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THE WINDOW-GAZER

ISABEL ECCLESTONE MACKAY

So in ye matere of Life's goodlie showe
Some buy what doth them plese.
While others stand withoute and gaze thereinne—
Your eare, good folk, for these!
—OLD ENGLISH RHYME.

THE WINDOW-GAZER

BY

ISABEL ECCLESTONE MACKAY

AUTHOR OF "MIST OF MORNING," "UP THE HILL AND OVER," "THE SHINING SHIP," ETC.

THE WINDOW-GAZER

CHAPTER I

Professor Spence sat upon an upturned keg—and shivered. No one had told him that there might be fog and he had not happened to think of it for himself. Still, fog in a coast city at that time of the year was not an unreasonable happening and the professor was a reasonable man. It wasn't the fog he blamed so much as the swiftness of its arrival. Fifteen minutes ago the world had been an ordinary world. He had walked about in it freely, if somewhat irritably, following certain vague directions of the hotel clerk as to the finding of Johnston's wharf. He had found Johnston's wharf; extracted it neatly from a very wilderness of wharves, a feat upon which Mr. Johnston, making boats in a shed at the end of it, had complimented him highly.

"There's terrible few as finds me just off," said Mr. Johnston. "Hours it takes 'em sometimes, sometimes days." It was clear that he was restrained from adding "weeks" only by a natural modesty.

At the time, this emphasizing of the wharf's seclusion had seemed extravagant, but now the professor wasn't so sure. For the wharf had again mysteriously lost itself. And Mr. Johnston had lost himself, and the city and the streets of it, and the sea and its ships were all lost—there was nothing left anywhere save a keg (of nails) and Professor Benis Hamilton Spence sitting upon it. Around him was nothing but a living, pulsing whiteness, which pushed momentarily nearer.

It was interesting. But it was really very cold. The professor, who had suffered much from sciatica owing to an injury of the left leg, remembered that he had been told by his medical man never to allow himself to shiver; and here he was, shivering violently without so much as asking his own leave. And the fog crept closer. He put out his hands to push it back—and immediately his hands were lost too. "Really," murmured the professor, "this is most interesting!" Nevertheless, he reclaimed his hands and placed them firmly in his coat pockets.

He began to wish that he had stayed with Mr. Johnston in the boat shed, pending the arrival of the launch which, so certain letters in his pocket informed him, would leave Johnston's wharf at 5 o'clock, or there-abouts, Mondays and Fridays. Mr. Johnston had felt very uncertain about this. "Though she does happen along off and on," he said optimistically, "and she might come today. Not," he added with commendable caution, "that I'd call old Doc. Farr's boat a 'launch' myself."

"What," asked Professor Spence, "would you call her yourself?"

"Don't know as I can just hit on a name," said Mr. Johnston. "Doesn't come natural to me to be free with language."

It had been pleasant enough on the wharf at first and certainly it had been worth something to see the fog come in. Its incredible advance, wave upon wave of massed and silent whiteness, had held him spellbound. While he had thought it still far off, it was upon him—around him, behind him, everywhere!

But perhaps it would go as quickly as it had come.

He had heard that this is sometimes a characteristic of fog. Fortunately he had already selected a keg upon which to sit, so with a patient fatalism, product of a brief but lurid career in Flemish trenches, he resigned himself to wait. The keg was dry, that was something, and if he spread the newspaper in his pocket over the most sciatic part of the shrapneled leg he might escape with nothing more than twinges.

How beautiful it was—this salt shroud from the sea! How it eddied and funneled and whorled, now massing thick like frosted glass, now thinning to a web of tissue. Suddenly, while he watched, a lane broke through. He saw clearly the piles at the wharf's end, a glimpse of dark water, and, between him and it, a figure huddled in a cloak—a female figure, also sitting upon an upturned keg. Then the magic mist closed in again.

"How the deuce did she get there?" the professor asked himself crossly. "She wasn't there before the fog came." He remembered having noticed that keg while choosing his own and there had been no woman sitting on it then. "Anyway," he reflected, "I don't know her and I won't have to speak to her." The thought warmed him so that he almost forgot to shiver. From which you may gather that Professor Spence was a bachelor, comparatively young; that he was of a retiring disposition and the object of considerable unsolicited attention in his own home town.

He arose cautiously from the keg of nails. It might be well to return to the boatshed, even at the risk of falling into the Inlet. But he had not proceeded very far before, suddenly, as he had hoped it would, the mist began to lift. Swiftly, before the puff of a warmer breeze, it eddied and thinned. Its soundless, impalpable pressure lessened. The wharf, the sea, the city began to steal back, sly, expressionless, pretending that they had been there all the time. Even Mr. Johnston could be clearly seen coming down from the boatshed with a curious figure beside him—a figure so odd and unfamiliar that he might have been part of the unfamiliar fog itself.

"Well, you've certainly struck it lucky today," called the genial Mr. Johnston. "This here is Doc. Farr's boy. He's going right back over there now and he'll take you along—if you want to go."

There was a disturbing cadence of doubt in the latter part of his speech which affected the professor's always alert curiosity, as did also the appearance of the "boy" reputed to belong to Dr. Farr. How old he was no one could have guessed. The yellow parchment of his face was ageless; ageless also the inscrutable, blank eyes. Only one thing was certain—he had never been young. For the rest, he was utterly composed and indifferent, and unmistakably Chinese.

"I hope there is no mistake," said Professor Spence hesitatingly. "Dr. Farr certainly informed me that this was the wharf at which his launch usually—er—tied up. But—there could scarcely be two doctors of that name, I suppose? It's somewhat uncommon."

"Oh, it's him you want," assured Mr. Johnston. "Only man of that name hereabouts. Lives out across the Narrows somewheres. Used to live here in Vancouver years ago but now he don't honor us much. Queer old skate! They say he's got some good Indian things, though—if it's them you're after?"

The professor ignored the question but pondered the information.

"I think you are right. It must be the same person," he said. "But he certainly led me to expect —"

A chuckle from the boat-builder interrupted him. "Ah, he'd do that, all right," grinned Mr. Johnston. "They do say he has a special gift that way."

"Well, thank you very much anyway." The professor offered his hand cordially. "And if we're going, we had better go."

"You'll be a tight fit in the launch," said Mr. Johnston. "Miss Farr's down 'ere somewhere. I saw her pass."

"Miss Farr!" The professor's ungallant horror was all too patent. He turned haunted eyes toward the second nail keg, now plainly visible and unoccupied.

"Missy in boat. She waitee. No likee!" said the Chinaman, speaking for the first time.

"But," began the professor, and then, seeing the appreciative grin upon Mr. Johnston's speaking countenance, he continued blandly—"Very well, let us not keep the lady waiting. Especially as she doesn't like it. Take this bag, my man, it's light. I'll carry the other."

With no words, and no apparent effort, the old man picked up both bags and shuffled off. The professor followed. At the end of the wharf there were steps and beneath the steps a small floating platform to which was secured what the professor afterwards described as "a marine vehicle, classification unknown." Someone, girl or woman, hidden in a loose, green coat, was already seated there. A pair of dark eyes looked up impatiently.

"I am afraid you were not expecting me," said the professor. "I am Hamilton Spence. Your father—"

"You're getting your feet wet," said the person in the coat. "Please jump in."

The professor jumped. He hadn't jumped since the sciatica and he didn't do it gracefully. But it landed him in the boat. The Chinaman was already in his place. A rattle and a roar arose, the air turned suddenly to gasoline and they were off.

"Has it a name?" asked the professor as soon as he could make himself heard.

"What?"

The professor was not feeling amiable. "It might be easier to refer to it in conversation if one knew its name," he remarked, "'Launch' seems a trifle misleading."

There was a moment's silence. Then, "I suppose 'launch' is what father called it," said his companion. He could have sworn that there was cool amusement in her tone. "I see your difficulty," she went on. "But, fortunately, it has a name of its own. It is called the Tillicum.'"

"As such I salute it!" said Spence, gravely.

The other made no attempt to continue the conversation. She retired into the fastness of the green cloak, leaving the professor to ponder the situation. It seemed on the face of it an absurd situation enough, yet there should certainly be nothing absurd in it. Spence felt a somewhat bulky package of letters even now in the pocket of his coat. These letters were real and sensible enough. They comprised his correspondence with one Dr. Herbert Farr, Vancouver, B. C. As letters they were quite charming. The earlier ones had dealt with the professor's pet subject, primitive psychology. The later ones had been more personal. Spence found himself remembering such phrases as "my humble but picturesque home," "my Chinese servant, a factotum extraordinary," "my young daughter who attends to all my simple wants" and "my secretary on whose efficient aid I more and more depend—"

"I suppose there is a secretary?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh yes," answered the green cloak, "I'm it."

"And, 'a young daughter who attends'—"

"—'to all my simple wants?' That's me, too."

"But you can't be 'my Chinese servant, a factotum extraordinary?'"

"No, you have already met Li Ho."

"There?" queried the professor, gesturing weakly.

"Yes."

Spence pulled himself together. "There must be a home, though," he asserted firmly, "'Humble but picturesque'—"

"Well," admitted the voice from the green cloak, "it is rather picturesque. And it is certainly humble."

Suddenly she laughed. It was a very young laugh. The professor felt relieved. She was a girl, then, not a woman.

"Isn't father too' amusing?" she asked pleasantly.

"Quite too much so," agreed the professor. He was very cold. "I beg your pardon," he added stiffly, remembering his manners.

"Oh, I don't mind!" The girl assured him. "Father is a dreadful old fraud. I have no illusions. But perhaps it isn't so bad after all. He really is quite an authority on the West Coast Indians,—if that is what you wish to consult him about."

Professor Spence was in a quandary. But perfect frankness seemed indicated.

"I didn't come to consult him about anything," he said slowly. "I am a psychologist. I wish to do my own observing, at first hand. I came not to question Dr. Farr, but to board with him."

"BOARD WITH HIM!"

In her heartfelt surprise the girl turned to him and he saw her face, young, arresting, and excessively indignant.

"Quite so," he said. "Do not excite yourself. I perceive the impossibility. I can't have you attending to my wants, however simple. Neither can I share the services of a secretary whose post, I gather, is an honorary one. But I simply cannot go back to Mr. Johnston's grin: so if you can put me up for the night—"

She had turned away again and was silent for so long that Spence became uneasy. But at last she spoke.

"This is really too bad of father! He has never done anything quite as absurd as this before. I don't quite see what he expected to get out of it. He might know that you would not stay. He wouldn't want you to stay. I can't understand—unless," her voice became crisp with sudden enlightenment, "unless you were foolish enough to pay in advance! Surely you did not do that?"

The professor was observing his boots in an abstracted way.

"I am afraid my feet are very wet," he remarked.

"They are. They are resting in at least an inch of water," she said coldly. "But that isn't answering my question. Did you pay my father anything in advance?"

The professor fidgeted.

"A small payment in advance is not very unusual," he offered. "Especially if one's prospective host is anxious to add a few little unaccustomed luxuries—"

"Yes, yes," she interrupted rudely. "I recognize the phrase!" Without looking up he felt her wrathful gaze upon his face. "It means that father has simply done you brown. Oh, well, it's your own fault. You're old enough to know your way about. And the luxuries you will enjoy at our place will certainly be unaccustomed ones. Didn't you even ask for references?"

Her tone irritated the professor unaccountably.

"Are we nearly there?" he asked, disdaining to answer. "I am extremely cold."

"You will have a nice climb to warm you," she told him grimly, "all up hill!"

"'A verdant slope,'" quoted the professor sweetly, "'rising gently from salt water toward snowclad peaks, which, far away,—'" They caught each other's eyes and laughed.

"Here is our landing," said the girl quite cheerfully. "And none too soon! I suppose you haven't noticed it, but the 'Tillicum' is leaking like a sieve!"

CHAPTER II

Salt in the air and the breath of pine and cedar are excellent sleep inducers. Professor Spence had not expected to sleep that night; yet he did sleep. He awoke to find the sun high. A great beam of it lay across the foot of his camp cot, bringing comforting warmth to the toes which protruded from the shelter of abbreviated blankets. The professor wiggled his toes cautiously. He was accustomed to doing this before making more radical movements. They were a valuable index to the state of the sciatic nerve. This morning they wiggled somewhat stiffly and there were also various twinges. But considering the trying experiences of yesterday it was surprising that they could wiggle at all. He lifted himself slowly—and sank back with a relieved sigh. It would have been embarrassing, he thought, had he not been able to get up.

All men have their secret fears and Professor Spence's secret fear was embodied in a story which his friend and medical adviser (otherwise "Old Bones") had seen fit to cite as a horrible example. It concerned a man who had sciatica and who didn't take proper care of him-self. One day this man went for a walk and fell suddenly upon the pavement unable to move or even to explain matters satisfactorily to a heartless policeman who insisted that he was drunk. The doctor had laughed over this story; doctors are notoriously inhuman. The professor had laughed also, but the possible picture of him-self squirming helplessly before a casually interested public had terrors which no enemies' shrapnel had ever been able to inspire.

Well, thank heaven it hadn't happened yet! The professor confided
his satisfaction to an inquisitive squirrel which swung, bright eyed, from a branch which swept the window, and, sitting up, prepared to take stock of the furnishings of his room. A grim smile signalled his discovery that there were no furnishings to take stock of. Save for his camp bed, an affair of stout canvas stretched between crossed legs, the room was beautifully bare. Not a chair, not a wash-stand, not a table cumbered it—unless a round, flat tree stump, which looked as if it might have grown up through the floor, was intended for both washstand and table. It had served the latter purpose at any rate as upon it rested the candle-stick containing the solitary candle by which he had got himself to bed.

"Single room, without bath," murmured the professor. "Oh, if my Aunt Caroline could see me now!"

Oddly enough, something in the thought of Aunt Caroline seemed to have a reconciling effect upon Aunt Caroline's nephew. He lay back upon his one thin pillow and reviewed his position with surprising fortitude. After all, Aunt Caroline couldn't see him—and that was something. Besides, it had been an adventure. It was surprising how he had come to look for adventures since that day, five years ago, when the grim adventure of war had called him from the peace-filled beginnings of what he had looked forward to as a life of scholarly leisure. He had been thirty, then, and quite done with adventuring. Now he was thirty-five and—well, he supposed the war had left him restless. Presently he would settle down. He would begin his great book on the "Psychology of Primitive Peoples." Everything would be as it had been before.

But in the meantime it insisted upon being somewhat different—hence this feeling which was not all dissatisfaction with his present absurd position. He was, he admitted it, a badly sold man. But did it matter? What had he lost except money and self-esteem? The money did not matter and he was sure that Aunt Caroline, at least, would say that he could spare the self-esteem. Besides, he would recover it in time. His opinion of himself as a man of perspicacity in business had recovered from harder blows than this. There was that affair of the South American mines, for instance,—but anybody may be mistaken about South American mines. He had told Aunt Caroline this. "It was," he told Aunt Caroline, "a financial accident. I do not blame myself. My father, as you know, was a far-sighted man. These aptitudes run in families." Aunt Caroline had said,

"Humph!"

Nevertheless it was true that the elder Hamilton Spence, now deceased, had been a far-sighted man. Benis had always cherished a warm admiration for the commercial astuteness which he conceived himself to have inherited. He would have been, he thought, exactly like his father—if he had cared for the drudgery of business. So it was a habit of his, when in a quandary, to consider what his parent would have done and then to do likewise—an excellent rule if he had ever succeeded in applying it properly. But there were always so many intruding details. Take the present predicament, for instance. He could scarcely picture his father in these precise circumstances. To do so would be to presuppose actions on the part of that astute ancestor quite out of keeping with his known character. Would Hamilton Spence, senior, have crossed a continent at the word of one of whom he knew nothing, save that he wrote an agreeable letter? Would he have engaged (and paid for in advance) board and lodging at a place wholly supposititious? Would he have neglected to ask for references? Hamilton Spence, junior, was forced to admit that he would not.

But those letters of old Farr had been so blamed plausible!

Well, anyhow, he would have the pleasure of meeting and outfacing the old rascal. This satisfaction he had expected the night before. But upon their arrival at the "picturesque though humble" cottage (after a climb at the memory of which his leg still shuddered), it was found that Dr. Farr was not at home.

"He has probably gone 'up trail'" Miss Farr had said casually, "and in that case he won't be back until morning."

"Did you say up?" The professor's voice held incredulity. Whereupon his hostess had most unkindly smiled: "You're not much of a walker, are you?" was her untactful comment.

"My leg—" He had actually begun to tell her about his leg! Luckily her amused shrug had acted as a period. He felt very glad of this now. To have admitted weakness would have been weak indeed. For the girl was so splendidly strong! Only a child, of course, but so finely moulded, so superbly strung—light and lithe. How she had swung up the trail, a heavy packet in either hand, with scarcely a quickened breath to tell of the effort! Her face?—he tried to recall her face but found it provokingly elusive. It was a young face, but not youthful. The distinction seemed strained and yet it was a real distinction. The eyes were grey, he thought. The eyebrows very fine, dark and slanted slightly, as if left that way by some unanswered question. The nose was straight, delightful in profile. The mouth too firm for a face so young, the chin too square—perhaps. But even as he catalogued the features the face escaped him. He had a changing impression, only, of a graceful contour, warm and white, dark careless eyes, and hair—quantities of hair lying close and smooth in undulated waves—its color like nothing so much as the brown of a crisping autumn leaf. He remembered, though, that she was poorly dressed—and utterly unconscious, or careless, of being so. And she had been amused, undoubtedly amused, at his annoyance. A most unfeminine girl! And that at least was fortunate—for he was very, very weary of everything feminine!

CHAPTER III

Yawningly, the professor reached for his watch.

It had run down.

"Evidently they do not wake guests for breakfast," he mused. "Perhaps," with rising dismay, "there isn't any breakfast to wake them for!"

He felt suddenly ravenous and hurried into his clothes. It is really wonderful how all kinds of problems give place to the need for a wash and breakfast. Somewhere outside he could hear water running, so with a towel over his arm and a piece of soap in his pocket he started out to find it. His room, as he had noted the night before, was one of two small rooms under the eaves. There was a small, dark landing between them and a steep, ladderlike stair led directly down into the living-room. There was no one there; neither was there anyone in the small kitchen at the back. Benis Spence decided that this second room was a kitchen because it contained a cooking stove. Otherwise he would not have recognized it, Aunt Caroline's idea of a kitchen being quite otherwise. Someone had been having breakfast on a corner of the table and a fire crackled in the stove. Window and door were open, and leafy, ferny odors mingled with the smell of burning cedar. The combined scent was very pleasant, but the professor could have wished that the bouquet of coffee and fried bacon had been included. He was quite painfully hungry.

Through the open door the voice of falling water still called to him but of other and more human voices there were none. Well, he could at least wash. With a shrug he turned away from

the half cleared table and, in the doorway, almost ran into the arms of a little, old man in a frock coat and a large umbrella. There were other items of attire, but they did not seem to matter.

"My dear sir," said the little, old man, in a gentle, gurgling voice. "Let me make you welcome —very, very welcome!"

"Thank you," said the professor.

There were other things that he might have said, but they did not seem to suggest themselves. All the smooth and biting sentences which his mind had held in readiness for this moment faded and died before the stunning knowledge of their own inadequacy. Surprise, pure and simple, stamped them down.

"Unpardonable, my not being at home to receive you," went on this amazing old gentleman. "But the exact time of your coming was somewhat indefinite. Still, I am displeased with myself, much displeased. You slept well, I trust?"

The professor was understood to say that he had slept well.

Dr. Farr sighed. "Youth!" he murmured, waving his umbrella. "Oh, youth!"

"Quite so," said the professor. There was a dryness in his tone not calculated to encourage rhapsody. The old gentleman's gurgle changed to a note of practical helpfulness.

"You wish to bathe, I see. I will not detain you. Our sylvan bathroom you will find just down the trail and behind those alders. Pray take your time. You will be quite undisturbed."

With another dry "Thank you," the professor passed on. He was limping slightly, otherwise he would have passed on much faster. His instinct was to seek cover before giving vent to the emotion which consumed him.

Behind the alders, and taking the precaution of stuffing his mouth with a towel, he could release this rising gust of almost hysterical laughter.

That was Dr. Herbert Farr! The fulfilled vision of the learned scholar he had come so far to see capped with nicety the climax of this absurd adventure. What an utter fool, what an unbelievable idiot he had made of himself! For the moment he saw clear and all normal reactions proved inadequate. There was left only laughter.

When this was over he felt better. Withdrawing the towel and wiping the tears of strangled mirth from his eyes he looked around him. The sylvan bathroom was indeed a charming place. Great rocks, all smooth and brown with velvet moss, curved gently down to form a basin into which fell the water from the tiny stream whose musical flowing had called to him through his window. Around, and somewhat back beneath tall sentinel trees, crept the bushes and bracken of the mountain; but, above, the foliage opened and the sun shone in, turning the brown-green water of the pool to gold. With a sigh of pure delight the laughter-weary professor stepped into its cool brightness—and with a gasp of something very different, stepped quickly out again. But, quick as he was, the liquid ice of that green-gold pool was quicker. It ran through his tortured nerve like mounting fire—"Oh—oh—damn!" said the professor heartily.

The sweat stood out on his forehead before he had rubbed and warmed the outraged limb into some semblance of quietude again. The pool seemed no longer lovely. Very gingerly he completed such ablutions as were strictly necessary and then, very cold, very stiff and very, very empty he turned back toward the house.

This time, instead of passing through the small vegetable garden behind the kitchen, he skirted the clearing, coming out into the wide, open space in front of the cottage. On one side of him, and behind, spread the mountain woods but before him and to the right the larger trees were down. There was a vista—for the first time since he had sat upon a keg in the fog he forgot him-self and his foolishness, his hunger, his aching nerves, his smarting pride, everything! The beauty before him filled his heart and mind, leaving not a cranny anywhere for lesser things. Blue sea, blue sky, blue mountains, blue smoke that rose in misty spirals as from a thousand fairy fires and, nearer, the sun-warmed, dew-drenched green—green of the earth, green of the trees, green of the graceful, sweeping curves of wooded point and bay. Far away, on peaks half hidden, snow still lay—a whiteness so ethereal that the gazer caught his breath.

And with it all there was the scent of something—something so fresh, so penetrating, so infinitely sweet—what could it be?

"Ambrosia!" said Benis Spence, unconscious that he spoke aloud.

"Balm of Gilead," said a practical voice beside him. "It smells like that in the bud, you know."

"Does it?" The professor's tone was dreamy. "Honey and wine—that's what it's like—honey and wine in the wilderness! You didn't tell me it would be like this," he added, turning abruptly to his companion of the night before.

"How could I tell what it would be like—to you?" asked the girl. "It's different for everyone.

I've known people stand here and think of nothing but their breakfast."

At the word "breakfast" (which had temporarily slipped from his vocabulary) the famished professor wheeled so quickly that his knee twisted. Miss Farr smiled, her cool and too-understanding smile.

"There's something to eat," she said. "Come in."

She did not wait for him but walked off quickly. The professor followed more slowly. The path, even the front path, was rough (he had noticed that last night); but the cottage, seen now with the glamour of its outlook still in his eyes, seemed not quite so impossible as he had thought. The grace of early spring lay upon it and all around. True, it was small and unpainted and in bad repair, but its smallness and its brownness seemed not out of keeping with the mountain-side. Its narrow veranda was railed by unbarked branches from the cedars. Its walls were rough and weather-beaten, its few windows, broad and low. The door was open and led directly into the living room whence his hostess had preceded him.

The marvellous scent of the morning was everywhere. The room, as he went in, seemed full of it. Not such a bad room, either, not nearly so comfortless as he had thought last night. There was a fireplace, for instance, a real fireplace of cobble-stones, for use, not ornament; a long table stood in the middle of the room, an old fashioned sofa sprawled beneath one of the windows. There was a dresser at one end with open shelves for china and, at the other, a book-case, also open, filled with old and miscellaneous books....

And, best and most encouraging of all, there was breakfast on the table.

"I told Li Ho to give you eggs," said Miss Farr. "It is the one thing we can be sure of having fresh. Do you like eggs?"

The professor liked eggs. He had never liked eggs so well before, except once in Flanders—he looked up to thank his hostess, but she had not waited. Nevertheless the breakfast was very good. Not until he had finished the last crumb of it did he notice that the comfort of the place was more apparent than real. The table tipped whenever you touched it. The chair upon which he sat had lost an original leg and didn't take kindly to its substitute. The china was thick and chipped. The walls were unfinished and draughty, the ceiling obviously leaked. There had been some effort to keep the place livable, for the faded curtains were at least clean and the floor swept—but the blight of decay and poverty lay hopelessly upon it all.

And what was a young girl—a girl with level eyes and lifted chin—doing in this galley? ... Undoubtedly the less he bothered himself about that question the better. This young person was probably just as she wished to appear, careless and content. And in any case it was none of his business.

The sensible thing for him to do was to pack his bag and turn his back—the absurd old man with the umbrella ... pshaw! ... He wouldn't go home, of course. Aunt Caroline would say "I told you so" ... no, she wouldn't say it—she would look it, which was worse ... he had come away for a rest cure and a rest cure he intended to have ... with a groan he thought of the pictures he had formed of this place, the comfortable seclusion, the congenial old scholar, the capable secretary, the—he looked up to find that Miss Farr had returned and was regarding him with a cool and pleasantly aloof consideration.

"Are you wondering how soon you may decently leave?" she inquired. "We are not at all formal here. And, of course—" her shrug and gesture disposed of all other matters at issue. "Yours are the only feelings that need to be considered. I should like to know, though," she continued with some warmth of interest, "if you really came just to observe Indians. Father might think of a variety of attractions. Health?—any-thing from gout to tuberculosis. Fish?—father can talk about fish until you actually see them leaping. Shooting?—according to father, all the animals of the ark abound in these mountains. Curios?—father has an Indian mound somewhere which he always keeps well stocked."

Professor Spence smiled. "So many activities," he said, "should bring better results."

"They are too well known. Most people make some inquiry." The faint emphasis on the "most" made the professor feel uncomfortable. Was it possible that this young girl considered him, Benis Spence, something of a fool? He dismissed the idea as unlikely.

"Inquiry in my case would have meant delay," he answered frankly, "and I was in a hurry. I wanted to get away from—I wanted to get away for rest and study in a congenial environment. Still, I will admit that I might not have inquired in any case. I am accustomed to trust to my instinct. My father was a very far-sighted man—what are you laughing at?"

"Nothing. Only it sounded so much like 'nevertheless, my grandsire drew a long bow at the battle of Hastings'—don't you remember, in 'Ivanhoe?'"

The professor sighed. "I have forgotten 'Ivanhoe,'" he said, "which means, I suppose, that I have forgotten youth. Sometimes its ghost walks, though. I think it was that which kept me so restless at home. I thought that if I could get away—You see, before the war, I was gathering

material for a book on primitive psychology and when I came back I found some of the keenness gone." He smiled grimly. "I came back inclined to think that all psychology is primitive. But I wanted to get to work again. I had never studied the West Coast Indians and your father's letters led me to believe that—er—"

It was not at all polite of her to laugh, but he had to admit that her laughter was very pleasant and young.

"It is funny, you know," she murmured apologetically. "For I am sure you pictured father as a kind of white patriarch, surrounded by his primitive children (father is certain to have called the Indians his 'children'!). Unfortunately, the Indians detest father. They're half afraid of him, too. I don't know why. Years ago, when we lived up coast—" she paused, plainly annoyed at her own loquacity, "we knew plenty of Indians then," she finished shortly.

"And are there no Indians here at all?"

"There is an Indian reservation at North Vancouver. That is the nearest. I do not think they are just what you are looking for. But both in Vancouver and Victoria you can get in touch with men who can direct you. Your journey need not be entirely wasted."

"But Dr. Farr himself—Is he not something of an authority?"

"Y-es. I suppose he is."

"What information the letters contained seemed to be the real thing."

"Oh, the letters were all right. I wrote them."

"You!"

"Didn't I tell you I was the secretary? My department is the 'information bureau.' I do not see the actual letters. There are always personal bits which father puts in himself."

"Bits regarding boarding accommodation, etc.?"

She did not answer his smile, and her eyes grew hard as she nodded.

"Usually I can keep things from going that far. I can't quite see how it happened so suddenly in your case."

"I happen to be a sudden person."

"Evidently. Father was quite dumbfounded when he knew you had actually arrived. He certainly expected an interval during which he could invent good and sufficient reasons for putting you off."

"Such as?"

"Such as smallpox. An outbreak of smallpox among the Indians is quite a favorite with father."

"The old—I beg your pardon!"

"Don't bother. You are certainly entitled to an expression of your feelings. It may be the only satisfaction, you will get. But aren't we getting away from the question?"

"Question?"

"When do you wish Li Ho to take you back to Vancouver?"

Professor Spence opened his lips to say that any time would suit. It was the obvious answer, the only sensible answer, the answer which he fully intended to make. But he did not make it.

"Must I really go?" he asked. He was, so he had said himself, a sudden person.

His hostess met his deprecating gaze with pure surprise.

"You can't possibly want to stay?"

"I quite possibly can. I like it here. And I'm horribly tired."

The hostility which had begun to gather in her eyes lightened a little.

"Tired? I noticed that you limped this morning. Is there anything the matter with you?"

It was certainly an ungracious way of putting it. And her eyes, while not exactly hostile, were ungracious, too. They would make anyone with a spark of pride want to go away at once. The professor told himself this. Besides, his only possible reason for wishing to stay had been some unformed idea of being helpful to the girl herself—ungrateful minx!

"If there is anything really wrong—" the cold incredulity of her tone was the last straw.

"Nothing wrong at all!" said Professor Spence. He arose briskly. Alas! He had forgotten his sciatic nerve. He had forgotten, too, the crampiness of its temper since that glacial bath, and, most completely of all, had he forgotten the fate of the man-who-didn't-take-care-of-himself. Therefore it was with something of surprise that he found himself crumpled up upon the floor. Only when he tried to rise again and felt the sweat upon his forehead did he remember the doctor's story.... Spence swore under his breath and attempted to pull himself up by the table.

"Wait a moment!"

The cold voice held authority—the authority he had come to respect in hospital—and he waited, setting his teeth. Next moment he set them still harder, for Li Ho and the girl picked him up without ceremony and laid him, whitefaced, upon the sprawling sofa.

"Why didn't you say you had sciatica?" asked Miss Farr, belligerently.

It seemed unnecessary to answer.

"I know it is sciatica," she went on, "because I've seen it before. And if you had no more sense than to bathe in that pool you deserve all you've got."

"It looked all right."

"Oh—looked! It's melted ice—simply."

"So I realized, afterwards."

"You seem to do most things afterwards. What caused it in the first place, cold?"

"The sciatica? No—an injury."

There was a slight pause.

"Was it—in the war?" The new note in her voice did not escape Spence. He lied promptly—too promptly. Desire Farr was an observant young person, quite capable of drawing conclusions.

"I'm not going to be sympathetic," she said. "That," with sudden illumination, "is probably what you ran away from. But you'd better be truthfull Was it a bullet?"

"Shrapnel."

"And the treatment?"

"Rest, and the tablets in my bag."

"Right—I'll get them."

It was quite like old hospital times. The sofa was hard and the pillows knobby. But he had lain upon worse. Li Ho was not more unhandy than many an orderly. And the tablets, quickly and neatly administered by Miss Farr, brought something of relief.

Not until she saw the strain within his eyes relax did his self-appointed nurse pass sentence.

"You certainly can't move until you are better," she said. "You'll have to stay. It can't be helped but—father will have a fit."

"A fit?" murmured Spence. Privately he thought that a fit might do the old gentleman good.

"He hates having anyone here," she went on thoughtfully. "It upsets him."

"Does it? But why? I can understand it upsetting you. But he—he doesn't do the work, does he?"

"Not exactly," the girl smiled. "But—oh well, I don't believe in explanations. You'll see things for your-self, perhaps. And now I'll get you a book. I won't warn you not to move for I know you can't."

With a glance which, true to her promise, was not overburdened with sympathy, his strangely acquired hostess went out and closed the door.

He tried to read the book she had handed him ("Green Mansions"—ho-r had it wandered out here?) but his mind could not detach itself. It insisted upon listening for sounds outside. And presently a sound came—the high, thin sound of a voice shaking with weakness or rage. Then the cool tones of his absent nurse, then the voice again—certainly a most unpleasant voice—and the crashing sound of something being violently thrown to the ground and stamped upon. Through the closed door, the professor seemed to see a vision of an absurd old man with pale eyes, who shrieked and stamped upon an umbrella.

"That," said Hamilton Spence, with resignation, "that must be father having a fit!"

CHAPTER IV

Letter from Professor Hamilton Spence to his friend, John Rogers, M.D.

DEAR Bones: Chortle if you want to—your worst prognostications have come true. The unexpectedness of the sciatic nerve, as set forth in your parting discourse, has amply proved itself. The dashed thing is all that you said of it—and more. It did not even permit me to collapse gracefully—or to choose my public. Your other man had a policeman, hadn't he?

Here I am, stranded upon a sofa from which I cannot get up and detained indefinitely upon a mountain from which I cannot get down. My nurse (I have a nurse) refuses to admit the mountain. She insists upon referring to this dizzy height as "just above sea-level" and declares that the precipitous ascent thereto is "a slight grade." Otherwise she is quite sane.

But sanity is more than I feel justified in claiming for anyone else in this household. There is Li Ho, for instance. Well, I'm not certain about Li Ho. He may be Chinese-sane. My nurse says he is. But I have no doubts at all about my host. He is so queer that I sometimes wonder if he is not a figment. Perhaps I imagine him. If so, my imagination is going strong. What I seem to see is a little old man in a frock coat so long that his legs (like those of the Queen of Spain) are negligible. He has a putty colored face (so blurred that I keep expecting him to rub it out altogether), white hair, pale blue eyes—and an umbrella.

Yesterday, attempting to establish cordial relations, I asked him why the umbrella. He had a fit right on the spot?

Let me explain about the fits. When his daughter just said, "Father will have a fit," I thought she spoke in a Pickwickian sense, meaning, "Father will experience annoyance." But when I heard him having it, I realized that she had probably been quite literal. When father has a fit he bangs his umbrella to the floor and jumps on it. Also he tears his hair. I have seen the pieces.

I said to my nurse: "The mention of his umbrella seems to agitate your father." She turned quite pale. "It does," she said. "I hope you haven't mentioned it." I said that I had merely asked for information. "And did you get it?" asked she. I said that I had—since it was apparent that one has to carry an umbrella if one wishes to have it handy to jump upon. She didn't laugh at all, and looked so withdrawn that it was quite plain I need expect no elucidation from her.

I had to dismiss the subject altogether. But, later on, Li Ho (who appears to partially approve of me) gave a curious side light on the matter. At night as he was tucking me up safely (the sofa is slippery), he said, "Honorable Boss got hole in head-top. Sun velly bad. Umblella keep him off."

"But he carries it at night, too," I objected.

Li Ho wagged his parchment head. "Keep moon off all same. Moon muchy more bad. Full moon find urn hole. Make Honorable Boss much klasy."

Remarkably lucid explanation—don't you think so? The "hole in head top" is evidently Li Ho's picturesque figure for "mental vacuum." Therefore I gather that our yellow brother suspects his honorable boss of being weak-headed, a condition aggravated by the direct rays of the sun and especially by the full moon. He may be right—though the old man seems harmless enough. "Childlike and bland" describes him usually. Though there are times when he looks at me with those pale eyes—and I wish that I were not quite so helpless! He dislikes me. But I have known quite sane people do that.

I am writing nonsense. One has to, with sciatica. I hope this confounded leg lets me get some sleep tonight.

Yours,
B.

P.S.: Not exactly an ideal home for a young girl—is it?

CHAPTER V

It had rained all night. It had rained all yesterday. It had rained all the day before. It was raining still. Apparently it could go on raining indefinitely.

Miss Farr said not. She said that it would be certain to clear up in a day or two. "And then," she said, "you will forget that it ever rained."

Professor Spence doubted it. He had a good memory.

"You look much better this morning," his nurse went on. "Have you tried to move your leg yet?"

"I am thinking of trying it."

This was not exactly a fib on the part of the professor because he was thinking of it. But it did not include the whole truth, because he had already tried it, tried it very successfully only a few moments before. First he had made sure that he was alone in the room and then he had proceeded with the trial. Very cautiously he had drawn his lame leg up, and tenderly stretched it out. He had turned over and back again. He had wiggled his toes to see how many of them were present—only the littlest toe was still numb. He had realized that he was much better. If the improvement kept on, he knew that in a day or so he would be able to walk with the aid of a cane. And he also knew that, with his walking, his status as an invalid guest would vanish. Luckily, no one but himself could say when the walking stage was reached—hence the strict privacy of his experiments.

"Father thinks that you should be able to walk in about three days," said Miss Farr cheerfully.

Spence said he hoped that Dr. Farr was right. But the rain, he feared, might keep him back a bit, "I am really sorry," he added, "that my presence is so distasteful to the doctor. I have been here almost two weeks and I have seen so little of him that I'm afraid I am keeping him out of his own house."

"No, you are not doing that," the girl's reassurance was cordial enough, "Father is having an outside spell just now. He quite often does. Sometimes for weeks together he spends most of his time out of doors. Then, quite suddenly, he will settle down and be more like—other people."

It was her way, the professor noticed, to state facts, not to explain them.

"Then he has what I call an 'inside spell,'" she went on. "That is when he does most of his writing. He does some quite good things, you know. And a few of them get published."

"Scientific articles?" asked Spence.

"Well—articles. You might not call them scientific. Science is very exact, isn't it? Father would rather be interesting than exact any day."

Her hearer found no difficulty in believing this.

"His folk-lore stories are the best—and the least exact," continued she, heedless of the shock inflicted upon the professorial mind. "He knows exactly the kind of things Indians tell, and tells it very much better."

"You mean he—he fakes it?"

"Well—he calls it 'editing.'"

"But, my dear girl, you can't edit folk-lore!"

"Father can."

"But—but it isn't done! Such material loses all value if not authentic."

"Does it?"

The question was indifferent. So indifferent, in the face of a matter of such moment, that Hamilton Spence writhed upon his couch. Here at least there was room for genuine missionary work. He cleared his throat.

"I will tell you just how much it matters," he began firmly. But the fates were not with him, neither was his audience. Attracted by some movement which he had missed she, the audience, had slipped to the door, and was opening it cautiously.

"What is it?" asked the baffled lecturer crossly.

"S-ssh! I think it's Sami."

"A tame bear?"

"No. Wait. I'll prop you up so you can see him. Look, behind the veranda post."

The professor looked and forgot about the value of authenticity; for from behind the veranda post a most curious face was peeping—a round, solemn baby face of cafe au lait with squat, wide nose and flat-set eyes.

"A Jap?" exclaimed Spence in surprise.

"No. He's Indian. Some of the babies are so Japaneesy that it's hard to tell the difference. Father says it's a strain of the same blood. But they are not all as pretty as Sami. Isn't he a

duck?"

"He is at home in the rain, anyway. Why doesn't he come in?"

"He's afraid of you."

"That's unusual—until one has seen me."

"Sami doesn't need to see a stranger."

"Well, that's primitive enough, surely! Let's call him in."

"I'd like to, but Sami won't come for calling."

"Oh, won't he? Leave the door open and watch him."

As absorbed now as the girl herself, the professor put his finger to his lips and whistled—a low, clear whistle, rather like the calling of a meditative bird. Several times he whistled so, on different notes; and then, to her surprise, the watching girl saw the little wild thing outside stir in answer to the call. Sami came out from behind the post and stood listening, for all the world like an inquiring squirrel. The whistle sounded again, a plaintive, seeking sound, infinitely alluring. It seemed to draw the heart like a living thing. Slowly at first and then with the swift, gliding motion of the woods, the wide-eyed youngster approached the open door and stood there waiting, poised and ready for advance or flight. Again the whistle came, and to it came Sami, straight as a bird to its calling mate.

"Tamed!" said the professor softly. "See, he is not a bit afraid."

"How on earth did you do it?" asked Miss Farr when the shy, brown baby had been duly welcomed. The whistler was visibly vain.

"Oh, it's quite simple. I merely talked to him in his own language."

"I see that. But where did you learn the language?"

"Well, a fellow taught me that—man I met at Ypres. He could have whistled back the dodo, I think. He knew all kinds of calls—said all the wild things answered to them."

"Was he a great naturalist?"

The cheerful vanity faded from Spence's face, leaving it sombre.

"He—would have been," he said briefly.

Miss Farr asked no more questions. It was a restful way she had. And perhaps because she did not ask, the professor felt an unaccustomed impulse. "He was a wonderful chap," he volunteered. "There are few like him in a generation. It seemed—rather a waste."

The girl nodded. "Used or wasted—it's as it happens," she said. "There is no plan."

"That's a heathen sentiment!" The professor recovered his cheerfulness. "A sentiment not at all suited for the contemplation of extreme youth."

"I am not extremely young."

"You? I was referring to our brown brother. He is becoming uneasy again. What's the matter with him?"

Whatever was the matter, it reached, at that moment, an acute stage and Sami disappeared through the door into the kitchen. Perhaps his ears were sharper than theirs and his eyes keener. He may have seen a large umbrella coming across the clearing.

Miss Farr frowned. "Sami is afraid of father," she explained briefly. The door opened as she added, "I wonder why?"

"A caprice of childhood, my daughter," said the old doctor mildly. "Who indeed can account for the vagaries of the young?"

"They are usually quite easy to account for," replied his daughter coldly. "You must have frightened the child some time."

"Tut, tut, my dear. How could an old fogey like myself frighten anyone?"

"I don't know. But I should like to."

Father and daughter looked at each other for a moment. And again the captive on the sofa found himself disliking intensely the glance of the old man's pale blue eyes. He was glad to see that they fell before the grey eyes of the girl.

"Well, well!" murmured Dr. Farr vaguely, looking away. "It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. Tut, tut, a trifle!"

"I don't think so," said she. And abruptly she went out after the child.

"Fanciful, very fanciful," murmured the old man, looking after her. "And stubborn, very stubborn. A bad fault in one so young. But," beaming benevolently upon his guest, "we must not trouble you with our small domestic discords. You are much better, I see, much better. That is good."

"Getting along very nicely, thanks," said Spence. "I was able to change position this morning without assistance."

"Only that?" The doctor's disappointment was patent. "Come, we should progress better than that. If you will allow me to prescribe—"

"Thank you—no. I feel quite satisfied with the treatment prescribed by old Bones—I mean by my friend, Dr. Rogers. He understands the case thoroughly. One must be patient."

"Quite so, quite so." The curiously blurred face of the doctor seemed for a moment to take on sharper lines. Spence had observed it do this before under stress of feeling. But as the exact feeling which caused the change was usually obscure, it seemed safest to ignore it altogether. He was growing quite expert at ignoring things. For, quite contrary to the usual trend of his character, he was reacting to the urge of a growing desire to stay where he wasn't wanted. He didn't reason about it. He did not even admit it. But it moved in his mind.

"I'm not fretting at all about being tied up here," he went on cheerfully. "I find the air quite stimulating. I believe I could work here. In fact, I have some notes with me which I may elaborate. I fancy that, as you said in your letters, Miss Farr will prove a most capable secretary. I am going to ask her to help me."

"Are you indeed?" The doctor's tone was polite but absent.

"You do not object, I hope?"

"Object—why should I object? But Desire is busy, very busy. I doubt if her duties will spare her. I doubt it very much."

"Naturally, I should wish to offer her ample remuneration."

Again the loose lines of the strange old face seemed to sharpen. There was a growing eagerness in the pale eyes ... but it died.

"Even in that case," said Dr. Farr regretfully, "I fear it will be impossible."

Spence pressed this particular point no further. He had found out what he wanted to know, namely, that his host's desire to see the last of him was stronger even than his desire for money. His own desire to see more of his host strengthened in proportion.

"Supposing we leave it to Miss Farr herself," he suggested smoothly. "Since you have personally no objection. If she is unwilling to oblige me, of course—"

"I will speak to her," promised the doctor.

Spence smiled.

"What surprises me, doctor," he went on, pushing a little further, "is how you have managed to keep so very intelligent a secretary in so restricted an environment. The stronger one's wings, the stronger the temptation to use them."

He had expected to strike fire with this, but the pale eyes looked placidly past him.

"Desire has left me, at times, but—she has always come back." The old man's voice was very gentle, almost caressing, and should certainly have provided no reason for the chill that crept up his hearer's spine.

"She has never found work suited to her, perhaps," suggested Spence. "If you will allow me, —"

"You are very kind," the velvet was off the doctor's voice now. He rose with a certain travesty of dignity. "But I may say that I desire—that I will tolerate—no interference. My daughter's future shall be her father's care."

Spence laughed. It was an insulting laugh, and he knew it. But the contrast between the grandiloquent words and the ridiculous figure which uttered them was too much for him. Besides, though the most courteous of men, he deliberately wished to be insulting. He couldn't help it. There rose up in him, suddenly, a wild and unreasoning anger that mere paternity could place anyone (and especially a young girl with cool, grey eyes) in the power of such a caricature

of manhood.

"Really?" said Spence. There was everything in the word that tone could utter of challenge and derision. He raised himself upon his elbow. The doctor, who had been closely contemplating his umbrella, looked up slowly. The eyes of the two men met.... Spence had never seen eyes like that ... they dazzled him like sudden sunlight on a blade of steel ... they clung to his mind and bewildered it ... he forgot the question at issue ... he forgot—

Just then Li Ho opened the kitchen door.

"Get 'um lunch now," said Li Ho, in his toneless drawl. "Like 'um egg flied? Like 'um boiled?"

Spence sank back upon his pillow.

"Like um any old way!" he said. His voice sounded a little breathless.

The doctor, once again absorbed in the contemplation of his umbrella, went out.

CHAPTER VI

Luncheon, for which Li Ho had provided eggs both boiled and fried, was eaten alone. His hostess did not honor him with her company, nor did her father return. Li Ho was attentive but silent And outside the rain still rained.

Professor Spence lay and counted the drops as they fell from a knot hole in the veranda roof —one small drop—two medium-sized drops—one big drop—as if some unseen djinn were measuring them out in ruthless monotony. He counted the drops until his brain felt soggy and he began to speculate upon what Aunt Caroline would think of fried eggs for luncheon. He wondered why there were no special dishes for special meals in Li Ho's domestic calendar; why all things, to Li Ho, were good (or bad) at all times? Would he give them porridge and bacon for dinner? Spence decided that he didn't mind. He was ready to like anything which was strikingly different from Aunt Caroline....

One small drop—two medium-sized drops—one big drop.... He wondered when he would know his young nurse well enough to call her by her first name? (Prefixed by "miss," perhaps.) "Desire"—it was a rather charming name. How old would she be, he wondered; twenty? There were times when she looked even younger than twenty. But he had to confess that she never acted like it. At least she did not act as he had believed girls of twenty are accustomed to act. Very differently indeed.... One small drop—two medium-sized—oh, bother the drops! Where was she, anyway? Did she intend to stay out all afternoon? Was that the way she treated an invalid? ... He couldn't see why people go out in the rain, anyway. People are apt to take their deaths of cold. People may get pneumonia. It would serve people right—almost.... One drop—oh, confound the drops!

