the man now hurrying away to multitudinous dangers, and her eyes grew strangely humid. When the mist cleared, she saw they were shaking hands, and Amos disappeared behind the garden wall. As the master neared the terrace steps he glanced up at her window, took off his cap, and saluted her. He had never looked so commanding, so nobly built, so superior to all other men. Something stirred, quivered, woke up in her heart, and a swift spasm of pain seized her.

A half hour later Mr. Herriott knocked at her door. She opened it, and one quick glance at the ivory bed and its lace hangings told him she had not lain down.

"Good morning. Will you come down and give me my coffee, or shall I send breakfast to you here?"

"I prefer to come down."

He held up a bouquet of heliotrope, daintily arranged.

"Amos Lea's 'compliments to the madam,' and he hopes she will wear these flowers, as he always cut heliotrope for her when she visited here."

Afraid to trust her voice, she took the bouquet, inhaled its fragrance, and slipped the stems into the girdle of her silk morning gown.

At the head of the stairs he put his palm under her elbow to steady her steps, but at the door of the dining-room, where butler and housekeeper waited, he took her fingers in his, led her to the head of the table, and seated her. During breakfast he talked of the garden, of his horses, of some pheasants he knew she would admire, of a tazza on the library mantel she must be sure to examine, and she wondered at the complete control and composure he had attained. Was it merely the *noblesse oblige* of a courteous host?

After a second cup of coffee, he looked at the clock.

"Hawkins, tell Rivers to bring the dog-cart around. Eglah, come and see Amos Lea's gloxinias."

He put on his hat and light overcoat, and walked beside her to the hothouse.

"I shall be busy in town nearly all day, there are so many last things to be attended to. I had abandoned all idea of joining this expedition, when I received a letter telling me an important member of the party had lost his father, and family interests compelled him to stay at home. The request was urgent that I should cable my acceptance of the invitation, which I did; hence I have had little time for necessary preparation, and some things I am obliged to do this morning. Here comes the cart. We must be at the station by five o'clock this afternoon. Your train southbound starts just ten minutes before mine leaves for New York. Trunks will be sent in at three o'clock. While I am away in town I should be glad to have you look all over the house. Some of the rooms you have never seen—my laboratory and den. In my bedroom hangs a portrait of my lovely mother, that I particularly desire you to see. Good-bye."

He raised his hat, sprang into the cart, and was soon out of sight.

Five moments later the keen, solemn eyes of Amos peered at her from behind a cluster of tall palms.

"Why didn't you marry him sooner, and keep him at home?"

"I did not know he was going until the day we were married. I hoped and believed I could induce him to stay, but he had given his word."

"And that word of his he never breaks. Head, heart, purse, maybe will give way, but not the pledged word of old Fergus Herriott's boy. This self-murder that goes on in the name of 'science' is a sin in the nostrils of the Lord, and if only the blear-eyed, spectacled old fools that set up to know more about creation than Moses did, after he went to school to God for forty days, could swamp themselves under the ice, it would be silly enough, and no matter, but for my lad! Susan and I nursed, rocked him, prayed over his cradle since he was barely one year old, and now for him to be cast out like Jonah for fish bait. If God had wanted the North Pole handled and strung with flags it would never have been shut up in nights six months long, behind ice high as Ararat and wide as the flood. There will be lonesome days till the lad gets home—and if he never comes back! Where will his dear bones be in the resurrection?"

His bearded chin trembled, and his heavy, shaggy white eyebrows met over his nose.

"Mr. Lea, we must not cease to pray. God needs such noble men as Mr. Herriott, and He can protect him from every danger."

"Madam, don't 'mister' me. I am just Amos Lea—Noel's Amos. Study your Bible and you will find out the Lord needs no man; the best of us are but worthless cumberers of the ground."

He drew his sleeve across his eyes and left her.

Up and down the hothouses, through the shrubbery, over the stile, along the curving beach and back to the terrace she wandered, striving in vain to divert her thoughts from one fact that overshadowed everything else—the master was going away that afternoon, and she might never see him again. From public disgrace her father was safe, the crisis of acute terror on his account had passed; but now, as the smoke of the battle drifted away, she became dimly conscious that she carried a wound she had not suspected and could not explain. The ache in her heart was unlike any former pain; there was nothing with which to compare it, and she dared not analyze it at present. Through the house she walked aimlessly until she reached the suite of rooms set apart for the master. In the laboratory she did not linger, but the adjoining apartment she knew must be the "den," from the strong, pervading odor of cigar smoke. The wainscoting of carved walnut, five feet high, was surmounted by a shelf holding a miscellaneous collection of whips, pipes, geological specimens, flints from Indian mounds, a hematite hatchet, a copper maul, a jade adze. In one corner of the room stood a totem pole with a brooding owl; in another a "kahili" of white feathers, with richly inlaid handle; and upon the wall above the shelf, suspended by heavy silk cords, a gold-colored "ahulla." Two trunks strapped and ready for removal had been drawn to the middle of the apartment. On one lay a heavy overcoat fur lined, and a fine field glass in a leather shield; on the other a gun case and box of instruments.

She sat down in a deep morocco cushioned chair, from the brass knob of which hung a somewhat faded silk smoking jacket lined with quilted orange satin, and looked up at the steel engravings, the etchings, the water colors on the wall; at some marble and bronze busts on the mantel shelf, and on the top of a teak cabinet filled with curios from Crete, Uxmal, Labná, and the Mancos Cañon.

Over the writing desk and a neighboring table were strewn scientific journals, and on a sheet of paper that had fluttered to the floor on its way to the over-laden waste basket, bold headlines had been written by Mr. Herriott:

"First—Were the cliff-dwellers of Asiatic origin?

"Second—Are the Eskimos survivors of pre-glacial man who dwelt within the Arctic circle when its fauna and flora, under similar climatic conditions, corresponded with those now existing in Virginia and Maryland?

"Third—Are kames and drumlins infallible index fingers?"

Whether the page contained notes from some book that he wished to controvert, or his own views jotted down for future elaboration, she could not determine; but as she stooped to pick up and preserve it, a growl startled her, and around the corner of the desk she saw the red eyes of Tzar. She spoke to him, but he rose, showed his fangs, and stalked out of the room, the bristles stiff on his dun-colored back. How long she sat, plunged in painful, perplexed revery, she never knew; but finally she went to the open door of the bedroom, and leaned against the facing, unwilling to enter. Over the low, carved chimney-piece hung the portrait of Mrs. Herriott, a very beautiful young woman in black velvet and pearls, and the perfect features, the poise of head, the silky black hair, and especially the fine moulding of brow she gave to her son, though unlike his her soft, tender eyes matched her hair in color.

Below the portrait a silver frame held a photograph of Eglah in evening dress, taken in Washington; beside it another, wearing her college cap and gown. On the dressing table a glittering circle arrested her attention. Swiftly she entered, crossed the room, and leaned over it. An exquisitely painted miniature of herself, set with diamonds, and resting on a carved ivory easel, looked up at her. Two discarded photographs of Mr. Herriott lay with some torn letters under a neighboring chair. She snatched one and hurried away, fearing to trust herself; but passing the smoking jacket she caught it up, folded it under her arm, and escaped to her room.

Exchanging her trailing morning gown of cream silk for the travelling suit, she packed her trunk, hiding jacket and photograph beneath the tray, locked it, and sat down to wait. In the wreck of her overturned altar and shattered filial ideals, beyond and above the desolation of her cruel disenchantment, rose one image inflexible, incorruptible, absolutely invulnerable to temptation, that involved sacrifice of duty. As the mist cleared, strange new valuations loomed, and she thought of lines that limned his portrait:

> "Loyalty is still the same,
> Whether it win or lose the game."

For years he had been entirely hers. Now she lost him hopelessly. His contempt could spare no room for pity; her presence infuriated him.

He had lifted her to a sacred niche where love and reverence jealously guarded her, and she had hurled herself down into the mire of the market place.

"For sale! Any man could have bought you, body and soul."

The words branded her. They seemed burned in by the scorn flaming in his eyes, and she thought of the red letter on Hester Prynne's breast. The world should never know, but she would carry that scar to her grave.

Soon the clock struck three, and simultaneously the outcry of the dogs announced their master's return. Hat and gloves in hand, Eglah went down to the drawing-room, and caught a glimpse of Mr. Herriott hurrying toward the gardener's cottage. Later he went to his own rooms, and when dinner was announced apologized for unavoidable delay.

He had reined himself in with a grip so tight that the only evidence of suppressed excitement was the feverish, steady gleam in his eyes. He talked of Mrs. St. Clair, of Father Temple, of Trix Stapleton, whom he should see for a moment in New York.

During a brief lull in the conversation, Eglah said:

"I found your mother's portrait, which you asked me to look at. In an extraordinary degree you resemble her."

"Thank you. That is a compliment I value. It is indeed a pity she could not have endowed me with the patience and amiability that so endeared her to all who knew her."

Very soon the moment came for parting words, and she went down to the carriage step, leaving him with the servants clustered in the hall, but Amos Lea was not visible. Mr. Herriott handed Eglah to the back seat, and for a moment stooped to speak to and pat the head of each dog. As he entered the carriage and seated himself opposite his companion, slamming the door as signal to the coachman, the housemaid threw up her hands and ran down the steps.

"Please, sir, Mr. Herriott, may I speak to you?"

He put out his head.

"What is the matter?"

"The silk jacket, sir. You told me to carry it to Mr. Lea, but, sir, I can't find it. You must have put it in your trunk."

"No, I wore it this morning after the trunks were locked and strapped."

"Indeed, sir, I have searched your rooms most faithful, and that jacket is not there."

"You will find it somewhere in the den. Good-bye, Della. Drive on, Rivers."

The house fronted the lake, and the carriage road at the rear wound through thick shrubbery, groups of deodars, and a lane of lilacs in full bloom. The iron gates were open, and against one marble pillar Amos Lea leaned. As the horses dashed through, he motioned to the driver. At sight of him Mr. Herriott's face changed, softened; he sprang out and walked back a few yards.

Through a glass in the curtain Eglah saw the old man's brawny hands laid on Mr. Herriott's shoulders, and the harsh voice shook.

"Oh, lad! May the Lord bless you and keep you in the hollow of His hand, and bring your body safely back, and save your dear soul from the snares of the ungodly that go down to the icy sea in ships. Wherever you wander Susan's eyes will follow you until you reach that rest where there is no more night."

"It hurts me sorely to say good-bye to you, Amos. For my sake take extra care of yourself. Let up on moles and slugs and shotbugs in damp weather. Look after my dogs for me, and be good to Aunt Trina when she comes for her visit. One thing more, be sure the tower lamp is lighted every night. When I am groping and stumbling in Arctic darkness, it will cheer me to know that light is shining over a black, stormy lake. Now I must go. I hope God will keep you strong and well. Good-bye."

Then the voice sank so low a few additional words were inaudible to those beyond the gate. He took the gardener's hands, shook them warmly, and re-entered the carriage. As he did so Eglah pointed to the seat beside her, which he accepted, and she saw his eyes were misty.

For some moments neither spoke.

"Aunt Trina is fond of the old place, and I have asked her to spend July here, with any friends she may wish to bring. She and Amos spar like prize fighters over immersion and close communion, and he brands her extreme ritualism 'idolatry rank as the groves of Baal.'"

He looked at his watch, and called to the coachman:

"Rivers, we have very little time to spare."

His closed right hand rested on his knee, and Eglah laid hers upon it.

"Since I was a little girl you have been my faithful, sympathizing, patient friend, and now I can not bear that you should leave me without uttering one kind word of forgiveness for the great wrong I realize at last that I have done you."

"Eglah, for God's sake don't open that door, which shuts out—what I can not discuss again with you, because I must not wound you."

She noticed the suppressed pant in his voice, and as he did not respond to the touch of her hand, her slender fingers crept between and twined around his.

"Mr. Herriott, when you come home——"

"I shall try not to come home."

"If I promise you shall never see me there, perhaps that assurance may tempt you back. You are casting me out of your life, and I have no right to complain, but I wish to say that I hope you will have no fear for the name you gave irrevocably into my keeping."

"You bear my name, my father's name, but I am very sure your little white hands will hold it clean, pure, and sacred. Should you invoke legal aid to free you from merely nominal matrimonial bonds, I prefer you should then resume your father's name. If you choose to make no change, and I do not return, the name will die with you, and I believe you will guard it as you would the Grail."

Unconsciously his hand tightened on hers, until the edge of the ring cut into her finger.

"Mr. Herriott, you will write to me?"

He shook his head.

Looking intently at her, he noticed the deep blue shadows under her eyes, and the first tears he had ever seen her shed rolled slowly over her worn face.

"Unless my letters were hollow shams, they would only distress you, and all future annoyance I wish to avoid. Silence is the only possible peace."

At this moment the carriage stopped, and he looked out.

"Why do you lag, Rivers?"

"A train, sir. Switch engine and gravel cars."

"Drive around it."

"I can't, sir. Red signal just ahead of the horse's nose."

Mr. Herriott stepped out, and walked for some minutes up and down the embankment. Then the train pulled out, and when he re-entered his carriage he took the front seat.

"I sent a telegram to your father, which ought to reach him in Washington, telling him the number of your train, and your hotel in Philadelphia; and I hope your return journey will prove more agreeable than your trip with me. If any necessity should arise that would require you to communicate with me, you will find this card in the outside pocket of your satchel, but the address means only that letters will be forwarded to Upernavik. When we leave there no mail will reach us."

The carriage drew up to the platform, and Mr. Herriott assisted Eglah into the train. With her wraps and satchel he preceded her to the drawing-room.

"This is more comfortable than the one you occupied two days ago, and I trust you can rest well. Here are your tickets and check. This train is almost ready to start, and mine moves in ten minutes. In parting I make only one request. I ask you now to put me out of your life. I want you to forget me, and be happy with your father. Good-bye."

His face was white, and the expression of his eyes she never forgot.

He had extended his hand, but the horrible possibilities of the future swept all proud scruples aside, and she put her arms around his neck, clinging desperately to him.

"Mr. Noel, you shall never, never, be out of my life! I will always belong to my—own—Mr. Noel."

The check rein snapped.

He clasped—strained her against his breast, and she felt the furious beating of his heart. It was barely a moment. Gently he unwound her arms, put her quickly aside, and left her.

CHAPTER XXIII

The resumption of cordially affectionate relations between Judge Kent and his daughter was marked on her part by increased tenderness and deference, on his by demonstrative caresses particularly conspicuous after years of alienation. His exactions upon her time became despotic; he was dissatisfied when she was out of his sight, and if within reach his hand usually rested on her arm or shoulder. The paramount aim of her life was attained. She was assured that she reigned supreme in her coveted kingdom—his heart. Freed from dread of public exposure, his spirits rebounded, and his jovial, self-indulgent nature enjoyed basking once more before the fire

of financial prosperity, exulted in the consciousness that at last the long desired Maurice fortune was at his command. Eglah wondered that from the hour he met her in Philadelphia he asked no questions concerning her bridal journey—no explanation of her unexpectedly hurried return.

He sedulously avoided all mention of Mr. Herriott, except to rail at the imbecility of Arctic explorers, and suspecting that he smarted from the humiliating knowledge that his son-in-law had possessed proofs of his guilt, she welcomed silence as balm for her sore heart. From the day of her return to Nutwood she severed every social tie linking her with Y——. Of visiting she made an end, all invitations were declined, and she was seen only at church, beside her father. They rode, drove, walked together. On his fishing jaunts she read while he wandered from pool to pool, and made tea for him when, tired and thirsty, he came back to a shaded spot where she waited. Now and then a few of his friends spent an evening in the billiard room, or played cards in the library, and discussed Republican policies. At night Eliza Mitchell usually brought her sewing to the table, Judge Kent smoked in his easy chair, and Eglah arranged the chessboard at his elbow, or read aloud from some volume he had selected. It rarely happened that she received his good-night kiss until she had played a *nocturne* or an *étude* for which he asked. He had an ardent, sensuous love of beauty in color, form, sound; impassioned poetry, deep, rich melody, and subtle harmonies entranced him, dimmed his fine, eloquent eyes. His musical taste had been cultivated in accordance with classical standards, and while his daughter's proficiency was not extraordinary, she played skilfully and with a tenderly magnetic touch that justified his compliment: "My daughter has tears in her pretty fingers."

