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The Key Note
Clara Louise Burnham

THE KEY NOTE

THE KEY NOTE

A Novel

BY

CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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TO
JOSEPHINE

CONTENTS

I. THE RAPSCALLION	1
II. VERONICA	19
III. A FRIENDLY PACT	45
IV. BIOGRAPHY	70
V. A FIRELIGHT INTERVIEW	90
VI. THE HAUNTED FARM	110
VII. ANOTHER WOUND	125
VIII. SKETCHES	137
IX. A WORKING PLAN	151
X. NICHOLAS GAYNE CONFIDES	164
XI. THE NEWPORT LETTER	181
XII. COUSIN HERBERT	194
XIII. THE LAW	208
XIV. THE WILL	222
XV. A SUDDEN JOURNEY	234
XVI. THE NEW CLIENT	246
XVII. THE HEIR	262
XVIII. DIANA'S IDEAL	276
XIX. MOONLIGHT	293
XX. REUNION	303
XXI. GOOD-BYES	317
XXII. THE DINNER PARTY	329
XXIII. THE MOON-GODDESS	345

THE KEY NOTE

[Pg 1]

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CHAPTER I THE RAPSCALLION

The sea glittered in all directions. The grassy field, humpy with knolls and lumpy with gray rock, sloped down toward the near-by water. Bunches of savin and bay and groups of Christmas trees flourished in the fresh June air, and exhilarating balsamic odors assailed Miss Burr ridge's nostrils as she stood in the doorway viewing the landscape o'er and reflectively picking her teeth with a pin.

"It's an awful sightly place to fail in, anyway," she thought.

Her one boarder came and stood beside her. She was a young woman with a creamy skin, regular features, dark, dreaming eyes, and a pleasant, slow smile.

"Are you gathering inspiration, Miss Burr ridge?" she asked, settling a white tam-o'-shanter on her smooth brown locks.

"I hope so, Miss Wilbur. I need it."

"How could any one help it!" was Diana Wilbur's soft exclamation, as she took a deep breath and gazed at the illimitable be-diamonded blue.

[Pg 2]

Priscilla Burr ridge turned her middle-aged gaze upon the enthusiasm of the twentieth year beside her.

"Do you know of any inspiration that would make me able to get the carpenter to come and jack up the saggin' corner of that piazza?" she asked. "Or get the plumber to mend the broken pipe in the kitchen?"

Miss Wilbur's dreaming gaze came back to the bony figure in brown calico.

"It seems almost sacrilege, doesn't it," she said in a voice of awe, "to speak of carpenters and plumbers in a place like this? Such odors, such crystal beauty untouched by the desecrating hand of man."

Miss Priscilla snorted. "If I don't get hold of the desecrating hand of man pretty soon, you'll be havin' a stream o' water come down on your bed, the first rain."

The girl's attitude of adoration remained unchanged.

"I noticed that little rift," she said slowly. "As I lay in bed this morning, I looked up at a spot of sapphire that seemed like a day-star full of promise of this transcendent beauty."

Miss Wilbur's pretty lips moved but little when she spoke and her slow utterance gave the effect of a recitation. [Pg 3]

Miss Priscilla, for all her harassment, could not forbear a smile.

"I'm certainly glad you're so easily pleased, but you don't know Casco Bay as well as I do, or that day-star would look powerful stormy to you. When it rains here, all other rains are mere imitations. It comes down from the sky and up from the ground, and the wind blows it east and west, and the porch furniture turns somersets out into the field, and windows and doors go back on you and give up the fight and let the water in everywhere, while the thunder rolls like the day o' judgment."

The ardent light in the depths of the young girl's eyes glowed deeper.

"I should expect a storm here to be inexorably superb!" she declared.

Miss Priscilla heaved a sigh, half dejection, half exasperation, and turned into the house.

"Drat that plumber!" she said. "I've only had a few days of it, but I'm sick of luggin' water in from that well."

"Why, Miss Burridge," said her boarder solicitously, "I haven't fully realized—let me bring in a supply."

"No, no, indeed, Miss Wilbur," exclaimed Miss Priscilla, as she moved through the living-room of the house into the kitchen, closely followed by Diana. "It ain't that I ain't able to do it, but it makes me darned mad when I know there's no need of it." [Pg 4]

"But I desire to, Miss Burridge," averred the young girl. "Any form of movement here cannot fail to be one of joy." She seized an empty bucket from the sink and went out the back door.

Small groves of evergreen dotted the incline behind the house, and on the right hand soon became a wood-road of stately fir and spruce, which led to a sun-warmed grassy slope which, like every hill of the lovely isle, led down to the jagged rocks that fringed its irregular shore.

"My muscular strength is not excessive," panted Diana, struggling up to the back door with her heavy bucket. "I'll fill it only half-full next time."

"You ain't goin' to fill it at all," declared Miss Priscilla emphatically, taking the pail from her. "That'll last me a long time, and when it's gone, I'll get more myself. 'T ain't that it does me a bit of hurt, but it riles me when I know there ain't any need of it."

She set the pail down beside the sink, filled the kettle from it, and set it on the oil stove while Diana sat down on the back doorstep. Then she proceeded: [Pg 5]

"One o' the most disagreeable things about this world is that we do seem to need men. They're strong and they don't wear skirts to stumble on, and when they're willin' and clever, they certainly do fill a need; but it does seem as if they were created to disappoint women. They don't know any more about keepin' their promises than they do about the other side o' the moon."

Diana nodded. "It is observable, I think," she said, "that men's natural regard for ethics is inferior to that of women."

Miss Priscilla sniffed. "Now it isn't only the plumber and the carpenter. I came here and saw 'em both over a month ago and explained my needs; explained that I ain't calc'latin' to take in boarders to break their legs on broken piazzas, or drown 'em in their beds. I explained all this when I rented the house, and when I arrived this week I naturally expected to find those things attended to; and there's Phil Barrison, too. I've known him most of his life. He has relatives here on the island, and when I heard he was comin' to stay with 'em on his vacation, I asked him if he wouldn't be a kind of a handy-man to me and he said he would. He got here before I did, but far as I can make out he's been fishin' ever since. A lot of help he's been. Oh, I knew well enough he was a broken reed. If ever a rapscaillon lived, Phil's it. 'Tain't natural for any young one to be so smart as he was. Do you believe in school he found out that by openin' and shuttin' his geography real slow, he could set the teacher to yawnin', and, of course, she'd set the rest of 'em off, and Phil just had a beautiful time. His pranks was always funny ones." [Pg 6]

Diana Wilbur gave her slow, rare smile. "What an interesting bit of hypnosis!" she remarked.

"Hey? Well, when that boy got older, he was real ambitious to study. He's got one o' those voices

that ought to belong to a cherubim instead of a limb like him, and he wanted lessons. So he got the job of janitor in our church one winter. I got onto him later. When he'd oversleep some awful cold mornin' and arrive too late to get the furnace to workin' right, that rascal would drive the mercury up and loosen the bulb of the thermometer so that when the folks came in and went over to it to see just how cold they *was* goin' to be, they'd see it register over sixty-five and of course they'd take their seats real satisfied."

[Pg 7]

Miss Wilbur smiled again. "Your friend certainly showed great resource and ingenuity. When those traits are joined to lofty principle, they should lift him to heights of success. Oh,"—the speaker's attitude and voice suddenly changed, and she lifted her finger to impose silence on the cooking utensils which Miss Burridge was dropping into the sink,—"listen!"

Mingled with the roulade of a song sparrow on the roof, came the flute of a human voice sounding and approaching through the field.

"Thou'rt like unto a flower,
So pure, so sweet, so fair—"

The one road of the island swept over a height at some distance behind the house and the singer had left it, and was striding down the incline and through the meadow toward Miss Burridge's. The still air brought the song while the singer was still hidden, but at last the girl saw him, and the volume of rich tone increased. At last he came bounding up the slope over which Diana had struggled with her heavy bucket a few minutes before, and then paused at sight of the stranger.

He was a tall, broad-shouldered youth in a dark-blue flannel shirt and nondescript trousers. He was bareheaded, and locks of his thick blond hair were tumbling over his forehead. He looked at Diana with curious, unembarrassed blue eyes, and, lips parted, stopped in the act of speaking.

[Pg 8]

Miss Burridge came to the door. "Well, at last, Phil," she remarked.

"I only just heard this morning that you had come," he said. "Here's a peace offering." He lifted the two mackerel that were hanging from his hand.

"Beauties," vouchsafed Miss Burridge. "Are they cleaned?"

"Well, if you don't look a gift horse—"

"Well, now, I ain't goin' to clean 'em," said Miss Burridge doggedly. "I've been rubbed the wrong way ever since I landed—"

Philip laughed. "And you won't do it to them, eh? Well, I guess I can rub 'em the wrong way for you—" His unabashed eyes were still regarding Diana as impersonally as though they had both been children of five.

"Excuse me, I am obstructing the passage," said the girl, rising.

"This is Miss Diana Wilbur, Phil. I suppose you're Mr. Barrison now that you have sung in New York."

[Pg 9]

The young fellow bowed to the girl who acknowledged the greeting.

"What is the name of those beautiful creatures?" she asked with her usual gentle simplicity of manner.

"These? Oh, these are mackerel."

"Jewels of the deep, surely," she said.

"They are rather dressy," returned Philip.

Diana bathed him in the light of her serene brown gaze.

"I am so ignorant of the names of the denizens of the sea," she said. "I come from Philadelphia."

Philip returned her look with dancing stars in his eyes. "I'd have said Boston if you only wore eyeglasses."

"Oh, that *is* the humorous tradition, is it not?" she returned.

"Now, don't you drip 'em in here," said Miss Burridge, as the young fellow started to enter the kitchen door. "If you're really goin' to be clever and clean 'em, I'll give you the knife and everything right outdoors."

"Then I think I would better withdraw," said Diana hastily. "I cannot bear to see the mutilation of such a rich specimen of Nature's handiwork; but, oh, Mr. Barrison, not without one word concerning the heavenly song that floated across the field as you came. Miss Burridge calls you Phil;—'Philomel with melody!' I should say. Au revoir. I will go down among the pebbles for a while."

[Pg 10]

She vanished, and Philip regarded Miss Burridge, who returned his gaze.

"*Good night!*" he said at last.

"Sh! Sh!" warned Miss Priscilla, and tiptoed across the kitchen. When she had looked from a window and seen her boarder's sweater and tam proceeding among the grassy hummocks toward the sea, she returned, bringing out the materials for Philip's operations on the fish.

"I'll bring a rhetoric instead of finny denizens of the deep, the next time I come," he continued, settling to his job.

Miss Priscilla took her boarder's deserted seat on the doorstep.

"Going to open a young ladies' seminary here, and got the teacher all secured?"

"Nothing of the kind, Phil, and there's only one explanation of her," declared Miss Priscilla impressively. "You've been in art galleries and seen these statues of Venus and Apollo and all that tribe?"

"I have."

[Pg 11]

"Well, sir, all I can think of is that one o' their Dianas got down off her perch some dark night, and managed to get hold o' some girl clothes, and came here to this island. She *says* she has come to recuperate from unwise vigils caused by vaulting ambition at school. I said it over to myself till I learned it."

"I should say her trouble might be indigestion from devouring dictionaries," remarked Philip.

"Well, anyway, she's a sweet girl and it's all as natural as breathing to her. At first I accused her in my own mind of affectation, but, there! she hasn't got an affected bone in her body, and she's willin' and simple as a child. You'd ought to 'a' seen her luggin' water up the hill for me this mornin'. That reminds me. You promised to give me a lift this summer when I needed it."

"At so much a lift," remarked Philip.

"Of course. Well, the first thing I want you to do is to get the carpenter and the plumber and knock their heads together, and then bring 'em here, one in each hand, so's I can have my house ready when the folks come. Why, my new stove ain't even put up. Mr. Buell, the plumber, promised me faithful he'd come this mornin'. I'm cookin' on an old kerosene stove there was here and managin' to keep Miss Wilbur from sheer starvation."

[Pg 12]

"Miss Wilbur? Is that the fair Diana? Where did you get the 'old master'? Did she find you waiting when she got off the pedestal?"

"No, I found her waiting. She came to the island on a misunderstandin'. There wasn't any one ready so early in the season to make strangers comfortable, and it seems she took a fancy to this place and I found her here sittin' on the steps when I arrived. She said she had been on the island a week and had walked up to this piazza every pleasant day, and she'd like to live here."

"Did she really say it as plain as that?"

"Well—I don't suppose those were her exact words, but she made me understand that she was willin' to come right in for better or for worse just so's she could have a room up there in front where the dawn—yes, she said something about the dawn, I forget whether it was purple or rosy —"

"Mottled, perhaps," suggested Philip.

"Well, anyway, I told her the dawn came awful early in the day this part o' the year, and that probably she'd be better satisfied in one o' the back rooms; but she was firm on the *dawn*, so she's got it. But I draw the line at her gettin' midnight shower-baths, and that's what she will get if that wretch of a Matt Blake don't get here before the next storm and put on the shingles."

[Pg 13]

"And I have to tell the plumber that you have to 'haul water' too. Is that it? The well is some little distance. Rather hard on the statue, wasn't it, to do the hauling? She'll wish she'd stayed in the gallery. I'll bring in a lot before I go."

"Don't go, Philip," begged Miss Priscilla. "Supposin' you don't go, not till you can leave me whole-footed. The men'll come sooner and work better if they know there's a man here. Your grandma won't care if her visit's interrupted for a little while. I'll feed you with your own mackerel and you can bet I know how to cook 'em."

"Do you think Matt Blake realizes that I'm a man?" The teeth Philip showed in his smile were an asset for a singer. "He helped teach me to walk, you know."

"Well, now, you teach *him*" retorted Miss Priscilla. "Show him how to walk in this direction. I don't want to make a fizzle of this thing. I found there wa'n't anybody goin' to run the place this summer, so I thought it might be a good job for me. I never took a thought that it was goin' to be so hard to get help. They tell me there ain't any servants any more; and there are enough folks writin' for rooms to fill me up entirely. I can do the *cookin'* myself—"

[Pg 14]

"Now, Miss Burrige, you aren't leading up to asking me to put on an apron and wait on table, are you? You must remember I'm recuperating also from a too vaulting ambition."

"Recuperatin', nothin'! You're the huskiest-lookin' thing I ever saw. No, I ain't goin' to ask you to wait on table; but I've got an idea. We're too out o' the way here for me to get college boys. They'd rather go to the mountains and so on—fashionable resorts. But I've got a niece, if she

don't feel too big of herself to do that sort of thing; she might come. I'm goin' to ask her anyway. I haven't seen her for years 'cause her mother's been gone a long time and her father went out to Jersey to live, but I've no doubt she's a nice girl. Her name's Veronica. Isn't that a beater? I told my sister I couldn't see why she didn't name her Japonica and be done with it."

"It's the name of a saint," remarked Philip.

[Pg 15]

"Well, I hope she's enough of one to come and help me out. I'm goin' to ask her."

"Better get Miss Wilbur to write her about the rosy dawn and the jeweled denizens. I'm afraid you'll be too truthful and tell about the leaks. With an 'old master' and a saint, you ought to get on swimmingly."

"Well, will you stay with me a few days?" said Miss Priscilla coaxingly. "If I had a rascalion to add to the menagerie—"

"Do you mean ménage, Miss Burrridge?"

"I'll call it anything in the world you like, if you'll only stand by me, Phil."

"All right." The young fellow tossed the second cleaned fish on to the plate. "Let me wash my hands and I'll go and throw out a line for the plumber."

"You're a good boy," returned Miss Burrridge, relieved. "I do think, Philip, that in the main you are a good boy! Who's that comin' over?" Miss Burrridge craned her neck and narrowed her eyes the better to observe a bicycle which appeared across the field.

The apparition of any human being was exciting to one responsible for the comfort of others in this Arcadia, where modern conveniences could only be obtained by effort both spasmodic and continuous.

[Pg 16]

"Oh, it's Marley Hughes from the post-office."

A youngster of fourteen came wheeling nonchalantly over the bumps of the field, and finally jumped off his machine and came leisurely up the rise among the trees.

"I hoped you might be Matt Blake," said Miss Priscilla. "He's got as far as to have the shingles here."

"Well, I ain't," remarked Marley in the pleasant, drawling, leisurely, island voice.

"What you got for me?" inquired Miss Burrridge.

"Telegram." The boy brought the store envelope from his pocket.

"Oh, I hate 'em," said Miss Burrridge apprehensively.

Marley held it aggravatingly away from Philip's extended hand. "Take it back if you want me ter," he said with a grin. "It's ten cents anyway, whether you take it or not."

"Oh, yes, I've got the money right here." Miss Priscilla turned to a shelf over the sink and took a dime from a purse which lay there.

"Here." She gave it to Marley, who without more ado jumped on his wheel and coasted down among the trees and off over the soft grass.

[Pg 17]

"You open it, Phil. My spectacles ain't here anyway," said Miss Priscilla anxiously.

So Philip tore open the envelope. The look of amazement which overspread his face as the message greeted him caused Miss Burrridge to exclaim fearfully: "Speak out, speak out, Phil."

"They must have taken this down wrong at the store," he said. Then he read the scrawled words slowly. "'Look in broiler oven for legs.'"

The cryptic sentence appeared to have a magical effect upon Miss Priscilla. Her face beamed and she threw up her hands in thanksgiving.

"Glory be!" she exclaimed devoutly.

"What am I stumbling on?" said Philip. "Have you taken to wiring in cipher?"

"You *see*" said Miss Priscilla excitedly, reaching for the telegram which Philip yielded, "it *came* without any *legs*. Mr. Buell himself looked it over on the wharf and said he couldn't find 'em anywhere; and, of course, it was a terrible anxiety to me and I wrote to them right off, and I was goin' to get Mr. Buell to set it up without the legs if necessary and stick somethin' else under. Come and help me look, Phil."

[Pg 18]

Miss Burrridge seized the young fellow's arm and dragged him into the kitchen, where in one corner reposed the new stove in its shining newness, its parts piled ignominiously lop-sided. Talking all the time, its owner pulled open one door after another, as Philip disengaged them, and at last she laid hands on the missing treasure.

"Now I'll give you as good a dinner as ever comes off this stove if you'll go and get those men and bring 'em up here," she said. "Don't leave me till I'm whole-footed, Phil."

"Want feet as well as legs, do you?" he chuckled. "All right. See you later if I can get Blake and Buell. If I can't, I suppose I'd better drown myself."

"No, no, don't do that, Phil. *You're* better than nothing, yourself."

CHAPTER II VERONICA

[Pg 19]

For the next few days the right moment for Philip to desert Miss Burrigde never seemed to arrive, and by that time the new establishment had come to be in very good running order, which was fortunate, as the expected boarders' dates were drawing near.

Diana approached Philip one morning with a pleased countenance. He was encouraging the hopeful little sweet peas that stood in a green row below the porch. She came and sat on the rail above and watched him.

"Miss Burrigde is going to allow me to name our domicile," she announced.

"Brave woman!" said Philip, coaxing the brown earth up against the line of green with his trowel.

"Which of us is brave?" asked Diana, smiling,—"*Miss Priscilla* or myself?"

"What are you going to call it? *Olympus*?"

"Why should I?" Diana gave a soft, gurgling laugh.

"I thought perhaps it might bring happy memories and prove a palliation of nostalgia."

"I always have a feeling that you are amusing yourself with me, Mr. Barrison."

[Pg 20]

"Have you any objection to my seeing that you are a goddess? What have you done with *Apollo*, by the way? Couldn't you persuade him to leave the gallery?"

"To what gallery do you refer? I do not particularly care for handsome men," was *Miss Wilbur's* thoughtful response.

"I'm sorry I'm so beautiful, then," said Philip, extending his little earth barricade.

Diana looked down from her balcony on his tumbling blond hair.

"You have a very good presence for your purpose," she said.

"What is my purpose?"

"The concert stage, is it not? Perhaps even opera, later?"

"Yes, divine huntress, if I ever succeed in making it."

"You will make it unless you are unpardonably dilatory and neglectful. Every time you utter a musical tone it sends a vibration coursing through my nerves with a pleasant thrill."

Philip looked up at the speaker with his sea-blue, curious gaze, which she received serenely.

"Bully for you, *Miss Wilbur*. That's all I can say. Bully for you."

[Pg 21]

"I am glad if that encourages you," she said kindly. "It is quite outside my own volition."

"Then I don't need to thank you, eh?"

"Oh, not in the least."

Philip laughed and stooped again to his job.

"Let me see, *Apollo*—he struck liars and knew how to prescribe for the croup, didn't he, besides being a looker beyond all comers?"

Diana smiled. "You think of everything in terms of humor, do you not?" she rejoined.

"Perhaps—of most things, but not of you."

"Oh, I think of me most of all."

"Far from it," said Philip. "I wouldn't dare. If my voice gives you a thrill, yours gives me a chill."

"I can't believe that really," said Diana equably, watching Philip's expert handling of the trowel. "You are always laughing at me. I don't in the least understand why, but it doesn't matter at all. I think it is a quite laudable mission to make people laugh. What a good gardener you are, Mr. Barrison."

"Oh, isn't he, though!" exclaimed *Miss Priscilla*, emerging from the house. "Think of my luck that Phil really likes to fuss with flowers. Ox-chains couldn't drag him to do it if he didn't like to."

[Pg 22]

"Really?" returned Diana. "Is she not maligning you, Mr. Barrison? Are you really the slave of

caprice?"

"I deny it," said Philip. "It doesn't sound nice."

"It would be a dire thing for you," declared the girl. "But you do not ask me what I am naming the Inn."

"Oh, it is an Inn, is it?"

"Yes," put in Miss Priscilla. "Since the leaks are mended, both pipes and roof, and the stove's up and the chimney draws, I think we can call it that."

"What is it, then? 'The Dew Drop'?" inquired Philip.

"I particularly dislike puns," said Diana quietly. "I like 'The Wayside.' Why shouldn't we call it 'The Wayside Inn'?"

"You have my permission," said Philip.

"We do not need anything original, but we do need a name that is lovely. 'The Wayside Inn' is lovely."

"So be it," said Philip.

"And you're not forgettin' what you are goin' to do to-morrow, are you, dear boy?" said Miss Priscilla ingratiatingly. [Pg 23]

"Not if it isn't to go again for the plumber," replied Philip. "His wrenches and hammers are too handy; and I'm sure one more call up here would render him dangerous."

"Mr. Buell is a very pleasant man," said Diana. "So is Mr. Blake, the carpenter. I have learned such interesting expressions from them. Mr. Blake was showing me the fault in one of the gables of this house. He said the builder had given the roof a 'too quick yank.' Is not that quaint?"

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Philip up into the girl's serious face. "Bully for Matt. You may get the vernacular, after all."

"I'm not quick," said Diana. "I'm afraid I should not prove an apt pupil."

"But, Philip," said Miss Priscilla, "about to-morrow. You know you'll have to get the early boat to go to meet Veronica. It's perfectly splendid of you to go, dear boy. I don't know how I could spare the time. I've got to get several rooms ready for to-morrow, and the child is such an utter stranger in this part o' the world."

"Oh, yes, I'll go," said Philip carelessly. "I think the Inn will be relieved that I can get a hair-cut. My tresses are nearly ready to braid now." [Pg 24]

Diana smiled pensively. "I think you are very amusing, Mr. Barrison," she said.

Philip vaulted up over the railing and took a seat beside her, regarding his earth-stained hands and then her serene countenance, whose gaze was bent upon him. He shook his head to toss the blond forelock out of his eyes.

"So my voice gives you a thrill, eh?"

"Oh, decidedly," was the devout response.

"That's a good thing. I thought perhaps you couldn't really be roused from your dreaminess before the fourth of July, but I have some tones that in that case will be warranted to set you and the echoes going at the same time."

Diana clasped her hands. "Oh, utter them," she begged.

"Can't," laughed Philip, wiping his warm forehead with his shirt-sleeve. "The stage isn't set."

Diana continued to look imploringly ardent. "'Drink to me only with thine eyes,'" she suggested.

"That's the only way they'll let you do it nowadays," responded Philip, kicking the heels of his sneakers gently against the railing. [Pg 25]

Miss Burridge looked over her spectacles at Diana in her beseeching attitude, and her eyes widened still further as the girl went on slowly with her brown gaze fixed on Philip's quizzical countenance:

"How can I bear to leave thee!
One parting kiss I give thee—"

"Dear me," thought Miss Priscilla. "I'd never have believed it of her." And it occurred to her for the first time that Philip Barrison was a handsome man.

"Farewell," went on Diana, with soft fervor. "'Farewell, my own true love—'"

"Farewell," sang Philip, falling into the trap and finishing the phrase. "'Farewe-ell, my own—true—love.'"

"Oh," breathed Diana, and the way her clasped hands fell upon her heart caused Miss Priscilla much embarrassment.

"I can scarcely wait," said the girl slowly, "to hear you sing a real song with a real accompaniment. There is such rare penetrating richness in the quality of your voice."

Miss Burrridge cleared her throat. "I shouldn't wonder if Miss Wilbur was a real help to you, Phil," she said. "Young folks need encouragement." [Pg 26]

"And soap-suds," added Philip, regarding his earthy hands and glancing merrily up at Diana, who was still standing in her attitude of adoration; but there was no answering merriment in those brown orbs. Her brain might tell her later that Miss Burrridge's patronizing remark had been amusing, but she would be obliged to think it over.

Philip jumped off the railing, whistling, and followed Miss Priscilla into the house and to the sink, while Diana, reminiscently humming "The Soldier's Farewell," descended the steps and wandered away.

When, the next day in town, Philip stood in the Union Station waiting for Veronica's train, he wondered how he was to know her, but remembering that Miss Burrridge spoke of having instructed her to go the first thing to the transfer office about her trunk, he turned his steps thither as the crowds poured off the train. All Boston seemed to have decided to come to Maine for the summer.

Soon he saw her—he felt at once it was she—looking about undecidedly as she came. She was a short, plump girl of seventeen or eighteen, at present bent a little sideways from the weight of the suitcase she was carrying. Philip strode forward and seized the suitcase with one hand while he lifted his hat with the other. [Pg 27]

"Here, you let that alone!" said the girl decidedly, her round eyes snapping.

"Isn't this Miss Trueman?"

"Why, yes, it is," she returned, but she still looked suspicious and clung to her suitcase. Nobody need think she wasn't up to all the tricks. "Did my aunt send you to meet me?"

"She certainly did."

"Then you know her name. What's her name?" The upward look was so childlike in its shrewdness that it stirred the spirit of mischief.

"Why—let me see, Lucilla, isn't it?"

"You give me that suitcase this minute." The girl pulled on the handle with a muscular little hand.

"Why, Veronica," Philip's smile became a laugh. "Santa Veronica, what a very unsaintlike voice and expression you're using."

She laughed, too, then, and relinquished her burden. "You do know me. Who are you?"

"Miss Burrridge's man-of-all-work. Name, Philip Barrison."

"So she gave you such a job as this. How did you pick me out?" [Pg 28]

"That wild look around for the transfer office." They were now moving toward it.

"It wasn't wild. I didn't need you at all. Aunt Priscilla needn't have bothered. I have a tongue in my head and money in my pocket, and Puppa said that's all anybody needs if she has any brains."

"But I have to do what my employer orders, you see," replied Philip.

Veronica looked him over. Fresh from the barber and in correct summer garb, he was an extremely good-looking object.

"Oh, yes, it isn't your fault," she returned generously, "but is it a swell place Aunt Priscilla's got?" She looked him over again while he stopped at the transfer window and checked her trunk.

"The Wayside Inn," replied Philip with dignity.

"Well, I've come to help her," said the girl. "But I've never done any serving. I haven't any uniform or anything like that."

"It isn't necessary. Look at me. I don't look like a footman—or a butler—or anything like that, do I?"

"No," said Veronica, her round eyes very serious. "You look like a—like a common—gentleman." [Pg 29]

"Thank you, Miss Trueman. I'll try to deserve your praise."

Philip took her and her suitcase across town in a cab, and aboard the little steamer, and found the best spot he could for them to sit.

"Puppa says this bay is noted for its picturesqueness," said Veronica, when they were settled.

"Quite right," returned Philip, putting in her lap one of the magazines he had bought on the wharf.

"No, thank you," she returned. "I shan't read. I'm going to look. Puppa'll expect me to tell him all about it. He was delighted at my having a chance to come to the seashore. He thought it would do my health so much good."

Philip regarded her round cheeks, round eyes, and round, rosy mouth.

"Your health? You look to me as though if you felt any better you'd have to call the doctor."

"Yes, I'm not really ailing—but I freckle. Isn't it a shame?" She put one hand to her nose which had an upward tilt.

"Oh, that's all right," laughed Philip. "Call 'em beauty spots."

[Pg 30]

She sat, pensively continuing to cover her nose with her silk-gloved hand.

"Perhaps you're hungry. I ought to have bought you some chocolates," said Philip. "Perhaps there's time still." He looked at his watch.

Veronica smiled. It was a pleasant operation to view and disclosed a dimple. "Did Aunt Priscilla give you money to buy me candy? Don't bother. I have some gum. Would you like some?" As she spoke, she opened her handbag.

Philip bent a dreadful frown upon her. "Do you chew gum?" he asked severely.

"Yes, sometimes, of course. Everybody does."

"Then you deserve to freckle. You deserve all the awful things that can befall a girl."

"Well, for a hired man," said Veronica, her hand pausing in its exploration, "you have the most nerve of any one I ever saw."