The professor tried to read. The book he opened had been a famous novel, a best-seller, some five years ago. It had been thought "advanced." Advanced!—but now how inconceivably flat and stale! How on earth had anyone ever praised it, called it "epoch-marking," bought it by the thousand thousand? Why, the thing was dead—a dead book, than which there is nothing deader. This reflection gave him something to think of for a while. Instead of counting drops he amused himself by strolling back through the years, a critical stretcher-bearer, picking up literary corpses by the wayside. They were thickly strewn. He was appalled to find how faintly beat the pulse of life even in the living. Would not another generation see the burial of them all? Was there no new Immortal anywhere?

"When I write a novel," thought the professor solemnly, "which, please God, I shall never do, I will write about people and not about things. Things change always; people never." It was a wise conclusion but it did not help the afternoon to pass.

Desire, that is to say Miss Farr, had passed the window twice already. He might have called her. But he hadn't. If people forget one's very existence it is not prideful to call them. And the Spences are a prideful race. Desire (he decided it didn't matter if he called her Desire to himself, she was such a child) was wearing—an old tweed coat and was carrying wood. She wore no hat and her hair was glossy with rain.... People take such silly risks—And where was Li Ho? Why wasn't he carrying the wood? Not that the wood seemed to bother Desire in the least.

The captive on the sofa sighed. It was no use trying to hide from himself his longing to be out there with her in that heavenly Spring-pierced air, revelling in its bloomy wetness; strong and fit in muscle and nerve, carrying wood, getting his head soaked, doing all the foolish things which youth does with impunity and careless joy. The new restlessness, which he had come so far to quiet, broke over him in miserable, taunting waves.

Why was he here on the sofa instead of out there in the rain? The war? But he was too inherently honest to blame the war. It was, perhaps, responsible for the present state of his sciatic nerve but not for the selling of his birthright of sturdy youth. The causes of that lay far behind the war. Had he not refused himself to youth when youth had called? Had he not shut himself behind study doors while Spring crept in at the window? The war had come and dragged him out. Across his quiet, ordered path its red trail had stretched and to go forward it had been necessary to go through. The Spences always went through. But Nature, every inch a woman, had made him pay for scorning her. She had killed no fatted calf for her prodigal.

So here he was, at thirty-five, envying a girl who could carry wood without weariness. The envy had become acute irritation by the time the wood was stacked and the wood-carrier brought her shining hair and rain-tinted cheeks into the living-room.

"Leg bad again?" asked Desire casually.

"No—temper."

"It's time for tea. I'll see about it."

"You'll take your wet things off first. You must be wet through. Do you want to come down with pneumonia?"

The girl's eyebrows lifted. "That's silly," she said. And indeed
the remark was absurd enough addressed to one on whom the wonder and mystery of budding life rested so visibly. "I'm not wet at all," she went on. "Only my coat." She slipped out of the old tweed ulster, scattering bright drops about the room. "And my hair," she added as if by an afterthought. "I'll dry it presently. But I don't wonder you're cross. The fire is almost out. We'll have something to eat when the kettle boils. Father's gone up trail. He probably won't be back." For an instant she stood with a considering air as if intending to add something. Then turned and went into the kitchen without doing it. She came back with a handful of pine-knots with which she deftly mended the fire.

The professor moved restlessly.

"I'll be around soon now," he said, "and then you shan't do that."

"Shan't do what?"

"Carry wood."

"That's funny." Desire placed a crackling pine-knot on the apex of her pyramid and sat back on her heels to watch it blaze. Her tone was ruminative. "There's no real sense in that, you know. Why shouldn't I carry wood when I am perfectly able to do it? Your objection is purely an acquired one—a manifestation of the herd instinct."

There was a slight pause. Professor Spence was wondering if he had really heard this.

"W—what was that you said?" he asked cautiously.

Desire laughed. He had observed with wonder, amounting almost to awe, that she never giggled.

"Score one for me!" She turned grey, mirthful eyes on his. "Amn't I learned? I read it in an article in an old Sociological Review—a copy left here by a man whom father—well, we needn't bother about that part of it. But the article was wonderful. I can't remember who wrote it."

"Trotter, perhaps,—yes, it would be Trotter," murmured the professor.

Desire swung round upon her heels, regarding him a trifle wistfully.

"I should like to know all that you know," she said. "All the strange things inside our minds."

"Would you? But if you knew what I know you would only know that you knew nothing at all."

"Yes, it's all very well to say that," shrewdly, "but you don't mean it. Besides, even if you don't know anything, you have glimpses of all sorts of wonderful things which might be known. You can go on, and it's the going on that matters."

"But I can't carry wood."

A little smile curled the corners of Desire's lips. He did not see it because she had turned to the fire again and, with that deliberate unself-consciousness which characterized her, was proceeding to unpin and dry her hair. Spence had not seen it undone before and was astonished at its length and lustre. The girl shook it as a young colt shakes its mane, spreading it out to the blaze upon her hands.

"I know what you mean, though," admitted Spence, "there is nothing like the fascination of the unknown. It very nearly did for me."

Desire looked up long enough to allow her slanting brows to ask their eternal question.

"Too much inside, not enough outside," he answered. "I ought to have made myself a man first and a student afterward. Then I might have been out in the rain you."

She considered this, as she considered most things, gravely. Then
met it in her downright way.

"There's nothing very wrong with you, is there? Nothing but what can be put right."

"No."

"Well then, you can begin again. And begin properly."

"I am thirty-five."

"In that case you have no time to waste."

It was a thoroughly sensible remark. But somehow the professor did not like it. After all, thirty-five is not so terribly old. He decided to change the subject. But there was no immediate hurry. It was pleasant to lie there in the firelight watching this enigma of girl-hood dry her hair. Perhaps she would notice his silence and ask him what he was thinking about.

"You really ought to offer me a penny for my thoughts," he observed plaintively.

"Oh, were you thinking? So was I."

"I'll give you a penny for yours!"

Desire shook her head.

"No? Then I'll give you mine for nothing. I was thinking what a pity it is that you are only an amateur nurse."

"I hate nursing."

"How unwomanly! Lots of women hate it—but few admit it. However, it wasn't a nurse's duties I was thinking of, but a patient's privileges. You see, if you were a professional nurse I could call you 'Nurse Desire.'"

"Do you mean that you want to call me by my first name?"

"Since you put it more bluntly than I should dare to,—yes. It is a charming name. But perhaps —"

"Oh, you may use it if you like," said the owner of the name indifferently. "It sounds more natural. I am not accustomed to 'Miss Fair.'"

This ought to have been satisfactory. But it wasn't. And after he had led up to it so tactfully, too! Not for the first time did it occur to our psychologist that tact was wasted upon this downright young person. He decided not to be tactful any longer.

"I'm getting well so rapidly," he said, "that I shall have to admit it soon."

The girl nodded.

"Are you glad?"

"Of course I am glad."

"I shall walk with a cane almost in no time. And when I can walk, I shall have to go away."

"Yes." There was no hesitation in her prompt agreement. Neither did she add any polite regrets. The professor felt unduly irritated. He had never become used to her ungirlish taciturnity. It always excited him. The women he had known, especially the younger women, had all been chatterers. They had talked and he had not listened. This girl said little and her silences seemed to clamour in his ears. Well, she would have to answer this time.

"Do you want me to go?" he asked plainly.

"I don't want you to go." Her tone was thoughtful. "But I know you can't stay. One has to accept things."

"One doesn't. One can make things happen."

"How?"

"By willing."

"Do you honestly believe that?" He was astonished at the depth of mockery in her tone.

"I certainly do believe it. I'll prove it if you like."

"How?"

"By staying."

Again she was silent.

He went on eagerly. "Why shouldn't I stay—for a time at least? I have plenty of work to go on with. Indeed it was with the definite intention of doing this work that I came. If you want me, I'll stay right enough. The bargain that was made with your father was a straight, fair business arrangement. I have no scruples about requiring him to carry out his part of it The trouble was that it seemed as if insistence would be unfair to you. But if you and I can arrange that—if you will agree to let me do what I can to help, chores, you know, carrying wood and so on, then I should not need to feel myself a burden."

"You have not been a burden."

"Thanks. You have been extraordinarily kind. As for the rest of it—I mentioned the matter to Dr. Farr this morning."

She was interested now. He could see her eyes, intent, through the falling shadow of her hair.

"I reminded him that he had offered me the services of a secretary and explained that I was ready to avail myself of his offer."

"And what did he say to that?"

"Well—er—we agreed to leave the decision to you."

"Was that all?"

"Practically all."

"Practically, but not quite. You quarreled, didn't you? Frankly, I do not understand father's attitude but I know what his attitude is. He does not want you here. Neither you nor anyone else. The secretarial work you offer would be—I can't tell you exactly what it would be to me. It would teach me something—and I am so hungry to know! But he will find some way to make it impossible. You will have to go."

"Nonsense! He cannot go back on his agreement."

"You mean he has accepted money? That," bitterly, "means nothing to him."

"Nevertheless it gives me ground to stand on. And you, too. You have done secretarial work before?"

"Yes. I have certain qualifications. At intervals I have tried to make myself independent. Several times I have secured office positions in Vancouver. But father has always made the holding of them impossible."

"How?"

"I would rather not go into it." There was weary disgust in her voice.

"But what reason does he give?"

"That his daughter's place is in her father's house—funny, isn't it?"

"You do not think that affection has anything to do with it?"

"Not even remotely. Whatever his reason may be for keeping me with him, it is not that. Affection is something of which one knows by instinct, don't you think? Even Li Ho—I know instinctively that Li Ho is fond of me. I am absolutely certain that my father is not."

"It is no life for a young girl."

"It has been my life."

The professor felt uncomfortable. There was that in her tone which forbade all comment. She had given him this tiny glimpse and quite evidently intended to give no more. But Spence, upon occasion, could be a persistent man.

"Miss Desire," he said gravely, "do you absolutely decline my friendship?" If she wanted directness, she was getting it now.

"How can I do otherwise?" Her face was turned from him and her low voice was muffled by her hair. But for the first time she had cast away her guard of light indifference. "Friendship is impossible for me. I thought you would see—and go away. Nothing that you can do would be any real help. I have tried before to free myself. But I could not. Nor, in the little flights of freedom which I had, did I find anything that I wanted. I am as well here as anywhere. Unless—"

She was silent, looking into the fire.

"Unless I were really free," she added softly.

He could not see her face. But she looked very young sitting there with her unbound hair and hands clasped childishly about her knees.

"You have wondered about me—in a psychological way—ever since you came." She went on, her voice taking on a harsher note. "You have been trying to 'place' me. Well, since you are curious I will tell you what I am. When I was younger and we lived in towns I used to wander off by myself down the main streets to gaze in the windows. I never went into any of the stores. The things I wanted were inside and for sale—but I could not buy them. I was just a window-gazer. That's what I am still. Life is for sale somewhere. But I cannot buy it."

The throb of her voice was like the beating of caged wings through the quiet room.

"But—" began Spence, and then he paused. It wasn't at all easy to know what to say. "You are mistaken," he went on finally. "Life isn't for sale anywhere. Life is inside, not outside. And no one ever really wants the things they see in other people's windows."

"I do," said Desire coldly.

She was certainty very young! Spence felt suddenly indulgent.

"What, then—for instance?" he asked.

The girl shook back her hair and arose.

"Freedom, money, leisure, books, travel, people!"

"I thought you were going to leave out people altogether," said Spence, whimsically. "But otherwise your wants are fairly comprehensive. You have neglected only two important things—health and love."

"I have health—and I don't want love."

"Not yet—of course—" began the professor, still fatherly indulgent. But she turned on him with a white face.

"Never!" she said. "That one thing I envy no one. You are wondering why I have never considered marriage as a possible way out? Well, it isn't a possible way—for me. Marriage is a hideous thing—hideous!"

She wasn't young now, that was certain. It was no child who stood there with a face of sick distaste. The professor's mood of indulgent maturity melted into dismay before the half-seen horror in her eyes.

But the moment of revelation passed as quickly as it had come. The girl's face settled again into its grave placidity.

"I'll get the tea," she said. "The kettle will be boiling dry."

CHAPTER VII

In the form of a letter from Professor Spence to his friend, Dr. John Rogers.

> No letter yet from you, Bones; Bainbridge must be having the measles. Or perhaps I am not allowing for the fact that it takes almost a fortnight to go and come across this little bit of Empire. Also Li Ho hasn't been across the Inlet for a week. He says "Tillicum too muchy hole. Li Ho long time patch um."
>
> On still days, I can hear him doing it. Perhaps my hostess is right and we are not so far away from the beach as I fancied on the night of my arrival. I'll test this detail, and many others, soon. For today I am sitting up. I'm sure I could walk a little, if I were to try. But I am not in a hurry. Hurry is a vice of youth.
>
> And I am actually getting some work done. Bones, old thing, I have made a discovery for the lack of which many famous men have died too soon. I have discovered the perfect secretary!

These blank lines represent all the things which I might say but which, with great moral effort, I suppress. I know what a frightful bore is the man who insists upon talking about a new discovery. Therefore I shall not indulge my natural inclination to tell you just how perfect this secretary is. I shall merely note that she is quick, accurate, silent, interested, appreciative, intelligent to a remarkable degree—Good Heavens! I'm doing it! I blush now when I remember that I engaged Miss Farr's services in the first place from motives of philanthropy. Is it possible that I was ever fatuous enough to believe that I was the party who conferred the benefit? If so, I very soon discovered my mistake. In justice to myself I must state that I saw at once what a treasure I had come upon. You remember what a quick, sure judgment my father had? Somehow I seem to be getting more like him all the time. The moment any proposition takes on a purely business aspect, I become, as it were, pure intellect. I see the exact value, business value, of the thing. Aunt Caroline never agrees with me in this. She insists upon referring to that oil property at Green Lake and that little matter of South American Mines. But those mistakes were trifles. Any man might have made them.

In this case, where I am right on the spot, there can be no possibility of a mistake. I see with my own eyes. Miss Farr is a dream of secretarial efficiency. She combines, with ease, those widely differing qualities which are so difficult to come by in a single individual. It is inspiring to work with her. I find that her co-operation actually stimulates creative thought. My notes are expanding at a most satisfactory rate. My introductory chapter already assumes form. And—by Jove! I seem to be doing it again.

But one simply does not make these discoveries every day.

The other aspects of the situation here, the non-business aspects, are not so satisfactory. The menage is certainly peculiar. I had what amounted to a bloodless duel with mine host the other day. Perhaps I was not as tactful as I might have been. But he is an irritating person. One of those people who seem to file your nerves. In fact there is something almost upsetting' about that mild old scoundrel. He gives me what the Scots call a "scunner." (You have to hear a true Scot pronounce it before you get its inner meaning.) And when, that day, he began talking about his daughter's future being her father's care, I said—I forget exactly what I said but he seemed to get the idea all right. It annoyed him. We were both annoyed. He did not put his feelings into words. He put them into his eyes instead. And horrid, nasty feelings they were. Quite murderous.

The duel was interrupted by Li Ho. Li Ho never listens but he always hears. Seems to have some quieting influence over his "honorable Boss," too.

But I wish you could have seen the old fellow's eyes, Bones. I think they might have told some tale to a medical mind. Normally, his eyes are blurry like the rest of his fatherly face. And their color, I think, is blue. But just then they looked like no eyes I have ever seen. A cold light on burnished steel is the only simile I can think of—perfect hardness, perfect coldness, lustre without depth! The description is poor, but you may get the idea better if I describe the effect of the look rather than the look itself. The warm spot in my heart froze. And it takes something fairly eerie to freeze the heart at its core.

From this, as a budding psychologist, I draw a conclusion—there was something abnormal, something not quite human in that flashing look. The conclusion seems somewhat strained now. But at the time I was undoubtedly glad to see Li Ho. Li Ho may be a Chink, but he is human.

You may gather that our "battle of the Glances" did not smooth my pillow here. If the old chap didn't want me to stay before, he is even less anxious for my company now. But I am going to stay. Aunt Caroline would call this stubbornness. But of course it isn't. It is merely a certain strength of character and a business determination to carry out a business bargain. Dr. Farr allowed me to engage board here and to pay for it. I am under no obligation to take cognizance of his deeper feelings.

The only feelings which concern me in this matter are the feelings of his daughter. If my staying were to prove a burden for her I could not, of course, stay. But I see many ways in which I may be helpful, and I know that she needs and wants the secretarial work which I have given her. Usually she holds her head high and one isn't even allowed to guess. But one does guess. Her meagre ration of life is plain beyond all artifice of pride.

John, she interests me intensely. She is a strange child. She is a strange woman. For both child and woman she seems to be, in fascinating combination. But, lest you should mistake me, good old bone-head, let me make it plain that there is absolutely no danger of my falling in love with her. My interest is not that kind of interest. I am far too hard headed to be susceptible. I can appreciate the tragedy of a charming girl placed in such unsavory environment, and feel impelled to seek some way of escape for her without being for one moment disturbed by that unreasoning madness called love. Every student of psychology understands the nature and the danger of loving. 'Every sensible student profits by what he understands. You and I have had this out before and you know my unalterable determination never to allow myself to become the slave of those primitive and passing instincts. Nature, the old hussy, is welcome to the use of man as a tool for her own purposes. But there are enough tools without me. The race will not perish because I intend to remain my own man. But I shall have to evolve some way of helping Miss Farr. She cannot be left here under these conditions.

I am writing to Aunt Caroline, briefly, that I am immersed in study and that my return is indefinite. Don't, for heaven's sake, let her suspect that I have employed Miss Farr as secretary. You know Aunt Caroline's failing. Do be discreet!

Yours,
B. H. S.

P.S.: Any arrangement I may find it necessary to propose in Miss Farr's case will be based on business, not sentiment. B.

CHAPTER VIII

Desire was seated upon a moss-covered rock, hugging her knees and gazing out to sea. It was her favorite attitude and, according to Professor Spence, a very dangerous one, especially in connection with a moss-covered rock. He would have liked to point out this obvious fact but that would have been fussy—and fussy the professor was firmly determined not to be. Aunt Caroline was fussy. The best he could do was to select another rock, not so slippery, and to provide an object lesson as to the proper way of sitting upon it. Unfortunately, Desire was not looking. They had come a little way "up trail"—at least Desire had said it was a little way, and her companion was too proud of his recovered powers of locomotion to express unkind doubt of the adjective. There had been no rainy days for a week. The air was sun-soaked, and salt-soaked, and somewhere there was a wind. But not here. Here some high rock angle shut it out and left them to the drowsy calm of wakening Summer. Below them lay the blue-green gulf, white-flecked and gently heaving; above them bent a sky which only Italy could rival—and if Miss Farr with her hands clasped round her knees were to move ever so little, either way, there was nothing to prevent her from falling off the face of the mountain. The professor tried not to let this reflection spoil his enjoyment of the view. He reminded him-self that she was probably much safer than she looked. And he remembered Aunt Caroline. Still—

"Don't you think you might sit a little farther back?" he suggested carelessly.

"Why?"

"I can't talk to the back of your head."

"Talk!" dreamily, "do you really have to talk?"

Naturally the professor was silent.

"That's rude, I suppose," said Desire, suddenly swinging round (a feat which brought Spence's heart into his mouth). "I don't seem to acquire the social graces very rapidly, do I?"

"I thought," the professor's tone was somewhat stiff, "that we came up here for the express purpose of talking."

"Y-es. You did express some such purpose. But—must we? It won't do any good, you know."

"I don't know. And it will do good. One can't get anywhere without proper discussion."

The girl sighed. "Very well—let's discuss. You begin."

"My month," said Spence firmly, "is almost up. I shall have to move along on Friday."

"On Friday?" If he had intended to startle her, he had certainly succeeded. "Was—was the arrangement only for a month?" she asked in a lowered voice.

"The arrangement was to continue for as long as I wished. But only one month's payment was made in advance. With Friday, Dr. Farr's obligation toward me ends. He is not likely to extend it."

She sat so still that he forgot how slippery the moss was and thought only of the growing shadow on her face.

"But, the work!" she murmured. "We are only just beginning. I wish—oh, I shall miss it dreadfully."

"'It,'" said Spence, "is not a personal pronoun."

"I shall miss you, too, of course."

"Well, be careful not to overemphasize it."

Her grey eyes looked frankly and straightly into his. Their clear depths held a rueful smile. "You are conceited enough already," she said, "but if it will make you feel any better, I don't mind admitting that I shall miss you far, far more than you deserve."

"Spoken like a lady!" said Spence warmly. "And now let us consider my side of it. After the month that I have spent here—do you really think that I intend to go away—like that?"

"There is only one way of going, isn't there?"

"Not at all. There are various ways. Ways which are quite, quite different."

"You have thought of some other—some quite different way?"

"Yes. But I daren't tell it to you while you sit on that slippery rock. It is a somewhat startling way and you might—er—manifest emotion. I should prefer to have you manifest it in a less dangerous place."

Desire's very young laugh rippled out. "Fussy!" she said. But nevertheless she climbed down and sat demurely upon stones in the hollow. There was an unfamiliar light in her waiting eyes, the light of interest and of hope.

Spence, rather to his consternation, realized that it was up to him to justify that hope. And he wasn't at all sure ... however, he had to go through with it, ... There was a fighting chance, anyway.

"Let's think about the work for a moment," he began nervously. "That work, my book, you know, is simply going all to pot if you can't keep on with it. You can see yourself what it means to have a competent secretary. And you like the work. You've just admitted that you like it."

He saw the light begin to fade from her eyes. She shook her head.

"If you are going to suggest that I go with you as your secretary," she said with her old bluntness, "it is useless. I have tried that way out. I won't try it again." Her lips grew stern and her eyes dark with some too bitter memory.

"I honestly don't see what Dr. Farr could do," said Spence tentatively.

"You would," said Dr. Farr's daughter with decision.

"And anyway," proceeding hastily, "that wasn't what I was thinking of. I knew that you would refuse to go as my secretary. I ask you to go as my wife."

Desire rose.

"Is this where I am expected to manifest emotion?" she asked dryly.

"Yes. And you're doing it! I knew you would. Women are utterly unreasoning. You won't even listen to what I have to say."

The girl moved slowly away.

"And I can't get up without help," he added querulously.

Desire stopped. "You can," she said.

"I can't. Not after that dreadful climb."

"Then I shall wait until you are ready. But we do not need to continue this conversation."

The professor sighed. "This," he said, "is what comes of taking a woman at her word."

"What?"

"I might have known," he went on guilefully, "that you didn't really mean it. No young girl would."

"Mean what?"

"That you had no room in your scheme of things for ordinary marriage. Of course you were talking nonsense. I beg your pardon."

"Will you kindly explain what you mean!"

"I will if you will sit down so that I may talk to you on my own level. You see, your determination not to marry struck me very much at the time because it voiced my own—er—determination also. I said to myself, 'Here are two people sufficiently original to wish to escape the common lot.' I thought about it a great deal. And then an idea came. It was, I admit, the inspiration of a moment. But it grew. It certainly grew."

Desire sat down again and folded her hands over her knees.

"I will listen."

"It is very simple," he hastened to explain. "Simplicity is, I think, the keynote of all true inspiration. An idea comes, and we are filled with amazement that we have so long ignored the obvious. Take our case. Here are we two, strongly of one mind and wanting the same thing. A perfectly feasible way of getting that thing occurs to me. Yet when I suggest this way you jump up and rush away."

"I haven't rushed yet."

"No. But you were going to. And all because you cannot be logical. No woman can."

His listener brushed this away with a gesture of impatience.

"I can prove it," went on the wily one. "You object to marriage, yet you covet the freedom marriage gives. Now what is the logical result of that? The logical result is fear—fear that some day you may want freedom so badly that you will marry in order to get it."

"It is not—I won't."

"I knew you would not admit it. But it is true all the same. The other night when you said 'marriage is hideous,' I saw fear in your eyes. There is fear in your eyes now."

The girl dropped her eyes and raised them again instantly. Her slanting eyebrows frowned.

"Nevertheless," she said, "I shall not marry."

"But you will, as an honest person, admit the other part of the proposition—that you want something at least of what marriage can give?"

"Yes."

"Well then—that states your case. Now let me state mine. I, too, have an insuperable objection to marriage. My—er—disinclination is probably more soundly based than yours, since it is built upon a wider view of life. But I, too, want certain things which marriage might bring. I want a home. Not too homey a home, in the strictly domestic sense (Aunt Caroline is strictly domestic) but a—a congenial home. I want the advice and help of a clever woman together with the sense of permanence and security which, in our imperfect state of civilization, is made possible only by marriage. And I, too, have my secret fear. I am afraid that some day I may be driven—in short, I am afraid of Aunt Caroline."

Desire's inquiring eyebrows lifted.

"A man—afraid of his aunt?"

"Yes," gloomily, "it is men who are afraid of aunts. It is not at all funny," he added as her eyes relaxed, "if you knew Aunt Caroline you wouldn't think so. She is determined to have me married and she has a long life of successful effort behind her. One failure is nothing to an aunt. She is always quite certain that the next venture will turn out well. And it usually does. In brief, I am thirty-five and I go in terror of the unknown. If I do not marry soon to please myself, I shall end by marrying to please someone else. Do you follow me?"

"Make it plainer," ordered Desire soberly. "Make it absolutely plain."

"I will. My proposition is, in its truest and strictest sense, a marriage of convenience. Marriage, it appears, can give us both what we want, a formal ceremony will legalize your position as my secretary and free you entirely from the interference of your father. It will permit you to accept freely my protection and everything else which I have. Your way will be open to the things you spoke of the other night, freedom, leisure, money, travel, books. The only thing we are shutting out is the thing you say you have no use for—love. But perhaps you did not mean—"

"I did."

"Then, logically, my proposal is sound."

"Am I to take all these things, and give nothing?"

"Not at all. You give me the things I want most, freedom, security, the grace of companionship, and collaboration in my work, so long as your interest in it continues. I will be a safely married man and you—you will be a window-gazer no longer. There is only one point"—the speaker's gaze turned from her and wandered out to sea—"I can be sure of what I can bring into your life," his voice was almost stern, "but I warn you to be very sure of what you will be shutting out."

"You mean?"

"Children," said Spence crisply.

"I do not care for children."

The professor's soberness vanished. "Oh—what a whopper!" he exclaimed.

"I mean, I do not want children of my own."

"But supposing you were to develop a desire for them later on?"

She nodded thoughtfully.

"I might," she acknowledged. "But in my case it would be merely the outcropping of a

feminine instinct, easily suppressed. I am not at all afraid of it. Look at all the women who are perfectly happy without children."

"Hum!" said the professor. "I am looking at them. But I find them unconvincing. There are a few, however, of whom what you say is true. You may be one of them. How about Sami?"

"Sami? Oh, Sami is different. He is more like a mountain imp than a child. I don't think Sami would seem real anywhere but here. If anyone were to try to transplant him he might vanish altogether. Poor little chap—how terribly he would miss me!" finished Desire artlessly.

She had accepted the possibility, then! Spence's heart gave a leap and was promptly reproved for leaping. This was not, he reminded himself, an affair of the heart at all. It was a coldly-thought-out, hard-headed business proposition. Such a proposition as his father's son might fittingly conceive. The thing to do now was to stride on briskly and avoid sentiment.

"Then as we seem to agree upon the essentials," he said, "there remains only one concrete difficulty, your father. He would object to marriage as to other things, I suppose?"

"Yes, but we should have to ignore that."

"You wouldn't mind?" somewhat doubtfully.

"No. I have always known that a break would come some day. It isn't as if he really cared. Or as if I cared. I don't. If I should decide that there is an honest chance for freedom, a chance which I can take and keep my self-respect, I am conscious of no duty that need restrain me."

Spence said nothing, and after a moment she went on.

"Why should I pretend—as he pretends? I loath it! Day after day, even when there is no one to see, he keeps up that horrible semblance of affection. And all the time he hates me. I see it in his eyes. And once or twice—" She hesitated and then went rapidly on without finishing her sentence. "There is some reason why it is to his advantage to keep me with him. But it imposes no obligation upon me. I do not even know what it is."

"Perhaps Li Ho may know?"

"Li Ho does know. Li Ho knows everything. But when I asked him he said, 'Honorable boss much lonely—heap scared of devil maybe.' Li Ho always refers to devils when he doesn't wish to tell anything."

"I've noticed that. He's a queer devil himself. Would he stay on, do you think?"

"Yes. And that's odd, too. In some way Li Ho is father's man. It's as if he owned him. There must be a story which explains it. But no one will ever hear it. Li Ho keeps his secrets."

Spence nodded. "Yes. Li Ho and his kind are the product of forces we only guess at. I asked a man who had spent twenty years in China if he had learned to understand the Oriental mind. He said he had learned more than that, he had learned that the Oriental mind is beyond understanding. But—aren't we getting away from our subject? Let's begin all over again. Miss Farr, I have the honor to ask your hand in marriage."

She was silent for so long a time that the professor had opportunity to think of many things. And, as he thought, his heart went down—and down. She would refuse. He knew it. The clean edge of her mind would cut through all his tangle of words right to the core of the real issue, And the core of the real issue was not as sound as it would need to be to satisfy her demands. For in that core still lay a possibility, the possibility of love. He had not eliminated love. Many a man has loved after thirty-five. Many a girl who has sworn—but no, she would not admit this possibility in her own case. It was only in his case that she would recognize it. She would see the weak spot there.... She would refuse. He could feel refusal gathering in her heart. And his own heart beat hotly in his throat. For if this failed, what other way was left? Yet to go and leave her here, alone in that rotting cottage on the hill.... the prey of any ghastly fate.... no, it couldn't be done. He must convince her. He must.

"My friend," said Desire (he loved her odd, old-fashioned way of calling him "my friend"), "I admit that you have tempted me. But—I can't. It wouldn't be fair. It is easy to feel sure for one's self but it's another thing to be sure for others. A marriage of that kind would not satisfy you. You say your outlook is wider than mine and of course it is. But I have seen more than you think. Even men who are tremendously interested in their work, like you, want—other things. They want what they call love, even if to them it always sinks to second place, if indeed it means nothing more than distraction. And love would mean more than that to you. I have an instinct which tells me that, in your case, love will come. You must be free to take it."

It was final. He felt its finality, and more than ever he swore that it should not be so. There must be an argument somewhere—wait!

"Supposing," said Spence haltingly, "Supposing.... supposing I am not free now? Supposing love has come—and gone?"

He was not a good liar. But his very ineptitude helped him here. It tangled the words on his tongue, it brought a convincing dew upon his forehead. "I'd rather not talk about it," he finished. "But you see what I mean."

"Yes. I hadn't thought of that. It might make a difference. I should want to be very sure. If there were any chance—"

"There is no chance. Positively none. That experience, which you say you feel was a necessary experience in my case, is over and done with. It cannot recur. I am not the man to—to—" he was really unable to go on. But she finished it for him.

"To love twice," said Desire, looking out over the sea. "Yes I can understand that—what did you say?"

"I think I may be able to walk now," said the professor.

CHAPTER IX

With the recovery of a leg sufficiently workable in the matter of climbing stairs, Dr. Farr's boarder had resigned the family couch in the sitting-room and had retired to his spartan chamber under the eaves. From its open window that night he watched the moon. Let nothing happen to the universe in the meantime, and there would be a full moon on Friday night. The professor hoped that nothing would happen.

She had not exactly said "Yes" yet. He must not forget that. But it could do no harm to feel reasonably sure that she was going to. He did not conceal from himself that he had brought things off remarkably well. That last argument of his had been a masterpiece of strategy. There were other, shorter, words which might have described it. But they were not such pleasant words. And when a thing is necessary it is just as well to be pleasant about it. No harm had been done. Quite the opposite. Desire's one valid objection had been neatly and effectually disposed of. And now the matter could be dropped. It would be forgotten.... What did it amount to in any case? Other men lied every day saying they had never loved. He had lied only once in saying that he had.... At the same time it might be very embarrassing to.... yes, certainly, the matter must be dropped!

They would, he supposed, find it necessary to elope.... No sense in looking for trouble! The old gentleman had been odder than ever the last day or so. He had ceased even to pretend that his guest's presence was anything but an annoyance. He had refused utterly to enter into any connected conversation and had been restless and erratic to a degree. "Too muchy moon-devil," according to Li Ho. That very afternoon he had met them coming down from their talk upon the rocks and the ironic courtesy of his greeting had been little less than baleful. At supper he had remarked sentimentally upon the flight of time, referring to the nearness of Friday in a way eminently calculated to speed the parting guest.

Friday, at latest, then? If they were to go they would go on Friday.—Friday and the full moon.

In the meantime he felt no desire for sleep. The moon, perhaps? Certainly there is nothing in the mere business-like prospect of engaging a permanent secretary to cause insomnia. The professor supposed it was simply his state of health in general. It might be a good idea to drop a line to his medical man. He had promised to report symptoms. Besides, it was only fair to prepare John. The candle was burnt out, but the moon would do—pad on knee, he began to write....

> "Beloved Bones—I am writing in the hope that the thought of you may cause cerebral exhaustion. I find the moon too stimulating. Otherwise I rejoice to report myself recovered. I can walk. I can climb hills. I can un-climb hills, which is much worse, and I eat so much that I'm ashamed to look my board money in the face. You might gently prepare Aunt Caroline by some mention of an improved appetite.
>
> I had a letter from Aunt Caroline yesterday. That is to say, three letters. When you included (by request) "positively no letter writing" in my holiday menu, you did not make it plain who it was that was positively not to write. So, although she tells me sadly that she expects no answers, Aunt Caroline positively does. I may say at once that I know all the news.
>
> On the other hand, there is some news which Aunt Caroline does not know. Owing to your embargo on letters, I have not been able to inform my Aunt of the progress of my book, nor of my discovery of the perfect secretary. I have not, in short, been able to tell her anything.
>
> So you will have to do it for me.
>
> But first, as man to man, I want to ask you a question. Having found, by an extraordinary turn of luck, the perfect secretary, would you consider me sane if I let her go? Of course you would not.

I asked myself the same question yesterday and received the same answer.

So I have asked her to marry me.

I put it that way because I know you like to have things broken to you. And now, having heard all your objections (oh, yes, I can hear them. Distance is only an idea) I shall proceed to answer them.—

No. It is not unwise to marry a young girl whom I scarcely know. Why man! That is part of the game. Think of the boredom of having to live with some one you know? Someone in whose house of life you need expect no odd corners, no unlooked for turnings, no steps up, or down, no windows with a view? Only a madman would face such monotony.

No. It is not unfair to the other party. The other party has a mind and is quite capable of making it up. She will not marry me unless she jolly well wants to. Far more than most people, I think, she has the gift of decision. Neither is it as if what I have to offer her were not bona fide. Take me on my merits and I'm not a bad chap. My life may have been tame but it has been clean. (Only don't tell Aunt Caroline). I have a sufficiency of money. What I promise, I shall perform. And as for ancestors—Well, I refer everyone to Aunt Caroline for ancestors. If Miss Desire marries me she will receive all that is in the bond and any little frills which I may be able to slip in. (There will not be many frills, though, for my lady is proud.)

Yes. Aunt Caroline will make a fuss. I trust you will bear up under it for my sake. I think it will be well for her to learn of my marriage sufficiently long before our return to insure resignation, at least, upon our arrival. After the storm the calm, and although, with my dear Aunt, the calm is almost the more devastating, I trust you will acquit yourself with fortitude.

And now we come to the only valid objection, which you have, strong-mindedly, left until the last—my prospective father-in-law! He is a very objectionable old party, and I do not mind your saying so. But one simply can't have everything. And Bainbridge is a long way from Vancouver. Also, as a husband I can take precedence, and, by George, I'll do it! So you see your objection is really an extra inducement. It is only by marrying the daughter of Dr. Farr that I can protect Dr. Farr's daughter.

Are you satisfied now? I don't know whether I mentioned it, but she hasn't actually said "yes" yet. She had certain objections, or rather a certain objection which I found it necessary to meet in a—a somewhat regrettable manner. I was compelled to adopt strategy. She thought our proposed contract (we do things in a business manner) might not be quite fair to me. She was ready to admit that I was getting a good thing in secretaries but she feared that, later on, I might wish to make a change. I had to meet this scruple somehow and I seemed to know by instinct that she would not believe me if I expounded those theories of love and marriage which you know I so strongly hold. Pure reason would not appeal to her. So I had to fall back upon sentiment. Instead of saying, "I shall never love. It is impossible," I said, "I have loved. It is over."

Sound tactics, don't you think? ... Well I don't care what you think! I have to get this girl safely placed somehow.

We shall have to elope probably. Fancy, an elopement at thirty-five! The father seems to consider her continued presence here as vital to his interest, though why, neither of us can understand. Well, I'm not exactly afraid of the old chap but it will certainly be easier for her if there are no wild farewells. Therefore we shall probably fold our tent like the Arabs and steal away as silently as the "Tillicum" will allow.

Li Ho will have to be told. He will know anyway, so we may as well tell him. It appears that whatever may be the reasons for keeping a young girl buried here, they do not extend to Li Ho. It will not be the first time that his Chinese inscrutability has assisted at a (temporary) departure.

I shall let Aunt Caroline know as soon as the act is irrevocable and shall inform you at the same time so that you may not be unprepared. You realize, I suppose, that you will be accused of being accessory? Didn't you tell me that a trip would do me good?

We shall not come home for a few weeks. My secretary has spoken of an old Indian whom she knows, a perfect mine of simon-pure folk-lore. He lives some-where up the coast, about a day's journey, I think. We may visit him. With her to interpret for me, I may get some very valuable notes. I may add that we are both very keen on notes. When we have done what can be done out here, we shall come home. The fall and winter we shall spend upon the book. My secretary will insist upon attending to business first. And then—well, then she wants to go shopping. So we shall have to go where the good shops are.

What does she wish to buy? Oh, not much—just life, the assorted kind.

B. H. S.

CHAPTER X

It was the day before Friday. Friday, so very near, seemed already palpably present in the surcharged air of the cottage. No one mentioned it, but that made its nearness more potent. At his usual hour for dictation, Professor Spence had come out upon the narrow veranda. But,

although his secretary was there, pencil in hand, he had not dictated. Instead he had sat contemplating Friday so long that his secretary tapped her foot in impatience.

"Are you really lazy?" she asked, "Or are you just pretending to be?"

"I am really lazy. All truly gifted people are. You know what Wilde says, 'Real industry is simply the refuge of people who have nothing to do.'"

The prompt, "Who is Wilde?" of the secretary did not disconcert him. He had discovered that her ignorance was as unusual as her knowledge.

"Who is Wilde? Oh, just a little bit of English literature. Christian name of Oscar. You'll come across him when you go shopping."

A faint pucker appeared between the secretary's eye-brows.

"You are coming shopping, aren't you?" asked Spence, faintly stressing the verb.

"I—want to."

"That's settled then."

The pucker grew more pronounced. The secretary resigned all hope of dictation and laid down her pencil.

"Tomorrow," reminded Spence gently, "is Friday."

"Yes, I know. And if I go, do I—we—go tomorrow?"

"It would be advisable."

"The time doesn't matter," mused Desire. "But—do you mind if I speak quite plainly?"

"Not at all. You have hardened me to plain speaking."

"I have been thinking over what you told me. It does make a difference. I see that I need not be afraid of—of what I was afraid of. It's as if—as if we had both had the measles."

"You can take—" began Spence, but stopped him-self. It would never do to remind her that one may take the measles twice.

"Of course you won't believe it, not for a long time anyway," she went on in the tone of an indulgent grand-mother, "but love is only an episode. You are fortunate to be well over it."

Spence sighed. He hadn't intended to sigh. It just happened. Fortunately it was the correct thing.

"I don't want to distress you," kindly, "but we were rather vague the other night. I understood the main fact, but that is about all. You didn't tell me what happened after."

The professor's chair, which had been tilted negligently back, came down with a thud.

"After?" he murmured meekly. "After—?"

"I mean," prompted Desire gently, "did she marry the other man?"

"The other man? I—I don't know." The professor was willing to be truthful while he could. But instantly he saw that it wouldn't do.

"You—don't—know?" If ever incredulity breathed in any voice it breathed in hers. It gave our weak-kneed liar the brace that he needed.

"No," he said sadly, "they were to have been married—I have never heard."

"Oh! Then, of course, she did not live in your home town."

"Didn't she?" asked Spence, momentarily off guard. "Oh, I see what you mean—no, naturally not."

"I thought that perhaps you might have been boy and girl together," dreamily. "It so often happens."

"It does," said Spence. "But it didn't."

"And is there no one—no friend, from whom you could naturally inquire? You feel you wouldn't care to ask anyone?"

"Ask? Good heavens, no—certainly not!"

"Men are queer," said Desire naively. "A woman would just simply have to ask."

"She would."

"You think me inquisitive?" Her quick brain had not missed the dry implication of his tone. "But you see I had to know something. It's all right, I'm sure. But it would have been so much—more comfortable if she were quite married."

(Oh course it would—why in thunder hadn't he thought of that? The professor was much annoyed with himself.)

"She is probably quite, utterly married long ago," he said gloomily. "What possible difference can it make?"

"None. Don't look so bitter! Perhaps I should not have asked questions. I won't ask any more—except one. Would you mind very much telling me her name?"

Her name!

The harassed man looked wildly around. But there was no escape. Not even Sami was in sight. Only a jeering crow flapped black wings and laughed discordantly.

"Just her first name, you know," added Desire reasonably.

"Oh yes—certainly. No, of course I don't mind. I am quite willing to tell you her name. But—do you mean her real name or—or—the name she was usually called?" The professor was sparring wildly for time.

"Wasn't she called by her real name?"

"Well—er—not always."

Desire's eyebrows became very slanting. "Any name will do," she said coldly.

The professor gathered himself together. "Her name," he said triumphantly, "Was—is Mary."

He had done well for himself this time! His questioner was plainly satisfied with the name Mary. Perhaps lying gets easier as you go on. He hoped so.

"My mother's name was Mary," said Desire. "It is a lovely name."

Spence felt very proud of himself. Not only had he produced a lovely name in the space of three seconds and a half, but he had also provided a not-to-be-missed opportunity of changing the subject.

"I suppose you do not remember your mother," he said tentatively.

"Oh yes, I do, although I was quite small when she died. Father says I fancy some of the things I remember. Perhaps I do. I always dream very vividly. And fact and dream are easily confused in a child's mind. My most distinct memories are detached, like pictures, without any before or after to explain them. There is one, for instance, about waking up in the woods at night, wrapped in my mother's shawl and seeing her face, all frightened and white, with the moon, like a great, silver eye, shining through the trees. But I can't imagine why my mother would be hiding in the woods at night."

"Why hiding?"

"There is a sense of hiding that comes with the memory—without anything to account for it But, although I do not remember connected incidents very well, I remember her—the feeling of having her with me. And the terrible emptiness afterwards. If she had gone quite away, all at once, I couldn't have borne it."

"Do you mean that she had a long illness?" asked Spence, greatly interested.

"No. She died suddenly. It was just—you will call it silly imagination—" she broke off uncertainly.

"I might call it imagination without the adjective."

"Yes. But it wasn't. It was real. The sense, I mean, that she hadn't gone away. Nothing that wasn't real would have been of the slightest use."

"It all depends on how we define reality. What seems real at one time may seem unreal at another."

She nodded.

"That is just what has happened. I am not sure, now. The sense of nearness left me as I grew up. But at that time, I lived by it. Do you find the idea absurd?"

"Why should I? Our knowledge of our own consciousness is the absurdity. All we know is that

our normal waking consciousness is only one special type. Around it lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different, and quite as real. Sometimes we, or it, or they, break through. I am paraphrasing James. Do you know James?"

"I have read 'Daisy Miller.'"

"This James was the Daisy Miller man's brother."

"Did he believe in the possibility of the dead helping the living?"

"He believed in all kinds of possibilities. But I don't think he considered that possibility proven."

"It couldn't be proved, could it?" asked Desire thoughtfully. "Experiences like that are so intensely individual. One cannot pass them on."

"Can you describe yours at all?"

"Hardly. It was just a feeling of Presence. A sense of her being there. It came at all sorts of times and in all sorts of places. We lived in Vancouver when mother died. It was a much smaller town then, not like the city you have seen. But after her death we moved about a great deal, never staying very long anywhere, until we came here. There were—experiences." Her eyes hardened. "But, as long as I had that sense I am speaking of, I was safe. I used to have long crying fits in the dark, a kind of blind terror of everything. And after one of them it nearly always came. I never questioned it. Never once did I ask myself, 'Is it mother?'. I just knew that it was. There seemed nothing unusual about it."

"Was there no one, no woman, to take care of you?"

"There were—women." Desire's lips tightened into a thin red line. "We did not travel alone. Once I remember terrifying a—a friend of father's who was 'looking after' me. She heard me crying in my little, dark room one night, and as soon as she could slip away, came in. She was a kindly sort. But when she got there I was quite content and happy—which surprised her much more than the crying had done. She asked me what had 'shut me up,' and I said 'My mother is here—go away.' She turned quite pasty-white and the candle shook so that the hot grease fell upon my hands."

"What a life for a child!" exclaimed Spence in sudden rage. "Desire dear, you must come with me! I couldn't—couldn't leave you here. I—oh, dash it! I mean, it's so evident, isn't it, that we need each other?"

"You really and truly need me?" doubtfully.

"Really and truly."

"But if I come, you ought to know something of the life I have lived. You must realize that I am not an innocent young girl."

"Aren't you?" The professor found it difficult to say this with the proper inflection. It did not sound as business-like as he could have wished. But she was too much absorbed to notice.

"No. I've seen things which young girls do not see. I have heard things which are never whispered before them. No one cared particularly what I saw or heard. When I was smaller there was always someone—some 'housekeeper.' They were all kinds. None of them ever stayed long. Looking back, it seems as if they passed like lurid shadows. Only one of them seemed a real person. The others were husks. Her name was Lily. She was very stout, her face was red and her voice loud. But there was something real about Lily. And she was fond of children. She liked me. She went out of her lazy way to teach me wisdom—oh, yes, it was wisdom," in answer to Spence's horrified exclamation, "hard, sordid wisdom, the only wisdom which would have helped me through the back alleys of those days. I am unspeakably grateful to Lily. She spared me much, and once she saved me—I can't tell you about that," she finished simply.

Spence bit his lip on a word to which the expression of his face gave force and meaning. But Desire was not looking at him.

"Do you see why I am different from other girls?" She asked gravely.

The professor restrained himself. "I see that you are different," he said. "I don't care why. But I'm glad that you have told me what you have. It explains something that has bothered me—" he paused seeking words. But she caught up his thought with lightning intuition.

"You mean it explains why marriage isn't beautiful to me, like it may be to a sheltered girl? Yes. I wanted you to see that. It may be holy, but it isn't holy to me. I want to live my life apart from all that. To me it is smirched and sodden and hateful. And now, do you still wish me to come and be your secretary?"

"Now more than ever," said Spence. It was only the sealing of a business transaction. But greatly to his annoyance he could not entirely control a certain warmth and eagerness.

Desire held out a frank hand.

"Then I will marry you when you are ready," she said.

CHAPTER XI

Being a delayed letter from Dr. John Rogers to his friend and patient, Benis Hamilton Spence.

DEAR Idiot: I knew you would get it—and you got it. Perhaps after this you will learn to treat your sciatic nerve with proper respect. But there is a worse complaint than sciatica. It lasts longer. Certain symptoms of it are indicated in the things which your letter leaves unsaid. Beans, old thing, you alarm me.

Now here is a sporting offer. If you'll drop it and come home at once I'll promise never to tell Aunt Caroline. Come the moment you can put foot to the ground. And, until then, I recommend strict seclusion and no nursing. Nursing might well be fatal. Stick to Li Ho. He is your only chance.

