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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WAYFARERS ***



Her cousin's arms were at last around her in welcome

THE WAYFARERS

BY

MARY STEWART CUTTING

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LITTLE STORIES OF MARRIED LIFE, ETC.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALICE BARBER STEPHENS

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THE WAYFARERS

CHAPTER ONE

There is no sight more uninspiring than a ferry-boat crowded with human beings at a quarter of six o'clock in the evening, when the great homeward rush from the offices and commercial houses sets in. At that time, although there are some returning shoppers and women type-writers and clerks, the larger number of the passengers are men, sitting in slanting rows to catch the light on the evening paper, or wedged in an upright mass at the forward end of the boat. It is noticeable that, with a few exceptions, those who have gone forth in the morning distinct individuals, well dressed, freshly shaven, with clean linen, an animated manner, a brisk step, and an eager-eyed disposition toward the labors of the day, seem, as they return at night, to be only component parts of a shabby crowd in indistinguishable apparel, and worn to a uniform dullness not only of appearance but of attitude and expression. The hard day's work is over, but the rest is not yet attained. We all know that between the darkness and the dawn comes the period when vitality is at its lowest ebb, and in all transition periods there is a subtle withdrawing of the old force before the new fills its place. In that temporary collapse in the daily adjustment between two lives, the business and the domestic, many a man with overwrought brain and tired body feels that what he has been looking forward to as a happy rest appears to him now momentarily

as an unavoidable and wearying need for further effort. The demand upon him varies in kind, but it is still there.

Men in a mass are neither beautiful nor impressive to look at in the modern black or sad-colored raiment of every-day custom, and it is difficult, as the eyes rest on the faces in these commonplace rows, to realize the space which love inevitably fills in these lives, so far apart from romance do they seem, forgetful as we are of the worn truth that romance is a flowering weed which grows in any soil. For three fourths of these men some woman waits. Those dull eyes can gleam, those set lips can kiss; these be heroes, handsome men, arbiters of destiny! There is positive grotesqueness in the idea, seen in this obliterating haze of fatigue that so maliciously dwarfs and slurs. That man over there with the long upper lip and closed lids has an episode in his middle-aged existence to match any in the annals of fiction. That other beside him, short, fat, with kind eyes and a stubby brown beard, is the sum of all that is good and beautiful to the wife for whom his homecoming continues to be the poignant event of the day. This man with the long, thin face is a modern martyr working himself to death for his family; this one was in the newspapers last week in a connection best not remembered. This one—you would pick him out at once from among the rest—is to be married to-morrow. This man, and this, and this, while presently unconscious of the great law, are still living under it. Not only to youth is the promise given; it becomes a larger and more vital thing as the opportunities of life increase, further spreading in its fostering of good or evil—a thread so deeply interwoven on the under side of the fabric that we forget to look for it.

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In every case is a character to be made or marred, not only by the large molding, but by the infinitesimal touches of that love whose influence we conventionally limit to young and unmarried persons—while knowing, whether we acknowledge it or not, that it is the one eternally powerful element in life.

Even in a far-off reflex action, this is shown on the ferry-boat in the fact that when one of this blended concourse of men meets a woman he instantly regains an individuality; he pulls himself together, his eyes become bright, his manner concentrated, his clothes set well on him. He is no longer one of the crowd, but himself.

Tireless youth may achieve the same individual effect, or unusual personal beauty, or great happiness, or the possession of a dominant idea. A number of people, as they came forward on the boat, turned to look back at two men sitting by the narrow passageway, who in the midst of the general indifference were talking in a low tone, with obviously intense earnestness. Those who looked once usually turned a second time to gaze on the face of one.

Many a man who has an upright nature and a good disposition fails to show these facts patently to the casual observer. To Justin Alexander had been given the grace of a singularly attractive countenance. He was of a fair complexion, with light hair, a good nose slightly aquiline, and a well-shaped mouth and chin; but his charm was irrespective of feature. No one could look at him and not know him to be a man of sweet and fine honor. The gaze of his keen blue eyes—clear, though not very large—carried conviction to whomsoever it rested on that a clean and honest soul dwelt therein. Although he did not in the least realize it, this had been one of the greatest factors in any success that he had ever had, joined as it was to good judgment and great physical energy. Everyone liked him, not for what he said or did, but for what he was, and for the encouragement of his bright glance, which had a convincing and magnetic quality in it. He talked intelligently and well, although not a great deal, and among the many people who were drawn toward him a corresponding liking on his part was easily inferred. Yet he was, in fact, innately although dumbly critical; a reticent man as to his own thoughts and opinions, he took an inward measurement of persons and circumstances often the very reverse of what was supposed. This attitude of his was in no sense of the word hypocritical, it came instead from a constitutional dislike of voicing his innermost feelings. It somehow hurt him to acknowledge defects in others, and he had also an impersonal sense of justice which allowed for good qualities in those who were uncongenial to him; he did not really like the man who sat beside him, and with whom he had the prospect of being intimately associated, but even his wife had hardly divined this; certainly Joseph Leverich himself, large, jovial, and shrewd-eyed, would have been the last to suspect it.

6

“The gist of the matter is this, Alexander,” he was saying, as he hit one hand heavily with the large forefinger of the other, “we want a man capable not only of overseeing the works,—Harker understands that pretty well,—but of managing the real business of the factory and representing it with business men; neither Foster nor I can attend to it—Great Scott, I wish we could! We haven’t the time. We bought the whole outfit a couple of years ago; it’s only one of twenty other irons we have in the fire.”

7

“I know that your interests are large,” said Alexander, as Leverich paused.

“The great drawback to having large interests is that you have to delegate so much of the management to others. When we took up this, it ran itself, after a fashion; but since that a dozen other people are making the same thing—of course, with slight variations, but practically the same thing. Patents don’t really protect you much. Now we want our machine pushed; but neither Foster nor I, for different reasons, can do this. The fact is, we don’t want to appear at all. And we’ve had our eye on you for some time.”

“This is news to me,” said Alexander.

“Now the control of the factory has to be settled suddenly, out of hand; somebody has got to take hold. So we make you the offer. We will deposit fifty thousand to your credit, to be used as

working capital—you can't branch out with less; you've got to be able to work to advantage. The days have gone when a business could be set going on a couple of thousand and worked up with industry and frugality, as the copy-books say, into the millions. Small concerns nowadays go to the wall—and serve 'em right, I say; only fools believe in success without money. We'll see to your backing! Of course, the interest will be paid out of the business, you don't undertake it individually. At the end of two years more we ought to have a big thing."

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"And if we don't?" said Alexander.

The other's dim gooseberry eyes suddenly flashed. "If you think we will not, you are not the man we want—he's got to have the courage of his convictions to be worth his salt. But you can't put me off this way—I know you. Take up the project or leave it—I say this, but in reality you can't leave it, and you know it. A man doesn't get a chance like this twice. Hamilton came to us the other day for the position, and we refused him, although he had capital and we wouldn't have had to advance a cent of the money we're willing to put up for you."

"But why are you willing to?" Justin looked with his bright eyes at the other.

"Because you are the man we want!" Leverich leaned forward eagerly, and shifted his large frame so as to put each muscle into an easier position. "Don't let's go over that old ground again. You've had just the experience in the old company that we need; but it's your wide acquaintance that tells, and it's that that we're willing to buy. We believe you can make a market for our goods."

"It is an important step," said the other thoughtfully, "to leave a certainty for an uncertainty—not that I should regard it as an uncertainty if I took it," he added, with a smile.

"I know it's hard to break away and start out for yourself when you have a family; lots of men go all their lives in a rut because they haven't the courage to take the plunge. But you don't want to work for somebody else all your life; you don't want to feel that you're wasting all your best years. By and by it will be too late. And a growing family takes more money each year, instead of less—you've got to think of that, too. It's a terrible thing to be always cramped, and know there's no way out of it in this world."

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"You don't need to tell me all this, Leverich," said Justin coolly.

"No, I know I don't; but I want you to realize that you have your chance now—one in a million. I'm sorry to hurry you, but you see the way we're fixed. Say the word now! Get it off your mind and you'll sleep easier. I know what your word is—as good as your bond. *I'd* take it! You can give any formal decision later."

Justin still smiled, but he shook his head; though capable of quick decision when necessary, it was yet impossible to hurry him; his actions in every case depended on his own thought, and gained no volition from outside influences, which might indeed retard but could never compel. Virtually he had concluded to accept Leverich's offer, but he would take his own time about saying so; he felt the haste of the other man to be somewhat of an offense against decency.

"Well!" Leverich shrugged his heavy shoulders at the bright impenetrableness that was like a shining armor. "We said we'd give you until Wednesday, so of course we will. We will bring the books around to-night anyway, and go over them, as we planned; you can't afford to lose any time. And talk to your wife about it, she's a sensible woman—and one who longs, like all the rest of 'em, for more than she's got," he added to himself, with cynical satisfaction.

"Martin is watching us now," he continued, waving his hand over toward the other side of the boat, where a slight, insignificant-looking man with small features and a large, bulging forehead lifted his hand in an answering gesture. "You'd never think, to look at him, that he was what he is; he has more brains in his little finger than I have in my whole head." Leverich spoke with evident sincerity. "I'm just a plain man of business, but Foster's a genius. He fixed on you from the start. Hello, we're 'most in already."

10

The crowd from the rear cabin had begun to push through the passageway and surge to the front of the boat, which was still some distance from the dock. The man next them folded up his paper, and Justin and Leverich rose mechanically and stood amid the throng, which became more and more compact every moment.

Suddenly both men started as they looked back at the fresh accessions to the crowd, and pushed sideways, falling behind a little to get in line with a tall and slender young woman with pink roses in a black hat, and a dotted veil that emphasized her rich coloring. She raised her head as a voice beside her said:

"Good evening, Mrs. Alexander!"

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Leverich? How do you do? I haven't met a soul I knew on the boat until this moment, and now I see six people. Oh, Justin!" She had faced around as a hand was laid on her arm, and stood looking up at him with happily surprised eyes, while he smiled back at her with a slight flush on his own cheek. "I was looking for you all the time," she said.

The sudden and unexpected meeting of husband and wife has a singular element in it—it is somewhat like unconsciously approaching a mirror in which one views a stranger who turns out to be one's self. That swift and impersonal view gives an impression as a whole that can be reached in no other way. Lois Alexander noticed at once that her husband's clothes needed brushing, and that the velvet collar of his overcoat was worn at the edges—she had hardly seen the coat this year except as he was putting it on or taking it off. It gave her a slight shock to see

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that the tired lines around his eyes made his face look older than she was accustomed to think of it. He, for his part, experienced the same slight shock in looking at her; he saw the little imperfections in her face, and the roses in her hat appeared to him perhaps too pink and girlish. Yet through all this there was an indescribable thrill of happy possession and loving admiration of each other, touchingly sweet, and all the tenderer for the hint of passing years. Among all the men around, Justin was the king; among all women, she was the most desirable.

After the expected sensations of the usual home greeting and the accustomed kiss, it gave a spice to intimacy to meet perforce as strangers. She leaned partly against him as she talked to Mr. Leverich, and he pressed her arm with his strong fingers under cover of her cloak and made the color come and go in her cheek; her eyes mutely implored him to stop, and he enjoyed her confusion. Husband and wife looked well together, in a certain vitality of movement and expression common to both which made others instinctively turn to observe them.

"I have been trying to discover my husband all the way across," she complained to Leverich. "I was sure that he was on this boat. Why didn't you look out for me, Justin?"

12

"You didn't say you were going in town to-day," he expostulated.

"How often have I told you to look out for me? I am likely to go in at any time. I had to get some things for the children. Have you—have you seen anyone to-day?" She spoke disconnectedly, as conscious as a girl of the disconcerting pressure on her arm.

"No—oh, yes; I saw Eugene Larue this morning, he's back from the other side."

"Did he say when he would be out?"

"No."

"Did you ask him?"

"No. The fact is, Lois, I only saw him for a moment and I never thought about it."

"Oh, it doesn't make any difference. I wanted to speak to you about Theodosia; I've had a letter, and she's coming. We are going to have a young lady as a visitor this winter," she added formally in explanation to Mr. Leverich, who still stood at her elbow. "She's coming up North to study music; she's very pretty, I believe, and clever."

"A relation?" hazarded Mr. Leverich.

"Yes; she's a young cousin of mine—I haven't seen her since she was a child. It will be so pleasant to have a girl in the house."

"You like company," he returned approvingly, "my wife does, too; we always have a houseful. She says I show off better when we have visitors—can't let my angry passions rise. By the way, Alexander, what time shall I bring the books over to-night?"

Lois Alexander's startled, questioning glance sought her husband's, and his gave a gravely confidential assent before he answered:

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"Any time you say."

"Will eight o'clock be too early?"

"No, that will suit me very well."

"Well, good-by!" He took off his hat in farewell to Lois, and disappeared in the crowd, as his broad shoulders forced a sinuous passage through the throng.

"How are the children?" Justin asked his wife.

"They're all right." She paused, and then said: "If you are to look over those books, I suppose we can't go to the Calenders' to-night."

"No." The dark line of the pier struck athwart the dusky light and divided the windows in two. "At least, I cannot, but there's no reason why you shouldn't go."

"You know that I will not go without you."

"Other women do."

"Well, I will not."

"What a foolish girl!" His tone was fond. "Then—*take* care!" The boat had bumped into the dock; in the struggling press of the stampeding crowd, Lois clung to her husband's arm and he strove to ward off the crush from her. When they were at last over the gang-plank, joining in the hurrying, straggling procession toward the train, he looked at her with tender solicitude.

"You shouldn't come out on the boat so late as this. Was it too much for you?"

"Oh, no, no! I do this alone lots of times." She felt so vividly happy that her breathlessness was hardly an annoyance as they dodged in front of the incoming drays of another boat and waved aside the impeding newsboys crying the evening papers.

14

She foresaw that they would be separated in the train, and found voice enough to whisper to him:

"Are you to decide to-night?"

"I have virtually decided now."

"To accept?"

"Yes."

Her breath came suddenly; with the monosyllable an electric wave had set the pulses of both tingling. The spoken word had not failed of its wonted power; it had at this moment opened a gate hitherto closed. Both husband and wife felt their feet at last set on the great highroad of modern romance, the road to wealth, along which ride daily, as of old, knights in armor, duly caparisoned, with shield and spear, bent, not on deeds of chivalry, but on one glittering quest—a grim pathway, veiled by a golden haze.

CHAPTER TWO

15

It was a mighty hour. Justin, sitting by the open window with his head upon his hand, looking out into the night, saw but dimly the pale shining of the familiar stars, in the search for the rising star of his own future. It was far on in the small hours, and he had not yet slept, although he had come up-stairs at twelve o'clock with the firm intention of undressing and going to bed at once. He had, instead, dropped down into the wicker chair in the unlighted sitting-room to think for a few moments—and a few moments—and a few moments more.

The dining-table which he had left was filled with sheets of paper covered with fine figures, and his mind at first continually reverted to them, multiplying, subtracting, and correcting with keen facility, and with infinitesimal changes in the final result, which he knew, notwithstanding, could be only approximate, no matter how painstakingly his fancy strove to render it exact.

After a while, however, other thoughts asserted themselves. The vast influences of the night were around him as from the deep places of the universe—the depth of dusky gloom, the depth of silence. The window looked out over a garden, but in this dusky gloom it had lost the semblance of earth and seemed, instead, but the under part of an enveloping cloud in which he was the only breathing human life. The vague dark branches of the trees waving across the lesser darkness spoke of even deeper mystery in their mute witness to that breath from the unseen which moved them.

16

It was not the problem of the universe of which all this spoke to Justin Alexander, though as such it had been part and parcel of his questioning youth. The days when he might have sung with Omar were gone with those speculative midnight hours, the foregathering with death, the conscious search for higher meanings, the effort to solve the unknowable; whatever philosophy was evolved from those journeys into the dark was labeled and put away on a remote shelf, where the mind occasionally reverted to it with a sigh of thoughtful possession, but for which there was no longer any daily use. There was even a chance that on bringing the precious package out into the modern daylight it might be found to have changed its color entirely.

The problem of his own life was what this hour held in its shifting hold for Justin, the wavering veiled outlines on which he gazed seemed to prefigure the uncertain boundaries of his own future. To a man who has a family, the leaving of a certain occupation for an uncertain one, even though it promise much, is like taking a leap off into space.

The opportunity for which he had been longing indefinitely any time for six years back had come at last, but it had brought with it at this moment a strange and unanticipated sadness, after the absorbing calculations of the evening; the natural buoyancy of a mind pleased with a new undertaking and eager for power had given place to a weight of responsibility and foreboding. How much, and how much, and yet how much, depended on his efforts! He must not, could not, fail; and yet, when he had succeeded, what would success bring him individually that he had not now? Where would be his real and vital compensation? The toil of years piled up before him, with the pain of satisfied ambition at the end of it.

17

In the loneliness of the hour the loneliness of his soul stood confessed before him. He yearned at the moment unutterably, and with a mighty longing, for another to be as one with that soul in the comprehension of mood and aim and means and accomplishment which is in itself the deepest sympathy. His wife—she was very sweet, she was very beloved, but her utmost understanding of this life of his was the conscious effort of one who lived in an alien sphere. His children—he loved them fondly, but the responsibility of their future years weighed upon him; as long as he could foresee, the eyes of all would still wait upon him in his rôle of provider—neither in body nor in spirit could he ever again have the rest of freedom.

Then there came to him, swiftly and inexplicably, and in spite of the inner knowledge of true love for the bonds that held him, a wild desire for the untrammelled liberty of his boyish days. If he could take his fishing-rod and tramp off through the woods by himself, or lie on a bank under the green trees and dabble his bare feet in the brown pools of the brook that flowed beneath the bank, with none to look for him or question why, and have neither yesterday nor to-morrow to hamper him, but only the joy of living! To saunter back to the house late in the warm afternoon with a string of fish over his shoulder and a book under his arm! He knew how the cold draught of buttermilk tasted after the long and dusty walk, when he dipped it up with a china cup out of the stone crock on the wooden bench in the cool cellar. Oh, the happy, careless day!

18

The primeval, savage spirit of man awoke now and grew uppermost in him to escape from civilization and wander as he would upon the brown earth, without let or hindrance! In those far-

off wilds where men tracked beasts to their lair he might leave his footsteps in the hot sands also, and joy in the fierce delight of killing. He had lost all connection now with his environment. The air that blew down from the hills and touched his cheek might have come over the burning desert, or have been freighted with the warm salt spray from wide tropical seas on which he sailed, never to return. Dark and darker thoughts possessed him now. His roaming fancy—

“Are you up still?”

Justin started—it was the voice of his wife. He came back to the familiar region of warm human love with a glad bound of relief so instantaneous that he had not even shame for his abnormal wanderings; they became already as though they had never been as he answered:

“Yes; I couldn’t have slept if I had gone to bed.”

“But you’re all cold sitting by that window, with the night air blowing in on you!”

Her hands had found out that fact in the darkness as they closed around his neck.

“Shut the window at once! You’re so imprudent. You must remember that it isn’t summer now.”

She lent herself to his embrace for a moment.

“Do you know how late it is?”

“No, and I don’t want to. Let’s sit here together for a little while, I’m unspeakably wide awake! I’ll make up a little fire for a few minutes and we’ll have a midnight talk.”

19

She laughed with evident pleasure. “Well!”

He took a match out of his pocket and, kneeling down on the hearth, lighted the small pine logs which were piled up there. A sudden flame brought into bold relief his sinewy frame and clear-cut features as he leaned forward—the light, waving hair pushed upward, and the strong set mouth and chin. His wife drew a low chair forward by him and put out her bare feet in their pink Turkish slippers to catch the warmth. When he turned, the flame had caught her also in its flaring light, and rose and wavered and fell around her.

It used to be the fashion in the old story-books to represent the parents of even the youngest infant as people of mature age and didactic wisdom; to be a mother was to be removed forever from the precincts of social vanities or young and active living. One can find in the books of fifty years ago the picture of a woman, austere middle-aged, with banded hair, a cap, a long nose, and a kerchief, dispensing advice to abnormally small children in trousers and pinafores who cluster at her knees. Lois Alexander would have been a revelation to that epoch; with her white lace-frilled draperies wrapped around her and her pink-slippered feet, she might have served as a distinctly modern illustration of youthful motherhood.

She was not very tall, but gave the effect of height in her bearing. Her form was beautifully rounded and her throat and neck were of a soft whiteness peculiarly their own. Everything about her was richly colored—her lips, her cheeks, her blue eyes, which had a certain rayed starriness in them, and her brown hair, which, when it lay, as now, unfastened, fell in large loose curls upon her bosom. Her usual expression was somewhat pensive and absorbed, as if she were thinking of herself; but when she smiled she seemed to think only of you.

20

She put a soft detaining hand on his shoulder as he bent forward watching the blaze in a new absorption.

“I know you’re thinking of the new venture.”

“Yes; it’s a good deal to think of.”

“I should say so!” She caught her breath admiringly. “I listened to you and those men talking to-night until I couldn’t stand it a moment longer. I should think those figures would drive you crazy!”

“They won’t drive me crazy if I can make them come out as I wish,” said Justin emphatically.

“But I thought it was all settled that you *could!*”

“Oh, yes—on paper. Everything looks all right there—and it shall be, too! But when you get to working things out in real life you must allow for differences. I know the machine is good—I don’t take any chances on that, as I told you before; but there are new machines put on the market all the time to compete with; we haven’t a monopoly.”

“Well, you can make your prices lower than the others,” she suggested brightly.

“Oh, yes, of course,” he explained with patience, “but if we put prices too low there’s no profit. We may have to do it for a while, though; we’ve got to be seen doing business, even if it’s at a loss. That’s what the fifty thousand’s for—to tide us over just such a time.”

21

“It is a great deal to have to pay back,” she said anxiously, leaning forward to throw a small log on the fire. “I don’t like you to saddle yourself with such a debt. I don’t like it!”

What weighed on him most—the personal care and responsibility—made no impression on her; she had a loyal and wifely faith in his large ability; but the thought of the money, which filled him only with the exhilaration of sufficient capital, made her uneasy. She had all a woman’s horror of debt. What is to a man a very usual and legitimate business resource seemed to her almost a disgrace.

“I wish you could get along without the money.”

"I'm glad enough to have it," he replied. "Rest assured, Lois, if they didn't think me worth it they wouldn't lend it to me—they expect big interest on their investment."

"And is our living to come out of it, too?"

"Oh, yes—until there's an income."

"How much will you take?"

"Oh, no fixed sum—just as little as we can get along with at present. We'll go slowly, Lois, and economize all we can, until we get on our feet."

"Indeed, I'll economize!" She clasped her hands earnestly. "There are only a few things to be bought first; things, you know, that we can't do without. After that we'll need next to nothing. This rug, for instance—it's in rags, I'm ashamed to bring anyone up here—but that won't cost much, and we've *got* to get one for the front hall; it isn't decent. And I'll have to buy the children's winter clothing before it gets too cold. Zaidee needs a new coat. She has such long legs, her last year's coat looks like a ruffle."

"Oh, of course, get what is needed," said the father resignedly. "Some money will have to be spent, necessarily, but make it as little as you can."

She felt the cessation of interest in his tone, and tried to get back her lost ground.

"Ah, don't let's leave the fire yet," she pleaded, as he made a motion to rise. "I want to sit here a few minutes more, and it's going to blaze up so beautifully! It's so seldom that we ever really get a chance to talk together. It seems wonderful that everything is to change in this way. I've hated so to think of you tied to that old treadmill—a man with your capabilities! I knew that if it had not been for the children and for me you would have left the place long ago."

"If it were not for the children and for you I might not be leaving it now," he answered gently.

"Yes, I know. It's been dreadfully hard to make both ends meet lately, I've seen how worried you were. Dear, I don't want to be a drag; I want to be an inspiration. Promise to let me help you all I can."

"You always help me."

"Ah, no, I don't; *I* feel it, though you may not." She paused, and went on again with a tremulous note in her voice: "Justin, I miss you so much sometimes; there are days and days when I feel as if I hadn't seen you at all!"

"You see all there is of me," said Justin tersely. "How many times a year do I go out of an evening without you?"

"Yes, I know that; but when I am alone all day with the children and the servants, I think of so many things that I want to say to you when you come home, and then you are tired, or sleepy, or want to read, and I don't get any chance at all. You *never* ask me anything, or notice when I don't feel well; yesterday I had such a headache I could hardly sit up, and you never noticed. Do you think, Justin, that you could feel ill and I not know it?"

"No, I suppose not," said Justin. "But I'm afraid you'll have another headache to-morrow if you sit up any longer, Lois."

"No, I will not!" She tossed her head gayly, and also tossed away a bright tear that was ready to fall. Her husband hated to see her cry, it filled him with a cold and unreasoning wrath at which she blindly wondered but was forced to accept as a fact. She knew that she had broken up many happy hours by weeping inopportunistly.

She tried to speak evenly as she said: "I didn't mean that to sound as if I were complaining. I think and think how I can make things—different."

She pushed her white, blue-veined feet, in their pink slippers, nearer to the blaze, and he put his hand over them protectingly. Although she had been married for nearly eight years, she had not lost a certain girlish trick of modesty, and blushed sweetly at his action and his gaze.

It was a remarkable thing that while marriage after any term of years seemed as though it could be only an antique and commonplace thing, it still held for them the essence of novelty; they were only beginning to act in the great drama, and not at all sure of their parts in it yet. To live one's own life is a matter of such poignant and absorbing interest that it insensibly creates an individual atmosphere which obscures the large known phenomena of nature.

Lois remembered once looking upon a man who had lost his wife after ten years of wedded happiness, and rather wondering at the pity bestowed upon him. Ten years! Why, it seemed like half a century—life must be nearly over, anyway. She was beginning to realize now, with a sort of wonder, that, as the years lengthened, one's inner limit of youth lengthened also; even after a decade they might still think of themselves as young married people with a future all to come.

The tender proprietorship of Justin's caress was more comforting to Lois than words. They both sat dreamily watching the blue pinnacle of flame as they rose from the red heart of the fire, her arm across his shoulders as he leaned backward, together, yet each with a mind preoccupied with divergent claims.

The fitful light revealed a tiny apartment, half sitting-room, half nursery, crowded with many things, the overflow of a small household. It was not in the least as Lois would have liked it to be, but she always felt that it was only a temporary arrangement. There was hardly space to walk

between the wicker chairs, the sewing-table, and the covered box by the window that served both as a seat and as a receptacle for toys—a doll's cradle and a horse on wheels taking up two of the corners by the window. Across the back of one chair hung a pair of diminutive stockings, and a basket filled with work stood on the table. The utter domesticity of the room was hardly relieved by an unframed engraving of the Madonna della Sedia over the wooden mantelpiece, with a heterogeneous collection of china ornaments, nursery properties, and a silent white clock below it. The other pictures were photographs, more or less the worse for wear, and two colored lithographs pinned to the wall; one of a horse carrying a boy on his back, and the other of a bright blue-and-yellow child feeding ducks. Lying on table and floor were picture-books and a fashion magazine. There was nothing to speak of the spirit but the beautiful flame, a mysterious power which the hand of man had wrested ignorantly from the elements, to burn and leap and soar upon his hearthstone.

25



They both sat dreamily watching the blue pinnacle of flame

Lois had married her husband because of the bright honor and force of character which attracted others, and because of his conquering love for her. She would have felt it impossible for any girl in her senses not to have loved Justin if he wanted her to, although he was the most unconscious of men as to his powers in that way. She had exulted in the thought that when other women were satisfied with mere half-men, her lover was a Saul among his brethren; and she was not deceived in her estimate of him—the honor, the sweetness, the force, the nobility of disposition which made it a pain for him to make note of the defects of those he liked, the love of her—all were there; but she was beginning gradually to find out, after all these years, that inside that shining outer circle of character was a whole world of thought and feeling and preference and habit of which she knew nothing—only as time went on did she begin to perceive the extent of it.

Those disappointing moments when they were not in accord—whole days sometimes dropped out of the week—left a void which no caresses filled. It hurts a woman to be forgotten both before and after she is kissed. Lois had discovered with resentful surprise that her husband was one of those men to whom women, in spite of the companionship of wedlock, are a thing apart, to be mentally left and returned to. Those disappointing moments and days were not the intimation of a transitory feeling, but evidences of a permanent quality that grew instead of lessening. She could hardly believe this, although she felt it, and was continually seeking for disclaimers of what she knew. Barred indefinitely from some larger interest, her efforts to reach her husband on the known lines became more and more trivial, more and more futile. The first years had held a certain floridity of living, of affection, in which one was always striving in some way to keep up the first feelings; everything was more or less upsetting,—marriage, babies, sickness, housekeeping,—years when domestic situations changed their shape daily, an evening together depending on whether the baby slept or waked; an entertainment abroad depending not only on that, but on the event of the servants being in or out, or on the event of having any at all. There were summer afternoons when Lois had wept because her husband had gone to the tennis courts, without her, and days when she had gone with him, after elaborately arranging babies and household matters to that end; when she had kept him waiting while she dressed, and they had started off heated and asunder in the broiling sun to something which she did not enjoy after all, and had kept him from enjoying. It was strange to find that the profession of a wife and mother seemed to imply a contradiction to everything that she had ever been before.

26

The meeting on the boat had brought a dear delight with it, a revivifying warmth which here, in this intimate stillness of the night, was lacking.

When she spoke again it was to say: "When do you take the new place?"

"Next month."

"I am so glad you will be your own master at last! Will you go in on a later train in the mornings, dear?"

27

"I'll take an earlier one."

"But then you'll come out sooner in the afternoon?"

"I'll come out much later."

"Oh, oh!" she sighed, with the prevision of long hours of loneliness for herself.

"At least, you can take more than that miserable two weeks' holiday in the summer."

"My dear girl, I shall probably have no vacation at all. You don't understand; I've got to work."

There was another pause. The fire was burning low, and the room had sunk into partial obscurity. She was the first to speak, as before, conquering anew the tremulousness in her voice:

"Did you hear me say that Theodosia is coming next month?"

"Yes. How long is she to stay?"

"For all winter. She's to study music, you remember?"

"For all winter!" He sat up straight with the emphasis of his words. "Why, where will you put her?"

"Oh, I'll manage that. But I do wish we had a larger house; this is maddening sometimes."

"Perhaps we'll be able to build some day."

"Oh, if we could really have our own house!"

She paused, her imagination leaping forward to that future which is the summit of good to suburban dwellers, when the contracted space of a rented house can be changed for a roomy one honeycombed with impossible closets and lined with hard-wood floors throughout.

"I know exactly how I should furnish it; I saw the loveliest things to-day in town."

Already the thought of brass and mahogany and Oriental rugs, rich in texture and delicious in coloring, filled her mind.

To Lois, an intelligent and practical woman, the possession of money meant the opportunity to buy; the possession of yet more money would mean more opportunity to buy. To Justin, on the other hand, it meant the ability to pay; the comfort of being able to accede, with ease and promptness, to the demands upon him. Like most American husbands in his station, the sum spent upon house and family far exceeded in ratio his own personal expenses. There were a few luxuries which he casually looked forward to enjoying, but beyond this money represented to him pre-eminently further business possibilities, the power to play competently in the great game, with the result of a sufficient provision for his wife and children in case of his death. His heart leaped now at the thought of taking a front rank among the players. If in this next year—

"Do you think I had better buy the new rug when I go to town Friday, or wait until next month?" asked Lois suddenly.

"You had better wait," said Justin, with decision. He rose, and added: "You must go to bed, Lois."

She rose also, in obedience, and he kissed her officially.

"Good night."

"You are not going to sit up later!"

"Just a minute. I want to light the candle and look for something in this paper I forgot to notice earlier."

He loved his wife, but felt, without owning it, that he must stay for a brief space beyond the sound of her voice.

"Now, don't wait another moment, or you'll get cold." He spoke authoritatively. "The fire's almost out."

He had already turned from her, and was sitting down by the dim flicker of the newly lighted candle, absorbed once more in figures, with the newspaper before him. The midnight hour had failed of its inspiration; both experienced the spiritual dearth and fatigue which follows time-worn and trivial conversation.

Lois' pensive eyes were full of a wistful question as she left the room; but after a slight interval she returned with a gliding step and softly placed a fresh log upon the dull red embers of the dying fire, and fanned them noiselessly until a flame leaped out again, holding her white draperies to one side the while, with one long curl falling across her bosom. As her husband looked up, her beautiful self-forgetting smile shone out and became a part of the light around him before she vanished once more through the doorway.

CHAPTER THREE

Theodosia Linden sat in the high-backed, plush-covered seat of the sleeping-car, with her hands

folded in her lap, looking out of the window at the flat landscape as it sped past her. The long green rows of cotton-plants were interspersed with tracts of scrub-oak and pine, dotted here and there with gray cabins, around which negroes, little and big, in scanty garments were grouped to watch the train go by; occasionally it whizzed past a small station, a mere shed set on a wooden platform reached by a flight of steps, and graced by no name for the aid of the traveler, except the cabalistic legend, "Southern Express Company," on a swinging board at one end. It was before these ultimate days when factories are springing up all over the new South, and she had not yet reached the scattered few that upraised their staring yellow frames by the side of the muddy streams; only the cotton-fields and the scrub-oaks ran along by the train, with the view of the blue mountains here and there, and a blue sky above all. Dosia thought that she had never seen anything so beautiful or inspiring; it was the world outside of her home.

There is no discontent so deep, so wearying, so soul-embracing, as that of the girl who is supposed to be contented with the little rounds of household life. Dosia's mother had died when she was a small child, but so much love and care had been given her by relatives and by her father, a professor in a small college and a gentle and good man, that she had never felt the loss. When she was twelve years old her father married again, and, on account of his failing health, they moved from their home in the West to the far South, where Mr. Linden hoped, with the small income which he already possessed, to engage in some industry suitable to his limited powers; but in the enervating climate he gradually lost all ambition and business habits. He became yellow in complexion and slouching as to appearance and walk; but he was even more gentle than before, and gave the benefit of much good advice to the loungers around the village store or the new people from the North who came to learn the methods pertaining to cotton-raising, for he always knew how everything should be done.

He was a kind, affectionate husband and father, always placid and amiable, and only regretting, as he continually affirmed, that he could not provide for the family as he should. The children, of whom there were four by this second marriage, adored their father, as did his wife, who was a pretty woman, and as gentle, as incompetent, and almost as self-regretful as himself. The little stepmother had from the first attached herself to Dosia, whom she treated even at that early stage of life less as a child than as a friend, to be depended on in all emergencies.

Dosia could not have told at just exactly what period in her existence the unthinking content of childhood had left her. It was natural to live in the small, poorly built house, surrounded by an unkempt yard with broken fences, with small children to dress and care for and a baby to be tended, and a dinner-table that was set at sixes and sevens, with a continual desultory striving after a refinement of dress and living that was never accomplished. It was a matter of course to be always "clearing up," yet never in order, and to be always economizing temporarily in view of the stated remittance which never could be used for paying anything but back debts when it did come. Dosia was a sweet-natured child, affectionate and helpful, with a healthy constitution which made work unnoticeable, and she had taken life happily in the old-fashioned way according to the views of her elders, without criticism or comment. Her education, although desultory, had been fairly good, depending partly on teachers who came from the North and stayed in Balderville for their health, and partly on her father, who was a man of taste as well as culture, and who read with her in the evenings when he felt like it; for that, as everything else, was a matter of inclination with him and not of duty. She was fond of reading, and had also somewhat of a talent for music, which made it possible for her to achieve pleasing results with very little real tuition or practice. Fortunately, she had been well taught at the beginning.

Society at Balderville was of the fluctuant, intermittent order that obtains at minor resorts; the crop of visitors was bad or good, according to the year, like the peaches or cotton. With some of these visitors Dosia formed eager, transitory friendships, but with others there could be no assimilation. There were a few nice families settled in the place, more or less bound together by a community of interest centering in Balderville and the future of their children, who were usually sent away to school when half grown.

Youth is a surprisingly concrete thing, possessing faculties of its own—a terrible clear-sightedness, for one thing, and a black-and-white ruled-out sense of justice and injustice; it brought an absolutely new sense of values to Dosia. It was when she was seventeen that it began to dawn upon her that the conditions at home, always looked upon as entirely temporary and sporadic by her father and stepmother, were really the inevitable expressions of law. She saw that the true character of her parents was quite different from their own idea of it; that they would never change materially, and therefore, in the very nature of things, their fortunes could never change materially; they would always be going a little faster or a little slower on a down grade. She wondered at the exhaustless capacity of complacently believing in worn fallacies which her young eyes saw pitilessly as such. Her stepmother still looked upon the father, as he did upon himself, as a successful and energetic man of business for the moment only disabled by his failing health, and believed herself to be always on the point of managing the little money they had with superhuman economy, so that it would cover all household emergencies; only Dosia knew that there could never be more money, and that what there was must always slip away. This knowledge laid the future waste and rendered effort futile. What was the use, for instance, of putting cushions on the lounge over the place where there was a big hole in the cover, until they could buy the new one? There never would be a new one. What was the use of pretending that when the cracked and heterogeneous plates and dishes were replaced the table would be properly set once more? They never would be replaced.

If Theodosia had not been of a sweet nature, scorn would have embittered her; as it was, she was still loving, but she grew tired. She taught a little, in the odd chances that served, and gained a

few pence here and there by it, for teaching brought an absurdly pitiful wage. She went to the simple entertainments of the place, which were mostly among the older people, and played the piano sometimes at them, when she could be spared long enough from her duties at home to practice beforehand. The young people around showed the usual rural effect of propinquity and childish habit in pairing off insensibly as they grew up; it was always said of such and such a one, in local parlance, that they "went together," and arrangements were made in view of this known fact whenever festivities were in prospect, but Dosithea had never "gone with" anyone for more than a few days at a time, when some young visitor staying in the place had given her the preference in the dances and picnics and straw-rides. For the rest, she sewed and mended and baked and took care of the children, and read, and found her father's walking-sticks for him, and filled the lamps and fed the dogs and went on errands. Her father and stepmother were quite contented, and why should she not be?



Theodosia

But there came a time when there seemed to be no point to living; after the day's work, what was there? What would there ever be? The children played merrily and went to bed happy. The father and mother loved each other, their very limitations made their engrossing interest, they were contented to be discontented. Dosithea took herself to task for her own discontent, she prayed against it, she made bracing rules for herself which she strove to follow; she read, she sewed with fresh vigor, she was nobly self-sacrificing. Mrs. Linden often said that she didn't know how they would ever get along without Dosithea. She also often spoke of the advantages she would like to give the girl, and at first Dosithea had listened with pleased hope to these aspirations, but as no effort was ever made to realize them in even the simplest way, they only served after a while to show more plainly the flatness of living.

Many a night—like many another girl!—Dosithea sat in the window of her shelving attic room, bathed in the golden moonlight, with her hair falling on her shoulders and her hands clasped before her, a picture for none to see. The warm summer odors of pine and hickory were around her. The tide of youth was so strong in her heart! In vain she tried to stem it. She longed inexpressibly for that outer world, of which she had read, where youth was a power. In an age of modern young womanhood, clever, self-satisfying, potential, Dosithea belonged to the old régime where sentiment still holds sway. She wanted, indeed, to learn more about many things,—she longed to study music,—but she felt no inspiration and no desire for the life of an artist; she was, in fact, just a girl, who longed with vague indefiniteness, yet none the less intensely, for the joyous life of a girl; the pleasure of being sought, the excitement of shining, for music and dancing and little daily delights, and—love. She dimly discerned unknown glories that made her breath come quickly. Dosithea dreamed of some one in the far future who would be very good and very noble, whose love would hold her to everything that was beautiful and right, with whom she would prove herself extraordinarily witty and brilliant and fascinating, and whose hand on hers would set her heart beating. She imagined pouring out her heart to him,—that heart which seemed to be forever shut in her breast now, with none to understand it, none to care,—going to him with all these doubts and self-convictions and hopes, and feeling the blessedness of his

response. "You darling," he would say, "don't you know I was loving you all the time? We neither of us knew each other, to be sure, but the love was there all the same; it had existed since the beginning of the world."

She began to show the effects of that terrible atrophy which affects not only the mind but the very blood of girlhood, and which does not need iron as a curative power so much as a legitimate and healthy excitement. Even Mrs. Linden noticed that the girl looked thin and pale, and showed listlessness in place of energy, after several neighbors had openly commented on the fact; she said placidly that she was really worried about Dosia, and wished that she could have a change. And then one of those impossible, wonderful things happened which alter the whole surface of the earth. A rich aunt in Cincinnati wrote that Dosia was to go to New York to study music, and spend the winter with a married cousin, Lois Alexander, in one of the suburbs.

Thus it came that Theodosia was journeying North, dressed in a new suit of blue serge, which had been sent from Atlanta, to fit her measure, with the rest of her traveling outfit. As she sat in the Pullman car, with her head in its little gray felt hat against the high back of the seat, and looked down at the tips of her new shoes, and then at the fingers of her new gloves, she felt like a princess.

Dress in Balderville had been a matter of necessity, not of choice—bleared and shapeless in effect from much "making over," as purchase was not to be thought of. Dosia had had no new clothing for such a long time that the sensation of delight was so keen that she almost felt as if it must be wicked. Her skin seemed satin smooth with the clean freshness of dainty linen against it, and the unwonted perfume of the suede gloves was subtly intoxicating. She took furtive glimpses of herself in the glass panel beside her, and the sight filled her with a delighted wonder. She could hardly believe that she really looked so much like other people.

It was her toilet that engaged her attention, not her face; she had that exaggerated idea of the importance of dress which belongs to people who have never been able to exercise their taste or fancy for it—particularly those who live in the country. A bit of bright velvet was like a picture to her, ribbons made a poem; for her face she cared little. It was not beautiful, but sweet and youthful—just a girl's face; small, quite pale, except when she spoke, when the color varied in it with the moment. She had blue eyes, a good mouth with a short upper lip, white teeth, and a pretty chin. Her blue eyes had a bright, alert look in them that waited on those with whom she held converse; her slender young figure bent slightly forward, while her lips parted unconsciously, as if in deep attention. This, with her varying color, gave her a charm.

But her greatest attraction was still the innocent, artless expression of extreme youth which experience has never touched, which has nothing to remember and nothing to forget—the typical fair white page, still unwritten upon, although she had been twenty on her last birthday.

When she looked at the scenery, she kept seeing at first only the family group at the station as she had left it: her father, tall, gray-bearded, with hollow eyes, a continually working mouth, a slouching gait, a worn hat and an old striped coat; her stepmother, short, stout, pretty, and unkempt, in a frayed and faded shirtwaist, and a skirt pinned with a large brass safety-pin dragging away from the belt; three barefooted children in nondescript attire beside her, and a curly-haired, brown-eyed boy of two holding her dress with one hand and throwing kisses with the other. That was how Dosia had seen them last. The elders had been so kind about her going, her eyes filled remorsefully at the thought; she had been so shamelessly glad to go! And yet, she did love them. Mingled with a sense of kindness was also a strange little disappointment—she felt that when they turned homeward with their backs to the train they would let her slip out of their lives with the same ease with which they had accustomed themselves to let other things go, with a selfish inertia too deep to feel anything long. Only the baby—little Rolf—he would miss her; he would cry, at any rate for a while, for his Dosia to put him to sleep. Her lips trembled and her arms yearned for him, with a sudden savage instinct of latent motherhood unknown to her placid stepmother. It was characteristic of this girl, who was tired of taking care of children, that the fact of there being a two-year-old baby also at her cousin's house seemed now its crowning attraction; she turned comfortingly to intimate speculations about the darling.

After a while the rush-rushing of the train, the sense of traveling, blurred out the past for her. She was journeying to the life that was hers by right; the luxurious appointments of the car, her own new elegance, began to seem a part of her, wonted necessities to which, indeed, she had been born. It was a buffet-car, and she took the card offered her by the white-aproned colored waiter and selected her dinner as she saw others doing. He was so long in bringing it that she thought he had forgotten it; but at last he brought the meal, and she ate it from the table which he had obsequiously fastened up in front of her; there was an exhilaration in the performance of this very simple act which made several people look at her with a smiling indulgence. Afterwards she put her gray felt hat in the rack, and took off her jacket, and made herself comfortable, as she saw others had done. The car was by no means crowded, and she had seen from the first that there was no one who could serve as a peg to hang a romance on—only middle-aged women and men, and a mother with half-grown children. She fell to wondering, as she had done many times before, what her cousins would be like; she was prepared to love them dearly. With the unconscious egotism of her age, everything in this new life was to revolve around her. The other players were accessories—she was the star performer.

The afternoon whirled away amid patches of light and dark, of green and shadow, red clay and somber pine, scattered white houses and rounded overhanging slopes that shut out the day. Dosia looked, and dreamed—and dreamed. Then night closed her into the train, with its crimson plush and gleaming woods and lights, and strange faces, and impalpable cinders, and that rush-

rushing still. Then the berths were made up, people sitting the while in tired, silent groups in other sections, holding on to cloaks and hand-bags, before disappearing singly behind the curtains. Dosia crept under hers. She had first tried to braid the brown hair that would curl itself out of the plaits, and then lay down at last without removing any clothing, with both hands tucked under her soft cheek and her eyes staring before her. There had been a bustle of walking to and fro before the berths were made ready, but after a while all was still behind the long curtains, that waved outward a little when the train went suddenly around a curve. Gradually those wide-open blue eyes began to close; she seemed to be floating in a blissful dream on pillows of roseate down, between waking and sleeping; and then—*God in heaven!* A crash as of a breaking world, an awful, blinding, helpless terror! A giant force had her by the throat, clutching her, beating her against the planks, jamming her into awful darkness as if she were a creature without bone or sinew, while her shrieking voice lost itself among the other voices shrieking. A plunge, and then—nothing.

The night was inky black, and the wind that swept down the gorge brought an occasional raindrop with it. Dosia felt one fall on her cheek. A long while after that she heard voices, then a man's hand was passed over her face and a voice close above her said, "It is a woman," and added, bending still nearer to her, "Can you speak?"

Dosia opened her lips, but no sound came from them; instead, she broke into a helpless sobbing in which there were no tears. The man spoke to some one near, and she became aware that there were other sounds of talking and distress around her. Far up above them an occasional light twinkled and disappeared.

Presently the man bent down to her again, and, lifting her head gently, placed something soft under it. His touch was compassionate, and his tone still more so as he said:

"Are you in much pain?"

She tried again to speak, and again the sobbing spoke for her. She wanted to question him, but could not. He seemed to divine her thought.

"Never mind; do not try to answer me. Perhaps you wonder where you are. There has been a terrible accident—the trestle gave way, and one car fell down here; the others, I believe, smashed farther up somewhere. People are coming to us with light and stretchers, and all we have to do now is to wait patiently. I wonder if you will try and do just as I tell you? Move your right foot—yes, there—now your left—now this arm—now the other. Why, that's brave of you!"—as she tried to raise herself a little. "Perhaps you will be able to stand soon." He broke off suddenly with a groan: "I wish to Heaven I had some whisky! I wish to Heaven I had! but there's not a drop left in the flask."

The wind began to blow harder, and the rain to descend, and the sounds of moving and confusion around increased. The lights Dosia had seen above seemed to get nearer, and then twinkled down close to the wreck; but even then, in the opaque blackness of the night, they remained only isolated points of light, diffusing no radiance around them, as they dipped down to the earth, and rose again, and wavered and went backward and forward; with them came more voices and stumbling feet, sounds half swallowed by the depth of the night and the growing fury of the gusts of wind.

Dosia felt a new and terrible pang of loneliness as the fleeting flash of a lantern above her revealed that there was no one beside her; it was like being dropped again into nothingness. She did not know how long she lay there. With the recognized tones came a returning wave of life, though she scarce knew what was said. A strong arm raised her to a sitting position, and held her there, with her head resting against the shoulder of this new-found friend. "Drink this—all of it. I want to see if you can stand after a few moments, and perhaps walk—there are so few stretchers." Dosia could feel him involuntarily shudder.

"No, I will not leave you"—he spoke as one would to a little child, as she made a faint, terrified motion to hold his arm—"I will not leave you. I will take you every step of the way. You are a girl, aren't you? Were you alone on the train? Had you no friends with you?"

She whispered with some difficulty, "No one."

"You are perhaps spared much." There was a silence. Presently he said gently: "We must not wait here too long; we must follow the lanterns—see, they are going. You can stand; now try and walk. Give me your hand—that way. Lean on me. Take one step—now another. Come! Don't be afraid—you *must*."

With his arm around her, supporting, guiding, almost carrying her, she essayed to walk. Shaking at each step pitifully at first, then growing stronger, with one hand locked in his, she found herself ascending the rocky path of the hillside with dark moving shapes beside her. The lights ahead disappeared in the mouth of a long tunnel into which the light was walled solidly. He was leading her along the railroad-ties. As she stumbled from time to time, she became formlessly conscious that he winced and caught his breath involuntarily while trying to keep her from falling with that strong grip. The confused impression of his suffering grew finally so intense upon her, and seemed in her weak condition such a terrible load to bear, that she wept helplessly.

He felt her shaking, and stopped short, looking back at her anxiously. "What's the matter?"

"I'm hurting you."

"Not more than I can stand. Don't stop to talk about it; we mustn't fall behind. Hold my hand

fast.”

The railroad-ties stretched beyond the tunnel. The rain met the wayfarers full in the face. The dark, tramping, struggling forms were all ahead with the drowning lanterns. The walk had become an incessant, endless thing, dreadful as a journey through the inferno, but for the protecting, enfolding clasp of that guiding hand—a strong, clean touch, that subtly conveyed warmth to the blood and courage to the heart. With her palm pressed to that of this unseen friend, Dosia felt clearly that she could have walked blindfolded to the end of the world, sure that he knew the path and that it led to some unknown good. They seemed to grow as one in the unspoken comforting of trust.

Their feet were on a road now. There was a sudden clatter of horses' hoofs through the rush of wind and rain. A wagon stopped beside them. Dosia found herself lifted in and laid on a pile of straw. There were others lifted in also; then the horses jogged on with their load, carrying her away from the friend whose face she had not seen, and with whom she had exchanged no word of farewell.

She heard nothing of him in that long day at the farmhouse, where she lay waiting in a half stupor for the cousin who had been sent for. But through her life long that hand-clasp stood to Theodosia Linden for all the high, protecting care, the strength and gentleness, the fine, unselfish thought that a woman looks for in a man, and the finding of which is her greatest good on earth.

CHAPTER FOUR

It was a bright, fresh morning in November, the day after Dosia had begun her journey, that Justin Alexander started out to take possession of the office and factory. The departure from his old place was a thing of the past, the preparations for entering into the new business were at an end. Every evening during the last month had been taken up in consultations with Leverich and Martin, and every other spare minute had been given to looking over the furnishings and mechanism of the factory and visiting or writing letters to people connected with the project. It was sheer joy to him to exercise a grasp of intellect hitherto perforce in abeyance, and he did not see the frequent glance of satisfaction which his two backers often gave each other across the table as he propounded his views. The people in the old place had been good to him; his leaving had been celebrated with a dinner and honest expressions of regret from his former companions. The only one he had been really sorry to leave was Callender; it would seem odd not to have him at his elbow any more.

But all the preliminaries were finished, and he was master now. For a man who has barely lived each month upon his earnings, to have fifty thousand dollars in the bank subject to his order is a fairly pleasurable sensation. Justin had always inveighed against the idea that character, like other products, is controlled by wealth, but he insensibly put on a bolder front as he buttoned himself into his overcoat and walked from the ferry to his office. The morning had certainly developed a larger manner in him. The ease of affluence is first assimilated in thought, which acts upon the muscles. Justin did not know that the buoyancy of a golden self-confidence had communicated itself to the very way in which he nodded to a friend or shouldered his closed umbrella, or that his step upon the sidewalk had a new ring in it. It is the transmutation of metal into the blood—the revivifying power which the seekers after the philosopher's stone recognized so thoroughly.

He had come to town on an earlier train than he was accustomed to take, and the people whom he passed were not familiar to him. There was a newness to the bright day, even in that, that marked the novel undertaking; the air was cold, but the light was golden. Men went by with yellow chrysanthemums pinned to their coats and a fresh and eager look upon their faces. The clang of the cable-cars had an enlivening condensation of sound in distinction to the hard rumble and jar of the wagons, but all the noises were inspiring as part of a great and concentrated movement in which the day awoke to an enormous energy—an energy so pervading that even inanimate objects seemed to reflect it, as a mirror reflects the expression of those who look upon it.

His way lay farther up-town than he had been wont to go, above the Wall Street line of work and into that great city of wholesale industries which stretches northward. The streets at this hour were new to him and filled with new sights and sounds: the apple-stands at the corners, being put in order for the day, the sidewalk venders with their small wares, were fewer and of a different order from those he had been used to seeing. The passers-by were different. There were a great many girls in bright hats and shabby jackets, who talked incessantly as they walked, and disappeared down side streets which looked dark and cold and damp in contrast to the bright glitter of Broadway. He turned into one of these streets himself, and walked eastward toward the river.

As it appeared to him to-day, so had it never appeared to him before, and never would again. He might have been in a foreign city, so keenly did he notice every detail. The street was filled at first with drays, loading up with huge boxes from the big warehouses on each side, at the entrances of which men in shirt-sleeves pulled and hauled at the ropes of freight-elevators; then he came to grimy buildings in which was heard the whir of machinery, and he caught a glimpse

of men, half stripped, moving backward and forward with strange motions. From across the street came the busy rush of sewing-machines as some one threw up a window and looked out, and a row of girls passed into view with heads bent forward and bodies swaying shoulder to shoulder; beyond were men bending over, pressing, and the steam from the hot irons on the wet cloth poured out around them; and all these toilers seemed no beaten-down wage-earners, but the glad chorus in his own drama of work. Between the factories there began to show neglected narrow brick dwelling-houses, with iron railings and mean, compressed doorways, fronted by garbage-barrels; basement saloons; tiny groceries with bread in the windows and wilted vegetables on the sidewalk, where women with shawled heads were grouped; attenuated furnishing-stores for men, with an ingratiating proprietor in the doorway. In the midst of this district, taking up a salient corner, was the large and ornate building of a patent-medicine concern, towering high into the air, and seeming to preach with lofty benevolence to those below that to be truly respectable and happy you must be rich.

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Beyond this the scene repeated itself with slight differences—the houses were not so many, and the factories gave place to warehouses again. The influence of those tall masts at the foot of the street began to be felt, although the signs as yet did not speak of oakum or ships' stores. Among the warehouses, however, was one brick dwelling that attracted Justin's particular attention, wedged in as it was between the taller buildings on either side. It varied from the others he had seen by the depths of its squalor. The stone steps were defaced and broken; the windows as well as the arched fan-light over the entrance—a relic of bygone days—had only a few jagged pieces of glass left; and a black hallway was revealed to view through the open door. The windows were so near the street that it was easy to see into the front room—an interior so sordid and forbidding that Justin involuntarily paused to view it.

The room was empty. The walls had been covered once with a brown-flowered paper which now hung from them in great patches, showing the green mold beneath. Under the black marble mantelpiece, thickly covered with white dust, was a grate piled high with ashes; ash-heaps stood also out on the floor, flanked with empty black bottles and broken remnants of furniture. In the background was a hideous black haircloth sofa. Heaven only knows with what past it had been associated to give that creeping feeling in the veins of the sober and practical man who gazed at it; it seemed the outward and visible sign of ruin. The unseen and abnormal still keeps its irrelevant and unexplained hold on the human intelligence, with no respect of persons. It gave Justin a momentary chill to think of passing this each day. Then he looked up, half turning as he felt that some one was observing him, and met the eye of a man who was walking on the other side of the street; he remembered suddenly that they had been almost keeping pace together since he had turned into this street from Broadway.

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The smile of this unknown foot-farer spoke of a conscious comradeship which surprised Justin, who held himself a little more stiffly and hurried forward at a quicker pace to reach his destination, which was now in sight. His eye approved the new paint and the air of decent reserve which appertained to the building; the new sign at the side of the hallway bore the legend of the typometer, with his name conspicuously above. As Justin entered he turned again involuntarily, and the man on the other side of the street, who was himself on the point of entering a hallway, turned also. This time Justin smiled in response. The opposite building, as he knew, bore a sign much resembling his own, with the name of Angevin L. Cater upon it; the air of proprietorship bespoke Mr. Cater himself. The meeting gave a welcome pleasure to rivalry, and brought back the dew of the morning.

The offices were in the second story, his own especial one railed off near the front windows and covered with a new green rug. To one side were the compartments of his subordinates and the open desk-room of the lower clerks; beyond these was the packing department of the factory; from above was heard the ceaseless whirring and clicking of machinery. The larger parts of the instrument—the copper tubing and the steel bars—were bought in the rough, so to speak, and shaped to their proper functions here, where, also, the more intricate portions were manufactured.

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The undertaking, briefly told, rested on the merits of a timing-machine invented and patented some years before in Connecticut, and sold to a manufacturer there, who had taken it as a side issue and failed properly to exploit it. The right to it had changed hands several times, during which it was pushed with varying energy, being finally domiciled in New York. In the meantime other machines, differing slightly in construction, had also been patented and put on the market in various cities, none of them with any great success until the present moment. Then the public began to wake up suddenly to the value of timing-machines, and Leverich and Martin, organizers of corporations, seized the opportunity of buying all the rights to the Warford Standard Typometer—so called because, in addition to measuring stated periods of elapsed time, it mechanically produced a type-written statement of it. The Warford, as the first invention, had some merits never quite attained by the later ones, in the eyes of its present purchasers. They said all it needed now was push.