She seemed quite heated by this condemnation, and instead of the gum drew out a vanity box and, looking in the mirror, powdered her nose deliberately.

Philip opened his magazine. The whistle blew and the boat began to back out of the slip. Veronica regarded her companion from time to time out of the tail of her eye, and at a moment when his manner indicated absorption in what he was reading, she replaced the vanity case in her bag and when her hand reappeared, it conveyed something to her mouth.

[Pg 31]

"I wouldn't," said Philip, without looking up. She colored hotly.

"Nobody asked you to," she retorted.

Then all was silence while the steamer, getting its direction, began moving toward the islands that dotted the bay.

The girl suddenly started.

"If there aren't those people!" she ejaculated.

"What people?" asked Philip.

"They came on in the same car with me from Boston. See that dark man over there with a young boy? I couldn't help noticing them on the train. You see how stupid the boy looks. He seemed so helpless, and the man just ignored him when he asked questions, and treated him so mean. I just hate that man."

Philip regarded the couple. They presented a contrast. The man was heavily built with a sallow, dark face, his restless eyes and body continually moving with what seemed an habitual impatience. The boy, perhaps fourteen years of age, had a vacant look, his lips were parted, and his position, slumped down in a camp-chair, indicated a total lack of interest in his surroundings.

[Pg 32]

"Tell me about Aunt Priscilla," said Veronica suddenly. "I haven't seen her since I was twelve years old. My mother died then. She was Aunt Priscilla's sister and Aunt Pris was willing to take me if Pa wanted her to, but he didn't and we moved away, and I've never seen her since. Of course, she writes sometimes and so do I. Has she many boarders?"

"Only one so far, but then she's a goddess. You've read your mythology, haven't you? This is the goddess Diana."

"Say, you're awfully fresh, do you know that?" remarked Veronica. "You treat me all the time as if I was a baby. I've graduated from high school and very likely I know just as much as you do."

"I shouldn't doubt that," returned Philip. "On the level, you'll see when you get to the Inn that I'm telling the truth. Diana is passing for the present under the title of Miss Wilbur."

[Pg 33]

"One boarder!" exclaimed Veronica with troubled brow. "Why, Aunt Priscilla doesn't need two helpers like you and me."

"Oh, there are plenty more boarders coming," said Philip. "This boat may be full of them for all we know. She is expecting people to-night. Let's look around and decide who we'll take up there with us."

"I'll tell you one person I'd choose first of all. See that woman with her back to us with a blue motor veil around her shoulders? I noticed her just when I was pointing out that devil and the boy to you."

"You use strong language, Miss Trueman. Couldn't you spare my feelings and call our dark friend Mephisto?"

"Sounds too good for him. I'd like to use me-fist-o on him, I know that." Veronica giggled, and went on: "Do you see her?"

"I do. My vision is excellent."

"Well, she was on the train, too, and once I saw her smile at that poor shy boy and show him how to get a drink of water. We were all in a day car. Chair car crowded. You can't see her face, but she's the sweetest thing." Then with a change of voice: "Oh, wouldn't it jar you! There's fuss-tail. See that dame with the white flower in her hat, looking over the rail? I suppose she's watching to see if the fishes behave themselves. She was on the train, too, and nothing suited her from Boston to Portland. She was too hot, or she felt a draught, or she didn't like the fruit the train-boy brought, or something else was wrong, every minute."

[Pg 34]

"We won't take her, then," said Philip.

"I should say not. She'd sour the milk. What's the island like?"

"Diana says it resembles Arcadia strikingly, and she ought to know."

"But I never was in Arcadia," objected Veronica.

"Well, it is just a green hill popping right up out of the Atlantic, with plenty of New England rocks in the fields, and drifts of daisies and wild roses for decoration, and huge rocky teeth around the shore that grind the waves into spray and spit it up flying toward the sky."

"What kind of folks? Just folks that come in summer?"

"Not at all. Old families. New England's aristocracy. These islands are the only place where there are no aliens, just the simon-pure descendants of Plymouth Rock. As I say aristocrats. I was born there."

[Pg 35]

"You were?" returned Veronica curiously.

"I were."

"Well, I was born in Maine, in Bangor. I guess that's just about as good."

"No, it's not as good," said Philip gravely. "Nevertheless, I forgive you."

"Tell me more about the island."

"Well, it has one road."

"Only one street?"

"No, no street. Just one road which has its source in a green field on the south and loses itself in the beach on the north after it has passed the by-path that leads to the haunted farm."

"Oh, go away!" scoffed Veronica.

"I can't. The walking won't be good for another hour."

"Who lives at the farm?"

"The ha'nts."

"Nobody else?"

"No, it isn't likely. It's at the head of Brook Cove where the pirates used to come in at a day when it was laughable to think that passenger boats would ever touch at this island."

Veronica's eyes grew rounder than before.

"Do you suppose there's gold packed in around there if people could only find it?"

[Pg 36]

"I don't, but a great many people thought there might be. It is much more fun to hunt for pirate gold than to go fishing in squally weather, and it has been hunted for, faithfully."

"And not any found?" said Veronica sympathetically.

"That's the mournful fact."

"But who were the farmers, and why did they stop farming? Was it the ghosts?"

"No, I think it was the rocks. It was found more profitable to farm the sea. You know abandoned farms are fashionable in New England, anyway, so the ghosts have a rather swell residence at the old Dexter place. I spent the first eight years of my life on the island. Then it was an undiscovered Arcadia. Now—why, you will go up to The Wayside Inn in a motor—that is, if I can get hold of Bill Lindsay before somebody else grabs him. Lots of people know a good thing when they see it, and

lots of people have seen the island."

The wharf was full of people to welcome the little steamer as it drew in, and there was a grand rush of passengers for the coveted motor. It seemed to Veronica that she heard her aunt's name on many lips, and Philip found himself feeling responsible for the trunk checks of everybody who was seeking Miss Burr ridge.

[Pg 37]

The upshot of it all was, by the time he had safeguarded the baggage of the arrivals and sent them on their way, he and Veronica were left to climb the road and pursue the walk toward home.

"Didn't that old hawk-nose say he was going to Aunt Priscilla's?"

"It's a very good-looking nose," remarked Philip. "But so far as I could see, all your friends of the train were bound for the same place."

"He'll be lucky," said Veronica viciously, "if I don't put Paris green in his tea. Oh, what a beautiful view of the sea!" she exclaimed as they reached the summit of the hill.

They had not walked far when Bill Lindsay's Ford came whirring back over the much-traveled road, and he turned around for them.

"After all," said Philip, as the machine started back up the island, "your lady of the blue veil should set off the affliction of Mephisto's presence."

"Did she come?" asked Veronica delightedly.

[Pg 38]

"Yes, didn't you see me pack her in with the woman whose halo won't fit? The dull boy sat between them."

"Well," said Veronica, "then there's no great loss without some small gain."

When the motor reached the Inn, Miss Priscilla was pleased with the way Veronica dropped her hat and jacket in the kitchen, and after drinking the one cup of cocoa upon which her aunt insisted, was ready to help her carry in the late supper for the new guests with whom Philip sat down at table. Veronica, coming and going, tried to make out his status in the house.

"That Mr. Barrison you sent to meet me," she said to her aunt when the meal was over, "told me he was your man-of-all-work. He don't act much like it."

"Law, child," Miss Priscilla laughed. "He has been lately. Phil's a dear boy when he isn't a wretch, and he's helped me out ever since I came. I won't ever forget how good he's been. Now, let's sit down and let me see you eat this fresh omelette and tell me all about yourself. I see you're just like your mother, handy and capable, and let me tell you, it takes a big load off me, Veronica."

[Pg 39]

Just as she finished speaking, Diana Wilbur came in from the twilight stroll she had been taking.

"Miss Wilbur, this is my little niece, Veronica Trueman," said Miss Priscilla. "She has come to help me, and high time, too. Four people came to-night and there will be more to-morrow."

Diana approached the newcomer and looked down upon her kindly after taking her offered hand.

"You must have had an inspiring ride down the bay, Miss Veronica," she said. "I have been taking a walk to see the sun set. It was heavenly to-night. Such translucent rose-color, and violet that shimmered into turquoise, and robin's-egg blue. How fortunate for the new people to get that first impression! Well, Miss Burr ridge," Diana sighed. "Of course we must be glad to see them, but it has been a very subtle joy to retire and to waken with no human sounds about us. I shall always remember this last two weeks."

"I'm glad you feel that way," said Miss Priscilla. "I thought, though, that you'd heard lots o' sounds. Phil makes enough noise for a regiment when he is dressin' in the mornin'."

[Pg 40]

"You can scarcely call such melodious tones noise, can you?" replied Miss Wilbur gently. "His flute is more liquid than that of the hermit thrush."

"I never heard him play the flute." Miss Priscilla looked surprised.

"I refer to the marvelous, God-bestowed instrument that dwells within him," explained Diana.

"I think myself," said Miss Priscilla, clearing her throat, "that it's kind o' cozy to hear a man whistlin' and shoutin' around in the mornin' while he's dressin'. I suppose he'll be leavin' us pretty soon now. I hate to see him go, he's gettin' the plants into such good shape; and wasn't he good about scythin' paths so we wouldn't get wet to our knees every time we left the house? I don't know how you ever had the courage to wade over to this piazza before I came, Miss Wilbur."

"Mr. Barrison certainly did smooth our paths."

"He told me he was Aunt Priscilla's man-of-all-work," said Veronica, busy with her omelette.

"So he has been," replied Diana seriously: "out of the goodness of his heart and the cleverness of his hands; but he is a great artist, Miss Veronica, or at least he will be."

[Pg 41]

"Do you mean he paints?"

"No, he sings: and it is singing—such as must have sounded when the stars sang together."

"Dear me," said Veronica, "I wish I'd asked him to pipe up when we were on the boat."

Diana let her gaze rest for a moment of silence on the sacrilegious speaker, then she excused herself, saying she would go up to her room.

As soon as the door had closed behind her, Veronica looked up and bestowed upon her aunt a meaning wink.

"She's got it bad, hasn't she?" she said.

Miss Burridge put her finger to her lips warningly. "Sh!" she breathed. "Sometimes I think she has: but, law, Phil's nothing but a boy."

"And she's nothing but a girl," said Veronica practically. "That's the way it usually begins."

Miss Burridge laughed. "What do you know about it, you child?"

"Not so much as I'd like to. Puppa would never let anybody stay after ten o'clock, and you don't really get warmed up before ten o'clock." [Pg 42]

"Why, Veronica Trueman, how you talk!"

"Don't speak of how I talk!" said Veronica. "Hasn't that Miss Wilbur got language! I guess Mr. Barrison likes her, too. He told me she was a goddess."

"Oh, Phil's just full of fun. He always will be a rapsallion at heart, no matter how great he ever gets to be."

"Well, he doesn't want anybody else to stop saying prunes and prisms. He didn't even want me to chew gum. Anybody that's as unnatural as that had better marry a goddess. Now, let's go for those dishes, Aunt Priscilla."

"You good child!" said Miss Burridge appreciatively. "I can't really ask Genevieve to stay in the evenin'. She's the little girl who comes every day and prepares vegetables and washes dishes. Now, one minute, Veronica, while I get the names o' these new people straight. I've got their letters here." Miss Priscilla took them down from the chimney-piece. "There's Mrs. Lowell, *she's* alone, and Miss Emerson, *she's* alone, and Mr. Nicholas Gayne and his nephew, Herbert Gayne. I wonder how long I'll remember that." [Pg 43]

"I know them all," said Veronica sententiously. "The whole bunch came on in the same car with me from Boston. It's my plan to poison Mr. Gayne."

"Don't talk that way, child."

"You'll agree to it when you see how mean he is to his nephew. The boy isn't all there."

"What do you mean?"

"Has rooms to let in the upper story, you know." Veronica touched her round forehead. "Mrs. Lowell is a queen and Miss Emerson isn't; or else Miss Emerson is a queen and Mrs. Lowell isn't. I'll know which is t'other to-morrow."

"You seem to have made up your mind about them all."

"Oh, yes!" said Veronica. "You don't have to eat a whole jar of butter to find out whether it's good. All I need is a three-minute taste of anybody, and I had three hours and a half of them. Now, come on, Aunt Priscilla, let's put some transparent water in the metal bowl, and the snowy foam of soap within it." She rolled up her naughty eyes as she spoke.

Miss Burridge gave the girl a rebuking look, and then laughed. "Don't you go to makin' fun of her now," she said. "She's my star boarder, no matter who else comes, I'm in love with her whether Phil is or not. She's genuine, that girl is,—genuine." [Pg 44]

"And you don't want me to be imitation," giggled Veronica. "I see."

Then the two went at the clearing-up and dish-washing in high good-humor.

CHAPTER III A FRIENDLY PACT

[Pg 45]

"You, Veronica," said Miss Burridge one morning, looking out of the kitchen window. "I feel sorry for that young boy."

"I told you you would. Old Nick should worry what his nephew does with himself all day."

"Veronica!" Miss Priscilla gave the girl a warning wink and motioned with her hand toward the sink where Genevieve, her hair in a tight braid and her slender figure attired in a scanty calico frock, was looking over the bib of an apron much too large for her, and washing the breakfast

dishes.

"Excuse me," said Veronica demurely. "I meant to say Mr. Gayne. Genevieve, you must never call Mr. Gayne 'Old Nick.' Do you hear?"

"Veronica!" pleaded Miss Burridge.

"Oh, we all know Mr. Gayne," said Genevieve, in her piercing, high voice which always seemed designed to be heard through the tumult of a storm at sea.

"He has been here before, then?" asked Miss Burridge.

"Pretty near all last summer. He comes to paint, you know."

[Pg 46]

"No, I didn't know he was an artist."

"Oh, yes, he paints somethin' grand, but I never saw any of his pitchers."

"Was his nephew with him last summer?"

"No, I don't believe so. I never saw anybody around with him. He spent most of his time up to the Dexter farm. He said he could paint the prettiest pitchers there. It was him seen the first ghost."

"What are you talking about, Genevieve?" asked Miss Burridge, while Veronica busied herself drying the glass and silver.

"Oh, yes," she put in. "That is the haunted farm. Mr. Barrison was telling me about it."

"Yep," said Genevieve. "Folks had said so a long time and heard awful queer noises up there, but Mr. Gayne was the first who really seen the spook."

"I'm not surprised that he had a visitor," said Veronica. "Dollars to doughnuts, it had horns and hoofs and a tail."

"That's what Uncle Zip said," remarked Genevieve. "He said 't wa'n't anything but an old stray white cow."

Veronica laughed, and her aunt met her mischievous look with an impressive shake of the head. "Mind me, now," she said, and Veronica did not pursue the subject.

[Pg 47]

The long porch across the front of the Inn made, sometimes a sunny, and sometimes a foggy, meeting-place for the members of the family. It boasted a hammock and some weather-beaten chairs, and Miss Myrna Emerson was not tardy in discovering the one of these which offered the most comfort. She was a lady of uncertain age and certain ideas. One of the latter was that it was imperative that she should be comfortable.

"I should think Miss Burridge would have some decent chairs here," she said one morning, dilating her thin nostrils with displeasure as she took possession of the most hopeful of the seats.

The remark was addressed to Diana who was perched on the piazza rail.

"Doubtless they will be added," she said, "should Miss Burridge find that her undertaking proves sufficiently remunerative."

"She charges enough, so far as that goes," declared Miss Emerson curtly, but finding the chair unexpectedly comfortable, she settled back and complained no further.

Philip was out on the grass painting on a long board the words "Ye Wayside Inn." Herbert Gayne stood watching him listlessly. His uncle was stretched in the hammock. Mrs. Lowell came out upon the porch. Mr. Gayne moved reluctantly, but he did arise. Men usually did exert themselves at the advent of this tall, slender lady with the radiant smile and laughing eyes.

[Pg 48]

"Perhaps you would like the hammock, Mrs. Lowell," he said perfunctorily.

"Offer it to me some time later in the day," she responded pleasantly, and he tumbled back into the couch with obvious relief.

Mrs. Lowell approached the rail and observed Philip's labors.

"Where are you going to hang that sign?" she asked in her charming voice. "Across the front of the house, I judge."

"Oh, no," replied Philip. "We can't hope to attract the fish. I am going to hang it at the back where Bill Lindsay's flivver will feel the lure before it gets here."

"Across the back of the house," cried Miss Emerson in alarm. "I hope nowhere near my window."

"The sign will depend from iron rings," explained Diana.

"I know they'll squeak," said Miss Emerson positively; "and if they do, Mr. Barrison, you'll simply have to take it down."

[Pg 49]

No one replied to this warning. So Miss Emerson dilated her nostrils again with an air of determination and leaned back in her chair.

The eyes of both Mrs. Lowell and Diana were upon the young boy whose watching face betrayed

no inspiration from the fresh morning. He had an ungainly, neglected appearance from his rough hair to his worn shoes. His clothes were partially outgrown and shabby.

"Bert," called his uncle from the hammock. The boy looked up. "Come here. Don't you hear me?" The boy started toward the piazza steps with a shuffling gait.

"You're slower than molasses in January," said Mr. Gayne lazily. "Go up to my room and get my field-glasses. They're on the dresser, I think."

Without a word the boy went into the house and Diana and Mrs. Lowell exchanged a look. Each was hoping the messenger would be successful and not draw upon himself a reprimand from the dark, impatient man smoking in the hammock.

The boy returned empty-handed. "They—they weren't there," he said.

"Weren't where, stu—" Mr. Gayne encountered Mrs. Lowell's gaze as he was in the middle of his epithet. Her eyes were not laughing now, and he restrained himself. "Weren't on the dresser, do you mean?" he continued in a quieter tone. "Well, didn't you look about any?" [Pg 50]

"Yes, sir. I looked on the—the trunk and on the—the floor."

Mr. Gayne emitted an inarticulate sound which, but for the presence of the ladies, would evidently have been articulate. "Oh, well," he groaned, rising to a sitting posture on the side of the hammock, "I suppose I shall have to galvanize my old bones and go after them myself."

His nephew's blank look did not change. He stood as if awaiting further orders, and his listless eyes met Mrs. Lowell's kindly gaze.

"It is good fun to look through field-glasses in a place like this, isn't it, Bertie?" she said.

The boy's surprise at being addressed was evident. "I—I don't know," he replied.

His uncle laughed. "That's all the answer you'll ever get out of him, Mrs. Lowell. He's the champion don't-know-er."

The boy's blank look continued the same. It was evident that his uncle's description of him was nothing new. [Pg 51]

"I don't believe that," said Mrs. Lowell. "I think Bertie and I are going to be friends. I like boys."

The look she was giving the lad as she spoke seemed for a moment to attract his attention.

"You won't—you won't like me," he said in his usual wooden manner.

"Children and fools," laughed his uncle, rising from the hammock.

"Mr. Gayne!" exclaimed Diana, electrified out of her customary serenity.

The man's restless, dark eyes glanced quickly from the face of one woman to another, even alighting upon Miss Emerson whose countenance only gave its usual indication that the lady had just detected a very unpleasant odor.

He laughed again, good-naturedly, and as he passed his nephew gave him a careless, friendly pat on the shoulder. The unexpected touch startled the boy and made him cringe.

"Bert believes honesty is the best policy," he said. "Don't you, Bert?"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy automatically.

"Sit down here a minute, won't you, Bertie?" asked Mrs. Lowell, making a place beside her on the piazza rail. The boy obeyed. "Have you ever seen this great ocean before?" [Pg 52]

"No. Yes. I don't know."

"Why, yes, you do know, of course," said Mrs. Lowell, with a soft little laugh, very intimate and pleasant. "You know whether you have seen the ocean before."

The boy regarded her, and in the surprise of being really challenged to think, he meditated.

"No," he said, at last. "I've never been here before."

"Isn't it a beautiful place?" asked Mrs. Lowell.

"I don't know," returned the boy after a hesitation. Then he looked down on the grass at Philip.

"Do you want to go back and watch Mr. Barrison paint?"

"Yes."

"All right. Run along. We'll talk some other time."

The boy rose and shuffled across the porch and down the steps.

"Mrs. Lowell, it is heart-breaking!" exclaimed Diana softly.

Her companion nodded.

"The situation is incomprehensible," said Diana. "It seems as if Mr. Gayne had some ulterior design which impelled him to stultify any outcropping of intelligence in his nephew. Have you not observed it from the moment of their arrival?"

"Yes, and before we arrived. I noticed them on the train."

"If there's anything I can't bear to have around, it's an idiot," said Miss Emerson. "It gives me the creeps. If he hangs about much, I shall complain to Miss Burridge."

The sweep of the ocean and the rush of the wind made her remark inaudible beyond the piazza. Mrs. Lowell turned to her.

"I think we all have a mission right there, perhaps, Miss Emerson. The boy is not an idiot. I have observed him closely enough to be convinced of that. He is a plant in a dark cellar, and I wonder how many years he has been there. His uncle's methods turn him into an automaton. If you keep your arm in a sling a few weeks you know it loses its power to act. The boy's brain seems to have been treated the same way. His uncle's every word holds the law over him that he cannot think, or reason, and that he is the stupidest creature living."

"That is true," said Diana. "That is just what he does."

[Pg 54]

Miss Emerson sniffed. "Well, I didn't come up to Maine on a mission. I came to rest, and I don't propose to have that gawk prowling around where I am."

Nicholas Gayne appeared, his binoculars in his hand. "Would you ladies like to look at the shipping?" he said, approaching. His manner was ingratiating, and Diana conquered the resentment filling her heart sufficiently to accept the glasses from his hand. He was conscious that he had not made a good impression. "The mackerel boats are going out to sea after yesterday's storm," he remarked. "You will see how wonderfully near you can bring them."

Diana adjusted the glass and exclaimed over its power. Miss Emerson jumped up from her chair.

"That's something I want to see," she said, and Diana handed her the glass while Nicholas Gayne scowled at the spinster's brown "transformation." He was not desirous of propitiating Miss Emerson, who, however, pressed him into the service of helping her adjust the screws to suit her eyes, and was effusive in her appreciation of the effect.

"You surely are a benefactor, Mr. Gayne," she said at last, with enthusiasm.

[Pg 55]

"Let me be a benefactor to Mrs. Lowell, too," he returned, and the lady yielded up the glass.

"That is the great Penguin Light beyond Crag Island," he said, as Mrs. Lowell accepted the binoculars. "The trees hide it in the daytime, it is so distant, but at night you will see it flash out."

"It is so interesting that you are familiar here, Mr. Gayne," said Miss Emerson. "You must tell us all about the island and show us the prettiest places."

The owner of the binoculars stirred restlessly under the appealing smile the lady was bestowing upon him.

"For myself, I just love to walk," she added suggestively.

"I don't do much walking," he returned shortly. "I come here to sketch."

"Oh, an artist!" exclaimed Miss Emerson, clasping her hands in the extremity of her delight. "Do you allow any one to watch you work? Such a pleasure as it would be."

"It isn't, though," said Nicholas Gayne with an uncomfortable side-glance at his admirer. "My daubs aren't worth watching."

"Oh, that will do for you to say," she returned archly. "I have done some sketching myself. Perhaps I could persuade you to take a pupil."

[Pg 56]

"Nothing doing," returned the artist hastily. "We all come up here to rest, don't we?" he added.

"Oh, I suppose so," sighed Miss Emerson. "But I do hope you will give me the great pleasure of seeing your work sometime." She sank back into her chair with a sigh.

"That is a very fine glass," remarked Mrs. Lowell as she returned it to its owner. His brow cleared as he received it.

"Well, I must be off," he said. "I mustn't waste time under these favoring skies."

"Oh, Miss Wilbur," said Miss Emerson, addressing the young girl. "Wouldn't it be lovely if Mr. Gayne would let us go with him and watch him sketch?"

"I am quite ignorant of his art," returned Diana, rising from her seat. "And I still have a great deal of exploring to do on my own account."

Nicholas Gayne cast an admiring glance at the statuesque lines of her face and figure.

"Perhaps you will let me make a sketch of you one of these days, Miss Wilbur." He approached the piazza rail as he spoke and his voice carried down to where Philip was painting under the eyes of the silent, watching boy.

[Pg 57]

Philip looked up, and, catching the expression with which Gayne seemed to be appraising the young girl, he ruined one of the *n*'s in Inn so that it had to be painted out and done over.

Veronica, her duties finished for the time being, sallied out of doors and approaching Philip looked curiously at his work.

"There's nothing the matter with that," she said encouragingly, and the others came down from the piazza to praise the painter. Miss Emerson followed, but she looked at the sign doubtfully.

"One can't help being sensitive, can one?" she said to Gayne. "And the wind blows so hard all the time up here, I'm afraid that sign is going to squeak."

"Show me your window," said Philip good-naturedly, "and I'll see if we can't avoid it."

So they all went around to the back of the house where Philip had his ladder waiting and the sign was finally placed to the satisfaction of everybody except Miss Emerson, who considered it on probation.

Nicholas Gayne was still conscious that he had not made a pleasing impression in his treatment of his nephew and it was no part of his programme to attract attention. He approached the boy now. [Pg 58]

"What are you going to do with yourself, Bert?"

"I don't know," was the answer.

"Want to come with me?"

"No, sir."

"Well, that's plain enough," said Gayne, laughing and looking around on the company.

"He's a very foolish boy," said Miss Emerson, "when he has an opportunity to watch you sketch."

"Oh, Mr. Gayne!" cried Veronica. "Don't go until you tell us about the haunted farm."

"Where did you ever hear about that?" asked the artist, looking with some favor on Veronica's round and dimpled personality. "I thought you were a stranger here."

"I am, but Genevieve Wilks has just been telling me that you really saw the spook."

Gayne laughed. "When I came up here last summer, I was told about the haunted farm, and, of course, I was interested in it at once. There are some particularly good views from there. So, naturally, I became one of the ha'nts myself and spent a lot of time with them." [Pg 59]

"Oh, but tell us what it looked like," persisted Veronica. "Did you really think you saw one?"

"What a subject for this time of a clear, sunny day," said Gayne, lightly. "Wait until the thunder rolls some stormy night," and, lifting his cap, he hurried away through the field, his sketch-book under his arm.

Diana looked after his receding form.

"It is odd how little like an artist Mr. Gayne looks," she said.

"You mean he should have long hair and dreamy eyes?" asked Philip.

"I think it is the eyes," replied Diana thoughtfully. "I cannot picture his looking with concentration and persistence at anything."

"Oh, I've seen him make a pretty good stab at it," said Philip dryly, thinking of the manner in which he had on several occasions seen him stare at Diana.

At this point the dull boy found his tongue.

"I wouldn't go up there," he said haltingly.

"Up where?" asked Mrs. Lowell encouragingly.

"Up to that farm. It's full of nettles that sting, and then, when it's dark, ghosts." [Pg 60]

The group exchanged glances.

"Who told you that?" asked Philip.

"Uncle Nick."

It did not increase the general admiration of Mr. Gayne that he should take such means for securing safety from his nephew's companionship.

Mrs. Lowell took the boy's arm. "I want to go down to the water," she said. "Will you go with me?"

"Are you afraid to go alone?" he asked.

"I should like it better if you went with me."

He allowed himself to be led around the house, then on among the grassy hummocks and clump of bay and savin and countless blueberry bushes.

"Do you see what quantities of blueberries we are going to have?" asked Mrs. Lowell.

"Are we?"

"Yes. These are berry bushes. Do you like blueberries?"

"I don't know."

Mrs. Lowell laughed and shook the arm she was still holding. "You do know, Bertie," she said. "You must have eaten lots of blueberries." Her merry eyes held his dull ones as she spoke. "I don't like to hear you say you don't know, all the time." [Pg 61]

"What difference does it make?" he returned.

"All the difference in the world. The most important thing in life is for us to *know*. There are such quantities of beautiful things for us to know. This day, for instance. We can know it is beautiful, can't we?"

When they reached the stony beach, she released his arm and sat down among the pebbles. He did not look at them or at the sea; but at her. She wore a blue dress and her brown hair was ruffling in the wind.

"Do you like stones?" she asked.

"I—" he began.

She lifted her hand and laughed again into his eyes. "Careful!" she said. "Don't say you don't know."

The boy's look altered from dullness to perplexity. "But I don't—" he began slowly.

"Then find out right now," she said, lifting a hand full of the smooth pebbles while the tide seethed and hissed near them. She held out her hand to him.

"Pick out the prettiest," she said, and he began pulling them over with his forefinger. [Pg 62]

"I love stones," she went on. "See how the ocean has polished them for us. Years and years of polishing has gone to these, and yet we can pick them up on a bright summer morning and have them for our own if we want them."

"There's one sort of green," said Bertie. "Green. That's like me. Uncle Nick says I'm green."

"Uncle Nick doesn't know everything," said Mrs. Lowell quietly, as she took the pebble he had chosen and, laying her handkerchief on the beach, placed the green pebble upon it. "Now, see if we can find some that you can see the light through. There is one now. See, that one is almost transparent. It is translucent. That is what translucent means. Isn't it a pretty word—and a pretty stone? Hold it up to your eye."

The boy obeyed, a slight look of interest coming into his face. Mrs. Lowell studying him realized what an attractive face his might be. It was as if the promising bud of a flower had been blighted in mid-opening.

"Let us put all the best pebbles on my handkerchief and take them home with us. Have you a father and mother, Bertie?"

"No." [Pg 63]

"Do you remember them?"

The boy hesitated and glanced into the kind face bent toward him. Its expression gave the lonely lad a strange sensation. A lump came into his throat and moisture suddenly gathered in his eyes. He swallowed the lump.