Your Aunt Caroline sends her love. (I told her I was writing you directions for further treatment). She feels the deprivation of your letters keenly. She can't see why the writing of a nice, chatty letter to one's only living Aunt should prove an undue drain upon nervous energy. Life has taught her not to expect consideration from relatives, but it does seem hard that her only sister's boy should treat her as if she were the scarlet fever. To allow himself to be ordered away from home for a rest cure was certainly less than courteous. To anyone not understanding the situation it would almost imply that his home was not restful. And after all the trouble she had taken even to the extent of strained relations with those Macfarland people who own a rooster. If the slight had been aimed entirely at herself she could have taken it silently, but when it included the three or four charming girls whom she had asked to visit (one at a time) for the purpose of providing pleasant company, she felt obliged to protest. Although protest, she knew, was useless. All this, however, she could have borne. The thing that she could scarcely forgive was the slight offered to his native town by a departure three days before the set date, thereby turning his "going away" tea into a "gone away"—an action considered by all (invited) Bainbridge as a personal insult.

Pause here for breath.

To continue. Your Aunt Caroline does not believe in rest cures anyway. She thinks poultices are much more effective. It stands to reason that if a thing is in, it ought to come out. Rest cures are just laziness. But, thank goodness, she never expected anything from the Spence family but laziness. And she had told her sister so before she married into it....

Allow an hour here for ancestral history with appropriate comment and another hour for a brief review of your own conduct from youth up and we come within measurable distance of a few words by me. I took up the point of the four or five nice girls who had been invited to visit. I put the whole thing down to shock and pointed out that patience is required. A return to physical normality, I said, would doubtless bring with it a reviving interest in the sex. It was indeed very fortunate, I told her, that you were, at present, indifferent. Any question of selecting a life partner in your present nervous state would be most dangerous. Your power of judgment, I pointed out, was temporarily jarred and out of gear. You might marry anybody. The only safe, the only humane way, was to give you time to recover yourself.

"Power of judgment!" said Aunt Caroline. "Do you mean to tell me that my sister's son is in danger of becoming an idiot?"

I said not exactly an idiot. Yet your strong disinclination toward marriage could certainly be traced to a shocked condition of the nerves. Certain fixed ideas—

"Fixed ideas!" said your Aunt. She has a particularly annoying habit of repeating one's words. "Benis has always had fixed ideas—though when he was young," she added with satisfaction, "I knew how to unfix them. If this absurd rest cure can do anything to cure chronic stubbornness, I've nothing to say. Why, even his father was easier to manage."

"Benis," I said, "considers himself very like his father."

"Does he?" retorted your dear Aunt with withering scorn. "He is just as much like his father as a lemon is like a lobster."

This ended our conversation. But the effect of it is still with me. Last night I dreamed of lemons and today I prescribed lobster for a man with acute dyspepsia. I tell you what, you old shirker, it's up to you to come home and bear your own Aunt. I'm through. Bones.

P.S. The office nurse has been changed since you left. I have now Miss Watkins, returned from overseas. I think you knew her—name of Mary? Very good looking—almost her only fault.

P.P.S. What you say about your pleasant old gentle-man with the umbrella sounds very much like masked epilepsy. Ought to be under treatment. I should say dangerous.

S.O.S. Aunt Caroline has just 'phoned to know whether all letter-writing is barred or if not, wouldn't it be helpful if you were to drop a line to a few of your young-friends? For herself she expects nothing, but she does think, etc., etc., etc.!

Come back! B.

CHAPTER XII

Comprising a lengthy letter from, Benis Spence to John Rogers, M.D.

DEAR and Venerable Bones: Your fatherly letter came too late. What was going to happen has happened. But I will be honest and admit that its earlier arrival would have made no difference. Calm yourself with the thought that our fates are written upon our foreheads. I have been able to read mine for some little time now. For there are some things which are impossible and leaving Desire here was one of them.

I call her "Desire" to you because it is what you will be calling her soon. Strange, how that small fact seems to place her' Fancy my marrying someone whom you would naturally call "Mrs. Spence"? There are such people. All Aunt Caroline's young friends are like that. You would say, "I have looked forward to meeting you, Mrs. Spence," and she would giggle and say, "Oh, Dr. Rogers, I have heard my husband speak of you so often!" But Desire will say, "So this is John." And then she will look at you with that detached yet interested look and you will find yourself saying "Desire" before you think of it. You see, she belongs.

But before I bring you up to date with regard to recent events, I had better tell you a few facts about my more remote past. I refer to Mary. I have already told you that I found a past necessary. At that time I hoped that something fairly abstract would do. But Desire does not like abstractions. She likes to "know where she is." So I had to tell her about Mary. I'll tell you, too, before I forget details and for heaven's sake get them right! You never can tell when your knowledge may be needed. In the first place there is the name. I'm rather proud of that. I had to choose it at a moment's notice and I did not hesitate. Desire herself says it is a lovely name. And so safe—amn't I right in the impression that every second girl in Bainbridge and elsewhere is called Mary? Mary, my Mary, might be anybody.

Here, then, are the main facts. I have had (pre-war) a serious attachment. It was an affection tragically misplaced. She did not love me. She loved another. She may, or may not, have married him. (It would have been better to have had the marriage certain, but I didn't see it in time.) I will never care for another woman. Her name was Mary. Please tabulate this romance where you can put your hand on it. I may need your help at any time. As a doctor your aid would be invaluable should it become necessary for Mary to decease.

And now to leave romance for reality. Your long and lucid discourse on masked epilepsy was most helpful. It was almost as informing as Li Ho's diagnosis of "moon-devil." Both have the merit of leaving the inquirer with an open mind. However—let's get on. If you have had my later letters you will know that circumstances indicated an elopement. But the more I thought of eloping, the more I disliked the idea. My father was not a man who would have eloped. And, in spite of Aunt Caroline's lobsters and lemons, I am very like my father. "That I have stolen away this old man's daughter—" Somehow it seemed very Othelloish. I decided to simply tell Dr. Farr, calmly and reasonably, that Desire and I had decided to marry. I did tell him. I was calm and reasonable. But he wasn't.

There is a bit of sound tactics which says, "Never let the enemy surprise you." But how is one to keep him from doing it if he insists? The surer you are that the enemy is going to do a certain thing, the more surprised you are when he doesn't. Now I felt sure that when Dr. Farr heard the news he would have a fit. I expected him to use language and even his umbrella. But nothing of this kind happened. He simply sat there like a slightly faded and vague old gentleman and said "So?"—just like that.

I assured him, as delicately as possible that it was so.

Then, without warning, he began to weep. John, it was horrible! I can't describe it. You would have to see his blurred old face and depthless eyes before you could understand. Tears are healthy, normal things. They were never meant for faces like his. I must have said something, in a kind of horror, for he got up suddenly and trotted off into the woods, without as much as a whisper.

It looked like an easy victory. But I knew it wasn't. I admit that I felt rather sorry we had not eloped. Li Ho made me still sorrier.

"Not much good, you make honorable Boss cly," said Li Ho. "Gettie mad heap better."

I felt that, as usual, Li Ho was right. And, just here, let me interpose that I am quite sure Li Ho can speak perfectly good English if he wishes. He certainly understands it. I have tried to puzzle him often by measured and academic speech and never yet has he missed the faintest shade of meaning. So I did not waste time with Pigeon English. I told him the facts briefly.

"Me no likee," said Li Ho.

"You don't have to," said I.

Li Ho explained that it was not the contemplated marriage which received his disapproval but the circumstances surrounding it. "Me muchy glad Missy get mallied," said he. "Ladies so do, velly nice! When you depart to go?"

"Tomorrow," I said. Since we had given up the elopement it seemed more dignified to wait and depart by daylight.

Li Ho shook his head.

"You no wait tomolla," said he, "You go tonight. You go click."

"We can't go too quickly to suit me," I said. "It is for Miss Desire to decide."

"Me tell Missy," he said and hurried away.

Somehow, Li Ho always knows where to find Desire. She vanishes from my ken often, but never from his. He must have found her quickly this time for she came at once. She looked troubled.

"Li Ho says we had better go tonight," she said.

"Can you be ready?"

"Yes. It isn't that. It's just that it would seem more—more sensible by daylight. But Li Ho says you have told father, and that father was—upset. He said something about tonight being the full moon. But I can't see why that should matter. Do you?"

"Only that it will be easy to cross the Inlet."

"It can't be that. Li Ho can take the Tillicum' over on the darkest night. It has something to do with father. He seems to think that the full moon affects him. And it's true that he often goes off on the mountain about that time. But I can't see why that should hurry us."

I did not see it either. And yet I felt that I should like to hurry.

"We certainly will not go unless you wish," I began. But Li Ho interrupted me in his colorless way.

"Alice same go this eveling," he said blandly. "No take 'Tillicum' tomolla. Velly busy tomolla. Velly busy next day. Velly busy all week."

"Look here," I said, "you'll do exactly what your mistress tells you."

His celestial impudence was making me hot. But Desire stopped me. "It's no use," she explained. "I have really no authority. And he means what he says. We must go tonight or wait indefinitely."

I was eager to be gone. But it went against the grain to be hustled off by a Chinaman. Perhaps my face showed as much, for Desire went on. "You needn't feel like that about it. He doesn't intend to be impudent. He probably thinks he has a very real reason for getting us away. And Li Ho's reasons are liable to be good ones. We had better go."

The rest of the day was uneventful, save for the incident of Sami. I think I told you about Sami, didn't I? A kind of brown familiar who follows Desire about. He is a baby Indian as much a part of the mountain as the leaping squirrels and not nearly so tame. He is the one thing here that I think Desire is sorry to leave. And for this reason I hoped he wouldn't appear before we were gone. I had done all my packing—easy enough since I had scarcely unpacked—and I could hear Desire moving about doing hers. The place seemed particularly peaceful. I could, have felt almost sorry to leave my cool, bare room with its tree-stump for a table and all the forest just outside. But as I sat there by the window there came upon me, for the second time that day, a mounting hurry to be gone. There was nothing to account for it, but I distinctly felt an inward "Hurry! Hurry!" So propelling was it that only the knowledge that the "Tillicum" would not float until high tide kept me from finding Desire and begging her to come away at once. I did go so far as to wander restlessly down into the garden where she had gone to feed the chickens. Perhaps I would have gone farther and mentioned my misgivings but just then Sami came and I forgot all about them. I don't believe I have ever seen any child so frightened as that little Indian! He simply fell through the bushes behind the chicken house and shot, like a small, brown catapult, into Desire's arms. His round face was actually grey with fear. And he huddled in her big apron shivering, for all the world like some terrified animal.

Naturally the first thing to do was to get the thing that had frightened him. An axe seemed a likely weapon, so, picking it up, I slid into the bushes at the point where Sami had come out of them.

Perfect serenity was there! The afternoon light lay golden on the moss above the fallen trees. No hidden scurrying in the underbrush told of wild, wood things hastening to safety from some half-sensed danger. No broken branches or trampled earth told of any past or present struggle. There was no trace of any fearsome creature having passed along that peaceful trail.

I searched thoroughly and found nothing. On my way back to the clearing I met Li Ho.

'"Find anything, Li Ho?" I asked eagerly.

The Celestial grinned.

"Find honorable self," said he. "Missy she send. Missy heap scared along of you."

"Nonsense!" I said. "I can take care of myself. Even if it had been a bear, I had an axe."

"Bear!" said Li Ho. And then he laughed. Did you ever hear a Chinaman laugh? I never had. Not this Chinaman anyway. It was so startling that I forgot what I was saying. Next moment I could have sworn that he had not laughed at all.

We found Sami, much comforted, sitting upon Desire's lap, a thing he could seldom be induced to do. At our entrance he began to shiver again but soon quieted. Desire had tried questioning

but it was of no use. He either couldn't, or wouldn't, say anything about what had frightened him. Desire was inclined to think that he did not know. But I was not so sure. It's a fairly well established fact that children simply can't speak of certain terrors. And the more frightened they are the more powerful is the inhibition. In any case it was useless to question Sami so we fed him instead and presently he went to sleep.

I suppose we all forgot him. I know I did. One doesn't elope every day. And it was never Sami's way to insist upon his presence as ordinary children do. Li Ho departed to tinker with the "Tillicum" and afterwards returned to give us a late supper. Desire kept out of my way. One might almost have thought that she was shy—if so, a most perplexing development. For why should she feel shy? It wasn't as if we had not put the whole affair on a perfectly business basis. Perhaps there is some elemental magic in names, so that, to a woman, the very word "marriage" has power to provoke certain nervous reactions?

However that may be, even Desire forgot Sami. We left the house just as the clearing began to grow brighter with light from the still hidden moon, and we were halfway down to the boat landing before anyone thought of him. Oddly enough it was I who remembered. "Sami!" I exclaimed, with a little throb of nameless fear. "We have forgotten Sami."

Desire, I thought, looked surprised and somewhat vexed at her oversight. But displayed no trace of the consternation which had suddenly fallen on me.

"He is all right," she said. "He will sleep till morning unless his mother comes for him."

"Where you leave um?" asked Li Ho briefly. He had already set down the bag he was carrying.

"In my own bed."

"Me go get!" said Li Ho.

But I had not waited. I had started to "go get" myself. The sense of breathless hurry was on me again. I did not pause to argue that the child was perfectly safe. I forgot that I had ever been lame. Perhaps that sciatic nerve is only mortal mind anyway. When I came out into the clearing the cottage was turning silver in the first rays of the full moon. Very peaceful and secure it looked. And yet I hurried!

I made no noise. To myself I explained this by a desire not to waken the youngster. No use frightening him. I stole, as quietly as one of his own ancestors, to the foot of the stairs. The door of Desire's room was open. I could see a moonlit bar across the dark landing....

I think I went straight up that stair. I hope so. You know that one of my worst nervous troubles has been a dread that I might fail in some emergency? I dread a sort of nerve paralysis.... But I got up the stair. The fear that seemed to push me back wasn't personal, or physical—one might call it psychic fear, only that the word explains nothing.... I looked in at the open door. There seemed to be nothing there but the moonlight. The room must have been almost as bare as my own. But over on the far side, beyond the zone of the window, was the dim whiteness of a bed. I could see nothing clearly—but the Fear was there. I dragged, actually dragged, my feet across the floor—my sight growing clearer, until at last—I saw!

I think I shouted, but it was so like a nightmare that I may not have made a sound.... The dragging weight must have left my feet as I sprang forward ... but it is all confused! And the whole thing lasted only a minute.

In that minute I had seen what I would have sworn was not human. Even while I knew It for the little old man with the umbrella, I had no sense of its humanness. Something bent above the bed —the old man's face was there, the thin figure, the white hair, and yet it seemed the wildest absurdity to call the Fury who wore them by any human name.

The eyes looked at me—eyes without depth or meaning—eyes like bits of blue steel reflecting the light of Tophet—, incarnate evil, blazing, peering ... I caught a glimpse of long, thin hands, like claws, around the folded umbrella, a flash of something bright at the ferrule ... and then the picture dissolved like an image passing from a dimly lighted screen. Before I could skirt the bed, whatever had been upon the other side of it had melted into the darkness beyond the moon. I bent over the bed. Sami was there—Sami, rolled shapelessly in the concealing bedclothes, his round face hidden in the pillow, his black hair just a blot of darkness on the white.... It might have been Desire lying there! ...

I found the door through which the Thing had slipped. But it was useless to try to follow. There was no one in the house nor in the moonlit clearing. And Desire and Li Ho were waiting on the trail. I picked up the still sleeping child and blundered down to them.

It seemed incredible to hear Desire's laugh.

"Good gracious!" she said. "You're carrying him upside down."

She had had no hint of danger. But with Li Ho it was different. He fell back beside me when Desire had relieved me of the child. I could feel his inscrutable eyes upon my face.

"You see um," said Li Ho. It was an assertion, not a question.

I nodded.

"No be scare," muttered he. "Missy all safe. Everything all safe now. Li Ho go catch um. Li Ho catch um good. All light—tomolla."

"You mean you can manage him and he'll be all right tomorrow?" I said. "But—what is it!"

The Celestial shrugged.

"Muchy devil maybe. Muchy moon-devil, plaps. Velly bad."

"There's a knife in that umbrella, Li Ho."

But though his eyes looked blandly into mine, I couldn't tell whether this was news to Li Ho or not....

Well, that's the story. I've written it down while it's fresh, sparing comment. Desire sang as we crossed the Inlet; little, low snatches of song with a hint of freedom in them. She had made her choice and it is never her way to look back. The old "Tillicum" rattled and chugged and the damp crept in around our feet. But the water was a path of gold and the sky a bowl of silver—and as an example of present day elopements it had certainly been fairly exciting.

Yours, Benis.

CHAPTER XIII

Desire Spence bent earnestly over the writing pad which lay open upon her knee.

"Mrs. Benis Hamilton Spence," she wrote. And then:

"Mrs. B. Hamilton Spence."

And then:

"Mrs. Benis H. Spence."

Over this last she sucked her pencil thoughtfully.

"One more!" prompted her husband encouragingly. "Don't decide before you inspect our full line of goods."

"Initials, only, lack character," objected Desire. "There is nothing distinctive about 'Mrs. B. H. Spence'. It doesn't balance well, either. I think I'll decide upon the 'Benis H.' I like it—although I have never heard of 'Benis' as a name before."

"You are not supposed to have heard of it," explained its owner complacently. "It is a very exclusive name, a family name. My mother's paternal grandmother was a Benis."

Desire was not attending. "Your nickname, too, is odd," she mused. "How on earth could anyone make 'Beans' out of 'Benis Hamilton?'"

"Very easily—but how did you know that anyone had?"

"Oh, from a touching inscription on one of your books, 'To Beans—from Bones.'"

"Well—there's a whole history in that. It happened by a well defined process of evolution. When I went to school I had to have a name. A school boy's proper name is no good to him. Proper names are simply not done. But the christening party found my combination rather a handful. No one could do anything with Benis and the obvious shortening of Hamilton was considered too Biblical. 'Ham', however, suggested 'Piggy'. This might have done had there not already existed a 'Piggy' with a prior right. 'Piggy' suggested 'Pork', but 'Pork' isn't a name. 'Pork' suggested 'Beans'. And once more behold the survival of the fittest."

Desire laughed.

The professor listened to her laugh with a strained expression which relaxed when no words followed it.

"I was afraid," he admitted penitently, "that you might want to know why 'Pork' is not as much a name as 'Beans'."

"But—it isn't."

"Quite so. Only you are the first member of your delightful sex who has ever perceived it. You are a perceptive person, Mrs. Spence."

It was the fourth day of their Business Honeymoon. Four days ago they had landed from the cheerful little coast steamer whose chattering load of summer campers they had left behind on the route. For four sun-bright days and dew-sweet nights they had found themselves sole possessors of a bay so lovely that it seemed to have emerged bodily from a green and opal dream.

"'Friendly Bay,' they calls it," a genial deckhand told them, grinning. "But you folks will be the only friends anywheres about. There's a sort of farm across the point, though, and maybe you

could hit the trail by climbing, if you get too fed up with the scenery."

"Oh, we shan't want any company," said the new Mrs. Spence innocently—a remark so disappointing in its unembarrassed frankness that the deck-hand lost interest and decided that they were "just relations" after all.

They had carried their camp with them, and, from where they now sat, they could see its canvas gleaming ivory white against its background of green. Desire's eyes, as she raised them from her name-building, lingered upon it proudly. It was such a wonderful camp!—her first experience of what money, unconsidered save as a purchasing agent, can do. Even her personal outfit was something of a revelation. How deliciously keen and new was this consciousness of clothes—the smart high-laced boots, the soft, sand-colored coat and skirt, the knickers which felt so easy and so trim, the cool, silk shirt with its wide collar, the dainty, intimate things beneath! She would have been less than woman, had the possession of these things failed to meet some need,—some instinct, deep within, which her old, bare life had daily mortified.

And it had all been so easy, so natural! How could she ever have hesitated to make the change? Even her pride was left to her, intact. He, her friend, had given and she had taken, but in this there had been no spoiling sense of obligation, for, presently, she too was to give and to give unstintedly: new strength and skill seemed already tingling in her firm, quick hands; new vigor and inspiration stirred in her eager brain—and both hands and brain were to be her share of giving—her partnership offering in this pact of theirs. She was eager, eager to begin.

But already they had been four days in camp without a beginning. So far they had not even looked for the trail which was to lead them to the cabin of Hawk-Eye Charlie whose store of Indian lore had been the reason for their upcoast journey. This delay of the expeditionary party was due to no fault of its secretary. During the past four days she had proposed the search for the trail four times, one proposal per day. And each day the chief expeditioner had voted a postponement. The chief expeditioner was lazy. At least that was the excuse he made. And Desire, who was not lazy, might have fretted at the inaction had she believed him. But she knew it was not laziness which had drawn certain new lines about the expeditioner's mouth and deepened the old ones on his forehead. It was not laziness which lay behind the strained look in his eyes and the sudden return of his almost vanished limp. These things are not symptoms of indolence. They are symptoms of nerves. And Desire knew something of nerves. What she did not know, in the present case, was their exciting cause. Neither could she understand this new reticence on the part of their victim nor his reluctance to admit the obvious. She puzzled much about these problems while the lazy one rested in the sun and the quiet, golden days wrought the magic of their cure.

And Spence, mere man that he was, fancied that she noticed nothing. The pleasant illusion hastened his recovery. It tended to restore a complacency, rudely disturbed by an enforced realization of his own back-sliding. He had been quite furious upon discovering that the "little episode" of the moonlit cottage had filched from him all his new won strength and nervous stamina, leaving him sleepless and unstrung, ready to jump at the rattling of a stone. More and more, there grew in him a fierce disdain of weakness and a cold determination to beat Nature at her own game. Let him once again be "fit" and wily indeed would be the trick which would steal his fitness from him.

Meanwhile, laziness was as good a camouflage as anything and lying on the grass while Desire chose her name was pleasant in the extreme.

"Names," murmured the lazy one dreamily, "are things. When a thing is 'named true' its name and itself become inseparable and identical. That is why all magic is wrought by names. It becomes simply a matter of knowing the right ones."

"Is that a very new idea, or a very old one?"

"All ideas are ageless, so it must be both."

"I wonder how they named things in the very, very first?" mused Desire. "Did they just sit in the sun, as we are sitting, and think and think, until suddenly—they knew?"

"Very likely. There is a legend that, in the beginning, everything was named true—fire, water, earth, air—so that the souls of everything knew their names and were ruled by those who could speak them. But, as the race grew less simple and more corrupt, the true names were obscured and then lost altogether. Only once or twice in all the ages has come some master who has known their secret—such, perhaps, as He who could speak peace to the wind and walk upon the sea and change the water into wine."

Desire nodded. "Yes," she said. "It feels like that—as if one had forgotten. Sometimes when I have been in the woods alone or drifting far out on the water, where there was no sound but its own voice, it has seemed as if I had only to think—hard—hard—in order to remember! Only one never does."

"But one may—there is always the chance. I fancied I was near it once—in a shell hole. The stars were big and close and the earth seemed light and ready to float away. I almost had it then—my lips were just moving upon some mighty word—but someone came. They found me and

carried me in ... I say, the sun is climbing up, let's follow it."

Hand in hand they followed the line of the sinking sun up the slippery slope. They both knew where they were going, for every evening of their stay they had wandered there to sit awhile in the little deserted Indian burying-ground which lay, white fenced and peaceful, facing the flaming west. When they had found it first it had seemed to give the last touch of beauty to that beautiful place.

"It is so different," said Desire, searching carefully, as was her way, for the proper word. "It is so—so beautifully dead. It ought to be like that," she went on thoughtfully. "I never realized before why our cemeteries are so sad—it is because we will not let them really die—we dress them up with flowers—a kind of ghastly life in death. But this—"

They looked around them at the little white-fenced spot with its great centre cross, grey and weather-beaten, and all its smaller crosses clustering round. There was warmth here, the warmth of sun upon a western slope. There was life, too, the natural life of grass and vine, the cheerful noise of birds and squirrels and bees. And, for color, there were harmonies in all the browns and greens and yellows of the rocky soil.

"Let us sit here. They won't mind. They are all sleeping so happily," Desire had declared. "And the crosses make it seem like one large family—see how that wild rose vine has spread itself over a whole group of graves! It is so friendly."

Spence had fallen in with her humor, and had come indeed to love this place where even the sun paused lingeringly before the mountains swallowed it up.

This afternoon he flung himself down beside their favorite rose-vine with the comfortable sense of well-being which comes with returning health. Even more than Desire, he wondered that he had ever hesitated before an arrangement so eminently satisfying. If ever events had justified an impulse, his impulse, he felt, had been justified. He stole a glance at Desire as she sat in pleasant silence gazing into the sunset. She was happier already, and younger. Something of that hard maturity was fading from her eyes—the tiny dented corners of her lips were softer.... Oh, undoubtedly he had done the right thing! And everything had run so smoothly. There had been no trouble. No unlocked for Nemesis had dogged his steps even in the matter of that small strategy concerning his unhappy past. He had been unduly worried about that, owing probably to early copy-book aphorisms. Honesty is the best policy. Yes, but—nothing had happened. Mary, bless her, was already only a memory. She had played her part and slipped back into the void from whence she came. He could forget her very name with impunity. A faint smile testified to a conscience lulled to warm security.

But security is a dangerous thing. It tempts the fates. Even while our strategist smiled, the girl who sat so silently beside him was wondering about that smile—and other things. He was much better, she reflected, if he could find his passing thoughts amusing. Amusement at one's own fancies is a healthy sign. And today she had noticed, also, that his laziness was almost natural. Perhaps it might be safe now to say what she had made up her mind should be said. But not too abruptly. When next she spoke it was merely to continue their previous discussion.

"Do you think people may have 'true' names, too?" she asked presently. "Just ordinary people, like you and me?"

Spence nodded. "Always noting," he added, "that you and I are not ordinary people."

"Then if anyone knew another's true name, and used it, the other could not help responding?"

"Um-m. I suppose not."

"Perhaps that is what love is," said Desire.

Even then no presentiment of coming trouble stirred beneath Spence's dangerous serenity. Perhaps it was because the air had made him comfortably drowsy. He merely nodded, deftly swallowing a yawn. Desire went on:

"Then love is only complete understanding?"

"Always thought it might be some trifle like that," murmured the drowsy one. "But don't ask me. How should I know? That is," rousing hastily, "I do know, of course. And it is. There's a squirrel eating your hat."

Desire changed the position of the hat. But the subject remained and she resumed it dreamily.

"Then in order that it might be quite complete, the understanding would have to be mutual. If only one loved, there would always be a lack."

"Not a doubt of it!" said Spence firmly.

"Well, then—don't you see?"

"See? See what? That squirrel's eating your hat again."

"Go away!" said Desire to the squirrel. And, when it had gone, "Don't you see?" she repeatedly gravely.

The professor always loved her gravity. And he had not seen. He was, in fact, almost asleep. "You tell me," he said, rushing upon destruction.

Then Desire said what she had made up her mind to say. He never knew exactly what it was because before she actually said the word "Mary," he was too sleepy, and afterwards he was too dazed.

Mary! The word went through him like an electric shock. It tingled to his criminal toes. It whirled through his cringing brain like a pinwheel suddenly lighted. It exploded like a bomb in the recesses of his false content.

Desire was talking about Mary! Talking about her in that frank and unembarrassed way which he had always admired. But good heavens! didn't she realize that Mary was dead and buried? No. She evidently did not. Far from it. When he was able to listen intelligently once more, Desire was saying:

"... and, to a man like you, philosophy should be such a help. I feel you will be far, far less unhappy if you do not shut yourself up with your memories. Do you suppose I have not noticed how nervous and worn out you have been since the night we came away? Why have you tried to hide it?"

"I haven't—"

"Yes you have. Please, please don't quibble. And hidden things are so dangerous. It isn't as if I would not understand. You ought to give me credit for a little knowledge of human nature. I knew perfectly well that when you married me—you would think of Mary. You could hardly help it."

The professor sat up. He was not at all sleepy now. Mary had "murdered sleep." But he was still dazed.

"Wait a moment." He raised a restraining hand. "Let me get this right. You say you have noticed a certain lack of energy in my manner of late?"

"Anyone must have noticed it."

"But I explained it, didn't I?"

"Yes?" The slight smile on Desire's lips was sufficient comment on the explanation. The professor began to feel injured.

"Then I gather, further, that you do not accept the explanation?"

"Don't be cross! How could I? I have eyes. And my point is simply that there is no need for any concealment between us. You promised that we should be friends. Friends help friends when they are in trouble."

The professor rumpled his hair The pinwheel in his brain was slowing down. Already the marvelous something which accepts and adjusts the unexpected was hard at work restoring order. Mary was not dead. He had to reckon with Mary. Very well, let Mary look to her-self. Let her beware how she harassed a desperate man! Let her—but he was not pushed to extremes yet.

"I thought," he said slowly, "that we had tacitly agreed not to reopen this subject."

Desire looked surprised.

"And I still think that it would be better, much better to ignore it altogether."

"Oh, but it wouldn't," said Desire. "See how dreadfully dumpy you have been since Friday."

"I have not been dumpy. But supposing I have, there may be other reasons. What if I can honorably assure you that I have not been thinking of the past at all?"

"Then I should want to know what you have been thinking of."

"But supposing I were to go further and say that my thoughts are my own property?"

"That would be horridly rude, don't you think? And you are not at all a rude person. If you'll risk it, I will."

Her smile was insufferably secure.

"You are willing to risk a great deal," snapped Spence. "But if it's truth you want—"

He almost confessed then. The temptation to slay Mary with a few well chosen words almost overpowered him. But he looked at the expectant face beside him and faltered. Mary would not die alone. With her would die this newborn comradeship. And Desire's smile, though insufferable, was sweet. How would it feel to see that bright look change and pale to cold dislike? Already in imagination he shivered under the frozen anger of that frank glance.

He could not risk it!

Should he then, ignoring Mary, ascribe his symptoms to their true cause? By dragging out the horror of that moonlit night, he could account for any vagary of nerves. But that way of escape was equally impossible. He could not let that shadow fall across her path of new-found freedom. Nor would he, in any case, gain much by such postponement. The wretched professor began to realize that the devil is indeed the father of lies and that he who sups with him needs a long spoon.

Meanwhile, Desire was waiting.

He felt that he would like to shake her—sitting there with untroubled air and face like an inquiring sphinx—to shake her and kiss her and tell her that there wasn't any Mary and—he brought himself up with a start. What nonsense was this!

"Look here," he said irritably, "you are all wrong. You really are. It's perfectly true I've been feeling groggy. But there doesn't have to be a reason for that, unfortunately. Old Bones warned me that I might expect all kinds of come-backs. But I'm almost right again now. Another day or two of this heavenly place and I shan't know that I have a nerve."

"Yes," critically. "You are better. I should say that the worst was over."

"I'm sure it is. Supposing we leave it at that."

Desire smiled her shadowy smile. "Very well. But I wanted you to know that I understand. It's so silly to go on pretending not to see, when one does see. And it's only natural that things should seem more poignant for a time. Only you will recover much more quickly if you adopt a sensible attitude. I do not say, 'do not think of Mary,' I say 'think of her openly.'"

"How," said Spence, "does one think openly?"

"One talks."

"You wish me to talk of Mary?"

"It will be so good for you!" warmly.

They looked for a moment into each other's eyes. And Spence was conscious of a second shock. Was there, was there the faintest glint of something which was not all sympathy in those grey depths of hers? Before his conscious mind had even formulated the question, his other mind had asked and answered it, and, with the lightning speed of the subconscious, had acted. The professor became aware of a complete change of outlook. His remorse and timidity left him. His brain worked clearly.

"Very well," said the professor.

The worm had turned!

CHAPTER XIV

Mornings are beautiful all over the earth but Nature keeps a special kind of morning for early summer use at Friendly Bay. In sudden clearness, in chill sweetness, in almost awful purity there is no other morning like it. It wrings the human soul quite clear of everything save wonder at its loveliness.

Desire never bathed until the sun was up, not because she feared the dawn-cold water but because she would not stir the unbroken beauty of its opal tide. With the first rays of the sun, the spell would break, the waves would dance again, the gulls would soar and dip, the crabs would scuttle across the shining sand, the round wet head of a friendly seal would pop up here and there to say good-morning. Then, Desire would swim—far out—so far that Spence, watching her, would feel his heart contract. He could not follow her—yet. But he never begged her not to take the risk, if risk there were. Why should she lose one happy thrill in her own joyous strength because he feared? Better that she should never come back from these long, glorious swims than that he should have held her from them by so much as a gesture.

And she always did come back, glowing, dripping, laughing, her head as sleek as a young

seal's, salt upon her lips and on her wave-whipped cheek. Spence, whose swims were shorter and more sedate, would usually have breakfast ready.

But upon this particular morning Desire loitered. Though the smell of bacon was in the air, she sat pensively in the shallows of an outgoing tide and flung shells at the crabs. She would have told you that she was thinking. But had she used the word "feeling" she would have been nearer the truth. And the thing which she obscurely felt was that something had mysteriously altered for the worse in a world which, of late, had shown remarkable promise. It was a small thing. She hardly knew what it was. Merely a sense of dissonance somewhere.

Whatever it was, it had not been there yesterday. Yesterday morning she had felt no desire to sit in the shallows and throw shells at crabs. Yesterday morning her mind had been full of that happy inconsequence which feels no need of thought. Today was different. Mentally she shook herself with some irritation. "What is the matter with you?" she asked. But the self she addressed seemed oddly reluctant. "Come now," said Desire, hitting an especially big crab, "out with it! There's no use pretending that you don't know." Thus adjured, the self offered one single and sulky word. The word was "Mary." "Oh, nonsense!" said Desire hastily.

But there it was. She had forced the answer and had to make the best of it. Her memory trailed back. Once started, it had small difficulty in tracking her dissatisfaction to its real beginning. Everything, it reminded her, had been perfect until she and Benis had sat upon the hill in the sunset and talked about Mary. Something had happened then. Like a certain ancestress she had coveted the fruit of knowledge and knowledge had been given her. Not at once—Benis had at first been distinctly reluctant—but by gentle persistence she had won through his cool reserve. Abruptly and without visible reason, his attitude had changed. He had said in that drawling voice of his, "You wish me to talk about Mary?" And then, suddenly, he had talked.

He had told her several things. The color of Mary's hair, for instance. Her hair was yellow. Benis had been insistent in pointing out that when he said "yellow" he did not mean goldish or bronze, or fawn-colored or tow-colored or Titian, but just yellow. "Do you see that patch of sky over there where the mountain dips?" he had said. "Mary's hair was yellow, like that."

That patch of sky, as Desire remembered it, was very beautiful. Quite too beautiful to be compared to any-one's hair. No doubt it was only in Benis's imagination that Mary's hair was anything like it.

But nevertheless it was there that the world had gone wrong. It was while Benis had sat gazing into that patch of amber sky that Desire, gazing too, had, for the first time, realized the Other. Up until then, Mary had been an abstraction—thenceforth she was a personality. That made all the difference. Desire, throwing shells at crabs, admitted that, for her, there had been no Mary until she had heard that her hair was yellow.

It was ridiculous but it was true. Mary without hair had been a gentle and retiring shade. A phantom in whom it had been possible to take an academic interest. But no shade has a right to hair like an amber sunset. Desire threw a shell viciously. Very little more, she felt, and she would positively dislike Mary!

She jumped up and stamped in the shallow water. The crabs, big and little, scuttled away.

"Hurr-ee!" called the professor waving a frying-pan.

"Com-ing!" Desire's voice rose gaily. For the present, her small dissatisfaction vanished with the crabs.

"This coffee has been made ten minutes," grumbled the getter-of-breakfast with a properly martyred air. "Whatever were you doing?"

"Thinking."

"It isn't done. Not before breakfast."

"I was thinking," fibbed Desire, "that I have never been so spoiled in my life and that it can't go on. My domestic conscience is beginning to murmur. As soon as we are at home, you will be expected to stay in bed until you smell the coffee coming up the stairs."

"Aunt Caroline," said the professor, "does not believe in coffee for breakfast, except on Sunday."

"I do."

"Eh? Oh—I see. Well, I'll put my money on you. Only I hope you aren't really set on making it yourself. Because the cook would leave.'"

"Good gracious! Do we have a cook?"

"We do. At least, we did. Also a maid. But maids, I understand, are greatly diminished. There appear to have been tragedies in Bainbridge. Have you eaten sufficient bacon to listen calmly to an extract from Aunt Caroline's last? Sit tight, then—

"'As to what the world is coming to in the matter of domestic service,'" writes Aunt Caroline, "I do not know. I do not wish to worry you, Benis, but as you will be marrying some day, in spite of that silly doctor of yours who insists that it's not to be thought of, you may as well be conversant with the situation. To put it briefly—I have been without competent help for two weeks. You know, dear boy, that I am easily satisfied. I expect very little from anyone. But I think that I am entitled to prompt and willing service. That, at the very least! Yet I must tell you that Mabel, my cook, has left me most ungratefully after only three months' notice! She is to be married to Bob Summers, the plumber. (Lieutenant Robert Summers, since the war, if you please!) Well, she can never say I did not warn her. I did not mince matters. I told her exactly what married life is, and why I have never tried it. But the foolish girl is beyond advice. I have had two cooks since Mabel, but one insisted upon whistling in the kitchen and the other served omelette made with one egg. My wants are trifling, as you know, but one cannot abrogate all personal dignity—'

"Do you get the subtle connection between the one egg and Aunt Caroline's personal dignity?" asked Spence with anxiety. "Because if you don't, I'll never be able to ask you to live in Bainbridge. I may as well confess now that it was only my serene confidence in your sense of humor which permitted me to marry you at all. I should never have dared to offer Aunt Caroline as an 'in-law' to anyone who couldn't see a joke."

"You are very fond of her all the same," said Desire shrewdly. "And though she expects very little from anyone, she evidently adores you. She can't be all funny. There must be an Aunt Caroline, deep down, that is not funny at all. I think I'm rather afraid of her. Only you have so often said that she wished you to get married—"

"Excuse me, my dear. What I said was, 'Aunt Caroline wished to get me married.' The position of the infinitive is the important thing. Aunt Caroline never intended me to do it all by myself."

"Oh. Then, in that case, she may resent your having done it."

"Resent," cheerfully, "is a feeble word. It doesn't express Aunt Caroline at all."

"You take it calmly."

"Well, you see I've got you to fight for me now."

They looked at each other over the empty coffee cups and laughed.

It is easy to laugh on a fine morning. But if they had known where Aunt Caroline was at that moment—how-ever, they didn't.

"Once," said Spence "my Aunt read a book upon Eugenics. I don't know how it happened. It was one of those inexplicable events for which no one can account. It made a deep impression. She has studied me ever since with a view to scientific matrimony. Alas, my poor relative!"

"I once read a book upon Eugenics, too," said Desire with a reminiscent smile. "It seemed sensible. Of course I was not personally interested and that always makes a difference. One thing occurred to me, though—it didn't seem to give Nature credit for much judgment."

Benis chuckled. "No, it wouldn't. Terrible old blunderer, Nature! Always working for the average. Never seems to have heard the word 'specialize.' We've got her there."

"Then you think—"

"Oh no," hastily, "I don't. I observe results with interest, that is all."

Desire began to collect the breakfast dishes. "That was where the book seemed weak," she said thoughtfully. "It hadn't much to say about results. It dealt mostly with consequences. They," she added after a pause, "were rather frightening."

The professor glanced at her sharply. Had she been worrying over this? Had she connected it with that dreadful old man whom she called father? But her face was quite untroubled as she went on.

"I think they've missed something, though," she said. "There must be something more than the things they tabulate. Some subtle force of life which isn't physical at all. Something that uses physical things as tools. If its tools are fine, it will do finer work, but if its tools are blunt it will work with them anyway. And it gets things done."

"By Jove!" said Spence. This was one of Desire's "windows with a view." He was always stumbling upon them. But he knew she was shy of comment. "We'll tell Aunt Caroline that," he murmured hopefully. "It may distract her mind." ...

That day they found and followed the trail to the shack of Hawk-Eye Charlie. It proved to be neither long nor arduous. The professor managed it with ease. But he would have been quite unable to manage the hawk-eyed one without the expert aid of his secretary. To his unaccustomed mind their quarry was almost witless and exceedingly dirty. But Desire knew her

Indian.

"It isn't what he is, but what he knows," she explained. "And he has a retiring nature."

So very retiring was it that only fair words, aided by tactful displays of tea and tobacco, could penetrate its reservations. Desire was quite unhurried. But presently she began to extract bits of carefully hidden knowledge. It had to be slow work, for, witless as he of the hawk-eye seemed, he was well aware of the value (in tobacco) of a wise conservation. He who babbles all he knows upon first asking is a fool. But he who withholds beyond patience is a fool also. Was it not so? Desire agreed that a middle course is undoubtedly the path of wisdom. She added, carelessly, that the white-man-who-wished-stories was in no hurry. Neither had he come seeking much for little. Payment would be made strictly on account of value received. The tea was good. And the tobacco exceptionally strong, as anyone could tell from a distance. Why then should the hawk-eyed one delay his own felicity?

This hastened matters considerably and the secretary's note-book was soon busy. Spence felt his oldtime keenness revive. And Desire was happy for was not this her work at last? It was a profitable day. Should anyone care to know its results, and the results of others like it, they may look up chapter six, section two, of Spence's Primitive Psychology, unabridged edition. Here they will find that the fables of Hawk-Eye Charlie, properly classified and commented upon, have added considerably to our knowledge of a fascinating subject. But far be it from us to steal the professor's thunder. We are not writing a book upon primitive psychology. We are interested only in the sigh of pleasurable satisfaction with which the professor's secretary closed her fat note-book and called it a day.

From that point our interest leads us back to camp along the trail through the warm June woods with the late sunlight hanging like golden gauze behind the fretted screens of green. We are interested in sunsets and in basket suppers eaten in the dim coolness of a miniature canyon through which rushed and tumbled an icy stream from, the snow peaks far above. We are interested in a breathless race with a chattering squirrel during which Desire's hair came down—a bit of glorious autumn in the deep green wood—and the tying of it up again (a lengthy process) by the professor with cleverly plaited stems of tender bracken. All these trifles interest us because, to those two who knew them, they remained fresh and living memories when the note-book and its contents were buried in the dust of yesterday.

It was twilight when they came out of the wood. The sun had gone and taken its golden trappings with it. A clear, still light was everywhere and, in the brilliant green of the far sky, a pale star shone. They watched it brighten as the green grew dark. A wonderful purple blueness spread upon the distant hills.

Desire sighed happily.

"It is the end of the first day of real work," she said. "The end and the beginning."

Her companion, usually like wax to her moods, made no answer. He did not seem to hear. His gaze seemed drowned in that wonderful blue. Desire, who had been unaccountably content, felt suddenly lonely and disturbed.

"What is it?" she asked. Her voice had fallen from its glad note. She put out her hand, touching his coat sleeve timidly. It was the first time she had ever touched him save in service. But if her touch brought a thrill there was no> sign of it. Her voice dropped still lower, "What are you thinking of?" she almost whispered.

The professor did not answer. Instead he turned to her with a sad smile. (Very well done, too!)

Desire dropped her hand with a sharp exclamation. "Oh," she said, "I forgot! You were thinking—"

The professor's smile smote her.

"Her eyes were blue like that!" he said.

Desire tripped over a fallen branch. And, when she recovered herself, "Purple, do you mean?" she asked. "I have always thought purple eyes were a myth."

"Now you are making fun," said the professor after a reproachful pause.

"How do you mean—making fun?"

"'I never saw a purple cow,'" quoted he patiently.

"Oh, I wasn't!" cried Desire in distress.

Spence begged her pardon. But he did it abstractedly. His eyes were still upon the sky.

"You'll fall over that root," prophesied she grimly. "Do look where you are going!"

The professor returned to earth with difficulty. "Sorry!" he murmured. "I doubt if I should allow these moods to bother you. But you told me it might do me good to talk."

"Not all the time!" said Desire a trifle tartly.

He looked surprised. "But—" he began.

"Oh, I'm so hungry!" said Desire. "Do let's hurry."

She hastened ahead down the slope towards the camp. The tents lay in the shadow now but, as they neared them, a flickering light shot up as if in welcome. Desire paused.

"Someone lighting a fire!" she exclaimed in surprise. "Who can it be?"

Against the glow of the new-lit blaze a tall figure lifted itself and a clear whistle cut the silence of the Bay.

Spence's graceful melancholy dropped from him like a forgotten cloak.

"Bones!" he gasped in an agitated whisper. "Oh, my prophetic soul, my doctor!"

Another figure rose against the glow—a wider figure who called shrilly through a cupped hand.

"Ben—is!"

"My Aunt!" said the professor.

He sat down suddenly behind a boulder.

CHAPTER XV

To understand Aunt Caroline's arrival at Friendly Bay we should have to understand Aunt Caroline, and that, as Euclid says, is absurd. Therefore we shall have to take the arrival for granted. The only light which she herself ever shed upon the matter was a statement that she "had a feeling." And feelings, to Aunt Caroline, were the only reliable things in a strictly unreliable world. To follow a feeling across a continent was a trifle to a determined character such as hers. To insist upon Dr. Rogers following it, too, was a matter of course.

"I shall need an escort," said Aunt Caroline to that astonished physician, "and you will do very nicely. If Benis is off his head, as you suggest, it is my plain duty to look into the matter and your plain duty, as his medical adviser, to accompany me. I am a woman who demands little from her fellow creatures, knowing perfectly well that she won't get it, but I naturally refuse to undertake the undivided responsibility of a deranged nephew galavanting, by your own orders, Doctor, at the ends of the earth."

"I did not say he was deranged," began the doctor helplessly, "and you said you didn't believe me anyway."

"Don't quote me to excuse yourself." Aunt Caroline sailed serenely on. "At least preserve the courage of your convictions. There is certainly something the matter with Benis. He has answered none of my letters. He has completely ignored my lettergrams. To my telegram of Thursday telling him that I had been compelled to discharge my third cook since Mabel for wiping dishes on a hand towel, he replied only by silence. And the telegraph people say that the message was never delivered owing to lack of address. Easy as I am to satisfy, things like this cannot be allowed to continue. My nephew must be found."

"But we don't know where to look for him," objected her victim weakly.

Aunt Caroline easily rose superior to this.

"We have a map, I hope? And Vancouver, heathenish name! must be marked on it somewhere. If not, the railroad people can tell us."

"But he is not in Vancouver."

"There—or thereabouts. When we get there we can ask the policeman, or," with a grim twinkle, "we can enquire at the asylums. You forget that my nephew is a celebrated man even if he is a fool."

The doctor gave in. He hadn't had a chance from the beginning, for Aunt Caroline could answer objections far faster than he could make them. They arrived at the terminus just four days

after the expeditionary party had left for Friendly Bay.

If Aunt Caroline were surprised at finding more than one policeman in Vancouver, she did not admit it. Neither did the general atmosphere of ignorance as to Benis daunt her in the least. She adhered firmly to her campaign of question asking and found it fully justified when inquiry at the post-office revealed that all letters for Professor Benis H. Spence were to be delivered to the care of the Union Steamship Company. From the Union Steamship Company to the professor's place of refuge was an easy step. But Dr. Rogers, to whom this last inquiry had been intrusted, returned to the hotel with a careful jauntiness of manner which ill accorded with a disturbed mind.

"Well, we've found him," he announced cheerfully. "And now, if we are wise, I think we'll leave him alone. He is camping up the coast at a place called Friendly Bay—no hotels, no accommodation for ladies—he is evidently perfectly well and attending to business. You know he came out here partly to get material for his book? Well, that's what he's doing. Must be, because there are only Indians up there."

