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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AUNT JANE \*\*\*

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# AUNT JANE

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AUNT JANE

BY

JENNETTE LEE

AUTHOR OF "UNCLE WILLIAM,"  
"THE WOMAN IN THE ALCOVE," ETC.

NEW YORK

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1915

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TO

GERALD STANLEY LEE

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## I

"Aunt Jane, what are you thinking of?" The young man turned his head a little on the pillow to look inquiringly toward the door.

It was the door of Room 24 leading into the Men's Ward. Aunt Jane had been standing there for five minutes, gazing intently before her into space. The serene face framed in the white muslin cap had a rapt, waiting look. It reminded the young man of a German madonna that he had run across last summer in an old gallery corner, whose face had haunted him. "Aunt Jane, what are you thinking about?" he repeated gently.

She turned slowly toward him, the placid look breaking into twinkles. "I was thinking I'd better turn Mr. Ketchell's mattress the other end to, and put a bolster under the upper end. It kind of sags."

For a moment the young man on the pillow looked a little bewildered. Then he lay back and laughed till the iron bedstead rang and the men in the ward pricked up their ears and smiled in sympathy.

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Aunt Jane smiled too, stepping leisurely toward him.

"There, there," she said as she adjusted the sheet and lowered his pillow a trifle: "I don't know as I'd laugh any more about that. 'Tisn't so very funny to change a mattress the other end to."

He raised a hand and wiped the laughter from either eye. "But you looked as if you were thinking of angels and cherubim and things, Aunt Jane."

She nodded placidly. "I generally do," she responded, "but that doesn't hinder knowing about

mattresses and bolsters.... I wouldn't laugh any more for a day or two if I was you. The bandages might get loose." She slipped a careless hand along his forehead, gathered up a cup and plate from the stand beside him, and slid plumply from the room.

His eyes followed her through the door, down the long ward as she stopped here and there for a word or a question. Once she raised her hand sternly at a bed and sniffed. The cap strings bristled fiercely. [Pg 3]

"He's catching it," muttered the young man from the private room. "I knew he would. You can't keep a baccy-pouch in the same room with Aunt Jane." He sighed a little and glanced, without turning his head, toward the window where the spring clouds sailed and filled with swelling whiteness. A breath of freshness stole in softly. On the sill was a bowl of pansies. He lay looking at them idly. His lids fluttered and closed—and lifted again and fell shut.

Out in the ward the men were laughing and talking. Sanderson, robbed of his baccy-pouch, was sullen and resentful and the men were chaffing him. Aunt Jane drifted through the swing-door at the end of the ward. She placed the cup and plate on a dumb-waiter and crossed the hall to the Women's Ward. A nurse met her as she came in the door. "Mrs. Crosby is worse. Temperature a hundred and four," she said in a low voice.

Aunt Jane nodded. She went slowly down the ward. White faces on the pillows greeted her and followed her. Aunt Jane beamed on them. She stopped beside a young girl and bent over to speak to her. The girl's face lighted. It lost its fretted look. Aunt Jane had told her that she was to have a chop for her dinner if she was a good girl, and that there was a robin out in the apple-tree. She turned her gaunt eyes toward the window. Her face listened. Aunt Jane went on.... A nurse coming in handed her a slip of paper. She glanced at it and tucked it into her dress. It was a telephone message from Dr. Carmon, asking to have the operating-room ready for an appendicitis case in ten minutes. [Pg 4]

The girl with the gaunt eyes called to her:

"Aunt Jane!" The voice was weak and impatient.

Aunt Jane turned slowly back. She stood by the bed, looking down with a smile.

The girl thrust an impatient hand under her cheek: "Can I hear him in here?" she demanded.

Aunt Jane glanced toward the window.

"The robin? Like enough, if he flies this way. I'll go out and chase him 'round by and by when I get time."

The girl laughed—a low, pleased laugh. Aunt Jane's tone had drawn a picture for her: The robin, the flying cap strings in swift pursuit, and all outdoors—birds and trees and sky. She nestled her face on her hand and smiled quietly. "I'm going to be good," she said. [Pg 5]

Aunt Jane looked at her with a severe twinkle. "Yes, you'll be good—till next time," she remarked.

The nurse by the door waited, impatient. Aunt Jane came across the room.

"Get 15 ready.... Find the new nurse," she said. "Send her to the operating-room.... Send Henry to the ambulance door.... Tell Miss Staunton to have things hot, and put out the new ether cones. It wants fresh carbolic and plenty of sponges."

The nurse sped swiftly away.

Aunt Jane looked peacefully around. She gave one or two instructions to the ward nurse, talked a moment with one of the patients, smiled a kind of general benediction on the beds and faces and sun-lit room, and went quietly out.... At the door of the operating-room she paused a moment and gave a slow, comfortable glance about. She changed the position of a stand and rearranged the ether cones. [Pg 6]

The next minute she was standing at the side door greeting Dr. Carmon. The ambulance was at the door.

"It's a bad case," he said. "Waited too long."

"Woman, I suppose," said Aunt Jane. She was watching the men as they put the trestles in place.

He looked at her. "How did you know?"

"They're 'most always the ones to wait. They stand the pain better'n men." She stepped to one side with a quiet glance at the litter as the men bore it past. "She'll come through," she said as they followed it up the low stairway.

"I wish I felt as sure," responded Dr. Carmon.

Aunt Jane glanced back. A man was standing at the door, his eyes following them. She looked inquiringly toward the doctor.

"Her husband," he said. "He's going to wait."

Aunt Jane spoke a word to a nurse who was coming down the stairs, with a motion of her hand toward the man waiting below. [Pg 7]

The little procession entered the operating-room, and the door was shut.

It was a current belief that the Berkeley House of Mercy belonged to Aunt Jane; and I am not at all sure that Aunt Jane did not think so herself—at times.

The hospital had been endowed by a rich patient in gratitude for recovery from a painful disease. She had wished to reward the surgeon who had cured her. And when Dr. Carmon had refused to accept anything beyond the very generous fee he had charged for the operation, she had built the hospital—over which he was to have absolute control. There was a nominal board of directors, and other physicians might bring their patients there. But Dr. Carmon was to be in control.

The surgeon had not cared for a fortune. Dr. Carmon was not married; he had no wife and children to tie him down to a fortune. But a hospital equipped to his fingers' ends was a different matter and he had accepted it gratefully.

Dr. Carmon had not always found it easy to get on with the surgical staff of his old hospital; partly perhaps, as Aunt Jane always maintained, because he was "too fond of having his own way"; and partly because he was of the type that must break ground. There were things that Dr. Carmon saw and wanted to do. And there was always a flock of malcontents at hand to peck at him if he did them.

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He accepted the Berkeley House of Mercy with a sense of relief and with the understanding that he was to be in absolute control. And he in turn had installed Aunt Jane as matron of the hospital—not with the understanding that she was to be in absolute control, but as being, on the whole, the most sensible woman of his acquaintance.

The result had not been altogether what Dr. Carmon had foreseen. Gradually he had awakened to the fact that the hospital and everything connected with it was under the absolute control—not of Dr. Frederic Carmon, but of Aunt Jane Holbrook. Each member of the white-capped corps of nurses looked to her for direction; and the cook and the man who ran the furnace refused to take orders from any one else. It was no unusual sight for the serene, white-framed face, with its crisp strings, to appear among the pipes and elbows of the furnace-room and leave behind it a whiff of common sense and a series of hints on the running of the hot-water boiler. Even Dr. Carmon himself never brought a patient to the House of Mercy without asking humble and solicitous permission of Aunt Jane. It was not known that she had ever refused him, pointblank. But she sometimes protested with a shrewd twinkle in her eye: "Oh, I can't have that Miss Enderby here. She's always wanting to have her own way about things!" Then Dr. Carmon would laugh and bring the patient. Perhaps he gave her a hint beforehand. Perhaps the fame of Aunt Jane's might had reached her. Perhaps it was the cool, firm fingers.... Whatever the reason, it is safe to say that Miss Enderby did not once have her own way from the day that she was carried into the wide doors of the House of Mercy, a sick and querulous woman, to the day when she left it with firm, quick step and, turning back at the door to fall with a sob on Aunt Jane's neck, was met with a gentle little push and a quick flash from the white-capped face. "There, there, Miss Enderby, you run right along. There's nothin' upsets folks like sayin' good-by. You come back some day and say it when you're feeling pretty well."

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### III

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Aunt Jane was thinking, as she went along the wide corridor to Room 15, that the new patient was not unlike Miss Enderby.

It was an hour since the operation and Aunt Jane had been in to see the patient two or three times; as she had stood looking down at her, the resemblance to Miss Enderby had come to her mind. There was the same inflexible tightening of the lips and the same contracted look of the high, level brows.

A nurse coming down the corridor stopped respectfully.

"Dr. Carmon has finished his visits," she said. "He asks me to say he is in your office—when you are ready."

Aunt Jane nodded absently. She went on to Room 15 and looked in at the door. The patient lay with closed eyes, a half-querulous expression on the high brows, and the corners of her lips sharply drawn. Aunt Jane crossed the floor lightly and bent to listen to the breathing from the tense lips.

The eyes opened slowly. "It's you!" said the woman.

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"Comfortable?" asked Aunt Jane. She ran her hand along the querulous forehead and straightened the clothes a little. "You'll feel better pretty soon now."

"Stay with me," said the woman sharply.

Aunt Jane shook her head: "I'll be back by and by. You lie still and be good. That's the way to get well."

She drifted from the room and the woman's eyes closed slowly. Something of the fretted look had left her face.

Aunt Jane stepped out into the wide, sun-lit corridor and moved serenely on. Her tall figure and plump back had a comfortable look as she went.

One of the men in the ward had said that Aunt Jane went on casters; and it was the Irishman in the bed next him who had retorted: "It's wings that you mean—two little wings to the feet of her—or however could she get along, at all, without putting foot to the floor!"

However she managed it, Aunt Jane came and went noiselessly; and when she chose, she could move from one end of the corridor to the other as swiftly as if indeed there had been "two little wings to the feet of her."

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She was not hurrying now. She stopped at one or two doors for a glance, gave directions to a nurse who passed with a tray, and went leisurely on to the office.

Over by the window, Dr. Carmon, his gloves in his hand, was standing with his back to the room, waiting.

Aunt Jane glanced at the back and sat down. "Did you want to see me?" she inquired pleasantly.

He wheeled about. "I have been waiting five minutes to see you," he said stiffly.

"The man in Number 20 is coming along first-rate," replied Aunt Jane. "I never saw a better first intention."

The doctor glared at her. His face cleared a little. "He *is* doing well."

"I want you to put Miss Wildman on the case," he added.

"She's put down to go on at eleven," responded Aunt Jane.

"Humph!" He drew out his note-book and looked at it. "I suppose you knew I'd want her."

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"I thought she'd better go on," said Aunt Jane serenely.

"And Miss Canfield needs to go off—for a good rest. I shall need her on Tuesday. There are two cases"—he consulted his notes—"a Mrs. Pelton—she'll go into the ward—after a few days."

"Poor," said Aunt Jane.

"Yes. And Herman G. Medfield—"

"He's not poor," interposed Aunt Jane. "He could give us a new wing for contagion when he gets well."

The doctor scowled a little. Perhaps it was the unconscious "us." Perhaps he was thinking that Herman G. Medfield had scant chance to give the new wing for contagion.... And a sudden sense that a great deal depended on him and that he was very tired had perhaps come over the surgeon.

Aunt Jane touched the bell by her table. "You sit down, Dr. Carmon," she said quietly.

Dr. Carmon picked up his hat. "I have to go," he replied brusquely.

"You sit down," said Aunt Jane.

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He seated himself with a half smile. When Aunt Jane chose to make you like what she was doing...!

The white-coated boy who came, took an order for meat broth and sandwiches and returned with them promptly.

"You're tired out," said Aunt Jane, as she arranged the dishes on the swing-leaf to the desk. "Up all night, I suppose?"

"No." The doctor nibbled at a sandwich. Then he broke off a generous piece and swallowed it and drank a little of the hot broth.

She watched him placidly.

He was a short, dark man with a dark mustache that managed, somehow, at once to bristle and to droop. His clothes were shabby and creased with little folds and wrinkles across the ample front, and he sat well forward in his chair to eat the sandwiches.

There was something a little grotesque about him perhaps.

But to Aunt Jane's absent-minded gaze, it may be, there was nothing grotesque in the short, stout figure, eating its sandwiches.... She had seen it too many times roused to fierce struggle, holding death at arm's length and fighting, inch by inch, for a life that was slipping away. To her Dr. Carmon was not so much a man, as a mighty gripping force that did things when you needed him.

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"I suppose I *was* hungry," he said.

He picked up the last crumb of sandwich and smiled at her.

Aunt Jane nodded. "You needed something to eat."

"And some one to tell me to eat it," he replied. And with the words he was gone.

The next minute Aunt Jane, sitting in the office, heard the warning toot of his motor as it turned the corner of the next street and was off for the day's work.

In the reception-room a man was waiting. He was thick-set, with dark hair and eyes and an obstinate chin. He looked up with a doubtful flash as Aunt Jane came in.

"How is she?" he demanded. He had sprung to his feet.

Aunt Jane descended into a creaking chair and folded her hands quietly. "Sit down, Mr. Dalton," she said; "I'm going to tell you all about it."

The words seemed to promise limitless details.

He sat down, chafing a little and looking at her eagerly.

She smiled on him. "Hard work waiting, isn't it?" she said.

His face broke a little.

"Has she come out of it?"

Aunt Jane nodded. "Yes, she's got through." She rocked a little in the big chair. "She's standing it pretty well, considering," she added after a pause.

"Will she get well?" The question burst at her.

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She looked up at him slowly—at the dark eyes and obstinate chin. "I don't know," she said. She waited a minute. "I suppose you'd rather know the truth," she asked.

"Yes—yes."

"I thought so." The muslin strings nodded. "When my husband died they didn't let us know how sick he was. I've always thought we might have saved him—between us—if we'd known. They wanted to spare my feelings." She looked at him inquiringly.

"Yes." He waited a little less impatiently. The world was a big place. Everybody died.... Would Edith die?... He looked at her imploringly.

She returned the look with one full of gentleness. "I don't see how she's going to live," she said slowly. The face under its white cap took on a trance-like look. The eyes were fixed on something unseen. She drew a quick breath.... "But I guess she will," she said with a tremulous laugh.

The man's lips parted.

She looked at him again. "If I were you, Mr. Dalton, I'd go home and feel pretty big and strong and well, and I'd hope pretty hard."

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He looked at her, bewildered.

She was on her feet. She ran her eye over his face and person. "I'd wear the cleanest, freshest clothes I could get, and I'd look so 'twould do her good just to set eyes on me."

He flushed under the two days' growth of beard and ran his hand awkwardly across his chin. "But they won't let me see her?" he said.

"Well, I don't know," responded Aunt Jane. "It'll do her good—whether she sees you or not," she added energetically.

He rose with a smile, holding out his hand. "I believe you're right," he said. "It gives me something to do, anyway, and that's worth a good deal."

"Yes, it's something to do," she responded, "and I don't suppose any of us knows just what cures folks."

"Could I see her to-morrow, perhaps?" he asked, watching her face.

She shook her head emphatically. "Not till I think best," she replied with decision.

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His face fell.

"And not then," she said, "unless you're feeling pretty well and strong and happy."

He gave a little abrupt laugh. "Oh, you've fixed that all right. I shan't sigh—not once—in a dark room—with the lights out."

Aunt Jane smiled serenely. "That's good." At the door she paused a moment. "I wouldn't reckon too much on seeing her," she said. "I shan't let any one see her till she asks. She won't pay much attention for three-four days yet."

A peculiar look crossed the man's dark face. "That's all right," he said. "I can wait."

Outside the door he lifted his face a little to the fresh breeze. His eyes stared absently at the drifting sky. "Now, how did she know Edith wouldn't want to see me?" he said softly: "how did she find that out?"

Aunt Jane bent her head and listened to the heavy breathing. Then she spoke softly to the nurse in charge, who listened obediently and went away. It was not an unusual thing for Aunt Jane to

assume control of a case at any moment. Perhaps she was most likely to do this about three or four o'clock in the morning when all the hospital was asleep and a chill had crept into the air. The nurse in charge of a critical case would look up to find Aunt Jane standing beside her, fresh from a cold bath, with a smile on her big, restful face and a whispered command on her lips that sent the tired nurse to bed with a clear conscience.

The patients that Aunt Jane assumed in this peremptory fashion always recovered. Perhaps they would have recovered in any case. This is one of the things that no one knows. It may be noted, however, in passing, that the patients themselves as they came into the new day, holding fast to Aunt Jane's hand, cherished a belief that had it not been for that firm, plump hand, the new day would not have dawned for them.... They had no strength and no will of their own. But through the cold and the darkness, something held them; and when the spirit came creeping back with the morning, the first thing that their eyes rested on was Aunt Jane's face.

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The woman's eyes opened suddenly. They looked for a moment, dull and unseeing, into Aunt Jane's. Then they fell shut. Aunt Jane's fingers noted the pulse and passed once or twice across the high, fretted brow. Slowly a look of sleep passed over the face and the strained lines relaxed. Aunt Jane, watching it, gave a nod of satisfaction. Out in the orchard the robin sang his twilight song, slow and cool and liquid, with long pauses between, and the dusk crept into the white room, touching it.

Aunt Jane sat passive, waiting, the eyes under her white cap glowing with a still, deep look. All the threads of life and death in the hospital gathered up and centred in the quiet figure sitting there. Not a pulse in the great building beat, or flickered and went out, that Aunt Jane did not know it. But she sat waiting while the twilight deepened, a look of restfulness in her big face. Now and then she crooned to herself, half humming the lines of some hymn and falling silent again, watching the sleeper's breath.

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The night nurse paused outside the door, and a little rush of gaslight flickered in. Aunt Jane rose and closed the door and shifted a screen noiselessly to the foot of the bed. The long night had settled down for its sleep. And Edith Dalton's soul was keeping watch with death. Slowly it sank back into the grim hold ... only a spark left, with Aunt Jane keeping guard over it.... So the night passed and the day, and another night and another day ... and the third day dawned. Edith Dalton would have said, as the spark glowed higher and blazed a little and lighted her soul, and her eyes rested on Aunt Jane's face, that the figure sitting there had not left her side for three days. Down through the deepest waters, where death lulled her and heaven waited, she had felt a touch on her soul, holding her, drawing her steadily back to life; and now she opened her eyes and they rested on Aunt Jane's face and smiled a little. Then the lids fluttered together again and sleep came to the face, natural and sweet.

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Aunt Jane's eyes grew dark beneath the white cap. She touched a bell and gave the case over to the day nurse that came. "She will be all right now," she said. She spoke in the low, even voice that was not a whisper and not a tone. "Give her plenty of water. She has been very thirsty. But there is no fever. Don't call me unless there is a change.... Then send at once." She departed on her rounds.

No one would have guessed, as the fresh, stout figure moved in and out among the wards, that she had not slept for two nights. There was a tradition that Aunt Jane never slept and that she was never tired. Dr. Carmon laughed at the tradition and said that Aunt Jane slept as much as any one, more than most people, in fact, only she did it with her eyes open—that it was only a superstition that made people think they must shut their eyes to sleep. The Hindoos had a trick worth two of that. Aunt Jane knew the trick, and she might tell other folks if she would, and save the world a lot of trouble.

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But Aunt Jane only shook her head, and smiled, and went her way. And when the fight with death came, she went with each one down into that other world, the world of sleep and faith and unconscious power, on the border-land of death, where the soul is reborn, and waited there for life. She had no theories about it, and no pride; and if she had now and then a gentle, imperious scorn of theorists and bunglers, it was only the touch of human nature that made the world love her.

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## VI

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It was late Monday afternoon that a card was brought to Aunt Jane—a thin, slim bit of card, with correct English lettering in plain type on it.

Aunt Jane read it and glanced up at Miss Murray who was on door duty for the afternoon.

"He's in the front room," said the nurse. "And there's a woman—came the same time but separate. I put her in the back room."

"Tell Miss Crosby and Miss Canfield to be ready to go on duty in Number 5 and Suite A," said Aunt Jane.

She said the last words almost with a sniff. If Aunt Jane had had her way, there would have been no Suite A in the House of Mercy.

For Suite A was a big, sunny, southeast room, with a sitting-room on one side and a bath on the

other—a royal bath, with overhead shower and side sprays and all the latest words in plumbing and fitting, all the most luxurious and costly appointments of nickel and marble and tile. [Pg 28]

Aunt Jane always went by Suite A with her head a little in the air and her nose a trifle raised. And woe to the man or woman who occupied Suite A. For a week or ten days he was left severely to the care of nurses and doctors. It was only after he had experienced to the full what a desolate place a hospital may be, that Aunt Jane condescended to look in and thaw the atmosphere a little.

It was perhaps her feeling for Suite A that led her to attend to ward patients and occupants of humble rooms before those of Suite A. "They'll be comfortable enough when they get to their suite," she had been known to say.

So it was the back room that she entered first—with the card in her hand.

A little woman at the side of the room got up quickly. "I came alone," she said. She fluttered a little and held out her hand nervously as if uncertain what might happen to her in a hospital.

Aunt Jane took it in her plump one and held it a minute. "Sit down."

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The woman sat down and looked at her. "John wanted to come. But I told him to stay home," she said.

"Much better," replied Aunt Jane, nodding.

"I told him he'd better kind of make supper for the children. So if they should miss me!" The look was wistful.

Aunt Jane regarded it comfortably.

"All the happier, when you get back home." She had seated herself in a large chair and she rocked a little.

The woman's face relaxed.

She looked about her more happily. "It seems kind of like home, don't it? I didn't think a hospital would be like this—not just like this. I don't seem to mind being here," she said with a little note of surprise.

"You won't mind it," said Aunt Jane. "You'll like it. Everybody likes it. Maybe you won't want to go away."

The woman smiled faintly. "I guess I shall be ready to go—when the time comes," she added slowly.... "There's one thing I wanted to ask somebody about—it's about paying— How much it will be, you know? I asked the doctor once—when he said I'd have to come, but he didn't tell me—not really."

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"Dr. Carmon doesn't think so much about his pay." There was something almost like pride in Aunt Jane's voice. "You needn't be afraid he'll overcharge for it."

"It isn't that—only maybe we *couldn't* pay," said the woman. Her forehead held little wrinkled lines and her face smiled. "And it don't seem quite right to be done—if we can't pay for it."

Aunt Jane rocked a minute. Her eyes travelled to the door leading to the front room. The door was ajar and through the crack there was a glimpse of a light overcoat lying carelessly across the chair. It had a silk lining.

Aunt Jane nodded toward it. "There's a man in there—"

"Yes, I know. I saw him. He got here the same time I did—in his motor-car."

"In his motor-car—that's it! Well—" Aunt Jane smiled. "*He's* going to pay Dr. Carmon—for your operation."

"Why—!" The little woman gasped. "He don't have any reason to pay for *me*!"

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"Well—" Aunt Jane rocked, turning it over and making it up as she went along: "Well— He's rich. He has a plenty— And he won't be comfortable without." She spoke with conviction.

"But he don't know me," said the woman. "Unless maybe he knows John!" she added thoughtfully.

"That's it," Aunt Jane responded. "Maybe he knows 'John.' Anyway he's going to pay." She touched a bell.

"Well—" The woman looked down at the hands in her lap, the fingers were working in and out. "I'm sure I don't know how to thank him!" she said. She looked up. Her eyes were full of tears. She brushed a quick hand across them. "I don't know how!" she said softly.

"You don't need to thank him," replied Aunt Jane. "He won't expect any thanks, I guess."

A nurse stood in the door. Aunt Jane's hand motioned to the woman. "This is Mrs. Pelton. She's going to be in Room 5. Take good care of her."

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The nurse held out her hand with a smile. And the little woman got up. "I've got a bag here somewhere—? That's it—yes. Thank you! I seem all kind of upset, somehow. I didn't know a hospital would be like this!"

Aunt Jane watched her with a smile as she went from the room. There was a gentle look in her eyes. Then she got up, with the card in her hand, and moved toward the front room. She had become serene and austere.

A tall, thin man rose courteously. "I am Dr. Carmon's patient. I understand a room has been reserved for me?" He looked up.



"There's a room, yes," admitted Aunt Jane.

The man's face waited. There was astonishment and a little amusement under its polite gaze.

Aunt Jane rang the bell.

"Won't you sit down," she indicated a chair.

"Thank you. I prefer to keep standing—while I can." He said it smilingly.

If there was an undertone of appeal for sympathy in the words, Aunt Jane's face ignored it. She turned to the nurse who entered. [Pg 33]

"Show Mr.—?" She consulted the card in her hand with elaborate care. "Mr.—? Medfield, yes, that's it—show Mr. Medfield to Suite A."

The man bowed and took his coat on his arm. The nurse led the way. And Aunt Jane watched them from the room, holding the little card in her hand.

A little later when she entered the name on the card in the hospital register, she added something after it in tiny hieroglyphics that made her smile as she closed the book and put it away on its shelf.

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## VII

[Pg 34]

Herman Medfield sat in the spacious sitting-room of Suite A, his paper spread out before him and his breakfast on the invalid table that had been wheeled up to the window. He had found the table with its tray of coffee and eggs and toast, an easy chair drawn up beside it, and the morning paper by his plate, ready for him when he came from his comfortable bath.

He had opened the paper, but not the eggs.... He read a few lines in the paper and glanced down at the table with a little scowl and pushed it from him.

Dr. Carmon had insisted on his being at the hospital for three or four days before the operation. He wanted to watch him and control conditions, he had said. It would make his decision easier.

The millionaire sitting in the window frowned a little and drummed with his fingers on the arm of the chair.

He took up the paper and glanced at it again and threw it down. [Pg 35]

One of the conditions had been that he should have no cigars. He had understood and agreed to it.

But this morning he was impatient with himself and annoyed with Dr. Carmon. These doctors had no end of theories—useless theories—that did more harm than good. He should be in no shape for an operation—if he could not keep his nerve better than this. He really needed a cigar.

He pressed the knob of the electric cord that reached to his chair and took up the paper again.

When the nurse came in, he glanced up and motioned courteously to the table.

"You may take it away, please."

She looked at the untouched food and lifted the tray without comment. At the door she paused, at a word from the window.

The man had turned over his paper, and he glanced down another column as he said carelessly:

"And—ah—would you be kind enough to telephone to my house for a box of cigars. I seem to have forgotten to bring any." [Pg 36]

The nurse waited the merest fraction of a second. "I will see if they are on your order," she said quietly, and went out.

He lifted his eyes a trifle and returned to his paper.

The nurse closed the two doors of Suite A noiselessly behind her. She went down the corridor, bearing the rejected tray.

Half-way down the corridor she encountered a plump figure.

Aunt Jane's mild glance rested on the tray. "Anything the matter with it?" she asked.

"He doesn't want it," said the nurse. "He said, 'take it away.'" Her lips smiled, ever so little, as she watched the round face in its cap.

The cap strings did not exactly bristle; but there was a look of firmness in the plump chin.

"Take it back," said Aunt Jane. "Tell him it is what was ordered for him. He is to eat it—eat all of it."

She spoke back over her shoulder, half turned away. "I've got a good many things on my hands this morning. I can't be bothered with fussy folks and notions." She passed on and disappeared in the door of Room 18. [Pg 37]

The nurse, with her tray, returned to Suite A. She opened the door softly and went in.

Two minutes later, she emerged, still with her tray—and a high, clear color in her face.

Aunt Jane coming out of Room 18, caught a glimpse of her and stopped.

The nurse shook her head, the color in her cheeks mounting. "He doesn't want it." Her eyes twinkled a little in spite of the color that flooded up.

Aunt Jane reached out her hands for the tray. She gave a half-impatient click. "More bother'n they worth!" she said. "Always are in that room!"

She bore the tray before like a charger, and entered Suite A without parley.

Herman Medfield looked up and saw her, and rose instinctively.

Aunt Jane set the tray on the table and pushed the table gently toward him. "Sit down," she said.

He sat down in his chair by the window, looking up at her inquiringly.

"Everything's there," said Aunt Jane. She glanced over the tray. "You're to eat it all—all there is on the tray." [Pg 38]

The man laid down his paper and smiled at her quizzically.

"But, madam, I have no appetite," he said courteously.

Aunt Jane regarded him mildly over her spectacles. "Folks that come here don't generally have appetites," she said. "They come here to get 'em."

Something crossed in the air between them and the millionaire's eyes dropped first. He drew his chair toward the table.

A half smile hovered on Aunt Jane's lips. She took up the coffee-pot and reached to the sugar. "How many lumps?" she asked pleasantly.

"Two, please," responded Herman Medfield.

She placed them in the cup and poured in cream and filled the cup with coffee. "Looks like good coffee, this morning," she said quietly. "You got everything you want?"

"I think so, yes." He looked at the tray with a little more interest and pecked at an egg.

Aunt Jane nodded shrewdly and kindly and went out. [Pg 39]

It was only after she had gone that Herman Medfield remembered he had not spoken of the cigars. On the whole, he decided to wait until to-morrow for his cigar.

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## VIII

[Pg 40]

In Room 5 Mrs. John Pelton lay staring at the wall, with quiet face. From a clock-tower came the sound of the striking of the hour. She counted the strokes—nine o'clock. She wished it were ten and Dr. Carmon had come.... After he came and things began—the operation was only "things," even in the background of her mind—after Dr. Carmon got there and things began, it would not be so hard, she thought. It was the waiting part that was hard.

She had had a restless night. There had seemed so many hours; and she had thought of things that she ought to have done before she left home.... She had forgotten to tell any one about Tommie's milk. He always got upset so easy! She wondered if Mrs. Colby would know. It had been good in Mrs. Colby to say she would come in and look after the children a little. But Mamie was really old enough to cook for them.... And she did hope John would be all right—and not worry about her.... He would be at work at ten—when "things" were going on. That was good!... Mrs. John Pelton knew that it was work that would carry John over the hard place—work that would take every nerve and thought for itself. John was a puddler and they were to "run" at ten o'clock—or about ten. He would have his hands full—enough to think about and not worry—till things were over.... He would come, after work hours, to see how she had got through.

[Pg 41]

Then she had fallen asleep and dreamed she was slipping down a steep place—down, down, and couldn't stop—and some one had caught her arm.... And it was the nurse, waking her gently for something. And then she had dozed a little and wakened and wondered about the children again....

And no one had brought her any breakfast—not even a cup of coffee. "Nothing to eat this morning," the nurse had said, smiling, when she had plucked up courage to ask for something. The nurse was a nice girl—a good girl, Mrs. Pelton thought—but hardly older than Mamie, it seemed.

That older woman was so good yesterday! Aunt Jane's look and cap came floating hazily to her; and she slipped a hand under her cheek and fell asleep, thinking of it. [Pg 42]

The thin face on the pillow, with the hair drawn tightly back and braided in its two small braids, had somehow a heroic look. There were lines of suffering on the forehead, but the mouth had a touch of something like courage, even in its sleep—as if it would smile, when the next hard thing was over.

Aunt Jane, who had come in silently and stood looking down at it, called it "the woman look."

"They always have it," she sometimes said—"the real ones have it—kind of as if they *knew* things would come better—if just they could hold on—not give up, or make a fuss or anything—just hold

on!"