"Uncle Nick doesn't want me—to talk about her," he stammered.

"Your mother, do you mean, Bertie?"

The tender tone was too much for the boy. He had to swallow faster and nodded. In a minute two drops ran down his cheeks. He ignored them and began throwing pebbles into the water.

The figure that he made in his outgrown trousers and faded old sweater, trying to control himself, moved his companion, and the sign of his emotion encouraged her. Perhaps he was not so stupid as he seemed.

"I think it would be nice to make a collection of stones while we are here," she said. "I'm sure Miss Burrige will let us have a glass jar. See this one."

Bertie dashed the back of his hand across his eyes and turned to look at the small pebble she offered.

"Isn't that a little beauty?" [Pg 64]

"I—"

"Careful!" his companion smiled as she said it and pretended to frown at him in such a merry way that the hint of a smile appeared on his face.

"Uncle Nick likes to have me say I don't know. He says it's honest."

"Well, no two people could be more different than Uncle Nick and me. I want you to *know*, and I want you to say so, because it's what we all have a right to. It is what God wants of us; and, Bertie, if you ever feel like talking about your mother to me, you must do so."

The boy glanced up at her, then down at the pebbles which he pulled over in silence.

"Where do you and your uncle live?"

"In Newark."

"Do you go to school there?"

"No."

"Where do you go to school?"

"Nowhere."

"Where did you learn to read and write then, Bertie?"

"In school. I went when—when *she* was here."

"Your mother?"

"Yes."

"And have you brothers and sisters?"

[Pg 65]

"No. Just Uncle Nick."

"Does he give you studies to learn?" Mrs. Lowell's catechism was given in such gentle, interested tones that the answers had come easily up to now.

Now the boy hesitated, and she began to expect the stereotyped answer which he had learned was most pleasing, and the easiest way out with his uncle.

"I—" he began, and caught her look. "Sometimes," he added. "But Uncle Nick says it isn't any use—and I don't care anyway, because—she isn't here."

Again Mrs. Lowell could see the spasm in his throat and face. It passed and left the usual dull listlessness of expression.

"Your mother was very sweet," said Mrs. Lowell quietly, and some acknowledgment lighted his eyes as he suddenly looked up at her. "I know that because she made such a deep impression on the little boy she left. How old were you, Bertie, in that happy time when she was here?"

"I—it was Christmas, and there have been—five Christmases since. I remember them on my fingers, and one hand is gone."

Mrs. Lowell met his shifting look with the steady, kind gaze which was so fraught with sympathy that his forlorn, neglected soul turned towards its warmth like a struggling flower to the sun.

[Pg 66]

"I'll tell you what I think would be beautiful, Bertie," she said. "And it is for you to do everything you do for her, just as if she were here, or as if you were going to see her to-morrow. Did she ever talk to you about God?"

"Yes. I said prayers that Christmas—and I got a sled."

"Do you ever say prayers now?"

"No. It—it doesn't do any good if you—if you live with Uncle Nick. He—he won't let God give you—anything."

"Let me tell you something wonderful, Bertie. Nobody—not even Uncle Nick—can stand between you and God. You know the way your mother loved you? God loves you that way, too. Like a Father and Mother both. So, whenever you think of your mother's love, think of God's love, too. It is just as real. In fact, it was God, you know, who made her love you."

The boy looked up at this.

"Yes. So, whenever you think of God, remember that 'I don't know' must never come into your thought. You *do* know, and you *can* know better every day."

[Pg 67]

"Uncle Nick won't like it if I know anything."

"Dear child!" burst from Mrs. Lowell at this unconscious revelation of blight. "We will have a secret from Uncle Nick. I am so glad you have told me about your dear mother, and now you are going to start doing everything in the way you think would make her happy if she were here. I am sure she loved everything beautiful. She loved flowers and birds and this splendid ocean that is going to catch us in a minute if we don't move back. What do you say to letting it catch us! Supposing we take off our shoes and stockings and wade. Doesn't that foam look tempting?"

Color rose in the speaker's cheeks as she finished, and the vitality in her voice was infectious.

"It's—it'll be cold," said the boy.

"Let it. Come on, it will be fun."

She was already taking off her shoes and he followed suit. It gave her a pang to see the holes in his faded socks, but she caught up her skirts and he pulled up his trousers and shrinkingly followed her. The June water was still reminiscent of ice, and she squealed as the foam curled around her ankles, and Bertie hopped up and down until color came into his face, too. The incoming tide, noisier and noisier, drove them farther and farther up the beach, until finally they sat down together on a rock at a safe distance from the water, and the sunlight fell hotly on their glistening feet.

[Pg 68]

"That was fun!" said Mrs. Lowell, laughing and breathing fast. "Do you know how to swim, Bertie?"

"I—no, I don't."

"That would be a nice thing to learn while you are here. You learn and then teach me."

"Me? Teach you?"

"Of course. Why not? There's a cove in the island where they all swim."

Bertie looked off on the billows. "Would my mother like that?" he asked.

"I'm sure she would, and she would like the collection of stones we are going to make, and she would like you to help Miss Burrridge by weeding the garden that they have started. There are so many delightful things to do in the world, and you are going to do them all—for her."

"All for her," echoed Bertie. "And not tell Uncle Nick," he added.

"No. You and I will keep the secret."

[Pg 69]

Mrs. Lowell looked at him with a smile, and the neglected boy, his dull wits stimulated by this amazing experience of comradeship, smiled back at her, the smile of the little child who in that far-away happy Christmas had received a sled.

CHAPTER IV BIOGRAPHY

[Pg 70]

"Well, good-bye, Miss Priscilla," said Philip, coming into the kitchen a few mornings afterward. "This landlubber life won't do for me any longer."

Small Genevieve was at the sink washing dishes and Veronica was drying them.

Miss Burrridge slid her last loaf of bread into the oven and then stood up and faced him.

"Philip Barrison," she said emphatically, "you have been a blessing for these weeks. I hate to see you go. Now, how much do I owe you for all the good things you've done for me?"

Philip laughed and, throwing his arms around her, gave her a hearty smack on the cheek.

"What do I owe you for popovers and corn fritters?" he rejoined. "Just don't let Veronica chew gum, nor let Genevieve flirt with Marley Hughes and we'll call it square."

Genevieve turned up her little nose and giggled, and Veronica looked scornful.

"Now, don't you tell me that Puppa liked it," he continued to her. "Besides, anybody that lives with your Aunt Pris has so many nicer things to chew there is no excuse. Oh, Miss Priscilla, how I hate to say adieu to the waffles!"

[Pg 71]

"Well, you must come real often, Phil. I heard you was goin' to give us a concert at the hall sometime this summer. Is that so? I do hope you will."

"I shouldn't wonder. My accompanist is coming to-day and we shall do a little work and a lot of fishing."

"Is he a young feller? You must bring him up to play croquet with the girls."

"Well, I don't know whether he has any experience as an Alpine climber or not."

"Why, I don't think it's such an awful bad ground. Do you, Veronica?"

"Not if he's real nice and hasn't any whiskers," replied the girl. "Heaven knows he'll be better than nothing. Such a place as this and not a beau! It's a crime."

"How about me?" inquired Philip modestly.

Veronica lifted her upper lip disdainfully. "Oh, you, with your lectures and your goddesses! What earthly good are you?"

"Cr-rushed!" exclaimed Philip.

"Talked to Mrs. Lowell all last evening on the piazza in that lovely moonlight. The idea of wasting it on a *Mrs.* I suppose there's a *Mr.* to her." [Pg 72]

"Yes, and he's coming before the summer is over. The worst of it is she seems to like him."

"Children, children," said Miss Burridge, and she winked toward the back of Genevieve's head. Well she knew the alertness of the ears that were holding back those tight braids of hair.

"Yes, my accompanist, Barney, is a broth of a boy, but I shall tell him, Veronica, that ten o'clock is the limit, the very extreme limit."

The girl flushed and laughed. "You mind your business now, Mr. Barrison, and I'll attend to mine. I'm perfectly capable of it."

"Very well. I'll simply keep Puppa's address on my desk, and I won't use it unless I really have to," said Phil, in a conscientious tone which nearly caused Veronica to throw a cup at him.

"Go along now if you must, Philip," said Miss Priscilla. "And I do thank you, dear boy. We shall miss you every minute. Give my love to your grandmother. I wish she could get up as far as this. You tell her so."

"All right, I will. Do you know where Miss Wilbur is?" [Pg 73]

"Aha!" said Veronica softly.

"I don't want to go without saying good-bye to her."

"I should hope not," jeered Veronica. "I suppose you won't see her again all summer."

"Oh, yes, I shall, unless Barney Kelly cuts me out."

"Sure, it's Oirish he is, thin?"

"Faith, and he is, and a bit chipped off the original blarney stone at that. Trust him not, Veronica."

"I only hope I'll get the chance, but if you're going to set him on the goddess, what sort of a look-in will I have? I've got five on my nose already."

"Five what, woman?"

"Freckles. Can't you see them from there? It will be fulsome flattery if you say you can't."

Philip squinted up his eyes and came nearer to examine.

"You remember what I said. Tell Barney they're beauty spots—'golden kisses of the sun.'"

"Oh, ain't that pretty!" shouted Genevieve. "I'm speckled with 'em jest like a turkey egg, but I don't mind 'em the way Veronica does. I've got some powder at home and I powder over 'em." [Pg 74]

"At your age, Genevieve!" exclaimed Philip sternly. "What shall I do with the extravagance and artificiality of this generation! Don't you know, Genevieve, that the money you spend for powder should go into the missionary box? You poor, lost, little soul!"

Genevieve giggled delightedly, and Miss Burridge, at the window, exclaimed:

"There's Miss Wilbur now, Phil, looking at the garden bed."

"If I were she," said Veronica, "I wouldn't have a word to say to you after the way you wasted last evening."

"If only she thought so, too!" groaned Philip. "But I'm not in it with her astronomy map for June. She is a hundred times more interested to know where Jupiter and Venus are than where I am—natural, I suppose—all in the family." He threw open the kitchen door and, standing on the step, threw kisses toward the group within.

"Good-bye, summer!" he sang. "*Good-bye, good-bye.*"

The beauty of his voice had its usual effect on Diana, who stood by the strip of green, growing things, looking in his direction, her lips slightly parted over her pretty teeth. [Pg 75]

"You see I'm good-bye-ing," he said, approaching her.

"Are you leaving us?" she returned, allowing her clasped hands to fall apart. "See how well the sweet peas are doing."

"Yes, I'm leaving you all in good shape. Do you think you can go on behaving yourselves without my watchful guardianship and Christian example?"

"I think we shall miss you. Mr. Gayne is not a fair exchange."

"Thank you. Mrs. Lowell was talking to me about that outfit last evening. She is quite stirred up about the boy."

"Yes," rejoined Diana. "I think she is a wonderful woman. She has taken him down to the beach

with her again this morning. She believes that Mr. Gayne is his nephew's enemy rather than his guardian. She believes he has some reason for desiring to blight any buddings of intelligence in the boy, and uses an outrageous method of suppression over him all the time. It would be so much easier to let it go, and most of us would, I'm sure, rather than spend vacation hours in such insipid company, or have any dealings with that—that impossible uncle; but Mrs. Lowell will not relinquish her efforts."

[Pg 76]

"Yes, she is a brilliant, fearless sort of woman," said Philip. "I shouldn't wonder if she gave Gayne a disagreeable quarter of an hour before she gets through with him."

"One has to exercise care, however," returned Diana, "lest the man become angered and visit his ill-humor on the boy. I am often obliged to constrain myself to civility when I yearn to hurl—" she hesitated.

"Plates? Oh, do say you long to throw a plate at him!"

Diana gave her remote moonbeam smile.

"I must admit that 'invective' was in my mind. A rather strong word for girls to use."

"A splendid word. A good long one, too. You might try hurling polysyllables at him some day and see him blink."

Diana shook her head. "That sort of man is a pachyderm. He would never flinch at verbal missiles. Since you must go, I wish some other agreeable man would join our group and converse with him at table."

Philip smiled. "Surely you have noticed that Miss Emerson is not averse to assuming all responsibility?"

"Mr. Barrison," said Diana gravely, "I hope when I am—am elderly and unmarried, that I shall not seek to attract men."

[Pg 77]

"Miss Wilbur," returned Philip, with a solemnity fitting hers, and regarding the symmetry and grace of her lovely head, "don't spend any time worrying about that; for some inner voice assures me that you will never be elderly and unmarried."

"The future is on the knees of the gods," she returned serenely.

"Then I don't need to lose any sleep on account of your posing for one of Mr. Gayne's wonderful sketches?"

Diana brought the brown velvet of her eyes to bear fully upon him. It even seemed hopeful that a spark would glow in them.

"I loathe the man," she said slowly.

"Forgive me, divine one. Well, I must go now. Why won't you take me home? I should like you to meet my grandmother, and think of the pitfalls and mantraps of the island road if I risk myself alone: Bill Lindsay's Ford! Marley Hughes's bicycle! Lou Buell's gray mare taking him to mend somebody's broken pipe! Matt Blake's express wagon! Come and keep my courage up."

"You have a grandmother on this island?"

"I'll prove it if you'll come with me."

[Pg 78]

Diana smiled and moved along beside him. "It doesn't seem a real, mundane, earthly place to me yet," she said. "It must be wonderful to have a solid *pied-à-terre* here. They tell me there are many summer cottages, but they are far from our Inn and I haven't realized them yet. I am hoping my parents will consent to purchasing some ground here for me."

"Where do you usually go in summer?"

"Our cottage is at Newport, but I like better Pittsfield, where we go in the autumn."

Philip looked around at her as she moved along through the field beside him. "Is your middle name Biddle?" he asked.

"No, I have no middle name."

"I thought in Philadelphia only the descendants of the Biddles had cottages at Newport and Pittsfield."

Diana smiled. "I know that is a stock bit of humor. What was that about an Englishman who said he had seen Niagara Falls and almost every other wonder of America except a Biddle? He had not yet seen one."

"When do you laugh, Miss Wilbur?" asked Philip suddenly.

"Why, whenever anything amuses me, of course."

"Yet you like the island, although it has never amused you yet. I have lived in the house with you for two weeks and I haven't heard you laugh."

[Pg 79]

Diana looked up at him and laughed softly. "How amusing!" she said.

He nodded. "It's very good-looking, very. Do that again sometime. How did you happen to run away from family this season?"

"I was tired and almost ill, and some people at home had been here and told me about it. So I came, really incontinently. I did not wait to perfect arrangements, and when I arrived in a severe rainstorm one evening, I found great kindness at the house my friends had told me of, but no clean towels. They were going to have a supply later, but meanwhile I lost my heart to the view from our Inn piazza and Miss Burridge found me there one day and took me in for better or for worse. That explains me. Now, what explains your having a grandmother here?"

"Her daughter marrying my father, I imagine. My grandfather was a sea-captain, Cap'n Steve Dorking. He had given up the sea by the time I came along."

"Here? Were you born here?"

"Yes."

"That explains the maritime tints in your eyes. Even when they laugh the sparkle is like the sun on the water. Continue, please." [Pg 80]

"Well, my father, who came here to fish, met my mother, fell in love, married her, and took her away. He was very clever at everything except making money, it seems, so my mother came home within a year to welcome me on to the planet. My grandfather had a small farm, and I was his shadow and one of his 'hands' until I was eight years old."

"Was it a happy life?"

"It was. I remember especially the smell of Grammy's buttery, sweet-smelling cookies, and gingerbread, and apple pies with cinnamon. It smells the same way now. Do you wonder I like to come back?"

"You stimulate my appetite," said Diana.

"Oh, she'll give you some. There were many jolly things in those days to brighten the life of a country boy. The way the soft grass felt to bare feet in the spring, and in the frosty autumn mornings when we went to the yard to milk and would scare up the cows so those same bare feet could stand in the warm place where the cows had lain. Then came winter and snowdrifts—making snow huts and coasting down the hills. Sliding and skating on the ice-filled hollows. It was all great. I'm glad I had it." [Pg 81]

"You test my credulity, Mr. Barrison, when you speak of ice and snow in this poetic home of summer breezes."

He looked down at her. "We will have a winter house-party at Grammy's sometime and convince you."

"So at eight years of age you went out into the world?"

"Yes, at my dear mother's apron strings. My father had spent some time with us every year and at last secured a living salary and took us to town. The first thing I did in the glitter of the blinking lamp-posts was to fall in love. I prayed every night for a long time that I might marry that girl. She had long curls and I reached just to her ear. I received her wedding cards a year or so ago. I was always praying for something, but only one of my prayers has ever been answered. I was always very devout in a thunderstorm, and I prayed that I might not be struck by lightning and I never have been yet."

"When was your wonderful voice discovered?"

"Look here, Miss Wilbur, you are tempting me to a whole biography, and it isn't interesting." [Pg 82]

"Yes, I am interested in—in your mother."

"My poor mother," said Philip, in a different tone. "When I was twelve years old my father was taken ill and soon left us. My mother had to struggle and I had to stop school and go to work. The first job I got was lathing a house. I walked seven miles into the country and put the laths on that house. I worked hard for a whole week and received twelve dollars and seventy-five cents. It was a ten-dollar gold piece, two silver dollars, fifty cents, and a quarter."

Diana lifted sympathetic eyes.

"I bought a suit of clothes and gave up the gold piece. The perfect lady clerk failed to give me credit for it and six months afterward the store sent the bill to my mother. I put up a heated argument, you may be sure, and before the matter was settled, the perfect lady clerk skipped with another woman's husband. So the powers inclined to believe me rather than her."

"Poor little boy," put in Diana. "But your music?"

"Yes. Well, our minister's wife took an interest in me and gave me lessons on the organ. I never would practice, though. I would pick out hymns with one finger while I stood on one foot and pumped the pedal with the other. It was results I was after; but the cornet allured me, and I learned to play that well enough to join the Sunday-School orchestra." [Pg 83]

"A cousin of my mother's came to our rescue sufficiently to let me go to school, and in all my

spare time I did odd jobs, some of them pretty strenuous; but I was a strong youngster, and evidently bore a charmed life, for I challenged fate on trains, on top of buildings, and in engine rooms. But I'll spare you the harrowing details. At the spring commencement of the high school, I was invited to sing a solo. I warbled good old 'Loch Lomond' and forgot the words and was mortified almost to death, but the audience was enthusiastic, I have always believed out of pity."

"No no," breathed Diana.

"Well, at any rate, they insisted on an encore, and I was so braced up by the applause and so furious at myself that I gave them 'The Owl and the Pussy Cat.'"

"Oh."

"I see you don't know it. Well, next day I met a lady on the street who was very musical, it seemed, and she invited me to come to her house and talk over studying music. She said I had a great responsibility. Oh, you don't want to hear all this!"

[Pg 84]

"I do, I do."

"My mother passed away soon afterward, and the musical friend in need—good friend she was, and is—told me of a town a hundred miles away where there were vacancies she knew of in choir positions. She would give me a letter of introduction and she believed I could qualify for one of them. I didn't tell her the slimness of my cash after my dear mother's funeral expenses were paid, and she didn't know. So I traveled that hundred miles on a freight train. When I first boarded it, I crawled into the fire-box of a new engine that was being transported over that line. It grew very cold before we had gone far, and I crawled out and climbed over the coal tender and opened the hole where they put the water in. I climbed down into that empty place and lighted a match only to find that there were about twenty bums there ahead of me. I didn't stay there long, for I was good and plenty afraid; some of them looked desperate. I climbed out again and went along the train till I came to a flat-car loaded with a new threshing machine. I saw a brakeman coming along with a lantern, and I knew if he saw me he'd put me off. So I climbed into the back of the threshing machine and down into its very depths, and after a while, when I had become chilled to the marrow, the train came to a halt. I crawled out and down to the ground and ran around to get warm. They were doing some switching and I saw they added two cars to the train. One had stock in one end and hay and grain in the other. They had to leave the door open to let in air for the stock, and up I climbed and hid under the straw and slept soundly the rest of the journey. Oh, I was dirty when I arrived! But my precious letter was safe in an inside pocket, and with the contents of the little bundle I had, and the expenditure of part of my small stock of money, I made myself decent and presented my letter of introduction. The organist of one of the churches tried me out. He liked my voice so much that he engaged me and was even interested enough to let me live at his house; but three dollars a Sunday was the salary and the voice lessons I engaged would be four dollars a week, so, of course, I had to go to work at once, and I got a job in a big sash and door factory where I worked like a horse ten hours a day."

[Pg 85]

[Pg 86]

"Why, Mr. Barrison," sighed Diana, "you are a hero."

Philip laughed. "I had no leisure to think about that. Times grew very slack and there began to be great danger that I would lose my job in the factory. They said they would have to lay me off unless I would whitewash an old building they had bought to store lumber. So I was given a brush and a barrel of lime-water and told to go at it. If I lost my job, I wouldn't be able to live. So I wrapped my feet in sacks to try to keep warm—it was late November—and went at it: and there were girls, Miss Wilbur, girls! And I couldn't put it over them after Tom Sawyer's fashion. Well, I had sung there just thirteen Sundays when the blow fell. The committee told me very kindly that they wanted to try another tenor. I went home from that talk with a heart heavy as lead. I could not sleep, and near midnight I began to cry. Yes, I did cry. I was twenty-one and I had voted, but I was the most broken-hearted boy in the State. I must have cried for two or three hours, pitying myself to the utmost, up three flights of stairs in that little attic room, with the rain pouring on the roof over my head, when all at once I jumped out of bed as dry-eyed as if I'd never shed a tear and, lifting my right hand as high as possible, I made a vow. I said—So help me, God, I will become a singer if I have to walk over everybody in the attempt. I will learn to sing, and these mutts will listen to me and pay to hear me, too. Then I jumped back into bed and fell asleep instantly."

[Pg 87]

"Splendid!" said Diana. "And how did you keep the vow?"

"Well, next morning I began to figure what I must do. I knew I hadn't enough education. I remembered that three years before I had won a scholarship for twenty weeks' free tuition in a business college in Portland, and I decided that I would need fifty dollars. The same cousin who had helped me before to go to school, came across. I quit my job, paid my bills, and left for Portland, getting there at Christmas. I sang at the Christmas-tree exercises in my home church. I went to school as I planned, took care of the furnace for the rent of my room, took care of three horses, got the janitorship of a church—"

Diana looked up with a sudden smile. "And forced up the thermometer when you overslept."

[Pg 88]

Philip burst into a hearty laugh. "Did Miss Burridge give me away? I tell you I saved that church lots of coal that winter."

"Oh, continue. I did not mean to interrupt you, for now you are coming to the climax."

"Nothing very wonderful, Miss Wilbur, but I found I had that to give that people were willing to pay for, and I began going about in country places giving recitals, mixing humorous recitations in with the groups of songs, playing my own accompaniments and sometimes having to shovel a path through the snow to the town hall before my audience could come in. I wonder if Caruso ever had to shovel snow away from the Metropolitan Opera House before his friends could get in to hear him! After that I worked my way through two years at college, studying with a good voice teacher. Then came the war. I got through with little more than a scratch and was in one of the first regiments to be sent home after the armistice was signed. The lady who first discovered my voice had influential musical friends in New York. She sent me to them, and, to make a long story a little shorter, last winter I was under an excellent management, obtained a church position, and have sung at a good many recitals. The coming winter looks hopeful." Philip put his hand on his heart and bowed. "Thanking you for your kind attention—here we are at Grammy's."

[Pg 89]

CHAPTER V

A FIRELIGHT INTERVIEW

[Pg 90]

Their path had led away from the main road across a field toward a buff-colored house set on a rise of ground like a billow in a green sea. Where the hill descended beyond, there grew a flourishing apple orchard.

"Since my grandfather's death, the little farm is overgrown," said Philip. "My grandmother gets a neighbor to cut the hay and milk her cow, and so leaves the cares of the world behind her."

A climbing rosebush nearly covered one side of the cottage, and old-fashioned perennials clung about its base. Nothing was yet in bloom; but soon the daisies in the field would lie in white drifts and the wild roses, large and of a deep pink, would soften the ledges of rock cropping out everywhere in the sweet-smelling fields.

Philip opened the door and ushered his companion into a small hallway covered with oilcloth, then into a sunny living-room, shining clean, with a floor varnished in yellow and strewn with rag rugs. An old lady, seated in one of the comfortable rocking-chairs, rose to meet them. Her face, the visitor thought, was one of the sweetest she had ever seen.

[Pg 91]

"What a pretty girl she must have been!" she reflected.

Around her neck the old lady wore a string of gold beads, and the thick gray hair growing becomingly around her low forehead was carried back and confined in a black net. The simple charm of her welcome to the young girl was the perfection of good manners and her voice was low and pleasant.

"I'm glad you've brought my boy back, Miss Wilbur, I've been missing him."

"That's right, Grammy. Give me a good character," said Philip hugging her and kissing her cheek. "I must have waffles, though. I'm spoiled."

Here a woman appeared at the door of the passageway that led to the kitchen. She was very wrinkled and care-worn in appearance, yet sprightly in her movements and manner. Many of her teeth were missing and her thin hair was strained back out of the way. She wore a large checked apron over her calico dress.

"Hello, there, Aunt Maria," said Philip. "This is Miss Wilbur, one of the guests at Miss Burrridge's."

"Happy to meet you," said Aunt Maria, but casually, in the manner of one who has but slight time for trivial things like social amenities. Then she fixed Philip with a severe stare. "Is this the day you was expectin' the New York man?"

[Pg 92]

"It is, Aunt Maria. Don't tell me you weren't sure and haven't plenty on hand for two man-sized appetites."

"Well, I thought 'twas. I guess I can feed you." Aunt Maria's severity lapsed in a semi-toothless smile. "How's Priscilla Burrridge gettin' along?"

"Famously," replied Philip. "She's given me waffles every morning."

"H'm!" grunted Aunt Maria. "I guess I can cook anything Priscilla Burrridge can, give me the ingreiciencies."

"The principal ingredient is a waffle iron. I'll send for one for you."

Diana had meanwhile been placed in a seat near her hostess, where she faced the line of cheerful red geraniums on the window-sill.

"Your first visit to the island, Miss Wilbur?" asked the old lady.

"Yes, Mrs. Dorking; but not the last, I assure you."

"You like it, then?"

"I think it is a fairy-tale place."

[Pg 93]

"Miss Wilbur has been accustomed to a summer home where the hand of man has been very busy and the foot of man has trodden out nearly all of Nature's earmarks. She finds she likes the raw material better," said Philip, leaning against the mantelpiece where odd shells and quaint China objects, half-dog, half-dragon, stood as memorials to Captain Steve Dorking's cruises. The swords of two swordfishes, elaborately carved, leaned near him.

"The island's filling up," said the old lady. "A lot of the summer people came yesterday and from now on they'll flock in."

"Are you glad to see them come?" asked Diana.

"Yes," returned Mrs. Dorking, a rising inflection in her kindly voice. "They're most of them good friends of mine."

"I should say she is glad," remarked Philip. "She sits here in state and receives them all, don't you, Grammy?"

"I don't know as there's much state about it." The old lady smiled, and leaned toward Diana. "Miss Wilbur, I guess you've found out already that Philip is the foolishest boy that ever lived. We can't afford to mind his talk, can we?"

"But his singing, Mrs. Dorking," Diana looked up at Philip's tow head towering toward the low ceiling. "It doesn't greatly matter how he talks when he can sing as he does." [Pg 94]

"Yes," returned the old lady, again with the moderate rising inflection. "I will say Philip's got a real pretty voice."

"And there is a piano!" said Diana, wistfully looking across the room at the ancient square instrument.

"That is a very polite name for it," remarked Philip.

"Oh, Mr. Barrison, could you, won't you, sing some song of the sea?" The girl clasped her hands in prospect. "I'm your guest, you know. It is not quite possible to refuse."

"Of the sea, eh?" Philip looked at his watch. "I think we have time before the boat comes. I'll make a bargain with you. I'll sing you a song if you will go down to the boat with me and meet my accompanist."

"Oh, is your accompanist coming?"

"Even so. But when is an accompanist not an accompanist? Answer: When he comes to the sea to fish. I've lured you far from home and dinner, so you come to the boat with me and I'll send you home in Bill Lindsay's chariot."

"Very well, but—please sing!"

[Pg 95]

"Oh, yes. A song of the sea is the order, I understand. Meanwhile, I accompany myself on the harp."

Philip moved over to the piano. It was placed so he could look over the case at his listeners. He ran his fingers over the yellow keys which gave out a thin, tinkling sound, and then plunged into song:

"The owl and the pussy cat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat,
They took some honey and plenty of money
Wrapped up in a five-pound note.
The owl looked up to the stars above
And sang to a small guitar,
'Oh, lovely Pussy, Oh, Pussy, my love,
What a beautiful Pussy you are!'"

* * * * *

Philip had never seen Diana look as lovely as when he finished and rose. There was no doubt now that she could laugh. His enunciation was perfect, and the alternations of sentimentality and fire with which he had delivered the nonsense made it thrilling in the little room where his velvet, vibrant tones at moments shook the shells on the mantelpiece, while they flowed around the listener's heart.

"That was delectable," laughed Diana, applauding, her eyes moist with excitement.

"Yes, ain't that a funny tune?" said Mrs. Dorking, looking with affectionate pride at her grandson as he emerged around the end of the piano. [Pg 96]

"We have to be off, Grammy," he said, "or Barney will be lost in the shuffle."

Mrs. Dorking rose and urged Diana warmly to come again, and the girl promised that she would do so. When they were outside she spoke:

"Is your Aunt Maria your grandmother's sister?"