"Indians? What do you mean—Indians? Wild ones?"

"Fairly wild."

Aunt Caroline snorted. She is one of the few ladies left who possess this Victorian, accomplishment. "And you advise my leaving my sister's child in his present precarious state of mind alone among fairly wild Indians?"

"Well—er—that's just it, you see. He isn't alone—not exactly."

"What do you mean—not exactly?"

"I mean that his—er—secretary is with him. He has to have a secretary on account of never being sure whether receive is 'ie' or 'ei.' They are quite all right, though. The captain of the boat says so. And naturally on a trip of that kind, research you know, a man doesn't like to be interrupted."

Aunt Caroline arose. "When does the next boat leave?" She asked calmly.

"But—dash it all! We're not invited. We can't butt in. I—I won't go."

Aunt Caroline, admirable woman, knew when she was defeated. She had a formula for it, a formula which seldom failed to turn defeat into victory. When all else failed, Aunt Caroline collapsed. She collapsed now. She had borne a great deal, she had not complained, but to be told that her presence would be a "butting in" upon the only living child of her only dead sister was more than even her fortitude could endure! No, she wouldn't take a glass of water, water would choke her. No, she wouldn't lie down. No, she wouldn't lower her voice. What did hotel people matter to her? What did anything matter? She had come to the end. Accustomed to ingratitude as she was, hardened to injustice and desertion, there were still limits—

There were. The doctor had reached his. Hastily he explained that she had mistaken his meaning. And, to prove it, engaged passage at once, for the next upcoast trip, on the same little steamer which a few days earlier had carried Mr. and Mrs. Benis H. Spence.

It was a heavenly day. The mountains lifted them-selves out of veils of tinted mist, the islands lay like jewels—but Aunt Caroline, impervious to mere scenery, turned her thought severely inward.

"I suppose," she said to her now subdued escort, "that we shall have to pay the secretary a month's salary. Benis will scarcely wish to take him back east with us."

The doctor attempted to answer but seemed to have some trouble with his throat.

"It's the damp air," said Aunt Caroline. "Have a troche. If Benis really needs a secretary I think I can arrange to get one for him. Do you remember Mary Davis? Her mother was an Ashton—a very good family. But unfortunate. The girls have had to look out for themselves rather. Mary took a course. She could be a secretary, I'm sure. Benis could always correct things afterward. And she is not too young. Just about the right age, I should think. They used to know each other. But you know what Benis is. He simply doesn't—your cold is quite distressing, Doctor. Do take a troche."

The doctor took one.

"Of course Benis may object to a lady secretary—"

"By Jove," said Rogers as if struck with a brilliant idea. "Perhaps his secretary is a lady!"

"How do you mean—a lady! Don't be absurd, Doctor. You said yourself there was no proper hotel. Benis is discreet. I'll say that for him."

The doctor's brilliance deserted him. He twiddled his thumbs. But although Aunt Caroline's

repudiation of his suggestion had been unhesitating there was a gleam of new uneasiness in her eye. She said no more. It was indeed quite half an hour before she remarked explosively.

"Unless it were an Indian!"

Her companion turned from the scenery in pained surprise.

"An Indian what?" he asked blankly.

"An Indian secretary—a female one."

"Nonsense. Indians aren't secretaries."

But Aunt Caroline had "had a feeling." "It was your-self who suggested that she might be a girl," she declared stubbornly, "and if she is a girl, she must be an Indian. Indians are different—look at Pullman porters."

The doctor gasped.

"Even I don't mind a Pullman porter," finished Aunt Caroline grandly.

"That's very nice," the doctor struggled to adjust him-self. "But Pullman porters are not Indians, and even if they were I can't quite see how it affects Benis and his lady secretary."

"The principle," said Aunt Caroline, "is the same."

Rogers wondered if his brain were going. At any rate he felt that he needed a smoke. Aunt Caroline did not like smoke, so comparative privacy was assured. Also, a good smoke might show him a way out of his difficulty.

It didn't. At the end of the second cigar the cold fact, imparted by the clerk in the steamship office, that Professor Spence and wife had preceded them upon this very boat, was still a cold fact and nothing more. The long letter from the bridegroom which would have made things plain had passed him on his trip across the continent and was even now lying, with other unopened mail, in his Bainbridge office.

If Benis were married, then the bride could be no other than the nurse-secretary he had written about in that one inconsequent letter to which he, Rogers, had replied with unmistakable warning. But the thing seemed scarcely credible. If it were a fact, then it might very easily be a tragedy also. Marriage in such haste and under such circumstances could scarcely be other than a mistake, and considering the quality of Benis Spence, a most serious one.

John Rogers was very fond of his eccentric friend and the threatened disaster loomed almost personal. He felt himself to blame too, for the advice which had thrown Spence directly from the frying-pan of Aunt Caroline into the fire of a sterner fate. Add to all this a keen feeling of unwarranted intrusion and we have some idea of the state of mind with which Dr. John Rogers saw the white tents of the campers as the steamer put in at Friendly Bay.

"There are two tents," said Aunt Caroline lowering her lorgnette. "I shall be quite comfortable."

The doctor did not smile. His sense of humor was suffering from temporary exhaustion and his strongest consciousness was a feeling of relief that neither Benis nor anyone else appeared to notice their arrival. Even the unique spectacle of a middle-aged lady in elastic-sided boots proceeding on tiptoe, and with all the tactics of a scouting party, toward the evidently deserted tents provoked no demonstration from anyone.

"They're not here!" called the scouting party in a carrying whisper.

"Obviously not." The doctor wiped his heated fore-head. "Probably they've gone for the night. Then you'll have to marry me to save my reputation."

"Jokes upon serious subjects are in very bad taste, young man," said Aunt Caroline. But her rebuke was half-hearted. She looked uneasy. "John," she added with sudden suspicion, "you don't suppose they could have known we were coming?"

"How could they possibly?"

"If she is an Indian, they might. I've heard of such things. I—oh, John! Look!"

"Snake?" asked John callously. Nevertheless he followed Aunt Caroline's horrified gaze and saw, with a thrill of more normal interest, a pair of dainty moccasins whose beaded toes protruded from the flap of one of the tents.

"Indian!" gasped Aunt Caroline. "Oh John!"

"Not a bit of it!" Our much tried physician spoke with salutary shortness. "They may be Indian-made but that's all. I'll eat my hat if it's an Indian who has worn them. Did you ever see an

Indian with a foot like that?"

Indignation enabled Aunt Caroline to disclaim acquaintance with any Indian feet whatever.

"It's a white girl's moccasin," he assured her. "Lots of girls wear them in camp. Or," hastily, "it may be a curiosity. Benis may be making a collection."

Aunt Caroline snorted. Her gaze was fixed with almost piteous intensity upon the tent.

"D'you think I might go in?" she faltered.

"You might" said John carefully.

Aunt Caroline sighed.

"How dreadful to have traditions!" she murmured. "There's no real reason why I shouldn't go in. And," with grim honesty, "if you weren't here watching I believe I'd do it. Anyway we may have to, if they don't come soon. I can't sit on this grass. I'm sure it's damp."

"I'll get you a chair from Benis's tent," offered John unkindly. "There are no traditions to forbid that, are there?"

"No. And, John—you might look around a little? Just to make sure."

The doctor nodded. He had every intention of looking around. He felt, in fact, entitled to any knowledge which his closest observation might bring him. But the tent was almost empty. That at least proved that the tent belonged to Spence. He was a man with an actual talent for bareness and spareness in his sleeping quarters. Even his room at school had possessed that man-made neatness which one associates with sailor's cabins and the cells of monks. The camp-bed was trimly made, a dressing-gown lay across a canvas chair, a shaving mug hung from the centre pole—there was not so much as a hairpin anywhere.

John crossed thoughtfully to the folding stand which stood with its portable reading lamp beside the bed. There was one unusual thing there, a photograph. Benis, as his friend knew, was an expert amateur photographer—but he never perched his photographs upon stands. This one must be an exception, and exceptions are illuminating.

It was still quite light inside the tent and the doctor could see the picture clearly. It was an extraordinarily good one, quite in the professor's happiest style. Composition, lighting, timing, all were perfect. But it is doubtful if John Rogers noticed any of these excellencies. He was absorbed at once and utterly in the personality of the person photographed. This was a girl, bending over a still pool. The pose was one of perfectly arrested grace and the face which was lifted, as if at the approach of someone, looked directly out of the picture and into Roger's eyes. It was the most living picture he had ever seen. The lips were parted as if for speech, there was a smile behind the widely opened eyes. And both face and form were beautiful.

The doctor straightened up with a sharply drawn breath. It seemed that something had happened. For one flashing instant some inner knowledge had linked him with his own unlived experience. It was gone as soon as it came. He did not even realize it, save as a sense of strangeness. Yet, as a chemist lifts a vial and drops the one drop which changes all within his crucible, so some magic philtre tinged John Roger's cup of life in that one stolen look.

"Have you found anything?" Aunt Caroline's voice came impatiently.

"Nothing."

But to himself he added "everything" for indeed the mystery of Benis seemed a mystery no longer. The photograph made everything clear. And yet not so clear, either. The doctor looked around at the ship-shape bachelorness of the tent, at the neat pile of newly typed manuscript upon the bed, and felt bewildered. Even the eccentricity of Benis, in its most extravagant mode, seemed inadequate as a covering explanation.

Giving himself a mental shake, the intruder picked up the largest chair and rejoined Aunt Caroline.

"It's Benis right enough," he announced. "He is probably off interviewing Indians. I had better light a fire. It may break the news."

CHAPTER XVI

We left the professor somewhat abruptly in the midst of a cryptic ejaculation of "My Aunt!"

"How can it be your Aunt?" asked Desire reasonably.

"I don't know how. But, owing to some mysterious combination of the forces of nature, it is my Aunt. No one else could wear that hat."

"Then hadn't we better go to meet her? You can't sit here all night."

"I know I can't. It's too near. We didn't see her soon enough!"

"Cowardly custard!" said Desire, stamping her foot.

The professor's mild eyes blinked at her in surprise. "Good!" he said with satisfaction. "That is the first remark suitable to your extreme youth that I've ever heard you make. But the sentiment it implies is all wrong. Physical courage, as such, is mere waste when opposed to my Aunt. What is wanted is technique. Technique requires thought. Thought requires leisure. That is why I am sitting here behind a boulder—what is she doing now?"

Desire investigated.

"She is walking up and down."

"A bad sign. It doesn't leave us much time. The most difficult point is the introduction. Now, in an introduction, what counts for most? Ancestors, of course. My dear, have you any ancestors?"

"Not one."

"I was afraid of that. In fact I had intended to provide a few. But I never dreamed they would be needed so soon. What is she doing now?"

"She has stopped walking. She has turned. She is coming this way."

"Then we must take our chance." The professor rose briskly. "Never allow the enemy to attack. Come on. But keep behind me while I draw her fire."

Aunt Caroline advanced in full formation.

"Benis. Ben—nis!" she called piercingly. "He can't be very far away," she declared over her shoulder. "I have a feeling—Benis!"

"Who calls so loud?" quoted the professor innocently, appearing with startling suddenness from behind the boulder. "Why!" in amazed recognition. "It is Aunt Caroline!"

"It is." Aunt Caroline corroborated grimly.

"This is a surprise," exclaimed the professor. As we have noted before, he liked to be truthful when possible. "How'd'do, Aunt! However did you get here?"

"How I came," replied Aunt Caroline, "is not material. The fact that I am here is sufficient."

"Quite," said Benis. "But," he added in a puzzled tone, "you are not alone. Surely, my dear Aunt, I see——"

"You see Dr. Rogers who has kindly accompanied me."

"John Rogers here? With you?" In rising amazement.

"It is a detail." Aunt Caroline's voice was somewhat tart. "I could scarcely travel unaccompanied."

"Surely not. But really—was there no lady friend—"

"Don't be absurd, Benis!" But she was obscurely conscious of a check. Against the disturbed surprise of her nephew's attitude her sharpened weapons had already turned an edge. Only one person can talk at a time, and, to her intense indignation, she found herself displaced as the attacking party. Also the behavior of her auxiliary force was distinctly apologetic.

"Hello, Benis!" said Rogers, coming up late and reluctant. "Sorry to have dropped in on you like this. But your Aunt thought—"

"Don't say a word, my dear fellow! No apology is necessary. I am quite sure she did. But it might be a good idea for you to do a little thinking yourself occasionally. Aunt is so rash. How were you to know that you would find us at home? Rather a risk, what? Luckily, Aunt," turning to that speechless relative with reassurance, "it is quite all right. My wife will be delighted—Desire, my dear, permit me—Aunt, you will be glad, I'm sure—this is Desire. Desire, this is your new Aunt."

"How do you do?" said Desire. "I have never had an Aunt before."

It was the one thing which she should have said. Had she known Aunt Caroline for years she could not have done better. But, unfortunately, that admirable lady did not hear it. She had heard nothing since the shattering blow of the word "wife."

"John," she said hoarsely. "Take me away. Take me away at once!"

"Certainly," said John, "Only it's frightfully damp in the woods. And there may be bears."

"Bears or not. I can't stay here."

"Oh, but you must," Desire came forward with innocent hospitality. "You can sleep on my cot and I'll curl up in a blanket. I am quite used to sleeping out."

Aunt Caroline closed her eyes. It was true then. Benis Spence had married a squaw! Blindly she groped for the supporting hand of the doctor. "John," she moaned, "did you hear that? Sleeping out—oh how could he?"

"Very easily, I should think." Under the slight handicap of assisting the drooping lady to her chair, John Rogers looked back at Desire, standing now within the radius of the camp fire's light—and once again he felt the strangeness as of some half-glimpsed prophecy. "She is wonderful," he added. "Look!"

Aunt Caroline looked, shuddered, and collapsed again upon a whispered "Indian!"

"Nonsense!" Rogers almost shook her. And yet, considering the suggestive force of the poor lady's preconceived ideas, the mistake was not unpardonable. In those surroundings, against that flickering light, standing, straight and silent in her short skirt and moccasins, her leaf-brown hair tied with bracken and turned to midnight black by the shadows, her grey eyes mysterious under their dark lashes, and her lips unsmiling, Desire might well have been some beauty of that vanishing race. A princess, perhaps, waiting with grave courtesy for the welcome due her from her husband's people.

"And not a bit ashamed of it," murmured Aunt Caroline in what she fondly hoped was a whisper. "Utterly callous! Benis," in a wavering voice, "I had a feeling—"

"Wait!" interrupted Benis, producing a notebook and pencil. "Let us be exact, Aunt. Just when did you notice the feeling first?"

"What difference does that make?" Aunt Caroline's voice was perceptibly stronger.

"Why," eagerly, "don't you see? If you had the feeling at the time (allowing for difference by the sun) it is a case of actual clairvoyance. If the feeling was experienced previous to the fact then it is a case of premonition only, and, if after, the whole thing can be explained as mere telepathy."

"Oh," said Aunt Caroline. But she said it thoughtfully. Her voice was normal.

"Wonderful thing—this psychic sense," went on her nephew. "Fancy you're knowing all about it even before you got my letter!"

"Did you send a letter?" asked Aunt Caroline after a pause. "Why Aunt! Of course. Two of them. Before and after. But I might have known you would hardly need them. If you had only arrived a few days sooner, you might have been present at the ceremony."

"Ceremony? There was a ceremony?"

"My dear Aunt!"

"The Church service?"

"My dear Aunt!"

"In a church?"

"Not exactly a church. You see it was rather late in the evening. The care-taker had gone to bed. In fact we had to get the Rector out of his."

"Bern's!"

"He didn't mind. Said he'd sleep all the better for it. And he wore his gown—over his pyjamas—very effective."

"Had the man no conscientious scruples?" sternly.

"Scruples—against pyjamas?"

"Against mixed marriages."

"I don't know. I didn't ask him. We weren't discussing the ethics of mixed marriage."

"Don't pretend to misunderstand me, Benis. For a man who has married an Indian, your levity is disgraceful."

"How ridiculous, Aunt! If you will listen to an explanation—"

"I need no explanation," Aunt Caroline, once more mistress of herself rose majestically. "I hope I know an Indian when I see one. I am not blind, I believe. But as there seems to be no question as to the marriage, I have nothing further to say. Another woman in my place might feel justified in voicing a just resentment, but I have made it a rule to expect nothing from any relative, especially if that relative be, even partially, a Spence. When my poor, dear sister married your father I told her what she was doing. And she lived to say, 'Caroline, you were right!' That was my only reward. More I have never asked. All that I have ever required of my sister's child has been ordinary docility and reliance upon my superior sense and judgment. Now when I find that, in a matter so serious as marriage, neither my wishes nor my judgment have been considered, I am not surprised. I may be shocked, outraged, overwhelmed, but I am not surprised."

"Bravo!" said Benis involuntarily. He couldn't help feeling that Aunt Caroline was really going strong. "What I mean to say," he added, "is that you are quite right Aunt, except in these particulars, in which you are entirely wrong. But before we go further, what about a little sustenance. Aren't you horribly hungry?"

"I am sure they are both starved," said Desire. "And I hate to remind you that you ate the last sandwich. Will you make Aunt Caroline comfortable while I cut some more? Perhaps Dr. John will help me—although we haven't shaken hands yet."

She held out her hands to the uneasy doctor with a charming gesture of understanding. "Did you expect to see a squaw, too', Doctor?"

"I expected to see, just you." His response was a little too eager. "I had seen you before—by a pool, bending over—"

"Oh, the photograph? Benis is terribly proud of it,"

"Best I've ever done," confirmed the professor. "Did you notice the curious light effect on that silver birch at the left?"

"Wonderful," said Rogers, but he wasn't thinking of the light effect on the silver birch. As he followed Desire to the tent his orderly mind was in a tumult. "He doesn't know how wonderful she is!" he thought. "And she doesn't care whether he does or not. And that explains—" But he saw in a moment that it didn't explain anything. It only made the mystery deeper.

"And now, Benis, that we are alone—" began Aunt Caroline....

We may safely leave out several pages here. If you realize Aunt Caroline at all, you will see that at least so much self-expression is necessary before anyone else can expect a chance. Time enough to pick up the thread again when the inevitable has happened and her exhausted vocabulary is replaced by tears.

"Not that I care at all for my own feelings," wept Aunt Caroline. "There are others to think of. What will Bainbridge say?"

Her nephew roused himself. From long experience he knew that the worst was over.

"Bainbridge, my dear Aunt," he said, "will say exactly what you tell it to say. It was because we realized this that we decided to leave the whole matter in your hands—all the announcing and things. But of course," with resignation, "if we have taken too much for granted; if you are not equal to it, we had better not come back to Bainbridge at all."

"Oh," cried Aunt Caroline with fresh tears. "My poor boy! The very idea! To think that I should live to hear you say it! How gladly I would have saved you from this had I known in time."

"I am sure you would, Aunt. But the gladness would have been all yours. I did not want to be saved, you see, and people who are saved against their will are so frightfully ungrateful. Wouldn't you like a dry hanky? Just wait till you've had a couple of dozen sandwiches. You'll feel quite differently. Think what a relief it will be to have me off your mind. You can relax now, and rest. You've been overworking for years. Consider how peaceful it will be not to have to ask any more silly girls to visit. You know you hated it, really, and only did it for my sake."

"I did everything for your sake," moaned Aunt Caroline brokenly. "And they were silly. But I hoped you would not notice it. And you will never know what I went through trying to get them down for breakfast at nine."

"I can imagine it," with ready sympathy. "They always yawned. And there must have been many darker secrets which I never guessed. You kept them from me. Do you remember that hole in Ada's stocking?"

"Yes, but I—"

"Never mind. The fib wasn't nearly as big as the hole. But how could you expect me to help noticing the general lightness and frivolity of your visitors, shown up so plainly against the background of your own character?"

"Y-es. I didn't think of that"

"Perhaps I should never have married if I had not got away—from the comparison, I mean."

"There was a danger, I suppose. But," with renewed grief, "Oh, Benis, such a wedding! No cards, no cake—and in pyjamas—oh!"

"Come now, Aunt, don't give way! And do you feel that it is quite right to criticise the clergy? I always fancy that it is the first step toward free-thinking. And you couldn't see much of them, you know, only the legs. Besides, consider what a wedding with cards and cake would have meant in Bainbridge at this time. No second maid, no proper cook! We should have appeared at a disadvantage in the eyes of the whole town. As it is, we can take our time, engage competent help, select a favorable date and give a reception which will be the very last word in elegance."

"Yes! I could get—what am I talking about? Of course I shan't do anything of the kind. How can you ask me to? Oh, Benis—a heathen!"

"Not a bit of it, Aunt. Church of England. But I can see what has happened. You have been allowing old Bones to cloud your judgment. I never knew a fellow so prone to jump to idiotic conclusions. No doubt he heard that I had come in search of Indians and, without a single inquiry, decided that I had married one."

"It was hasty of him. I admit that," said Aunt Caroline wiping her eyes.

"But with your knowledge of my personal character you will understand that my interest in, and admiration for, our aborigines in their darker and wilder state—"

"John said they were only fairly wild."

"Well, even in a fairly wild state. Or indeed in a wholly tame one. My interest at any time is purely scientific and would never lead me to marry into their family circle. My wife's father, as a matter of fact, is English. A professional man, retired, and living upon a small—er—estate near Vancouver. Her mother, who died when Desire was a child, was English also."

"Who took care of the child?"

"A Chinaman." The professor was listening to Desire's distant laugh and answered absently with more truth than wisdom.

"What!" The tone of horror brought him back.

"Oh, you mean who brought her up? Her father, of course."

"You said a Chinaman."

"They had a Chinese cook."

"Scandalous! Had the child no Aunt?"

The professor sighed. "Poor girl," he said. "One of the first things she told me about herself was, 'I have no Aunt.'"

Aunt Caroline polished her nose thoughtfully.

"That would account for a great deal," she admitted. "And her being English on both sides is something. Now that you speak of it, I did notice a slight accent. I never met an English person yet who could say "a" properly. But she is young and may learn. In the meantime—"

"The sandwiches are ready," called Desire from the tent.

CHAPTER XVII

"And do you mean to tell me that she really believes that lie?"

Benis Spence had taken his medical adviser up the slope to the Indian burying-ground. It was the one place within reasonable radius where they were not likely to be interrupted by periodic appearances of Aunt Caroline. Aunt Caroline never took liberties with burying-grounds. "A graveyard is a graveyard," said Aunt Caroline, "and not a place for casual conversation." There-

fore, amid the graves and the crosses, the friends felt fairly safe.

"Why shouldn't she believe it?" countered Spence. "Don't you suppose I can tell a lie properly?"

"To be honest—I don't."

"Well," somewhat gloomily, "this one seemed to go over all right. It went much farther than I ever expected. It's far too up-and-coming. The way it grows frightens me. At first there was nothing—just an 'experience.' A mild abstraction, buried in the past, a sentimental 'has-been' without form or substance. Then, without warning, the experience acquired a name, and then a history and then, just when I had begun to forget about it, hair suddenly popped up, yellow hair, and, the day after, eyes—blue eyes, misty. The nose remains indeterminate, but noses often do. Only yesterday I felt compelled to add a mouth. Small and red, I made it—ugh! How I hate a small red mouth. Oh, if it amuses you—all right!"

"Laugh at it yourself, old man! It's all you can do. But what a frightful list of blunders. If you had to tell a lie why didn't you take Mark Twain's advice and tell a good one? The name, for instance—why on earth did you choose 'Mary?' Even 'Marion' would have been safer. Don't you know you can't turn a corner in Bainbridge or anywhere else without stumbling over a Mary? There's a Mary in my office at the present minute and—yes, by Jove, she has golden hair!"

The professor looked stubborn.

"My Mary's hair was not golden. It was yellow, plain yellow. I remember I made a point of that."

"Well then, there's Mary Davis. You remember her?"

"The one who visited Aunt Caroline?"

"Yes. Pretty girl. About your own age! 'Twas thought in Bainbridge that her thoughts turned youward. Her hair was yellow then, and may be again by now. And she had blue eyes, bright blue."

"My Mary's were not bright blue. Hers were misty, like the hills."

"Forget it, old man! You'll find you won't be able to insist on shades. Any Mary with golden, yellow, tawny or tow-colored hair, and old blue, grey blue, Alice blue or plain blue eyes will come under Mrs. Spence's reflective observation. Your progress will be a regular charge of the light brigade with Marys on all sides."

"Now you're making yourself unpleasant," said the professor. "And, to change the subject, why do you insist upon calling Desire 'Mrs. Spence?' She calls you John."

To his questioner's infinite amazement the doctor blushed.

"She has told me I might," he admitted. "But it seemed so dashed cheeky."

"Why? You are at least ten years older than she. And a friend of the family."

"Ten years is nothing," said the doctor. "And I want to be her friend, not a friend of the family. Besides, she, herself, is not at all like the girls of twenty whom one usually meets."

"She is simpler, perhaps."

"In manner, but not in character. There is a distance, a poise, a—surely you feel what I mean."

"Imagination, John. It is you who create the distance by clinging to formality."

"All right. You're sure you don't object?"

"My dear Bones, why should I possibly?"

The doctor looked sulky. Benis smiled.

"Look here, John," he said after a reflective pause. "Desire is as direct as a child. If she calls you by your first name you can depend that she feels no embarrassment about it. So why should you? And there's another thing. She may not find everything quite easy in Bainbridge. She will need your frank and unembarrassed friendship—as well as mine."

"Yours?"

"Yes. You understand the situation, don't you? At least as far as understanding is necessary. And you are the only one who will understand. So you will be of more use to her than anyone else, except me. I am going to do my best to make her happy. It's my job. I am not turning it over to you. But there may be times when I shall fail. There may be times when I shan't know that she isn't happy—a lack of perspective or something. If ever there comes a time like that and you

know of it, don't spare me. I have taken the responsibility of her youth upon my shoulders and I am not going to shirk. It will be her happiness first—at all costs."

"People aren't usually made happy at all costs," said the doctor wisely.

"They may be, if they do not know the price."

"I see."

"You'll know where I stand a bit better when you've read a letter you'll find waiting for you at home. But here is the whole point of the matter—I had to get Desire away from that devilish old parent of hers. And marriage was the only effective way. But Desire did not want marriage. She has never told me just why but I have seen and heard enough to know that her horror of the idea is deep seated, a spiritual nausea, an abnormal twist which may never straighten. I say 'may,' because there is a good chance the other way. All one can do is to wait. And in the meantime I want her to find life pleasant. She once told me that she was a window-gazer. I want to open all the doors."

"Except the one door that; matters," said Rogers gloomily.

"Nonsense! You don't believe that. Life has many things to give besides the love of man and woman."

"Has it? You'll know better some day—even a cold-blooded fish like you."

"Fish?" said Spence sorrowfully. "And from mine own familiar friend? Fish!"

"What will you do," exploded the doctor, "when she wakes up and finds how you have cheated her? When she realizes, too late, that she has sold her birthright?"

The professor rose slowly and dusted the dry grass from the knees of his knickers. "Tut, tut!" he said, "the subject excites you. Let us talk about me for a change. Observe me carefully, John, and tell me what you think of me. Only not in marine language. Am I an Apollo? Or a Greek god? Or even a movie star of the third magnitude? Or am I, not to put too fine a point on it, as homely as a hedge fence?"

"Oh, hang it, Benis, stop your fooling."

"I'm not fooling. I want you to understand that I have consulted my mirror. And I know just how likely I am to appeal to the imagination of a young girl. I take my chance, nevertheless. Your question, divested of oratory, means what shall I do if Desire finds her mate and that mate is not myself? My answer, also divested of oratory, is that I do not keep what does not belong to me. Is that plain?"

The doctor nodded. "Plain enough," he said. "But how will you know?"

"Well, I might guess. You see," resuming his seat and his ordinary manner at the same time, "Desire is my secretary. I make a point of studying the psychology of those who work with me. And, aside from the slight abnormality which I have mentioned, Desire is very true to type, her own type—a very womanly one. And a woman in love is hard to mistake. But," cheerfully, "she is only a child yet in matters of loving. And she may never grow up."

"You seem quite happy about it."

"'Call no man happy till he is dead.' And yet—I am happy. If tears must come, why anticipate them?"

"There speaks the hopeless optimist," said Rogers, laughing. "But because I called you a fish, I'll give you a bit of valuable advice. I can't see you scrap quite all your chances. Kill Mary."

"I can't. Besides, why should I? Desire likes to hear about her. Or says she does. It provides her with an interest. And a little perfectly human jealousy is very stimulating."

"You think she is jealous?"

"Oh, not in the way you mean. But every woman likes to be first, even with her friends. And if she can't be first, she is healthily curious about the woman who is. Desire would miss Mary very much."

"You've been a fool, Benis."

"I shall try not to be a bigger one."

The friends looked polite daggers at each other. And suddenly smiled.

"To be continued in our next," said Rogers. "Is it finally settled that we turn homeward tomorrow?"

"Yes. We did our last extracting from the hawk-eyed one yesterday. He has been a real find,

John. Do you know what he calls Aunt Caroline? 'The-old-woman-who-sniffs-the-air.' Desire did not translate. Isn't she rather a wonder, John? Did you ever see anything like the way she manages Aunt?"

But the doctor's eyes were on the distant tents.

"Someone in blue is waving to us," he said. "It must be your Aunt."

Spence lazily raised his eyes.

"No. That's Desire. She is wearing blue."

"She was wearing pink this morning."

"Yes. But she won't be wearing it this afternoon."

"How do you know?" curiously.

The professor yawned. "By psychology! I happened to mention that pink was Mary's favorite color."

Rogers opened his lips. He was plainly struggling with himself.

"Don't trouble," said Spence serenely. "I know what you feel it your duty to say. But it isn't really your duty. And there would be no use in saying it, anyway. I take my chances!"

CHAPTER XVIII

The long Transcontinental puffed steadily up toward the white-capped peaks of a continent. They were a day out from Vancouver—a day during which Desire had sat upon the observation platform, drugged with wonder and beauty. She had known mountains all her life. They were dear and familiar, and the sound of rushing water was in her blood. But these heights and depths, these incredible valleys, these ever-climbing, piling hills pushing brown shoulders through their million pines, the dizzy, twisting track and the constant marvel of the man-made train which braved it, held her spellbound and almost speechless.

Fortunately, Aunt Caroline was indisposed and had remained all day in the privacy of their reserved compartment. Only one such reservation had been available and the men of the party had been compelled to content themselves with upper berths in the next car.

To Desire, who presented that happy combination, a good traveller still uncloyed by travel, every deft arrangement of the comfortable train provided matter for curiosity and interest—the little ladders for the upstair berths, the tiny reading-lamps, the paper bags for one's new hat, the queer little soaps and drinking cups in sealed oil paper—all these brought their separate thrill. And then there was the inexhaustible interest of the travellers themselves. When night had fallen and the great Outside withdrew itself, she turned with eager eyes to the shifting world around her, a human world even more absorbing than the panorama of the hills.

What was there, for instance, about that handsome old lady, from Golden (fascinating name!) which permitted her to act as if the whole train were her private suite and all the porters servants of her person? She was the most autocratic old lady Desire had ever seen and far younger and more alert than the tired-looking daughter who accompanied her. They were going to New York. They went to New York every year. Desire wondered why.

She wondered, too, about the rancher's wife going home to Scotland for the first time since her marriage. What did it feel like to be going home—to a real home with a mother and brothers and sisters? What did it feel like to be taking two dark-haired, bright-eyed babies, as like as twins and with only a year between them, for the fond approval of grand-parents across the seas? ... The rancher's wife looked as if she enjoyed it. But women will pretend anything.

Desire's eyes shifted to the inevitable honeymoon couple who were going to Winnipeg to visit "his" people. The bride was almost painfully smart, but she was pretty and "he" adored her. Her mouth was small and red. It fascinated Desire. She could not keep her eyes off it. It was like—well, it was the kind of mouth men seemed to admire. She tried honestly to admire it her-self, but the more she tried the less admirable she found it. She wondered if Benis—

"What do you think of the bride?" she murmured, under cover of a magazine.

"Where?" said Benis, in an unnecessarily loud voice, laying down his paper.

"S-ssh! Over there. The girl in green."

"Pretty little thing," said Benis. His tone lacked conviction.

"Lovely eyes, don't you think? Nice hair and such a darling nose. But her mouth—isn't her mouth rather small?"

"Regular 'prunes and prisms,'" agreed Benis.

"It is very red, though."

"Lipstick, probably."

"But I thought you liked small, red mouths."

"Hate 'em," said Benis, who had a shockingly bad memory.

Desire went to bed thoughtful. "I suppose," she thought as she lay listening to the swinging train, "men like certain things because they belong to certain people and not because they like them really at all." This was not very lucid but it seemed to satisfy Desire for she stopped thinking and went to sleep.

Morning found them on the top of the world. Desire was up and out long before the mists had lifted. She watched the wonder of their going, she saw the coming of the sun. She drew in, with great deep breaths, the high, sweet air. The cream of her skin glowed softly with the tang of it.

"Quite lovely!" said a voice behind her, and Desire turned to find her solitude shared by the young old lady from Golden.

"Your complexion, I mean, my dear," said she, sitting down comfortably in the folds of a fur coat. "I never use adjectives about the mountains. It would seem impertinent. How old are you?"

Desire gave her age smiling. "Charming age," nodded the old lady. "Youth is a wonderful thing. See that you keep it."

"Like you?" said Desire, her smile brightening.

The old lady looked pleased.

"Quite so," she said. "Never allow yourself to believe that silly folly about a woman being as old as she looks. As if a mirror had more mind than the person looking in it! I remember very well waking up on the morning of my thirtieth birthday and thinking, 'I am thirty. I am growing old.' But, thank heaven, I had a mind. I soon put a stop to that. 'Not a day older will I grow!' I said. And I never have. What's a mind for, if not to make use of?"

Desire looked a little awed at an audacity which defied time.

"Don't misunderstand me," went on her companion. "I don't mean that I tried to look young. I was young. I am young still."

"Yes," said Desire. "I see what you mean. But—wasn't it lonely?"

The old lady patted her arm with an approving hand.

"Clever child!" she said. "Yes, of course it was lonely. But one can't have everything. Pick out what you want most and cling to it. Let the rest go. It's a good philosophy."

"Isn't it selfish?"

"Youth is always selfish," complacently. "I feel quite complimented now when anyone calls me a selfish creature. You are a bride, aren't you?"

Desire blushed beautifully. But one couldn't resent so frank an interest.

"Yes," she said.

"That thin, dark man is your husband? The one with the chin?"

"He has a chin," doubtfully. "Oh, I see what you mean. Yes, he is my husband."

"Odd you never noticed his chin before," commented the old lady. "Well, look out! That man has reserves. Who is the other one?"

"A friend."

The old lady shook a well-kept finger.

"Inconvenient things, friends!" said she. "Far better without them."

"Haven't you any?"

"Not one. They went on. All old fogies now." Her air of boredom was unfeigned.

"But you have your daughter."

"Too old!" The youthful eyes twinkled maliciously. "Now you, my dear, would be nearer my age. For you have youth within as well as without. Keep it. It's all there is worth having."

Desire smiled. But the words lingered. She had never valued her youth. She had been impatient of it. And now to be told that it was all there was worth having! It was the creed of selfishness. And yet—had life already given her one of her greatest treasures and had she come near to missing the meaning of the gift?

At breakfast she observed her husband's chin so narrowly that he became uneasy, wondering if he had forgotten to shave. She looked at John's chin, too, with reflective eyes. Undoubtedly it was much inferior.

The train had conquered the mountains now and was plunging down upon their farther side. Soon they were in the foot-hills and then nothing but a flashing streak across an endless, endless tableland of wheat. Desire, who had never seen the prairie, smiled whimsically.

"It is like coming from the world's cathedral to the world's breakfast-table!" said she.

Aunt Caroline snorted. For her part, she said, she found train breakfasts much the same anywhere except near the Great Lakes, where one might expect better fish.

It grew very hot. The effortless speed of the train rolled up the blazing miles and threw them behind, league on league. The sun set and rose on a level sky. The babies of the rancher's wife grew tired and sticky. They were almost too much for their equally tired mother, so half of them sat on Desire's lap most of the time. Desire's half seemed to bounce a great deal and gave bubbly kisses, but the rings around its fat wrist and the pink dimples in its fingers were well worth while keeping clean and cool just to look at. It was true, as Desire reminded herself, that she did not care for children, but anyone might find a round, fat one with cooey laughs a pleasant thing to play with! She did it mostly when Benis was in the smoker with John.

At Winnipeg the honeymoon couple left them and the old lady from Golden, much to her disgust, was also compelled to stay over for a day because her middle-aged daughter was train-sick. Other and less interesting faces took their places.

Desire watched them hopefully but the only one who seemed appealing was a sturdy prairie school teacher going "home." Desire liked the school teacher. She was so solid, so sure of herself, so wrapped up in and satisfied with something which she called "education." She asked Desire where she had been educated. Desire did not seem to know. "Just anywhere," she said, "when father felt like it and had time. And I taught myself shorthand."

"Then you aren't really educated at all?" said the teacher with frank pity. "What a shame! Education is so important."

Benis was frankly afraid of her.

"But you need not be," Desire assured him. "She looks up to you. She thinks that, being a professor, you have even more education than she has."

"God forbid!" said Benis devoutly.

"Besides, she knows all about you. I found out today that she is an Ontario girl. And she lives —guess where? In Bainbridge!"

Aunt Caroline (they were at dinner) looked up from her roast lamb and remarked "Impossible."

"But she does, Aunt. She says so."

Aunt Caroline fancied that probably the young person was mistaken. "Certainly," she said, "I have never heard of her."

"She lives," said Desire, "on Barker Street and she took her first class teacher's certificate at Bainbridge Collegiate Institute."

Aunt Caroline fancied that they gave almost anyone a certificate there. All one had to do was to pass the examinations. As to Barker Street—there was a Barker Street, certainly. And this young person might live on it. She, herself, was not acquainted with the neighborhood.

"But she knows you," Desire persisted. "She said, 'Oh, is Miss Caroline Campion your Aunt? I remember her from my youth up.'"

"Very impertinent," said Miss Campion. Her nephew's eyes began to twinkle.

"Oh, everyone knows Aunt Caroline," he explained. "But then, everyone knows the Queen of

England."

Aunt Caroline was mollified. "Of course, in that sense—" She felt able to go on with her roast lamb.

Dr. Rogers, who had listened to this interchange with delight, said now that the young lady had been quite right about her place of residence. She did live in Bainbridge, on Barker Street. He did not know her personally but her older sister was a patient of his. The mother and father were dead. Very nice, quiet people.

Desire was quite young enough to laugh and to point this with "Dead ones usually are."

The school teacher, at another table, heard the laugh and felt a passing sense of injustice. It seemed unfair that anyone so obviously without education could feel free to laugh in that satisfying way. It was plain that young Mrs. Spence scarcely realized her sad deficiency. And it certainly was a little discouraging that the cleverest men almost invariably....

Fort William came and passed and in the sparkling sunshine of another morning the train dashed into the wild Superior country where the wealth lies under the rock instead of above it. To Desire, her first glimpse of the Great Lake was like a glimpse of home. The coolness of the air was grateful after prairie heat but, scarcely had she welcomed back the smell of pine and fir, before it, too, was left behind and they swung swiftly into a softer land—a land of rolling fields and fences and farmhouses; of little towns, with tree-lined roads; of streams less noisy and more disciplined; of fat cows drowsy in the growing heat.

"This," said Aunt Caroline with a breath of proprietary satisfaction, "is Ontario."

Desire, always literal, pointed out that according to the map in the time-table, they had been in Ontario for some considerable time.

Aunt Caroline thought that the map was probably mistaken. "For," she added with finality, "it was certainly not the Ontario to which I have been accustomed."

This settled the matter for any sensible person.

"We are nearly home now," she went on kindly. "I hope you are not feeling very nervous, my dear."

"I am not feeling nervous at all," said Desire with surprise.

Fortunately Aunt Caroline took this proof of insensibility in a flattering light.

"Yes, yes," she said. "It is not, of course, as if you were arriving alone. You can depend upon me entirely. John, are you sure that your car will be in waiting?"

"I wired it to wait," grinned John. "And usually it's a good waiter."

"Because," said Aunt Caroline, "we do not wish to be delayed at the station. If Eliza Merry weather is there, the quicker we get away the better. I am determined that she shall be introduced to Desire exactly when other people are and not before. Please remember that, Benis. Introduce Desire to no one at the station. I think, my dear, we may put on our hats."

"It's an hour yet, Aunt."

"I know, but I do not wish to be hurried."

Desire put on her hat. It was because she was always willing to give Aunt Caroline her way in small matters that she invariably took her own in anything that counted. It is a simple recipe and recommended to anyone with Aunts....

"There's Potter's wood!" said Benis, who had been somewhat silent.

Desire looked out eagerly. But Potter's wood was just like any other wood and—

"There's Sadler's Pond!" said John.

"They've cut down the old elm!" Aunt Caroline voiced deep displeasure.

"And put up a bill-board," said Benis.

Desire felt a trifle lonely. These people, so close to her and yet so far away, were going home.

"Oh, how I wish you weren't stopping off," said the rancher's wife, an actual tear on her flushed cheek. "You've been so kind, Mrs. Spence. And anyone more understanding with children I never saw. When you've got a boy like my Sandy for your own—"

"By jove!" exclaimed Benis. "They're starting to cut down Miller's hill at last."

Aunt Caroline rose flutteringly. "There is the water-tank," she announced in an agitated

voice. "Desire, where is your parasol? My dear, don't kiss that child again, it's sticky. WHERE is my hand-bag? John, do you see your car?"

"I don't SEE it," admitted John, "but—"

"Bainbridge!" shouted the brakeman.

CHAPTER XIX

Desire was conscious of a brown and gabled station with a bow-window and flower-beds, a long platform where baggage trucks lumbered, the calling of taxi-men, a confused noise of greeting and farewell, and Aunt Caroline's voice uncomfortably near her ear.

"There she is!" whispered Aunt Caroline hoarsely. "Be careful! Don't look!"

"Who? Where?" asked Desire, wondering.

"Eliza Merryweather. Second to the left."

There was another confused impression of curious faces, of one face especially with eager eyes and bobbing grey curls, and then she was caught, as it were, in the swirl of Aunt Caroline and deposited, somewhat breathless, in a car which, providentially, seemed to expect her.

Miss Campion was breathing heavily but her face was calm.

"She nearly got it," she said. "But not quite."

"Got what?" asked Desire, still wondering.

"An introduction. Where is Benis? My dear, DON'T LOOK! She is the most determined person."

Miss Campion herself was staring straight ahead. Desire, much amused, endeavored to do the same.

"Surely it is a trifle!" she murmured.

But Miss Campion was preoccupied. "Where can Benis be? John, do you know what is keeping Benis? Oh, here he is," with an exclamation of relief. "Now we can start. Did I hear you say 'trifle,' my dear? There are no trifles in Bainbridge. John, I think we might drive home by the Park."

They drove home by the Park. It was not a long drive, just a dozen or so of quiet streets, sentineled by maples; a factory in a hollow; a church upon a hill; a glimpse of two long rows of prosperous looking business blocks facing each other across an asphalted pavement; a white brick school where children shouted; then quiet streets again, the leisurely rising of a boulevarded slope and—home.

They turned in at a white gate in the centre of a long fence backed by trees. The Spences had built their homestead in days when land was plentiful and, being a liberal-minded race, they had taken of it what they would. Of all the houses in Bainbridge theirs alone was prodigal of space. It stood aloof in its own grounds, its face turned negligently from the street, outside. For the passer-by it had no welcome; it kept itself, its flowers and its charm, for its own people.

Desire said "Oh," as she saw it—long and white, with green shutters and deep verandas and wide, unhurried steps. She had seen many beautiful homes but she had never seen "home" before. The beauty and the peace of it caught the breath in her throat. She was glad that Benis did not speak as he gave her his hand from the car. She was glad for the volubility of Aunt Caroline and for the preoccupation of Dr. John with his engine. She was glad that she and Benis stepped info the cool, dim hall alone. In the dimness she could just see the little, nervous smile upon his lips and the warm and kindly look in his steady eyes.

After that first moment, the picture blurred a little with the bustle of arrival. Aunt Caroline, large and light in her cream dust-coat, seemed everywhere. The dimness fled before her and rooms and stairs and a white-capped maid emerged. The rooms confused Desire, there were so many of them and all with such a strong family likeness of dark furniture and chintz. Aunt Caroline called them by their names and, throwing open their doors, announced them in prideful tones. Desire felt very diffident, they were such exclusive rooms, so old and settled and sure of themselves—and she was so new. They might, she felt, cold-shoulder her entirely. It was touch and go.

All but one room!

"This," said her conductor, throwing open a door, "is where Benis does his work. He calls it his den. But you will agree that library sounds better."

Desire went in—with the other rooms she had been content to stand in the doors—and, as she entered, the room seemed to draw round and welcome her. It was deeply and happily familiar—that shallow, rounded window from which one could lean and touch the grass outside, that dark, old desk with its leather and brass, that blue bowl on the corner of the mantel-piece, the lazy, yet expectant, chairs; even the beech tree whose light fingers tapped upon the window glass! It was all part of her life, past or future—somewhere.

"You see," said Aunt Caroline in her character of showman, "we have fireplaces!"

Desire was so used to fireplaces that this did not seem extraordinary and yet, from Aunt Caroline's tone, she knew that it must be, and tried to look impressed.

"They are dirty," went on Aunt Caroline, "but they are worth it. They give atmosphere. If you have a house like this, you have to have fireplaces. That is what I tell my maids when I engage them. So that they cannot grumble afterwards. Fireplaces are dirty, I tell them, but—what are you staring at, my dear?"

"Was I staring? I didn't know. It is just that I seem to know it all."

Aunt Caroline looked wise. "Oh, yes. I know what you mean. Benis explains that curious feeling—some-thing about your right sphere or something being larger than your left, or quicker, I forget which. Not that I can see any sense in it, anyway. Do you mind if I leave you here? I want to see if Olive has made the changes I ordered upstairs."

"Get a hump on!" said a loud, rude voice.

Aunt Caroline jumped.

"Oh, my dear! It's that horrible parrot. Benis insists on keeping it. Some soldier friend of his left it to him. A really terrible bird. And its language is disgraceful. It doesn't know anything but slang. Not even 'Polly wants a cracker.' You'll hardly believe me, but it says, 'Gimme the eats!' instead."

"Can it!" said the parrot. Aunt Caroline fled.

Desire, to whom a talking bird was a delightful novelty, went over to the large cage where a beautiful green and yellow parrot swung mournfully, head down.

"Pretty Polly," said Desire timidly.

The bird made a chuckling noise in his throat like a derisive goblin.

"What is your name, Polly?"

"Yorick," said Polly unexpectedly. "Alas. Poor Yorick! I knew him well."

"You'd think it knew what I said!" thought Desire with a start. She edged away and once more the welcoming spirit of the room rose up to meet her. She tried first one chair and then another, fingered the leather on their backs and finally settled on the light, straight one in the round window. It was as familiar as the glove upon her hand, and the view from the window—well, the view from the window was partially blocked by the professor under the beech tree, smoking.

Seeing her, he discarded his cigar and came nearer, leaning on the sill of the opened window.

"You haven't got your hat off yet," he said in a discontented tone. "Aren't you going to stay?"

"May not a lady wear her hat in her own house?"