When a proud, reticent, beautiful woman suddenly takes an unusual and totally unexpected step, abrogating fashionable conventions—when, keeping her own counsel, she disdains explanation and shuts herself away from curious questioners—the hounds of gossip are unleashed, and beagles and fox-terriers follow in full cry. Outraged Y—— hummed like a swarming hive.

"Married without a sign of a trousseau, on a few hours' notice, with barely time to get a license, a ring and a minister, and to pack her trunk! Disgraceful!"

Rumors of Mr. Herriott's wealth swelled to fabulous proportions. A sister of Dr. Burbridge, whose young cousin was employed in the office of the telegraph company, plied him with questions, until indiscreetly and reluctantly he confided to her that two telegrams sent by the groom showed that he had not come to Y—— intending marriage; whereupon she set afloat information which merely increased the complexity of the problem. Judge Kent had been so long the community scapegoat that in the final public solution and adjustment of disreputable responsibility, an additional load of selfish, wily iniquity was laid on his sin-stained shoulders. By cunning chicanery he had forced his daughter's sudden marriage, hoping that Arctic dangers, often fatal, would soon make her a widow dowered with millions.

Even the few who witnessed the ceremony, and recalled Eglah's inscrutable white face, understood as little as the resentful uninvited, yet when questioned they loyally maintained reserve.

Bishop Vivian, Mr. Whitfield, and the Egglestons warmly defended the girl, whom secretly they pitied, but society pilloried her.

"She was shamelessly mercenary, absolutely devoid of womanly delicacy, and a shocking disgrace to her poor mother's family."

Henceforth the anti-Kent social element in Y—— resolved itself into a vigilance committee to watch her behavior as a married woman.

Into the whirlpool of tittle-tattle Mrs. Mitchell wisely abstained from plunging. Her own information was too meagre, her uneasiness concerning Eglah's stubborn silence and inexplicable manner too profound to admit of discussion, even in defence. She staid at home, bided her time, and held her peace. Moreover, she was wrestling with conscientious scruples regarding her duty in withholding from Eglah some disquieting facts known only to herself.

The second night after his daughter's departure, Judge Kent had indulged in stimulants to an unprecedented and alarming extent. With a decanter of brandy at his elbow, he dozed in his arm-chair until roused by Aaron, who delivered a telegram. Eliza was going upstairs to her own room, when the boy rang the bell and handed in the message.

"Lock up the house, Aaron. I think the judge is sleepy and will soon go to bed."

An hour later she sat reading her Bible, and heard a sound as of some heavy object falling. Snatching her lamp, she went swiftly to the library. The overturned decanter was slowly emptying itself on the table, and Judge Kent lay on the floor, his head resting against the cushioned seat of his chair. Evidently he had risen, slipped on the polished floor, dropped the decanter, and lost consciousness.

His face was purple, his breathing stertorous. Holding his head, she pushed the chair back and laid him flat on the floor.

Was it apoplectic seizure or intoxication? Her inexperience justified no independent action, yet if drunkenness explained existing conditions, she shrank from publishing the disgrace that would mortally wound Eglah.

Bathing his head and face, she administered such restoratives as she possessed, and loosened his

vest and collar. Finally it seemed necessary to summon Aaron and send Oliver for the doctor, but as she rose to ring the bell Judge Kent opened his eyes. A dark, turbid red still stained his face, but his respiration was less labored.

"Don't move. After a little I can get Oliver to help you into bed."

"I had a fall?"

His utterance was thick, his articulation indistinct, and he hiccoughed.

"Yes, sir. You are better, I think, and if you will only lie still a while you can soon be made comfortable in your own room."

She went into the adjoining apartment, saw that the bed had been prepared, and a lamp lighted. When she returned he had struggled into a sitting posture, his arms clasped around his knees. She sat down and waited. On the table lay the brandy-stained telegram sent by Mr. Herriott after he had burned the papers at Carville. She picked it up, read it twice, and laid it down.

"Mrs. Mitchell, if you will help me I can get into a chair."

She took his extended hands, and he rose slowly, staggered against her, and sank into his chair. Five minutes later he slept, but gradually his face resumed its usual color. Eliza brought a basin of water from the bedroom, washed away the brandy streaks from the floor and table, and with a silk handkerchief dried and polished the fine old mahogany, already whitening from its alcoholic bath. She went to an open window and waited. The night was balmy, and loitering, thievish puffs of air came laden with rifled sweetness from multitudinous lips of forest and garden bloom. Far away the muffled monody of the river falls rose towards the stars, whose light wove a golden braid across the water's quivering crystal plunge over granite crags. In the dense shadow of the walnut grove a squirrel barked, and from their red cedar covert the game cocks shrilled midnight.

After two hours Judge Kent awoke and groaned. Mrs. Mitchell handed him a goblet of iced water, which he drained.

"Shall I go and rouse Oliver, or would you prefer Aaron to assist you?"

"I don't want either. If you will help me over this infernally slippery floor to my bedroom sofa, I can manage."

"You do not wish the doctor sent for?"

"No."

She took his arm, guided his unsteady steps to the sofa, arranged a pillow, and unlaced his shoes. Very soon his deep, regular breathing assured her the worst had passed. Was it the brandy, or the telegram or both? What were the "Ely Twiggs" papers, of which Eglah must know nothing, and why was she coming home immediately, instead of going to Sydney, or at least as far as Boston? Could Mr. Herriott have been a party to some scheme whereby she was entrapped into that sudden marriage?

At three o'clock she looked from the library door at the sleeping form on the sofa, and with anxiety allayed, went upstairs to her room. Awaiting a cue, she made no inquiries when he appeared at late breakfast, and with characteristic aplomb his only reference to the previous evening was an apology for troubling her to give him a third cup of tea.

"My head is a trifle shaky from the jar of that fall. Men of my age and weight can not afford to sit down so heavily on bare boards, and I shall insist on matting when the carpets are taken up."

The receipt of the telegram requesting him to meet his daughter in Philadelphia was followed by hurried preparations for departure, and Mrs. Mitchell ventured to expostulate.

"Judge Kent, if you realized how serious was your attack in the library, you would not risk the imprudence of a railway journey. You ought to see your doctor. Let me go and meet Eglah in Philadelphia."

His bloodshot eyes twinkled as they met hers.

"Doctor? Absurd! Attack? You mean that unlucky slip? It amounts to nothing except a stubborn stiffness on the side where I struck those diabolical sand-scoured boards. I particularly desire the matter should not be mentioned to my daughter, who would reproach herself severely for that 'dry-rubbed' floor she knows I detest as a cat does swimming."

During his absence a cabinet maker was summoned and removed the ugly grey stains on Eglah's favorite piece of old claw-footed mahogany. For a time the incident seemed forgotten by all save the quiet, silent woman keeping watch for the consequences.

A few days after Eglah's return she sat at a window in her bedroom, noting the deepening glory of the west, where the sun was just sinking behind purple hills. It was the date on which the "Ahvungah" would leave Sydney and begin her voyage to the world of eternal ice.

The day had seemed one of doom, as if set for a funeral, and the going down of the sun brought other shadows—darker than the mists that would soon swim under the stars. If Mr. Herriott had forgiven her she might have gone to Cape Breton, could have been with him till the last moment.

Now he was upon the ocean, and only God knew the future that looked so black, so spectral, so full of desolation.

Mrs. Mitchell opened the door and handed her a package.

"Dearie, the express messenger brought this, and I signed for you."

She went back to her own room and resumed her darning.

The parcel was addressed in Mr. Herriott's handwriting: "Mrs. Noel Herriott. Care Hon. Allison Kent." A wave of color flowed over Eglah's pale face as she looked at her new name, and felt assured his eyes had gleamed with scorn as he penned it. A pass-book and check-book of a New York bank, with note from the cashier, were the first objects that met her eye, and were instantly thrown aside; then a square box, elaborately sealed. When she removed the wrapping paper a red morocco case appeared, and around it was tied a note without a personal address.

> "Just before my father died he gave me two rings; one the little gold band that hangs on my watch chain—my mother's wedding ring. The other a stone he had given her on the day of their betrothal. When he laid them in my hand, he said: 'Wear one always. If you should ever marry, give the other, with my blessing, to the woman who bears our name.' Because it was his wish, I simply obey his injunction, and trust the ring sacred from my mother's touch will grace the hand it was once my fondest hope, my most ardent wish to claim. This should reach you the day we leave Sydney. The sham is ended. Your freedom is now complete. Do not hesitate to use it in any way that will restore the happiness you so unwisely, so rashly imperilled. If possible, your path in future shall be spared my shadow. Good-bye.
>
> "HERRIOTT."

The words stung like a scourge, and involuntarily she covered her face with her hands. Time merely increased his bitterness; there was nothing more for her to hope or expect. He intended perpetual separation.

Mechanically she lifted the ring from its velvet bed. It was a superb diamond, marked on the inside of the gold band, "Fergus to Una." The circle fitted only one finger, that wearing the wedding ring, and was too broad to share it. She replaced the jewel in its case and closed it. A little later, when Mrs. Mitchell came in, the stony, despairing face of the girl startled her. She ran forward and took her in her arms.

"What is the matter? You have shut me out long enough; now I will know. You have heard from Mr. Herriott?"

"Yes. He sent me a check-book for money on deposit and a ring that had been his mother's."

"What are you breaking your heart over? O my baby, don't keep your trouble from me! The dreadful night you went away you asked me not to question you, but I must; I can't bear the sight of your dear face. Nobody loves you as I do, and you know you can trust me."

Eglah was silent a moment, and Eliza felt her shiver.

"Yes, I am sure your love is the truest I shall ever possess, and I trust you; but some things are like red coals, and you shrink from handling them. Suppose you had wounded your Robert so deeply, so sorely he never forgave you, would you wish to drag the horror up and talk of the details? Put yourself in my place."

"I cannot understand, because Mr. Herriott loves you so devotedly he would forgive anything you might have done."

"You do not know him; neither did I before I left home. I made the mistake of presuming too far on his love. I wronged him, and he will never forgive me."

"I refuse to believe you wronged him."

"Yes, I did him a great wrong. I did not intend to wound him, and when I realized all that followed, it was too late for remedy. I don't wish to say anything more, even to you. The thought of the red coals scorches my heart. If the time should ever come when I feel I can talk freely, you will not need to question. Until then, love me and be patient, and leave me to myself. To-day Mr. Herriott is at sea—gone on his long voyage. O Ma-Lila! Ma-Lila, pray to God that he may never come home! Or that if he lives, I may die soon."

"You foolish, wicked girl! Are you crazy?"

"I have been, but my late tenants have gone into the swine. A week ago they possessed me, and wild work followed. Since their departure I find it impossible to regain my old self. I have, after frightful nightmare, awakened a very repentant, an exceedingly miserable woman, but the fault was all mine. Mr. Herriott was not to blame. He is even nobler than you know, nobler than I dreamed; but I wounded, injured him past pardon; and now I purpose to bear in silence, and as best I may, a sorrow that I alone have brought upon myself. No one can help me. I only ask to be spared all questions, all reference to my marriage. Father is calling me. Will you give him his tea? Ask him to excuse me. Good-night. I wish to be alone until breakfast."

When Eliza went downstairs next morning, Eglah was coming from the side garden with both

hands full of dewy roses for the table vase, and, having listened until two o'clock to the restless footsteps in the room next to her own, the foster-mother glanced anxiously at her.

The cold, passionless repose that comes only after a fierce and vital struggle had settled upon her white, worn face, and the woman who knew her best could not determine whether it meant conquest or surrender.

As summer advanced, Eglah noticed the frequency with which her father fell asleep in the midst of conversation, and when he dozed one day with a bowl of sherbet in his hand, she became alarmed and sent for Dr. Plympton, an old friend of Judge Kent's, who had moved South and settled in Y—— during the dismal days of carpet bag rule.

He gave him tonics, diet regimen on which he laid much stress, and ordered the family away to certain springs in a distant State. Having secured a cottage, Eglah avoided the hotel and maintained complete seclusion. Her father keenly enjoyed the change, and gradually the tendency to drowse was less apparent, but the prohibition of alcoholic drinks fretted him, and that which was tabooed at the cottage was alluringly accessible at the hotel.

When the season closed, he and Eglah decided to stop *en route* for a day, to pay their long promised visit to Calvary House.

As Mrs. Mitchell could not be persuaded to enter "an Episcopal monkish institution" of which she disapproved so vigorously, she went back alone to Nutwood and busied herself with household preparations for winter.

When the judge and his daughter reached home, Dr. Plympton expressed himself much pleased with improved conditions which Mrs. Mitchell could not discover, and Eglah's apprehensions were allayed. Her father's increasing dependence upon her touched and cheered her inexpressibly, and for his sake she diligently assisted him in work that forced her thoughts into a new channel. An important appropriation bill, in which Judge Kent's native State was much interested, would be presented to Congress about the middle of December, or soon after the holiday recess, and he had been requested by old friends and constituents to address the Senate committee, advocating a favorable report. The collection and arrangement of necessary statistics kept her busy at his side, and when the last type-written page was added to the pile at his elbow, he patted her hand fondly and complimented her useful accuracy.

Rejoicing in the accomplishment of their tedious task, the trap was ordered, and father and daughter drove until the dinner hour.

She noticed he dozed twice while she talked, although when they reached home he seemed as well as usual, humming a gay little Sicilian song as he divested himself of overcoat and muffler. It had been a perfect autumn day, crisp, crystalline. The deep, vivid yellow of the great undulating mass of walnut foliage hung against the western sky like cloth of gold curtains around a porphyry shrine, above which Venus burned as ministering taper. With her cheek pressed to the window pane in the library, Eglah watched the fading after-glow, and her hands clutched each other. This was the day when from the iron-bound, ice-sheathed fiords of Smith's Sound the sun disappeared. The long Polar night had set in. Would Mr. Herriott ever see the sun again?

She had procured all books written in English that related to Arctic travel, and in the sanctuary of her own room prepared, from an almanac and from explorer's diaries, a calendar, noting the length of each day, the coming of the moon, the date of shortest twilight, the falling of total darkness. Mr. Herriott's voyage began in May; no tidings had reached her. She expected none, but her lips moved: "Oh, God, keep him in safety through the awful night!"

The dreary vision of her imagination contrasted sharply with the luxurious aspect of the library, where a fire of oak logs glowed beyond the marble hearth. A crimson velvet carpet covered the floor, and warm winter draperies enhanced the atmosphere of comfort. On the table an oval cut-glass basket held great clusters of orange chrysanthemums; not the huge, solitary, odorless globes now so popular in cities, but thickly studded, fragrant branches that bloom nowhere with such lavish sweetness as in old Southern gardens.

Mrs. Mitchell brightened the lamp and began to match the squares of a calico "rising sun" quilt she was making as her Christmas present to the Methodist parsonage. Judge Kent leaned back in his arm-chair, his silver-powdered head on the red cushion, good looking, debonair, thoroughly content; and in one hand he held a richly gilded liqueur glass, brimming with an emerald cordial. Eglah came to his side and put her hand on his wrist.

"Father, Dr. Plympton forbids liqueurs. Please do not drink that."

"Only a thimbleful of *crème de menthe*! Babies take mint tea. Even Mrs. Mitchell drinks this."

His fine eyes sparkled mischievously, and he bowed to her.

"No, sir. I make my mint cordial from my own garden, and I know what is in it; but you can't be sure about foreign-fangled mixtures."

"I wish to make sure that delicious gumbo-filé will not give me nightmare."

"Father, I begged you not to touch it, and you had your favorite clam bouillon the doctor commends so highly."