The woman opened her eyes and smiled faintly. "I didn't know as you came to see us—in the rooms," she said.

Aunt Jane nodded. "Yes, I'm 'most everywhere."

She seated herself comfortably and looked about the room. "You've got a good day for your operation," she said. "It's a good, sunny day." [Pg 43]

The woman's startled eyes sought her face. She had been living so alone in the hours of the night, that it seemed strange to her that any one should speak out loud of—"the operation."

Her lips half opened, to speak, and closed again.

Aunt Jane's glance rested on them and she smiled. "Dreading it?" she asked.

The lips moistened themselves and smiled back. "A little," said the woman.

Aunt Jane's face grew kinder and rounder and beamed on her; and the woman's eyes rested on it.

"You never had one, did you?" said Aunt Jane.

The woman shook her head.

"I thought likely not. Folks don't generally dread things that they've had—not so much as they do those they don't know anything about.... You won't dread it next time!" She said the words with a slow, encouraging smile.

The woman's face lighted. "I hope there won't be any next time," she replied softly.

"More than likely not. Dr. Carmon does his work pretty thorough." Aunt Jane made a little gesture of approval. "He does the best he knows how.... You won't mind it a bit, I guess—not half so much as you mind thinking about minding it." [Pg 44]

"Do they carry me out?" asked the woman quickly. All the troubled lines of her face relaxed as she asked the question.

It was the look Aunt Jane had been waiting for. The blessedness of talking out was a therapeutic discovery all Aunt Jane's own.

Long before scientists had written of the value of spoken expression as a curative method—long before "mental therapy" was fashionable—Aunt Jane had come to know that "a good talk does folks a lot of good."

"Let them kind of spit it out," she said, "get it off the end of their tongues 'most any way.... It seems to do them a world of good—and it don't ever hurt me— Seems to kind of slide off me."

She watched the light break in on the tense look, with a little smile, and bent toward the bed.

"No, you don't have to be carried—not unless you want to. I guess you're pretty good and strong; and you've got good courage. I can see that." [Pg 45]

"I'd rather walk," said the woman quickly.

"Yes, I know." Aunt Jane nodded. "I'll go with you—when the time comes. We just go down the hall here a little way—to the elevator. The operating-room's on the top floor— It's a nice, sunny, big room. And you'll have the ether in the room next to it. There's a lounge there for you to lie on and a nice comfortable chair for me."

"Shall you go with me?" It was a quick word.

"Yes, I'm going up with you. I go, a good many times, with folks that want me——"

"Yes, I want you."

The small face had grown relaxed; the eyes were clear and waiting. The unbleached nightgown, with the bit of coarse edging at neck and wrists, seemed a comely garment.

Something had taken place in Room 5, for which scientists have not yet found a name. At ten o'clock Dr. Carmon would perform his difficult operation on the frail body of Mrs. John Pelton. But the spirit that would go under the knife was the spirit of Aunt Jane, smiling and saying placidly: [Pg 46]

"There, he's just come. That's his car tooting out here. Now we're ready to go."

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## IX

[Pg 47]

The room had a sunny stillness. The sun poured in at the window on the whiteness and on the figure lying on the couch and on the young doctor bending toward it and adjusting the ether cone with light touch, and on Aunt Jane rocking placidly in her chair by the couch.

"You won't mind it a mite," said Aunt Jane. Her hand held the thin one in its warm clasp. "You won't mind.... Dr. Doty'll give it to you, nice. He's about the best one we've got—to give it."

The doctor smiled at the words—a boyish, whimsical smile at flattery. He adjusted the cone a little. "Breathe deep," he said gently.

There was silence in the room—only a little burring sound somewhere, and the soft creak of Aunt

Jane's rockers as they moved to and fro.

The door of the operating-room stood open. Through the crack Aunt Jane could see a round, stout figure, enveloped from head to foot in its rubber apron, bending over a tray of instruments. The great arms, bare to the shoulders, the exposed neck, and round head with short bristling hair, a little bald at the top, gave a curious sense of alert power and force.

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Aunt Jane had never seen a picture of St. George and the Dragon, or of St. Michael. She had scant material for comparison. But I suspect if she had seen through the open door of the operating-room, either of these saints fastening on his greaves—whatever greaves may be—and getting ready for the dragon, he would have seemed to her a less heroic and noble and beautiful figure than the short, square man, bending over his case of instruments and selecting a particularly sharp and glittering one for use.

The young doctor leaning over the figure on the couch moved a little and lifted his head. "All right," he said quietly. He nodded toward the door of the operating-room.

A nurse appeared in the doorway.

Aunt Jane pushed back her chair; and the nurse and doctor, at either end, lifted the movable top of the couch by its handles and carried the light burden easily between them to the open door.

[Pg 49]

Aunt Jane watched till the door was shut.... Her work began and ended at the door of the operating-room.

Inside that door, Dr. Carmon was supreme. Elsewhere in the hospital Aunt Jane might treat him as a mere man; she might criticise and advise, and even rebuke the surgeon for whose use the hospital had been built and endowed. But within the operating-room he was supreme. She allowed patients to enter that door without word or comment, and she received them back from his hands with a childlike humility that went a long way—it may be—toward reconciling the surgeon to her rule elsewhere.

"Aunt Jane knows what she knows—and what she doesn't know," Dr. Carmon had been heard to say. And if she regarded him as a mere man, it is only fair to say that he, in turn, looked upon Aunt Jane as a woman; a mere woman, perhaps, but remarkably sensible—for a woman.

When the door of the operating-room closed upon her, Aunt Jane stood a minute in the sunny room, looking tranquilly about. She drew down a shade and returned the rocking-chair to its place and went quietly out.

[Pg 50]

In the corridor, nurses were coming and going with long, light boxes or tall vases and great handfuls of fragrant blossoms. The florist's wagon had just come; the corridor was filled with light and movement and the fresh scent of flowers. Aunt Jane beamed on it all and passed on.

It was one of the pleasantest hours of the day for Aunt Jane. She knew that scrubbing and sweeping and dusting were done—every inch of the hard floors clean with carbolic and soap, every patient bathed and fed, and the beds freshly made—everything in order for doctor's visits—and inspection. Through an open door, here and there as she went, she caught a glimpse of a black-coated shoulder or arm by the side of some bed. Aunt Jane had no fear of adverse criticism on her hospital or of complaint of her way of doing things.

She moved serenely on.

Then, at a door, she stopped. It was at the far end of the corridor; and through the half-curtained glass of the door she looked into a great sunny room that extended across the width of the house and opened on one side to the sky and all outdoors.

[Pg 51]

It was filled with small cots and beds and cribs.

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## X

[Pg 52]

Aunt Jane stood in the doorway a minute, smiling and looking down the long room. Presently from somewhere there came a piping cry:

"Aunt Jane's come!"

And then another cry—and another: "Aunt Jane's come! Aunt Jane's come!"

No one knew who had started the custom. But some child, some sunny morning, had broken out with it when Aunt Jane appeared. And the others had taken it up, as children will; and now it had become a happy part of the day's routine, as regular as the doctor's visit—or the night nurse's rounds.

"Aunt Jane's come—Aunt Jane's come!"

They broke off from picture-books or blocks, to look up and call out and pass the word along. Then they chanted it together.... And the newcomer in the ward, a boy lying with bandaged face and eyes half closed, turned a first curious, questioning look—to find the white-capped face smiling down at him.

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At the top of the house, at either end of the long corridor—in Dr. Carmon's operating-room and here in the Children's Ward—Aunt Jane was not the implacable personage that ruled elsewhere in the hospital.

She beamed down the ward.

A dozen hands reached out to her and she smiled to them and nodded and scolded a little and fussed and drew them all into a happy sense that this was home—and Aunt Jane a kind of new and glorified mother for little children. All the sick ones and lame ones, and the bruised ones and bandaged ones were Aunt Jane's children— It did not seem like a hospital, as one looked down the sunny room, so much as a place where children were gathered in; pinched faces lighted up—for the first time in life, perhaps—with round, shrewd, loving smiles for Aunt Jane; delicate bandaged faces looked out at her wistfully and happily; and laughing, rosy ones turned to her.

There were no unhappy ones there. "Children suffer and don't know," was Aunt Jane's comment. [Pg 54]

Sometimes as she stood among them she marvelled a little at the quiet unconscious force that ignored pain, or adjusted itself to twinges. Some child, with a look almost of impatience, would shift a bandaged leg or foot to an easier position, as it listened to the story she was telling or entered into some game of her contriving.

Sometimes it was a guessing game that was played by the whole ward at once—a kind of twenty questions, shouted at her as she came in, her hands held carefully behind her.... And, curiously, it was always some little one that guessed first; some feeble one, just beginning to take notice, that had a glimpse of Aunt Jane's broad back as she turned casually with a serene unconscious look, or moved a little and revealed the hidden thing behind her.

The whole ward was interested this morning in Jimmie Sullivan's new leg. It was a frame-leg that got in the way when he walked and tripped him up. He was a little proud of it, but more annoyed, as he came hurrying down the ward to meet her.

Aunt Jane adjusted her spectacles and looked. [Pg 55]

"Well, well!" she said.

Jimmie glanced down at it, a little proud and abashed. "It can't walk," he admitted.

"Want me to carry you?" asked Aunt Jane.

"No, sir!" He slipped a proud hand into hers and stumbled happily and awkwardly along.

Aunt Jane moved toward a bed where a child lay strapped on his back, hands and feet and head held fast, only his eyes free to turn to her with a smile.

"How's Alec?" said Aunt Jane.

"All right," replied the child. "You going to tell a story?"

"Well—maybe. I don't know as I know any new stories," she said slowly. She considered it.

"Tell an old one," said the boy. "Any old story," he added with a grim smile under the crisscross bandages of the stiff face.

"Tell about the little red hen," piped a voice from the next bed.

"No—about billy-goat," from across the room.

"Tell about the old lady that runned away," came shrilling close at hand. [Pg 56]

Aunt Jane put her hands over her ears. "I can't hear anything," she announced.

Their faces grew still and alert till she should move her hands a tiny crack and they could shout again: "Billy-goat!" "The little red hen!" "The lady that runned away!"

Jimmie Sullivan, half leaning against her, looked at them reproachfully. "She can't tell nuthin' while you make such a racket!" he said.

"She likes it!—She likes it!—*She* don't care!" They returned.

Aunt Jane looked at them and smiled. She took down her hands.

"Let me see—" She glanced from one bed to the other. "I am going to let Edna choose.... She can whisper it to me." She went to a bed across the room, Jimmie Sullivan's frame-leg clanking happily beside her, and bent to the pillow.

The girl lifted a thin arm and threw it about Aunt Jane's neck to draw her close.

Aunt Jane listened and lifted her head and smiled. "All right," she announced.

The room was so still you could hear a pin drop. A nurse passing the lower end of the ward, with a dish in her hand, paused and looked down the quiet room. Every eye was fastened expectantly on the motherly figure moving serenely about.... It crossed to the side of the room and adjusted the skylight shade and brought a big rocker and placed it in the middle of the room under the skylight and put a low chair for Jimmie Sullivan, and another beside it for the child that was limping slowly across to her.... A girl in a wheeled chair propelled herself swiftly down the ward and came to a stop as close to the big rocker as she could get. [Pg 57]

Aunt Jane glanced slowly about the ward—at the expectant faces looking at her from every bed.

"Now, the rest of you stay where you are!" she said severely.

They laughed and adjusted themselves, and then they were quiet again, watching her intently.

She sat down in the big chair and rocked a little.

"Let me see—" She sat smiling thoughtfully; the smile ran along the pillows—waiting. [Pg 58]

"Once when I was a little girl—"

The pillows nestled a little and sighed happily and settled down; and Aunt Jane's voice went on with the tale and the nurse at the end of the ward passed out with her dish. The door swung to behind her.

The great sunny room was left to happiness and to Aunt Jane and to the children and: "Once when I was a little girl."

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## XI

[Pg 59]

In Suite A, Herman Medfield had eaten the last of his breakfast. It might almost be said that, sitting in the window with the paper spread before him and the sun shining in, he had enjoyed his breakfast.... It was a long time since Herman Medfield had eaten a complete breakfast served in the ordinary way. The road to the House of Mercy was strewn with a vast wreckage of fads and hopes and breakfast foods. There were long vegetarian streaks that excluded milk and eggs; and gusts of Fletcherizing—chewing wind hopefully and patiently; and there were wide negative deserts—forbidden fruits—no starches-and-sweets together, no sweets-and-acids, no potato-and-meat, no proteids-and-carbons. A long, weary, hopeless watching and coaxing of gastric juices, and infinite patience and cunning toward the vagaries of indigestion. He had "rolled the stomach gently," and he had lain with "a pillow under his back and head down." He had become a finical, peripatetic amphitheatre of constant, cautious experiment and investigation. And it had brought him at last to Suite A and the sunny window.

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And now in a breath, it seemed, in the Berkeley House of Mercy Aunt Jane's touch had broken the habit of years. He felt like a very small boy, who has been taken up and set down gently in his chair—and told to eat his breakfast and keep still.

He had thrown caution to the winds and had eaten like a hungry human being. He had drunk great swallows of the delicious brown coffee—with cream and sugar in it—without a thought of diluted gastric juice, or secretions, or fads, or fermentations.... He felt almost well as he ate the last of his toast and read his paper and basked in the sunny quiet. And behind it all was a sense of security and protection; no telephone could get at him, no clicking of the tape could reach his ear and set his tired brain to work.

So he had finished his breakfast and read his paper and had been almost happy.

But now he had read the paper through three times, gleaning last scanty bits of news; he had opened the elaborate writing-desk across the room and investigated the neat assortment of pens and blotters and paper and ink—each sheet with its neatly stamped heading of the House of Mercy; and he was feeling a little bored.

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He stood looking down at the desk and fingering the keys in his pocket. Then he went over and stood by the window and looked out, and turned away and paced the room once or twice, fingering absently at the keys in his pocket. He wondered whether perhaps his breakfast had not been a little heavy, after all—two eggs for a man who had been dieting!

And all the time his restless fingers—whether thrust deep in the pockets of his black velvet coat, or twisting a little as he walked, or jingling the keys—were rolling imaginary cigarettes and reaching toward a swiftly struck match—and the fragrant in-drawn breath of smoke.

It had not occurred to him when Dr. Carmon had told him that he would probably have to undergo an operation and that he must have him at the House of Mercy for a few days to watch the case—it had not occurred to Herman Medfield that he would be a prisoner in the House of Mercy.

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He stepped impatiently to the window and looked out again and shrugged his shoulders.... It was all very well to have an operation—very likely he did need something of the sort.... But this coming beforehand and being shut up by himself—while his machinery was going, full tilt—all this fuss was ridiculous!... Down in the yard a maid was hanging out clothes; he watched her strong arms lift the wet sheets and swing them to the line; the wind blew her hair a little.... It was more than likely it was largely for effect—this having him come beforehand and shutting him up like a prisoner in a cell, and taking away his tobacco—it was more than likely that it was all for effect. Herman Medfield knew most things that could be known about advertising and about the value of advertising methods.... It might very well be a good card for the hospital and for Dr. Carmon to have him there, and to get the advertising that would come from having it known. The reporters were sure to get hold of it.... It flitted across his mind that there might be an interview.... It was years since Herman Medfield had granted an interview. But even a reporter would relieve the monotony a little. He glanced at his watch and felt a little cheered at the thought of the reporter.

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Then something occurred to him. He wondered whether the efficient Person, who seemed to have charge of the Berkeley House of Mercy, would *allow* him to see a reporter!... He had eaten his breakfast—and, on the whole, he felt better for it—the eggs seemed to be taking care of themselves after all.... He foresaw that for the next three or four weeks he was not going to do what he chose, but what the Person thought best for him. Then his sense of humor came to the rescue. He recalled the cap strings—and smiled.

It would not be such bad sport, matching one's wits against the cap strings.... But there was still the morning to get through!

He wandered across and stopped again by the elaborate writing-desk and looked at it. He might write to some one. He sat down and drew a sheet of paper toward him and looked at the neatly cut inscription across the top—"The Berkeley House of Mercy"—his prison cell, he thought grimly. His fingers reached out for a half-smoked cigar—and drew back and smoothed the paper thoughtfully and took up the pen and dipped it in the ink and waited.

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He would write to Julian. He had not written to Julian in his own handwriting—not since the boy was a pupil at Exeter—that was ten years ago.... He was his own secretary those days.

He wrote: "My dear Julian." Then he waited. He was seeing Julian as he used to look when he was at Exeter; he had been such a fresh, clear-faced boy; he had been proud of him—and Julian's mother.... The millionaire was living over those first days of life together—the time when Julian was born—he had not thought of it for years—all her pretty ways in the house—and the garden he had made for her, and her coming to meet him when he came from the office at night.... And then the days when she had seemed to fade like a flower and they had carried her out of the house—and there had been no one but the boy to come running to meet him when he came home— But the boy had hurt him and he had sent him away ... and the loneliness since.... The empty house at night, and the great void spaces of life that opened on every side. He had thrown gold into them—and he had reached out for more gold—great heaped-up masses of gold and bonds and thrifty investments; and the gold had mounted higher every year—till it seemed to shut him off from every one.... No one came to him now except for money—or about money. Even Julian hardly wrote except to ask for a check or to acknowledge one. And he only knew the boy's address through his bankers.... It was somewhere on the Riviera, the last time. He dipped the pen again in the ink.

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There was a knock at the door and he turned. It was Miss Canfield, the nurse who had been assigned him. She carried a long, light box. She held it out.

"Some flowers for you."

He reached up his hand, half pleased. He had not expected any one would send flowers to him.

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She undid the wrapper and handed him the box.... On the top lay a card edged in black. He put on his eye-glasses and took it up.

"Mrs. Cawein—"

His face fell a little. She was his partner's wife—his late partner's widow, that is—she had a right to send flowers to him, of course—if she chose.

He set the box down on the desk and took up his pen. The nurse brought a large vase and placed it beside him and arranged the flowers. They were huge yellow roses, with long stems and crisp leaves—a kind of salmon-pink yellow. Herman Medfield glanced at them grudgingly. It seemed to him they were a singularly displeasing color. He had not supposed there were any roses of that shade of yellow! He grew roses himself, and he knew something about them. He shrugged his shoulder a little toward them and took up the pen.

"Put them somewhere else," he said irritably.

A little clear color flushed up in her face. "Would you like them on the table?" she asked.

[Pg 67]

"Yes—please."

She removed the vase and placed it on the table across the room and went out.

He stared at the heading on the paper: "My dear Julian." After all, what was there he could say to the boy? He could tell him he was in a hospital. But that might seem weak—as if he wanted sympathy—because he was down.... Herman Medfield never asked for sympathy; his heart was especially hard toward men who did. They were always the devils who were down and out—that asked for sympathy—and hoped to get some of his money to waste—as they had wasted their own. He would give hundreds to a man who stood up to him—when he would not give a dollar to the one that whined.

He dipped the pen again and wrote rapidly—a mere note, telling the boy that he was away from home for a while—under the doctor's orders, nothing serious, nothing to worry any one; he should be around again in a few days. He signed it grimly and hunted up the banker's address and directed and sealed it.... That was done! He pushed the letter from him. He was tired. He wanted a cigar.

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There was a quick knock at the door. Dr. Carmon had finished his operation and made his round of visits in the hospital and he was doing Suite A.

Herman Medfield greeted him with relief. "Come in," he said. "Come in and sit down.... I am sorry I cannot offer you a cigar," he added with a little humorous sigh.

The doctor sat down. "Hard work, is it?"

He drew his chair in front of Herman Medfield, leaning forward a little, with his elbows on his knees.

"Find it hard, do you?" he asked pleasantly.

"I've known easier things," replied Herman Medfield dryly.

The doctor regarded him without comment. He reached out a hand to his pulse and took out his watch and sat with bent head a minute. Then he slipped the watch back into his pocket and stood up.

"I'd like to put you on that couch a few minutes," he said. "That's right—over there." He rolled up the window-shades and moved the couch nearer to the window. Herman Medfield lay down, half grudgingly.

"Now, if you will relax and breathe easily—" The doctor's face had grown absorbed. He seemed not to see Herman Medfield, but something that might have been an abstraction—the essence, or spirit, of Medfield. And while he gazed at this Medfield abstraction, Dr. Carmon's hands were busy. They thumped the liver and sounded the heart and pounded the back of Herman Medfield with quick, absorbed movements that left no depth unsounded.

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"Um-m!" he said at last.

And then—"Ah!"

He straightened his back and beamed down on Herman Medfield from behind the spectacles.

"All right—am I?" asked Medfield.

"You'll be all right—in three or four days," responded Dr. Carmon, with his round, successful diagnosis smile.

"You won't have to operate?" Medfield's face lighted.

"Operate—? Oh—! Yes—I shall operate." The doctor spoke absently. It was the tone of one to whom it could never occur not to operate. "I shall operate. It's fine!"

"Better than you thought?" asked Medfield hopefully.

The doctor's absent-minded gaze broke. He smiled. "Worse! Much worse than I thought. You could not live three months—as you are."

[Pg 71]

Herman Medfield sat up.

Dr. Carmon surveyed him proudly. "And in three months you'll be a new man—made over—top to toe!"

"When do you operate?" asked Medfield a little dryly.

"Um—this is Wednesday? Yes—about Friday, then." He got up. "There is something I want you to do meantime." He rang for the nurse and called for a roll of bandage.

When she brought it, he asked her to send Aunt Jane to Suite A.

"Do you know where she is?" he asked.

"In the Children's Ward, I think," said Miss Canfield.

"Very well. Ask her to come. I want her to have special charge of this brace for me."

He turned back to the window. "Now, if I may have you here. I want to take measurements, please."

The man stood straight as a tailor's dummy while the surgeon's hands flitted over and around him. The tall figure outlined against the window had a singular grace and charm; and the short, square one moving jerkily around it, taking measurements and jotting down figures had an added absurdity from the contrast.... Now, Dr. Carmon was on his hands and knees on the floor; and now, stretching tiptoe to pass a tape-measure over the tall, thin shoulders of the aristocratic figure.

[Pg 72]

It was thus that Aunt Jane saw the two men as she opened the door. She stood for a moment in the doorway. Then she closed the door and came in.

But between the opening of the door and the closing it, she had seen for the first time Dr. Carmon as he really was—a homely and grotesque and brusque little man. It added, perhaps, a touch of severity to the expression of the round face and its crisp cap strings.

He looked up quickly from his thumb that marked a place on the tape-measure, and glanced from one to the other.

"You know Mr. Medfield?" he said.

"I met Mr. Medfield when he came—yesterday," said Aunt Jane safely.

"Yes, we have become acquainted," rejoined Herman Medfield, with a little polite gesture of the hand.

[Pg 73]

Aunt Jane's face was non-committal.

Dr. Carmon turned to it. "I want a brace made—for temporary use. Here are the measurements. Be sure to give it plenty of room here—and here." He drew a few lines and jotted down the figures and handed the paper to her.



She received it in silence.

The millionaire stood at his ease, smiling at her. He did not look like a man condemned to die in three months. His eye was keen and there was a little line of firmness under the smile of his lips.

"I want to see my lawyer," he said. "I will go to my office in the morning. There are things to arrange."

Dr. Carmon paused abruptly. "I thought you attended to all that before you came." His tone was brusque. "I told you—"

"I did not understand," said the millionaire quietly. "I did not think you knew." He looked at him.

"Well—of course—if you have to—" Dr. Carmon's gaze was reluctant and his brow puckered itself.... Standing beside the millionaire and looking up at him with the puckered forehead, he may have seemed an awkward and fussy and ineffectual little man. [Pg 74]

"He can't go!" It was Aunt Jane's voice, prompt and decisive—and the two men turned and looked at her.

"He can't go," she repeated calmly. "He's got to have this on." She motioned to the paper she held in her hand. "He's got to have it on right away and go to bed."

"But—" said Herman Medfield.

"You can't go to bed and go to an office, too," replied Aunt Jane firmly.

The millionaire looked at her. His glance travelled to Dr. Carmon's face. There was the merest hint of a twinkle behind the round professional glasses, and Herman Medfield regarded it.

"Do I understand that this is *your* order?" he asked politely.

"It's better for you—not—to wait," admitted Dr. Carmon slowly.

"You mean I'm taking chances?"

"Yes."

The millionaire's glance fell. "Very well. I shall do as you say, of course." He moved a little away and sat down. [Pg 75]

Aunt Jane's glance followed him—the look in it changed subtly. Something that had been in it up in the Children's Ward came back.

"You can have your lawyer here," she said almost kindly. "We've got plenty of pens and paper and ink. And you can tell him all you want to without going to any office, I guess. Now I'll go get this made for you; and you be ready to have it on when I come back."

She opened the door and went out.

The two men looked at each other like two boys—and smiled. Both boys had had mothers. Herman Medfield's mother had worn a cap, an aristocratic affair of ribbons and lace that had little relation to the clear-starched whiteness of Aunt Jane's muslin strings; Dr. Carmon's mother had never known what it was to cover her smooth-parted hair under a cap—she had been a hard-working woman and far removed from Mrs. Oliver Medfield's way of life. But the two men, as they watched Aunt Jane disappear, had a sudden common sense of motherly protection and wisdom; and they smiled across to each other in almost shamefaced understanding. [Pg 76]

"It really *is* better not to wait—" said the doctor, half apologetically: "It *might* be all right. But we're taking chances enough as it is—without that."

The professional look had come back to his face. He was looking absently before him at something unseen.

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### XIII

[Pg 77]

It was the sixth day, and Edith Dalton was doing well—the wound was doing well. As for the woman, she lay with indifferent eyes looking at the white wall of her room and waiting recovery. The only time that the look in the eyes changed was when Aunt Jane appeared in the doorway for a moment, or sat by her bed. Then it would deepen to a question and flicker toward hope.

"Doing well?" Aunt Jane would say. "They give you good things to eat, don't they?"

The woman smiled faintly. "Yes."

"That's right. Eat and sleep. And hope don't hurt—a little of it."

"Aunt Jane?" The voice had a sharp note. The invalid was resting against the pillows that had been raised on the bed.

"Yes?" Aunt Jane turned back.

"Hasn't he been to see me—once—my husband?" There was a shamed, half-imperious note in the words. [Pg 78]

Aunt Jane sat down comfortably by the bed and looked at her. Then she shook her head chidingly.... "I've never seen a sick person yet that wasn't unreasonable," she said.

The woman's face relaxed. "I know," she said apologetically, "but when one is sick the days are long."

"You told me, that was four-five days ago," said Aunt Jane, "that you didn't want to see him or hear his name mentioned. At least, that's what I understood."

The woman was not looking at her.

"So when he's been here, time and again—three times a day, some days—I've told him you couldn't see anybody—not even your husband.... I thought that was what you wanted."

"Yes," said the woman faintly.

Aunt Jane nodded. "And now you're acting hurt and keeping yourself from getting well."

The woman flushed a little. "I don't think I am."

"Yes, you are," said Aunt Jane comfortably. "Of course it don't make any real difference. You'll get well sometime.... Only it seems foolish. Well, I must be going on my rounds. Keep up good courage." She stood up and moved toward the door. [Pg 79]

"Aunt Jane."

"Yes."

"You haven't time to stop a few minutes?"

"Why, yes. I've got plenty of time, if you want me. There's two operations this morning, but everything's ready."

"Two operations?" The woman's lips grew white.

"One's a man with five children. Got to lose his leg.... His wife's plucky. She's gone right to work earning money. But she's coming this morning to be with him for the operation. She says he'll stand it better. I guess she's right. They seem pretty close together.... That's the only thing I really envy in this world," said Aunt Jane slowly, ... "having a husband that loves you and cares." She sat quietly watching the locust leaves outside the window. They shimmered in the light.

The woman raised a hand. "You don't understand," she said. [Pg 80]

"Like enough not," said Aunt Jane. "It's hard work understanding other folks' feelings. I don't more'n half understand mine.... I suppose you were kind of disappointed in him...?"

"I don't know—" The words faltered.

"They be, mostly."

"Is every one unhappily married?" the voice flashed at her.

"Well, I didn't say just that. But most of 'em find it different from what they expected—men being men.... Women are women, too. I'll have to go now. It's time for the man, and she'll be waiting in the parlor. I told her to wait there." She rose slowly. "You don't want to see him, if he should happen to come to-day?"

"No." The lips trembled a little and closed over the word.

"All right," said Aunt Jane soothingly. "Take plenty of time to get well. He can wait. He's a good kind to wait, I can see that." She had drifted out.

The woman's eyes followed her eagerly with a question in them. She put up her hands to cover them. "Yes," she said softly, "he can wait." [Pg 81]

As Aunt Jane opened the waiting-room door the man sprang to his feet. He was radiant with a look of courage, and his eyes glowed as he came toward her.

She shook her head, smiling a little. Then she turned to a young woman waiting by the door. She was strong and fresh and a look of purpose gleamed in her face. Aunt Jane looked at her approvingly. "Go down to Room 20, Mrs. Patton, on the left-hand side. I've told Dr. Carmon you're to be there. It's all right."

As the young woman left the room she turned to him again.

"Won't she see me?" he asked.

"Have patience three or four days more," she said slowly. "She'll be wanting to see you before long now."

"How do you know?" He reached out a hand.

"I don't know, but I seem to feel it in my bones. She's most well.... She's well all through."

And she left him standing there, a glad light in his eyes, while she went down the corridor to the man waiting in Room 20. [Pg 82]

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## XIV

[Pg 83]

In Herman Medfield's room, the night-light was carefully shaded. Through the dimness one guessed rather than saw the figure lying straight on the high bed, motionless under the blanket, and the night nurse standing beside it. The nurse bent a little toward the figure and listened.

Through the half-opened window a breeze came in, swaying the curtains, and the night-light cast reaching, moving shadows across the ceiling and along the bed.

The figure on the bed stirred a little and moaned, and the nurse spoke softly. There was no response—only an inarticulate sigh, and quickened breath for a moment, and rigid silence again. The nurse touched the clothes gently, straightening them, and returned to her chair by the table. The light fell on her face, the fresh face with clear features and half-reddish hair gathered up under its white cap. She sat bending forward, her hands relaxed in her lap. The breeze from the window came in and mixed with the shadows and crept through the room toward the bed.

[Pg 84]

A thoroughly successful operation, Dr. Carmon had said. But he had been in twice since to look at the motionless figure, and the nurse sitting by the table had careful instructions to call him at any moment.... The operation had been a success, but who knew what subtle forces had been attacked, perhaps overthrown, in those sharp, fierce minutes in the operating-room while the knife was at work? Dr. Carmon knew that he could cut clean and quick and sure; he knew that he could follow a nerve almost as a dog follows a scent, without fear or flinching; but it was something within the nerves, the unseen, unguessed something—that was life itself—that might undo his work and leave him helpless.... He could only look at the silent figure and repeat again his careful instructions and go away and leave it to the power that no man understands, and no man can help or hinder.

The curtains moved in the breeze; and the nurse rose now and then as the night wore on and went to the bed and waited a minute and returned to her chair. Then some movement in the room—something unseen, drew her and she went again to the bed. She moved the light so that it fell, half-shaded, on the pillow, and bent forward and looked. Her hand sought the wrist under the blanket and held it a minute and she lifted her face and turned the light quickly away.