"Oh, I see. Then I shan't have to butter your fingers?"

"Do you compare me to a stray cat?"

"I never compare you to anything."

Desire wanted terribly to ask why, but an unaccustomed shyness prevented her. Instead she asked if Yorick were really the parrot's name.

"I don't know. But he says it is, so I take his word for it. Do you want to talk about parrots? Because it's not one of my best subjects. May I change it?"

"If you like."

"Don't say, 'If you like,' say 'Right-o.' I always do when I think of it. Since the war it is expected of one—a sign of this new fraternity, you know, between Englishmen and Colonials. Everyone over there is expected to say 'I guess' for the same reason. Only they don't do it. How do you like your workroom?"

"Mine?"

"I thought you might not like me to say 'Ours.'"

"Don't be silly!"

"Well, how do you like it, anyway?"

Desire's eyes met his for an instant and then fell quickly. But not before he had seen a mistiness which looked remarkably like—Good heavens, he might have known that she would be tired and upset!

"You have noticed, of course," he went on lightly, "that we have fireplaces? They are very dirty but they provide atmosphere. Almost too much atmosphere sometimes. There are no dampers and when the wind blows the wrong way—Oh, my dear child, do cry if you really feel like it."

"Cry!" indignantly. "I n—never cry."

"Well, try it for a change. I believe it is strongly recommended and—don't go away. Please."

"I had no idea I was going to be silly," said Desire after a moment, in an annoyed voice.

"It usually comes unexpectedly. Probably you are tired."

Desire wiped her eyes with businesslike thoroughness.

"No. I'm not. I'm suppressed. Do you remember what you said about suppressed emotion the other day? Well, I'm like that, and it's your fault. You bring me to this beautiful home and you never, never once, allow me to thank you properly—oh, I'm not going to do it, so don't look frightened. But one feels so safe here. Benis, it's years and years since I felt just safe."

"I know. I swear every time I think of it"

"Then you can guess a little of what it means?"

Their hands were very close upon the window-sill.

"As a psychologist—" began the professor.

"Oh—No!" murmured Desire.

Their hands almost touched.

And just at that moment Aunt Caroline came in.

"Are you there, Benis?" asked Aunt Caroline unnecessarily. "I wish you would come in and take—oh, I did not mean you to come in through the window. If Olive saw you! But a Spence has no idea of dignity. Now that you are in, I wish you would take Desire up to your room. I wired Olive to prepare the west room. It is grey and pink, so nice for Desire who is somewhat pale. The bed is very comfortable, too, and large. But, of course, if you prefer any other room you will change. Desire, my dear, it is your home, I do not forget that. I have had your bags carried up. Benis can manage his own."

If Desire were pale naturally, she was more than pale now. Her frightened eyes fluttered to her husband's face and fluttered away again. Why had she never thought of this! Sheer panic held her quiet in the straight-backed chair.

But Spence, without seeming to notice, had seen and understood her startled eyes.

"Thanks, Aunt," he said cheerfully. "Of course Desire must make her own choice. But if she takes my tip she will stay where you've put her. It's a jolly room. As for me, I'm going up to my old diggings—thought I'd told you."

"What!"

Aunt Caroline's remark was not a question. It was an explosion.

Spence dropped his bantering manner.

"My dear Aunt. I hate to disturb your arrangements with my eccentricities. But insomnia is a hard master. I must sleep in my old room. We'll consider that settled."

"Humph!" said Aunt Caroline.

Like the house, she was somewhat old fashioned.

CHAPTER XX

Tea had been laid on the west lawn under the maples.

Possibly some time in the past the Spences had been a leisured people. They had brought from the old country the tradition of afternoon tea. Many others had, no doubt, done the same but with these others the tradition had not persisted. In the more crowded life of a new country they had let it go. The Spences had not let it go. It wasn't their way. And in time it had assumed the importance of a survival. It stood for some-thing. Other Bainbridgers had "Teas." The Spences had "tea."

Desire had been in her new home a month and had just made a remark which showed her astonished Aunt Caroline that tea was no more of a surprise to her than fireplaces had been.

"Do you mean to tell me you have always had tea?" Miss Campion ceased from pouring in pure surprise.

"Why, yes." Desire's surprise was even greater than Aunt Caroline's. "Li Ho never dreamed of forgetting tea. He served it much more regularly than dinner because sometimes there wasn't any dinner to serve. It was a great comfort—the tea, I mean."

"But how extraordinary! And a Chinaman, too."

"I suppose my mother trained him."

"And Vancouver isn't Bainbridge," put in Benis lazily. "A great many people there are more English than they are in England. All the old-time Chinese 'boys' served tea as a matter of course."

"Even when no one was calling?"

"Absolutely sans callers of any kind."

"Well, I am sure that is very nice." But it was plain from Aunt Caroline's tone that she thought it a highly impertinent infringement upon the privileges of a Spence. She poured her nephew's cup in aloof silence and refreshed herself with a second before re-entering the conversation. When she did, it was with something of a bounce.

"Benis," she said abruptly, "can you tell me just exactly what is a Primitive?"

"Eh?" The professor had been trying to read the afternoon News-Telegram and sip tea at the same time.

Aunt Caroline repeated her question.

"Certainly," said Spence. "That is to say, I can be fairly exact. Would you like me to begin now? If you have nothing to do until dinner I can get you nicely started. And there is a course of reading—"

Aunt Caroline stopped him with dignity. "Thank you, Benis. I infer that the subject is a complicated one. Therefore I will word my question more simply. Would an Indian, for instance, be considered a Primitive?"

"Um—some Indians might."

"Oh," thoughtfully, "then I suppose that is what Mrs. Stopford Brown meant."

Her delighted listeners exchanged an appreciative glance.

"Very probably," said Benis, with tact, "were you discussing Primitives at the Club?"

"No. Though it might be rather a good idea, don't you think? If, as you say, there is a course of reading, it would be sufficiently literary, I suppose? At present we are taking up psycho-analysis—dreams, you know. It was not my choice. As a subject for club study I consider it too modern. Besides, I seldom dream. And when I do, my dreams are not remarkable. However, it seems that all dreams are remarkable. And I admit that there may be something in it. Take, for instance, a dream which I had the other night. I dreamed that I was endeavoring to do my hair and every time I put my hand on a hairpin that horrible parrot of yours snapped it up and swallowed it. Now, according to psycho-analysis, that dream has a meaning. Understood rightly it discloses that I have, in my waking moments, a repressed feeling of intense dislike for that hateful bird. And it is quite true. I have. So you can see how useful that kind of thing might be in getting at the truth in cases of murder. I hope," turning to Desire, "I hope I am not being too scientific for you, my dear? When the ladies feel that they know you better you may perhaps join our club, if you care for anything so serious? May I give you more tea?"

"Thanks, yes. That would be delightful."

"Not so delightful, my dear, as educative. But as I was saying, Benis, it is all your fault that this misconception has got about. I blame you very much in the matter. It comes naturally from your writing so continually about Indians and foreigners and Primitives generally. People come to associate you with them. Still, I think it was extremely rude of Mrs. Stopford Brown to say it."

"So do I," said Spence, with conviction.

"I asked Mrs. Everett, who told me, if anyone else had made remarks leading up to it. But she says not a word. It was just that Mrs. Everett said that it was strange that when you had taken so long to consider marriage you should have made up your mind so quickly in the end—'Gone off like a sky-rocket!' was her exact wording, and Mrs. Stopford Brown said, in that frivolous way she has, 'Oh, I suppose he stumbled across a Primitive.' You will notice, Desire, that Mrs. Stopford Brown's name is not upon the list for your reception."

"But—" began Desire, controlling her face with difficulty.

"No 'buts,' my dear. It may seem severe, but Mrs. Stopford Brown is quite too careless in her general conversation. It is true that her remark is directly traceable to my nephew's unfortunate writings, but she should have investigated her facts before speaking. The result is that it is all over town that you have Indian blood. They say that, out there, almost everyone married squaws once and that is why there is no dower law in British Columbia. Those selfish people did not wish their Indian wives to wear the family jewels. Benis! You will break that cup if you balance it so carelessly. What I want to know is, what are you going to do about it?"

"Not being a resident of British Columbia, I cannot do anything, Aunt. But I think you will find that since women got the vote the matter has been adjusted."

"I do not understand you. What possible connection has the women's vote with Mrs. Stopford Brown?"

"I thought you were speaking of dower laws. As for Mrs. Brown, haven't you already fitted the punishment to the crime?"

"Then you will not officially contradict the rumor?"

"Dear Aunt, I am not an official. And a rumor is of no importance—until it is contradicted. Surely you are letting yourself get excited about nothing."

Aunt Caroline bestowed upon Desire the feminine glance which means, "What fools men are."

"That's all very well now," she said. "But it is incredible how rumor persists. And when you are a father—there! I knew you would end by breaking that cup."

"Aren't we being rather absurd?" asked Desire a little later when Aunt Caroline and the tea tray had departed together. "Besides, you can't break a cup every time."

Spence sighed. It was undoubtedly true that cups do come to an end.

"What we want to do," said Desire, angry at her heightened color, "is to be sensible."

"That's what Aunt Caroline is. Do you want us to be like Aunt Caroline?"

"I want us to face facts without blushing and jumping."

"I never blush."

"You jump."

"Sorry. But give me time. I am new at this yet. Presently I shall be able to listen to Aunt describing my feelings as a grandfather without a quiver. Poor Aunt!"

"Why do you say 'poor Aunt'?"

"It is going to be rather a blow to her, you know."

"Do you think we ought to—tell her?"

"Good heavens, no!"

"But it seems so mean to let her go on believing things."

"Not half so mean as taking the belief from her. Besides—" He paused and Desire felt herself clutch, unaccountably, at the arm of her garden chair.

"She wouldn't understand," finished Benis.

Desire's grasp upon the chair relaxed.

"Life is like that," he went on slowly. "No matter how careful people are there is always someone who slips in and gets hurt. Our affairs are strictly our own affairs and yet—we stumble over Aunt Caroline and leave her indignant and disappointed and probably blaming Providence for the whole affair. It is just a curious instance of the intricacy of human relationships—you're not going in, are you?"

"There is some typing I want to finish," said Desire. "I have been letting myself get shamefully behind."

CHAPTER XXI

The weather on the day of Desire's reception could scarcely have been bettered. Rain had fallen during the night; fallen just sufficiently to lay the dust on the drive and liberate all the thousand flower scents in the drowsy garden. It was hot enough for the most summery dresses and cool enough for a summer fur. What more could be desired?

Bainbridge was expectant. It was known that Miss Campion was excelling herself in honor of her nephew's bride, and the bride herself was alluringly rumored to be a personality. It is doubtful if anyone really believed the "part Indian" suggestion, but there were those who liked to dally with it. Its possibility was a taste of lemon on a cloyed tongue.

"They say she is part Indian—fancy, a Spence!"

"Nonsense. I asked Dr. Rogers about it and he made me feel pretty foolish. The truth is—her parents are both English. The father is a doctor, at one time a most celebrated physician in London."

"Physicians who are celebrated in London usually stay there."

"And I am sure she is dark enough."

"Not with that skin! And her eyes are grey."

"Oh, I admit she's pretty—if you like that style. I wonder where she gets her clothes?"

"Where they know how to make them, anyway. Did you notice that smoke colored georgette she wore on Sunday? Not a scrap of relief anywhere. Not even around the neck."

"It's the latest. I went right home and ripped the lace off mine. But it made me look like a skinned rabbit, so I put it back. I don't see why fashions are always made for sweet and twenty!"

"Twenty? She's twenty-five if she's a day. For myself I can't say that I like to see young people so sure of themselves. A bride, too!"

"They say Mrs. Stopford Brown hasn't had a card for the reception."

"Did she tell you so?"

"Oh, no! But she let it drop that she thought it was on the seventh instead of the eighth."

"Plow funny! Serve her right. It's about time she knew she isn't quite everybody...."

Desire, herself, was unperturbed. To her direct and unself-conscious mind there was no reason why she should excite herself. These people, to whom she was so new, were equally new to her. The interest might be expected to be mutual. Any picture of herself as affected by their personal opinions had not obtruded itself. She was prepared to like them; hoped they would like her, but was not actively concerned with whether they did or not. She had lived too far away from her kind to feel the impact of their social aura. Besides, she had other things to think about.

First of all, there was Mary. She found that she had to think about Mary a great deal. She did not want to, but there seemed to be a compulsion. This may have been partly owing to a change of mind with regard to Mary as a subject for conversation. She had decided that it was not good for Benis to talk about Her. Why revive memories that are best forgotten? She never now disturbed him when he gazed into the sunset; and when he sighed, as he sometimes did without reason, she did not ask him why. She had even felt impatient once or twice and, upon leaving the room abruptly, had banged the door.

So, because Mary was unavailable for discussion, Desire had to think about her. She had to wonder whether her hair was really? And whether her eyes really were? She wanted to know. If she could find someone who had known Mary, some entirely unprejudiced person who would tell her, she might be able to dismiss the subject from her mind. And surely, in Bainbridge, there must be someone?

But she had been in Bainbridge a month now. People had called. And she was still as ignorant as ever. She had been so sure that someone would mention Mary almost at once. She had felt that people would simply not be able to refrain from hinting to the bride a knowledge of her husband's unhappy past. There were so many ways in which it might be done. Someone might say, "When I heard that Professor Spence was married, I felt sure that the bride would have dark hair because—oh, what am I saying! Please, may I have more tea?" But no one, not even the giddiest flapper of them all, had said even that! Perhaps, incredible as it might seem, Bainbridge did not know about Mary? She had been, Desire remembered, a visitor there when Benis met her. Perhaps her stay had been brief. Perhaps the ill-fated courtship had taken place elsewhere? Even then, it seemed almost unbelievably stupid of Bainbridge not to have known something. But of course, she had not met nearly everybody. This fact lent excitement to the idea of the reception. Something might be said at any moment.

If not—there was still John. John must know. A man does not keep the news of a serious love affair from his best friend. Some day, when John knew her well enough, he might speak, delicately, of that lost romance. Yes. She would have to cultivate John.

Luckily, John was easily cultivated. He had been quite charming to her from the very first. He thought of her comfort continually, almost too continually—but that, no doubt, was medical fussiness. He insisted, for instance, upon putting wraps about her shoulders after dewfall and refused to believe that she never caught cold. Only last night he had left early saying that she must get her beauty sleep so as to be fresh for the reception.

"One would think," she had said, sauntering with him to the gate, "that the guests might decide to eat me instead of the ices. Why do you all expect me to quake and shiver? They can't really do anything to me, I suppose?"

"Do?" The doctor was absent-minded. "Do? Oh, they can do things all right. But," with quite unnecessary emphasis, "their worst efforts won't be a patch on the things you will do to them. Why, you'll add ten years to the age of everyone over twenty and make the others feel like babes in arms. You'll raise all their vibrations to boiling point and remain yourself as cool and pulseless as—as you are now."

Desire was surprised, but she was reasonable.

"If you can tell me why my vibrations should raise themselves," she said, "I will see what can be done."

The doctor had gone home gloomily.

"He is really very moody, for a doctor," thought Desire, as she sauntered back through the dusk. "It seems to me that he needs cheering up."

Then she probably forgot him, for certainly no thought of his gloominess disturbed her beauty sleep. A fresher or more glowing bride had never gathered flowers for her own reception. She had carried them into all the rooms; careless for once of their cool aloofness; making them welcome her whether they would or not. Then, as the stir of preparation ceased and the house sank into perfumed quiet, she had slipped back into her own pink and grey room for a breathing space before it was time to dress.

At Aunt Caroline's earnest request she had taken Yorick with her. "For," said Aunt Caroline, "I refuse to receive guests with that bird within hearing distance. The things he says are bad enough but I have a feeling that he knows many things which he hasn't said yet. And people are sensitive. Only the other day when old Mrs. Burton was calling him 'Pretty Pol,' he burst into that dreadful laugh of his and told her to 'Shake a leg'! How the creature happened to know about the scandal of her early youth I can't say. But it is quite true that she did dance on the stage. She grew quite purple when that wretched bird threw it up to her."

Desire had laughed and promised to sequestrate Yorick for the afternoon. He had taken the insult badly and was now muttering protests to himself with throaty noises which exploded occasionally in bursts of bitter laughter.

It was too early to dress for another hour but already the dress lay ready on the bed. Desire had chosen it with care. She had no wedding-dress. Bridal white would have seemed—well, dangerously near the humorous. She would have feared that half-smile with which Spence was wont to appreciate life's pleasantries. But the gown upon the bed was the last word in smartness and charm. In color it was like pale sunlight through green water. It was both cool and bright. Against it, her warm, white skin glowed warmer and whiter; her leaf-brown hair showed more softly brown. Its skirt was daintily short and beneath it would show green stockings that shimmered, and slippers that were vanity.

Desire sat in the window seat and allowed herself to be quite happy. "If I could just sit here forever," she mused. "If someone could enchant me, just as I am, with the sun warm on the tips of my toes and this little wind, so full of flowers, cool upon my face. If I need never again hear anything save the drone of sleepy bees, the chirping of fat robins and the hum of a lawn-mower —"

She sat up suddenly. Who could be mowing the west lawn in the heat of the day? Desire, forgetting about the enchantment, leaned out to see. Surely it couldn't be? And yet it certainly was. The lawn-mower man displayed the heated countenance of the bridegroom him-self.

"What is he thinking of?" groaned Desire. "He will make himself a rag—a perfect rag. I wonder Aunt Caroline allows it."

But Aunt Caroline was presumably occupied elsewhere. No one came to prevent the ragmaking of the professor, and Desire, after watching for a moment, raised her finger and gave the little searching call which had been their way of finding each other in the woods at Friendly Bay.

The professor stopped instantly, leaving the lawn-mower exactly where it was, in the middle of a swath. With an answering wave he crossed to the west room window and, with an ease which surprised his audience, drew his long slimness up the pillar of the porch and clambered over the railing into the small balcony.

"I can't come in by the front door," he explained, "on account of my boots. And I can't come in by the back door on account of Extra Help. I intended getting in eventually by the cellarway, but, if you want me, that would take too long. Besides, I wanted to show you how neatly I can shin up a post."

He smiled at her cheerfully. He was damp and flushed, but much brisker than Desire had thought. He did not look at all raglike. For the first time since their homecoming she seemed to see him with clear eyes. And she found him changed. He was younger. Some of the lines had smoothed out of his forehead. His face showed its cheekbones less sharply and his hair dipped charmingly, like an untidy boy's. His shirt was open at the throat. He did not look like a professor at all. Desire momentarily experienced what Dr. John had called a "heightening of vibration."

"Anything that I can do," offered he helpfully.

"The best thing will be to stop doing," suggested Desire. "Don't you know that you're accessory to a reception this afternoon? Of course you are only the host, but it looks better to have the host unwilted."

"Like the salad? I hadn't thought of that. In fact I'm afraid I haven't been giving the matter serious attention. I must consult my secretary. How else should a host look?"

"He should look happy."

Benis noted this on his cuff.

"Yes?"

Desire's eyes began to sparkle.

"If he is a bridegroom, as well as a host, he should be careful to look often at the bride."

"No chance," said Spence gloomily. "Not with the mob that's coming."

"Above all, he looks after his least attractive lady guests. And he never on any account slips away for a smoke with a stray gentleman friend."

The professor's gloom lightened. "Is there going to be a stray gentleman friend? Did old Bones promise?"

Desire nodded triumphantly.

"First time in captivity," murmured Spence. "How on earth did you manage it?"

"I simply asked him!"

"As easy as that?"

They both laughed as happy people laugh at merest nonsense.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" shrieked Yorick. "Go to it, give 'em hell!"

"I don't wonder Aunt Caroline dreads him," said Desire. "His experience seems to have been lurid."

"Kiss her, you flat-foot, kiss her," shrieked the ribald Yorick.

"Sorry, old man," said Spence regretfully. "It's against the rules to kiss one's secretary."

Again they both laughed. But was it fancy, or was this laugh a trifle less spontaneous than the other? "Gracious!" said Desire, suddenly in a hurry, "I've hardly left myself time to dress."

CHAPTER XXII

It may be said with fairness that the reception given by Miss Campion for her nephew's bride left Bainbridge thoughtful. They had expected the bride to be different, and they had found her to be different from what they had expected. They could not place her; and, in Bainbridge, everyone is placed.

"I understood," said Mrs. T. L. Lawson, whose word in intellectual matters was final, "that young Mrs. Spence was wholly uneducated. A school teacher who met her on the train told my dressmaker that she had heard her admit the fact with her own lips. So, naturally, not wishing to embarrass a newcomer, I confined my remarks to the simplest matters. She did not say very much but I must confess—you will scarcely believe it—I actually got the impression that she was accommodating her conversation to me."

"Oh, surely not!" from a shocked chorus.

"It is just a manner she affects," comforted Mrs. Burton Holmes. "Far, far too assured, in my opinion, for a young bride. I hope it does not denote a certain lack of fine feeling. In a girl who had been brought up to an assured social position, such a manner might be understood. But—well, all I can say is that I heard from my friend Marion Walford yesterday, and she assured me that Mrs. Spence is quite unknown in Vancouver society. But, of course, dear Marion knows only the very smartest people. For myself I do not allow these distinctions to affect me. If only for dear Miss Campion's sake I determined to be perfectly friendly. But I felt that, in justice to everybody, it might be well for her to know that we know. So I asked her, casually, if she were well acquainted with the Walfords. At first she looked as if she had never heard of them, and then —'Oh, do you mean the soap people?' she said. 'I don't know them—but one sees their bill-boards everywhere.' It was almost as if—"

"Oh—absurd!" echoed the chorus. "Though if she is really English," ventured one of them, "she might, you know. The English have such a horror of trade."

These social and educational puzzles were as nothing to the religious problem. Bainbridge, who had seen Desire more or less regularly at church, had taken for granted that in this respect, at least, she was even as they were. But, after the reception, Mrs. Pennington thought not.

"I felt quite worried about our pretty bride," said Mrs. Pennington. "You know how we all hoped that when the dear professor married he would become more orthodox. Science is so unsettling. And married men so often do. But—" she sighed.

"Surely not a free thinker?" ventured one in a subdued whisper.

"Or a Christian Scientist?" with equal horror.

Mrs. Pennington intimated that she had not yet sufficient data to decide. "But," she added, solemnly, "she is not a. Presbyterian."

"She goes to church."

"Yes. She was quite frank about that. She did not scruple to say that she goes to please Miss Campion and because 'it is all so new.'"

"New?"

"Exactly what I said to her. I said, 'New?' My dear, what you do mean—new?' And she tipped her eyebrows in that oriental way she has and said, 'Why, just new. I have never been to church, you know!'"

"Oh, impossible—in this country!"

"Yes, imagine it! Perhaps she saw my disapproval for she added, 'We had a prayer-book in the house, though.' As if it were quite the same thing."

One of the more optimistic members of the chorus thought that this might show some connection with the Church of England. But Mrs. Pennington shook her head.

"Hardly, I think. Her language was not such as to encourage such a hope. The very next thing she said to me was, 'Don't you think the prayer-book is lovely?'"

"Oh!—not really?"

"I admit I was shocked. I am not," said Mrs. Pennington, "a Church of England woman. But I am broad-minded, I hope. And I have more respect for ANY sacred work than to speak of it as 'lovely.' In fact, in all kindness, I must say that I fear the poor child is a veritable heathen."

This conclusion was felt to be sound, logically, but without great practical significance. The veritable heathen persisted in church-going to such an extent that she tired out several of the most orthodox and it was rumored that she even went so far as to discuss the sermon afterward. "Just as if," said Mrs. Pennington, "it were a lecture or a play or something."

As a matter of fact, Desire was intensely interested in sermons. She had so seldom heard any that the weekly doling out of truth by the Rev. Mr. McClintock had all the fascination of a new experience. Mr. McClintock was of the type which does not falter in its message. He had no doubts. He had thought out every possible spiritual problem as a young man and had seen no reason for thinking them out a second time. What he had accepted at twenty, he believed at sixty, with this difference that while at twenty some of his conclusions had caused him sleepless nights, at sixty they were accepted with complacency. No questioning pierced the hard enamel of his assurance. He saw no second side to anything because he never turned it over. He had a way of saying "I believe" which was absolutely final.

Desire had been collecting Mr. McClintock's beliefs carefully. They fascinated her. She often woke up in the night thinking of them, wondering at their strange diversity and speculating as to the ultimate discovery of some missing piece which might make them all fit in. It was because she was afraid of missing this master-bit that she went to church so regularly.

The Sunday after the reception was exceptionally hot. It was exceptionally dusty too, for Bainbridge tolerated no water carts on Sunday. It was one of those Sundays when people have headaches. Aunt Caroline had a head-ache. She felt that it would be most unwise to venture out. She even suggested that, no doubt, Desire had a headache, too.

"But I haven't," said that downright young person, looking provokingly cool and energetic. Her husband groaned.

"Don't look at me," he said hastily. "My excuse is not hallowed by antiquity like Aunt's but it is equally effective. I have to go down to the cellar to make ice-cream."

This, as Desire knew, was perfectly legitimate. No ice-cream of any kind could be bought in Bainbridge on Sunday. Therefore a certain proportion of the population had to descend into its cellars and make it. It was even possible to tell, if one were curious, how many families were going to have ice-cream for dinner by counting the empty seats at morning service. Nearly all of the more prominent families owned freezers while many of those who were freezerless did not go to church, anyway. From which it would seem that, in Bainbridge at least, the righteous had prospered.

On this hot morning, therefore, Desire collected Mr. McClintock's belief alone. It was an especially puzzling one, having to do with the origin and meaning of pain and founded upon the text, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth."

"There is a tendency among modern translators," began Mr. McClintock, "a tendency which I deplore, to render the word 'chasteneth' as 'teacheth or directeth.' This rendering, in my opinion, is regrettably lax. We will therefore confine our attention to the older version. It is my belief that...."

Desire listened attentively to a lengthy and blood-curdling exposition of this belief and was still in the daze which followed the hearty singing of the doxology on top of it when the assistant Sunday School Superintendent asked her to take a class. He was a very hot assistant and a very hurried one. Even while he spoke to Desire his eye wandered past her to some of his flock who were escaping by the church door.

"Do take a class, Mrs. Spence," he urged.

"Do you mean teach one?" asked Desire. "I'm sorry, but I don't know how."

"Beg pardon? Oh, but of course you do. It is only for today. We are so short. You will do splendidly, I'm sure. They are very little girls and it's in the Old Testament."

"But I don't—"

"Oh, that will be quite all right. It's Moses. Quite easy."

"I have never—"

"It doesn't matter, really. Just the plain story, you know. I find myself the best way is to adopt a cheerful, conversational manner and keep them from asking questions. At that age they never ask the right ones. Stump you every time if you're not careful. Give them the facts. They'll understand them later."

"I don't understand them myself," objected Desire. But by this time the assistant's eye was quite distracted.

"So very good of you," he murmured, "if you will come this way—"

Desire went that way and presently found herself seated in the Sunday School room in a

blazing bar of sunlight and facing a row of small Bainbridgers, surprisingly brisk and wide-awake considering the weather.

"We usually have our boys' and girls' classes separate," explained the assistant. "But this is a mixed class as you see."

Desire saw that the mixture consisted of a very round boy in a very stiff sailor suit.

"Now children, Mrs. Spence is going to tell you about Moses. Mrs. Spence is a newcomer. We must make her welcome and show her how well behaved we are."

"I'm not," volunteered an angel-faced child with an engaging smile.

"I got a lickin' on Friday," added the round boy, who as sole member of his sex felt that he must stand up for it.

The assistant shook a finger at them cheerfully and hurried away.

Desire became the focus of all eyes and a watchful dumbness settled down upon them like a pall. Frantically she tried to remember her instructions. But never had a light conversational manner seemed more difficult to attain.

"I hope," she faltered, seeking for a sympathetic entry, "that your regular teacher is not ill?"

The row of inquiring eyes showed no intelligence.

"Is she?" asked Desire, looking directly at the child opposite.

"Ma says she only thinks she is," said the child. The row rustled pleasantly.

"I understand," went on Desire hastily, "that we are to talk about Moses. How many here can tell me anything about Moses?"

The row of eyes blinked. But Moses might have been a perfect stranger for any sign of recognition from their owners.

"Moses," went on Desire, "was a very remarkable man. In his age he seems even more remarkable—"

A small hand shot up and an injured voice inquired: "Please, teacher, don't we have the Golden Text?"

"I suppose we do." There was evidently some technique here of which the hurried assistant had not informed her. "We will have it now. What is the Golden Text?"

Nobody seemed to know.

"I don't see how we can have it, if you don't know it," said Desire mildly.

Another hand shot up. "Please teacher, you say it first."

There was also, then, an established order of precedence.

"I don't know it, either," said Desire.

This might have precipitated a deadlock. But, fortunately, the row did not believe her. They smiled stiffly. Their smile revealed more clearly than anything else how unthinkable it was for a teacher not to know the Golden Text. Desire, in desperation, remembered the paper-covered "Quarterly" which the assistant had put into her hands and, with a flash of inspiration, decided that what the children wanted was probably there. She opened it feverishly and was delighted to discover "Golden Text" in large letters on the first page she looked at. She read hastily.

"And thou Bethlehem in the land of Juda—"

A whole row of hands shot up. "Please teacher, that was last Christmas!" announced the class reproachfully.

With shame Desire noticed that the lessons in the Quarterly were dated. But she was regaining something of her ordinary poise.

"You ought to know it, even if it is," she remarked firmly. This was more according to Hoyle. The little boy's hand answered it.

"'Tain't review Sunday, teacher."

Teacher decided to ignore this. "Very well," she said. "We will now have the Golden Text for today. Who will say it first? I will give you a start—'As Moses—'"

"As Moses," piped a chorus of small voices.

"Lifted up," prompted Desire.

"Lifted up," shrilled the chorus.

"Yes?" expectantly.

The chorus was silent.

"Well, children, go on."

But nobody went on.

"You don't know it," declared Desire with mild severity. "Very well. Learn it for next Sunday. Now I am going to ask you some questions. First of all—who was Moses?"

She asked the question generally but her eye fell upon the one male member who swallowed his Sunday gum-drop with a gulp.

"Don't know his nother name," said the male member sulkily.

Desire realized that she didn't know, either. "I did not ask you to tell his name but something about him. Where he lived, for instance. Where did Moses live?" Her eye swept down to the mite at the end of the row.

"Bulrushes!" said that infant gaspingly.

"He was hidden among bulrushes," explained Desire, "but he couldn't exactly live there. Does anyone know what a bulrush is?"

The row exchanged glances and nudged each other.

"Things you soak in coal-oil," began one.

"To make torches at 'lections," added another.

"Same as cat-tails," volunteered a third condescendingly.

"Well, even if they were anything like that, he couldn't live in them, could he?" Desire felt that she had made a point at last.

"Could if he was a frog," offered the male member after consideration.

To Desire's surprise the row accepted this seriously.

"But as he was a baby and not a frog," she went on hurriedly, "he must have lived with his mother in a house. The name of the country they lived in was Egypt. And Egypt had a wicked King. This wicked King ordered all the little boy babies—" She paused, appalled at the thought of telling these infants of that long-past ruthlessness. But, again to her surprise, the infants now showed pleasurable interest. An excited murmur rose.

"I like that part!" ... "Why didn't he kill the girl babies, too?" ... "Did he cut their heads right off?" ... "Did their mothers holler?" ... While the male member offered with an air of authority, "I 'spect he just wrung their necks."

"Well, well! Getting along nicely, I see," said the assistant, tiptoeing down the aisle. "I felt sure you would interest them, Mrs. Spence. You will find our children very intelligent."

"Very," agreed Desire.

"They all know the Golden Text, I am sure," he continued with that delightful manner which children dumbly hate. "Annie, you may begin."

But Annie refused to avail herself of this privilege. Instead she showed symptoms of tears.

"Come, come!" chided the assistant still more delightfully. "We mustn't be shy! Bessie, let us hear from you. 'As Moses—'"

"As Moses."

"Very good. Now, Eddie. 'Lifted up.'"

"Lifted up."

"Very good indeed. Mabel, you next. 'The ser-'"

"I'm scared of snakes," said Mabel unexpectedly.

"Well, well! But you are not afraid of snakes in Sunday School."

"I'm s-cared of snakes anywhere!" wailed Mabel.

"Oh, there is the first bell—excuse me." The relief of the assistant was a joyful thing. "That means that you have three minutes more, Mrs. Spence. We usually utilize these last moments for driving home the main thought of the lesson. Very important, of course, to leave some concrete idea—sorry, I must hurry."

Desire felt that she must hurry, too. She hadn't even time to wonder what a concrete idea might be. One can't wonder about anything in three minutes.

"Children," she began. "We haven't learned much about Moses. But the main idea of this lesson is that he was a very good man and a great patriot. He had been brought up in a King's palace, yet when the time came for him to choose, he left the beautiful home of the mother who had adopted him and went to his own people. His Own People," she repeated slowly. "Do you understand that?" The class sat stolidly silent. Desire's eye rested again upon the little girl with the prim mouth.

"Ma says 'dopting anyone's a terrible risk," said the prim one. "Like as not they'll never say thank yuh." ...

CHAPTER XXIII

"And that," said Desire later in the day as she related her experiences to the professor, "that was the idea with which I left them! I shan't have to teach again, shall I, Benis?"

Her husband smiled. "No. I should think more would be a superfluity."

"They'll say I'm a heathen. I know they will. You don't realize how serious it is. Think how your prestige will suffer."

"It has suffered already. Only yesterday Mrs. Walkem, the laundress, told Aunt that your—er—peculiarities were a judgment on me for 'tryin' to find out them things in folkses minds which God has hid away a-purpose.'"

"But I'm in earnest, Benis—more or less."

"Let it be less, then. My dear girl, you don't really think that Bainbridge disturbs me?"

"N-no. But it disturbs me. A little. I am so different from all these people, your friends. And being different is rather—lonely."

"It is," he agreed. "But it is also stimulating."

"I used to think," she went on, following her own thought, "that I was different because my life was different. I thought that if I could ever live with people, just as we live here, with everything normal and everyday, the strangeness would drop away. But it hasn't. I am still outside."

"Everyone is, though you are young to realize it. Our social life is very deceiving. Most of us wake up some day to find ourselves alone in a desert."

Desire swung the hammock gently with the tip of her shoe. "Is not one ever a part of a whole?"

"Socially, yes. Spiritually—I doubt it. It is some-thing which you will have to decide for yourself."

"I don't want to be alone," said Desire rebelliously. "It frightens me. I want to have a place. I want to fit in. But here, it seems as if I had come too late. Every-one is fitted in already. There isn't a tiny corner left."

Spence's grey eyes looked at her with a curious light in their depths.

"Wait," he said. "You haven't found your corner yet. When you do, the rest won't matter."

"But people do not want me. I had a horrid dream last night. I was wandering all through Bainbridge and all the doors were open so that I might go in anywhere. I was glad—at first. But I soon saw that my freedom did not mean anything. No one saw me when I entered or cared when I went away. I spoke to them and they did not answer. Then I knew that I was just a ghost."

"I'm another," said a cheerful voice behind them. "All my 'too, too solid flesh' is melting rapidly. Only ice-cream can save me now!" Using his straw hat vigorously as a fan Dr. Rogers dropped limply into an empty chair. "Tell you a secret," he went on confidentially. "I had two invitations to Sunday supper but neither included ice-cream. So I came on here."

"Very kind, I'm sure," murmured Benis.

"How did you guess?" began Desire, and then she dimpled. "Oh, of course,—Benis wasn't in church."

"How did he know that?" asked Benis sharply. "He wasn't there, was he?"

The doctor looked conscious. Desire laughed. "His presence did seem to create a mild sensation," she admitted.

"Well, you see," he explained, "in the summer I am often very busy—"

"In the cellar," murmured Benis.

"But no one happened to need me today and, besides, my freezer is broken. This, combined with—"

"An added attraction," sotto voce from the professor.

"Oh, well—I went, anyway."

"I saw you there," said Desire, ignoring their banter. "I thought you might have gone for the sermon. The subject was one of your specialties, wasn't it?"

The doctor twirled his hat.

"Better tell him what the subject was," suggested Benis unkindly.

"Didn't you listen?" Desire's inquiring eyebrows lifted. "That's one of the things I don't understand about people here. Church and church affairs seem to play such an important part in Bainbridge. Nearly everyone goes to some church. But no one seems at all disturbed about what they hear there. Is it because they believe all that the minister says, or because they don't believe any of it?"

Her hearers exchanged an alarmed glance.

"What do you want them to do?" said John uneasily. "Argue about it? Besides, this morning was very exceptionally hot."

"I don't want to be any more heathen than I have to be," went on Desire, "but I must be terribly heathen if what Mr. McClintock said this morning is right. He was speaking of pain, physical pain, and, he said God sent it. I always thought," she concluded naively, "that it came straight from the devil."

"Healthy chap, McClintock!" said Benis lazily. "Never had anything worse than measles and doesn't remember them."

"What I'd like to know," said the doctor, "would be his opinion after several weeks of—something unpleasant. He might feel more like blaming the devil. What does he think doctors are fighting? God? By Jove, I must have this out with McClintock! I know that, for one, I never fight down pain without a glorious sense of giving Satan his licks."

"But you did not even listen."

"I'm listening now."

"And no one else seemed to object to anything he said. I heard some of them call it a 'beautiful discourse' and 'so helpful.'"

Under her perplexed gaze the two Bainbridgers were clearly uncomfortable.

"It's because you don't really care what you hear from the pulpit," said the girl accusingly. "You have your own beliefs and go your own ways. Another man's views, good or bad, make no difference."

"S-shish! 'ware Aunt Caroline!" warned the professor, but Desire was too absorbed to heed.

"Why, if one actually believed half of what was said this morning," she went on, "the world would be a beautiful garden with half its lovely things forbidden. 'Don't touch the flowers' and 'Keep off the grass' would be everywhere. It seems such a waste, if God made so many happy things and then doesn't like it if people are too happy."

"Not many of us suffer from too much happiness," muttered Benis.

"Or too much health," echoed the doctor. "I'd like to tell McClintock that if people would expect more health, they'd get more. The ordinary person expects ill-ness. They have a 'disease complex'—that's in your line, Benis. But just supposing they could change the idea—Eh? Supposing everybody began to look for health—just take it, you know, as a God-intended right? I'd lose half my living in a fortnight."

"John Rogers!" Aunt Caroline's voice fell with the effect of sizzling hailstones upon the fire of John's enthusiasm. "If you must talk heresy, there are other places beside my garden to do it in."

"I was merely saying—"

"I heard what you were saying. And although it takes a great deal to surprise me, I am surprised. Such doctrines I consider most dangerous, highly so. If you are thinking of setting up as a faith healer, the sooner we know it the better. Desire, my dear, you might see Olive about tea. Tell her not to forget the lemon. I do not know what I have done to deserve a maid called Olive," she sighed, "but the only alternative was Gladys. And Gladys I could not endure. As for illness, I am surprised at you, John Rogers. I was not in church owing to a severe headache, but I know the sermon. It is one of Mr. McClintock's very best. If you had not gone to sleep in the middle of the first point you would have heard the mystery of pain beautifully explained. A wonderful preacher. If he wouldn't click his teeth."

The professor shuddered.

"Benis acts so foolishly about it," went on Aunt Caroline. "He insists that the clicking makes him ill. But why should it? At the same time, if one of the Elders were to suggest, tactfully, to Mr. McClintock that he have the upper set tightened it might be well. It would at least" (with grimness) "do away with the trivial excuses of some people for not attending Divine service."

Her graceless nephew was understood to murmur something about "too hot to fight."

"As for Mr. McClintock's ideas," pursued Aunt Caroline, "they are quite beautiful. The first time he gave the deathbed description which comprises part of this morning's discourse he had us all in tears. I mean all of us who were sufficiently awake to realize the fact that it was a deathbed. His description of the last agony has clearly lost nothing in poignancy, for Desire came home quite pale. I wonder if you have noticed, Benis, that Desire is looking somewhat less robust? Doctor, now that she is not here—"

"Now that she is not here, we will not discuss her," said Spence firmly.

"Indeed! And may I ask why you wish to stop me, Benis? I am speaking to a qualified medical man, am I not? But there," with resignation, "I never can expect to understand the present generation. So lax on one hand, so squeamish on the other. Surely it is perfectly proper that I, her Aunt—oh, very well, Benis, if you are determined to be silly."

"Now with regard to the Rev. McClintock," put in the doctor hastily. "Do you really think that he is sufficiently in touch with modern views to—to—oh, dash it! what was I saying?"

"You were interrupting me when I was telling Benis—"

"Oh yes. I remember. We were talking about new ideas. And you suggested heresy. But you must remember that, in my profession, new ideas are not called heresy—except when they are very new. What would you think of me if I doctored exactly as my father did before me?"

"When you are half as capable as your father, young man, I may discuss that with you."

"One for you!'' said Benis gleefully.

"Well, leaving me out then, and speaking generally, why should a physician search continually for fresh wisdom, while a minister—"

"Beware, young man!" Aunt Caroline raised an affrighted hand. "Beware how you compare your case with that of a minister of the Gospel. That further wisdom is needed in the practice of medicine, anyone who has ever employed a doctor is well aware. But where is he who dare add one jot to Divine revelation?"

"No one is speaking of adding anything. But surely, in the matter of interpretation, an open mind is a first essential?"

"In the matter of interpretation," said Aunt Caroline grandly, "we have our ordained ministers. How do you feel," she added shrewdly, "toward quacks and healers who, without study or training, call themselves doctors? Do you say, 'Let us display an open mind'?"

"Time!" said Benis, who enjoyed his relative hugely—when she was disciplining someone else. "Here comes Desire with the tea."

"What I really came out to say, Benis," resumed Aunt Caroline, "is that I have just had a long distance call—Desire, my dear, cream or lemon?—a long distance call from Toronto where, I fear, such things are allowed on Sunday—Doctor, you like lemon, I think?—a call in fact from Mary Davis. You remember her, Benis? Such a sweet girl. She is feeling a little tired and would like to run down here for a rest. Desire, my dear, have you any plans with which this would interfere? I said that I would consult you and let her know. You are very careless with your plate, Benis. That Spode can never be replaced."

Fortunately her anxiety for the family heirloom absorbed Aunt Caroline's whole attention. If

she noticed her nephew's look of anguished guilt and his friend's politely raised brows she ascribed it to his carelessness in balancing china. Desire's downcast eyes and stiffened manner she did not notice at all.

"Well, my dear, what do you say? Shall we invite Mary?"

"It depends on Benis, of course," said Desire quietly.

"Benis? What has Benis to do with it? Not but that he enjoyed having her here last time well enough. It is the privilege of the mistress of the house to choose her guests. I hope you will not be slack in claiming your privileges. They are much harder to obtain than one's rights. My dear sister was careless. She allowed Benis's father to do just as he pleased. Be warned in time."

"Do you wish Miss Davis to visit us, Benis?" Desire's hands were busy with her teacup. Her eyes were still lowered.

"I have no wishes whatever in the matter," said the professor with what might be considered admirable detachment.

"Tell Miss Davis we shall be delighted, Aunt," said Desire.

CHAPTER XXIV

Time, in quiet neighborhoods, like water in a pool, slips in and out leaving the pool but little changed. Only when one is waiting for something dreaded or desired do the days drag or hasten. Miss Davis was to arrive upon the Friday following her telephone invitation. That left Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Desire found them very long.

Nothing more had been said of the personality of the expected visitor. Desire did not ask, because she felt sure that, when she had seen, she would know without asking. At present there was little enough to go upon. The guest's name was Mary. Her hair was yellow. She had visited in Bainbridge before. She and Benis had been friends. Beyond this there was nothing save the professor's carelessness with the family Spode—an annoying device for diverting attention in moments of embarrassment.

Against this circumstantial evidence there was the common-sense argument that the real Mary of the professor's romance would hardly be likely, under the circumstances, to propose herself as his aunt's guest.

Desire was inclined to take the common-sense view. Especially as just about this time she came upon the track of another Mary, also with yellow hair, who presented possibilities. The most suspicious thing about this second Mary was that neither the professor nor his friend Dr. Rogers had been able to tell Desire her first name. Now in Bainbridge everyone knows the first name of everyone else. One does not use it, necessarily, but one knows it. So that when Desire, having one day noticed a gleam of particularly golden hair, asked innocently to "whom it might belong" and was met by a plain surname prefixed merely by "Miss," she became instantly curious. From other sources she learned that the golden-haired Miss Watkins had been employed as a nurse in Dr. Rogers' office for several months and that her Christian name was Mary Sophia.

This also, you will see, was not much to build upon. But Desire felt that she must neglect nothing. The menace of the unseen, unknown Mary was beginning seriously to disturb her peace of mind. She determined to see the doctor's pretty nurse at the earliest opportunity.

The comradeship between herself and Rogers had prospered amazingly. She had liked the young doctor at first sight; had discerned in him something charmingly boylike and appealing. And Desire had never had boy friends. The utter frankness of her friendship was undisturbed by overmuch knowledge of her own attractions, and the possibility of less contentment on his side did not occur to her. Feeling herself so much older, in reality, than he, she assumed with delicious naivete, the role of confidant and general adviser. What time she could spare from Benis and the great Book she bestowed most generously upon his friend.

During the four dragging days of waiting the appearance of Miss Davis, she had found the distraction of Dr. John's company particularly helpful. And then, after all, Miss Davis did not arrive. Instead, there came a note regretting a very bad cold and postponing the visit until its indefinite recovery. The news came at the breakfast table.

"How long," asked Desire thoughtfully, "does a bad cold usually last?"

"Not long—if it's just a cold," answered Benis with some gloom. "But," more hopefully, "if it is tonsillitis it lasts weeks and if pneumonia sets in you have to stay indoors for months."

Aunt Caroline looked over her spectacles.

"You sound," she said, "as if you wish it were pneumonia."

But in this she was, perhaps, severe. Her nephew was really not capable of wishing pneumonia for anyone, not even a possible Nemesis by the name of Mary. He merely felt that if such a complication should supervene he would bear the news with fortitude. For, speaking colloquially, the professor was finding himself very much "in the air." Desire's mind upon the subject of this guest in particular and of Marys in general, had become clouded to his psychological gaze. He had thought at first that his young secretary was jealous with that harmless sex jealousy which may almost as well be described as "pique." But, of late, he had not felt so sure about it. He did not, in fact, feel quite so sure about any-thing.

Desire was changing. He had expected her to change, but the rapidity of it was somewhat breath-taking. In appearance she had become noticeably younger. The firm line of her lips had taken on softer curves; the warm white of her skin was bloomy like a healthy child's; shadow after shadow had lifted from her deep grey eyes. But it was in her manner that the most significant difference lay. Spence sometimes wondered if he had dreamed the silent Desire of the mountain cottage. That Desire had stood coldly alone; had listened and weighed and gone her own way with the hard confidence of too early maturity. This Desire listened and weighed still, but her confidence was often now replaced by questioning. In this new and more normal world, her unserved, unsatisfied youth was breaking through.

But, if she were younger, she was certainly not more simple. If the grey eyes were less shadowed, they were no less inscrutable. If the lips were softer, their serenity was as baffling as their sternness had been. If she seemed more plastic she was not less illusive. Nimble as were his mental processes, the professor was discomfited to find that hers were still more nimble.