"Bouillon—gumbo-filé? 'As moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine.' My duchess, don't scold. Your pretty mouth was made for sweeter uses. Kiss me."

He brushed his white mustache aside, and leaning down she pressed her lips to his.

"Father, are you quite well to-night?"

"Quite well, and absolutely happy. Now, give me some music to round out and seal this glorious, perfect day."

She opened the upright piano, and while she played one of his favorite fugues—Handel's in E minor—he kept time, swinging the tiny, gilded glass. Flickering flames in the wide chimney were reflected on the polished rosewood panels of the piano, and as they wavered up and down before her, Eglah thought of spectral auroral fringes flashing in moonless Polar night, staining with prismatic hues the world of snow, kindling red beacons on pinnacles of immemorial ice.

The fugue ended, and as her fingers left the keys a tinkling crash caused her to turn her head.

The liqueur glass was shattered on the floor and Judge Kent lay insensible in his chair.

Paralysis appeared so complete that for some days Doctors Plympton and Eggleston entertained no hope; but the sufferer rallied surprisingly, and while his utterance was not fully intelligible, and he never regained the use of his lower limbs, he was often conscious.

Mrs. Mitchell and the physicians would have welcomed a passionate outbreak of the silent grief that seemed to have frozen Eglah, as, calm and dry-eyed, she ministered in the sick-room she rarely left. Two faithful men assisted in nursing—one by day, one by night, because she could not lift her father—and she slept on a cot beside him, or across the foot of his bed. She administered all his medicine, fed him with her own hands, caressed, and cheered him.

After a few weeks, though entirely helpless, he was able to be dressed and lifted into a reclining rolling-chair, and when the weather permitted she wheeled him around the sunny side of the long colonnade, where he usually fell asleep. The speech arranged so carefully for the Senate committee she read again critically, made a few corrections, and forwarded it with a brief announcement of his illness to the friends who had employed Judge Kent to prepare and deliver it in committee room.

Her stern self-repression discouraged conversation relative to the sufferer, and she buoyed herself with no false hopes.

A ripple of compassion stirred Y——, and some who had criticized her most severely for her haughty aloofness—some whose sole grievance was her absolute devotion to an "unprincipled father"—left cards, words of sympathy, and flowers for Mrs. Herriott. Except the doctors, she saw no one but Mrs. Eggleston and Mr. Whitfield, who had lost his wife a few months previous. Bishop Vivian had died during the summer, but her father's rector came often. At times the sick man's clouded mind seemed incapable of retaining any impression, but he never failed to respond to music, and when his chair was rolled close to the piano and Eglah played selections he loved best, it comforted her to watch the pleased, contented expression of the placid, handsome old face so dear to her. Noticing how wan and drawn the girl's lips were, the physicians urged Mrs. Mitchell to persuade her to drive or walk.

"No. I will not lose sight of him for a moment. He is my all, and what becomes of me makes no difference. I have but one wish now—to go with him."

One bright, warm day, late in December, Judge Kent appeared surprisingly better, though his articulation continued very indistinct, and his daughter understood him best because she closely watched his lips. The doctors had made their morning visit, and, wrapped in his dressing-gown, the sick man asked to be rolled into sunshine.

Eglah tucked a lap robe carefully about the reclining form, and he feebly lifted the one hand he could move, and pointed to the glass door.

"That way; not through library."

She unlocked and opened it, wheeling the chair out on the colonnade, and some change in his countenance arrested her attention. Bending down, she found tears on his cheeks.

"You opened this door the day Herriott came. Because you heard him tell me about Keith, you married him. You burned the papers—you saved me."

"No, father; no!"

She fell on her knees and hid her face in his gown.

"You tried to keep me from knowing you heard Herriott, but I saw you. You married him for my sake. My blessed child! When I am gone, I want you to remember no other man ever had such a daughter. My Eglah——"

After a moment he sighed, and with great difficulty added slowly:

"My dear, kiss me, and always—always you must know—how precious you—are, precious——"

She kissed him twice, dried his cheeks, and, as he turned his head on the pillow and closed his

eyes, she rolled him up and down the colonnade, hoping that during his nap he would forget. He often slept soundly in this way, soothed by the motion like a child in a carriage.

Was he laboring under some delusion of an enfeebled brain—did he dream? Or was it possible he had actually seen her leave his room on her errand of rescue?

A half hour later a veil of cloud drifted across the sun, a blast of wind leaped out of the northwest, and, fearing a change of temperature, she turned the chair toward the door and wheeled it inside.

Leaning tenderly over the sleeper, his quiet, cold, set face told her he had gone to that bar of final trial where, in his Maker's infinite mercy, only He who fashions and reads human hearts and sees entirely around the circle of circumstances, can justly judge.

A low, long-drawn, quivering cry, as of some creature mortally stricken, summoned Mrs. Mitchell, who found the girl huddled over the still form, his grey head lifted to her breast.

Holding her solitary vigil that night beside him, her cheek laid on his shoulder, her hand clasping his icy, interlocked fingers, she found a solace which surprised her in the assurance that he had known the significance of her sacrifice—that he loved her better in consequence of all she had ventured and suffered in his behalf. Her supreme dread had been his discovery of the cause of her marriage, but now and then the scowling menace from which we cower, breaks in smiling, tender benediction. To love, that prompts and sustains in crucial hours of self-immolation, is occasionally added a transforming exaltation that sublimates the unworthy object for whom the sacrifice is borne; and the most pityingly merciful of all angels—Death—extinguishes life with one hand, while the other smooths scars of character, levels unlovely angles, lifts shadows of sin, and gives to memory that magic mantle whose halo never fades.

With singular and unnatural calmness, Eglah had arranged the details of the funeral service next day in her father's church. She telegraphed Father Temple to meet her in Washington *en route* to the North, and asked Mr. Whitfield to go with her until her cousin joined her on the train.

To lay her father to rest among his enemies in Y—— was unendurable; she would take him to the cemetery in his native State, where his parents and sisters slept, and erect a monument there in sight of his constituents who had honored and loved him.

It had grown very cold; there was no fire in the long drawing-room, where portraits of Maurices and Vivians stared imperiously down at the alien lying motionless under the great cut-glass chandelier. Silent and tearless the girl kept watch. The undertaker had mentioned the date to be inscribed on the casket plate, and she recalled her Arctic calendar. This was the solstice, the sunless midnight, the core of Polar winter. To-morrow the sun would begin to climb back to Mr. Herriott, but the sun of her life had set forever. A shudder shook her, and she nestled closer, laying her lips against her father's throat. Eliza laid heavier wraps around the stooping shoulders, placed a hot blanket under her feet, and now and then kissed the girl's bowed head, but no words, no sob, profaned the sacred silence.

When the body was carried to the chancel of the crowded church, she walked alone, followed closely by the few who best understood her isolation. Shrouded in black, she sat still and silent as her dead; and some persons present who had cause for bitterness against "reconstruction judiciary" forgot their wrongs in genuine pity for the proud and lonely mourner.

Under a fragrant pall, woven of smilax and his favorite double white violets, that covered the casket and fell to its handles, she bore him away to the stony hills of New England.

CHAPTER XXIV

Its alliterative jingle had probably commended Dairy Dingle to Marcia Maurice when she selected a name for the new home of the overseer, Robert Mitchell. Here he brought his bride from Nutwood, where she had lived since her father's death on the battle-field. A Federal cavalry raid, intended specially for the looting of Y—— and the destruction of its factories, had loitered too long at Willow Bend plantation, and finding Confederate squadrons in hot pursuit, the Union troopers were forced to retreat, after burning every building in sight except the cabins of the negroes. General Maurice loved the rambling, airy, old-fashioned country house where he was born, and here he usually brought his family to spend Christmas, and make genuine holiday for his numerous slaves. After the raid only rock chimneys stood as commemorative pillars, and not a vestige of gin-house, cotton sheds, or stables was visible. At a hard gallop the fleeing troopers passed an adjacent grist-mill which supplied several plantations with meal, and paused long enough to kindle a blaze in a pile of corn sacks. The miller, a lame negro, extinguished the flames, and preserved a structure where several generations had brought their contributions to the hopper. Near this old red mill Mrs. Maurice built a house for her overseer, and after Eliza's marriage gave it and the adjoining fifty acres of cleared land to the young wife. It was a small, square box of a house, with four rooms, broad, low-pitched piazzas, and wide hall running through the middle. Where the rear gallery ended, a covered way, brick paved, led to the kitchen and servants' room. On the left, at a sudden dip of the land, and several hundred yards distant, stood the spring house, or stone dairy, a low structure built over a small stream running from the

bold spring that gushed out of the hillside a few feet away—and falling into the creek just above the mill-dam.

A shallow canal dug through the centre of the dairy had been paved with rock, and here, winter and summer, the milk bowls and butter jars stood in water rippling against their sides.

While General Maurice lived, he kept only his Jersey herd at Nutwood, but at Willow Bend his famous Short-horns, red, and red roan, roamed over pasturage extending hundreds of acres. The "cow pen" and milking shed were not visible, hidden on the edge of a plateau running far away to a stretch of primeval, lonely pine woods crossed only by cattle paths. In a green cup encircled by wimpling hills the overseer's home nestled like a white bird hovering to drink. The sharply curving creek that divided it from the plantation was bridged a half mile below the mill, and a dense growth of trees and vines clothed the banks. In an opposite direction, beyond the house, and mantling the upland slopes, lay fields of grain, glistening as the wind crinkled the yellowing folds.

Locust and china trees, overrun by English honeysuckle, coral, and buff woodbine, shaded the cottage, and all about the spring house clustered azaleas—white, pink, orange, scarlet—filling the quiet hollow with waves of incomparable perfume. Hanging on the bluff above the bubbling spring a thicket of titi swung exquisite opal plumes, over which bees drowsed; and crowding to the front for dress parade clung a line of mountain laurel or "ivy" faintly flushed with pale-rose clusters waiting to burst into bloom and with their crimped shell-pink cups rival fluted and tinted treasures from Sèvres and Murano.

Into this green, shadowy dingle had come its long absent mistress, and, closing Nutwood, Eglah shared her foster-mother's secluded home in the heart of the pine woods.

For many months after her father's death she seemed a mute, breathing statue rather than a suffering woman, so deep lay the pain no words could fathom. Close and tender as were the ties linking the two, Eliza dared not probe the wound, and when Eglah closed the door of her own room, the loving little mother would have broken into a sealed tomb as soon as violate her solitude.

Two miles beyond the plantation, across the creek, a new railway line had established a station called Maurice, and about this nucleus a village grew with surprising rapidity. The site selected on Eglah's land by the railway company chanced to be that of the neighborhood school-house, where, on the fourth Sunday of each month, a Methodist minister of many mission chapels preached. Mrs. Mitchell had organized a Sabbath school, and Eglah had given a cabinet organ, but the figure shrouded in mourning was seen only when driving in her trap, or more frequently alone on horseback. These long rides through rolling pine forests and silent sunny glades, where she met none but her own velvet-eyed, browsing red cattle, and shy, happy rabbits, were hours of immeasurable relief; yet, at intervals, proved battle-ground on which she fought the crowding spectres of a sombre, brooding future. Political and social ambitions were shut forever in her father's grave; domestic duties ended when the doors and gates of Nutwood had been locked; and business affairs were in far wiser hands than hers. What should she do with her empty life?

One afternoon, goaded by sad thoughts, she had ridden farther than usual, and, returning, reined her horse in at the brink of a meadow to tighten her coil of hair, shaken by a rapid gallop. Before her a group of young, red, dappled calves lay in the thick grass, their soft eyes wonderingly alert, and all Pan's orchestra seemed rehearsing. A wood-lark in a crab-apple bush set the pitch, a red-bird followed; two crows answered from the top of an ancient pine, and among beech boughs a velvet-throated thrush trilled, while under sedge shadows frogs croaked a hoarse bassoon. From the edge of a pool dimpling the turf white herons rose, flitting slowly across an orange sky, where cloud fringes burned in the similitude of scarlet tulips. If she could cease to be a woman with an aching heart and an immortal soul, what a peaceful home was here among the sinless forest children vast mother earth had called to sing and play in her pine-roofed, grassy nursery. If the sylvan quietude of this Theocritan retreat had power to witch her surging pulses to unbroken calm, she might hide for ever in her own green aisles, secure from stinging shafts of gossip and derision. She lifted the reins and the horse sprang forward.

A year ago Mr. Herriott had sailed. No tidings reached her; no allusion to the "Ahvungah" had appeared in any of the newspapers she searched daily. She knew the vessel would not stop at an American port—would return directly to Europe from the Arctic circle—but the American press would chronicle the close of the expedition. If disaster had overtaken it, how soon could she know?

Was Mr. Herriott frozen fast in the awful desolation of Whale Sound, or sledging in a race with death across that vast, level, white ice desert of compacted snow in central Greenland, eight thousand feet above the sea, swept by Polar winds that never sleep? Wherever Arctic fetters held him, the moon shone constantly two weeks for him, and after the long night a returning sun was now gilding the minarets of icebergs and unlocking the bars of floes.

If he never came back she could indulge the love that so unexpectedly stirred her heart, that had grown swiftly since he left her; if he survived and returned she must hide her affection and herself far from the biting, branding scorn that would always glow in his eyes. How could she

bear the dreary coming years of a possibly long life? There were hours in which she tried to hope he would not come back; but recalling that one moment when he held her so tight to his breast, she seemed to feel again the furious beating of his heart which had never belonged to any woman but herself, and, as the memory thrilled her, into her wan face crept a joyful flush. At last, too late, her heart was his, but he no longer desired or valued it. He had cast her out of his life. Riding slowly homeward in the star-powdered, silvery-grey gloaming, she locked her torturing thoughts behind the mask of silence that was becoming habitual, and near the mill met Mrs. Mitchell's tender eyes on watch for her.

A few mornings later, Eglah stood in the dairy door, looking up beyond a sentry line of tall pear trees uniformed in vivid green, to the hillside, where lay the peach orchard a month before in full flower, billowing gently like a wide coverlet of pink silk shaken in sunlight. Followed by Delilah, who knew the haunts of water-rats in the velvet moss low on the banks, she walked toward the creek. Over one corner of the deserted red mill a dewberry vine feathered with blossoms rambled almost to the sagging roof, and along the ruined line of the old race ferns held up their lace fronds to shade the lilac spikes of water-hyacinths. It was a cool, lonely place, sweet with the breath of wild flowers, silent save the endless adagio in minors played by crystal fingers of the stream stealing down the broken, crumbling stone dam. In that quiet nook all outside noises seemed intrusive, and Eglah listened to the beat of a horse's hoofs cantering across the bridge below the mill. Very soon Mr. Boynton appeared and dismounted.

"Good morning, Miss Eglah. A telegram was forwarded from Y——, and as I happened to be at Maurice when it came, I brought it at once."

"Thank you very much."

She took the message and walked away a few steps, struggling for strength to face the worst.

> "Mrs. Noel Herriott:
>
> "Amos Lea has been ill for months. To-day I am called to Chicago to my sick son. Della will not stay here without me. Some woman ought to come.
>
> "Amanda Orr."

"I hope it is good news about your husband?"

"Mr. Boynton, it might be worse. Sickness in Mr. Herriott's household seems to require that I should go to his home for a few days. Please wait here until I can go to the house and find out what must be done. I may trouble you to attend to some matters for me."

Mrs. Mitchell sat on the steps at the rear of the cottage, stemming a bowl of strawberries and warily watching the elusive feints of a white turkey hen picking her way to a nest hidden in a tangle of blackberry vines. Eglah held the open telegram before her eyes and waited.

"I suppose you want me to go?"

"I wish you to be there with me. I can not go alone."

"Dearie, you can't nurse the gardener. If Mr. Herriott were at home he would not listen to any such nonsense."

"I like Amos Lea, and I intend to put him in the hands of a good trained nurse until Mrs. Orr returns."

"That could be done easily by telegraph or letter. But, my baby, if it would comfort you to be in the house——"

Eglah threw up her hand with a warning gesture.