Thousands of little books entitled "Sixty Seconds with the Typometer" had been sent abroad in the last month, setting forth with attractive brevity, and in large black print that could be read without glasses, Why you wanted a typometer, Which was the best one to buy, and Where you could buy it. Long articles advertising it appeared in the daily papers, in which the sales of the machine reached an effective aggregate.

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The business, in fact, showed signs of seriously forging ahead under the renewed efforts of Leverich and Martin, and their portrayal of its future was within the bounds of possibility. The

foreman of the factory was one of the original workmen, and some of the men had also been associated with the machine for several years, so that the running-gear ran with fair smoothness; the head bookkeeper and manager, an elderly man, had also remained a fixture through all the fluctuations, and had been the great dependence of the new purchasers; if he had possessed the requisite mental capacity, it is doubtful whether Justin's services would have been needed at all.

As Justin went up to the factory floor on this morning, the foreman stepped out from among the machinery to offer his greeting; he was a slight man with deep-set, swiftly observant eyes and a mouth that drooped at the corners; his sleeves were rolled up over his thin, muscular arms.

To Justin's pleasant good morning he responded, with a quick gleam of pleasure in his eyes:

"Good morning, sir. I'm glad to see you here so early. You've perhaps heard of the big order that came in last night from Cincinnati."

"No," said Justin; "I came up here first. That's good news, Bullen."

"Yes, sir. I've made a list of the stock we'll need as soon as we can get it in, I sent it down to your desk, sir, a moment ago. I'll want to see you later, Mr. Alexander, about taking on more men."

"Very well," said Justin. His step was jubilant as he descended to the office, to be greeted with the same congratulatory news from Harker, the assistant manager.

"And I think these letters mean more orders, Mr. Alexander," he said.

They did. The next mail brought more. As Justin opened them, one by one, it was impossible not to feel the sharp thrill of mastery, of gratified ambition. It was his efforts in the new line which were bringing in this first harvest; all the time he had been outwardly listening to Martin and Leverich, his mind had run steadily on its own gearing, he had weighed their propositions and conclusions in a secret balance. He meant, within due limits, to conduct this business as he thought best. If orders came in every day like this—and why should they not? if not now, at least in the near future—

The atmosphere of the office was festal that day, imbued with the smell of fresh varnish and new rugs. The complications that arise later on as one gets down into the solid experience of an undertaking, hampered by the work of yesterday and the future work of to-morrow, were beautifully absent. Everything was clear and possible; everyone was busy, and the master busiest of all. To write out checks for money which has been furnished by some one else is a keen pleasure at the first blush; the store and the coffers seem illimitable to him who has not earned it. Afterwards—

"By the way, Harker," he asked once, in an interval of waiting, "what is the concern across the street?"

"It's much the same as ours, Mr. Alexander."

Justin looked up, surprised. "I never knew that."

"Oh, Mr. Cater calls his machine by a different name; it's the Timoscript. But it amounts to the same thing, after a fashion—not as good as ours, by a long shot; it clogs horribly after you've worked it for a while. They've got one in the billiard-room around the corner."

"And this Mr. Cater—has he been in the business long?"

"He was here when we came, two years ago."

Justin said no more. He went out later to search for a decent place for luncheon in this unfamiliar city, and was hardly surprised, when he seated himself by a little white table in a small, rather dark room, to look up and recognize opposite him the smiling face of Mr. Angevin L. Cater.

"I was wondering how soon you'd find this place out," said the latter. He spoke with a Southern drawl. "You don't get a very large repertoire here, but what they do give you is sort of catchy. They fry well, and that's an art. And it's clean."

"Yes," said Justin shortly. It was his untoward fate to be usually spoken to by strangers, and he had a much more social feeling toward those who let him alone, but even the shadows of this golden day were translucent.

"I reckon you know who I am—Angevin L. Cater. Angevin's a queer name, isn't it? French—several generations back."

To this Justin made no reply, conceiving that none was required. After a moment Mr. Cater began again:

"Perhaps you think it's strange—my speaking to you in this way. Of course I've seen you coming to Number 270, and knew that you were taking charge there, but that's not the whole of it. I'm from Georgia—got a wife and two children and a mother-in-law in Balderville now." He paused to give this impressive fact full weight. "You've some relatives there, haven't you, by the name of Linden?"

"My wife has," said Justin, with new attention.

"Well, I reckon I heard of you some this fall when I was home. Miss Theodosia was talking of spending the winter North with you, she asked me if I knew Mr. Justin Alexander, and I had to tell her no. I didn't think I'd meet up with you so soon. Heard from her lately?"

"We expect Miss Linden to-morrow," said Justin. "How is Mr. Linden getting on? We haven't

heard very good accounts of him lately.”

“Oh, Linden’s a mighty fine man; he ain’t successful, that’s all. I find a heap of mighty fine men that ain’t successful, don’t you? I don’t think it’s anything against a man that he ain’t successful. Besides, old man Linden ain’t got his health; you can’t do anything if you haven’t got your health. His wife’s a mighty fine lady—pretty, too; but she ain’t much on dressin’ up; stays at home and takes care of her children. And Miss Dosia—well, Miss Dosia’s a peach. Talented, too—I tell you, she can bang the ivories! But she’s been kinder pinin’ lately; I reckon she needs a change—though a change isn’t always what it’s cracked up to be. I’ve found that out, haven’t you? I changed into a New York business two years ago, and it’s taken all my strength to buck up against it till now. I reckon maybe it’ll carry me along all right—now.”

55

“You’re in the same line that I am, I understand,” said Justin, who had been eating while the other talked.

“Why, yes, you might call it that, I guess both machines started in Connecticut. A cousin of mine owned one, he said Warford stole his idea and got it patented first—I don’t know. When he died he left me what money he had, and I took up the concern. I’ve got a Yankee side to me as well as a Southern side; sometimes I get tuckered out tryin’ to combine ’em.”

“You say that trade is looking up now?” asked Justin.

“Well, yes, it is. The public is beginning to learn the value of time as recorded by the timoscript.” His eyes twinkled. “Our machine is put together better than the Warford. I feel it my duty to say that, Mr. Alexander. It’s simpler, for one thing—there ain’t so many little cogs to catch and get out of order. No complex mechanism; a child can run it—that’s what my circulars say. I believe in advertising, same as you; I don’t object to your booming trade. The more people there are, now, who know there is a time-machine, the more there’ll be to find they’ve had a long-felt want for one, no matter what you call it. And—you shouldn’t hurry over your luncheon so, Mr. Alexander,” for Justin had thrown down his napkin and was rising.

“I’ve got to be back at the office by two,” said Justin, glancing at the clock, which showed five minutes of the hour.

“Oh, you can walk it in three minutes; but of course you’re not down to that yet. I’m glad to have met up with you, sir, and I hope to see you often. I reckon this town’s big enough for two of a kind.”

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“Thank you,” said Justin, glad to escape. He had been telling himself during the conversation that he would take care to avoid Mr. Angevin L. Cater’s favorite haunt for the future, but he was surprised to find a change gradually stealing over him after he had left the man. There are some persons, distinctly agreeable at first, whose absence materializes an unexpected aversion to their further acquaintance; others, whose company one has found tedious, leave a wholesome flavor, after all, behind them. Mr. Cater appeared to be of the latter class. Justin found himself smiling with real kindness once or twice as he thought of his opposite neighbor.

But there was little time for turning aside during the afternoon—the evening as well as the morning were component parts of that golden day. The orders that came in gave a wonderful effect of luck, although they were largely the legitimate outcome of well-planned efforts. Justin thought the work of the last six months was bringing its fulfillment now, but this clear stream of accomplishment showed him the way to a mighty ocean. Power, power, power! The sense of it was in his finger-ends as he focused his mind on world-embracing schemes; with that impelling current of strength, he could have turned even failure to success, and he knew it.

The hours were all too short for transacting the business that had to be done, and for all the consultations as to ways and means. It would take some time to put these preparations on a larger scale.

Justin was ready to leave at six o’clock, with a bundle of price-lists under his arm to look over when he got home. The last mail was handed to him just as he was locking his desk.

57

“There is no use in my looking over these to-night, Harker,” he said. “You can get at them the first thing in the morning. I will be down even earlier than to-day. Stay—” His eye had caught sight of an envelope with the name of a well-known Chicago firm on it. He tore it open, ran his eye rapidly over the contents, and then handed it, with a gesture as of abdication, to Harker. The bookkeeper was the first to break the silence.

“I thought we were getting along pretty rapidly to-day,” he said, “but it seems that we haven’t even started. This tops all! We’ll have to get a big move on, Mr. Alexander. They’re giving us very short time.”

“Yes,” said Justin. He lingered irresolutely, and then laid down his papers with the hat which he held ready to put on, and went over to the safe. He took from it five new ten-dollar bills and tucked them into his waistcoat pocket. They sent a glow to his heart, for they were intended as a little gift to his wife; it seemed to him that this last good fortune had given him the right to make her a visible sharer in it.

As he ran up the steps of his home, he collided with a small boy who was holding a bicycle with one hand and proffering a yellow envelope through the open doorway with an outstretched arm. Lois was taking it. She and Justin read the telegram at the same moment, before it fell fluttering to the ground between them, as both hands dropped it.

“I cannot possibly go,” he said, staring at her.

"Oh, Justin! I will, then—some one *must*."

"No, no, *you* can't; that's nonsense. Great heavens! for this to come at such a time!" He broke off again, staring helplessly before him. Leverich was in St. Louis, Martin at his home ill. "Why didn't the girl start last week, as she intended?"

58

"Oh, the poor child—don't blame *her*. The accident must have been so terrible!"

"Yes—yes, indeed." He sat down in the hall chair, while his wife signed the telegraph-book which the boy incidentally held open for her as he chewed gum. When she finished, she saw that Justin was pouring over the time-table in an evening paper; he laid it down to say:

"If I start back for town in ten minutes I can catch the eight-thirty train south, and get home again to-morrow night or the morning after, if Theodosia is able to travel. That will only make me lose one day." One day! He shook his head in bitter impatience.

"Oh, I hate to have you go in this way! Shall I send word to the office for you?"

"No; I'll write some telegrams on the way in. I'll run up-stairs and put a few things in the bag, and kiss the children good night—I hear them calling." He put his hand in his pocket and hurriedly drew out the crisp roll of bills, and looked at them ruefully.

"I brought this money for you, Lois, but I'll have to take it with me, I'm afraid, for I might run short." He put his arm around her for a brief instant, in answer to her exclamation. "No, don't get me anything to eat; I haven't time, I tell you. I'll get what I want later, on the train." In the strong irritation which he was curbing he felt as if he would never want to eat again. He was in reality by nature both kind and compassionate, but the worst sting of trouble lies often in the fact that it is so inopportune.

CHAPTER FIVE

59

"Are we near New York?"

"Yes," said Justin, smiling encouragement at his young companion. He stood up and took down from the rack above them Dosithea's jacket, which had been reclaimed from the wreck soaked and torn, and a boy's cap in lieu of her missing hat.

"You had better put these on now, and then you can rest again for a little while before we have to move."

It was unavoidable that after the enforced journey the sight of Dosithea's white face and imploring eyes should have filled him with a rush of tender compassion which completely blotted out the previous reluctance from his memory. Few men spend their time regretting past stages of thought, and he had naturally accepted her tremulous thankfulness for his solicitude.

After the long day of travel in Justin's company, the color had begun to return faintly to Dosithea's lips and cheeks. She was also growing to feel a little more at home with him; he had seemed too much a stranger and she had been too greatly in awe of him at first to ask many questions. He himself had spoken little, but had been kind in numberless ways, and thoughtful of her comfort, and always smiled encouragingly when he looked at her. Now, at the journey's end, he began to talk, in a secret restlessness which he could not own. His mind had been busy all day with the typometer and his plans for the morrow, but as he neared home he could not shake off a haunting premonition of something unpleasant to come.

60

"Lois and the children will all be drawn up in line expecting the new cousin," he said.

"Will they?" asked Theodosia, with pleased interest. "But they will be looking out for you as well as for me."

"Yes, I suppose so; I very seldom go away from home. But I was wrong in saying that both children would be up, for it will be nearly seven when we reach the house, and they go to bed at six; perhaps Zaidee will be there. I hope you like children, or you will have a bad time of it at our house."

"I love children," said Dosithea, with the solemnity of a profession of faith.

"I think you will like Zaidee, then; she is a little girl who has her hair tied up with bunches of blue ribbon, and the rest of it straggles around in light wisps, or is gathered into an inconceivably small pigtail at the back of her neck. She has a pug-nose, round blue eyes, little white teeth, and an expression of great responsibility and wisdom, because at the age of six she is the eldest daughter—and that means a great deal, you know."

"Oh," said Dosithea, "I am an 'eldest daughter.'" She choked, momentarily, as she thought of the family at home. "Was it only last night that you started for me?" she asked, after a pause during which she had looked hard out of the car-window.

"Yes; I've made pretty good time, I think. It was lucky that we could catch that eight-thirty express this morning; if we hadn't it would have put us back nearly twenty-four hours—and that would have been bad," he added under his breath.

61

"Perhaps it was hard for you to leave even for one day," said Dosia timidly. She felt somehow away outside of his inner thought, as if she had no inherent place in his mind at all. "You are just starting in business, aren't you?"

"Oh, that is all right. We are both starting in new ventures—Dosia and the typometer appear on the scene at the same moment, starting out on a career together; and for this time Dosia had to take precedence, that is all. I hope we'll both be equally successful."

"Yes, indeed." She responded to his smile, and tried to rally her failing powers.

"I am very glad I went for you." He regarded her with anxiety. "You could not have made the journey alone."

"Oh, I could have—but I am so glad you came!" said Dosia. She leaned against the window, with closed eyes, to rest—her wan face, her dress, crumpled and stained, the negligence of her hair, which she had been unable to arrange properly, and her air of fatigue making a pitiful contrast to the girl who had started out so gayly on her travels in her trim attire two days before. Now, as in many another moment of silence, she felt once more the hurtling fall, the pressure of darkness, and the ravages of the rain and wind; the nightmare horror of the wreck was upon her; only the remembered clasp of a hand held her reason firm. She had spent half the day in thinking of that unknown friend, and the thought seemed to put her under some obligation of high and pure living, in a cloistered gratitude. A girl who had been saved in that way ought to be worthy of it. Some day or other—some day—it must be meant that she should meet him again and tell him what his help had been to her. She imagined herself engaged in some errand of mercy—supporting the tottering footsteps of an old woman as she crossed a crowded street, or carrying a little sick child, or kneeling by a fever-touched bedside in a tenement-house, or encouraging a terror-stricken creature through smoke and fire. She would meet him thus, and when he said, "How good and brave you are!" she might look up and say: "I learned it from you. Do you remember the girl you helped the night the train was wrecked? I am she." And when he asked, "How did you know it was I?" she would answer: "By the tones of your voice; I would know that anywhere." And then he would take her hand again—

Her eyes ached with unshed tears at the lost comfort of it. She tried to see his form through the blur of darkness that had enveloped it,—a swinging step, a square set of the shoulders, an effect of strong young manhood,—and she pictured his face as noble and beautiful as his care for her. Her reverie passed through different grades. She found herself after a while idly scanning Justin's face and wondering if it embodied all that was high and good to her cousin Lois; after one was married a long time, say six or seven years, did it still matter how a man looked? She felt herself a little in awe of his keen blue eyes, in spite of his kindness; she thought she preferred a dark man.

She clung to Justin's arm at the crossings and ferry, and hardly heard his words, bewildered by the unaccustomed sights and sounds and the weakness of her knees. Her feet slipped on the cobblestones, the hurrying people made her dizzy, and the electric lights danced before her eyes.

As they were standing on the boat, two men came up to speak to Justin; she gathered that they had heard of the accident and of his journey from Mrs. Alexander at the whist club the night before, and stopped now to make courteous inquiries. One, who was short and stout, with a pleasant if commonplace face, passed on, after his introduction to Dosia; but the other turned back, as he was following, to say:

"By the way, I see that there was a fire in your new quarters to-day, Alexander."

"A fire! For Heaven's sake, Barr—"

"Oh, I don't think it amounted to much; there's just a line in the evening paper about it. Here, read for yourself—'fire confined to one floor, machinery slightly damaged.' Insured, weren't you?"

"Oh, yes, yes—that isn't the point now. We can't afford to be kept back a minute! I'm glad you told me; I must go—I must go back at once and see for myself." He stopped and looked hopelessly at Dosia.

Short as the journey was now, he could not let her continue it by herself; yet every fiber in him was quivering in his wild desire to get over to the scene of disaster. He looked at his informant, who, in his turn, was regarding the girl beside Justin.

"I can go on by myself," said Dosia, divining his thought, and wondering when this terrible journey would ever end. "Truly, I can. I know you want to go and see about the fire; please, please do! Oh, please!"

"Barr, will you take charge of Miss Linden?" asked Justin abruptly. He did not particularly like Barr, but this was an emergency. "Will you take her to Mrs. Alexander?"

"I will, indeed," said the newcomer, with responsive earnestness.

"Very well, then; I'll go back on this boat. I'll be out on a later train, tell Lois." He started to make his way to the other end of the boat, to be in readiness for the return trip, and turned back once more to give the girl her ticket; then he was lost to sight, and Theodosia was left, for the third time, on the hands of an unknown man.

This one only spoke to give her the necessary directions as they joined the usual rush for the train, and refrained from talking, to her great relief, after he had settled her comfortably in the car for the last half-hour of traveling. She leaned against the window-casing, as before, as far

away from him as possible, suddenly and wretchedly aware of her dilapidated appearance and the boy's cap that covered the fair hair curling out from under it. Her cheeks were whiter than ever, and the corners of her mouth had the pathetic droop of extreme fatigue.

She looked, without knowing it, very young, very forlorn, and very frightened, and the hand in which she held the ticket given her by Justin trembled. She was morbidly afraid that this new person would question her as to the accident, about which she shrank from speaking; but after a while, encouraged by his silence, she tried to turn her thoughts by stealthily observing him.

If her friend of the voice and hand of the night before had been only a tall blur in the darkness, the man beside her was effectively concrete. Neither tall nor large, he gave an impression of strength and vitality in the ease and quickness of his motions, which bespoke trained muscles. She decided that he was rather old—perhaps thirty. Dark-skinned, black-haired, with a thin face, a low forehead, deep-set eyes, a high, rather hooked nose, and a mustache, he was somewhat of the Oriental type, although, as she learned later, a New Englander by birth and heritage. Dosia was not quite sure whether the effect was pleasing or the reverse; there seemed to be something about him different from the other men she had seen, even in his clothing, although it was plain enough.

Interspersed with these observations were the increasing throbs of homesickness that threatened to overwhelm her. Kind as Justin had been, she had felt all the time outside of his thought and affection. This new companion had shown consideration for her; she was grateful for it, but she was unprepared to have him lean suddenly toward her, as a tear trembled perilously on her lashes, and say, with twinkling eyes:

"I beg your pardon, but do I look like him?"

"Like—like whom?" asked Dosia, in amazement.

"Like a person to be approved of."

"I haven't considered the subject," said Dosia, with swift dignity.

"Ah, you see, it's the reverse with me. As soon as Mrs. Alexander told me she was expecting you, my mind was filled with visions of a sweet young thing from the South. All sweet young things from the South have dreams; mine was to embody yours. And when I saw you, I said to myself—I beg your pardon, do you think I am getting too personal, on such short acquaintance?"

"Yes," answered Dosia, dimpling in spite of herself, "very much too personal." She turned her head away from him, that she might not see those sparkling, quizzical eyes so close.

"Very well; I will finish the sentence to-morrow, as you suggest. In the meantime, let me ask you if you have ever made a collection of conductors' thumbs?"

"No!" said Dosia, in astonishment, turning around again to face him.

"I am told that there is a great deal of character in them; it is given by the broad, free movement of punching tickets. I have thought of collecting thumbs for purposes of study—in alcohol, of course. But why do you look so surprised?"

"I am surprised that you have no collection already," said Dosia, with spirit; "you seem to be so enterprising."

He shook his head sadly. "No. How little you know me! I'm not enterprising in the least; I have no heroic virtues, I'm only—loving."

"Oh!" cried Dosia, and stopped short in a ripple of merriment that was more invigorating than wine, and that brought a rush of color to her cheeks.

"No? well, not until the day after to-morrow, then, if you say so. You're so very, very good to me, Miss Linden; it's not often I find anyone so considerate as you are. And have you come up North to make your entrance into society?"

"I have come North to study music," said Theodosia impressively.

"Music! Ah, there you have me." He spoke with a new soberness.

"Do you like it?"

"I like it almost better than anything else in the world—too much, and yet not enough, after all." He shook his head with a quick, somber gesture. "I'll help you with the music, if you'll let me. Did you notice how very quickly we became acquainted? Yes? I know now why; it puzzled me at first. It was the music in you to which I responded—I can tell you just what little song of Schubert's your smile is from, if you'll give me time."

"No," said Dosia, "it isn't from Schubert at all, and you'll never find the key-note to it, so you needn't try." She could not help daring a little, in her girlishness.

He laughed. "Oh, I shall make it my business to find out. For what else what I constituted your guardian at the beginning of your career? And it's so good of you to say that I can come to-morrow and pour out my heart to you! Shall it be at five? No, please don't trouble to answer; I like to look at your ear in that position—it's so pearly. Too personal again? Then let us converse about your Old Kentucky Home."

"It isn't in Kentucky," interpolated Dosia desperately, but there was no stopping him. He was so irrelevantly absurd that she succumbed at last entirely, and hardly knew when they left the train; when they walked up the path to her cousin's door, they were both laughing causelessly and

irresponsibly, in delightful comradeship.

He turned to Dosia after he had rung the bell and said, "Good night."

"Aren't you coming in to see my cousin?"

"Oh, yes; but this is our farewell. Please make it as touching as you can."

She looked up frankly as she gave him her hand and said:

"Thank you for taking charge of me."

"And making a fool of myself? It was in a good cause, at any rate. But what I wanted you to say was——"

She did not hear, for the door had opened, and he only waited a moment inside the house to explain her husband's absence to Mrs. Alexander. The news arrested her greeting to Dosia, whom she held tentatively by the hand as she repeated:

"Justin went back to the fire! Oh, I'm so sorry! Do you think that it was very bad?"

"The paper said not."

"It must be out now, anyway. I'm so disappointed that he did not come home, and I have such a nice little dinner. Will you not stay, Lawson?"

"Thank you—I wish I could." There was a penetrative, lingering flash of those still quizzical eyes at Dosia as he made his adieu, and then he was gone. Why should she feel alone?

Her cousin's arms were at last around her in welcome, the warmer for being deferred; and the little Zaidee, whom she would have known from Justin's description of her, was standing first on one tiptoe and then on the other, waiting to be kissed before going off to bed, as she announced. From above came the sound of small running feet, and a child's voice calling:

"Cousin Dosia—I want to see my Cousin Dosia!" A bare foot and leg surmounted by a fluttering scrap of white raiment was thrust through the balusters, followed by a protesting scream as his nurse heavily pursued the fugitive with upraised voice:

"Coom back, Reginald, coom back!" There was the noise of a scuffle as Dosia, with her escort, laughingly ascended the stairs, to elicit a shriek of terror and a rear view of the mercurial Reginald in full flight for the nursery door, which banged after him, and behind which he still raised his voice, to the shrill accompaniment of the nurse.

"I'll go in and keep him quiet," said Zaidee reassuringly, in answer to her mother's look of appeal, and she also disappeared beyond the prison bars, after a whisk of her short crisp pink skirt, and a smile at Dosia in which her little white teeth gleamed in an infantile glee that only accentuated her air of preternatural capability.

Her cousin's kindly hands helped Dosia to remove the traces of travel, when she had definitely refused the offer pressed upon her to be undressed and go to bed and have her dinner brought up to her. It was sweet to be in feminine care once more, and be pitied for the terrors she had undergone, and feel the bond of relationship assert itself in spite of the fact that the cousins had not seen each other since Dosia's early childhood. She did not want to be alone up-stairs, and sat instead in Justin's place at the table, clad in a soft silken tea-gown of Lois' that was in itself restful, trying to eat and drink and keep up her part in the conversation about her journey and the absent members of the family. Changes had crowded so upon poor Dosia that she felt as if she were living in a kaleidoscope that rattled her every minute or two into a new position; the glittering table and her cousin's form would presently dissolve, and leave her perhaps out in the crowded, unknown streets, with wild-eyed faces pressing near her.

After all, she only changed to an arm-chair in the little drawing-room, with her head against a cushion and her feet on a foot-stool, and her cousin still beside her, pulling back the window-curtains once in a while to take a peep outside for her missing husband; in spite of the real kindness of her welcome, Dosia felt a certain preoccupation in it. Her coming was only accessory to the real importance of his, when she herself should have been the event; the warmth of heart which she had expected to feel toward her cousin somehow seemed to fail of expression in this attitude. At the same time, Lois was also conscious of a lack of response, a dullness, in Theodosia. Perhaps the likeness of relationship was answerable for a certain reserve of manner, a formality which neither knew how to break then or at a later time, and which was to last until the barriers were swept away by a mighty flood; but the real cause of the lack of sympathy lay in something much deeper. The strong thought of self is inevitably insulating—it is as restrictive of human contact as a live wire. Dosia, whose young life had all been spent in unselfishness, was experiencing unexpectedly the other swing of the pendulum in an intense and absorbing desire to have everything now as she wanted it. She was tired of thinking of other people; the scene should be set now for *her*. This desire was a huge mushroom growth, sprung up in a night; it had no real root in her nature, and would vanish as suddenly as it had come, but the shadow of it distorted her.

The house was very much smaller than Dosia had imagined, and her eyes roved over the little drawing-room in some perplexity, trying to make it come up to her anticipation. All dwellers in small country places, where economy is Heaven's first law, expect to be dazzled by the grandeur and elegance of "the city." People in Balderville never dreamed of buying new furniture from towns twenty or thirty miles away; as chair-legs broke off, or rockers split, or tables came to pieces, all sorts of domestic devices were resorted to by all but shiftless householders who tamely

submitted to ruin, in coaxing the article into seeming wholeness and keeping it still in active use. The best families were learned in all the little ways and capabilities of string and wire, and wooden cleats and old hinges and tacks, and pieces of tin cut from tomato-cans, and in the glueing on of piano-keys, black-walnut excrescences, ornaments, and sofa-arms.

Mended furniture has, however, a deprecating expression of its own, not to be concealed by any art. Dosia recognized the absence of it in these trim chairs that stood nattily on their slender curved legs, in the little shining tables which did not require to be hidden by a hanging cloth, and in the china and bric-à-brac placed boldly where they could be seen on all sides. She wondered a little at the low wicker arm-chair in which she was sitting, for they had wicker furnishings in the Balderville hotel, but the blue-skyed water-color sketches on the walls caught her fancy, and the vista of a blue-and-white dining-room, seen through half-closed reddish portières, was charming. For all the shine and polish and multiplicity of small ornaments in the tiny apartment, it seemed to lack a kind of comfort to which she was used, and of which she had caught a glimpse in the sitting-room as she passed it. She gave an exclamation of delight as her eyes fell on a stand in one corner of the room on which was a long glass filled with pink roses.

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"How beautiful these are! I haven't seen any finer ones in Balderville, and you know we are famed for our roses there."

"Oh," said Lois, "to think that you have been in the house for over an hour and I never told you about them! Justin's not coming upset everything. They were sent to you this afternoon."

"Sent to *me*?"

"Yes—by Mr. Sutton. Didn't you say you met him with Justin on the boat?—a short, stout man with sandy hair."

"Yes, Justin introduced him, but he hardly spoke to me."

"That doesn't make any difference, he sent them before he saw you at all. I told him you were coming, and these arrived this afternoon. You needn't feel particularly flattered; he sends them to everybody."

"Sends them to everybody!" Dosia looked amazed.

"Oh, yes; he's rich, and devoted to girls. They laugh at him, but I notice that they are quite ready to accept his flowers and candy and tickets for the opera. I believe that he wants to get married; but he really is sensible and quite nice underneath it all."

"Oh!" said Dosia, indefinably revolted. "And—and is Mr. Barr like that, too?"

"Who, Lawson? Oh, dear, no; he can't even support himself, let alone sending presents."

"He said such queer things," ventured Dosia, with a shy desire to talk about him. "I did not know what to make of it at first."

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"Oh, nobody pays any attention to what Lawson says," said Lois indifferently.

Dosia longed to ask why, with an instant wave of resentment at this way of speaking; a cloud seemed suddenly to have descended upon the glittering possibilities of her future. She fixed her eyes on her cousin, who sat in a high, slender chair, one arm gowned in yellow silk thrown over the back of it, and her cheek upon her arm—her rich coloring, the grace of her attitude, the sweep of her long black skirt, made a deep impression on the mind of the little country girl, who seemed slight and meager and insignificant to herself. And this other woman had been loved—she had passed through all the experiences to which Dosia looked forward. Was it that which gave her this charm thrown over her like a gauzy veil?

"What a beautiful waist you have on!" she exclaimed impulsively. "Yellow is such a lovely color."

"Do you think so?" said Lois. "This is an old thing that I mended to wear because Justin always likes it. I do wish he'd come." She rose and walked restlessly to the window. "I'm worried about him."

"Yes," said Dosia, still looking, and pleased that the remark bore out her fancy. But she wondered; married women in Balderville looked different—the hot Southern sun had burned the color out of their cheeks, and the gowns they mended were of cotton, not of yellow silk; this fresh youthfulness and self-sufficiency both attracted and repelled, it seemed so beyond her. Her heart bounded at the thought that Aunt Theodosia had sent money for her clothes as well as for her music lessons.

She did not resist the second attempt to send her to bed, although Justin was still absent. Lois had brought her all the things she needed in the absence of her wrecked luggage, and kissed her good night with tenderness, saying, "I hope you'll be very happy here, Dosia," and she answered, "Thank you so much for having me."

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In spite of her helpless fatigue, she lay awake for a long time in her tiny room. The brass bed, the polished floor with the crimson rug on it, the dainty dressing-table, had all seemed charmingly luxurious and like a book, but now that she was in darkness, she only saw vividly a pair of sparkling eyes looking into hers, and caught the sound of a kind, half-mocking voice. Every word of the conversation repeated itself again to her excited mind; it was delightful to remember, because she had acquitted herself so well; if she had replied stupidly she would have died of vexation now. How clever he had been, and how really considerate!—for she was glad to think that he had said foolish things to her to keep her from breaking down.

"Do I look like a person of whom you would approve?"

"I haven't considered the subject." She flashed the answer back again, and laughed, with her cheek glowing on the pillow. Why had Lois spoken of him so strangely? She vainly strove to fathom the significance of the words, which she resented, although they had coincided with an instinctive feeling she had that he was not at all the kind of man she would ever want to marry. She had already taken that provisional leap into a mythical future which is one of the perfunctory attitudes of maidenhood.

But who wanted to think of marrying now, anyway? That was something so far off that it seemed like the end of all things to Dosia, who at present only innocently desired plenty of emotions to live upon—costlier living than she knew, poor child! The very instinct that warned her against it added a heightened charm to the perilous pleasure. And the other man—Mr. Sutton—had already sent her flowers! Oh, this was life, life—the life she had read of and longed for, where dark eyes looked at you and made you feel how interesting you were; where you could have pretty clothes, and look like other people, and be brilliant and witty and sought after. She blushed with pleasure and excitement. Then she said a little prayer, with palm pressed to palm under the covers, and the glamour faded away as a sweet and pure feeling welled up from the clear depths of her heart. Her hand was once more held in safety. In her drowsiness, it was as if she had lifted her soft cheek to be kissed.

To the eager inquiries of Lois, Justin answered that he had had his dinner long before and wanted nothing.

He asked if she and the children were all right,—his usual question,—and she waited until he had dropped down in the arm-chair in the sitting-room up-stairs, after changing his shoes for slippers, before questioning him. Then she sat down by him and asked:

"Well, how was it?"

She spoke with eagerness, holding one of his hands in hers tenderly, although it hung limp after the first strong, responsive clasp.

"The fire was out before I got there."

"Do they know how it started?"

"Not yet."

"Was the place burned much?"

"No, not much."

"Did it do any damage to the machinery?"

"Some."

Lois looked at him in despair.

"Aren't you going to tell me *anything*?"

"There really isn't anything to tell, dear." He strove to speak with attention. "You know just about as much of it all as I do."

"Oh, but I'm so sorry for you! Will it put you back any?"

"I suppose so."

"Oh, *dear!*" she moaned helplessly. "Isn't it too bad! If only you had not been obliged to take that journey! Do you suppose it would have happened if you had stayed at home?"

"I really can't tell. The fire might have been discovered earlier; it started at noon, when most of the clerks were out at lunch."

"I see. But no one can hold you responsible."

"I am responsible for everything. If you do not mind, Lois, I'll go to bed. I'm tired; I didn't get any sleep last night."

"Yes, of course." She smoothed his hair with her fingers in remorseful tenderness, leaning against him, with her laces touching his cheek. "Such a long, long, tiresome journey! It's such a pity you had to go."

"Oh, well, I had to, and that's the end of it. Don't let's talk about it any more. I hope that poor girl gets some sleep to-night; she needs it. She can't hear us, can she?"

"No. Didn't you think she was sweet?"

"Yes, she seemed nice enough; she's pretty—a little stupid, perhaps."

"Oh, poor Dosia!" said Lois, "stupid! I should think she might have been, after all she had gone through. But then, you're so used to my cleverness!" She looked up at him with provocative eyes, into which he smiled faintly, in recognition of what was expected of him; then he said, with a sudden appealing change of tone, "I'm *very* tired, Lois."

She kissed him good night tenderly, with magnanimous concession to his unresponsiveness; there was no room for her in his thoughts to-night, and she had been so longing to see him! But she would tell him all about it to-morrow.

Justin laid his head upon the pillow, but his eyes burned into the darkness; there was a proud and

bitter disappointment at his heart, even while reason adjusted his losses to their proper place. Before him in disagreeable force came the face of Leverich, and it was not the face of a man to whom one would care to make excuse or from whom one would challenge reproof; he could see the heavy jowl, the piercing eyes, the half-pompous, half-shrewd expression of one who respected nothing but success. This tangle up of the machinery, unusual and costly in its parts and appointments—Heaven only knew what far-reaching complications the delay of its repair might occasion! Justin had seen only too well in others how a false step at the first may count.

Whether or not Dosia and the typometer were united in their destinies, they had at least one thing in common—they were both embarked upon perilous ways.

CHAPTER SIX

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Joseph Leverich, however, proved unexpectedly kind and sympathetic when Justin approached him on the latter's return from the West. Justin had written to him, and then had been incidentally reënforced by the assistance of Mr. Angevin L. Cater. Bullen, the foreman, was versed in practical knowledge of the machinery, and how to go to work about repairs; different portions had to be sent for to all parts of the country. Justin pored over catalogues, and checked off and figured, and tried to find ready-made substitutes wherever he could for those they ordinarily manufactured for the typometer. Here Cater, who had worked up gradually into the manufacturing of his own machine, was of great use.

"You never can find anything just as you want it," he conceded, encouragingly, to Justin, "but you can whittle off here and there, and make it do. I had to get along that way at first. You can manage pretty well, only there isn't any real certainty to it. I got sort of weary"—he pronounced it "weery"—"of sending for steel bars to fit, and then getting a consignment of 'em just two sizes too large, with a polite note saying that they were out of what I wanted, but thought it was best, at any rate, to send me what they had. You don't want to buck up against that kind of thing too often—not for your own good. So I started up the machinery, and even that goes back on you sometimes."

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"Mine has," said Justin grimly.

"Oh, I don't mean that way—it's in the way it turns out the stuff. You get so cussed mi-nute nothing seems quite right to you. You get kinder soured even on the material in the rough; the grain is wrong in this, and that hasn't been worked sufficient, and that t'other weighs too light."

"How long do you guarantee the typometer for?"

"For a year."

"We stake out ours for two,—go you one better,—but it's all rot. You can't guarantee nothin' in this world; I know that isn't grammar, but it kinder seems to mean more'n if 'twas. You can't guarantee nothin', not unless you could have the making of the raw material, and then you couldn't. And you can't guarantee your workmen, especially when you have to keep changing; I reckon human imperfection's got to step in somewhere. Talk of skilled labor! That's what takes the blood out of a man, the everlasting wrench of trying to get 'skilled labor' that is skilled. Some of it is so loose-jawed it can't even chew straight."

"You're a pessimist," said Justin, smiling.

The other broke into a responsive grin.

"Yes, I reckon that's so; but I don't even guarantee to be that, steady. Sometimes I get kinder mushy and pleasant, and think the world ain't a closed-up oyster,—Shakespeare,—but just nice soft cream-cheese that's ready to be spooned up when you want it. Those are the sort of spells a man's got to look out for, or he's likely to find himself up against the rocks, without even an oyster-shell in sight."

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"That's a bad position," said Justin, and Cater nodded confirmatively. After a moment he said:

"Well, I'll guarantee *that*; I've been there." As he was going, he asked: "How's Miss Dosia? Pretty well shook up, I suppose."

"Oh, she's all right now," said Justin. "She's been resting for a couple of days. You must come and see her; she will be glad to see a face from home."

"I reckon I'll wait awhile," said Cater, "till a face from home's more of a novelty. She ain't hankering for a sight of mine now." And, indeed, Dosia, on being informed of the prospect, showed no great enthusiasm. Balderville and the people there were so far away in the past that she had lost connection with them.

And, after all, Leverich met Justin's explanation cordially.

"Oh, you couldn't help a thing like that," he said. "Don't know yet how the fire started, do they? Accidents are bound to occur when you least look for them. The loss was fully covered, wasn't it?"

"Oh, yes."

"I'm glad the orders came in, anyway. Just bluff those fellows off a bit—tell 'em you've got a lot more orders on and *they've* got to wait; that's the way to do it."

"Oh, yes, I know that; the only thing I want is to be sure, myself, when the orders can be filled. I'm trying to get the machinery at work as soon as possible, and we're sending all over the country for what we need. Cater—he's the manufacturer of the timoscript, across the street, has told me of a place where they make small steel bars such as we use. I've brought the catalogue with me. I sent for a consignment of them yesterday; Bullen says they'll do."

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"Yes, that's all right," said Leverich. "Oh, you'll get along, you'll get along! I knew you wouldn't sit down and wait until I came home to get on your feet. Don't mind drawing on us for extra money if you need it—and we want to get in for the export trade. What do you think of this?" He took some papers out of his desk and began explaining them to Justin, who listened attentively before making suggestions. His mind, although not unusually quick, was singularly clear and comprehensive; he brought to Leverich's aid, if not the intelligence of the expert, something which is often harder to get, and which Leverich was experienced enough to appreciate at its full value—the intelligence which sees the matter from the standpoint of the big outer world, and not only from the inner radius of a little circle. Justin's vision was not, as yet, impeded by the technicalities and preconceived opinions which often obstruct the fresh point of view even in very clever men whose talent it is to see clearly.

"We haven't made any mistake in getting you," he said to Justin, as they parted.

The belated fifty dollars were carried to Lois that night, with a subdued joy in the glad provision of more to come. They were still to live on as little as they could, but the idea of the limit stretched to include those extra fives and tens whose expenditure was in the interest of true economy.

For a few days after her arrival Theodosia had kept her bed, in a reaction from the strain of the journey that made her too weak to care to do anything but lie in a half-drowsing and peaceful condition, hearing the sound of the children's voices as if they were very far off. Lois brought up the dainty meals herself, and talked the little talk women use on such occasions, and at four o'clock each afternoon Zaidee appeared with a tiny lacquered tray on which stood an egg-shell cup filled with fragrant tea, and a biscuit, and watched Dosia, as she ate and drank, with benignant satisfaction. The younger Reginald was still afraid and was lured near her bedside only to rush off again; but with Zaidee there was a loving comradeship.

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It was well that Dosia had even lost interest in Mr. Barr's call the next afternoon, for he did not come, and afterwards she grew ashamed that she had harbored the interest at all. Mr. Sutton, after sending more flowers, had departed for Boston.

But, after this convalescence, by the end of the week Dosia emerged, eager, alert, with pink cheeks and gleaming eyes, having passed through some subtle transformation, and bent on pleasure. She was rather silent, indeed, except when carried away by sudden excitement, but she was rapturously happy at the prospect of a concert and a card-party and a large bazaar to be given soon; the concert and the bazaar were both for charity, and she was already engaged to serve at the flower-booth in the latter; there was to be dancing after the closing of both entertainments.

Clothes were the first requisite, after a definite arrangement had been made to begin the music lessons in two weeks' time. Every little preparation was a source of delight to Dosia, who thought Lois wonderful as a designer and adapter of fashions suitable to her purse, and the older woman threw herself into this work with a sort of fierce ardor.



Zaidée watched Dosia with benignant satisfaction

Dosia had never seen so much ready money spent in her life, and had never heard so much talk about it—why should she, in a place where no one bought anything, where long-outstanding bills for tiny sums were paid for mostly in lumber, or chickens, or cotton? Here the price of daily living and clothing and amusements was one of the stock topics in the intimate round of suburban dwellers. Women came to visit her cousin Lois who at times made it their sole subject of conversation, incidentally submitting the very garments they wore to appraisal, for the pleasure of springing an unexpected price in her face like a jack-in-the-box, at which she was to jump admiringly. Lois declaimed against the habit, even while she sometimes fell a victim to it, and Dosia found herself drawn into the same ways, after a delightful revel in shopping for new clothes with Aunt Theodosia's money. The chief requisite in any article bought was that it should look to be worth more than was paid for it.

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What most impressed Dosia in the big city was, not the size of it, nor the height of the buildings, nor the magnificence of the shops—she accepted these wonders, indeed, with the provoking acquiescence which dwellers in outlying sections of the country display when confronted with the reality they have seen so often depicted. It was the crowd, the rush of the people, the tense expression on the faces, that struck her with amazement; everyone looked in grim haste to get somewhere, and forged ahead untiringly with set and definite purpose, as if there were not a minute to lose. Dosia had been used to sauntering aimlessly, and to seeing everyone else saunter. There was no hurry at Balderville, except in Northern people on their first arrival, and they soon lost it. Dosia clung to Lois' arm on their first excursion, but the next time she suddenly dropped the arm and forged ahead breathlessly, being caught, as she was crossing a street, by a policeman just in time to escape being run over by an electric car. When Lois came up to her, horrified and indignant, the girl was laughing in wild exhilaration.

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"Oh, it's such fun!" she said. "I'm going to walk like the other people after this; but I'll stop when I get to the crossings, so you needn't mind." People turned around to look at the pretty girl with the hair blown back from her face, standing still in the street and laughing. The excitement was all part of the first intoxication of the new life.

In the intervals of going to town, there were calls to be received, some from married women, and some from young girls who were asked especially to meet Dosia, and who expressed pleasure that she was to spend the winter with them. She was asked to join a book club and a card club, and to pour tea at the next meeting of the Junior Guild—proceedings that at the first blush appeared radiantly festive. It was understood that she was to be of the inner circle.

When the other functions took place, Dosia was a success both at the concert and the bazaar; a score of youths were introduced to her, with whom she laughed and chatted and promenaded and danced; she danced every time. The society of a new place is apt to appear extraordinarily attractive until one begins to resolve it into its component parts, when it is seen to differ but little from that one has hitherto known. Of these dancing youths, Dosia was yet to realize that half of them were younger even than she; some who seemed to take a great fancy for her were the bores whom all the other girls got rid of, if possible; others were just a little below the grade of real

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refinement; the really nice fellows were not there at all, with the exception of a stray few, and those who were attendant on their fiancées. Just at present the rhythm of the music and the joy of motion were all in all to Dosia. Her honest and artless pleasure shone so plainly from her face that for the moment it was a compelling attraction in itself—for the moment, as neither good looks, nor honesty, nor the artlessness of joy in one's own pleasure, serve as a power of fascination: it takes a subtler quality, combined of both sympathy and reserve—something always given, something always withheld.

This happiness of healthy youth, which as yet depended on no individual note, could last but such a brief time! When she looked back upon it, it seemed like a little sunny, transfigured place that somebody else had lived in—the Dosia who was just glad.

Lois watched her enjoyment, half preoccupied, yet smilingly, pleased with the girl's prettiness and success. Dosia thought, "How kind she is!" and yet, when another woman came to her and said, with warm impulsiveness, "My dear child, it's a pleasure to look at you!" she felt that she had now the one thing she had missed.

She went to the last evening of the bazaar clad in a floating blue gown that matched her eyes. The curve of her arms, bare to the elbow, the way the tendrils of her hair fell across her forehead, her sudden dimpling smile, the glad, unconscious motions of her beautiful youth, would have made her, to those who loved, the personification of darling maidenhood, with that haunting tinge of pathos which is the inheritance of the woman-child.

She sold more flowers than any other girl at the bazaar that night, and there she met Mr. Sutton, who had, indeed, called upon her, but at a time when she was out. This guaranteed man was rather short, stocky, and common-place-looking, with a large, round, beardless face, and a long, newly shaven upper lip. But his appearance made no difference; Dosia's radiant happiness flowed over on him with impartial delight, and if she sold many flowers, it was he who bought most of them, presenting them to her again afterwards, so that one corner of the room was heaped up with her spoils, and her arms were full of roses. She trailed around the crowded room with him in her blue gown, as he had insisted on her advice in buying, and received gifts of books and candy in the interests of organized charity. It was like being in the Arabian Nights to have inconsequent gifts showered upon one in this way, but she succeeded in dissuading him from offering her a large green and pink flowered plaque of local art, and was relieved when he gave it to the lady who had it for sale.

"A bachelor has use for so few things, Miss Linden," he said apologetically. "Each lady makes me promise—weeks beforehand—to come and buy from her especial table. If they would only have something I *could* want,"—he looked at her humorously,—“it would be easy enough to keep my word. Why don't they ever sell things a man can use? But look for yourself, Miss Linden—it's charity to help me out.” He paused irresolutely by a yellow-draped table. "Might you like some sewing-bags, now, or this piece of linen with little holes in it, or any of these—plush arrangements?"

"No!" said Dosia, laughing and shaking her head, "I mightn't."

"Or a doll, now?" He had strayed a step farther on. "Would you like a doll for Mrs. Alexander's little girl, and some of these charming toys?"

"Oh, how *lovely* of you!" said Dosia, touched in the sweetest part of her nature, and turning up to him a face of such childlike and fervent gratitude that it was like a little rift of heavenly blue let in upon the scene. George Sutton's seasoned heart gave an unexpected thump. He was used to feeling susceptible to the presence of a pretty girl; it had been his normal condition ever since he first grew up, when a girl had been a forbidden distraction in an existence devoted to earning and living on eight dollars a week; when he slept in the office, and studied Spanish in a night class. He had given a dozen or more years of his life to amassing a comfortable fortune before he felt himself at liberty to give any time to society; he had always cherished an old-fashioned idea that a man should be able to surround a woman with luxuries before asking her to marry him, and now that he had money, it was no secret that he was looking for a wife to share it. There was hardly a young woman in the place who had not been the recipient of the ardor of his glances, as well as of more substantial tokens of his regard; his sentimental remarks had been confided by one girl to another. But further than this, much as he desired marriage, George had not gone. Susceptibility has this drawback: it is hard to concentrate it permanently on one person. George Sutton's heart performed the pleasing miracle of always burning, yet never being consumed. Under all his amatory sentiment was the cool streak of common sense that showed so strongly in his business relations, and kept him from committing himself to the permanent selection of a partner who might prove, after all, to have no real fitness for the part. He was fond of saying that he had never made a bad bargain.

Dosia's grateful and sympathetic eyes raised to his opened up a sweet vista of domestic joys. She did not notice his growing silence as she gayly accepted the engines and dolls and sail-boats that he bought for the young Alexanders. She insisted on carrying them herself to be deposited near Lois, and then afterwards went off again with him, to be fed on ices, and have chances taken for her in everything; she did not notice that she was the recipient of his whole attention, although everyone else smilingly observed it. Dosia was only filling up the time until the dancing began.

Then Mr. Sutton stood against the wall and watched her. He had not learned to dance in the days of his youth, and heroic effort since had been of no avail. He had, indeed, after humiliating and anguished perseverance, succeeded in learning the correct mathematical movements of the feet in the two-step and the waltz, and he knew how to turn, without tuition; but to take the steps and

turn as he did so he could not have done to save his immortal soul. If the offering up of pigeons or of lambs could have propitiated the gods who presided over the Terpsichorean art, Mr. Sutton's domestic altars would have been reeking with sacrifice. Girls never looked so beautiful to his susceptible heart as when they were whirling past him to the inspiring dance music. It seemed really pathetic not to be able to do it too! He would have liked in the present instance, in default of greater skill, to have symbolized his lightness of heart by taking Dosia by her two hands and jumping up and down the room with her, after a fashion he had practiced as a little boy.

It was at the end of the evening that Dosia saw Lawson Barr standing in the doorway by one of the booths, with his overcoat on and his hat held in his hand. He was not looking at her, but talking to another man. She watched him under her eyelids, as she had done once before, and rather wondered that she had thought him attractive; he looked thinner and darker than she had thought, and more worn, and he had more than ever the peculiar effect of being unlike other people—his overcoat hung carelessly on him, and his necktie was prominent when almost all the other young men were in evening dress. He gave somewhat the impression of an Oriental in civilized clothing. She disclaimed to herself the fact that he had lingered in her thought at all.

He had been the subject of Lois' conversation on one of the afternoons of Dosia's convalescence, and she had since heard him spoken of by others, and always in the same tone. When she asked particularly about him, she was met by the casual answer, "Oh, everybody knows what Lawson is." He was liked, she found, to a certain extent, by everyone; but he carried no weight, and there seemed to be social limitations which it was an understood thing that he was not to pass.

Seven or eight years before, he had come from the little country town of his birth with a past such as places of the kind are too fatally apt to fasten upon the boys who grow up in them. Witty, talented, good-hearted, Heaven only knows to what terrible influences Lawson Barr's idle youth had been subject; and nobody in his new home had cared to hear. Scandal may be interesting, but one instinctively avoids filth. It was an understood thing, when he first came to Woodside, that his brother-in-law, Joseph Leverich, had lifted him out of "a scrape" in response to the appeal of a weeping aunt, and had brought the boy back with him to get him away from village temptations and substitute the more bracing conditions of city life, where entertainment that was not vicious could be had.

The experiment had apparently worked well; in the eight years which Lawson Barr had passed in Woodside, no one had anything bad to tell of him. He was more inclined to the society of men than of women, and shared the imputation of being fond of what is called "a good time"; but he was never seen really under the influence of liquor. Shy in general company at first, he became rather a favorite afterwards in a certain way; he was fond of sports, and was very kind to women and children; he was also witty and clever, and played entrancingly on the piano when he was in the mood; he was one of those gifted people who can play, after their own fashion, on any instrument. When he felt pleasantly inclined, no one was more amiable; in another humor, he spoke to no one. He had become engaged to a girl in good standing, after a summer flirtation. The girl had come there on a visit, and the engagement lasted only until her return and the revelation of his prospects to parental inspection.

For Lawson never had any prospects—or, at least, they never solidly materialized. He never kept his positions for more than a few months at a time. There was always a different reason for this, more or less unimportant on each occasion, but the fact remained the same. Strangers whom he met invariably took a great interest in him, and, captivated by his undoubted cleverness and charm, were enthusiastic in finding new openings for him, ready to champion hotly his merits against that most galling of all criticism, which consists in the simple statement of adverse facts.

"You will never be able to make anything out of him," was a sentence which his relays of friends were sure to hand on to one another.

One summer Lawson had come down so far as to keep the golf-grounds in order—a position, however, which he filled in such a well-bred manner, and with so many niceties of consideration for everyone's comfort, that to have him around considerably enhanced the pleasures of the game, and the players were sorry when he bought a commutation-ticket once more and started going in to town mornings as one of them.

Part of the time he boarded at a small hotel in the village, and part of the time he stayed with the Leverichs; rumor said that Leverich alternately turned him out or welcomed him, as he lost or renewed patience, but the relations of the two men, as seen by outsiders, always appeared to be friendly.

Welcomed at the outset kindly by a society willing to forget the youthful faults of the handsome, clever boy, and let him in on probation to the outer edges of it, it was a singular fact that after all these years of apparent respectability he had made no further progress.

There are men who come out of crucial youthful experiences with a certain inner purity untouched; with an added reverence for goodness, and a strength of character all the greater for the sheer effort of retrieval; whose eyes are forever ashamed when they look back on the sins that were extraneous to the true nature, leaving it, save for the painful scars, clean and whole. With poor Lawson there had been, perhaps, some inherent flaw in which the poison lodged, to a deterioration, however delicate, of the whole tissue. It is strange—or, rather, it is not strange—that, in spite of respectability of life, with nothing whatever that was tangible to contravene it, this should have been thing each person is bound to make, irresponsive of what felt of Lawson Barr. An individual impression is the one he does, and the combined judgment of the members of an intelligent suburban community is very keen as to character, no matter how it differs in

regard to actions. The standard of morality in such a section is high—it may indulge occasionally in the witticisms and literature of a lower scale, but in social relations the lesser order must go. “Shadiness” is damning. Lawson was not exactly “shady,” but he might be. No girl was ever supposed to fall in love with him, and a young man who was seen too intimately with him received a sort of reflected obloquy. Strangers whom he impressed favorably always asked, as Dosia did, “Why, what has he *done*?” And received the same reply Lois gave her: “Oh, nothing.”

“Isn’t he—nice?”

“Yes, nice enough, as far as that goes. He can’t seem to make a living; I don’t know why—he’s clever enough. There’s really nothing against him though, except that he was wild when he was a boy. I have heard that when he goes away on trips he—drinks. But Justin wouldn’t like me to say it; he hates to have people talked about in this way. Still—it’s just as well that you should know all about him.”

“Oh, yes,” said Dosia, in a tone personifying clear intelligence, yet in reality mystified. She felt at once indignant at the imputations thrown on Mr. Barr, and yet a little ashamed of having liked him, as something in bad taste.

As she saw him now in the doorway, she rather hoped that he wouldn’t come and speak to her at all; but the hope was vain, for, without apparently seeing her, he made his way through the room, at the cessation of the dance, and held out his ungloved hand for hers.

It is in one of George MacDonald’s stories that Curdie, the hero, tests everyone he meets by a hand-clasp, which unconsciously reveals the true nature to his magic sense; claws and paws and hoofs and the serpent’s writhe are plain to him. Since the walk in the darkness, Dosia involuntarily tested the feeling of palm to palm by the hand that had held hers then; the dreaming yet deep conviction was strong within her that some day she would meet and recognize her helper by that remembered touch, if in no other way. Mr. Barr’s hand was smooth, with long fingers, and a lingering, intimate clasp. Dosia drew hers away quickly, with a flush on her cheek, and then felt, as she met his coolly appraising eyes, that she had done something school-girlish and ill-bred.

“You did not come to see me, after all,” she said, when the first greeting was over, and could have bitten out her tongue for saying it.

“I regretted very much not being able to,” he replied, in a tone of conventional politeness. “I went West the next day, and have only just returned. You have been enjoying yourself, I hope?”

“Oh, immensely,” said Dosia, with exaggerated emphasis; “I couldn’t have had a better time, possibly.” Her eyes roved toward the people in front of them with studied inattention, although she was strangely conscious in every tingling fiber of the presence of the man by her side.

“You have been to town, I suppose?” he pursued.

“Yes, indeed, several times.”

“Would you care to come out in the corridor and walk?” he asked abruptly, as the music struck up again. “I’m not in evening dress, you see; I only returned from my trip half an hour ago. Or would you prefer to dance?” he added.

“Oh, I prefer to dance!” said Dosia, with the first natural inflection her voice had possessed in speaking to him.

“Then I will ask you to excuse me. I see Billy Snow coming over for you. Good night.”

“You are not going to leave *now*?” exclaimed Dosia, with disappointment too quick to be concealed.

“In a few moments; I may not see you again.” He did not offer his hand this time, but bowed and was gone.

It was the last dance. Billy Snow, slim and young, was a good partner, and Dosia’s feet were light, yet, for the first time that evening, she did not feel the buoyancy of dancing; the flavor of it was lost. As they circled around the room, she saw that the booths were being dismantled of their blue and crimson and yellow draperies, the decorations were being torn from the walls, and cloaks and boxes routed out from under the tables. The receivers of money were busily counting up the piles of silver. A few children ran up and down at the end of the room, on the smooth floor, unchecked, and a small boy lay asleep on a bench, while his mother lamented her husband’s prolonged absence to everyone who passed. Each minute the crowd in the room thinned out more and more, going out by twos and threes and fours, leaving fewer couples on the floor and a scattered line of chaperons against the wall. But the dancers who were left clung to their privilege. As the clock struck twelve, and the musicians got up to leave, a cry of protest arose:

“One more waltz—just one more! This is the best part of the evening. Lawson—Lawson Barr, give us a waltz! Ah, no, don’t say you’re too tired—play!”