"Oh, no." Philip laughed. "She is a good village-aunt who helps in the home. She likes to look harassed and overworked, but she adores having charge of the house since my grandfather's death, and is devoted to Grammy. Barney Kelly will have to look out for himself, for Aunt Maria is an excellent cook and Kelly would be inclined to umbumpum if he didn't mortify the flesh. He's a Canuck and one of the best fellows going."

"And are those summer cottages?" asked Diana, her glance sweeping over an adjacent field. It was high ground sloping gradually to the sea, and was dotted with shingled cottages of varying shapes and sizes.

"Yes, that was my grandfather's pasture, and many a time I've gone there for the cows. But one woman after another besieged him for the ground, and he sold it off." [Pg 97]

"If I had some land here, I would prefer to be more isolated," said Diana.

"Then you would better speak quick," said Philip. "The country seems to have its eye on Casco Bay. There comes the boat around the point now."

They hastened their pace and went down a flight of steps which led to the wharf. It was a busy spot full of people and trunks and barrels and boxes. Everybody greeted Philip and looked at Diana, and Philip presently descried the peering face of a man on the upper deck of the approaching boat. He was dressed in a double-breasted suit of a fine check and carried a stick which, presently descrying Philip's blond head, he shook in his direction and, picking up his bag, turned and went downstairs at the call: "Land from the lower deck." The newcomer was evidently alive all over and impatient of the delay to the moment when he could run up the gangplank. From time to time he shook his stick toward Philip, and gazed at the girl beside him. At last he gained the wharf, set down his bag and shook hands with Philip. Being presented to Miss Wilbur, he took off his hat and disclosed tight curly hair, close-clipped and groomed to the last degree of shine. [Pg 98]

"Perfectly heavenly sail we've had down, or up, I don't know which it is," he exclaimed with a burr to his r's which increased the enthusiastic effect of his speech.

"I told you it was paradise," said Philip.

"And you proved it by bringing one o' the angels with you," returned Kelly, smiling at Diana.

She regarded him with her usual serenity. "I see that, like Mr. Barrison, you enjoy using hyperbole," she said.

"Really," returned Kelly curiously. "Am I that clever? Yes, old chap, here's my check. I have a box somewhere around these diggings."

"Now, wait a minute," said Philip. "I lured Miss Wilbur down here with me to meet you and now I must return her honorably to her dinner. *Oh*, Bill."

He pushed through the crowd to where the motor stood, the center of new arrivals. "Save one seat, Bill," he said. "Lady for Miss Burr ridge's."

There was some good-natured crowding, but there being two more passengers for Miss Burr ridge's, Diana was squeezed in, and Barney Kelly, his hat waving from his hand, quite eclipsed Philip in the attentiveness with which he bade her godspeed. [Pg 99]

"Who's the Vere de Vere?" he asked when Bill Lindsay had whipped up his engine and moved off.

"A young lady from Philadelphia," returned Philip, a trifle stiffly.

"Aren't touchy about her, are you? Great Scott, boy, you haven't had time! Now, if it had been me, a day's enough. Fire and tow. Fire and tow. You'd supply the tow all right, old cotton-top, but I'll be hanged if I can see where she'd provide the spark. Don't you touch that bag, Barrison," for Philip had caught up his guest's suitcase. "Like a condemned fool, I put the scores in it instead of in the box. There must be some horse here that wouldn't take it quite so much to heart as I do."

"All right," said Philip. "It can come up with your trunk. Here, Matt,"—for the too-popular carpenter was expressman as well,—"this is my friend Mr. Kelly. He aids and abets me when I shriek at the public and he's loaded up his bag with music. Bring it along with his trunk, will you? Here's the check. Mr. Blake, Barney." [Pg 100]

The newcomer shook hands with the long-legged, long-armed thin man in his shirtsleeves, and Matt Blake appraised the stranger out of his blue, grave, shrewd island eyes.

"Just crazy about this place already, Mr. Blake, just crazy about it," the newcomer assured him, and Matt Blake nodded his old straw hat and listed the volatile Barney as "another nut."

It was about a week afterward that opportunity found Mrs. Lowell and Nicholas Gayne together one evening in the living-room of the Inn. It was cool and a wood fire blazed on the hearth, but the night was still inviting and had lured the others to put on wraps and stay out of doors.

When Mrs. Lowell came in, Gayne was in a wicker rocker before the fire, his legs stretched out, and, as the lady entered, he drew them in and rose.

"You are choosing the better part, too, are you?" he said, not doubting that his presence was proving as much of an attraction as the fire. Two other men had arrived, teachers from a boys' school, Evans and Pratt by name, and it was probable that Miss Emerson was figuratively sitting at the feet of one of them and asking questions about the stars. At all events, she was out of doors. Nicholas Gayne had looked up apprehensively at Mrs. Lowell's entrance, fearing the worst; and his relief caused him to be quite effusive in his welcome of the lady and the manner in which he brought forward a chair for her.

[Pg 101]

"Have you had a good day?" she asked as she seated herself and he fell back into his rocker.

"It has been a nice day, yes."

"I meant as to your work."

"My work?"

"Yes, your sketching."

"Oh. Oh, yes, of course. Fine. Very clear. Very good views."

"I suppose you elaborate these in your studio in town."

"What? Oh, well—it isn't much of a studio at that. It is more or less on the side—my art work. I—I make no pretensions. Everybody's got to have a fad to be truly happy, haven't they? I like to scrawl and daub a little."

"You are modest. I've been expecting you would show us some of these views. This place is surely one to tempt the artist. Doubtless you have seen some of Frederic Waugh's canvases done from the sketches he made here."

[Pg 102]

"Eh? Who? Oh, yes, of course," replied Gayne lamely. "Strange that that Miss Wilbur should ever have struck this island. I understand she's the daughter of the steel man. I suppose she's slumming." Gayne laughed.

Mrs. Lowell could not force a responsive smile. "She is a very charming girl." After a pause: "I've had several talks with your nephew, Mr. Gayne."

Her companion shook off the ash from his cigar into the fire.

"You did the talking, I'm sure," he responded dryly, and his manner made her determined to be doubly careful how she proceeded.

"This place should build him up," she said. "He seems a rather fragile boy."

"Yes. He grew too fast; makes him rather weedy. Too bad he didn't keep pace mentally. He's weedy there, too."

"I should think it might be well to have him tutored for an hour a day while he is here." Mrs. Lowell tried to speak carelessly as she kept her eyes on the blaze.

[Pg 103]

"How could you find a tutor in a place like this?" was the response. "Surely Mr. Pratt and Mr. Evans—I understand they are teachers—wouldn't take kindly to the task of trying to find Bert's brains while they're on their vacation."

"No, I was thinking of a very simple plan. Miss Burridge's niece, Veronica, would perhaps be glad to work with the boy an hour a day. She has a good common education."

"Nothing doing, Mrs. Lowell." Nicholas Gayne sat up in his chair and evidently put a constraint upon himself. "You come upon this problem as a new one and you think you understand it, but you don't. You think it's not hopeless, but it is. The boy began by being backward and he's got worse and worse all his life. He couldn't keep up with any class in school and I finally took him out. Oh, I've done my best, believe *me*. I had a tutor come to the house for a while, but I was finally convinced that Bert hadn't the equipment to think *with*. Of course, there's schools for deficient children, but have you got any idea what they cost? I'm a poor man. I couldn't pay what they tax you. Bert'll end up in an institution, that's the place for him; but I'm soft-hearted. I'll keep him with me as long as I can. The doctors all warn you that it isn't safe. That kind of weak intellect is liable to take a dangerous turn any time. There's thousands of cases where relations have insisted on keeping morons like Bert near them too long. I only hope I shan't. Just take my advice, Mrs. Lowell, and don't have much to say to the boy. He gets along best when he's left alone. It doesn't do to try to wake up that kind of a brain. There's no normal balance there, and any sharpening is liable to make it take a wrong shoot. I've been on this problem five years, and, believe *me*, I know something about it."

[Pg 104]

The speaker's voice grew more and more blustering as he proceeded, and Mrs. Lowell could feel her limbs trembling with the intensity of her own feeling and the necessity for concealing her thoughts from him.

"He is your brother's child, I understand," she said quietly, when Gayne had made his last emphatic gesture and sunk back in his chair, red in the face.

"Yes, he is. These things are awful in a family."

"Awful," echoed Mrs. Lowell.

The next morning, after breakfast, she went to Diana's room and knocked. The girl welcomed her in. She was shaking a blanket. [Pg 105]

"I do enjoy making my bed so much," she said. "I learned how at school."

"Then let me watch you do it while I talk to you." The visitor sat down, and Diana went on in the most earnest manner to tuck in sheets and pat and smooth pillows as if her life depended on the squareness of corners.

"I had a talk with Mr. Gayne last night."

"I observed you through the window. I felt a certainty that you were not happy."

"It was an ordeal, but I verified my suspicions—my worst suspicions. The man is planning to get his nephew out of the way, to have him shut up."

Diana left the flap of a pillow-case to its fate and faced her caller.

"To incarcerate him!"

"Yes. In an asylum. Some state institution. He has been training the boy toward that end. You have seen it. I have seen it. What is his motive? That is the question."

"Don't you think it may be merely to rid himself of a burden which hampers his life?"

"But his own flesh and blood!" exclaimed Mrs. Lowell. "Does any one live who would go to such lengths without a greater reason? Miss Wilbur, let us see what the man does in these daily rambles of his. I am convinced that his artistic pose is a cloak. He didn't even know who Frederic Waugh was." [Pg 106]

"Oh, but to accompany the creature!" protested Diana.

"No, of course, we shouldn't find out anything by accompanying him except that he cannot sketch, and I'm sure of that already. But let us go to walk this morning, and why not visit the haunted farm?"

"No reason except that he knows we are aware that he haunts the place, which, if I were a ghost, would make it immune from my visits."

"Yes, but he cannot expect us to remember or care where he goes. I feel I must be doing something about this, no matter how slight, and—and don't let Miss Emerson join us as we go out."

"Perish the thought!" said Diana devoutly.

"God will not let this outrage take place," said Mrs. Lowell, her thought leaping back from Miss Emerson to the neglected boy. "I wish I could ask Bertie to go with us, but I feel I must be very careful not to let his uncle suspect the depth of my interest." [Pg 107]

"Miss Emerson is very timorous about horned cattle," said Diana. "We can remember that. Sunburn, too. She has a great dread of becoming tanned."

With these encouraging considerations the two amateur detectives stole downstairs. Mrs. Lowell went to the kitchen where Veronica was as usual at this hour drying the breakfast dishes.

"Miss Veronica," she said, "would you do a little missionary work this morning?"

"I'd like to hear about it first," was the cautious reply.

"Veronica is ready for every good word and work, Mrs. Lowell," put in Miss Burrridge, "but she's a busy child."

"I know that, but I wondered if she could give half an hour to playing a game of croquet with Bert Gayne."

"Oh, land!" exclaimed the girl, aghast. "He won't want to."

"That's the point, Miss Veronica,"—Mrs. Lowell looked with her loving, radiant gaze into the young girl's eyes. "We want to make him know that young people don't shrink from him. He knows that I don't. I want him to know that an attractive young girl like you doesn't either. You can see that his mind is sick. He has had great sorrow." [Pg 108]

"Sure!" said Veronica. "It's sorrow enough to have that uncle of his."

"Ve-ronica!" exclaimed Miss Burrridge with one of her warning looks at the back of Genevieve's head.

"You know now what I meant by calling it missionary work," said Mrs. Lowell. "Think about it if you have time. You will find the boy dull and distrustful. I have great hopes of you. Try to make him bright and trustful. I know it can't be done in a minute." The speaker again smiled confidentially into the girl's eyes.

Diana appeared in the entrance.

"Miss Emerson is in the hammock," she said softly. "Shall we take the back way?"

They slipped out the kitchen door and Veronica scrubbed a plate already dry.

"Mrs. Lowell is the sweetest, prettiest, most darling woman I ever saw," she stated.

"But nothin' like that Miss Diana," uttered Genevieve in, for her, a lowered voice. "She's so grand it scares me when she looks at me, and Matt Blake says her father owns the whole of Pennsylvania." [Pg 109]

Veronica turned up an already aspiring nose and grunted disparagingly. It was hard to forgive Diana for being a goddess and not chewing gum.

CHAPTER VI THE HAUNTED FARM

[Pg 110]

"Where every prospect pleases," said Diana, "and only man is vile."

They had crossed the field and come up to the height of the road which commanded an extensive view of the bay and other islands. They stood still for a minute.

"Are you at all interested in metaphysics, Miss Diana?" asked her companion.

"I think I am. I am interested in everything."

"I don't like the latter half of that quotation," said Mrs. Lowell. "It stands to reason that God couldn't create anything vile."

"No, of course," agreed the girl. "It is man who makes himself vile."

"God's man couldn't do that either," returned Mrs. Lowell. "There is no potentiality in him for vileness."

"Then," said Diana, "how do you explain Mr. Gayne and his like?"

"He is a man whose real selfhood is buried under a mass of selfishness and cruelty, the beliefs of error and mortality. God doesn't even know what the poor creature believes, and all his mistakes and blundering will have to be blotted out finally by suffering, unless he should learn to turn to the Love that is always available; for God can't know anything unlike Himself." [Pg 111]

"Your ideas are quite new to me," said the girl. "I am an Episcopalian."

Mrs. Lowell smiled. She understood this final tone.

"Then you are satisfied, I see."

"So far as religion goes, yes."

"Religion goes all the way, my dear girl."

They turned to the right and continued their walk.

"The islanders call this direction 'up-along,' Mr. Blake told me," said Diana. "If we had turned south we should have gone 'down-along.' Isn't that quaint? Mr. Barrison's grandmother lives down-along. He took me to see her the other day, the sweetest old lady."

"That refreshing young man hails from here, then?"

"Yes. He is the Viking type, is he not? I can picture him in the prow of one of those strange Norse ships. Physically he seems an anachronism."

Mrs. Lowell smiled. "Physically, perhaps, but colloquially he is certainly an up-to-the-minute American." [Pg 112]

"He is an eminent singer and has shown himself a hero in arriving at that point."

"A hero, really?"

"Yes, but most unconsciously so."

"He is certainly as unaffected and straightforward as a child," said Mrs. Lowell. "I hope he will sing for us."

"I have heard him once," said Diana. "It was merely a nonsense song, because he had only an heirloom of a piano—a harp he called it, and I imagine harpsichords did sound similar to that. Now, we are on a high point of the island, Mrs. Lowell."

They paused again and, looking off, saw a vast ocean in all directions, foam breaking on its ledges. Mrs. Lowell drew a long breath of delight.

"Every prospect pleases," she said.

"Does it not seem a pity," returned Diana, "that it is our duty to hunt for a vile, imitation man?"

Mrs. Lowell laughed. "He is scarcely even an imitation," she replied. "But come," she sighed, "let us go after him. I wonder what gave this farm its reputation." They walked on.

"I'll ask Mr. Blake," began Diana. "Oh, here he comes now."

[Pg 113]

The carpenter was returning down the island preparing to take up his freight duties on the wharf. Diana accosted him and introduced him to Mrs. Lowell.

The latter shook hands with Matt, her radiant smile beaming, "I am glad to meet you, Mr. Blake," she said. "You seem to be Miss Wilbur's oracle. She is always quoting you, and I am rather curious about this farm up here. Why do they call it haunted?"

"Oh," said Blake, "let any place be left empty a few years, and windows get loose, and blinds bang, and it's called haunted."

"I suppose that is often true," said Mrs. Lowell. "It is an abandoned farm, then?"

"Yes, for many years."

"I don't know why I have never inspected it," said Diana, "when who knows but it is the very homestead for me?"

Matt Blake shook his head and smiled. "The old house is crumbling away. There is a part of it that'll keep the rain off, and there Mr. Gayne keeps his stuff."

"Stuff?" echoed Mrs. Lowell interrogatively.

"Brushes and paints and pencils and all his outfit," said Blake.

[Pg 114]

"Oh, oh, yes," replied the lady. "You know in the West a squatter claims complete rights to the land he has settled on. I hope Mr. Gayne hasn't established an ownership up there that will make us seem like intruders. We thought we would like to see this exciting place."

"'Tain't exciting," said Matt Blake with another shake of the head. "It's asleep and snoring, the Dexter farm is."

"Who does own the place?" asked Diana with interest.

"It would take a pretty smart lawyer to find that out," was the reply. "It's been in litigation longer than it's been haunted. There's three women, I believe, pullin' and haulin' on it."

"I think I might pull and haul, too, if I find I like it," said Diana with her most dreamy serenity, and Matt Blake laughed.

"Well, you won't," he returned. "'Twould give a body the Injun blues to live there. How Mr. Gayne can stand it even in the daytime is a mystery to me; and there don't either o' the claimants really want it. They live around the State somewheres. I s'pose it would be hard to buy 'em out at that, because landowners here seem to think the island's goin' to turn into a regular Newport and that they'll make a fortune if they only hang on."

[Pg 115]

"Do not speak such desecrating words!" begged Diana. "Do not hint at waking the island from its alluring, scented dream."

Matt Blake gave her a patient stare. "Just as you say," he returned. He had already, as a fruit of many interviews with Diana, given her up as a conundrum. He tipped his hat and continued on his way.

The two companions pursued theirs, and soon came to where a rather steep hill led down to the northern beach.

"Now, we do not go down there unless we wish to be 'set across.' That is what they call it: set across to the next island, our near neighbor."

"We must do it some day," replied Mrs. Lowell, looking at that other green hill rising out of the sea.

As they stood gazing, they saw a man run across the rocks on its shore and hail a rowboat which came to meet him.

"It is within rowing distance, isn't it?" said Mrs. Lowell.

"Yes. Little Genevieve told me, one can always find some fisherman who is willing to act as a ferry." Diana looked about. "I think we shall be obliged to ask our path to the farm. Let us go to that cottage over there. It is probably on our way."

[Pg 116]

They proceeded to a house near the road where cats and chickens seemed equally numerous, and knocked.

"Will you tell us how to get to the Dexter farm?" asked Diana of the woman who answered the summons.

The woman pointed. "You go right up that way to Brook Cove and you'll really be on the farm then if you keep to the right bank. You'll see the old house near a big willow tree."

They thanked her and moved on.

"What pleasant voices these people have," said Diana. "They have not been obliged to shout above clanging trolleys and auto horns."

"No; all except Genevieve," returned Mrs. Lowell. "I should guess that she had been brought up in a boiler factory."

"Yet it is a piercing sweetness," protested Diana.

Mrs. Lowell laughed. "The island can do no wrong, eh?"

"Perhaps I am somewhat partial," admitted the girl.

[Pg 117]

They sprang along over the rough hillside, and at last came to a deep, precipitous cleft in its shore. The rocky sides of the hollow were decked with clumps of clinging shrub and evergreen and the clear water lapped a miniature beach.

"Why Brook Cove?" asked Mrs. Lowell. "I suppose there must be one about here. What a mystery the springs are in the midst of all this salt water. Miss Burridge says everybody has a well."

Diana gave her her most dreamy and seraphic look.

"Angels fold their wings and rest
In this haven of the blest,"

she replied.

"I wish only angels did," sighed Mrs. Lowell. "You remind me of our errand."

"Don't you think we might spare a few minutes for repose?" asked Diana, looking wistfully at the bank where the grass grew close and green to the very edge of the chasm.

"You want to sit down and let your feet hang over," laughed Mrs. Lowell. "You may as well confess it."

As she spoke, a man appeared on the other side of the cove. He skirted it and, hurrying, passed them and disappeared in a grove of fir trees.

[Pg 118]

Mrs. Lowell looked at her companion with large eyes.

"All the Sherlock Holmes in me responds to that man," she said in a low tone. "This is no time to let our feet hang over. He probably is the very one who came across in the rowboat and he is on an errand. His whole manner showed it. We're on the right bank. So we're on the farm now. Let us go into those woods and see what happens."

"Shall we not be intruding?" said Diana, hesitating.

"I hope so," returned Mrs. Lowell valiantly, and she seized her companion's hand and drew her toward the grove. There a winding path greeted them, a lover's lane, between close-growing firs, and together they sped along the scented aisle. The man was the swifter and, by the time they emerged from the fir grove, he was approaching a huge willow tree near the crumbling farmhouse built in a hollow with protecting mounds of green hills and trees on three sides of it.

They saw Gayne come out of the house and shake hands with the man, giving him a most effusive welcome, but before he had had opportunity to do more than this, the host descried the other visitors.

[Pg 119]

The eyes of both young women being excellent, they were able to observe the lightning change which took place in the pleased excitement of his face. The ugly frown that appeared was banished as soon as he could control himself. He said something to the other man, and the latter walked on to a rise of ground where he stood to enjoy the view, and Gayne came to meet the ladies.

"Ah, good-day," he said with as pleasant a manner as he could command. "Your explorations are leading you far this morning."

"Is this the Dexter farm?" asked Mrs. Lowell.

"The very same," replied Gayne lightly. "I see its creepy reputation has aroused your curiosity. Too bad there isn't more here to gratify it. It is a very tame place by daylight, as you see."

"The house is a ruin, they tell me. Doesn't it seem a pity that should have been allowed? The place is full of possibilities, isn't it?"

"I should say not," returned Gayne, speaking curtly in spite of his best efforts. "It is about the least attractive part of the island. Far from the open ocean, no place to bathe, cuddled into a hollow, no views."

[Pg 120]

Mrs. Lowell met his impatient look.

"I thought the very reason you chose this for a sort of artist camp was on account of the views," she said pleasantly.

"A headquarters. A headquarters only," said Gayne quickly. "I haven't locomotor ataxia, you

know," he added, laughing; "I can still get about."

"I should like very much to see that old house," said Mrs. Lowell, her gaze wandering over to it. "We interrupted your greeting of a friend. Please don't let us detain you. We will just roam around here a bit."

Nicholas Gayne hesitated for an instant as the young women moved toward the house, but he followed them.

"There is nothing to see, I assure you, and it's an unsafe place. The floors are rotting; you are liable to fall through anywhere. I really feel as if I ought to beg you to confine your curiosity to the outside."

"You speak quite like the owner of the place," said Mrs. Lowell, with an access of dignity not lost upon Gayne. "We will absolve you if any accident befalls us."

The man's frown at her reply was so unpleasant that Diana felt some timidity and took her friend's arm. [Pg 121]

"Another time, perhaps," she suggested.

"Why not now, since we are here," returned Mrs. Lowell calmly. "A haunted house isn't to be seen every day." She smiled. "Do join your friend, Mr. Gayne. He seems to have found some view well worth looking at. We shall not stay long."

"Oh, take your time," returned Gayne, seeing that he could not prevent the intrusion, and altering his manner to that of a host. "Perhaps you would like to see my artist camp as you call it. I did find one spot where there is a dry season and my canvases can be safe."

He led the way into the farmhouse. The paper on the little hallway in oval designs of faded green landscapes had peeled and was hanging from the wall. They passed into a living-room where tattered and splintered furniture and a rusty stove met the eye. Back of this was the artist's den evidently. A table stood in the center, on which reposed a palette, some brushes, a couple of sketch-books, and a portfolio. Against the side of the room were a few canvases leaning against the wall, and in bold relief, supported against the table, stood a pickaxe and a shovel.

Mrs. Lowell regarded Gayne's flushed countenance as he picked up the tools and pushed them behind a screen. [Pg 122]

"Your still-life studies, appropriate to an abandoned farm?" she laughed.

"They don't look very artistic, I must say," returned Gayne. "Of course, I'm an amateur of the amateurs," he went on, picking up the portfolio (he pronounced it *amatoor*), "but a man is all the better for having a fad, no matter how footless. Since you are here and have caught me red-handed, you may as well know the worst."

He opened the portfolio and threw down a couple of crayon sketches of woods, water, and rocks.

"But these are good!" exclaimed Mrs. Lowell, in a tone of such astonishment that it could scarcely be considered complimentary.

Gayne shrugged his shoulders, as Diana, looking over her friend, added her approval.

"I make no pretensions," he repeated. "I amuse myself."

His guests lingered a minute over the sketches, then looked about the forlorn old homestead, but as each step was closely accompanied by Gayne, they soon took their departure, passing the stranger on his knoll as they walked toward the sea, over grassy hill and fragrant spruce-filled hollow. The stranger, as they passed, kept his hands folded behind him and stared stolidly ahead. [Pg 123]

"Were you ever more astonished?" asked Mrs. Lowell in a low tone as if the balsamic breeze could carry her words back.

"Your suspicion that the man is sailing under false colors seems to be incorrect," replied Diana.

"He's a rascal!" declared Mrs. Lowell with conviction.

"Artists often are, I believe," returned Diana.

"I wish with all my heart I could know what he and his visitor will talk about during the next half-hour, and what that pick and shovel meant. Why was he so sorry to see us?" Mrs. Lowell's brows drew together in perplexity.

"Perhaps they are going to search for smugglers' treasures, or pirate gold," suggested Diana.

Her companion smiled. "Perhaps so. The man has some reason for promoting the foolish ghost talk and resenting visitors to his preserves. Of course, the treasure idea is as foolish as the phantoms, and just as little likely to fool a modern man in his senses." [Pg 124]

Diana shook her head. "It is certainly rather irritating to have him assume jurisdiction over that ruin which is open and free to all," she said. "I dislike his personality extremely, but his pencil has a sure touch and those sketches showed an appreciation of values."

"If he did them," said Mrs. Lowell thoughtfully.

Diana smiled. "You surely are consistent."

Her companion drew a deep breath. "A man who can treat that fragile, sensitive, lonely boy as he does—his own brother's son at that—can plan to crush him and sweep him out of his way as he would an insect—that man is dangerously wicked, and so long as the matter has come to my notice, I must share in the responsibility."

"He would be a merciless enemy," said Diana warningly.

Mrs. Lowell shook her head. "I shall pray for the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove," she said.

CHAPTER VII ANOTHER WOUND

[Pg 125]

Meanwhile Veronica, her morning work finished, had started out to oblige Mrs. Lowell. As she tripped around the house in search of the unfortunate boy, she suspected herself of hoping she should not find him. She summoned recollections of the Boston train and of various occasions since, when her sympathy for him had been roused, and by the time she espied him lying against a rock in the sunshine, her courage had risen sufficiently to address him.

"Good-morning, Bertie," she said.

He started, as was his habit when addressed, and turned his apathetic face toward her.

"Do you like to play croquet?"

The boy rose to a sitting position.

"I—" he began, then some recollection came to him. "I never did play," he finished; then, his stolid eyes meeting the fresh young face: "You don't need to be kind to me," he added bluntly.

Much disconcerted, Veronica flushed.

"What do you mean?" she returned. "I like to play croquet. I'll teach you."

"No," said the boy. "Uncle Nick said—said this morning that—that when people were—were kind to me, it was because they—they pitied me because I was a fool." The boy swallowed. "You can—go away, please." [Pg 126]

Veronica's round eyes snapped with indignation. "Your Uncle Nick's the fool to say such a thing," she returned, her cheeks growing very red. "Don't you believe him. You and I are the youngest people here. Don't you think we ought to play together a little?"

"No. You pity me. Go away, please."

"Now, Bertie, I wish you wouldn't talk to me like that."

He averted his head and was silent, and Veronica stood there, uncertainly.

"I wonder if you are stronger than I am," she said at last.

"I don't know."

"The grass is too long on the croquet ground. I want to mow it. The lawnmower is pretty heavy. Do you think you could help me?"

The boy lay still for a minute more without meeting her eyes again. Then he pulled himself up slowly and walked beside her back to the shed.

"Mr. Barrison makes fun of our croquet ground because it is rough. I want him to see an improvement when he comes again." Veronica led the way to where the mower stood, and the boy took hold of it and drew it after him back to the desired spot. [Pg 127]

"I'll pull up all the wickets," said the girl eagerly, and, as she did so, she cast a side-glance at her companion, waiting, and she thought his face the most hopeless and sad she had ever looked upon. She could feel her own eyes sting.

"None of that, none of that," she told herself.

"Now, don't you get too tired," she said. "Let me take my turn." She followed him as he went across the ground once and back again. She chattered of the weather, the sea, the song sparrows, and he answered never a word, just pushed the clicking little machine until the perspiration stood out on his forehead.

"Now, you must let me take it," said Veronica. "I didn't mean that I couldn't do any of it. I just felt it would be tiresome to do it all."

She insisted, and the boy yielded the lawnmower to her, and, standing still, took out his handkerchief and wiped his face.

Veronica pushed the mower valiantly up and down the ground. It was a cumbrous one and somewhat rusty. So the effort she let appear was not all assumed. When she returned, the boy took it from her and went to work again. He was on the last lap when Mrs. Lowell and Diana appeared, coming up from the sea, having returned from their ramble by the rocky shore instead of by the road. Mrs. Lowell's face lighted as she saw what was going on, and she cast a grateful look at Veronica as she approached. [Pg 128]

"Good for you, Bertie," she said, as he at last dropped the mower and again wiped his hot face. "It is fine of you to help Veronica."

He looked at her for a second mutely, and then turned away.

"Thank you," called Veronica as he moved off. "I'll bring you an extra large piece of pie this noon. I must go in and set the table now," she added to the others, and she winked at Mrs. Lowell who followed her into the house.

"You succeeded better than I hoped," said Mrs. Lowell. "Activity is what that boy needs."