"I wish to stay only a few days; just long enough to assure myself that the old man is carefully attended to. I prefer not to start from Y——, and the train despatcher at Maurice can stop the up train at 11.45. We need no trunk, and I have the money to pay our way on. I shall write and have more forwarded from the bank. Ma-Lila, I wish to start to-night. Can you get ready?"

The little woman's level brows puckered, but the light in her eyes was a caress.

"Can I refuse any of your foolish whims? I have spoiled you all your life, and it is rather late in the day for me to undertake to oppose you. I see Hiram Boynton waiting, and I must arrange with him to have his boys sleep here and take care of everything in our absence. You know my pet cow's calf is only three days old, and her udder needs watching."

They reached Greyledge at noon, accompanied by the middle-aged nurse commended by the matron of a hospital in the neighboring city. At the sound of carriage wheels on the stone driveway, the dogs greeted them from the kennels in the stable yard, and several peals from the front door bell rang through the closed house before the butler, pipe in hand, opened the door. Speechless from astonishment, he staggered back.

"Good morning, Hawkins. How is Amos Lea?"

"About the same, ma'am, the doctor says. Mrs. Herriott, I hope you will excuse the looks of things. If I had known you were coming I would have lighted the furnace and warmed the house

and been nearer ready. There is not a female on the place. Della was that prudish she went with her aunt."

"Did Mrs. Orr leave all the keys with you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Bring them to me and show me where they belong. Is Rivers here?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am; also his cousin Nelson, who helps with the horses and dogs; and David Green, the under gardener."

"Hawkins, you know Mrs. Mitchell; she came with me on a visit before my marriage; and this is Mrs. Adams, who will nurse Amos for the present. Open the house and make fires in the 'blue room' and two other bedrooms. I shall be here only a short while, and you must do the best you can for us as regards meals. When the time comes for feeding the dogs I wish to be notified. I am afraid they have forgotten me."

"If you please, ma'am, what is the news from Mr. Herriott? When I saw you I felt sure he must be coming home shortly. We count the days till we see him."

"I am sorry, Hawkins, but no news reaches me now. It has been a long, dreary, dreadful time. I came because Mrs. Orr telegraphed me some one was needed here to look after the sick. Ma-Lila, will you go upstairs with Mrs. Adams while I see Amos?"

Near the gardener's cottage she met David Green, with a bowl of broth in his hands and a scowl on his sunburned face.

"How are you, David? Hearing that Amos is sick, I have brought a good nurse to stay with him till the housekeeper returns. What is the matter with him?"

"Madam, it is mostly crankiness now, in my opinion. Last fall he had a spell of fever that left him ailing, and in January he fell into inflammatory rheumatism that made him as helpless as a baby and fractious as a bull pup. But he got better of it, and able to hobble around his room on crutches. Like the mule he is, he would creep down to the green-houses, hunting something to scold me about, and his crutch slipped on the ice and he hurt his hip joint. The doctor orders him to keep still and not move that leg, but, madam, he shuffles around in his bed for all the world like hyenas in a circus cage. We men take him up as easy as can be and lay him on a cot and change his clothes; but cranky! Cross! The angels couldn't please him. I guess he is sore, and when we jar and hurt him, instead of cursing us with a wholesome, honest oath we are used to, he throws up his arms, rolls back his eyes till they are all white balls, and shouts to the Lord to set Jezreel's hounds, and Og, and the rest of the Bible beasts, and the imps of Belial upon us! He calls us 'godless goats,' and we don't set up to be religious, but he passes for pious and stands high in his church, and it makes us feel creepy, because we don't know when the Lord might happen to listen to him. You know, madam, he has got a strong pull on the master. Mr. Herriott humors his whims, and now he is away we are doing our best for Amos. Every other night I leave my family, three miles away, and sleep here in his room. Mrs. Herriott, I have come to the conclusion that if the master does not get home soon the old man will fret himself to death. Day and night he prays for him. Every morning we bring him a paper, and his poor hands shake while he holds it and searches for news of the vessel, as a pointer hunts partridges. My wife is a first-class cook, and, thinking to please him, she made and sent him this broth. Just now, when he tasted it, the corners of his mouth went nearly to his ears, and he asked me please to pour it into Tzar's pan as I passed the kennel. If I had my choice, I would rather nurse a bucketful of hornets."

"I am glad you have all been so good to him; you especially, who have a wife and children to claim you. I hope Mr. Herriott can soon be at home, and he will thank you. Now your responsibility ceases, because I have employed a good nurse, trained in a hospital, who will know what is best for him and make him obey the doctor's directions. David, I am sure you men will be considerate and respectful while she remains."

At the door of the gardener's house, Snap dashed out, barking viciously. She called his name twice and held out her hand, but, eyeing her suspiciously, he growled and retreated across the threshold. Propped with pillows, Amos was on a cot near the hearth, and a newspaper lay across his knees. The room was bright with sunshine, and when Eglah entered, clad in black, her long crêpe veil thrown back and falling nearly to the floor, the old man stared at her and almost shrieked:

"Has the Lord God taken my lad? You wear widow's black for him?"

"No, Amos. The Lord God took my father, and my mourning is for him."

He threw up his arms.

"God be praised!"

After a moment, he added apologetically:

"Madam, I mean I am thankful Noel is spared. You see, I think only of the boy."

She drew a chair to the cot and took one of the gardener's wasted, gnarled hands in hers.

"I did not hear of your sickness till three days ago, and I came at once, to see if I could not make you more comfortable while Mrs. Orr is away."

"It makes no difference about my worn-out old body—that is a crippled hulk. My mind is in torment because of the lad's danger. Where is he now? In the ice on land, or locked up in the ship of the ungodly name, that can never break loose from the bergs leaning over her? Tell me, was your news later than my letter?"

He dragged from his bosom two worn, soiled envelopes and held them towards her. One was postmarked St. John, N. B., the other Dundee, Scotland. As she opened them a bunch of yellow poppies and a little square of moss fell into her lap. She glanced at the dates. The oldest was from Upernavik, soon after the vessel reached Greenland; the most recent was from off Cape Alexander, where the "Ahvungah" was frozen in.

"No, Amos, your news is the latest I have heard."

Her voice quivered, and replacing the flowers in an envelope, she laid the unread letters on the cot.

"Was your last letter from him the same date as mine?"

"No; it was earlier."

The cold, light-grey eyes in their deep, sunken sockets probed hers like steel.

"Madam, it was your fault he went away."

"No, his word was pledged before our marriage, and I am not responsible for this journey. I did all that was possible to keep him."

Amos leaned forward and grasped her wrist.

"You know you are to blame. What was it you did to him? That night you came—a bride—I saw when he took you from the carriage everything had gone wrong with him. I knew what that grip of his mouth and that red spark in his eyes meant. You did him some wrong."

She shook her head, and, even in his wrath, the hopeless sorrow in her eyes touched him.

"You struck him a bitter, hard blow somewhere. You see, since he was a year old and his mother died, I have watched him. His father was away with his railroads and his mines out West, and Susan and I had the care of him till he was put to his books and had a tutor to teach him Latin. They set him at that stupid business too early. I made his kites, and played marbles with him, and sailed his little boats, and—" His voice broke, and he paused to steady it.

"He was always truthful, and honorable, and generous, but—may the Lord have mercy on him—he was born with the temper of Beelzebub. Not from his mother did he get it, but from his hard old father, Fergus Herriott, who somehow managed to keep himself under check-rein and bit. He never punished the lad but once, and that was when the devil possessed the child. He was barely ten years old. He fell into a terrible rage with Susan about the fit of a bathing suit she made for him, and kicked the clothes into the lake. Then he turned on her like a son of Belial with rough, ugly, sinful language till she cried. His father happened to be in the boat house near by. He came out, took him by the shoulders and shook him, ordering him to apologize instantly to his nurse. The boy set his teeth and shook his head.

"'If you do not apologize properly to her, I shall thrash you.'

"The lad's eyes blazed.

"'As you are my father, you will do as you like, sir.'

"Then and there he thrashed him, Susan howling, but not a sound from him. Mr. Herriott sent him to his room, and ordered Susan not to go near him. There were several railroad officials to dinner that day, and they staid late. Susan sat yonder by the window, crying fit to break her heart, when the lad walked in and went close to her. She held out her arms, and the tears ran down her cheeks.

"'Susan, I am sorry I was such a beast. I am ashamed of what I said, and I beg your pardon. Dear Susan, forgive me.'

"My poor wife, how she hugged and petted him, only he never would let any one kiss him on his lips. As he sat in her lap, with one arm around her neck, his face was deadly white and his eyes looked like two red stars; the devil had not loosed his grip. Then his father called at the doorstep, 'Amos, is Noel here?' When the old man came in, the boy was standing in the middle of the floor, with his hands behind him, and Susan ran forward.

"'If you please, Mr. Herriott, I am sure he is not well. I thought so at the lake side, and he is feverish. His head is hot.'

"'Yes, Susan. Truly his head is too hot. Come, my son.'

"He held out his hand, but Noel did not move. His father went to him, put an arm around him, and forced him away. Next morning the doctor was sent for, found him in a raging fever; said it was measles, but Susan knew better. For a week Mr. Herriott never left that room, even for his

meals, and he chastised him no more. Each day he was prouder and fonder of the boy. Madam, I am telling you all this that you may be sure I make no mistakes about him. He was hard hit the day he went away. There is a place far around the beach bend, a stone bench, where he has fought battles with himself since he wore frilled shirts. It is his stamping-ground when his blood is up, and the devil squats at his ears. Now I want to know why he spent his last night at home down there alone?"

His bony hand tightened its grip like the claw of an eagle on her wrist, and beneath the shaggy white brows his keen, fiery eyes demanded answer.

"Madam, you drove him there."

"Mr. Herriott was very angry with me. Unintentionally I had wounded him, and he did not forgive me; I fear he never will. He is not to blame. I did what seemed right and necessary at the time, but afterward I found I had made a terrible mistake. It is all my fault, not his. Amos, I am very unhappy, far more so than Mr. Herriott; but some matters I discuss with no one, and you must ask me no more questions."

"Of course he was not to blame; he never is. You did not read his letters." He held them toward her.

"No, they were intended solely for you."

"But I am more than willing you should see what he says about the God-forsaken den of bears and wolves where he is blundering around in the dark."

"Thank you, Amos, but they would only distress me."

Watching her pale, beautiful face, the old man sighed.

"Madam, if you are not to blame for his going on this wild, godless chase, I must not feel so bitter against his young wife as I have done. Dear lad! The very last words he spoke to me that day at the gate were, 'If I never come back, do all you can for Mrs. Herriott, for my sake. Amos, I have loved her since she was ten years old.'"

There was a tap at the door, and the doctor entered. Eglah rose and drew her veil over her face, but Amos clutched her sleeve.

"Doctor, this is Mrs. Herriott, the lad's wife."

"I am glad to see you here, doctor. Knowing Mrs. Orr was called away, I have a trained nurse, who will help you get Amos Lea out of bed. I shall send her at once to you for instructions."

Without attempting to analyze her complex emotions, Eglah surrendered herself to the strange new comfort of wandering hour after hour about the house, where every nook and corner babbled of the owner. Despite her efforts to placate and win the dogs, they sullenly rejected her overtures, echoing the repudiation of their master, and watching her with suspicious enmity. On the second afternoon the doctor and nurse assured her the gardener would soon be relieved by electricity, massage, and tonics, and when a letter from Mrs. Orr to Hawkins announced her expected return two days later, there seemed no reason for prolonging Eglah's visit. She wished to avoid an interview with the housekeeper, and arranged to start south a few hours earlier than the time fixed for her arrival. In the stone cottage she spent a portion of each day; had gone carefully over Arctic maps and charts with Amos, outlining the probable course of the exploring party. She explained some terms, and gave him a duplicate of the calendar she had made for herself, whereby he could tell when and how long the moon shone, what day the sun set, and when, after months, it would rise again. As the old man watched through his silver spectacles the sad, worn, pallid face, and realized that she too suffered, his resentful antipathy diminished, and Mr. Herriott's farewell charge began to invest her with an unexpected sanctity.

The last day of her stay was unusually warm for the season, and after reading to the sick man and leaving a bunch of jonquils near his cot, Eglah went quite late in the afternoon for a farewell walk along the beach. She coaxed the dogs unavailingly. Pilot, the collie, followed as far as the stone stile, and then deserted her. Beyond the end of the curve, where silver poplars came to the water's edge, she found a white marble seat, shaped like a horseshoe, with broad arms and an arched back elaborately carved. Winter rains had rippled and drifted the sand over its feet, and across one corner a bramble strayed. It was here Mr. Herriott had spent his last night at home. She brushed aside dead leaves, sat down, and plucked away the encroaching vine. Deep in her heart sang his final words to Amos: "I have loved her since she was ten years old." Living or dead, he was hers; angry and estranged, but hers—always hers.

She thought of what life might have been with him here, remembered the warm, close clasp of his hand, the lover light in his fine eyes that was a caress that first hour on the cars; and recalling the last moment, when he strained her to his breast, her fair face flushed, her sad heart thrilled. Now that beautiful "might have been" lay irrecoverable as the "lost land of Lyonnesse," under its transparent shroud, and haunting echoes of tender tones tolled faintly, like buried bells of Folge Fond.

The day had been sultry, but the wind rose with the full, red moon that swung now above the cliffs, a globe of burnished copper, taking on the glory of gold as it climbed higher, and from some distant belfry a vesper benediction, low and sweet, slowly drifted over the great lake. The

water, glassy an hour before, thrilled and swelled in answer to the fingers of the wind, as a viol to the touch of its bow, and wavelets widened, shimmered as they ran. An eastbound schooner, all sails set, midway from shore to horizon, followed the path of light like a gigantic white moth fluttering upward to the moon. Where did her rays find Mr. Herriott to-night? Sleeping his last sleep in the wind-carved marble sepulchre of glittering sastrugi, with that white moon of the "Great Ice" silvering the face now so dear to his abandoned wife? Or frozen and embalmed under the lee of towering blue hummocks, in the grim shadow of looming iron-bound shores? Or dying of starvation in a lampless, rent, ruined, iglooyah, with only Innuit corpses encircling him?

She fell on her knees, bowed her head on the seat, and prayed as never before for his safety.

The wind freshened from the south, and far away in some mountain lair thunder growled. Eglah looked long at the beautiful curve of the land, at the shivering poplars turning white in anticipation of storm, at the irregular outline of the old stone pile projecting its spectral shadow on the shining water lapping the terrace wall. Two hours later a gale swept the lake, and under bluish glare of lightning the waves showed their flashing teeth.

With fine feminine instinct that penetrates far below the surface, yet gives no hint of the depths, Eliza divined that the unhappy woman desired unbroken solitude, and the foster-mother went early to her own bedroom.

Slowly Eglah mounted the spiral stairs that led to the billiard room and thence to the tower. The former was dark, and as she placed her candle on the table something fluttered and fell. It was a Chiriqui quetzal, perched upon a small slab brought from Palenque and fastened as a bracket above the fireplace. She picked it up, smoothed the brilliant, drooping feathers, and set it securely on the table, but a legend she had associated with it made her shiver as she opened the door and stepped into the tower.

High above her, and just under the roof, the great lamp with its reflector threw light far out over the tossing waste of water, kindling crowns of fire where the wave crests broke. She sat down on a wooden bench at one of the open arches, and watched the departing cloud fringe of the storm rushing from the far, sweet, throbbing South, to the icy silence of a more distant North; listened to the fitful moan of tired waves, trying to sob themselves to rest. Would the fleet *föhn* reach Greenland, melt the blue cables strong as steel that held iceberg ranges, domed with frosted silver—open the yellow eyes of poppies, and waft the ivory gulls back to weary watchers? Often a blessing there, it was sometimes a curse. Could that fierce, hot, southern breath battle against the ceaseless wind, snow-laden even in sunshine, that sweeps forever from palæocrystic seas across the white desolation of the great ice cap? Persistent study of Northern travels had so completely filled Eglah's mind with Arctic images, that by an inevitable magnetism every change of atmospheric conditions pointed to the Pole.