Young Billy Snow stood with his arm half withdrawn from Dosia’s waist, looking questioningly down at her.

“I think I’d better go,” she murmured uncertainly, loath to depart, yet with a glance toward Lois, who, with Justin now standing beside her, was plainly expectant of departure. Lois had had no dancing—yet she was young, too. But at that moment the music struck up again—there was a crash of chords, and then a strain, wildly sweet, to which Dosia found herself gliding into motion ere she was aware. She knew before she looked that Lawson Barr was at the piano. His intent

face, bent upon the keys, seemed remote and sad.

The big room was nearly empty. One of the high windows had been opened for air, revealing the shining of the stars far up above in the bluish-black sky; below it a heap of tall white chrysanthemums stood massed to be taken away. There were barely a dozen couples on the polished floor. These had caught the white fire of a dance played as Dosia had never heard one played before; there was a wild swing to it that got into the blood and made the pulses leap in unison. The dancers flew by on swift and swifter feet, with paling cheeks and gleaming eyes. Dosia was dancing with Billy Snow, it was his arm around her on which she leaned, but to her intense imagining it was with Lawson Barr that she whirled, with closed eyes, on a rushing and delicious air that swept them past the tinkling shivers of icy falls into a white, white garden of moon-flowers, with the silver stars above. From the flowers to the stars she swung in that long, entrancing strain—from the flowers to the stars! From the stars—ah, whither went that flight of ecstasy—this endless, undulating, dreaming whirl? Down to the flowers again now—back to the stars; beyond, beyond—oh, whither?

A chord, sharp and strong, rent the music into silence. It brought Dosia to the earth, awake and trembling, with parted lips and panting breath. But her eyes had the wonder still in them, her face the whiteness of the flowers, as, with head thrown back, her bright loosened hair touching the blue of her gown, the trailing folds of which had slipped unnoticed from her hand, she walked across the floor with Billy. Her loveliness, as she smiled, brought a pang to the woman-soul of Lois, it was so plainly of the evanescent moment; she felt that it was filched from the future possession of some dearest lover, who could never know his loss.

"I hope I haven't let you stay too long, Dosia," she said practically, and Justin hurried her into her wraps, after she had given Billy the rose he asked for. Everybody was leaving at once in couples, laughing and chattering, with the lights turned out behind them as they went.

The last thing which Dosia saw as she left the hall with Justin and Lois was a side view of Lawson Barr going down the stone steps, carrying in his arms the child who had fallen asleep on one of the benches. The light head rested on his shoulder, and the long black-stockinged legs hung down over his arm. Beside him walked the mother, voluble in thanks, with the child's cap in her hand.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Mr. William Snow was at present in that preparatory stage of existence known locally as "going to Stevens"; in other words, he was a daily attendant at the institute of that name, situate on the heights of Hoboken, in the State of New Jersey, and was destined to become one of that army of young electricians who, in point of numbers, threaten to over-run the earth. He wended his way to the college by train each morning as far as the terminus, from thence taking the convenient trolley. His arms were always full of books, from which he studied fitfully as he journeyed.

Mr. Snow was slim and tall, being, in fact, as his mother and sisters admiringly noted, six feet one, with long legs, narrow shoulders, and a small round face of such an open, infantile character that his mother often averred that it had changed in nothing since his babyhood, and that a frilled cap framing his chubby visage would produce the same effect as at that early stage. His name seemed to typify the purity of his nature, as seen through this countenance so fair and fresh, so blue-eyed and guileless, accentuated by the curls of light hair upon his round white forehead. Mrs. Snow was wont to discourse upon her William's ingenuousness and his freedom from the usual faults of youth in a way that sometimes taxed the gravity of the listener, for, in point of fact, Billy was a young scapegrace whose existence ever since he was in short clothes had been devoted to mischief and levity as much as the limits of circumstance would allow. No one could tell how he had suffered from his mother's exalted belief in him. She had forbidden him to play with naughty boys whose mischievous pranks he had himself instigated; she had accompanied him to school to point with tense indignation at the injuries he had received from stones thrown by playmates at whom he had had the first convincing "shy"; she had complained untiringly to parents by letter, by his sisters, and by interview, of indignities offered to the clothing and the person of her unoffending son. If Billy hadn't been the whole-souled and genial boy that he was, he would have been made an outlaw and an object of derision among his kind, but it was an understood thing that, far from being responsible for his mother's attitude, he writhed under it with an extorted obedience. A certain loyalty to his parent, and also the tongue-tied position of youth toward authority, made it impossible for him fully to state to her how far below her estimate of him he really was; he bore it, instead, with the meekness of an only son whose mother was a widow.

The fact that he was a born lover and had been intermittently experiencing the tender passion since the age of seven, she regarded only as an additional proof of his gentle disposition. She would have liked him to be always in the society of girls instead of those rude boys.

With added years Billy's outward demeanor had changed in his daily journey toward education. He no longer had scimmages in the train with school-fellows, in which books of tuition served as weapons of warfare; he no longer harried the brakeman or climbed outside on the ferry-boat, or was chided for outrageous noisiness by long-suffering commuters. But the happy expression of

his countenance was usually such a fixture that its marked absence attracted the attention of his fellow-passengers one day in the latter part of January. His face was gloomy and averted; he would not talk. To cheerful questions as to what had disagreed with him, or whether he was "up against it again" at Stevens, his replies were unexpectedly brief, and evinced his desire to be let entirely alone. The change had, in truth, come over him since entering the car, and was caused by the sight of two figures in a seat ahead of him.

The figures were those of a man and a girl, and their conversation had a peculiar air of absorption which seemed to make them alone together in the crowd. Billy could see only the backs of this couple, save when one turned a little sideways to the other, and the round curve of a cheek and a fluff of fair hair became visible, or the bend of an aquiline nose and a dark mustache—the nose and the mustache turned sideways much oftener than the fairer profile. Once or twice Billy caught sight of a pink throat and ear; on such occasions the girl bent her head and fingered nervously at a music-roll she held upright in her hand, and Billy swore under his breath.

When the train had rolled into the station, he went with the other passengers as far as the door of the ferry-house to see—yes, they were going over the same ferry together, he still bending toward her as they walked, she with a charming, shy hesitancy in her manner, as of one unaccustomed to her position. Bill said bitterly, "The gall of him!" and walked away to the humiliating trolley which showed that he was still "going to Stevens'." If he had been out of bondage, he would have been quick to follow and take his place on the other side of the girl, and show to all men that she was not making one of an intimate duet.

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It was after this that his mother noticed that on certain days his accustomed spirits flagged. Her keen ear detected that he no longer whistled cheerily all the time he was dressing, but only when he heard her foot upon the stairs; and although he still chaffed his admiring sisters at dinner, there was a bitter and realistic strain in the jesting that made them all sure that Willie could not feel well. He found fault with his food, also a thing unprecedented. His mother brought him pills which he refused to take, towering above her—she was a little woman—tense and aloof. When she taxed him with having something on his mind, he admitted it at once, in a tone that bade her go no further.

"It is nothing to do with myself," he conceded, with the spirit of a man looking at her from his baby-blue eyes. The woman in her bowed to it as she went down-stairs, with pride in him rampant in her heart, to deliver her report to the two sisters waiting below.

The Snow family had been settled in the town from its beginning as a suburb, some thirty years back; Mr. Snow having died—after losing money largely on his real-estate investments there—twelve years later, when Billy was an infant, leaving many unproductive tracts of land with large taxes appertaining to them. The Snows knew everybody in the place, rich and poor, and were consequently regarded somewhat in the light of a directory; the woman by the day, the cheap dressmaker, and the handy man or boy could always be achieved by applying to them, for they had an invariable acquaintance with respectable persons temporarily forced into filling these positions. They themselves, while adding to their own finances in various ways, neither concealed nor obtruded the fact; their affairs could interest no one but themselves. They lived in a very small old-fashioned white frame house with a narrow entrance-hall nearly level with the street; and the little low-ceiled parlor and sitting-room, with their narrow doorways and slightly uneven floors, were crowded with large mahogany and walnut furniture and bedecked with the birthday and Christmas gifts of the family for the last thirty years, from the cherry-stone basket once carved by Father to the ornamental hanging calendar of the past season. In the autumn the ladies potted plants with such accumulative energy that the rooms became more and more a jungle of damp pots and tubs, topped by overflowing showers and spikes and flat blobs of green. Only the family knew exactly where to sit without encroaching perilously on these; Billy's friends always dropped first into a certain chair and rocked into a dangling mass of Wandering Jew on the marble-topped table behind.

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The Snows had the recognized position in society of being Asked to Everything. When they went to entertainments, it was in the dark, quiet garments of every-day life, or the one often remodeled state robe belonging to each, irrespective of what other people wore. Their circumstances and their birth were too well known to need pretense.

Ada, the second daughter, taught in a school. She was twenty-seven, tall like her brother, and with a fair, babyish face like his. It seems to be the rule in the pages of fiction, even at the present day, to depict unmarried women of this age as both feeling and looking no longer young—as a matter of fact, a girl of twenty-seven is rarely distinguishable from one of twenty-three, and is often more attractive. Ada Snow had been, besides, one of those immature young persons who grow up late, and become graceful and natural in society only after long custom; at twenty, shy and awkward, she had usually been mistaken for sixteen. She was her brother's favorite, secretly aiding and abetting him in many evasions of the maternal law; she tied his cravats for him now, and got up little suppers for him, and he posed as her elder, in view of his height and large experience.

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The other sister, Bertha, was a delicate and much older woman, dark-haired, lined and sallow, given to intermittent nerve-prostrations and neuralgia, yet keeping a certain sanity and strength of mind hidden beneath an accumulation of small interests. She seldom went out, but sat by a window in the sitting-room all day, screened by the steaming plants, embroidering on linen, and keeping tally of the persons who went up and down the street, the number of oranges bought out of a cart, and the frequency of the meetings of two servants over a boundary fence—incidents of note in themselves without further connection. She seemed almost inconceivably petty in

conversation and idea, but if one were strong enough to speak only to the truth that was in her, she could answer. She was honest and she was loyal; she knew a friend. She had worked hard for her mother in her early youth—that little mother who now looked almost younger than she, as she came into the room from her interview with William, and sat down by her daughter to say, in a tone of the mother who believes no secret is hid from her: “William won’t tell me what’s the matter, but I know it’s something to do with that girl at the Alexanders’. Willie is growing up so fast!”

“Oh, yes, if you mean Miss Linden,” said Miss Bertha, in comfortable corroboration. “That’s been going on for some weeks.”

“Yes, I know; but he acts differently this time. Perhaps she’s snubbed him in some way.”

“No, he was there the other night, and he is to take her skating Saturday. I saw the note open on his bureau. Maybe, after all, it’s just being in love that upsets him.”

“Yes, I really think that’s all.”

Miss Bertha put her work down on her lap, and smoothed it out with slender, nervous fingers, before rolling it up in a thin white cloth. The daylight was beginning to go.

“He’s got a rose she gave him,—never mind how I know,—and he keeps it wrapped up in tissue”—she pronounced it “tisher”—“paper in his waistcoat pocket. He leaves it in there sometimes when he changes his clothes. And Ada says—you know that picture in the magazine that we all said looked so like Miss Linden? He’s got it in a little frame. Ada says that it tumbles out from underneath his pillow once in a while when she’s taking the covers off; I suppose the child puts it there at night and forgets it in the morning. Ada just slips it half-way back again when she makes up the bed, as if she’d overlooked it. He never says anything, and of course she doesn’t, either.”

“I hope the girl will not take his attentions seriously,” said the mother, alarmed. She had known all this before, but it was a fashion of the family to talk over and over what they already knew. “I *hope* she will not take him seriously.”

“Mother! They’re both so young.” Ada, who had been leaning forward with her face in her hands and her chin upturned at a statuesque angle, spoke for the first time.

“Oh, that’s very well!” Mrs. Snow tossed her head as one with experience. “He is, of course, nothing but a mere boy at nineteen, but a girl of twenty is years older. When a girl is twenty, she goes in society with women of *any* age. I was married myself at eighteen—not that I should wish either of my daughters to do so.”

“Well, you can feel safe about that, mother,” interpolated Ada.

“William is very attractive, dear boy, and I could not blame any girl for being somewhat captivated by him; I should be sorry if Miss Linden allowed her affections to be engaged. She may not know that his career is mapped out before him. William will not be in a position to marry before he is thirty-six. William is—”

“The people are coming from the train,” interposed Miss Bertha, waving back one thin hand to stop her mother’s discourse—which she could have repeated backward—and scanning the hurrying file in the dusk across the street.

“Now you can tell how long the days are getting. Ada, come here. Mrs. Leverich has on her new furs—the ones her husband gave her. Don’t they make her look stout? There are the Brentons, I think that’s a bag of coffee he’s carrying. He has a long, narrow package, too, with square ends—perhaps *she’s* been buying corsets; if not, it must be a bottle of whisky. And there—who is that? Oh, I thought it was Mr. Alexander in a new coat; of course it’s too early for him—they say he’s been making money hand over hand lately. And here comes—why it’s George Sutton! Ada, Ada, bow! he’s looking. He sees us waving—ah!”

There was a pause, in which an interested flush appeared on the cheeks of both sisters.

The mother murmured apprehensively, “They say *he* is devoted to Miss Linden,” but neither answered. Ada had benefited, like the other girls, by his attentions, she had been given candy and flowers and made one in his theater-parties, but it was the secret conviction of all three women that all his general attentions were simply a cloak for his real devotion to Ada. The others were just a circle—she was the particular one; and Heaven only knows how many girls in this circle shared the same conviction. His smile and nod now seemed to speak of an intimacy that blotted out all his preference for Miss Linden.

“You had better pull down the shade now,” said Mrs. Snow, after a few minutes. “It’s time to light the lamp.”

“No, wait a moment—there’s another train in.” Miss Bertha’s eyes pierced the gloom. “The Carpenter boys, those new people in the Farley house, and that’s all. No, there’s somebody ‘way behind—I declare, it’s Miss Linden! She’s ever so much more stylish-looking than she was at first. I wonder she didn’t come on the train ahead. Who can that be with her? Why—” there was a pause. “I suppose he must have just happened to get off with her at the station,” said Miss Bertha in an altered voice.

“Oh, yes; I’m sure that’s it,” said Ada.

"What is all this that I hear about Dosia and Lawson Barr?" asked Justin abruptly, one evening when he and his wife were at home alone together, a rather unusual occurrence now. Either he was out, or there was company, or Dosia was sitting with them by the table on which stood the reading-lamp. Just now she was staying overnight with Miss Torrington, at the other end of the town, "across the track," practicing for a concert.

Justin had dropped his collar-button that morning in the process of dressing, and the small incident was productive of unforeseen results. The hunt for it had delayed him to a later train and a seat by Billy Snow.

"What is this I hear about Dosia and Lawson Barr? They say she has been going in with him on the express nearly every morning this month. She may have been coming out with him, too, for all I know."

"Who says so?" asked Lois, startled, but contemptuous.

"Billy, for one."

"I do not see what business it is of his."

"That hasn't anything to do with it, Lois. As a matter of fact, the boy wouldn't have told me at all if I hadn't happened to sit with him to-day; he's heard plenty of remarks on it, though, and he's cut up about it. They sat in front of us, some seats down, entirely oblivious of everybody; it might have been their private car. It gave me a start, I can tell you, when Billy said it was not the first time. Has she said anything to you about it?"

"Yes, I think she has mentioned once or twice that she had seen him on the train; I know he brought her home one afternoon when she was late. But I haven't paid any particular attention; and, after all, there's no harm in it."

"Oh, no; there's no *harm*, if you put it that way—only she mustn't do it. You know what I mean, Lois. Dosia ought not to want to be with him."

"I suppose he comes and talks to her, and she doesn't know how to stop him."

"Perhaps."

"And you sent her out in his care that first night," said Lois. She felt unbelieving and combative; Lawson was so unattractive to her that she could not conceive of his being otherwise to any girl.

"Of course; and I would do so again under the same circumstances—that was an emergency. But that's very different from making a practice of it. You must tell Dosia, as long as she can't see it herself. Let her get her lesson changed to another hour and that will settle the thing. Does she see much of Barr at other places?"

"No more than anybody else does; of course, he is more or less around. But she knows *just* what he is like, Justin; I told her all about him the first thing, and she hears it from everybody. I am sure you are mistaken about her liking his society, she told me once that it always made her uncomfortable when he was near her. I really don't think you need be afraid of anything serious."

"All right, then. Probably a hint will be sufficient; but don't forget to give it, Lois. She is very much of a child in some things."

"Yes, she is," said Lois, resignedly.

This having Dosia with them had turned into one of those burdens which people sometimes ignorantly assume under a rose-colored impulse. It had seemed that it must be necessarily a charming thing to have a young girl in the house. But to have a young girl who was always practicing on the piano, to the derangement of Reginald's sleep or to the inconvenience of visitors in the little drawing-room, one who had to be specially considered in every plan, and whose presence took away all privacy from Lois' daily companionship with Justin, was a doubtful pleasure. Even this rainy evening with Justin and herself cozily placed together was, after all, not hers, but invaded, if not with the presence, at least with the disturbing thought of Dosia.

There were all the little grievances which sound so infinitesimal, and yet count up to so much when sympathy is lacking. Dosia had lived in a Southern atmosphere and in a home which had no regular rule. She invariably wanted to play with the children at the wrong time, and yet perhaps did not always offer to take care of them when it would have been a help. If Lois was busy when Justin came home at night, she would invariably find afterwards that Dosia had swiftly poured into his ears—in nervous loquacity at being alone with him—all the domestic happenings of the day, so that every remark that Lois made was answered by a "Yes; Dosia has already told me." These slight threads, which Lois had treasured up from which to spin a little web of interest for her beloved, would thus be broken off short. Dosia also had a fashion of ensconcing herself unthinkingly in Justin's particular seat by the lamp, in which case he sat patiently and uncomfortably in an attitude out of the radius, or else went up-stairs to the untidy sitting-room to read by himself, leaving Lois, with her teeth on edge, to keep company perforce with Dosia, to whom he would not allow Lois to make protest, avowing that he was not inconvenienced at all. He had an unvarying kindness and sense of justice regarding the girl. But the family was like the bicycle of concert-hall fame, built for two, and this third person jarred its running qualities out of gear.

It was the night after Justin's charge to her that Lois nerved herself to broach the subject of Lawson to Dosia, who was copying some music by the table. Both her hair and her dress were arranged with a little new touch of elegance, but there was a droop to the corners of her mouth that had not been there before—a suggestion of hardness or melancholy or defiance, it would have been difficult to say which.

Justin was getting ready to go out, and Lois could hear his footsteps as he walked up and down above. She hated to begin, and her very reluctance gave a chill tone to her voice as she said temporizingly, "Dosia, please don't keep Reginald out so late again as you did this afternoon. It is too cold."

"We only went to the post-office; he said he was warm."

Dosia, who had generously curtailed her practicing to take the mother's place, felt ill-used.

"I know; but it was too late for him. His feet were as cold as ice. I am *so* afraid of croup."

"I'm sorry," said Dosia, in a low voice. "I won't do it again."

"Well, never mind that now." Lois hesitated, and then took the plunge: "I want to speak to you about Lawson Barr, Dosia."

Dosia's color, which came and went so prettily when she spoke, always left her when she was really moved, or at the times when girls ordinarily blush. She turned pale now and her eyes became defiant, but she did not answer.

The other stumbled along, sorry and ashamed, as if she were the culprit:

"People have been commenting—I hear that he has been with you a great deal lately."

"Where?" The girl's voice was hard.

"On the train."

"He went in to town with me twice last week, and twice the week before—yes, and yesterday. And he came out with me once." She counted out the times as if they were a contravention. "I don't see how I am going to help it if people speak to me, I can't *tell* them to go away. *I* don't want him to do it! Mr. Sutton took me over the ferry one day; was that commented on, too?"

There was a passion of tears in her voice, called forth by outraged modesty—and there is no modesty that feels itself more outraged than that of the girl who knows she has given some slight cause for reproof.

"Dosia, be reasonable," said Lois, annoyed that her talk was being made so hard for her. "I know it's horrid to be 'spoken to,' but Justin is very particular, and he feels that we are responsible for you. And, besides, you wouldn't want it thought that you liked Lawson's society. I am to go in to town with you to-morrow, and we will get the hour for your lesson changed." She paused for some answer, but none came, and she went on: "I told Justin that he need not worry, there was no danger of your caring too much for *Lawson!* That's nonsense. Why, you know all *about* him, and just what he amounts to. But, of course, if you are seen with him—"

"You need not say any more. I never want to speak to him again!" said Dosia, strangling. She swept her things from the table and rushed up to her own room in a whirlwind of indignation and shame, scathed by the imputation in Lois' tone. The bubble of her imagining of Lawson was pricked for the moment by it; it is hard to idealize what another despises. She felt herself as false to her own estimate of him as she had hitherto been to the public one.

She threw herself upon the bed face downward. Something that she had been unconsciously dreading had come upon her—the notice of her little world. Before it had been voiced to her by Lois she had persistently considered herself unseen. She cried out now that there was no occasion for her being "spoken to," yet she knew with a deep acknowledgment that she had not been quite true to her highest instincts.

The exquisitely sensitive perception which is an inherent part of innocence was hers. The Dosia who at twelve could not be induced to enter a room when a certain man was in it, because she "did not like the way he *looked* at her," had as unerring an instinct now as then; it was an instinct so deep, so interwoven with every pulse of her nature, that to deny it ever so little was a spiritual hurt. She could not have told why certain subjects, certain joking expressions even, revolted her so that she shrank from them involuntarily. She could not have told why she knew there was something about Lawson different from the other men she had been accustomed to. Dosia not only knew nothing of the practice of evil, she knew nothing of life nor the laws of it; but it could never be said of her that she did not know when right bordered on wrong. She knew—and it would have been impossible for her not to have known—her slightest deviation from that shining road which can only be followed by white feet. Her first quick idea of Lawson as not the kind of man that she would ever want to marry still held good. Back of all this was the image of the true prince.

There are people whose natures we always feel electrically, a sensation which depends neither on liking nor on disliking, and which often partakes of both. When we meet them there is always a slight shock, a psychic tingling, a displacement of values, that makes us uncertain of our pathway; the colors seen in this artificial light are different from those seen by day. Barr affected Dosia thus. If he came into a room, she knew it at once; dancing or walking or talking with others, she felt his eyes upon her, disquieting her and making her conscious of his presence, so that she could not get up or sit down naturally. When he was not there, everything was flat and

uninteresting in the withdrawal of this exciting disquietude. If she met his remarks cleverly, it gave her a delighted occupation for hours in recalling them; if she failed in repartee, and was "thick" and school-girlish, her cheeks would burn and the taste for life would leave her; she could hardly wait to see him again to retrieve herself. She was not in love with Barr, she was not even in love with love,—a fairly healthful process,—but she was in love with the excitement of his presence.

She had been shy of him at first, waiting for him to seek her. After the night of the bazaar and that wondrous waltz, she had felt that he must fly to speak to her at the nearest opportunity, and tell her that he had played for her, and her alone; and in return she had longed to assure him of her divining sympathy. But he did not come. She invented many excuses for this, but it gave her a sharp disappointment of which he was necessarily unconscious. As she met him casually at different places,—with the old quizzical gleam in his eye, and that peculiar manner,—his lightest word became fraught with deep meaning, over which she pondered, refusing to believe that the world she lived in was entirely of her own creation. In these last two months she had always an undercurrent of thought for him, whether she was practicing or sewing, or chaffing with Billy, or receiving the gallant but somewhat heavy attentions of Mr. Sutton. With Lawson's avoidance of her had come a childish, uncalculating impulse to attract. Dosia had not told the truth when she said that she could not help his speaking to her; she knew very well the morning he would have passed her by in the train, as usual, if her eyes had not met his. Barr never presumed,—he knew the place allotted to him,—but he accepted permission. When he sat down by her, she swiftly wished him away again; yet her heart beat under his cool glance—a glance which seemed to read her every thought. These interviews, in which the conversations were of the lightest, yet in which she felt subtle intimations, were a delicious and stinging pleasure, like eating ice.

There had been a fitful burst of suburban gayety about Christmas-time and after—a delightful flare that burned up red and glowing, only to sink back gradually into the darkness of monotony. There was that fall into a hum-drum condition of living, instigated by bad weather, which shuts up each household into itself; the men were kept later down-town, and the women had the usual influx of winter colds and minor maladies which interfere with planned festivities. The younger sort had engagements, individually and collectively, for "things in town," either coming out on the last train or staying comfortably overnight with friends. An assembly dance planned for Shrove Tuesday had fallen through.

The fairy glamour was already gone for Dosia. The personal note which she had missed at first was everything, and she found it nowhere but in Lawson. If she could have poured out her thoughts and feelings to Lois,—“talked things over,” girl-fashion,—if Lois had been her friend and lover—But Lois had no room for her; Dosia had learned to feel all the bitterness of the alien. And she was shy with the pleasant but self-sufficient women whom she met socially, and who were so intimate with one another; Dosia merely sat on the edge of conversations, so to speak, and smiled. She could not learn this assured fluency. The very children were hedged in from her by restrictions. To give up those little incidental meetings with Lawson was to give up the one silver string on which hung happiness, and yet—and yet—Dosia felt the sting of Lois' matter-of-fact contempt for him; it lowered him indescribably. All women look down upon a man who will allow himself to be despised. She had cherished an ideal of him as a man lonely, misunderstood, terribly handicapped by opinion, by his own nature even, and yet capable of good and noble things. She had thought—

“Dosia?”

“Well?”

“Will you shut your door? The light streams down here and keeps Reginald from going to sleep. He waked when you went up-stairs.”

Dosia rose and closed the door noiselessly; she would have liked to shut it with a bang. It was a climax. There seemed to be nothing that she could do in this house that was right! Her attitude had ceased to be only that of an alien, it was that of an antagonist; but it was also that of a lonely and unguarded child.

CHAPTER NINE

The closed door did not keep out the sounds below. Dosia could hear Justin's voice upraised toward his only son, and Lois' pleading “*Please, Justin!*”

“Be quiet, Lois; I'll settle this. Go down-stairs.”

“I want dinky orter.” The child's voice was high.

“You have just had a drink of water; lie still.”

“Redge 'ants 'noder dinky orter.”

“Do you hear me? Lie still.”

“Let me take him, Justin; I'm sure he isn't well. I—”

Dosia could hear her step getting fainter in the distance, and could imagine the look from Justin

that had commanded her obedience. There was a definite masculine authority about him before which, on those rare occasions when he chose to exert it, every woman-soul in the house bowed down with the curious submission inherited from barbaric ages. Only the son and heir rebelled openly, with a firmness caught from the same blood.

It took a hard tussle to conquer Redge. The mother down-stairs, vibrating with sympathy for her child, could not understand Justin's attitude, or why he was so much more severe with the boy than he had ever been with Zaidee.

Zaidee was his little, gentle girl, his dainty, delicate princess, toward whom his attitude must be always that of tenderness and chivalry. But the boy was different. Civilized man still usually lives in the outward semblance of a harem, in a household with a large predominance of women. Justin had a fierce pride in the boy, the one human creature in the house of the same nature as himself. They two, they two! And he knew the nature; there was no need of any pretense or fooling about it. His "Lie still, you rascal, or I'll make you," voiced in its sternness an even deeper sentiment than he had for Zaidee.

Something of this hardness was still in his manner when he came down once more, after reducing the child to quiet, and leaned over his wife to kiss her good-by.

"Are you going out again?" Her voice had a dull patience in it and her eyes refused to meet his.

"Yes; did you want me for anything special?"

He stood, half irresolute, hat in hand. His clear, fair skin and blue eyes showed off to advantage, in the estimation of his wife, set off by his luxuriously lined overcoat. It was a new one; he had lately, at Lois' insistence, gone to a more expensive tailor, and the richness of the cloth and its very cut and finish exhaled an air of prosperity. Nothing so betrays the status of the inner man as that outer garment. Justin's discarded one had passed through every stage of decent finesse—the turned-up coat-collar, the reversed closing, the relined sleeves, the buttons sewed on daily at the breakfast-table by his wife in the places from which the ineffectual threads of her workmanship still dangled. This perfect and ample covering seemed in its plenitude to make a new and opulent person of him.

"No, of course I don't want you for anything special"—she spoke in a monotone. "I only thought you were going to stay home."

"I've got to go to Leverich's, and I want to speak to Selden about the house first. I promised him I'd stop there."

They had decided to take one of the houses that were building on the hill, and Selden was the architect.

"You have been out every night this week"—there was a suspicion of tears in her voice. "I do so hate to be left alone."

"You have Dosia."

"Dosia! How would *you* like to be left with Dosia? I can't make out that girl. She gets more wooden every day, and if I speak to her she looks as if she thought I was going to beat her. Oh, Justin, stay home this evening—won't you, dear?"

"I can't—I wish I could." He said the words mechanically, for he was burning to get away to Leverich to talk over some matters. "I must be at Selden's by half-past eight."

"It is only a quarter-past now—you can walk there in five minutes. Do sit down for a moment. I don't get any chance to talk to you at all, and you come home so late to dinner that you never see the children any more—except to scold them, as you scolded Redge to-night."

Lois was sitting under the rays of the lamp. She wore a scarlet gown and held a piece of white embroidery in her lap. She seemed to absorb all the light in the room, and to leave the rest of it dark by contrast—her rosy cheeks, her white eyelids dropped over her work, the bronze waves of her hair melted into the gloom of the background. She was beautiful, but Justin did not care to look at her; it was even momentarily repugnant to him to do so. He sat on the edge of his chair, tapping his hat against it. She lacked the one thing that made a woman beautiful to him; absorbed as he was in his own plans, his own life he felt a loss—

Her remark about the children made him wince. He was a man who loved his children, and he had not only been obliged to lose most of the sweetness of their possession lately,—the sweetness that consists in watching the unfolding, day by day, of the flower-petals of childhood,—but when he had the rare chance of being in their society he could not enjoy it; a hitherto unsuspected capriciousness and irritation laid the precious moments waste. He could hear Zaidee's gentle little voice repeating her mother's perfunctory extenuation: "Poor daddy's nervous; come away, Redge!"

"I hope you'll tell Mr. Selden that I must have a closet under the stairs," said Lois suddenly.

"He'll put one there if he can."

"If he can! Justin, I spoke about it from the very first. I don't want the house if he can't put the closet in. I—"

"All right. I've got to go now." If he had cared to think about it, he might have wondered why she wanted him to wait for such last words as these. As the door closed behind him, she let her embroidery fall from her fingers and listened to the last sound of his footsteps echoing far into

the frosty night. There was a firm directness in it as it carried him from her.

The overcoat had not belied its appearance as the harbinger of prosperity and the forerunner of large expenditures—of which the house on the hill was one. The typometer was having a boom, the orders for it were phenomenal; the factory was working night and day. Even with the principle of trying to be rigidly conservative in estimates, it was hard not to count on an unvaried continuance of the miraculous; everybody knows of instances when it has continued, or seemed to. In reality, there is no such continuous miracle; a succession of adapted conditions has to be keenly worked out to produce the effect of continuity. In a sense, the Typometer Company was aware of this, and was consequently assimilating gradually smaller ventures with the main one.

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The state of mind in which Justin had gone to take possession of the factory that bright November morning was as different in graduation from that present with him now as the single simply clear notes of the flute are from the twanging strings and blended diversity of a whole orchestra. Everything hinged on something else, and there was nothing that did not hinge on money. Amid the immense daily complications of enlarging the business was the nagging daily complication of keeping enough of a balance in the bank in spite of the continual outgo. Money came in lavishly at times, but the outgo had to be enormous; it was as the essential bread upon the waters that insured its own return a hundredfold. Materials can be bought with a leeway of credit, but “hands” must be paid off on Saturday night; there had been one Saturday when there had been what Leverich called “tall hustling” by him and Martin and Alexander, before those hands could be paid. Justin had thought of his backers as men of millions—with that easy, assured confidence one has in regard to the superficially known; the millions were in the concrete, solid and golden—a bottomless store in reserve. He had gradually come to realize that the millions were a fluctuant quality, running like quicksilver from side to side, here in one place, there in another, as the various needs of corporations called them. Both Martin and Leverich were past masters in the art of making a little butter cover many slices of bread; to have to appropriate money to cover an emergency was a daily expedient—the ability to do so ranked as a part of one’s assets. Lois could not understand why, when such large sales were being made, there were not larger returns now; the “business” seemed to swallow up everything, and more than all else her husband. To his luminous, excited brain, the different phases of trade passed and repassed as pictures in a lighted transparency, riveting an exhilarated attention; all else was in blurred darkness and must wait until after the show for recognition. He felt it inexpressibly tiresome and unkind of Lois to wish to engross him, when he was laboring for her welfare and the children’s.

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Lois Alexander, who had a household to look after, servants to keep in order, children to be attended to, who was subject to the claims of social functions, clubs, friends, and affairs generally, was through everything absorbed in her husband to a degree incredible to anyone but a woman. His attitude toward her had come to occupy the substrata of her thoughts morning, noon, and night. To have him leave with a shade less of affection for her in the morning farewell left her with a sick feeling throughout the day; everything done in those next hours was merely to fill up the time until his return, that she might see then if her exacting soul might be satisfied. Sometimes she reproached him tearfully before he left, and then it was not only with a sick feeling that she spent the day, but with an absolutely intolerant pain, because she must wait until night to set herself right with him again. At those times she could not derive any satisfaction even from her children—her only refuge from weeping herself into a sick-headache was to go to town and shop exhaustingly. One cannot well shed tears in the crowded streets, or before a clerk who is showing one goods over a counter. But when she went shopping too many days in succession the children showed the effects of it in the lawlessness which creeps in in a mother’s absence.

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She could not understand why the morning reproach and the evening retraction had grown alike unimportant to her husband; after the first surprise and solicitude occasioned by this recurrent state, he had grown to regard it as something to be borne with like any other normal annoyance, —like fog, rain, or mosquitoes,—that measurably lessened the joy of the day, but upon which no action of his had any bearing. A man must have patience with his wife’s complainings, and try always to remember the delicacy of her bodily strength and the many calls upon it, which made little things a grievance to her. He himself never complained; complaint was in itself distasteful to him.

Lois, left alone now, with Dosia up-stairs, felt herself relapsing into the dark mood she dreaded, when there came the welcome sound of the door-bell. A moment later the maid took up a card to Dosia on which was inscribed the name of Mr. Angevin L. Cater. He was scrupulously attired in an old “dress suit,” the conventional lines of which, with the stiff expanse of shirt-front, seemed to make his yellow angularity of feature still more pronounced. He looked so oddly out of place in the little drawing-room, where he sat talking to Lois, his long limbs tucked back as far as possible under the small spindle-legged sofa, and one arm stretched out embracingly over the green cushions at his side, and yet he looked so oddly natural and homelike, too, that Dosia felt a swift pleasure in his presence. At her entrance, he disentangled himself from the sofa and stood up to take the two hands which she had extended to him before she knew it, regarding her the while with admiring earnestness.

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“Well, you are all right,” he said, after the first greetings; “Miss Dosia, you certainly are all right. If I was back in the South I’d say just what I thought of you, but I’m afraid to up here; folks are too careful about complimentin’ for me. When I see a young lady like you,—or like Mrs. Alexander, here,—” he rose and bowed gallantly, “I want to get straight up and tell you just how handsome you look. There’s nothing so beautiful on God’s earth to me as a beautiful woman—unless it’s a mother. A mother doesn’t need to have a complexion if she’s got the mother spirit

shinin' out of her. I had a mother once—a better never lived. She's dead."

"That is very sad," said Lois, in the pause that followed this announcement, keeping back an almost irresistible smile. Both she and Dosia felt the relief of light and impersonal conversation after painful communing.

"Yes, ma'am," said the visitor, sitting, as before, with his long legs back under the little sofa and one long arm embracing the top of it.

"How is your wife?" asked Dosia. "Have you seen her lately?"

"I was home for a week around Christmas-time," answered Mr. Cater. "It's sort of unsettling, though, to go home for a short period—at least, I find it so. I don't know as it pays, except as something to look forward to before you've done it; there's a good deal in that. My wife lives with her family; they have a right smart amount of trouble, and it seems like it always saves up for a real spell when I get home."

"I should think she would want to stay here with you," said Dosia.

Mr. Cater cleared his throat apologetically. "Well, the fact is," he conceded, "my wife's powerful fond of her family. There's nothing against a woman being fond of her family."

"Oh, no," said Lois.

"No, ma'am. My wife's a mighty fine woman. If I'd had the luck to belong to her family—but seems like I was made different; the Yankee side to me crops up, I expect, when I ain't countin' on it. She did bring the children and try livin' up here in a flat the first year I went into the business, but it made her so pinin' she had to go back; she wasn't used to the neighborhood. Women depend a good deal on the neighborhood. *You* know my wife, Miss Dosia. Her parents are gettin' sort of old and agin', and she allowed that they needed her; and they kept on needin' her, I reckon. Her brother Bob was jailed again on Christmas day for drawin' a gun on one of the Groudys. It kind of broke her all up; he'd promised her to quit. Her sister's husband, Jim Pierce, he'd lit out before. Now, there's the other brother, Satterson—he's a mighty fine fellow, six foot two in his stockin's, but he doesn't *do* anything. Just drinks. My wife she thinks the world and all of Satterson. I don't blame any woman for being devoted to her family—shows heart."

"Why, yes, I suppose so," said Dosia, staring at Mr. Cater, who wore an inscrutable expression. She was wondering if this crew of unsavory relations-in-law lived on Mr. Cater's earnings; she knew his wife as a pretty, fretful woman with a discontented mouth.

"After all, there isn't much in a man, when you get down to it, to interest a woman," continued Mr. Cater impartially. "She wants him to think of *her*; of co'se it's his business to. I had a sort of set idea to begin on—but there's nothin' in life so wreckin' as a set idea; I've found that out. You've got to keep your point of view on a swivel, and turn it so's you can see to keep on your windin' way without runnin' down your fellow-bein's—isn't that so? I don't blame any woman for findin' out that a man doesn't always make up for home and mother—I don't know that I always yearn for my own society." His inscrutable expression changed to a smile. "I reckon you won't yearn for it, either, if I go on talkin' in this way."

"Oh, yes, I will," said Dosia, dimpling. "Did you see my father and mother when you were in Balderville? How did they look?"

"Why—about the same as usual," replied Mr. Cater delicately, with a swift mental view of them passing before his eyes that instantly materialized itself to Dosia. "I promised them I'd come and see you—and meant to before this. It was through Miss Dosia's comin' here that I got acquainted with your husband, Mrs. Alexander," he continued, turning to Lois. "He's a mighty fine man. He and I, we're choppin' at the same log, so to speak, only he's takin' side hacks at a lot more logs. I reckon he's got a pretty good backin'?"

"Oh, yes," affirmed Lois.

"Yes, ma'am. Of course, he doesn't talk about it. I haven't seen Mr. Alexander much for a couple of weeks; he's been busy and I've been busy—we lunch at the same place sometimes. I know some of his friends—Mr. Leverich for one—slightly in the way of business. Mr. Martin—Mr. Martin's a man *nobody* knows more'n slightly. You would not think he was such a smart business man, would you? He's so sort of small and feeble-looking, and has such a little lisping voice. But I don't care for any dealings with him; those little clawlike hands of his rake in all they touch. Now you think I'm hard on him, don't you?" He hesitated, and then went on, looking with a veiled shrewdness at Lois: "Martin sort of reminds me of somethin' that happened with my two boys when I was home at Christmas. They're little shavers, Mrs. Alexander, right cute, too, if they are mine. Miss Dosia, here, she can tell you."

"They are dear little fellows," said Dosia warmly.

"They were going up-stairs to bed. I was behind 'em, and Angy—that's the eldest, he's six—was stoppin' the way; so I says to him, 'What's stoppin' you, son?' and he answers: 'Oh, I'm carryin' up Jim's cake and my cake, and I'm eatin' *Jim's cake now*.' That's like Martin for all the world—always carryin' somebody's cake for 'em, and swallowin' it on the way. Well, doesn't it seem good to be lookin' at you again, Miss Dosia! But I'm sorry Alexander isn't in, too."

"Oh, I hope he'll come before you leave," returned Lois. It seemed a foregone conclusion that he must, when it was discovered that the nine-forty-five train back to town was then on the point of departure, half a mile away, and the next did not leave until eleven-fifteen. There was a genuineness about Mr. Cater which could not fail to win responsive recognition, but the

contemplation of an inexorably fixed time over which conversation must be spread has an indescribably paralyzing effect on spontaneity. Like many talkative people, Mr. Cater developed a way, when you counted upon his garrulousness, of suddenly becoming silent.

Lois busied herself in collecting the materials for refreshment, while Dosia and he conversed laboriously and minutely about the denizens of Balderville, to the third and fourth generation. The very word "home" carried such suggested association that Dosia half forgot that it had never been one for her, and that to leave its semblance had been a joy.

When the little meal was ready, Lois manipulated the chafing-dish and Dosia served. Mr. Cater moved to the little chair drawn up with the others by the small mahogany table, and relaxed once more.

"Well, this is comfort," he said, with a sort of wistful gratitude. "I've been thinkin' 'twas pretty inconsiderate of me to miss that train, but I'm sort of glad now that I did. When I see you two beautiful young ladies takin' all this trouble for me—well, I just can't tell you how I appreciate it; sort of warms me up inside."

"You must get pretty lonely sometimes," said Lois kindly, with a sudden sympathy for something in his tone.

He nodded slowly. "Well, yes, I do; but I've quit thinkin' of it, as a rule. I reckon I've got about as much as I deserve in this world, when you come to sizin' things up. If you get to pityin' yourself, you slump; you slump all *to* pieces—ain't no mortal good to yourself nor anybody else. I've found *that* out."

"You seem to find out a good many things," said Lois, with a twinge of assent.

"Well, yes, I do." His face relaxed in a pleased smile. "Keep addin' to my collection daily; but it isn't cheap, no more than other collectin'—costs money. Girard says—by the way, I never asked you if you knew Girard, Bailey Girard; I met him to-night getting off the train. I didn't know he was on it till then. Mrs. Alexander, this rabbit's more'n good. I haven't had one like it since I was with Girard last year."

"No, I do not know anyone by that name," said Lois a little wearily.

"Then you'd ought to; Miss Dosia, here, she'd ought to. He's a *man*. Young, too, just the kind she'd like. He's related to the Wilmots, Judge Wilmot's family; they lived down our way, Miss Dosia, before you came. His folks were mighty fine people in the South, but they lost all their money. Kind of wearin' to hear that, ain't it? I get tired of it myself. I know a lot of splendid families who have lost all their money—or are a-losin' it. It kind of tones me up now when I hear of anybody that's risin' into the ranks of the solid rich; makes it seem sort of possible to walk on somethin' that isn't a down grade."

"How about Mr. Girard?" asked Dosia.

"Oh, well, he's all right. He's on an up grade, if anybody ever was—now. But I wouldn't want a boy of mine to go through what he has, though it's made him what he is. His mother was left a widow after they'd moved 'way out West. She was a delicate woman, and had a hard time of it struggling along; most of her folks were dead, and I don't know that she wrote to the rest of 'em. I don't know but what her mind got sort of wanderin' when she fell sick. She died at a little town in Indiana, on her way back East, and there wasn't anyone to look after the child. He was bound out to a man on a farm; he was ten years old then, and he stayed there till he was thirteen. The cussed hound used to beat him with a strap, nights when he was in liquor. Many a time the poor little chap, brought up tender by a lovin' mother, used to crawl into the barn and hide in a corner of the hay near the dumb beasts and cry his heart out till he got quiet. He told me once—Girard, he hardly ever talks about himself, but this was a time when we were stalled in a snow-storm—he told me that he supposed it was because of the Christmas story you read in the Bible that he felt that if he could only get into the barn in the hay by the dumb beasts he was a little nearer to *her*."

"How did he get away?" asked Dosia. She longed pitifully to take the boy's little hand and kiss it, and hold it against her cheek, although the hurt had been over so long ago.

"Oh, he lit out when he was about thirteen. He didn't tell me the whole of it. He sold papers in New York, and went to night-school; and next he went to college and rowed in the crew. He met up with some of his own people, too. Then he was war correspondent in Cuba—I guess some of the wounded know what he did for them. Later he went to South America on some government business; he's a personal friend of the President. He's young, too, not more'n twenty-eight. He's bound to get ahead at whatever he sets himself to. But he's got an awful tender heart; I saw him nearly kill a big Swede once that was wallopin' a sick horse. What you laughin' at, Miss Dosia? I reckon we're all of us made two ways. Shucks! it isn't *that* time, is it?" He turned with startled amaze to look behind him at the clock that was striking.

"I'm afraid it is," affirmed Lois.

"Then I've got to make tracks to catch that eleven-fifteen. 'Tisn't manners to eat and run, I know, but—" He had risen and was swiftly putting on his coat in the hall. "Thank you, Miss Dosia, I guess I can get into this best by myself; I know where to humor the sleeve-linin'. Is that my hat? Mrs. Alexander, I think a mighty lot of your hospitality; I do *so*. I—" He was loping down the path already, his long legs making preternatural shadows on the snow in the moonlight. Dosia called after him mischievously, "You'd better wait until the twelve-three," before she shut the door. The

momentary rush of cold air was as invigorating, as wholesome and clear in the atmosphere of the lamp-lit, evening-heated room, as Mr. Cater's presence had been.

She went to her room, leaving Lois down-stairs clearing away the remains of the little supper, her offer of assistance having been refused. Lois wished to be there alone when her husband came in, experience having taught her that he was much more apt to be communicative at that time than at any other. Fresh from a social experience, and feeling still the interest of it, he would like to talk of it; by morning it would have relapsed so deeply into his inner consciousness that it would take a sort of conversational derrick on the part of his wife to bring up any reminiscence whatever.

He came in now, fresh, eager, and alert, pleased and surprised to find traces of a convivial evening, when he had expected to be late. 132

"Mr. Cater has been here," announced Lois, in explanation.

"Cater! I'm sorry to have missed him."

"He was very sorry you were not at home. He did not go until eleven, and I was sure you would be in before that."

"Well, I meant to be."

"Yes; he was telling us so many things. Justin,"—something prompted her against her will to say what had been rankling in her memory,—"he thinks Mr. Martin is like a crab, and that he takes people in between his claws and pinches them. I wish you'd be careful."

Steel seemed swiftly to incase her husband. "He will not pinch me, at all events," he said shortly. After a moment's pause he made an effort to return to his former manner, but with an altered tone:

"I'm sorry I was kept so late. I was some time consulting with Selden about the house; you can have the closet. After that we were all talking at Leverich's. He had a friend out there to-night, a fine young fellow, extraordinarily interesting; he was giving us points on the South American trade. He's going to be of great use to us, he goes down there again in the spring. He's a fine-looking fellow, by the way, tall and well set up; he reminds me of Brent, Lois—you remember him? The same kind of bright, resolute face; only this man's browner."

Conscious of a perverse irresponsiveness in his wife, Justin turned to Dosia, who had slipped back into the room to look under the table and chairs for a blue bow that had fallen from her hair. She stood now in the doorway with it in her hand. 133

"He came up from the South the same day you did last fall, Dosia, he was in that wreck. It must have been a horrible thing." Justin broke off at the retrospection of the narrative.

"Yes," said Dosia in a whisper. She leaned against the door for support.

"You were fortunate to get off so well." Absorbed in his own recital, Justin did not observe her. "He was going from one car to another when the train went off the trestle—I don't wonder you would never talk about it, Dosia. He was able to help some of the survivors. There was a poor young girl who was alone, like you—he didn't know what became of her; he was ill himself in the hospital for two weeks afterwards. His description of the whole thing was extraordinarily vivid." Justin was now bolting windows and putting out lights as he talked. "You two girls must go to bed at once; it's nearly twelve."

"What was his name?" asked Dosia.

"His name? Why, I thought I'd told you. His name's Girard—Bailey Girard."

CHAPTER TEN 134

"Reginald has the measles."

Lois made the announcement breathlessly, as she stood outside of the drawing-room, addressing the visitors who sat on the sofa, talking to Dosia.

"The doctor has just gone, and he says it is the measles. I don't suppose I had better come in the room." There was a tone of resentment in her voice which seemed to originate in the idea of being excluded; in reality, it was caused by the bitter thought that she had known for a couple of days that Redge was not well, and that his father had been exacting with him. "I really suppose I had better not come in."

"Oh, don't mind me!" Mrs. Leverich, gorgeous in velvet and furs, spoke reassuringly. "There are no children at our house, and I've had the measles."

"Of course, it's not scarlet fever," continued Lois, dropping into a chair, "or diphtheria. I suppose Zaidee will get it, and we have to be quarantined. I don't know what to do about you, Dosia." She was feeling the fell blow of a contagious disease, which upsets every previously stable condition.

"I've had the measles," said the girl, but she added with quick anxiety: "There are my lessons; do you suppose it will make any difference about them? I don't see how I can lose them now, and 135

there's that concert Saturday."

"If we're quarantined, you're quarantined," said Lois tersely. "If there was *any* place where you could go and stay—"

"Mrs. Alexander, let her come to me," said Mrs. Leverich warmly. "I'd love to have her; I *really* would. She can keep up with her lessons and engagements just the same then. You know, I'm always so happy when I can have a young girl in the house; and as for Mr. Leverich, nothing pleases him better. Go and pack your trunk at once, my dear, and we'll take it on the carriage as we go back."

Dosia looked hesitatingly at Lois.

"Why—I do not know," said Lois, surprised, yet considering.

"But *I* do." Mrs. Leverich spoke with a cordial authority that, after a little more conversation, settled the matter.

Dosia packed up her belongings, with the sweet, wise little help of Zaidee, who brought shoes and slippers from the closet and toilet articles from the dressing-table, and in her efforts dropped the red ribbon from her hair into the trunk, to her own great glee, amid fond, swift huggings from Dosia. The latter arranged herself for this transmigration with quick, excited fingers, yet there was something on her mind. As she heard Lois on the floor below, she ran down to speak to her, half dressed: "Lois, I hate to leave you here alone; I don't mind being kept from things, really and truly. Let me stay and help you with dear little Redge." For once her sympathy made her natural.

"No, you had better go," said Lois. She had but one desire—to be left at liberty at last with her own. She added, to avoid further pleading:

"I would rather be alone."

"Oh!" exclaimed Dosia, shrinking. But conscience had unexpectedly claimed her, and she went on, hesitantly, with a painful timidity, her color coming and going:

"I wanted to ask—do you think I ought to go to Mrs. Leverich's, after what you said? Won't Mr. Barr be there?"

In the whole realm of the mother's mind there was no room for anything at present but her measles-smitten household. She looked at Dosia as if making an effort to understand. "Why, yes, I suppose he will be there. Just don't have anything to do with him if you don't want to. You will not need to; he is out of the house most of the time, anyway."

"Oh, very well," assented Dosia, chilled and yet relieved. The blood of youth was already running riot at the delightful prospect of another change. But she slipped into the nursery to kiss poor little feverish Redge good-by, and leaned out of the carriage that was driving her away to wave her hand again and again to Zaidee, whose red cheeks and little snub-nose were pressed close to the window-pane.

Mrs. Leverich was a woman who was somewhat below par in birth and education, devoid of certain finer instincts, and used to an overflow of luxury in her daily living that amounted sometimes to vulgar display. To balance this, she was still handsome, if somewhat too stout, and hospitable to a superlative degree. "Staying company" was a necessity to her happiness. She had an absolute passion for making other people comfortable, and surrounded her guests with a kindness and forethought so enveloping that it almost spoiled them for contact afterwards with a rude world. She really possessed in this regard an unselfish good-heartedness, mingled with a sort of vanity that was pleased with applause at its manipulations; her own comfort was indifferent to her beside the subtler and warmer pleasure of being the source of good to others. It is no figure of speech to say that she was willing to do anything to promote the welfare of her guests; it was no hardship to give up her own way in their interests, or to do any act, however tiring and distasteful, that gave pleasure to anyone. She hated cards, yet she would play long, tedious games with beaming incompetence, to make up a hand; she disliked the smell of tobacco, but was never satisfied until every man around her was happily supplied with cigars or pipes. Music was a jangle to her, and any book above the caliber of the fiction which displays a low-necked authoress upon the cover a weariness indeed; but she would labor unceasingly to place both music and literature within the reach of her guests. She had windows opened when she herself was chilly, and fires lighted when she was suffering with the heat; she took long drives in the hot sun when she would have much preferred a nap; she chaperoned girls uncomplainingly until five o'clock in the morning. The least wish of a guest, spoken or divined, was gratified if within her power. It is true that she had a retinue of servants at her command, but, if necessary, she would have served her guests with her own hands, and had been known to do so. There was only one drawback to her hospitality—she welcomed, but did not speed the parting guest. It was difficult indeed to leave without a pitched battle, and the effort of temporary disunion was so great as sometimes to result in a permanent rupture of friendship. Her "I see—you don't want to stay with us any longer" voiced that injured feeling which blasts whatever it comes in contact with, and which disclaimers serve only to heighten. Once away from her, her interest in the former guest ceased almost entirely, no matter how close the association had been under her roof; outside of it everyone was lost in a haze which called for a distinct and wearying effort, seldom undertaken, to penetrate.

In appearance she was on the Oriental type of her half-brother, Lawson Barr, but with a softness, both of expression and contour, which he did not possess. She was ten years older than he. Her motions and the tone of her voice were languid. Her husband—who enjoyed the benefits of being

the chief and permanent guest in this household—was extremely fond of her, and proud of her beauty and popularity. Leverich was one of those coarse-seeming and coarse-acting men who, nevertheless, come of a race of gentefolk, and who have innately, and no matter how much they may choose to overlay the fact, certain traditions. He had been known to say, in rebuttal of some criticism on his wife's breeding, what was quite true—that she was good enough for *him*; but he had, underneath, a little contempt for her because she was. It was one of the traditions that a man should find a quality in his wife to revere.

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Leverich liked to surround his wife with luxuries, to give her everything that money could buy and that her gently sensuous temperament craved. Her attachment was riveted to him by gifts of clothing and jewelry and bric-à-brac as well as money—such things being to her the only tangible evidences of affection. Dosia had hitherto seen the house only as a caller. She was impressed now by the richness of the furnishings above, as she was led up to her room, a large, many-windowed apartment on the second floor. It was all a gleam of polished mahogany, and brass and mirrors and silver toilet articles, blended with rose-silk draperies; the alcoved bed was spread with a flowered silk counterpane, the floors covered with rich Eastern rugs; easy-chairs and low tables spread with books dotted the room; a couch piled high with down cushions stood at a seductive angle. A maid glided forward to take Dosia's hat and cloak, while another knelt at the hearth to light the logs upon the brass andirons, and Mrs. Leverich came in and out in an overflow of solicitude.

"I really think you had better rest. You *must* be tired. No, of course"—at Dosia's laughing remonstrance—"the drive was nothing, but the shock—a shock like that tells on you before you know it. Here comes your trunk; have you the key? Elizabeth, unpack Miss Dosia's trunk, and get out a dressing-gown for her. I'm going to insist on your lying down on the lounge for a while. Now, don't do that, Elizabeth will take off your shoes for you. And, Amelia,"—this to the maid at the hearth,—“bring up some tea and biscuits. No, you don't care for tea? Well, a glass of sherry, then, and some hothouse grapes. My dear Dosia,—you'll let me call you Dosia, won't you?—you may not feel the need of it now, but it will do you good. I'm not going to stay with you, I'll just move this little table with the magazines on it near you, and leave you to rest; but first I want to show you this.” She opened the door of a smaller, hexagonal apartment adjoining. “I'm going to turn it into a music-room for you.”

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“Oh, Mrs. Leverich!” protested Dosia, in amazement.

“I've been thinking of it all the way home in the carriage. Of course, you won't want to practice down-stairs, where people are coming in and out all the time; it would be very annoying to you. This has been used as an extra dressing-room. I shall have those thick hangings taken down and the furniture moved out, and put in light chairs and a cottage piano, and a few palms over by the window. You'll see!”

“But, Mrs. Leverich—”

“Now, don't say a *word*; it's all settled. Elizabeth will come to you when it's time to dress, so you need give yourself no anxiety about that. Just let me draw this coverlet over you and tuck your feet in. Now, how sweet you do look, to be sure!”

Dosia did “look sweet,” and as comfortable and soft as a kitten. The light-blue kimono of outing flannel,—of which she had been half ashamed when the maid unpacked it,—though cheap, was becoming; her loosened hair fell over the blended pillows and the rosy coverlet. The wood fire at which she gazed crackled and sent out the pungent, aromatic smell of Southern pine, which mingled with the perfume of a bunch of violets on the table near the golden sherry in its crystal glass, and the plate of white and reddish grapes. There was the unaccustomed stillness of a large, well-appointed house, where the walls were deadened to sound, and the floors had thick-piled rugs upon them, and the servants walked with soft-shod feet. Such luxurious well-being had never been Dosia's before. This was like being in a fairy palace, where you had only to clap your hands to get anything you wished for. And the most charming thing about the fairy palace was that there you always met the prince.