Meanwhile the Book was getting on. No excursions into the land of youth were allowed to interfere with Desire's idea of her secretarial duties. If anyone shirked, it was the author; if anyone wanted holidays it was he. If he were lazy, Desire found ways of making progress without him; if he grumbled, she laughed.

The day set apart for the arrival of Miss Davis had been voted a holiday and the professor hoped that her non-appearance would not interfere with so pleasant an arrangement. But Desire's ideas were quite otherwise. Sharply on time she descended to the library with her note-book ready. The professor felt injured.

"Must we really?" he said. "Yes. I see we must. But mind! I know why you are doing it. I thought of your reason in the night when I was unable to sleep from overwork. You are hurrying to get through so that we may leave this sleepy town. Insatiable window-gazer! You wish to look in bigger windows."

"Do I?" Desire turned limpid eyes upon him and tapped her note-book. "Then the sooner we get on with this chapter on 'The Significance of the Totem' the better. But, if you can excuse me this afternoon, Dr. John has just 'phoned to ask me if I can call on the eldest Miss Martin. He says that her state of mind is her greatest trouble. And it does not react to medicine."

The professor looked still more injured.

"We can't begin the totem chapter unless we are going to go on with it," he objected. "I don't see why John doesn't get a secretary of his own."

"He has a nurse," said Desire smoothly.

"Er—oh yes, of course. Well, perhaps we had better begin—but why does he want you to call on Miss Martin?"

Desire looked self-conscious, a rare thing for her. "Well, you see, I have an idea about Miss Martin. It may be entirely wrong but John thinks it worth trying. You knew that her fiance was killed just before the armistice, didn't you? John says she seemed stunned at the time but kept on, the way most women did. She helped him fight the 'flu' all that winter without taking it her-self. But she was one of the first to come down with it when it returned this Spring. She got through the worst—and there she stays. John says that if she doesn't begin to pick up soon there won't be enough of her left to bother about."

"And your idea?"

"You might laugh," said Desire with sudden shyness.

The professor promised not to laugh.

"My idea is this. To find out the real reason for her not getting better and treat that."

"Very simple."

"Yes, because John already knows the real cause. He says she doesn't get well because she doesn't want to. In the old days people would say her heart was broken. And it seems such a pity,

because, if what everyone says is true, she would have been frightfully unhappy if she had married him. (Desire became slightly incoherent here.) They weren't suited at all. He was a musician, a derelict who hadn't a thought in the world for anything but his violin. Aunt Caroline says the engagement was a mystery to everyone. She says that probably Miss Martin just offered to take him in hand and look after him (she used to be very capable) and he hadn't backbone enough to say she couldn't. They say that the only time anyone ever saw a gleam in his face was the day he went away to the war. Then he was killed. And now she won't get well because she can't forget him."

"And that is what you call a 'pity'?"

"Well, not exactly that." She hesitated. "If he had cared for her as she thought he did, it wouldn't seem such a waste. But he didn't. Everybody knew it—except herself."

"Everybody may have been wrong."

"Yes. But that is just the point. They weren't. He died as he had lived without a thought for anything but music. I happened to hear a rather wonderful story about his dying. Sergeant Timms, who drives the baker's cart, was in the next cot to his, in the hospital. And my idea is that if he could just tell her the story—just let her see that he went away without a thought—she might get things in proportion again and let herself get well."

"I see. Well, my dear, it is your idea. Is John going to drive you out?"

"No. He wanted to. But I'll have to find the Sergeant and take him with me."

"In the baker's cart?"

"What a good idea! I would never have thought of that. And I've always wanted to ride in a baker's cart. They smell so crusty."

So it was really the professor's fault that Bainbridge was scandalized by the sight of young Mrs. Spence jogging comfortably along through the outskirts in a bread cart driven by the one-time Sergeant Edward Timms.

"And him so silly with havin' her," said Mrs. Beatty (who first noticed them), "that he didn't know a French roll from a currant bun."

Indeed we may as well admit that the gallant Sergeant confused more things that day than rolls and buns. The latter part of his orderly bread route was strewn thickly with indignant customers. For the Sergeant was a thoroughgoing fellow quite incapable of a divided interest.

"You can tell me the details of the story as we go along," Desire said, "so that I shan't be interrupting your work at all."

The dazzled Sergeant agreed and immediately delivered two whites instead of one brown and forgot the tickets.

"Well, you see," he said, "it was this way. We went over there together, him and me. And we hadn't known each other, so to speak, not intimate. You didn't know him yourself at all, did you?"

Desire shook her head.

"He was a queer one. Willin' as could be to do what he was told, but forgettin' what it was, regular. Just naturally no good, like, except with the fiddle. I will say, that with that there instrument he was a Paderwooski—yes, mam! By the time our outfit got into them trenches the boys was just clean dippy about him. They kind of took turns dry-nursin' him and remindin' him of the things he'd got to do, and doin' them for him when they could put it over. I'll tell you this—it's my private suspicion that more than one chap went west tryin' to keep the bullets offen him! Not that they were crazy about him exactly, but that fiddle of his had got them goin'. 'Twasn't only the fiddle he played on, either. Anything would do. That there chap could play you into any kind of dashed mood he liked and out of it again. Put more pep into you with a penny whistle than Sousy's band or a bottle of rum. Ring you out like a dishrag, he could, and hang you out to dry. Gee! He could do anything—just anything!"

(It was here that the bun episode occurred.)

"Well,—he got buried. Parapet blown in. And when they got him out he was—hurt some." (The Sergeant remembered that one must not shock the ladies.)

"That was all I would have known about it," he went on, "only we happen to turn up in hospital together. I wakes up one mornin' and finds him in the next cot. He was supposed to be recoverin' but was somehow botchin' the job.

"'Where's the fiddle?' I says to him one day when I was feelin' social. And then, all of a minute, I guessed why he wasn't patchin' up like what was his duty. You see, that b-blessed parapet hadn't had any more sense than to go and spoil his right arm for him—the one he fiddled with, see?"

(Here the Sergeant delivered one brick loaf instead of two sandwich ditto.)

"Well, they kept sayin' there weren't any reason he shouldn't mend up. But he didn't. And one night—" the Sergeant pulled up the cart so quickly that Desire almost fell out of it. "You won't believe this part," he said in a kind of shamefaced way.

"Try me."

"Well then, one night he called to me in a kind of clear whisper. 'Bob!' he says, 'I've got my fiddle!'

"'Sure you have, old cock,' says I.

"'And my arm's as good as ever,' says he.

"'Sure it is! Better,' says I.

"'Listen!' says he.

"And I listened and—but you won't believe this part—"

"I will."

"Well, I heared him playin'! Not loud—not very near but so clear not one of the littlest, tinkly notes was lost. I never heard playin' like that—no, mam! And the ward was still. I never heard the ward still, like that. I think I went to sleep listenin'. I don't know."

The Sergeant broke off here long enough to deliver several orders—all wrong. Desire waited quietly and presently he finished with a jerk.

"When I woke up in the mornin', I was feelin' fine—fine. The first thing I did was to look over to the next cot. But there was a screen around it.... I ain't told the story to his folks because he hasn't got any," he added after a pause. "And I kind of thought it mightn't comfort his fiancy any—it not bein' personal, so to speak."

Desire frankly wiped her eyes. (It was fortunate that no one saw her do this.)

"It's a beautiful story," she said.

"Well, if you think I ought to tell, I will. But if his fiancy says, 'Was there any message?' hadn't I best put in a little one—somethin' comforting?"

"Oh—no."

"All right. Couldn't I just say that at the end he called out 'Amelia!'?"

"Oh, Mr. Timms!"

"Not quite playin' the game, eh? Well, then I won't. But it does seem kind of skimp like.... There's the doctor waitin' at the gate."

CHAPTER XXV

It seemed to Desire, waiting in the garden, that the Sergeant was taking an unnecessarily long time in telling his story. She had thought it best that he should be left alone to tell it, so the doctor had gone on to visit another patient, promising to call for her as he came back.

Desire waited. And, as she waited, she thought. And, as she thought, she questioned. What had Benis meant when he had said, in that whimsical way of his, "Well, my dear, it is your idea"? If he had not approved of it, why hadn't he said so? It had seemed such a sensible idea. An idea of which anyone might approve.... Why also had Sergeant Timms been so reluctant to approach Miss Martin with the bare (and, Desire thought, beautiful) truth? Because he feared it would rob her of an illusion? But illusions are surely something which people are better without?—aren't they?

The Sergeant came at last, twirling his cap and looking hot.

"Well?" asked Desire nervously.

"She'd like you to go in, Mrs. Spence, if you can spare the time. She took it quite quiet. 'Thank you, Sergeant,' says she. And never a question."

The two looked at each other and Desire saw her own doubt plainly reflected upon the honest

gaze of Robert Timms.

"I'll go in," she said. "The doctor will take me home."

In the invalid's room there was only quietness. Miss Martin sat in her chair by the window; her plain, thin face had not sought to turn from the searching light. Desire felt her heart begin to beat with the beginnings of an understanding as new as it was revealing.

"Don't be sorry," Miss Martin's reassurance was instant. "I am glad to know.... I always did know, anyway ... and it did not make any difference ... If you can understand."

Desire nodded. "He must have been very wonderful," she said. In that new and nameless understanding she forgot that only that morning she had referred to the dead musician as a "derelict" and "no good for anything."

"Yes," said the invalid musing. "Not quite like the rest of us. And I see now that he never would have been. I used to think—but the difference was too deep. It was fundamental.... I feel ... as if he knew it ... and just wandered on."

"But you?" Desire ventured this almost timidly. The quietness seemed to intensify in the room. Then the invalid's voice, serene, distant.

"I? ... There is no hurry.... He has his fiddle, you see...." Miss Martin smiled and the smile held no bitterness. So might a mother have smiled over a thoughtless child who turns away from a love he is too young to value.

Desire was silent.

"I did not know love was like that," she said after a long pause. "But perhaps I do not know anything about love at all."

The older woman looked at her with quiet scrutiny.

"You will," she said.

After that they talked of other things until the doctor came to take Desire home.

"Queer thing," he said as he threw in the clutch, "I believe she looks a little better already. That was an excellent idea of yours."

"It was anything but an excellent idea." Desire's tone was taut with emotional reaction. "Fortunately, it did no harm. But I don't know what you were thinking of to allow it."

"Allow it?" In surprised injury.

Desire did not take up the challenge. She was looking, he thought, unusually excited. There was faint color on her cheek. Her hands, generally so quiet, clasped and unclasped her handbag with an irritating click. Being a wise man, Rogers waited until the clicking had subsided. Then, "What's the matter?" he asked mildly.

"John," said Desire, "do you know anything about love?"

"I see you do," she added as the car leapt forward, narrowly missing a surprised cow. "So perhaps you will laugh at my new wisdom. I learned something to-day."

The car was giving trouble. For a few moments its eccentricities required its driver's undivided attention. Even when it was running smoothly again, he appeared preoccupied. But Desire was seldom in a hurry. She waited until he was quite ready.

"You learned something—about love?" asked John gruffly.

"Yes. Have you a sore throat? Your voice sounds all dusty. I used to think," she went on dreamily, "that love was something that came from outside. That it depended on things. But it doesn't depend on anything and it's not outside at all."

"And you found this out, today?"

"Yes. I saw it, in Miss Martin. It was quite plain. What idiots we were to pity her!"

"Did we pity her?"

The question was mechanical. John was not thinking of Miss Martin. He was thinking of the faint rose upon Desire's half-turned cheek. Desire blushing!

"Of course we did. And we had no right. And there is no need."

"Don't let's do it, then," said John. Out of the corner of his eye he saw, with a quickening of his pulse, how stirred she was. And his wonder mounted. That Desire, of the cool, grey eyes and unwarmed smile, should speak of love at all was sufficiently amazing, but that she should speak

of it with tinted cheek was a miracle.

Yet this, he quickly remembered, was something which he had himself foreseen. He had never really accepted Spence's theory that early disillusion had seriously poisoned the lifesprings natural to her age. Her awakening had been certain. He had warned Spence that she would wake! He felt all the exultation of a prophet who sees his prophecy fulfilled. But common sense urged caution. To frighten her now might be fatal. He tried to bring his mind back to Miss Martin.

"At least," he said, "our intentions were admirable. We were trying to help her."

"We were being very impertinent," affirmed Desire. "Benis told me so this morning."

"Benis told you?" in surprise.

"Well, he didn't exactly tell me. But I am sure he wanted to."

This was too subtle for the doctor. There were times when he frankly admitted his inability to bridge Desire's conversational chasms. He was often puzzled by the things she did not say.

"What was Benis thinking of," he said irritably, "to let you come out in that bread cart?"

Desire laughed. "I hope he was thinking of the Significance of the Totem. But I'm almost sure he wasn't."

"Does he ever think of anything but that blessed book of his?"

"I'm afraid he does—occasionally."

"You mean," with sharpened interest, "that he isn't quite as keen on it as he used to be?"

"I mean that he doesn't like me to work too hard."

"Oh, I see. Perhaps he does not wish you to work too hard for me, either?"

Desire folded her hands upon her bag and looked primly into space.

"He is a very considerate employer," she remarked mildly. "Take care—you nearly hit that hen!"

"Oh, d—bother the hen!"

"And he never swears," added Desire with gentle dignity.

They drove for a mile or so without remark and then, Desire, who had something to say, reopened the conversation without rancour.

"Don't be cross," she said. "As a matter of fact Benis does swear sometimes. He is nervous, you know. I sometimes wonder if it is all due to shell shock, or whether it is a result of his—er—other experience."

For the second time that day the car skidded. And for the second time, its unfortunate driver was called upon to give it his whole attention. Desire waited.

"I mean his former love affair," said she when conversation was again possible.

"His—I don't know," said John weakly.

Desire looked sceptical.

"Don't fancy I want to question you," she said with haughtiness. "But I don't see how you can help knowing. You are his doctor. And his friend, too. He must have told you. Didn't he?"

"He mentioned something—er—that is to say—"

"Oh, don't hesitate! Don't fancy that I mind. I don't, of course. And I am not curious. Although any-one might be curious. I won't ask you questions. I am only mildly interested. It is entirely for his own good that I should like to know if she is quite as wonderful as he thinks. Is she, John?"

"I—I don't know," stammered the wretched John.

Desire nodded patiently.

"You mean you don't know how wonderful he thought her? But did you think her very wonderful, John?"

"No, I didn't"

"You thought her plain?"

"No, I—I didn't think of her at all."

"You mean that you found her insignificant?"

The doctor made a sound which Desire was pleased to interpret as assent.

"I'm not surprised," said she earnestly. "Because, from the description Benis gave, I felt sure he was exaggerating. Not that it makes any difference, because, if he thought she was like that, what she really was like didn't matter. That," with plaintive triumph, "is one of the things I learned today."

The doctor said nothing. It was the only thing which he felt it safe to say.

CHAPTER XXVI

The professor was smoking under the maples by the front steps when the car drove up. He looked very cool, very comfortable and very sure of himself—entirely too sure of himself, in John's opinion. John, who at the moment, felt neither cool nor comfortable, and anything but sure, observed him with envy and pity. Envy for so obvious a content, pity for an ignorance which made content possible.

Spence, on his part, seemed unaware of a certain tenseness in the attitude of both Desire and John, a symptom which might have suggested many things to a reflective mind.

"You look frightfully 'het up,' Bones," he said. "And your collar is wilting. Better pause in your mad career and have some tea."

"Thanks, can't. Office hours—see you later," jerked the doctor rapidly as he turned his car.

"What have you been doing to John to bring on an attack of 'office hours' at this time of day?" asked Spence as he and Desire crossed the lawn together. "Wasn't the great idea a success?"

"John thinks it was."

It was so unlike Desire to give someone else's opinion when asked for her own that the professor said "um."

"I suppose," she added stiffly, "it is a question of values."

"Something for something—and a doubt as to whether one pays too dear for the whistle? Well, don't worry about it. If you could not help, you probably could not hurt, either.... I had a letter from Li Ho this afternoon."

"A letter!" Desire's swift step halted. Her eyes, wide and startled, questioned him. "A letter from Li Ho? But Li Ho can't write—in English."

"Can't he? Wait until you've read it. But I shan't let you read it, if you look like that."

"Like what? Frightened? But I am frightened. I can't help it. I know it's foolish. But the more I forget—the worse it is when I remember."

"You must get over that. Sit here while I fetch the letter. Aunt is out. I'll tell Olive to bring tea."

Desire sat where he placed her. It was very pleasant there with the green slope of the lawn and the cool shadow of trees. But her widely opened eyes saw nothing of its homely peace. They saw, instead, a curving stretch of moonlit beach and a trail which wound upwards into thick darkness. Ever since she had broken away, that vision had haunted her, now near and menacing, now dimmer and farther off, but always there like a spectre of the past.

"It hasn't let me go—it is there always—waiting," thought Desire. And in the still warmth of the garden she shivered.

The sense of Self, which is our proudest possession, receives some curious shocks at times. Before the mystery of its own strange changing the personality stands appalled. The world swings round in chaos before the startled question, "Who am I—where is that other Self that once was I?"

Only a few months separated Desire from her old life in the mountain cottage and already the mental and spiritual separation seemed infinite. But was it? Was there any real separation at all? That ghost of herself, which she had left behind on the moonlit beach, was it not still as much herself as ever it had been? Behind the shrouding veil of the present might not the old life still

live, and the old Self wander, fixed and changeless? It was a fantastic idea of Desire's that the girl she had been was still where she had left her, working about the log-walled rooms, or wandering alone by the shining water. This Self knew no other life, would never know it—had no lot or part in the new life of the new Desire. Yet in its background she was always there, a figure of fate, waiting. Through the pleasant, busy days Desire forgot her—almost. But never was she quite free from the pull of that unsevered bond.

Until today there had been no actual word from the discarded past. Dr. Farr had not replied to Desire's brief announcement of her marriage. She had not expected that he would. And for the rest, Spence had arranged with Li Ho for news of anything which might concern the old man's welfare.

"Here is the letter," said Benis, breaking in upon her musing. "You will see that, if the clear expression of thought constitutes good English, Li Ho's English is excellent."

He handed her a single sheet of blue note paper, beautiful with a narrow purple border and the very last word in "chaste and distinctive" stationery.

"Honorable Spence and Respected Sir"—wrote Li Ho—"I address husband as is propriety but include to Missy wishes of much happiness. Honorable Boss and father is as per accustomed but no different. Admirable Sami child also of strong appetite when last observed. Departure of Missy is well to remain so. Moon-devil not say when, but arrive spontaneous. This insignificant advise from worthless personage Li Ho."

Desire handed back the letter with a hand that was not quite steady. The professor frowned. He had hoped that she was beginning to forget. But, with one so unused to self-revelation as Desire, it had been difficult to tell. He had thought it unwise to question and he had never pressed any comparison between her life as it was and as it had been. Better, he thought, to let all the old memories die. They were, he fancied, not very tellable memories, being compounded not so much of word and deed as of those more subtle things without voice or being which are no less terribly, evilly, real and whose mark remains longest upon the soul. Even complete understanding would not help him to rub out these markings. Only that slow over-growing of life, which we call forgetfulness, could do that. She was so young, there was still an infinite impulse of growth within her and in the new growth old scars might pass away.

Desire noticing the new seriousness of his face was conscious of a pang of guilt. It seems such crass ingratitude to doubt for one instant the stability of the happiness he had given her. Had he not done more than it had seemed possible for anyone to do? From the first she had overflowed with silent gratitude to him. There was wonder yet in the apparent ease with which he had sauntered into the prison of her life and, with a laugh and jest, set her free. He had shown her, for the first time in her life, the blessedness of receiving. Those whose nature it is to give greatly are not ungenerous to the giving of others. It is a small and selfish mind which fears to take, and Desire was neither small nor selfish. She had hidden the thanks she could not speak deep in her heart, letting them lie there, a core of sweetness, sweeter for its silence.

Who shall say when in this secret core a wonderful something began to quicken and to grow? So fine were its beginnings that Desire herself knew them only as new bloom and color, 'violets sweeter, the blue sky bluer'—the old eternal miracle of a new-made earth.

She had called this new thing friendship and had been content. Only today, when she had for an instant glimpsed life through the eyes of Agnes Martin, had there seemed possible a greater word. In that quiet room another name had whispered around her heart like the first breath of a rising wind. She had not dared to listen. Yet, without listening, she heard. And now, through Li Ho's letter, that other Self who would have none of love, stretched out a phantom hand and beckoned.

The professor took the letter from her gravely, retaining, for an instant the unsteady hand that gave it.

"Aren't you able to get away from it yet?" he asked kindly.

"No. Perhaps I never shall. When the memory comes back I feel—sick. It is even worse in retrospect. When it was my daily life, I lived it. But now it seems impossible. Am I getting more cowardly, do you think?"

Spence smiled. "I hope you are," he told her. "When you lived under a daily strain you were probably keyed to a sort of harmony with it. Now you are getting more normal. Life is a thing of infinite adjustment."

"You think I could get 'adjusted' again if I had to?"

"You won't have to. Why discuss it?"

"Because it puzzles me. Why do I mind things more now than I did? I used to feel quite casual about father's oddities. They never seemed to exactly matter. But now," naively, "I would so much like to have a father like other people."

"That is more normal, too."

"I suppose," she went on, as if following her own thoughts, "what Li Ho calls the moon-devil is really a disease. Have you ever told Dr. John about father, Benis? What did he say?" The professor fidgeted. "Oh, nothing much. He couldn't, you know, without more data. But he thinks his periodical spells may be a kind of masked epilepsy. There are some symptoms which look like it. The way the attacks come on, with restlessness and that peculiar steely look in the eye, the unreasoning anger and especially the—er—general indications." The professor came to a stammering end, suddenly remembering that she did not know that last and worst of the moon-devil symptoms.

"It is hereditary, of course," said Desire calmly.

The professor jumped.

"My dear girl! What an idea."

"An idea which I could not very well escape. All these things tend to transmit themselves, do they not? Only not necessarily so. I seem to have escaped."

"Yes," shortly. "Surely you have never supposed—"

"No. I haven't. That's the odd part of it. I have never been the least bit afraid. Perhaps it's because I have never felt that I have anything at all in common with father. Or it may be because I have never faced facts. I don't know. Even now, when I am facing facts, they do not seem really to touch me. I never pretended to understand father. He seemed like two or three people, all strangers. Sometimes he was just a rather sly old man full of schemes for getting money without working for it, and very clever and astute. Sometimes he seemed a student and a scholar—this was his best mood. It was during this phase that he wrote his scientific articles and taught me all that I know. His own knowledge seemed to be an orderly confusion o>f all kinds of things. And he could be intensely interesting when he chose. In those moods he treated me with a certain courtesy which may have been a remnant of an earlier manner. But it never lasted long."

"And the other mood—the third one?"

"Oh, that Well, that was the bad mood. If it is a disease he was not responsible. So' we won't talk of it." Desire's lips tightened. "He usually went away in the hills when the restlessness came on. And I fancy Li Ho—watched."

"Good old Li Ho!"

Desire nodded. "I think now that perhaps I did not quite appreciate Li Ho. I should like to know—but what is the use? We shall never know more than we do."

"Not about Li Ho'. He is the eternal Sphinx wrapped in an everlasting yesterday. I suppose he did not have even a beginning?"

Desire smiled. "No. He was always there. He is one of my first memories. A kind of family familiar. Sometimes I think that if he had not been away the night my mother died she might have been alive still."

Spence hesitated. "You have never told me about your mother's death, you know," he reminded her gently.

"Haven't I?" Desire was plainly surprised. "Why—I thought you knew. That is a queer thing about you," she went on musingly, "I am always thinking that you know things which you don't. Perhaps it's because you guess so much without being told. My mother died suddenly—of shock. Her heart was never strong and the fright of waking to find a thief in her room proved fatal. It happened one night when Li Ho was away. We lived in Vancouver at the time and Li Ho often disappeared into Chinatown. He had all the Oriental passion for fan-tan. That night there was a police raid on his favorite gambling place and Li Ho was held till morning. It was always he who locked the doors and attended to everything at night. Perhaps it was known that he was away. But just what happened was never settled, for my father was found unconscious on the floor of the passage outside my mother's door. He couldn't remember anything clearly. The fact that there had been several previous burglaries in town and that there were valuables missing offered the only explanation."

The professor was silent so long that Desire added: "I'm sorry. I should have told you before."

"What difference would it have made?" He roused himself. "Tell me the rest of it. Did Li Ho think that your mother had been frightened by a—thief?"

"I suppose so," in surprise. "Li Ho blamed himself terribly. He said it was his fault. If they hadn't known he was in the cells all night they might have suspected him. He acted so queerly. But of course what he meant was that if he had been at home the thief would not have broken in."

"There were evidences of his having broken in?"

"There was a window open."

"And were any of the stolen things recovered."

"Not that I ever heard of. And yet, I think perhaps some of them were. I remember—" Desire paused and a painful flush crept into her cheek.

"Yes?" prompted Spence gently.

"One of the lost things was an old-fashioned watch belonging to mother. I used to listen to it ticking. And once, years after, I saw it. Father had given it to—a friend of his. So, you see, he must have got it back."

"I see." The professor was aware of a pricking along his spine. He looked at the unconscious face of the girl and ventured another question.

"Was your father injured at all?"

"His head was hurt. They did not know whether the thief had struck him or whether it was the fall. He had fallen just at the foot of the stairs. We lived in a bungalow, then, and as I was asleep in my little room under the eaves, it was thought that he had been trying to reach me—what is the matter?"

The professor had been unable to control an involuntary shudder.

"Nothing," he said. "Just nerves."

Desire's smile was wistful. "It isn't a pretty story," she said. "None of the stories I can tell are pretty. That's why I am different from other people. But I am trying. Perhaps I shall get to be more like them presently."

The professor banished his dark thoughts with an effort. "God forbid!" he said cheerfully. "And here comes tea!"

CHAPTER XXVII

One wonders what would happen to our admirable muddle of a world, if even a minority of its inhabitants were suddenly to embrace consistency. It would, presumably, be a world still, but so changed that its best friends would not know it. It is because every-body, everywhere and at all times, acts as they could not logically be expected to act, that our dear familiar chaos of you-never-can-tell continues to entertain us.

Had Desire possessed consistency, this quality so jewel-like in its rarity, she would have realized that, having voluntarily stepped aside from woman's natural destiny, she should also have ceased to trouble herself with those feminine doubts and hopes which are peculiar to it. She would have known that the position of secretary to a professional man does not logically include heart-burnings and questionings concerning that gentleman's love affairs, past or present. She would have refused to consider Mary. She would have been quite happy in the position she had deliberately made for herself.

Much as we would like to present Desire in this thoroughly sensible light, we fear that her action on the morning following her visit to the invalid Miss Martin would not bear us out in so doing. For on that morning, with all facts of the situation freshly in her mind, she went down-town to Dr. Rogers' office for no other purpose than to see and talk to Dr. Rogers' yellow-haired nurse.

"When I see her and hear her," said Desire to her-self, "I shall know. And it will be so comfortable to know." Never a word, mind you, about the inconsistency of being uncomfortable through not knowing.

No attempt at reminding herself that knowledge was none of her business. No arguing out of the matter at all. Merely the following of a blind impulse to find Mary if Mary were to be found.

This impulse, which was wholly foreign to her natural habit of mind, she justified to herself under the guise of "natural curiosity." All she had to do was to make the call seem sufficiently casual and to time her arrival at the doctor's office at an hour when he could not possibly be in it. As a newcomer, such a mistake would seem quite plausible and could be passed over easily with "How stupid of me! I should have known." After that the nurse would probably invite her to wait. And, even if she did not, the mere exchange of question and answer would probably be sufficiently revealing.

This small program proceeded exactly as planned and Desire, in her most becoming frock,

learned of the absence of Dr. Rogers with exactly the right degree of impatience and regret.

"Please come in," said Dr. Rogers' nurse in somewhat drawling accents. "Doctor may be back any minute." Being a nurse she always predicted the doctor's arrival no matter how certain she might be that he would not arrive.

Desire hesitated, glanced quite naturally at her watch and decided to wait. "If you are sure the doctor won't be long—?" The nurse was sure that he wouldn't be long.

Here her interest in the caller seemed to cease and she became very much occupied with a business-like addressing of envelopes at a desk in the corner.

Desire looked around the cool and pleasant room. It was not like her idea of a doctor's office, save perhaps for a faint clean smell of drugs. There were comfortable chairs, flowers in a window-box, a table with a book or two and some magazines. Through a half-open door, an inner office showed—all very different from the picture her memory showed her of the musty, cumbered room in which her father had received his dwindling patients. As a child she had hated that room, hated the hideous charts of "people with their skins off," the ponderous books with their horrific and highly colored plates, the "patients' chair" with its clinging odor of plush and ether, the untidy desk, the dust on everything!

But she had not come to Dr. Rogers' office to indulge in memory. She had come to see the lady who was so busily addressing envelopes and, after a decent interval of polite abstraction, she devoted herself cautiously to this purpose.

Nurse Watkins, before Desire's entrance, had not been addressing envelopes. She had been reading. Her book lay open upon the window-sill and Desire, having good eyes, could read its title upside down. It was not a title which she knew, nor, if titles tell anything, did it belong to a book which invited knowing. Desire felt almost certain that it was not a book which Mary would care to read. Still, one never could tell. The professor had said nothing whatever about Mary's literary taste.

Desire's eyes strayed, vaguely, from the book to its owner. Only Miss Watkins' profile was visible but it was a profile well worth attention. People who cannot choose their literature are often quite successful with their caps. Miss Watkins' cap was just right. And her hair was certainly yellow. Desire frowned.

Miss Watkins, looking up, caught the frown.

"Doctor really can't be long now," she drawled sympathetically. Desire felt that the sympathy, like the assurance, was professional—an afterglow, perhaps of sympathy which had existed once, before life had overdrawn its account. She felt, also, that Miss Watkins' nose was decidedly good. It was straight, with the nicest little blunt point; and her eyes were blue—not misty blue, like the hills, but a passable blue for all that. Her expression was cold and eminently superior. ("Frightfully nursey" was what Desire called it to herself.) Her voice was thin. (Desire was glad of that.)

"Doctor must have been kept somewhere," said the nurse pursuing her formula. "Won't you sit near the window? There's a breeze."

"Thank you." Desire moved to the window. "You must find it very peaceful here—after nursing overseas."

Nurse Watkins tapped her full upper lip with her pen. "Yes," she said. "It's very dull." Desire smiled. Her spirits had been rising ever since her entrance and she was now quite cheerful. Pretty as Miss Mary Watkins undoubtedly was, there was a some-thing—could it be possible that she chewed gum? No, of course she could not chew gum. And yet there was an impression of gum somewhere—an insinuating certainty that she might chew gum on a dark night when no one was looking. Desire heaved a little sigh of satisfaction and, leaning out, appeared to occupy herself with the passers-by.

"Aren't Bainbridge streets wonderful?" she said.

Nurse Watkins' mouth took on a discontented droop. "The streets are all right," she said, "only they don't go anywhere."

Desire laughed. "Are you as bored as that?" she asked.

"Worse. I wouldn't stay here a minute if it weren't—I mean, if I hadn't been advised to rest up a bit."

Desire looked at her watch, and rose. Now that her curiosity had been amply satisfied, she began to realize that curiosity is an undignified thing. And also that she had not been the only person present to give way to it.

The somewhat drawling tones of Miss Watkins' voice were not at all in keeping with the activity of her wide-awake blue eyes. A sense of this nurse's speculation as to her presence there

flicked Desire with little whips of irritation. It is one thing to observe and quite another to render oneself observable. She felt the blood flow hotly to her cheek. Why had she come? How could she have so far forgotten her natural reserve, her instinctive dislike of intrusion? Desire saw plainly that she had allowed a regrettable sentiment to trick her into a ridiculous situation. Satisfied curiosity is usually ashamed of itself.

And how absurd to have fancied for a moment that this blond prettiness could be Mary!

"I am afraid I cannot wait longer," she murmured with polite regret.

"If there is any message—"

"None, I think. Thank you so much."

With the departure of her caller, Miss Watkins' manner underwent a remarkable change. Professional coolness deserted her. She stamped her foot and, from the safe concealment of the window curtain, she watched Desire's unhurried progress down the street with eyes in which the blue grew clouded and opaque. They brightened again as she noticed Professor Spence passing on the opposite side of the street, and became quite snappy with interest as she saw him pause as if to call to his wife, then, after a swift and hesitating glance at the door from which she had emerged, pass on without attracting her attention.

As a bit of pure pantomime, these expressions of feeling on Miss Watkins' part might be misleading with-out the added comment of a letter which she wrote that night.

"I'm going to cut it, Flossy old girl," wrote Miss Watkins. "If you know of anything near you that would suit me, pass it on. I think I'm about due to get out of here. You know why I've stayed so long. At first, I thought if we were together enough he might get to care. People say I'm not bad for the eyes. And I don't use peroxide. Well, I've made myself useful—he'll miss me anyway!

"It's kind of hard to give up. But I don't believe it's a bit of use. I've noticed a difference in him ever since he came back from that western trip. He doesn't seem to see me anymore. And there's something else, a look in his eyes and a line along his mouth that were never there before. I knew something had happened. And now I know what it was. Another girl, of course.

"And this girl is married!

"You might think this would make things hopeful for me. But it doesn't. Doctor's just the kind that would go on loving her if she had a thousand husbands. So here's where I hook it. No use wasting myself, honey. Maybe I'll get over it. They say everyone does.

"Funny thing—she's just the kind I'd think he'd go dippy over, dark and still, with a lovely, wide mouth and skin like lilies. She is young, younger than I am. But, believe me, she isn't a kid. Those eyes of hers have seen things. They're the kind of eyes that I'd go wild over if I were a man. So I'm not blaming Doctor. He can't help it.

"She came into the office today, just like an ordinary patient. But I knew right off that she'd come for some-thing. Don't know yet what she came for. She doesn't give herself away, that one! Didn't seem to look around, didn't ask questions and only stayed a few minutes. Do you suppose she could have come to see me? Because, if she did—Well, that shows where her interest is.

"Another odd thing—as she went out, I saw her husband. (I'll tell you, in strict confidence, that her husband is Professor Spence. They are well known people here. He used to be a sort of recluse. A queer chap. Deep as a judge.) Well, I saw him pass, on the opposite side of the road. He saw her and was just going to call, when it seemed to strike him where she had come from. I couldn't see very well across the road, but he looked as if someone had hit him. And he went on without saying a word. Now that looked queer to me.

"Don't write and say that I'm only guessing at things. I may be mistaken, of course, but I know I'm not. And I'm not a Pharisee (or whoever it was that threw stones). If she cares for Doctor, I suppose she can't help it. Some people think her husband handsome but I don't. He's too thin and he has the oddest little smile. It slips out and slips in like a mouse. When Dr. John smiles, he smiles all over.

"Well, I'll wait a week or so to make sure. Although I'm sure now. If I ever see Doctor look at her, I'll know. You see, I know how he'd look if he looked that way. I've kept hoping—but I guess I'd better take my ticket, Yours,

"MARY."

This letter satisfactorily explains the loss, some weeks later, of Dr. Rogers' capable nurse—a matter which he, himself, could never understand.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Desire was smiling as she left Dr. Rogers' office. It was a smile compounded of derision and relief—a shamefaced smile which admitted an opinion of herself very far from flattering.

So occupied was she with her mental reactions that she had no attention to spare for the opposite side of the street and therefore missed the slightly peculiar action of her husband-by-courtesy. Professor Spence, when he had first caught sight of his wife had automatically paused, as if to call or cross over. It had become their friendly habit to inform each other of their daily plans and a cheery "whither away?" had risen naturally to the professor's lips. It rose to them, but did not leave them, for, in the intervening instant, he had grasped the fact of Desire's smiling abstraction and had sought its explanation in the place from which she had come. Desire calling at old Bones' office at this hour of the morning? Before he had recovered from the surprise of it, she had passed.

Time, which seems so mighty, is sometimes quite negligible. The most amazing mental illuminations may occupy only the fraction of a second. A light flashes and is gone—but meanwhile one has seen.

The professor's pause was hardly noticeable. He walked on at once. But years could not have instructed him more thoroughly than that one second. He had received a revelation. Like all revelations, he received it in its entirety and realized it piecemeal. His thoughts stumbled over each other in confusion.... Desire at John's office at this unusual hour? ... Desire in her prettiest frock and smiling ... smiling, and so lost in her own thoughts that she saw no one ... Desire ... John? ... What the devil!

Spence had a finicky dislike of strong language. He thought it savored of weakness, yet he found himself swearing heartily as he hurried on—meaningless swears which by their very childishness brought him back to common sense. His step slowed, he forced himself to be reasonable. He took a brief against his own unwarranted disturbance of mind and reduced it to argument. There was nothing at all strange, he pointed out, in Desire having called at old Bones' office at this, or any other, time of day (but what under heaven did she do it for?). She might easily have forgotten to tell the doctor some-thing. (What in thunder would she have to tell him?) She might have dropped in, in passing (at that hour of the morning?) merely to ask him over for some tennis (was the dashed telephone out of order?). Or she might have felt a trifle seedy (pshaw! her health was perfect—idiot!). Anyway she had a perfect right to see Dr. Rogers at any time and for any reason she might choose. (Yes, she had—that was the devil of it!)

At this point of his argument the professor was nearly-run down by a delivery boy on a bicycle and saved himself only by a sharp collision with a telegraph pole. This served to clear his brain somewhat. His confusion of thought dropped away. He began to look his revelation in the face—

"Desire—John?"

It was certainly possible! Why had he never seen it before? ... He had been warned. John himself had warned him—Old John who had been so palpably "hit" when he had first seen Desire at Friendly Bay. But he, Benis Spence, had laughed. Honestly laughed. No possibility of this possibility had troubled him. He simply had not seen it. And now—he saw. The thing italicised itself on his brain.

Granted that Desire might love, there was no reason on earth why she should not love John.

The conclusion seemed childishly simple and yet he had never seriously considered it. Why? Relentlessly he forced himself to answer why. It was because he had believed that when Desire woke to love, if she should so wake, she would wake to love for him! He tore this admission out of a shrinking heart and laughed at it. It was funny, quite funny in its ridiculous conceit.... But it hadn't been conceit, it had been assurance. Impossible to account for, and absurd as it seemed now, it was some-thing higher than vanity which had hidden in his heart that happy sense of kinship with Desire which had made John's warning seem an emptiness of words.

It was gone now, that wonderful sense of "belonging," swept away in the swift rush of startled doubt. Searching as it might, his mind could not find anywhere the faintest foothold for a belief that Desire, free to choose, should turn to him and not to another.

"I had better go and sleep this off somewhere," murmured the professor with a wry smile. "Mustn't let it get ahead of me. Mustn't make any more mistakes. This needs thinking out—steady now!"

He tried to forget his own problem in thinking of hers. It couldn't be very pleasant for her—this. And yet she had been smiling as she came out of John's office. Perhaps she did not know yet? On second thoughts, he felt sure that she did not know. He recognized the essentials of Desire. She was loyalty itself. And had he not reason to know from his own present experience that the beginnings of love can be very blind.

John, too—but with John it was different. John had given his warning. If the warning were to

be justified he could not blame John. He could not blame anyone save his own too confident self. Why, oh why, had he been so sure? Had he not known that love is the most unaccountable of all the passions? How had he dared to build security on that subtle thing within himself which, without cause or reason, had claimed as his the unstirred heart of the girl he had married.

Spence returned home with lagging step. The old distaste for familiar things, which he thought had gone with the coming of Desire, was heavy upon him. The gate of his pleasant home shut behind him like a prison gate. In short, Benis Spence paid for a moment's enlightenment with a bad day and a night that was no better.

By the morning he had won through. One must carry on. And the advantage of a quiet manner is that no one notices when it grows more quiet.

Desire was already in the library when he entered it. She looked very crisp and cool. It struck Spence for the first time that she was dressing her part—the neat, dark skirt and laundered blouse, blackbowed at the neck in a perfect orgy of simplicity, were eminently secretarial. How beautifully young she was!

Desire looked up from her note-book with business-like promptitude.

"I think," she said, "that we are quite ready to go on with the thirteenth chapter."

"But I think," said Benis, "that it would be much nicer to go fishing."

"Why?"

"Well, it's Friday, for one thing. Do you really think it safe to begin the thirteenth chapter on a Friday?"

His secretary's smile was dutiful, but her lips were firm. "We didn't do a thing-yesterday," she reminded him. "I couldn't find you anywhere and no one knew where you were."

"I was—just around," vaguely.

"Not around here," Desire was uncompromising. "Benis, I think we should really be more businesslike. We should have talked this thirteenth chapter over yesterday. I see you have a note here for some opening paragraphs on The Apprehension of Color in Primitive Minds—"

A cascade of goblin laughter from Yorick interrupted her.

"Yorick is amused," said Benis. "He knows all about the apprehension of color in primitive minds. He advises us to go fishing."

Desire watched him stroke the bird's bent head with a puzzled frown.

"I wish you wouldn't joke about—this," she said slowly. "You don't want that habit of mind to affect your serious work."

Spence looked up surprised.

"The whole character of the book is changing," went on Desire resolutely. "It will all have to be revised and brought into harmony. I'm sure you've felt it yourself. In a book like this the treatment must be the same throughout. I've heard you say that a hundred times. It doesn't matter what the treatment is, the necessary thing is that it be consistent. Isn't that right?"

"Certainly."

"Well—yours isn't!"

Spence forgot the parrot (who immediately pecked his finger). He almost forgot that he had suffered an awakening and had passed a bad night. Desire interested him in the present moment as she always did. She was—what was she? "Satisfying" was perhaps the best word for it. Just to be with her seemed to round out life.

"Prove it!" said he with some heat.

For half an hour he listened while she proved it with great energy and a thorough knowledge of her facts. He listened because he liked to listen and not because she was telling him anything new. He knew just where his "treatment" of his material had changed, and he knew, as Desire did not, what had changed it. For the change was not really in the treatment at all, but in himself.

This book had been his earliest ambition. It had been the sole companion of his thoughts for years. It had been the little idol which must be served. Without a word of it being written, it had grown with his growth. His notes for it comprised all that he had filched from life. He had not hurried. He was leisurely by nature. Then had come the war, lifting him out of all the things he knew. And, after the war, its great weariness. Not until he had met Desire and found, in her fresh interest, something of his own lost enthusiasm, had he been able to work again. Then, in a glow of recovered energy, the book had been begun. And all had gone well until the book's inspirer

had begun to usurp the place of the book itself. (Spence smiled as he realized that Desire was painstakingly tracing the course of her self-caused destruction.) How could he think of the book when he wanted only to think of her? Insensibly, his gathered facts had begun to lose their prime importance, his deductions had lost their sense of weight, all that he had done seemed strangely insignificant—it was like looking at something through the wrong end of a telescope. The great book was a star which grew steadily smaller.

The proportion was wrong. He knew that. But at present he could do nothing to readjust it. Two interests cannot occupy the same space at the same time. The book interest had simply succumbed to an interest older and more potent.

"In this chapter, the Sixth," Desire was saying, "you seem to lose some of the serious purpose which is a prominent note in the opening chapters. You begin to treat things casually. You almost allow yourself to be humorous. Now is this supposed to be a humorous book, or is it not?"

"Oh—not. Distinctly not."

"Well then, don't you see? If you had treated the thing in that semi-humorous manner all through and continued in that vein you would produce a certain definite type of book. The critics would probably say—"

"I know, spare me!"

"They would say," sternly, "that 'Professor Spence has a light touch.' That 'he has treated his subject in a popular manner.'" (The professor groaned.) "But that isn't a patch upon what they will say if you mix up your styles as you are doing at present."

"But—well, what do you advise?"

Desire sucked her pencil. (He had given up trying to cure her of this poisonous habit.)

"I've thought about that. If you were not so—so temperamental, I would say go back and begin again. But that is risky. It will be better to go on, I think, trying to recapture the more serious style, until the whole book it at least in some form. Then you will know exactly where you are and what is necessary to harmonize the whole. You can then rewrite the 'off' chapters, bringing them into line. This is a recognized literary method, I believe."

"Is it? Good heavens!"

"I read it in a book."

"Then it must be literary. All right. I'm agreeable. But at present—"

"At present," firmly, "the main thing is to go on."

"This morning?"

"Certainly."

"But I don't want to go on this morning. That is the flaw in your literary method. It makes me go on whether I want to or not. Now the really top-notchers never do that. They are as full of stoppages as a freight train. Fact. They only create when the spirit moves them."

"Aren't you thinking of Quakers?" suggested Desire sweetly. "Besides you are not creating. You are compiling—a very different thing."

"But what is the use of compiling an off chapter when I know it is going to be an off one?"

Desire threw down her pencil.

"Oh, Benis," she said. "I don't like this. Don't let us play with words. Surely you are not getting tired—you can't be."

Her eyes, urgent and truth-compelling, forced an answer.

"I don't quite know," he said. "But I am certainly off work at present. There may be all kinds of reasons. You will have to be patient, Desire."

"Then," in a low voice, "it isn't only indolence?"

He was moved to candor. "It isn't indolence at all. I have always been a fairly good worker, and will be again. But the driving force has shifted. I have not been doing good work and I know it. The more I know it the worse the work will become.... It doesn't matter, really, child," he added gently, seeing that she had turned away. "The world can wait for the bit of knowledge I can give it."

Desire, whose face was invisible, took a moment to answer this. When she did her voice was carefully with-out expression.

"Then this ends my usefulness. You will not need me any more."

The professor, who had been nursing his knee on the corner of the desk, straightened up so suddenly that he heard his spine click.

"What's this?" he said. (Good heavens—the girl was as full of surprises as a grab-bag!)

"It was for the book you needed me, was it not? That was my share of our partnership."

("Now you've done it!" shouted an exultant voice in the professor's brain. "Oh, you are an ass!")

"Shut up!" said Spence irritably. "I wasn't talking to you," he explained apologetically. "It's just a horrid little devil I converse with sometimes. What I meant was—" He did not seem to know what he meant and looked rather helplessly out of the window. "Oh, I say," he said presently, "you are not going to—to act like that, are you? Agitation's so frightfully bad for me. Ask old Bones."

"You are not agitated," said Desire coldly. "Please be serious."

"I am. Deuced serious. And agitated too. You ought to think twice before you startle me like that—just when everything was going along so nicely."

"I am only reminding you of your own agreement," stubbornly. "I want to be of use."

"Very selfish of you. Can't you think of someone else once in a while?"

"Selfish? Because I want to help?"

"Certainly. I wonder you don't see it! Think of the mornings I've put in on this dashed book just because you wanted to help. I have to be polite, haven't I?—up to a point. But when you begin to blame me for doing poorly what I do not want to do at all I begin to see that my self-sacrifice is not appreciated."

"You are talking nonsense."

"Perhaps I am. But it was you who started it. When you said I did not need you, you said a very nonsensical thing. And a very unkind thing, too. A man does not like to talk of—his need. But, now that we have come to just this point, let us have it out. Surely our partnership was not quite as narrow as you suggest? The book is a detail. It is L. part of life which will fit in somewhere—an important part in its right place—but it isn't the whole pattern." He smiled whimsically. "Do not think of me as just an animated book, my dear—if you can help it. And remember, no matter how we choose to interpret our marriage, you are my wife. And my very good comrade. The one thing which could ever change my need of you is your greater need of—of someone else."

The last words were casual enough but the look which accompanied them was keen, and a sense of relief rose gratefully in the professor as no sign of disturbance appeared upon the thoughtful face of his hearer.