As the night waned, the moon emerged from ragged clouds, and gradually the lake quieted to its wonted crooning monologue, broken only by the strophe and antistrophe of startled water-fowl scattered by the storm. Eglah heard the clock strike two, and went down to the billiard room. The candle was flickering, and in its spasmodic light the eyes of the Quiché holy bird had a preternatural, sinister glitter. She hurried downstairs and locked herself in the den, the master's favorite room. Cabinets were sealed, busts shrouded in cambric hoods, pictures veiled. Only Mr. Herriott's desk remained as she remembered it, and here, with her arms crossed on the morocco cover and her face hidden upon them, she watched the night depart, saw the dawn of the day that would take her away forever from the home she had learned to love too late.

CHAPTER XXV

Heavy are the brakes with which suspense and anxious longing clog the wheels of time, yet seasons end; the spokes spin and come again, insistent reminders to waiting watchers of the endless, inexorable procession of years.

An early frost had hastened autumnal effects usually due a month later, and the atmosphere was crisp and sparkling. White oaks, maples, and sweet gums rustled their amber leaves sprinkled with red, black gums swung scarlet torches from every bough, wild grape vines festooned supporting trees with fluttering lace-of-gold, and crimson and bronze berry-brambles had colored warmly under the first frost kiss. Close to the little wire gate of the Dingle a tulip tree shook its burnished, brocaded banners, and in and around its branches coiled a muscadine, hung with glossy, purplish-black clusters that filled the air with delicious, challenging fragrance.

With an unopened roll of newspapers in her hand, Eglah leaned for some moments on the gate, admiring the superb vestments of yellow and red that nature hung out to bar the cold—a small cloud island of ruby near the horizon against which an acacia etched its slender lines, and listening to the song of a mocking-bird, that rose like a flute above the whistle of a partridge astray in feathery broom sedge. On the orchard slope Mrs. Mitchell, basket in hand, groped and peered amid tufts of golden-rod, hunting a belated brood of young turkeys. Eglah passed through the gate, went into the mill, and found a seat on one of the circular grinding stones. The wall had partly fallen on the west side, and the glow of a sinking sun lighted the dusty, cobwebbed rafters that upheld what remained of the roof. The chant of a portion of the stream rolling from mossy

rocks to the ruined, sluggish race was low and soothing as a lullaby.

It had been a sad day, marking two years since the evening in the library when Judge Kent had been stricken; the beginning of a slow death. Dwelling upon the indelible incidents, an acute pain was added to the chronic ache from which his daughter's heart was never free. While missing her father sorely in her sorrowful isolation, she realized that death had come at the behest of mercy. As long as he lived his enemies could assail him at any moment; now he was comparatively safe under the snow of his native hills. If it were possible to recall him, she would not; she preferred to suffer alone that he might rest in peace. Two days before she had gone for a few hours to Y—— to see in his favorite church the recently completed tall, arched window, ablaze with rose, purple, crimson, and emerald glass, erected by her, "To the glory of God and in memory of Allison Kent."

Depressed and heartsick, she often sought the solitude of the mill, but in the grey gloom of the rafters above her head a pair of wrens had dwelt for several seasons, and now resented her presence, twittering their protest. Opening the New York and Boston papers, she glanced over one and laid it aside. Unfolding another, her fingers clutched the sheet, where headlines had been reprinted from an English journal:

> "RETURN OF THE 'AHVUNGAH.'"
>
> "After an absence of more than two years, the 'Ahvungah' has brought back the scientific explorers who, having investigated the phenomena of Arctic midnights, are glad to return to less rigorous temperatures. The second winter the vessel, while frozen in, was lifted upon ice hummocks in Whale Sound. Deeming the 'Ahvungah' fast until early summer, some of the party, availing themselves of a continuously shining, two weeks' moon, and in order to avoid sun glare later in the season, made a sledging trip inland over the 'Great Ice,'—the *Sermiksoak*, but the loss of their dogs cut short the journey. During their absence the floe holding the vessel had been broken from the shore-ice by some upheaval unusual at that season, and had drifted many miles. While travelling on the 'ice-foot' to overtake the 'Ahvungah,' the members of the sledging party suffered very severely. Only two deaths occurred during the long voyage; a sailor was drowned in attempting to jump across a lead that closed suddenly after he fell, and the meteorologist, Herr Sprotmund, succumbed to heart disease while climbing a glacier. The 'Ahvungah' touched here only long enough to land the surgeon, Dr. Klinehurst, and the mail for America, then went on to The Hague. It was learned from the surgeon that two gentlemen of the party preferred to remain in Polar regions at least another year—Professor Roy, the palæontologist, and Mr. Herriott, of New York, who is much interested in ethnography. Having studied the Eskimos of the Greenland coast, they crossed to the west shore of Smith's Sound, and will make their way slowly through Ellesmere Land, hunting traces of an Innuit tribe they believe to be the descendants of the Onkilon of Siberia. These gentlemen expect to meet whalers next year somewhere along the west coast, but should their plan fail, still another winter will imprison them."

Until this spasm of pain seized her heart, Eglah had not realized or acknowledged that she cherished any hope, save that God would preserve the life of the man who so completely renounced her. If she had vaguely trusted time might soften and remove his bitterness, she understood at last the mockery of a delusion that she had unconsciously indulged. Above the evensong of the rippling water at her feet, rang his passionate words that last day in the carriage: "I shall try not to come home." To escape the possibility of proximity to her he had plunged into unknown wilds, where only the trails of foxes, wolves, bears, could thread the silent desolation, and at all hazards he would keep the promise of his farewell note: "Your path in future shall be spared my shadow." Wandering into the jaws of death, rather than see her again; for how elusive, how slender, the chances of meeting whalers. As in a mirage she seemed to see him on the colonnade at Nutwood, as he stood looking with eloquent, happy eyes at her, assuring her father: "When I know she is waiting at home for me, do you suppose all the ice in Greenland can shut me away from her?" And now the Arctic Circle would hold his chosen grave, because she could never cross it. The mail for America held no word for her; but doubtless kind messages had come to an old man whose sunken eyes would shine with delight over tidings from "the lad."

To all of us come times when, self-surrendered to depression, some psychic imp drags from mental oblivion and shakes fiendishly before us ghoulish images long forgotten; and now, as purplish-grey shadows gathered in the mill, Eglah saw that vision of "Were-Wolves," the souls of wretched men fleeing from light, hiding in Polar midnight.

> "Each panter in the darkness
> Is a demon-haunted soul,
> The shadowy, phantom were-wolves,
> Who circle round the Pole.
> Their tongues are crimson flaming,
> Their haunted blue eyes gleam,
> And they strain them to the utmost
> O'er frozen lake and stream;
> Their cry one note of agony
> That is neither yelp nor bark,
> These panters of the northern waste
> Who hound them to the dark."

The voice of Mrs. Mitchell calling her name aroused Eglah, and she staggered to her feet, swaying slightly as from a stinging blow. That silent, yearning tenderness, to which she had gladly yielded for so many months, now appeared an insult to her womanly pride.

Rejected and despised, abandoned forever, made by her husband's repudiation a target for gossip and harsh comment, why should she love him? Why, when too hopelessly late, had her heart so unexpectedly followed him, refusing to relax its quest?

Gathering the scattered papers, she left the mill and walked toward the house. As the core of an opal the west showed bands of pearl, beryl, sapphire, rose, and when twilight stole over hillside and dingle, Venus glowed in a violet sea, so large, palpitating, brilliant, she seemed a golden torch flaring in interstellar currents, to light the way of the thin young moon swimming beneath her. Did both torture the were-wolves?

At the gate Eliza waited, and putting an arm around the girl drew her into the hall of the cottage, where a lamp hung from the low ceiling. Under its light Eglah's face showed white and rigid.

"Little mother, I must ask you to leave me to myself to-night. This has been a sad day in many ways. I miss my father, and one trouble of which I never speak, even to you—the only one who loves me—presses heavily upon me just now. There are the papers. You will find an account of the return of the 'Ahvungah,' but Mr. Herriott preferred to remain another year. Kiss me good-night, and ask God to take me soon, soon—to father."

The following winter was long and cold, with flurries of snow, and rattling of sleet, and it proved monotonously dull to the two women shut in the small house. The rooms were cosey, with curtains falling to the bright carpets; and roaring fires of oak and pine logs reddened the walls of the little parlor, where Eglah's upright piano enabled her to banish, at times, gloomy retrospection. Twice Mr. Whitfield came for a day and night, and cheered them with news of the outside world.

When the weather permitted Eliza to attend her Sabbath-school at Maurice, she occasionally persuaded Eglah to play the organ for the children, but she was annoyed by no obtrusive attention on the part of sympathetic country people, whose warm hearts respected the heavy mourning in which she was wrapped, and recognized her right to complete seclusion. At college one of her favorite studies had been Spanish, and without giving an explanation she now applied herself to it with renewed interest. When Eliza questioned her, she referred vaguely to the liquid melody that charmed her in Spanish poetry, and expressed a desire to translate a volume which pleased her.

No allusion to Mr. Herriott or his home now passed her lips. Mr. Whitfield's anxiety to understand the perplexing conditions, and Eglah's unwavering reticence, led him to interrogate Eliza.

"Mr. Whitfield, I can't tell you what I do not know. Mr. Herriott's name is never uttered by her, never mentioned now by me. She is so silent she would certainly forget how to talk if she were not a woman. She intends to go to Europe, and, as you know, keeps some business matters in readiness, but no date has been fixed. You will be advised in time to draw up her will, of which she talked to me about a week ago. The months come and go, and the dear child is always as you see her, calm, uncomplaining, with lips locked as a statue's, but I must say I feel all the time as if I am walking over a grave that may suddenly crumble and cave in under my feet."

Returning spring was welcome, and early summer brought once more the solace and diversion of long rides through solemn, lonely pine stretches, where only birds, nature's feathered syrinx, sounded in the silence, happy as human children prattling to their mother.

A mute acceptance of the inevitable, as far removed from resignation, as from pleading protest, had sealed Eglah's face in passionless repose, pathetic and inscrutable. Inflexibly she maintained her resolve,

"—to fly no signal
That the soul founders in a sea of sorrow,"

and solitude was her refuge. A long delayed monument having been completed at her father's grave, the desire to visit and inspect it dominated her, and one hot day the two women went North. To the devoted child bowed at the feet of a marble angel, the carved lips seemed to whisper her father's farewell words of commendation and tender gratitude for her self-sacrifice in his behalf. Did he know now all it had cost—the branding humiliation, the fierce heart hunger she had found only when she offered herself on an altar that crumbled beneath her?

When the slab was covered with white violets, and she had pressed her lips to the name chiselled on the scroll, she put one hand on Mrs. Mitchell's shoulder and pointed to a grassy plot at her feet.

"Little mother, I hope it will not be long before I can shut my tired eyes forever, and when that happy day comes I want you to bring me here and lay me close to father, at his left side. One other thing you must not fail to do; after I am in my coffin be sure you take off my ring—my wedding ring—and if Mr. Herriott be living give it into his hand. He has wanted it back since the day he placed it on my finger, and only God knows how glad I shall be to surrender it. 'So long as

ye both shall live' it is mine, but in the grave God gives us back our vows and sets us free."

The cold, hopeless renunciation in face and voice was more than the loving little woman could endure, and with a burst of tears she threw her arm about the girl, pressing her to her heart.

"My baby, have you no mercy for me, that you talk so cruelly? I shall be asleep by my Robert long before death calls one so young and strong and beautiful as my own dearie. Please have some consideration for me, and don't discuss such dreadful matters. I see from your eyes you want a promise. Well, if I outlive you—preposterous—I will forget nothing, provided you spare me all heart-sickening talk in future."

On the return journey Mrs. Mitchell wished to stop in New York, but Eglah shrank from the possibility of meeting old friends, dreading questions. As she intended to see her cousin Vernon Temple for a day, she went on to the hotel in the city near Calvary House, where her foster-mother joined her after a day's shopping tour in New York. At the time of Eglah's visit of a few hours here with her father, and while her cousin was at Nutwood, they had discussed plans for a new altar much needed in the chapel, and during her residence at the Dingle she had submitted a design duplicating in many respects a carved and pillared shrine she and Judge Kent had seen near Avignon. The Father Superior and her cousin gratefully accepted her offer, and before she started to New England a letter announced the completion of the altar, and expressed the hope that she would be able to see it. If Mr. Herriott never returned, she locked deep in her heart an intention to make it a memorial to him, the donor of house and estate to the Brotherhood. The Provençal model was guarded by two seraphs; these she would add later, if the White North kept the wanderer folded forever to her breast of snow.

Of celibate organizations, Romish or Protestant, Mrs. Mitchell distinctly disapproved, and she had listened with ill-concealed annoyance and uneasiness when at Nutwood Vernon Temple expatiated upon the noble work accomplished by Episcopal deaconesses in sisterhood homes. She had always dreaded his influence over his cousin, especially since her father's death. Calvary House was as the threshold of Rimmon, and when the carriage approached it she exclaimed:

"I have no intention of going inside that monkish den. How a sensible, level-headed man like Mr. Herriott could give away property for such fanatical use passes my understanding. I may be an ecclesiastical ignoramus; I certainly am a 'narrow Methodist'; but, my dear baby, I can't broaden even to please you, and you must excuse me. I had a catalogue from the great poultry farm that I hear is only a mile or two farther out on this road, and while you see your cousin and examine the things you gave the chapel, I will drive on and order some white guineas. Here, don't forget your box of embroideries. I shall wait at the gate for you."

The bell on the latch rang as Eglah passed under the gilt cross, and at the front door the porter, a young lay brother, looked at her in amazement.

"I wish to see Father Temple. I am his cousin, Eglah Kent."

"He is not here. He went to Philadelphia yesterday."

"Then tell the Father Superior—he knows me—that the lady who gave the new altar wishes to speak to him about it."

"Father Superior is holding a mission in New York."

"Where is the sacristan?"

"'Free time' has just begun, and he has gone to look after his beehives. I can call Father Phillips."

"No. I do not care to meet any of the Brotherhood who do not know me. I was here once with my father, and Father Temple has visited my house in the South. I came merely to look at the new altar, and bring some fresh covers to the sacristan. Do not disturb any one; this is 'free time,' and I must not keep you. Please say nothing about me now. I shall go into the chapel—I know the way—and then return to my carriage."

He opened the nearest door of the chapel, bowed, and disappeared.

Before the carved panel in the centre of the altar she stood some moments, rejoicing that the sculptor had succeeded so well in reproducing the cherub heads running as a frieze between the columns. From the box she shook out two pulpit-falls, one embroidered with iris, one with passion flowers; then a chalice veil of shimmering white silk marked with a Greek cross. Beneath these lay a long altar cover of snowy linen cambric, "the fair linen cloth," studded with crosses along the centre, and bordered with annunciation lilies.

She smoothed and arranged it on the polished surface of the shrine, while a vision of an added seraph, standing *in memoriam* at each end, shone before her. She recalled Tennyson's inscription in Westminster Abbey, where one wife, widowed by Polar perils, had set her tribute of love. To her the sympathy of the world went out, and the nations, sharing her long search, shared her sorrow.

Misunderstood and censured, Eglah bore her burden alone, and now, sinking to her knees, with her forehead pressed against the marble, she prayed that the wanderer in desolate lands might be guarded from every ill and brought safely home. Prayer always deepened her impression that he would return, and as she rose and loitered a moment in admiration of the chiselled stone, her sad lips whispered to her lonely heart:

"He will come,—
Ay, he will come! I can not make him dead."

Suddenly her heart leaped, then seemed to forget to beat. A voice rich, mellow, unmistakable, came from the arched gallery beyond the little oratory opening into the chapel:

"Roy, you are no baby, and my singing days are over."