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This girl was so constituted that, except in the first flush of excitement incident to her entrance into this new sphere, she must have always some heart-warm thought, some little inner pleasure of her own, to make the larger one serve. Dosia knew now that she was to meet the true prince. This was the house he visited; all this outer circle of comfort was but the prelude to love—that mysterious and intangible love that made you happy ever after. She was glad that she had kept hold of that hand, and had not let herself be drawn away by lesser ties. Her day-dream was to bewitch and dazzle him, to compel him to her attraction; a dozen situations, based on that first idea of his recognition of her in some noble deed, occupied her happy mind; in all moments of extra exaltation she brought out the thought and played with it and hugged it to her. She had yet to learn how few things happen as we imagine them.

In the midst of her half-drowsy musings, the door behind her burst open; suddenly a big collie-dog bounded in. He was licking her cheeks, when a sharp whistle called him back, and the door was instantly closed again. Dosia knew that the dog was Lawson's. She sprang up and locked the door, but her dream had vanished. She had a tingling consciousness that she was to meet Lawson at dinner. She made up her mind to be very dignified and cool toward him; she rehearsed the manner in which her eyelashes would fall, the politely bored expression of her forced attention, the casual tips of her fingers as they touched his in the conventional handshake of greeting—all of which would emphasize the fact that he had now no particular interest for her, if, indeed, he had ever had any.

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But, after all, he was not at dinner, which was a relief, and yet a disappointment: when you have sharpened your weapons, it is only natural to want to use them. Lawson did not appear the next day, nor the next. Once she heard him coming in very late at night, and in the morning he had gone before she breakfasted. A couple of times in the late afternoon, when the dog came trotting ahead through the hall, she had slipped aside, breathless, as from some peril escaped. It was the third day after her arrival that he suddenly made his appearance in the drawing-room, where she was seated by the piano, looking over a pile of music. Mrs. Leverich was out driving, but had thought the air too damp for Dosia.

She tried to accomplish the indifferent handshake she had prefigured, and could have flagellated herself for the color that she felt enveloping her from brow to throat under his cool, appraising eyes, as he bent over the piano as if to help her with her search.

"What do you wish to find?" he asked in a businesslike way. "Perhaps I can assist you."

"Thank you, it isn't necessary."

She held her head at an unresponsive angle involuntarily, so that she might not see his face, which had struck her as unexpectedly younger and better-looking than hitherto.

"I see that my sister has fitted up a little music-room for you. Have you done much practicing there yet?"

"Some."

"You are not homesick in your new quarters?"

"No."

"Let me hold that portfolio for you." He interposed a dexterous hand. "Oh, don't thank me—you see, if you drop it, courtesy will oblige me to pick up all the music. This is the first time we've met since you have been in the house; I've been so patient that I deserve more than to have little cold, hard monosyllables thrown at me."

"Patient!"

"Haven't I seen you slip out of the way when you thought I was coming? I'm accustomed to the phenomenon." The lightness of his tone did not hide the bitter strain under it. "Really, I'm not lacking in perception. I wished to give you time to get inured to the sad fact that I live here; and you need not have changed the time for your lessons last week, for I have no regular time for my daily exodus at present. If you *will* keep your head so persistently turned away, you might as well utilize the position. Play me something."

"No, you play for me," returned Dosia, glad of the chance to divert his attention from her.

"I might play 'Greeting,' since I'm not going to get any."

He seated himself on the piano-bench she vacated, and played a few strains absently; there was that in the low, sweet chords among which his fingers strayed that could not but enchain. She forgot her aloofness to listen. Presently he said:

"Who is my rival?"

"What do you mean?" She started up, and stood with both arms resting on the lower end of the grand piano, staring at him.

"I could not think that blush was for me—that beautiful color that stole over you when I came in. It couldn't be for me, when you have avoided me so pointedly. So I concluded, of course, that it was either the reflection from that brick wall out there, or was called forth by the thought of my rival."

"I will not say that it was the brick wall," said Dosia, yielding to the light, heady spirit he always roused in her, with, also, the little under-knowledge of her secret dream.

"Then I will not say it was the rival," said Lawson. He added in a lower tone: "And I wouldn't give it up to any rival; I saw it—it was mine."

"You claim a great deal," returned Dosia, wishing that she had the strength of mind to go and leave him, yet loath to lose a moment of this converse.

He shook his head as he answered gently: "No, you are mistaken there; I claim nothing. I have no rights—only privileges. I hope it's going to be my privilege to have a little of your charming society in the next few days. I shall be at home, perforce; I've lost my position."

"Oh, I'm sorry!" said Dosia, with her quick sympathy. He raised one hand deprecatingly, while the other still weaved in and out in a pianissimo accompaniment.

"Sorry? For me? Oh, that's not the thing to say, at all. You should condemn my inability to keep the place."

"Why do you talk like this?" asked Dosia, with a pained feeling.

"Why do you run when you see me coming?" He flashed a quizzical glance at her.

"I don't," she began to say, but her words trailed off into an inarticulate murmur.

He had played a chord or two more to her silence before he stopped to lean forward and say:

"Why did you avoid me on the train? You need not trouble yourself to answer. Some kind person

had warned you against being too polite to me—and you took the warning like a good little girl. It has been borne in upon me quite a number of times that I do not exactly command respect in this community. I assure you that I know my place.”

“But, oh, why don’t you *make* people respect you?” cried Dosia. “Why don’t you make them? If you really try—oh, if I were a man, I wouldn’t sit quietly and say such things. You can do anything if you really try.”

“Can you?” He smiled with indulgence at her copy-book wisdom. “Well, perhaps you can, if there’s sufficient impetus to the effort. There really isn’t with me. When I was a boy—you’ll tire yourself if you stand up any longer. Come and sit over here by the fire.”

She followed half mechanically to the sofa on which he arranged the cushions for her, seating himself in the other corner, where he leaned forward, looking, not at her, but at the fire. His personality was so strong that each inch that lessened the distance between her and that lithe, sinewy figure and the dark Oriental face brought a corresponding thrill of magnetism to Dosia—a subtle excitement which drew her into its spell. The confusion which had clouded her at first was gone; she felt luminously clear, in preparation for some great moment of confidence, in which her mission would be to help and sustain. She broke the silence presently to say, with a sweet and halting diffidence, through which her earnestness showed:

“I want you to tell me. You began to say—I want to know about when you were a boy.”

“When I was a boy I made a wrong start. Heaven knows, it wasn’t my fault! I was good enough before that—religiously inclined!” He leaned forward and struck a log with one of the fire-irons, sending a shower of sparks flying upward. “Where do you think I learned half the bad I know? At a camp-meeting! But I won’t go back to the past—it’s a mistake. Only, I came here literally ‘on suspicion.’”

“Yes,” said Dosia, with her clear spirit-voice; “and you tried to work up from under it.”

Lawson dropped his chin into his hands, looking moodily ahead. “I’m afraid not always. Sometimes the contrary.”

“Oh, oh,” breathed Dosia, in a whisper.

“If you want me to tell you the truth—! Your relatives are quite right in ordering you to avoid me. There has never been anybody, you see, to really care whether I kept straight or not.”

“Your sister?”



He played a chord or two more to her silence

Lawson shrugged his shoulders. “It would, of course, be pleasanter for Myra if she hadn’t me on her mind, and Leverich has done his best, I suppose. I’m not groaning—just telling you the bare facts. Living ‘on suspicion’ is demoralizing in the long run, that’s all; one lives down to an opinion as well as up to it, you know. There’s never been anyone, since I was a child, to really believe in me, so there’s nobody to be disappointed.”

“I will believe in you,” said Dosia, with the vibrating tone of her emotion. Her clear eyes looked at his as if to convey strength and warmth and all that was uplifting straight to his heart.

“You had better not.”

“I will believe in you!” Her tone had even greater insistence. “I know what it is—myself—to be with those who do not care. You are not as other people think you! You can be good and noble. You can”—her voice sank to a whisper—“resist temptation. If one prays—it helps; I know that.” Her voice rose steadily again, after a tremulous silence: “You can never say again that no one believes in you, for I believe in you.”

“And care?” asked Lawson.

His eyes glittered and his face worked with some unusual emotion.

"And care," assented Dosia, with the same unwavering eyes and serious, childlike candor of tone.

He stooped and gently pressed his lips to her hand as it lay upon her gown. "You are the very sweetest child! I—" He stopped abruptly, and walked away to the window. The next moment Mrs. Leverich was rustling into the room.

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If she suspected an interview too confidential, she showed nothing of it in her manner. She had come back to take her guest out driving, after all—the sun was shining. Dosia ran to get ready, tingling—was it from the exaltation or the excitement of this interview, with its unexpected compact? She trembled with the pathos of it all. She passed each phase of it rapidly before her mind, to convince herself that there was nothing in words or feeling, no, nor in that reverential homage of Lawson's, that could be interpreted as disloyalty to the unknown to whom her future belonged.

Mrs. Leverich was waiting with a magnificent wrap of velvet and fur for Dosia to put on in the carriage over her street costume.

"I was sure you were not warm enough yesterday," she explained. She leaned forward to call to the coachman: "James, you may drive first to Benning's. We are going to get some chocolates to take with us, dear; I know girls always enjoy themselves more if there is a box of chocolates handy."

"Oh, Mrs. Leverich!" said Dosia gratefully.

"And we will stop at the greenhouse and get some flowers for you to wear to-night at dinner; you know, George Sutton is coming. I want you to look particularly well."

"I don't care to look particularly well for *him*," objected Dosia, stiffening.

"No, of course, you don't *need* to; but, still, a girl should always look as pretty as she *can*; she can never tell who is going to see her. James, ask at the express-office if there are any packages. I sent for some of the new books. Yes, that is for me. Now, my dear, you'll have something nice to read."

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"You are too good, Mrs. Leverich; you are just spoiling me," said Dosia.

In these three days she had been the recipient of so many gifts and favors that it was difficult to know how to vary her expression of gratitude. She had already been presented with a white China silk tea-gown, the scores of two of the latest light operas, and an amethyst belt-pin. The little music-room had been fitted out appropriately from floor to ceiling, and framed with palms; Mrs. Leverich had spent the whole of one morning with a corps of servants, planning, directing, and approving. Dosia had hardly time to frame a wish before it was forestalled.

"It is such a comfort to me to have you here," continued Mrs. Leverich, sinking back among her cushions. "You may take the Five-mile Drive, James. If I had only had a daughter! I said this morning to Mr. Leverich, 'I am going to pretend she's my daughter while she's here.' You don't mind, dear? You will let me have you for my very own?"

"Yes, indeed," answered Dosia, with the warmth of youth.

"I have never wished for a son. Boys are a terrible responsibility. There is Lawson."

"Yes," said Dosia, as she paused.

"He has always been such a trial. We have given him every advantage—and he *has* every advantage naturally; but it's no use. Mr. Leverich says he will make one more effort for him, and if that is no use he must go. We have simply done all we can. I would not speak so openly to you if you had not been staying in the house, but you could not help hearing."

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"Hearing—?"

"Yes, these nights when he has come home so late. George Sutton brought him home Tuesday night from the train—he couldn't walk alone. I was so ashamed at the noise!"

"Oh!" breathed Dosia in a horrified undertone. She added, "Has he always been like this?"

"More or less. At first it was only when he went away; but he couldn't keep any position long, because he *would* go away for days and days at a stretch. And now it is getting to be—*any* time. I'm sure we have done everything in this world to keep it quiet. And Lawson has every advantage naturally; it is only this—drinking. Of course, no one can have any confidence in him; I always felt that it was hopeless, from the first."

No one had believed in him! Dosia caught at the confirmation as a ray of light gilding this dark and slimy morass, the sight of which had unexpectedly revolted her. In Balderville only the lower class of inhabitants drank; no young man of respectability or position was to be seen among them. But was not this the very kind of trial of her through which she had promised to have faith? He had not posed as devoid of offense; on the contrary, he had confessed to guilt, only she had not quite understood. Sin as plain sin shows a glazed surface, quite decently presentable; it is only when it is particularized that the monstrosities below are hideously revealed.

"It must be a great grief to you," she said now, with earnestness.

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"Yes, it is. Mr. Leverich says I shall not have so much on my mind after this winter; he has put his foot down. The nights I have passed! I'm always fancying that he is run over, or has fallen from the ferry-boat; it's the most dreadful strain. James, we are to stop for the ice-cream on the way back—don't forget; and those cakes at Mrs. Springer's—they were ordered yesterday. Where was

I? I forget. Oh, yes—the most dreadful strain! and I felt that I ought to speak about him to you, as you are staying under my care, and yet I hated to. But, of course, after the disturbance, I knew that it was nonsense to try and keep up a pretense any longer. You can see just what he is yourself.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Dosia, grown big-eyed and silent.

Her hostess insisted on her drinking a large cup of hot bouillon on her return, she looked so pale and chilly, relighted the logs in Dosia’s room with her own fat, white, beringed hands, and enveloped the girl enthusiastically several times in a large and perfumed embrace, in confirmation of her new position as a daughter. Dosia was dainty about the manifestations of affection; though she was intensely responsive in spirit to the least show of it, material demonstrations were unnatural to her; she was shy of being touched even by her own sex. It was only with little children that the exuberance of her feeling poured forth in caresses. That the hand-clasp the night of the disaster had appealed so strongly to her imagination was partly because of the fact that the comfort it conveyed transcended the strangeness of contact. To be pressed now to a warm, semimaternal bosom covered with voluminous folds of mauve velvet and lace gave her only an embarrassed gratitude, which she felt, guiltily, as being far from adequate to the occasion. And she was weary of trying to elude the vacillations of her mind. She would keep her promise to Lawson,—yes, yes, indeed! a hundred times more, the more he needed it,—but she would be very careful, too; she would be *very* careful. A hundred tiny defenses seemed to spring into being.

He was at the dinner as well as Mr. Sutton. The sixth person was Ada Snow, with the well-bred composure which concealed her innate shyness, and in the white dotted swiss she had worn for ten years past, ever since she had graduated, in fact, and which still looked decently presentable. Dosia was gay and conversational, as she was expected to be, the party being hers; she had begun to feel the daughter of luxury, if not of Mrs. Leverich, and accepted the honors with the easily accustomed grace that is born of admiration and security, conscious every moment through it all of that bond between herself and Lawson. He looked boyish and happy. Later, in a talk about skating, he offered to teach her to skate the next day if the ice held, and Mrs. Leverich, to whom Dosia looked, expecting her to invent some excuse, approved at once, and planned to send for skates the first thing in the morning. His quizzical eye seized unerringly on the signs of withdrawal in her, and brought the blush of compunction to her cheek, while Mr. Leverich jocosely deplored that he could not take the office of trainer instead. Mr. Sutton, who had sat by her at dinner, and hovered amorously over her in the way a girl detests in a man she does not care for, might have been mysteriously rebuffed by the suggestion of Lawson’s intimacy, for he devoted himself for the rest of the short evening to Ada Snow, who dropped into one of her statuesque angles on an ottoman, and talked to him in her low, trained voice with modestly confidential deference, until he left, quite early. His attention to Miss Snow had not kept him, however, from picking up Dosia’s handkerchief twice when she happened to drop it.

Billy Snow created a diversion by coming in at half-past ten for his sister, and stating casually that he had seen the doctor’s carriage stopping at the Alexander house as he passed.

“As you passed *now*?” cried Dosia, startled. “Are the children worse?” An unacknowledged compunction, which she had felt through all her pleasures, at leaving the sick household, sprang swiftly to the front. “Oh, I’m so afraid Redge and Zaidee are worse! I wish I could go there at once and see!”

“If they only had a telephone,” began Mrs. Leverich, for the twentieth time. “I can send——”

“Oh, if I could only go myself!” interrupted Dosia, looking utterly miserable in her sudden wild anxiety.

“You could have the carriage—but James is asleep.” Mrs. Leverich looked almost as miserable as Dosia in her baffled hospitality. “But if you don’t mind walking——”

“No—oh, no!”

“Then Lawson can take you, of course. There are some wraps in the hall; I’ll pin your dress up, so that you won’t need to take the time to change it. *Must* you go, Ada? Then you can all walk down together. Mr. Leverich would have offered to go with you himself, I know, Dosia,—wouldn’t you, Joseph?—if it were not for his cold. But Lawson can take you, of *course*!”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Lois, left in charge of a measles-stricken household, had plenty to keep her hands busy, and yet, as there was no particular anxiety attaching to the disease, plenty of time for meditation. She possessed the unfortunate quality of being able to keep up two lines of thought at the same time, so that little occupations really occupied only a small corner of her mind, and the larger part was continually taken up with the subject of larger interest—herself. While she rocked the children and sang to them, and cut out pictures, and prepared their meals, and took care of them all day with the aid of a young nurse-maid, she was unceasingly traversing a country wherein she walked alone and in exile. The quarantine had shut her in more rigorously upon herself; there were now no distractions. Her husband was more anxious about the children than she was, and seriously

distressed at first that so much was thrown upon her; he had wanted to get a trained nurse at once, but after her assurances that she did not mind staying in, that her exertions did not tire her, and that she much preferred matters as they were, he accepted this version without further question or comment, and went about his affairs, satisfied that she knew best in this her own department. It is a well-known fact that quarantine, the observance of which is exacted down to the last second of its limit from the women of a household, does not affect the bread winner of it, who goes and comes immune; Justin thought it his duty, in view of this fact, to be as careful as possible about being much with the children. He stood obediently outside of the nursery door and talked to them from there when Lois said, "You had better not come in." When she refused a service offered by him, he did not press it again. He frequently stayed late at the office, and got his dinner in town, or, if he did come home, he went out again to spend the long evenings, in which she had to be up-stairs, at houses where there were no children to be kept from contagion, and where he could talk to men. He was really so busy that, though he was ready to help his wife in any way that she would indicate, it was an immense relief to be able to leave the conduct of affairs to her. There was, besides, a curious hardness of manner in her which he unconsciously resented—she seemed to hold herself aloof from him, and there was no allurements to follow. That temporary indifference which those who love allow themselves sometimes, with the clear knowledge that it is only indifference because they do allow it, to be merged into dearest companionship at will—this had been pushed too far. It is a dangerous thing to let love slip away, even for the pleasure of regaining it.

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It seemed pitiful beyond words to Lois that she should have to stand alone now. She could have done this willingly if she had been by herself, but to stand alone in this dual solitude, where she might have had support—she could not understand it. She wept uncontrollably with the pity of it, and dashed the tears away that she might smile, red-eyed, upon her children, who could not feel the pathos of her effort.

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There is little provision made in most girlhood for that independence of living which marriage unexpectedly forces upon a woman, in many instances, in almost as great a degree as when she is thrown out into the world upon her own resources. To be high and fine, rational and spirited, cheerful and loving, quite by one's self, without audience or applause, takes a new kind of strength, to which the muscles are little trained. A woman can reach almost any height on a spurt for praise or recognition; but to get up, sit down, eat, drink, walk, read, sleep, care for the children, order the meals, as a rational human being whose business it was to perform these functions intelligently, with no personality attached to it—to have it taken for granted that she would naturally order her life as suited her best, and desired no interference—it was like being pushed out into the cold.

If Justin's indifference was unexplainable to Lois, it was equally mysterious to him that she expected daily to be urged to seek amusement, to "take something" for her cold, to stay in if it were wet or to go out if it were dry, to avoid overwork, not to sew too much, and to be sure and rest in the afternoon—all the little kindly round of woman's sympathies that keep the heart warm. Justin had been brought up in the good old-fashioned way by a mother who, while requiring obedience and honesty from her sons, never required them to think of anybody else. In his conduct now he did entirely as he would be done by. He hated to be noticed, himself, in little ways; he did as he pleased, with the directness that is the inheritance of centuries of predominance, but he had become affectionately parrot-wise in some of the sentences he found were conducive to his wife's happiness. In his new absorption he had forgotten the sentences; he was deeply occupied with his own affairs. When Lois said to Zaidee, "Mamma is busy; she cannot attend to you now," she exemplified unconsciously her husband's present position toward herself. Many men regard women primarily in the light of children; and the more occupied Justin became in his own affairs, the more reluctant he became to talk of them at home to this child who was his wife. Her vivid surprise at normal conditions, the unnecessary worry and shallow generalization of ignorance, irritated him. He became more and more taciturn, though he was always kind and affectionate, even if his kindness and affection lacked, as she felt, the true inner glow; but in the state of mind which Lois had now made her own, no evidence of affection, however great on the part of her husband, would have meant anything to her more than momentarily, for it was seen afterwards through a medium which at once distorted and nullified, and not even the complete absorption in and surrender to herself that she craved could have satisfied the insatiable. She was drifting to a place among the great and terrible company of nerve-centered people, revolving wheels of centripetal force, sweeping into their own restless orbit all with which they come in contact as they go on their devastating way through the universe.

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Dosia, on the night when she had hurried down to the house with Lawson Barr, had found nothing out of the ordinary; the doctor had been delayed until late by a case of more insistence, that was all. She came down, however, on other evenings, luxuriously cloaked and wrapped, rosy and smiling, with radiant eyes, and held rapid conversations with Lois down-stairs, while Lawson waited in the hall, or sometimes went on farther and came back for her. Lois herself had never considered Lawson of importance, although she had warned Dosia against him; his sympathetic manner now pleased her. As the children improved, the measles threatened to become at once epidemic and more virulent in the town, so that it was thought wise to avoid comment by having no communication by daylight with the Alexander household. Dosia was thus, for a few minutes at a time, Lois' one social link with the outside world, for Justin, as she said bitterly, told her nothing. After three weeks of solitude and self-communing the barriers began to give way.

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She was glad to hear her husband come in one afternoon much earlier than usual. Something had been said the day before about her going out for a drive. Her heart beat at the sound of his voice,

and she ran down-stairs eagerly, but checked herself, as she had a way of doing lately, when she came near him. Her face, devoid of expression, was lifted to his to be kissed; for all her forbidding manner, she was ready to thaw if he would only take the trouble to shine directly upon her. It was a beautiful spring afternoon, and she felt the invading monitions of happiness, in spite of herself, as he kissed her, saying at once hurriedly, if very kindly:

"I've got to dress and take the five-o'clock train back to town."

"Oh!" She was chilled to ice. "Won't you be here to dinner?"

"Why, no. Girard—do you remember my speaking of him? He's sent me a ticket for the Western Club dinner in town to-night. There will be fine speaking; not that I care for that particularly, but it is really important for me to be there. There are not many tickets; I'm in luck to get one." He stopped irresolutely. "You don't mind my going? I thought you'd be with the children."

"No, I don't mind your going." She added under her breath, "And it wouldn't make any difference to you if I did."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"If it were any place to which you could have gone with me, I would have refused."

"Oh!"

He looked at her uneasily, but said no more; she heard him whistling softly as he was getting dressed. In reality his conscience was uncomfortably pricking him. He felt that he had let her bear too much alone, that he might have been more thoughtful—he couldn't exactly tell how. He registered a mental vow to take her out somewhere the very first chance he got.

He came in the nursery to say good-by to the children and to her. She asked:

"What train will you take back to-night?"

"I don't suppose I can get anything earlier than the twelve."

"You mean the one that gets here at a quarter to one?"

"Yes, of course. Don't sit up for me."

He was gone; the door had closed behind him—he was gone. Almost before she realized it, he was gone. It could not be—she was not ready to have him go yet! There were so many things she had meant to say to him. She would have rushed to the door to call him back, but Redge cried out for her. She took him from his crib and ran to the window with him, over the floor that was strewn with play-things—Justin was already nearly out of sight. He must, he must, he *must* come back again! He must. She willed it so intensely that he must feel it, if he loved her, and come back. If you willed things hard enough, they happened; people said so. She was willing, willing, *willing* him to come back. She watched the clock, and listened for the sound of the passing train. Seven minutes to walk to the station—seven minutes to walk back again, as she willed him to come. Thirty minutes had passed; he had stopped here, there, or yon, on his way home. An hour—and he had not come! She had willed in vain. He had gone.

From six o'clock until a quarter of one,—until one o'clock, for the midnight train was always late,—that was seven hours. Seven hours to wait, seven hours to think and think. She gave the children their supper; she laughed with them, she played with them, helped the nurse undress them, sang them to sleep, with that dreadful undercurrent of thinking all the time. She had her dinner, eating without knowing what she ate, trying to take a long while at it. Afterwards she lighted the lamp in the little drawing-room, took out her sewing, and sat down there to wait. There were five hours and a half yet.

There was a ring at the door-bell about eight o'clock, which proved the herald of little Mrs. Snow, holding in one hand a provisional vial.

"No, thank you, I won't sit down," she said, in answer to Lois' invitation. "I just ran over to see if you could let me have a little cough medicine for William to-night, he has a little tickle in his throat that keeps him coughing, I knew it was no use telling *him* to get any medicine, so I said to Bertha, 'Bertha, I'm just going to run over to Mrs. Alexander's and see if she can lend me a spoonful of cough mixture.' I'll have my bottle renewed to-morrow."

"I'm sorry," said Lois, wondering at her power of suspending a heartbreak, "but we haven't a drop left in the house."

"There is so much bronchitis around now," continued Mrs. Snow, oblivious of the fact that the same impetus that had brought her as far as the Alexanders' would have taken her to the druggist's. "No, thank you; I can't sit down."

She stood by the mantel in a drooping attitude that gave her a plaintive effect, in combination with her soft crinkled black garments and her small white, delicate, finely wrinkled face. Mrs. Snow had, as a usual thing, only two tones to her voice—the plaintive and the inquisitive; the former was in evidence now.

"There is so much bronchitis around now. I think if you can take hold of it at the first beginning, with a little cough medicine, when it's just a tickle in the throat, you can often save a great deal."

"I suppose you can," said Lois. She felt a vague duty of conversation. "Isn't William well?"

His mother shook her head. "No, my dear, not at all, though he will not own it. I ask him every time he comes in the house how he feels, and sometimes he won't even answer me." She heaved a sigh. "You're not looking well yourself, Mrs. Alexander; you mustn't take care of the children too hard."

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"Oh, nothing ever hurts *me*," said Lois in a hard voice.

"I'm glad they're so nearly well. I met Mr. Alexander to-night on his way back to town. It was a pity you couldn't have gone with him; if you had sent for me, I could have come and stayed with the children as well as not."

"Oh, thank you," said Lois.

"I suppose you don't see much of Miss Dosia?"

"No, not much as yet."

Mrs. Snow cleared her throat deprecatingly. "A number of people have been asking me lately if she and Mr. Barr were engaged."

"Engaged! Why, of course not," exclaimed Lois contemptuously. "There is not the slightest question of such a thing; in fact, she dislikes him. He simply takes her around because she is at his sister's."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Snow, "Miss Dosia dislikes Mr. Barr—does she really, now! I'm sure I told everybody that I knew they couldn't be engaged, although they do seem to be so much together. So she dislikes him; Ada dislikes him, too. There's something about Mr. Barr so—well, you can't exactly tell what it is, can you, but it's there; something that's not exactly like a gentleman—not like Mr. Sutton. Ada likes Mr. Sutton so much. It's such a relief to me to find that Miss Dosia is so sensible; she's a sweet young girl—a little fond of attention, perhaps, but many young girls *are*. No, I thank you, my dear, I cannot sit down, I *must* go now. I don't think you're looking well; you must be careful and not overdo."

"Oh, nothing hurts me," said Lois again, with a peculiar little smile. The insinuation about Dosia did no more than swell the undercurrent of bitterness by another unnecessary drop.

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And Mrs. Snow was gone. Lois had not wanted her, but how alone it was now! Even Mrs. Snow had seen that she did not look well—had pitied her.

The children were asleep up-stairs, the maids were in the kitchen. The clock in the hall ticked. People walked past the house: a man alone—another man; young people, laughing and catching up with those ahead; some shuffling, hobbling toilers; then the light step of a woman returning from work; then another man. Occasionally, but not often, a carriage rolled down the street. The footsteps were always clear and distinct from the corner below to the upper crossing; when it was a train-time, there were more footsteps coming and going—between trains only the solitary footsteps again. She heard the man in the house across the street run up the steps to his front door, and turn the key in the lock. The door opened and shut behind him. The clock in the hall struck the half-hour—it was half-past eight. Oh, if there had been a life-time of misery in that last half-hour, what was there to come? An eternity, an eternity of desolation!

If she were to will him now to come home, if in the midst of the glittering lights and flowers he could hear her cry to him,—"*Justin, I want you!*"—he would *have* to come. "Justin, I want you!" She rose and paced the floor, sobbing out the words. No, he would not hear her—he did not want to hear her. Perhaps he was laughing now. She would have gone to *him*, if he had wanted her, though she had had to crawl upon her knees through thorns and briars. Ah, how she would have gone! A rush of blinding tears filled her eyes. He did not care. She had been ready to cling to him, and sob her heart out on his breast, and beg him to love her and kiss her and stay with her, and he had not seen. She had asked—in the tone that mutely pleaded—*You will not leave me so long?*—"The train that gets here at a quarter to one?" and he had answered, "Yes, of course." That was all. If her lips had touched his so coldly when he had said good-by, it was because she had longed to have him notice it, and ask her why. But he had not noticed the coldness, he had not asked her why. He had not wanted any more warmth in her. He did not care!

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There came swift moments in those long and passion-freighted hours when the darkened, distorted vision cleared in wonderful flashes that brought the healing of light. In these moments she caught glimpses of herself, not as this draggled, pain-gripped, hungry creature, the prey of frenzied, torturing moods, but as a wife tenderly beloved, a happy mother of little children, the mistress of comforts that her husband had won for her, the appointed dispenser of blessings; a wife tenderly beloved, the true owner of her husband's heart, a woman whose work it was to grow daily in strength and grace, that she might be more and more his helper, his lover. Even as this glimpse was shut out again, there was the piercing thought: If that were real, and what her darkened eyes beheld untrue! Things are what they are, no matter how one's distorted vision sees them. If it were really true, no matter how she saw it now, that she was a wife tenderly beloved, with happiness within her grasp, and a miserable woman indeed only that she was blind to its possibilities! She had said, *The train that gets here at a quarter to one?* with what a longing for him not to leave her, and he had answered, *Yes, of course*. Nothing could make those words any different. And she wanted him, and he did not care—he did not care. Justin, Justin! The long, long, torturing fangs of self-pity had her by the throat.

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The house was silent, the children slept, the maids had gone up-stairs. The hours wore on into the night. The footsteps passed up and down the street only at long intervals. The air grew chill in the house. In the quiet, the watcher could hear the trains far, far off across the flats.

At twelve o'clock the spring rain began to fall, gently at first, and then in torrents, coming straight down with a rushing sound that blotted out both trains and footsteps. And the train was late, as she had said it would be, it was after one o'clock when Justin ran up the steps with that firm, quick tread of his, opened the door, and came in. His face was bright and eager; he was full yet of the pleasure of the evening, and anxious to make her a sharer of it. He turned to speak to his wife, and the glow on his countenance died out instantly as with a breath from the tomb.

Lois sat stiffly upright in a chair, facing him. The light had gone out in the lamp, and the one gas-burner above, with its meager flicker, cast the room into the desolate half-shadows that speak of the late hours of the night. She had worn a scarlet house-gown in the evening; the trailing folds swept the floor around her slipped feet now, her bare arms gleamed below the sleeves that only reached beyond the elbow. Around her was flung a gray cloak, buttoned askew at the throat, and in one of her folded hands she held a black lace scarf. Her face was white, and her large eyes stared straight before her rigidly, yet with a wild gleam in them; as he looked at her she rose and moved as if to pass him.

He stepped forward with his dripping overcoat half off.

"Where are you going?"

She made no answer, but looked at him as she edged on farther to the door.

"Where are you going? Answer me."

Her lips stiffly framed the word: "Out."

"Out! What do you mean?" He spoke roughly, in a terrible anxiety and anger mixed together. "What are you working yourself up to all this foolishness for?"

Again she did not answer.

He went on more sternly, yet with an undercurrent of entreaty:

"Come in here and take off those things and be rational. Why do you look at me like that?"

"You don't care—any more."

Oh, if he would snatch her to him now, and press her to his breast, that she might feel his protecting arms around her! If he would kiss her now with the kisses she remembered, and love her, and comfort her, and send this horrible spirit out of her! How could he not know that that was the way to exorcise it, that it was what her spent soul craved? How could he keep from putting his arms around her when she was in agony?

Never in his life had her husband been less likely to do so. The wild defiance in her eyes would have made any woman repulsive to him; he had all a man's horror of a "scene," mingled with a deeper disgust that she should be the actress in it, and his anger was the more that he felt the whole thing to be unnecessary. Underneath this anger, however, was the sense of responsibility for his wife's welfare, such as one would have for a child, no matter how outrageous.

"You don't care!" She whispered the words again.

"No, I don't care for you when you act like this." His voice was even sterner now; it was time that this travesty came to an end.

She stared at him as before. "Then I'll go!" she said wildly, and slipped past him out of the door and into the rain, running with swift yet uncertain footsteps down the black, wet street, listening, listening all the time for him to follow—listening as she ran. She walked more slowly now as she listened; she had gone nearly a block already toward the river. Oh, would he let her go? For one awful moment she feared that this phantasm might become a reality; and yet she knew, as well as she knew that she lived, that he would not let it be so. Yes, yes, there was his quick, sharp tread at last, gaining on her. He walked like the angry man he was, but the sound brought a furtive thrill of bliss to her. How strong he was when he was angry! He had had to notice her at last; he could think of nothing but her now.

She trembled as he came up to her. He only said in a matter-of-fact tone, "It's time to stop this now; you'll get wet." He took her by the arm and turned her around, heading for home; the mere touch of his guiding hand on her arm sent warmth through her icy veins. She trembled as her feet tottered beside his, her strength suddenly spent with the breaking up of her long passion.

Neither spoke as they walked home. When they were in the house again, he unfastened her cloak with awkward fingers, and took the dripping scarf from her wet hair, throwing them on a chair.

She leaned her head upon his breast, clinging to him with an inarticulate murmur for forgiveness, and he smoothed her hair for a moment. She raised her face to his to be kissed, and he kissed her. She humbly asked nothing; she would be satisfied with anything now. She went up to her room, as he bade her, and when she was in bed, he came and sat down by her, and held the hand she mutely placed in his, as her imploring eyes asked. But he had to put a force upon himself to do it. The whole play was distasteful and repugnant beyond words to him; it weakened every bond that bound him to her. He sought for no self-analyzing causes. He had so much care upon him now that more than ever in his life before he needed diversion, sympathy, love, rest—rest above everything else on earth.

To live in the same house, to meet not only at the accepted times, but in all the little passing ways—on the stairs, coming in and out of the door; to meet also in all the little unpremeditated ways that are really premeditated—the going to the library for a book, the searching over this, that, and the other, with all its pretended inconsequence and surprise; the abstraction of two people from the same room at the same time on different pretexts; the lingerings while the minutes grew toward the hour, the sudden hurried partings at a foot-step, the reunion for just a moment more when the foot-step did not come that way—all this unnoticed and casual intercourse with its half-secrecy and hint of the forbidden becomes a large factor in its relation to after-events, when the participants are a man and a woman. There is no influence so little regarded for the young by those in authority as the tremendous influence of propinquity.

Among all the social comings and goings at the Leverichs', the excitement of Lawson's presence held its place with Dosia. The sudden sight of his olive profile and his lithe figure, his cool, appraising gaze, his "Well, young lady?" with its ironic tone that yet conveyed a subtle kindness, his lazy, caressing expostulation, "Why not, when we are friends?"—these things made heart-beats that Dosia took pains to assure herself were of a purely Platonic nature, when she stopped at rare occasions to take tally of her emotions, though there was a continual unacknowledged inner protest, in spite of her yielding, which made her resolve each day to withdraw a little on the next. But they never talked of love; they talked only of goodness, or art, or music, or about the way you felt about different subjects, or little teasing things, like why she drew her mouth down at the corners when he looked at her, or why she had seemed to disapprove the night before. They were bound together by the hope of higher things. She met him always in the morning with the bright uplifting smile that said, "I know you will repay my confidence—for *I* believe in you!"

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"I really wish Lawson would go away," said Mrs. Leverich, one day, as the two sat over their afternoon tea together.

"Why?" asked Dosia, with the suddenly concentrated composure his name always brought her outwardly. "I thought you said last week that he had improved so much."

"Oh, yes, he's had one of his good streaks lately; and he *is* a sweet fellow when he's nice—he was the dearest *little* boy! Lawson can twist me around his little finger when he wants to; he knows that he can get money out of me every time, even when he oughtn't to have it. But he can't keep up this sort of thing long, you know, he is so restless; there's bound to be a breakdown afterwards. I dread it; the breakdowns get worse, now, every time."

"Perhaps there will be no breakdown, after all," said Dosia, in an even voice, but with that sudden deep sensation of disenchantment which his sister's words always brought to her, and which lay upon her spirit like a living thing, dragging her fancy in chains. It was not alone Mrs. Leverich's words, either, that had this power; when anyone spoke of Lawson it brought the same displeasing uneasiness, followed by the wonted eager remorsefulness later, when she saw him. But through each phase one foundational sense held good—he was not at all the kind of man she would ever want to marry; the whole attraction of the situation was in the fact that one could be so nobly intimate, and still keep off the danger-ground. Once or twice he had seemed to be infringing on it, and then she had turned him aside with sweet solemnity and additional inner excitement.

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These were days indeed! It was Lent, but there were all the minor pleasures of luncheons and card-parties, and little evening entertainments held at Mrs. Leverich's hospitable mansion. It mattered not whether there was anything going on in the town or not; society focused at her house, with Dosia for the central point. When she thought of going back again to Lois it was with a blank shiver.

Lois, indeed, had not been well lately; the children were out of quarantine, but she had a sore throat, and kept her room under the care of a trained nurse. Dosia had not seen her, but only Justin, who looked tired and older. Dosia was not to return now until after Easter and after the ball—Mrs. Leverich was going to give a ball for Dosia; it was to be, in a sense, her "coming out."

She had by this time become quite used to her position as daughter of the house, accepted luxuries as a matter of course, and even suggested improvements, when she found that it pleased Mrs. Leverich to have her do so. She received that lady's embraces gracefully, brought newspapers unasked for Mr. Leverich, and gave orders to the maids for her hostess. She had grown accustomed to being waited on, petted, made much of, and given presents, and blossomed like the rose under this vernal shower of kindness; her dress, her manner, her very expression, betrayed the ease of elegance. She did not like to own, even to herself, that long conversations with Mrs. Leverich were somewhat tiresome when the subject was neither Lawson nor herself, and she learned to get out of the way of too many tête-à-têtes. This did not keep her from having a fervent gratitude for all the blessings of the situation, and a real love for the dispenser of them. Now, when the time of her stay was narrowing to a close, she clung to each day as if it neared the end of life; every pleasure was doubly dear in that it was the last of its kind. To be sure, the fairy prince had not arrived as yet—Bailey Girard, who had come to the house while she was still a stranger to it, had been half across the Continent since. It is one of the shabby jests that life is always playing us, that two who have met once as wayfarers on the same road, with the memory of that one meeting so curiously vivid and intimate that it seems as if the fate of the next turning must bring them within touch again, are yet kept out of sight or sound of each other for miles by the slight accidents of travel. Fate, when we count upon her, is apt to be extraordinarily slow in

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working out her fulfillments.

Dosia hailed with delight a proposition made by Mrs. Leverich to get up a party and drive over one evening to a neighboring town to hear a lecture given there by a friend. The lecture was nothing, the friend not a very great attraction, but the expedition in itself gave an excuse for a drive, and a supper on the return to the Leverich mansion. It was early April, but the weather was unseasonably warm, and there was a golden moon. They were to go in a "barge"—the local name for a long, low, uncovered wagon, with two lateral seats, holding about thirty people. Mrs. Leverich had insisted on plenty of lap-ropes and extra wrappings and even umbrellas, in spite of remonstrances. She herself could not go, but there were plenty of chaperons, little Mrs. Snow having been pressed into service as a substitute at the last moment, with every promise of mild evening weather especially beneficial to rheumatism.

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Some one had a bugle that woke the echoes as the caravan drew up at each door to gather the different segments of the party. Dosia felt wild with glee as she bundled into the barge, amid merry shrieks and laughter, and found herself seated by Mr. William Snow, while Lawson took the place on the other side of her. Ada and Mr. Sutton were farther down, with Mrs. Snow near them. Opposite Dosia was a chaperon of the chaperons.

Dosia hardly knew what she was saying as she laughed and talked with the crowd, while Lawson conversed across with Mrs. Malcolmson, but the sense of his nearness never left her. Billy at last got a chance to say to her in a low, intense voice:

"Why are you always listening for what *he* says?"

Her glance followed his, and her color rose.

"Dear little Billy is rude; Billy must learn manners," she retorted gayly, but with a sharpness below the gayety.

"I don't care whether it's rude or not. Here I'm sitting by you for the first time this week, and you don't seem to hear a word I say. I've been trying to talk to you, and you don't pay the slightest attention."

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"Oh, you poor child!" said Dosia. "Would it like some candy?"

"It's no use talking to me like that," returned William stubbornly. "I know you're a year older than I am——"

"Two," interpolated Dosia.

"It's seventeen months and three days—but that's nothing to do with it. It's no use your trying the grandmother act—I could marry you, just the same, if I *am* younger. Mrs. Stanford is two years older than her husband, and Mrs. Taylor is five years older than hers. Lots of people do it—but that's not the point now. I'm miles older than you in everything but years. I've had experience of the world, and you haven't." His belligerent tone softened, and he looked at her tenderly as he towered above her, his blue eyes alight. "You need somebody to take care of you. I don't care whether you believe it or not, I know what I'm talking about. I wish you'd drop that fellow."

"Why?" asked Dosia, with dangerous calm.

"Why? Because—you ought to know. He isn't a gentleman; he's no good. He isn't *fit*. If he was, don't you think he'd look out for you, and not take advantage the way he does? If he had a decent spark in him, he'd never let you be seen with him; he knows it, if you don't. Why, there have been times I've seen him when you wouldn't pick him up off the road with a pair of tongs."

"Mr. Barr, will you fasten this cloak around me?" said Dosia, in a clear voice.

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She turned with her back to William and leaned a little closer to Lawson, after he had helped her arrange the garment. Lawson had made every resolution to take no advantage of his position, but he was not proof against this alluring moment; his warm hand with its long, tapering fingers sought hers under cover of the lap-robe, and held it while he still talked with apparent unconcern to his matronly vis-à-vis. Once he looked around at Dosia with those teasing eyes full of laughter, and yet of something more. She could not drag her hand away without betraying the struggle, as his closed more tightly over it, though her riotous heart beat so that she feared it must get into her voice, and there was an odd feeling as if she were doing some one a wrong. Her fluttering was intoxication to Lawson.

They drove for five miles with the early spring moonlight shining silverly through the last rosy haze of the sunset, the air sweet with the scent of green grass and dewy blossoms.

Lawson did not look at Dosia as he helped her out of the wagon, nor did he come in to listen to the lecture, through which she sat pulsating at the thought of the drive home, desiring yet fearing it. Would he be near her then? Her question was answered. He helped to put everyone else in the wagon, and they two came last. This time their opposite neighbors were a young couple engrossed in each other. Dosia's quick eye took in the situation at once. She was determined not to speak first, and they rode for a while in silence; then he moved nearer, and asked in a low tone:

"Why don't you look at me?"

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"Why did you—hold my hand?" She spoke in a whisper that he had to bend his head to hear.

"I might tell you a good many reasons—but one will do. I am going away for good."

"What?" She turned breathlessly, with a quick pang. The night had grown very dark, but she

could see the gleam of his eyes and the outline of his olive face as it leaned over her. "Why?"

"Because—" He stopped, and his quizzical look changed into something deeper. "I believe I ought to. I've had a sort of an offer out West, and it's time I made a change."

"Is it to lead a new life?" asked Dosia, with deep and tender solemnity. Mrs. Leverich's words came back to her; this, then, had been all planned.

"Oh, let us always hope so!" said Lawson lightly. "Who knows? Perhaps I'll turn into a highly respectable individual and make money. You can't be respectable without money, I've tried it, and I know. I had a sort of an opening in Central Africa which my dear brother-in-law pressed upon me, but I decided against it."

"Central Africa!"

"Yes. I appreciated Leverich's feelings in the plan—you can't get back easily from Central Africa, if you get back at all. So I'm going, for good or bad, to a nice little mining-camp in Nevada, where you get your mail every six weeks or so, and where you can go down into your grave any way you please without scandalizing your friends. I'll be really quite out of the way."

"Out of the way!" Her heart leaped with pride in him. How little William knew of this man!

"Yes, out of everybody's way—and yours, dear little girl. I'm not good enough for much, but perhaps I'm good enough for that."

"Oh," said Dosia, distressed and fascinated by his tone of real feeling. "But why—oh, I shall miss you so much—and think of you—so much!" Her voice broke. "I can't bear to think of your going off in this way—so lonely."

There was a shriek from farther down the barge. "It's beginning to rain, it's beginning to rain!" A wild scramble ensued for cloaks and umbrellas. A furious shower was descending almost with the words, and the whole party slid off the two long seats into the straw on the bottom of the barge, and cowered under the carriage-ropes pulled up around them for a shelter, showing only a mass of umbrellas above.

Lawson's quick movements had insured Dosia's protection.

"You are not getting wet at all?" He bent over her tenderly under the enveloping umbrella.

"Not at all," she whispered.

It was as if everything were a confidence now. She reverted to the subject of their conversation:

"Oh, do you think you will really not come back?"

He laughed. "Yes, I mean it—now. Of course, you know that's my chief fault—my resolutions are too frequently writ on sand." He spoke of his own weakness with the bitter yet facile contempt which too often enervates still more instead of strengthening. "Yes, I mean it. Do you wonder I took your hand? Are you sorry I'm going—? is my little friend sorry? She mustn't be sorry; you know, nobody is sorry—she must be glad to get rid of inc. Speak—and say it."

"No," whispered Dosia.

He pressed her arm close to him, as he held her hand and pulled the wraps around her, shifting the umbrella as the wind changed. One of the men in front lighted a lantern and held it out in the rain at arm's length, to glimmer ahead in the pitchy darkness and show the road to the driver, who held the horses at a walk. The wagon lurched and tipped in mud-holes and unexpected ridges and depressions, running up once on the edge of a bank, while the couples on the floor of it screamed and laughed. There were muttered rolls of thunder in the distance. Rain in the night had always brought back the scene of the disaster to Dosia, but she only thought now that she could not think. All of her that lived was living at this moment here.

"Why are you so silent?" he murmured headily, after an interval.

"I don't know."

"Is there anything else that you want to tell me?"

"I don't know."

"Oh, yes, you do." His voice had grown dangerously tender. "What is it?" He waited again, bending nearer. "Don't you want me to leave you—is that it? Don't you want me to leave you?"

"No," whispered Dosia.

"Then I'll stay!"

His arm slid exultingly around her waist, and his hand pressed her head down upon his shoulder, while she submitted passively, a thing of suffocating heart-beats and burning blushes, captive to she knew not what. "You oughtn't to have said that, you know, for now I'll never go. I'll stay with you. Hush—keep still!" He held her firmly as some one spoke from the front, and he answered in a loud tone:

"Yes, Mrs. Malcolmson, it's the right road. Swing the lantern a little further around, Billy. Yes, that's the old white house; we turn there—it's all right."

He kept his attitude of attention for a few minutes, looking from under the cover of his umbrella at the huddled heaps and the umbrellas in front of him. Then Dosia felt that he was coming back to her. She tried desperately to rally her forces, to think if this was the man with whom she

wanted to spend her life, her husband for all her days. Alas, she could not think! Some giant, unknown force had sapped her power of thought. She weakly took his two hands and tried to push his arm from around her waist and to raise her head from his shoulder. His arm did not move; her head sank back again. His lips were on hers—which no man had ever touched before,—and those lips now were Lawson's.

"There was *one* girl kissed to-night," announced Mrs. Snow, as she took off her numerous layers of shawls and worsted head-coverings in household conclave after her return from the Leverichs'.

"It was perfectly disgraceful! Is there any hot water on the stove, Bertha? I want a glassful to drink. I hope you left a piece of stale bread in the oven for me, I feel a little need of something. Oh, yes, of course there was a supper, we had lobster Newburg and champagne, but I didn't take any; a cup of beef-tea or a little cereal would have suited me much better. It's a mercy if I haven't taken my death of cold. It was Dosithea Linden's goings-on that I was speaking of; she's a bold sort of a piece, evidently, quite different from what I thought. Sh—William's gone up-stairs, hasn't he?" Mrs. Snow dropped her voice mysteriously. "My dear, she and Lawson Barr sat hidden under an umbrella all the way home, and never spoke a word. You can't tell *me*! Never said a word that anyone could hear. When she came into the dining-room at the Leverichs', her face was scarlet, and she couldn't even look at anyone, though she talked enough for ten while he played some queer thing on the piano. You can just ask Ada."

Miss Bertha had preserved an immovable countenance throughout the monologue, but her eye now sought her sister's and received a swift glance of confirmation from that silent and discreet damsel. The confirmation brought a shock to Miss Bertha—fond of the trivial and unimportant in gossip, the scandal which hurt the young devolved a hurt on her, too. As mothers who have lost children feel a tenderness for those who do not belong to them, so Miss Bertha, who had lost her youth, felt toward the youth in others. Her mother's small mind yet had an uncanny power of partial divination, gained from years of experience and espial, that irritated while it impressed.

"Her face was probably red from the wind and the rain," said Miss Bertha, in a matter-of-fact tone, regardless of her mother's contemptuous sniff. "What kind of a time did you have, Ada? Did you see anything of Mr. Sutton?"

"Just a little," replied Ada temperately.

This time it was the mother's and Miss Bertha's eyes that telegraphed. "Ada, my dear, you may take my shawls up-stairs. She was with him *all* the time. I hope he saw enough of Dosithea Linden's bold actions to disgust him, at any rate. Yes, my dear, everything was managed very beautifully at the Leverichs', and it was all very elegant; but she is a little common—Mrs. Leverich, I mean. She was really quite put out because we hadn't driven back faster. There was a Mr. Girard who had come out from the city, and she wanted Miss Dosithea to meet him before he left—he had just come back from somewhere in the West. She really made quite a time about it. And there's a sort of vulgar display about her that I don't care for; you can see she's Lawson's brother. Oh, well, don't take me up so, Bertha; you know what I mean, well enough. You have such a sharp way with you sometimes, like your dear father's family. William—*Wil-liam!*"

"Yes, mother."

"I want you to come down and put the cat out and lock up at once,—oh, you did, did you?—and kissed me good night, too, you say? I didn't notice it. And did you empty the water-pan under the ice-box, and bank up the fire, and water the big palm? Oh, very well. Then, William—*Wil-liam!* I want you to come down again, now, and take a rhinitis tablet, after the dampness of to-night."

There was an emphatic sound from above.

"He's shut his door," said Miss Bertha.

Ah, what does a girl think who has given up all her bright anticipations for a man whom she knows is not worthy? Lawson had pressed Dosithea's hand only when he said good night,—there were others around,—but he had looked at her lips. She knew how his felt upon them; their touch—more than all the murmured elusive questions and answers—had made her his.

She knelt down by the big chair in her room, and buried her hot face in the cushions, to try and think at last, with a suddenly sinking heart that feared when it should have rejoiced. He had told her that no one could make him go, now that she loved him; he would stay here. "And work for me?" she had asked, and he had answered, "Yes, and work for you." She should be so happy now, so happy! The perspective down which she had always seen her future was suddenly shortened; this was the end. Lawson Barr, the man she had been playing with at a delightful, enthralling, forbidden game, he was the man with whom she had promised to spend her life, her husband for all her days; that which was to have been her uplifting was instead something for her to carry. Suppose that she had more of those awful, clear-sighted moments which had disenchanting her when his sister spoke? No, no; that must not happen, that must not! Dosithea had acquiesced in what was said about him, with the large-eyed incomprehension of the girl who pretends that she understands what everyone expects her to; it meant something—she was afraid to have anyone tell her what; she pretended to understand, because she was afraid some one would let her know of half-divined, unmentionable things. He was not—good; he drank—people despised him; but he clung to her, and she had let him kiss her, oh, not only once or twice, but many, many times. She knew in her heart, she knew, that he was what they said; but it was to be her work to help him always. When she had been with him hitherto, there had always been the excitement of feeling that the claim was temporary, to hold or not, at will, a mere pretense of a claim. Now it was real. She was bound forever!

Was the moment of disenchantment upon her now? She did not deceive herself—too late she owned the truth. What was the worst? He was weak—then she must be strong. She thought of herself in years to come. People said you couldn't reform a man who drank—her father had been very strong on this point. She had thought of it all before, to be sure; but now—now it came home. She imagined herself keeping his house for him, getting his meals—perhaps with children; waiting, listening suspiciously for his returning footsteps; trying to keep him "straight,"—perhaps not succeeding. Yes, she must succeed! People looked down on him—so they would look down on her. And while her clear and pure nature reasserted itself, and thought and tried pathetically to find out truth alone, her cheeks still burned, her senses owned his sway. Those intoxicating moments forced themselves upon her, whether she would or no. But the truth—the truth below that, the truth was that she did not love him. You can carry any burden if you have the strong wings of love, but she had them not. What was to have been the crowning of her maidenhood had come to this—a sacrifice to the baser, and without love. Nay, not that, not quite that! The maternal spirit in Dosia rose and yearned over this outcast, whom nobody loved, with a tenderness which owned no thought of self; she must never think of herself any more, but only what was best for him. She was to be his wife. The word brought a choking feeling, with its thrill of mystery. She was so young—so young! Could she keep up a sacrifice always? Why had she not been able to think in this way until now? The answer came clearly in her search for truth: because she would not let herself do so. She had been warned—she had been warned.

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"Pray—it helps." That was what she had said to him. Ah, yes! She slid to her knees; her only real help was in Heaven. She must keep her promise! She must always love him whom nobody loved, and trust him whom nobody trusted. Perhaps—perhaps when he kissed her again—She put the thought away, so that she, a child, might speak straight to God. And while she prayed Lawson was coming down-stairs with his hat on.

"You are not going out?" His sister barred the way, in a purple velvet gown, and laid a plump jeweled hand on his sleeve. The lights were already out in the drawing-room, and, beyond, the servants were removing the last traces of the supper.

He did not answer for a moment, looking at her with hard eyes, void of expression save for a certain tenseness. It was a look she knew. Then he answered roughly:

"I'm going in on the twelve-o'clock train with some of the boys. It's no good to talk."

"Lawson! not now." Her tone was angry. "Go up-stairs—to bed."

"Well, I guess—not!" said Lawson. He swept her hand from his arm, and was out of the door and running quickly down the steps before she turned.



It was a look she knew

Dosia, on her knees, heard his step; it set her heart beating with a rush of emotions that drowned her prayer. She was his, though she had been warned.

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Warned—yes; and left carelessly to her fate in a world of chaperons and parents and guardians and people who knew!

It was the night of Mrs. Leverich's grand ball. Dossia was "coming out."

The preparations had been going on for the entire week since the drive. The great house had been cleaned from top to bottom, the floors waxed, the state silver brought out and polished. Mrs. Leverich drove out half a dozen times a day with Dossia, to order or to countermand orders, to select, compare, discuss. Every arrangement that was made or thought of required discussion—what furniture was to be taken up in the attic and what left where it belonged; where the flowers were to be placed, where the musicians were to take their stand; how many small tables would be needed for the serving of the supper that was to come from town. Leverich himself had said there was to be no expense spared, and he would see to the wine; all he wanted was the privilege of asking some of his own friends. The invitations were out late, as there had been a delay in the engraving; Dossia looked at her own name on them, and tried to realize that this was indeed what Mr. Leverich called "her party." He had insisted, at his wife's suggestion, in presenting Dossia with her gown for the occasion, and had been pleased with her pretty thanks for his kindness. There was something about Mr. Leverich, with all his outer coarseness, that Dossia liked. When she spoke in a certain way, he never answered wrong, as his wife sometimes did; he understood.

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Not since the night of the barge-ride had Dossia seen her lover. After her first disquiet and wonder at not seeing him at the breakfast to which she came down very late the next morning, she was relieved to hear that he had suddenly been called away earlier. He might not be back for a day or two. She longed to question more, but could not bring herself to do it, and his absence seemed to be taken as a matter of course by everyone else. But there had been a note from him, after the two days were up, postmarked from the city—a mere line that said only, "For the girl I love."

"Will your brother be back for the party?" she asked Mrs. Leverich, trying to keep her color steady and ask the question casually.

"Oh, yes, indeed," the sister answered readily. "He may be back at any minute now. He'll be here on the day itself, for certain; he knows I want his help about some things."

Without Lawson's actual presence Dossia could fashion him into the man she loved, and pitch her own key of living higher. With that higher thought and her simple earnestness of purpose, she grew sweeter, dearer, more subtly sympathetic with others; she was no girl any longer, she said to herself, but a woman, for she was loved. How would his eyes claim hers when he came? Her cheeks mantled at the thought. There was a strange tingling emotion in everything connected with him. Ah, he would be worthy—he must! Suppose he were her hero, after all? Absence supplied him with the halo.