"Is Benis here, my dear?" asked Aunt Caroline opening the door. "Oh yes, I see that he is. Benis, you are wanted on the 'phone. If you would take my advice, which you never do, you would have an extension placed in this room. Then you could always just answer and save Olive a great deal of bother. Not that I think maids ought to mind being bothered. They never did in my time. But it would be quite simple for you, when you are writing here, to attend to the 'phone. Perhaps if the butcher heard a man's voice occasionally he might be more respectful. I do not expect much of tradespeople, as you know, but if the butcher—"

"Is it the butcher who wishes to speak to me, Aunt?"

"Good gracious, no. It's long distance. Why don't you hurry? ... Men have no idea of the value of time," she added as the professor vanished. "My dear you must not let Benis overwork you. He doesn't intend to be unkind, but men never think."

CHAPTER XXIX

Desire turned back to her papers as the door closed. But her manner was no longer brisk and business-like. There was a small, hot lump in her throat.

"It isn't fair," she thought passionately. "It's all very well to talk, but it does make a difference—it does. If I'm not his secretary what am I?" A hot blush crimsoned her white skin and she stamped her foot. "I'm not his wife. I'm not! I'm not!" she said defiantly.

There was no one to contradict her. Even Yorick was silent. And, as contradiction is really necessary to belligerency, some of the fire died out of her stormy eyes. But it flared again as thought flung thought upon the embers.

"Wife!" How dared he use the word? And in that tone! A word that meant nothing to him. Nothing, save a cold, calm statement of claim.... Not that she wanted it to mean anything else. Had she not, herself, arranged a most satisfactory basis of coolness and calmness? (Reason insisted upon reminding her of this.) And a strict recognition of this basis was precisely what she wanted, of course. Only she wanted it as a secretary and not as a—not as anything else.

"What's in a word?" asked Reason mildly. "Words mean only what you mean by them. Wife or secretary, if they mean the same—"

Desire flung her note-books viciously into a drawer and banged it shut.

Why did things insist upon changing anyway? She had been content—well, almost. She had not asked for more than she had. Why, then, should a cross-grained fate insist upon her getting less? Since yesterday she had not troubled even about Mary. Her self-ridicule at the absurdity of her mistake regarding Dr. Rogers' pretty nurse had had a salutary effect. And now—just when everything promised so well (self-pity began to cool the hot lump in her throat). And just when she had made up her mind that, however small her portion of her husband's thought might be, it would be enough—well, almost enough—

A screech from Yorick made her start nervously.

"Cats!" said Yorick. "Oh the devil—cats!"

Desire laughed and firmly dislodged Aunt Caroline's big Maltese cat from its place of vantage on the window-sill. The laughter dissolved the last of the troublesome lump and she began to feel better. After all, the book-weariness of which Benis had spoken would probably be a passing phase. If she allowed herself to go on creating mountains out of molehills she would soon have a whole range upon her hands.

And he had said he needed her!

Mechanically, she began to straighten the desk, restoring the professor's notes to their proper places. She was feeling almost sanguine again when her hand fell upon the photograph.

We say "the" photograph because, of all photographs in the world, this one was the one most fatal to Desire's new content. She picked it up casually. Photographs have no proper place amongst notes of research. Desire, frowning her secretarial frown, lifted the intruder to remove it and, lifting, naturally looked at it. Having looked, she continued looking.

It was an arresting photograph. Desire had not seen it before. That in itself was surprising, since one of Aunt Caroline's hardest-to-bear social graces was the showing of photographs. She had quantities of them—tons, Desire sometimes thought. They lived in boxes in different parts of the house, and were produced upon most unlikely occasions. One was never quite safe from them. Even the spare room had its own box, appropriately covered with chintz to match the curtains.

This photograph, Desire saw at once, would not fit into Aunt Caroline's boxes. It was too big. And it was very modern. Most of Aunt Caroline's collection dated from the "background" period of photographic art. But this one was all person. And a very charming person too.

Photographs are often deceiving. But one can usually catch them at it. Desire perceived at once that this photograph's nose had been artistically rounded and that its flawlessness of line and texture owed something to retoucher's lead. But looking through and behind all this, there was enough—oh, more than enough!

With instant disfavor, Desire noted the perfect arrangement of the hair, the delicate slope of the shoulder, the lifted chin, the tip of a hidden ear, the slightly mocking, but very alluring, glance of long, fawn-like eyes.

"Another molehill," thought Desire. And, virtuously disregarding the instinct leaping in her heart, she turned the fascinating thing face downwards. Probably fate laughed then. For written large and in very black ink across the back was the admirably restrained autograph, "Benis, from Mary" ...

Well, she knew now!

A very different person, this, from the blond Miss Watkins with her hard blue eyes and too, too dewy lips! Here was a woman of character and charm. A woman fully armed with all the witchery of sex. A woman any man might love—even Benis.

Desire did not struggle against her certainty. Her acceptance of it was as sudden as it was complete. Huddling back in her chair, with the tell-tale photo in her hands, she felt cold. Certainty is a chill thing. We all seek certainty but, when we get it, we shiver. The proper place

for certainty is just ahead, that we may warm our blood in the pursuit of it. Certainty stands at the end of things and human nature shrinks from endings.

Only that morning, Desire had qualified the good of her present state by the "if" of "if I only knew." And, now that she did know, the only unqualified thing was her sense of desolation. The most disturbing of her speculations had been as nothing to this relentless knowledge. Not until she had found certainty did she realize how she had clung to hope.

She did not know that she was crying until a tear splashed hot upon her hand. She did not hear the door open as Benis reentered the room, but she sprang to her feet, alert and defensive, at the sound of his voice.

"Crying?" said Benis.

It was hardly a question. He had, in fact, seen the tear. But there was nothing in his manner to indicate more than ordinary concern.

"Certainly not," said Desire.

"My mistake. But what is it you are hiding so carefully behind you? Mayn't I see?"

Desire thought quickly. Her denial of tears had been, she knew, quite useless. Besides, she had heard that note of dry patience in the professor's voice before. It came when he wanted something and intended to get it. And he wanted now to know the cause of her tears. Well, he would never know it—never. It was the one impossible thing. Desire's pride flamed in her, a white fire which would consume her utterly—if he knew.

"It is a personal matter," she said. (This was merely to gain time.)

"It is personal to me also."

"I do not wish to show it to you."

"No. But—do not force me to insist."

These two wasted but few words upon each other. It was not necessary. Desire took a quick step backward. And, as she did so, the desired inspiration came. Directly behind her stood the table on which lay Aunt Caroline's box of photographs. If she could, without turning, substitute one of them for the tell-tale picture in her hand—

"You will hardly insist, I think." Her eyes were on him, cool and wary. She took another step backward. He did not follow her. There was a faint smile on his lips but his face, she noticed with perturbation, had gone very pale. His eyes were shining and chill, like water under grey skies.

"Please," he said, holding out his hand.

Desire let her glance go past him. "The door!" she murmured. He turned to close it. It gave her only a moment. But a moment was all she needed.

"Surely we are making a fuss over nothing." With difficulty she kept a too obvious relief out of her voice. He must not find her opposition weakened.

"Perhaps. But—let me decide, Desire."

"Shan't!" said Desire, like a naughty child.

Fire leapt from the chill grey of his eyes.

"Very well, then—"

He took it so quickly that Desire gasped. Then she laughed. She had never had anything taken from her by force since her childhood and it was an astonishing experience. Also, she had not dreamed that Benis was so strong. It hadn't been at all difficult. And this in spite of the fact that she had clung to the substituted photo-graph with convincing stubbornness.

"Well—now you've got it, I hope you like it," she said a little breathlessly. Her eyes were sparkling. She did not know what photo she had picked up when she dropped the real one. 'Probably it was a picture of Aunt Caroline herself or of some dear and departed Spence. Benis would have some difficulty in tracing the cause of the tears he had surprised. Fortunately he could always see a joke on himself. It would be funny ...

But it did not seem to be funny. Benis was not laughing. He had gone quite grey.

"What is it, Benis?" in a startled tone. "You see it was just a mistake? I was crying because—because I was sorry you were not going on with the book. I just happened to have a photograph —" The look in his eyes stopped her.

"Please don't," he said.

She took the card he held out to her, glanced at it, and choked back a spasm of hysterical laughter. For it wasn't a picture of Aunt Caroline, or even of a departed Spence—it was a picture of Dr. John Rogers!

"Gracious!" said Desire. There seemed to be nothing else to say. "Well," she ventured after a perplexed pause, "you can see that I couldn't be crying over John, can't you?"

"I can see—no need why you should;" said Benis slowly. "I'm afraid I have been very blind."

The girl's complete bewilderment at this was plain to anyone of unbiased judgment. But Spence's judgment was not at present unbiased. He went on painfully.

"I owe you an apology for my very primitive method of obtaining your confidence. But it is better that I should know—"

"Know what? You don't know. I don't know myself. I did not even know whose the photograph was until—" She hesitated at the look of hurt wonder in his eyes. "You think I am lying?" she finished angrily.

"I think you are making things unnecessarily difficult. There is no need for you to explain—anything."

Desire was furious. And helpless. She remembered now that when he had entered the room he had certainly seen her bending over a photograph. No wonder her statement that she did not know whose photograph it was seemed uniquely absurd. There was only one adequate explanation. And that explanation she wouldn't and couldn't make.

"Very well then," she said loftily. "I shall not explain."

He did not look at her. He had not looked at her since handing her back John's picture. But he had himself well in hand now. Desire wondered if she had imagined that greyish pallor, that sudden look of a man struck down. What possible reason had there been for such an effect anyway? Desire could see none.

"I came to tell you," he said in his ordinary voice, "that the long distance call came from Miss Davis. If it is convenient for you and Aunt, she plans to come along on the evening train. Her cold is quite better."

"The evening train, tonight?"

"Yes." He smiled. "She is a sudden person. Gone today and here tomorrow. But you will like her. And you will adore her clothes."

"Are they the very latest?"

"Later than that. Mary always buys yesterday what most women buy tomorrow."

"Oh," said Desire. "And what does this futurist lady look like?"

Benis considered. "I can't think of anything that she looks like," he concluded. "She doesn't go in for resemblances. Futurists don't, you know!"

"Isn't it odd?" said Desire in what she hoped was a casual voice. "So many of your friends seem to be named Mary."

"I've noticed that myself—lately."

"There are—"

"'Mary Seaton and Mary Beaton and Mary Carmichael and me,'" quoted Benis gravely.

Desire permitted herself to smile and turning, still smiling, faced Aunt Caroline; who, for her part, was in anything but a smiling humor.

"I'm glad you take it good-naturedly, Desire," said Aunt Caroline acidly. "But people who arrive at a moment's warning always annoy me. I do not require much, but a few days' notice at the least—have you seen a photograph anywhere about?"

Desire bit her lips. "Whose photograph was it, Aunt?"

"Why, Mary Davis' photograph, of course. The one she gave to Benis when she was last here. I hope you do not mind my taking it from your room, Benis? My intention was to have it framed. People do like to see themselves framed. I thought it might be a delicate little attention. But if she is coming tonight, it is too late now. Still, we might put it in place of Cousin Amelia Spence on the drawing-room mantel. What do you think, my dear?"

"I think we might," said Desire. Her tone was admirably judicial but her thoughts were not.... If the Mary of the visit were no other than the Mary of the faun-eyed photograph, why then—

Why then, no wonder that Benis had lost interest in the great Book!

CHAPTER XXX

To give exhaustive reasons for the impulse which brought Miss Mary Davis to Bainbridge at this particular time would be to delve too deeply into the complex psychology of that lady. But we shall not be far wrong if we sum up the determining impulse in one word—curiosity.

The news of Benis Spence's unexpected marriage had been something of a shock to more than one of his friends. But especially so to Mary Davis. Upon a certain interesting list, which Miss Davis kept in her well-ordered mind, the name of this agreeable bachelor had been distinctly labelled "possible." To have a possibility snatched from under one's nose without warning is annoying, especially if the season in possibilities threatens to be poor. The war had sadly depleted Miss Davis' once lengthy list. And she, herself, was five years older. It would be interesting, and perhaps instructive, to see the young person from nowhere who had still further narrowed her personal territory.

"It does seem rather a shame," she confided to a select friend or two, "that clever men who have escaped the perils of early matrimony should in maturity turn back to the very thing which constituted that peril."

"You mean men like them young?" said a select friend with brutal candor.

"I mean they like them too young. In the case I'm thinking of, the girl is a mere child. And quite uncultured. What possibility of intellectual companionship could the most sanguine man expect?"

"None. But they don't want intellectual companionship." Another select friend spoke bitterly. "I used to think they did. It seemed reasonable. As the basis for a whole lifetime, it seemed the only possible thing. But what's the use of insisting on a theory, no matter how abstractly sound, if it is disproved in practice every day? Remember Bobby Wells? He is quite famous now; knows more about biology than any man on this side of the water. He married last week. His wife is a pretty little creature who thinks protoplasm another name for appendicitis."

There was a sympathetic pause.

"And biology was always such a fad of yours," sighed Mary thoughtfully. "Never mind! They are sure to be frightfully unhappy."

"No, they won't. That's it. That's the point I am making. They'll be as cozy as possible."

Miss Davis thought this point over after the select friend who made it had gone. She did not wish to believe that its implication was a true one. But, if it were, if youth, just youth, were the thing of power, then it were wise that she should realize it before it was too late. Her own share of the magic thing was swiftly passing.

From a drawer of her desk she took a recent letter from a Bainbridge correspondent and re-read the part referring to the Spence reception.

"Really, it was quite well done," she read. "Old Miss Campion has a 'flair' for the suitabilities, and now that so many are trying to be smart or bizarre, it is a relief to come back to the old pleasant suitable things—you know what I mean. And the old lady has an air. How she gets it, I don't know, for the dear Queen is her idea of style. Perhaps there is something in the 'aura' theory. If so, Miss Campion's aura is the very glass of fashion.

"And the bride! But I hear you are coming down, so you will see the bride for yourself. There was a silly rumor about her being part Indian. Well, if Indian blood can give one a skin like hers, I could do with an off-side ancestor myself! She is even younger than report predicted. But not sweet or coy (Heavens, how one wearies of that type!) And Benis Spence, as a bride-groom, has lost something of his 'moony' air. He is quite attractive in an odd way. All the same, I can't help feeling (and others agree with me) that there is something odd about that marriage. My dear, they do not act like married people. The girl is as cool as a princess (I suppose princesses are). And the professor's attitude is so—so casual. Even John Rogers' manner to the bride is more marked than the bridegroom's. But you know I never repeat gossip. It isn't kind. And any-way it may not be true that he drops in for tea nearly every day."

Miss Davis replaced the letter with a musing smile. And the next morning she called up on long distance. A visit to Bainbridge, she felt, might be quite stimulating....

Observe her, then, on the morning of her arrival having breakfast in bed. Breakfast in bed is always offered to travellers at the Spence home—a courtesy based upon the tradition of an age

which travelled hard and seldom. Miss Davis quite approved of the custom. She had not neglected to bring "matinees" in which she looked most charming. Negligee became her. She openly envied Margot Asquith her bedroom receptions.

Young Mrs. Spence, inquiring with true western hospitality, whether the breakfast had been all that could be desired, was conscious of a pang, successfully repressed, at the sight of that matinee. She saw at once that she had never realized possibilities in this direction. Her night-gowns (even the new ones) were merely night-gowns and her kimonas were garments which could still be recognized under that name.

"It is rather a duck," said Mary, reading Desire's admiring glance. "Quite French, I think. But of course, as a bride, you will have oceans of lovely things. I adore trousseaux. Perhaps you will show me some of your pretties?" (The bride's gowns, she admitted, might be passable but what really tells the tale is the underneaths.)

"Oh, with pleasure." Desire's assent was instant and warm. "I shall love to let you see my things."

It was risky—but effective. Mary's desire to see the trousseau evaporated on the instant. No girl would be so eager to show things which were not worth showing. And Mary was no altruist to rejoice over other people's Paris follies.

After all, she really knew very little about Benis's wife. And you never can tell. She began to wish that she had brought down with her some very special glories—things she had decided not to waste on Bainbridge. Her young hostess had eyes which were coolly, almost humorously, critical. "Absurd in a girl who simply can't have any proper criteria!" thought Miss Davis crossly.

"When you are quite rested," said Desire kindly, "you will find us on the west lawn. The sun is never too hot there in the morning."

"Yes—I remember that." The faintest sigh disturbed the laces of Mary's matinee. Her faun-like eyes looked wistful. "But if you do not mind, I think I shall be really lazy—these colds do leave one so wretched."

Desire agreed that colds were annoying. She had not missed the sigh which accompanied Mary's memory of the west lawn and very naturally misread it. Mary's regretful decision to challenge no morning comparison in the sunlight on any lawn was interpreted as regret of a much more tender nature. Desire's eyes grew cold and dark with shadow as she left her charming visitor to her wistful rest.

That Mary Davis was the lady of her husband's one romance, she had no longer any doubt. Anyone, that is, any man, might love deeply and hopelessly a woman of such rare and subtle charm. Possessing youth in glorious measure herself, Desire naturally discounted her rival's lack of it. With her, the slight blurring of Mary's carefully tended "lines," the tired look around her eyes, the somewhat cold-creamy texture of her delicate skin, weighed nothing against the exquisite finish and fine sophistication which had been the gift of the added years.

In age, she thought, Mary and Benis would rank each other. They were also essentially of the same world. Neither had ever gazed through windows. Both had been free of life from its beginning. Love between them might well have been a fitting progression.

The one fact which did not fit in here was this—in the story as told by Benis the affair had been one of unreciprocated affection. This presupposed a blindness on the lady's part which Desire began increasingly to doubt. She had already reached the point when it seemed impossible that anyone should not admire what to her was entirely admirable. Even the explanation of a prior attachment (the "Someone Else" of the professor's story), did not carry conviction. Who else could there be—compared with Benis?

No. It looked, upon the face of it, as if there had been a mistake somewhere. Benis had despaired too soon!

This fateful thought had been crouching at the door of Desire's mind ever since Mary had ceased to be an abstraction. She had kept it out. She had refused to know that it was there. She had been happy in spite of it. But now, when its time was fully come, it made small work of her frail barriers. It blundered in, leering and triumphant.

Men have been mistaken before now. Men have turned aside in the very moment of victory. And Benis Spence was not a man who would beg or importune. How easily he might have taken for refusal what was, in effect, mere withdrawal. Had Mary retreated only that he might pursue? And had the Someone Else been No One Else at all?

If this were so, and it seemed at least possible, the retreating lady had been smartly punished. Serve her right—oh, serve her right a thousand times for having dared to trifle! Desire wasted no pity on her. But what of him? With merciless lucidity Desire's busy brain created the missing acts which might have brought the professor's tragedy of errors to a happy ending. It would have been so simple—if Benis had only waited. Even pursuit would not have been required of him. Mary, unpursued, would have come back; unasked, she might have offered. But Benis had

not waited.

Desire saw all this in the time that it took her to go down-stairs. At the bottom of the stairs she faced its unescapable logic: if he were free now, he might be happy yet.

How blind they had both been! He to believe that love had passed; she to believe that love would never come. Desire paused with her hand upon the library door. He was there. She could hear him talking to Yorick. She had only to open the door ... but she did not open it. Yesterday the library had been her kingdom, the heart of her widening world. Now it was only a room in someone else's house. Yesterday she would have gone in swiftly—hiding her gladness in a little net of everyday words. But today she had no gladness and no words.

CHAPTER XXXI

Miss Davis had been in Bainbridge a week. Her cold was entirely better and her nerves, she said, much rested. "This is such a restful place," murmured Miss Davis, selecting her breakfast toast with care.

"I'm glad you find it so," said Aunt Caroline. "Though, with the club elections coming on next week—" she broke off to ask if Desire would have more coffee.

Desire would have no more, thanks. Miss Campion, looking over her spectacles, frowned faintly and took a second cup herself—an indulgence which showed that she had something on her mind. Her nephew, knowing this symptom, was not surprised when later she joined him on the side veranda. Being a prompt person she began at once.

"Benis," she said, "I have a feeling—I am not at all satisfied about Desire. If you know what is the matter with her I wish you would tell me. I am not curious. I expect no one's confidence, nor do I ask for it. But I have a right to object to mysteries, I think."

As Aunt Caroline spoke, she looked sternly at the smoke of the professor's after-breakfast cigarette, the blue haze of which temporarily clouded his expression. Benis took his time in answering.

"You think there is something the matter besides the heat?" he inquired mildly.

"Heat! It is only ordinary summer weather."

"But Desire is not used to ordinary summer, in Ontario."

"Nonsense. It can't be much cooler on the coast. Although I have heard people say that they felt quite chilly there. It isn't that."

"What is it, then?"

Not noticing that she was being asked to answer her own question, Aunt Caroline considered. Then, with a flash of shrewd insight, "Well," she said, "if there were any possible excuse for it, I should say that it is Mary Davis."

"My dear Aunt!"

"You asked me, Benis. And I have told you what I think. Desire has changed since Mary came. Before that she seemed happy. There was something about her—well, I admit I liked to look at her. And she seemed to love this place. Even that Yorick bird pleased her, a taste which I admit I could never understand. Now she looks around and sees nothing. The girl has some-thing on her mind, Benis. She's thinking."

"With some people thought is not fatal."

"I am serious, Benis."

"So am I."

"What I should like to know is—have you, by any chance, been flirting with Mary?"

"What?"

"Don't shout. You heard what I said perfectly. I do not wish to interfere. It is against my nature. But if you had been flirting with Mary, that might account for it. I don't believe Desire would understand. She might take it seriously. As for Mary—I am ashamed of her. I shall not invite her here again."

"This is nonsense, Aunt."

"Excuse me, Benis. The nonsense is on your side. I know what I am talking about, and I know Mary Davis. She is one of those women for whom a man obscures the landscape. She will flirt on her deathbed, or any-body else's deathbed, which is worse. Come now, be honest. She has been doing it, hasn't she?"

"Certainly not."

"I suppose you have to say that. I'll put it in another way. What is your opinion of Mary?"

"She is an interesting woman."

"You find her more interesting than you did upon her former visit?"

"I hardly remember her former visit. I never really knew her before."

"And you know her now?"

"She has honored me with a certain amount of confidence."

Aunt Caroline snorted. "I thought so. Well, she doesn't need to honor me with her confidence because I know her without it. Was she honoring you that way last night when you stayed out in the garden until mid-night?"

"We were talking, naturally."

"And—your wife?"

There was a moment's pause while the cigarette smoke grew bluer. "My wife," said Benis, "was very well occupied."

"You mean that when Dr. John saw how distrait and pale she was, he took her for a run in his car? Now admit, Benis, that you made it plain that you wished her to go."

"Did I?"

"Yes," significantly, "too plain. Mary saw it—and John. You are acting strangely, Benis. I don't like it, that's flat. Desire is too much with John. And you are too much with Mary. It is not a natural arrangement. And it is largely your fault. It is almost as if you were acting with some purpose. But I'll tell you this—whatever your purpose may be—you have no right to expose your wife to comment."

She had his full attention now. The cigarette haze drifted away.

"Comment?" slowly. "You mean that people—but of course people always do. I hadn't allowed for that. Which shows how impossible it is to think of everything. I'm sorry."

"I do not pretend to understand you, Benis. But then, I never did. Your private affairs are your own, also your motives. And I never meddle, as you know. I think though, that I may be permitted a straight question. Has your feeling toward Desire changed?"

"Neither changed nor likely to change."

Miss Campion's expression softened.

"Are you sure that she knows it?"

"I am not sure of anything with regard to Desire."

"Then you ought to be. Don't shilly-shally, Benis. It is a habit of yours. All of the Spences shilly-shally. Make certain that Desire is aware of your—er—affection. Mark my words—I have a feeling. She is fretting over Mary."

"I happen to know that she is not."

Small red flags began to fly from Miss Campion's prominent cheek-bones.

"We shall quarrel in a moment, Benis. You are pig-headed. Exactly as your father was, and without his common sense. I know you think me an interfering old maid. But I like Desire, and I won't have her made miserable. I want—"

"Hush—here she comes."

"Ill leave you then," in a sepulchral whisper. "And for goodness' sake, Benis, do something! ... Were you looking for me, my dear?" added Aunt Caroline innocently as Desire came slowly toward them. "Do not try to be energetic this morning. It is so very hot. Sit here. I'll send Olive out with something cool. I'd like you both to try the new raspberry vinegar."

Greatly pleased with her simple stratagem the good soul bustled away. Desire looked after her with a grateful smile.

"I believe Aunt Caroline likes me," she said with a note of faint surprise.

"Is that very wonderful?"

"Yes."

Benis looked at her quickly and looked away. She was certainly paler. She held her head as if its crown of hair were heavy.

"It does not seem wonderful to other people who also—like you."

Her eyes turned to him almost timidly. It hurt him to notice that the old frank openness of glance was gone. Good heavens! was the child afraid of him? Did she think that he blamed her? That he did not understand how helpless she was before her awakening womanhood? He forgot how difficult speech was in the overpowering impulse to reassure her.

"I wish you could be happy; my dear," he said. "You are so young. Can't you be a little patient? Can't you be content as things are—for a while?"

Even Spence, blinded as he was by the bitterness of his own struggle, noticed the strangeness of her look.

"You want things to go on—as they are?"

"Yes. For a time. We had better be quite sure. We do not want a second mistake."

"You see that there has been a mistake?"

"Can I help seeing it, Desire?"

"No, I suppose not.... And when you are sure?" Her voice was very low.

"When I—when we are both sure, I shall act. There are ways out. It ought not to be difficult."

"No, quite easy, I think. I hope it will not be long."

His mask of reasonable acquiescence slipped a little at the wistfulness of her voice.

"Don't speak like that!" he said sharply. "No man is worth it."

Desire smiled. It was such a sure, secret little smile, that it maddened him.

"You can't—you can't care like that!" he said in a low, furious tone. "You said you never could!"

"I do," said Desire.

It was the avowal which she had sworn she would never make. Yet she made it without shame. Love had taught Desire much since the day of the episode of the photograph. And one of its teachings had to do with the comparative insignificance of pride. Why should he not know that she loved him? Of what use a gift that is never given? Besides, as this leaden week had passed, she knew that, more than anything else, she wanted truth between them. Now, when he asked it of her, she gave him truth.

"It is breaking our bargain," she went on with a wavering smile. "But I was so sure! I cannot even blame myself. It must be possible to be quite sure and quite wrong at the same time."

"Yes. There is no blame, anywhere. I—I didn't think of what I was saying."

"Well, then—you will guess that it isn't exactly easy. But I will wait as you ask me. When you are quite sure—you will let me go?"

"Yes," he said.

Neither of them looked at the other.

Does Jove indeed laugh at lover's perjuries? Even more at their stupidities, perhaps!

CHAPTER XXXII

For they really were stupid! Looking on, we can see so plainly what they should have seen, and didn't.

If thoughts are things (and Professor Spence continues to argue that they are) a mistaken thought is quite as powerful a reality as the other kind. Only let it be conceived with sufficient force and nourished by continual attention and it will grow into a veritable highwayman of the mind—a thievish tyrant of one's mental roads, holding their more legitimate travellers at the stand and deliver.

Desire, usually so clearsighted, ought to have seen that the attentions of Benis to the too-sympathetic Mary were hollow at the core. But this, her mistaken Thought would by no means allow. Ceaselessly on the watch, it leapt upon every unprejudiced deduction and turned it to the strengthening of its own mistaken self. What might have seemed merely boredom on the professor's part was twisted by the Thought to appear an anguished effort after self-control. Any avoidance of Mary's society was attributed to fear rather than to indifference. And so on and so on.

Spence, too, a man learned in the byways of the mind, ought to have known that, to Desire, John was a refuge merely, and Mary the real lion in the way. But his mistaken Thought, born of a smile and a photograph, grew steadily stronger and waxed fat upon the everyday trivialities which should have slain it. So powerful had it become that, by the time of Desire's arrival on the veranda, it had closed every road of interpretation save its own.

Nor was John in more reasonable case. His mistaken Thought was different in action but equally successful in effect. Born of an insistent desire, and nursed by half fearful hope, it stood a beggar at the door of life, snatching from every passing circumstance the crumbs by which it lived. Did Desire smile—how eagerly John's famished Thought would claim it for his own. Did she frown—how quick it was to find some foreign cause for frowning. And, as Desire woke to love under his eyes, how ceaselessly it worked to add belief to hope. How plausibly it reasoned, how cleverly it justified! That Spence loved his wife, the Thought would not accept as possible. All John's actual knowledge of the depth and steadfastness of his friend's nature was pooh-poohed or ignored. Benis, dear old chap, cared nothing for women. Hadn't he always shunned them in his quiet way? And hadn't he, John, warned Benis, anyway? The Thought insisted upon the warning with virtuous emphasis. It pointed out that Benis had laughed at the warning. Even if—but we need not follow John's excursions further. They all led through devious ways to the old, old justification of everything in love and war.

As time went on, the thing which fed the mistaken thoughts of both Benis and John was the change in Desire herself. That she was increasingly unhappy was evident to both. And why should she be unhappy—unless?

To John Rogers, that summer remained the most distracting summer of his life. Desire should have seen this—would have seen it had her mind-roads not been closed by their own obsession. The probability is that she did not consciously think of John at all. He was there and he was kind. She saw nothing farther than that.

The relationship between the two men remained apparently the same and indeed it is likely that, in the main, their conception one of the other did not change. To Benis, John's virtues were still as real and admirable as ever. To John, Benis was still a bit of a mystery and a bit of a hero>. (There were war stories which John knew but had never dared to tell, lest vengeance befall him.) But, these basic things aside, there were new points of view. Seen as a possible mate for Desire, Benis found John most lamentably lacking. Seen in the same light, Benis to John was undesirable in the extreme. "If it could only be someone more subtle than John," thought Benis. And, "If only old Benis were a bit more stable," thought John. Both were insincere, since no possible combination of qualities would have satisfied either.

Of this fatally misled quartette, Mary Davis was perhaps the one most open to reason. And yet not altogether so, for the thought of Benis Spence as eternally escaped was not a welcome one. She realized now that she might have liked the elusive professor more than a little. They would have been, she thought, admirably suited. At the worst, neither would have bored the other. And the Spence home was quite possible—as a home for part of the year at least. It was certainly annoying that fate should have cut in so unexpectedly. And for what? Apparently for nothing but that a girl with grey, enigmatic eyes and close-shut lips should keep from Mary a position which she did not want herself. For Mary, captive of her Thought, was more than ready to believe that Desire's hidden preference was for John. She naturally could not grant her rival a share of her own discriminating taste in loving.

"I suppose," thought Mary, "it is her immaturity which makes her prefer the doctor person to one who so far outranks him. She admires sleek hair and a straight nose. The finer fascinations of Benis escape her."

Meanwhile she stayed on.

"I know I should come home," she wrote the most select of the select friends. "And I know dear Miss Campion thinks so! But the situation here is too absorbing. And, as my invitation was indefinite, I can hardly be accused of outstaying it. I can't be supposed to know that I'm not

wanted. I justify myself by the knowledge that I am of some use to Benis. You know I can interest most men when I try, and this time my 'heart is in it'—like Sentimental Tommy. I am even teaching a perfectly dear parrot they have here to sing, 'Oh, What a Pal was Mary.' Will you run over to my rooms and send down that London smoke chiffon frock with the silver underslip? Stockings and slippers to match in a box in the bottom drawer. I am contemplating a moon-light mood and must have the accessories. One loses half the effect if one does not dress the part. Madam Enigma never dresses in character. Because she never assumes one. So dull to be always just oneself, don't you think? Even if one knew what one's real self is, which I am sure I do not.

"This girl annoys me. How she can be so simple and yet so complex I can't understand. I thought perhaps a dash of jealousy might be revealing. But she hasn't turned a hair. I have my emotions pretty well in hand myself but even if I didn't adore my husband, I'd see that no one else appropriated him. But as far as Madam Coolness is concerned it looks as if I might put her husband in my pocket and keep him there indefinitely.

"I told you in my last about the good-looking doctor. What she sees in him puzzles me. He is handsome but as dull as all the proverbs. Can't be original even in his love affairs—otherwise he would hardly select his best friend's bride—so bookish! Why doesn't someone fall in love with the wife of his enemy? It seems to have gone out since Romeo's time. (Now don't write and tell me that Juliet wasn't married.)

"Another thing which I find odd, is the attitude of Benis himself. He is quite alive, painfully so, to the drift of the thing. Yet he does nothing. And this is not in keeping with his character. He is the type of man who, in spite of an unassertive manner, holds what he has with no uncertain grasp. Why, then, does he let this one thing go? The logical deduction is that he knows that he never had it. All of which, being interpreted, means that things may happen here through the sheer inertia of other things. Almost every day I think, 'Something ought to be done.' But I know I shall never do it. I am not the novelist's villainess who arranges a compromising situation and produces the surprised husband from behind a door. Neither am I a peacemaker or an altruist. I am not selfish enough in one way nor un-selfish enough in another. (Probably that is why life has lost interest in my special case.) Even my emotions are hopelessly mixed. There are times when I find myself viciously hoping that Madam Composure will go the limit and that right quickly. And there are other times when I feel I should like to choke her into a proper realization of what she is risking. Not for her sake—I'm far too feminine for that—but because I hate to see her play with this man (whom I like myself) and get away with it."

It is worth while remembering the closing sentences of this letter. They explain, or partially explain, a certain future action on the part of the writer, which might otherwise seem out of keeping with her well defined attitude of "Mary first."

CHAPTER XXXIII

"There is one thing which I simply do not understand." Miss Davis dug the point of a destructive parasol into the well-kept gravel of the drive and allowed a glance of deep seriousness to drift from under the shadow of her hat. Unfortunately, her companion was not attending.

It was the day of Mrs. Burton Jones' garden party, the Bainbridge event for which Miss Davis was, presumably, staying over. Mary, in a new frock of sheerest grey and most diaphanous white, and a hat which lay like a breath of mist against the gold of her hair, had come down early. In the course of an observant career, she had learned that, in one respect at least, men are like worms. They are inclined to be early. Mary had often profited by this bit of wisdom, and was glad that so few other women seemed to realize its importance. One can do much with ten or fifteen uninterrupted minutes.

But today Mary had not done much. She had found Benis, as she expected, on the front steps. They had talked for quite ten minutes without an interruption—but also without any reason to deplore one.

This was failure. And Mary, whose love of the chase grew as the quarry proved shy, was beginning to be seriously annoyed with Benis. He might at least play up! Even now he was not looking at her, and he did not ask her what it was that she simply did not understand. Mary decided that he deserved something—a pin-prick at least.

"Why don't you get a car, Benis?" she asked inconsequently. "If you had one, Desire might ride in it some-times, instead of always in Dr. Rogers'. Can't you see that it's dangerous?"

"One has to take risks," said Spence plaintively. "John is careless. But he has never killed anyone yet."

"You're impossible, Benis."

"Yes, I know. But particularly impossible as a chauffeur. That's why I haven't a car. What would I do with a driver when I wasn't using him? Desire will have a car of her own as soon as she likes to try it. Aunt won't drive and I—don't."

This was the first approach to a personal remark the professor had made. No one was in sight yet and Mary began to hope again. Once more she tried the gently serious gaze.

"Why not?" she asked, not too eagerly.

Yorick, sunning himself by the door, gave vent to a goblin chuckle. "Oh, what a pal was M-Mary! Oh, what a pal—Nothing doing!" he finished with a shriek and began to flap his wings.

The professor laughed. "Yorick gets his lessons mixed," he said. "But isn't he a wonder? Did you ever know a bird who could learn so quickly?"

Mary did not want to talk about birds. "Do tell me why you dislike driving?" she asked with gentle insistence.

"Oh, I like it.-It's not that. I used to drive like Jehu, or John. Never had an accident. But when I came back from overseas I found I couldn't trust my nerve—no quick judgment, no instinctive reaction—all gone to pieces. Rather rotten."

With unerring intuition Mary knew this for a real confidence. Fortunately she was an expert with shy game.

"Quite rotten," she said soberly. He went on.

"It's little things like that that hit hard. Not to be One's own man in a crisis—d'y' see?"

Mary nodded.

"But it's only temporary," he continued more cheer-fully. "I'll try myself out one of these days. Only, of course, arranged tests are never real ones. The crisis must leap on one to be of any use. Some little time ago, when I was at the coast, an incident happened—a kind of unexpected emergency"—he paused thoughtfully as a sudden vision of a moon-lit room flashed before him—"I got through that all right," he added, "so I'm hopeful."

"How thrilling," said Mary. "Won't you tell me what it was?"

His eyes met hers with a placidity for which she could have shaken him.

"It wouldn't interest you," he said. "I hear Aunt coming at last."

Miss Campion's voice had indeed preceded her.

"Oh, there you are, Mary," she said with some acidity. "I told Desire you were sure to be down first."

"I try to be prompt," said Mary meekly. "I have been keeping Benis company until you were ready." She spoke to Miss Campion but her slightly mocking eyes watched for some change upon the face of her young hostess. Desire, as usual, was serene.

"Mary thinks we are all heathens not to have a car," said Benis. "When are you going to choose yours, Desire?"

"Not at all, I think," said Desire.

Men, even clever men, are like that. The professor had seen no possible sting in his idly spoken words. But the sore, hot spot, which now seemed ever present in Desire's heart, grew sorer and hotter. To owe a car to the reminder of another woman! Naturally, Desire could do very well without it.

"But don't you miss a car terribly?" asked Mary with kind concern.

"I cannot miss what I have never had."

"Oh, in the west, I suppose one does have horses still."

"There may be a few left, I think." Desire's slow smile crept out as memory brought the asthmatic "chug" of the "Tillicum." "My father and I used a launch almost exclusively." In spite of herself she could not resist a glance at the professor. His eyes met hers with a ghost of their old twinkle.

"A launch?" Mary's surprise was patent. "Did you run it yourself?"

"We had a Chinese engineer," said Desire demurely. "But I could manage it if necessary."

Further conversation upon modes of locomotion on the coast was cut off by the precipitate arrival of John who, coming up the drive in his best manner, narrowly escaped a triple fatality at the steps.

"You people are careless!" he exclaimed indignantly. "What do you mean by standing on the drive? Some-one might have been hurt! Anyone here like to get driven to the garden party?"

"Do doctors find time for garden parties in Bainbridge?" asked Mary in mock surprise.

"Healthiest place you ever saw!" declared Dr. John gloomily. "And anyway, this garden party is a prescription of mine. Naturally I am expected to take my own medicine. I said to Mrs. B. Jones, 'What you need, dear Mrs. Jones, is a little gentle excitement combined with fresh air, complete absence of mental strain and plenty of cooling nourishment.' Did you ever hear a garden party more delicately suggested? Desire, will you sit in front?"

"Husbands first," said Benis. "In the case of a head-on collision, I claim the post of honorable danger."

It was surely a natural and a harmless speech. But instantly the various mistaken thoughts of his hearers turned it to their will. Desire's eyes grew still more clouded under their lowered lids. "He does not dare to sit beside Mary," whispered her particular mental highwayman. "Oho, he is beginning to show human jealousy at last," thought Mary. "He has noticed that she likes to sit beside me," exulted John. Of them all, only Aunt Caroline was anywhere near the truth. "He has taken my warning to heart," thought she. "But then, I always knew I could manage men if I had a chance."

A garden party in Bainbridge is not exciting, in itself. In themselves, no garden parties are exciting. As mere garden parties they partake somewhat of the slow and awful calm of undisturbed nature. One could see the grass grow at a garden party, if so many people were not trampling on it. So it is possible that there were those in Mrs. Burton Jones' grounds that afternoon who, bringing no personal drama with them, had rather a dull time. For others it was a fateful day. There were psychic milestones on Mrs. Burton Jones' smooth lawn that afternoon.

It was there, for instance, that the youngest Miss Keith (the pretty one) decided to marry Jerry Clarkson, junior (and regretted it all her life). It was there that Mrs. Keene first suspected the new principal of the Collegiate Institute of Bolshevik tendencies. (He had said that, in his opinion, kings were bound to go.) And it was there that Miss Ellis spoke to Miss Sutherland for the first time in three years. (She asked her if she would have lemon or chocolate cake—a clear matter of social duty.) It was there also that Miss Mary Sophia Watkins, Dr. Rogers' capable nurse, decided finally that a longer stay in Bainbridge would be wasted time. It was the first time she had actually seen her admired doctor and the object of his supposed regard together, and a certain look which she surprised on Dr. John's face as his eyes followed Desire across the lawn, convinced her so thoroughly that, like a sensible girl, she packed up that night and went back to the city.

Perhaps it was that very look which also decided Spence. For decide he did. There was no excuse for waiting longer. He must "have it out" with John. Desire must be given her freedom. Of John's attitude he had small doubt. His infatuation for Desire had been plain from the beginning. Time had served only to centre and strengthen it. He could not in justice blame John. He didn't blame John. That is to say, he would not officially permit himself to blame John, though he knew very well that he did blame him. A sense of the rights of other people as opposed to one's own rights has been hardly gained by the Race, and is by no means firmly seated yet. Let primitive passions slip control for an instant and presto! good-bye to the rights of other people! The primitive man in Spence would not have argued the matter. Having obtained his mate by any means at all, it would have gone hard with anyone who, however justly, attempted to take her from him. Today, at Mrs. Burton-Jones' garden party, the acquired restraints of character seemed wearing thin. The professor decided that it might be advisable to go home.

Desire and Mary noticed his absence at about the same time. And both lost interest in the party with the suddenness of a light blown out.

"Things are moving," thought Mary with a thrill of triumph. But in spite of her triumph she was angry. It is not pleasant to have the power of one's rival so starkly revealed. Malice crept into her faun-like eyes as she looked across to where Desire sat, a composed young figure, listening with apparent interest to the biggest bore in Bainbridge. What right had she to hold a man's hot heart between her placid hands! Mary ground her parasol into Mrs. Burton-Jones' best sod and her small white teeth shut grindingly behind her lips.

Desire was trying to listen to the little man with the enlarged ego who attempted to entertain her. But she was very much aware of Mary and all her moods. "She is selfish. She will make him miserable," thought Desire. "But she will make him happy first. And, in any case, he must be free."

"Yes, Mrs. Spence," the little man beside her was saying, "a man like myself, however diffident, must be ready to do his full duty by the community in which he lives. That is why I feel I must accept the nomination for mayor of this town—if I am offered it. My friends say to me,

'Miller, you are a man, and we need a man. Bainbridge needs a man.' What am I to do under such circumstances? If there is no man—"

"You might try a woman," said Desire, suddenly losing patience. The garden party was stupid. The egotist was stupid. She was probably stupid too, because she knew that a few weeks ago she would have found both the party and the egotist entertaining. She would have been delighted to peep in at a window where every-thing was labelled "Big I." She would have enjoyed Mrs. Burton-Jones' windows immensely—but now, windows bored her. In the only window that mattered the blinds were down. Desire's life had narrowed as it broadened. It wasn't life that she wanted any more—it was the one thing which could have made life dear.

A great impatience of trivialities came upon her. She hardly heard the injured tones of the little man who had embarked upon a heated repudiation of a feminine mayoralty. It did not amuse her even when he proved logically that women could never be anything because they were always something else. Instead she looked to Dr. John for rescue, and Dr. John, most observant of knights, immediately rescued her.

"Did you see that?" asked Mrs. Keene (the same who discovered the Bolshevik principal). She touched Miss Davis significantly on the arm.

Mary, who had seen perfectly well, looked blank.

"Of course you are not one of us," went on Mrs. Keene. "So you can scarcely be expected.... Still, living in the same house ... and knowing the dear professor so well."

"Did you wish to speak to him? He has gone home, I think," said Mary, innocently. "I fancy he doesn't suffer garden parties gladly."

"No—such a pity! With a wife so young and, if I may say so, so different. One feels that she has not been brought up amongst us. So sad. I always say 'Let our young men marry at home.' So sensible. One knows where one is then, don't you think?"

Mary agreed that, in such a position, one might know where one was.

"And book writing," said Mrs. Keene, "so fatiguing! So liable to occupy one's attention—to the exclusion of other matters.... The dear professor.... So bound up in the marvels of the human brain!"

"Not brain, mind," corrected Mary gently. "The professor is a psychologist."

"Well, of course if you wish to separate them, in a scriptural sense. But what I mean is that such biological studies are dangerous. So absorbing. When one examines things through a microscope—"

"One doesn't—in psychology."

"Well, perhaps not so much as formerly, especially since vivisection is so looked down upon. But it is terribly absorbing, as I say. And one can hardly expect an absorbed man to see things. And yet—"

"What is it," asked Mary bluntly, "that you think Professor Spence ought to see?"

This was entirely too blunt for Mrs. Keene. She, in her turn, looked blank. What did Miss Davis mean? She was not aware that she had suggested the professor's seeing anything. Probably there was nothing at all to see. Young people have such latitude nowadays. She herself was not a gossip. She despised gossip. "What I always say," declared she, virtuously, "is 'do not hint thing's.' Say them right out and then we shall know where we are. Don't you think so?"

Mary agreed that, under these conditions also, one might be fairly sure of one's position in space. "Unless," she concluded maliciously, "there is anything in the Einstein theory."

This latter shot had the effect intended, for Mrs. Keene said hurriedly, "Oh, of course in that case—" and moved away.

"I'm going home, Mary," said Aunt Caroline, coming up. Aunt Caroline had had enough garden party. She had noticed both the rescue of Desire by John, and the conversation of Mary with Mrs. Keene—the "worst old gossip in Bainbridge."

Desire was quite ready to go. So was Mary. The centre of attraction for them both had shifted itself. John too, felt that he ought to turn up at the office. But all three ladies politely declined a lift home in his car.

"It is so hot," he pleaded.

"It is not hot," said Aunt Caroline.

Mary smiled mockingly and murmured something about the great distances of small towns. Desire said, "No, thank you, John," in her detached way—a way which drove him mad even while

he adored it.

So the Burton-Jones garden party faded into history. But history-in-the-making caught up its effects and carried them on....

It was a lovely night. But indoors it was hot with the accumulated heat of the day. Instead of going to bed, Mary slipped out into the garden. It was fresher there, and she was restless. The front of the house lay in darkness, but, from the library window at the side, stretched a ribbon of light. Benis must be still at work. With slippers which made no sound upon the grass, Mary crossed over to the window and looked in.

What she saw there stung her already fretted soul to unreasoning anger, and for once the circumspect Miss Davis acted upon impulse undeterred by thought. Entering the house softly, she ran upstairs to the west room which she entered without knocking.

Desire, seated at the dressing table, turned in surprise. She was ready for bed, but lingered over the brushing of her hair. With another spasm of anger, Mary noticed the hair she brushed—hair long and lustrous and lifted in soft waves. A pink kimona lay across the back of her chair, a pretty thing—but not at all French.

"Put it on," said Mary, "and come here. I want to show you something."

Desire did not ask "What?" Nor did she keep Mary waiting. Pleasant or unpleasant, it was not Desire's way to delay revelation. Together the two girls hurried out into the dew-sweet garden. As they went, Mary spoke in gusty sentences.

"I don't care what you do." (She was almost sobbing in her anger.) "I don't understand you.... I don't want to.... But you're not going to get away with it ... that cool air of yours ... pretending not to see.... If you are human at all you'll see ... and remember all your life."

They were close to the library window now. Desire looked in.

She looked so long and stood so still that Mary had time to get back a little of her breath and something of her common sense. An instinct which her selfish life had pretty well buried began to stir.