A feeble, nervous tone answered:

"Herriott, you sang life into me that awful night after you carried me in your arms behind a snow drift, rubbed my frozen hands, and tied our last dog to my legs to keep me warm. 'It shall be light, it shall be light!' How the song soared and echoed in the terrible silence of the ice desert, as if spirits of the snow caught up the refrain! Do you remember that ghastly red thread of a moon on the glacial line above us, like a swooping bloody sickle? Even in my blindness that infernal moon haunts me still. Just then, as the echo died, out of the blackness, as if an answer to a prophet's prayer, the swift glory of the aurora swept down and enveloped us. You saved my life, and before you leave me here I should like to hear that song once more. I suppose I am childish yet, but in my blindness you might humor me. Who wrote that song?"

"You are such a hopeless pagan you do not recognize the Bible? It is an arrangement of two verses in the Old Testament: 'And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear. But it shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light.' When I was attending lectures in Germany, one of the professors set the words to the tune of an old Latin hymn, and the students began to chant it. That night when I was obliged to keep you awake, it occurred to me. Roy, I can't humor you now, but I intend to take you and an old man at home down to Arizona to thaw the Arctic poison out of you. When we are stretched on a sunny mesa where the air quivers with heat, if you feel the need of more light, I promise to chant your song. I am not willing to abandon the goal that we were so near. If you had not broken down, we should have found those stone ruins with the inscriptions, and I intend to see them. After a while I shall fit out an expedition to suit myself, and if you can get rid of your horror of that baby moon that in your delirium you swore was a bloody scythe coming to cut your throat, I hope to number you among my impedimenta."

The purple curtain, caught back only during service, hung over the arch; but at one side a narrow aperture, close to the gilt organ pipe in the oratory, admitted outside light.

Irresistibly drawn by the voice that set her pulses surging, Eglah had gone to the arch, and grasping the velvet folds looked cautiously through the cleft between organ and curtain, across the small oratory and down the cloister. On a cot lay an emaciated man whose eyes were bandaged. By his side and fronting the oratory stood Mr. Herriott, his hands in his pockets.

He looked taller, rather gaunt, somewhat bleached in complexion, and the absence of mustache showed the fine curves of his peculiarly firm, thin lips. His eyes were lowered to the sick man's countenance, and the thick black lashes veiled their grey-blue depths, but over the handsome face had come a subtle change, etched by corroding memories. It was graver, colder, less magnetic.

As Eglah watched him her breath fluttered; involuntarily she stretched her arms an instant toward him, and her eyes lighted with a tender glow. "My own Mr. Noel. My own!" was the unspoken claim of her heart, momentarily happy at sight of him. Then Mr. Herriott put his fingers over his friend's pulse.

"Vernon promised to get back to-morrow, and the oculist will look after you until I can go home and see about my neglected household. In order to avoid press publicity and inevitable interviewing, I am keeping my return secret for a few days; and, clean-shaven and goggle-eyed, hope to reach my house unrecognized, where I can smooth out the tangles that years of absence tie. Later, business will force me to New York, and I shall be glad of a glimpse of my old club life, but meanwhile you will not be forgotten. Now, Roy, you must come in. One of the lay brothers will help me lift your cot."

As he advanced toward the steps near the end of the cloister, Eglah covered her face with her heavy veil, and went swiftly through a side door of the chapel, down the gladiolus-bordered walk to the gate, where the carriage waited. As she sank back in one corner, keeping her features veiled, Mrs. Mitchell laid a hand on her knee.

"Well? Are you satisfied, and did the altar cloths fit? Did you find what you expected?"

She did not answer immediately, and when she spoke her voice quivered through the effort to strangle a dry sob.

"I found far more than I expected, and the altar is lovely. Everything I could possibly do that would have pleased father I have done. My father, my father, have I spared even myself! Memorial window, monument, the altar here, all are finished, and now nothing remains for my empty hands. My dear little mother, you are so good to me; you promised you would go abroad when I felt it best to start. At last the time has come, and I wish to leave America within the next week if possible."

After a moment a long, shuddering sigh made her voice unsteady.

"I have just seen Mr. Herriott—safe, strong, and well. He will never know I was so near; he could not see me. Accidentally I heard his voice, and looked through a curtain, and——"

Mrs. Mitchell had drawn her into her arms, but the black crêpe was held over her face.

"The public will be kept in ignorance of his return for a few days, and before his arrival is announced and people begin to question and speculate, I must be on the ocean. I was so close to him—so close—and yet——"

A wave of tenderness drowned words.

"Oh, my baby! Why did you not speak to your husband?"

After a struggle for composure she answered, with a cold, rising ring in her tone:

"He does not consider himself my husband. More than three years ago he willed we should be strangers. He built the wall of separation, of absolute silence between us, and no word, no sign from me shall ever cross it. He is within his rights. I dispute nothing. I claim only the privilege of helping him in his effort to avoid me, and I must have the ocean between us. He will breathe freely when he feels sure that by no possible accident the sight of my face can ever again affront him."

CHAPTER XXVI

"Willow Creek Plantation,

"Wednesday.

"Mr. Herriott.

"Dear Sir: Permit me to say at the outset that these lines are intended solely for your eyes, and I beg you will regard them as strictly confidential. If I were not so sure you are an honorable gentleman, they would never be written. On the 18th my foster-child and I expect to leave my little home at Willow Bend, where we have lived since her father's death. By her desire we go to Europe, and, as we shall remain there indefinitely, I should like to talk with you of some matters that concern you—matters I am unwilling to mention unless we are face to face. The railway station Maurice is near me, but if you do me the favor to grant my request, it would be better for you to avoid Y—— and come directly to Sunflower, ten miles north of Maurice. If you can be at Sunflower on the 17th, I will meet you there when the one o'clock train arrives. Unless you come that day, it would be too late. You will see no one but me, and no one must ever be told I went to Sunflower, or saw you. My child is absent in Y——, and will not return until night of the 17th, when I meet her at Maurice. Do not write me. Do not telegraph me. I scarcely allow myself to hope that you will come, and if I do not see you I shall regret it for many reasons. If I fail in my conscientious effort to right a great wrong, it will not be my fault.

"Very respectfully,

"Eliza Mitchell."

Allowing two days' margin for accidental delays, Eliza indulged no doubt that this letter would reach its destination in ample time to enable Mr. Herriott to keep the appointment, should he consent to meet her, and, after putting on a special delivery stamp, she mailed it at Maurice with her own hand.

The probability of a change of residence had been so fully discussed that preliminary arrangements had long been made; but the early date, suddenly fixed, necessitated great activity to insure readiness for departure.

Eglah's calm, listless indifference had given place to feverish impatience in expediting all preparations incident to the journey, and the perplexed and anxious little woman who watched her movements was rejoiced when business of importance called her to Y——, where Mr. Whitfield was confined by gout to his room. Since the day at Calvary House, Eliza had observed a marked change in Eglah; the wistful, hopeless expression had vanished, and proud defiance settled on her face. While tortured by suspense, she had yielded to the tender yearning of her heart; but the sight of Mr. Herriott, safe, well, and strong, contentedly planning a future in which he assigned no niche to her, stung her womanly pride, intensified her longing to evade forever the possibility of meeting the man who had so completely ignored and repudiated her.

Some delay in the preparation of papers Mr. Whitfield required her to sign kept her in Y—— longer than she had intended. He very carefully wrote her will, in which, following the trend of her grandmother's sympathies, she bequeathed Nutwood and adjoining lands as a Maurice Home "to childless widows of Confederate soldiers in the State." To Vivian and Maurice relatives of her own mother, who refused association with Marcia after her marriage, and whom Eglah had always avoided, she gave one plantation—Canebrake. To Mrs. Mitchell Willow Creek Bend was left, in grateful recognition of her loving care; and all personal property, stocks, and bonds were

devised to the vestry of her father's church, for the erection and maintenance of a memorial Chapter House.

Business concluded, she telegraphed that on the 17th, at eight P.M., she would reach Maurice, and wished Mrs. Mitchell to meet her with the trap.

At nine o'clock on the morning of the 17th, the overseer's wife, desiring to avoid the passenger train, went in the caboose of a local freight to Sunflower. It was an "excursion" day in honor of the opening of a Masonic hall just completed, and many strangers strolled about the village awaiting the hour fixed for the dedication ceremonies. At one o'clock, when the fast southbound train paused long enough to deliver the mail-bag, Eliza stood on the little platform, watching the line of dusty cars. As a tall figure, valise in hand, stepped from the Pullman sleeper, she did not promptly recognize the clean-shaven face, wearing grey goggles. Handing his valise to a negro porter sitting on the baggage truck, he glanced about him, and approached the little woman, who was trembling with suspense.

"How are you, Mrs. Mitchell?"

He held out his hand.

"Oh, Mr. Herriott! I was not sure it was you. Thank God! I was so afraid you would not come."

He took off the goggles and dropped them in his coat pocket.

"I dare say these glasses partly disguise, but snow-blindness left my eyes rather sensitive, and I wore them as guard against railroad dust."

"Come with me, Mr. Herriott. This little place is full of strangers to-day on account of a Masonic meeting, but there is a quiet spot in the grove yonder, where a recent picnic party left some benches."

In silence they reached the grove of old red oaks, and Eliza sat down on a rough, board seat; but he declined to share it, and stood before her, his eyes an interrogation.

"Mr. Herriott, I asked you to come here because you are pursuing a course I think you would abandon if you knew some facts that only I can give you. But first, I want your promise that no matter what the future holds, you will never let Eglah know or suspect that I wrote you, came here, or saw you. If she found it out she would never forgive me; she would desert me, and I am running a great risk. Give me your word of honor to keep this meeting always strictly confidential. If you promise, I shall feel easy."

"I promise. You may trust me."

"Thank you, sir. Before I say more, will you tell me if you still love your wife?"

His face hardened and his eyes narrowed.

"Pardon me, madam. I did not come here to be catechised."

"If you have ceased to love her, then I should betray a holy trust by lifting a very sacred veil. I can speak freely only to a man who loves her as she deserves—and as I have always believed you did. If you no longer love her, I have come on worse than a fool's errand."

There was a brief silence, and hot tears ran over the little woman's cheeks.

"And if I love her still? Go on, go on."

"Then why are you breaking her dear heart?"

"Madam, her heart has never been in my keeping. You must know that for years I made every effort to win it, and failing, I abandoned the hope. Our merely nominal relation was dissolved by mutual consent, and I gave her entire freedom before I started North. I have never been close enough to her heart to wound it."

"Please, Mr. Herriott, listen to me patiently. I must go back so far. She did not love you when she married you. Why she so suddenly took that awful step I don't know. She refused to explain. I believed that her father had persuaded her, but she assured me he had no knowledge of her intention until after she had voluntarily made her decision, and she is absolutely truthful. She is reticent and proud, but of false statements she is incapable. She has never confided the motive of her rash marriage to me, and what she is unwilling to have me know, nobody else can ever tell me. Better than any one living I understand her, and when she came back with her father from Greyledge I saw a great change in her; she was not the indifferent girl whom you had taken away. The estrangement between Judge Kent and herself had ended, and she rejoiced in the cordial reconciliation, but some sad mystery in the background overshadowed her and puzzled me. The day she received that express package from you she suddenly seemed to go frantic, and her distress was so overwhelming I was frightened. Never before or since has she shown such passionate grief. She told me she had wronged, wounded you, and that you would never forgive her. How she wronged you she would not explain, and I don't know any more now than I did then. But she insisted again and again that you were not to blame—that it was entirely her fault, and she must bear the sorrow she had brought upon herself. She wrung her hands and begged me to pray she might die before you came back and rejected her. When I tried to comfort her, and asked why you should do such a cruel, unjust thing, she wailed: 'You loved your husband; if you

had wounded him past pardon, could you bear to talk about it? Don't question me. Think of your Robert, and try to realize how I feel.' All that night she walked the floor of her room, and next morning she looked years older—so white, so silent, as if gazing down into a grave. Since then she has never been the same Eglah. Something in your last message, which I did not see, slew her peace of mind for all time. She shut herself away from society, lived exclusively with her father and with me. When Judge Kent died I dreaded a total collapse in the child who had worshipped him from her babyhood; but she bore the awful strain silently, calmly, surprisingly. Mr. Whitfield put his arm around her shoulder as she stood by the coffin, and, with tears in his eyes, the old man praised her devotion and her bravery. She looked up at him with a strange smile on her bloodless lips.

"'One can suffer only so much, then numbness comes. After the misery of many months a last blow does not crush. The petrified are not always where they belong—in the grave.'

"After the funeral she closed Nutwood, moved her books, piano, and horses down to my little cottage in the heart of the pine woods, denied herself to every one, and there we have lived in strict seclusion. Day and night she pored over books of Arctic travel, and on the walls of her room she had maps and charts, and what she called her 'comfort calendar,' that she patched together from almanacs, to mark what time day and night began near the Pole and when the new moons were due. It made my heart ache to see her face each day as she searched the papers for some news of you. At last she ceased to expect any, and your name was not mentioned. Mr. Herriott, do you recollect your striped silk smoking-jacket, with pink poppies embroidered on collar and cuffs and down the front?"

"Yes. I had such a jacket."

"One sultry summer night, about one o'clock, I went on tiptoe into Eglah's room to get a vial of medicine that was kept in a closet there, and, as she slept poorly, I tried not to disturb her. Her window was open, the curtains looped back, and a full moon shone in. She was sitting up in bed, with her face buried in some bright wrapping, and a sort of strangled moan came from her. I went to the bed and asked what the trouble was. Had she neuralgia in her face, that she was muffling it on such a hot night? Oh, Mr. Herriott, if you could have heard the quiver in her voice!

"'No, no. Heartache—heartache only the grave can ease.'

"Next day, while she was away, I searched for that striped thing which I had never seen before. She kept it in a long, satin-lined, sandalwood case, among her perfumed laces, and when I examined it I found a smoking-jacket, with a dog whistle in one pocket, and in the other a handkerchief marked 'Herriott.' I——"

Mr. Herriott had walked away, and after several moments recalled the search for the missing jacket on the day of his departure, and the pride with which Amos only three nights ago, had shown him a warm, quilted cashmere gown "the madam" had sent him because the jacket left for him had never been found. When he came back to the seat, he stood with his face turned from her, and she could see only his profile.

"Sir, if you don't hear me out, you can't understand why I came. Eglah would sit for hours, a book before her, her hands folded in a way peculiar to her—her wedding ring against her lips—so silent, so still, she seemed a stone; but she roused to a manifestation of interest when we heard your old gardener was ill and needed attention. While we were at your house she seemed more like herself than at any time since that express package reached her; but a deep undercurrent of sorrow she could not hide. Over the house and grounds she wandered continually, and that long lake beach was her favorite walk. Every evening she shut herself in one of the rooms downstairs —I think it was your smoking-room—and the last night we were there she spent locked in that room. She sent for a photographer from the city and had copies taken of your mother's portrait and of yours—that one hanging next to your father's in the drawing-room. To-day on her dressing-table stand two pictures of you and one she insists resembles you—the photograph of a French poet she saw once in Arles. She thinks the brow and eyes and nose are yours, and, though she does not like the lower portion of the face, she had the photograph enlarged and framed. I could not keep my tears back when, leaning from the carriage, she took her last look at your home. There was such a world of suffering in her sad eyes, and her dear lips and chin trembled like a little child's.

"'Being here is next best to seeing the master. I can never come again. When he returns I must be in Europe, out of his way.'"

Mr. Herriott turned suddenly and looked down steadily at his companion.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Mitchell. You prefer to stay at home? You do not wish to go abroad?"

His keen eyes searched hers, and their flash answered him.

"Whatever the child thinks is best for her peace I want above everything else; and I am ready and willing to go with her to Europe, Africa, the Fiji Islands—to the ends of the earth. I do love my little home, still more my husband's grave, almost in sight of it; I love my cows and my chickens; but first and last, and better than all, I love my baby, who came to my arms when she was three hours old, and who now, in turning her back upon an unjust world, clings only to me. I never took an oath before God that I would 'for better, for worse, love and cherish her till death,' but I rather think my love will abide, will stand all tests and trials that have crumbled some other vows she

once trusted."