All the village was astir over the ball, as well as the Leverich house; it was impossible to overestimate its importance. Every woman was having a new dress made, or was absorbingly renovating an old one, and every man was sick and tired of hearing about the festivity. Everybody was asked; not to have an invitation to the Leverich ball was to be outside the pale indeed. Mrs. Snow was not going,—she had taken cold on the ride,—but it was to be one of Miss Bertha's rare appearances in public; she was to chaperon Ada. Lois and Justin were coming; the former was to be one of the receiving party.

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Dossia's week had been one surging thought of Lawson, mixed with wild anticipations of the ball, yet even at dinner-time on the eventful night he had not arrived.

"Girard is coming, you know, after all," said Leverich, as they assembled for the hasty meal in a little side-room. "I met him in town to-day, and was lucky enough to get him. That's the right man for you, Dossia."

"For me!" Dossia laughed, with her rising color. "Mr. Leverich, you are always trying to find the right man for me. I don't want him!"

"You haven't met him yet," said Leverich wisely. "He's the only fellow I know that I'd be willing to have you marry. I told him you were waiting for him."

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Dossia, in consternation.

"Now, don't get excited," said Leverich, smiling broadly. "I said he'd have to work to get you—that you weren't the kind of a girl that came when she was beckoned to. Oh, I put your stock 'way up."

He laughed at her horrified gaze, and then lapsed indulgently. "No, I'll confess! I didn't say anything of the kind; I was just romancing. I did tell him he'd meet a pretty nice girl—you don't mind that, do you?"

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"You don't deserve to be answered," said Dossia. She went and hung over his chair caressingly for a moment before escaping from the room.

In spite of his recantation, the effect of having been offered to Mr. Girard remained the real situation—one of sudden and great intimacy. The thought of his coming to-night added to her happiness; it brought the deep pleasure inseparable from his name—it was as if something both calm and protecting had been added, like the comfortable presence of one who understood. He would sympathize, if he knew, with that high motive of duty which must uphold her, whether the glamour held or failed. He would know what it was to feel that you must be true.

As she went through the still unlighted upper hall, she came face to face with some one in an overcoat, a man who carried a valise.

"Lawson!" she whispered.

For one dreadful moment she saw him in that way she feared; shallow, insincere, unstable—was that all? Was there something indefinably odd, indefinably strange? Then she saw only the gaze that recalled everything—he loved her! That thrilling thought carried all before it; her pulses leaped to own him master, with a sudden lovely, trusting joy.

“No, no!” she whispered again, with falling eyelids, as he made a movement toward her. His lips touched her hair. “Not here! Some one is coming.”

“Later, then!” he murmured assentingly, with a gleaming eye, as she eluded him and ran down the corridor to her own room.

This was to be her ball, her ball! Her lover had come. Her dress lay on the bed, a white and airy thing; her white pearl-beaded slippers were below it on the floor. Every chair was piled high with dainty whiteness of some sort. Her dressing-table, with its candles and flowers, was like a shrine for her beauty. The mirror reflected her with loosened waves of hair and bare arms and feet, her bath-robe slipping from her shoulders. It reflected her again, fresh and gleaming, low-bodiced, short-skirted, and a-tiptoe in her pearly slippers; and again in filmy, trailing petticoats, and half-covered neck, sitting like a pictured marchioness of old in front of the dressing-table, in the shine of the candles, while Mrs. Leverich’s maid piled the fair hair high on her small head. And every few minutes there was a knock at the door, and a maid brought in a box of flowers, great, delicious bunches of red and pink and white roses, and sweet peas and lilies, and violets tied with yards of lustrous satin ribbon. Dosia held out her arms for them, the dear, fragrant, heavenly things, and hung over them, and buried her face in them, and kissed them, before she sent them down-stairs, with loving protest that she should have to be parted from them until she should follow. She had not so much as dreamed of this richness of flowers for her! It was because it was her ball, her ball! And her lover had come.

There was a noise of carriages driving up to the house—the intimate friends who came first. The musicians below were beginning to tune their instruments, and the twanging of the strings touched an intenser chord of exhilaration. The long-ago dance at the bazaar—was Dosia to have another to-night to which that would be but as a shadow? For this was her ball—her ball, and the dance would be with Lawson as her lover. Her feet kept time to some fairy measure of her own.



Like a pictured marchioness of old

Now she was robed in the white gown. It was like a white cloud enveloping her. Mrs. Leverich, rustling richly in pale green satin, came into the room and clasped a little thread of pearls around the slender white throat before she went down-stairs.

Lois came also, gowned in trailing blue, beautiful, but pale and cold; there was a sick look around her mouth. One or two girls ran in for a peep at the débutante. And was not Dosia coming down? Mrs. Leverich sent up word that they were all waiting for her. In a moment—Dosia would come in a moment. If they would leave her, she would be down in a moment. The music had struck up now, and swung into the preparatory strains of Lohengrin. Dosia would come in a moment.

As the bride feels who lingers for that little space alone in her chamber before facing the new joy, so felt Dosia. Her spirit cried out that this instant could never come again; she wished to feel it, to know it, forever. The mirrors reflected her with her hand on the door-knob, as she leaned half backward, her lashes touching her cheeks.... Then she opened the door and went down the hall to the stairs.

Dosia’s beauty was of the kind that distinctly depends on the soul within, the most touching, yet the most transitory. Never in her life would she look again as she did to-night, with that lovely,

childlike joy of anticipation; deeper happiness might be hers, but never happiness of the same kind. The men at the foot of the stairs saw it, and one shaded his eyes with his hand.

The green-embowered stairway was a broad one which led to a broad landing; from thence it faced the wide doorway of the brilliantly lighted drawing-room across the hall. In there were grouped Mrs. Leverich, Lois, the rest of the receiving party, and the Misses Snow, standing near a table on which were piled the flowers sent to Dosia, their long ribbon streamers hanging down to the floor. Mr. Leverich was at the foot of the stairs, talking to Justin; beside him was George Sutton; beside him, again, was Billy Snow; at one side in the half-shadow of some palms was another man. Something in the turn of the shoulders was oddly familiar to Dosia—he moved suddenly, and for a second she stood with that figure in a dimly lighted tunnel. This was Bailey Girard. Hardly had this swift thought come to her than it was followed by another: Where was Lawson?

“Here is our princess descending the stairs,” announced Mr. Sutton gallantly.

At that instant, as Dosia stood on the landing, with one slippared foot on the lower step, facing her little admiring world, somebody began to come down the flight at the side with hurrying, stumbling feet. It was Lawson in evening dress, his olive cheeks flushed, his eyes reckless. The men who were watching knew at once that, in common parlance, he was “not himself.” Dosia, her sweet eyes raised to meet his, only knew, with a quick, half-frightened thrill, that he looked strangely unnatural. He seemed to see no one but her, as he caught up to her, saying jovially:

“You can give me that other kiss now.”



Somebody began to come down with hurrying, stumbling feet

Did his hand but touch her white shoulder in that suggestion of vulgar familiarity that branded her as with a hot iron in its scorching, blinding shame? She could not blush, the blood had all gone to her stricken heart and left her white as a snow wreath. Then Leverich sprang up the steps and took Lawson by the arm, dragging him forcibly back into the upper regions, as some of the guests began to descend. Dosia must go in, helpless, toward those staring faces. Would no one come to her aid? Justin? He had turned to speak to Lois. Billy Snow? His face was averted, his eyes on the ground. Bailey Girard, her helper once, the hero of her dreams, the man his friend had pledged for succor—Bailey Girard stood motionless.

It was George Sutton who came forward and, placing her hand in his arm, led her with old-fashioned courtesy to her place beside Mrs. Leverich. The whole incident had taken barely a moment. Dosia stood up, pale and graceful, artificially self-composed, greeting the many people who began to pour in, smiling above the enormous bouquet of bride roses that she held, and chatting in a high, thin voice. Her one immediate thought was that she must stand up straight, as if nothing had happened—stand up straight and talk.

“Has the girl no feeling?” thought Lois contemptuously. “Why, she did not even blush!”

Feeling! If Lois had known of that corpse-like feeling of death in the heart that Dosia strove to cover decently! What did those men think of her, or those women who saw? What could they think her like, to have given any man a right to act that way toward her? Yet, what had Lawson done? Nothing. He had put his hand on her shoulder—he had asked her for a kiss. That was all. It

was nothing and it was everything—something that could never be undone. Through the dancing, through the flirting, through all the laughing and the talking the words repeated themselves. What had happened? It was nothing—and it was everything. Each effort for comfort brought with it that horrible, blinding shame to surge over her more and more, as each time also she recalled the scene, the touch.

How dazzlingly bright the room was, how brilliantly showed the people, how gay the scene! One partner after another claimed Dosia. She danced and danced, and did not know she danced. This was her ball! And in all that throng there was not one person whom she could call her friend. She fancied that people were whispering as she passed them. She had but one prayer—that the evening might end. She met Justin's eyes from time to time; they looked stern and disapproving. Even Leverich had an altered expression. She knew both he and Justin blamed her, and she was right. Those who are responsible are squeamish as to the appearance of delicacy in the conduct of a young girl. Lawson was in the greater condemnation, yet there was more of personal irritation felt with her, in that such a thing had been possible; it lowered her, and it placed them all in an awkward position. Justin had said to Leverich briefly, "She had better come back to us at once," and Leverich had answered, "Well, perhaps it would be best."

William Snow stayed outside in the hall, not coming into the ball-room at all. He stood, instead, leaning against a doorway, and watched everyone who approached Dosia; his brows were lowering, his attitude aggressive. He saw that George Sutton hovered around Dosia when she was not dancing, his round moon-face, suffused with pleasure, bent solicitously toward her. Once she sent him for a glass of water, and William saw that she had lapsed momentarily on a corner divan by his sister Bertha. He noticed the wistful eyes raised to the elder woman, but he did not hear the younger say with a suddenly tremulous voice:

"Oh, Miss Bertha, I'm so glad to be here with you!"

"Thank you, my dear."

"I'm homesick," said Dosia, with a white smile. "Oh, Miss Bertha, I'm so homesick!" Her fancy had leaped passionately to the security of the untidy cottage in the South, with its irresponsive inmates, as if it were really the loving home she longed for.

"Homesick at a ball!" said Miss Bertha, with a kind inflection. She patted the folds of the dress near her comfortingly with her thin ungloved hand. "You oughtn't to be homesick now, you must enjoy yourself, my dear; you're young."

Something in her tone nearly brought the tears to Dosia's burning eyes. If she could only have stayed with Miss Bertha! But she was claimed for the dance. Why must you dance when you were dead? Would the ball never end?

The evening was half over when she found herself in front of Mr. Girard, with some one hastily introducing them. He had just come from up-stairs with several men, all laughing and talking together interestedly, but he hardly had been in the room at all, and she had sensitively fancied that he had kept out of her way on purpose, though she remembered hearing Leverich say that he did not know how to dance, and so did not care for balls. Now, as she had looked at him coming through the crowd, his personality made itself felt, through her dull misery, as something unaffectedly charming and magnetic. He was tall, straight, and well made, with the square shoulders she remembered, and the easy, erect carriage of a soldier. The thick waves of his light-brown hair, his long, thin face with its large, well-shaped nose and resolute chin, all gave an impression of young vitality and power that accorded well with her thought of him. His eyes were light gray, and not very large; Dosia had seen them full of laughter a moment before, but they seemed to acquire a sudden baffling hardness now as they met hers. She had thought of him so long and intimately that his presence near her brought its exquisite suggestion of help and comfort. She looked up at him. It might help even her to be near anyone as strong as that, if he were kind—as kind as she knew he could be. Her heart was in her eyes, as ever, unconsciously, as she half extended her hand.

Was it by accident that he did not see it? He bowed formally as he said: "Pardon me, but I am just on my way to the train."

He stepped aside, leaving a free passage for the youth who came pushing by to claim his dance with her, and was gone almost before she knew it. He *could* have stayed—he did not want to talk to her! She was lonely and disgraced, and the thought of Lawson an agony.

She did not see that, as Girard went into the hall, some one gripped him there and said fiercely, "Come with me!" Billy Snow, his eyes blazing, had pulled him out on the piazza beyond.

"You've got to answer to me for that," he stuttered. "You've got to answer to me for that, Mr. Girard. Why did you turn away from Do—from Miss Linden like that?"

"What right have you to ask?" questioned the other man coolly, but with a sudden frown.

"None, except that I—love her," said Billy, with a queer, boyish catch in his voice. "Yes, I love her, and she doesn't care a snap of her finger for me. But I don't care; I love her anyway, and I always shall. I'm proud to!" The catch came again. "She may step on me, if she wants to. You saw what happened here to-night when that damned brute—" He made a gesture toward the hallway.

Girard made no answer, but looked into vacancy for a moment. Before the sight of both of them came a vision of Dosia in all the radiance of her beautiful innocence, the flush on her cheek, and the divine, shy look in her eyes when she first raised them to Lawson, before it changed to—

"You saw what happened here to-night," said Billy, with renewed heat at the other's silence. "I don't care what *he* said, or what you think; she's no more to blame than—"

The other stopped him with a quick, peremptory gesture.

"You mistake," he said shortly. "You're speaking to the wrong person. I saw nothing. I don't know what you mean, and I don't want to."

"What!" cried William, staring.

"Let me give you a piece of advice," said Girard incisively, with an odd whiteness in his face. "Don't you know better than to bring the name of a woman into a discussion like this? If a girl needs no defense—by Heaven, she needs none! And that's the end of it. Only a fool talks."

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"Yes," said William, with a sharp breath, after a pause,—“yes; thank you—I'll remember. But when I meet *him*—” He stopped significantly.

"Oh, whatever you please!" said Girard, spreading out his hands lightly, with a smile and a quick, steely gleam in his eyes that cut like a scimitar.

"Sorry I've got to go—my overcoat is just inside. No, I don't want to drive, I'd rather walk. Good-by!"

He went off in a moment, with long strides, down the carriage-drive to the station, the dance-music growing fainter in the distance. She was dancing still. Her face—her pure, sweet, pleading child's face—went with him through the moonlight. He knew that look! When helpless things were hurt like that—He couldn't talk to her that night, nor touch her hand, because of that burning desire to leap on Lawson Barr and choke the life out of him first.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

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The morrow after the ball was drawing to a close in darkening clouds and an eerie, rushing wind. It had been one of the gray, cold days of spring, with a leaden sky and a pervading damp and chill—a long, long day to some of those in the Leverich house. Rumor whispered that Lawson had been found upon the highroad in the early morning, unconscious, with his face and head cut, and that there were tracks yet on the side piazza from the feet of those who had carried him in from the muddy roads. Rumor said that the wounds had not come from accident. The doctor's carriage had been there, and had gone again; but the doctor might have come to see Miss Linden, who was also said to be prostrated and in bed, or Mrs. Leverich, who was excused to callers as having a headache. The great house was silent and deserted-looking inside, except for the servants engaged in setting it to rights and carrying the furniture down from the attic, where it had been stored overnight.

Only a few even of the inmates—of whom Dosia was one—knew that Lawson was in an upper room, with his head bandaged, sobered and sullen, watching through the wide windows the gray clouds shifting overhead, as he waited the completion of the arrangements that were to take him at nightfall a couple of thousand miles away. Leverich had put his foot down this time; Lawson was to go. He was bringing his vices too near home, concealment was no longer possible. All his unsavory hidden past rose to make a fetid exhalation about his name that also affected Dosia's.

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"It's no use," Leverich had said to his wife, in a stormy interview that morning, "I won't have the fellow here another day. I'll ship him off to Nevada, and not another penny will I give him while he lives. He can sink or swim, for all me; and he *will* sink—down to hell."

"Oh, don't say that you won't send the poor boy any money," pleaded his wife.

"Not a red. I've had enough of him, Myra. *You* know! As long as he could appear half-way decent, I was willing to carry my end, but he's going to the dogs now too fast for me. I've done with him; he goes to-night, whether he's able to or not."

Dosia was not to leave the house until the next day. Mrs. Leverich, impelled by what sometimes seems to be the very demon of hospitality, still pressed her to stay longer, while knowing that her absence would be a relief.

"It is too bad that you want to go like this," she had said crossly, sitting in gorgeous negligée by the side of Dosia's bed, her handsome, richly colored face showing mean lines in it. "I looked upon you quite as a daughter; I thought we would have such nice times together. Why on earth couldn't you let Lawson alone, as I told you to? Then none of this would have happened." Her tone was complaining, as of one compelled to suffer unnecessarily; there was such a total absence of warmth as to prove that shown before as but a tinsel glow. Mrs. Leverich hated unpleasant things, discomfort of any kind gave her an injured feeling; if there had been a glamour around Dosia the glamour had departed. What little depth the nature of Myra Leverich contained was all in the tie of blood, which made her resent any imputation on Lawson.

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"I suppose you'd like to rest up-stairs to-day, and have your meals in your room," she went on in a businesslike way. "I'll send Martha up to pack your trunk for you—that is, if you insist on going—if she's not too busy. The servants have so much to do to-day."

"Oh, I can pack it myself," said Dosia. What did one stab the more matter now? She took Mrs.

Leverich's hand impulsively. "You've been so good, so kind to me—you've given me so many pretty things,"—her voice sank to a whisper,—“it doesn't seem to me that I ought to keep them now. I want to give them back to you.”

“What is it you say?” asked Mrs. Leverich impatiently. “You speak so low, I can hardly hear you. Oh, these!” She turned to a little pile of jewel-cases on the table. “Why, I gave them to you to keep. Well, if you feel that way about it—These pearls, perhaps, but the pins were quite inexpensive; do keep them, really, there's no reason why you shouldn't, you know.”

“I'd rather not,” said Dosia; and her hostess gathered the things when she went out.

It was a long day—a long, long day. From the bed where Dosia lay, she saw the gray clouds shifting, shifting endlessly above through the opening made by the parted window-curtains. What had happened? Nothing—and everything; nothing—and everything!

Gossip reigned in the village, carrying Dosia and Lawson up and down its gamut, even reaching the high crescendo of a secret marriage, with the inevitably hinted smirching reasons therefor. The Leverich ball promised to supply subject-matter for many a day to come. Mrs. Snow, from as early as eleven o'clock in the morning, sat with a white worsted shawl wrapped around her—the sign of elegant leisure—and rocked in the green-bowered and steaming little sitting-room between the geraniums and the begonias while awaiting visitors. She greeted each one who “ran in” with the invariable remark:

“I suppose you know all about the Leverichs' ball last night. Well, what do you think of the goings-on there?” being intent mousingly on getting every last little cheesy crumb of detail, and peacefully unaware of deep, rich stores concealed in her own family. The incident of the stairway was common property, but Miss Bertha had told nothing of Dosia's little heart-breaking confidence to her. Her mother was amazed at the very conservative disapproval expressed by this elder daughter, turning for confirmation of her own views to her callers.

“I thought, before all this, that the girl was a bold thing,” she announced in virtuous condemnation. “It's all very well for you to try and defend her, Bertha, but neither you nor Ada would have gone on in that way.—Oh, yes, Mrs. Willetts, my dear, he kissed her on the stairs—just as they all say. But that was the least part of it. They say his *manner* to her—And he was—yes, exactly. Oh, a man doesn't take liberties, in *such* a way, unless a girl has allowed a good deal. It's evident that they've—been—pret-ty—intimate. I'm sorry for the Alexanders, they'll have a handful in her. Bertha, will you knock on the window? The man with the eggs is passing by, and we want three. *Bertha!* you are not paying any attention to me. She is not herself at all to-day, Mrs. Willetts, she looks so yellow. Yes, you do, Bertha. Don't you think she's very yellow, Mrs. Willetts?”

“Perhaps it is the light,” suggested Mrs. Willetts evasively.

“No, it's not the light; it's the late hours,” said Mrs. Snow. “I did not want her to go to the ball, late hours knock her up for days. William shows the effect of it, too—his right hand is all swelled up. He says he doesn't know how it got so, but I think it's from dancing too much.”

“Mother!” expostulated Miss Bertha.

“Well, my dear, I don't see why you speak to me like that. I'm not in my second childhood yet! I don't know why he couldn't get a swelled hand from dancing; some of these young girls are so athletic, they grip your fingers like a vise—I know *I* find it very unpleasant. Don't you remember—no, of course you don't, but I do—how poor General Grant's hand was puffed out to twice its size from people shaking it? The picture of it was in all the papers at the time.”

“I don't think William danced much,” said Ada.

Mrs. Snow pursed her pale lips and shook her small, neat head.

“All I know is that he was quite worn out; he slept so heavily that he never heard me at all when I rattled at his door-knob and called to him at three o'clock this morning that I thought I heard some one on the porch below his window. It's very odd—I've heard it before. I don't think it's cats, and I'm so afraid of tramps.”

The statuesque Ada looked up with a swiftly startled expression.

“There are always tramps around,” said Mrs. Willetts.

“Yes, I know it, and it worries me to have William out so late alone. William is nothing but a child, though he is so tall,” said Mrs. Snow. “Of course, last night his sisters were with him.” She paused before harking back to the appetizing theme. “They say Miss Linden is still staying at the Leverichs'. I shouldn't think she'd stay there an hour longer than she could help. They say Mrs. Alexander refused to have her back again at first—did you hear that? They say—”

And in Dosia's room, where she lay alone, the long, silent day wore on; the gray clouds shifted, shifted above. What had happened? Nothing—and everything.

If Leverich was to keep his word about Lawson, the preparations for his departure must be speedy. They also took money. Leverich could contract for any amount of expenditure to be paid in the future by large drafts, but to hand over five hundred on the minute in cash was at certain times and hours an irritatingly difficult procedure. He cursed the necessity now, with a fervor born of the disastrous ball, and the late hours, and the further fact that stocks had gone down suddenly and he was out on a deal. The gray clouds meant also, in the city, clouds of dust, which the raw wind swept smartingly into his eyes every time he had occasion to go out. As he was

getting ready at last to go home with the purchased tickets, he looked up and saw Justin coming in. Leverich nodded to the other's greeting, but did not otherwise return it.

"I won't ask you to sit down," he said curtly; "I want to catch the four-o'clock train out. How are you getting on? All right?"

"All wrong."

"What's the matter?"

"This," said Justin, with a white light in his eyes, and holding out a letter which the other took half reluctantly, relapsing mechanically into the chair by his desk, while Justin dropped straddle-legged into another opposite, his face looking over the back of it, around which his arms were clasped. He went on talking, while the other slowly unfolded the paper and looked at the heading.

"You remember those first big consignments we sent out after the fire? Well, the whole output was rotten!"

"Great heavens!" said the other, sitting up straight, with his eyes stuck to the lines. "Are you sure it's as this says?"

"Sure? It's the sixth letter of the kind we've had in ten days; three came in this morning's mail. The packing-room is full now of returned machines—what we'll do with the rest I don't know. A couple of firms want the instruments duplicated; the rest want their money back. We talked big at first, thought it was a mistake—that's why I didn't speak of it to you—but it's no mistake; the whole output's rotten. The bars are rusted and bent, so that everything's out of gear; it would cost more to repair the machines than to make new ones."

"Were the bars those you got from Cater?" asked Leverich.

"Yes."

Leverich whistled.

"It's no fault of his, those he used were all right."

Bullen says they must have been a fraction off size for us, and that did the business. Heaven only knows how many more letters we'll get! I don't see how we're to pay up and get out of it, as it is."

"Yes," said Leverich, throwing the letter down on the desk, drumming on it with the ends of his fingers. Then he shrugged his big shoulders as if shunting the burden from them as he rose. "Well, I must go. Sorry I can't help you out, but Martin's away now. By the way, when you can pay up on that interest, we'll be glad to have it. We've been going pretty easy with you, you know, but it can't last forever; we've got to have our money, as well as other people." He had not meant to say anything of the kind, but the bad news and the inferred appeal had accented the irritation of the day.

"Oh, certainly," said Justin, with a swift gleam in his blue eyes, and a pride that could be large enough to make contemptuous allowance for a little meanness in the man from whom he had received benefits. He had counted on Leverich's ready help in this trouble, but there was more between the two men than the money—from the first moment of meeting this afternoon, Dosa's name, unspoken, had correlated in each a little hidden spring of antagonism. One of Justin's womenkind had misused Leverich's hospitality; both resented the fact and her enforced departure. How many business situations have been made or marred by domestic happenings, no history of finance will ever tell.

And still the long day wore on in Dosa's silent room.

The preparations for Lawson's going were all made before the nightfall that was to cover his exit. His trunk had gone; his coat and hat and hand-luggage were stacked conveniently together on a chair in the empty, cleared-out room.

"And this is the last money you'll ever get from me," Leverich said, counting out the bills on the table by which Lawson sat uneasily, his head and part of his swollen, discolored face bandaged, his dark eyes glancing furtively from under their heavy lids. "There are your tickets, they'll carry you through. Peters will be at the door with the carriage at nine to take you to the train here, and James will go over with you to the terminal and put you on the sleeper. You can't get out too fast for me."

"It's kind of you to kick a fellow when he's down," said Lawson sardonically.

"It's a pretty expensive kick," returned Leverich grimly, "but it's the last. You'll never get a cent more from me, nor from Myra either, if I know it."

"Oh, very well," said Lawson indifferently. But when his sister came in afterwards alone, he cut her words short; through all her plaintive farewell complainings there was a manifestly cheerful prevision of relief when he should be gone.

"I've had enough of this—don't come in here again. He says you're to send me no money, but you're to send me all I want—you hear?"

"Oh, Lawson!"

"You know why you'd better." He fixed his eye on her threateningly, and the full color blanched suddenly from her face.

"Yes, yes, I will." She made an effort to recover herself. "If you realized how used up I am over all

this—”

“Don’t come in here again!” His rising voice, the glance he shot at her, sent her flying from the room—it was as if some crouching animal were about to leap a barrier between them.

The shifting gray clouds were darkening now into a solid mass, the eerie wind that had sprung up whined fitfully around the corners of the house, as he sat there waiting. After a while the door opened and shut; there was a soft, rustling noise. Lawson looked up, and saw Dosia against that background of the darkening sky. She was in a white silken gown, given her by Mrs. Leverich, that fell in straight folds from her waist to her feet. She had been in white the night of the ball. But her face! He put his hand involuntarily across his eyes. So pinched, so wan, so small, so piteously changed that face, he did well to hide the sight of it from him. Only her eyes—those eyes that were the mirrors of Dosia’s soul—showed that she still lived; in them was a steadfastness and a purpose won from death.

She came straight toward him, though with a slow and languid step, dragging a low chair forward to a place by his. His rough appearance, so different from his usual carelessly well-cared-for aspect, sent a momentary spasm over her pinched face, but that was all. She dropped into the chair as one who found it difficult to stand, saying after a moment’s silence, in a childlike voice:

“Please take your hand down from your eyes; please don’t mind looking at me.”

He dropped the hand heavily on the table, with some inarticulate protest.

“Please don’t mind looking at me. I want to say—I came here to say—it is all wrong to act as if everything were all your fault, as if you were all to blame. I’ve been thinking, thinking, thinking, all day long. If I had done what was right, none of this would have happened. It was my fault too.”

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“No!” said Lawson roughly.

“Yes.” She stopped, and repeated solemnly: “It was my fault too. They are sending you away now because—because you had been making love to me. But I let you”—her locked fingers twisted and untwisted as she talked—“I *wanted* you to, when I knew it was wrong, when I didn’t really love you. That was why you couldn’t respect me. If I had been quite high and good, you would not have—none of this would have happened.”

“Oh!” said Lawson; the old bitter, mocking smile flickered back to his lips. “Really, don’t you think you’re setting too much value even on *your* influence? I assure you, you can have quite a clear conscience in that regard.”

She went on, with no attention to what he had been saying beyond the fact that her pale cheek seemed to whiten and her gaze was fixed the more solemnly on his.

“I couldn’t be satisfied until I had thought out the truth. There is nothing that satisfies but the truth.” Her voice sank to a whisper. “If it cuts your heart in two, you’ve got to bear it—and be glad—because it’s the truth. I know now that, after all, I didn’t help you; I *hindered*. That’s all the more reason for me to stand by you now. And I came to say,”—she took his hand and laid her cold cheek upon it,—“if you go away—take me with you! I have enough money to go too. If you have to work, I’ll work; if you are hungry, I’ll be hungry. There is no one to love you but me, and I *will*. I said I would believe in you, and I will believe in you—as I promised—always.”

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“My God!” said Lawson. He tore his hand from her, and flung his head upon his folded arms on the table, breaking into great, voiceless sobs that shook him from head to foot. Half-inarticulate words fell from him: “Don’t touch me—don’t come near me!” At last he turned, and, gathering up a fold of her gown, kissed it again and again. His passion raised a faint stir of the old thrill that came from she knew not where, except that his presence inevitably called it forth.

“For this once you may believe in me,” he said. “Look at me!” His gaze, burning with an inner scorn, rested on hers. “You are the dearest, the loveliest—” His voice broke once more, he had to wait before he could regain it. “If I were to let you sink your life with mine, I’d deserve to be hung. I’ve let you talk as if you could help me. Well, you can’t, and I’ll tell you why—I’ll clear your conscience of me forever. Down at the bottom of it all, I don’t want to be helped. I don’t want to be made better. I don’t want to live a different life! There are moments when I’ve deceived myself as well as you, but it was all rot. It’s not that I’m not fit for you,—no man’s that!—but I’m made so that I’d rather go to the devil than *be* fit for you. The more you cared for me, the more I’d drag you down. That’s the whole brutal truth. The one saving grace I own is that I tell it to you now.”

“Ah, no, no!” said Dosia, with a cry. “It can’t be so.” She turned her head from side to side, as one looking for succor; her composure was failing her, after so many cruel knife-thrusts in her already bleeding heart—she yearned over him with a compassion and longing too great to bear.

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“Dosia,” said Lawson, standing up; his altered voice sounded far away in her ears.

“Yes,” she answered, rising also, she knew not why.

“This is good-by.”

She did not speak, but looked at him. His face seemed to lose the marks of dissipation and bitterness, and become strangely boyish, strangely sweet, in its expression.

“See!” he said, “I could clasp my arms around you, as I’m longing to, and kiss your darling mouth. You’d let me, wouldn’t you, blessed one? For all that I’ve done or all that I’ve been, you’d let me?”

“Yes,” whispered Dosia, trembling.

"Then remember it of me, for one poor thing of good, that I did not—that I was man enough to keep you free of me at the last. I'll never touch you again—no, not so much as the hem of your gown. And, so help me God, I'll never look upon your face again."

"Lawson, Lawson!"

"I'll never see your face again. When you think of me, believe and pray that I'll keep my word. I want to have the thought of you to die with."

"I can't bear it!" wailed Dosia suddenly.

"Good-by."

She made a motion as if to fling herself upon his breast, and his gesture stayed her. They stood, instead, looking at each other; the room faded away from before them in those moments that were of eternity. The past—the present—the future crept up now and stood between them, pushing them farther and farther away from each other, farther and farther, till even parting had become a fact long ago lived through and grown dim. They were neither man nor woman, but two souls who saw truth, and beyond it something beautifully just, even comforting.

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Through the high window the darkening sky had become suddenly luminous where it touched the horizon.

Slowly she moved away from him—slowly, slowly. One last lingering, solemn look, and the door had closed.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

213

"Lois, would you mind very much if we didn't move into the new house, after all?"

"Not move into the new house! What do you mean? I thought it would be finished next week."

"It means that I shall not be able to increase my living expenses this year," said Justin.

Husband and wife were sitting on the piazza, in the shade of the purple wistaria-vines, on a warm Sunday afternoon, a month after Dosia's return. At the side of the steps a bed of lilies-of-the-valley made the place fragrant; the air was full of a sort of glitter that touched the leaves whenever they swayed into the sunshine or the shadow, and made the grass brilliant in its new greenness. From within, the voices of the children sounded peacefully over their early supper.

The afternoon, so far, had savored only of domestic monotony, with no foreshadowing of events to come. Dosia was out walking with George Sutton, and the people who might "drop in," as they often did on Sundays, had other engagements to-day. Lois, gowned in lavender muslin, had been sitting on the piazza for an hour, trying to read while waiting for Justin to join her. She had counted each minute, but now that he was here she put down her book with a show of reluctance as she said:

"Why didn't you tell me before? I gave the order for the window-shades yesterday when I was in town—that was what I wanted to talk to you about this afternoon. You have to leave your order at least two weeks beforehand at this season of the year."

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"You can countermand it, can't you?"

"I suppose I'll have to—if we're not to move into the house," said Lois in a high-keyed voice, with those tiresome tears coming, as usual, to her eyes. She felt inexpressibly hurt, disappointed, fooled. "I thought you said you were having so many orders lately. Does the money *all* have to 'go back into the business,'" she quoted sardonically, "as usual? I think there might be some left for your own family sometimes. I'm tired of always going without for the business." It was a complaint she had made many times before, but in each fresh pang of her resentment she felt as if she were saying it for the first time.

"We have orders, I'm glad to say, but we've had one big setback lately," he answered.

He knew, with a twinge, that she had some reason on her side—the very effort for success was meat and drink to him, he cared not what else he went without, so the business grew; but she *might* have had a little more out of it as they went along, instead of waiting for the grand climax of undoubted prosperity. A little means so much to a wife sometimes, because it means the recognition of her right.

"I've been in a lot of trouble lately, Lois, though I haven't talked about it," he continued, with an unusual appeal in his voice. The blasting fact of those returned machines had been all he could cope with; he had been tongue-tied when it came to speaking about it—the whirl and counter-whirl in his brain demanded concentration, not diffusion and easy words to interpret. But now that he had begun to see his way clear again, he had a sudden deep craving for the unreasoning sympathy of love.

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"I waited until the last possible moment to tell you, in hopes that I shouldn't have to, Lois. Anyway, Saunders is going to put up a couple of houses for next year that you'll like much better, he says."

"Oh, it will be just the same next year; there'll always be something," said Lois indifferently, getting up to go into the house. "I hate the whole thing!"

He was bitterly hurt, and far too proud to show it. He could have counted on quickest sympathy from her once; he knew in his heart that he could call it out even now if he chose, but he did not choose. If his own wife could be like that, she might be.

"Papa dear, I love you so much!"

He looked down to see his little fair-haired girl, white-ruffled and blue-ribboned, standing beside him a-tiptoe in her little white shoes, her arms reached up to tighten instantly around his neck as he bent over.

"Zaidee, my little Zaidie," he said, and, lifting her on his knee, strained her tightly to him with a rush of such passionate affection that it almost unmanned him for the moment. She lay against his heart perfectly still. After a few moments she put her small hand to his lips, and he kissed it, and she smiled up at him, warm and secure—his little darling girl, his little princess. Yet, even in that joy of his child, he felt a new heart-hunger which no child love, beautiful as it was, could ever satisfy, any more than it could satisfy the heart-hunger of his wife.

She had begun, since the ball, to go around again as usual, and the house looked as if it had a mistress in it once more, though the atmosphere of a home was lacking. She was languid, irritable, and unsmiling, accepting Justin's occasional caresses as if they made little difference to her, though sometimes she showed a sort of fierce, passionate remorse and longing. Either mood was unpleasing to him; it contained tacit reproach for his separateness. Then, there were still occasionally evenings when he came home to find her windows darkened and everything in the household upset and forlorn; when every footfall must be adjusted to her ear—that ear that had strained and ached for his coming. Her whole day culminated in that poor, meager half-hour in which he sat by her, and in which her personality hardly reached him until he kissed her, on leaving, with a quick, remorseful affection at being so glad to go.

The typometer disaster had proved as bad as, and worse than, he had feared, but he was working retrieval with splendid effort, calling all his personal magnetism into play where it was possible. He had borrowed a large sum from Lewiston's,—a young private banking firm, glad at the moment to lend at a fairly large interest for a term of months,—holding on to the dissatisfied customers and creating new demand for the machine, so that the sales forged ahead of Cater's, with whom there was still a good-natured we-rise-together sort of rivalry, though it seemed at times as if it might take a sharper edge. Leverich's dictum regarding Cater embodied an extension of the policy to be pursued with minor, outlying competitors: "You'll have to force that fellow out of business or get him to come into the combine."

Leverich again smiled on Justin. Immediate success was the price demanded for the continuance of a backing; there was just a little of the high-handed quality in his manner which says, "No more nonsense, if you please." That morning after the ball had shown Justin the fangs that were ready, if he showed symptoms of "falling down," to shake him ratlike by the neck and cast him out.

"Papa dear, papa dear! There's a man coming up the walk, my papa dear."

"Why, so there is," said Justin, rising and setting the child down gently as he went forward with outstretched hand, while Lois simultaneously appeared once more on the piazza. "Why, how are you, Larue? I'm mighty glad to see you back again. When did you get home?"

"The steamer got in day before yesterday," said the newcomer, shaking hands heartily with host and hostess. He was a man with a dark, pointed beard and mustache, deep-set eyes, and an unusually pleasant deep voice that seemed to imply a grave kindness. His glance lingered over Lois. "How are you, Mrs. Alexander? Better, I hope? Which chair shall I push out of the sun for you—this one?"

"Yes, thank you," responded Lois, sinking into it, with her billows of lilac muslin and her rich brown hair against the background of green vines. "Aren't you going to sit down yourself?"

"Thank you, I've only a minute," said the visitor, leaning against one of the piazza-posts, his wide hat in his hand. "I'm out at my place at Collingswood for the summer, and the trains don't connect very well on Sunday. I had to run down here to see some people, but I thought I wouldn't pass you by."

"Did you have a pleasant trip?" asked Lois.

"Very pleasant," rejoined Mr. Larue, without enthusiasm. "Oh, by the way, Alexander, I heard that you were inquiring for me at the office last week. Anything I can do for you?"

"Have you any money lying around just now that you don't know what to do with?" asked Justin significantly.

Mr. Larue's dark, deep-set eyes took on the guarded change which the mention of money brings into social relations.

"Perhaps," he admitted.

"May I come around to-morrow at three o'clock and talk to you?"

"Yes, do," said the other, preparing to move on. "Please don't get up, Mrs. Alexander; you don't look as well as I'd like to see you."

"Oh, I'm all right," said Lois.

"You must try and get strong this summer," said Mr. Larue, his eyes dwelling on her with an intimate, penetrating thoughtfulness before he turned away and went, Justin accompanying him down the walk, Zaidee dancing on behind. Lois looked after them. At the gate, Mr. Larue turned once more and lifted his hat to her.

A faint, lovely color had come into Lois' cheek, brought there by the powerful tonic which she always felt in Eugene Larue's presence; she felt cheered, invigorated, comforted, by a man with whom she had hardly talked alone for a couple of hours altogether in their whole five years' acquaintance. He had a way of taking thought for her on the slightest occasion, as he had to-day; he knew when she entered a room or left it, and she knew that he knew.

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It was one of those peculiar, unspoken sympathetic intimacies which exist between certain men and women, without the conscious volition of either. He knew as soon as his eyes fell on her whether she were glad or sorry, lonely or confident, and his glance or the tone of his voice was a response to her mood; he saw instinctively when she was too warm or too cold, or needed a rest. Her husband, who loved her, had no such intuitions; he had to be told clumsily, and even then might not understand. Yet she had not loved him the less because she must beat down such little barriers herself; perhaps she had loved him the more for it—he was the man to whom she belonged heart and soul—but the barriers were a fact. She had an absolute conviction that she could do nothing that Eugene Larue would misunderstand, any more than she misunderstood her involuntary attraction for him. Above all things, he revered her as his ideal of what a wife and mother should be. He would have given all he possessed to have the kind of love which Justin took as a matter of course.

Eugene Larue had been married himself for ten years, for more than half of which time his wife, whom Lois had never seen, had lived abroad for the further study of music, an art to which she was passionately devoted. If there had been any effort to bring a hint of scandal into the semi-separation, it had been instantly frowned away; there was nothing for it to feed on. Mrs. Larue lived in Dresden, under the undoubted chaperonage of an elderly aunt and in the constant publicity of large musical entertainments and gatherings. She sometimes played the accompaniments of great singers. Her husband went over every spring, presumably to be with her, living alone for the greater part of the year at his large place at Collingswood. Neither was ever known to speak of the other without the greatest respect, and questions as to when either had been "heard from" were usual and in order; it was always tacitly taken for granted that Mrs. Larue's expatriation was but temporary.

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But Lois knew, without needing to be told, that he was a man who had suffered, and still suffered at times profoundly, from having all the tenderness of his nature thrown back upon itself, without reference to that sting of the known comment of other men: "It must be pretty tough to have your wife go back on you like that." In some mysterious way his wife had not needed the richness of the affection that he lavished on her. If her heart had been warmed by it a little when she married him, it had soon cooled off; she was glad to get away, and he had proudly let her go.

Lois smiled up at Justin with sudden coquetry as he mounted the porch steps, but he only looked at her absently as he said:

"There seems to be a shower coming up. Dositia's hurrying down the road. I think I'd better take the chairs in now."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

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Dositia had come back from the Leverichs' to a household in which her presence no longer made any difference for either pleasure or annoyance. She came and went unquestioned, practiced interminably, and spent her evenings usually in her own room, developing a hungry capacity for sleep, of which she could not seem to have enough—sleep, where all one's sensibilities were dulled, and shame and tragedy forgotten. She had, however, rather more of the society of the children than before, owing to their mother's preoccupation. Nothing could have been more of a drop from her position as princess and lady-of-love in the Leverich domicile, where she had been the center of attraction and interest. Everything seemed terribly unnatural here, and she the most unnatural of all—as if she were clinging temporarily to a ledge in mid-air, waiting for the next thing to happen.

Lois had really tried to show some sympathy for the girl, but was held back by her repugnance to Lawson, which inevitably made itself felt. She couldn't understand how Dositia could possibly have allowed herself to get into an equivocal position with such a man—"really not a gentleman," as she complained to Justin, and he had answered with the vague remark that you could never tell about a girl; even in its vagueness the reply was condemning.

The people whom Dositia met in the street looked at her with curiously questioning eyes as they talked about casual matters. Mrs. Leverich bowed incidentally as she passed in her carriage, where another visitor was ensconced, a blonde lady from Montreal, in whom her hostess was absorbed.

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Dositia had been twice to see Miss Bertha, with a blind, desultory counting on the sympathy that

had helped her before, but she had been unfortunate in the times for her visits; on the first occasion Mrs. Snow, with majestic demeanor and pursed lips, had kept guard, and on the second the whole feminine part of the family were engaged, in weird pinned-up garments, in the sacred rite of setting out the innumerable house-plants, with the help of a man hired semiannually, for the day, to put out the plants or to take them in. Callers are a very serious thing when you have a man hired by the day, who must be looked after every minute, so that he may be worth his wage. As Mrs. Snow remarked, "People ought to know when to come and when not to." Dosia got no farther than the porch, and though Miss Bertha asked her to come again, and gave her a sprig of sweet geranium, with a kind little pressure of the hand, she was not asked to sit down.

Your trouble wasn't anybody else's trouble, no matter how kind people were; it was only your own. Billy Snow, who had always been her devoted cavalier, patently avoided her, turning red in the face and giving her a curt, shamefaced bow as he went by, having his own reasons therefor. It would have hurt her, if anything of that kind could have hurt her very much. But Dosia was in the half-numb condition which may result from some great blow or the fall from a great height, save for those moments when she was anguished suddenly by poignant memories of sharpest dagger-thrusts, at which her heart still bled unbearably afresh, as when one remembers the sufferings of the long-peaceful dead which one must, for all time, be terribly powerless to alleviate.

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Mr. Sutton alone kept his attitude toward her unchanged. He sent her great bunches of roses that seemed somehow alive and comfortingly akin when she buried her face in them. He had come to see her every week, though twice she had gone to bed before his arrival. If his attitude was changed at all, it was to a heightened respect and interest and solicitude. It might be that in the subsidence of other claims Mr. Sutton, who had a good business head, saw an occasion of profit for himself which he might well be pardoned for seizing. He required little entertaining when he called, developing an unsuspected faculty for narrative conversation.

Foolish and inane in amatory "attentions" to young ladies, George was no fool. He had a fund of knowledge gained from the observation of current facts, and could talk about the newsboys' clubs, or the condition of the docks, or the latest motor-cars and ballooning, or the practical reasons why motives for reform didn't reform; and the talk was usually semi-interesting, and sometimes more—he had the personal intimacy with his topics which gives them life. Dosia began to find him, if not exciting, at least not tiring; restful, indeed. She began genuinely to like him; he took her thoughts away from herself, while obviously always thinking of her. She did not even actively dislike those moments when his pale blue eyes became suffused with admiration or a warmer feeling, but was, instead, somewhat gratefully touched by it. Not only her starved vanity but her starved self-respect cried out for food, and he alone gave it to her.

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This Sunday afternoon Dosia—modish and natty in her short walking-skirt and little jacket of shepherd's check, and a clumpy, black-velveted, pink-rosed straw hat—walked companionably beside the square-set figure of George up the long slope of the semi-suburban road. Dosia had preferred to walk instead of driving. There was a strong breeze, although the sun was warm; and the summerish wayside trees and grasses had inspired him with the recollection of a country boy's calendar—a pleasing, homely monologue. He was, however, never too occupied with his theme to stoop over and throw a stone out of her path, or to hold her little checked umbrella so that the sun should not shine in her eyes, or to offer her his hand with old-fashioned gallantry if there was any hint of an obstacle to surmount. The way was long, yet not too long. They stopped, however, when they reached the summit, to rest for a while leaning against the top bar of the rail fence on the side of the slope below the carriage drive, looking down into the green meadows below; beyond, afar off, there was the white mist-hazed glimpse of a river with toy houses crowded thickly into the middle distance.

As they stood there, looking into the distance for some minutes, Dosia with thoughts far, far from the scene, George Sutton's voice suddenly broke the silence:

"I had a letter from Lawson Barr yesterday."

Dosia's heart gave a leap that choked her. It was the first time that anybody had spoken his name since he left. She had prayed for him every night—how she had prayed! as for one gone forever from any other reach than that of the spirit. At this heart-leap... fear was in it—fear of any news she might hear of him; fear of the slighting tone of the person who told it, which she would be powerless to resent; fear of awakening in herself the echo of that struggle of the past.

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"He's at the mines, isn't he?" she questioned, in that tone which she had always striven to make coolly natural when she spoke of him.

"Yes; but I don't believe he's working there yet. He seems to be mostly engaged in playing at the dance-hall for the miners. Sounds like him, doesn't it?"

"Yes," assented Dosia, looking straight off into the distance.

"I call it hard luck for Barr to be sent out there," pursued Mr. Sutton. "It's the worst kind of a life for him. He's an awfully clever fellow; he could do anything, if he wanted to. I don't know any man I admire more, in certain ways, than I do Barr."

Sutton spoke with evident sincerity. Lawson's clever brilliancy, his social ease and versatility and musical talent, were all what he himself had longed unspeakably to possess. Besides, there was a deeper bond. "I've known him ever since he was a curly-headed boy, long before he came to this place," he continued.

"Oh, did you?" cried Dosia, suddenly heart-warm. With a flash, some words of Mrs. Leverich's returned to her—"Mr. Sutton brought Lawson home last night." So that was the reason! Her voice was tremulous as she went on: "It is very unusual to hear anyone speak as you do of Mr. Barr. Everybody here seems to look down on—to despise him."

"Oh, that sort of talk makes me sick," said George, with an unexpected crude energy; his good-natured face took on a sneering, contemptuous expression. "Men talking about him who themselves—" He looked down sidewise at Dosia and closed his lips tightly. No man was more respectable than he,—respectability might be said to be his cult,—yet he lived in daily, matter-of-fact touch with a world of men wherein "ladies" were a thing apart. No man was ever kept from any sort of confidence by the fact of George Sutton's presence. His feeling for Barr and toleration of his shortcomings were partly due to the fact that George himself had also been brought up in one of those small, dull country towns in which all too many of the cleanly, white, God-fearing houses have no home in them for a boy and his friends.

"If Lawson had had money, everybody would have thought he was all right," he asserted shortly. "Perhaps we'd better be going home; it looks as if there was a shower coming up. Money makes a lot of difference in this world, Miss Dosia."

"I suppose it does; I've never had it," said Dosia simply.

"Maybe you'll have it some day," returned Mr. Sutton significantly. His pale eyes glowed down at her as they walked back along the road together, but the fact was not unpleasant to her; Lawson's name had created a new bond between them. Poor, storm-beaten Dosia felt a warm throb of friendship for George. He sympathized with Lawson; *he* prized her highly, if nobody else did, and he was not ashamed to show it. He went on now with genuine emotion: "I know one thing; if—I had a wife, she'd never have to wish twice for anything I could give her, Miss Dosia."

"She ought to care a good deal for you, then," suggested Dosia, picking her way daintily along the steeply sloping path, her little black ties finding a foothold between the stones, with Mr. Sutton's hand ever on the watch to interpose supportingly at her elbow.

"No, I wouldn't ask that; I'd only ask her to let me care for *her*. I think most men expect too much from their wives," said George. "I don't think they've got the right to ask it. And I don't think a man has any right to marry until he can give the lady all she ought to have—that's my idea! If any beautiful young lady, as sweet as she was beautiful, did me the honor of accepting my hand,"—Mr. Sutton's voice faltered with honest emotion,—"*I'd* spend my life trying to make her happy, I would indeed, Miss Dosia. I'd take her wherever she wanted to go, as far as my means would afford; she should have anything I could get for her."

"I think you are the very kindest man I have ever known," said Dosia, with sincerity, touched by his earnestness, though with a far-off, outside sort of feeling that the whole thing was happening in a book. Her vivid imagination was alluringly at work. In many novels which she had read the real hero was the other man, whom no one noticed at first, and who seemed to be prosaic, even uncouth and stupid, when confronted with his fascinating rival, yet who turned out to be permanently true and unselfish and omnisciently kind, the possessor, in spite of his uninspiring exterior, of all the sterling qualities of love—in short, "John," the honest, patient, constant "John" of fiction. His affection for the maiden might be of so high a nature that he would not even claim her as a wife after marriage until she had learned truly to love him, which of course she always did. If Mr. Sutton were really "John"—Dosia half-freakishly cast a swift inventorial side-glance at the gentleman.

The next moment they turned into the highroad, and a rippling smile overspread her face.

"Here's the very lady for you now," she remarked flippantly, as Ada Snow, prayer-book in hand, came into view at the crossing against a dark cloud in the background, on her way to a friend's house from service at the little mission chapel on the hill. Ada's cheeks took on a not unbecoming flush, her eyes drooped modestly beneath Mr. Sutton's glance,—a maidenly tribute to masculine superiority,—before she went down the side-road.

Mr. Sutton's face reddened also. "Now, Miss Dosia! Miss Ada may be very charming, but I wouldn't marry Miss Ada if she were the only girl left in the world. I give you my word I wouldn't. *You* ought to know—"

"We'll have to hurry, or we'll be caught in the rain," interrupted Dosia, rushing ahead with a rapidity that made further conversation an affair of ineffective jerks, though she dreaded to get back to the house and be left alone to the numb dreariness of her thoughts. Justin and Lois were gathering up the rugs and sofa-pillows as the two reached the piazza, to take them in from the blackly advancing storm. Lois greeted Mr. Sutton with unusual cordiality; perhaps she also dreaded the accustomed dead level.

"Do come in, you'll be caught in the rain if you go on. Can't you stay to a Sunday night's tea with us?"

"Oh, do," urged Dosia, disregarding the delighted fervor of his gaze. Lois' hospitality, never her strong point, had been much in abeyance lately; to have a fourth at the table would be a blessed relief. She felt a new tie with Mr. Sutton—they both sympathized with Lawson, believed in him!

She ran up-stairs to change her walking-suit for a soft little round-necked summer gown of pinkish tint, made at Mrs. Leverich's, which somehow made her pale little face and fair, curling hair look like a cameo. When she came down again, she ensconced herself in one corner of the

small spindle sofa, to which Zaidée instantly gravitated, her red lips parted over her little white teeth in a smile of comfort as she cuddled within Dosia's half-bare round white arm, while Mr. Sutton, drawing his chair up very close, leaned over Dosia with eyes for nobody else, his round face getting brick-red at times with suppressed emotion, though he tried to keep up his part in an amiable if desultory conversation. Lois reclined languidly in an easy-chair, and Justin alternately played with and scolded the irrepressible Redge, in the intervals of discourse.

Through the long open windows they watched the sky, which seemed to darken or grow light as fitfully, in the progress of the oncoming storm; the wind lifted the vines on the piazza and flapped them down again; the trees bent in straightly slanting lines, with foam-tossing of green and white from the maples; still it did not rain. Presently from where Dosia sat she caught sight of a passer-by on the other side of the street—a tall, straight, well-set-up figure with the easy, erect carriage of a soldier. He stopped suddenly when he was opposite the house, looked over at it, and seemed to hesitate; then he moved on hastily, only to stop the next instant and hesitate once more. This time he crossed over with a quick, decided step.

"Why, here's Girard!" cried Justin, rising with alacrity. His voice came back from the hall. "Awfully glad you took us on your way. Leverich told you where I lived? You'll have to stay now until the storm is over. Lois, this is Mr. Girard. You know Sutton, of course. Dosia——"

"I have already met Mr. Girard," said Dosia, turning very white, but speaking in a clear voice. This time it was she who did not see the half-extended hand, which immediately dropped to his side, though he bowed with politely murmured assent. Stepping back to a chair half across the room, he seated himself by Justin.

A wave of resentment, greater than anything that she had ever felt before, had surged over Dosia at the sight of him, as his eyes, with a sort of quick, veiled questioning in them, had for an instant met hers—resentment as for some deep, irremediable wrong. Her cheeks and lips grew scarlet with the proudly surging blood, she held her head high, while Mr. Sutton looked at her as if bewitched—though he turned from her a moment to say:

"Weren't you up on the Sunset Drive this afternoon, Girard?"

"Yes; I thought you didn't see me," said the other lightly, himself turning to respond to a question of Justin's, which left the other group out of the conversation, an exclusion of which George availed himself with ardor.



Mr. Sutton leaned over Dosia with eyes for nobody else

There is an atmosphere in the presence of those who have lived through large experiences which is hard to describe. As Girard sat there talking to Justin in courteous ease, his elbow on the arm of his chair, his chin leaning on the fingers of his hand, he had a distinction possessed by no one else in the room. Even Justin, with all his engaging personality, seemed somehow a little narrow, a little provincial, by the side of Girard.

Lois, who had been going backward and forward from the dining-room,—with black-eyed Redge, sturdy and turbulent, following after her astride a stick, until the nurse was called to take him away,—came and sat down quite naturally beside this new visitor as if he had been an old friend, and was evidently interested and pleased. As a matter of fact, though all women as a rule liked Girard at sight, he much preferred the society of those who were married, when he went in women's society at all. Girls gave him a strange inner feeling of shyness, of deficiency—perhaps partly caused by the conscious disadvantages of a youth other than that to which he had been born, but it was a feeling with which he would have been the last to be credited, and which he certainly need have been the last to possess. Like many very attractive people, he had no satisfying sense of attractiveness himself.

It was raining now, but very softly, after all the wild preparation, with a hint of sunshine through the rain that sent a pale-green light over the little drawing-room, with its spindle-legged furniture

and the water-colors on its walls, though the gloom of the dining-room beyond was relieved only by the silver and the white napkins on the round mahogany table with a glass bowl of green-stemmed, white-belled lilies-of-the-valley in the center.

The people in the two separate groups in the drawing-room took on an odd, pearly distinctness, with the flesh-tints subdued. In this commonplace little gathering on a Sunday afternoon the material seemed to be only a veil for the things of the spirit—subtle cross-communications of thought-touch or repulsion, impressions tinglingly felt. Something seemed to be curiously happening, though one knew not what. To Dositia's swift observation, Girard had lost some of the brightness that had shone upon her vision the night of the ball; he looked as if he had been under some harassing strain. Her first impression that he had come into the house reluctantly was reinforced now by an equal impression that he stayed with reluctance. Why, then, had he come at all? Was it only to escape the rain? Her rescuer, the hero of her dreams, still held his stunted place in the shrine of her memory, as proudly, defiantly opposed to this stranger. Had he known? He must have known, just as she had. It was not Lawson who had hurt her the most! She could not hear what he said though the room was small; he and Justin and Lois were absorbed together. It was evident that he frankly admired Lois, who was smiling at him. Yet, as he talked, Dositia became curiously aware that from his position directly across the room he was covertly watching her as she sat consentingly listening to George Sutton, whose round face was bending over very near, his thick coat sleeve pinning down the filmy ruffles of hers as it rested on the carved arm of the little sofa.

She still held Zaidee cuddled close to her, the light head with its big blue bow lying against her breast, as the child played with the simple rings on the soft fingers of the hand she held.

Mr. Sutton got up, at Dositia's bidding, to alter the shade, and she moved a little, drawing Zaidee up to her to kiss her; Girard the next instant moved slightly also, so that her face was still within his range of vision, the intent gray eyes shaded by his hand. It was not her imagining—she felt the strong play of unknown forces; the gaze of those two men never left her, one covertly observant, the other most obviously so. George came back from his errand only to sit a little closer to Dositia, his eyes in their most suffused state. He was, indeed, in that stage of infatuation which can no longer brook any concealment, and for which other men feel a shamefaced contempt, though a woman, even while she derides, holds it in a certain respect as a foolish manifestation of something inherently great, and a tribute to her power. To Dositia's indifference, in this strange dual sense of another and resented excitement,—an excitement like that produced on the brain by some intolerably high altitude,—Mr. Sutton's attentions seemed to breathe only of a grateful warmth; she felt that he was being very, very kind. She could ask him to do anything for her, and he would do it, no matter what it was, just because she asked him. He was planning now a day on somebody's yacht, with Lois, of course; and "What do you say, Miss Dositia—can't we make it a family party, and take the children too?" he asked, with eager divination of what would please this lovely thing.