[Pg 85]

She was moving toward the door—but it had swung softly back into the shadowy room, and Aunt Jane was nodding to her and smiling—with a subdued half-gesture toward the bed.

"I'll take him now," she said in her low voice.

"Shall I call Dr. Carmon?"

"Not yet." She went on toward the bed and the nurse passed out.

In the dimness of the room, nothing had happened. The curtains swayed a little in the breeze—the motionless figure on the bed lay rigid as before under its blanket—and the shadows crept toward it and back. But in the turning of a minute, forces had ranged themselves in the quiet room.

Aunt Jane turned off the light and pushed back the curtains from the window and brought a chair to the side of the bed, and sat down quietly with the forces. She had moved with the certainty of one who sees what is to be done. She knew that presently there would steal out from the shadows something that has neither name nor shape.

[Pg 86]

She slipped her hand along inside the blanket and found the lifeless one and rubbed it a little and touched the wrist with firm, quick fingers and clasped the hand close.

Then she sat with her head bent, as motionless as the figure beside her. The moments came and went. Outside, the clock-tower boomed the hour softly, and then the half-hour; and somewhere in the distance a rooster crowed—a shrill, clear call, like light.... Something ran through the figure on the bed—the man stirred a little. Half-way through the lifeless fingers something crept toward warmth, and lay chill—and went slowly back and came again—and Aunt Jane's hand closed on it, clean and soft.... The man stirred and opened his eyes and stared vaguely out.

The shadows in the room were clear gray—the east light had touched them. The eyes looked out on the light, unseeing, and fell shut. A half sigh fluttered to the parched lips and escaped and the man turned his head. Aunt Jane bent forward, waiting. The eyes opened and saw her and closed, and an even breath came through the lips. Then a deep groan broke from them and Aunt Jane smiled.... It was a quiet, brooding smile like the light of the morning that was flooding in through the room.... The man groaned again.

[Pg 87]

Aunt Jane nodded happily and got up. She opened the windows wide and let in the freshness and stood for a moment breathing it in. Then she went back to the bed.

The man's eyes regarded her dully.

"You feeling all right now?" she said cheerfully, bending over him.

He turned his head with a groan and Aunt Jane touched the bell.

It was the nurse with the reddish hair who responded, fresh from her nap.

"How is he?" she asked. She looked toward the drawn face on the pillow.

"He's all right," said Aunt Jane. "He's just begun to suffer. He'll get along all right now."

[Pg 88]

"You don't think we need to send for Dr. Carmon?" she asked doubtfully.

"No, we don't need Dr. Carmon," replied Aunt Jane. "He did *his* work yesterday. It's our turn now — It's Mr. Medfield's turn." She nodded toward the bed and smiled and went out.

Through the open door of Room 5, Aunt Jane heard voices and stopped to listen. Then she went in.

"This is my husband," said the little woman on the bed. "He says they're getting along real well."

The man by the bed rose awkwardly, turning his stiff hat in his hands. He wore a high collar with sharp points turning back in front and a bright-blue necktie. A large stick pin was thrust through the tie, and his hair was combed carefully in a wide, flat curl on his forehead. He stood with his feet close together, and bowed to Aunt Jane over the hat.

She held out her hand. "How do you do, Mr. Pelton?— Your wife is getting along first-rate!" She nodded toward the bed.

The little woman's face flushed with clear color. "The doctor says I can go in ten days!" she announced.

Aunt Jane considered it. "Well, you can go as soon as you can go—it may be ten days and it may be eleven. I wouldn't begin to say just how many days 'tis—if I was you. We mean to make you comfortable as long as you stay here." She looked at her benignly over her glasses. "You're comfortable, aren't you?" [Pg 90]

"Oh, I'm comfortable!" said the woman. "Everybody's real good to me, John." She turned to him. "Tommie don't miss me, does he?" It was wistful.

John tugged at something in his pocket. "He kind of misses you, I guess. But we're getting along *fine!*... I got these for you—so's you could see." He put a fat envelope in her fingers and she received it doubtingly. She held it up and looked at it.

"I don't know where they put my spectacles—I can't see very well."

"You don't need to see—not for them. Here—I'll show you." He took the envelope proudly and stiffly and drew out a card and held it toward her. "There you be!"

She took it in questioning fingers.

"Why, it's Mamie!"

She turned her face to Aunt Jane and held up the card to her: "That's my oldest girl—that's Mamie!" Her voice had a happy tone—with quick tears somewhere in it. [Pg 91]

The man smiled broadly. "I've got another one!" He took it from the envelope and extended it. "And here's two more!" He held the group of pictures spread before him like a fan in his big hand and gazed at them.

"Why, John Pelton! You don't mean you had 'em all done!"

"The whole family," he said proudly.

"John—*Pelton!* Here—let *me* see!"

She took the pictures from him, one by one, and her fingers trembled with them. "That's Tommie! He's got on the little sack Aunt Minnie made for him!"

"He looks nice—don't he?" She held it toward Aunt Jane.

"And that's Wesley. His tie don't set quite straight." Regret and pride mingled over the tie and smiled at it fondly. "And that's Lulie! It's the whole family!"

"Well, I *am pleased!*"

She lay back and looked at them, proud and content, and Aunt Jane praised the children. [Pg 92]

"I've got another one here," said the man. He looked half shamefaced as he drew it out.

Aunt Jane took it and smiled, and glanced from the picture to his face.

"Yes, it's good— Looks like you," she said.

The woman raised a curious hand to it—

"Why—John!"

He stood smiling almost bashfully.

"I thought you'd better have the whole family while you were about it," he said.

She gathered her family into eager hands. "I'd rather have them than anything in the world!" she said softly.

"They didn't cost much," he volunteered. "Twenty cents apiece—the kind you send on post-cards, you know."

"I don't care what they cost!" said the little woman. "It's worth it!... The doctor says I'm going to be real well, John, when I get up."

She was looking at the baby, in his knitted sack. "But there won't be any more babies," she said half wistfully.

John blew his nose violently and looked out of the window. [Pg 93]

"I'd better be going," he announced.

"Yes—time for you to go," said Aunt Jane. She moved with him toward the door.

In the corridor he turned to her. "Tickled most to death, wa'n't she?—I was kind o' 'fraid she'd

think it was foolish."

"If more men were foolish, the world would get along a good deal better," said Aunt Jane cryptically.

She beamed on him. "You better not come again for four-five days now, Mr. Pelton. She'd ought to keep quiet and not think about what the children are doing and what's going on.

"She can think about her pictures for a while," she added kindly as his face fell. "There's times when picture children help more than real ones—more handy for sick folks sometimes."

"I guess that's so," said the man. "I don't know as I ever saw her look so pleased—not since before we were married," he added thoughtfully.

Aunt Jane watched him march happily down the corridor. Then she turned back to the room.

[Pg 94]

The woman had spread the children in a little row along the ridge of the blanket, and was looking at them with happy eyes. She turned her gaze to Aunt Jane as she came in.

"Wa'n't that just like a man!" she said deprecatingly.

"Just like a man," assented Aunt Jane. "One of them senseless things that comes out all right!"

She sat down comfortably by the bed. "Sometimes I think men don't know any more'n big grampuses—they just go blundering along!" She looked benevolently at the row of faces on the blanket.

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## XVI

[Pg 95]

Half-way down the corridor Aunt Jane encountered Miss Canfield.

The nurse stopped her with a word. "Mr. Medfield keeps asking for you." She raised her chin a little as she spoke.

Aunt Jane regarded it mildly.

"Anything the matter with him?" she asked.

Miss Canfield hesitated. "He's irritable," she said safely.

Aunt Jane nodded. "That's good for him— That won't hurt any! He's got his Suite and he's got the best 'special' in the house on his case."

Miss Canfield's face softened subtly.

"You tell him I'm busy," said Aunt Jane. "Tell him I'll come by and by, when I get around to it— There's Miss Manners with a baby! I was just looking for a baby!" She hurried off.

Miss Canfield watched, with amused face, while Aunt Jane gathered the baby into her ample arms and disappeared in Room 15. Then she turned back to report to Herman Medfield in Suite A that Aunt Jane would come when she was not so busy.

[Pg 96]

Aunt Jane gazed shrewdly over the little bundle of blankets in her arms at Edith Dalton, sitting propped against her pillows and scowling a little discontentedly.

Aunt Jane sat down and undid the blanket. "They're such cute little things," she said. "It don't seem as if there'd ever be enough of *him* to make a man of, does it!" She held up the coming man in his long white gown.

Edith Dalton glanced indifferently—and glanced away.

The baby, out of his blue eyes, gazed at something unseen.

"I always do wonder what they're looking at and what they're thinking about!" said Aunt Jane. She had gathered the baby comfortably up against the curve of her breast and was rocking gently back and forth.

"I don't suppose they think about anything," said Edith Dalton with a look of unconcern.

"I used to think maybe that was so," said Aunt Jane. "But since I've had so many of 'em——"

[Pg 97]

"How many have you had?" asked the other quickly.

"Of my own—you mean?" Aunt Jane paused. "I never had but one of my own," she said regretfully. "But here—I've had three hundred and sixty-nine."

Edith Dalton smiled a faint smile.

Aunt Jane watched it and rocked.

"It's different when you've a good many," she said placidly. "You begin to see what they mean— just plain baby! Not because it's *your* baby, you know—but what they're like and what they mean."

"They don't mean much of anything, do they—except to cry?" The indifferent look held itself, but something had stirred in it.

"Yes, they cry!" Aunt Jane was silent.... "They cry, good and hard sometimes.... And that means something, too. Folks don't let 'em cry half enough, *I* think! I don't know what it means—their

crying so," she admitted. "But it sounds as if it meant something—something more than just tummy-ache.... And their smiling's like that, too. It isn't just smiling at something you do to them, or something you say. It's more as if they were smiling at something inside—kind of as if the whole world was a joke to 'em, and being alive was a kind of beautiful joke—if we could see how 'tis." She was looking down at the bundle in her arms and smiling to it.

[Pg 98]

Edith Dalton eyed it curiously.

Aunt Jane shook her head reproachfully at the baby, still smiling a little. She looked significantly at Edith Dalton. "He's trying to get his thumb in," she said. "They won't let him do that in there." She nodded toward the other wing.

"He kind of knows, I reckon. He knows his Aunt Jane will let him do it—if he can." She watched him happily.

"There! he's done it!"

The woman glanced at the baby indifferently and then at Aunt Jane's face, and the softness crept out a little.

"You think a great deal of babies and children, don't you?" She said it almost jealously.

"Yes, I love 'em," said Aunt Jane. She rocked happily. "You didn't ever have any children, did you?"

[Pg 99]

"No."

Aunt Jane's face made no comment. She rocked a minute. "I reckon women always wants children.... Every woman wants 'em—even when she doesn't know.... She wants 'em—way in back somewhere; she kind o' misses 'em."

She rocked again—slowly.

"I only had that one baby myself—and he died. But I've always been thankful I had him—even if he died.... That was a good many years ago. But even now, every once in a while, I'll dream I'm holding him in my arms; and then I'll wake up—and I'm not holding anything.... When I wake up like that, when I've been dreaming, I generally throw on my wrapper and run down to the Mother's Ward and wander around a spell, tucking 'em in and seeing that everybody's comfortable. Then I can generally go back and go to sleep all right."

Her face was beautiful and gentle as she talked, and Edith Dalton watched it wistfully. She had relaxed a little, and rested back against the pillow.

[Pg 100]

"You don't want children unless you have a home for them," she said half rebelliously.

"That's so. Children do need a home! I guess that's what homes are for—little children playing round in 'em."

The two women were silent and the room grew darker. Aunt Jane watched the face on her arm.

"He's going to sleep," she said. "I'll have to take him back to his mammy."

She got up quietly and moved toward the door, jogging her arms as she went. At the door she paused and looked back, over the sleeping child, to the woman on the pillows and smiled to her—as if they knew something together.

Then she went out. And Edith Dalton lay staring at the wall. Slowly her eyes filled with tears that sobbed and ran down her face. She covered them with her hands and sobbed again and nestled to the pillows and cried happily—as if her heart were breaking in her.

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## XVII

[Pg 101]

"Mr. Medfield is asking for you again," said Miss Canfield.

Aunt Jane, coming out of the Children's Ward, stopped and looked at the nurse and smiled. "I suppose he's fussing and tewing a good deal?" she asked.

"He is," admitted Miss Canfield.

"Well, I'll be in by and by. You can tell him I'm coming."

She went leisurely on. When she had made the rounds of the top floor and had descended to the office and entered a few items in her day-book and given directions for linen and had a conference with the cook, she turned toward Suite A.

She knocked on the outer door, and bent her head a little to listen—and as she listened she had a sudden sense of the room on the other side of the door—she saw it lying in the darkness, and she heard the rooster's clear, shrill call through the window, and saw the straight form on the bed. It all came before her and vanished as she put her hand on the door and knocked.

[Pg 102]

"Come in!" The voice was sharp and a little imperious.

Aunt Jane opened the door.

A burst of light and color greeted her. The shades were rolled to the tops of the windows. And there were flowers everywhere.... Roses on the table, a great bunch of carnations on the desk,

violets on the stand at the head of Herman Medfield's bed, foxgloves and snapdragons filling the window-sill and spilling over into the room. It was a riot of color; and in the midst of it, propped on his pillows on the high white bed, the millionaire looked out with a scowl.

He wore an embroidered Chinese shoulder coat of blue and gold; and his hair, carefully combed, stood up a little on his forehead. The Vandyke beard was clipped to a point.

"You look pretty as a picture," said Aunt Jane cheerfully.

The scowl deepened a little—then it broke. "Will you sit down?" said Medfield politely.

Aunt Jane drew up a chair.

He watched her descend into it and his brow cleared. "I have been wanting to see you."

[Pg 103]

Aunt Jane nodded. "I've been meaning to come. There's a good many things to do in a hospital." The chair adjusted itself—"Was it anything in particular you wanted to ask me about?"

The millionaire's eyes had been resting on the quiet face. They turned away, a little startled. "Why—um—yes! I was thinking—I was thinking—" His eyes fell on the roses and he swept a hand toward them. "These flowers—all of them!" he said.

Aunt Jane turned a little in her chair and beamed. "They look nice, don't they?"

"They're well enough," said Medfield grudgingly. Then—with petulance: "I'm tired of them. I want them taken away—all of them!"

"Sick folks get notions," said Aunt Jane placidly. "Where shall I take 'em to?"

"Why, take them—" He looked about impatiently. "Take them where you usually take flowers!"

"We generally take them to the folks they're sent to." She leaned forward to the violets and touched them with cool, gentle fingers, looking at them kindly.

[Pg 104]

"There's something about violets makes me think of home places," she said.

"Would you like them?" said Herman Medfield. He was watching the cool, firm fingers with a quiet look—almost a pleasant look.

"Me?—Mercy, no!" The fingers withdrew to her lap. "You couldn't *send* 'em to me. I'm here."

"Yes, you are here—that's so!" He almost smiled at her. His eyes returned to the fingers resting in her lap. "I have not had a chance to thank you—for your great kindness the other night."

"You are welcome," said Aunt Jane.

"It wasn't any great kindness," she added after a minute, "I always do for folks that need me."

"I suppose you know—" He stopped a moment, as if he could not quite speak of the thing that was in his mind. "I think you *made* me—come back," he said slowly.

"It makes a difference whether somebody cares," admitted Aunt Jane.

"Did you care?" The sharp, pointed face was turned to her. "Did you care—!"

[Pg 105]

"Yes, I cared," said Aunt Jane.

"But—" He looked at her, bewildered, and was silent—looking before him.

Aunt Jane regarded him and smiled. "There didn't seem to be anybody *but* me—to care," she said cheerfully.

"No—there wasn't."

"But I see now that there's a good many of them—" She motioned to the flowers. "I don't know as I ever see anybody have more flowers the first week."

"Flowers don't care—the people those came from don't care!"

The tone was scornful, almost bitter.

"Don't they!" She beamed on the flowers. "Somehow I can't ever believe flowers don't mean what they look," she said thoughtfully.

"These don't!" His little cynical smile rested on them. "Those roses there—They must have cost ten dollars at least—"

"I never saw bigger ones," assented Aunt Jane.

"My partner's widow sent them.... She sent them for business."

"*Did* she!" Aunt Jane looked at the roses with interest.

[Pg 106]

"Mere business!" said Medfield. "And the carnations on the desk there—are from the men in the office—"

"There's always something fresh about carnations." She got up leisurely and went over to them and lifted the vase and brought it to him.

"Just smell of those!" She held them out. "Aren't they just about the freshest things you ever smelled!"

He sniffed at them reluctantly and motioned them aside.

"And those foxgloves there—"

He was talking out all the bitterness that had been in him as he had lain and watched the great

boxes opened and the flowers ranged about him—"exactly as if I were a funeral!" he finished up at last.

Aunt Jane smiled to him. "What would you like me to do with them for you?" she asked tranquilly. "Do whatever you like. *I don't care!*" His indifference had returned and he looked tired.

She leaned forward a little. "I'm going to take out that head-rest," she said, "so's you can lie down." [Pg 107]

She removed the frame from behind the pillows and shook them a little and let them gently back. "There—now you can lie down and have a good rest; and pretty quick now you're going to have some broth and then you'll go to sleep.... It don't do any good to get stirred up over folks' flowers," she said quietly.

"No." There was a little smile on his lips. He looked up at her, almost like a boy, from his pillow. "But it did me good to tell you!"

"I reckoned it would," said Aunt Jane. "Now I'll go get your broth for you."

She disappeared from the room and Herman Medfield's eyes closed—and opened again to find her standing beside him, the cup of broth in her hand.

She gave it to him through the crooked tube and watched the liquid lower in the cup with benignant eye.

"Just a little mite more," she said as he turned away his head—"Just a mite. There! You've done first-rate!"

She set the cup on the stand. [Pg 108]

"Now I'm going to take all these flowers—" she gathered the carnations in her hands as she spoke: "I was thinking about it whilst I was heating your broth for you—I'm going to take them up to the Children's Ward. They'll be happy enough—when they see 'em!" She held the flowers at arm's length and looked at them with pleased eyes. He watched her with a faint smile and a look almost of interest.

"And I'm going to tell them that Mr. Medfield sent them——"

He raised a quick hand. "No——!"

She turned in surprise. "Don't you want me to tell them?"

"No."

He waited a minute.

"You can say a man sent them."

"Yes, I can say that—" Aunt Jane's face cleared. "I see how 'tis— You don't want them to know about you—who you are."

"No." He was looking almost embarrassed.

She considered it a minute. "What is your first name?" she asked.

He cleared his throat like a boy. "Herman," he said meekly. "Herman G. Medfield." [Pg 109]

Aunt Jane smiled. "I remember about it now—'Herman,'" she said it softly, as if it pleased her. "Herman— That'll do! We don't need the G.—just Herman.... I'll tell them Mr. Herman sent them." She smiled at him cheerfully.

"Very well."

Aunt Jane went over to the window and gathered up the foxgloves—as many as her hands could hold—and turned to the door.

"I'll come back for the rest."

But the door had opened and the white-coated boy was standing, holding out three large boxes and grinning pleasantly.

Herman Medfield, from his pillow, groaned.

Aunt Jane glanced toward him with reassurance in her look—"I shall take them all— You don't need to worry. You won't be bothered. You go get the wheel-tray, Preston, and we'll take 'em all at once."

They filled the cart—the three great boxes underneath and the loose flowers on top covering them and trailing over the sides and ends: and Preston wheeled it out the door.

Aunt Jane, still with her hands full of blossoms, looked back with a smile. "Now you'll rest comfortable," she said. [Pg 110]

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## XVIII

[Pg 111]

When the wheel-tray appeared in the door of the Children's Ward and Aunt Jane—with her arms overflowing—close behind it, there was silence for a breath, and then a cry——



"Look there!"

"My goodness!"

"See the flowers!"

They leaned forward with eager hands, or raised themselves on a hand or elbow, as she went down between the beds, pushing the wheel-tray before her.

She smiled and nodded and came to a full stop by the big table in the centre of the ward. She laid her armful of flowers carefully on the table and turned to the tray.

The room was in a joyful bubble. "Where did they come from? Look at the roses. My!"

They reached out hands to her—"Where'd they come from, Aunt Jane?"... "Who sent them to us?"... "My! Look at the vi'lets!"

She smiled and heaped the blossoms on the table and disclosed the three boxes beneath. There was a hush of expectancy. There were always flowers in the ward—a bunch or two here and there—but not such a feast as these!

[Pg 112]

They waited, impatient.

Aunt Jane took her time. She polished her glasses and returned them to her nose and adjusted them carefully. Then she took up one of the boxes and read the florist's name printed on the top—"J. L. Parker & Co. He always sends nice flowers," she said heartily.

"Did he send them to us?"

"Well, they came from his greenhouse. He raised them—planted them and took care of them, and so on." Her fingers were busy with the tape, untying it. "But another man *sent* them—a man by the name of—Herman."

"Mr. Herman sent them!" They waited.

She lifted the cover and held out the box and a little cry went up from the ward, half repressed and full of awed delight.... It was a happy thing to see a great trayful of blossoms come rolling in; and it was a still more beautiful thing to have the cover lifted from the box, and all that color and fragrance leap out!

[Pg 113]

They watched with eager eyes.

Aunt Jane lifted a card from the top of the flowers and looked at it and tucked it away in the pocket of her big apron. The card had a narrow black edge.

"What did it say, Aunt Jane? What was on it?"

Aunt Jane looked at them over her glasses. "Just the name," she said. "The name of the one that sent them. People always send names with flowers, don't they?" She lifted a handful of the blossoms and shook them loose till they filled and overflowed the box. "They send names—so you'll know who it was sent them."

"Mr. Herman sent these, didn't he?"

"Yes, Mr. Herman sent them and you're going to each have one for your own. I'm going to let you choose."

There was laughing and chatter and a happy stir as Aunt Jane carried the boxes from bed to bed.

She watched the hands reach to the choosing—and hesitate—and the eyes fill with light—and little smiles come as they sank back contented.... She had a sudden glimpse of Herman Medfield in his blue-and-gold Chinese coat, waving them away.

[Pg 114]

"Seems a pity he can't see them," she thought, watching the faces. "They're all different—just as different as the flowers be!"

For some of them held the flowers in both hands; and some of them laid them on the pillows and some were smelling them and some were only looking; and one blossom was caught into the iron framework of a bed where the sun fell on it and the child was looking at it with wonder-filled eyes.... It was her own—her flower—that some one had sent—a crimson rose with soft dark color clear to the heart of it where the sun went in. It nodded down to her.

Aunt Jane, looking at her, thought of the people who had sent the flowers to Herman Medfield.

"I guess they didn't any of them think anything quite as nice as this would come of their flowers!" she said to the nurse who had brought the vases and jars for the flowers and was standing beside her at the table.

The nurse glanced down the ward. "They like them, don't they? But it seems a pity, almost, not to have them in water. They fade so soon!"

[Pg 115]

"Well, I don't know"—Aunt Jane surveyed the room slowly—"I guess they're doing about as much good now as they ever will. There's something about a flower—about holding it right in your hand—that does something to you. It isn't the same thing as having it in water."

"I don't see why not." The nurse glanced again, a little puzzled, down the room.

"Well, I don't know why *not*," said Aunt Jane. "Seems as if it would be the same.... But it isn't! When it's in water somehow you know it's safe—*your* rose.... You know it's going to keep—just as long as it can; and you look at it—kind of on the outside. But when you have it in your hand—it's all there! Maybe you know it can't last very long and you just take it in all over—"

The nurse laughed out.

"Yes, I know that sounds foolish," Aunt Jane nodded. "But we don't any of us know just what happens to us." She was looking down the ward as if she saw something beyond the beds and the sun shining in on them.

[Pg 116]

The nurse gathered up the bits of leaves and the stems and litter from the floor and table and threw them on the wheel-tray and pushed it from the room.

The children's eyes watched it go and returned to their blossoms.

Jimmie Sullivan had clumped over to Aunt Jane, carrying his carnation. His new leg worked better to-day. He reached up an arm and Aunt Jane bent her ear.

She listened and shook her head. "No, I can't tell stories to-day. I'm going to hold Susie a little while, and then I've got my work to do. I can't be bothering with you children all the time!"

She went over to the bed where the crimson rose was and held out her arms. The child climbed into them and laughed. She was a gay little thing—not four years old. To-morrow she would be sitting up and the next day she would go home.

Aunt Jane knew the home.... The father and mother drunk, perhaps. The child had been broken, between them, and had come to the House of Mercy for repairs.... She held her in her arms and rocked a little—and thought.... Something must be done to protect the child.... Dr. Carmon must do something. He always did things—if he had to. Aunt Jane rocked back and forth, thinking. She must take him when he was in good humor—to-morrow morning perhaps.

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The child raised her hand to Aunt Jane's face. "You don't smile!" she said imperiously.

Aunt Jane looked down at her severely.

The child laughed out, and nestled close and presently they were playing a game. It was not a new game in the ward; other children played it sometimes. But you were only allowed to play it if you had been very ill and were getting well; or perhaps if you were going home—day after to-morrow, and father and mother might be drunk and might break tables and chairs—and perhaps a child's arm if it got in the way of their playfulness.... The game was to catch Aunt Jane off guard and take off her spectacles and cap—and see how she looked.

The child reached up a quick hand and laughed.... Aunt Jane dodged and shook her head, and escaped the hand. And then—perhaps because Susie was going home day after to-morrow—she had caught off the spectacles and Aunt Jane's cap lay on the floor and the hair was escaping from its pins and coming down all about her face and shoulders—and the child was lying back against her arm, looking at her and laughing happily.

[Pg 118]

The door from the corridor swung silently, and Dr. Carmon stood looking into the room.

The children in the beds turned merry eyes to him.

But his hand made a gesture and they held their breath, laughing as he came down between the beds and stood looking sternly at the figure in the big chair.

Aunt Jane was groping at the tumbled hair and she was laughing gently, watching the child's face.

Then she looked up—

"Mercy sakes!" Her hand reached for her cap.

But Dr. Carmon had bent to the floor and picked up the cap. He was holding it and looking at her. "How old are you, Aunt Jane?" he said sternly.

[Pg 119]

Aunt Jane, out of the maze of her hair, looked up. "I am forty-five years old," she said. "Give me my cap!"

"Say, 'please,'" said Dr. Carmon gravely, holding it at arm's length.

From the beds, the children looked on with shining eyes.

Aunt Jane looked at the cap—and at the child in her arms—and felt the eyes encircling her—and smiled a little.

"Please," she said meekly, and her hand reached up.

But Dr. Carmon held it still at arm's length. "Say, 'please, Frederic,'" he insisted.... Not even the nearest bed could have guessed the words that went with the laughing gesture of the hand holding the cap.

But Aunt Jane's face flushed swiftly.

She gathered the child in her arms and carried her to her bed and put her down gently. Then her hands caught up the tumbled hair and fastened it in place and smoothed it down, and she came placidly back to Dr. Carmon.

His face was very grave. But something in behind his eyes laughed.

[Pg 120]

He held out the cap with a low bow.

She took it and put it on her head, with dignity, and looked for her spectacles.

"They're on the table," said Dr. Carmon.

He handed them to her and she put them on and gazed at him in serene competence. "I'll send

Miss Simpson up to you—I suppose you'll want her," she said.

"Yes—*please*," said Dr. Carmon, polite and grave.

Aunt Jane hesitated a second. Then her hand motioned to the beds. "The Lord never see fit to let me have any of my own—not to grow up.... I've always thought he was making it up to me this way," she said, and there was something almost like an appeal in the quiet words.

The doctor looked at her, and then at the children's faces. "I should say he's making it up to *them*," he said gruffly.

He watched the serene figure as it passed through the swinging doors.... His face, as he went among the children and questioned them and listened absently to their replies, was full of gentleness and kindness, and a little, shy, flitting happiness that beamed on them.

[Pg 121]

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## XIX

[Pg 122]

The cards Aunt Jane had taken from the boxes of flowers remained untouched in her apron pocket.

She had intended to take them to Herman Medfield at once. But the days that followed the flowers in the Children's Ward had been busy ones. Serious cases had come in and Dr. Carmon's face had been severe and a little anxious. No one would have guessed from its puckered gaze as he looked at Aunt Jane and gave minute directions for the case in Room 18 that he had ever seen the correct muslin cap except as it looked now, framing her serene face.

He gazed at it absently and fussed at his pocket and took out his notes and consulted them. "I am to be sent for, you understand, if there is the slightest change!" He looked at her severely.

"We'll send for you," said Aunt Jane quietly, "same as we always do."

There was a tap on the office door and she went leisurely across to open it.

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It was the laundress with three cards in her wet thumb. She half drew back as she caught a glimpse of Dr. Carmon's bulky form.

"I found 'em in the pocket of your apron," she announced in a stage whisper. "They got a little mite wet, but I dried 'em off."

Aunt Jane received the cards and returned to Dr. Carmon.

He glanced at them inquiringly.

"Some cards that came with flowers." She laid them on her desk.

"Somebody been sending you flowers!" He relaxed a little over the joke.

"Mr. Medfield's flowers," said Aunt Jane tranquilly.

His pencil stopped and he regarded the cards stiffly.

"How many cards does he send you with flowers?" he asked.

Aunt Jane smiled. "He didn't send them. They came with some flowers for *him*."

"Umph!" Dr. Carmon's pencil went on with its notes. When he had gone and Aunt Jane was alone in the office—she took up the cards and looked at them. She might take them up to Mr. Medfield now, before dinner—There would be time.

[Pg 124]

Herman Medfield had summoned Aunt Jane several times during the hurried days, and she had sent back word each time that she would come when she was not so busy.

She smiled a little as she looked down at the cards. She could see him, fuming and giving instructions that she was to come at once, and Miss Canfield's face as she took the message.

She put the cards in her pocket and went along the hall to Suite A.

Herman Medfield propped up in bed, surrounded by books and papers, looked up with a little scowling frown.

Aunt Jane glanced at it and crossed the room. She gathered up the books and papers from the bed and carried them to the table and laid them down. "I guess you won't want these any more, will you? It's most dinner-time."

She sat down by him.

His face relaxed. "I haven't seen you for four days," he remarked dryly.

"I've been busy," returned Aunt Jane. "A good many folks suffering."

[Pg 125]

He was silent. She watched the face with a shrewd, kindly smile.

"You hadn't thought as anybody *could* suffer, maybe—anybody except you?"

"No—I hadn't thought of anything." He looked ashamed, but he held his point. "*I've* suffered—horribly!" he said.

"I thought likely you would." Aunt Jane was placid.

He stared.

"You're the kind that's liable to suffer," she said slowly, "—all sort o' tewed up inside.... That kind has to suffer a good deal."

He looked down at his hands. Probably no one had ever spoken to Herman Medfield just as Aunt Jane was speaking.

She held the cards toward him—the black-edged one on top. "They came in your flower-boxes."

He took them without seeing them. Then he glanced at the black one and pushed them away.

"The same one that came before—*isn't it?*" remarked Aunt Jane serenely.

"Yes."