After a moment she added:

"Perhaps I have already said too much, and you may not care to hear more."

"Madam, I wish you to tell me everything you think it best I should know. I am here for that purpose, at your request."

"Eglah was terribly hurt to find Amos had heard twice from you while, consumed with suspense, she had received not even a line. After we went home she grew more and more restless, but I noticed she carefully avoided any allusion to you. One night I heard her moving about, and then she left her room. It is a lonely little place where we live, rather unprotected, and the servants—man and wife—do not wake easily. Eglah had a way of walking about the gallery and yard when she could not sleep that made me uneasy. I went out to expostulate, and found her sitting on the steps in the moonlight with that jacket of yours in her arms. I sat down and took her hand. In a horrible dream, she had seen you lying dead between two blue slabs of ice, a white owl on your breast, and she was hugging and stroking that striped silk as only those who love can caress the garments of lost darlings. You know she very rarely cries. In all her life I never saw tears on her face more than three or four times. I tried to soothe her, and said that full moon overhead was making the Pole itself bright. She turned suddenly to me, the tears dripping, and, oh, if I could give you the heartbroken tone in which she said:

> 'The broad noonday was night to me,
> The full-moon night was dark to me,
> The stars whirled and the poles span
> The hour God took him far from me.'

"After that night she guarded herself more closely against any expression of feeling, and carefully abstained from all reference to you until the evening she learned from a Boston paper that your vessel had returned to Europe, and you had preferred to stay in Arctic regions. My poor baby! She looked so white, so stunned, as if some one had struck her a heavy blow."

Eliza sobbed and her tears streamed.

"Mr. Herriott, she felt assured you would not come home because you feared you might meet her, and then she asked me to keep my promise and go with her to Europe as soon as some stone-cutting designs could be filled. She waited only to see three memorials completed. From the day she learned the 'Ahvungah' had returned, I saw a bitter, resentful element beginning to invade what had been only regretful tenderness, and her lips were locked. The window in the Episcopal Church at Y—— was placed, and soon after we went North to see the monument ordered for her father's grave. I dreaded she would break down there, but she was as quiet as the marble angel of the Resurrection standing on the slab. She showed me where she wished her body laid, close to her father's, and then she asked me to be sure—after she was safe in her coffin—to take off her wedding ring and send it to you, because you had wanted it back from the day you gave it to her. She refused to stop in New York, fearing some of her friends or yours might see and question her. Any allusion to her marriage was as the touch of red-hot irons. On our way home she went one afternoon to Calvary House to see her cousin Temple—the priest—and look at an altar she had given him. I waited outside in the carriage, and she joined me, holding her thick mourning veil over her face. As she and her father designed this altar after one they had seen somewhere abroad, I thought her silence and evident distress resulted from its association with him. After a while she said, in a strange, muffled way, that she had done everything she was sure her father would like if he could speak to her, and now her hands were empty, and she wished to sail for Europe at the earliest possible date—probably within a week. As she leaned against me, and I held her hand, I felt her shiver. Then she told me she had just seen you at Calvary House, strong and well, and she must leave America at once."

"She saw me! When?"

Mr. Herriott had grown very pale.

"A week ago yesterday. She said you had brought some sick, blind man there, and you were going home. I asked her why she did not speak to you, and she answered that three years ago you had willed you and she should be strangers; you had built a wall of silence, and no word, no sign from her should ever break it. Unobserved by you, she had seen you in the cloister, heard you talking of your plans for future travel, and, fearing discovery, she had hurried from the chapel. Since then every nerve has been strained to get away."

Mr. Herriott walked a few yards, put on his glasses, and stood for some time with his hands behind him. A sad, perplexed face met Eliza's eager eyes when he came back, and for the first time seated himself beside her.

"To what portion of Europe are you going?"

"To Spain; to a quiet little place hidden away in the Pyrenees, where she hopes she will meet no one who ever heard of her, and where, having nothing to remind her of three horrible years, she can try to forget her suffering. To avoid all acquaintances, she will not sail from New York, but goes directly to Charleston, and thence to Havana, where she can take a steamer to Spain. I think, sir, no one can understand her terrible humiliation in being rejected. While you were away,

surrounded by dangers, and she was on the rack of suspense, tortured almost beyond endurance, only deep and tender love filled her heart. Since she has seen you safe and well—yet no word of remembrance has been sent to her—wounded pride possesses her, and she seems indeed petrified. Even now she maintains with strange composure: 'He is within his rights; he is not to blame. It was all my fault. I made the mistake of presuming too far on his love, which was less than I counted on, and I deserve my punishment; but sometimes I think God, who saw my heart and knew I did not intend any wrong, might have spared me some of the bitter dregs I have had to drink.' With all her pride, she is acutely sensitive to adverse gossip. From childhood she has borne so much on account of her father's unpopularity in the State, and people do not understand her. In Washington her loyalty to the South and to the Maurices subjected her to sneers and much unpleasantness. Her sudden marriage and subsequent events, especially her coming home before you sailed, have caused annoying comment, and now she is hurrying through Y——, anxious to get away before the fact of your return is known there. She does not suspect the opposition manifested by some of the vestrymen to that memorial window. Only the pleadings of the rector and the influence of Mr. Whitfield, who is not an Episcopalian and who had no cause to like Judge Kent, availed to smother the objections to its erection. This mortification we have managed to save her. Now, sir, you will please pardon me if I speak very frankly. What passed between you and Eglah after your marriage I do not know, nor did Judge Kent. Her lips have been sealed, but I have often thought the estrangement arose from your discovery of the fact that she did not love you as she should have done before she married you, and therefore I have come here to try to save you both from making shipwreck of your lives. If that was the cause of the trouble, it exists no longer. She loves you now as devotedly as even you could wish."

He shook his head and swept his hand across his face.

"Madam, she pities me, she deplores my disappointment; perhaps she censures herself unduly, but love! She knows no more of love than a baby in its cradle. She never will. She is absolutely incapable of loving any man. Too many have tried zealously to touch her heart, and failed as signally as I certainly did."

Mrs. Mitchell's black eyes sparkled through her tears.

"Mr. Herriott, since she was three hours old she has been my child. I know her as well as I know myself. I am a woman; I loved my husband better than my life, and when I see genuine, loyal, tender love in a wife I know it as surely as you know where the sun rises. My baby did not love you when she took her marriage vows, but you were deep in her heart when she came home; and her love has grown until it is now so strong it is a slow torture, from which she would gladly escape if she could. Do you suppose a woman proud, reserved, cold as Eglah is would treasure and caress, and sleep with her cheek on a man's faded old smoking-jacket if she did not tenderly love the wearer whose touch had made it sacred? Oh, Mr. Herriott, if you could have seen her all these years—her patient, hopeless face! If you could realize the life she leads in the overseer's house and contrast it with that brilliant past when you saw her admired and sought in New York —even in London—you might perhaps understand how changed she is. I longed for you to know that your wife's heart is wholly yours, because I have believed you would always love her. If she ever suspects I have told you her secret she will never forgive—she will disown me. You must not cause me to lose my child. Just now she is sorely mortified and resentful, but——"

Eliza paused and looked at the man beside her, but she could not see his eyes.

"Please do me the kindness to finish your sentence."

"But if you could meet her and——"

Again she hesitated, discouraged by the expression settling around his mouth.

"In consequence of a voluntary pledge on my part, I could not now intrude upon her."

"If you called and asked to see her, I am sure she would decline to receive you; but if you really desire to see her before she sails, it could be arranged without her knowledge or co-operation. We go from Maurice to-morrow night at eight o'clock and pass through Y—— without stopping. Eglah comes from Y—— at eight to-night. To-morrow she will be at my house all day until four o'clock, when she goes over to the Willow Bend plantation to say good-bye to the Boyntons and negro tenants, and also the tenants and field hands from Canebrake plantation, whom Mr. Boynton will have present. Eglah usually takes a book and spends the morning under the trees in my front yard, or in the old mill, where she often sits for hours. If you merely want to see your wife again before she passes forever out of your life you can easily do so from the shelter of my butter-bean arbor, which is near the trees, and she will never know it. If you care to speak to her, you may be sure of no interruption. Mr. Herriott, God took my husband, but I could not have borne my loss if my Robert had voluntarily taken himself from me. My heart aches for Eglah. She is indeed my all in this world, and I have risked a great deal to put you in possession of the truth. She loves you as earnestly and tenderly as you could wish, but it remains for you to make her admit it—to compel her to confession. Her pride has been so sorely wounded she would die sooner than move one inch toward reconciliation."

She looked at her watch and rose.

"My train will soon be due."

As they walked toward the small station-house, Mr. Herriott held out his hand.

"Whatever the future may hold, I shall always thank you inexpressibly for the confidence, the sacred trust you have reposed in me, and I will never betray it. I doubt the wisdom of seeing Eglah. I know only too well the difference between true love and that regretful compassion her kind heart indulges. There are reasons that make me unwilling to violate my own pledge to her, but if I should decide to go to your house, will you direct me how to find it?"

"You can drive to Maurice, ten miles south, or take the night train, which will not stop here unless it is flagged. Once at Maurice, any one will show you Willow Bend road. When you pass the plantation, which is quite a settlement, cross the bridge, turn to the right, and you will soon see an old red mill in front of my gate. Here comes my train."

"No, madam; not your train. That is only a freight-engine and gravel cars."

"I came on it, and I go back the same way. For many reasons I prefer to keep this trip as secret as possible, at least until after to-morrow, when we leave home; so I avoided the passenger train that brought up some Maurice Masons. The smaller the place, the wider the eyes, the keener the ears, and the more nimble the tongues that dwell there. Rufus Boling, the conductor yonder, expects to marry my favorite Sunday-school pupil, Minna Gaines, to-morrow night, and I have done all I could for the child's wedding. Consequently, though the railroad officials grumble and forbid, he consented to let me ride in the caboose, provided I would not sit at the window, and promised not to sue for damages if I lost a limb or an eye on the trip. Are you ready, Rufus? Good-bye, Mr. Herriott. I have done my best for my child and for you. God help you both!"

He took her hand and pressed it cordially.

"In any event, you may rest assured I never shall cease to thank you for your effort; and life will always be sweeter because of some facts you have given me."

He assisted her into the close, smoky caboose, lifted his hat and, as the engine pulled slowly out, he took off his glasses and walked back to the red-oak grove.

CHAPTER XXVII

It was a cloudless, warm day when Mr. Herriott crossed the bridge, and walked up the road bordering a creek hidden by its vivid fringe of willows. At the ruined mill he paused; here the sandy road ended. Beyond on an upland towered a pine forest, its organ pipes whispering as the south wind touched the tremolo; in front nestled the small, white house, partly veiled by rose and yellow jasmine vines, and all the little hollow was brimmed with cool, green shadows cast by trees across clustering flower beds. A blended perfume distilled by dew from Hersé's crystal fingers hovered over the Dingle, the cold, unctuous odor of tuberoses, the warm spice of carnations, and that clinging breath of wan lilies that evokes white faces and folded fingers of the dead, but stronger than all, the fragrance of wild grapes in creamy bloom. More than cloistral quiet reigned; only the rippling monody of water feeling its way over the crumbling dam to the far-off sea, and the tinkle of the spring runnel sounding low, clear, elfish, as if some Malis or "April-eyed Nycheia" smote her tambourine and set silver bells ringing. Once from the green silken tent of willows a shy lark, hermit of dells, thrilled the silence with his resonant, sylvan roulade, and a locust under beech boughs answered, clashing his brazen sistrum.

The blinds and windows at the front of the cottage were open, and white muslin curtains stirred now and then, as the breeze swayed them. Pots of flowering geranium and heliotrope were grouped on the piazza, and among them slept Delilah. As Mr. Herriott looked at the humble nest of a home, and thought of stately Nutwood, of gilded ballrooms where Eglah had reigned an acknowledged beauty, he began to realize the monotony, the dreary loneliness of life here in the heart of almost primeval forests. She had elected to shut herself far away from the brilliant circle of former days, but he could not believe it was for his sake; grief for her father had made her a recluse.

The dazzling possibility with which Mrs. Mitchell enticed him, he had put aside as a delusion he could not indulge a second time, for behind it was the biting mockery with which he had once grappled. His nominal wife had led the life of a nun during his absence, but loyalty was far removed from love, and the steps of an altar suited her nature better than a husband's arms. For many hours he had fought the hope that would smile out of the folds of his old jacket, but the intense longing to see her again conquered reason, prudence, consistent adherence to the line of action he had voluntarily prescribed for both. He would secrete himself, and merely look once more at the face he had striven ineffectually to forget, and she should never suspect his presence.

At a little distance was the gate of the low wire fence, but he stepped across the wire, and passed through the open door of the dairy to a tall tulip tree, around the body of which coiled the brown serpent of the muscadine. Very near this tree, now all aglow with its orange-spotted cups, stood—on the edge of a verbena bed—an ancient mimosa in full bloom. Years before, an August gale had pollarded it, and lateral branches drooped almost to the ground, except on one side, where they were cut away to frame an arch, and this entrance showed a wooden bench set against the trunk of the tree. To-day it resembled a huge Japanese umbrella of olive-green lace thickly studded with pink silk aigrettes that shook out waves of sweetness, mellow, fruity, languorous. Looking around

for the best coign of vantage, Mr. Herriott noticed the narrow arbor covered by a thick growth of butter-bean vines, where he stood secure from observation. On the ground, only five yards distant, lay a woman's broad black straw hat tied basket-fashion with its ribbon strings, and filled with spikes of tuberoses. By cautious pressure of the bean vines he could see very distinctly the front of the house and the mimosa seat.

With his head on his hand and a throbbing of his heart that defied control, he waited, his eyes on the hat, he never knew how long, until a sudden thrill shook him.

From an invisible corner of the garden, Eglah came slowly toward the arbor. Her mourning gown of lustreless, thin black silk fitted perfectly the curves of her finely moulded figure, and at her throat she had fastened a spray of white star jasmine. High on her head the glossy, gold-flecked chestnut hair was piled in soft loose coils and puffs that caught the sunshine as she walked, holding in the clasp of one arm a sheaf of long-stemmed lilies. Advancing until she reached the hat, she leaned down, swung the knotted ribbons over her right wrist, and stood a moment listening to the peaceful woodland message of the lark. Three years had wrought a marvellous change. The rich promise of her youth had expanded into an almost flawless loveliness. A certain girlish slimness had given place to the fuller, rounded lines of graceful, perfect womanhood, and over the pathetic, pale face had settled a passionless repose that comes only when hope is dead, and silent pride sits on its tombstone. As she held the lilies with her left arm, the hand gleamed white against the folds of her black dress, and the wedding ring flashed. Her cold, exquisite purity matched that of a Roman vestal on her way to shrines, but her large brown eyes, looking far away, were so darkened by shadows of mournful memory, of helpless yet uncomplaining renunciation, that Mr. Herriott could not endure the sight. He threw his hand across his face, and strangled the impulse to spring to her side, to catch her in his arms. When he looked again, she had walked away toward the house.

With a book in her hand, Mrs. Mitchell ran down the steps.

"I am waiting for the flowers, before I close the box for the little bride. These lilies are just what she needs for the altar. Give them to me."

Then a low, sweet, sad voice swept the heartstrings of the man who watched and listened.

"Do not forget to send my present. I put my card inside the case. Dear little Minna, I hope she may be happy. If her husband really loves her, she enters her heaven; but if not, the poor little thing will soon wish the burial instead of marriage service had been read over her to-night. I trust the child may never find out that a tolling bell is sweeter than a wedding peal. You found my Baedeker?"

"Yes, in the mill where you left it a week ago."

"I must look out one or two points in it, and the air is so deliciously sweet I think I shall stay a while in the garden on this last Dingle day, unless you need me to help you."

"There is nothing for you to do inside; everything is ready."

"Ma-Lila, you have been crying! What makes you so nervous? You are trembling."

"Oh, I feel upset! Leaving Robert's lonely grave, and all."