"Yes, oh, why can't you take *us*?" cried Zaidee, trembling with delight.

The rain had ceased, but the sunlight had vanished, too; the whole place was growing dark. There was a sudden silence, in which Dositia's voice was heard saying:

"I'll get my photograph now, if you want it." She rose and left the room,—she could not have stayed in it a moment longer,—and Zaidee ran over to her father, her white frock crumpled and the cheek that had lain against Dositia rosy warm.

"You had better light the lamp, Justin," said Lois, and then, "Oh, you're not going?" as Girard stood up.

He turned his bright, gentle regard upon her. "I'm afraid I'll have to."

"I expected you to stay to tea; I've had a place set for you."

"I'd like to very much—it's kind of you to ask me—but I'm afraid not to-night. I'll see you tomorrow, Sutton, I suppose. Good evening, Mrs. Alexander." His hand-touch seemed to give an intimacy to the words.

"Your stick is out here in the hall somewhere," said Justin, investigating the corners for it, while Zaidee, who had followed the two, stood in the doorway.

"I wonder if this little girl will kiss me good-by?" asked Girard tentatively.

"Will you, Zaidee?" asked her father, in his turn.

For all answer, Zaidee raised her little face trustfully. Girard dropped on one knee, a very gallant figure of a gentleman, as he put both arms around the small, light form of the child and held her tightly to him for one brief instant while his lips pressed that warm cheek. When he strode lightly away, waving his hand behind him in farewell, it was with an odd, somber effect of having said good-by to a great deal.

For the second time that day, it seemed that Zaidee had been the recipient of an emotion called forth by some one else.

"Lois?"

"Yes?"

Dosia had come into the nursery, where Lois sat sewing, a canary overhead singing with shrill velocity in a stream of sunshine. Her look gave no invitation to Dosia. She did not want to talk; she was busy, as ever, with—no matter what she was doing—the self-fullness of her thoughts, which chained her like a slave. She had been longing to move into the other house, where, amid new surroundings, she could escape from the familiar walls and outlook that each brought its suggestion of pain, with the wearying iterancy of habit, no matter how she wanted to be happy.

Dosia dropped half-unwillingly into a chair as she said:

"I've something to tell you, Lois."

"Well?"

"I'm engaged to George Sutton."

"Dosia!"

Lois' work fell from her hand as she stared at the girl.

"I'm sure I don't see that you need be surprised," said Dosia. She looked pale and expressionless, as one who did not expect either sympathy or interest.

"No, I suppose not," said Lois. "Of course, I know he has been paying you a great deal of attention, but then, he has paid other girls almost as much." She stopped, with her eyes fixed on Dosia. In a sense, she had rather hoped for this; the marriage would certainly solve many difficulties, and be a very fine thing for Dosia—if Dosia could—! Yet now the idea revolted Lois. To marry a man without loving him would have been to her, at any time or under any stress, a physical impossibility. Marriage for friendship or suitability or support was outside her scheme of comprehension. She spoke now with cold disapproval:

"Dosia, you don't know what you are doing. You don't love George Sutton."

Dosia's face took on the well-known obstinate expression.

"He loves me, anyhow, and he is satisfied with me as I am. If he is satisfied, I don't see why anyone else need object! He likes me just as I am, whether I care for him or not."

She clasped both hands over her knee as she went on with that unexplainable freakishness to which girlhood is sometimes maddeningly subject, when all feeling as well as reason seems in abeyance, though her voice was tremulous. "And I *do* care for him. I like him better than anyone I know; we are sympathetic on a great many points. No one—*no one* has been so kind to me as he! He doesn't want anything but to make me happy."

Lois made a gesture of despair. "Oh, *kind!* As if a man like George Sutton, who has done nothing but have his own way for forty years, is going to give up wanting it now! Marriage is very different from what girls imagine, Dosia."

"I suppose so," said Dosia indifferently. She rose and came over to Lois. "Would you like to see my ring?" She turned the circle around on her finger, displaying a diamond like a search-light. "He gave it to me last night."

"It is very handsome," said Lois. "I suppose you will have to be thinking of clothes soon," she added, with a glimmer of the natural feminine interest in all that pertains to a wedding, since further protest seemed futile. "I will write to Aunt Theodosia."

"Thank you," said Dosia dutifully.

A hamper of fruit came for her at luncheon, almost unimaginably beautiful in its arrangement of white hothouse grapes and peaches, and strawberries as large as the peaches, and the contents of a box of flowers filled every available vase and jug and bowl in the house, as Dosia arranged them, with the help of Zaidee and Redge—the former winningly helpful, and the latter elfishly agile, his bare knees nut-brown from the sun of the spring-time, jumping on her back whenever she stooped over, to be seized in her arms and hugged when she recovered herself. Flowers and children, children and flowers! Nothing could be sweeter than these.

In the afternoon, in a renewed capacity for social duties, she put on her hat with the roses and went to make a call, long deferred and hitherto impossible of accomplishment, on a certain Mrs. Wayne, a bride of a few months, who, as Alice Torrington, had been one of the girls of her outer circle. Dosia did not mean to announce her engagement, but she felt that Alice Wayne's state of mind would be more sympathetic, even if unconsciously so, than Lois'.

As she walked along now, she thought of George with a deeply grateful affection. How good he was to her! He had been unexpectedly nice when he had asked her to marry him; the very force of his feeling had given him an unusual dignity. His voice had broken almost with a groan on the words:

"I have never known anyone with such a beautiful nature as yours, Miss Dosia! I just worship you! I only want to live to make you happy."

He did not himself care for motoring—being, truth to tell, afraid of it—but she was to choose a car next week. She had told him about her father and her mother and the children. She was to have the latter come up to stay with her after she was married—do anything for them that she would. In imagination now she was taking them through all the shops in town, buying them toy

horses and soldiers and balls, and dressing them in darling little light-blue sailor-suits. She could hardly wait for the time to come! She thought with a little awe that she hadn't known that Mr. Sutton was as well off as he seemed to be. And the way he had spoken of Lawson—Ah, Lawson! That name tugged at her heart; this suddenly became one of those anguished moments when she yearned over him as over a beloved lost child, to be wept for, succored only through her efforts. She must never forget! "Lawson, I believe in you." She stopped in the shaded, quiet street with its garden-surrounded houses, and said the words aloud with a solemn sense of immortal infinite power, before coming back to the eager surface planning of her own life, with an intermediate throb of a new and deeper loneliness. The Dosia who had so upliftingly faced truth had only strength enough left now to evade it. Perhaps some of that exquisite inner perception of her nature had been jarred confusingly out of touch.



Flowers and children, children and flowers

Mrs. Wayne was in, although, the maid announced, she had but just returned from town. A moment later Dosia heard herself called from above:

"Dosia Linden! Won't you come up-stairs? You don't mind, do you?"

"No, indeed," answered Dosia, obeying the summons with alacrity, and pleased that she should be considered so intimate. This was more than she had expected—an informal reception and talk! With Dosia's own responsive warmth, she felt that she really must always have wanted to see more of Alice, who, in her lacy pink-and-white negligée, might be pardoned for wishing to show off this ornament of her trousseau.

"I hope you won't mind the appearance of this room," she announced, after a hospitable violet-perfumed embrace. "I went to town so early this morning that I didn't have time to really set things to rights, and I don't like the new maid to touch them."

"You have so many pretty things," said Dosia admiringly.

"Yes, haven't I? Take that seat by the window, it's cooler. Please don't look at that dressing-table; Harry leaves his neckties everywhere, though he has his own chiffonier in the other room—he's such a *bad* boy! He seems to think I have nothing to do but put away his things for him."

Mrs. Wayne paused with a bridal air of important matronly responsibility. She was a tall, thin, black-haired, dashing girl, not at all pretty, who was always spoken of compensatingly as having a great deal of "style," but she seemed to have gained some new and gentle charm of attraction because she was so happy.

"Have this fan, won't you?" She went on talking: "Harry and I saw you and George Sutton out walking yesterday. We were in the motor, and had stopped up on the Drive to speak to Mr. Girard. He *is* just the loveliest thing! What a pity he won't go where there are girls! Harry is quite jealous, though I tell him he needn't be." Mrs. Wayne paused with a lovely flush before going on. "You didn't see us, though we stopped quite near you. My dear, it's *very* evident that—" She paused once more, this time with arch significance. "Oh, you needn't be afraid, I never know anything until I'm told. But George is such a good fellow! I'm sure I ought to know—he was perfectly devoted to me. He's not the kind girls are apt to take a fancy to, perhaps,—girls are so foolish and romantic,—but he'd be awfully nice to his wife. Harry says he's a lot richer than

anybody knows. And people are so much happier married—the right people, of course.”

“Did you have a pleasant time while you were away?” asked Dosia, as she lay back in her low, wide, prettily chintz-covered arm-chair. If she had had some half-defined impulse to confide in Alice Wayne, it was gone, melted away in this too fervid sunshine of approval. She had, instead, one of her accessions of dainty shyness; the ring on her finger, underneath her glove, seemed to burn into her flesh. Her eyes roved warily around the room as Mrs. Wayne talked about her wedding-trip and her husband, folding up her Harry’s neckties as she chattered, her fingers lingering over them with little secret pats. She brought out some of her pretty dresses afterwards for Dosia’s inspection. From the open door of a closet beyond, a pair of shoes was distinctly visible—Harry’s shoes, which the wife laughingly put back into place as she went and closed the door. It was impossible not to see that even those clumsy, monstrously thick-soled things were touched with sentiment for her because the feet of her dearest had worn them.

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In Dosia’s world so far it was a matter of course that some people were married—their household life went unnoticed, the fact had no relation to her own intangible dreams or hopes; it was a condition inherent to these elders, and not of any particular interest to her. But Alice Wayne had been a girl like herself until now. This matter-of-fact community of living forced itself upon her notice, as if for the first time, as an absolutely new thing. The blood surged up suddenly through the ice of her indifference; the room choked her. George Button’s neckties, not to speak of his shoes—!

“I’ll have to be going,” she interrupted precipitately, rising as she spoke.

“Why,”—Alice Wayne stopped in the middle of a sentence, looking at her in surprise,—“what’s the matter? Aren’t you well?”

“Yes, yes, but I have an appointment,” affirmed Dosia desperately. “I’ve been enjoying it all so much, but I’d forgotten I must go—at once! Good-by.”

She almost ran on the way home. There was no appointment, but it was imperative that she should be alone, away from all suggestion of the newly married. She hoped that there would be no visitors, but as she neared the house she saw that there was some one on the piazza—George Sutton, frock-coated and high-hatted, with a rose above his white waistcoat and a beaming face that rivaled the rose in color as he came to meet her.

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“Why, I thought you were not coming until this evening,” said Dosia demandingly,—“not until you could see Justin.”

“Did you think I could stay away as long as that?” asked George. His manner the night before had been almost reverential in the depth of his honest emotion; the kiss he had imprinted on her forehead had seemed of an impersonal nature, and she a princess who regally allowed it. She was conscious now of a change.

“Where is Lois?” she asked, as they went up the steps together.

“The maid said she had stepped out for a moment.”

“Then we’ll sit here on the piazza and wait for her,” said Dosia, without looking at her lover. Taking the hat-pins out of her hat, she deposited it on a chair with a quick decision of movement, and then seated herself by a wicker table, while Mr. Sutton, looking disappointed, was left perforce to the rocker on the other side.

The piazza was rather a long one, and, except for a rambling vine, open toward the street; but around the corner of the house Japanese screens walled it off from passers-by into a cozy arbored nook, sweet with big bowls of roses.

“Come around to the other end of the porch,” said George appealingly.

“No,” said Dosia, with her obstinate expression; “I like it here.”

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She stripped the long gloves from her arms, and spread out her hands, palms upward, in her lap. The diamond, which had been turned inward, caught the sunshine gloriously. His gaze fell upon it, and he smiled. Dosia saw the smile and reddened.

“I wish you wouldn’t sit there looking at me,” she said in a tone which she tried to make neutral.

“Come down to the other end of the piazza—just for a moment.”

“No!” said Dosia again. She gave a sudden movement and changed her tone sharply: “Oh, there’s a spider on the table there, crawling toward me! Please take it away.” Her voice rose uncontrollably. “I hate spiders— oh, I *hate* spiders! I’m afraid of them. Make it go away! please! There—now you’ve got it; throw it off the piazza, quick! Don’t bring it near me!”

“The little spider won’t hurt you,” said George enjoyingly.

Dosia, flushing and paling alternately, carried entirely out of her deterring placidity, her blue eyes dilatingly raised to his, her red lips quivering, was distractingly lovely; fear gave to her quick, uncalculated movements the grace of a wild thing. George, in spite of his solid good qualities, possessed the mistaken playfulness of the innately vulgar. He advanced, the spider now held between his thumb and forefinger, a little nearer to her—a little nearer yet. There is a type of bucolic mind to which the causeless, palpitating fear of a woman is an exquisitely funny joke.

“Don’t,” said Dosia again, in a strangled voice, ready to fly from the chair. The spider touched her sleeve, with George’s fatuously smiling face behind it. The next instant she had fled wildly down to the screened corner of the veranda, with George after her, only to be stopped by the screens at

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the end. His following arms closed tightly around her as he kissed her in happy triumph.

After one wild, instinctive effort at struggle, Dosia stood perfectly still, with that peculiarly defensive self-possession that came into play at such times. She seemed to yield entirely now to the rightful caresses of an accepted lover as she said in a perfectly even and casual tone of voice:

"Let me go for a moment, George! I must get my handkerchief from up-stairs. I'll be right back again."

"Don't be gone long," said George fondly, releasing her half-unconsciously at the accent of custom.

"No," said Dosia, very pale, and smiling back at him coquettishly as she went off with unhurried step—to dart up two pairs of stairs like a flying, hunted thing, and into her room, to lock the door fast and bolt it as if from the thoughts that pursued her.

Lois, coming up the stairs half an hour later, rattled the door-knob ineffectually before she knocked.

"Dosia, what's the matter? To whom are you talking? Let me in! Katy said, when she came up, you would not answer—she said Mr. Sutton had been walking up and down the piazza for a long time. Dosia, let me in; let me in this minute!"

The key clicked in the lock, the bolt slipped back, and the door flew open. Dosia, in her blue muslin frock, her hair in wild disorder, was standing in the center of the room, fiercely rubbing her already scarlet cheeks with a rough towel. Every trace of assumed listlessness had vanished; she was frantically alive, with blazing, defiant eyes, and talking half-disconnectedly.

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"Never let him come here again—never, never!" she appealed to Lois.



"Never let him come here again—never, never!"

"Whom do you mean?"

"George Sutton!"

A contraction passed over her face; she began rubbing again with renewed fury.

"Don't do that, Dosia! You'll take the skin off. Stop it!"

Lois, alarmed, put her arm around the girl, trying to push the towel away from her. "Dosia, sit down by me here on the bed—how you're trembling! What on earth is the matter? Dosia, you must not, you'll take the skin off your face."

"I want to take it off," whispered Dosia intensely. "I hate him, I hate him! I never want to see him again. I can't see him again! I threw the ring out in the hall somewhere. You'll have to find it—I couldn't have it in the room with me! Lois, you must tell him I can't see him again; promise me that I'll never see him again—promise, *promise!*" She clung to Lois as if her life depended on that protection.

"Yes, yes, dear, I promise," said Lois with a sudden warmth of sympathy such as she had never before felt for the girl. This situation, this feeling, she could comprehend—it might have been her own in similar case. She had known girls before who had been engaged for but a day or a week, and then revolted; it was not so new a circumstance as the world fancies.

She drew the towel now from Dosia's relaxed fingers, and held her closer as she said:

"There, be quiet, Dosia, and don't make yourself ill. I don't see what that poor man is going to do—of course he'll feel dreadfully; but you can't help that now—it's a great deal better than finding out the mistake later. I'll tell him not to come again, I promise you. Of course, I'll have to speak to Justin; I don't know what he will say!" Lois broke into a rueful smile. "Dosia, Dosia! What scrape will you get into next?"

"Isn't it dreadful!" gasped poor Dosia. She sat up straight and looked at Lois with tragic eyes.

"Now two men have kissed me. I can never get over that in this world. I can never be nice again—no one can ever think I'm nice again! No one can ever—*love* me in this world!" She buried her hot face in Lois' bosom, sobbing tearlessly against that new shelter, in spite of the other's incoherent words of comfort so unalterably, so inherently a woman made to be loved that the loss of the dream of it was like the loss of existence. After a moment Dosia went on brokenly:

"It seems so strange—things begin—and you think they are going to turn out to be something you want very much, and then all of a sudden they end—and there is nothing more. Everything is all beginning—and then it ends—there is nothing more. And now I can never be really nice again!"

"Nonsense! You'll feel very differently about it all after a while," said Lois sensibly.

"I don't want to go down-stairs again." Dosia began to shake violently. "If he were to come back —"

"Well, stay up here. Zaidee shall bring you your dinner," said Lois humoringly. "I must go down now; I hear Justin. Only, you'll have to promise me to be quiet, Dosia, and not begin going wild again the moment I'm out of the room."

"No, I'll be good," murmured Dosia submissively. "Oh, Lois, you're so kind to me! I love you so much!"

Her head ached so hard that it was easy to be quiet now. She could not eat the meal which Zaidee, assisted to the door by the maid, brought in to her. It seemed, oddly enough, like a reversion back to that first night of her arrival—oh, so long ago!—after tempest and disaster. Yet then the white, enhancing light of the future had shone down through everything, and now there was no future, only a murky past, and she a poor girl who had dropped so far out of the way of happiness that she could never get back to it, never be nice again. That hand that had once held hers so firmly, so steadily, that she could sleep secure with just the comfort of its remembered touch—the thought of it had become only pain, like everything else. Oh, back of all this shaming hurt with Lawson and George Sutton was another shame, that went deeper and deeper still. Since that visit of Bailey Girard's, she had known that he had thought of her as she had thought of him, with a knowledge that could not be controverted. It is astonishing that we, who feel ourselves to be so dependent on speech as a means of communication, have our intensest, our most revealing moments without it. He had thought of her as she had of him, and, with the thought of her in his heart, had been content easily that it should be no more.

Oh, if this stranger had been indeed the hero of her dreams,—lover, protector, dearest friend,—to have sought her mightily with the privilege and the prerogative of a man, so that she might have had no experience to live through but that white experience with him!

"Dosia! Open the door quickly."

It was the voice of Lois once more, with a strange note in it. She stood, hurried and breathless, under the gas she turned on as she held out a telegram—for the second time the transmitter of bad news from the South. The message read: "Your father is ill. Come at once."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

There are times and seasons which seem to be full of happenings, followed by long stretches that have only the character of transition from the former stage to something that is to come. Weeks and months fly by us; we do not realize that they are here before they are gone, there is so little to mark any day from its fellow. Yet we lay too much stress on the power of separate and peculiar events to shape the current of our lives, and do not take into account that drama which never ceases to be acted, which knows no pause nor interim, and which takes place within ourselves.

It was April once more before Dosia Linden came North again, after extending months, in no day of which had her stay seemed anything but temporary—a condition to be ended next week or the week after at farthest. Her father's illness turned out to be a lingering one, taking every last ounce of strength from his wife and his daughter; and after his death the little stepmother had collapsed for a while, with only Dosia to take the helm. Dosia had worked early and late, nursing, looking after the children, cooking, sewing, and later on, when sickness and death had taken nearly all the means of livelihood, trying to earn money for the immediate needs by teaching the

scales to some of the temporary tribe at the hotel—an existence in which self was submerged in loving care for those who clung to her, and to cling to Dosia was always to receive from her. Sleep was the goal of the day, and too much of a luxury to have any of its precious moments wasted in wakeful dreaming; besides, there was nothing to dream about any more. But when she crept into her low bed she turned away from the moonlight, because there are times, when one is young, when moonlight is very hard to bear.

The little family, bewildered and exhausted, had come to the end of its resources, when Mrs. Linden's brother in San Francisco offered her and her children a home with him—an offer which, naturally, did not include Dosia. She was very glad for them, but, after all, though she had worked so hard for them, they were not to belong to her for her very own. The aunt whose generosity had given her the money for her musical education had also died, leaving a small sum in trust for the girl; it was that which furnished her with means when she went once more to stay at the Alexanders'. Justin himself had written to see if she could come.

There was another baby now, a couple of months old, and Lois needed her. No fairy-story maiden this, going out to seek her fortune, who took an uneventful train journey this time—only a very tired girl, worn with work and worn with the sorrow of parting, yet thankful to lean her head against the back of the car-seat and feel the burden of anxiety and care slip from her for a little while.

Hard work alone is not ennobling, but drudgery for those whom we love may have its uplifting trend. Dosia was pale and thin, the blue veins on her temples showed more plainly, her face was no longer the typical white page, unwritten upon; that first freshness of youth and inexperience had gone. Dosia had lived. Young as she was, she had tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; she had known suffering, she had faced shame and disappointment and—truth; yes, through everything she had faced that—taken herself to account, probed, condemned, renounced. What she had lost in youthfulness she had gained in character. She had an innocent nobility of expression that came from a light within, as of one ready to answer unwaveringly wherever she might be called. Yet something in her soft eyes at times trembled into being, indescribably gentle, intolerably sweet—the soul of that Dosia who was made to be loved.

If she had changed since that first journeying a year and a half ago, so had the conditions changed in the household to which she went. Justin had had the not unusual experience of the business man who has achieved what he has set out to achieve without the expected result; in the silting-pan which holds success some of the gold mysteriously drops through. The Typometer Company was doing a very large business, quadrupled since the day of its inception. The building was hardly big enough now to hold the offices and manufacturing plant; the force had been greatly increased, and an additional floor for storage had been hired next door. The typometer had absorbed the output of two small rival companies, one out West and one in a neighboring town—both glad, in view of a losing game, to make terms with the successful arbiter. Where one person used a typometer three years ago, it was in request by fifty people now, for many things—for many more, indeed, than had been thought of at first; every week plans in special adjustments were made to fit the machine for different purposes. It was undoubtedly not only a success in itself, but was destined to fit into more and more of the needs of the working world as a standard product.

Orders came in from all parts of the globe. Justin, as he hurried over to his office or held important consultations with the men who wanted to see him, was awarded the respect given to the head of a large and successful concern. He was marked as a rising man. Yet, in spite of all this real accomplishment of the Typometer Company, the net profits had always fallen short of the mark set for them; the company was in constant and growing need of money.

Prices of everything to do with manufacturing had increased—prices of copper and steel, of machinery, of wages, in addition to the larger number of hands employed, and the rent of the additional floor. It was always necessary for one's peace of mind to go back to the value of the material stock and the assets to be counted on in the future. The steady branching out of the business in every direction was proof of the fact that if it did not it must retrench; and to retrench meant fewer orders, fewer opportunities—financial suicide.

It was the powerful shibboleth of the world of trade that one must be seen to be doing business; only so could the doors of credit be opened. If Cater came in with him now, as seemed at last to be expected, the doors must open farther. No matter how one tries to see all around the consequences of any change, any undertaking, there always arise minor consequences which from their very nature must be unforeseen, and yet which may turn out to be the really powerful factors in the main issue; unimportant genii that, let out of their bottles, swell immeasurably. The consequences of the fire, small as it was, seemed never-ending. The defective bars had proved a disastrous supply for the machine, in more ways than one.

Left by the Leverich-Martin combination to work his own retrieval, he had borrowed the ten thousand from Lewiston, and had used part of the money to pay the interest to the others; and later, in the flush of reinstatement, he had borrowed another ten thousand from Leverich, a loan to be called by him at any time. Lewiston's loan had seemed easy of repayment at six months, Justin knew when the money was coming in, but he had been obliged, after all, to anticipate, and get his bills discounted before they came due for other purposes, often paying huge tribute for the service. Lewiston had renewed the note for sixty days, and then for sixty more, but with the proviso that this was the last extension.

In short, the whole process of competently keeping afloat had been gone through, with a definite

aim of accomplishment; Cater's cooperation, about which he had been so slow, would infuse new blood into the business. It was maddening at times to have so many good uses for money and to be unable to command it at the crucial moment. Justin had approached Eugene Larue on that past Sunday afternoon, only to find him cautiously negative where once he had seemed friendly suggesting.

Such a process, to be successful, depends on the power of the man behind it, which must not only comprehend and direct the larger issues, but must be able to carry along smoothly all the easily entangling threads of detail; he must not only have a capable brain, but he must have the untiring nervous energy that can "hold out" through any crisis. Such men may go to pieces after incredible effort, but they are on the way to success first. Danger only quickens the sure leap to safety.

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Justin, preëminently clear-headed, had been conscious lately of two phases—one an almost preternatural illumination of intellect, and the other a sort of brain-inertia, more soul- and body-fatiguing than any pain. There were seasons when he was obliged to think when he could instead of when he would. He looked grave, alert, competent, but underneath this demeanor there went an unceasing effort of computation and reckoning to which the computation and reckoning on the first night of his agreement with Leverich was as a child's play with toy bricks is to the building of an edifice of stone.

The large responsibilities now incurred clashed grotesquely with the daily need of money at home for petty uses; a condition of affairs which often happens at the birth of a child, when the household is at loose ends, and the expenses are necessarily greater in every direction at the time when it seems most imperative to limit them. Justin seemed never to have enough "change" in his pockets, no matter how much he brought home.

In some men the business faculties become more and more self-sufficing when there is no other passion to divide them—the nature grows all one way; and there are others who seem independent, yet who are always as dependent as children on the unnoticed, sustaining help of affection, the love that makes the home a refuge from the provoking of all men—that unreasonably, and at all times, hotly champions the cause of the beloved against the world. No help-giving virtue had gone out from this household in the last year; it had all been a dead lift.

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Justin had never spoken of his affairs to Lois since that Sunday when she had said that she hated them. When she had asked for money, she had always added the proviso, "if he could afford it," and accepted the fact either way without comment. He was, as time went on, more and more affectionately solicitous for her welfare, even if he was, as she keenly felt, less personally loving.

If she went to bed early in the evening, he took that opportunity to go out; and if she stayed up, he remained at home and went to sleep on the lounge; and the little touch that binds divergence with the inner thread of sympathy was lacking.

Yet, strange as it might seem, while she consciously suffered far the most, his loss was mysteriously the greater; the fire of love of which she was by right high priestess still burned secretly for her tending as she cowered over the embers on the hearthstone, though he was cold and chill for lack of that vital warmth.

There were moments when she felt that she could die gladly for him, but always for that glory of self-triumphing in the end. Then that which seemed as if it could never change began to change.

Before the child was born, and now since that, there was a difference. Men and women who suffer most from imaginary wrongs may become sane and heroic in times of real danger. Lois, noble, sweet, and brave, thoughtful for Zaidee and Hedge and Justin even while she trembled, excited reverence and a deep and anxious tenderness in her husband.

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Then, afterwards, he was proud of his second son. When Justin came in at the end of each day and sat down by his wife's bedside, holding her blue-veined hand while she smiled peacefully at him, there was a sweet, sufficing pleasure about those few minutes, singularly soothing, though the interim had no relation to actual living, except in the fact that one anxiety had been lifted. While the expectant birth of the child had been to her, as it is to almost every woman, a separate and distinct calamitous illness to which she looked forward as one might look forward to being taken with typhoid or diphtheria, he considered it as a manifestation of nature, not in itself dangerous, and her fear that of a child, to be soothed by reason.

Still, he had had his moments of a reluctant, twinging fear. One cause for disquieting thought was removed. Now the helplessness of this little family, for whom he was the provider, tugged at a swelling heart.

As he walked toward his office to-day somewhat later than was his wont, he diverged from his usual custom—instead of entering his own doorway, he went across the street to Cater's after a moment's hesitation. Now that Cater's cooperation was at the consummating point, it was wiser not to run the risk of its sagging back. Leverich and Martin were keenly for its success, Justin's credit would rise immeasurably with it. The Typometer Company had absorbed the minor machines with so little trouble that the unabsorbability of the timoscript had seemed an unnecessary stumbling block. Time and time again Justin had sought Cater with tabulated figures and unanswerable arguments. The combination, he firmly believed, would be highly beneficial for both—the field was, in its way, too narrow to be divided with the highest profit; together they could command the trade.

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Cater was opposed to all combinations as trusts,—a word against which he was principled, with

obstinate refusal to differentiate as to kind, quality, or intent. Like many men who are given to a far-seeing philosophy in speech, he was narrow-mindedly cautious when it came to action, apt to be suspicious in the wrong place, and requiring to be continually reassured about conditions which seemed the very a-b-c of commerce. The rivalry between the two firms had been apparently good-natured, yet a little of the sharp edge of competition had shown signs of cutting through the bond.

The typometer had put its prices down, and the timoscript had cut under; then the typometer had gone as low as was wise, and the timoscript had begun to weaken in its defenses.

Cater was already at work at a big desk as Justin entered, but rose to shake hands. There was a look of melancholy in his eyes, in spite of his smile of greeting.

"Anything wrong with you?" asked Justin, instinctively noticing the look rather than the smile.

"No," said Cater. He hooked his legs under his chair, and leaned back, the light from the high unshaded window striking full on his lean yellow countenance. "No, there's nothing wrong. Got some things off my mind, things that have been bothering me for a long time, and I reckon I don't feel quite easy without 'em."

"I think you're very lucky," said Justin. The light from the high window fell on his face, too—on his brown hair, turning a little gray at the temples, on the set lines of his face, in which his eyes, keen and blue, looked intently at his friend. He was well dressed; the foot that was crossed over his knee was excellently shod.

Cater shifted a little in his seat. "Well, I don't know. My experience is some different from the usual run, I reckon; I never had any big streak of luck that it didn't get back at me afterwards. There was my marriage—I know it ain't the thing to talk about your marriage, but you do sometimes. My wife's a fine woman,—yes, sir, I was mighty lucky to get her,—but I didn't know how to live up to her family. It's been that-a-way all my life. Sure's I get to ringin' the bells, the floorin' caves in under me."

"We'll see that the flooring holds, now that you're coming in with us," said Justin good-naturedly. "I've got some propositions to put up to you to-day."

Cater shook his head. "There's no use of your putting up any propositions. I've been drawin' on my well of thought so hard lately that I reckon you could hear the pumps workin' plumb across the street. I've been cipherin' down to the fact that I can't go it alone, any more'n you,—there we agree; hold on, now!—but I can't combine."

"You can't!" cried Justin, with unusual violence. "Why not?"

"Well, you know my feelin's about trusts, and—I like you, Mr. Alexander, you know that, mighty well, but I balk at your backin'. I don't believe in it. It'll fail when you count on it most, it'll cramp on you merciless if you come short of its expectations. Leverich isn't so bad, but Martin cramps a hold of him, and I can't stand Martin havin' a finger in any concern I have a hold of."

"He's clever enough to make what he touches pay," said Justin.

Cater's eyebrows contracted. "You say he's clever because he's tricky—because he's sharp. He isn't clever enough to make money honestly, he isn't big enough. You and me, we're honest, or try to be, but we haven't the brain to give every man his just due, and get ahead, too. It's the greatest game there is, but you got to be a genius to play it! You and me, we can't do it; we ain't got the brain and we ain't got the nerve; I haven't. You've just ever-lastingly got to do the best for yourself if you've got a family; the best *as* you see it."

"What's all this leading up to? What change have you been making, Cater?" asked Justin, with stern abruptness.

"I've given the agency of the machine to Hardanger."

"Hardanger!" Justin's face flushed momentarily, then became set and expressionless. To stand out on abstract questions of honor, and then tacitly break all faith by going in with Hardanger!

"I shut down on part of my plant when I began figuring on this change," continued Cater. "I've been getting the steel fittin's on contract from Benschoten again, as I did at first; it'll come cheaper in the end. Gives us a pretty big stock to start off with. I was sorry—I was sorry to have to turn off a dozen men, but what you going to do? I've got to cut down on the manufacturing as close as I can now."

"I suppose so."

"I wanted to tell you the first one," said Cater.

"Well, I congratulate you," said Justin formally, rising.

"This isn't going to make any difference in the friendship between me and you, Mr. Alexander? I've thought a powerful lot of your friendship. If I'd 'a' seen any way to have come in with you, I'd 'a' done it. But business ain't going to interfere between two such good friends as we are!"

"Why, no," said Justin, with the conventional answer to an appeal which still pitifully claims for truth that which it has made false. The handshake that followed was one in which all their friendship seemed to dissolve and change its character, hardening into ice.

Hardanger!

Hardanger & Co. represented one of the greatest factors in the trade of two hemispheres. To say

that a thing was taken up by Hardanger & Co. meant its success—they took nothing that was not likely to succeed; they *made* it succeed—for them. Their agents in all parts of the known world had easy access to firms and to opportunities hard to be reached by those of lesser credit. Their reputation was unassailed; they kept scrupulously to the terms agreed upon. The only bar to putting an article into their hands was the fact that their terms—except in the case of certain standard articles which they were obliged to have—embraced nearly all the profits, only the very narrowest margins coming to the original owners. Everything had to be figured down, and still further and further down, by those owners, to make that margin possible. It was cut-throat all the way through—a policy that made for the rottenness of trade.

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Justin and Leverich had once made tentative investigations as to Hardanger, with the conclusion that there was far more money outside, even if one must go a little more slowly. It was better to go a little more slowly, for the sake of getting so much more out of it in the end. Hardanger was to be kept as a last resort, if everything else failed. Cater had expressed himself as feeling the same way; that was the understanding between them. But now? Backed by this powerful agency, the timoscript assumed disquieting proportions. In the distance, a time not so very far distant either, Justin could see himself squeezed to the wall, the output of his factory bought up by Hardanger for the price of old iron—forced into it, whether he would or no. Why had he been so short-sighted? Why hadn't he made terms himself sooner? But Cater had been a fool to give in to those terms when, by combining, they could have swung trade between them to their own measure. Then Hardanger might have been obliged to seek *them*, to take their price!—Hardanger, who could afford to laugh at his pretensions now!

He thought of Cater without malice—with, instead, a shrewd, kind philosophy, a sad, clear-
visioned impulse of pity mixed with his wonder. So that was the way a man was caught stumbling between the meshes, blinded, dulled, unconsciously maimed of honor, while still feeling himself erect and honest-eyed! There had been no written agreement between them that either should consult the other before seeking Hardanger; but some promises should be all the stronger for not being written.

This thing *couldn't* happen; in some way, he must get his foot inside the door, so that it couldn't shut on him. There was that note of Lewiston's, due in thirty days—no, twenty-five now. What about that?

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Later in the day, after he had been seeing drayful after drayful of boxes leave the factory opposite, Bullen, the foreman, came into the office with some estimates, pointing out the figures with a small strip of steel tubing held absently in his fingers.

While the clerks were all deferential, and those of foreign birth obsequious, Bullen had an air that was more than sturdily independent—the air and the eye of the skilled mechanic. On his own ground he was master, and Justin, with a smile, deferred to him. But Justin broke into Bullen's calculations abruptly, after a while, to ask:

"What's that you've got there? It looks like one of those bars that nearly smashed us."

"You've got a good eye, sir," said Bullen approvingly. "A year and a half ago you'd not have seen any difference between one bit of steel and another. But there's one thing I didn't see about it myself until Venly—he's a new man we've taken on—pointed it out to me. He came across a case of these to-day we'd thrown out in the waste-heap. We thought our machine had jarred them out of shape, because they were a fraction off size; well, so they were. But Venly he spotted them in a minute, when he was out there, and he asked me if they weren't from the Benschoten factory—he was turned off from there last week, they're cutting down the force; they always do, come spring. He said they looked like part of a bum lot that had flaws in them. He got the magnifying-glass and showed me, and, sure enough, 'twas right he was! He says they've got piles of them they've been workin' off on the trade at a cut price. Venly he said he didn't have any stomach for a skin game like that."

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"That's a pretty ruinous way to do business, isn't it?" asked Justin.

"Oh, they're going to sell out in July, so they don't care. I pity anyone that's counting on any sort of machine that's got these in 'em. Would you take the glass and look for yourself, sir? Every one of 'em is flawed!"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

264

"Slipped through your fingers like that! Like a—" Leverich's words were not fit for print. He had been away for a couple of days, and now sat tilted back in his office chair, a heavy, leather-covered thing not meant for tilting, his face puffed with anger, his mouth snarling—a wild beast balked of his prey. His eyes, ferociously insolent, dwelt on Justin, who, fine and keen and smiling a little, sat opposite him. Brute anger never had any effect on Justin but to give him a contemptuous, chill self-possession.

"You're sure the agreement's made?"

"Cater's been sending new consignments as fast as they could go for the past three days; he's loaded up with machines."

Leverich swore again. "D—d fools, not to have made terms with Hardanger first! If we'd only known! If there was only some way to put a spoke in the wheel, even yet!"

"Oh, I've got the spoke, easily enough," said Justin indifferently, "the only trouble is, I can't use it."

"Got a spoke! Why in heaven didn't you say that before?" Leverich came down on the front legs of his chair with a force that sent it rolling ahead on its casters. "What are you sitting here for? What do you mean by telling me that you can't use it?"

"Just what I say. But it's not worth talking about."

"See here, Alexander, could you get our machine in now instead of his?"

"I suppose I might."

"And you're not going to do it?"

"I can't, I tell you, Leverich. The information came to me in such a way that I can't touch it."

"The information—' It's something damaging to do with the machine?"

Justin drummed with his fingers on the desk without answering.

"You have proof?"

"What's the sense of talking, Leverich? Proof or no, I tell you, I can't use it. This isn't any funny business, you can see that. Don't you suppose, if I could use it, that I would? But there are some things a man can't do—at any rate, *I* can't. And that settles it."

Heaven knows he had gone over the matter insistently enough in the last few days, since the combination had been unwillingly given into his hands, but always with the foregone conclusion. The devil—granting that there is one,—doesn't, as a rule, actively try to tempt us to evil—he simply confuses us, so that we are kept from using our reason. But this time he had no field for action. To use secret information against Cater, that could never have been had but for Cater's kindness to him in helping him to those bars in time of need, was first, last, and every time impossible to Justin Alexander. It was vain for argument to suggest that this very deed of kindness had worked his disaster—the fact remained the same. He might do other things, he might do worse things—this thing he could not do, not though the refusal worked his own ruin, not though Cater's ruin with Hardanger was insured anyway, but too late for the typometer to profit by it. Even if the typometer could by some means keep afloat until that day arrived, it would take a couple of years for such a timing-machine to regain its prestige in a foreign country.

Justin had no excess of sentiment, no quixotic impulse urged him to go and tell Cater what he had learned. It was Cater's business to look after his end of the game, if the price of material or labor was too cheap, he must know that there was something wrong with it. The stream of Justin's mind ran clear in spite of that feeling of sharp practice toward himself—nay, because of it; it was impossible to use the weapon that a former kindness had placed in his hand. He looked at Leverich now with an expression which the latter quieted himself to meet. This was a situation, not for bluster and rage, but to be competently grappled with.

"How about your obligations? Do you call this fair dealing to us, Alexander? There's Lewiston's note—once this deal was settled we would have paid that, as you know. But it's out of the question as things stand. We'll have to get our money out the best way we can. If this is your sense of honor—to sacrifice your friends! See here, Alexander, let's talk this out. When it comes to talking of ruin, no man can afford to stand on terms. We didn't put you into the typometer business on any kindergarten principles—it isn't to form your character. What we did, we did for profit; and if the profit isn't there, we get out. We've no objection to doing a kindness for anyone, if we can do it and make a profit, but it stands to reason that we're not in the business for philanthropy any more than for kindergartening. We liked you, and we were willing to give you a place in the game if you could run it to suit us, but we don't consider any scheme that doesn't make money—what doesn't make money has to go. Profit, profit, profit—that's what every sane man puts first, and there's no justice in losing a chance to make it. What you lose, another man takes—if you make another man's wife and children better off, you stint your own. You've got to consider a question on all sides. No woman respects a man who can't make money; it's his everlasting business to make money, and she knows it. Your wife won't think much of your fine scruples if she's to go without for 'em—and, by the Lord, she's right! When you go into business, you've got to make up your mind to one of two things: you've either got to step hard on the necks of those below you, or you've got to lie down and let them wipe their feet on you."

Leverich had stopped at intervals for comment from Justin. Since none was offered, he went on, with the large and easy manner of one who feels the justice of his convictions: "No man ever accused me of being close. I'm free-handed, if I say it that shouldn't. I like to give, and I *do* give. If there's money wanted for charity, the committees know very well where to come. And my wife likes to give, too; her name's on the books of twenty charitable organizations. But we give out of money I've made by *not* being free-handed—by getting every last cent that belonged to me. You see, I don't leave my wife out of my calculations—any man's a fool that does. She's got the right to have as good as I can give her. I wouldn't talk like this to most men, Alexander, but between you and me it's different. It pays to keep your wife in a good humor, when you've got to go home after a hard day's work; you take a dissatisfied woman, and she'll make your home a hell. I know men—Great Scott! I don't know how they live!" He paused again. Justin did not answer. He sat with his head on his hand, looking, not at Leverich, but to one side of him.

"When I say I've made the money," continued Leverich, "I mean that I actually *have* made most of it—made it out of nothing! like the first chapter of Genesis. If a man has money to start with, he can add to it as easily as you can roll up a snowball—it's no credit to him. But I've had only my brains. I've seen money where other men couldn't, and nothing has stood in my way of getting to it; that's the whole secret of success. And my attitude's fair—you couldn't find a fairer. When one of your clerks falls sick, you pay him his full salary for three or four months till he's around again. I know! Well, I don't do any such stunts. When I was a clerk myself, I was on the sick-list once for three months, and nobody paid me. After the first month I was bounced, and I didn't expect anything else. I didn't expect any philanthropical business, and I don't give it. That's fair, isn't it? I don't give quarter, and I don't expect any. If I'm squeezed, I pay. I don't stand still in the middle of a deal and snivel about what I can do and what I can't do. I don't snivel about what you call moral obligations; I only recognize money obligations. Why, see here, Alexander," he broke off, "if you use the influence you spoke of, you don't have to tell me what it is—you don't have to tell anybody but Hardanger. Cater himself needn't know that you had anything to do with it."

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"But I'd know," said Justin quietly.

Leverich lost his easy manner; his jaw protruded.

"Very well, then, it comes down to this: If you fail us now, out of any of your fool scruples toward that poor devil across the street,—who's bound to get the blood sucked out of him anyway,—you ruin your own prospects, and you try and cheat us out of the money we put up on you. By—, if you see any honor in that, I don't."

"Mr. Leverich," said Justin, raising his head swiftly, with a steely gleam in his eyes that matched the other's, "when I try to cheat you or Lewiston or any man out of what has been put up on me, I'll give you leave to say what you please. At present I'll say good morning."

Leverich shrugged his shoulders and turned his back as he bent over his desk. Justin picked up his hat and went out, brushing, as he did so, against a dark, pleasant-faced man who had been sitting in the next room. Something in his face instantly conveyed to Justin the knowledge that the conversation he had just been engaged in had grown louder than the partition warranted. The next instant he recognized the man as a Mr. Warren, of Rondell Brothers. Each turned to look back at the other, and both men bowed; the action had a certain definiteness in it, unwarranted by the slightness of the meeting. The next moment Justin was in the street.

The clash of steel always roused the blood in him; he felt actively stronger for combat. He was competently apportioning toward Lewiston's note the different sums coming in this month. There were large bills to be paid to the typometer's credit by several firms, one of them Coneways'. Coneways represented the largest counted-in asset for the entire year—it was the backbone of the establishment. If it went to Lewiston, what would be left for the business? That could come next, Lewiston was first. Leverich and Martin would exact every penny of their principal after these intervening six months of the year were over. Well, let them! Lewiston's note was what he had to think of now.

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All business undertakings, no matter how wild, how precarious to the sense of the beholder, are started with confidence in their ultimate success; it is the one trite, universal reason for starting—that faith is the capital that all possess in common. Some of these doubtful ventures, while never really succeeding, do not fail at once; they are always hard up, but they keep on, though gradually sinking lower all the time. Others seem to exist by the continuance of that first faith alone—a sheer optimism that keeps the courage alive and keen enough to seize hold of the slightest driftwood of opportunity, binding this flotsam into a raft that takes them triumphantly out on the high tide. For all the long drag, the anxiety, the physical strain, the harassment, failure in itself seemed as inherently impossible to Justin as that he should be stricken blind or lose the use of his limbs. He must think harder to find a way of accomplishment, that was all.

His step had its own peculiar ring in it as he left Leverich's, but it lost somewhat of its alertness as he turned down the street that led to the factory, unaltered, since his first coming to it, save for the transformation of the neglected house he had noticed then, with its grewsome interior, which had been turned into a freshly painted shop long ago. The effect of association is inexorable. There was not a corner, not a building, along that too familiar way, that was not hung with some thought of care; there were moments of such strong repulsion that he felt as if he couldn't turn down that street again—moments lately when to enter the factory with its red-brick-arched yawning mouth of a doorway occasioned a physical nausea—a foolish, womanish state which irritated him.

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The mail brought him the usual miscellaneous assortment of orders and bills, and letters on minor points, and questions as to the typometer. The mail was rather apt to be encouraging in its suggestions of a large trade. Two letters this morning were full of enthusiastic encomium on the use of the machine. In spite of an enormous and long-outstanding bill for office stationery, insistently clamorous for payment—one of those bills looked upon as trifles until they suddenly become staggering—there was, after the mail, a general feeling of wielding the destiny of a large part of the world, where the typometer was a power.

A little woman whose husband, now dead, had been in his employ, came in to get help in collecting his insurance; she was timid before Justin, deeply grateful for his kind and effective assistance. Two men called at different times, for advice and introductions to important people. A friend brought in a possible customer from the Sandwich Islands. There was all that aura of prosperity that has nothing to do with the payment of one's bills.

Justin took both the friend and the customer out to lunch, his pleasant sense of hospitality only dimmed by the disagreeable fact of its taking every cent of the five dollars he had expected to last him for the week. He was "strapped." The luncheon took longer, also, than he had counted on its doing. The morning, begun well, seemed to lead up only to sordid and anxious details and a sense of non-accomplishment, induced also by small requisitions from different people presupposing cash from a cash-drawer that was empty.

It was a welcome relief to figure, with Harker's assistance, on the large sums coming in at the end of the month from Coneways. There were a hundred ways for them to go, but they were to go to Lewiston. Perhaps, after all, as Harker astutely suggested, Lewiston would be satisfied with a partial payment and extend the rest of the note. While they were still consulting, word was brought in that Mr. Lewiston was there.

Mr. Lewiston was a young man, small-featured, black-haired, smooth-shaven, and with an air of nattiness and fashion set at odds at present by a very pale and anxious face and eager, dilated black eyes. He cut short Justin's greeting with the words:

"I've just come over to speak about that note, Alexander."

"Well, I was just wanting to speak to you about it myself," said Justin easily. "Have a cigar?"

"Thank you," said Lewiston mechanically, and as mechanically holding out his hand for the cigar, evidently forgetting it the next moment. "The fact is, I don't want to seem importunate, but if you could pay off that note fifteen days before date,—a week from to-day, that is,—we'd discount it to satisfy you. I didn't want to bother you about it, and I tried outside first, but nobody will take up the paper just now, except at a ruinous rate. If you could make it convenient, Alexander—" Young Lewiston sat with his small, eager face bent forward over his knees, his lips twitching slightly. "You know that money wasn't loaned on strictly business principles, Alexander, but for friendship; I got father to consent to it. If you could let us have it now, it would save us a world of trouble. It's really not much—only ten thousand."

Justin shook his head, his keen blue eyes fixed on the other. "I can't let you have it, Lewiston; I wish I could! But I'm waiting on payments myself. Can't you pull out without it?"

Lewiston drew in his breath. "Oh, yes, of course we'll have to, but it means—Well, I know you would if you could, Alexander, I told father so—father in a way holds me responsible, he was in London when I renewed the note the last time. There isn't anything to interfere with the payment when it's due?"

"On my honor, no," said Justin. "You shall have it then without fail."

"For if that should slip up—" continued young Lewiston, wrapped in somber contemplation of his own affairs alone; he threw his arms outward with a gesture suddenly tragic in its intensity, paused an instant, then wrung Justin's hand silently and departed.

"Are you busy, Alexander? They said I could come in."

"Why, Girard!"

Justin wheeled a chair around with an instantly brightened face. "Sit down. I'm mighty glad to see you." He looked smilingly at his visitor, whose presence, long-limbed, straight, clean, and clear-eyed, always elicited a peculiar admiration from other men. "I heard that you had a room at the Snows' now, while Billy is away, but I haven't laid eyes on you for a month."

"I've been coming in on a later train every morning and going out again on a very much later one at night. I'm back in town on the paper for a while."

"Why don't you settle down to something worth while?" asked Justin, with the reserved disapproval of the business man for any mode of life but his own.

"Settle down to this kind of thing?" said Girard thoughtfully. "Well, I did think of it last year, when I undertook those commissions for you. But what's the use—yet awhile, at any rate? You see, I can always make enough money for what I want and to spare, and there's nobody else to care. I like my liberty! The love of trade doesn't take hold of me, somehow—and you have to have such a tremendous amount of capital to keep your place. By the way, have you sold the island yet?" The island was a small one up near Nova Scotia, taken once for a debt.

"Not yet."

Girard gave him a quick glance—with the instant penetration of a man who has known hard times himself, he detected the signs of it in another; the perception lent a sort of under-warmth and kindness to his voice as he asked: "How are things going with you?"

"Fine," said Justin in a conventionally prosperous tone, with a sudden sight of a bottomless pit yawning below him. "I've had a few things on my mind lately—but they're all right now. By the way, how do you like it at the Snows'?"

"Oh, fairly well." Girard's gray eyes twinkled in an irrepressible smile. "I score high at present. They all approve of me, and I am told that I am the only man who has never run into the Boston fern or got tangled in the Wandering Jew. Miss Bertha and I have long talks together—she's great. As for Mrs. Snow—she heard Sutton speak of her the other night to Ada as 'the old lady.' I assure you that since—" He shook his head, and both men laughed.

"Come to see us. Miss Linden is back with us again," said Justin hospitably, indescribably cheered by some soul-offered sympathy that lay below the trivial converse.

"Thank you," said Girard, an indefinable stiffening change coming over him momentarily, to disappear at once, however, as he went on: "By the way, I mustn't forget what I came for before I hurry off."

He took some bills out of his long, flat leather wallet as he rose. "Do you remember lending that fifty dollars to my friend Keston last year? He turned up yesterday, and asked me to see that you got this."

"I'd forgotten all about it," averred Justin. He had not realized until he took the bills that he had been keeping up all day by main strength, with that caved-in sensation of there being nothing back of it—nothing back of it. There are times when the touch of money is as the elixir of life. Justin, holding on by the skin of his teeth for ten thousand dollars, and needing imperatively at least as much more, felt that with this paltry fifty dollars it was suddenly possible to draw a free breath, felt a sheer, uncalculating lightness of spirit that showed how terrible was the persistent weight under which he was living. The very feeling of those separate bills in his pocket made him calmly sanguine.

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He got ready to go home a little earlier than usual, saying lightly to Harker, who had come in for his signature to some papers:

"Those payments will begin to straggle in next week. Coneways' isn't due until the 31st—the very last minute! But he's always prompt, thank Heaven—what are you doing?"

"Knocking on wood," said Harker, with a grim smile.

"Oh, knock on wood all you want to," returned Justin.

He even thought of Lois on his way, and stopped to buy her some flowers. It was the first time he had thought of her unconsciously for a week. While he was waiting for a car to pass before he crossed the street, his eye caught the headline on a paper a newsboy was holding out to him:

GREAT CRASH
CONEWAYS & CO. FAIL
IN BOSTON

CHAPTER TWENTY

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"I don't think Justin looks very well," said Dosia that afternoon. She was sitting on the edge of the bed, with her arms spread out half-protectingly over Lois. The latter was only resting; she had been up and around the house now for three or four weeks, and, although she looked unusually fragile, seemed well, if not very strong.

The baby, wrapped in a blue embroidered blanket, with only a round forehead and a small pink nose visible, was of that satisfactory variety entirely given to sleep; Zaidee and even Redge, adoring little sister and brother, had been allowed to hold him in their arms, so securely unstimulating was their small burden. Lois, who had passionately rebelled against the prospect of additional motherhood, exhibited a not unusual phase of it now in as passionately adoring this second boy. He seemed peculiarly, intensely her own, not only a baby, but a spiritual possession that communicated a new strength to her. Lois was changed. She had always been beautiful, as a matter of fact, but there was now something withheld, mysterious, in her expression, as if she were taking counsel of some half-slumberous force within, like one listening at a shell for the murmur of the ocean.

Not only Lois, but everything else, seemed changed to Dosia, at the same time being also flatly, unchangeably natural. She had longed—oh, how she had longed!—to be back here. Even while loving and working in her so-called home, she had felt that this was her real home, although here her cruelest blows had fallen on her; even while bleeding with the wrench of parting from her own flesh and blood, she had felt that this was the true home, for here she had really lived—and it was the home of the nicer, more delicate instincts. After the crude housekeeping, the lack of comforts that made the simplest nursing a grinding struggle with circumstance, it was a blessed relief to get back to a sphere where minor details were all in order as a matter of course. The Alexanders, with their three children, kept only one maid now, but even that restriction did not prevent the unlimited flow of hot and cold water!

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Yet she had also dreaded this returning,—how she had dreaded it!—with that old sickening shame which came over her inevitably as she thought of certain people and places and days. The mere thought of seeing Mrs. Leverich or George Sutton and that chorus of onlookers was like passing through fire. One braces one's self to withstand the pain of scenes of joy or sorrow revisited, to find that, after all, when the moment comes, there is little of that dreaded pain—it has been lived through and the climax passed in that previsioning which imagination made more intense, more harrowingly real, than the reality.



Even Redge had been allowed to hold him

Mrs. Leverich stopped her carriage one day to greet Dosia, and to ask her, with a tentative semblance of her old effusion, to come and make her a visit—an effusion which immediately died down into complete non-interest, on Dosia's polite refusal; and the incident was not especially heart-racking at the time, though afterwards it set her unaccountably trembling. Mrs. Leverich had in the carriage with her a small, thin, long-nosed, under-bred-looking man with a pale-reddish mustache and hair, who, gossip said, passed most of his time at the Leverichs'—he was seen out driving alone with Myra nearly every day. He was "an old friend from home." It had been gossip at first, but it was growing to be scandal now, with audible wonder as to how much Mr. Leverich knew about it.

Her avoidance of George Sutton was as nothing to his desire of avoiding her; he dived with surreptitious haste down side streets when he saw her coming, or disappeared within shop doorways. Once, when Dosia confronted him inadvertently on the platform of a car, and he had perforce to take off his hat and murmur, "Good morning," he turned pale and was evidently scared to death. After this he only appeared in the village street guarded on either side by a female Snow—usually Ada and her mother, though occasionally Bertha served as escort instead of the latter. The elder Snows, in spite of this apparent security, were in a state of constant nervous tension over Mr. Sutton's attention to Ada; he had not "spoken" yet, but it had begun to be felt severely of late that he ought to speak. Whenever Ada came into the house, her face was eagerly scanned by both mother and sister to see from its look if it bore any trace of the fateful words having been uttered. Everyone knew, though how no one could tell, that that bold thing, Dosia Linden, had tried to get him once, and failed.

The thing that had unaccountably stirred her most since her arrival was an unexpected meeting with Bailey Girard. Dosia, with Zaidee and Redge held by either hand and pressing close to her as they walked merrily along, suddenly came upon a gray-clad figure emerging from the post-office; he seemed to make an instinctive movement as if to draw back, that sent the swift color to her cheeks and then turned them white. Were all the men in the place trying to avoid her? Dosia thought, with bitter humor; but, if it were so, he instantly recovered himself, and came forward, hat in hand, with a quick access of bright courtesy, a punctilious warmth of manner. He walked along with her a few paces as he talked, lifting Zaidee over a flooded crossing, before going once more on his way. He was nothing to Dosia, the stranger who had killed her ideal, yet all day it was as if his image were photographed in the colors of life upon the retina of her eye; she could not push it away, try as she might.

Of Lawson Dosia had heard only such vague rumors as had sifted through the letters written by Lois; he had been reported as going on in his old way in the mining-camps, drifting from one to another. She heard nothing more now. He was the only one who had really loved her up here, except Lois, who loved her now. Dosia had slipped into her now position of sister and helper as if she had always filled it. She was not an outsider any more; she *belonged*.