"Come away," she whispered, "I shouldn't have ... it wasn't fair ... he would never forgive us if he knew we had seen him like this!"

Desire drew back instantly.

"No," she said. Her voice was toneless. Her face in the darkness gleamed wedge-shaped and unfamiliar between the falling waves of her hair.

"I'm sorry," said Mary sulkily. "But I thought you ought to know what you are doing. It takes a lot to break up a man like that."

"Yes," said Desire. "All the same I had no right—"

"You will have," said Desire evenly.

They were at her door now. She paused with her hand on the knob.

"I knew he cared," she said in the same level voice, "but I didn't know that he cared like that."

"You know now," said Mary. Her irritation was returning.

"Yes," said Desire. "Good-night."

She opened the door and went in.

CHAPTER XXXIV

It seems incredible and yet it is a fact that Bainbridge never knew that young Mrs. Spence had run away. Full credit for this must be given to Miss Caroline Campion, who never really believed it herself—a mental limitation which lent the necessary air of unemphasized truth to her statement that Desire had been summoned suddenly to her father.

Miss Campion had, in her own mind, built up an imaginary Dr. Farr in every way suited to be the father-in-law of a Spence. This creation she passed on to Bainbridge as Desire's father. "Such a fine old gentleman," she would say. "And so devoted to his only daughter. Quite a recluse, though, my nephew tells me. And not at all strong." This idea of delicacy, which Miss Campion

had added to the picture from a sense of the fitness of things, proved useful now. An only daughter may be summoned to attend a delicate father at a moment's notice, without unduly straining credulity.

One feels almost sorry for Bainbridge. It would have enjoyed the truth so much!

"Is Desire going to have no breakfast at all?" asked Aunt Caroline, from behind the coffee-urn on the morning following the garden-party. It was an invariable custom of hers to pretend that her nephew was fully conversant with his wife's intentions.

"She may be tired," said Benis.

"No. She has been up some time. The door of her room was open when I came down."

"Then she is probably in the garden. I'll ask Olive to call her."

"Why not call her yourself? I have a feeling—"

The professor rose from his untasted coffee. When Aunt Caroline "had a feeling" it was useless to argue.

"Are you sleeping badly again, Benis?" asked Aunt Caroline. "Your eyes look like burnt holes in a blanket."

"Nothing to bother about, Aunt." He stepped out quickly into the sunny garden. But Desire was not among the flowers, neither was she on the lawn nor in the shrubbery. A few moments' search proved that she was not out of doors at all. Benis returned to his coffee. He found it quite cold and no waiting Aunt Caroline to pour him another cup. "I wonder," he pondered idly, "why, when one really wants coffee, it is always cold."

Then he forgot about coffee suddenly and completely, for Aunt Caroline came in with the news that Desire was gone.

"Gone where?" asked Spence stupidly.

"That," said Aunt Caroline, "she leaves you to inform me."

With the feeling of being someone else and acting under compulsion he took the few written lines which she held out to him. "Dear Aunt Caroline," he read, "Benis will tell you why I am going. But I cannot go without thanking you. I'll never forget how good you have been—Desire."

"I had a feeling," said Aunt Caroline with mournful triumph. "It never deceives me, never! As I passed our dear girl's room this morning, I said, 'She is not there'—and she wasn't!"

"I think you mentioned that the door was open."

"That has nothing to do with it. I—"

"Where did you find this note?"

"On her dressing table. When you went into the gar-den, I went upstairs. I had a feeling—"

"Was there nothing else? No note for me?"

"No," in surprise. "She says you know all about it. Don't you?"

"Something, not all."

Aunt Caroline was, upon occasion, quite capable of meeting a crisis. Remembering the neglected coffee, she poured a cup for each of them.

"Here," said she, "drink this. You look as if you needed it. I must say, Benis, that you don't act as if you knew anything, but if you do, you'd better tell me. Where is Desire?"

"I don't know."

"Umph! Then what you do know won't help us to find her. Finding her is the first thing. I wonder," thoughtfully, "if she told John?"

A wintry smile passed over the professor's lips.

"I shall ask him," he said.

Aunt Caroline proceeded with her own deducing. "There is no one else she could have told," she reasoned. "She did not tell you. She did not tell me. Naturally, she would not tell Mary. And a girl nearly always tells somebody. So it must be John. I hope you are sufficiently ashamed of yourself, Benis? I told you Desire wouldn't understand your attentions to Mary. Though I admit I did not dream she would take them quite so seriously. I don't envy you your explanations."

"Aunt—"

"Wait a moment, Benis. On second thought, if I were you I would not explain at all. Simply tell her she is mistaken and stick to that. She may believe you. Promise her that you will never see Mary again—and you won't" (grimly) "if I have anything to say about it. Desire will come around. I have a feeling—"

"My dear Aunt!"

"Let me proceed, Benis. I have a feeling that she will forgive you—once. But let this be a lesson. Desire is not a girl who will forgive twice."

"You are all wrong, Aunt," with weary patience. "But it doesn't matter. Say nothing about this. I am going to see John."

"Not before you drink that coffee."

Benis obediently drank. Hurry would not mend what had happened.

"She has taken her travelling coat and hat," pursued Aunt Caroline. "Her train slippers, that taupe jersey-cloth suit, some fresh blouses, her dressing case, her night things and your photo off the dressing table."

Benis smiled, a wry smile, and pushed back his cup.

"You don't look fit to go anywhere," said Aunt Caroline irritably. "Why can't you call John on the 'phone?"

"That would be quite modern," said Benis. "But—I think I'll see him. I shan't be long."

It never once occurred to the professor, you will notice, that he might find John vanished also. His obsessing thought had not been able to change his essential knowledge of either Desire or John. If Desire had gone, she had gone because she could not stay. But she had gone alone. Just what determining thing had happened to make her flight imperative, Benis could not guess. But he would not have been human if he had not blamed the other man. "The fool has bungled it!" he thought. "Lost control of his precious feelings, perhaps—broken through—said something—frightened her." We may be sure that he cursed John in his heart very completely.

But when he entered John's office and saw John he began to doubt even this. There was no guilt on the doctor's face—no sign of apprehension or regret, no tremor of knowledge. An angry-eyed young man looked up from a letter he was reading with nothing more serious than injured wonder in his gaze.

"Can you beat it?" asked John disgustedly, waving the letter. "Aren't women the limit? Here's this one going off without a word, or an excuse, or anything. Just gone! And a silly note thrown on my desk. I tell you women have absolutely no sense of business obligation—positively not!"

Spence restrained himself.

"You are speaking of—?"

"That nurse of mine, Miss Watkins. Never a word about leaving yesterday, and today vanished—vamoosed—simply non est! Look at what she says.—"

Spence pushed the letter aside.

"There is something more important than that, John," he said quietly, "Desire has left me."

The two men stared at each other. Spence was the first to speak.

"There is no doubt about it. She is gone. She has not told us where. I see that you do not know."

John shook his head.

"There may be a note for you in the morning's mail." Benis was coldly brief. "I must know where she is. If you can help me, let me know." He turned to the door.

With difficulty John found his voice.

"I knew nothing of this, Benis."

"I realize that," dryly. "But you may be responsible for it. She had no idea of leaving yesterday."

"Benis, I swear—"

"It is not necessary. Besides," bitterly, "you could afford to be patient. You felt fairly—sure, didn't you?"

"Sure! No, I—"

"You mean you merely hoped?"

"Oh—damn!"

"Quite so. There is nothing to say. Not being a sentimentalist, I shan't pretend to love you, John. But I gambled and I've lost. I have always admired a good loser."

CHAPTER XXXV

Upon reaching home Benis found Aunt Caroline waiting for him just inside the outer gate.

"I thought," she explained, "that we might talk while strolling up the drive. Then Olive would not overhear."

The professor had quite neglected to consider Olive.

"I have told Olive," went on Aunt Caroline, "that Mrs. Spence had received news of her father which was far from satisfactory and that she had left for Vancouver by the early morning train. The morning train is the only one she could have left by, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then that's all right. I also let Olive know, indirectly, that you were remaining behind to attend to a few matters. After which you would follow."

Admiration for this generalship pierced even the deep depression of the professor.

"Does John know where she is?" pursued Aunt Caroline.

"No."

"Then she has gone home to her father. She said something the other day which puzzled me. I can't remember just what it was but she seemed to have some fatalistic idea, about her old life having a hold upon her which she couldn't shake off. Pure morbidity, as I pointed out. But she has gone back. I have a feeling that she has."

"You may be right, Aunt. It will be easy to find out. If I can make the necessary inquiries without arousing gossip. There was nothing in the mail—for me?"

"No. The man has just been. But there is something for Desire, an odd looking package done up in foreign paper. I have it here."

Spence took from her hand a slim, yellowish packet, directed in the crabbed writing of Li Ho.

"I can't make out whether it is 'Hon. Mrs. Professor Spence' or whether the 'Mrs.' is 'Mr.' Perhaps you had better open it, Benis."

"Perhaps, later." Spence slipped the packet into his pocket. "It 'can't have anything to do with our present problem.... I must make some telephone inquiries. But if Desire has gone, Aunt, we may as well face facts. She does not want me to follow her."

"Doesn't she?" Aunt Caroline surveyed him with a pitying smile. "How stupid men are! But go along to the library. You've had no decent breakfast. I'll send you in something to eat. As for Bainbridge—leave that to me." ...

How curiously does a room change with the changing mind of its occupant. Benis Spence had known his library in many moods. It had been a refuge; it had been a prison; it had been a place of dreams. He had liked to fancy that something of himself stayed there—something which met him, warm and welcoming, when he came in at the door. He had liked to play that the room had a soul. And, after he had brought Desire home, the idea had grown until he had seemed to feel an actual presence in its cool seclusion. But if presence there had been, it was gone now. The place was empty. The air hung dull and lifeless. The chairs stood stiff against the wall, the watching books had no greeting. Only Yorick swung and flapped in his cage, his throat full of mutterings.

It is all very well to be a good loser. But loss is bitter. Here was loss, stark and staring.

Spence walked over to the neatly tidied desk and there, for an instant, the cold finger lifted from his heart. A letter was lying on the clean blotter—she had not gone without a word, then! She had slipped in here to say good-bye.... A very little is much to him who has nothing.

The letter was brief. Only a few words written hurriedly with a spluttering pen:

"I am going, Ben-is. I think we are both sure now. But please—please do not pity me. Love is too big for pity. You have given me so much, give me this one thing more—the understanding that can believe me when I say that I, too, am glad to give.

"Desire."

Benis laid the letter softly down upon the ordered desk. No, he need not pity her. She had had the courage to let little things go. She, who had demanded so royally of life, now made no outcry that the price was high. Well, ... it need not be so high, perhaps. He would make it as easy as might be.

The parrot was trying to attract him with his usual goblin croaks. Benis rubbed its bent, green head.

"You'll miss her, too, old chap," he said, adding angrily, "dashed sentimentality!"

The sound of his own voice steadied him. He must be careful. Above all, he must not sink into self-pity. He must go back to his work. It had meant everything to him once. It must mean everything to him again. If he were a man at all he must fight through this inertia. Life had tumbled him out of his shell, played with him for an hour, and now would tumble him back again —no, by Jove, he refused to be tumbled back! He would fight through. He would come out somewhere, some-time.

It occurred to him that he ought to be thankful that Desire at least was going to be happy. But he did not feel glad. He was not even sure that she was going to be happy. Something kept stubbornly insisting that she would have been much happier with him. Quite with-out prejudice, had they not been extraordinarily well suited? He put the question up to fate. The hardest thing about the whole hard matter was the insistent feeling that a second mistake had been made. John and Desire—his mind refused to see any fitness in the mating. Yet this very perversity of love was something which he had long recognized with the complacence of assured psychology.

He heard Mary's voice in the hall. He had forgotten Mary. He hoped she would not tap upon the library door—as she sometimes did. No, thank heaven, she had gone upstairs! That was an odd idea of Aunt Caroline's. If he had felt like smiling he would have smiled at it. Desire jealous of Mary? Ridiculous....

"Here comes old Bones," said Yorick conversationally.

The professor started. It was a phrase he had him-self taught the bird during that time of illness when John's visit had been the bright spot in long dull days. It had amused them both that the parrot seldom made a mistake, seeming to know, long before his master, when the doctor was near.

But today? Surely Yorick was wrong today. John would not come today. Would never come again—but did anyone save John race up the drive in that abandoned manner? Benis frowned. He did not want to see John. He would not see him! But as he went to leave the library by one door John threw open the other and stood for an instant blinded by the comparative dimness within.

"Where are you, Benis?"

"Here."

Spence closed the door. His brief anger was swallowed up in something else. Never, even in France, had he seen John look like this.

"We're a precious pair of dupes!" began John in a high voice and without preliminaries. "Prize idiots—imbeciles!"

"Very likely," said Benis. "But you're not talking to New York."

He made no move to take the paper which John held out in a shaking hand.

"What is the matter with you?" he asked sternly.

"What's the matter with me? Oh, nothing. What's the matter with all of us? Crazy—that's all! Here—read it! It's from Desire. Must have posted it last night."

Spence put the letter aside.

"If you have news, you had better tell it. That is if you can talk in an ordinary voice."

John laughed harshly. "My voice is all right. Not so dashed cool as yours. Read it!"

Spence took the sheet held out to him; but he had no wish to> read Desire's words to John.

"If it is a private letter—" he began.

"Oh, don't be a bigger fool than you have been! Unless," with sudden suspicion, "you've known all along? Perhaps you have. Even you could hardly have been so completely duped."

"If you will tell me what you are talking about—"

"Read it. It is plain enough."

The professor slowly opened the folded sheet. It was a longer note than the one she had left for him.

"Dear John," he read, "if I I'd known yesterday that I would leave so soon I could have said good-bye. But my decision was made suddenly. I think you must have seen how it is with Benis and Mary and I can't go without telling you that I knew about it from the first. I don't want you to blame Benis. He told me about it before we were married, and I took the risk with my eyes open. How could he, or I, have guessed that he had given up hope too soon?—and anyway, it wasn't in the bargain that I should love him.—It just happened.—He is desperately unhappy. Help him if you can.—Your affectionate Desire."

"My affectionate Desire!" mocked John, still in that high, strained voice which now was perilously near a sob. "That—that is what I was to her, a convenient friend! You—you had it all. And let it go, for the sake of that blond-haired, deer-eyed, fashion plate—"

"That's enough! You are not an hysterical girl. Sit down.... I can't understand this, John. I thought—"

The two men looked at each other, a long look in which distrust at least was faced and ended. The excited flush, died out of John's cheek. He looked weary and shame-faced.

"I thought she loved you," said Spence simply.

The doctor's eyes fell. It was his honest admission that he, too, had thought this possible.

"Even now," went on the professor haltingly, "I can-not believe ... it doesn't seem possible ... me? ... John, does the letter mean that Desire loves me?"

John Rogers nodded, turning away.

Silence fell between them.

"What will you do—about the other?" asked the doctor presently.

"What other? There is no other. I loved Desire from the very first night I saw her. I didn't know it, then. It was all new. And," with a bitter smile, "so different from what one expects. Mary was never any-thing but the figure of straw I told you of. I thought," naively, "that Desire had forgotten Mary."

"Did you?" said John. "Why man, the woman doesn't live who would forget! And Miss Davis filled the bill to the last item—even the name 'Mary'."

"Oh what a pal was M-Mary!" croaked Yorick obligingly.

"The bird, too!" said John. "Everyone doing his little best to sustain the illusion—even, if I am any judge, the lady herself."

But Benis Spence had never wasted time upon the lady herself. And he did not begin now. With a face which had suddenly become years younger he was searching frantically in his desk for the transcontinental time-table.

CHAPTER XXXVI

The train crawled.

Although it was a fast express whose speed might well provoke the admiration of travellers, in one traveller it provoked nothing save grim endurance. Beside the consuming impatience of Benis Hamilton Spence, its best effort was a little thing. When it slowed, he fidgeted, when it stopped he fumed. He wanted to get out and push it.

Five days—four—three—two—a day and a half—the vastness of the spaces over which it must carry him grew endless as his mind continually tried to span them. He felt a distinct grievance that any country should be so wide.

"Making good time!" said a genial person, travelling in the tobacco trade. The professor eyed

him with suspicion, as a man deranged by optimism.

The train crawled.

Spence removed his eyes from the passing landscape and tried to forget how slowly it was passing. He saw himself at the end of his journey. He saw Desire. He saw a grudging moment, or second perhaps, devoted to explanation. And then—How happy they were going to be! (If the train would only forget to stop at stations it might get somewhere.) How wonderful it would be to feel the empty world grow full again! To raise one's eyes, just casually, and to see—Desire. To speak, in just one's ordinary voice, and to know she heard. To stretch out one's hand and feel that she was there. (What were they doing now? Putting on more cars? Outrageous!) He would even write that book presently, when he got around to it. (When one felt sure one could write.) But first they would go away, just he and she, east of the sun and west of the moon. They would sit together somewhere, as they used to sit on the sun-warmed grass at Friendly Bay, and say nothing at all.... How nearly they had missed it ... but it would be all right now. Love, whom they had both denied, had both given and forgiven. It would be all right, it must be all right, now! (But how the train crawled.)

Poor John, poor old Bones! What a blow it had been for him. Although he should certainly have had more sense than to fancy—Well, of course, a man can fancy anything it he wants it badly enough. Spence was honestly sorry for John—that is, he would be when he had time to consider John's case. But John, too, would be all right presently. (Why under heaven do trains need to wait ten minutes while silly people walk on platforms without hats?) John would marry a nice girl. Not a girl like Desire—not that type of girl at all. Someone quite different, but nice. A fair girl, like that nurse he had had in his office. John might be very happy with a wife like that ...

It was not until the fourth night out that the professor remembered the packet from Li Ho. It had loomed so small among the events of that day of revelations that he had completely forgotten it. He did not even remember putting it in his pocket—but there it was, still unopened, and promising some slight distraction from the wearying contemplation of the crawling train. It would shut out, too, the annoyance of the tobacco traveller, smoking with an offensive leisureliness, and declaring, in defiance of all feeling, that they were "Sharp on time and going some!"

With a reviving interest in something outside the time-table, Spence cut the string and opened the yellow packet. A small note-book fell out and a letter—two letters, and one of them in the unmistakable writing of Li Ho him-self. This latter, the professor opened first.

"Honorable Spence and Esteemed Professor, dear Sir," wrote Li Ho. "Permit felicity to include book belong departed parent of valued wife. Deceased lady write as per day. Li Ho extract and think proper missy to know. Honorable Boss head much loony. Secure that missy remain removed if desiring safety. Belong much danger here since married as per also enclosed. Exalted self be insignificantly warned by person of no intelligence, Li Ho."

Farther down, in a corner of the sheet was this sentence:

"Permit to notably add that respected lady departed life Jan. 14."

Li Ho had certainly surpassed himself. The bewildered professor forgot about the time-table entirely. What Chinese meaning lay behind this jumble of dictionary words? That they were not used at haphazard Spence knew. Li Ho had some distinct meaning to convey—had indeed already conveyed it in the one outstanding word "danger." For an instant the professor's mind sickened with that weakness which had been his dreadful legacy of war. But it passed immediately. Something stronger, deeper in, took quiet command. Desire was in danger! Shock has a way at times of giving back what shock has taken.—Spence became his own man once more—cool, ready.

With infinite care he went over the Chinaman's disjointed sentences. They had been written under stress.

That much presented no difficulty. Li Ho, the imperturbable, had permitted himself a fit of nerves ... Something must have happened. Something new. Something which threatened a danger not sufficiently emphasized before. In his former letter Li Ho had indeed intimated that a return was not desirable, but it had been an intimation based on general principles only. This was different. This had all the marks of urgent warning. "No more safe being married as per inclosed." This cryptic remark might mean that further enlightenment was to be sought in the enclosures.

Spence picked up the second letter. It was addressed to Dr. Herbert Farr at Vancouver, and was merely a formal notice from a firm of English solicitors—post-marked London—a well-known firm, probably, from the address on their letterhead.

"Dr. Herbert Farr, Vancouver, B. C.

Dear Sir:

As executors in the estate of Mrs. Henry Strangeways we beg to inform you that the allowance paid to you for the maintenance of Miss Desire Farr is hereby discontinued. This action is taken under the terms of our late clients will,—whereby such allowance ceases upon the marriage of the said Desire Farr or her voluntary removal from your roof and care.

Obediently yours, Hervey & Ellis."

The professor whistled. Here was enlightenment indeed! A very sufficient explanation of the old man's grim determination to block any self-dependence on Desire's part which would mean "removal from" his "care." Here was someone paying a steady (and perhaps a fat) allowance for the young girl's maintenance—someone of whom she herself had certainly never heard and of whose bounty she remained completely ignorant. It was easy enough now to follow Li Ho's reasoning. If it was for this allowance, and this alone, that the old doctor had kept Desire with him, long after her presence had become a matter of indifference or even of distaste, the ending of the allowance meant also the ending of his tolerance. "No more safe, being married." The difference, in Li Ho's opinion, was all the difference between comparative safety and real danger. Money! As long as Desire had meant money there had been an instinct in the old scoundrel which, even in his moon-devil fits, had protected the goose which laid the golden eggs. But now—now this inhibition was removed, Desire, no longer valuable, was no longer safeguarded. And who could tell what added grudge of rage and vengeance might be darkly harbored in the depths of that crafty and unbalanced mind?

And Desire, unwarned, was even now almost within the madman's reach.... Spence sternly refused to think of this ... there was time yet ... plenty of time.... The thing to do was to keep cool ... steady now!

"Kind of pretty, going through these here mountains by moonlight," observed the tobacco traveller, inclined to be genial even under difficulties. "She'll be full tomorrow night. Queer thing that them there prohibitionists can't keep the moon from getting full!" He laughed in hearty appreciation of his own cleverness.

The professor, a polite man, tried to smile. And then, suddenly, the meaning of what had been said came home to him.

Tomorrow night would be full moon!

He had forgotten about the moon.

"Queer cuss," thought the travelling man. "Stares at you polite enough but never says anything. No conversation. Just about as lively as an undertaker."

But if Benis had forgotten to remove his eyes from the travelling man, he did not know it. He did not see him. He saw nothing but moonlight—moonlight across an uncovered floor and the white dimness of a bed in the shadow! ... But he must keep cool ... was there time to stop Desire with a telegram? She was only a day ahead ... no—he was just too late for that. He knew the time-table by heart. Her train was already in ... impossible to reach her now!

Fear having reached its limit, his mind swung slowly back to reason.... There was, he told himself, no occasion for panic. Li Ho might have exaggerated. Besides, a danger known is almost a danger met And Li Ho knew. Li Ho would be there. When, Desire came he would guard her.... A few hours only ... until he could get to her.... She was safe for tonight at least. She would not attempt to cross the Inlet, until the morning. She would have to hire a launch—a thing no woman would attempt to do at that hour of night. She was in no hurry. She would stay somewhere in the city and get herself taken to Farr's Landing in the morning.... Through the day, too, she would be safe ... and, to-morrow night, he, Benis, would be there.... But not until late ... not until after the moon ... better not think of the moon ... think of Li Ho ... Li Ho would surely watch ...

He lay in his berth and told himself this over and over. The train swung on. The cool, high air of the mountains crept through the screened window. They were swinging through a land of awful and gigantic beauty. The white moon turned the snow peaks into glittering fountains from which pure light cascaded down, down into the blackness at their base ... one more morning ... one more day ... Vancouver at night ... a launch ... Desire!

Meanwhile one must keep steady. The professor drew from its yellow wrapping the little note-book which had been the second of Li Ho's enclosures. It had belonged, if Li Ho's information were correct, to Desire's mother—a diary, probably. "Deceased lady write as per day." Spence hesitated. It was Desire's property. He felt a delicacy in examining it. But so many mistakes had already been made through want of knowledge, he dared not risk another one. And Li Ho had probably other than sentimental reasons for sending the book.

He shut out the mountains and the moonlight, and clicking on the berth-light, turned the dog-eared pages reverently. Only a few were written upon. It was a diary, as he had guessed, or rather brief bits of one. The writing was small but very clear in spite of the fading ink. The entries began abruptly. It was plain that there had been another book of which this was a continuation.

The first date was November 1st—no year given.

"It is raining. The Indians say the winter will be very wet. Desire plays in the rain and thrives. She is a lovely child, high-spirited—not like me."

"November 10th—He was worse this month. I think he gets steadily a little worse. I dare not say what I think. He would say that I had fancies. No one else sees anything save harmless eccentricity,—except perhaps Li Ho. But I am terrified.

"December 7th—I tried once more to get away. He found me quickly. It isn't easy for a woman with a child to hide—without money. For myself I can stand it—my own fault! But—my little girl!

"December 15th—I have been ill. Such a terrible experience. My one thought was the dread of dying. I must live. I cannot leave Desire—here.

"December 20th—He bought Desire new shoes and a frock today. It is strange, but he seems to take a certain care of her. Why? I do not know. I have wondered about his motives until I fancy things. What motive could he have ... except that maybe he is not all evil? Maybe be cares for the child. She is so sweet—No. I must not deceive myself. Whatever his reason is, I know that it is not that.

"January 9th—A strange thing happened today. I found a torn envelope bearing the name of Harry's English lawyers. I have seen the same kind of envelope in Harry's hands more than once. They used to send him his remittance, I think. What can this man have to do with English lawyers? I am frightened. But for once I am more angry than afraid. I must watch. If he has dared to write to Harry's people—"

The writing of the next entry had lost its clearness. It was almost illegible.

"January 13th—How could he! How could he sink so low! I have seen the lawyer's letter. He has taken money. From Harry's mother—for Desire. And this began within a month of our marriage. It shames me so that I cannot live. Yet I must live. I can't leave the child. But I can stop this hateful traffic in a dead man's honor. I will write myself to England."

This was the last fragment. Spence looked again at the almost erased date—January 13th. He felt the sweat on his forehead for, beside that date, the unexplained postscript of Li Ho's letter took on a ghastly significance.

"Respected lady depart life on January 14th."

She had not lived to write to England!

CHAPTER XXXVII

It seemed to Benis Spence afterward that during that last day, while the train plunged steadily down to sea level, he passed every boundary ever set for the patience of man. It was a lovely, sparkling day. The rivers leaped and danced in sunshine. Long shadows swept like beating wings along the mountain sides. The air blew cool and sweet upon his lips. But for once he was deaf and blind and heedless of it all. He thought only of the night—of the night and the moon.

It came at last—a night as lovely as the day. Benis sat with his hand upon his watch. They were running sharp on time. There could be nothing to delay them now—barring an accident. Instantly his mind created an accident, providing all the ghastly details. He saw himself helpless, pinned down, while the full moon climbed and sailed across the skies....

But there was no accident. A cheery bustle soon began in the car. Suitcases were lifted up, unstrapped and strapped again. Women took their hats from the big paper bags which hung like balloons between the windows. There was a general shaking and fixing and sorting of possessions. Only the porter remained serene. He knew exactly how long it would take him to brush his car and did not believe in beginning too soon. Benis kept his eye on the porter. He stirred at last.

"Bresh yo' coat, Suh?"

The professor allowed himself to be brushed and even proffered the usual tip, so powerful is the push of habit. In the narrow corridor by the door he waited politely while the lady who wouldn't trust her suitcase to the porter got stuck sideways and had to be pried out. But when once his foot descended upon the station platform, he was a man again. The killing inaction was over.

With the quiet speed of one who knows that hurry defeats haste, he set about materializing the plans which he had made upon the train. And circumstance, repentant of former caprice,

seemed willing to serve. The very first taxi-man he questioned was an intelligent fellow who knew more about Vancouver than its various hotels. A launch? Yes, he knew where a launch might be hired, also a man who could run it. Provided, of course—

Spence produced an inspiring roll of bills. The taxi-man grinned.

"Sure, if you've got the oof it's easy enough," he assured him. "Wake up the whole town and charter a steamer if you don't care what they soak you." He considered a moment. "'Tisn't a dope job, is it?"

Spence looked blank.

"What I mean to say is, what kind of man do you want?"

"Any man who will take me where I want to go."

The taxi-man nodded. "All right. That's easy."

In less time than even to the professor seemed possible the required boat-man was produced and bargained with. That is to say he was requested to mention his terms and produce his launch, both of which he did without hesitancy. And again circumstance was kind.

"If it's Farr's Landing you want," said the boat-man, leading a precarious way down a dark wharf, "I guess you've come to the right party. 'Taint a place many folks know. But I ran in there once to borrow some gas. Queer gink that there Chinaman! Anyone know you're coming? Anyone likely to show a light or anything?"

The professor said that his visit was unexpected. They would have to manage without a light.

The boat-man feared that, in that case, the terms might "run to" a bit more. But, upon receiving a wink from the taxi-man, did not waste time in stating how far they might run, but devoted himself to the encouragement of a cold engine and the business of getting under way.

Once more Spence was reduced to passive waiting. But the taste of the salt and the smell of it brought back the picture of Desire as he had seen her first—strong, self-confident. He had thought these qualities ungirlish at the time; now he thanked God for the memory of them.

It had been dark enough when they left the wharf but soon a soft brightness grew.

"Here she comes!" said his pilot with satisfaction. "Some moon, ain't she?"

"Hurry!" There was an urge in the professor's voice which fitted in but poorly with the magic of the night. The boat-man felt it and wondered. He tried a little conversation.

"Know the old Doc. well?" he inquired. "Queer old duck, eh? And that Li Ho is about the most Chinky Chinaman I ever seen. Come to think of it, I never paid him back that gas I borrowed."

"Hasn't he been across lately?" asked Spence, controlling his voice.

"Haven't seen him. But then 'tisn't as if I was out looking for him. Used to be a right pretty girl come over sometimes, the old Doc's daughter. Hasn't been around for a long time. Maybe you're a relative or some-thing?"

"See here," said Spence. "It's on account of the young lady that I am going there tonight. I have reason to fear that she may be in danger."

"That so?" The boat-man's comfortably slouched shoulders squared. He leaned over and did something to his engine. "In that case we'll take a chance or two. Hold tight, we're bucking the tide-rip. Lucky we've got the moon!"

Yes, they had the moon! With growing despair the professor watched her white loveliness drag a slipping mantle over the dark water. The same light must lie upon the clearing on the mountain ... where was Li Ho? Was he awake—and watching? Had he warned the girl? Or was she sleeping, weary with the journey, while only one frail old Chinaman stood between her and a terror too grim to guess ...

A long interval ... the sailing moon ... the swish of parting water as the launch cut through ...

"Must be thereabouts now," said the boat-man suddenly. "I'll slow her down. Keep your eye skinned for the landing."

A period of endless waiting, while the launch crept cautiously along the rocky shore—then a darker shadow in the shadows and the boat-man's excited "Got it!" The launch slipped neatly in beside the float.

"Want any help?" asked the boat-man curiously as his passenger sprang from the moving launch.

Spence did not hear him. He was already across the sodden planks. Only the up-trail now lay

between him and the end—or the beginning. The shadows of the trees stretched waving arms. He felt strong as steel, light as air as he sprang up the wooded path....

It was just as he had pictured it—the cottage in its square of silver ... the sailing moon!

But the cottage was empty.

He knew at once that it was empty. He dared not let himself know it. With a doggedness which defied conviction, he dragged his feet, suddenly heavy, across the rough grass. The door on the veranda was open. Why not?—the door of an empty house.... He went in.

The moonlight showed the old familiar things, the chinks in the wall, the rickety table, the couch, the stairway! ... He stumbled to the stairway. He forced his leaden feet to mount it.... It was pitch dark there. The upper doors were shut.... "Her door—on the right." He said this to himself as if prompting a stupid little boy with a lesson ... In the darkness his hand felt for the door-knob ... but why open the door? ... There was no life behind it. He knew that.... There was no life anywhere in this horrible emptiness.... "Death, then." He muttered, as he flung back the door.

There was nothing there ... only moonlight ... nothing ... yes, something on the floor ... something light and lacy, crushed into shapelessness ... Desire's hat.

He picked it up. The wires of its chiffon frame, broken and twisted, fell limp in his hand.

There was no other sign in the room. The bed was untouched. The Thing which had wrecked its insatiate rage upon the hat had not lingered. Spence went out slowly. There would be time for everything now—since time had ceased to matter. He laid the hat aside gently. There might be work for his hands to do.

With mechanical care he searched the cottage. No trace of disturbance met him anywhere until he reached the kitchen. Something had happened there Over-turned chairs and broken table—a door half off its hinge. Someone had fled from the house this way ... fled where?

There were so many places!

In his mind's eye Spence saw them ... the steep and slippery cliff, with shingle far below ... the clumps of dense bracken ... the deep, dark crevices where water splashed! ...

He went outside. It was not so bright now. There were clouds on the moon. One side of the clearing lay wholly in shadow. He waited and, as the light brightened, he saw the thing he sought—trampled bracken, a broken bush.... He followed the trail with a slow certitude of which ordinarily he would have been incapable.... It did not lead very far. The trees thinned abruptly. A rounded moss-covered rock rose up between him and the moon ... and on the rock, grotesque and darkly clear, a crouching figure—looking down....

A curious sound broke from Spence's throat. He stooped and sprang. But quick as he was, the figure on the rock was quicker. It slipped aside. Spence heard a guttural exclamation and caught a glimpse of a yellow face.

"Li Ho!"

The Chinaman pulled him firmly back from the edge of the moss-covered rock.

"All same Li Ho," he said. "You come click—but not too dam click."

"I know. Where is he?"

It was the one thing which held interest for Bern's Spence now.

Li Ho stepped gingerly to the edge of the rounded rock. In the clear light, Spence could see how the moss had been scraped from the margin.

"Him down there," said Li Ho. "Moon-devil push 'um. Plenty stlong devil!" Li Ho shrugged.

Spence's clenched hands relaxed.

"Dead?" he asked dully.

"Heap much dead," said Li Ho. "Oh, too much squash!" He made a gesture.

Benis was not quite sure what happened then. He remembers leaning against a tree. Presently he was aware of a horrible smell—the smell of some object which Li Ho held to his nostrils.

"Plenty big smell," said Li Ho. "Make 'urn sit up."

Benis sat up.

"Where is—" he began. But his throat closed upon the question. He could not ask.

"Missy in tent," said Li Ho stolidly. "Missy plenty tired. Sleep velly good."

Spence tried to take this in ... tent ... sleep ...

"Li Ho tell missy house no so-so," went on the China-man, pressing his evil-smelling salts closer to his victim's face. "Missy say 'all light'—sleep plenty well in tent; velly fine night."

Benis tried feebly to push the abomination away from his nose.

"Desire ... alive?" he whispered.

"Oh elite so. Velly much. Moon-devil velly smart but Li Ho much more clever. Missy she no savey—all light."

Spence began to laugh. It was dangerous laughter—or so at least Li Ho thought, for he promptly smothered it with his "velly big smell." The measure proved effective. The professor decided not to laugh. He held himself quiet until control came back and then stood up.

"I thought she was dead, Li Ho," he said.

In the half light the inscrutable face changed ever so little.

"Li Ho no let," said the Chinaman simply. "You better now, p'laps?" he went on. "We go catch honor-able Boss before missy wake." Spence nodded. He felt extraordinarily tired. But it seemed that tiredness did not matter, would never matter. The empty world had become warm and small again. Desire was safe.

Together he and Li Ho slid and scrambled down the mountain's face, by ways known only to Li Ho. And there, on a strip of beach left clean and wet by the receding tide, they found the dead man. Beside him, and twisted beneath, lay the green umbrella.

"How did it really happen, Li Ho?" asked Spence. Not that he expected any information.

"Moon-devil velly mad," said Li Ho. "Honorable Boss no watch step. Moon-devil push—too bad!"

"And the fight in the kitchen? And on the trail?"

Li Ho shook his head.

"No fight anywhere," he said blandly.

"And this long rip in your coat?"

"Too much old coat—catch 'um in bush," said Li Ho.

So when they lifted the body and it was found that the arm beneath the torn coat was useless, Spence said nothing. And somehow they managed to carry the dead man home.

It was dawn when they laid him down. Birds were already beginning to twitter in the trees. Desire would be waking soon. The world was going to begin all over presently. Spence laid his hand gently on the Chinaman's injured arm.

"You saved her, Li Ho," he said. "It is a big debt for one man to owe another."

The Chinaman said nothing. He was looking at the dead face—a curious lost look.

"He velly good man one time," said Li Ho. "All same before moon-devil catch 'um."

"You stayed with him a long time, Li Ho. You were a good friend."

Li Ho blinked rapidly, but made no reply.

"Will you come with us, Li Ho?" The inscrutable, oriental eyes looked for a moment into the frank eyes of the white man and then passed by them to the open door—to the dawn just turning gold above the sea. The uninjured hand rose and fell in an indescribable gesture.

"Li Ho go home now!"

The words seemed to flutter out like birds into some vast ocean of content.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Desire was waking. She had slept without a dream and woke wonderingly to the shadows of dancing leaves upon the white canvas above her. It was a long time since she had slept in a tent—a lifetime. She felt very drowsy and stupid. The brooding sense of fatality which had made her return so dreamlike still numbed her senses. She had come back to the mountain, as she had known she must come. And, curiously enough, in returning she had freed herself. In coming back to what she had hated and feared she had faced a bogie. It would trouble her no more. For all that she had lost she had gained one thing, Freedom. But even freedom did not thrill her. She was too horribly tired.

Idly she let her thought drift over the details of her home-coming. Li Ho had been so surprised. His consternation at seeing her had been comic. But he had asked no questions, and had given her breakfast in hospitable haste. In the cottage nothing was altered. It was as if she had been away overnight. And against this changelessness she knew herself changed. She was outside of it now. It could never prison her again.

While she drank Li Ho's coffee, Dr. Farr had come in. He had been told, she supposed, of her return, for he showed no surprise at seeing her—had greeted her absently—and sat for a time without speaking, his long hands folded about the green umbrella. This, too, was familiar and added to the "yesterday" feeling. He had not changed. It was her attitude toward him which was different. The curious fear of him, which she had hidden under a mask of indifference, was no longer there to hide. Even the fact of his relationship had lost its sharp significance. She was done with the thing which had made it poignant. Parentage no longer mattered. So little mattered now.

She had spoken to him cheerfully, ignoring his mood, and he had replied irritably, like a bad-tempered child who resents some unnecessary claim upon its attention. But she did not observe him closely. Had she done so, she might have noticed a curious glazing of the eyes as they lifted to follow her—shining and depthless like blue steel.

"I do not expect to stay long, father," she told him. "Only until I find something to do. I am a woman now, you know, and must support myself."

She spoke as one might speak to a child, and he had nodded and mumbled: "Yes, yes ... a woman now ... certainly." Then he had begun to laugh. She had always hated this silent, shaking laugh of his. Even now it stirred something in her, something urgent and afraid. But she was too tired to be urged or frightened. She refused to listen.

In the afternoon she had sat out in the sun, not thinking, willing to be rested by the quiet and drugged by the scent of pine and sea. To her had come Sami, appearing out of nothing as by magic, his butter-colored face aglow with joy. Sami had almost broken up her weary calm. He was so glad, so warm, so alive, so little! But even while he snuggled against her side, her Self had drifted away. It would not feel or know. It was not ready yet for anything save rest.

Li Ho had made luncheon, Li Ho had brought tea. Otherwise Li Ho had left her alone. About one thing only had he been fussy. She must not sleep in her old room. It was not aired. It needed "heap scrub." He had arranged, he said, a little tent "all velly fine." Desire was passive. She did not care where she slept.

When bedtime had come, Li Ho had taken her to the tent. It was cozily hidden in the bush and, as he had promised, quite comfortable. But she thought his manner odd. "Are you nervous, Li Ho?" she asked with a smile.

The Chinaman blinked rapidly, disdaining reply. But in his turn asked a question—his first since her arrival. Had the honorable Professor Spence received an insignificant parcel? Desire replied vaguely that she did not know. What was in the parcel?

"Velly implotant plasel," said Li Ho gravely. "Honorable husband arrive plenty click when read um insides."

There had seemed no sense to this. But Desire did not argue. She did not even attend very carefully when Li Ho added certain explanations. He had found, it appeared, some papers which had belonged to her mother and had felt it his duty to send them on.

"Where did you find them, Li Ho?"

Instead of answering this, Li Ho, after a moment's hesitation, had produced from some recess of his old blue coat an envelope which he handled with an air of awed respect.

"Li Ho find more plasel too. Pletty soon put um back. Honorable Boss indulge in fit if missing."

"Which means that it belongs to father and that you have—borrowed it?" suggested she, delicately.

"No b'long him. B'long you," said Li Ho, thrusting the packet into her hand. And, as if fearful of being questioned further, he had taken the candle and departed.

"Leave me the candle, Li Ho," she had called to him. But he had not returned. And a candle is a small matter. She was used to undressing in the dusk. Almost at once she had fallen asleep.

Now in the morning, as she lay and watched the shadows of the leaves, she remembered that, though he had taken the candle, he had left the letter. It lay there on the strip of old carpet beside her cot. Desire withdrew her attention from the leaves and picked it up. With a little thrill she saw that Li Ho had been right. It was her own name which was written across the envelope ...

Her own name, faded yet clear on a wrinkled envelope yellowed at the edges. The seal of the envelope had been broken....

Sometime in her childhood Desire must have seen her mother's writing. Conscious memory of it was gone, but in the deeper recesses of her mind there must have lingered some recognition which quickened her heart at sight of it.

A letter from the dead? No wonder Li Ho had handled it with reverence. With trembling fingers the girl drew it from its violated covering.

"Little Desire"—the name lay like a caress—"if you read this it will be because I am not here to tell you. And, there is no one else. My great dread is the dread of leaving you. If I could only look into the future for one moment, and see you in it, safe and happy, nothing else would matter. But I am afraid. I have always been too much afraid. You are not like me. I try to remember that. You are like your grandfather. He was a brave man. His eyes were grey like yours. He died before you were born and he never knew that Harry was not really my husband. I did not know it either, then. You see, he had a wife in England. I suppose he thought it did not matter. But when he died, it did matter. There was no one then on whom either you or I had any claim. I should have been brave enough to go on by myself. But I was never brave.

"It was then that Dr. Farr, who had been kind through Harry's illness, asked me to marry him. He was a middle-aged man. He said he would take care of w both. You were just three months old.

"I know now that I made a terrible mistake. He is not kind. He is not good. I am terrified of him. But the fear which makes me brave against other fears is the thought of leaving you. I try to remember my father. If I had been like him I could have worked for you and we might have been happy. Perhaps my mother was timid. I don't remember her.

"I don't know what to put in this letter, or how to make you understand. I loved your father. He was not a bad man. I am sure he never harmed anyone. He would have taken care of me all his life. But he didn't live. It was Dr. Farr who found out about the English wife. He pointed out that you would have no name and offered to give you his.

"I did you a great wrong. His name—better far to have no name than his! I am sure it is a wicked name. So I want you to know that it is not yours. You have no name by law, but I think, now, that there are worse things. Your father's name was Harry Strangeways. His people are English, a good family but very strict. I could not let them know about us. They would never have forgiven Harry. It would have been like slandering the dead. Do not blame him, little Desire, for I am sure he meant to do right. He was always light-hearted. And kind—always kind. Your laugh is just like his. Think of us both, if you can, with kindness—your unhappy Mother."

Long before Desire came to the end of the crumpled sheets her tears were falling hot and thick upon them. Tears which she had not been able to shed for her own broken hope came easily now for this long vanished sorrow. Her mother! How pitifully bare lay the shortened story of that smothered life. Desire's heart, so much stronger than the heart of her who gave it birth, filled with a great tenderness. She saw herself once more a little frightened child. She felt again that sense of Presence in the room. And knew that, for a child's sake, a gentle soul had not made haste to happiness.

For that gay scamp, her father, Desire had no tear. And no condemnation. Her mother had loved him. Her gentleness had seen no flaw. Lightly he had taken a woman to protect through life —to neglect, as lightly, the little matter of living. Desire let his picture slip unhindered from her mind.

There was relief, though, in the knowledge that she owed no duty there—or here. The instinct which had always balked at kinship with the strange old man who had held her youth in bondage had not been the abnormal thing she once had feared it was. She had fought through—but it was good to know that she had fought with Nature, not against her. At least she could start upon her new life clean and free....

A pity, though, that life should lie like ashes on her lips!

CHAPTER XXXIX

Nevertheless, and despite the taste of ashes, one must live and take one's morning bath. Desire thought, not without pleasure, of the pool beneath the tree. Wrapped in her blue kimona, her leaf-brown hair braided tightly into a thick pigtail and both hands occupied with towels and soap, she pushed back the tent flap and stepped out into the green and gold of morning.

The first thing she saw was Benis sitting on a fallen log and waiting. He had been waiting a long time. In the flashing second before he saw her, Desire had time to draw one long breath of wonder. After that, there was no time for anything. The professor's patience suddenly gave out.

He had intended to begin with an explanation. But it is a poor lover who can't find a better beginning than that ... And what could Desire do, with towels in one hand and soap in the other?

When he released her at last, blushing and glowing, it was to find the most urgent need for explanation past.

"Idiots, weren't we?" asked Benis happily.

Desire agreed. But her eyes questioned.

"There isn't any Mary, you see," he told her hastily. "Never was; never could be. (Let me take your soap?) Mary was a figment—mortal mind, you know. Your fault entirely."

"But—"

"Yes, I know. But I did it to please you. I am a truthful person, really. (Let me take your towels?) And I thought you had more sense—Oh, Desire, darling!"

"But—"

"Oh, I was a fool, too. I admit it. I thought you were fretting about John. Fancy your fretting about dear old Bones! I thought—oh well, it seems silly enough now. But the day I found you crying over his photo-graph—"

"Her photograph," interposed Desire shakily.

"Eh?"

"It was Mary's photograph. I found it on your desk."

"It was John's, when I saw it."

"Yes—but you didn't see it soon enough."

"Oh—you young deceiver! But once you went to John's office and came away smiling."

"Why not? I went to find Mary. And I didn't find her. When the real Mary came—"

"There is no real Mary."

"Oh, Benis—isn't she?"

"She positively isn't."

"But you said—"

"I lied, my dear. It was a jolly good lie, though."

"A lie is never—"

"No, but this one was. You wouldn't have married me if I hadn't. And you told a whopper yourself once. You said that children—" but Desire refused to listen.

Later on, as they sat together on the log with a squirrel hiding provender in one of Desire's slippers and another chattering agreeably in Benis's ear, he told her briefly the history of the night. That is, he told her all that he thought it needful she should know. Of the scraps of diary in his pocket he said nothing,—some day, perhaps, when she had become used to happiness, and the cottage on the mountain was far away. But now—of what use to drag out the innermost horror or add an awful query to her memory of her mother's death? The old man was gone—let the past go with him.

Desire listened silently. Sorrow she could not pretend. The suddenness of the end was shocking and death is ever awful to the young. But the eyes she lifted to her husband, though solemn, were not sad. When he had finished, she slipped into his hand, with new, sweet shyness, the letter which lifted forever the shadow of the dead man from across their path.

Benis Spence read it with deep thankfulness. Fate was indeed making full amends. No dread inheritance now need narrow the way before them. It meant—he stole a glance at Desire who was

industriously emptying her slipper. The curve of her averted cheek was faintly flushed. The professor's whimsical smile crept out.

"Let me!" he said. He took her slipper from her and, kneeling, felt her breath like flowers brush his cheek.

"It was a whopper, Benis," Desire whispered.

Looking up, he saw the open gladness of her face.

THE END

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