"I wish whipping-posts hadn't been abolished," said Veronica. "I could see Uncle Nick tied up there and enjoy the activity that followed." [Pg 129]

Then she told Mrs. Lowell of the reception Bertie had given her and all he had said.

Mrs. Lowell shook her head in silence and laid her hand on the girl's shoulder. "You can see we have work to do there," she replied. "We must not be discouraged."

Diana had heard the recital. "What an extraordinary circumstance it is," she said, "that strangers should be endeavoring to build for the boy while his next of kin systematically tears down."

"That is what I was telling you," replied Mrs. Lowell. "The man is pursuing a system." She shook her head again, and added as if to herself: "But he cannot defy Omnipotence."

It was probably a very good thing for Mr. Gayne that he did not return to-day to the noon dinner. The waitress would have been likely to give him cool soup, warm water, and the undesirable portions of meat and vegetables. She served the boy with the best of everything. In the chatter about the table, he was never included, so his silence was not noticeable, but Mrs. Lowell observed the pallor under the sunburn, the hopeless droop of the mouth, and the languid appetite that should have been voracious in a growing boy fresh from exercise. [Pg 130]

After dinner she stopped him, the others all having gone out on the piazza. He was moving toward the stairway.

"Where are you going, Bertie?"

"Upstairs."

"I don't think we ought to waste this weather in the house. Do you?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I do. It is liable to change any time now. We have had so much sunshine. We ought to make the most of it."

"You go out, then," said the boy.

"But I would rather you came, too."

"No. You pity me, that's all."

"No," returned Mrs. Lowell quietly. "I pity your uncle, not you."

The boy stared at her, unmoved.

"I pity him because he doesn't know how to make you happy."

"You don't need to—to take any trouble," was the stolid reply.

"It isn't a trouble. I like you. I like to have you with me. I went up to the farm this morning—the haunted farm."

"Did—did you see anything?"

"Yes. Supposing we go down to the beach and I'll tell you about it. You shall carry two cushions for us; then if you want to take a nap you can do so while I read." [Pg 131]

"I would rather—rather be alone."

Mrs. Lowell met his wretched eyes with her irresistible smile which had in it selflessness, love, and courage.

"No, you wouldn't, dear boy. Besides, it is an impossibility. We are never alone. You know the Father we talked about the other day, the One who showed your mother how to love you. He is with us all the time, and no one and nothing can separate us from Him, no matter what seems to be."

"Could I see Him if I—if I died? Because I'd like to—to die and see—my mother."

"You will see her at the right time," said Mrs. Lowell. "You have a great deal to do for her first. Were you going upstairs to sleep? No doubt you are sleepy after all that mowing. It was very kind of you to do it for Veronica."

"I didn't do it for her." There was no stammering in the declaration. "She thought I did, but I didn't."

Mrs. Lowell smiled again and nodded. "I understand," she said. "I'm sorry I didn't know your mother. I believe she would like you to go outdoors with me now." [Pg 132]

"You don't—don't need to—to have me. I'm—I'm all right."

Mrs. Lowell could see the wound throb.

"I know I don't need to. I should think you could see that I really want you."

He hesitated and looked away.

"Now," she went on, "I will go up to my room and get some cushions and my books and we will have a nice read or a nice snooze, and perhaps get some more stones for our collection. Perhaps you have some book you would like to bring."

"I haven't any books—except a paper one."

"Bring it," said Mrs. Lowell with interest. "I would like to see it. Let us meet down here in five minutes, then."

She went up the stairs and the boy followed.

When she came down again, the corridor and living-room were empty. Perhaps the lad had decided against her plan after all. She sank down in a chair by the door and closed her eyes.

"Dear Father," she prayed, "Thy will be done, and may my thought be ever ready to separate between the real and the unreal. Let me not be discouraged by the seeming, but may I remember every moment what Thy will is, and that Thine omnipotent Love is ever present. Let me reflect Thine intelligence and take my human footsteps wisely. Let me know that Thy Truth will uncover the error that is to be met, and that I cannot be dismayed, for Thou art with me, and underneath are the everlasting arms." [Pg 133]

Footsteps sounded on the uncarpeted stairs and she looked up and saw Bertie.

"I thought I wouldn't come," he said. "Then I thought you—you might wait—"

"You see I did," said Mrs. Lowell, "and here are the cushions. Will you take them, please?"

The boy picked them up and they set forth.

As they crossed the piazza, Mrs. Lowell nodded to Miss Emerson and the two men with her. These followed the pair with their eyes as they descended the steps, and started across the field.

"By Jove, that young nut is in luck," said Mr. Evans, a short, thick-set man, with spectacles.

"Why, do you think Mrs. Lowell is so attractive?" asked Miss Emerson.

"Of course. Don't you?"

"Why, I think she's a very good-looking woman," was the reply. "Her husband is coming up later." [Pg 134]

Mr. Evans shook his head mournfully. "I'm afraid it won't make any difference to me. I've tried to prattle to her a little, but she doesn't hear me, or, if she does, I've been weighed and found wanting. I talked to her quite a while my first morning here. As soon as I saw her I determined to make hay while the sun shone, but I soon found I couldn't make any, or even cut any ice either. So, since then, I just look at her from afar."

"I'm sure you're too easily discouraged," said Miss Emerson with some acerbity. "You underrate your own attractiveness, Mr. Evans. Any woman who would rather spend her time with that poor, forlorn image of a boy than with men of intellect, cannot be so very interesting, herself."

Mr. Pratt, a tall, slender, long-necked gentleman, here spoke: "I judge from what Mr. Gayne says that the boy is pretty far gone mentally. He said he supposed he really shouldn't have brought him up here. Gayne has a heavy burden on his hands evidently. It's naturally hard to bring one's self to shutting up any one who is your own kin, and, as Gayne says, you're between the devil and the deep sea, for you may put it off too long. It looks like a case of dangerous melancholia to me." [Pg 135]

Miss Emerson shuddered. "All I know is that if Mrs. Lowell was as sensitive as I am, she never in the world could bear to have that boy around with her as much as she does. Mr. Gayne, an artist as he is! What he must suffer in that constant association!"

"He doesn't seem to be much with his nephew," remarked Mr. Evans.

"Well, I should think rooming with him was enough," retorted the lady. "He has a cot for the boy right in his own room."

"Well, it isn't my business," yawned the other. "Come on, Pratt. I hear they've taken a horse-mackerel and it's down on the wharf. Let's go and see it."

"Oh, I think those giant fish are so interesting!" exclaimed Miss Emerson, sitting up alertly.

Mr. Evans nodded at her over his shoulder as the two friends started off.

"After your siesta you ought to get Miss Wilbur and come down," he said.

"I don't want any siesta," thought the lady crossly. "Why did I get into this hammock? They would probably have asked me if I hadn't been lying down." [Pg 136]

She had not yet discovered the domestic status of the two men, although she had put out many a feeler to learn whether they were unprotected males. She was wearing one of her prettiest dresses since their arrival, but the emergency sport suit of baronet satin would not come forth from its hanger on any such uncertainty.

CHAPTER VIII SKETCHES

[Pg 137]

"Our pebbles are getting a good washing, aren't they?" said Mrs. Lowell, when she and her protégé had reached the shore.

The tide was high and she had Bert put the cushions in front of a rock which sprang from the grass on the edge of the stony beach. He followed her directions apathetically.

"Put your pillow against the rock. See, there is a nice slanting place. Perhaps you will take a little nap. The sea is making a rather thunderous lullaby. Try it. I shan't mind; for here are my books and my writing-paper and pencils galore."

The boy sank down beside her in the place she indicated and looked at the materials in her lap. She had opened a leather case and showed a tablet of paper fitted at the side with a case for pencils.

"Do you ever write letters, Bertie?"

"I—no."

"When you and your uncle leave home, is there no one for you to write back to?"

"There's Cora."

"Your housekeeper?"

The boy nodded, his eyes still on the books and materials in his friend's lap. She, alert to meet any show of interest on his part, took up one of the books. [Pg 138]

"Do you ever read the Bible, Bertie?"

"I don't—no, I never did."

"Didn't your mother ever read it to you?"

The boy looked up into her eyes. "Yes, about the shepherd."

"I'm so glad that you know that psalm," she returned gently. "Can you say it? The Lord is my shepherd?"

He shook his head, and again his eyes dropped to the contents of her lap.

"It is like a game of magic music," she thought. "There is something here I should do. Divine Harmony, Divine Love, show me what it is!"

"Are you looking at this?" She took up the other book and pointed to the gold cross and crown on its cover. Then she offered it to him.

He shook his head.

"Veronica told me that your uncle hurt your feelings this morning," went on Mrs. Lowell, laying the book down.

The boy's brows drew together and his gaze sought the ground.

"You know the Bible is the most beautiful book in the world. It has hundreds of verses as lovely as those about the shepherd. This is one: Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. Fear Him means fear to displease Him on account of our love for Him and His love for us." [Pg 139]

It was so long since the boy had heard any mention of love that he looked up at her, still gloomily.

"You know how unhappy you always were when you displeased your mother, and you know how she pitied you for your mistake and drew you back to her—and forgave you."

"Yes—yes, I do."

"That is the way God does with us. So you see it isn't a bad thing to be pitied with love. If you ever think again of what your uncle said, just turn away from it and know that Love is taking care of you every minute. God is always here, waiting to bless us."

"I'd—I'd rather see Him," said the boy.

"Your friends are His messengers," said Mrs. Lowell.

"What—what friends have I?"

"Me, for one," replied his companion. As she leaned toward him with her spontaneous grace, he met her affectionate regard with his piteous eyes.

"Did God—did God send you to—to me?"

[Pg 140]

"I'm sure He did," she returned slowly.

"Then—then can I—take one of your pencils?"

Mrs. Lowell looked down at her writing-tablet.

"Certainly," she said, passing the whole affair to him.

A remarkable transformation took place in the boy's face. He took the folding case with its complete outfit and his companion regarded him in surprise. His eyes lighted and color came stealing up over face and brow. He looked over his shoulder apprehensively, then back at her.

"You won't tell him?" he said.

"Who? Your uncle?"

"Yes. He would beat me."

"Why? Doesn't he like you to write letters?"

The first smile she had ever seen on the boy's face altered it now as he looked at her, and her heart beat faster in a mystified sense that some cruelly bolted door had been pushed ajar.

"You can have that portfolio for your own, Bertie," she said.

"No, no, he'd kill me."

[Pg 141]

"What can you mean, dear child?"

The boy started up from his cushion and perched on top of the rock, glancing along the shore. Mrs. Lowell leaned forward and saw his hand with the pencil move swiftly here and there on the blank sheet. She said not a word, but watched the slender young face with the new alertness in the eyes.

The tide was making its splendid slow retreat, the gulls were wheeling and crying, and white as their wings the daisy drifts were beginning to appear on the uplands. Activity, growing, unfolding, all about her, the watcher felt this waif to be part of it. One of God's little ones who could not be kept in bondage.

At last the boy came down again and gave her his work. She looked at it in amazement. The curve of the shore, the groups of spruces, a distant cottage, the light clouds on the blue were all sketched in with a sure touch.

"Who taught you this, Bertie?"

"Nobody—but I watched my mother. She was an artist. She let me draw beside her. She knew I could. She said so. I'll show you. You won't tell?"

"Never."

The boy drew from his pocket a small folded paper. He took off the paper and revealed oiled silk. He unfolded this and a small pen-and-ink sketch came to view. It was of a woman's face, slightly smiling. There was expression in the long-lashed eyes, eyes like the boy's own. The hair waved off the forehead. Bertie held the treasure for Mrs. Lowell to see, but did not relinquish it.

[Pg 142]

"Is this your mother?"

"Yes."

"Who did it?"

"I did."

"When, Bertie, when?"

"After—afterward," he answered, and his companion could hear that some obstruction stopped his speech.

"It is very—very lovely," said Mrs. Lowell slowly, and the boy looked over his shoulder again, apprehensively.

"Did you say your uncle forbade you to sketch?"

The boy folded the little picture back carefully in its wrappings and replaced it in his pocket.

"Why do you suppose your uncle did that?" asked Mrs. Lowell.

"I don't know."

"Don't you really, Bertie?" she asked, dreading the signs of dullness she perceived altering his face as the brightness died away. [Pg 143]

"I guess it was because he said it—it wasted my time. He took everything except this." The boy's hand rested on the pocket that held the treasure. "He didn't find this."

"Took what? Your materials, your sketching things?"

"Everything. He gets very—very angry if I take a pencil. Twice he has whipped me for it."

"But, Bertie, please try to make me understand. Mr. Gayne is an artist himself, he says."

"Yes. He says he—has money enough to live and I haven't. He says I just hang on him. So I must chop wood and—and wash windows, and Cora makes me scrub the floors. He says if he wants to waste time painting he can, but I must not."

Mrs. Lowell regarded the boy closely. "Your uncle showed me some very charming sketches up at the farm this morning."

"Did he?" returned the boy listlessly. "He never was an artist when—when she was here."

"That is strange, isn't it?" said Mrs. Lowell. "Strange that he should be able suddenly to do such good things?"

"No," said Bertie simply. "It is easy."

[Pg 144]

They were both silent for a time. The portfolio lay on the stones between them. The boy suddenly picked it up.

"I must tear this," he said.

Mrs. Lowell caught his hand just as he started to pull the sketch from the tablet.

"Won't you give it to me, Bertie?" she asked.

He hesitated. "He'll find it."

"Indeed he will not. It will go into the bottom of my trunk."

The boy took his hand away and she recovered the portfolio. He had replaced the pencil in the case.

"I should so like to give you the pencil," she said.

The boy shook his head decidedly. "No. He'd find it," he answered.

"I am very much interested about your mother being an artist," said Mrs. Lowell. "You know you are going to do everything you can to please her. She would be very sorry that your uncle has not made you happy. I am sure she wanted you to use your talent. So, very often we will take walks and I will get better materials for you than this, and you shall make many sketches."

The boy's brows drew together. It was evident that he was in such fetters of fear that the prospect was a mixed pleasure. [Pg 145]

"Do you remember your father? When did he die?"

"I don't know. It was before—"

"Was he a kind father, and kind to your dear mother?"

"I don't know. Everybody was angry with her, all the rich people, because she—she ran away to marry him. Then she was left all—alone with me and—and she sold pictures and we were—" The voice stopped.

"Yes, I know you were happy. Then when she went away your uncle took you?"

"Yes, and Cora."

"And wasn't Cora kind to you?"

Bertie shook his head. "I don't know," he said. It seemed as if the recollection of his uncle's housekeeper made him retreat at once into the protective shell.

"Just let me ask you one more question. Your Uncle Nick was here at the island last summer. He didn't bring you with him. Where were you then?"

"Home."

"Alone?"

"No, with Cora."

"But wouldn't Cora like you to draw a pretty picture for her?"

"No. She knows Uncle Nick would hit her."

"What did you do all summer?"

"Helped Cora. Then, when she was drunk, I went in the park. Sometimes I slept there."

Mrs. Lowell shook her head. "I'm glad your uncle brought you this time."

"Cora wouldn't stay. They had the worst fight of all. They were always fighting."

"Bertie, dear," said Mrs. Lowell tenderly, "try to know all the time that God is taking care of you and leading you. We know He will. Uncle Nick must know it, too, sometime."

"Know what?" exclaimed the boy with a start.

"That God takes care of His children. Your uncle is one, and I am one, and you are one. We shall have to keep some secrets from Uncle Nick until he grows kinder and knows that the only way to be happy is to love. I should like to know your mother's people."

"Uncle Nick says they're all dead."

"Do you know their name?"

"No."

"Think, Bertie. What was your mother's name?"

"Helen."

[Pg 147]

"What else? Can't you remember—the name on her paintings, perhaps?"

The boy was silent and his brow was puzzled. He reached into a pocket.

"I brought my book," he said, drawing forth a worn and much-thumbed pamphlet.

"I'm so glad you did," she returned.

He did not offer it to her, but she looked over his shoulder as he turned the leaves of the catalogue of an exhibition of paintings.

"There are two of my mother's," he said. He indicated the small reproductions of two landscapes and Mrs. Lowell studied them with interest.

"I can see that they must be charming," she said. "Have you any of her pictures?"

"There was one," said the boy, and he had to wait for a time before he could add: "Uncle Nick sold it."

"Let us see if there may be a list of the exhibitors," said Mrs. Lowell. "May I take it a minute?"

Bertie yielded the pamphlet and she turned to the front of the book. Yes, there was the list and her eye quickly caught the name: Helen Loring Gayne.

"Your mother's name was Loring, then."

"It's my name, too. Herbert Loring Gayne."

[Pg 148]

"Where did her people live, Bertie?"

"In Boston. I can always remember that because—because—when Uncle Nick is angry at what I—I do, he says don't try any Boston on me, and then—then I know he means my mother, because he—he didn't like—"

The boy's voice hesitated and stopped.

Mrs. Lowell called his attention to some of the other pictures in the pamphlet, speaking of the artists whose names were known to her, and he finally restored his treasure to his pocket.

When they again reached the Inn, they found Nicholas Gayne walking up and down the piazza. He came to the head of the steps.

"This is too much, Mrs. Lowell," he said with an effort at bluff good nature, "for you to burden yourself with a young hobble-de-hoy like Bert when you take your rambles."

"If I like it I suppose you have no objections," she returned pleasantly. "I assure you I had to urge him to accompany me. Too bad there aren't some young people of his own age here."

"He wouldn't know what to say to them if there were, would you, Bert?"

"No, sir," was the reply, and the boy started to go into the house.

[Pg 149]

"Here, what are you doing?" said his uncle, catching him roughly by the arm. "You haven't said good-bye to the lady after her kindness in dragging you around."

Mrs. Lowell controlled herself to speak calmly. "I tell Bert it would be a good thing for him to learn to swim while he is here."

"That's the talk!" ejaculated his uncle, throwing the arm off as roughly as he had grasped it. "Go in and win, Bert. I'll get you a bathing suit. Show 'em you ain't any milk sop. Take the dives with the best of them."

The boy stood with his eyes downcast.

"And don't sulk," went on his uncle with exasperation. "For Heaven's sake, don't sulk. That's the way it is, Mrs. Lowell, if you try to think up some jolly thing for him to do, he stands like an image. No more backbone than a jellyfish."

"Everybody doesn't like the water," returned Mrs. Lowell, moved now by the dread that the man might suspect her influence and remove the boy.

"Well, how did you like the farm?" he pursued.

"What a pleasant place it is," she returned, seating herself on the piazza rail. "No wonder you like to spend time there. I haven't forgotten those charming sketches you showed me, either." [Pg 150]

Gayne made a clumsy bow. "You flatter me," he said. "I make no claims."

The lady looked down on the garden border.

"The sweet peas look thirsty, Bertie," she said. "Let's water them."

The boy followed her in silence to where the coiled hose lay, and his uncle looked after them, a thoughtful frown gathering on his dark brow.

CHAPTER IX A WORKING PLAN

[Pg 151]

Mrs. Lowell knocked for admittance at Diana's door that evening, and entering found the girl sitting at the little desk she had added to Miss Burr ridge's furnishings, surrounded by books and papers.

"Is it an inopportune time?" asked the caller, hesitating.

Diana rose smiling. "That can never be for you," she replied.

"Thank you, dear child. I am so full, I long to talk to you. You may have a helpful suggestion."

"I shall be pleased to act as your confidante. Sit here, Mrs. Lowell. I was just writing my mother how fortunate I am in the fact that you are here. I encounter a good deal of difficulty in persuading my mother that I am not in a desert place and am not doing penance. I am very desirous of restraining her from coming to see for herself. I should be aghast at the prospect of taking care of her and her maid here. Yet, when I pile up superlatives, she decides that I have fallen in love with an Indian and is increasingly disturbed."

The girl looked very pretty in the peach-colored negligee she was wearing, its precious laces falling over Miss Burr ridge's cheap chairs and matting, and her thick bright-brown hair in disorder. [Pg 152]

"Oh, tell her he isn't an Indian; tell her he is a Viking."

Diana's serene gaze did not falter, though her color rose.

"I do not mind your badinage," she returned, "for when I fall in love, it is going to be with a supremely unattractive man externally. I shall be the only woman who knows and understands his charm, then other women will not infringe my rights. After you hear Mr. Barrison sing, you will understand that in his career, women will bow before him like flowers in an irresistible gust of wind. I cannot imagine a worse fate for a girl than to share that career; the more brilliant it might be, the more crushing to her happiness. But this interview is getting turned about. I was to be the confidante, not you."

"Then this is my tale, my dear," said Mrs. Lowell. "I have discovered who did those sketches Mr. Gayne showed us this morning."

"Then you were right, and they were not his own?"

"Bertie's mother did them, and he inherits her talent: this poor child whom the man is trying to blot out of normal life." [Pg 153]

"What makes you certain?"

"Because he did one before my eyes down by the shore to-day, with a swift, sure touch, and that thin, sad face of his lighted till he looked like a different being. His parents are dead. His mother was an artist. He worked with her. As soon as she left the child, his uncle forbade him to draw, and took all his materials away from him, whipped him if he found a pencil in his possession. Those sketches we saw were done either by the boy or his mother. There is no doubt of it. She eloped with his father, estranging her family from her. She was a Loring of Boston."

Diana regarded the speaker with admiration. "How wonderful for you to obtain so much information from such a source."

"Oh, it was little by little, of course. I told him his uncle had shown us some good sketches and asked him if it was not strange that Mr. Gayne could do them, taking up the art so late in life; for it seems he took it up only as Bertie laid it down; and the boy's reply was significant. He said: 'Oh, no, it is easy.' He seemed to have no suspicion, but then he hasn't life or interest enough to harbor suspicion. He just endures."

[Pg 154]

Mrs. Lowell went on to tell of Cora and the drudgery of the boy's dull and dulling existence, and her listener's eyes lost their customary serenity.

"It must not be," said the girl at last, as her companion ceased. "Have you made a diagnosis?"

"I only feel that the 'root of all evil' must be at the bottom of it," replied Mrs. Lowell. "The Old Nick, as Veronica calls him, must believe there is money to be secured, and that if he can only prove that his nephew is incompetent, he can gain charge of it. Bertie told me that his mother's people were rich."

"Of course, then, that is the key; but it does not explain what the man is doing with pickaxe and shovel up at my farm."

"Your farm, my dear?"

"Perhaps," said Diana carelessly. "But that is not interesting us now. Mrs. Lowell, I adore the unselfishness which has caused you to give your time to this boy. I have tried to converse with him, but his lack of responsiveness seems to obscure the clarity of my mental processes. I wish, however, to have a hand in his salvation. The thing to do now, it appears to me, is to discover this Loring family. That will take money and I will supply it."

[Pg 155]

"My dear Miss Diana!"

"Drop the Miss, please. I feel honored by your friendship. Do you know of a good lawyer?"

"My husband is a lawyer."

"Then, please, ask him to proceed at once."

The girl's dignity and beauty added charm to the sense of power in an emergency which money sometimes gives. "It is galling that we cannot take the boy away from that brute immediately," she added.

"Oh, we must be so careful," exclaimed Mrs. Lowell. "Rather than let us do one thing to clear and brighten Bertie's mind his uncle would send him off the island. We must not show dislike or suspicion; and God will guide us in the footsteps we must take. He is taking care of the child now, through us."

"Really, Mrs. Lowell, your faith is very beautiful," said Diana.

"Everybody should have it. Why go alone while the Bible is right there with its marvelous promises? God's children are not puppets pulled by wires, and so people complain that the promises are not kept. We are made in His image and likeness, tributary only to Him—every good thing is possible to us if we turn toward Him instead of away from Him."

[Pg 156]

"Mr. Gayne appears to have turned away," said Diana dryly.

"Yes, he made me shudder this afternoon when he talked of Bertie's learning to swim. It was as if he hoped it might be the child's end."

Diana shook her head. "He doesn't want that."

"No, so I consoled myself afterward, but his malignant spirit bursts forth in spite of him occasionally."

Mrs. Lowell rose and the girl followed her example. The older woman approached and placed her hands on Diana's shoulders.

"I thank God," she said, "for your cooperation. I will write to my husband to-night."

"Is he as—as religious as you are?"

"Not perhaps in the same way. He does not see quite as I do, but he is a good man and loves everything good." Some recollection made the speaker smile. "I try his soul at times by not doing what he calls minding my own business. For instance, once I saw a young fellow at an elevated station in New York, dazed by drink. I was in haste and on an important errand, but I couldn't take my train and leave him there. So I went and sat down beside him and asked him where he was going. He said, to the Brooklyn ferry, but he was thick and helpless. I called a little colored boy carrying a large milliner's box, and I asked him if his errand needed to be done immediately. He was pretty doubtful, but he finally said no. So I told him I would check his box and leave a dollar with it for him when he returned, if he would take this young man straight to the Brooklyn ferry and see that he did not go in anywhere on the way. He said he would do so, and I gave him his check and car fare and some nickels for telephoning, and asked him to call me up that evening. I wrote my telephone number and left it with the box. He promised, and my train came

[Pg 157]

along and I had to leave them. About six o'clock that afternoon, the telephone rang. It was my messenger. He said that when he got the young man downstairs to go to the train for the ferry, his charge became violently sick. After that, he came to himself and gave a different direction to the boy. The address of an office building. He was pale and shaky. So the boy stayed with him. They went up in an elevator and into an office where the young man said that he had brought the money. They sent for some one from another office, and to this person the young man gave a roll of a thousand dollars.

[Pg 158]

"Of course, I was quite excited, and happy over this news, and I thanked my messenger and said: 'See what God has helped us to do to-day. That young man might have been robbed, and would have been suspected of theft by his employer and lost his character and his position.' My husband was sitting near by, reading the paper, and he looked up and said: 'Who on earth are you talking to?' I just answered: 'A little darky boy!' and went on, while my husband stared. When I told him the whole story, he laughed and shook his head. 'Hopeless,' he said, 'hopeless.' He is quite conservative, and he would like me to stay in the beaten track."

"That was fine," said Diana. "Mr. Lowell will be in sympathy with this case, I hope, and undertake it with his whole heart. I am going to give you a check to send him as a retainer. Then he will know that this is a serious business matter."

[Pg 159]

The girl sat down at her desk and wrote the check and Mrs. Lowell took it thankfully. She went to her room and wrote her letter. In due time she received a reply.

Dear One,

I see you have again ceased minding your own business and I am really very proud of you in spite of your obstinacy. I thought in the wilds of Casco Bay, you might get away from responsibilities for awhile, but I might have known that, unless I set you adrift on an iceberg, you would find some lame, or halt, or blind, to succor. Even then, I think the iceberg would melt at your presence, and in short order you would be down among the mermaids explaining to them that it was error to get out on the rocks to do their hair and sing to sailors.

Your story is very interesting, and while I believe that Boston is as full of Loring as it is of beans, Miss Wilbur has made it possible to ring every Loring doorbell and ask down which steps ran the eloping daughter. Rest assured, as her lawyer I shall do my best in this affair. Owing to Mr. Wilbur's prominence in the public prints, his connections are pretty well known, and I thought I associated Herbert Loring, the railroad president, with him. I suppose Miss Wilbur would have told you if there were anything in that.

The remainder of the letter dealt with different subjects, and, when Mrs. Lowell had finished it, she hastened to her friend, and put her question.

[Pg 160]

"I will send my father a telegram at once," responded the girl.

That form of speech was not strictly accurate, as it was rather an elaborate operation to send a telegram from the island. However, it was finally accomplished. This was the message to her father:

Have you any friends named Loring? Have we any relatives or connections by marriage of that name?

DIANA

The day after the girl had given her check to Mrs. Lowell, Bertie Gayne was not seen about the Inn all the morning. At dinnertime he returned with his uncle. Mr. Gayne's manner was disarmingly bluff and hearty. He had a cheerful word for everybody. The boy's silent manner and uninterested look were just as usual. Mrs. Lowell managed to catch his eye once or twice, but he gave no sign of understanding.

The horse-mackerel were running and the island population was all excited. The taking of one of the huge fish was an event, and very lucrative for the captors. The talk of the table was all on this subject, and Nicholas Gayne entered into it with zest.

[Pg 161]

After dinner everybody went out in front of the house to view the telltale disturbances in the waters of the bay, where numerous small boats were hanging about awaiting their opportunity. Veronica eagerly joined the watchers as soon as she was at liberty.

"Let us walk down nearer the water," proposed Diana.

Mr. Gayne's field-glasses were being handed about, and she was afraid they would be offered to her. So she and Veronica moved down across the field and seated themselves on the grass against a convenient rock.

"Where do you think Bertie was this morning?" she asked.

"Uncle took him off with him."

"Up to the farm?"

"I suppose so. Mr. Gayne seems to think that farm might get away if he didn't see it for twenty-

four hours."

"I wonder if he will not be wishing to purchase it one of these days," said Diana.

"I'd buy some clothes for Bert first if I was in his place. Everything the boy has seems to have been bought for his little brother."

"Did you ever read 'Nicholas Nickleby,' Veronica?"

[Pg 162]

"Yes, I have." The younger girl looked around brightly. "I know who you're thinking of—Smike. I've thought of Smike ever since they came."

Diana received her look with a smile. One touch of nature made them kin for the moment, and Diana, all unconscious of her companion's mental reservations, did not know that at this moment she was nearer than she had ever been to being forgiven for her various perfections.

"All my childhood," said Diana, "I used to wish I could have done something for Smike."

"I've wished that, too," said Veronica.

"Now we have an opportunity," returned Diana. "You are young and sportive and you made a good beginning."