[Pg 126]

"I thought it was the same name. The flowers were nice that came with it—roses—red ones."

He was silent.

"I gave Susie Cannon a bunch of them to take home with her. Her folks drink—both of 'em."

He stared at her. Then his face smiled a little. "It's a new cure for the drink habit, *isn't it*—red roses?" He laughed a little cynically.

Aunt Jane regarded him impartially.

"Your folks didn't ever any of 'em drink, did they?"

"You mean—?" His face was politely puzzled.

"Get drunk, I mean— You don't come of a drinking family, do you?"

"No." His eyes were still a little amused.

"I reckoned not. Steve Cannon does—and his wife drinks. They'd broke Susie's arm between 'em. So she came to us."

He was looking at her thoughtfully. "How old is she?"

"Three," said Aunt Jane, "three—going on four."

"Good God!"

[Pg 127]

She nodded. "Yes, He's good. But somebody's got to look after Susie."

He waited a minute. Then he spoke, almost hesitatingly. "I don't suppose that money would do—any good?"

She shook her head. "I don't know what'll do good. Dr. Carmon's got to find out and do it. He generally does—when things get too bad."

There was a knock on the door.

"Your dinner, I guess," said Aunt Jane.

But it was Preston—with a box. When he saw Medfield's eyes he half retreated. Aunt Jane held out her hand.

"I'll take care of it," she said. She laid it on her lap. "Miss Canfield said you wasn't having 'em brought here any more.... I guess Preston made a mistake, maybe."

"*I* guess' he did," replied Medfield. His eye was on the box, balefully.

Aunt Jane took it up and undid it slowly. When she looked in she smiled. She took out a black-edged card and handed it to him. "She's sent another one!"

He groaned softly.

"I don't know what we'll do—if they keep coming in like this," she was fingering the blossoms tranquilly and looking at them. [Pg 128]

He lay back on his pillows. "That's your affair!" He smiled more cheerfully. "You said *I* should not be bothered!" He closed his eyes.

"The Children's Ward is full," said Aunt Jane thoughtfully. "It's a regular flower-garden—every bed a posy-bed." She laughed comfortably and looked at him. "You'd ought to have seen the way they looked when they got your flowers. They were tickled most to death with 'em!"

"I am glad they enjoyed them," said Medfield tamely.

"I felt as if it was 'most a pity they couldn't know you sent 'em," she added.

He started a little and Aunt Jane put out a hand. "Don't you worry, Mr. Medfield. I didn't tell 'em. I just said it was a man—by the name of 'Herman'.... But maybe you'll get it, all the same."

He stared at her. "Get—*it?*"

She nodded. "They'll be thinking about that Mr. Herman—and kind of talking about him and loving him.... I reckon it'll do him good—whoever he is." She was looking at 'Mr. Herman' in space, regarding him with kindly gaze. [Pg 129]

Medfield smiled grimly. "I don't suppose you know what it is—not to want any one to know who you are?"

She looked at him. "I should hate terribly not to have folks know I'm Jane Holbrook!"

She was thoughtful a minute. "Seems as if it wouldn't be *me*—not more than half me—if folks didn't know I was Aunt Jane!" She was looking at him questioningly.

He shook his head.

"You've never been in my place." The words were dry.

"No.... I have a good many things to be thankful for," she added impersonally.

His eyes were looking at something before him and there was a little hard smile in their gaze. "Let some of them try it awhile," he said, as if answering an accusation. "Let them try!" He turned to her.

"I can't go in a street-car or a restaurant or a store in town—I can't walk along the street like other men—without being beset by people with axes to grind." He looked at Aunt Jane as if he thought she might have an axe concealed somewhere about her person. "They carry them around with them in their pockets," he said savagely, "ready the minute they see me coming down the street. They line up with them and wait for me to appear. The minute a man hears my name, he doesn't think of *me*—he's thinking what he can get out of me." His mouth set itself close. "I'm not a *man*—I'm money!"

[Pg 130]

Aunt Jane's look was full of twinkling sympathy that went out to him. "It's a pity you didn't think about that sooner, wasn't it?"

He stared.

"You might 'a' give away most of it—if you'd thought in time."

The stare broke. "You think it is easy, don't you?" he scoffed.

Her face grew sober. "No, I don't think it's easy.... Money seems to stick to folks' fingers—kind o' glues 'em together, I guess."

He rubbed his thin fingers absently and looked down at them.

"It seems to me I could find a way, but I suppose I should be just like the rest, if I had it—holding on to it for dear life!" She smiled at him.

[Pg 131]

He was silent a minute, looking before him. "Sometimes I think I would give every dollar I have in the world," he said slowly—"to have some one think of me apart from my money!" He looked at the face in its muslin cap. He knew he had never spoken to any one as he was speaking to Aunt Jane. He had a sense of freeing himself from something.

He watched the face in its cap.... "I don't suppose any one can understand—" He broke off with a sigh.

"Yes, I understand, I guess." She was looking down at the box of flowers in her lap. "We all have our besetting sins. I have 'em! I guess money's a kind of besetting sin!"

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## XX

[Pg 132]

"If I felt the way you do, Mr. Medfield, I'd do something."

"What would you do?" He watched her face.

"Well—I'd find things." The face in its cap filled with little thoughts that came and went.... "Dear me! There's so many things, I wouldn't know which to do!"

"Suppose you tell *me* a few."

"Well—there's things.... Jimmie Sullivan needs a new leg, for one thing. He needs it the worst way \_\_\_"

"*Who* is Jimmie Sullivan?" asked the millionaire.

"He's in the Children's Ward. Belongs to nobody—as you might say. We're kind of carrying him along till he gets on his feet."

"Gets on his legs, you mean?" His face had lost its fretted look; it was smiling a little.

"It's a frame leg he needs—one of the kind that lets out and stretches as he grows. Dr. Carmon's made him one—a sort of make-shift leg.... A good one costs two hundred and twenty-five dollars."

[Pg 133]

"Would you mind giving me a pencil and paper?" said Medfield.

Aunt Jane brought it from the table and he made a note.

"Two hundred and twenty-five, you said?"

She nodded. "If he don't have it—a good frame one—his leg will be the kind that flops all round.... I've seen beggars with 'em sometimes, selling pencils and so on. I can't hardly bear to see 'em that way!"

"I should think not! Horrible!"

"Then, there's Mrs. Pelton—"

"I don't seem to remember—Mrs. Pelton?" he said politely.

"Why she's the one you're—" Aunt Jane stopped suddenly.

"Yes?"

"She's a woman that came the same day you did," she said safely.

"Oh!" His mind seemed to be looking back—to the day when he came to the House of Mercy, perhaps.

Aunt Jane did not disturb him.

[Pg 134]

Presently he took up his pencil with a little sigh. "What were you saying about a Mrs. Pelton?" he asked.

"She came the day you did and *she's* sitting up! And her case was a good deal worse than yours." She was looking at him almost severely.

"But— She had her operation sooner—than I did! *I* had to wait—almost a week—You know I had to wait!" He was like a sick boy—with his excuses and his injured look.

"Yes—she was operated on—a day or two sooner—maybe. But she's acted better than you have, every way." She looked at him over her spectacles. "And she's a little mite of a thing. Don't come up to your shoulder hardly."

He smiled ruefully and took up the pencil. "I am going to try— What about this Mrs. Pelton? What would you do for her if you were as badly off—as I am?"

She gave him a quick smile, out of her cap. "Why—I'd—I'd—I declare I don't know just what you could *do* for her! She's got so much pluck, it 'most seems as if you couldn't do much.... But I can kind of see her—" She was looking at it. "I can see that if she had, maybe a hundred dollars, say—of her own, unexpected like—when she left the hospital—I can just see the things she would do with it! There's four of the children and a kind of fiddling husband—*good*, you know— But the way men are—"

[Pg 135]

"Yes, I know." His pencil was making absent notes. "What's his business?"

"She told me—he's a puddler. I don't know just what puddling is.... He works in a shop. You know, maybe, how they 'puddle'?"

"I've heard of puddling, yes."

"It's a respectable business, I guess. It sounds something the way he looks."

"The way he looks!"

She nodded. "'Puddler' makes me feel the way he does. It's a kind o' queer word."

He glanced at his paper. "Is there anything else you happen to think of for me to do?" The tone was dry, but a little amused.

"Well, there's folks—plenty of folks. You don't have to be in a hospital very long before you begin to know about folks—and begin to wish you was made of money."

[Pg 136]

"It's a good place for me, then.... I may get cured all through!" He laughed a little harshly.

"I hope you will," said Aunt Jane. She was looking at him with a deep, big kindness that suddenly broke through the little crust of cynicism in his face. He leaned forward and held out his hand.

"Thank you," he said.

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## XXI

[Pg 137]

"I wonder what I'd better do with these." She looked at the flowers in the box in her lap. "They're about the prettiest ones she's sent you—forget-me-nots." She lifted a handful of the blossoms and held them out.

He regarded them cynically. "I'm not likely to forget!" he said.

She looked at him over the flowers and smiled. "*She* doesn't seem to forget either.... I guess she thinks a good deal of you," she added quaintly.

He shook his head. "You'd be wrong. She doesn't care any more for me than—that clothes-pole there!"

Aunt Jane looked at it uncritically.

"She sent those—" He motioned to the flowers, "to Herman Medfield's money! She began on the boy," he said scornfully. "She's a dozen years older than Julian and twice as clever. I packed him off to Europe when I found out—then she started in on the old man!"

Aunt Jane looked at him with interest. "I didn't know as you had a boy—how old is he?" she said quickly.

[Pg 138]

"Twenty-two," said Medfield.

"That's an interesting age, isn't it?" Aunt Jane was thoughtful. "That's just the age my boy would have been—if he'd lived. I'm always wondering what he would be doing now." She was silent a minute. Then she looked at him and smiled. "Europe isn't so very far off," she said.

She gathered up the flowers in her lap, and glanced toward the door.

Herman Medfield's dinner was being brought in.

Miss Canfield carried the big tray in both hands. Aunt Jane glanced at it and got up.

"I guess I'll give your flowers to Mrs. Pelton," she said slowly. "She doesn't happen to have any flowers. Nobody's sent her any—yet. She'll be real pleased with 'em."

She cast another glance at the tray. "They've brought you a good dinner to-day—beefsteak and onions and green peas."

From the door she looked back. "I'll tell her Mr. Herman sent them."

The nurse who was bending over Herman Medfield, tucking the napkin into his coat, saw a quick flush come in the thin face. She seemed not to notice it as she placed the tray before him. [Pg 139]

"Shall I cut your meat?"

"Yes—please."

He watched the efficient fingers cut the juicy steak in strips and he glanced at the face bending above the tray. The reddish hair drawn trimly up under the cap and the look of competence in the face and in the firm hands.

She gave him the knife and fork and glanced at the tray. "You have everything you need? Here's your bell."

She placed the cord where he could reach it and turned away.

But Herman Medfield's look stayed her. "You didn't know my name was Herman, did you?" He said it with a little quizzical smile.

"I thought it was Medfield," replied the girl. She looked at him with clear, straight eyes. "The flowers come to Herman Medfield."

"That was a mistake," he said. "They got it wrong when I came—on the books—And it was in the papers, I suppose.... It's quite a joke that I should have had all Herman Medfield's flowers." He chuckled a little. "He's a distant relative of mine—Herman Medfield— But quite a different sort of man," he added quietly. "I don't see any salt here—"

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She glanced quickly at the tray and went out to bring the salt.

He smiled at his dinner blandly and began to eat. He would get rid of the incubus of Herman Medfield's money for a while—and see how it felt.

His whole body relaxed as the weight of Herman Medfield went sliding from his shoulders.... No more suspicions, no more watching while people talked to him, for the inevitable money to crop up, or for some philanthropic scheme to put its hand in his pocket, on the sly.... They seemed to think, if a man had money, that he doted on orphan asylums and libraries and dormitories! He wished, fervently, that he might never hear of another college or foundation, or any sort of institution for doing good. He longed to be rid of it all. He wanted to be like other men—a human being—for a month, for six weeks.... He began to wonder how long a patient could stay in the Berkeley House of Mercy—how sick he had to be?... They shouldn't turn him out *too* soon. He could invent an ache or two. He would take a long vacation from his money.

[Pg 141]

Miss Canfield brought the salt. She looked at his face as she put it down. "You're feeling better, aren't you?" she said.

He relaxed the cheerful look. "A little better," he admitted. "Some pain still."

She smiled. It was only in the Children's Ward that they were glad to let the pains go—that they ignored them or forgot them as quickly as they could.... Men were all alike—men and women were the same in cherishing their pains and the memory of their pains—women a little more reluctant than men, perhaps, to see them go. Men were more like children.

This gray-haired man, eating his dinner happily, was a little like a child, she thought as she watched him. He seemed to have grown younger—even in a day.... It was curious they should have got his name wrong on the books.... It was probably because of the aristocratic look. He was a very stately figure, leaning back there against the pillows, in his embroidered Chinese coat, with his gray hair and little pointed beard.... She turned to go.

[Pg 142]

"Won't you sit down? Can't you stay?" said Medfield politely.

"There's another patient waiting. They've put me on double special since you are better." She nodded to him and went out.

He watched her go, almost regretfully. It was wonderful what a difference it made, wanting to have people around—now that money could not get between.... He would have liked to talk with the girl. Ask her about her family and how she came to be a nurse. He wondered what sort of a home a girl like that had come out of, and what she expected to do.

More than once, as he had watched her moving about the room, absorbed in her work, he had thought of Julian.... It occurred to him to wonder what Julian would be like now. He had not seen the boy for two years—not since he sent him off to Europe. He glanced a little resentfully at the black-edged card lying on the stand beside him.... If it had not been for Julia Cawein and her airs and fascinations, the boy would be here now.

[Pg 143]

His thought recurred to the girl who had just left him. He had never seen any one work just the way she worked—as if she loved it. She moved quietly and easily, as if there were plenty of time to do all that must be done in the day.... She would make a good wife for some man.... And it suddenly struck him that a rich young fellow would be lucky to marry a girl like that.... He

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## XXII

[Pg 144]

He had finished his dinner and pushed aside the tray. He wondered where Julian was—whether he had got his letter and whether he would care—a little.... It was ten days now since he sent the letter—just before the doctor told him ... that was the day Aunt Jane took charge of his case.

He smiled a little, thinking of Aunt Jane and her ways.... Since she took him in hand, he had eaten and breathed and slept only as she permitted.... But, after all, it was a relief to get rid of thinking and do what one was told—like a boy.... He wished his own boy were here—to play with.... He found his imagination always coming back to Julian. He had hardly thought of the boy before as an individual; he had been a responsibility—some one to be kept out of scrapes—and, in a vague way, he was the successor to the Medfield fortune and business.... Now he wondered what the boy was really like.... Two years might have changed him—body and soul almost.

[Pg 145]

He closed his eyes a little wearily, and rested back against the pillows. The room was quiet and filled with sunshine. He felt suddenly at home in it—as he had never felt at home in his own house across the town.... The rooms were very lonely there.... He rested quietly.

A knock came on the door—perhaps the nurse for the tray. He did not turn his head or open his eyes. He was resting in the quiet.

A light step crossed the room and stopped—and presently Herman Medfield looked up.

The boy was smiling down at him. "Hallo, Father!"

He put up a swift hand to brush the vision away.

And the boy took it, and bent down and kissed him, almost shyly.

Then Herman Medfield reached out both hands. "Why—Julian! I was thinking about you!" He threw his arms around him hungrily. "I was wishing you would come!"

[Pg 146]

"Were you?" The young man laughed happily and drew up a chair to the bed. "I'm just in time, then."

He sat looking at his father; and it came to Herman Medfield that the boy was fond of him. There was a look in the clear eyes of affection and pride.

He gazed at it. "You didn't get my letter?"

"Which? The one with the check for three thousand?"

"The one telling you I was—here."

The boy shook his head. "I got Ballantine's cable, and took the next boat."

"I didn't know Ballantine cabled," said Medfield thoughtfully.

"It came ten days ago—the thirtieth, wasn't it—just as I was starting for Norway. I'm pretty glad it didn't miss me!"—They sat quiet a minute. Then the boy looked at him. "You're looking fine, sir!"

"I'm all right! Doing splendidly!"

He felt suddenly that he could let his pains go. The house across the town was not so empty, after all. He had a sudden vision of Julian running up the long stairs—two at a time—and he looked at him happily.

[Pg 147]

The boy leaned forward. His eye fell on the black-edged card; he looked at it and smiled and half reached out a hand, incredulous.

"How is—" He hesitated. He had always been afraid of his father. But the man on the pillows was, somehow, a different sort of father; he leaned forward with a swift twinkle at the card.

"How is the—widow?" he asked.

"Very well, I suppose," said Medfield. "It is some time since I saw her." He spoke a little formally. But his heart leaped at the touch of comradeship.

"How about this?" said Julian. He touched the black-edged card.

Herman Medfield's face flushed—almost guiltily. "Flowers," he said.

"I say!" The boy whistled softly. Then he laughed. "I say!" He put down the card and looked at it.

"Three boxes!" acknowledged Medfield.

The boy held out his hand. "Would you mind shaking hands, sir?"

Herman Medfield took the hand, laughing a little, and his eyes filled with quiet pride and happiness. "I am glad you've come home, Julian."

[Pg 148]

"Looks to me about time!" said the youth. He glanced again at the card and chuckled.

Then he stood up.

It was Miss Canfield for the tray.



She came around to the other side of the bed; and Herman Medfield looked up at her—and glanced from her to his boy.

"This is my son, Julian, Miss Canfield." He was watching the two faces that confronted each other across the bed.

The young man's had lighted with a little look of admiration.

He held out his hand across the bed. "It's a long-distance introduction, isn't it?"

The girl took the hand quietly. "How do you do, Mr. Herman," she said pleasantly.

"I'm glad to meet you," said Julian out of a puzzled look; and the two hands fell apart.

Herman Medfield flashed a twinkle at her. "His name is not Herman," he remarked dryly. "Nor mine," he added after a minute. "'Herman' is for the hospital— Aunt Jane invented it." [Pg 149]

"I see." The girl held it. "I wondered a little——"

"Don't let anybody else wonder," said Medfield. "I want to get rid of myself—for a while."

The young man smiled whimsically. "Where do I come in, sir?"

"You stay where you are," said his father tolerantly. "You're well enough as it is—if you behave!" He was looking with satisfaction from his son to the young girl. She had turned to the tray and her fingers were busy with the dishes.

"She takes good care of me," said Medfield, with a little gesture toward the competent fingers.

"I don't doubt it, sir.... I might almost say I wouldn't mind being ill—myself!" A kind of shyness in the words redeemed them and the girl smiled.

"People who are not ill, generally think they wouldn't mind," she said quietly.

She lifted the tray and set it aside.

"I'll take out your pillows now. It's time for you to rest." She removed the pillows and shook them a little and placed the fresh one beneath his head and straightened the clothes for him, with her firm, competent, comfortable hands. [Pg 150]

The boy's eyes followed the white figure as it left the room, carrying the tray lightly. They came back to his father's face.

"I think I've had my orders," he said laughingly. "I'm to go now, I understand. I'll be back by and by, sir—when you are 'rested.'" He hesitated a minute. Then he bent down and kissed his father, almost shyly, and left the room.

The door closed behind him and Herman Medfield fell asleep and dreamed—"as if he really cared," thought Herman Medfield, as he drifted away into sleep.

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## XXIII

[Pg 151]

In Room 5, Mrs. Pelton was sitting in a big rocking-chair by the window, her feet on a hassock and her eyes fixed on the great bowl of blue forget-me-nots on the table beside her.

She had been looking at the forget-me-nots ever since Aunt Jane appeared with the big box, just before dinner.... She could hardly eat her dinner for looking at them. She had had the bowl of flowers set on her tray—where they crowded the soup and vegetables, and made her happy.... She wished John could see them, and the children could see them—or that there was somebody she could divide with. The beauty of the forget-me-nots was too much for her. It was such a great bunch—it filled the bowl and overflowed the sides. She had never seen so many forget-me-nots in one bunch!... Now and then, sitting in the big chair, she reached out a hand to them and touched the flowers delicately. She wished she were bigger—the happiness of the flowers crowded on her. Perhaps if she were bigger, she could enjoy them more. [Pg 152]

Aunt Jane had not seemed overcome by the flowers when she brought them in. She had taken them from the box and shaken them apart with brisk fingers and arranged them in the bowl and moved the stand over by the window close to Mrs. Pelton's chair.

"There!" she had said. "Makes you quite a nice bunch, don't it!" She stood off and admired them.... Mrs. Pelton was thinking now of Aunt Jane, and she was thinking that she did not even know who had sent them—"A man by the name of Herman," Aunt Jane had said.

Mrs. Pelton had gone over in her mind all the people she had ever known—but there were no Hermans that she knew, or that John knew. It seemed very strange for any one to send a great bunch of flowers to her—one she didn't know!

She wished she could thank him. She wished Mamie could see them. Mamie loved flowers so. She looked at the flowers and thought of Mamie and the children and John—and her face was happy. She looked at the row of photographs ranged along the bureau in front of the mirror.... It had been such a comfortable time at the hospital. And she had dreaded it so before she came! And there wasn't anything to dread. Somehow, it was a beautiful place.... And there was the man who was going to pay for her being here.... She had gone over and over it, in her mind—his paying for her—wondering about it.... They had worried, she and John, and they had turned and twisted every penny, and after all there was not enough.... But of course she had to come. The doctor had [Pg 153]

said it wouldn't do to put it off; and so she had come, worried and anxious about it all—and right in the room next to her, while she waited—was the man who had offered to pay everything.... It was a beautiful place—with such a good man in it—and Aunt Jane, always doing something for her—and the forget-me-nots. She sighed happily, her eyes on the flowers.

Aunt Jane appeared in the doorway, and surveyed her shrewdly. "Tired?" she asked.

"Not a bit." Mrs. Pelton shook her head. "I don't feel as if I could ever be tired any more."

[Pg 154]

She was dressed in a long blue garment—one of Aunt Jane's wrappers—that enveloped her from head to foot. Her parted hair, smooth and shining, was combed close to her head and she looked very small in the big rocking-chair, but resolute and brave.

Aunt Jane regarded her mildly. "I reckon you'll get around to being tired, after a while—like the rest of us." She glanced at the bowl of forget-me-nots. "You enjoy your flowers, don't you!"

"They make me 'most *too* happy—they're so beautiful!"

"I guess they won't hurt," said Aunt Jane. "Being happy don't hurt—though sometimes it feels as if it hurt," she added thoughtfully. "—as you just couldn't hold any more."

"Yes. That's it! That's the way I feel!" The little woman spoke eagerly and sat up.

"I've been thinking—" she waited a minute, looking at the flowers. "Maybe I ought to go in the ward. I always meant to go in the ward, you know."

Aunt Jane regarded her. "You like it here, don't you?"

[Pg 155]

"I like it—yes!" She looked about her with grateful eyes—at the photographs and flowers and then at Aunt Jane's face. "It's beautiful!" she said softly.

"Well, I don't know as it's so beautiful." Aunt Jane was looking thoughtfully before her. She was thinking of Suite A, perhaps. "It's a good, comfortable room and you get a little sun—along toward sunset." She glanced at the window, where the streak of sunshine was creeping in on the sill, and a little glow came from the sky. "It's a comfortable room—yes."

"The ward would be cheaper," said the woman. She hesitated. "It don't seem quite fair to him—the man that's paying, I mean—not to get along as cheap as we can."

"I wouldn't worry about getting along cheap," said Aunt Jane. "Some folks need one thing, and some another. What *you* need is to keep still a spell and rest.... You don't feel lonesome, do you?"

"Lonesome! Oh, no!" She gave a little sigh. Her thin hands were clasped in her lap. "It is so *good* to be quiet!" she said.

"I thought likely," Aunt Jane nodded. "You just sit still and enjoy your quiet and get well ... you don't need to worry about the man that's going to pay. He wouldn't want you to worry. He's comfortable and he'd want *you* to be comfortable. *He's* got a good room."

[Pg 156]

The woman's eyes brooded on it. "I can't thank him, or do anything," she said a little wistfully. "I'd like to have him know how we feel about his doing it."

"Well, you can thank him by and by, when you get round to it—if you want to," said Aunt Jane. "I guess he'll let you thank him. You want to get well first."

"Yes." Her eyes were on the forget-me-nots and she reached out a hand to them. "I might send him some of my flowers," she said eagerly.

Aunt Jane's face wrinkled at the forget-me-nots—a little perplexed and surprised and amused look.

"I *could* send them to him, couldn't I? It would be proper to send them to him?"

"Yes—I guess it's proper," said Aunt Jane dryly. "I don't believe he's got any flowers in his room." Her eyes twinkled.

"I'll send them to him now—right off! You pick out a nice bunch for him." She reached to them with a happy gesture.

[Pg 157]

Aunt Jane bent over the forget-me-nots, her smile full of gentle chuckles. "We'll make him a nice bunch," she said cheerfully. She selected a few meagre blossoms here and there.

"You're not getting the best ones!" The little woman was excited and eager. "They're better on this side. See—there's one—and there!" Her face had the soft, clear color of happiness.

Aunt Jane drew out the flowers with half-reluctant touch and arranged them slowly. "Seems 'most too bad to spoil your bunch," she said.

"Oh, I like it!" The woman laughed a little tremulously. "I told you it kind of hurt me to have so many, and it's a way of thanking him, isn't it? Here, take this one!"

Her eyes were shining. "Don't they look nice! You tell him I thank him, please, and I hope he's doing well."

"I'll tell him," said Aunt Jane. Her eyes rested on the flowers. "I shouldn't wonder if he'd be real pleased with them." She held them off and surveyed them thoughtfully. "I'll tell him what you said and I guess maybe he'll get a good deal of comfort out of it. He needs flowers—and some one to think about him—as much as anybody ever I see."

[Pg 158]

Aunt Jane came in, bearing the forget-me-nots before her.

The millionaire raised a hand. "Take them a—!"

But she came tranquilly on.

"They were sent to you—special." She held them out.

He scowled at them. Then his look broke to bewilderment and a little amusement.

"They're the ones you carried off!" he exclaimed.

"The same ones," replied Aunt Jane with satisfaction. "A woman sent them to you."

"I know who sent them!"

"You don't know this one—it's a Mrs. Pelton."

He stared at her. "The one I sent them to—the one you took them to?"

She nodded. "She's sent 'em back."

"Didn't she like them?" His tone was hurt—almost stiff.

"Oh, she *liked* 'em. She said they made her 'most *too* happy." Aunt Jane was arranging the flowers and smiling at them. "She only sent part of them you see. She's divided with you." [Pg 160]

"I see!" He looked at the flowers vaguely.

"She didn't know it was you that sent them," said Aunt Jane. She stood off to get the effect.

"Who did she think sent them?" he demanded.

"Why—'Mr. Herman,' I told her.... You know about Mr. Herman?" She looked at him.

"Yes," meekly.

"I told her about him. So she's feeling thankful to him." Her eyes twinkled a little.

"But why should she send flowers to *me*?" He looked at her almost suspiciously, as if he had caught her.

Aunt Jane shook her head reprovingly. "She sent them to you because you happened to come the same day she did. She saw you through the door whilst she was waiting for me to come in, and it made her feel acquainted with you, coming the same day—so—and both having suffering to go through with— There, they look nice, don't they!" She gave a final touch to them and sat down. [Pg 161]

He glanced at them grudgingly.

"I'll take them out if you say so—if you'd rather not have them?"

"No, leave them.... I—want them." The words came almost quickly.

"I thought you'd like them," she said placidly, "when you'd made up your mind to it. It's hard for any one to make up his mind sometimes."

The millionaire was looking at the flowers. "I've been thinking about what you told me this morning," he motioned to the bowl of forget-me-nots, "—about Mrs. Pelton.... This hospital business must be a big bill for a workingman to meet.... I was wondering if it couldn't be arranged so that I could pay—without their knowing, of course," he added hastily.

Aunt Jane was silent a minute. Then, a little guiltily, she looked at him. "You *have* paid already," she said.

He had been looking dreamily before him, pleased with Aunt Jane, and with the flowers—and with himself—pleased with everybody. He moved irritably and stared. [Pg 162]

She nodded, the little wrinkles gathering about her eyes. "I didn't mean that you should find it out—not right off.... But it's just as well, I guess."

"What do you mean?"

"Well." She rocked a little. "She was kind of anxious—the day she came, you know.... I see, as soon as I came into the room that she was worrying—" Aunt Jane rocked placidly, looking back to Mrs. Pelton's worrying face. "Pretty soon it came out—they hadn't got the money; and she'd been just drove to come—as you might say—Dr. Carmon makes 'em come whether they want to or not, you know?" She looked at him inquiringly over her glasses.

"Yes, I know." The words were remote and dry.

Aunt Jane smiled a little. "And just then I caught sight of you through the door, and your coat lying on a chair—it was a silk-lined coat, you know—your clothes are all pretty good." She looked at him with satisfaction. [Pg 163]

A glint of amusement crossed the remote face.

"So it came to me, then and there, just the way the things do—the right ones, when you're bothering—and I said to her that *you* were going to pay for her."

She sat looking at him.

"Well?"

She roused herself. "You never see anybody change so—right in a minute, that way.... I do wish you could have seen her!" She gave a pitying glance at the handsome figure on the pillow.... "It seems a pity, 'most, to do so much for everybody and not have the good of seeing it!"

"How do you know I will pay the bill?" asked the millionaire grimly.

She turned and stared—and a little gleaming smile twinkled at him. "Why—you *have* paid already! Leastways, your lawyer's paid. He sends a check every week—the way you told him—to pay the bill; and I've made it out big enough for two, right along." Her face was complacent and kind.

"Do you call that business?" He asked it almost sharply.

[Pg 164]

"No—not business—just good sense, I guess—and decency."

"I call it crooked dealing!" said the millionaire. Something of the old, gripping look came into the shapely hands lying on the bed.

Aunt Jane surveyed him and rocked on. "How much do you reckon your life is worth, Mr. Medfield?" she said after a little pause.

"I'm insured for—" He stopped.

She nodded. "That wasn't what I meant—but it will do. Whatever you're insured for—you're worth it, I guess." She paused and regarded him doubtfully.... "You're probably worth as much as you are insured for—" Her look considered it, and let it go.... "Whatever it is, we've saved it for you—among us. We've given you the best care we knew how.... You've had good care, haven't you?" She bent a solicitous look on him.

"The best of care," he said courteously. Then, after a minute: "Money could not pay for it—the kind of care you have given.... I have not forgotten the night—when I went down into the dark—and you held me." He was looking at something deep and quiet—then his gaze turned to her.

[Pg 165]

Aunt Jane returned it a minute—and looked away.... There was something in the face of the millionaire that she had not seen in it before. She got up and went to the window. "Looks as if it would be a good day to-morrow," she murmured.

She straightened the curtains a little and shook them out and came leisurely back. She glanced at the forget-me-nots.

"What I meant was," she said slowly, "some folks get big bills when they're here—and some folks get little ones, and some don't get any. It depends on what the Lord has given 'em; and we mean to take good care of 'em all."

He smiled. "Well—the Lord has given me plenty. I ought not to complain!"