*After this he only appeared in the village street
guarded on either side by a female Snow*

As she sat bending over Lois now, her attitude was instinct with something high-mindedly lovely. The Dosia who had only wanted to be loved, now felt—after a year of trial and conflict with death—that she only wanted, and with the same youthful intensity, to be very good, even though it seemed sometimes to that same youthfulness a strange and tragic thing that it should be all she wanted. The mysterious, fathomless depression of youth, as of something akin to unknown primal depths of loneliness, sometimes laid its chill hand on her heart; but when Dosia “said her prayers,” she got, child-fashion, very near to a Someone who brought her an intimate, tender comfort of resurrection and of life.

“I don’t think Justin seems well,” she repeated, Lois, looking up at her with calmly expressionless eyes from her pillow, having taken no notice of the remark. “He has changed, I think, even in the ten days since I came.”

“He has something on his mind,” assented Lois, with a note of languor in her voice, “I suppose it’s the business—I made up my mind to ask him about it to-night; he has been out every evening lately, and I hardly see him at all before he goes off in the morning, now that I don’t get down to breakfast.”

“Oh, he gave me a message for you this morning,” cried Dosia, with compunction at having so far forgotten it. “He said that Mr. Larue had come in to inquire about you yesterday; he is going to send you a basket of strawberries and roses from his place at Collingswood to-morrow.”

“Eugene Larue!” Lois’ lips relaxed into a pleased curve, a slight color touched her cheek. “That was very nice of him; he knew I’d like to look forward to getting them. Strawberries and roses!”

“I met Mr. Girard in the street to-day, he asked after you,” continued Dosia, with the feeling that if she spoke of him she might get that tiresome, insistent image of him from before her eyes.

“Bailey Girard? Yes; he has a room at the Snows’. Billy’s out West.”

“So I’ve heard,” said Dosia.

It was one of the strange and melancholy ironies of life that the man of all others whom she had desired to meet should be thrown daily in her pathway now, after that desire was gone!

“You’d better not talk any more now, Lois; you look tired, it’s time for you to take a little rest. I’ll see to the children, I hope baby will stay asleep. Let me put this coverlet over you. Shall I pull down the shades?”

“No, I’d rather have the light. Please hand me that book over there on the stand,” said Lois, holding out her hand for the big, old-fashioned brown volume that Dosia brought to her.

“You oughtn’t to read, you ought to go to sleep,” said Dosia, with tender severity.

“I’m not going to read,” returned Lois pacifically. Her hand closed over the book, she smiled, and Dosia closed the door. Lois turned to the sleeping child with a peculiar delight in being quite alone with him—alone with him, to think.

The book was a novel of some forty years ago, called, as the title-page proclaimed, “The Woman’s Kingdom,” and written by Dinah Maria Mulock. A neighbor had brought it in to Lois during the

first month of her convalescence—in all the time she had had it, she had never read any further than that title-page.

There is often more in the birth of a child than the coming of another son or daughter into the world. Between those forces of life and death a woman may also get her chance to be born anew, made over again, spiritually as well as physically; in those long, restful hours afterwards, when suspense is over and pain is over, and there is a freedom from household cares, and one is looked upon with renewed tenderness, the thoughts may flow over long, long ways. To face danger bravely in itself gives strength for the clearer vision, and a peculiarly loved child unlocks with its tiny hands springs unknown before.

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Lois, though she had been a mother twice before, had never felt toward either of the other children at all as she did now toward this little boy. She could not bear to be parted from him. Somehow that terrible corrosive selfishness had been blessedly taken away from her—for a little while only? She only felt at first that she must not think of those horrible depths, for fear of slipping back into the pit again; even to think of the slimy powers of darkness gave them a fresh hold on one. She put off her return to that soul-embracing egotism. It was sweet to lie there and meet the tender gentleness of her husband's gaze when he came home, and to talk to him about the baby as a child might talk about a new toy, though she could not but begin to perceive that she was as far, far out of his real life as if she had indeed been a child.

One evening he came in to sit by her,—her convalescence had been a long and dragging one,—and she had paused in the midst of telling him something to await an answer. None came. She spoke again, and raised herself to look. Then she saw that even within that brief space he had fallen asleep, as a man may who is thoroughly exhausted. Thoroughly exhausted! Everything proclaimed it—his attitude, grimly grotesque in the dim light, one leg stretched out half in front of the other, as he had dropped into the seat, his relaxed arms hanging down, his head resting sidewise against the back of the chair, with the face sharply upturned. The shadows lay in the hollows under his cheek-bones and in those lines that marked his temples. Divested of color and the transforming play of expression, he looked strangely old, terribly lifeless. He slept without moving,—almost, it seemed, without breathing,—while Lois, with a new dread, watched him with frightened, dilated, fascinated eyes. How had he grown like this? What unnoticed change had been at work? She called him again, but he did not hear; she stretched out her arm, but he was just beyond reach. Suddenly it seemed to her that he was dead, and that she could never reach him again; an icy hand seemed to have been laid on her heart. What if never, never, never—

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Just then he opened his eyes and sat up, saying naturally, "Did you speak?"

"Oh, you frightened me so! Don't go to sleep like that again," said Lois, with a shaking voice. "Come here."

He came and knelt down by her, and she pressed his cheek close to hers with a rush of painful emotion. "Why, you mustn't get worked up over a little thing like that," he objected lightly, going out of the room afterwards with a reassuring smile at her, while she gazed after him with strangely awakened eyes. For the first time in months, she thought of him without any idea of benefit to herself.

The next day the neighbor sent her over the book; the title arrested her attention oddly—"The Woman's Kingdom." Another phrase correlated with it in her memory—"Queen of the Home." The home was supposed to be woman's domain, where she was the sovereign power; there she was helper, sustainer, director, the dear dispenser of favors. *The Woman's Kingdom, Queen of the Home*. Gradually the words drew her down long lanes of retrospect, led by the rose-leaf touch of the baby's fingers; *they* kept her strong. What kingdom had she ever made her own? She poor, bedraggled, complaining suppliant, a beggar where she should have been a queen! Home and the heart of her husband—there lay her woman's kingdom, her realm, her God-given province. She had had the ordering of it, none other; she had married a good man. Glad or sorry, that kingdom was as her rule made it; she must be judged by her government—as she was queen enough to hold it. She fell asleep that day thinking of the words.

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Day by day, other thoughts came to her more or less disconnectedly,—set in motion by those magic words,—when she lay at rest in the afternoons, with the book in her fingers and the dear little baby form close beside her. Lois was one of those women of intense feeling who can never perceive from imagination, but only from experience—who cannot even adequately sympathize with sorrows and conditions which they have not personally lived through. No advice touches them, for the words that embody it are in a language not yet understood. The mistakes of the past seem to have been necessary, when they look back. Given the same circumstances, they could not have acted differently; but they seldom look back—the present, that is always climbing on into the future, occupies them exclusively.

Lois with "The Woman's Kingdom" in her hand, felt that some source of power and happiness which she had not realized had slipped from her grasp, yet might still be hers. So many disconnected, half-childish thoughts came with the words—historic names of women whom men had loved devotedly, who had kept them as their friends and lovers even when they themselves had grown old, women who had never lost their charm. There were those women of the French salons, who could interest even other generations; Queens indeed! She couldn't really interest one man! She thought over the married couples of her acquaintance, in search of those who should reveal some secret, some guiding light. One woman across the street had no other object in life than purveying to the household comfort of her husband, and seemed, good soul, to expect nothing from him in return; if William liked his fish, she was repaid. A couple farther down

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appeared to be held together by the fact of marriage, nothing more; they were bored to death by each other's society. Another couple were happily absorbed in their children, to whom they were both sacrificially subordinate. With none of these conditions could Lois be satisfied. Then, there were the women who always spoke as if a man were an animal and a woman were not a woman, but a spirit; but Lois was very much a woman! She settled at last, after penetrative thought, on one husband and wife, the latter a plain little person no longer young. Every man liked to go to her charming, comfortable house; every man admired her; and that her husband, a very handsome man himself, admired her most of all was unobtrusively evident. Every look, every gesture, betrayed the charming, vivifying unity between those two. How was it accomplished?

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How could one interest a man like that? There was Eugene Larue—she could interest him! The thought of him always gave her a sense of conscious power; he paid her homage. She did not know what his relations were with other women, but of his with her she was sure: she felt her woman's kingdom. If you could talk to the soul of a man like that as if he had the soul of an angel, and learn from him what you wanted to know—get his guidance—But Lois was before all things inviolably a wife, with the instinctive dignity of one. The sympathy between her and Eugene Larue was so deep that she feared sometimes that in some brief moment she might reveal in words, to be forever regretted afterwards, conditions which he knew without her telling. To be loved as Eugene Larue would love a woman! But his wife had not cared to be loved that way. Lois took deep, thoughtful counsel of her heart. If they two, she and Eugene, had met while both were free? The answer was what she had known it would be, else she had not dared to make the test—the man who was her husband was the only man who could ever have been her husband. Justin!

With "The Woman's Kingdom" in her hand now, her lips touching the cheek of the soft little darling thing beside her, she felt that some knowledge had been gradually revealed to her, of which she was now really aware only for the first time. Justin was not looking well—that was what Dosia had said. Oh, he was not looking well! But she would make him forget his cares, his anxieties, with this new-found power of hers; she would bewitch him, take him off his feet, so that he would be able to think of nothing, of no one, but her—he had not always thought of her! No, no—she would not remember that, *she would not pity herself*. She would learn to laugh, even if it took heroic effort—men liked you to laugh, she had always taken everything too seriously. The vision of his sleeping, *dead* face of a month ago frightened her for a moment, painfully; but he had seemed better since, though, as Dosia said, he didn't look well. Oh, when he came home to-night—!

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She dressed herself with a new care, putting on a soft yellowish gown with a yoke of creamy lace, unworn for months. The color was more brilliant than ever in her cheeks, her lips redder, her eyes more deeply blue. The children exclaimed over their "pretty mamma"; she looked younger, more beautiful, than Dosia had ever seen her. The latter could not help saying:

"How lovely you are, Lois! And you're all dressed up, too; do you expect anyone?"

"Only Justin," said Lois.

"Only Justin"! The words brought an exquisite joy with them—only Justin, the one man in all the world for her. There was but a half-hour now until dinner-time. It had passed, and he had not come; but he was often late—Still he did not come; that happened too, sometimes. The two women sat down to dinner alone, at last. The baby woke up afterwards, an unusual thing, and wailed, and would not stop; Lois, divested of her rich apparel and once more swathed in a loose, shabby gown, rocked and soothed the infant interminably, while Dosia, her efforts to help unavailing, crouched over a book down-stairs, trying to read. After an interval of quiet she went up again, to find Lois at last lying down.

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"It's eleven o'clock, Lois; I think I'll go to bed. Shall I leave the gas burning down-stairs?"

"Yes, please do; he can't get anything now but the last train out."

"And you don't want me to stay here with you?"

"No—oh, no."

As once before, Lois waited for that train—yet how differently! If that injured feeling rose, for an instant, at his not having sent her word, she crushed it back as one would crush the head of a viper that showed itself between the crevices of the hearthstone. She would not pity herself—she would not pity herself! She knew now that madness lay that way.

The night was clear and warm, the stars were shining, as she got up and sat by the window, looking out from behind the curtain, her beautiful braided hair over one shoulder. The last train came in, the people from it, in twos and threes, straggled down the street, but not Justin. He must have missed that last train out—of course he must have missed it!

We are apt to fancy causeless disaster to those we love; the amount of "worry" more or less willingly indulged in by uncontrolled minds seems at times enough to swamp the understanding. Yet there is a foreboding, unsought, unwelcomed, combated, which, once felt, can never be counterfeited; it carries with it some chill, unfathomed quality of truth.

Lois knew now that she had had this foreboding all day.

"And you haven't heard *anything* of him yet?"

"Not yet, Mrs. Alexander. I'm sorry—oh, so sorry—to have nothing more to tell you. But I'm sure we'll hear something before morning."

Bailey Girard spoke with confidence, his eyes bent controllingly on Lois, who trembled as she stood in the little hallway, looking up at him, with Dosia behind her. This was the third night since that one when Justin had failed to appear, and there had been no word from him in the interim. Owing to that curious way that women have of waiting for events to happen that will end suspense, rather than seeking to end it by any unaccustomed action of their own, no inquiry had been made at the Typometer Company until late in the afternoon of the next day, which had been passed in the hourly expectation of hearing from Justin or seeing him walk in. However, nobody at the company knew anything of Justin's movements, except that he had left the office rather early the afternoon before, and had been seen to take a car going up-town. It was presumable that he had been called suddenly out of town, and had sent some word to Mrs. Alexander that had miscarried.

That evening, however, Lois sent for Leverich, who was evidently disquieted, though bluffly and rather irritatingly making light of her fears; he seemed to be both a little reluctant and a little contemptuous.

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"My dear Mrs. Alexander, you can't expect a fellow to be always tied to his wife's apron-strings! He doesn't tell you everything. We like to have a free foot once in a while. Why, my wife's glad when I get off for a day or two—coaxes me to go away herself! And as for anything happening to Alexander—well, an able-bodied man can look out for himself every time; there's nothing in the world to be anxious about. He's meant to wire to you and forgotten to do it, that's all—I forgot it myself last year, when I was called away suddenly, but Myra didn't turn a hair; she knew I was all right. And if I were you, Mrs. Alexander,—this is just a tip,—I wouldn't go around telling *everyone* that he's gone off and you don't know where he is. It's the kind of thing folks get talking about in all kinds of ways; his affairs aren't in any too good shape, as he may have told you."

"Isn't the business all right?" queried Lois, with a puzzled fear.

"Oh, yes, of course—all right; but—I wouldn't go around wondering about his being away; he's got his own reasons. You haven't a telephone, have you? I'll send around word to have one put in to-day. I'll tell you what, I'll ask Bailey Girard to come around and see you on the quiet—he's got lots of wires he can pull. You won't need me any more."

Leverich's meeting with Dosia had been characterized on his part by a show of brusque uninterest; he seemed to her indefinitely lowered and coarsened in some way—his cheeks sagged, in his eyes was an unpleasant admission that he must bluster to avoid the detection of some weakness. And Dosia had lived in his house, eaten at his table, received benefits from him, caressed him prettily! He had been really kind to her, she ought not to let that fact be defaced, but everything connected with that time seemed to lower her in retrospect, to fill her with a sort of horror. All his loud rebuttal of anxiety now could not cover an undercurrent of uneasiness that made the anxiety of the two women tenfold greater when he was gone.

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Mr. Girard had come twice the next morning. Dosia, as well as Lois, had seen him both times; he had greeted her with matter-of-fact courtesy, and appealed to her with earnest painstaking, whenever necessary, for details or confirmation, in their mutual office of helpers to Mrs. Alexander, but the retrieving warmth and intimacy of his manner the day he had avoided her in the street was lacking. There was certainly nothing in Dosia's quietly impersonal attitude to call it forth. Her face no longer swiftly mirrored each fleeting emotion at all times, for anyone to see—poor Dosia had learned in a bitter school her woman's lesson of concealment.

But, if Girard were only sensibly consulting with her, toward Lois his sympathy was instinct with strength and helpfulness. He seemed to have affiliations with reporters, with telegraph operators, and with a hundred lower runways of life unknown to other people. He gave the tortured wife the feeling so dear, so sustaining to one in sorrow, of his being entirely one with her in its absorption—of there being no other interest, no other issue in life, but this one of Justin's return. When Girard came, bright and alert and confident, all fears seemed to be set at rest; during the few minutes that he stayed all difficulties were swept away, everything was on the right train, word would arrive from Justin at once; and when he left, all was black and terrible again.

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The children had clung to Dosia in the hours of these strange days when mamma never seemed to hear their questions. Dosia read to them, made merry for them, and saw to the household, which was dependent on the service of a new and untrained maid, going back in the interval to put her young arms around Lois and hold her close with aching pity.

The suspense of these days had changed Lois terribly—her cheeks were hollow, her mouth was drawn, her eyes looked twice their natural size, with the black circles below them. Only the knowledge that her baby's welfare—perhaps his life—depended on her, kept her from giving way entirely. Redge, always a complicating child, had an attack of croup, which necessitated a visit from the doctor and further anxiety. Toward afternoon of this third day a man came to put in the telephone, which set them in touch with the unseen world. Girard's voice over it later had been mistakenly understood to promise an immediate ending of the mystery.

Everything was excitement—delicacies were bought, in case Justin might like them, Redge and Zaidee were hurriedly dressed in their best "to see dear papa," and, even though they had to go to bed without the desired result, Redge in a fresh spasm of coughing, it was with the repeated

promise that the father should come up-stairs to kiss them as soon as he got in.

Expectation had been unwarrantedly raised so high in the suddenly sanguine heart of Lois that now, to-night, at Girard's word that nothing more had been heard, as she was still looking up at him everything turned black before her. She found herself half lying on the little spindle-legged sofa, without knowing how she got there, her head pillowed on a green silken cushion, with Dosia fanning her, while Girard leaned against the little mirrored mantelpiece with set face and contracted brows. Presently Lois pushed away the fan, made a motion as if to rise, only to relapse again on the cushion; she looked up at Girard and tried to smile with piteous, brimming eyes.

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"Ah, don't!" he said, with a quick gesture. His voice had an odd sound, as if drawing breath hurt him, yet with it mingled also a compassionate tenderness so great that it seemed to inform not only his face but his whole attitude as he bent over her.

"You're very good to be so sorry for me," she whispered.

He made a swift gesture of protest. "There's one thing I can't stand—to see a woman suffer."

She waited a moment, as if to take in his words, and then motioned him to the seat beside her. When she spoke again, it was slowly, as if she were trying to concentrate her mind:

"You have known sorrow?"

"Yes."

"Tell me."

He saw that she wished to forget her own trouble for a moment in that of another, yet the effort to obey evidently cost him much. They had both spoken as if they two were alone in the room. Dosia, who had withdrawn to the ottoman some paces away, out of the radius of the lamp, sat there in her white cotton frock, leaning a little forward, her hands clasped loosely in her lap, her face upraised and her eyes looking somewhere beyond. So still was she, so gentle, so fair, that she might have been a spirit outside the stormy circle in which these two communed. In such moments as these she prayed for Lawson.

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"I"—it was Girard who spoke at last—"my mother—Cater said once that he'd told you something about me."

"Yes, I remember."

"It's hard to talk about it, yet sometimes I feel as if I'd like to. You see, I was so little when we drifted off, she and I. I didn't know how to help, how to save her anything. Yet it has always seemed to me since that I ought to have known—I ought to have known!" His hands clenched, his voice had subsided to a groan.

"You were her comfort when you least thought it," said Lois.

"Perhaps; I've always hoped so, in my saner moments. No matter how I should try I could never tell anyone what that time was really like. It seems now as if we were wandering for years, but I don't suppose it was for so very long. We stumbled along from day to day, and slept out at night, always trying to keep away from people, when—she thought we were going back to our old home in the South, and that they would prevent us." He stopped for a moment, and then went on, driven by that Ancient Mariner spirit which makes people, once they have touched on a forbidden subject, probe it to its haunting depths. "Did Cater tell you how she died? She died in a barn. My *mother*! She used to hold me in her arms at night, and make me rest my head against her bosom when I was tired; and I didn't even have a pillow for her when she was dying; it's one of those things you can never make up for—that you can never change, no matter how you live, no matter what you do. It comes back to you when you least expect it."

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Both were silent for a while before Lois murmured: "But the pain ended in happiness and peace for her. It would hurt her more than anything to know that you grieved."

"Yes, I believe that," he acquiesced simply. "I'm glad you said it now. I couldn't rest until I got money enough to take her out of her pauper grave and lay her by the side of her own people at home."

"And you have had a pretty hard time."

"Oh, that's nothing!" He squared his shoulders with unconscious rebuttal of sympathy. "When I was a kid, perhaps—but I get a lot of pleasure out of life."

"But you must be lonely without anyone belonging to you," said Lois, trying to grope her way into the labyrinth. "Wouldn't you be happier if you were married?"

He laughed involuntarily and shook his head, with a slight flush that seemed to come from the embarrassment of some secret thought. The action, and the change of expression, made him singularly charming. "Possibly; but the chance of that is small. Women—that is, unmarried women—don't care for my society."

"Oh, oh!" protested Lois, with quick knowledge, as she looked at him, of how much the reverse the truth must be. "But if you found the right woman you might make her care for you."

He shook his head, with a sudden gleam in his gray eyes. "No; there you're wrong. I'd never make any woman care for me, because I'd never want to. If she couldn't care for me without my *making* her—! I'd have to know, when I first looked at her, that she was *mine*. And if she were not, if she did not care for me herself, I'd never want to make her—never!"

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"Oh, oh!" protested Lois again, with interested amusement, shattered the next instant as a fragile glass may be shattered by the blow of a hammer.

The telephone-bell had rung, and Girard ran to it, closing the intervening door behind him. The curtain of anxiety, lifted for breathing-space for a moment, hung over them again somberly, like a pall. Where was Justin?

The two women clinging together hung breathlessly on Girard's movements; his low, murmuring voice told nothing. When he returned to where they stood, his face was impassive.

"Nothing new; I'm just going to town for a couple of hours, that's all."

"Oh, must you leave us?"

"I'm coming back, if you'll let me." He bent over Lois with that earnest look which seemed somehow to insure protection. "I want you to let me stay down-stairs here all night, if you will; I'm going to make arrangements to get a special message through, no matter what time it comes, and I'll sit here in the parlor and wait for it, so that you and Miss Linden can sleep."

"Oh, I'd be so glad to have you here! Redge has that croupy cough again. But you can't sit up," said Lois.

"Why not? It's luxury to stay awake in a comfortable chair with a lot of books around. I'll be back in a couple of hours without fail."

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A couple of hours! If he had said a couple of years, the words could have brought, it seemed, no deeper sense of desolation. Hardly had he gone, however, when the door-bell rang, and word was brought to Lois, who with Dusia had gone up-stairs, that it was Mr. Harker from the typometer office. The visitor, a tall, colorless, darkly sack-coated man, with a jaded necktie, had entered the little drawing-room with a decorously self-effacing step, and sat now on the edge of his chair, his body bent forward and his hat still held in one hand, with an effect of being entirely isolated from social relations and existing here solely at the behest of business. He rose as Lois came into the room, and handed her a small packet, in response to her greeting, before reseating himself.

"Thank you very much," said Lois. "This is the money, I suppose. I'm sorry you went to the trouble of bringing it out yourself, I thought you might send me a check."

Mr. Harker shook his head with a grim semblance of a smile. "That's the trouble, Mrs. Alexander, we can't send any checks, Mr. Alexander is the one who does that. Everything is in Mr. Alexander's name. I went to Mr. Leverich to-day to see how we were going to straighten out things, but he doesn't seem inclined to take hold at all, though he could help us out easily enough if he wanted to. I—there's no use keeping it back, Mrs. Alexander. This is a pretty bad time for Mr. Alexander to stay away. He ought to be home."

"Why, yes," said Lois.

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"Exactly. His absence places us all in a very strange, very unpleasant position." Mr. Harker spoke with a sort of somber monotony, with his gaze on the ground. "The business requires the most particular management at the moment—the most particular. I—" He raised his eyes with such tragic earnestness that Lois realized for the first time that this manner of his might not be his usual manner, but was called forth by the stress of anxiety. For the first time also, the force of the daily tie of business companionship was borne in upon her. She looked at Mr. Harker. This man spent more waking hours with Justin than she did—knew him, perhaps, in a sense, better.

He went on now, with a tremor in his voice: "Mrs. Alexander, your husband and I have worked together for a year and a half now, with never a word between us. I'm ready to swear by him any moment, if I've got him to swear by. I'll back him up in anything, no matter what, if it's his say-so—we've pulled through a good many tight places. But I can't do it alone; it's madness to try. If he doesn't show up, I'd better close the place down at once."

"Why do you say this to me?" asked Lois, shrinking a little.

"Why? because,—Mrs. Alexander, this is no time to mince words; if you know where your husband is, for God's sake, get word to him to come back—every minute is precious. He may be ill—Heaven knows he had enough to make him so; my wife knows the strain I've been through, she says she wonders I'm alive,—but he can't look after his health now. If he's on top of ground, he's got to *come*. I've put every cent I own into this business. I haven't drawn my whole salary, even, for months. I don't know what reasons he has for staying away, but his nerve mustn't give out now."

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"Mr. Harker!" cried Lois. She turned blankly to Dusia, who had come forward. "What does he mean?"

"She doesn't know where her husband is," said the girl convincingly. Her eyes and Mr. Harker's met. The somber eagerness faded out of his; he sighed and rose.

"Anything I can do for you, Mrs. Alexander? I think I'll hurry to catch the next train; I haven't been home to my dinner yet."

"Won't you have something here before you go?" asked Lois. "It's so late."

"Oh, that's nothing, I'm used to it," returned Mr. Harker, with a pale smile and the passive, self-effacing business manner as he departed, while Lois went up-stairs once more. The baby cried, and she soothed him, holding the warm little form close, closer to her—something tangible before she put him down again to step back into this strange void where Justin was not.

For the first time, in this meeting with Mr. Harker, Lois realized the existence of a world beyond her ken—a world that had been Justin's. New as the visitor's words had been, they seemed to open to her a vision of herculean struggle; the way this man had looked—his wife had "wondered that he was still alive." And Justin—where was he now? *She* had not noticed, she had not wondered—until lately.

Slight as seemed her recognition, her sympathy, her help, it was the one thing now that kept her reason firm. She knew that she had not been all unfaithful; sometimes he had been rested, sometimes cheered, when she was near. She had suffered, too, *she* had longed for his help and sympathy. No, she would not think of *that*; she would not! When two are separated, one must love enough to bridge the gulf—what matter which one? It seemed now as if there were so much that she might have given, as if all this torrent of love that nearly broke her heart might have been poured out and poured out at his feet—lavished on him, without regard to need or fitness or expense, as Mary lavished her precious box of spikenard on One she loved. Now that he was gone, there could be nothing too hard to have done for him, no words too sweet for her to have said to him.

Redge woke up and cried for her, and she told him hoarsely to be still; and then, suddenly conscience-stricken and fearful at the slighting of this other demand of love,—what awful reprisal might it not exact from her?—she went to kiss the child, to infold him in her arms, the boy that Justin loved, before she bade him go to sleep, for mother would stay by her darling. And, left to herself again, the grinding and destroying wheel of thought had her bound to it once more.

He could not have left her of his own will! If he did not come, it would be because he was dead—and then he could never know, never, never know. There would be nothing left to her but the place where he had been. She looked at the walls and the homely furnishings as one seeing them for the first time bare forever of the beloved presence, and fell on her knees, and went on them around the room, dragging herself from chair to sofa, from sofa to bed,—these were the Stations of the Cross that she was making,—with sobs and cries, low and inarticulate, yet carrying with them the awful anguish of a heart laid bare before the Almighty. Here his dear hand had rested, while he thought of her; on this table—here—and here—and here his head had lain. Her tears ceased; she buried her face in the pillow. She must go after him, wherever he was, in this world or another. For he was her husband—where he was she must be, either in body or in spirit.

The telephone-bell rang, and Dosia answered it, the voice at the other end inquiring for Mr. Girard, cautiously, it seemed; withholding information from any other. The doctor rang up, in response to an earlier call, with directions for Redge. Hardly had the receiver been laid down when the door-bell clanged. This was to be a night of the ringing of bells!

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

This time, of course, the visitor was Mrs. Snow. In any exigency, any mind- and body-absorbing event of life, the inopportune presence of Mrs. Snow was inexorably to be counted on, though it came always as one of those exasperating recurrences which bring with them a ridiculously fresh irritation each time. It seemed to be the one extra thing you couldn't stand; in either trouble or joy she affected you like a clinging, ankle-flapping mackintosh on a rainy day. She bowed now to Dosia with a patronizing dignity, pointed by the plaintive warmth of the greeting to Lois, who had come hurrying down-stairs out of those passion-depths of darkness so that Mrs. Snow wouldn't suspect anything. She had an uncanny faculty of divining just what you didn't want her to.

Once before Lois had suspended tragedy for Mrs. Snow. The same things happen to us over and over again daily in our crowded yet restricted lives—it is we who change in our meeting with them. We have our great passions, our great joys, our heartbreaks, no matter how small our environment.

"How do you do, my dear? Mr. Girard has just told me that he was going to stay here to-night, in Mr. Alexander's absence. He said little Redge was threatened with the croup. Now, if I had only known that Mr. Alexander was away, *I* could have come and stayed with you!"

"Oh, that wasn't at all necessary," said Lois hastily. "Thank you very much. Do sit down, won't you, Mrs. Snow?"

"Only for a minute, then; I must go back to Bertha," said Mrs. Snow, seating herself and fumbling for something under her cloak. "I just came over to read you a letter. It's in my bag—I can't seem to find it. Well, perhaps I'd better rest for a minute." Mrs. Snow's face looked unusually lined and set; in spite of her plaintiveness, her eyes had a harassed glitter.

"Isn't it rather late for you to be out alone?" asked Lois.

"Yes; Ada would have come around here with me, but she was expecting Mr. Sutton. She was expecting him last night, but he didn't come. If *I* were a young lady, I'd let a gentleman wait for *me* the next time; it used to be thought more attractive, in my day, but Ada's so afraid of not seeming cordial; gentlemen seem to be so sensitive nowadays! I said to her, 'Ada, when a man is enough at home in a house to kick the cat, and ask for cake whenever he feels like it, I do *not* see that it is necessary to stand on ceremony with him.' But Ada thinks differently."

"It is difficult to make rules," said Lois vaguely.

"Yes," sighed Mrs. Snow. "As I was saying to Bertha, you don't find a young man like Mr. Girard so considerate of everyone—not that he's so *very* young, either; I'm sure he often appears much older than he is. It's his manner—he has a manner like my dear father. He and Bertha have long chats together; really, he is what *I* would call quite attentive, though she won't hear of such a thing—but sometimes young men *do* take a great fancy for older girls. I had a friend who married a gentleman twenty-seven years younger—he died soon afterwards. But many people think nothing of a little difference of twelve or fifteen years. I said to Bertha this morning, 'Bertha, if you'd dress yourself a little younger—if you'd only wear a blue bow in your hair.' But no; I can't say anything nowadays to my own children without being flown at!" Mrs. Snow's voice trembled. "If my darling William were here!"

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"Have you heard from William lately?" asked Lois, with supreme effort.

"My dear, he's in Chicago. I came over to read you a letter from him that I got to-night. That new postman left it at the Scovels', by mistake, and they never sent it over until a little while ago. There was a sentence in it," Mrs. Snow was fumbling with a paper, "that I thought you'd like to hear. Where is it? Let me see. 'Next month I hope to be able to send you more'—no, no, that's not it. 'When my socks get holes in them I throw them'—that's not it, either. Oh! he says, 'I caught a glimpse of Mr. Alexander last night, getting on a West Side car'—this was written yesterday morning. 'I called to him, but too late. I'm sorry, for I'd like to have seen him.' That's all, but Mr. Girard seemed so pleased with the letter, I promised that I would bring it around to you that very minute,—*he* had to run for the train,—but I was detained. He thought you'd like to hear that William had seen Mr. Alexander."

Like to hear! The relief for the moment turned Lois faint. Yet, after Mrs. Snow went, the torturing questions began to repeat themselves again. Justin was alive—Justin was alive on Tuesday night. Was he alive now? And why had he gone to Chicago at all? Why had he sent her no word? The wall between them seemed only the more opaque. Every fear that imagination could devise seemed to center around this new fact.

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She and Dosia went around, straightening up the little drawing-room, making it ready for Girard's occupancy—pulling out a big chair for his use, and putting fresh books on the table. The maid had long ago gone to bed, and there was coffee to be made for him—he might get hungry in the night. When he came in at last, he brought all the brightness and courage of hope with him; he had wired to William, he had phoned to a dozen different places in Chicago.

"Oh, what should we do without you?" breathed Lois, her foot on the stairway.

"It doesn't seem to me I've helped you very much so far, our one clue has been from Mrs. Snow. I want you to go to bed now, and to sleep, Mrs. Alexander; take all the rest you can. I'm here to do the watching. If there's anything really to tell, I'll call you, I promise faithfully. What is it, Miss Linden? Did you want to speak to me?"

"There was a message for you while you were gone," said Dosia in a low tone.

His eyes assented. "Yes, I went there—to the place that they—but it wasn't Alexander, I'm glad to say, though I was afraid when I went in—"

"I know," said Dosia.

Another strange night had begun, with the master of the house away. Lois went to her room to lie down clothed, jumping up to come to the head of the stairs whenever the telephone-bell rang, and then going back again when she found that those who were consulting were asking for information instead of giving it, but by and by the messages ceased.

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Suppose Justin never came back! She began to feel that he had been gone for years, and tried confusedly to plan out the future. There were the children—how should she support them? She must support them. It was hard to get work when you had a baby. If she hadn't the baby—no one should take the baby from her! She clasped him to her for a moment in terror, as if she were being hunted, before she grew calm and began planning again. There was only a little money left—to-morrow they must still eat. She must make the money last.

Dosia, on the bed by Redge's crib, went softly after a while into the other room, and saw that Lois at last slept, though she herself could not. Each time that she saw Girard he seemed more and more a stranger, so far removed was he from her dream of him; through all his softness, his gentleness, she felt the streak of hardness, if nobody else did—though Mr. Cater, she remembered now, had spoken of it too—that the fires of adversity had molded. Perhaps no man could have worked up from the cruel circumstances of his early days without that hardening streak to uphold him. She divined, with some surprising new power of divination, that in spite of all his strong, capable dealing with actualities and his magnetic drawing of men, for the inner conduct of his own life he was shyly dependent on odd, deeply held theory—theory that he had solitarily woven for himself. She felt impersonally sorry for him, as for a boy who must be disappointed, though he was nothing to her.

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Yet, as Dosia lay there in the dumb stretches of the night, her tired eyes wide open, close to Redge's crib, with his little hot hand clinging to hers, the mere fact of Girard's bodily presence in the house, down-stairs, seemed something overpoweringly insistent; she couldn't get away from it. It gave her, apparently, neither pleasure nor pain; it called forth no conscious excitement as had been the case with Lawson—unless this strange, rarefied sense was a higher excitement. This consciousness of his presence was, tiresomely enough, something not to be escaped from; it

pulsed in every vein, keeping her awake. She tried to lose it in the thought of Lois' great trouble, of this weighting, pitiful mystery of Justin's absence—of what it meant to him and to the household; she tried to lose it in the thought of Lawson, with the prayer that always instinctively came at his name. Nothing availed; through everything was that wearing, persistent consciousness of Girard's bodily presence down-stairs. If it would only fade out, so that she might sleep, she was so tired! The clock struck two. A voice spoke from the other room, sending her to her feet instantly:

"Dosia?"

"Yes, Lois, dearest, I'm here."

"Has any word come from Justin?"

"No."

Lois shivered. "I think, when Redge wakes up next, you'd better give him a drink of water, he sounds so hoarse. I've used all I brought up. Do you mind going down to get some more? I would go myself, but I can't slip my arm from under baby; he wakes when I move. Here is the pitcher."

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"Yes," said Dosia, stopping for a moment to pull the coverlet tenderly over Lois, before stepping out into the lighted hall.

It seemed very silent; there was no sound from below. Dosia went down the low, wide stairs with that indescribable air of the watcher in the night. Her white cotton gown, the same that she had worn throughout the afternoon, had lost its freshness, and clung to her figure in twisted folds; the waist was slightly open at the throat, and the long white necktie was half untied. One cheek was warm where it had pressed the pillow; the other was pale, and her hair, half loosened, hung against it. Her eyes, very blue, showed a rayed starriness, the pupils contracted from the sudden light—her expression, tired and half bewildered, had in it somewhat of the little lost look of a child, up in the unwonted middle of the night, who might go naturally and comfortably into any kind arms held out to her. The turn of the stairs brought her fronting the little drawing-room and the figure of Girard, who sat leaning forward, smoking, in the Morris chair, with his elbow resting on the arm of it and his head on his hand; the books and bric-à-brac on the table beside him had been pushed back to make room for the tray containing the coffee-pot, a cup and saucer, and a plate with some biscuits; a newspaper lay on the floor at his feet. Notwithstanding the light in the hallway and the room, there was that odd atmospheric effect which belongs only to the late and solitary hours of the night, when the very furniture itself seems to share in a chill detachment from the life of the day. Yet, in the midst of this night silence, this withdrawing of the ordinary vital forces, the figure of Bailey Girard seemed to be extraordinarily instinct with vitality, even in that second before he moved; his attitude, his eyes, his expression, were informed with such intense and eager thoughts that it was as startling, as instantly arresting, as the blast of a trumpet.

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At the sound of Dosia's light oncoming step opposite the door, he rose at once, and with a quick stride stood beside her. He seemed tall and unexpectedly dazzling as he confronted her; his deep set gray eyes were very brilliant.

"What is the matter? Is Mrs. Alexander ill?"

"No—oh, no; the children have been restless, that is all," said Dosia, recovering, with annoyed self-possession, from a momentary shock, and feeling disagreeably conscious of looking tumbled and forlorn. "I came down to get a pitcher of water."

"Can't I get it in the dining-room for you?" he asked, with formal politeness.

"Thank you. The water isn't running in the butler's pantry, I have to go in the kitchen for it. If you would light the gas there for me——"

"Yes, certainly," he responded promptly, pushing the portières aside to make a passage for her, as he went ahead to scratch a match and light the long, one-armed flickering kitchen burner. The bare, deeply shadowed floor, the kitchen table, the blank windows, and the blackened range, in which the fire was out, came desolately into view. There was a sense as of the deep darkness of the night outside around everything.

A large white cat lying on a red-striped cushion on a chair by the chilly hearth stretched itself and blinked its yellow eyes toward the two intruders.

"Let me fill this," said Girard, taking the pitcher from her—a rather large, clumsy majolica article with a twisted vine for a handle—and carrying it over to the faucet. The intimacy of the hour and the scene emphasized the more the punctilious aloofness of this enforced companionship.

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Dosia leaned back against the table, while he let the water run, that it might grow cold. It sounded in the silence as if it were falling on a drumhead. The moment—it was hardly more—seemed interminable to Dosia. The white cat, jumping up on the table, put its paws on her shoulders, and she leaned back very absently, and curved her throat sideways that her cheek might touch him in recognition. Some inner thought claimed her, to the exclusion of the present; her eyes, looking dreamily before her, took on that expression that was indescribably gentle, intolerably sweet.

Dosia has been ill described if it has not been made evident that to caress, to *touch* her, seemed the involuntarily natural expression of any feeling toward her. Something in the bright, tendril-curling hair, the curve of her young cheek, the curve of her red lips, her light, yet rounded form, with its confiding, unconscious movements, made as inevitable an allure as the soft rosiness of a

darling child, with always the suggestion of that illusive spirit that dared, and retreated, ever giving, ere it veiled itself, the promise of some lovelier glimpse to come.

The water had stopped running, and Dosia straightened herself. She raised her head, to meet his eyes upon her. What was in them? The color flamed in her face and left her white, although in a second there was nothing more to see in his but a deep and guarded gentleness as he came toward her with the pitcher.

"I'll take it now, please," she said hurriedly.

"Won't you let me carry it up for you?"

"Thank you, it isn't necessary. I'll go along, if you'll wait and turn out the light."

"Very well. You're sure it's not too heavy for you?" he asked anxiously, as her wrists bent a little with the weight.

"Oh, no, indeed," said Dosia quickly, turning to go. At that moment the white cat, jumping down from the table in front of her, rubbed itself against her skirts, and she stumbled slightly.

"Take care!" cried Girard, grasping the shaking pitcher over her slight hold of it.

Their hands touched—for the first time since the night of disaster, the night of her trust and his protection. The next instant there was a crash—the fragments of the jug lay upon the kitchen floor, the water streaming over it in rivulets.

"Dosia!" called the frightened voice of Lois from above.

"Yes, I'm coming," Dosia called back. "There's nothing the matter!" She had run from the room without looking up at that figure beside her, snatching a glass of water automatically from the dining-table as she passed by it. Fast as her feet might carry her, they could not keep pace with her beating heart.

When the telephone-bell rang a moment after, it was to confirm the tidings given before. Justin was in Chicago.



He came toward her with the pitcher

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Justin was in Chicago,—the fact was verified, and he would start for home on the morrow. There seemed to be no details, save the comforting one that Billy Snow was with him. After that first sharp immediate relief from suspense, Lois again felt its filminess settling down upon her, all the more clingingly each time, not to be fully dissipated, after all, until Justin's bodily return.

Girard had gone back very early to the Snows' to breakfast. He talked to Lois by telephone, but

he did not come to the house; while Dosia, wrapped in an outward abstraction that concealed a whirl within, went about her daily tasks, living over and over the scene of the night before. The shattering of the pitcher seemed to have shattered something else. Once he had felt, then, as she had done; once—so far away that night of disaster had gone, so long was it since she had held that protecting hand in her dreams, that the touch brought a strange resurrection of the spirit. She had an upwelling new sense of gratitude to him for something unexpressed, some quality which she passionately revered, and which other men had not always used toward her.

"Oh, he's *good*, he's good!" she whispered to herself, with the tears blinding her, as she picked up Redge's blocks from the floor. She felt Lawson's kisses on her lips, her throat—that cross of shame that she held always close to her; George Sutton's fat face thrust itself leeringly before her. How many girls have passages in their lives to which they look back with the shame that only purity and innocence can feel! Yet the sense of Girard's presence before was as nothing to her sense of it now—it blotted out the world. She saw him sitting alone in the dining-room, with his head resting on his hand, the quiet attitude filled intensely with life; the turn of his head, the shape of his hand, were insistent things. She saw him standing in front of her, long-limbed, erect of mien. She saw—If she looked pale and inert, it was because that inner thought of her lived so hard that the body was worn out with it.

Neither telegram nor any other message came from Justin, except the bare word that he had started home. Lois was not expecting him until nine o'clock on the second morning, the early trains from town were coming out at inconvenient intervals, but just as Lois had finished dressing, she heard the hall door open and shut. She called, but cautiously, for fear of disturbing her baby, who had dropped off to sleep again.

Justin was standing by the table, looking at the newspaper, as she entered the dining-room. With a cry, she ran toward him. "Justin!"

He turned, and she put her arms around him passionately. He held her for a moment, and then said, "You'd better sit down."

"But, Justin—oh, my dearest, how ill you look!" She clung to him. "Where have you been? Why didn't you send me any word?"

"I've been to Chicago."

"Yes, yes, I know. Why did you go?"

"I don't know."

"You don't *know*?"

"Lois, will you give me some coffee?"

She poured out the cup with trembling hands, and sat while he took a swallow of the hot fluid, still scanning the newspaper. At last she said:

"Aren't you going to tell me any more?"

"There isn't any more to tell. There's no use talking about it. I believe I had some idea of selling the island when I went to Chicago, but I don't know how I got there. I didn't know I was there until I woke up two nights ago at a little hotel away out on the West Side; Billy pounded on the door, and said they told him I had been asleep for twenty-eight hours. I suppose I was dead tired out. I don't want to speak of it again, Lois; it wasn't a particularly pleasant thing to happen. Will you tell Mary to bring in the rest of the breakfast? I must catch the eight-thirty train back into town. I ought to have stopped there, but I thought you might be bothered, so I came out first. Where are the children?"

"They are coming down now with Dosia," said his wife, helping Mary with the dishes, as the patter of little feet sounded in the hall. Redge ran up to his father, hitting him jubilantly with a small stick which he held in his chubby hand, and bringing irritated reproof down upon him at once; but Zaidee, her blue eyes open, her lips parted over her little white teeth, slid into the arm outstretched for her, and stood there leaning against "Daddy's" side, while he ate and drank hurriedly, with only one hand at his disposal. Poor Lois could not help one pang of jealousy at being shut out, but she heroically smothered the feeling.

"Mr. Harker was here the evening before last; he brought me some money," she ventured at last.

"That was all right."

"And Mr. Girard was very kind; he stayed here all that night—until your message came."

"I hope you haven't been talking about this all over the place."

"No—oh, no," said Lois, driving back the tears at this causeless injury. "Mr. Leverich—he was here one morning—said it was best not to. He was rather unpleasant, though. But nobody knows about your being away at all. You're not going now, Justin—without even seeing baby?"

"I'll see him to-night when I come home," said Justin, rising. He kissed the children and his wife hastily, but she followed him into the hall, standing there, dumbly beseeching, while he brushed his hat with the hat-brush on the table, and then rummaged hastily as if for something else.

"Here are your gloves, if that is what you are looking for," she said.

"Yes, thank you." He bent over and kissed her again, as if really seeing her for the first time, with a whispered "Poor girl!" That momentary close embrace brought her a needed—oh, so needed!—

crumb of comfort. She who had hungered so insatiably for recognition could be humbly thankful now for the two words that spoke of an inner bond.

But all day she could not get rid of that feeling of suspense that had been hers for five days past; the strain was to end, of course, with Justin's return, but it had not ended—in some sad, weighting fashion it seemed to have just begun. What was he so worried about? Was she never to hear any more?

That night Girard came over, but with him was another visitor—William Snow. No sun could brown that baby-fair skin of William's, but he had an indefinably large and Western air; the very way in which he wore his clothes showed his independence. Dosia did not notice his swift, covert, shamefaced glance at her when she came into the room where he was talking to Lois—his avoidance of her the year before had dropped clear out of her mind; but his expression changed to one of complacent delight as she ran to him instantly and clasped his arms with both hands to cry, "Oh, Billy, Billy, I'm so glad to see you! I am so glad—I can't tell you how glad I am!"

"All right, Sweetness, you're not going to lose me again," said William encouragingly. "My, but you do knock the spots out of those Western girls. Can't we go in the dining-room by ourselves? I want to ask you to marry me before we talk any more."

"Yes, do," said Dosia, dimpling.

It was sweet to be chaffed, to be heedlessly young once more, to take refuge from all disconcerting thoughts—and from the new embarrassment of Girard's presence—with Billy in the corner of the other room, where she sat in a low chair, and he dragged up an ottoman close in front of her. Through the open window the scent of honeysuckle came in with the gloom.

"Oh, but you've grown pretty!" he said, his hands clasped over his knees, gazing at her. "That's right, get pink—it makes you prettier. I like this slimpsy sort of dress you've got on; I like that black velvet around your throat; I—have you missed me much?"

"No," said Dosia, with the old-time sparkle. "I've hardly thought of you at all. But I feel now as if I had."

Billy nodded. "All right, I'll pay you up for that some day. Oh, Dosia, you may think I'm joking, but I'm not! There have been days and nights when I've done nothing but plan the things I was going to do and say to make you care for me—but they're all gone the moment I lay eyes on you. I'll talk of whatever you like afterwards, but I've got to say first,"—Billy's voice, deep and manly and confident, had yet a little shake in it,—"that nobody is going to marry you but me, and don't you forget it. I'm no kid any more." Something in his tone gave his words emphasis. "I know how to look out for you better than anyone else does."

"Dear Billy," said Dosia, touched, and resting her cheek momentarily against the rough sleeve of his coat, "it's so good to have you back again."

"I'm no kid any more," said William warningly.

Lois, who had been longing intolerably all day for evening to come, so that she could be alone with her husband, sat in the drawing-room, trying to sew with nervous, trembling fingers, while her husband, looking frightfully tired, and Bailey Girard smoked and talked—of all things in the world!—of the relative merits of live bait or "spoon" bait in trolling, and afterwards went minutely into details of the manufacture of artificial lures for catching trout.

Those waste "social" hours of non-interest, non-satisfaction, that must be lived through before one can get to the place just ahead of them—how long, how unbearably long, they can seem! Lois' face twitched, as well as her fingers; Girard's voice, lucidly expressionless, went on and on in reminiscent detail, and Justin, looking frightfully tired, but apparently deeply interested, remembered and remembered the day they caught this, and the way they landed that and, with exasperating monotony, drew diagrams corroboratingly with two fingers on the table beside him. She did not realize, as women do not, that to Justin this conversation, banal and irrelevant to any action of his present life or his present anxiety, was like coming up from under-depths to breathe at a necessary air-hole.

After five days of torturing, unexplained absence, to talk of nothing but fishing, as if his life depended on it! Girard himself had wondered, but he accepted the position allotted to him as a matter of course. He had thought, from Justin's manner to-day, that he was to know something of his affairs; but if Justin did not choose to confide in him, that was all right. Possibly the affairs were all right, too; they were none of his business, anyway.

Suddenly a word in the fishing conversation caught the ears of the two who were sitting in the dining-room, in a momentary pause.

"That was the kind Lawson Barr used when he went down on the Susquehanna. By the way, I hear that he's dead."

Lawson! Dosia's face changed as if a whip had flicked across it, and then trembled back into its normal quiet. William leaned a little nearer, his eyes curiously scanning her.

"Hadn't you heard before?"

"No; what?"

"He's dead."

"Lawson *dead!* Not Lawson?" Her dry lips illy formed the words.

"Yes, Dosia—don't look like that—don't let them see in there, Girard is looking at you; turn your face toward me. Leverich told us, coming up to-night. Lawson died a week ago."

"How?"

"Fell from his horse somewhere up in a cañon—he was drunk, I reckon. They found him twenty-four hours afterwards; the superintendent of the mines wrote to Leverich. He'd tried to keep pretty straight out there, all but the drinking, I guess that was too much for him. It was the best thing he could do—to die—as Girard says. Girard hates the very sound of his name."

"Oh," breathed Dosia painfully.

"The superintendent said that some of the miners chipped in to bury him, and the woman he boarded with sent a pencil scrawl along with the superintendent's letter to say that she'd 'miss Mr. Barr dreadful,—that he'd get up and get the breakfast when she was sick, and the kids, they thought the world of him.' She signed herself, 'A true mourner, Mrs. Wilson.'"

Lawson was dead!

Dosia sat there, her hand clasping Billy's sleeve as at first—something tangible to hold on to. Her gaze had gone far beyond the room, even that haunting knowledge that Bailey Girard was near her was but a far, hidden subconsciousness. She was out on a rocky slope beside a dead body—Lawson, his head thrown back, those mocking, caressing eyes, those curving, passionate lips, closed forever, the blood oozing from between his dark locks. Always she had secretly visioned some distant day when, Lucile-like, she might be near him, helping, though he would not know it until he lay dying. As ever with poor Dosia, there was that sharp, unbearable pang of self-reproach, of self-condemnation. Of what avail her prayers, her belief in him, when he had died thus? Oh, she had not prayed enough! She had not been good enough to be allowed to help; she had not believed hard enough. Perhaps it had helped just a little—he had "tried to keep pretty straight, all but the drinking; that was too much for him."

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That covered some resistance in an under-world of which she knew nothing. Poor Lawson, who had so early lost his chance, whose youth had been poisoned at the start! In that grave where he lay, drunkard and reveler, part of the youth of her, Dosia Linden,—once his promised wife, to whom she had given herself in her soul,—must always lie too, buried with him; nothing could undo that. To die so causelessly! But the miners had "chipped in" for a resting-place for him—they had cared a little; he had been kind to a woman and her little children—"the kids had thought the world of him"; she was "a true mourner, Mrs. Wilson." Dosia imagined him cheerfully cooking for this poor, worn-out mother, carrying the children from place to place as she had once seen him carry that little boy home from the ball, long, long ago.

A strain from that unforgotten music came to her now, carrying her to the stars! Oh, not for Lawson the splendid rehabilitation of the strong, except in that one moment of denial when he had risen by the might of his manhood in renunciation for her sake; only the humble virtues of his weakness could be his—yet perhaps, in the sight of the God Who pities, no such small offering, after all!

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"Dosia, you didn't really *care* for him!"

She smiled with pale lips and brimming eyes—an enigmatic answer which Billy could not read. He sat beside her, smoothing her dress furtively, until she got up, and, whispering, "I must go," left the room, unconscious of Girard's following gaze.

"I think we'd better be getting back," said the latter suddenly, in an odd voice, rising in the middle of one of Justin's sentences as Billy came straying in to join the group.

Lois' heart leaped. She had felt that another moment of live bait and reminiscences would be more than she could stand.

"You need some rest," she said gratefully. "You have been tired out in our service."

"Oh, I'm not tired at all," he returned shortly. Her work seemed to catch his eye for the first time, in a desire to change the subject. "What are you making?"

"A ball for Redge. I made one for Zaidee, and he felt left out—he's of a very jealous disposition," she went on abstractedly. "Are you of a jealous disposition, Mr. Girard?"

"I!" He stopped short, with the air of one not accustomed to taking account of his own attributes, and apparently pondered the question as if for the first time. When he looked up to answer, it was with abrupt decision: "Yes, I am."

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"Don't look so like a pirate," said young Billy, giving him a thump on the back that sent them both out of the house, laughing, when Lois rose and went over to Justin's side.

Husband and wife were at last alone.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

324

In the days that followed, Justin, going away in the morning very early with a set face, coming home very late in the evening with that set face still, hardly seemed to notice the children or

Dosia. Some tremulous change had affected Dosia; her eyelashes were often mysteriously wet, though no one saw her weep.

"Justin has so much on his mind." Lois kept repeating the words over and over, as if she found in them something by which to hold fast. Rich in beauty as she was, full of love and tender favor, with the sweetness and the pathos of an awakening soul, her husband seemed to have no eyes, no thought for her. That one murmured sentence in the hallway was all her food to live on—his only personal recognition of her.

On the other hand, he poured out his affairs and his plans to her with a freedom of confidence unknown before, a confidence which seemed to presuppose her oneness of interest with him. He had talked exhaustively about everything but those few days' absence; that was a sore that she must not touch, a wound that could bear no probing. She had striven very hard not to show when she didn't understand, taking her cues for assent or dissent as he evidently wished her to, letting him think aloud, as it seemed to be a relief to him, and saying little herself. The only time when she broke in on her own account was when he had told her about Cater, and the defective bars, and Leverich's ultimatum. Here was an issue that she could comprehend; here her woman's instinct rang true. A man may juggle with that fluctuating line where sharp practice and honest shrewdness meet, so that he fails to see where one begins and another ends; but a woman of Lois' caliber *knows*. Her "Justin, you wouldn't do that; you wouldn't tell!" met with his quick response: "No, I couldn't."

"Oh, I know that, I know that! I'm glad, whatever comes, that you couldn't do it. I'd rather be a hundred times poorer than we are! Aren't you glad that you couldn't do it?"

"No; I think I'm rather sorry," said Justin, with a half-smile. The peculiar sharpness of the thought that it was between Cater and Leverich—his friends, Heaven save the mark! that he was being pushed toward ruin, had not lost any of its edge.

There had been a tonic in a certain attitude of Cater's mind toward Justin—an unspoken kindness and admiration and tenderness such as an older man who has been along a hard road may feel toward another who has come along the same way. Cater's kind, unobtrusive comradeship, the fair-dealing friendliness of his rivalry, had seemed to be one of the factors of support, of honesty, of commercial righteousness.

Justin was surprised to find out how much the morning greeting with Cater, or the occasional lunch-hour together, had meant to him. Cater and he had mutually understood a great many things. Cater had done nothing wrong now, except to pull the foothold from under his friend's feet. It was not men who were known to be bad who hurt you when they were dishonest; it was the *good* men who slid over that dividing-line, with apparent unconsciousness that they were on that other, shaming side. To break an unwritten bond is perhaps worse than to break one printed and scheduled, because it presupposes a greater faith and trust. Justin could smile proudly at Leverich, but he couldn't smile when he thought of Cater—it weighed upon and humiliated him for the man who had been his friend.

"I am glad that you couldn't do it anyway!" said Lois. "It wouldn't have been you if you had! Can't you take a rest now, dear, when *you* look so ill? No, no; I didn't mean that—of course you can't!"

"A *rest!*" He rose and walked up and down the room. "Lois, do you know that, in some way, I've got to get that money before the thirteenth? Those days in Chicago—at the worst time! It makes me wild to think of the time I've lost. I'm looking out for a partner who will buy out Leverich and Martin, and we've got a chance yet—I'll swear we have! But Lewiston's note has got to be paid first; then I can take time to breathe. Harker saw a man from Boston from whom we might have borrowed the money, if I had only been here. If we get that we can hold over; if we don't we go to smash, and so does Lewiston. Lewiston *trusted* me. I've been to several places to-day to men that would be willing enough to lend the money if they didn't know I needed it."

"George Sutton?" hazarded Lois.

Justin's lips curved bitterly. "Oh, he's a cur. He had some money invested last year when he was sweet on Dosia, and drew it all out afterwards! And, after all, I went to him to-day, like a fool!"

"Can't you go to Eugene Larue?"

"No. We talked about it once, but he fought shy; he didn't think the security enough. If he thought so then, it would be worse than useless now."

"Mr. Girard?"

"There's no use telling things to him, he hasn't any money." Justin turned a dim eye on her. "I tell you, Lois, I haven't left a stone unturned so far, that I could get at. If we could only sell the island! Girard's looking it up for me; there may be a chance of that. There are lots of chances to be thought out. I don't even know how we keep running, but we do. Harker's a trump! If I can hold up my end, we'll be all right."

"Then go to bed now," said Lois, with a quick dread that gave her courage. "And you must have something to eat first—and to drink, too. Come, Justin! Do as I say." Her voice had a new firmness in it which he unconsciously obeyed. She crept to her bed at last, aching in every limb, but with her baby pressed close to her, her one darling comfort, the source from which she drew a new love as the child drew its life from her. It was the first time in all her married life that she had borne the burden of her husband's care, a burden from which she must seek no solace from him. Yet the thought of him was in itself solace—her faith in him so strong that she simply knew

he must succeed. A king of men! If only he did not look so badly!