"Oh, I did—*not*," returned Veronica. "You might as well try to sport with a hearse. Everything you say to him he turns his eyes on you all darkened up with those lashes, regular mourning, and you don't know where to look, yourself, nor what to say. Yes, I did want to help Smike, but so long as the law won't let us string Mr. Gayne up somewhere, lots of times I wish they'd gone to some other island. Isn't it a pity he hasn't got spunk enough to run away? Even Smike ran away."

[Pg 163]

"I am glad this boy is not inclined to do that," returned Diana, "for I feel that he has friends here and that something good should come of his summer."

"Not if Mr. Gayne can help it," declared Veronica. "He was afraid Mrs. Lowell was giving Bert too good a time with these walks and talks." She nodded her head. "Believe me, that is the reason—"

"Well, we have found you," said a voice behind them. It was a voice which made color steal up into Diana's cheeks. The girls both looked around quickly.

Philip Barrison was approaching, and with him a shorter man. Both were bareheaded.

"The blarney stone!" thought Veronica. She had been wondering when Mr. Barrison would bring him, and now she gave him what she herself would have described as the "once-over" as he smiled at Diana and lifted his hand to his tightly waved hair in salute.

What Veronica saw caused her to lift her hand to the bridge of her nose and cover its small proportions with two fingers, from both sides of which her round eyes gazed seriously.

CHAPTER X

NICHOLAS GAYNE CONFIDES

[Pg 164]

"Are you interested in the horse-mackerel, too?" asked Diana.

The two men sat down on the grass near the girls as Barney Kelly answered: "Moderately, Miss Wilbur. Moderately interested. Being allowed to witness anything from *terra firma* invests it with a certain charm. Barrison has been merciless, I assure you, simply merciless."

"The man came here to fish," said Philip, "and I've only tried to be hospitable."

"Deep-sea fishing," groaned his friend. "If you ever hear any tenderfoot express ambitions to go deep-sea fishing, tell him to see me if possible, otherwise write or wire me before he embarks."

"Did you find the motion disconcerting?" asked Diana.

Barney looked at Philip. "Don't you think I might admit as much as that?"

Philip laughed and bit the red clover he had pulled from a bunch near him.

"First," said Kelly, "you are waked at an hour when all men should sleep; then you are forced to eat at a time when your soul rebels at such outrage; after that, you go aboard beneath the stars, and you chug, chug, miles into the darkness; but the chug-chugging you soon find to be the best part of it for when you arrive midway between here and Liverpool, you anchor. The sky and the sea begin to get hopelessly mixed up. Why should I try to describe the writhings of all nature! They put a heavy rope into your hands, it slides through your fists and removes the skin before any one remembers that you have no gloves on. Oh, let Dante try! I can't!"

[Pg 165]

Philip laughed. "Then I took him out next day to the pound and let him help draw the net."

"The smell of that boat, Miss Wilbur!" Kelly's eyes rolled fiercely.

"I'm afraid you won't like the island," volunteered Veronica, who, when she laughed had

forgotten her nose and dropped her hand.

"My dear Miss Trueman, how can I tell, when I am never allowed to stay on it? This man, when he couldn't think of anything else hydraulic to do, has made me go in bathing in water at a temperature which no humane person will credit when I tell them. To-day, I struck. I said to him, do for Heaven's sake do something to show that you are at least amphibious. So he consented to bring me up here to meet his friends, and I shall be pleasantly surprised if you young ladies don't turn into mermaids right before my eyes, as they do in the movies, and pop off that beach into the water."

[Pg 166]

Veronica giggled so joyously that the speaker turned away from Diana's serene smile and regarded her. "I assure you," he added slowly and solemnly, "that if you do, I shall not follow you. So if you wish the pleasure of my society you won't unfold any graceful, glittering tails."

Veronica giggled again, and, if she had only known it, her dimples were warranted at any time to divert attention from those afflicting little freckles.

"I can see that Kelly will be fruit for you, Veronica, on that croquet ground," said Philip.

The guest clasped his hands rapturously. "Do you guarantee, Miss Veronica, that croquet at this island is unfailingly played on land?"

"Hold on, Barney, don't go too fast; it's the kind of croquet you play with an alpenstock in one hand and a mallet in the other."

[Pg 167]

"It is not, Mr. Barrison," declared Veronica stoutly. "Bert has mowed it."

"That poor little chap? Did you work him in? Good for you. It's what he needs."

"When are you going to have Mr. Barrison sing for us, Mr. Kelly?" asked Diana.

Barney shrugged his shoulders. "A poor worm of an accompanist can't answer that, Miss Wilbur."

"But I suppose you will be practicing, or rehearsing at times, will you not?"

"Yes. I understand there is a piano in the little Casino that was pointed out to me. I understand—eh, Barrison?"

Philip nodded. "Yes, they have allowed me to engage an hour a day on that piano for a while, for some work we have to do."

Diana's face lighted beautifully. "And may one—may one sit on the piazza?" she asked beseechingly.

"I should advise one not to," said Philip, "unless one has been inoculated for strong language."

"I should not in the least mind what you said."

"But you would what Barney says, at times."

"The verdure about the hall is free," said Diana doubtfully.

[Pg 168]

"Yes, if you don't mind a baseball in the eye once in a while. That is where the boys do congregate."

"He's a most ungrateful ass—Barrison," said Barney warmly. "Of course you shall sit on the piazza if you care about it. I promise to restrain my *penchant* for calling him pet names in private. I have to do it, you see, to strike a balance. At performances, who so meek as the accompanist! Barrison stands there, dolled up in his dress-clothes, probably a white carnation in his buttonhole; the women down front gazing at him and ruining their best gloves. I gaze at him, too,—Kelly looked up with meek worship,—"like a flower at the sun, waiting for the sultan to throw the handkerchief, or, in other words, give me a careless nod, indicating that I may come to life. At last he does so, and I begin to play—subserviently, unostentatiously. Very few in the house know that I am there. He reaches his climax, he finishes with a pianissimo that curls around all the women's hearts, draws them out and strings them on a wire before him. Then the applause bursts forth. He bows over and over again, until he looks like a blond mandarin, and I rise, but nobody knows it, and when he has passed me on his way off the stage, I come to heel like a well-trained dog, and—there we are!"

[Pg 169]

As Kelly finished his harangue with a gesture of both hands, the girls were laughing and Diana was quite flushed.

"What a fool you are, Barney," said Philip calmly, still biting the honey out of the red clover. "He plays like a house afire," he added, turning to the girls. "You will be delighted."

"Oh, yes," said Kelly. "On the road I get a group. I play the Chopin and Grieg things that the girls practice at home, and they get out their vanity cases and prink and wait for Barrison to come on again."

"Oh, cut it out, you idiot!" exclaimed Philip, jumping up. "I don't believe they're going to get one of those mackerel. Let's amuse little Veronica and go up and have a game of croquet."

Meanwhile Mr. Gayne had again taken his nephew with him to the farm.

"In spite of all I say," he told the boy, "you will bother those ladies at the Inn. So if you come along with me, I'll know where you are." And the lad answered him not at all, but plodded up the road. [Pg 170]

He did, however, think of some of the things Mrs. Lowell had said to him. Some of the love and courage that emanated from her gave him a novel certainty that he was not altogether friendless, and the wild roses that began to peep at him from the roadside suggested the idea that she would like it if he brought some home to her. In the idle hours of the afternoon he might gather some, and some of the myriad daisies and Indian paintbrush that decked the fields. But his heart sank at the prospect of what his uncle would say if he attempted to carry back a bouquet when they returned.

Gayne forbade the boy to enter the house when they reached their destination, just as he had done in the morning. So Bertie, his hands in his pockets, wandered about the surrounding fields and in the spruce groves, and picked up the shells the crows had dropped and emptied. Once he found a ridge of grass unusually long and green, and heard a whispering, and investigating found a narrow brook which murmured as it flowed. He followed along its bank until he came to the cove it had named, and watched the sparse stream cascade over the granite and fall thinly down its steep wall. The wet rock glistened in the sun, it seemed to the boy as if with tears. He threw himself down beside it and, leaning on his elbow, rested his head on his hand. Through the cut between this island and the next, boats were passing coming in from the foaming waves of the sea to the quiet waters of the sound. Life, beauty, peace. The boy closed his eyes. The longing to portray it all rose in him like an anguish. He felt his old torpidity to be better than this. Why should his new friend stir up a craving for the impossible? She meant to be kind. She seemed really to like him; and she had liked his drawing and had wanted him to do more. She would find that it was impossible, and he hoped that she would make no more effort. He squeezed his eyelids together to keep back stinging drops. He felt shame at his own weakness. Uncle Nick had said he had no more backbone than a jellyfish and he felt this was true. He had no physical strength to defend himself, none to take his fortunes into his own hands, as he felt most boys would do, run away and do something to keep himself from starvation. [Pg 171]

For years he had been fed as an animal might have been fed: at any hour that suited Cora, and with anything she might happen to have in the house. He was undernourished, neglected, crushed, and spiritless. He despised his weakness as much as his uncle despised him, and he was conscious that it was a new estimate of himself that he was now making, an estimate due to the awakening of thought that had come to him through that lady who meant to be kind. He felt very bitterly toward her as he lay there, his eyes closed to the loveliness of sea and sky. [Pg 172]

He had lain there half an hour when Matt Blake came across from the road and passed near him.

"Poor youngster," he thought. "I guess it's true he ain't all there." The feeling that the boy was not capable of responding kept him from calling out some sort of greeting as he passed, and he went on through the spruce grove to the farm-house. "Hello the house," he called.

"That you, Blake?" came from within. "Yes, I'm out here at the back. Come in."

The carpenter made his way through to the studio, and there Nicholas Gayne rose from an armchair to meet him, and swayed slightly as he stood.

"You sent for me," said Blake, regarding the other's red-rimmed eyes. [Pg 173]

"Yes, and you'll be glad I did when you see this, eh, old man?"

Gayne lurched toward the screen and took a bottle from behind it, and held it out triumphantly. "Kind o' dizzy 'cause I been asleep and you waked me sudden. 'Twas the shock, you see, the shock." He lurched back toward the table where there was a glass. He filled this half-full and offered it to his caller. "It's the real thing, the real thing," he said.

"I smell that it is," returned Blake dryly. "That's too stiff for me. No, no, Gayne," he added as the latter started to raise it to his own lips, and he took the glass from him, "you've had too much now. If you want anything of me, tell me while you've got sense enough to talk."

"You insult me, Blake," said the other with dignity. "I'm a gentleman and I know when I've had enough, and I know when I've had too much. Some folks never know that, but I do."

The carpenter regarded him impassively, and set the bottle and glass out of his reach. "Now go ahead. Tell me what you want."

"Want you to shingle the kitchen so's I can—can cook there. Come and I'll show you." He opened a door in the studio which led into a damp room where the rain had fallen unmolested. "Want you to shingle this room." [Pg 174]

"Nothing doing," said the carpenter.

"You won't say that when I show you what I've got here." Gayne's speech was thick and he took Blake's arm and led him across to a large covered stone crock sitting on a bench. "Home brew, Matt. Home brew. We can have many a cozy evening here when this gets into shape."

"Going to keep a horse?" asked the carpenter, lifting up what appeared to be a nosebag.

"No, no, that's strainer. You leave it to me, Matt. I'll give you something'll make your hair curl. All

you got to do is shingle—"

"You ain't going to pay for having somebody else's property shingled?"

"'Tain't going to be somebody else's. Going to be mine. I'm going to buy the farm. There's a fortune on it." The speaker's legs were planted far apart to preserve his equilibrium, but even at that he swayed so far toward his visitor that Blake put up his hand to hold him off.

"Which have you found, gold or oil?" he asked, laughing.

[Pg 175]

His host assumed an impressive dignity. "Not gold, not oil. Spring."

"A spring? Of course you have. They're all over the lots. You'd better patronize 'em, too. You certainly need to put more water in it."

"I'm goin' tell you secret, Blake," said Gayne.

"Better not," said the carpenter good-naturedly.

"Goin' tell you. I've found mineral spring here."

"That so?" was the unperturbed reply.

"Great and won-wonderful water. Don't tell anybody."

"All right."

"Had chemist 'zamine it. Says it's got everything in it to cure you. Fortune in it. Fortune. You don't b'lieve me."

"Sounds a little fishy," remarked Blake.

"Lemme take your arm—I'll lead you to it."

The visitor supplied the arm and Gayne's heavy weight hung upon it. They went out of doors and Gayne stopped and looked around cautiously. "Where's that brat?" he demanded.

"Do you mean the boy? He's over there by the cove. Asleep, I think."

[Pg 176]

"Then come on. Can't trust him 'cause they're the kind that speak the truth. Fools, you know. Can trust you, Blake. Trust you anywhere."

"Thank you," returned the visitor dryly.

At some distance from the house, in a hollow overhung with rocks, the heavy weight on Matt's arm became heavier and Gayne pushed away some turf and stones with his foot, disclosing a puddle of dark-colored water. He stooped and, picking up a rusty tin cup, half-filled it, and presented it to his companion whose arm he released.

"There, if you don't b'lieve me!" he said triumphantly.

The carpenter accepted the cup doubtfully and smelled of it. "Phew!" he exclaimed with a grimace.

"'Course," said the other. "Sulphur. Won'ful sulphur spring. Cure you of ever'thing. Had it an'lyzed. Drink it."

Blake took a cautious sip.

"Tell you, Matt," said Gayne, speaking slowly and nodding with tipsy solemnity, "'twas m' guardian angel guided me to that spring."

The carpenter glanced at him with disfavor. "One sniff's enough to convince anybody o' that," he remarked. "At that, it's better for you than the stuff you've got in there on the table. Now, look here, Gayne, you're going to be sorry to-morrow you told me about this—"

[Pg 177]

"Wouldn't tell anybody else," vowed Gayne, solemnly, seizing his companion by the arm and pushing back the concealing turf and stones with his foot. "Nobody else on this earth. Fools own the farm put up the price if they knew."

"But what I was going to say is you needn't be sorry," went on Blake. "I'm not going to tell a soul. I don't want to be mixed up in your affairs, but do you think you can understand if I talk to you?"

"Un'stand! Well!" exclaimed Gayne. "I'm a man o' brains I'll have you know."

"Well, if you've got any, use 'em now," said Blake impatiently. "There ain't any money in a mineral spring unless you've got piles o' dough to put it on the market. Don't you know that?"

"I sh'd say so," nodded Gayne, triumphant again. "That's just what I'm goin' to have: piles o' dough. Bushels."

"Where are you goin' to get it?"

[Pg 178]

"Well, I'll tell you, Matt, 'cause you're a good friend and you know how to hold your tongue. That boy out there, that poor numskull is the heir to a big enough fortune to f'nance twenty springs."

"He is?" returned Blake, astonished. "What do you mean?"

"His grandfather is one of the richest men in Boston. Went to see him once. Took my proofs with me. Wouldn't look at 'em. Turned me out. He's sick as the devil. Always travelin' 'round tryin' to get well. I wouldn't—I would not give him one cup o' this water." Gayne gestured impressively as he made the ferocious declaration. "Just come home from Europe now. Saw it in the paper," he added.

"Then he'll leave his money where it won't do you any good," said Blake.

"I'll break the will. I've thought it all out. I'm a man o' brains. Bert'll get the money."

"Perhaps the boy won't want to spend it on springs."

A crafty change came over Gayne's face and he smiled. "He won't have any say. I'm his guardian, ain't I? And he's non compos, ain't he? He'll be put where he belongs, believe me."

[Pg 179]

"You'll shut him up, do you mean?" asked Blake, frowning.

"F'r his own good. You understand?"

"Your guardian angel suggested that to you, too, probably."

"Prob'bly did, Matt," was the pious reply. "If all his kind was shut up there'd be less crime in the papers. I put it off and put it off, but I ought to do it and do it soon."

The carpenter regarded the speaker in silence for some moments. Gayne's eyes were closing and opening sleepily.

"Now, see here, man. You go in the house and sleep this off. I'll take the boy down-along with me."

"I won't allow it," Gayne shook his head. "Women at the house pamperin' him. I won't have it. He'll stay where I am till I get him settled for life."

"I'm goin' to take the boy along with me," repeated Blake, speaking louder. "You're in no state for him to see you. Where'd you get your stuff, anyway?"

"Chemist p'esc'ription," said Gayne, as his companion drew him along at as swift a pace as possible.

"Well, next time, drink out o' your own mud puddle. I think it comes from the lower regions, anyway. You might as well be getting used to it."

[Pg 180]

Gayne laughed, but rather feebly. He was beginning to wonder just what he had said to his friend.

Matt got him into the house and into the lop-sided armchair where he had found him, and he fell asleep at once. Then the carpenter took the partly filled glass from the table and held it up to the light.

"I'd like it," he mused, "but, by thunder, that loafer's worse 'n a temperance lecture." And he threw the whiskey out of an open window.

The bottle he placed behind the screen; then, with one last disgusted look at his host, whose head was hanging sideways with the mouth open, he left the house.

CHAPTER XI THE NEWPORT LETTER

[Pg 181]

Blake went back through the grove of firs to the cove bank and there he saw the boy again. He had sunk down on his back and, as Blake approached, appeared to be asleep. The man stooped over him.

"Hello, kid," he said.

As the boy did not move, Matt shook him gently by the shoulder. Bert jumped up with a start.

"I didn't—didn't hear you," he said. Then, looking up and seeing that it was a stranger, he got to his feet.

"Does—does Uncle Nick want me?" he asked.

Blake shook his head. "No, he's busy. You better go down the road with me."

"He told me—told me to wait for him," said the boy.

"Well, he doesn't want you now. He wants you to go along with me. I've just left him."

Upon this the boy followed obediently, and they walked together over the field to the road. Blake occasionally looked at the unsmiling young face as he cogitated on Gayne's plans for the lad.

[Pg 182]

"Like it pretty well here?" he asked.

"No—yes—I don't know," was the answer.

The delicacy and refinement of the boy's face, and the utter hopelessness of it, stirred his companion, as he considered the one he had left in the tattered armchair. They walked on in silence until they had nearly reached the little island cemetery. Then the boy's long lashes lifted. He seemed to be gazing at the shafts and headstones.

"Uncle Nick says the—the ghosts don't have far to walk," he remarked.

The carpenter put his hand on Bert's shoulder. "Stuff and nonsense," he said. "You're too big a boy to believe that foolishness."

The dark eyes regarded him. "That's what Mrs. Lowell says. She says God takes care of us."

The carpenter nodded. "That's right," he returned emphatically. "I hope He's got His eye on you right now and will see you through. You tie to Mrs. Lowell and you believe what she says."

"Uncle Nick doesn't want me to. He says I'm—I'm better off alone."

[Pg 183]

"You're the best judge of that, I should say," remarked Matt bluntly. "We're all entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I hope you'll get 'em, kid. Stand up for yourself. Do you like Mrs. Lowell?"

"I—I don't know.—It isn't any use for me to—to like her. Uncle Nick doesn't." They began to pass hedges of wild roses. "She likes—likes flowers," added the boy.

"Take her some, that's right, take her some," said Blake, stopping and going to the side of the road.

"You won't tell Uncle Nick?" said Bert anxiously.

"No, blast him, I won't tell him. Here, I've got a knife. They know how to defend themselves all right, don't they?"

Bert gathered some of the flowers, amazingly large and deep of color they were, and Matt cut more, and a charming bunch was in the boy's hand at last. Blake noted that the sight of it brought color into the pale face.

"This must be another secret," said Bert. "Mrs. Lowell and I have some already."

They plodded on again.

"That's right," said Blake. "Hold 'em tight. That Mrs. Lowell and Miss Wilbur are friends worth having, I'm thinking." The man frowned at his own thoughts. The creed of the island had, as its first article: Mind your own business. Matt wished he could go to Mrs. Lowell and pour out to her all he had learned this afternoon, but had his pledged word not prevented, his own habit and training would have made it difficult.

[Pg 184]

When they reached the field which divided the road from the Inn, Blake parted from the boy, who started off for home with his prize. He stumbled over the knolls while looking at the blossoms, and inhaling their delicious fragrance.

When he had nearly reached the house, he met the quartette of croquet players, the girls escorting the men to the road.

Veronica and Barney Kelly came first and Diana and Philip followed.

"Oh, how lovely, Bertie!" exclaimed Veronica, stopping and stooping the five sun-kisses to smell deep of the roses.

"They are not—they are not for you," said the boy hastily.

"You've no taste, then," said Kelly, while Veronica laughed. "Have you a better girl than this one?"

Bertie pushed on in nervous haste, and Diana's smile did not detain him.

[Pg 185]

"Not for you either, apparently," remarked Philip.

"No," said Veronica. "I'm *good*, Miss Wilbur is *better*, but his *best* girl is at home on the porch."

There the boy found her, and luckily alone. He advanced holding out his gift without a word. She colored with pleasure as she accepted it, holding it in one hand and caressing it with the other as from time to time she took the sweet breath of the roses.

"Thank you so much, Bertie!" she exclaimed. "It must have taken you a long time to gather so many."

"No—he had a knife."

"Who, your uncle?"

"No—Mr. Blake. Uncle Nick mustn't know. You won't tell him?"

"No, dear child, I won't tell him." She looked in the boy's face for a reflection of her own pleasure, but there was none. He remained standing.

"Sit down, Bertie, you have had a long walk."

He did so with some reluctance. "This is the last—last time I'll sit with you," he said.

"Are you going away?" she asked, much concerned.

[Pg 186]

"No, but—but Uncle Nick doesn't—doesn't want me to speak to you—and you make me sad."

"How do I make you sad, Bertie?"

"Talking about—about things," he said vaguely. "If I don't think and don't talk, then—then it's better. Uncle Nick says so and—and I—it is so."

"Very well, Bertie," returned Mrs. Lowell quietly. "All I want is what is best for you."

He looked at her sweet face with the affection in the eyes. She was wearing a white dress and the blossoms were a roseate glow against it. He struggled against all that he blindly felt she represented: all he had lost, all that would have kept the present and the future from being blank. His face suffused with color, his eyes with tears.

"I can't bear it!" he said suddenly, with more force than she had supposed was in him, and rising with an energy of movement that sent his chair over with a crash, he fled into the house.

Mrs. Lowell bent her head over the flowers for minutes, and, when she raised it, there was dew upon them. She looked off a moment in thought, then rose, went into the house and upstairs to the Gayne room. The door was ajar. She could hear the boy sobbing. Entering, she saw him stretched on his cot, and she approached, drawing a chair beside it.

[Pg 187]

Seating herself, she put a hand on his tightly doubled arm and looked at the averted, dark head, its face buried in the pillow.

She spoke to him quietly: "Bertie, I am going to do just as you plan and not ask you to go about with me any more, but I want you to remember all the time that I love you and am thinking of you, and knowing that better times are coming for you. No human being can have as much power over us as God has. He isn't going to forget His own children whom He has created. So the more you think about Him, knowing that He is all-powerful and all-loving, the sooner you will feel His help coming to you. We don't know just how or when, but be sure it will come if you won't listen to discouragement. Discouragement is like a cloud that hides the sun, and God is the sun of the whole universe. You are trying to hide away from Him when you weep and let thoughts of grief and despair come in."

Her voice carried through the nervous, dry sobs, and they lessened as she talked. When she finished, the dark head lay still on the pillow. She patted the thin arm.

[Pg 188]

"Now I will leave you, Bertie," she went on. "Try to think about the Shepherd. 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.' Say that over and over to yourself, and know that it is true. Some day all these things that seem barriers to everything that you feel makes life worth living, will melt away. Think about it, and be hopeful, dear child. Remember I am in the house when you want me, and remember that I love to help you. Good-bye, dear."

She stooped over the averted face and kissed the boy's temple. Then she passed out and down the stairs.

The answer to Diana's telegram came from her mother, and read as follows:

Your father away on the yacht. Be cautious socially. No Loring relatives or friends in this country. Letter follows.

The letter did follow with great promptness. It was the old story of the worried hen who had hatched a duck.

My dear child:

[Pg 189]

You say you are feeling very well again, sleeping soundly and eating with good appetite. Then do come home at once. I have submitted to your wild-goose chase because the doctor approved, and it was evidently working well, but I haven't really had an easy minute since you left. When you said that even taking a maid with you would make you nervous, and I allowed you to go off to a strange island quite alone, I put a great constraint upon myself. Your wire shows me that you are encountering some of the circumstances which I feared, and which will lead to future embarrassment. Some people are evidently trying to claim acquaintance or even relationship with our family. I wired you that there were no Loring's connected with us in this country. It was an odd coincidence that just after I sent the message to you, I picked up a newspaper and saw that Herbert Loring had returned from Paris and was staying at the Copley-Plaza. I am quite certain *he* has not emigrated to your island. So my message is true enough. He is a distant cousin of your father's and though not an old man is a very broken one, owing to family troubles. Seeing his name in the paper brought up sad memories and made me thankful for a good, conscientious daughter who will always remember what is due her family, and now, when you are thrown among ordinary people, such as you have

never come in contact with, is a good time to speak of such a tragedy. Mr. Loring's only child was a daughter, a pretty, artistic girl of whom he was inordinately proud and fond. She became infatuated with a man whom her father forbade her even to see. She eloped with him. Oh, the agony she caused that father, who had lost his wife years before. Of course, he did the only thing possible in such a case—forbade her name to be mentioned. He became very ill, and, as soon as he was convalescent, gave up business and went abroad. He has spent all the years since—about fifteen, I think—in traveling about, trying to recover his health and divert his mind. Now the poor, weary man has come back again. I am wondering if he will open his house. He is wealthy, and, if his health is restored, he may do so and take up life again. I am sure your father will wish to communicate with Mr. Loring as soon as he returns from his cruise. Perhaps the lonely man will accept an invitation to visit us.

[Pg 190]

I think it a grave question whether the artistic temperament does not furnish more sorrow than joy to the world. I am proud and thankful that I have a daughter to whom an infatuation would be an impossibility. Come back, Diana, if you feel strong enough. I promise to preserve you from gayety if you wish me to do so. I do not feel at all easy about you. Please write and set a date for coming, explaining also all that lay behind your wire.

Your affectionate
MOTHER

By the time Diana finished reading this letter, her hands were trembling.

She hurried to Mrs. Lowell's room. A rather stifled voice bade her enter. Her friend was stooping over the washstand bathing her eyes. Her face, as she looked up through the splashing, showed an April smile.

[Pg 191]

"I knew it was you," she said. "I recognized the step, and I knew you wouldn't mind discovering that I cry once in a while."

"My dear Mrs. Lowell, I'm sorry for whatever distresses you."

"Oh, it is just that dear talented, wretched boy. I couldn't help weeping a few little weeps; but what happy thing has happened to you, my dear?" she added, catching the excitement in the girl's face. She dried her own finally, and came forward and Diana put the letter into her hands.

They both stood in silence until Mrs. Lowell had finished reading and looked up. Her cheeks were as flushed as Diana's, and they exchanged a radiant gaze and then sat down.

"One always weeps too soon," said Mrs. Lowell at last.

"I was thinking," said Diana, looking off, "that it might be a good plan for me to go to Mr. Loring myself."

"You good girl! Do you know him?"

"Not at all, but any one can go to the Copley-Plaza, and I can tell him I am his cousin."

"You're a precious child. When had you thought of going?"

[Pg 192]

"Immediately," said Diana, with recovered serenity.

"Shall I go to Boston with you?"

"It will not be necessary, I think."

"But your mother would prefer it, I am sure. Yes, I see that I should go," added Mrs. Lowell, casting a glance at the rich stationery in her hand with its heading "Idlewild, Newport, R. I." She could feel the probable disapproval of this move which Mrs. Wilbur would feel.

Nicholas Gayne did not come back to the Inn to supper that afternoon. Bertie came to the table expecting his uncle would be there and not daring to absent himself, but he showed the effect of his unwonted outburst in such extra pallor and lassitude that Veronica was moved to give him her choicest offerings. Mrs. Lowell thought it best for his calm not to take any notice of him, but she and Diana found it difficult to control the excitement that beset their hearts as they looked at him: the drooping bird in the cage of a cruel and neglectful master, the key that would unlock its door almost in their hands.

The next morning they took the early boat from the island, leaving word that they were going to Boston for a few days. Miss Burridge gave them their coffee and toast and bade them God-speed, little reckoning how appropriate was the prayer for them.

[Pg 193]

CHAPTER XII COUSIN HERBERT

[Pg 194]

Arrived at the hotel in Boston, an inquiry for Herbert Loring revealed that he was still there, but

indisposed and not seeing visitors.

In the suite Diana engaged, the two friends discussed ways and means, and it was decided that Diana should write a note to the invalid and make herself known.

My dear Mr. Loring (she wrote),

I might perhaps call you Cousin Herbert, for I believe my father, Charles Wilbur, claims relationship, and, if you grant me permission, I certainly shall do so. I believe you and my father had time to see something of one another before steel swallowed him up and you became absorbed in railroads. My mother is at our cottage in Newport, and is wondering whether you could be induced to visit us when Father returns from a cruise he is taking. I am here in the hotel for a short time, and would like very much to call on you if there is some half-hour when you would feel like seeing a relative, even though you could not grant a similar privilege to an outsider. I shall be so glad if you can allow me to make your acquaintance. It would be a satisfaction to my parents to hear from you by word of mouth. My mother saw by the papers that you were back in this country and she wrote me of it. I have been on one of the islands in Casco Bay where one gets very near to Nature's heart: the best thing that can happen to a tired schoolgirl.