"I didn't expect you would complain," said Aunt Jane. "I put it in the bill under Suite A—enough for two. And I told Dr. Carmon to make *his* bill big enough for two—I guess he'll do it. He's a pretty sensible man." She rocked placidly.

Herman Medfield relaxed a little and looked at her whimsically. "It's a human way to do," he said thoughtfully. "And I do get *something* for my money. This is a pleasant room."

[Pg 166]

"It's pleasant enough. But I've thought a good many times it's a pity you can't be in the ward."

"Me—in a ward!"

She nodded. "You're lonesome, aren't you?"

He looked at her with sudden thought. "You didn't know my boy has come!" he said.

Aunt Jane stopped. "Your boy?"

"My boy—Julian! I told you!"

"You said Julian was in Europe—" replied Aunt Jane.

"He came this morning!" The millionaire's voice laughed. "Walked right in through that door—without a word!" He nodded to it—as if still seeing the boy coming toward him.

Aunt Jane looked at the door and then at the man's face, and smiled.

"I told you Europe wasn't so very far off," she said. "But I didn't know it was *quite* so near you as that!"

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## XXV

[Pg 167]

Herman Medfield, wrapped in a dark-blue quilted gown, was sitting in the sunny window that looked down into the back yards.... He remembered the day—only three weeks ago, was it—that he had watched the servant-girl hanging sheets on the line. He remembered how strong her arms were as she swung the sheets on the line.... He looked down into the yard. She was there now—singing just as she had then; the window was open and her voice came drifting in with the scent of the flowers that grew down by the fence.

He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. He was tired; more tired than he had thought he should be. Sitting in bed, he had felt strong—almost well. And he had demanded his clothes.

"We'll let you wear a dressing-gown the first day or two," Aunt Jane had said with a twinkle. [Pg 168]  
"You've got a real pretty silk one, I see."

So she had brought out the quilted gown and laid it on the bed; and he had dressed slowly and come out here to the sunny sitting-room, where the big chair was drawn up in the window.

He had looked down into the yard, with a feeling of strangeness and newness, and had wondered a little whether it was the change in the foliage that made the yard look different, or whether the change was in Herman Medfield's eyes.

Then he had closed his eyes and leaned back.... Perhaps he had slept a little—with the fresh air coming in and the girl's voice singing and the sound of doves cooing from a roof near by—for when he opened his eyes again, Julian was sitting at the desk, writing.

He looked up and encountered his father's gaze and came over to the window.

"How are you feeling, Dad?"

"First-rate. It seems good to get on my legs again." He was looking eagerly at the boy, taking in his fresh young strength.... It had been several days since Julian came; but Herman Medfield was not yet used to his being there, or to the little proud feeling that came over him as he looked at this young man who was his son. He had never thought Julian was handsome. But something seemed to have happened to him.... He carried himself more like a man; and there was a look behind the lines of his face.... He thought of the boy's mother, as he watched it.... Europe had brought out the best that was in him. It had been a wise move—sending him off like that, to get him out of Mrs. Cawein's way.... And then it came to him that Julian was looking even better than the day he arrived.... Perhaps, after all, he was fond of his old dad! They had had many talks together—and had sat silent for long spaces of quiet; and the boy came and went as if his father's room were home to him. Every one in the hospital had come to know the quick step and light figure and the laugh that ran through the hall.... He went across the town to the vacant house to sleep. But his meals were served with his father's—when he could persuade Aunt Jane to send them in—and when he could not coax her to send in the extra tray, he went to a restaurant near by. [Pg 169]

Aunt Jane and he had been friends from the minute he held out his hand to her, and she had taken it in hers and patted it and looked at him out of her muslin cap. "You're just the age of my boy," she had said, looking at him. "I always wonder what he'd be doing now—if I could see him."

And the young man had reached up an arm—before she could catch the meaning of his look—and thrown it around her neck and kissed her, just under the muslin border of her cap. "I guess that's what he would do first," he said. And Aunt Jane's eyes had filled with quick tears as she turned away. [Pg 170]

"That's great foolishness!" she had said softly.

But the boy had won his place; and he was always asking for her when he came. She appeared now in the doorway with a card in her hand—looking at it doubtfully. Her glance ran to the figure in the window in its stately dressing-gown, and returned again to the little black-edged card.

The young man's eye fell on it and his eyebrows lifted a trifle. He came over. [Pg 171]

"For me?" He held out his hand.

She ignored the hand and passed on to the millionaire, extending the card. Her face was impersonal and severe.

The boy's quick laugh broke across it.

"Caught, Dad!" he chuckled, looking at the card.

The millionaire glanced down and his face darkened.

"Tell her I cannot—" He stopped abruptly— Suppose she had heard that the boy was home! His father's room was the best place for him—and for her to see him! He sighed and laid down the card.

"Very well. Tell her to come in."

The young man watched her go, and laughed out and then chuckled softly; his father smiled grimly.

The door opened and the widow entered. She was dark, with a white throat and white hands and bewildering bits of jet that twinkled as she moved. They tinkled softly as she came in.

Aunt Jane, following discreetly, closed the door behind her and went to a table across the room. [Pg 172]

The widow stood looking at the two men with a charming smile.

Julian came forward. "How do you do, Mrs. Cawein?" he was holding out his hand and smiling.

"How-de-do, Julie!" She touched the hand lightly and fluttered by him toward the chair in the window— "And how is the dear man!" she cried.

Julian, the little smile still on his lips, watched the comedy. Aunt Jane from across the room regarded it mildly.

The millionaire half rose as if warding off something—

But the dark lady only pressed his hand as it reached out; she lighted on a chair near by and twinkled a little and shone beamingly on him.

Herman Medfield sank back in his chair.

"It's so good to see you!" she exclaimed softly. "And do you know I might have missed you altogether!" She had clasped her hands and was looking at him reproachfully.

"There was a nurse person met me in the hall, and she said you were not here—that it was all a mistake in the name!" She spread her hands dramatically; the jets twinkled fast like little eyes all over her.... "She said you weren't here—that they'd got the wrong name!... Then *this* good woman—" The little jewels on her hands glinted at Aunt Jane lightly. "This good woman met me—or I shouldn't have got in at all!" [Pg 173]

Herman Medfield cast a glance of due appreciation at "this good woman." Her face was expressionless and cheerful; she was regarding the widow with uncritical eyes.

"It was very good in her, I am sure," murmured Herman Medfield.

"Wasn't it!... I've quite been dying to see you, you know!" She leaned toward him a little and sparkled for him.

"I think I must have been dying to see you," responded the millionaire politely. "Though they told me I was doing very well." He said it reflectively, leaning back in his chair and smiling at her.

The boy watched the play with amused eyes. He had no idea his father could be so courtly with women.

The visitor bridled to it and used her eyes. "It's a mercy you're better! Think of the interests you represent!" [Pg 174]

"I try not to think of them," said Medfield dryly.

"Of course!— You must not!" She quite cried out about it.

Then she turned to Julian. "And where have you been—naughty boy?"

The young man blushed and stammered. She had not held him at finger ends the last time he saw her.

"I've been—been *everywhere*!" he said with a laugh.

Aunt Jane had slipped quietly into the next room and through the doorway her ample figure could be seen shaking up pillows and moving softly about. The widow's eyes followed the figure reflectively and watched it disappear through a door that led into the corridor.

"Julian—dear——"

The boy jumped a little.

She was speaking over her shoulder to him and she leaned back smilingly. "Would you mind, Julian, getting my bag for me? I left it in the car— So stupid of me!"

"With pleasure." The young man went toward the door. He glanced casually as he passed her at the chair she sat so airily upon. [Pg 175]

There was a little smile on his lips as he closed the door.

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## XXVI

[Pg 176]

The widow's eyes followed him. "He is a dear boy," she said, with a motherly glance at the softly closing door.

Then her look changed and she leaned forward and touched the bowl of forget-me-nots with lightest finger-tip.

"Mine?" she said archly.

"If you would like them," said the millionaire graciously.

"Naughty man!" She shook the finger at him and then pointed it at the forget-me-nots.

"Who sent them to you?" Her chin tilted the question.

He regarded it gravely. "A woman sent them," he said.

She nodded and the little jets dinged at him.

"This woman?" She placed the finger on her chest and looked at him reproachfully.

The millionaire's look broke in startled confusion. He glanced swiftly at the flowers. "Why—yes— of course!... I ought to have thanked you.... But—I have not been well, you know." He smiled whimsically. [Pg 177]

She motioned it aside. "I don't mind being thanked—so long as you got them!" Her eyes travelled about the room. "They are the only ones you have!" she said reflectively.

The millionaire's glance followed hers.

"There were—others," he said vaguely.

"But you have not kept them!" She leaned forward.

"No." He admitted it.

"These are the only ones—" she paused, looking at them pensively. "You don't know how happy you make me!" she said—and sighed it away.

"I am glad to have pleased you," responded the millionaire feebly.

"You don't know—" she touched the flowers as if they were something precious that must not be disturbed. "You—don't know how happy—you make me!"

The millionaire glanced uneasily about.

The door opened and Julian flashed in. "I say! I couldn't find your bag, you know!"

[Pg 178]

"Never mind!" She was sweet with it. "Perhaps I didn't bring it, after all."

"You don't think it is possibly—in your chair," he suggested, smiling a little.

He had come over and was standing quite close to her.

She glanced at him deprecatingly. "How clever in you, Julian!"

Her hand groped in the chair for the bag and found it—and she held it out, laughing at her mistake.

The two men smiled.

"So stupid—in me!" She took out a tiny handkerchief and shook it and the faintest scent of violets flew about the room.

The door opened. It was Miss Canfield, with a glass of water on a small round tray. She came across to the millionaire. "It is medicine time," she said quietly.

The millionaire drank it off and returned the glass to the tray and thanked her.

She looked down at him. "Is there anything else—you would like?" There was a clear, faint color in her cheeks, like a rose-leaf.

The widow's eye rested on it.

[Pg 179]

"Nothing, thank you," said Medfield.

"You have sat up a little longer than the doctor said— You must not get too tired."

She left the room, carrying the little tray lightly before her, moving with noiseless step.

Three pairs of eyes watched her from the room.

"They take good care of you, don't they?" said Mrs. Cawein patronizingly. Her eyes were still reflectively on the door.

"The best of care!" responded Medfield.

"Well—" she sighed brightly and shook the handkerchief. "I think I was told to go?" She nodded archly. "Yes—she told me!— I feel sure of it!"

She got up. "You must get well fast!" Her hand touched his lightly and whisked away, and the violet scent was wafted about him.

She moved toward the door, drawing Julian into her wake.

Herman Medfield's eyes watched them. His lips grew a little compressed. "You have forgotten your hat, Julian," he said sharply.

The boy glanced back over his shoulder and flashed a smile at him. "I'm seeing Mrs. Cawein to her car. I'll be back in a minute, sir—"

[Pg 180]

She murmured deprecation as they went. "You really—do not need to come with me, Julian."

"But I want to," said the young man. He shifted his feet quickly and caught step with her as she plumed along beside him.

"Your father's looking very well!" she said.

"Isn't he!" The reply was absent.

She glanced at him sharply. "You must come and see me—I have missed you!"

His eye went past her to the car that was waiting. "It is very kind in you," he murmured.

She tripped a little on the step and he caught her arm to save her.

She glowed to him. "Be sure to come," she said softly. "We must take up old times."

Julian looked at her and smiled ever so faintly.

He opened the door of the car and put her in and bowed ceremoniously and closed the door. She nodded brightly through the window.... The car rolled away.

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He stood looking after it, smiling with a little amusement. Then he ran lightly up the steps.

The long corridor lighted by a great window stretched before him, and a figure at the end was outlined against it—a slender figure that carried itself very light and straight. She was walking from him, her face toward the window, and the white uniform and the cap glowed softly.... The reddish hair under the cap caught little glints of light. He watched till the figure disappeared in the distance. Then he turned to the door of Suite A.

The light of the reddish, shining hair was still in his face as he came in.

Medfield grunted and stirred a little in his chair. He glanced at the absorbed face.

"You find her attractive?" he said dryly.

The young man stared at him. He had forgotten Julia Cawein and her car; he had forgotten everything except the window of the long lighted hall and the girl's head lifted against it.

"I think she is charming!" he cried.

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"Don't you?" he added after a little, uncomfortable pause.

"No," said his father shortly.

"What is the matter with her?" asked the boy. He was watching his father's face.

"Nothing is the matter if you don't happen to see it."

"I don't!"

The man was silent a minute. "Sherwood Cawein died of a broken heart," he said at last.

The boy stared. Then the look in his face broke and danced. "I was not thinking of Mrs. Cawein," he said quietly.

"You were not speaking of Julia Cawein?" His father sat up, his hands on the arms of his chair, and looked at him.

"No, I was not thinking of Mrs. Cawein. I'll tell you some day, Father, what I was thinking of. But—" he looked at him straight. "I'd like you to trust me a little if you will, please."

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## XXVII

[Pg 183]

"I'm not going to bed!" said Medfield irritably. "I don't want to lie down. I'm tired of lying down!" He looked out of the window and scowled.

The nurse was silent a minute, regarding him thoughtfully. Then she laid a light, cool hand on his wrist and her fingers found the pulse and held it.

"There's nothing the matter!" he said crossly.

"No, there doesn't seem to be." She released his wrist and went quietly out.

The millionaire's eyes followed her.... A shrewd flash came into them. The little annoyance had left his face; it had the keen, concentrated look that men who knew Herman Medfield did not care to see on his face—if they had business with him. It was the look that meant he was on the track of something or somebody.

He reached out to the bell.

Miss Canfield came. She waited with an inquiring look.

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"I should like to see Mrs. Holbrook," said Medfield politely.

"Aunt Jane?" The nurse hesitated. "She's in the Children's Ward. Is it something that can wait—or something I can do for you, sir?" Her face was troubled.

He smiled at her reassuringly. "I want to see Aunt Jane— She will come, I think—if you tell her." He settled back comfortably in his chair and waited.

He did not look up when Aunt Jane came in. His head rested against the chair and his face was drawn in the look of pathetic distress and helplessness that calls for pity.

Aunt Jane took in the look with kindly glance.

"You've been having too much company," she said.

"I do feel rather done up," admitted Medfield weakly.

"Well, you better go right to bed—" Aunt Jane moved toward the door of the adjoining room.

"I'm not going to bed," said Medfield.

Aunt Jane stood arrested—

[Pg 185]

"I want the doctor," added Medfield warily.

"I'll send for him—soon as you get in," she said placidly. "You come right along."

"No." He put his hands on the arms of the chair and looked at her like a spoiled child.

Aunt Jane regarded him calmly. She went into the corridor and sent word for Miss Canfield to come to her office. Then she went on to the office and took up the receiver and called Dr. Carmon's number; and stood waiting, with bent head, her cap strings reflective.

The head lifted itself—and her face focussed to the little black cup on the desk before her.

"It's about Mr. Medfield—Herman G. Medfield—yes." She said it severely into the blackness. "He won't do as he's told!"

Her ear listened. "Well, that's all right. But you'll have to come.... No, I don't know. He's cross—



for one thing!... In half an hour, you say?... Well, that will do, I guess—I can handle him that long." She smiled and hung up the receiver and turned to Miss Canfield and looked at her through her glasses. [Pg 186]

"What is the matter with him?" she asked.

The nurse shook her head. "He was all right until half an hour ago. I took him his medicine then," she replied.

"It's the widow!" said Aunt Jane.

Miss Canfield glanced at her inquiringly. "The one who was—?"

"Visiting him—yes. You saw her?"

Miss Canfield smiled. "Yes."

Aunt Jane nodded. "She's done it, somehow." Her face grew reflective. "I hadn't ought to have let her in," she said softly. "You had more sense than I did about that."

"I wondered a little why you did it," said Miss Canfield safely.

"Well—" Aunt Jane considered. "I thought maybe he needed stirring up a little—so he would get along faster. I didn't mean to stir him up quite so much," she added reflectively. "I didn't know he'd act like this.... He's always making a fuss!" she added disapprovingly.

Miss Canfield's face grew defensive. She turned it away. "I had thought he was a very good patient," she said quietly. [Pg 187]

Aunt Jane's glance flashed at her. The muslin cap covered a question. "I don't know as he's any better than any other patient," she said, watching her critically.... "He ought to be good—with his Suite—and everybody running and waiting on him all the time!"

A bell tinkled and buzzed on the board in the hall.

Aunt Jane's cap turned toward it. "That's him now, I suppose, wanting something!"

The nurse went to the board and scanned it. She reached up and threw off the number and turned down the hall toward Suite A.

Aunt Jane's gaze followed her reflectively. Then she turned to her desk. When Dr. Carmon arrived she was sitting quietly at work on her books.

"What's up?" he said brusquely as he came in.

"I hope you'll find out," said Aunt Jane. Her tone was tranquil.

He shrugged his shoulders and removed his coat—throwing it carelessly across a chair. He took up his little black bag. [Pg 188]

Aunt Jane regarded the coat disapprovingly. She went across and shook it out and laid it in neat folds.

"I think likely—it's a woman," she said, smoothing the coat.

He stopped abruptly and looked at her. "Anybody been here?"

"Yes—a widow."

The doctor grunted a little. "Who let her in?"

"Well—I don't *know* that she upset him," said Aunt Jane. "Something did! You can find out, I guess." Her gaze was approvingly mild.

He relaxed a little.

"You want I should come with you?" she asked.

"No," hastily, "I'll send for you—if I need anything. Miss Canfield's around, I suppose."

"Yes, she's there, I guess. She's there most of the time," said Aunt Jane. Her face was non-committal.

But he glanced at it sharply. Then he went down to Suite A.

Herman Medfield, still sitting in his window, with the blue quilted gown wrapped about his legs, wore an unhappy expression. [Pg 189]

Dr. Carmon scanned it. He set down the black bag and drew up a chair.

"What seems to be the matter?" he asked. He seated himself firmly in the chair and looked at his patient through keen glasses. All the little fine unconscious fibres that diagnosed a case for Dr. Carmon were alert and reaching out for signs; but the doctor himself looked as impassive as a stone jug, sitting in his chair, a hand on either knee—surveying Herman Medfield.

"What is the matter?" he said.

"I don't know." Medfield's tone was indifferent. "I feel worse—general distress—heaviness."

"Any pain?" The doctor's hand burrowing in his pocket had brought out the stethoscope.

He adjusted it to his ears and hitched his chair a little nearer. Medfield made an obliging movement forward.

"Stay where you are," said the doctor gruffly. He leaned forward and placed the little metal disks on the blue quilted gown and bent his head. [Pg 190]

The two men were silent. Medfield with his head against the back of the chair and his eyes closed was wondering guiltily what the two little flexible tubes were revealing to the listening ears.

And Dr. Carmon, behind an impenetrable scowling mask, was wondering what the devil had gone wrong with Herman Medfield. And he listened—not so much with his ears, as with those little inner senses that never deceived him if he trusted them.

He slipped off the stethoscope and sat up. "Did you say you had pain?" he asked.

"A little." The tone was weary.

Dr. Carmon looked at him sharply. "Whereabouts?"

Medfield turned his head restively. "Everywhere," he said. "Up my back and shoulders—the right one—and in my head."

"Your head aches, does it?" That was the outside question; and inside, all the little therapeutic fibres in Dr. Carmon's stubby figure were saying to him: "His head is as good as yours is, this minute! What's the matter with him? Buck up—and find out!" [Pg 191]

He put his hand on the patient's wrist. "What would you like for dinner?" he asked.

"I couldn't eat anything," said Medfield passively.

"Not a nice chop—with some asparagus and mayonnaise?" The doctor was watching the face.

Medfield shook his head resolutely. "I don't feel like eating."

"Very well." Dr. Carmon sat back and looked at him. "I think you'd better go to bed—and stay there for a while."

"You think I got up too soon?" Medfield's voice was patient and full of acquiescence; it was very meek.

"I don't think anything," said Dr. Carmon gruffly. "But when a man can't eat, he'd better be in bed.... There's nothing the matter with you."

Medfield's heart gave a quick little jump, and the doctor's hand that had strayed again to his wrist, counted it grimly.

"You're tired. That's all! Had company?"

"Some one came in—yes. She only stayed a few minutes," he added virtuously. [Pg 192]

"Well." Dr. Carmon got up. "That didn't hurt you—probably. You'll be all right. How's the boy?"

"All right. He's generally here," replied Medfield.

"Doesn't tire you?"

Herman Medfield's eyes opened quickly. "I want him here!" he said sharply.

Dr. Carmon's thought followed the look swiftly. "It isn't the boy, but it's something about him. I'll see the boy."

He rang the bell. "I'd get to bed right away if I were you."

It was Aunt Jane who came leisurely in, glancing at the two men. "Miss Canfield's at dinner. She'll come pretty quick—if you need her."

"We don't need her. He's to go to bed for a while." The doctor nodded to Herman Medfield, who had got up from his chair, and was standing beside him.

The millionaire in his blue silk robe with the velvet girdle and tassel was a stately figure; and, for the second time, Aunt Jane had a lively sense of Dr. Carmon's short, uncouthness and rumpled clothes—there was a large grease spot on the front of his vest. Her mind made a quick note of the spot while her eyes travelled placidly to Herman Medfield. [Pg 193]

"I'm glad you've made up your mind," she said pleasantly.

He was moving toward the door of his bedroom. He stopped. "It isn't *my* mind. It's the doctor's mind that's made up," he replied suavely.

Dr. Carmon watched him and smiled a little and Miss Canfield, coming in the door, wondered what Dr. Carmon's smile meant.

Aunt Jane and the doctor returned to the office.... She faced him.

"What's the matter?" she said.

He shook his head. "Just one of those things to keep you guessing." He shrugged his shoulders.

Aunt Jane's eye rested on the grease spot. "Soap and water will take that off!" she said practically. She laid a finger on the spot.

The doctor doubled his chin to look down on himself.

"Have the water hot—and plenty of soap," said Aunt Jane. [Pg 194]

He grunted, and drew his coat over the spot. "When I get time," he replied.

Aunt Jane was in her office. It was Monday morning and the wheels had grinded getting under way. She had poured a drop of oil here and another drop there, as it seemed needed, and had come back to her office for a general survey before starting again.

It was well known in the House of Mercy that the times when the whole hospital force went scurrying about, under some sudden emergency, were often the times that Aunt Jane chose, for some unknown reason, to sit quietly in her office, doing nothing.

Hurrying by the office door, with tense look and quick-running feet, they would catch a glimpse of Aunt Jane sitting placidly at ease; and they would slow down a little, perhaps, and wonder what she could be thinking of to sit there as if nothing were wrong.... And then, somehow, through the hospital would run a quiet, steadying force that seemed to hold them in place and use them for its ends; and they would be conscious, as they worked, of being bigger than they had guessed.

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Aunt Jane was not thinking now of any crisis. The troubles this morning were petty ones—"pin pricks," she called them. She was wondering about the millionaire—and wondering whether she would better go to Suite A.... Miss Canfield had reported a good night and Dr. Carmon would be coming soon.

She looked up. The doctor's figure was in the doorway. He nodded gruffly as he took off his coat. "Everybody all right?"

Aunt Jane's tongue clicked a little. She went to a corner of the room and moved back the screen and turned on the hot water.

"Come here," she said.

The doctor looked at her inquiringly.

"You didn't clean your vest! It's a perfect sight!" She tested the water with her hand and took up the soap.

Dr. Carmon glanced down at the expanse of vest guiltily. He scowled. "I'm too busy—to fuss." He reached for his bag.

"Come here!" said Aunt Jane.

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And while he fidgeted and grumbled, her firm, efficient fingers scrubbed at him with soap and hot water and a bit of rough cloth. Satisfaction shone on him. "I never knew a man that could keep himself clean!" she said briskly.

"There!" She stood back a little. "It doesn't show much now. I'll do a little more on it—when it's dried off so I can see."

He backed hastily away. "I'll send it to the tailor. I'll do it to-night."

"You don't need to waste money on tailors," she said calmly. "A little soap and—" But he was gone.

Aunt Jane smiled to herself and put back the soap and hung up the cloth and replaced the screen. She moved with the ample leisure of those who have plenty of time.

A nurse came in from the waiting-room. "A man is here—a Mr. Dalton. He wants to know if he can see you?"

"Yes, I'll see him," said Aunt Jane.

"He said he could come again if you are too busy." The nurse waited.

"No, I'm not busy—no busier than I always am, I guess. You tell him to come in."

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He came in with quick step and a little light in his face—as if a glint of sun shone on a dark field.

Aunt Jane looked at him approvingly. "You're doing first-rate!"

He laughed. "I don't have to try. Luck is coming my way now!"

"Folks generally have to go fully half-way to meet it," said Aunt Jane. "You seen your wife?"

He nodded. "She has been telling me—I want to thank you!" He said it impulsively and came nearer to her; his dark face worked with something he did not say.

"Sit down, Mr. Dalton. You don't need to thank *me*," said Aunt Jane.

"Edith told me——"

"Yes, I don't doubt she told you. She thinks I did something, maybe. But I didn't.... When folks get well," she was looking at him and speaking slowly. "When folks get well they *get* well—all over; and then no matter *who* comes along and says to 'em, 'Why don't you do so-and-so?'—they think it's something special.... Maybe it's just as well to let them think it—" she was smiling to him—"if it helps any."

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"But it's true!" he said stoutly. "I've known Edith longer than you have—she hasn't ever been the way she is now."

"I'm glad for you, Mr. Dalton!" said Aunt Jane heartily, "and I know you'll be good to her. I can see it in your face—that you treat her well."

The face clouded. "I mean to—but I never seem to know just how she'll take things——"

"What's been the trouble?" asked Aunt Jane.

"She didn't tell you?"

Aunt Jane shook her head. "We didn't talk much—just visited together a little and got acquainted."

He seemed thoughtful. "I think the real trouble is something that never gets put into words; and it isn't so easy to put in words.... I'm a failure, I guess!" He looked up apologetically. "I don't know that you will understand. But I've had chances—every sort of chance—and I've never made good."

"Never made money, you mean," said Aunt Jane placidly.

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He looked up quickly. "That's it!"

"What seemed to be the matter?"

"I don't know." He was looking before him. "When I got through college, I thought I was going to get on all right—thought I should be a big man some day." He looked at her and smiled.

"You look pretty big and strong," assented Aunt Jane.

He laughed out. "I'm big enough this way!" He reached out his arms from the broad shoulders and clinched the hands a little. "I can tackle anything in sight. But—" he leaned forward—"it's the things that are out of sight that I can't seem to come to grips with."

"That's what bothers most folks, I guess—men folks special," said Aunt Jane. "I've known a good many men, and I like them.... I like men better'n I do women," she added a little guiltily, "but sometimes it seems to me, when I'm with 'em, as if they were blind—a little mite blind about what's going on inside."

She rocked a little.

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"Maybe it's just because they're slow," she said reflectively. "They can't see quick, the way women can, and they're kind of afraid of what they can't see—some like children in the dark." She was smiling at him.

He nodded. "You've got it! I shouldn't wonder if that's the way Edith feels. She's never said it just that way. But she doesn't seem to understand what I'm after; and I can't tell her—because I don't know myself," he added candidly.

"So while you're figuring it out, she calls it something else?" said Aunt Jane.

"That's it! And then we get—angry, and I can't even think. It seems to paralyze me, some way."

Aunt Jane was smiling to herself. "'Most seems as if it would have been a better way to have men folks marry men folks—" She looked at him shrewdly. "They'd get along more comfortable?"

He shook his head and laughed. "I want Edith just the way she is. But I wish—"

"Yes—we all do." Aunt Jane nodded. "We like what we've got—pretty well. But we're always wishing it was a little mite different some way.... I like my work here; and I do it about as well as I know how. But some days I wish—" She broke off and sat looking before her.

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The young man's face regarded her attentively. He leaned forward. "I'm taking too much of your time. I didn't think how busy you must be. I'll go now. And thank you for letting me talk." He stood up.

Aunt Jane reached out a hand.

"Sit down, Mr. Dalton. That's what my time is for—to talk about things.... What was it you said you wished?"

He sat down. "I'd like to tell you—if you really have time.... And it won't take so long—" He was looking at it thoughtfully. "You see, I've never made good, because I've never stayed long in one place. That is what frets Edith—what she can't understand."

"It's hard for a woman—always changing round," said Aunt Jane. "Hard on the furniture."

He smiled. "We haven't changed house so many times. It's been mostly in the city here. But each time I've had to start all over.... After we were married, I went in with Clark & Lyman; that's Edith's father—George B. Lyman; and I thought I was fixed for life. And it wasn't six months before I had to move on."

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"I suppose you'd done something they didn't like," commented Aunt Jane.

He laughed. "It was what I *didn't* do! They said I didn't take my chances. Edith's father said I didn't."

"Take risks, you mean?"

"No.... Chances to make money—he said I let the best chances go by."

"Why did you do that?" asked Aunt Jane. Her face, turned to him, was full of kindly interest.

He sat with his hands thrust in his pockets, looking at her.

"That's what I've never been able to tell Edith," he said slowly. "But I think I can tell you—if you'll let me.... I've been thinking about it a good deal since she's been ill and I think it's because I always see something ahead—something bigger—that I'd rather work for." The hands thrust themselves deeper into his pockets and his face grew intent. "I feel it so strongly—that it seems wasteful to stop to pick up the twopenny bits they're scrambling for."

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He threw back his shoulders. "Well, I'm going to try.... I've made up my mind—She means more to me than anything in the world and if she can't be happy, I'm going to give it up.... That's all! And thank you for letting me talk it out. It's done me more good than you know!" He held out his hand.

Aunt Jane took it slowly. "I don't quite think I'd give up, Mr. Dalton." She was looking at him through her glasses, and the young man had a sudden sense that her face was beautiful. "I don't think I'd give up—not quite yet—if I was you."

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## XXIX

[Pg 205]

Dr. Carmon and Aunt Jane stood in the sitting-room of Suite A. The door to the bedroom was ajar, and through it Miss Canfield could be seen moving about and waiting on Herman Medfield.

Aunt Jane went quietly to the door and drew it together with noiseless touch. "How is he?" she asked.

"All right. There's nothing the matter—that I can find out." Dr. Carmon shrugged his shoulders a little. "Temperature normal—no change, you see." He pointed to the chart lying on the table, and ran his finger along the lines. "Pulse good. Slept like a top, Miss Canfield says."

"She's to go on ward duty to-day," said Aunt Jane.

He looked up quickly. "I want her!"

"You said, yesterday, I could have her for the Men's Ward," replied Aunt Jane. She was looking critically at the spot on his vest and he drew his coat quickly together.

"That was yesterday," he said gruffly. "I can't spare her now."

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Aunt Jane sighed. "It doesn't seem right for one person to have everything."

"He'll have to have things—for a while," replied Dr. Carmon. "He'll have to have what he wants—till I find out what's wrong with him.... He wants Miss Canfield—and I can't take the risk of having him upset!" He spoke a little brusquely at the end.

Aunt Jane's feathers ruffled themselves. "I don't know what call he has to expect to have any particular nurse!" she said. "We shall take good care of him, whatever nurse he has!"

"Yes—yes—of course." Dr. Carmon was testy and placating. "But I told him he could have Miss Canfield—till he was out of bed—and she'll have to stay."