The girl stooped, and kissed her cheek.

"It seems very selfish to ask you to leave a place so dear to you; but I hope God will begin to pity me at last, and call me soon where I shall trouble no one any more. Then——"

Mrs. Mitchell laid the lilies on her lips to close them.

"Hush, my baby—hush! I am screwed up now like a frazzled fiddle-string, and if you give another twist I shall just go to pieces."

Taking the flower-laden hat, she placed it with the lilies on the step, and turned toward the dairy.

Baedeker in hand, Eglah moved away, but as she neared the arbor she looked back over her shoulder and called:

"Little mother, when Dorcas brings the clothes she kept to flute, please call me. I ought to finish packing my trunk by one o'clock. Mr. Boynton says the baggage should be at the station not later than five o'clock, and you know we have to shake hands with all the plantation folks at four. Where are you going?"

"Only to the spring house for the cream I promised Minna for charlotte-russe. I set the jug there to cool."

"Let me bring it. You will wear yourself out."

"As if you knew morning's cream from that two days old! Go read your book."

She sped toward the dairy like a running bird and though she did not turn her head, the black eyes were busy. In the shelter of the spring house she fell on her knees beside pans and bowls and with streaming eyes prayed that after the battle perpetual peace might come.

Under the canopy of the mimosa Eglah passed, seated herself on the bench, and opened the

Baedeker. Through the lace meshes of the foliage filtered sunshine, dappling her mourning gown with gold, quivering in the waves of her hair, and after a while she pushed the book aside, laid her head back against the trunk of the tree, and her long, silky lashes touched her cheeks.

Mr. Herriott's glowing, hungry eyes watched every movement, noted the outline of the full white throat, the listless drooping of the hands at her side, the sad, proud curve of sensitive lips closed on ceaseless pain that no complaint could adequately voice. He was unable to bear any longer the look of patient hopelessness that each moment stabbed his heart. At the thought that this was possibly his last sight of her, that in obedience to his harsh dictates she was passing forever out of his life, a wave of invincible protest surged over him, and before its passionate fury pride, resolutions, his pledges of renunciation vanished. The longing of many years seized, mastered him. In the sight of God and man she was his. He would possess his own. With a quick, noiseless stride he crossed the narrow space that separated them, and entered the arch. His shadow was thrown forward, and she lifted her eyes.

For an instant, a bewildered expression drifted over her countenance, then her features settled into a marble mask. Her eyes shone suddenly with a jewel gleam, as when a lamp flashes over the face of a gem; her lids drooped, and she rose.

They stood only a few feet apart, a little belt of white verbena fluttering flags of truce between them. His bronze face locked, his eager grey eyes starred with the glint of battle probed hers for an instant; she calmly defiant, colorless as the jasmine on her breast.

He held out his hand.

"Eglah!" His voice was a passionate appeal.

She interlaced and clasped her own fingers, her hands hanging in front of her.

"Mr. Herriott, I am very glad you have reached home safely. I congratulate you upon escaping the dangers of your Arctic journey."

"You are not surprised to see me in the United States?"

"Not at all. I happened to call at Calvary House recently, and accidentally I saw and heard you talking in the cloister."

"You were so near, so near—yet gave me no intimation of your presence?"

"I have studied and learned thoroughly the lesson you selected and set for me; you wished to avoid me. My schooling was effectual, and I was glad to gratify you."

"When I landed I went first to Calvary House with a suffering human wreck whom I promised ——"

"Why trouble yourself to explain what concerns only you and your sick friend? Your reasons I have neither the right to ask, nor any desire to hear."

"At least you will permit me to thank you for all your gracious kindness to Amos Lea. He tells me you saved his life, and thereby I am far more your debtor than is the poor old man."

"Never my debtor. Amos and I understand each other, and I was glad to help take care of him. You owe me absolutely nothing but the fulfilment of your own unsolicited pledges."

"Why do you suppose I came here?"

"Why—indeed; when you pressed on my acceptance the promise that my 'future should be spared your shadow'? I presume you came from a chivalric sense of imaginary duty, or possibly a courteous semi-recognition of what you may have conjectured I might regard as my legal claims. I have absolutely none of any kind, along any lines. Having renounced and banished me, perhaps you wished to assure yourself that the condemned is at least not needy in exile? By what right could you expect me—disowned, rejected, scorned—to desire ever to see again a man whom once I trusted, almost as I did my God? To whom I fled as sole refuge from the infamy that threatened one supreme in my life, and when like a frantic child I clung to him, believing he loved me, he shook me off, as if a worm crawled on his hand. After the whirlwind passed, after the black veil of death mercifully interposed and hid us from ruin, I came to my senses—I realized the magnitude of my error. My ideal world had crumbled, you alone survived the wreck; I honored you for your loyalty to the innocent man in his grave, and God knows I have rejoiced that you denied my prayer, that you refused to perjure yourself, but—your cruel words sank deep. While I could not blame you, my punishment has been as severe as I deserved, as keenly mortifying as you intended and desired. In my helplessness and sorrow you have humiliated me by every means at your command, made me a target for derision and for slander. Three long, sad years, without a line. Yet you found a way to write to your gardener."

"Yes, I knew Amos loved me. You did not."

"As you felt assured of that fact, I fail to understand why you have come."

"Not from the chivalric motives you have done me the honor to impute to me. I am no walking code of priggish courtesy; I am merely a man who knows exactly what he wants most, and, missing that, deceives himself with nothing less. I am here to-day solely to see, at least once more, the face that has held my heart in bondage since you were a child. To intrude upon you

was not my purpose, and I did not intend to violate my self-imposed limit of absolute silence, but I could not resist the longing to look into your eyes, to hear your voice; and I thought I was strong enough to watch you a little while, without your knowledge, and go away forever, leaving you in peace. I might have known better. The sight of you shivered my own compact. I have suffered far more than you, and if my harshness wounded you beyond forgiveness, remember, oh, remember, how long I have loved you!"

"I can remember only that your last spoken words were a vehement request that I should forget you."

Her lower lip fluttered, and she caught it between her teeth.

"Yes, but if farewell utterances are inexorably binding, you must pardon me if I remind you of yours. All through the gloom and bitterness of our separation a sacred, sweet voice has sounded in my ears the precious words of promise you whispered when your arms clasped my neck, and your dear face lay on my heart: 'You will never be out of my life—my own Mr. Noel.'"

A vivid rose stole into her cheeks, and she leaned farther back to increase the space between them.

"I had not then received my text-book—had not learned the lesson assigned. After that, you wrote your final mandate: 'My freedom was complete,' and you urged me to use it in any way most 'conducive to the happiness so unwisely imperilled' by my rash marriage. I shall endeavor to follow your counsel, and if you had waited one day later, you would have been spared this unpleasant duty-visit. I go away to-night, and never again shall you be annoyed by even hearing of me. Mr. Herriott, in spite of all your wrongs, at the last you trusted your name to my keeping. I have indeed held it 'sacred as the Grail,' and now I return it to you as stainless as when you gave it. I am leaving America to find an obscure resting-place in a strange land where I shall be known only by the name to which I was born; and, once across the ocean, I can escape, perhaps, the social gibbet from which dangle, deservedly, 'women with histories.' I have no need of your name, noble though it is, to help me keep my oath to God. Divorce I hold a shameful blot on true womanhood, a menace to domestic and national morality, an insult to the Lord. Human law can no more annul my marriage than my baptismal vow; neither was made to man; both stand on that divine record only death can erase; they are locked among the sacraments of God, *'so long as ye both shall live.'* Your freedom is as unconditional as you may wish, and that court of release which you commended to me, is equally open to you."

The pulse in her lovely throat throbbed violently, and watching her lift one hand there with the old childish effort to loosen the stricture, his lips tightened and he stepped closer.

"And if I decline to accept, to permit your renunciation of my name, which is more sacred since you have worn it? To make a football of God's statute is as little my purpose as is yours. Sometimes I have cheated myself with the forlorn hope that absence might possibly help me to accomplish that which long association failed to bring me. After years of suffering, of sombre retrospection, I hope I have come back less a Tartar than when we parted. Then I surrendered you entirely—absolutely. I do so still. I claim no more rights or privileges than I possessed before that marriage ceremony made you nominally mine; but if your great pity for the lonely man who never loved any other woman can possibly grow into a deeper feeling, will you try to forgive my harshness that dreadful night? Knowing what you are to me, will you come to me?"

"Come to you who repudiated me! By what right dare you suppose, expect——"

"I have no right even to hope, but my hungry heart dares, and will dare desperate chances."

"You told me your confidence was dead as your love. The scar of that brand can never heal."

"Yes, I said many bitter, cruel things in the hot rage of my disappointment, that I should be glad to forget. In extenuation, you must remember that you beckoned me unexpectedly to heaven, and when I was thrust out the crash unhinged me. It was for your own sake I asked you to put me out of your life; to save you from the horrible martyrdom of unloving wifehood, from dragging through life the ball and chain of a galling, intolerable tie. To put you out of mine I knew was as impossible in future years as I had found it in the past. In my farewell note I considered your peace of mind, not my own. If you could realize all you are to me, perhaps you might understand better what that voluntary surrender of your precious self cost me, when, by the law of God and of man, you belonged to me."

She had avoided meeting his eyes; the strain set her lips to quivering, increased the strangling grip on her throat, and unconsciously her fingers clutched and wrung one another.

"After three years of dreary absence you have not even a friendly hand to offer to the man who has carried you in his heart ever since you wore muslin aprons—who holds you the one love of his life?"

"Mr. Herriott, you ceased to love me when you ceased to trust me, else all these years——"

She paused, warned by the treacherous quiver in her voice. He stood quite still, and after a moment opened his arms.

"My sweetheart, will you try me? Will you grant me the privilege of convincing you?"

She shook her head. Something in his eyes dazzled her, and an alarming pallor overspread her

face, blanching her lips.

"If you have found happiness in forgetting and excluding me entirely from your life and your future, I cannot complain that you followed my counsel; but I will accept that positive assurance only from your own truthful lips. Your peace of mind is more to me than my own. Have you shut me out of your heart forever?"

She tried to move aside, to pass him, but he barred her escape with an outstretched arm, and she shrank back.

"If you care no more for me now than when I left you, I have no alternative but to live alone; and I will never again intrude, never annoy you by the sight of my face. I will not accept compassion, or friendly sympathy. All—or none. I want love—love that brings a pure woman gladly to her husband's breast. Once you took some solemn vows for me, invoking the presence of the Lord you worship. Now, trusting you implicitly, knowing you will not deceive me, I must ask you to give me one final pledge. If you cannot love me as I wish—if your heart, your whole heart will never belong to me—then, calling God to witness the truth of your words, look me straight in the eyes and tell me so."

She trembled, shut her eyes, and, as a rich red rushed into her white cheeks, she covered her face with her hands.

A gust of wind shook the mimosa, and on her bowed head drifted the pink silk filaments, powdering her brown coil and puffs.

Very gently Mr. Herriott took the trembling little hands, kissed the palms, and, drawing her slowly, tenderly toward him, lifted her arms to his neck, holding them there.

With a low, broken cry she surrendered.

"Mr. Noel, you have broken my heart."

He waited to steady his voice.

"My proud darling, there seemed no other way. When it heals, please God, I shall have my throne inside."

With her face hidden on his shoulder, he held her close, his cheek against her hair, and each knew how fiercely the heart of the other throbbed. After some moments, he tightened the arm clasping her waist, and his deep, passionately tender tone caressed like a velvet glove.

"I don't know how many years I have longed for the touch of your lips. Even as a child you never allowed me to kiss you; and, except your father, I am sure no man ever has. My sweetheart, if indeed you are learning to love me, can you, will you give me now what I want—my own wife's pure lips?"

She crimsoned to the tips of her small ears, and clung to him, not daring to meet his eyes.

"One memorable night, when two of my dogs froze at my feet, I sat under the lee of my sledge, waiting for a gale of sleet to howl itself to rest. I fell asleep and had a heavenly dream, in which you came and kissed me."

"Mr. Herriott, you cannot love me now as you did before that horrible journey on the cars when your words seemed to scorch—brand me. I am afraid—I am afraid——"

He felt her tremble.

"My darling, I love you infinitely more. You were never so sacred, so dear as to-day. Of what can you feel afraid now? In my dream you were more generous. I can take, but I prefer to receive the blessed seal I hope you will give me, as holy assurance that you are entirely my own."

Shyly she turned her flushed face towards his, one hand, quivering like a frightened bird, softly drew his brown cheek closer, and the proud, beautiful, vestal lips nestled and clung to her husband's.

Sitting beside her on the bench, he said, as his brilliant, happy eyes studied her face:

"Will you please tell me when you began really to care for me?"

"What can that matter now? Do not make me look back into shadows I wish to forget. All our light shines ahead."

"I should like to fix the date of my coronation, that I may compute accurately my despotic reign from the hour I entered into possession of my kingdom. Tell me, sweetheart; why should you shrink?"

"Do you recall that last morning at home, when you came from the beach followed by the dogs? Seeing me at the window, you took off your cap and waved it. As I looked down at you then, something strange seemed suddenly to stir and wake up and tremble in my heart. I did not understand; it was a new feeling, and I was so wounded and tortured over many things I could not analyze it; supposed it a part of my punishment. I had seen you look better. Your boating suit and full evening dress were certainly more becoming, but in some unaccountable, extraordinary way that grey cap wave, and the peculiar expression I had never before seen in your eyes,

brought you closer to me than you had ever been. When I sat alone in your smoking-room and saw the strapped trunks and your fur overcoat—like a coffin and a pall—a terribly bitter wave rolled over me at the thought of giving you up. I began to be jealous of Amos, and I envied the dear old dogs the tender caress of your stroking hand. At the last you coldly said good-bye; but when you caught, strained me against you, I found out what it all meant. I knew then that woman's heritage of sorrow was mine, and that my heart followed you into Polar night. The ache that began that day at Greyledge grew and tortured me until—I felt your arms around me once more."

He lifted her left hand and kissed it, pressing the ring against his face.

"Why did not you tell me? I should have been spared so much brutal bitterness of feeling."

"It was impossible after all the harsh, cruel things you had deemed it your duty to say to me, and you would have scouted such a sudden change of feeling as inconceivable, as absurd. The strangeness of the revelation overwhelmed, frightened me; I was more astonished than you would have been. Tell you? Mr. Noel, I would sooner have gone to the stake."

"Your silence tied me to one. Men are perverse devils. I hated the sight of this wedding ring; I longed to melt it in a crucible in my laboratory. You will never understand the storm that raged within me that day on the train when you hummed Kücken and laid the baby on your breast. Every time you lifted your hand and patted the poor little creature, that gold band danced and flashed in my eyes like a mocking imp. But your ring had its innings. After a year my temper cooled. Day and night I found myself drifting back more hopelessly to you; and always before me your little white hand flashed that circle—signet of my ownership—because you had clung to it and declared 'it was the badge of your loyalty.' I saw it in the blue gulfs of icebergs, in the wonderful orange radiance of auroral arches, in the glare of low, tired suns that could not set, in the unearthly lustre of moons holding vigil over a silent desert wrapped in its shroud of ice, and in the ghostly phosphorescence of snow-mantled glaciers. Always, everywhere, that dear ringed hand beckoned like a beacon. I knew you did not love me; I was grimly sure you never would; but the assurance that no other man could ever claim lips denied to me, that you would proudly hold and keep your precious self sacred to one whose name you bore, comforted me."

He took her face in his palms, bending close his handsome head, and a mist dimmed the sparkle in his magnetic eyes.

"My darling, the coldest night I ever spent, when lost on the 'Great Ice,' where a snow-storm obliterated sledge tracks and death seemed inevitable, the remembered touch of your dear arms clinging around my neck, the pressure of your face on my breast, thrilled my heart, fired my blood, and warmed my freezing body. I missed the Pole; I nearly lost my life; but, ah, thank God, better than either, more precious than all, I have found at last, and I own the pure heart of my wife."

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