She bent all her energies, these next days, to keeping him well fed, and ordering everything minutely for his comfort when he came home, aided and abetted by Dosia. The two women worked as with one thought between them, as women can work, for the well-being of one they love, with fond and minute care. Every detail, from the time he went away in the morning, stooping slightly under the weight of something mysterious and unseen, was ordered with reference to his homecoming at night—the husband and father on whose strength all this helpless little family hung for their own sustenance. The children were shown him at their best, and whisked away the moment they got troublesome.

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Lois dressed herself in the colors he had liked. The cloth was laid immaculately for dinner, although the maid had gone and had not been replaced, and dainty dishes for him were concocted with delicate care—the more care, that every penny had to be counted; when Justin took out that lean pocket-book to give her money, Lois winced. If he seemed to relish anything he ate, she and Dosia looked at each other with covert triumph.

Everything that was done for him had to be done covertly, it was found; he disliked any manifestation of undue attention to his wants. Sometimes he was terribly irritable and unjust, and at others almost heartbreakingly gentle and mild. Lois had persuaded him to have the doctor, who told him seriously that he must stay home and rest—a futile prescription which he treated with scorn. Rest! He knew very well that it was not rest that he needed, but money—money, money, the elixir of life! He looked drawn and haggard and old, despite his nervous energy, but a sufficient quantity of that magic metal would smooth out those premature wrinkles, and round out those hollow checks, and give a cheerful brightness to his eye, and take ten years from his age.

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Both women came to know the days when the prospects for selling the island looked well or ill, with those telegrams of Girard's. Lois poured out her heart about him to Dosia, her minute anxieties and fears.

William came around several times to see Dosia—his visit almost invariably followed by one from Mrs. Snow, to see if her William were there. For the rest, there were few callers.

It was near the end of this week when Justin came home, as Lois could see at once, revived and encouraged, though still abstracted. He had an invitation to take a ride in the doctor's motor, the doctor being a man who, when the hazard of dangerous cases had been extreme, absented himself for a couple of hours, in which, under a breathless and unholy speed of motoring, he reversed the pressure on his nerves, and came to the renewed sanity of a wind-swept brain when every idea had been rushed out of it.

Lois felt that it would be good for Justin, too, and was glad that he had been persuaded to go; yet she caught him looking at her with such strange intentness a couple of times during the dinner that it discomposed her oddly. It made her a little silent; she pondered over it after she had gone up, as usual, to the baby. Was there something wrong with her appearance? She looked anxiously in the glass, and was annoyed to find that the white fichu, open at the throat, was not on quite straight, and her hair was a little disarranged. She was pale, and there were dark lines under her eyes. She hated not to look nice— Yet it might not be that. Was it, perhaps, that something else was wrong—that he had bad news which he did not like to tell? Was he to leave her again on some journey? She turned white for a moment, and sat down, to get the baby to sleep, and then resolutely tried to drive the thought from her. Yet, as she sat there rocking gently, the thought still came back to her, oddly, puzzlingly. Why had he looked at her like that? The smoke of his pipe down-stairs kept her still aware of his presence.

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Presently he came up-stairs and tiptoed into the room in clumsy fashion, for fear of waking the baby, in his quest for a handkerchief in a chiffonier drawer. After finding it, he stopped for a moment in front of her, with that odd, arrested expression once more.

"You don't mind my going out to-night and leaving you?" he murmured. "The doctor ought to have asked *you* to go instead; you need it more than I."

"Oh, no, no!" she hastened to reassure. "I don't mind at all, really!" Her eyes gazed up at him limpidly clear, and emptied of self. "I have to run up and down stairs so many times to baby now that I couldn't go, no matter how much I was asked to. I'm only glad that you will have the distraction—you need it. I hope you'll have a lovely time."

She listened to his descending footsteps, and after a moment or two arose and laid the sleeping child down in his crib. From across the hall she could hear Redge and Zaidee prattling to each other from their beds with an elfish glee that began to have long waits between its outbursts.

In the dim light she went about the room, picking up toys and little discarded garments left by the children, folding the clothes away, her tall, graceful figure, in the large curves of its repeated bending and straightening, seeming to exemplify some unpainted Millet-like idea of mother-work, emblematic of its unceasing round. She was hanging up a tiny cloak in the half-gloom of her closet, when she heard her husband's step once more stealing into the room, and the next moment saw him beside her.

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"What's the matter?" she asked, with quick premonition.

"Nothing, nothing at all; we haven't started yet." He put one arm around her, and with the other lifted her face up toward his. "I only came back to tell you—"His voice broke; there seemed to be a mist over the eyes that were bent on hers. "I can't talk. I can't be as I ought to be, Lois, until all

this is over—but—I don't know what's getting into me lately, you look so beautiful to me that I can't take my eyes off you! I went around all to-day counting the hours, like a foolish boy, until it was time to come back to you; I grudge every minute that I spend away from my lovely wife.”%

Sometimes we have a happiness so much greater, so much more blessed than our easily imagined bliss that we can only hide our eyes from it at first, like those of old, when in some humble and unthought-of place they were visited by angels.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

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Very late that night Bailey Girard arrived at the house, after an absence of ten days. Dosia had gone to bed unusually early, but she could not sleep. She could not seem to sleep at all lately—the more tired she was the more ceaselessly luminous seemed her brain; it was like trying to sleep in a white glare in which all sorts of trivial things became unnaturally distinct. So many wakeful nights had she passed that one seemed to presuppose another, darkness brought, not a sense of rest, but that dread knowledge that she was going to lie there staring through all the hours of it. Since that night that the pitcher had broken, she was ever waiting tensely for the day to bring her something that it never brought. Lawson's death—Girard—Billy, who was getting a little troublesome lately—the dear little brothers far away, mixed up with tiny household perplexities, kept going through and through her mind. Her heart was wrung for those two in the house, Justin and Lois; yet they had each other! Dreams could no longer comfort and support Dosia; they had had their day. Prayer but wakened her further, wandering off in desultory thought. If she could only sleep and forget!

To-night she heard Justin's return from the automobile ride; apparently the machine had broken down, but the accident seemed only to have added to the zest. Lois was still dressed and waiting up for him. Then Girard came—he had seen the light in the window. Dosia could hear the murmuring of the voices down-stairs—Girard's sent the blood leaping to her heart so fast that she pressed her hands against it. For a moment his face seemed near, his lips almost touched hers—her heart stopped before it went on again. Why had he come now? It seemed suddenly an unbearable thing that those others down-stairs should see him and hear him, and that she could not. Why, oh why, had she gone to bed so early to-night of all nights? She was ready to cry with the passion of a disappointment that seemed, not a little thing, but something crushing and calamitous, a loss for which she never could be repaid. She could imagine Justin and Lois meeting the kind glances of those gray eyes, smiling when he did. He was beautiful when he smiled! She was within a few yards of him, but convention, absurd yet maddening, held her in its chains. She couldn't get dressed and break in upon their intimate conference—or it seemed as if she could not. Besides, he would probably go very soon. But he did not go! After a while she could lie there no longer. She crept out upon the landing of the stairs, and sat there desolately on the top step, “in her long night-gown, white as boughs of May,” with her little bare feet curled over each other, and her hands clasping the balustrade against which her cheek was pressed, watching and waiting for him to go. The ends of her long fair hair fell into large loose curls where it hung over her shoulder, as she bent to listen—and to listen—and to listen.

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“I want to be there, too—I want to be there, too!” she whispered, with quivering lips, in her voice the sobbing catch of a very little child. “I want to be there, too. They're having it all—without me. And I want to be there, too. They might have called me to come down, and they didn't.” They might have called her! All her passion, all her philosophy, all her endurance, melted into that one desire. If she had only known at first that he was going to stay so long, she would have dressed and gone down. She could hardly bear it a moment longer.

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After a while a door on the landing of the second story below opened, and a little figure crept out—Zaidee. She stood irresolute in the hall, looking down; then she looked up, and, seeing Dosia, ran to her and climbed into her lap, resting her little pigtailed head confidingly against Dosia's warm young shoulder.

“They woke me up,” she said placidly. “Did they woke you up, too, Cousin Dosia?”

“Yes,” said Dosia, hugging the child close. Some spell was broken.

Zaidee listened. “Papa and mamma talking down-stairs, oh, so-o-o-o late!” Zaidee gave a little wriggle of delight; her eyes gleamed winkingly. “Redge doesn't know, but I do! Who is that with papa and mamma, Cousin Dosia? Oh, I know! it's the lovely man—that's what Redge and me calls him. I wish I was down-stairs, don't you? Cousin Dosia, don't you wish you were down-stairs?”

“Yes,” said Dosia again. “Hush! some one is coming; you'll get sent to bed again.” This time it was Lois. Her abstracted gaze seemed to take in the two on the upper stairway as a matter of course.



Sat desolately on the top step

“Oh, it’s you, is it?” she said. “I thought I heard some one talking.” She rested on the post below, looking up. “I came to see if you’d take Zaidee in with you for the rest of the night, Dosia. I want to give Justin’s room to Mr. Girard.”

“Is he going to stay?” asked Dosia.

“Yes. It’s too late for him to disturb the Snows, and he’s been traveling all day; he’s dreadfully tired. He wanted to sleep on the sofa down-stairs, but I wouldn’t let him.” She was carrying Zaidee, already half asleep again, in her arms as she talked, depositing her in Dosia’s bed, while Dosia followed her.

“Did he sell the island?” asked Dosia.

Lois shook her head. “No. They may really sell it next week, but not now— The woman who was surely going to buy it—she’s withdrawn; she’s bought a steam-yacht instead. But Mr. Girard says he has hopes of another purchaser next week. Only that will be too late to save the business. Of course he doesn’t know that, and Justin will not tell him—he says Mr. Girard cannot help. Oh, Dosia, when Justin came in from that ride he looked so well, and now—” She covered her face with her hands, before recovering herself. “It’s time you were both asleep.”

“Can’t I help you?” asked Dosia; but Lois only answered indifferently, “No, it’s not necessary,” and went around making arrangements, while Dosia, with Zaidee nestling close to her, slept at last.

It was late the next morning before Girard came down. Justin had had breakfast, and gone; Lois was up-stairs with the children, and Dosia, who had been tidying up the place, was arranging some flowers in the vases when he strode in. There was no vestige of that sick-hearted, imploring maiden of the night before; no desolate frenzy was to be seen in this trim, neat, capable little figure, clad in blue gingham, that made her throat very white, her hair very fair. Something in Girard’s glance seemed to show an instant pleasure that she should be the one to greet him, but he bent anxiously over the watch he held in his hand.

“Will you tell me what time it is? My watch has stopped.”

“It’s half-past nine,” said Dosia.

“Half-past *nine!*” He looked at her in a sort of quick, horrified arraignment. “What do you mean?” His eye fell upon the clock, and conviction seemed to steal upon him against his will. “Heavens and earth, why wasn’t I called? On this morning of all others, when every moment’s of importance! I thought I asked particularly to be waked early.”

“I suppose they thought you were tired and needed the rest,” apologized Dosia.

“Needed the rest!” His tone was poignant; he looked outraged, but his anger was entirely impersonal—there was in it even a sort of boyish appeal to her, as if she must feel it, too.

"You had better sit down and have some breakfast."

"Oh, *breakfast!*" His gesture deprecated her evident intention. "Please don't. Thank you very much, but I don't want any breakfast; I only want to get to town."

"There isn't any train for twenty-five minutes, so you might as well sit down and eat," said Dosia firmly. "Come out to this little table on the piazza." She led the way to the screened corner at the end, sweet with the honeysuckle that swung its long loops in the wind, and faced him sternly. "Do you take coffee?"

"Please don't, please don't cook me anything! I'd hate to trouble you." He seemed so distressed that she relented a little.

"A glass of milk and some fruit, then; you'll *have* to take that."

"Very well—if I must. Can't I get the things myself?"

"No." She ran away to get them for him, with some new joy singing in her heart as she went backward and forward, bringing a pitcher of milk, a glass, a dish of strawberries, some cream, and the sugar, sitting down herself by the table afterwards as he ate and drank. He gave her a sudden smile, so surprised and pleased that the color surged in her cheeks.

"I'm not used to this," he said simply. "What is that dress you have on—silk?"

"No, it's cotton; do you like it?"

"*Very* much. Oh, please don't get up—Zaidee wasn't calling you. I won't eat another mouthful unless you stay just where you are—please!"

"Well!" said Dosia, with laughing pleasure.

"Besides, I've been wanting to consult you about the Alexanders," he went on, leaning across the table toward her, intimately. "It's so beautiful to me to see them together that to feel that they're in trouble distresses me beyond words. You're so near to them both I thought that perhaps—Do you know anything about the real state of Mr. Alexander's affairs?"

Dosia shook her head. "No; only that he is very much worried over them."

"He wanted to sell the island; he sent me off on that business lately. He'll sell it some time, of course, but I don't know how complicating the delay is. He's the kind of man you can't ask; you have to wait until he tells you. You can't *make* a person have confidence in you. Won't you please have some of these strawberries with me? Do!"

"No; you must eat them *all*," said Dosia, with charming authority, her arms before her on the table, elbow-sleeved, white and dimpled, as she regarded him. He seemed to take up all the corner, against the background of the green honeysuckle in the fresh morning light. With that smile upon his face, he seemed extraordinarily masculine and absorbing, yet appealing, too, inviting of confidence.

Dosia felt carried out of herself by a sudden heady resolution—or, rather, not a new resolution, but one that she had had in mind for a long, long time, before, oh, before she had even known who this man was. She had planned over and over again how she was to say those words, and now the time had come. She could not sit here with him in this new, sweet friendliness without saying them. She had imagined the scene in so many different ways! When she had gone over it by herself, her cheeks had flushed, her eyes had shone with the tears in them; the words as she spoke them had gone deeply, convincingly, from heart to heart—or perhaps, in an assumed, tremulous lightness, the meaning in her impulse had shown all the clearer to one who understood. For a year and a half the uttered thought had been the climax to which her dreams had led; it would have seemed a monstrous, impossible thing that it had not been reached before.

She began now in a moment's pause, only to find, too late, that all warmth and naturalness had left her with the effort. Fluent dream-practice is only too apt to make one uncomfortably crude and conscious in real life.

"I want to thank you for being so kind to me the night of that accident on the train coming up from the South." Poor Dosia instantly felt committed to a mistake. Her eyes fell for a moment on his hand, as it lay upon the table, with a terribly disconcerting remembrance that hers had not only rested in it, but that in fancy she had more than once pillowed her cheek upon it, and knew that he had seen the look; she continued in desperation, with still increasing stiffness and formality: "I have always known, of course, that it was you. You must pardon me for not thanking you before."

The old unapproachable manner instantly incased him as if in remembrance of something that hurt. "Oh, pray don't mention it," he said, with a formality that matched hers. "It was nothing but what anyone would have done—little enough, anyway."

What happened afterwards she did not know, except that in a few minutes he had gone.

She watched him go off down the path with that swift, long, easy step; watched till the last vestige of the gray suit was out of sight—he had a fashion of wearing gray!—before clearing off the table. Then she went and sat on the back steps that led into the little garden, bright with the sunshine and a blaze of tulips at her feet. Justin was fond of flowers.

Much has been written about the power of the mind to reproduce minute details of a scene that has served as the setting for some great emotion; the pattern of a table-cover or a rug, the flowers in a vase, the titles of the books, the strain of music being played in the next room—all

stand out, separate and distinct, indelibly imprinted upon the memory. There is another variety of the same phenomena, seldom commented on, where an entirely unreal impression of the scene as a whole is left on the mind by one or two details. To Dosia, sitting there by the little plot of tulips, the sun was the brilliant sun of July, and those scarlet tulips a garden wide and far-reaching, an endless vista of flowers, the blue sky an endless vault above her—high noon and midsummer, with that sweet-scented warmth at the busy heart of things, a circle of infinite life humming in the low grasses, in the almost windless, hardly stirring air. Warmth and color and life, at high noon, listening close to the heart of things.

And Dosia! She had never supposed that any girl could care for a man until he had shown that he cared for her—it was the unmaidenly, impossible thing. And now—how beautiful he was, how dear! A wistful smile trembled around her lips. All that had gone before with other men suddenly became as nothing, forgotten and out of mind, and she herself made clean by this purifying fire. Even if she never had anything more in her whole life, she had this—even if she never had anything more. Yet what had she? Nothing and less than nothing. If he had ever thought of her, if he had ever dreamed of her, if her soft, frightened hand trustfully clinging fast to his, only to be comforted by his touch, had been a sign and a symbol to him of some dearer trust and faith for him alone—if in some way, as she dimly visioned it, the thought had once been his, it had gone long ago. Every action showed it. And yet, and yet—so unconquerably does the soul speak that, though he might deny her attraction for him, she knew that she had it. It was something to which he might never give way, but it was unalterably there—as it was unalterably there with her. All that year at home, when she believed she had not been thinking of him, she really had been thinking of him. We learn to know each other sometimes in long absences. She began to perceive in him now a humility and a pride strangely at variance with each other, and both equally at variance with the bright assurance of his outer manner. He gave to everyone; he would work early and late for others, in his yearning sympathy and affection: yet he himself, from the very intenseness of his desire for it, stood aloof, and drew back from the insistence of any claim for himself. They might meet a hundred times and grow no closer; they might grow farther and farther away.

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Dosia felt that other women must have loved him—how could they have helped it? She had a pang of sorrow for them—for herself it made no difference. If she had pain for all her life afterwards, she was glad at this moment that he was worthy to be loved; she need never be ashamed of loving him—he was “good.” The word seemed to contain some beautiful comfort and uplifting. No matter what experience he had passed through in his struggle with the world, he had held some simple, honorable, *clean* quality intact. The Dosia who must always have some heart-warm dream to live by had it now; for all her life she could love him, pray for him. She had always thought that to love was to be happy; now she was to love and be unhappy—yet she would not have it otherwise.

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So slight, so young, so lightly dealt with, Dosia had the pathetically clear insight and the power that comes to those who see, not themselves alone, their own desires and hopes, but the universe in which they stand, and view their acts and thoughts in relation to it. She must see Truth, “and be glad, even if it hurt.”

The sunshine fell upon her in the garden; she was bathed in it. Whether she had nights of straining, bitter wakefulness and days of heartache afterwards, this joy of loving was enough for her to-day—the joy of loving him. She saw, in that lovely, brooding thought of him, what that first meeting had taught of his character, and molded in with it her knowledge of him now, to make the real man far more imperfect, though far dearer. Yet, if he ever loved her as she loved him, part of that for which she had always sought love would have to be foregone—she could never come to him, as she had fondly dreamed of doing, and pour out to him all those hopes and fears, those struggles and mistakes and trials and indignities, the shame and the penitence that had been hers. She could never talk of Lawson—her past must be forever unshriven and un comforted. Bailey Girard would be the last man on earth to whom she could bare her heart in confession; these were the things that touched him on the raw. He “hated the sound of Lawson’s name.” How many times had George Sutton’s face blotted out hers? If he knew *that!* She must forever be unshriven. There would be things also, perhaps, that *she* could not bear to hear! The eternal hurt of love, that it never can be truly one with the beloved, touched her with its sadness, and then slipped away in the thought of him now—not just the man who was to help and protect her with his love, but the man whom she longed to help also. His pleased eyes, his lips, the way his hair fell over his forehead— She thought of him with the fond dream-passion of the maiden, that is often the shyest thing on earth, ready to veil itself and turn and elude and hide at the first chance that it may be revealed.

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“Dosia! Dosia, where are you?”

Suddenly she saw that the sunshine had faded out, the sky had grown gray, a chill wind had sprung up. All the trouble, all the stress of the world, seemed to encompass her with that tone in the voice of Lois.

"Justin has come home ill, he was taken with a chill as soon as he got to town; he drove back in a carriage from the station. I want you to telephone for the doctor, and ask him to get here as soon as he can." Lois spoke with rapid distinctness, stooping as she did so to pick up the scattered toys on the floor and push the chairs into place, as one who mechanically attends to the usual duties of routine, no matter what may be happening. "And, Dosia!" she arrested the girl as she was disappearing, "I may not be down-stairs again. Will you see about what we need for meals? My pocket-book is in the desk. And see about the children. They're in the nursery now, but I'll send them down; they had better play outdoors, where he won't hear them."

"Oh, yes, yes; I'll attend to everything," affirmed Dosia hurriedly, while Lois disappeared up-stairs. For a man to stop work and come home because he is not well argues at once the most serious need for the act. It is the public crossing of the danger zone.

With all her anxiety, Dosia was filled now with a wondering knowledge of something unnatural about Lois, not to be explained by the fact of Justin's illness. There was something newly impassioned in the duskiness of her eyes, in the fullness of her red lips, in every sweeping movement of her body, which seemed caused by the obsession of a hidden fiery force that held her apart and afar, goddess-like, even while she spoke of and handled the things of every-day life. She looked at the commonplace surroundings, at the children, at Dosia; but she saw only Justin. When she was beside him, she smiled into his gentle, stricken eyes, telling him little fondly-foolish anecdotes of the children to make him smile also; patting him, talking of the summer, when they would go off together—anything to make him forget, even though the effort left her breathless afterwards. When she went out of the room and came back again, she found him still watching the place where she had been, with haggard, feverish, burning eyes. He would not go to bed, but lay on the outside of it in his dressing-gown, so that he might get ready the more quickly to go down-town again if the doctor "fixed him up," though now he felt weighted from head to foot with stones.

There was a ring at the door-bell in the middle of the morning, which might have been the doctor, but which turned out surprisingly to be Mr. Angevin L. Cater.

"I heard Mr. Alexander was taken ill this morning and had gone home, and as I had to come out this way on business, I thought I'd just drop in and see if there was anything I could do for him in town," he stated to Dosia.

"I'll find out," said Dosia, and came down in a moment with the word that Justin would like to see the visitor.

Cater himself had grown extraordinarily lean and yellow. The fact that his clothes were new and of a fashionable cut seemed only to make him the more grotesque. He looked oddly shrunken; the quality of his smile of greeting appeared to have shrunk also—something had gone out of it.

"Well, Cater, you find me down," said Justin, with glittering, cold cheerfulness.

"I hope not for long," said the visitor.

"Oh, no; but, when I get up, you won't see me going past much longer; I'll soon be out of the old place. I guess the game is up, as far as I'm concerned. Your end is ahead."

"Mr. Alexander," began Cater, clearing his throat and bending earnestly toward Justin, who, with the folds of his blue dressing-gown around him, had the unnatural surroundings of the flowered-chintz-covered bedroom furniture, and Lois' swinging-glassed, mahogany dressing-table with its silver appointments. The room had already the cleared-up neatness with which one prepares for illness, with everything irrelevant put away. A cluster of white tulips was in a thin glass vase on the mantel; the shades were drawn to an inch, so that an unglaring yet dimly cheerful light came through them; on the little mahogany stand by Cater there was a glass of water and a watch, ticking face upward. Cater's elbow jostled into the light table as he turned, and he steadied it before bracing himself to go on. "I hope you ain't going to hold it up against me that I had to make a different business deal from what we proposed; I've been thinking about it a powerful lot. There wasn't any written agreement, you know."

"No, there was no written agreement," assented Justin; "there was nothing to bind you."

"That's what I said to myself. If there had been, I'd 'a' stuck to it, of course. But a man's got to do the best he can for himself in this world."

"Has he?" asked the sick man, with an enigmatic questioning smile.

"I'd be mighty sorry to have anything come between us. I reckon I took a shine to you the first day I met up with you," continued Cater helplessly. "I'd be mighty sorry to think we weren't friends."

Justin's brilliant eyes surveyed him serenely. Something sadly humorous, yet noble and imposing, seemed to emanate from his presence, weak and a failure though he was. "I can be friends with you, but you can't be friends with me, Cater; it isn't in you to know how," he said. "Good-by."

"Well, good-by," said the other, rising, his long, angular figure knocking awkwardly against chairs and tables as he went out, leaving Justin lying there alone, with his head throbbing horribly. Yet, strangely enough, in spite of it, his mind felt luminously clear, in that a certain power seemed to have come to him—a power of correlating all the events of the past eighteen months and placing them in their relative sequence. A certain faith—the candid, boyish, unquestioning faith in the adequacy of his knowledge of those whom he had called his friends—was gone; the face of Leverich came to him, brutal in its unveiled cupidity, showing what other

men felt but concealed, yet his own faith in honor and honesty remained, stronger and higher than ever before. Nothing, he knew, could take it from him; it was a faith that he had won from the battle with his own soul. If other so-called material things had to go, then they had to—he couldn't pay the price, for one! He saw now that he had been foredoomed from the start. Men who ventured on a capital controlled by others, hadn't any chance of free movement.

By to-morrow night that note of Lewiston's would be protested, and then—the burning pain of failure gripped him in its racking clutches once more, though he strove to fight it off. He would have to get well quickly, so as to begin to hustle for a small clerkship somewhere, to get bread for Lois and the babies. Men of his age who were successful were sought for, but men of his age who were not had a pretty hard row to hoe.

Lois was long gone—probably she was with the baby. He missed his handkerchief, and rose and went over, with a swaying unsteadiness, to his chiffonier drawer in the farther corner to get one. A pistol lying there in its leather case, as it had done any time this five years, for a reserve protection against burglars, caught his eyes. He took it out of its case, examining the little weapon carefully, with his finger on the trigger, half cocking it, to see if it needed oil. It was a pretty little toy. Suddenly, as he held it there, leaning against the chiffonier, his thin white face with its deep black shadows under the eyes reflected by the high, narrow glass, the four walls faded away from him, with their familiar objects; his face gleamed whiter and whiter; the shadows grew blacker; only his eyes stared—

A room, noticed once a year and a half ago, came before him now with a creeping, all-possessing distinctness—that loathsome, dreadful room (long since renovated) which, with its unmentionable suggestion of horror, had held him spellbound on that morning when he had begun his career at the factory. It held him spellbound now, evilly, insidiously. He stood by that blackened, ashy hearth in the foul room, with its damp, mottled, rotting walls, his eyes fastened on that hideous sofa to which he was drawn—drawn a little nearer and a little nearer; the thing in his hand—did it move itself? Cold to his touch it moved—

The door opened, and Lois, with a face of awful calm, glided up to him. She took the pistol from his relaxed hold; her lips refused to speak.

"Why, you needn't have been afraid, dear," he said at once, looking at her with a gentle surprise. "I'm not a coward, to go and leave you *that* way. You need never be afraid of that, Lois."

"No," said Lois, with smiling, white lips. She could not have told what made the frantic, overmastering fear, under the impulse of which she had suddenly thrown the baby down on the bed and fled to Justin—what strange force of thought-transference, imagined or real, had called her there.

She busied herself making him comfortable, divining his wants and getting things for him, simply and noiselessly, and then knelt down beside him where he lay, putting her arms around him.

"You oughtn't to be doing this for me; I ought to be taking care of *you*," he said, with a tender self-reproach that seemed to come from a new, hitherto unknown Justin, who watched her face to see if it showed fatigue, and counted the steps she took for him.

The doctor came, and sent him off sternly to bed, and came again later. The last time he looked grave, ordered complete quiet, and left sedatives to insure it. Grip, brought on by overwork, had evidently taken a disregarded hold some time before, and must be reckoned with now. What Mr. Alexander imperatively needed was rest, and, above all things, freedom from care. Freedom from care!

Every footfall was taken to-day with reference to this. An impression of Justin as of something noble and firm seemed to emanate from the room where he lay and fill the house; in his complete abdication, he dominated as never before. More than that, there seemed to be a peculiar poignancy, a peculiar sweetness, in every little thing done for him; it made one honorable to serve him.

The light was still brightly that of day at a quarter of seven, when Dosia, who had been putting Zaidee and Redge to bed, came into Lois' room, and found her with crimson cheeks and eyes red from weeping. At Dosia's entrance she rose at once from her chair, and Dosia saw that she was partially dressed in her walking-skirt; she flared out passionately as she was crossing the room, as if in answer to some implied criticism:

"I don't care what you say—I don't care what anybody says. I can't stand it any longer, when it's *killing* him! He *can't* rest unless he has that money. Am I to just sit down and let my husband die, when he's in such trouble as this? Is *that* all I can do? Why, whose trouble is it? Mine as well as his! If it's his responsibility, it's mine, too—mine as well as his!"

She hit her soft hand against the sharp edge of the table, and was unconscious that it bled. "If there's nobody else to get that money for him, *I'll* rise up and get it. He's stood alone long enough—long enough! He says there is no help left, but he forgets that there's his wife!"

"Oh, Lois," said Dosia, half weeping. "Oh, Lois, what can *you* do? There, you've waked the baby—he's crying."

"Get me the waist to this skirt and my walking-jacket. No, give me the baby first; he's hungry."

She spoke collectedly, bending over the child as she held him to her, and straightening the folds of the little garments. "There, there, dear little heart, dear little heart, mother's comfort—oh, my comfort, my blessing! Get my things out of the closet now, Dosia, and my gloves from that

drawer, the top one. Oh, and bring me baby's cloak and cap, too. I forgot that I couldn't leave him. I must take him with me." She had sunk her voice to a low murmur, so as not to disturb the child.

"Where are you going?" asked Dosia.

"To Eugene Larue."

"Mr. Larue!"

"Yes. He'll let me have the money—he'll understand. He wouldn't let Justin have it, but he'll give it to me—if I'm not too proud to ask for it; and I'm not too proud." She spoke in a tone the more thrilling for its enforced calm. "There are things a man will do for a woman, when he won't for a man because then he has to be businesslike; but he doesn't have to be businesslike to a woman—he can lend to her just because she needs it."

"Lois!"

"Oh, there's many a woman—like me—who always knows, even though she never acts on the knowledge, that there is some man she could go to for help, and get it, just because she was *herself*—a woman and in trouble—just for that! Dosia, if I go to Eugene Larue myself in trouble—*such* trouble——"

"But he's out at Collingswood!" said Dosia, bewildered.

"Yes, I know. The train leaves here at seven-thirty, it connects at Haledon. It only takes three quarters of an hour to get to the place; I've looked it up in the time-table. I'll be back here again by ten o'clock. I——" She stopped with a sudden intense motion of listening, then put the child from her and ran across the hall to the opposite room.

When she came back, pale and collected, it was to say: "Justin's gone to sleep now. The doctor says he will be under the influence of the anodynes until morning. Mrs. Bently is in there—I sent for her; she says she'll stay until I get back." Mrs. Bently was a woman of the plainer class, half nurse, half friend, capable and kind. "If the children wake up they won't be afraid with her; but you'll be here, anyway."

"Leave the baby with me," implored Dosia.

"No, I can't—suppose I were detained? *Then* I'd go crazy! He won't be any bother, he's so little and so light."

"Very well, then; I'll go, too," stated Dosia in desperation. "I am not needed here. You must have some one with you if you have baby! Let me go, Lois! You *must!*"

"Oh, very well, if you like," responded Lois indifferently. But that the suggestion was an unconscious relief to her she showed the next moment, as she gave some directions to Dosia, who put a few necessaries and some biscuits in a little hand-bag, and an extra blanket for the baby if it grew chilly.

The train went at seven-thirty. The house must be lighted and the gas turned down, and the new maid impressed with the fact that they would be back at a little after nine, though it might really be nearer ten. After Lois was ready, she went in once more to look at Justin as he slept—his head thrown forward a little on the pillow, his right hand clasped, and his knees bent as one supinely running in a dream race with fate. Lois stooped over and laid her cheek to his hair, to his hand, as one who sought for the swift, reviving warmth of the spirit.

Then the two women walked down the street toward the station, Lois absorbed in her own thoughts, and Dosia distracted, confused, half assenting and half dissenting to the expedition.

"Are you sure Mr. Larue will be at Collingswood?" she asked anxiously.

"Justin saw him Saturday. He said he was going out there then for the summer."

So far it would be all right, then. They had passed the Snows' house, and Dosia looked eagerly for some sign of life there; she hesitated, and then went on. As they got beyond it, at the corner turning, she looked back, and saw Miss Bertha had come out on the piazza.

"I'll catch up to you in a moment," she said to Lois, and ran back quickly.

"Miss Bertha!"

"Why, Dosia, my dear, I didn't see you; don't speak loud!" Miss Bertha's face, her whispering lips, her hands, were trembling with excitement. "We've been under quite a strain, but it's all over now—I'm sure I can tell *you*. Dear mother has gone up-stairs with a sick-headache! Mr. Sutton has just proposed to Ada—in the sitting-room. We left them the parlor, but they preferred the sitting-room. Mother's white shawl is in there, and I haven't been able to get it."

"Oh!" said Dosia blankly, trying to take in the importance of the fact. "Is Mr. Girard in? No? Will he be in later?"

"No, not until to-morrow night," said Miss Bertha as blankly, but Dosia had already gone on. She did not know whether she were relieved or sorry that Girard was not there. She did not know what she had meant to say to him, but it had seemed as if she *must* see him. She caught up to Lois and the baby in a few steps, and drew back into the station as Billy passed it. She had felt anxiously as if some one ought to know where they were going, but not Billy—Billy, who was always now either too melancholy or too joyous, as she rebuffed or relented.

Lois did not ask her why she had stopped; her spirit seemed to be wrapped in an obscurity as enshrouding as the darkness that was gathering around them. Only, when they were at last in the train, she threw back her veil and smiled at Dosia, with a clear, triumphant relief in the smile, a sweetness, a lightness of expression that was almost roguish, and that communicated a similar lightness of heart to Dosia.

"He will lend me the money," said Lois, with a grateful, touching confidence that seemed to shut out every conventional, every worldly suggestion, and to breathe only of her need and the willingness of a friend to help—not alone for the need's sake, but for hers.

Dosia tried to picture Eugene Larue as Lois must see him; his bearded lips, his worn forehead, his quiet, sad, piercing eyes, were not attractive to her. The whole thing was very bewildering.

It was twenty miles, a forty-minute ride, to Haledon, where they changed cars for the little branch road that went past Collingswood—a signal station, as the conductor who punched their tickets impressed on Lois. Haledon itself was a junction for many lines, with a crowd of people on the platform continually coming and going under the electric lights. As Lois and Dosia waited for their train, an automobile dashed up, and a man and a woman, getting out of it with wraps and bundles, took their place among those who were waiting for the westbound express. The woman, large and elegantly gowned, had something familiar in her outline as she turned to her companion, a short, ferret-faced man with a fair mustache—the man who lately had been seen everywhere with Mrs. Leverich. Yes, it was Mrs. Leverich. Dosia shrank back into the shadow. The light struck full athwart the large, full-blown face of Myra as she turned to the man caressingly with some remark; his eyes, evilly cognizant, smiled back again as he answered, with his cigar between his teeth.

Dosia felt that old sensation of burning shame—she had seen something that should have been hidden in darkness. They were going off together. All those whispers about Mrs. Leverich had been true.

There were only a few people in the shaky, rattling little car when Lois and Dosia entered it, whizzing off, a moment later, down a lonely road with wooded hills sloping to the track on one side and a wooded brook on the other. The air grew aromatic in the chill spring dusk with the odor of damp fern and pine. Both women were silent, and the baby, rolled in his long cloak, slept all the way. It was but seven miles to Collingswood, yet the time seemed longer than all the rest of the journey before they were finally dumped out at the little empty station with the hills towering above it. A youth was just locking up the ticket-office and going off as they reached it. Dosia ran after him.

"Mr. Larue's place is near here, isn't it?" she called.

"Yes, over there to the right," said the youth, pointing down the board walk, which seemed to end at nowhere, "about a quarter of a mile down. You'll know when you come to the gates. They're big iron ones."

"Isn't there any way of riding?"

"I guess not," said the youth, and disappeared into the woods on a bicycle.

"Oh, it will be only a step," said Lois, starting off in the direction indicated, followed perforce by Dosia with the hand-bag, both walking in silence.

The excursion, from an easily imagined, matter-of-fact daylight possibility, had been growing gradually a thing of the dark, unknown, fantastic. A faint remnant of the fading light remained in the west, vanishing as they looked at it. Above the treetops a pale moon hung high; there seemed nothing to connect them with civilization but that iron track curved out of sight.

The quarter of a mile prolonged itself indefinitely, with that strangely eternal effect of the unknown; yet the big iron gates were reached at last, showing a long winding drive within. It was here that Eugene Larue had built a house for his bride, living in it these summers when she was away, alone among his kind, a man who must confess tacitly before the world that he was unable to make his wife care for him—a darkened, desolate, lonely life, as dark and as desolate as this house seemed now. An undefined dread possessed Dosia, though Lois spoke confidently:

"The walk has not really been very long. We'll probably drive back. It's odd that there are no lights, but perhaps he is sitting outside. Ah, there's a light!"

Yet, as she spoke, the light left the window and hung on the cornice above—it was the moon and not a lamp that had made it. They ascended the piazza steps; there was no one there.

"There is a knocker at the front door," said Lois. She pounded, and the noise vibrated terrifyingly through the stillness. At the same instant a scraping on the gravel walk behind them made them turn. It was the boy on the bicycle, who, having sped back to them, was wheeling around at the moment that he might lose no impetus in retracing his way, while he leaned over to call:

"Mr. Larue ain't there. The woman who closed up the house told me he had a cable from his wife, and he sailed for Europe this afternoon. She says, do you want the key?"

"No," said Lois, and the messenger once more disappeared.

"I wish he had waited until we could have asked him some questions," said Dosia, vexed. "Don't let's stay here; it's too dark and too dreadfully lonely under these trees. We had better get back to the station and wait for the train."

"I suppose so," said Lois drearily. This, then, was the end of her exaltation—for this she had

passionately nerved herself! There was to be neither the warmth of instant comprehension of her errand, nor the frank giving of aid when necessity had been pleaded; there was nothing. She shifted the baby over to the other shoulder, and they retraced their way, which now seemed familiar and short. There was, at any rate, a light on a tall pole in front of the little station, although the station itself was deserted; they seated themselves on the bench under it to wait. The train was not scheduled for nearly an hour yet. The watch that Lois carried showed that it was a quarter to nine.

"Oh, if I could only fly back!" she groaned. "I don't see how I can wait—I don't see how I can wait! Oh, why did I come?"

"Perhaps there is a train before the one you spoke of," said Dosia, with the terribly self-accusing feeling now that she ought to have prevented the expedition at the beginning. She got up to go into the little box of a house, in search of a time-table. As she passed the tall post that held the light, she saw tacked on it a paper, and read aloud the words written on it below the date:

NOTICE

NO TRAINS WILL RUN ON THIS ROAD TO-NIGHT
AFTER 8.30 P.M., ON ACCOUNT OF REPAIRS

Dosia and Lois looked at each other with the blankness of despair—the frantic, forlornly heroic impulse, uncalculating of circumstances, began to show itself in all its piteous woman-folly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Only fifty miles from a great city, the little station seemed like the typical lodge in a wilderness; as far as one could see up or down the track, on either side were wooded hills. A vast silence seemed to be gathering from unseen fastnesses, to halt in this spot.

There were no houses and no light to be seen anywhere, except that one swinging on the pole above, and the moon which was just rising. It was, in fact, one of those places which consist of the far, back-lying acres of the great country-owners, and which seem to the casual traveler forgotten or unknown in their extent and apparently primitive condition. The other railroad, six or seven miles away, went past the country towns and the façaded mansions and the conventional horticultural grounds of the possessors of these uncultivated tracts of woodland.

To the women sitting on the bench, wrapped around by the loneliness and the intense stillness of the oncoming night, the whole expedition appeared at last unveiled in all its grim betrayal. While Lois had been exaltedly imaginative, had resolved so desperately, had acted so daringly, there had never been, from the inception of the scheme, any chance that it could succeed. For the first time since Lois had left home, a wild seething anxiety for Justin possessed her. How could she have left him? She must go back to him at once!

"Oh, Dosia, we must get home again; we must get home!" she cried, starting up so vehemently that the baby in her arms screamed, startled, and Lois walked up and down distractedly hushing him, and then, as he still wailed, sat down once more and bared her white bosom to quiet him, talking the while in a low tone: "We will have to get back; Dosia, we must start at once."

"We will have to walk to Haledon," said Dosia.

"Yes, yes. Perhaps we may come to some farmhouse where they will let us have a wagon, or one may pass us on the way and give us a lift. It is seven miles to Haledon—that isn't very far! I often walked five miles with Justin before I was married, and a mile or two more is nothing. There are plenty of trains from Haledon."

"Oh, we can do it easily enough," said Dosia, though her heart was as lead within her breast. "You had better eat some of these biscuits before we start," she advised, taking them out of the bag; and Lois munched them obediently, and drank some tepid water from a pitcher which Dosia had found inside. As she put it back again in its place, she slipped to the side of the platform and looked down the moon-filled narrow valley.

Through all this journey Dosia had carried double thoughts; her voice called where none might hear. It spoke to far distances now as she whispered, with hands outspread:

"Oh, *why* weren't you in when I went for you? Why didn't you come and take care of us, when I needed you so much? Why did you let us go off this way? You might have known! Why *don't* you come and take care of us? There's no one to take care of us but you! *You* could!" A dry sob stopped the words—the deep, inherent cry of womankind to man for help, for succor. She stooped over and picked up an oak-leaf that had lain on the ground since the winter, and pressed it to her bosom, and sent it fluttering off on a gust of wind down the incline, as if it could indeed take her message with it, before she went back to Lois.

After some hesitation as to the path,—one led across the rails from where they were sitting,—they finally took that behind the station, which broadened out into a road that lay along the wooded slope above, from which they could look down at intervals and see the track below. One side of that road was bordered by a high wire fencing inclosing pieces of woodland, sometimes so

thick as to be impenetrable, while along other stretches there would be glimpsed through the trees some farther open field. To the right toward the railway, there were only woods and no fencing.

The two walked off briskly at first, but the road was of a heavy, loose, shelving soil in which the foot sank at each step; the grass at the edge was wet with dew and intersected by the ridged, branching roots of trees; the pace grew, perforce, slower and slower still. They took turns in carrying the baby, whose small bundled form began to seem as if weighted with lead.

Far over on what must have been the other side of the track, they occasionally saw the light of a house; at one place there seemed to be a little hamlet, from the number of lights. They were clearly on the wrong bank; they should have crossed over at the station. The only house they came to was the skeleton of one, the walls blackened and charred with fire. There was only that endless line of wire fencing along which they pushed forward painfully, with dragging step; instead of passing any given point, the road seemed to keep on with them, as if they could never get farther on. Wire fencing, and moonlight, and silence, and trees. Trees! They became nightmarishly oppressive in those dark, solemn ranks and groups—those silent thicknesses; the air grew chill beneath them; terror lurked in the shadows. Oh, to get out from under the trees, away into the open, with only the clear sky overhead! If that road to the house of Eugene Larue had seemed a part of infinity in the dimness of the unknown, what was this?

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They sat down now every little while to rest, Dosia's voice coaxing and cheering, and then got up to shake the earth out of their shoes and struggle on once more—bending, shivering, leaning against each other for support; two silent and puny figures, outside of any connection with other lives, toiling, as it seemed, against the universe, as women do toil, apparently futile of result.

Once the loud blare of a horn sent them over to the side of the road, clinging to the wire fencing, as an automobile shot by—a cheerful monster that spoke of life in towns, leaving a new and sharp desolation behind it. Why hadn't they seen it before? Why hadn't they tried to hail it when they *did* see? To have had such a chance and lost it! It seemed to have come and gone too swiftly for coherent thought. Once they were frightened almost uncontrollably by a group of men approaching with strange sounds—a group of Italian laborers, cheerful and unintelligible when Dosia intrepidly questioned them. They passed on, still jabbering, two bedraggled women and a baby were no novelty to them. Then there were more long, high fencing, and moonlight, and silence, and shadows, and trees—and trees—

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"Do you suppose we'll *ever* get out of here?" asked Lois at last, dully.

"Why, of course; we can't help getting out, if we keep on," said Dosia, in a comfortingly matter-of-fact tone.

It was she who was helper and guide now.

"Oh, if I had never left Justin! Why, why did I leave him? How far do you think we have walked, Dosia?"

"It seems so endless, I can't tell; but we must be nearly at Haledon," said Dosia. "Let's sit down and rest awhile here. Oh, Lois, Lois *dear!*" She had taken off her jacket and spread it on the damp grass for them both to sit on, huddled close together, and now pressed the older woman's head down on her shoulder, holding both mother and child in her young arms. "Oh, Lois, Lois!"

Lois lay there without stirring. Far off in the stillness, there came the murmur of the brook they had passed in the train—so long since, it seemed! The moon hung higher above now, pouring a flood of light down through the arching branches of the trees upon her beautiful face with its closed eyes, and the tiny features of the sleeping child. Something in the utter relaxation of the attitude and manner began to alarm the girl.

"Lois, we must go on," she said, with an anxious note in her voice. "Lois! You *mustn't* give up. We can't stay here!"

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"Yes, I know," said Lois. She struggled to her feet, and began to walk ahead slowly. Dosia, behind her, flung out her arms to the shadow-embroidered road over which they had just passed.

"Oh, why *don't* you come!" she whispered again intensely, with passionate reproach; and then, swiftly catching up to Lois, took the child from her, and again they stumbled on together, haltingly, to the accompaniment of that far-off brook.

The wire fencing ceased, but the road became narrower, the walls of trees darker, closer together, though the soil under foot grew firmer. They had to stop every few minutes to rest. Lois saw ever before her the one objective point—a dimly lighted room, with Justin stretched out upon the bed, dying, while she could not get there. Hope was crushed out. Death and ruin—that was the end.

The end! There are paths one walks along in life that seem only to end in the barrier of a stone wall, with "No thoroughfare" written on it; there is no way beyond. Yet, when one gets close to that insurmountable, impenetrable barrier, how often there is seen to be some hitherto unnoticed aperture, some little postern-gate by which one can pass on into the highroad!

"Hark!" said Dosia suddenly, standing still. The sound of a voice trolling drunkenly made itself heard, came nearer, while the women stood terrified. The thing they had both unspeakably dreaded had happened; the moonlight brought into view the unmistakable figure of a tramp, with a bundle swung upon his shoulder. No terror of the future could compare with this one, that neared them with the seconds, swaying unsteadily from side to side of the road, as the tipsy voice

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alternately muttered and roared the reiterated words:

“For I have come from Pad-dy land,
The land—I do adore!”

They had fled, crouching into the bushes at the edge of the path, and he passed with his eyes on the ground, or he must have seen—a blotched, dark-visaged, leering creature, living in an insane world of his own. They waited until he was far out of sight before creeping, all of a tremble, from their shelter, only to hear another footfall unexpectedly near—the pad, pad, pad of a runner, a tall figure as one saw it through the lights and shadows under the trees, capless and coatless, with sleeves rolled up, arms bent at the elbows, and head held forward. Suddenly the pace slackened, stopped.

“Great *heavens!*” said the voice of Bailey Girard.

“Oh, it’s you, it’s you!” cried Dosia, running to him with an ineffable, revealing gesture, a lovely motion of her upflinging arms, a passion of joy in the face upraised to his, that called forth an instantly flashing, all-embracing light in his.

In that moment there was an acknowledgment in each of an intimacy that went back of all words, back of all action. The arms that upheld her gripped her close to him as one who defends his own as he said tensely:

“That beast ahead, did he touch you?”

“Oh, no; he didn’t see us. We hid!” She tried to explain in hurrying, disconnected sentences. “I’ve been longing and *praying* for you to come! I tried to let you know before we started, and you weren’t there. Lois was half crazy about Justin. Come to her now! She wanted to see Mr. Larue, and he was gone. We’ve walked from Collingswood; we have the baby with us.”

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“The *baby!*”

“Yes; she couldn’t leave him behind. Oh, it’s been so terrible! If you had only known!”

“Oh, why didn’t I?” he groaned. “I ought to have known—I *ought* to have known! I was in that motor that must have passed you; it was just a chance that I got out to walk.” They had reached the place where Lois sat, and he bent over her tenderly. She smiled into his anxious eyes, though her poor face was sunken and wan.

“I’m glad it’s you,” she whispered. “You’ll help me to get home!”

“Dear Mrs. Alexander! I want to help you to more than that. I want you to tell me everything.” He pressed her hand, and stood looking irresolutely down the road.

“I could go to Haledon, and send back a carriage for you; it’s three miles further on.”

“No, no, no! Don’t leave us!” the accents came in terror from both. “We can walk with you. Only don’t leave us!”

“Very well; we’ll try it, then.”

He took the warm bundle that was the sleeping child from Lois, saying, as she half demurred, “It’s all right; I’ve carried ’em in the Spanish-American War in Cuba,” holding it in one arm, while with the other he supported Lois. The dragging march began again, Dosia, stumbling sometimes, trying to keep alongside of him, so that when he turned his head anxiously to look for her she would be there, to meet his eyes with hers, bravely scorning fatigue.

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The trees had disappeared now from the side of the road; long, swelling, wild fields lay on the slopes of the hillside, broken only by solitary clumps of bushes—fields deserted of life, broad resting-places for the moonlight, which illumined the farthest edge of the scene, although the moon itself was hidden by the crest of a hill. And as they went on, slowly perforce, he questioned Lois gently; and she, with simple words, gradually laid the facts bare.

“Oh, why didn’t Alexander tell me all this?” he asked pitifully, and she answered:

“He said it was no use; he said you had no money.”

“No; but I can sometimes get it for other people! I could have gone to Rondell Brothers and got it.”

“Rondell Brothers? I thought they were difficult to approach.”

“That depends. I was with Rondell’s boy in Cuba when he had the fever, and he’s always said—but that’s neither here nor there. Apart from that, they’ve had their eye on your husband lately. You can’t hide the quality of a man like him, Mrs. Alexander; it shows in a hundred ways that he doesn’t think of. They have had dealings with him, though he doesn’t know it—it’s been through agents. Mr. Warren, one of their best men, has, it seems, taken a fancy to him. I shouldn’t wonder if they’d take over the typometer as it stands, and work Alexander in with it. If Rondell Brothers really take up anyone—!” Girard did not need to finish.

Even Lois and Dosia had heard of Rondell Brothers, the great firm that was known from one end of the country to the other—a commercial house whose standing was as firm, as unquestioned, as the Bank of England, and almost as conservative. Apart from this, its reputation was unique. The house was more than a commercial establishment: it was an institution, in which for three generations the firm known as Rondell Brothers had carried on, in the conduct of their business—and carried to high advantage—the principles of personal honor and honesty and fair dealing.

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No boy or man of good character, intelligence, and industry was ever connected with Rondell's without its making for his advancement; to get a position there was to be assured of his future. Their young men stayed with them, and rose steadily higher as they stayed, or went out from them strong to labor, backed with a solid backing. The number of young firms whom Rondell Brothers had started and made, and whose profit also afterwards profited them, were more than had ever been counted. They were never deceived, for they had an unerring faculty for knowing their own kind. No firm was keener. Straight on the nail themselves, they exacted the same quality in others. What they traded in needed no other guaranty than the name of Rondell.

If Rondell Brothers took Justin's affairs in hand! Lois felt a hope that sent life through her veins.

"Oh, let us hurry home!" she pleaded, and tried to quicken her pace, though it was Girard who supported her, else she must have fallen, while Dosia slipped a little behind, still trying to keep her place by his side, so that she might meet his look when he turned to her.

"You're so tired," he whispered, with a break in his voice, "and I can't help you!" and she tried to beat back that dear pity and longing with her comforting "No, no, no! I'm not really tired"; her voice thrilled with life, though her feet stumbled.

In that walk beside him, toiling slowly on and on in the bright, far solitude of those empty fields, where even their hands might not touch, they two were so heart-close—so heavenly, so fulfillingly near!

Once he whispered in a yearning distress, "Why are you crying?" And she answered through those welling tears:

"I'm only crying because I'm so glad you're here!"

After a while there was a sound of wheels—wheels! Only a sulky, it proved to be—a mere half-wagon set low down in the springs, and a trotting horse in front, driven by a round-faced boy in a derby hat, the turnout casting long, thin shadows ahead before Girard stopped it.

"You'll have to take another passenger," he said, after explaining matters to the half-unwilling boy, who crowded himself at last to the farthest edge of the seat, so that Lois might take possession of the six inches allotted to her.

She held out her arms hastily. "My boy!" she said, but it was a voice that had hope in it once more.

"Oh, yes, I forgot; here's the baby," said Girard, looking curiously at the bundle before handing it to her. "We'll meet you at the Haledon station very soon now; my friends will have left my hat and coat there for me."

In another moment the little vehicle was out of sight, jogging around a bend of the road.

So still was the night! Only that long, curving runnel of the brook again accompanied the silence. Not a leaf moved on the bushes of those far-swelling fields or on the hill that hid their summit; the air was like the moonlight, so fragrantly cool with the odors of the damp fern and birch. The straight, supple figure of Girard still stood in the roadway, bareheaded, with that powerful effect which he had, even here, of absorbing all the life of the scene.

Dosia experienced the inexplicable feeling of the girl alone, for the first time, with the man who loves her and whom she loves. At that moment she loved him so much that she would have fled anywhere in the world from him.

The next moment he said in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Sit down on that stone, and let me shake out your shoes before we go on; they're full of earth."

She obeyed with an open-eyed gaze that dwelt on him while he knelt down and loosened the bows, and took off the little clumpy low shoes, shaking them out carefully, and then put them on once more, retying the bows neatly with long, slowly accomplishing fingers.

"They'll get full of earth again," she protested, her voice half lost in the silence.

"Then I'll take them off and shake them out over again."

He stood up, brushing the sand from his palms, smiling down at her as she stood up also. "I've always dreamed of doing that," he said simply. "I've dreamed of taking you in my arms and carrying you off through the night—as I couldn't that first time! I've longed so to do it. There have been times when I couldn't *stand* it to see you, because you weren't mine." Then—her hands were in his, his dear, protecting hands, the hands she loved, with their thrilling, long-familiar touch, claiming as well as giving.

"Oh—*Dosia!*" he said below his breath.

As their eyes dwelt on each other in that long look, all that had hurt love rose up between them, and passed away, forgiven. She foresaw a time when all her life before he came into it would have dropped out of remembrance as a tale that is told. And now—

It seemed that he was going to be a very splendid lover!

The summer was nearly at an end—a summer that had brought rehabilitation to the Typometer Company, yet rehabilitation of a certain kind, under strict rule, strict economy, endless work. Nominally the same thing, the typometer was now but one factor of trade among a dozen other patented inventions under the control of Rondell Brothers.

If there was not quite the same personal flavor as yet in Justin's relation to the business which had seemed so inspiringly his own, there was a larger relation to greater interests, a wider field, a greater sense of security, and a sense of justice in the change; he felt that he had much to learn. There was something in him that could not profit where other men profited—that could not take advantage when that advantage meant loss to another. He was not great enough alone to reconcile the narrowing factors of trade with that warring law within him. The stumbling of Cater would have been another stumbling-block if it had not been that one; that for which Leverich, with Martin always behind him, had chosen Justin first had been the very thing that had fought against them.



He held out his arm unconsciously as Lois stole into the room

The summer was far spent. Justin had been working hard. It was long after midnight. Lois slept, but Justin could not; he rose and went into the adjoining room, and sat down by the open window. The night had been very close, but now a faint breath stirred from somewhere out of the darkness. It was just before the dawn—Justin looked out into a gloom in which the darkness of trees wavered uncertainly and brought with it a vague remembrance. He had done all this before. When? Suddenly he recollected the night he had sat at this same window, at the beginning of this terrible journey, and his thoughts and feelings then; his deep loneliness of soul, the prevision of the pain even of fulfillment—an endless, endless arid waste, with the welling forth of that black spirit of evil in his own nature as the only vital thing to bear him secret company—a moment that was wolfish to his better nature. Almost with the remembrance came the same mood, but only as reflected in the surface of his saner nature, not arising from it.

As he gazed, wrapped in self-communing, on the vague formlessness of the night, it began gradually to dissolve mysteriously, and the outlines of the trees and the surrounding objects melted into view; a bird sang from somewhere near by, a heavenly, clear, full-throated call that brought a shaft of light from across the world, broadening, as the eye leaped to it, into a great and spreading glory of flame.

It had rained just before; the drops still hung on bush and tree, and as the dazzling radiance of the sun touched them every drop also radiated light, prismatic and scintillating—an almost audibly tinkling joy. So indescribably wonderful and beautiful, yet so tender, seemed this scene—as of a mighty light informing the least atom of our tearful human existence—that the profoundest depths of Justin's nature opened to the illumination.

In that moment, with calm eyes, and lips firmly pressed together, his thoughts reached upward; far, far upward. For the first time, he felt in accordance with something divine and beyond—an accordance that seemed to solve the meaning of life; what had gone and what was to come. All the hopes, the planning, the seeking and slaving, whatever they accomplished or did not accomplish, they fashioned us, ourselves. As it had been, so it still would be. But for what had

gone before, he had not had this hour.

It was the journey itself that counted—the dear joys by the way, that come even through suffering and through pain—the joy of the red dawn, of the summer breeze, of the winter sun; the joy of children, the joy of companionship.

He held out his arm unconsciously as Lois stole into the room.

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