"You told him—he could have Miss Canfield!" Aunt Jane's eye held something and looked at it. "When did you tell him that?" she asked at last, letting it go.

"I told him yesterday—when you sent for me."

"After the widow was here?"

"Yes." He looked at her. "Anything wrong about that?" Dr. Carmon was not in his best humor. He felt Aunt Jane's eye boring through to the offending spot and there was subtle disapproval in her manner—something he did not quite fathom. "She'll have to stay!" he said—and the tone was final.

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Aunt Jane's only reply was a little chuckling laugh.

He glared at her and went out.

Her smile followed him from the room. She went over to the window. From the next room came the sound of voices—Miss Canfield's low and quieting, and Herman Medfield's expostulating and fretful—and then silence.

Aunt Jane went across and opened the door. She looked in on Herman Medfield. He was lying with his eyes closed and an almost peaceful expression on his countenance. Miss Canfield was not in the room.

He opened his eyes and saw Aunt Jane and closed them quickly. His face changed subtly and swiftly to mild distress.

Aunt Jane came leisurely in.

The eyes did not open or respond to her questioning look.

[Pg 208]

She sat down by the bed.

"Good morning," he said feebly.

Aunt Jane smiled. "I didn't think it was good—not very good—not from what Dr. Carmon told me," she said slowly.

Medfield sighed. "Some pain," he admitted. He turned his head restlessly.

"Well, we must expect *some* pain." Her voice was as big and breezy as all outdoors.

Medfield's face relaxed under it—to a kind of meek patience.

Aunt Jane watched it kindly.

"What you need, Mr. Medfield, is a good wife—"

The eyes flew open—and stared—and closed again quickly.

She nodded. "That's what I've been thinking—some one that has sense and can do things—not just talk about 'em."

He smiled faintly. "I'm taken very good care of," he replied politely. "I couldn't ask for better care than I've had here." The eyes closed themselves again.

"Yes—Miss Canfield's a good nurse." She was watching the face and the closed eyes. "She takes good care—and she's got sense.... What I was thinking was, that you could go home now—if you had somebody to go with you to look after you and take interest—if you had a wife." [Pg 209]

"I'm not well enough," interposed Medfield quickly.

"Oh, yes—you're well enough, I guess."

"The doctor said I was to stay in bed!" His defense was almost spirited.

"You and Julian could go together," went on Aunt Jane ignoring it. "*He'll* look after you some."

Medfield groaned. And Aunt Jane reached out a hand to his forehead. Her cool touch rested on it.

"Your head feels all right," she said, smoothing it slowly.

The little wrinkles went out of Medfield's brow and Aunt Jane watched it relax.

"Better tell me all about it," she said gently. "You'll feel better to get it off your mind, maybe."

"I *don't* feel well, you know." It was almost apologetic.

"No—and next thing you know, you'll be down sick—just pretending.... I've been thinking about it," she said slowly. "Ever since you were took down yesterday—but I didn't sense what was the matter—not till this morning." [Pg 210]

"You don't know now!" Herman Medfield's tone was guilty and a little apprehensive.

Aunt Jane smiled. "Yes, I reckon I see it just about the way it is—now.... You don't *want* to get well—not yet."

"No." He admitted it feebly.

"And you don't want we should take Miss Canfield off your case."

He said nothing.

"Well, we're not going to take her off."

His face brightened a little.

Aunt Jane laughed softly. "That's right! You can chirk up—all you want to!... You *do* need a good wife—much as anybody ever I see."

He opened his lips—and stared at her—and closed them. "I—I believe I do!" His eyes rested on the fresh childlike color in Aunt Jane's face and the little lines that twinkled at him.

"I believe I do!" he repeated softly. [Pg 211]

Aunt Jane nodded sagely, "That's what you need."

She got up leisurely. "Well, I must go do my work."

He put out his hand. "When will you come again?" he asked.

"Oh—along by and by." She was moving from him. "You just tend to getting well.... You'll be able to sit up some time this afternoon maybe." She nodded to him from the door and was gone.

He lay looking at the place where she had disappeared. A little wonder held his face; a gentleness had come into it and the eyes watching the closed door smiled dreamily.

When Miss Canfield returned she glanced at him in surprise. "You're looking better!" she exclaimed.

"I feel better!" said Medfield almost gayly. "The pain is entirely gone."

"That's good! We'll have you up—in a day or two."

"I don't see why Julian has not been in," replied Medfield.

She paused. "He did come," she spoke slowly. "But we thought perhaps it was better not to disturb you.... You were sleeping when he came—you seemed to be asleep." [Pg 212]

"Did *you* see him?" demanded Medfield.

"Yes." The little dear color that was always in her face mounted a trifle. "He's coming after dinner," she added quietly.

Medfield's face was cheerful. "I want to see him when he comes— If I am asleep, you tell him to wait."

"Very well, sir."

"You tell him, yourself. Don't trust any of those people out there!" He made a motion of distrust toward the hospital in general. "You have him wait—see him yourself."

In the linen-room at the end of the corridor Miss Canfield was busy with supplies for Suite A. She stood on a chair in front of a great cupboard; and her shoulders were lost in the depths of the cupboard.... A sound behind her caused her to withdraw her head.

Julian Medfield, standing in the door, looked at her.

"What is the matter?" she said quickly. She got down from the chair.

"I thought I should find you," replied the youth.

"Did you want me?"

"Yes."

"What has happened?"

He watched her smilingly. "I didn't say anything had happened.... I said I wanted you."

The color mounted swiftly and she turned to the pile of linen on the table and gathered it up. "I am rather busy this morning," she said quietly. "I thought you meant your father needed something." [Pg 214]

"No—he doesn't need anything, I guess. They told me in the office, that *you* wanted *me*—they said you had left word for me. They made a mistake, perhaps." He spoke half teasingly and she lifted her chin.

"That was your father," she replied. "He didn't want to miss you." She sorted out the sheets impersonally. She had not looked at him after the first flurried minute.

"Do you want me to go away?" he said quietly.

She looked up, startled. "Why?"

"I didn't know."

Her fingers returned to their work. "I think your father is awake," she said in a businesslike tone. "I will go and see." She placed the linen in the cupboard and closed the door and locked it.

His hand made a little gesture. "Would you please——"

She waited.

"I can't say anything if you look like that!" he said whimsically.

She moved from him to the window. "There isn't any need to—say anything!" [Pg 215]

The reddish hair was lighted up against the window as he had seen it before, and he watched it.

"That's the way *I* feel!" he said softly.

"How do you feel?" She wheeled about and looked at him.

"As if there wasn't any need to say things. As if——"

She had turned back to the window. He went toward her.

"You've known all along!" he said.

He addressed the little locks gathered up under her cap.

He was quite near to her now.

"You knew—the first day I came—when I saw you—in father's room," he declared to the little locks of hair. "Didn't you?"

There was no reply.

"And every time I've seen you since!" he said exultingly. "And now that I've got you alone for a minute—you pretend——"

"I'm not pretending!" The shoulders shrugged a little.

"And turn your back on me," he added quietly.

"It's very thoughtless!" she said, speaking to the window. "You make it awkward for me.... I hoped you would have sense enough—not to say anything!" [Pg 216]

"I haven't any sense," said the young man. "And you have so much.... That's why I like you. I fell in love with your sense—the first day!"

She had turned and faced him now. "Of course you don't care!" she said indignantly. "It is just a joke to you—to come, interfering with my work——"

"I didn't mean to stop you!" He glanced helplessly at the linen-cupboard.

"I mean my nursing!" she said with dignity. "I can't take care of your father if you're looking at me—and saying foolish things—all the time!"

He reached out a hand. "I'm not saying foolish things," he said quietly. "And you know it——"

A little bell buzzed somewhere and she lifted her head. "He's ringing—" she said quickly. "It's his bell! I'll have to go!"

Then she waited.

And he took her hands and looked down at them, and bent and kissed them gently, and watched the little color come dancing into her face. [Pg 217]

"Pretending you didn't care!" he said.

He crushed the two hands hard and she cried out and drew them away—and lifted them to her face and began to cry into them—little hard sobs that shook her. And he held her close and patted the troubled shoulder.

"There, there!" he said. His voice was very young and happy and surprised.

And she looked up and smiled—a queer little reddened smile—under her crooked cap.

The bell tinkled—and rang a long shrill burr.

"I shall have to go! I know I look like a fright!" She reached to the cap.

"You look dear!" said the young man exultantly.

But she was gone and he was speaking only to the white wainscoted panels of the linen-room and to the sunlight flooding in.

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## XXXI

[Pg 218]

Herman Medfield glanced at her sharply as she came in.

"I've been ringing some time," he said dryly.

"I was in the linen-room. I'm sorry. I came as soon as I could."

He looked at her face. "What is the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing." She shook her head.

"You look as if you had been crying," he said, studying her.

"I haven't anything to cry about. I am very happy!" She returned his gaze serenely, with a little fluttering look that came and went underneath.

"You look happy," he admitted. "But I could swear you'd been crying."

"It doesn't matter how I look, does it?" She straightened the clothes a little and shook out his pillows. "Can I get you something, sir? I'm sorry you had to wait."

"It doesn't matter. But I woke up, and thought of Julian—I was afraid he would go away.... I told you to have him wait, you know; and it's after three—he ought to be here by this time." His tone was petulant. [Pg 219]

"I'll see if he is here," she replied.

But the door of the sitting-room had opened and they caught a glimpse of the young man crossing the room.

"There he is!" said his father with satisfaction. "Now, don't you go—I may need you."

The boy came and stood in the doorway. "Hallo, Father! How do you do, Miss Canfield." He bowed to her.

"Come in, Julian," said Medfield impatiently. "I missed you this morning. How did you find things at the office?"

"All right, I guess." The young man crossed the room slowly. "I shouldn't know if they weren't right.... I know as much about the business as"—he looked about him and smiled—"as that brass knob over there!" He nodded to it.

His father smiled contentedly. "You'll learn." Then he looked at him quickly. "You like it, don't you?" [Pg 220]

"Oh, I like it," said the young man comfortably. "I like it better than anything I've ever done—I feel as if I belonged there. I feel like my own grandfather, I guess." He laughed happily.

"Of course they treat me a good deal like a kid," he added.

"You're not so very old!" responded Herman Medfield with a twinkle.

The young man's eye rested impersonally on the nurse who was moving about the room. "I'm growing up every day," he declared cheerfully.

Miss Canfield's face was not responsive. She was studying Herman Medfield's chart. She took it up and left the room.

Medfield's eyes followed her. "There's a young woman who knows her business," he said with approval.

Julian sat down. "She seems very competent," he responded.

His father shot a keen glance at his cheerful indifference.

"She's more than competent," he said severely. "You want to be tied up like this for a while—to find out what people really are." [Pg 221]



"I don't think I should mind it—so much." The boy smiled at him frankly. "You look very comfortable, sir."

"I am better," admitted Medfield.

"What put you back yesterday?"

Medfield looked at the ceiling. "Nobody seems to understand just what it was," he said quietly, "unless, maybe, Aunt Jane knows.... I think perhaps she understands the case—better than the doctor."

"She's a nice old woman!" said Julian pleasantly. "Comfortable to have around."

His father's glance was amused and a little critical. "How old do you suppose she may be, my son?"

"Oh—I don't know—fifty! Any age!" said the boy. "You don't think of age—with a woman like that. You just love her!"

His father smiled. "You have *some* sense, I see...."

"No, I don't want it!" He held up a warning hand. Miss Canfield had returned with his medicine. "I don't want it!" he said.

Miss Canfield smiled. "The doctor said you were to have it, sir."

[Pg 222]

"Set it down," said Medfield. "I'll take it by and by.... I'm not sick," he grumbled. "I don't need medicine!" He glanced at it with aversion.

His son looked on with amused smile.

Medfield's eye rested on him and then on Miss Canfield. His face cleared. He motioned to her. "I want my son to see that catalogue that came this morning—the rose catalogue, you know. Will you show it to him, please. It's in the other room."

She started toward the door. "I will bring it."

But he held up a hand. "No, I don't want it in here. I'm tired."

He turned to Julian. "It's the catalogue of foreign roses, from Rotterdam—the firm that Munson orders from. He wants to send in orders for fall delivery—right away. I looked it over and made out a list.... I showed Miss Canfield. She understands—"

He closed his eyes. "I think I'll rest a few minutes," he said. "She'll show the list to you and tell you what I said, and you can give it to Munson to-night. Don't forget it."

[Pg 223]

He waved them away and lay with closed eyes.... Presently he opened his eyes and smiled a little.... Through the open door he could see two heads bending over the catalogue. The murmur of voices came to him soothingly.

He drew a sigh.... It was almost as if the boy were stupid! A girl like that—one in a thousand—right before him, every day for over a week now!... He lay listening to the voices—there were long silences, it seemed to him, and pauses.... The heads had moved a little. He could not see them and the gaps of silence irritated him.... His thoughts ran back to his own youth. *He* had not been backward! He held it with a flitting smile. In less than two weeks from the day he met her, she had promised to marry him.... Young people nowadays had no spirit—no fire! He fumed a little. It would probably take Julian six months to discover that the girl was even pretty!... He could not lie in bed six months, waiting for his son to get his eyes open!

He rang the bell impatiently and Miss Canfield came to the door.

[Pg 224]

She glanced at the glass on the stand beside him. "You have not taken your medicine!"

He looked at it guiltily. "I forgot.... Did you make out the list?"

"Partly." She hesitated, and he fancied that a little fine flush crept along under the transparent skin. "I don't believe I remembered all you said about them."

"Never mind!" He was magnanimous and suddenly cheerful. "I'll go over them again to-morrow.... And I'd like you to see the place where they are to be put." He was speaking slowly. "I think you might help me—if it isn't too much trouble—"

She looked at him questioningly.

"My rose garden, I mean," said Medfield.

"Oh—!" The little fine flush swept up again.

He watched it with satisfaction.

"Julian has never taken much interest in the garden," said Medfield. "He doesn't know one rose from another."

"No—?" She was busy with the glass on the stand.

"But women have a kind of instinct about such things." He was impersonal and gallant; and the little shadow of disturbance left her face.

[Pg 225]

She moved about, making him comfortable.

"I wish you would ask my son to come here," said Medfield.

The young man came—with the catalogue in his hand. His face was open and cheerful.

"How far have you got?" asked Medfield.

"I don't understand all your hieroglyphics," replied the young man, seating himself on the edge of the bed. "This, for instance!" He held out the book, pointing to a brilliantly colored specimen with little pencilled dots on the margin.

Medfield glanced at it. "That means, 'Try again,'" he said.

"Oh—!" He made a memorandum on the margin, smiling a little as he did it.

"Munson never wants to try things twice," said his father. "You'll have to watch him, or he'll leave that out, now." He nodded to the brilliant-pictured rose.

The boy's eye dwelt on it. "Looks worth trying for—several times," he said softly.

"It is," replied his father. "It's hardy and fragrant and prolific—I am going to have Miss Canfield go out home—to see the garden," he added irrelevantly. [Pg 226]

The young man stood up. He looked at his father, a little bewildered, and then toward the door of the next room, where a white figure was flitting about at work.

"I want her to see the garden," went on Medfield. "She has excellent taste—and common sense. She can tell me what Munson's up to—this is just the season he needs watching. No telling what he'll do!"

"I see!" The young man turned over the pages of the Rotterdam catalogue slowly. He was absorbed in them.

"She's going to-morrow afternoon," said Medfield.

"Alone?"

"I suppose she'll go alone, yes—unless you want to spare time to take her," said Medfield carelessly.

"I shall be very glad to take her, sir!"

"Very well." Medfield was indifferent. "You can arrange it between you—four o'clock is a good time to be there," he added. "The light is very good about four." He lay silent for a few minutes. It was growing dark in the room. [Pg 227]

"You might have them serve tea for you in the pergola," he said quietly.

Julian started. He had thought his father was asleep. He came over to the bed.

"I'll see that she has a pleasant afternoon, sir." He stood looking down at his father, his hands in his pockets.

"She's been very good to me—taken good care of me, you know," replied Medfield.

"I understand," said Julian. "I'll do everything I can to make it pleasant for her." He looked at his father—and opened his lips to say something and turned away.

Miss Canfield had come in and touched the electric light, and it flooded softly into the room.

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## XXXII

[Pg 228]

Some one was singing in the linen-room. Aunt Jane, going by in the corridor, heard the little song and stopped and looked in.

Miss Canfield, at work on her linen-cupboard, was singing happily as she worked. She had gathered up a handful of towels and carried them to the table and was looking at them with a little vexation, her lips still humming the song. She glanced up and saw Aunt Jane and the song stopped. She nodded to her.

"Things are in a terrible state here!"

Aunt Jane came leisurely in. "What's the matter?"

"Look at that!" The girl spread out the towel rapidly—"and that! Did you ever see such work! And—that! They ought not to be sent out like this!... And these belong in the Men's Ward!" She tossed them aside.

Aunt Jane surveyed the confusion equably. "I must get around to the laundry," she said, "—and give them a good going over. I haven't given them a real good talking to—not for as much as three months, I should think!" [Pg 229]

"They need it!" said the girl crossly. But her lips were smiling.

Aunt Jane glanced at them. "You're feeling pretty happy this morning," she commented.

The face broke in little dancing waves. "I don't know— Am I?"

"You look happy," said Aunt Jane. "It's your afternoon off— Maybe that has something to do with it?" She surveyed her kindly.

"Perhaps." The girl hesitated a minute, turning over the towels ineffectually—almost as if she did not see them. "I'm going out to Mr. Medfield's garden," she said at last. She was examining the torn hem of a towel with an absorbed look.

Aunt Jane accepted the news without surprise. "It's a nice garden, they say.... He's given you permission, I suppose?"

"He wants me to go—yes.... He's making plans for some new roses and he asked me to see where they are putting them." She did not look at the face, across the table, that was surveying her shrewdly. "I can get back in time," she added concisely—as if that were the main thing to be considered.

[Pg 230]

"Oh, you'll get back, time enough—I 'most wish I was going with you," said Aunt Jane reflectively. The girl looked up quickly and down again at her towels. "Mr. Medfield is going—with me."

Aunt Jane's gaze remained in mid air—astonished and protesting. "He can't sit up!"

"Oh—I didn't mean— It's his son that is going."

"Oh—Julian!" Aunt Jane's tone was relieved. "Julian can go all right, I guess.... He's a nice boy," she added impersonally.

Miss Canfield made no comment.

"They say it's about the prettiest garden anywhere round," added Aunt Jane. "I've heard there's only one or two gardens to compare with it—as beautiful as his."

"Yes, I've heard so."

[Pg 231]

"It's real kind in him to think of it—sending you out there.... He's a good man," she added diplomatically. "He's cranky, but he's good!"

"He's an old dear!" said the girl heartily.

Aunt Jane stared. Her countenance was subdued. "Well—I don't know as I should call him *old!*"... She considered it. "I don't believe he's a day over fifty!" she concluded.

"I don't believe he is," assented Miss Canfield. "I should say that's just about what he is—fifty." She gathered up the towels.

Aunt Jane's face was a study. It opened out in little lines of protest—and closed slowly. "Fifty isn't so very old!" she finished mildly.

"Of course not. And he's an active man—for his years." Miss Canfield carried the pile of linen to the cupboard and stowed it away and came back. "What shall I do with these?" She pointed to the discarded pile.

Aunt Jane looked at it critically and sighed. "Leave it there! I'll take 'em along when I go to give 'em their talking to. I can't stop for it now."

She went into the corridor and presently the song floated out after her—light-hearted, and gay with little tripping runs in it.

[Pg 232]

Aunt Jane heard the song faintly in the distance as she knocked on Herman Medfield's door, and her face smiled intently.

He looked up almost benignantly from his place in the window and laid the newspaper on his knees and nodded to her.

"Good morning. I was wishing you would come in!"

"You don't look as if you needed anybody," responded Aunt Jane. "You look first-rate! I'm pretty busy this morning," she added thoughtfully. She sat down.

He beamed toward her; and the sunshine flooding in behind him lighted up the quilted robe in a kind of radiant haze of blueness.

"It's a wonderful day!" said Medfield, motioning toward the window.

"I don't know as it's any better day than it was yesterday," replied Aunt Jane. "Better inside, maybe," she added significantly.

He laughed out. "Much better! I'm all ready for business." He pointed to a pile of papers lying on a chair beside him.

She regarded them thoughtfully. "You don't want to go to work too soon— Can't somebody do it for you?"

[Pg 233]

"Nobody but me can attend to these." He laid his hand on them almost affectionately, and patted them.

"You're kind of tied down to them, aren't you?" she said impersonally.

"They are my interest in life!" he replied quickly. "I shouldn't have anything to live for—if it weren't for these!" A note of regret crept into the last words and shadowed them a little.

"No—I don't suppose you would." Aunt Jane's face was lost in something.

He regarded the look curiously. "Well—what is it?" he said. "Tell me!"

"I was just thinking you wouldn't need 'em so much when you got your wife," she said quietly.

"My—wife!" His hand loosened its grasp on the papers, and he looked out of the window.

"No." He turned to her and smiled. "I shall not need law papers, nor any other kind—when I have her."

And suddenly something happened to Aunt Jane. She sat up, very straight; the muslin cap

[Pg 234]

radiated lines of dignity about a disturbed face. "I guess maybe we weren't talking about the same thing!" she said quickly.... "Miss Canfield told me she's going out to see your garden this afternoon."

"Yes—she's going with Julian." He spoke with satisfaction and a significance under-ran the words and laughed at her.

Aunt Jane gave a startled gesture—

"Oh!" she said.

Then, after a minute: "Oh!"

Something had collapsed in her. She was gazing at the ruins, a little bewildered.

Herman Medfield watched her and smiled. "You hadn't thought of that!" he said quietly.

"Well—" she made the slide gracefully and recovered herself. "No, I hadn't thought of just—that!"

She looked at him over her glasses. "It's a good thing!" she announced.

He nodded. "But it's a secret!" he cautioned. "Nobody knows—except you and me." He looked at her happily and shared his secret with her. [Pg 235]

Aunt Jane's face grew inscrutable. She gave a little sigh. "When did it happen?" she asked.

"It hasn't happened!" returned Medfield. "But it's going to—"

"Well!" Aunt Jane got her breath. "It makes me feel as if I was a kind of blind—Blind as a bat!" she said vigorously. "Not to see.... I guess maybe I don't see anything!" she added with quiet scorn.

He laughed out. "You see more than I wish you did!... You were the only one I couldn't fool. You suspected something right away."

"Yes, I suspected *something*—" said Aunt Jane. She let it go at that. She beamed on him. "I don't know *when* I've been so pleased about anything!" she declared. "He's a nice boy!"

"One of the best!" said Medfield. "All he needs is backbone—and a little more steadying."

"She'll help," commented Aunt Jane.

"Yes, she will help." Medfield was thoughtful. "But he needs some one in the business—I'm going to put him right into the business and the older men will overrun him—if I don't look out. He's clever. But he's too eager to agree. He takes the first thing at hand. He doesn't look ahead." [Pg 236]

Aunt Jane's glance followed it. "He *is* pretty agreeable," she said slowly. "He needs somebody kind of contrary, I guess—"

"Why!" Her face lighted. "I know a man! Mr. Dalton would be a good man for him!" she exclaimed. "He'd be good for anybody!"

"You speak as if he were a pill!" said Medfield dryly. He had faith in Aunt Jane; and the more he studied the face under its muslin cap, the more faith he had—and something that was not faith, perhaps.... But as a man of business—

"He's just the one you want," said Aunt Jane with decision.

"Well—?" He resigned himself.

"He's obstinate— Of course, any man is obstinate," she interpolated kindly. "But he's more set than anybody I've ever seen! Seems as if it was part of his make-up, somehow.... I was talking with him the other day and he was telling me about how he'd never succeeded yet—" [Pg 237]

There was a little amused and courteous smile on the millionaire's face. He had seen men before who had not succeeded—yet.

Aunt Jane nodded to it. "He said he couldn't stop to pick up the twopenny bits they wanted him to—because he saw something ahead—and all round him, kind of—that was worth more. So he was always having to move on." She rocked a little.

Medfield sat up. His hand reached out to the pile of papers and found a pencil.

"What did you say his name was?"

There was a keen little edge of interest to the words.

"His name is Dalton," said Aunt Jane. "His wife's been here a month and over, now. She goes home to-morrow. She's a nice woman!"

"And what is the address?" His pencil was making little marks on the pad.

"I'll get it for you in the office," said Aunt Jane. She got up. "He had to write it down for me when she came—the same as you all do." [Pg 238]

"Of course he may have 'moved on'—by this time." She smiled back to him whimsically from the door.

"If he has moved on, we will move—after him," said Medfield. "I suspect he's the man I have been looking for—a good while!"

Aunt Jane closed the door softly and left him to his happiness. At the far end of the corridor, as she looked down, she caught a glimpse of a dark, stubby figure pursuing its way. It disappeared in Room 16.... Dr. Carmon had a difficult case on this morning. He had told her there was little

chance for the man in Number 16. She felt the concentration in the broad back as it disappeared from sight; and her thought left the millionaire in his suite and followed the shabby, grim figure into a darkened room.

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### XXXIII

[Pg 239]

"You look very well!" Medfield glanced at his son approvingly. "New suit?"

"I got it in Vienna," said Julian modestly.

"Um-m— Very good cut! Turn around."

The boy wheeled about.

"Yes—very good— You have a nice day to go."

Medfield nodded toward the window.

"First-rate!" The young man's face was full of careless light. It seemed to radiate about them.

His father looked at it half curiously. "Have them serve tea for you.... Give her a good time," he said absently. He was searching among the papers beside him. "I ought to have some cards somewhere!"

"What is it, sir? Can I get something for you?"

"Over there in that desk— That's it! Lower drawer— Just see if there are some of my cards there, will you?"

The boy took them out with an amused smile. "Going calling?" He brought them across.

[Pg 240]

Medfield selected one and held his pencil thoughtfully poised for a moment—and smiled as he jotted something down.

He slipped it into an envelope and pencilled the address and handed it to his son.

"Give that to Munson, will you? Tell him to pick three dozen of the best roses in the garden, and send them to-day.... Tell him the *best* ones!" he added exactly.

The young man glanced at the address carelessly. His face lighted up.

"Fine! I'll tell him to send her some corking ones—a big bunch of them!"

"You can tell him what I said," said his father dryly. "And have them sent to-day."

"All right, sir." He half turned away. "I'd like to pick some roses myself—for Miss Canfield— You won't object, I suppose?" His father's roses were sacred.

But Herman Medfield waved it away. "Pick all you like." He was gracious with it.

"But not the best ones," laughed the boy. He tucked the card in his pocket and went out.

Aunt Jane, sitting at her desk in the office, looked up as he went by.

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He nodded and smiled to her, thinking of the little card tucked away in his pocket.

She got up and came across. "You going out home?" she asked.

He radiated happiness. "A ripping good day, isn't it!" He waved his hand at all outdoors.

"You'll have a good time," said Aunt Jane. "And Miss Canfield's a nice girl." She was surveying his new clothes kindly. "I'm glad you're going to take her."

"So am I!" said the boy. "She's waiting for me—" And he hurried on.

But Miss Canfield was not in the waiting-room. He glanced hurriedly about, and crossed to the open window and looked into the street. He could not sit down.

It was a glorious day—floating clouds, everything fresh and flooded with light.... Down on the walk under the window the man-of-all-work trundled a low cart, and the rumble of the wheels came up, chucking clumsily along.

The young man scarcely heard the sound of the wheels. His ear was waiting for something in the corridor—for light footsteps that would come.... He shrugged his shoulders, looking down on the man trundling his cart, and he whistled softly.... Then his ear caught the sound, coming along the corridor far off—light, tripping steps and the little swish of draperies—and he had turned to face her.

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It was not Miss Canfield!

A young woman stood in the doorway, looking in inquiringly.

She was tall and slender, with a certain quiet grace as she stood there, glancing into the room. There was something poised in the motion—a kind of freedom and lightness.

The young man's eye rested on her a minute—and turned back to the window indifferent.... She was very late. He took out his watch and looked—five minutes past the hour. He put it back with a little impatient gesture. They would miss the best light for the garden!

Behind him, in the room, he was conscious that the young woman had come in. She was waiting

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for some one, it seemed, like himself—and he heard her move a little ... and then a subdued laugh. He half turned his head—it reminded him of something.... Could he have met her somewhere—before he went abroad? The steps rustled and came nearer and a touch fell on his shoulder—very light, as if it might drift away—as if perhaps it were not there....

Julian turned swiftly—and stared into her eyes; they were bubbling over with laughter, and the hair fluffing under the little modish hat, caught reddish gleams and glinted at him. And he stared!

She laughed out—the hands hanging easily before her. "You didn't know me!"

"You are not—you!" blurted Julian. "You are—you're different!"

Then he seized her hands and looked at her—"I say! Come on!... You are—You're stunning, you know!"

"Thank you!" said the girl. "Yes—I'm ready." And they went out into the sunshine.

And all the way, in the street-car, sitting beside her, the young man stole glimpses.

She was different! He had expected that she would be changed, of course—a little different in her street clothes; and underneath he discovered he had been half afraid of the change—afraid perhaps that she might be a little common or awkward, without the distinction of her cap and uniform.... But this young woman— He stole another glance, and his shoulders straightened in a gesture of pride and bewildered delight. This was the real thing! The other girl was masquerading.

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"Who are you?" he said abruptly, as he put up his hand to help her from the car. "I don't know you! I thought I did—but you are somebody else!" He was looking at her keenly.

"Goose!" she laughed. "I am Mary Canfield, of course— Which way do we go?"

"This way." They fell into step. And he was conscious that the light, tripping, hospital step had given way to a free, swinging movement of the whole body. She was like the radiant day about them.... And she was like the roses—when at last they stood among them.... Her freedom had the same careful air of cultivation; and the crisp little color in her cheeks had the same dainty refinement.

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He plucked a rose and held it against her cheek. "Just a match!" he said critically. "Goes with you! Will you have it?"

She tucked it in her belt—among the endless frills—and he looked at it admiringly.

When he saw the gardener's eyes following them, he walked with conscious pride. He had not known that any one felt like this! He would have liked to walk with her always—with the whole world looking on and admiring her.... She belonged to him!

"I say!" He stopped short in the path. "You are engaged to me, you know!"

"Oh—am I?" She laughed.

He went in a panic— Some girls were such frightful flirts! They had no decency—They didn't play the game!

"You are *mine*!" he said fiercely and he glared at the gardener among his roses across the path.

"Oh—very well! Have it so!" Her voice was laughing and sweet.

His courage came flooding back. "You are to wait here—please, and we'll have the tea brought out."

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"Oh— How pretty!" She was looking into the pergola. A green maze of branches crossed and recrossed the sides; and among them the scattered roses flushed transparently in the light. "How beautiful it is!"

"Will you go in?" he said, standing aside.

"Will you walk into my parlor?" She stepped lightly in and faced him. "Now go and get tea! I like it here!"

She sat down and he looked at her once—and was off.

He hurried fast. Suppose she didn't stay?... Suppose it were not real! He fussed about cakes and sandwiches—and there must be strawberries. Everything must be of the best. Suppose she didn't wait! He hurried back.