[Pg 195]

Kindly let me hear from you, and I shall be grateful if you will see me. After all, though we are strangers, blood is thicker than water!

Yours cordially
DIANA WILBUR

"This is most extraordinary, upon my word, it is most extraordinary," was Herbert Loring's comment when he had read this communication. His words might have been addressed to thin air or to Marlitt, his man; and Marlitt knew by experience that it was well not to appropriate them until he had received some further hint. So he stood at attention and looked with interest at the view from an opposite window.

His employer was a haggard man, with a white mustache and gray hair. He was immaculately groomed and was seated in a reclining chair, his feet supported on the footrest. He wore a rich dressing-gown of gray silk. One noticed that his left arm was never raised, but with his right hand he now stroked his mustache. There were pouches under the eyes he lifted to his valet.

"Here is a schoolgirl in the hotel who wants to come to see me; says she's my cousin. I'm a nice figure to receive a schoolgirl."

[Pg 196]

Marlitt raised his eyebrows. "You are certainly in shape to receive anybody, sir. But this young lady? May she be an impostor, sir?"

"No. I think not." Marlitt perceived that the note was an agreeable incident. "She says she is the daughter of Wilbur, the Philadelphia steel man. It's odd that they should not have forgotten me."

"Begging your pardon, sir, I think if you were not so determined to deny yourself to friends, you would find that no one who had once known you would have forgotten."

The sick man glanced back at the note in his lap. It escaped him on the slippery silk and he made an involuntary effort with the useless arm to recover it. He frowned, and Marlitt, stooping quickly, picked up the sheet and restored it. The invalid read the letter once again.

"Send word to this young lady that I will see her at three-thirty to-day," he said at last.

With much rejoicing, Diana, when she had received this word, arrayed herself for the call. She wore a thin gray gown with a rose at the girdle, and Mrs. Lowell, regarding her with admiration, thought no one could be better equipped externally to win the fastidious masculine heart.

[Pg 197]

Herbert Loring thought so, too, when at the appointed hour she entered his room, and he received a swift impression of her fine quality.

"Welcome, my little cousin," he said as he met her eyes and the serene and charming smile irradiating her youthful beauty. "I am a useless hulk; can't get out of this chair without help. So you will pardon me."

She put her hand in the one he offered, and Marlitt placed a chair beside him in such fashion that she faced him.

"That makes it the more gracious of you to receive me," she replied.

"I should never have known what I missed, had I refused," he said gallantly. "My friend Wilbur has a very beautiful daughter."

Marlitt disappeared into the next room, and Diana blushed.

"Even in spite of sunburn?" she said.

"I was really touched, Cousin Diana, that your parents should remember me sufficiently for you to take the trouble to come to see me. It is a long time since anything has pleased me so much. I have been such a rover that I am a stranger in my own land."

[Pg 198]

Diana had not expected to feel guilty of false pretences, but this speech accused her even while it

lent her increased courage, since his was a heart that could be touched.

"I hope you will visit us," she said, "after I return to Newport."

"Are you on your way there now?"

"No, not quite yet. It is difficult to tear one's self away from Casco Bay after one once falls under the spell."

Loring nodded. "I know the environment. Very piney and fresh and all that. Cold water though, very cold."

"Yes, but we all take dips in it."

"Youth!" said the sick man, shaking his head. "Youth!"

"If one does not swim, I know it is quite too cold," said Diana. "I am glad you are familiar with that country, for then you can sympathize with my enthusiasm. I long to have a place there of my own and, perhaps with such congruity of taste, you and I together can persuade my parents that it would not be too erratic in me to buy a part of that green hill and be there a little while every year."

The invalid nodded. "I'll say Amen to anything you indicate," he returned readily.

[Pg 199]

How devoutly Diana hoped this promise might be kept!

"I have another reason for being glad to meet a man relative just now," she went on. "There are some people at the Inn where I am staying who present such a strange problem. When injustice is obviously being done, one longs to help."

Her companion nodded. "That is natural, but usually futile," he said. "It is a very good rule to 'keep off the grass.'"

"Yes, but this affair makes me very unhappy, Cousin Herbert."

"A shame," he returned, and he would like to have patted her pretty hand, but she was on his left side. "Too bad there is always some serpent in paradise. Don't be too tender-hearted, my dear. Don't be too tender-hearted. It doesn't pay. Of course, where-ever you go people will try to lay you under tribute. You must learn to wear an armor, a full suit of chain armor under your dainty costumes."

"This is not a question of money," said Diana, her heart beating faster and, for the first time, she quaked at the full realization of her errand. "Would you let me tell you about it, Cousin Herbert?"

[Pg 200]

"Why, of course, my child, if it is any satisfaction to you to confide in such a useless old cripple as I have become."

"You are far from that," returned the girl, steadying the voice which threatened to waver. "Your opinion on the subject will be very valuable to me."

The sick man lifted his heavy eyebrows and smoothed his mustache. "Then proceed, by all means," he said. "One thing I have in tragic abundance is time; and I am flattered."

"There is a man at our Inn," began Diana, her fingers tightly intertwined in her lap, "who has a young boy in his power. The lad is his nephew. He shows every sign of years of neglect. The uncle continually betrays himself, and scarcely tries to hide the fact that he is looking forward to incarcerating the boy in some institution for the deranged."

"Simply to get rid of him?"

"No; there is money back in the family somewhere, and we—I have come to the conviction that this man believes the boy will fall heir to it, and that, if he is safely out of the way, the uncle as guardian will get control of this money."

"What sort of mentality does the boy seem to have?"

[Pg 201]

"He is a sensitive, fine-grained lad with just the sort of nature which persistent brutality will blight and paralyze. He has been so neglected that he has little physical resistance and one can see him being gradually crushed with as little hope of escape as the fly in the spider's web."

"And you take it greatly to heart, eh?" said the invalid, regarding the girl's flushed face and appealing eyes.

"Wouldn't any one?" she asked.

"A confounded nuisance to have such a circumstance mar your vacation."

"Oh, think of the boy's side of it, Cousin Herbert!"

"You want my opinion? I think the law could take a hand there."

"Yes; but the law is so slow!" Diana swallowed. "So near a relative as an uncle, own brother to the boy's father, can put up a hypocritical fight and establish a very strong claim."

Herbert Loring shook his head. "My dear child, in your position, if you begin on this Quixotic

business, there will be no end to it, believe me. You can't right all the wrongs in the world, and you will have the pack in full cry after you if it is known that you have let down the bars. You can state this case to a lawyer, and put it in his hands with the understanding that you will pay the bills, but your identity must be kept secret. Then let them fight it out. You can't do any more than that. A pity I didn't know you were here this morning. My lawyer was with me." The speaker's tired eyes smiled and the corners of his mustache lifted slightly. "I have celebrated my return by destroying my will and the new business was to have been finished this morning, but I was uncertain about some matters that the lawyer is looking up to-day. He will come to-morrow morning to draw up the new will, and before he goes I will send for you and you shall tell him about your boy and his ogre of an uncle."

[Pg 202]

Diana's heart was beating fast now. She summoned all her courage. "What is so exciting to me, Cousin Herbert," she began,—and he wondered to hear the wavering in her voice,—“is that lately I have learned that this lad is related to some one rich and powerful who could rescue him at once."

A puzzled frown came in Loring's forehead.

"Any one I know?" he asked.

[Pg 203]

"Surely, or I should not trouble you at a time when you are not feeling strong. Cousin Herbert, this neglected boy belongs to you. He is your grandson." Diana unconsciously stretched her clasped hands toward him.

A strange white change came over her listener's face and the expression that awoke in the eyes that met hers was terrible to her.

"This is the explanation of your desire to make my acquaintance," he said in a changed voice.

She was so frightened that she seemed to hear her own heartbeats. "The boy's name is Gayne. Herbert Loring Gayne," she went on, desperately.

"Miss Wilbur, you have ventured in where angels would fear to tread," said the sick man sternly, "but you awake no memory. That room where you intrude is bare and empty. You—"

"He is talented," pleaded Diana. "Very talented as an artist. Any family might be proud to own him and bring him out of a cellar into the sunshine. Think of the interest in life it would give you. Think it over, Cousin Herbert. Just be willing to see him once—"

While she was talking, her companion touched the bell on the table beside him and the words died on her lips as the valet came into the room.

[Pg 204]

"I am tired, Marlitt," said the invalid huskily. "Miss Wilbur is ready to go." His head fell back against a down pillow. "Pardon my not attending you to the door," he added, ignoring the girl's wet-eyed confusion. She gathered herself together and rose.

"Thank you for allowing me to come in," she said, inclining her head; then she turned toward the door which Marlitt held open.

She continued to hold her head high until she reached her own apartment, where Mrs. Lowell was waiting. The latter started to her feet as she viewed her friend's entrance and noted her excited color and trembling lips.

Diana succeeded in uttering one word, "Hopeless," then she succumbed into Mrs. Lowell's arms and fell into wild weeping on her shoulder.

Led to a couch, she lay upon it and continued weeping while Mrs. Lowell sat beside her and held her hand comfortingly.

"We did right to come, however," she said, when, after a time, the girl was quiet, "and you fulfilled your duty bravely in going to him. You cannot tell what fruit your visit may bring forth. Don't try to tell me about it now. He has suffered a terrible wound to his pride and heart, and even after many years it could smart when touched. We mustn't be discouraged. Our mission is a righteous one and so God is on our side, and if we don't accomplish the child's deliverance in this way, we shall in some other way. I am going to read to you one of the most inspired and inspiring poems ever written," and, taking up her Bible, Mrs. Lowell turned its pages and read aloud the ninety-first psalm.

[Pg 205]

At seven o'clock they had dinner served in their room, and Diana recounted her experience with the invalid before they retired for the night. Mrs. Lowell again talked to her calmly and comfortingly and the girl's mortified pride and disappointed heart finally quieted and she slept.

The next morning the two friends discussed plans over the breakfast which was served in their room. When later the waiter arrived to carry away the tray, he was so full of news that he was obliged to speak.

"Big excitement in the house," he said. "Gentleman dead in his bed. Big man, too. Used to be president of big railroad. Wouldn't wonder if the papers had extrys out in a few minutes."

[Pg 206]

Diana caught Mrs. Lowell's hand and the latter spoke to the man: "What name?"

"Why it's Herbert Loring. I guess that'll make some stir."

It certainly made some stir in Diana's heart. It was throbbing. When the waiter had left the room, she lifted horrified eyes to her friend.

"Do you think I killed him?" she murmured.

"No, no, dear child."

"I noticed he was paralyzed on one side," said the girl, "but the valet will tell them that I excited him so that he dismissed me. Shall I pay our bill and we go away at once?"

"Just as you like, dear."

"I couldn't do that," said Diana suddenly. "I cannot be a coward."

"Then let us stay right here," said Mrs. Lowell quietly. "You may be questioned, and it will be better to be found easily. I suppose there will have to be an inquest or some such formality."

"Oh, it is dreadful!" exclaimed the girl. "If my mother knew this, she would never allow me to escape from under her wing again. She has a horror of anything even unconventional."

[Pg 207]

"Just be calm and strong in the right, Diana, and if any one comes to question you, try not to lose your self-control. I know you have a great deal. I shall stay beside you."

"Yes, I beg of you not to leave me. Poor Mr. Loring. Poor Cousin Herbert. How much sorrow he must have had. So proud a man to become helpless."

Only five minutes later two cards were presented at the door. One was that of a doctor, the other of a lawyer. Mrs. Lowell sent word that the men were to be admitted.

Diana had on the peach-colored negligee and, when the two callers were ushered into the living-room of her suite, they found a pale, large-eyed girl standing with their cards in her hand.

CHAPTER XIII THE LAW

[Pg 208]

One of the cards which Diana held read Ernst Veldt, M.D., the other was that of Luther Wrenn, Attorney at Law.

"Be seated, gentlemen," said Diana. "I know the urgency of your errand and, therefore, I would not detain you while I dressed. This is my friend, Mrs. Lowell. We were just finishing breakfast when the shocking news was brought to us. Mrs. Lowell, Dr. Veldt and Mr. Wrenn."

The portentous expression in the face of the two visitors did not lighten as they bowed and took possession of the chairs Diana indicated. Thrills of dread were coursing down her spine and her knees were weak enough to cause her to be glad to take her own seat. She felt a horrible uncertainty as to her own responsibility in the tragedy.

The physician, as the most aggrieved party, spoke first: "Mr. Loring was my patient," he said, speaking with some accent. "From what his valet tells us you should be able to throw some light on what has occurred." The speaker's frown darkened as he spoke. This wretched girl had robbed him, no one could tell of how much. "Mr. Loring did not know you, had never seen you—"

[Pg 209]

"Let me question the young lady," interrupted the lawyer. If this girl in the rich garments and the luxurious suite were an adventuress planning to get money from the sick man, she had staged herself well. She was beautiful and her eyes now were large with horror, perhaps with guilt.

"How did you manage to get into Mr. Loring's apartment?"

"I wrote him a note requesting him to see me," faltered Diana. "He is—he is a sort of relation of mine."

"It would be a little difficult to tell just what relation, I dare say," put in the doctor, nodding. "Odd that you couldn't let a sick man get a bit acclimated on his return before you forced yourself, an utter stranger, into his rooms—"

"Wait a bit, Dr. Veldt," said the lawyer, interrupting again. "Let us have your full name, please," he added, turning to the culprit.

"Diana Wilbur," said the girl. "Did you not find the note I wrote Mr. Loring?"

"No. The valet followed his master's orders and destroyed the note as soon as you were gone. Marlitt is completely unstrung. He couldn't remember anything about your communication except that Mr. Loring told him that he was about to have a visit from a schoolgirl. Marlitt said that you finally left the room in tears and that his master collapsed."

[Pg 210]

"And it looks like manslaughter, that's what it looks like, manslaughter," said the doctor angrily.

Diana's very lips grew pale. "Oh, gentlemen," she said, and her quiet voice trembled, "please be very careful what you say. Supposing anything about me should get into the papers."

"Yes, Dr. Veldt," said the lawyer quickly, "we should be careful in our accusations. Remember that Mr. Loring had sustained two strokes before his return. His interview with me yesterday morning was a draught upon him."

Diana turned toward the lawyer and clasped her hands. "Oh, yes," she said. "He told me he had destroyed his will—"

"Aha," said the doctor, nodding his big gray head again, "we begin to see light. His will. That is what you were interested in, eh? A sort of relation, eh?"

"Gentlemen," said Mrs. Lowell suddenly taking part in the interview, "I think it might help you in your judgments to know that Miss Wilbur is the only child of Charles Wilbur, the steel man of Philadelphia." [Pg 211]

Her announcement had a dramatic effect. The doctor's mouth opened mutely as he stared. The lawyer's brow cleared and he looked curiously at Diana and bowed.

"You see," said the girl unsteadily, "it would be dreadful if anything about me in connection with this shocking occurrence should get into the papers, for I meant no harm. Mr. Loring was a distant connection of my father's and I went to him in behalf of some one else—" she hesitated.

"Can you tell why your visit should have so excited him?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes. It was because I spoke of his daughter."

"Will you repeat to us just what you said to him?"

"I will tell *you*. It is a matter for a lawyer."

"Miss Wilbur," said Dr. Veldt, rising and speaking in a voice which he strove not to make too unlike his previous manner, "we cannot tell, until the post mortem takes place, just what caused this death, but I hope the result of the investigation may be enlightenment that will set your mind at rest. Since you wish to speak with Mr. Wrenn, I will leave you and hope that he will be able to assist you in your problem, whatever it may be. Good-morning." And with what grace he could muster, the physician left the room. [Pg 212]

Diana sank back in her chair and Mrs. Lowell saw her exhaustion.

"Shall I tell our story to Mr. Wrenn?" she asked.

The girl nodded.

"Miss Wilbur has generously thrown herself into the thick of a problem which has been absorbing me in the last weeks," she began, and then she proceeded to tell the details of their experience.

The lawyer listened with close attention. "So, on the impulse of the moment, we came to Boston, arriving yesterday morning, and Miss Wilbur's request to see Mr. Loring was met by an appointment by him for three-thirty, which she kept."

"He was very gracious to me," said Diana, "and I was very hopeful at first." She stopped to control the quivering of her lips.

"How did you proceed?" asked the lawyer kindly.

"I told him the boy's story, and he advised me to keep out of that sort of entanglement in another's affairs. I was frightened then, but I continued because, of course, I could not relinquish the matter there, and finally, I told him that the boy was his grandson." Diana's voice stopped again, and she shook her head. [Pg 213]

"He became excited, heated?" asked the lawyer encouragingly.

"No; cold, stern. He—he repulsed me and utterly repudiated the whole matter. He said there was not even the—the echo of a memory left." Diana lifted her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Poor little Helen. I knew her well," said the lawyer thoughtfully.

"You did know Bertie's mother?" said Mrs. Lowell with interest. "Then you will be able to judge of the sketch a lonely little boy made of her."

"We had put this matter into the hands of Mrs. Lowell's husband, who is a lawyer in New York," said Diana. "We expected to have a long search for Bertie's grandfather, but, as Mrs. Lowell has told you, my mother, all unconsciously gave us the information we needed, and then—Oh, Mr. Wrenn, how could I do otherwise, and yet it is—so dreadful to think—" Again Diana covered her eyes. [Pg 214]

"Don't think it, Miss Wilbur," said the lawyer decidedly. "You did what was womanly and brave. Had you come to me, instead of going directly to Mr. Loring, it might possibly have been better, but how can we know? My client and old friend was immovably set against the daughter who defied him, and if the intense feeling which your plea roused in him was a boomerang that laid him low, that is not your fault, and couldn't possibly have been foreseen. Now, dismiss that fear from your thoughts. A condition has arisen which perhaps has not occurred to either of you ladies. From what you tell me, it looks as if the boy who has interested you may really be Herbert Loring's grandson. That will have to be proved, and doubtless the avaricious uncle has the proofs

if they exist. That once accomplished, this lad will be sole heir to a considerable fortune, for there is no will."

Mrs. Lowell and Diana exchanged a look.

"Mr. Wrenn," said Mrs. Lowell quickly, "Mr. Gayne is capable of any brutality. He will see Mr. Loring's death in the papers—"

"But he does not know that there is no will," the lawyer reminded her, "and he will probably come to me with proofs that the boy should inherit. That would naturally be his next step. Do you think the boy's mentality has been hopelessly impaired?" [Pg 215]

"I do not," said Mrs. Lowell, and her face grew radiant. "When once the slave is freed, God will take care of Bertie's mentality."

The lawyer bent his heavy brows upon her gravely. "Young Herbert has a good friend in you," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Wrenn," exclaimed Diana fervently, "if you can get Mrs. Lowell to supervise his life for the next five years, you will do the best thing that could be done for him in all the world."

The lawyer nodded, still with thoughtful eyes on Mrs. Lowell's speaking face. She was thanking God as she sat there that the crushing burden was being lifted from one of His little ones.

"Mr. Loring's funeral will be a rather sad and perfunctory ceremony," said Mr. Wrenn. "For several years he has absented himself from this country most of the time. He is not rich in even poor relations. I remember a few names which were mentioned in the will which was destroyed yesterday, and I am sure he would wish me to respect his wishes and give moderate sums to those beneficiaries, for he stated that he should not change that clause. I wonder if you ladies might be willing to stay over for the funeral. I am certain that Mr. Gayne will attend it and see me afterward." [Pg 216]

A compassion that swept through Diana at remembrance of the tired eyes and the helpless figure in its rich wrappings caused her to give her consent to remain for the funeral.

She wired her mother that, being in Boston for a few days, she should attend that ceremony, and was disconcerted to receive a return message stating that her mother would also attend, her father not having returned from his cruise. She showed this to Mrs. Lowell, and the latter was privately amused at the consternation betrayed by the girl at the prospect of welcoming a parent.

"Of course, it won't be necessary to trouble her with any details," said Mrs. Lowell, and Diana pressed her hand in token that she appreciated the comfort of her perception.

The first thought Mrs. Lowell had, upon seeing Mrs. Wilbur, was: "What a handsome man Diana's father must be," for the girl did not get her beauty from this plump little lady with the short nose, wide mouth, and small eyes. Even Mrs. Wilbur's grand air, erect carriage, and perfect dress could not make her a stately figure, although it was her habit to consider herself one, and her plump little jeweled hand wielded a lorgnette in a manner which entitled her to a Roman nose and impressive height. Her maid, Léonie, was with her, and looked after her mistress with what seemed to Mrs. Lowell an amazing knowledge of her needs and wishes. [Pg 217]

"Look at your hands!" was Mrs. Wilbur's greeting of her daughter. "I know you have not worn gloves."

Diana bent down to her in all meekness. "Not continuously, Mamma," she said. "They will very soon blanch again."

"You're coming right home with me after this sad, sad affair, of course," continued Mrs. Wilbur. "How strange that you happened to be in Boston, and fortunate, too. Your father would have liked us to show this attention." By this time they were in Mrs. Wilbur's suite in the hotel, and she turned to Mrs. Lowell. "I am grateful to you for taking care of this child of mine," she said. "I don't like to tell her how well she looks, for it encourages her in such a prank as this island summer." [Pg 218]

"It has proved a good plan for her, I'm sure," responded Mrs. Lowell.

"But enough is enough," said Mrs. Wilbur. "She is rested now and our friends are always asking for her. No more island."

"Dear Mamma, do not be so determined, for Mrs. Lowell and I just came here for a few days and I shall have to return and gather my belongings together at least."

"Very well, then I will go with you and look at it myself."

Mrs. Lowell could with difficulty repress a smile at the way Diana's eyes enlarged with apprehension.

"You would not like it, dear, you would not like it," she said earnestly.

"Then why do you?" responded her mother defiantly.

"Because I like roughing it. I like camping."

"Well," sighed Mrs. Wilbur, "I am so near, I may as well look at it."

"What would you do in a house without a bathroom?" asked Diana.

The blank, incredulous look with which Mrs. Wilbur met her daughter's question made Mrs. Lowell expect her parted lips to utter: "There ain't no such animal." But the lady merely said, reproachfully: "How can you like it there, Diana?" [Pg 219]

"My ancestors had no bathtubs," replied the girl. "Then, besides, we have the ocean."

"Well," sighed Mrs. Wilbur, "the funeral comes first. I suppose Mr. Loring was confined to his room so you couldn't happen to see him about the hotel."

Diana cast a glance at Mrs. Lowell before she replied: "I did see him, though, Mamma." The girl felt very certain that the episode could never be finished without this fact transpiring.

"You did?" Mrs. Wilbur sat up with great interest. "That explains why you have seemed to me a little sad ever since I came. You saw the poor man. How did it happen?"

"I wrote him a note and asked him if I could call. I reminded him that we were related—" She hesitated.

"Why, Diana Wilbur, I never heard of anything so extraordinary! You dear lamb, how pleased your father will be! Mrs. Lowell," she turned to that lady, "do you wonder I'm proud of this child? Do you believe that one young girl in a thousand would take the trouble to pay such an attention to an elderly relative whom she had never seen?" [Pg 220]

Mrs. Lowell was saved from the embarrassment of replying, for Diana spoke hurriedly:

"It isn't what you think, Mamma. I went to him on an errand—some one else's errand."

Mrs. Wilbur put up her lorgnette the better to view her daughter's crimsoning cheeks and quivering lips.

"Tell me what it was, at once," she commanded. "Who dared to make use of you in such a way?"

"No one," protested the girl. "It was my own idea, but please don't ask me to tell you of it now. I have had such a shock—I am really not able to talk about it yet."

"Very well, then, I will wait." Mrs. Wilbur's dilated nostrils expressed her displeasure. "But this proves that you are, just as I have felt, too young to be wandering about on your own. I should not have allowed you to leave me." As she finished, the mother swept Mrs. Lowell with a condemning glance in which she withdrew all her previous approval of that lady.

Mrs. Lowell understood it, but she spoke pleasantly: "When the right time comes for you to learn what brought us to Boston, you will find that your daughter deserves only approval," she said in her quiet, cheerful manner. [Pg 221]

Mrs. Wilbur's nostrils still dilated and she used her fan in a majestic silence.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WILL

[Pg 222]

Herbert Loring's funeral was conducted in the church to which he had been a contributor for many years. Distant connections of the family, old business friends, and curiosity-seekers made a gathering of average size, and among those seated, toward the back of the audience, was Nicholas Gayne.

The astute lawyer's expectation of a visit from him was not disappointed. Indeed, Luther Wrenn came to his office at an earlier hour than usual the following morning, entirely in honor of that gentleman.

On the drive to the cemetery the day of the funeral, Mr. Wrenn had placed Diana, her mother, and Mrs. Lowell in the motor with himself. There was little said on the way out. The lawyer was well known by reputation to Mrs. Wilbur, and the only drawback to her satisfaction in the arrangement was Diana's preoccupation and the knowledge that interesting information was being kept back from her. Mrs. Wilbur had not only sent lavish gifts of flowers to the church, but, there seeming to be no one but paid workers to attend to the decorations, she had personally supervised them, and, coming back from the cemetery, the lawyer expressed his appreciation of her kindness and her presence in a manner to apply much balm. However, he turned directly from his respectful laudation of Mrs. Wilbur to her daughter. [Pg 223]

"How long can you and Mrs. Lowell stay on?" he asked, and the mother became alert. His manner signified previous acquaintance with Diana.

"Just as long as is necessary," was the girl's surprising reply.

"I am certain that Gayne will call on me the first thing to-morrow morning, and I should like you to remain near the telephone if you will."

"Certainly," replied Diana.

"Mr. Wrenn, I don't understand what you are asking of my daughter," said Mrs. Wilbur crisply.

"Ah,"—the lawyer bowed gravely. "Perhaps you have not been told of the surprising turn events have taken. It is a matter which requires secrecy until identities are established and evil-doers circumvented. Let me congratulate you, Mrs. Wilbur, on a remarkably fine and intelligent daughter. She is a credit to your bringing-up. Not many mothers can boast of having instilled such prudence."

[Pg 224]

The lady leaned back in her corner, not certain whether to accept this disarming, or to insist immediately upon her rights. She decided to compromise and wait until they reached the hotel.

"My daughter tells you she can wait in Boston as long as is necessary," she said at last, "and her mother will have to understand the necessity."

"Certainly, Mrs. Wilbur," responded the lawyer. "We have found ourselves in a totally unexpected situation. Mr. Herbert Loring destroyed his will and died before he could make another."

Mrs. Wilbur exclaimed. Mr. Loring was known to be wealthy and she was interested in fortunes. Her brain began working actively on the probabilities of the heirs.

"The next strange event is that your young daughter has probably found the heir."

Mrs. Wilbur raised her lorgnette and regarded Diana, drooping opposite, as if she were a new discovery.

"I wish to understand," she said with dignity.

"It seems that Mr. Loring's disobedient daughter left a son whose existence has been unsuspected unless Mr. Loring himself knew of it, which he never betrayed. Your daughter and Mrs. Lowell have found the boy."

[Pg 225]

"Not I," protested Diana. "Mrs. Lowell, in her sweet unselfishness, deserves all the credit. I should have paid no attention to him, but I—it was through your letter, Mamma, that I found the boy's grandfather."

"We all had a hand in it, then, it seems," said Mrs. Wilbur.

"The boy's uncle has possession of him. His father and mother are both dead, and, according to these ladies, the uncle can qualify as the world's meanest man. So we proceed carefully until the proofs which he is supposed to have are in hand. You, Mrs. Wilbur, will aid us in silence on the subject until the right time for speaking."

"How old is he, Diana?" burst forth the lady. "What does he look like? Is he clever and worthy of such a heritage?"

"He is a poor, shabby, ill-treated boy about fourteen years old. He has never had a chance, but I scarcely know him. Mrs. Lowell is the one who discovered him and cared for him."

Mrs. Wilbur glanced at Mrs. Lowell, but she could not bring herself to ask her a question. She felt a vague jealousy and sense of injury at finding this stranger in her child's confidence and aiding and abetting her in so much independence of action.

[Pg 226]

As soon as possible after the reception of Mrs. Wilbur's enlightening letter at the island, Mrs. Lowell had wired her husband that the search was ended before it had begun, and he returned Diana's check with congratulations.

"What an amazed boy that will be, Mr. Wrenn," remarked Mrs. Wilbur. "What is his name?"

"Herbert Loring Gayne."

"H'm. I suppose his mother had all sorts of hope that with a son of that name she could placate her father."

"Doubtless she did," replied the lawyer, "and I wish it might have proved so. Perhaps they would both have been alive to-day had she succeeded, but my old friend Loring never mentioned her to me and I don't know what efforts she made. There must be a good deal of delay before the young heir can come into his own."

"I suppose so," sighed Mrs. Wilbur. "That tiresome law moves slowly."

Diana looked up with sudden attention. "But we must not be dilatory in rescuing the boy."

[Pg 227]

Mr. Wrenn nodded. "If he is proved to be the right one."

"There can be no doubt of it," said Mrs. Lowell.

"Not to charming, sympathetic ladies, of course," returned the lawyer with a smile.

"I feel that every day counts," said Mrs. Lowell. "He must be removed from that mental malaria as soon as possible."

"I will—" began Diana, and then she glanced at her mother,— "I mean Mamma will gladly finance him, I'm sure, for the present."

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Wilbur with dignity, "when you see fit to tell me the whole story. I'm sure I haven't it yet."

"There is no reason to burden you, Mamma, with disagreeable considerations," said Diana meekly. "I can myself look after the boy's needs."