She had taken off her hat and sat with her hands clasped, looking up into the mazy green tracery and the bits of rose color shining through.

"It is like us," she said with a little motion of her hand.

"Like you," he said soberly, sitting beside her. "*I'm* not a rose!"

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"No!" She laughed out. "But it *is* like us—it's just happiness—nothing to it!" She crushed it in her hand.

And he stared at her.

"No one takes us seriously," she said. "They just think how young we are——"

"And how beautiful *you* are!"

"They know it won't last." She was looking at it musingly. "And they think *we don't* know——"

"It *will* last!" said the boy vehemently.

"Will it?" She held out her hand prettily and he kissed it.

"It's going to last forever," he said stoutly.

"But we don't care if it doesn't.... Do you know, I think that is what makes it beautiful—" She glanced at the leafy walls of the pergola. "We know it will not be like this always—and so we just—love it!"

He stared a little. "You are not the least bit what I thought you were!" he said helplessly.

"Don't you like me!" Her eyes demanded it.

"I—adore you!" he said softly. "But all these ideas about not lasting— Good Lord!—Here's the tea!" He sprang up and took it from the man and set it out for her. And they drank it—with the light coming in through the crossing vines and checkering the table, and falling on her hair and gleaming delicately at him in little glints like stars—all through it.

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## XXXIV

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"Do you think we'd better tell dad?"

They had gathered an armful of the roses and loitered along the winding paths, and were standing at last by the curb, waiting for the car.... She carried a few of the roses in her hand. She looked down at them thoughtfully. And suddenly the look of Miss Canfield, the nurse, flashed back to him.

"We don't want to upset him," she said slowly.

"I don't believe it will—upset him.... Do you know, I believe he wants it—I half suspect he's been planning it all along!"

"Do you? What makes you think so?" She had turned to him curiously.

He shook his head.

"Father's deep! I can't tell exactly why I think he knows.... But I never got very far ahead of him yet!"

"Very well—we will tell him."

"To-night?"

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"If you like."

"I want him to see you like this— There's the car!" He hailed it.

So they came into Herman Medfield's room and stood before him with the armful of flowers. And he looked up at them—and smiled.

"God bless you, my children!" he said, after a critical glance at their smiling faces. "That is the proper thing to say, isn't it?" His eyes dwelt on them fondly.

Julian glanced at her. "I told you!" he said meaningly.

"What did you tell her?"

"That you knew all along, sir. I told her I never fooled you yet!"

"Well, you have tried hard enough.... Come here, please, Daughter."

So she went over and stood beside him and bent a little for him. And he kissed her, and looked at the delicate color that came and went in her face, and at the slender freshness of her figure as it straightened itself.

"I am glad my boy has done so well," he said quietly.... "I think I'll go to bed, when my nurse comes back. I am a little tired, I find."

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"She will be here in a minute, sir—as soon as she changes her gown." She nodded to him and was gone.

And the boy and his father sat facing each other, with the light lessening in the room.

"How was the garden?" asked Medfield.

"Fine! I never saw it look so well!" The boy's voice was happy.

Medfield's eyes twinkled. "Perhaps you were not altogether fitted to judge." He was leaning back in his chair and looking at the light in his son's face.

"Perhaps not. I was never so happy in my life—I know that!" And his voice was serious now, with a deeper note in it than his father had heard.

And Herman Medfield began to speak of the business and of Dalton, and of his purpose to see Dalton.... They could use him, perhaps, in some minor capacity and see how he did.

"I have an idea that he may be the very man for your secretary—for your personal work, you know. I've always depended a good deal on Sully. You must have some one of your own.... Suppose you see this man Dalton yourself. See him to-morrow. Get the address from Aunt Jane—"

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He paused.... A look came to his face.

"You told Munson to send the roses, did you?"

"I told him. Yes. He'll send them to-night." The reply was absent. The young man's mind was reaching out to business and to the responsibilities that he saw his father would lay on him.

His shoulders straightened a little as he stood up. "I feel as if I had just come home," he said. "I've never felt at home before—anywhere!... It is curious to feel that way in a hospital, isn't it?"

His father's eyes were fixed on him dreamily. "I've been feeling 'at home,' too. And I have an idea a good many people feel that way—in the Berkeley House of Mercy." He said the last words slowly and softly, as if they pleased him.

"Why should they, I wonder?" said the boy.

"I wonder—" said Herman Medfield. "Perhaps I shall be able to tell you some day. I feel as if I were beginning to understand a good many things I never knew before.... If you will just give me your arm now, across the room, I think I'll get to bed."

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## XXXV

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Aunt Jane was tired. She would not acknowledge it—even to herself. But it had been a trying day. The people in the laundry had been surprisingly difficult—when she went to give them their talking to, and she finally had to put her foot down.

She went slowly along the hall now, giving a last look for the night and glancing into shaded rooms, here and there.... At the door of 16 she paused.... The case in 16 troubled her. Dr. Carmon was anxious about the case. He did not need to tell her. She had known by the little hunched-over look of his broad shoulders down the hall.... She knew that look as far as she could see it.... And he had already been twice to look after Room 16.

She went in and gave a few directions to the nurse and glanced at the figure on the bed, and went on to her office.

The room looked very inviting as she came in. Her big chair stood waiting for her, the light comfortably shaded beside it, and she crossed to it leisurely. She would rest a few minutes, and make her entries in the day-book and go to bed.

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She sat down with a sigh of comfort and rocked gently.

The house was very quiet. The softly creaking rockers seemed the only thing awake....

Aunt Jane's eye fell on a long pasteboard box resting on a chair across the room. She looked at it doubtfully. She was too tired to get up. But the sight of the long box irritated her subtly. She had thought flowers were over—for the day. Sometimes Aunt Jane wished that she might never see another flower-box! She wished so now.... Just as she wanted to rest! Well, she would get up presently and take it to the ice-box. Let it stay there till morning. It was no time of night to be sending flowers.... Everybody in bed and asleep! She looked at it severely and got up from her chair and took it up.

Her eye fell on the address— She looked at it disbelievingly—and put it back on the chair—and looked at it.... She fidgeted about the room and came back to the chair.

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Aunt Jane had never received a box of flowers in her life. She had handled hundreds of them—they had passed through her hands into the eager waiting hands held out for them. She had watched the faces light up, and she had looked on and smiled tolerantly. Folks' faces were *her* flowers, she had said.... She had never wanted to keep the flowers herself. Flowers were things to be passed on to some one else. No one had ever sent them to her. They knew better!

She looked down at the innocent box as if it contained something baleful—something that would disturb the quiet routine of life for her. She did not want to be disturbed—She did not want flowers! And she reached out her hand to the box.... It was very long and big. She wondered how she could have overlooked it when she came in.... If she had not been so tired she would have seen it—perhaps. Who could have sent it, she wondered; and a little, mild curiosity came under the white cap as her fingers undid the tape, and rolled it methodically, and lifted the lid of the box and raised the bit of waxed paper underneath— Aunt Jane gave a pleased sigh.

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Herman Medfield's best roses—three dozen of them—shed their fragrance about her; and the little card lying on top of them held their message. She took it up gingerly and read it and put it down sharply—as if it had burned her—and looked at it.

Then she gathered up the roses in her hands and held them against her face—until her very cap was lost to sight.... It was a subdued face that emerged from the roses at last. Something of their hardy color seemed to have been caught in its disturbed quiet.

She laid them on the table and brought a great vase of water and shook them loose in it—standing off to look at them and touching them here and there.... The subdued look glanced softly at the roses as she lifted the vase and set it on her desk—and stood back again to admire them.

They made a gorgeous show—lighting up the wall behind them. The room was filled with rose fragrance.

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She moved slowly backward, gazing at them—a troubled, happy look in her face.... Then her eye fell on the little card lying on the table.

She looked down at it, fascinated, and took it firmly in her fingers and carried it to the desk and slipped it beneath the vase—with Herman G. Medfield's name exposed.... There was no reason why Mr. Medfield should not send flowers to her!

She surveyed them complacently. It was very natural for Mr. Medfield to send flowers—and the little card announced to all the world—how natural it was.... The words jotted on the other side of the card were safely out of sight.

Aunt Jane sat down at her desk and folded her hands on the edge of the blotter and looked at the flowers. Her peaceful face gave no hint of anything but the most serene admiration and pride.

Her hand reached out for the big day-book and drew it forward and opened it and took up the pen; and Aunt Jane's finger found the place and moved along the dotted lines composedly.... And two great tears fell on the spotless page and blurred it and Aunt Jane sat up and sought swiftly for her handkerchief. She dabbed at two more tears that were sweeping down—she moved the handkerchief quickly across her face and wiped it over the page, and once more across her face—that kept breaking up in little incredulous, ashamed waves. She shut up the day-book impatiently and folded her arms on top of it and dropped her face on her arms and sobbed—a great, shamed, bewildered sob that shook the quiet shoulders; then they were very still.

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Presently she sat up. She shook out her handkerchief and blew her nose methodically and opened the book. "I am a fool!" she said softly. "Room 36—" And two left-over tears splashed down on Room 36 and flooded it—Tears enough to wash Room 36 out of existence. They overwhelmed Aunt Jane.

She got up abruptly and closed the book and turned down the light—groping for it and glancing hastily at the open door. The light shone dimly on a very disturbed and crumpled face.

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She looked about her for a minute. Then she went to a small door and drew a key from beneath her apron and inserted it in the lock.

No one in the hospital knew what was behind the small door. It was popularly supposed to hold Aunt Jane's private supplies—dangerous remedies for emergencies, perhaps. No one knew.

She opened the door slowly and stepped in, closing it gently behind her; the key still dangled from the lock. There was no light in the little room—except for the moonlight shining through a small window and lighting up the bareness of the place; it shone on a single chair by the window. There was nothing else in the room. Aunt Jane went across to it and sat down.... She was not crying now. She folded her hands in her lap and sat very quiet, and the moonlight filtered in through the window and touched the muslin cap and the white figure, and passed silently across it and fell on the floor, making a luminous path in the blackness.... And Aunt Jane did not stir.

Often when she was sought for in the hospital and could not be found, high or low, Aunt Jane was sitting by the window of this tiny room, gathering up the tangled fibres of pain and discord and holding them steady.... She knew all the stars that moved across the window—at every hour of the night, and every night of the year. It was not a new experience for her to sit very quiet, while the stars travelled across.... But to-night she was not reaching out to stars and drawing them down into the pain of the world to heal it.

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She was looking into a very queer, disturbed heart—that seemed breaking up in little bits. Curious things bubbled up and startled her as she gazed at them.... No one had loved her for twenty years!—Why *should* any one love—an old woman like her?... Why should she *want* to be loved? Her thought was full of gentle scorn for all old women that wanted to be loved—and for Aunt Jane!... She would have to get a new day-book, or tear out the page! What would Mrs. Samuel Hotchkiss, chairman of the Woman's Board of Directors, say to that page if she happened to come on it!... It was a disgraceful page! Aunt Jane was a disgrace! And something in her heart ached so with the happiness and the misery of it, that Aunt Jane's lips fell to quivering.... Any woman that had as much as she had to be thankful for, ought to be ashamed!... And what was Herman Medfield? Just a man! But it wasn't Herman Medfield—it was all the repressed heartache of years.... "Women are not fit to live alone!" She had said it many times. But she had not thought of Aunt Jane when she said it. *She* was superior to such things—with her hospital and her patients and Dr. Carmon—Her thought stopped suddenly—and flashed on.... She had always thought she depended on the Lord—and here was this great lonely ache in her heart.

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It didn't seem to make any difference how ashamed she was!

Her handkerchief brushed fiercely at her eyes.

There was a sound in the outer office. Aunt Jane sat up—Some one looking for her! The hand felt again for its handkerchief and she turned her head to listen.... The steps crossed the office and a bright line of light ran along under the door. Aunt Jane's eye rested on it. She brushed the traces of crying from her face and reached up to her cap. Then she leaned forward to the door—she could reach it from her chair in the little room without getting up; and she turned the handle softly, opening it a crack.

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There was no sound in the office.

From her crack, Aunt Jane could see the table and the shaded light on it and a man standing by the table looking down.

His back was toward the door, but Aunt Jane had no doubt about the shabby, wrinkled coat and the shrugging shoulders.

She waited, holding her breath. She was not quite sure of her cap—she put up her hands to it cautiously, adjusting and smoothing it.... The figure by the table moved across to the bell and rang it sharply.

His face was toward her now. She saw that he was smiling a little.

Aunt Jane nodded shrewdly. Number 16 was better!... From her place in the dark, she watched the man move about the room. He was humming softly—a half-meaningless little tune, with a tumty-tumty refrain, and his face was absent.

A nurse appeared in the door and looked at him inquiringly.

He glanced at her. "I want Mrs. Holbrook—yes."

"Aunt Jane? I don't know where she is. I thought she came into her office."

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"Well—she isn't here. You can see she isn't here, can't you? Find her—please."

Aunt Jane behind her crack, shivered a little as the girl turned. But the nurse had eyes and ears only for the surgeon and his impatience. She hurried away.

Aunt Jane drew a free breath.

The surgeon crossed to her desk and halted there. His eye rested absently on the great bunch of roses. Presently his face lighted up; he was seeing the roses! He looked at them with an air of appreciation. The little smile was still on his lips, and the tumty-tumty tune.... Slowly he leaned forward, on tiptoe, and—smelled of them and nodded approval.

Aunt Jane's hands made swift, darting touches at her cap and her apron and her hair and she got up quickly.... Perhaps he would go away! But Dr. Carmon's eye had fallen on the little card under the vase and he took it up—and read the name with near-sighted curious gaze, and turned it over —

Aunt Jane stepped out from her place. "How is Number 16?" she asked placidly.

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He wheeled—the card in his hand.

"Oh! You're here! I just sent for you." He waved the card.

"I know. I was busy."

"Funny, I didn't hear you come in!" He looked at her thoughtfully.

"You were thinking of something else, maybe," said Aunt Jane tranquilly. She came up to the desk.

He looked curiously at her face.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing," responded Aunt Jane. "Do I look as if anything was the matter?" The face under its ink stains was serene.

Dr. Carmon regarded it critically. "Soap and water—" he suggested. He pointed a helpful finger at the smudge of ink on her cheek.

She lifted a quick hand.

He nodded grimly. "And there's a little over there by your left ear," he said wickedly.

She rubbed at the place blindly. "I must have got ink on me—when I was making up my book—" Her glance flitted toward it.

Dr. Carmon's eye fell on the open page and on the smudge of Room 36. He bent forward, tapping the place with the card in his hand, and laughed out.

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"I never saw your book look like that!" He gazed at it and then at Aunt Jane's face—a little suspiciously.

She leaned forward to inspect it.

"Somebody must have spilled water—or something on it!" she said casually. "Folks are so careless here!" She laid a blotter methodically across the smudge and closed the book and put it away.

Dr. Carmon surveyed the roses. "Handsome bunch of flowers!" he said carelessly. He waved the card at them.

"They look nice," admitted Aunt Jane. "They're some Mr. Medfield sent—they came from his garden." Her tone was quiet and businesslike—there was no nonsense about those roses. She looked at them impersonally.

"I saw it was his card." Dr. Carmon's hand motioned with the card and dropped it to the desk. He might almost have been said to fling it from him—as if it were a challenge.

"Who did he send them to?" he asked.

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"Why—to me!" said Aunt Jane.

She tried her best to look commonplace and unconcerned—as if she had been receiving roses all her life—as if she had large bunches of them every day, flaming away there on her desk.

Dr. Carmon's glance twinkled across the roses—to the placid face.

"Humph!" he said.

"How is Number 16?" asked Aunt Jane.

"Fine!" Dr. Carmon's face lighted with it. He forgot roses—"He's going to pull through all right—I think."

"That's good! I kind of reckoned he'd come through." She had turned a leisurely glance to the door.

The nurse stood there.

"I can't—" she began. "Oh—you're here! I looked everywhere for you!"

"Yes, I'm here. I've been here quite a spell," said Aunt Jane.

The nurse withdrew and Dr. Carmon and Aunt Jane and the roses were left alone.

He looked suspiciously and grudgingly at the roses and shrugged his shoulders and turned away. [Pg 269]  
He took his hat. "I want you to look in on Number 16—sometime later."

There was no "please" about the request—or "will you kindly." But Aunt Jane understood.

"I was planning to go in by and by—along about four o'clock," she said kindly. "That's the time he'll need somebody most, I guess!"

Dr. Carmon looked again at the roses. "I shall want Suite A, Friday—for a new patient," he said abruptly.

Aunt Jane's mouth opened—and closed.

"Medfield's well enough to go," said Dr. Carmon. He nodded to the roses—as if they knew of Herman Medfield's health. "He'll be better off at home!" he said shortly—and shot out the door.

Aunt Jane gazed after him, a minute.

She took up the card from the desk and held it off and looked at it severely and shook it a little—as if it might have known better—and dropped it into a small drawer behind the roses and locked the drawer—and put the key in her pocket.

Then she turned off the lights and left the room. And the great bunch of roses that had flamed up so bravely, lost their color in the dark. [Pg 270]

Perhaps they went to sleep.

All night the fragrance of the roses stole out into the room and filled it—as if little flitting dreams of roses came and went there in the dark.

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## XXXVII

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Things were moving happily in Suite A. Herman Medfield had been awake and stirring since daybreak. He had written one or two notes in his own hand, and had dictated a longer one to Miss Canfield. It was addressed to Thomas Dalton, and it lay on the stand beside his chair in the window.

The girl had grasped its import swiftly, as she took down the crisp words.

"It is just what Julian needs," she said compactly as she folded and sealed and stamped it.

He nodded. "You understand him surprisingly well—considering that you love him," he added smiling.

She returned the smile. "That's *why* I understand, isn't it?"

"Perhaps—"

He watched her move about the room, contentedly. Julian was a lucky dog! Luckier than he knew, to win a girl like that—sweet and sensible and poor! [Pg 272]

"I will mail this now," she said. She took it from the stand.

He watched her go, and looked out of the window, and fell to thinking of the things life was bringing him.... Everything seemed coming to him out of this great, comfortable hospital—that he had looked forward to with dread!... A wife for Julian—He might have searched the world over to find a girl like that! Straight, and as true as steel, and best of all—she was poor; she would know the value of money. She had had to work for it— He had always spoiled Julian. He knew it, guiltily. Julian had never known what it was to want for anything that money could get—except, perhaps, a widow or two! The millionaire's lips smiled grimly. That danger was over—thank Heaven! The boy would marry a poor girl—and a lady!... Herman Medfield had perhaps old-fashioned ideas as to what makes a lady; and the nurse who moved so noiselessly about his room suited him to perfection.... His thought dwelt on her happily.... Then there was this man, Dalton—Thanks to Aunt Jane!... Ah, that was the secret! "Thanks to Aunt Jane!" [Pg 273]

The millionaire leaned back in his chair, smiling thoughtfully. He had known that he was coming to that—as he sat there in the window, looking idly down into the little squares of back yards—he had known all along—under his thankfulness for Julian—that he was coming to the thought of Aunt Jane.... He had held it to the last.... It was not Julian he was thinking of now—with the little smile that kept coming to his lips.

He was smiling at Aunt Jane and her crispness and her goodness and her little managing wilful ways that kept him straight.... He was like a small boy in the very thought of her. A man ought to feel that way toward his wife, he told himself—all men really feel like that!

There was a gentle tap on the door and he sat up. He smoothed the dreams from his face.

"Come in!"

The whole room seemed to become a place of comfort, as she came leisurely across to him.

"I hear you've been doing considerable this morning." She looked at him uncritically.

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His response was guilty. "Only a letter or two— Sit down, won't you?" He reached out to a chair for her.

But Aunt Jane interposed—"When you're well enough to wait on folks, you're well enough to go home," she said.

"Oh— I'm not well enough for that—I feel sure!" He sank back in his chair. "I shall be very careful what I do!"

She surveyed him. "I liked the roses you sent— They're real handsome!... I don't know as I ever had any handsomer roses sent to me!"

"I am glad you liked them." He was suddenly a little formal and polite. He had not expected quite such frank and open delight in his offering.

"And the card—" he said softly, after a minute. "I hoped you liked that, too?" He was almost shy about it!

Aunt Jane looked at him inquiringly and rocked a little. "Was there a card—?" She seemed considering it. "Maybe it got lost out." She shook her head.

The shadow crossed his face. "You're sure there wasn't a card with them—no message?" His tone was vexed and he sat up.

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"That's Munson's carelessness!" he said dryly.

"I can't seem to remember any card," said Aunt Jane.

A little smile broke up his face.

"You would remember it—if you had read it! I made sure of that!" He chuckled gently.... "Never mind—I will send you another—with some more roses."

"You don't need to send them right away—not for some time," said Aunt Jane hastily. "These will last quite a spell. I cut the stems every day, you know—same as if I was a patient!" Her eyes twinkled at him.

And he smiled at the round trustfulness of her face. He was vexed at Munson for carelessness. But there was plenty of time—to send roses! And he enjoyed sitting there and teasing her a little and watching the guileless face, turned so comfortably upon him.... She little knew what was on that card!

He chuckled.

"You'll be ready to go home in a day or two now," she said impersonally.

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He cast a quick look at the face in its cap. "No use to borrow trouble!" he responded lightly.... "I have some news for you!"

"For me!" A quick flush swept under the cap and subsided. "I hope it's good news," she said tranquilly.

"Yes—It's good for you.... You'll think it's good some day! My son is going to be married." He leaned back to watch the effect.

She nodded. "We talked about that yesterday."

"But it hadn't happened then!"

"Hadn't it?" There was no contradiction in the response. But it brought him to a sudden pause.

"Why—of course not! I don't believe it had! Do you know anything?" He turned on her swiftly.

"No, I don't know anything." Aunt Jane was cheerful. "Not anything I could put my finger on," she added slowly. "But I kind of sensed, somehow, that they'd got things settled—between 'em."

"Oh, you 'sensed'!" he scoffed gently.

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"Well—she'll make him a good wife," Aunt Jane rocked. "Of course, he don't need a rich wife——"

"No, I don't want him to marry money!" Medfield spoke with satisfaction. His magnanimity overspread the poverty of his son's wife—and welcomed it and exulted in it.

Aunt Jane's face was tranquil—and somewhere deep below, little twinkles came up to the surface and stirred it.

"Well, he doesn't need to marry her money—" she said slowly. "He can't help her having it, of course. But she'll make him just as good a wife."

He stared. "I must have given you a wrong impression." He was polite about it. "Julian is going to marry Miss Canfield."

"Mary Canfield has money—more money than most folks. She's going to make a good nurse, though. She came in and took the training as if she hadn't a cent to her name—She said she wanted to be something besides Sheldon Canfield's—"

"Sheldon Canfield!" He took it up. "Was Sheldon Canfield her father?"

"His name was Sheldon," said Aunt Jane. "Maybe you've heard of him?"

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Herman Medfield laughed shortly. "He did me out of a million dollars! Sheldon Canfield!" He looked at the thought and shook it. "I fought him for ten years. I swore I would break him before I died— But *he* died first! Sheldon Canfield's daughter!" He held it before him. "So Sheldon Canfield's daughter has been taking care of *me*!"

"She's taken good care of you!" said Aunt Jane. It was almost defensive; and he gave her a quick look.

"The best of care!" he said emphatically. "Couldn't have been better—unless you had done it yourself," he ended gallantly.

Aunt Jane's look cleared, and then became a little confused—under something that danced in the eyes bent upon her.

"I must go do my work," she said.

"And leave me to my Juliet?"

"Julian, I suppose you mean," Aunt Jane corrected him kindly.

"He's Romeo—of the house of Montague!" he said dreamily.

She stared a little. He waved a hand.

"Go away, Aunt Jane, and do your work. You have disturbed me—even more than usual. I want to collect my thoughts!"

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She went out almost soberly, turning it in her mind, on the way to her office. She had upset him and she was a little remorseful! She ought not to have let him run on like that! There was no telling that he would not have a setback.... And they needed Suite A for Dr. Carmon's new patient Friday.... He had said Herman Medfield was well enough to go home—that he would be better off at home.

She entered the office—and stopped.

On a chair across the room, was a long, light box.

Aunt Jane almost fancied she had been dreaming, and had never opened that box.... She contemplated it and went over to it slowly—and looked at her desk, where the great flaming roses gave out their fragrance.... She went back to the box and took it up slowly, and undid the tape.

It was filled to the brim with roses—great pink-and-white heads glowed through the transparent waxed paper at her—and on top of the paper lay a card—with the name uppermost—

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"Dr. Frederic H. Carmon."

Aunt Jane stared at it.

She reached out a hand to it—as if fascinated and almost afraid—and took it up and turned it over slowly.... There was no writing! She laid it back with a little quick sigh of relief—and stared down at it.... Presently a shrewd look of amusement overspread the stupefaction in her face and she nodded to the little card and took it up and carried it to her desk and unlocked a drawer—moving the great flaming roses to reach it. She dropped the card beside the other one that lay there—and the amusement in her face grew to soft chuckles that filled all the spaces in her roundness.

When she had arranged the pink-and-white roses and carried them to her desk and placed them opposite the flaming ones, she stood back and surveyed them—and shook her head—and smiled radiantly to them.

A man, who had come quietly down the hall, stood in the open door of the office. He watched her a minute.

He cleared his throat circumspectly.

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She turned swiftly—and saw him—and moved a reproachful hand to the flowers.

"You never ought to have done it!"

He smiled on the roses complacently and removed his gloves.

"Like 'em?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I haven't any call to like them—or not to like them!" It was severe disapproval. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"I'm not!" He looked at them with satisfaction. He was whistling softly. "I didn't know you wanted flowers—or I'd have sent them before."

He had turned—his glance was on her face.

Something in the glance sent Aunt Jane hastily across the room. She straightened the furniture a little and came back to the desk and looked at the bunches of roses on either side, regarding them impartially.

"I hadn't ought to want flowers—goodness knows!" she said slowly. "I see enough of 'em, around every day, to make any one sick of them for life." She paused and studied the pink-and-white blossoms.

"Somehow, it's different—when they're your own! I guess maybe I did need to have them sent to me—so I'd know how folks feel inside—when I open their boxes for them and they look in and see the flowers and see somebody's card on top—somebody that's thought about them—somebody that loves 'em!" she ended it triumphantly and happily and smiled—sharing it with him.

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Dr. Carmon looked at the two great bunches of flowers—and grunted—and went out.

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## XXXVIII

[Pg 283]

The sunshine in the Children's Ward glinted happily; it touched on bits of brass here and there and gleamed, and slipped across the skylight, making shadows in the room. The white-capped nurses had finished their work. Every bed was freshly made, picture-books and toys were scattered through the ward. Flowers stood on the little stands by the beds; and a great bunch of roses was on the table in the centre, under the skylight.

Aunt Jane standing at the door of the ward, looked in, touching the arm of the man beside her. "Those are your roses over there—the ones that came yesterday— They look nice, don't they?" She spoke in a half-whisper—not to attract the attention of the children.

She had wanted him to see the ward like this; and she had wanted him to see Jimmie Sullivan's new leg. And, most of all, she had wanted a good excuse for persuading Herman Medfield to try his strength a little.... If Dr. Carmon's new patient was to have Suite A on Friday, there was no time to waste; and Herman Medfield had been obstinate in refusing to exert himself.

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"I'm very comfortable where I am!" he had declared. And he had refused to budge, or to wear anything except the æsthetic, blue quilted gown.

It was only by deep guilelessness that Aunt Jane had succeeded in bringing him as far as the door of the Children's Ward.

Herman Medfield's glance followed the motion of her hand and rested on the roses. It grew interested as it travelled slowly through the ward to the faces of the children. He was taking in the clean, cool look of the place and the sunlight coming in and the happiness that shone everywhere. It was not what he had imagined the Children's Ward in a hospital would be.... And he had a suspicion that all Children's Wards were not like this—a suspicion that the woman beside him had more to do with the quiet charm of the room than one might have guessed from the unconcerned look of her face.

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Beyond the ward, opening out through big doors and the low, wide windows, he had a glimpse of a balcony—with growing plants along its edge and a striped awning; and drifting clouds and the blue sky beyond the awning. His glance came back to his roses in the centre of the room. They were a great bunch of the choicest ones that grew in his garden. They looked very well there, he admitted.

"But I did not intend them for the Children's Ward—" he said, turning and looking down at her.

"I told them Mr. Herman sent them," said Aunt Jane. "I knew you'd like them to have 'em. They take comfort with 'em, you see." She nodded to a child who was lying with her eyes fixed on the flowers. There was a patient look in the small, shrewd face.

"She likes 'em," said Aunt Jane. "They'll do her a world of good!"

She avoided Herman Medfield's eye. She had been a little surprised to find that it was difficult to meet his gaze.... He was almost like a stranger—dressed in the gray business suit and looking down on her with keen, clear eyes.... She had forgotten that Herman Medfield was tall. As she had remembered him, that first day when she went into the waiting-room with his card in her hand, he had not been so tall. She seemed to remember that she had looked down on him and had put him in his place—easily.... Perhaps his thinness made him seem taller—or was it the little triumphing twinkle that had crept into his eyes.

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Aunt Jane refused to see the twinkle. She felt sorry for Herman Medfield—somewhere in the back of her mind.

"There's Jimmie Sullivan!" she said. "That's your leg—the one you got for him!"

"Looks like his own," commented Medfield.

Aunt Jane opened the door—and a child looked up from her picture-book.

"Aunt Jane's come!" The ward took it up.

Aunt Jane looked up at Herman Medfield, half apologizing for the commotion they made.

"It helps them get well," she said.

He nodded. "I know all about that."

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They went slowly down the ward to the big chair by the table. She stopped by it. "You can sit down here and rest if you want to— You've done first-rate. You'll be well enough to go, Friday, I guess."

She arranged the chair for him and he sat down. "I'm pretty well tired out!" he remarked.

"That's natural enough— You see how nice Jimmie gets around on your leg? Come here, Jimmie, and make your manners to Mr. Herman."

Jimmie came up proudly, hardly limping at all as he approached the man sitting in the big chair. He stood very straight on his frame leg, his hands in his pockets, and looked him in the eye.

"I thank you for my leg!" he said. "It's fine!"

"You are welcome." Medfield was smiling.

"Show him how it walks, Jimmie."

Jimmie strutted off, swinging it proudly.

"You see—it hardly shows at all!" she said, as they watched him cross the room. "And the older he gets, the better he'll manage. You've made a man of him!" She beamed approval on Medfield and on Jimmie and the frame leg and on the whole ward.

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Medfield, leaning back in his chair, smiled at her whimsically.

"You spoil everybody!" he said.

She ignored it. "You sit there and rest a spell—till I'm ready to go."

She moved to a bed near by and leaned over to the child and said something. The girl put up a quick hand and listened and glanced at the man in the big chair and nodded happily.

"That's him!" said Aunt Jane looking back to the child and smiling as she went to the next bed.

"We like your flowers, Mr. Herman." The child was speaking softly to him.

Medfield started and turned.

"We like them very much!" said the child, regarding him gravely.

"Yes, we do like them!" came from the next bed. "We like them!" "We do like them!" The call was from farther off. "They're fine, you know!"

It came from all sides now! Medfield glanced from one to the other, a little bewildered and touched.

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"We like Mr. Herman's flowers!" they called out.

"I told you they liked 'em," said Aunt Jane. She had come back and was standing smiling at the children. "I thought you'd just like to see how it was yourself!"

"You have them well trained!" replied Medfield, "—all but the name," he added.

"The name doesn't matter—I thought you'd like it better?"

"I do!" He got up, half embarrassed. "I'd better hide somewhere! I never had such an ovation—for a few flowers!"

He turned toward the balcony that opened from the side of the room—with its flower-boxes, and the striped awning covering it from the sun.

He stepped out into the balcony. Below him were the roofs of houses; and the city stretched away in the distance to a sunny haze.

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## XXXIX

[Pg 290]

Medfield looked back into the ward. The children had returned to their picture-books and toys. They were not thinking of Mr. Herman any more. The quiet look had returned to the room.

"That was very pretty," he said. "Thank you!" His eyes were gentle, and a little moist, as they met hers for a moment.

"Don't thank me!" said Aunt Jane hastily. "I didn't do anything!"

"Didn't you tell them to do it?"

"I didn't tell them anything, except that you were Mr. Herman. They did the rest themselves.... Children generally do things—nice things, if you let 'em alone—and don't meddle too much."

"You better go out and preach that doctrine to the world," said Medfield laughing. He was looking out over the city.

"I haven't time to preach," said Aunt Jane.... "Sometimes I wish I had—I've got a good many things I'd like to say!" Her eyes twinkled swiftly.

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He nodded. "I've heard them—some of them—when I was cantankerous."

"You're doing pretty well, now," responded Aunt Jane.

"Fair." His tone was cautious. He was not to be inveigled into acknowledging complete recovery—yet. His glance travelled out over the roofs—and he started and leaned forward.

"I believe that is my place—over there!" He was pointing off into the haze where a greenhouse caught the sun on its glass and flashed back from the distance.

She nodded toward it. "That's your place, yes. I was noticing it the other day—when Julian and Mary Canfield went out there. I happened to be up here—and looked off and saw it." She regarded the flashing glass in the haze.

"It's quite a ways off," she said.

"Not very far—with a machine." His tone was aggressive and a little masterful. It seemed to pick her up and whirl her away through distance. Aunt Jane's face was meek.

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"I'm glad you've got along so fast," she replied.

He regarded her suspiciously.

"And having your own car so—you won't mind the trip—"

"I'm not going!" said Medfield. He was chuckling a little.

She turned a distressed face to him. "I don't see how we're going to manage—if you don't!"

"I am not in anybody's way," said Medfield.... "I'll be good!" He was watching her expressive face.

"Yes, you're good! You are always good!" Aunt Jane's diplomacy was at its best.

He laughed out.

"You see—we need your room—your suite."

"What for?— I pay as much as anybody, don't I?" He turned on her quickly.

"You pay more.... Don't you remember I told you about that?"

"Yes." He recalled the facts. "I'm to pay for a Mrs. Pelton, too."

"That's it. I let you pay for her—"

"Thank you"—a little ironical and smiling.

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"*She* wants to thank *you*," said Aunt Jane quietly. "I told her you'd let her."

"Keep her away!" He put out his hand to ward it off. "I've made out a check for her—you remind me to give it to you."

"A check?"

"You said she could use a hundred dollars," he replied.

"Now, wasn't that good in you!" She beamed on him and on his goodness.

He received it complacently. "I only wish there were something more I could do—for you." He said it carefully. He did not look at her now. He wanted to be sure she took it in—and he did not want to frustrate the meek quiet of her face.

A little light crept into the face—half guilty. "I've been planning to ask you for something," she said, "kind of screwing up my courage."

"Ask away—what is it?" He looked at her as Ahasuerus may have looked on Esther.

"You sit down, Mr. Medfield," said Aunt Jane.

"Is it as bad as that?" He laughed and sat down, regarding her quizzically.

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"Go ahead!"

"It's a new wing—" said Aunt Jane.

"One of yours worn out?" Pretended astonishment and happiness was in the tone and she smiled at him tolerantly.

"It's for contagion— It will cost fifty thousand dollars— I thought maybe you'd like to give it." She flung the words at him. She had been meaning to do it all day—"screwing up her courage" to it.... She fired her bomb and she watched, waiting for it to go off. She sat alert and anxious.

He chuckled. "I'm glad I have enough!"

She wheeled quickly— "You're going to do it?"

"I'm going to think about it—look into it," said the man of business. A little keen look had come into his face, breaking its lazy quiet.

Aunt Jane regarded it without fear. She was her tranquil self again. "If you look into it, you'll find we need it pretty bad," she said.

He had taken out his pencil and was making a note. "All right. I may give you *two* wings ... if you really *need* them!" The tone was teasing again.

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"I don't need two," said Aunt Jane composedly. "Of course, we may need another—some time," she added thoughtfully.

His laugh was happy.



"You'll let me stay now, won't you?" He put back his pencil and settled reposefully in his chair and watched her.

She turned on him. "Now you are being selfish!—and spoiling everything!" It was full of reproach, but tinged with the happiness of the new wing....

"You see it's a child!" said Aunt Jane.

"A child?" He sat up. "Put her in there!" He motioned to the ward.

She shook her head. "She can't be put there at first—not right off. Her mother's coming with her— Your suite is the only place we've got." She gazed out over the balcony-rail—not to disturb his feelings—but he stirred uncomfortably.

"Of course the mother'll go home in a day or two," went on Aunt Jane. "They generally do go home.... They come here thinking nobody can do for their children but themselves—and then, somehow—in a day or two, they go home." She sat looking at him and beaming, and Medfield laughed.

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"And you're proud of it!" he said.

"I'm not proud—exactly," said Aunt Jane. "But I do take comfort, doing for them—and knowing they're all happy—as happy as they can be, with their sufferings.... They are coming Friday afternoon, along about four. So if you could be ready to go at three——"

"I'm not going!"

She regarded him mildly.

"You can have your old suite for them—" He was like a boy, laughing at her. "But I won't go home!"

"There isn't any other place for you," said Aunt Jane calmly. "I told you about it—we haven't any other room."

He looked about him. "I'll sleep anywhere—! I'll sleep in the Children's Ward!" He waved a hand.

Aunt Jane's face was vexed. Of course, he was going to give the wing—and it softened her austerity a little. But he was a grown man. He ought to behave better. She got up quickly. "I can't have you upsetting everything!" she said.

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She went into the ward, leaving him in solitary state.

He watched the plump figure moving among the beds, and the faces turned to it; and he smiled whimsically.... "I mean to upset things a good deal more for you—before I'm done, Aunt Jane!" he said softly.

He sat looking out over the city and dreaming contentedly. When Aunt Jane appeared again in the door, he turned to her.

"I've decided," he said.

She came out.

"I'll go," he said, looking up at her. "I'll go—if you will go with me."

Up above them they could hear the awning flapping a little in the wind, and the children's voices from the ward.

Aunt Jane's gaze travelled out over the roofs, to the greenhouse and its glass flashing back the sunlight. She sighed.

"Well—I'll go. I'm too busy, and I ought not to take time.... I don't see how I can spare time to go. But you're so obstinate—" She looked at him appealingly.

He shook his head.

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"Well—I'll go with you—" said Aunt Jane. "It won't take long—going in a car."

And Herman Medfield smiled, looking out across the roofs to his home.

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## XL

[Pg 299]

At last Herman Medfield was ready to leave the Berkeley House of Mercy. He stood on the top step, looking contentedly down at the car that waited for him.

The chauffeur glanced up and caught sight of him and sprang up the steps.

"Can I help you, sir?" He offered a helpful arm. But Medfield motioned it aside.

"I'm all right, Buckman.... I'm quite myself, thank you. I am waiting for some one——"

He glanced toward the door. "Some one is coming—with me."

The chauffeur returned to his car, standing immovable, and the master of the car waited on the steps.... There had been a dozen things to do. Aunt Jane had insisted on his seeing Mrs. Pelton, and there had been delays. And at the last minute, Aunt Jane had disappeared in her office for something. He turned toward the door.

She was coming.

The door opened and Aunt Jane stood in it, smiling and competent—in her cap.

He flashed a look at it. "You're not coming?" It was disappointed and vexed.

"Yes, I'm coming." Her face was pleased.

"You've forgotten your bonnet," he laughed.

"Oh—I don't need a bonnet." She went slowly down the steps. "I never wear a bonnet when I go with a patient." She looked back to him. "You want me to help you?"

He came quickly down with a laugh and placed her in the car. "I don't want anything—except to get home!" he said exultantly.

The chauffeur slammed the door.

Aunt Jane beamed on her patient. "I thought you'd be ready to go—when the time came," she said philosophically.

"I'm happy. I don't want anything but what I've got—right here!" He was looking at the face in its cap.

Aunt Jane transferred her gaze to the window, watching the houses slide by, and the long, smooth roll of streets. "I do like a car!" she declared with a sigh. "I always feel as if I owned the whole earth when I go in a car—kind of on top, you know!"

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And the car bore her onward without a jolt or jar, as she sat competently erect; and Herman Medfield, leaning back against the cushions, relaxed to the motion, and watched her pleasure, happily.... There were many things he could give her. He was glad he was a rich man.

The car flashed them through the maze of streets and in through the great gate that formed the entrance to the Medfield estate; and Aunt Jane looked out, with pleased eyes, on trees and shrubs and on a wide soft greenness of turf, and little open vistas shining out as they passed them. "I always heard it was a nice place!" she said contentedly.

"I knew you would like it!" replied Medfield.

Aunt Jane turned her glance on him. "Anybody would be pretty hard to please that didn't like this," she said simply and returned to her window.

He smiled a contented, thoughtful smile.

"Here we are! Home at last—!" He held up a hand to her as she stepped out. "It has been a long time!" He was looking toward the entrance.

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"Yes— You've been away a good while." She moved tranquilly beside him, up the low steps into the hall. "Now, I'll make you comfortable." She was looking about her. "And then I must go back. We'd better tell the man to wait—" she turned toward the door.

"We'll call him up," said Medfield quickly. "He's gone— And I want to give you tea and show you my rose-garden—we'll have tea out there—"

"If it isn't too damp," said Aunt Jane.

"What do I care!" He was impatient.

"Dr. Carmon said you'd have to be careful." She spoke the name with authority and a look of vexation crossed Medfield's face.

"Bother! Well—I shall be careful! You won't let me do anything rash!"

"No, I'll try not to—you don't think you'd better go to bed, do you?"

"I do not!"

And he took the situation into his own hands and showed Aunt Jane through the house; and she admired it all, and liked the flowers growing in little pots in the drawing-room windows.

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"This would be a good place to have your tea," she remarked.

"We are going outdoors," he said obstinately—and there was a long, low rumble somewhere—"What's that?" He had started.

"Sounds like thunder," said Aunt Jane. She moved over to the window. "Yes—looks as if we were going to have a shower—a hard one. I thought I felt like it." She sat down placidly.

Lightning played through the room, with fantastic touches on the chairs and tables and on the little growing plants in the windows.

"I guess we'll have tea indoors." She beamed on him.

He laughed out with vexation and rang the bell and ordered tea and had a fire made on the great open hearth. He drew up a chair before it for Aunt Jane and made her comfortable.

There was nothing of the invalid in the slim, quick-moving, aristocratic figure. He was playing the host with happy face.

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"I declare—you look real well!" said Aunt Jane, watching him.

"Oh, I'm well—I'm happy!" he replied.

Something in the voice arrested her, and she turned away.

"I wouldn't be too happy—not the first day or so," she said softly.

"Do you mean to spoil it?" He came and stood by the fire and looked down at her sternly.

"No—I shan't spoil anything—" A crash of thunder filled the air, and the room grew dark. Little sulphurous lights played in it—and withdrew, dancing across the potted plants.

"Here's your tea!" said Aunt Jane out of the subsiding din.

"Put it here, Henry." Medfield rolled a little table in front of Aunt Jane and watched the man as he set it down. He ran an eye over the tray—

"That's all right. I'll set it out. You draw the curtains and light the candles."

He motioned the man aside and arranged the dishes himself, setting the toast in front of the fire and placing the cups and plates with swift touch. [Pg 305]

"There you are!" He had taken the chair opposite her and he looked across with happy eyes. "This is all right!" he said.

The man had left the room; the crashing thunder was shut behind the heavy curtains, the candles shone down on them, and the firelight played across the table. It shone on Aunt Jane's face.

"You have a nice home," she said safely. She lifted a napkin from her plate.

"Mercy—what's this!" She peered at the thin blue strip of paper that fluttered from under the napkin. She took it up and read it—and laid it down hastily. "It's for the wing!" she said.

He nodded quietly, watching her. "You guessed right—the first time!"

Her face looking down at the check was thoughtful and sweet.

"Are you going to pour my tea?" said Medfield.

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## XLI

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"Ah!—This is comfortable!"

He had taken his tea from her and was sipping it slowly. He looked about the great room, lighted with high candles in the massive silver sticks, and at the soft folds of curtains that shut out the storm.

"You don't know what a lonely place it is!— With no one here!" He shivered, and then looked contentedly at Aunt Jane drinking her tea.

"Places generally *are* lonely," she responded. "It takes folks—not to be lonely.... Most of us *need* folks, I guess."

"I need them!" said Medfield emphatically. "And I didn't know it—how lonely I was.... I knew I was beastly unhappy!" He leaned forward and seemed to be looking at his unhappiness in the fire that glowed on the hearth and danced in the flames and flew away up the chimney.

"That's over!" he said. He leaned back happily in his chair, watching the flames. [Pg 307]

"Yes. You're going to have a family now—"

He turned on her with a little amused stare.

She nodded. "You'll have Julian here, and Mary Canfield—"

"Oh—Romeo and Juliet!" The tone dismissed the youthful lovers, and laughed at her.

Aunt Jane received it. "They're only two—I know—and two isn't a family—exactly—but there'll be little ones—you see! They'll be all over the place, I expect."

Her eyes seemed to be watching the children playing in the great room. "They'll look nice, won't they!"

He shook his head. "I wasn't thinking of Julian and Mary—nor of children— Never mind!" He put it aside. "I'll tell you sometime."

Aunt Jane had taken up the check from beside her plate, and was folding it in slow fingers.

"You don't know what that is going to do," she said slowly. "But I can see it—plain as if I was right there now—the folks that will get well with this, and be like folks again!... It's hard to be poor!" She opened the bag that hung at her side, and put in the check, and closed it softly. [Pg 308]

He sat up and leaned an elbow on the table, resting his head on it and looking across to her under the shading hand. "There's one thing I wanted to ask you."

"Yes?" Aunt Jane's response was veiled. But the good-will in her face shone through. "I'll tell you anything I can. There's a good many things I don't know." Her cap was whimsical.

"You know this!" He laughed. "It's about your old hospital!" He motioned toward the little bag with its check.

"Oh—I know the hospital— It's 'most all I do know!"

"You feel as if you owned it, don't you!" His tone teased her gently. Then he left it—and leaned forward—

"What I was thinking was this: Isn't there something that you would like for the hospital—not just contagion—not a whole wingful!" He twinkled at it. "But something you have seen that is needed. Isn't there something?" He folded his arms on the table, and looked across the teacups at the thoughtful little lines that came and went in her face.

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"Is there?" he said.

The lines took it in—and held it wistfully. "You don't mean tea-strainers and such things—you mean something worth while?"

He nodded. "Something worth while, yes. I mean anything.... Think of it—not for yourself, perhaps—" His face grew intent. "Think of it as if some other woman were there."

Aunt Jane sat up. "I can't hardly think of any other woman running my hospital!" she said dryly.

He waved it off. "But if there were?"

She accepted it. "Well—if there was—there's one thing she could make a good deal of use of—if she had it. I've thought about it——"

"Yes— That's what I want!"

"It's expensive," said Aunt Jane.

"We can talk about that later."

She sighed. "It seems kind of ridiculous!... I don't suppose you'll understand, maybe?" She looked up at him.

[Pg 310]

"I'll try—I don't think there are many things you could say that I should not understand," he said softly.

Aunt Jane's glance hastily sought the teacups. "It's a kind of little home for me." She looked at him as if begging him not to make fun of her.

"You don't mean you want to leave your hospital!" It was half amused and wholly alert, and the question darted at her.

She caught it with a quick shake of the muslin cap. "I don't ever want to live anywhere except in the House of Mercy," she said.

"Oh!" The crestfallen word slipped across to her, and Aunt Jane's face relaxed.

"It's kind of a wing I was thinking of——"

"But I gave you your wing!"

"This is a little one—a kind of place of my own—where I could have them—when they were dismissed, you know—well enough to go home but not quite ready—in their minds, maybe.... I don't know as you ever thought—that it takes courage to start?" She regarded him mildly.

[Pg 311]

"I can imagine it—yes." His tone was dry.

She nodded. "I'd like to have a little home—not belonging to the hospital, but just to me, close by—where I could take 'em in, for a visit-like, till their courage had time to grow."

"I see—a cucumber frame for courage."

She looked up to see if he were making fun. But he was gazing thoughtfully into a teacup.

"Poor folks have to get their courage somehow—and it's hard work—wastes a good deal," she said practically.... "And then sometimes, there's rich folks that don't want to go—when the time comes—" Her eyes twinkled with it. "I'd like to ask them to visit me sometimes."

He was silent, looking into his teacup.

"Have you finished?" he asked. "Is that all?" The little irony of the words danced across to her kindly.

She sighed, and leaned back in her chair. "You made me tell you! I've never told anybody, before. I know it sounds foolish—having a home of my own!"

[Pg 312]

He got up from his chair, and went toward a big desk. Then he paused and came back and stood by her chair, with one hand on it, looking down at her.

"I never think anything you do is foolish! You know that!"

Aunt Jane jumped a little. "Well—I think I'm foolish—a good many times!"

He smiled and went over to the desk and drew out his check-book. "How much will it cost, do you suppose?" He looked over his shoulder to her.

"I could get along with a little one," she said meekly.

He smiled again, and filled in the check. "Make it ten thousand for a start." He blotted it carefully. "If it isn't enough, there's more where it came from." He patted the check-book with just a little happy touch of pride, and came across and laid the blue slip in her lap.

"It is for another woman, you know," said Medfield.

He moved across and stood by the fireplace, looking at her with frankly happy eyes.

"What do you mean—by that?" said Aunt Jane. Her fingers seemed a little afraid of the blue slip in her lap.

[Pg 313]

"Just that!" His face was quiet with the happiness shining in it—ready to break through at a word. "Just that. If some other woman comes to the House of Mercy, she is to have it—otherwise I take it back."

Aunt Jane's fingers abandoned the check. It slipped to the floor.

He came over and picked it up and placed it on the table beside her, and bent a little to her. "I want to give you a larger home, Jane. I want to give you all I have.... Won't you come and live with me?"

"Oh—dear!" said Aunt Jane.

"That's what I meant." He was smiling, but the shadow crossed his face.

"I can't!" said Aunt Jane. She pushed the check from her, and opened the little bag, searching—with half-blinded fingers for the other.

"I can't take 'em!" she said.... "And we do need the wing for contagion—" Her fingers had found the slip and she took it out longingly, and laid it beside the other on the table and glanced up at him with a little, tremulous shake. "I can't take it—if you were offering it to me just because you thought you were—in love with me!"

[Pg 314]

She looked at it regretfully. "I did hope it wasn't that!" she said softly.

"But it is!" The tone was grave, with a little line of hope running through. "Take it, Jane!" he said gently. "I am not asking anything. It's yours, you know!"

She shook her head. "It seems as if it wouldn't be quite—fair— And we do need the new wing for contagion—the worst way!"

He took up the two checks and folded them in his thin, quiet fingers and lifted the little bag.

"You will take them," he said. He slipped them into the bag and closed it. "Money is only good for what it will buy— Mine does not seem able to buy anything better worth while at present.... Besides"—he dropped the little bag and crossed the hearth—"I shall not spoil your life—or mine! You're going to ask me to visit you, you know, in your little home!"

He was smiling at her.

"You're tired!" she said with quick remorse.

[Pg 315]

But he lifted a hand. "I'm all right. I'm not going to play on your sympathies that way!" He sat down. "I'm all right!"

"You're going to bed!" said Aunt Jane. She got up and rang the bell.

Then she came and stood by his chair and looked at him and hesitated....

And he smiled at her. "It's all right, Jane."

"I'm old enough to be your mother," she said ruefully.

"Nonsense!"

"Well, I *feel* old enough! I feel like a mother to everybody, I guess!" She bent to him.... "And I'm sorry!" she said swiftly. She kissed him on the cheek—a full, loving, motherly kiss—and drew back from the detaining hand.

"Now you are going to bed," she said practically. "Here's Henry!" She crossed to the man and gave directions for Herman Medfield's comfort; she looked regretfully at the figure sitting in the big chair before the fire as she gave them. She crossed to it again.

"Good-by," she said.

He took the cool, firm fingers in his, and held them close and lifted them to his lips.

[Pg 316]

"Good-by," he said.

Aunt Jane went quietly from the room.

Henry, with discreet face, was removing the tea-things. He lifted the tray and then set it down and went to the window, pushing back the heavy curtains. "The storm is over, sir," he said.

The fresh, full light flooded in. Henry put out the candles one by one and took up his tray. "Mr. Julian sent word as he'll be home to dinner, sir—with a young lady—" He paused. "Shall I lay the table for her?"

"Yes—she will stay to dinner. She will be here often now," said Herman Medfield.

"Very good, sir. Thank you, sir." Henry took up his tray and went out.

Herman Medfield sat alone by his fire, with the memory of a white-capped face across the hearth and a little thought stirring in him of children playing in the great room, among his art treasures—with the light coming in softly, as it was coming now, across the little potted plants in the windows.

"Where have you been, all the afternoon!" Dr. Carmon was fuming in the office. He got up as

Aunt Jane came in.

"Where have you been?" he demanded. "I've needed you! They looked everywhere for you!"

She came calmly in. "I went home with Mr. Medfield." She took up the little tablet slate on her desk and consulted it absently. "He needed me—he thought he needed me."

"What for?" The tone was brusque. "He was well enough when *I* saw him. Couldn't he go home without upsetting the whole hospital!"

"He didn't like to go without me," said Aunt Jane. "In fact, he wouldn't go," she added. She put down the little tablet. "I'm sorry you needed me.... I don't very often go out."

"Well"—his tone was mollified—"we managed to pull through without you. But I like to feel you're around—when I need you." [Pg 318]

"I generally mean to be," she said placidly.

He glanced at her suspiciously. She was unusually meek.

"What have you been doing all the afternoon? It didn't take four hours to go out to Medfield's place and back!"

"We had tea—and we talked some."

"Umph! Well, we've got *him* off our hands!"

"Yes—we've got him off our hands," assented Aunt Jane. "He's a good man," she added.

"He's got money," said Dr. Carmon, without enthusiasm. "I never heard of his doing much good with it."

She opened her little bag and took out the two blue slips and looked at them. Then she returned one of them to the bag and handed the other to him, without comment.

He received it blankly and read it—and readjusted his glasses and read it again. He took off the glasses and held them in the tight clutch of one hand, resting on his knee, and surveyed her keenly.

"I suppose you know what it is!"

[Pg 319]

"Fifty thousand," she said meekly.

"He's given you fifty thousand dollars!" He shook the little blue slip scornfully.

"It isn't for me— It's for us!"

"What!" he said sharply. He put on his glasses again. "For the hospital, is it?" He took it up.

She nodded. "For the new contagion wing."

"We need it badly enough!" He fingered the check absently. "I didn't suppose we should ever have it, though!"

"I told him we needed it," she said casually.

"You begged it of him, I suppose!" A little trace of annoyance ran in the words.

She received it equably. "I didn't do any begging, I guess. I just told him we wanted it."

"So he handed it out!"

"Well—not right then. He said he'd think it over— He gave it to me this afternoon. Put it on my plate—for a kind of surprise." She was looking at something and smiling mistily at it.

He watched her uneasily.

"He's a nice man!" she said, meeting the glance he bent upon her.

[Pg 320]

"You're tired," he responded abruptly.

"I am—a little mite tired."

He got up and opened his bag and fussed at bottles and shook something into a bit of folded paper and held it out.

"There—take that."

"I don't need it!"

"You take it!"

She accepted it meekly, and he brought a glass of water from behind the screen, and watched her drink it.

"Everybody seems to think you can chase all over town for them!" he grumbled.

"It was quite a nice ride out there," replied Aunt Jane. She wiped the taste of medicine furtively from her lips and set down the glass.

"He's going to give me a little home, too."

"What!" He glared at her fiercely.

She took hold of her bag—as if to protect something. "I knew you wouldn't like it!" she said. "I hated to tell you! I thought maybe I'd put it off ... not tell you for a good while."

"If you will tell me now—and not sit there gibbering and chattering——"

[Pg 321]

She nodded. "Yes—I'd better do it to-night—right off—and get it done with!" She opened the bag slowly. "Of course, I know you won't want me to have it—" She looked at him doubtfully, holding on to the bit of paper.

"Let me see it!" He held out an imperious hand, and she gave it up. And he sat, with a check in each hand—one hand on either knee—and looked at her severely.

"Any more?" he said bitingly.

"That's all!" She leaned back with a sigh. The worst was probably over.

He read first one check, and then the other, and looked up swiftly—"They're both made out to you!"

"Yes! I saw he'd done it that way—I'm going to make the contagion one over to you."

"They're both contagion, probably!" He smiled grimly.

"No—one is for me—and he said I could build it just the way I want, and furnish it—and have my own way about everything!"

"You'll feel strange, won't you—having your own way!" He almost growled, and tossed the checks at her: [Pg 322]

"Take 'em!"

She went over to her desk and looked for her pen and sat down, dipping it in ink, and sat very still—and presently her head nodded—she caught herself, and sat up.

"I declare—I'm sleepy!" she said.

She dipped the pen again and her head nodded as she wrote.... "I don't know when I've been so sleepy." She reached for the blotter. He came over and took it from her and blotted the little paper carefully, looking down at her kindly.

"It's time you went to sleep," he said.

She looked up. "What do you suppose—is the matter—with me?"

He only smiled at her quietly.

"It's the powder!" she exclaimed.

He nodded. "You'll have a good night's rest. You need it!"

"Such foolishness!" She got up, resting one hand on the lid of the desk, and looked about her. "I have to—put out—my lights—"

"I'll put them out," he said impatiently. [Pg 323]

She waited. "Isn't there something else—I ought—to do—something I need to—?" She looked at him appealingly, and he took her hand.

"You need some one to take care of you—that's what you need!" He said it almost gently and he led her to the door.

"Sure you can go by yourself?" he said.

It was half mocking and half tender; and he watched until the quiet-moving figure disappeared in the distance of the long corridor.

Then he put out Aunt Jane's lights and went home.

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## XLIII

[Pg 324]

It was very quiet in the hospital. The lights were turned low in the corridors; only a subdued glow from Aunt Jane's office shone out into the dimness.

Dr. Carmon, on his round of late visits, glanced at the light as he came and went. He had not seen Aunt Jane to-day. He had been out of town. It had been a hard day for Dr. Carmon.

When the last visit was over, he hesitated a minute. Then he went swiftly down the hall toward the light shining from the door.

At the door he paused. Aunt Jane, over by the shaded lamp, sat in her rocking-chair. She rocked gently; and as she rocked, little thoughts came and went in her face.

He stood silently watching the face. It was smiling now. He stepped in quickly.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked.

She looked up with a start—and brushed a hand across her face.

[Pg 325]

"I—I was thinking about my—my wings, I guess." She was laughing a little.

"Umph! Just about ready to grow 'em, I expect!"

He put down his bag and came and sat opposite her and placed a hand on either knee, surveying her shrewdly.

"How are you feeling?"

"All right."

"Slept well?" A little smile crossed the words.

"I never had such a sleep!... And I feel all right after it," she added thoughtfully. "But I don't believe in taking things!"

She was mildly indignant.

"Can't hurt you," he said absently. "I knew what I was giving."

"But—I didn't."

"'Twasn't necessary," he said briefly.

She looked up at him with a little surprised twinkle and rocked gently.

He was leaning forward, an arm resting on either knee, his hands hanging relaxed between the knees. He was lost in thought.

She stole a glance at the preoccupied face—and opened her lips—and closed them and went on rocking. [Pg 326]

He had put the tips of his fingers together and was swinging them a little and whistling softly. He looked at her.

"Jane——"

"What!" It was almost a jump.

He smiled a little. The whistle had ceased.

"Do—you—love me, Jane?"

She looked at him indignantly. "Whatever put such an idea into your head!"

"It isn't there—I wish it were!"

He was looking at her quietly and at something flooding up under her cap.

"I wonder—if you do?" He was swinging the finger-tips thoughtfully, as if they balanced it for him, and his eyes did not leave her face.

"Jane——"

She looked at him meekly, a flitting glance—and then away.

"Don't you love me?"

"Yes." She drew in the word with a quick breath and got up abruptly. She went straight across the room to her desk—and stopped.

He watched her with a slow, questioning look. [Pg 327]

He got up slowly.

"I—I'm too *old* to love anybody!" The words came softly to him—with a half sob. "I'm just ashamed of it!"

She was sitting facing the desk and her shoulders lifted with the little sobbing breaths she tried to control.

Dr. Carmon came over and stood beside her and laid his hand on her shoulder and stood quiet a minute.

"I need you, Jane!" he said at last. "I can't tell you how I need you!"

She turned and looked up at him then, her face quivering in little lights. "Well—I guess it's all right—the way I feel! It's the way the Lord made me, anyhow! *I* don't want to be this way!" She brushed her hand across her eyes and smiled at him a little tremulously.

He was looking down—his face almost grave in its quiet happiness.... "I don't quite believe it, Jane—that you are coming to live with me——"

"But I'm not!" She got up quickly.

He faced her. "You said—" He gazed at her. [Pg 328]

"I said I—that—I—loved you!" She threw it at him. "That's bad enough, I hope—without having to leave my hospital!" A fine, clear color had come into her face.

He watched it smilingly. "I'll come here to live!" he announced.

"I can't have you! You wouldn't like it! It wouldn't be good for you—living with your work!... Oh—dear!"

She wrestled with it and he watched the disturbed face, with happy, affectionate eyes.

"Don't bother—Jane!" he said softly.

"Of course I've got my wing—" She paused on it. "You can come and live in my wing.... That's the best I can do for you!" She threw out her hands, half laughing, half crying, and he took them and led her to the rocking-chair and put her in it and stood beside her.

"I wonder if you need another powder," he said reflectively.

"Mercy—no!... Sit down!"



"Here I am, being happy! And I've been using other folks' happiness so long, I don't hardly know what to do with any of my own—happiness that belongs just to me!"

"It doesn't belong just to you!" said Dr. Carmon sternly. "You are the most self-centred woman I ever knew!" he added.

"Yes, I suppose I am!" sighed Aunt Jane. She rocked happily and looked at it.

"I'm going to teach you how to be happy!" said Frederic Carmon. "I can teach you! There are several things I can teach you, I suspect." He said it slowly. His eye dwelt on her.... "For one thing, you are not going to have your own way so much as you have—it's not good for you!"

"Oh!" said Aunt Jane. She sat very still looking at it—and the face in its white cap smiled in little, gentle, breaking lines.

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