"Yes, she can," said Mrs. Wilbur in an offended tone. "What do you think, Mr. Wrenn, of a father who insists on giving a young girl an unlimited check-book, not requiring her to give any account of what she does with money?"

The lawyer smiled at the embarrassed culprit. "I think that your husband has proved himself a very good reader of character all through his career." [Pg 228]

Mrs. Wilbur bounced back into her corner. She didn't intend to bounce; she intended to lean back gracefully, with an air of renouncing all interest in this matter which had proceeded so far without her coöperation, but just at that moment the car went over a "thank-you-ma'am."

As has already been said, Luther Wrenn, the following morning, sought his office at an earlier hour than was customary, and Nicholas Gayne was there before him.

He did not keep him waiting long, and the stocky figure and dark face soon appeared in the private office.

The lawyer regarded the stranger over his eye-glasses.

"I didn't have any card," said the visitor. "My name is Gayne, Nicholas Gayne."

"Be seated, sir. What is your errand?"

"I would like to be present at the reading of the Herbert Loring will." The speaker's manner was confident, and he seemed endeavoring to repress excitement.

"Indeed? Are you a relative?"

"No, but my nephew is. I have a great surprise for you, Mr. Wrenn. My nephew is Herbert Loring's grandson and namesake." Nicholas Gayne marveled at the self-control of a lawyer, for Luther Wrenn's expression did not change. "I visited Mr. Loring before he went abroad the last time, but he would not listen to me or look at my proofs. So I suppose he has not mentioned his grandson in his will, and, if that is the fact, I wish to retain you to break the will." This declaration was made with great energy and a flash of the speaker's dark eyes. [Pg 229]

"You have proofs, then," said Mr. Wrenn, after a short hesitation, perhaps to make sure of the retention of that self-control.

"Yes, right here." Gayne caught up from the floor a small black leather bag, and opened it. "Here are the letters Bert's mother wrote her father to try for a reconciliation. Returned unopened, you see. Here is her picture. Perhaps you knew her."

Luther Wrenn took the small card photograph and gazed at it long.

"My brother was an irresponsible sort of chap. At the time he met Miss Loring, he had put through a good deal and was riding on top of the wave. She was artistic in her tastes, and he met her through the artist set at Gloucester, where she was that summer, and she took a fancy to him that her father couldn't break off. Unfortunate, you'll say, but Lambert was a stunning-looking chap and she decided firmly on her course. So now here is this boy and the law should protect his rights. Here's the record of his birth fourteen years ago, in her own writing; perhaps you know her writing." Gayne was talking fast and excitedly, and Wrenn took from his hand one after another of the proofs he offered and laid them on his desk with no change of countenance. [Pg 230]

"What sort of a boy is your nephew?" he asked. "A bright boy?"

Gayne's face changed. He looked away. "Well, no. I can't say he is. Bert is delicate. He needs all sorts of care, care that takes heaps of money to pay for. I haven't been able to do for him what I'd like to. As soon as you get his money for him, I shall engage professional care and see that he has the best. I'm a good business man, if I do say it, and I'll see that his funds multiply until he is able to look after his fortune himself."

Luther Wrenn nodded. "I see," he said; and he did, very plainly. "Now, there will be no reading of the will, Mr. Gayne. That is all attended to. So you may leave this matter with me." [Pg 231]

"Was the boy mentioned?" asked Gayne eagerly.

"No; no mention of him."

"You think you can get some money, though, don't you?"

"Possibly. I'll see you again."

"There ain't any kind of doubt that he's the genuine grandson," said Gayne, rising reluctantly, as the lawyer got to his feet.

"Your proofs seem to be convincing," was the grave reply.

"Well, could you—couldn't you advance me something now for Bert's care? He needs a lot of

things, that boy does."

"You go too swiftly, Mr. Gayne. Come back here at three o'clock day after to-morrow."

Gayne looked at the papers and picture strewn on the lawyer's desk. "I don't know about leaving the only proofs of our rights that I've got."

Luther Wrenn turned to the desk and gathered them up. "Certainly. Take them to some lawyer in whom you have confidence."

"Oh, pshaw, no," said Gayne sheepishly. "I didn't mean that. You were Mr. Loring's lawyer. You're the one to handle the case." [Pg 232]

"Good-day, then, Mr. Gayne."

"Good-day," and Nicholas took his departure.

As soon as the door had closed behind him, Wrenn seated himself at the desk and called up the Copley-Plaza. Diana was waiting.

"Miss Wilbur?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Wrenn speaking. Mr. Gayne has been here. Please wire at once to the island and get some one to bring the boy to your hotel as soon as possible."

"Yes, Mr. Wrenn."

"I think Mr. Barrison is the one to ask," said Diana to Mrs. Lowell, who was waiting near.

So it was that an hour later Philip Barrison was called to the telephone at the island store to receive a telegram.

"I know what it is!" exclaimed Barney Kelly. "'All Saints' is going to outbid 'The Apostles' for you. You're the rising young beggar."

He wandered down with Philip to the store and loitered about outside talking to Matt Blake. When Philip reappeared, it was with a hurried air.

"Want anything in Boston?" he asked. [Pg 233]

"Of course, we do—the Brahms, but what's up?"

"I've got to go. Wire from Miss Wilbur."

"Aha," said Kelly, following Philip's long strides to the express wagon which Blake was just mounting.

"No, no, no," returned Philip. "Naught personal. No such luck. Hello, Matt, going up-along?"

"Yes."

"See you later, Kelly, I have to go up to Miss Burridge's." And Philip jumped into the seat beside the driver.

"No, you guessed wrong. You're going to see me right along," returned Barney, hopping up on the tail of the wagon and letting his feet hang over, while he whistled cheerily.

CHAPTER XV A SUDDEN JOURNEY

[Pg 234]

"I have to get the afternoon boat, Matt," explained Philip. "Miss Wilbur wants me to bring the Gayne boy to Boston in a hurry."

Blake looked around alertly as his horse pulled slowly up the hill to the road. "Miss Wilbur?" he repeated. "Why didn't his uncle send for him? He is there."

"Is he?" asked Philip carelessly. "I didn't know the island had been deprived of his artistic presence."

"Yes. You bet he lit out when he saw by the paper that the millionaire he's had his eye on was dead." Blake shook his head. "There must be something doing or Miss Wilbur wouldn't be sending for the kid."

"Oh, you know she and Mrs. Lowell made a protégé of him. My idea is they want to give him some kind of a treat, but I must say I'm surprised at the importance she seems to put on my bringing him—dead or alive, as you might say. She says if he holds back, through fear of his uncle's displeasure, to tell the boy his uncle is there."

"Oh, yes, he's there, believe me. Keep it under your hat, but that old souse has got it all fixed that the boy is the grandson of that Herbert Loring who has just died, and that he's going to get a [Pg 235]

slice o' the money. Now you might as well know, Phil, as long as you're doing the errand, that Gayne's a skunk. He's counting on shutting that boy up and gettin' the money himself. He told me so one time when he was half-seas over. Believe me, I feel sorry for that kid. If he ever had any spirit, he's had it squeezed out of him. By George, I'd like to have those ladies know Gayne's plans."

"They certainly must be greatly interested in the boy to take all this trouble," said Philip. "I knew they were very much stirred up over Gayne's treatment of Bert, but I don't know whether they're aware of how far he intends to carry it. I'm glad you've told me this. I fancy we shall find that their plan is to give the boy a show or two and some ice-cream instead of a fortune. Bert Gayne, Herbert Loring's heir!" scoffed Philip. "Don't make me laugh. My lip's cracked. However, I'll oblige those two corking women and bring him to them, by the scruff of the neck, if necessary. Ever see the Copley-Plaza, Matt? If you did, you can make a picture of me making a grand entrance there with Bert."

[Pg 236]

"I do feel sorry for that kid," repeated Blake with feeling.

"So do I, and after what you say, I'm wondering why Gayne is keeping himself in the background and letting the goddess Diana take charge."

"I wish her luck," said Matt emphatically. "I wish her luck."

Arrived where the road branches away to the Inn, Philip and his friend left the wagon and struck off through the field. Halfway across they met Miss Emerson, walking triumphantly between Mr. Pratt and Mr. Evans, a parasol over her shoulder. It is not well to sun soft ripples of hair, when the head that grew them is far across the seas.

"Good-morning," she cried gayly; "we're going to the post-office. Can we do anything for you?"

"Thank you," said Barney. "We've just come from there. You might write me a letter or two, Miss Emerson, while you're waiting. I've been neglected since I've been here."

"I shall be delighted," she returned, regarding his tanned face and permanent wave with high approval. "I love to write. I even like pencil and paper games, verbarium, and crambo, and all those. I've been trying to convert these men. I wish you would both come up and spend the evening and let me show you how much fun it is."

[Pg 237]

There was a wild look in the grave faces of her escorts which advised caution.

"You're always so kind, Miss Emerson," said Kelly.

"Shall we see you at dinner?" she asked.

"Depends on how good your eyes are," said Philip pleasantly. "We dine at home and then I'm off for Boston."

"Really? How can you bear to leave here!" Miss Emerson waved her parasol as the young men nodded and passed on.

"I think that Mr. Kelly is perfectly delightful," she said as they pursued their way. "So full of fun always." Then she proceeded to tell her captives how many words could be made from the one: c-a-r-p-e-t.

Philip and Barney walked around to the front of the Inn and there were Veronica and the unconscious young Herbert, leaning over the sweet-pea bed. Veronica was using the trowel and the boy was weeding. He glanced up under his lashes, then went on with his work. Veronica rose and welcomed the arrivals.

[Pg 238]

"You see, Aunt Priscilla keeps us at it, Mr. Barrison. She isn't going to have your garden neglected, and just look at the buds."

"Fine. In another week they'll be a show."

"And a smell," said Barney fervently. "I adore them. You look rather sweet-peaish yourself, Miss Veronica," he added, regarding her gingham gown of fine pink-and-white checks. "Do you know you're going to have me on your hands the next few days?"

"What's going to happen?" asked Veronica.

"There is going to be a dance at the hall to-night," suggested Barney.

"I know it," returned Veronica. "Can you dance?"

Barney looked at her reproachfully. "It's a land sport. How can you ask? A duck can swim and Kelly can dance. Will you take me? I'm shy."

"If Mr. Barrison will allow it," said Veronica with a demure glance at Philip.

"Not a word to Puppa. I promise," he said.

"What a pity Miss Diana isn't here!" she exclaimed.

"I shall see her to-morrow," returned Philip.

[Pg 239]

"You going to Boston?"

"M-h'm."

"That's what I'm telling you," said Kelly. "You mustn't allow me to get lonely. We'll row in the cove."

"Really go near the water?" replied Veronica, laughing incredulously.

"Yes. Aunt Maria is stuffing me like a Thanksgiving turkey. No tennis, I just natchelly had to get a boat—without a motor, be it well understood."

"That's fun," said Veronica, her eyes shining. She hoped Philip would stay away indefinitely. "If Mr. Kelly could really dance—"

Meanwhile Philip had stood watching the boy's slender hands pulling out weeds.

"Aren't you going to speak to me, Bert?"

"I—yes. How do you do?" The lad was so used to being overlooked by everybody except Mrs. Lowell and Diana that Philip's question surprised him and he rose and looked at him.

"Do you miss Mrs. Lowell and Miss Wilbur?" asked Philip.

"Yes."

"His uncle has gone, too," said Veronica. "We have had some good times all alone, haven't we, Bert? He is learning to play croquet and he helps me with the garden." [Pg 240]

The boy regarded her in silence and with no change of expression. Philip thought or imagined that in his dull, undeveloped way he resented the girl's kindly tone of patronage. He caught the lad's eye again.

"I am going to see Mrs. Lowell and Miss Wilbur. Would you like to go with me to see them?"

Color stole up into Bert's face and he brushed the clinging soil from his hands.

"Yes.—No," he said.

"I am going to Boston this afternoon," continued Philip, in a quiet, matter-of-fact tone. "The ladies would like to have you come with me."

"No," returned the boy. "I have to—to wait here for—for Uncle Nick."

"Oh, he is there, too," returned Philip. "They have made some plan. We shall be all together there just as we were here. It won't take you long to get ready. I'll help you."

"No," said the boy breathlessly. "Uncle Nick—"

"But Mrs. Lowell wants you." [Pg 241]

"No. Uncle Nick doesn't want—Mrs. Lowell—"

"Oh, boy, you know Mrs. Lowell wouldn't ask you to do anything that would get you into any trouble," said Philip pleasantly. "Perhaps your uncle has decided not to come back to the island. At any rate, they want you there in Boston and they sent me a telegram asking me to bring you. So it is up to us to do what they say. Don't you think so? Come upstairs and I'll help you get ready."

The boy's stolid habit of obedience stood Philip in good stead now. With heightened color, but no other change in his face, he followed to his room, washed his face and hands, and got into his shabby best while Philip found a comb and brush and toothbrush, and put them into a paper parcel. Returning downstairs, they found Veronica consuming with curiosity, but considerably entertained by her future dance partner, who was teaching her a new step by means of his blunt finger-tips on the porch rail.

"I'm going to take Bert home to dinner with me, Veronica. So say good-bye and expect us when you see us. Where's Miss Burrigge?"

"Oh, Aunt Priscilla!" shouted Veronica at the kitchen door. "Come out. Bertie Gayne is going to Boston with Mr. Barrison." [Pg 242]

Miss Burrigge emerged wiping her hands on a towel. The other went to meet her.

"How nice!" she said, beaming. "What a nice outing for Bertie. That's real clever of you, Philip. How did you happen to think of it?"

"Well, his friends in Boston want him," said Philip, and he administered a wink which Miss Burrigge understood sufficiently to postpone a catechism until later. The boy allowed her and Veronica to shake his passive hand in bidding him good-bye and then he went away with his companions with no further questioning.

When they were gone, Miss Burrigge exclaimed her astonishment.

"Mr. Barrison received a wire, that's all I know," said Veronica. "The youngster's in mortal terror of his uncle, but Mr. Barrison told him his uncle was there and it was all right. Miss Wilbur or else Mrs. Lowell sent the telegram. Sort of queer they should be hobnobbing with old Nick, but

perhaps he let them send the wire to save expense."

Philip made conscientious efforts to entertain his young charge on their trip. In Portland, where they spent the night, he bought some magazines, naturally guessing that the more filled with pictures they were the better, and he was puzzled at the evident shrinking from the illustrations that the boy displayed.

[Pg 243]

"Something seriously off with the poor little nut," he thought. "Any boy likes to look at pictures."

So he left him in peace and let him stare apathetically from the car window all the way to Boston, or doze in his corner.

Philip wired Diana just before they took the train, and she ordered luncheon to be served in her rooms. She wished very much that some kind turn of Fortune's wheel would call her mother forth to the shops that morning, but by reason of the fragments Mrs. Wilbur overheard passing between her child and Mrs. Lowell or the lawyer, her curiosity as to this waif who might be going to carry on the Loring fortunes became sufficiently vivid to determine her to remain where she could oversee all that her daughter did.

"Who did you say is bringing the boy on?" she asked Diana that morning.

"His name is Barrison."

"You wired him to do this?"

[Pg 244]

"Yes, Mamma."

"How could you ask it? Is he a servant?"

"No, Mamma, he is a professional singer taking his vacation at the island."

Mrs. Wilbur looked at the girl closely. "You must have become rather friendly with him to ask such a favor?"

Mrs. Lowell glanced up from a glove she was mending. "Everybody is friendly at the island, Mrs. Wilbur. It is one of the assets of the simple life. As one of the men at the Inn said: 'Every time you go out the door, you wade up to your knees in the milk of human kindness.'"

Mrs. Wilbur regarded her coldly. "An inexperienced schoolgirl cannot discriminate," she said. "I felt all the time that Diana should not go there."

Her dominating tone was significant of the relation she, contrary to the experience of most American mothers, had succeeded in retaining with her daughter. The average American girl of Diana's age would have had no difficulty in telling her mother that the expected boy would be embarrassed by the presence of a stranger and requesting her, more or less agreeably, to return to her apartments. Not so Diana. Her mother plied her now with additional questions about Herbert Loring's heir.

[Pg 245]

"For mercy's sake," said Mrs. Wilbur at last, "I should judge from what you say that the boy isn't far off melancholia."

Mrs. Lowell sighed unconsciously. Mrs. Wilbur heard her, but did not understand the reason for it.

"Well, don't ask me to lunch with him. I am sure he would make me nervous," added the lady.

"I think it quite likely he would, Mamma," said her daughter dutifully, one of her problems disappearing. "There certainly will be an interesting evolution observable in him very soon, but just at first his limitations might annoy you."

"Well, I'll just stay long enough to look at him and then I will go," returned Mrs. Wilbur.

CHAPTER XVI THE NEW CLIENT

[Pg 246]

She used her lorgnette upon the pair of guests when they were ushered in, but her interest in the silent boy was quickly transferred to the tall, attractive blond man with the flashing smile and sparkling eyes, who greeted her daughter with such accustomed friendliness.

"Mamma, may I present Mr. Barrison," said Diana serenely.

Philip's smile vanished and he bowed. His manner, Mrs. Wilbur thought, was unpleasantly good.

"And this is Herbert Gayne, Mamma," went on Diana.

The boy's eyes roved to the plump lady, who came forward and took his hand.

"I knew your grandfather, my dear child," she said, and she glanced over his shabby figure, appalled that the name of Loring could ever fall so low.

Bertie said nothing. What did the lady mean by talking about his grandfather? No one but his mother had ever done that.

A slight smile touched his lips as Mrs. Lowell greeted him, and then he looked over his shoulder and all about the flower-strewn room. [Pg 247]

"Your uncle is not here," she said quietly. "He isn't coming, Bertie. We are going to have lunch alone."

The boy's melancholy eyes lifted to hers questioningly. She nodded reassuringly.

"Mr. Barrison, this is the key to Bert's room," said Diana. "Will you go up with him and then return here? Luncheon will be ready."

Philip took the key, and, wondering, escorted his charge to the elevator. "Bert's room," he said to himself. When they arrived there, the flowers on the dresser caused him to remember Matt Blake's absurd account, and he felt his first questioning as to whether ice-cream and a show or two did really cover the plans of these ladies for the boy. "But where is Uncle Nick?" was his mental query.

Herbert, second, looked about his bathroom. He had never seen anything in the slightest degree like it.

"Treating you pretty well, aren't they, old man?" said Philip, opening his bag and taking out the boy's worn brush and broken comb.

"Uncle Nick will be mad," said Bert. [Pg 248]

"I heard Mrs. Lowell say that he wasn't coming," remarked Philip.

"Of course—he'll come," returned the boy. "And he'll—he'll beat me."

"Bet you a thousand dollars he won't," said Philip. "Have you any money with you?"

The boy felt in his pockets and brought forth a penny.

"That's all right," said Philip gayly. "If your Uncle Nick beats you, I'll give you a thousand dollars. If he doesn't, you are to give me that penny. Understand?"

Philip's smile was infectious. The corners of the boy's mouth twitched a little. The flowers on the dresser smelled sweet, so did the soap he was using. It was all like a wonderful dream, but over its brightness hung a dark cloud: Uncle Nick.

"All right," he said vaguely.

"Say, make it snappy, boy. I'm as hungry as a bear, aren't you? Here's a nailbrush. Better use it."

Bert hurried, and finally dried his hands and brushed his hair obediently. As much as he noticed anybody he had always noticed and liked Philip from the day that he watched him paint the Inn sign, and now, in spite of his apprehensions, he felt some stimulation from the company of this big strong man who was going to give him a thousand dollars if Uncle Nick should beat him. [Pg 249]

While he was brushing his hair, the telephone rang. Philip answered it. It was Diana speaking.

"I want to thank you so much for doing this errand for us. I know you must be mystified by the urgency of my wire, and this is my best way to tell you in a few words what has occurred. You can see that the matter is confidential, for time and labor and the law will be necessary to adjust matters, but I feel we owe it to you to tell you all. Of course, the boy knows nothing as yet—"

When Philip finally turned from the telephone, he met his companion's troubled gaze, the hairbrush hung suspended in the air.

"Was it Uncle Nick?" he asked.

"No," returned Philip. He continued to sit still for a minute, regarding the unconscious millionaire with the penny in the pocket of his outgrown trousers. "It's all right, old man. Miss Wilbur wants us to come down to lunch, that's all."

As they went to the elevator to descend, the boy spoke again: "Uncle Nick hates—he hates Mrs. Lowell," he said. [Pg 250]

"Good thing he isn't coming, then, isn't it?" returned Philip.

"But he'll—he will come sometime," said Bert with conviction.

Arrived at Diana's suite, they found luncheon ready to be served. Mrs. Wilbur had vanished, not without some uneasy comments upon Philip, which Diana had answered with such utter serenity as to quiet any suspicion she might have entertained that there was something personal in her child's extraordinary attachment to the wilderness.

The four sat down to the charming little meal, and, in spite of the boy's unconquerable apprehensions, he ate pretty well, as he sat there opposite Philip and between Mrs. Lowell and Diana.

The former asked him about the garden and the croquet ground, while Philip addressed himself

to Diana, who wore the gray gown with a rose at the belt, although she had felt she could never put it on again. The contents of a suitcase do not admit of much variety of costume.

"I'm almost dumb with surprise at your news," he said.

"Of course you would be."

[Pg 251]

"Does the ogre know of the arrival of relatives?"

"He has not the least suspicion of it. He will be told to-morrow."

"Can a can be tied to him?"

Bert was telling about weeding the garden with Veronica, and Diana leaned a little toward Philip. "What—what was your question?"

Philip smiled. "I asked if it would be possible to eliminate the gentleman."

"I think so. Mr. Loring's lawyer is, of course, attending to the whole matter and is to see him for the second time to-morrow. Does any one doubt that truth is stranger than fiction?"

"No." Philip looked across at Mrs. Lowell and the sweet regard she was bending upon the boy, who was trying in his hesitating way to tell her something about the beach.

Bert put his hand in his pocket, and Philip wondered if he were going to produce his capital, but instead he drew forth a little yellow stone and offered it to his friend.

"That is unusually lovely," she said, and held it up to the light before she handed it back.

"No, it is for you," said the boy. Sad as he may have maintained that it made him to be in this lady's company, her gentle presence was irresistible to him, and his face, as he handed back to her the little stone, had a more interested expression than his friends had ever seen it wear.

[Pg 252]

"It is to go—with the others in—in a bottle," he said.

"It is almost too nice for that. I think this is a little gem. Supposing I take it to a lapidary, a man who polishes stones, and have it made into a scarf-pin for you."

"No, for you," said the boy.

Philip and Diana exchanged a look.

"There is 'the greatest thing in the world' working again," he said.

They had just finished dessert when Miss Wilbur was called to the telephone.

"Ask him to come up to my room," she answered.

"Is it—Uncle Nick?" asked Bert, his light extinguished.

"No," returned Mrs. Lowell, smiling reassuringly. "You must remember I told you he is not coming."

Philip gave the boy his gay smile. "Bert thought he was going to make a thousand dollars," he said; but the rusty springs of the lad's mind could not respond quickly. He looked at the young man questioningly. "Don't you remember," added Philip, "we have a bet up, one thousand dollars to a cent?"

[Pg 253]

The boy did not answer. He kept his eyes fixed on the door. Nothing which could be said was able entirely to quiet the apprehension that his uncle would walk in upon him, surrounded as he was by forbidden companions, and a luxury which his tyrant had not been invited to share.

"The gentleman who is coming to call on us is one who knew your mother," said Mrs. Lowell. "You will like to meet him."

"Is he—is he angry with her, too?" asked the boy quickly.

"No, dear child," returned Mrs. Lowell, compassion surging through her for this young life which knew so much of anger and so little of anything else.

The noiseless waiters were removing all signs of the luncheon when the door opened and Luther Wrenn entered.

As soon as he had greeted the ladies and Philip had been introduced, his smooth-shaven, keen face at once centered on the boy. Mrs. Lowell, her hand on Bert's arm, guided him to stand.

[Pg 254]

"This is Herbert Gayne, Mr. Wrenn, and this is your mother's friend, Bertie."

The boy's plaintive, spiritless gaze and the passive hand which the lawyer took bore out all he had heard of him, but Mrs. Lowell's expressive face was courageous and the lawyer sat down beside Herbert Loring's heir determined not to be outdone by her in hopefulness. Of course, he had been painstakingly told every detail concerning the boy which Mrs. Lowell had discovered, and it was a very kindly look with which he regarded his new client as they were seated near together.

"I brought my introduction with me, Herbert," he said, and feeling in a breast-pocket he drew

forth the card photograph which had yesterday been put into his hands.

Color streamed over the boy's face when he saw it. "It is—it is like one I lost," he said, and he held it between his hands, studying it.

"You shall have this one, then," said Mr. Wrenn. "I was fond of your mother, Herbert."

"They were angry with her," said the boy, and his lip quivered at some memory.

"Yes, her father felt very badly because she went away from him, but he has gone to her now. Did you know that?" [Pg 255]

The boy lifted his eyes to the thin, kindly face. "No," he said.

"Yes," went on Mr. Wrenn quietly. "Her father has gone to her in that pleasant world where she is."

"I want to go," burst forth the boy, holding the picture tightly.

"All in good time," returned the lawyer. "You have some work to do for her here first."

"Do you mean—weed the garden?"

"I mean quite a lot of very pleasant things. I'll tell you about them later."

"But Uncle Nick won't—won't let me. He—I don't know whether I can hide this picture." A sudden panic seemed to seize the boy, and he looked toward the door. It was not possible that his uncle would not come in upon all these totally forbidden proceedings.

"See here, Herbert,"—Mr. Wrenn leaned toward the lad, speaking very kindly. "I think it quite likely that you will never see your uncle again."

Some thought made the boy's eyes dilate. "He hasn't—gone where—where my mother is—has he?" [Pg 256]

"No."

"I'm—I'm glad. He'd—he'd spoil heaven," declared Bertie earnestly.

Luther Wrenn nodded slowly. "An excellent description," he said. The three observers of the interview smiled. "Do you think you might adopt me in his place?" added the lawyer.

"He—he wouldn't let me. He'll come," said the boy with conviction.

"Now, Herbert," said Mr. Wrenn, with reassuring calm, "I know more about this than you do. I talked with your uncle yesterday and I think he will give you to me."

The boy's lips fell apart and he stared at the speaker gravely.

"To me, and to Mrs. Lowell. How would you like that?"

It was evident that this information could not be credited entirely, but the boy glanced around at Mrs. Lowell, who still sat close beside him, and she looked as if she believed this marvel. Unconsciously he pressed the picture against his breast. Luther Wrenn regarded the thin wrists and ankles protruding from the worn coat and trousers.

"Have you your sketch of your mother?" asked Mrs. Lowell. "Will you show it to Mr. Wrenn?" [Pg 257]

The boy put his hand in a pocket and drew out the small folded square, and the lawyer felt some obstruction in his throat as he saw the worn tissue paper and the morsel of oiled silk being so tenderly unrolled.

"When I lost the one like—like this, I tried to—to make another," the boy explained.

Luther Wrenn put on his eye-glasses and examined the little sketch. He looked at Mrs. Lowell and nodded. "Save this," he said to the boy. "Go on being careful of it, for you will always be glad you made it, but you need never hide anything again. Do you understand that? We will get a case for this photograph so you can carry it in your pocket, and I can have an enlargement made of it so you can have it framed on your wall."

"I haven't—haven't any money," said Bertie, overwhelmed by these novel prospects, and convinced that this kindly visitor must be laboring under some great delusion. "I just have—have one cent, but—but I have to give that to—to Mr. Barrison if Uncle Nick doesn't—doesn't beat me. He bet me a thousand dollars."

Luther Wrenn gave a queer broken sort of laugh and wiped his eye-glasses. "Mr. Barrison has won," he said. "Always pay your debts, Herbert." [Pg 258]

"Do you mean I—I shall give him the cent?"

"Your last cent, yes. He was right, you see, and it belongs to him."

The boy took out the penny and, rising gravely, crossed to Philip and proffered the coin.

Philip accepted it and bowed. "You are an honorable gentleman," he said.

Bert returned quickly to his chair and again possessed himself of the picture which he had given Mrs. Lowell to hold during the financial transaction.

"Now, Herbert," said Mr. Wrenn slowly, "I see that you were thinking that photograph cases and frames cost money. You will be glad to know that your grandfather—your mother's father, who has now gone to her—has left you some of his money. If you think of anything especial that you would like to have while you are here in Boston, you can buy it."

No one present ever forgot the boy's face as he spoke, looking up into the lawyer's eyes. "A pencil?" he said.

Luther Wrenn nodded and swallowed again. "Yes, pencils, paper, sketch-blocks, brushes, paints, anything you want. Just tell Mr. Barrison. I think he will take you out presently and get you the clothes you need—" The boy looked down over his old suit, quite dazed, and more than ever certain that all this must be a dream and that he should waken on his cot at the island and find the familiar dark face bending over him and some greeting, like "Get up, stupid," assailing his ears.

[Pg 259]

But he did not waken. Mrs. Lowell put her arm around his shoulders and gave him a little squeeze, and when he looked up he found her smiling at him.

Mr. Wrenn addressed her. "The more I see of the boy, the more I recognize a resemblance to his mother." He rose and crossed to Philip, who got to his feet. "Mr. Barrison, we are greatly indebted to you, and we wish to be more so. Can you oblige us by dressing this young client of mine this afternoon?"

"Delighted," replied Philip.

"What has he brought with him?"

"A brush and comb and toothbrush, all veterans, and all wounded."

"Very well. If you will get for him everything a boy needs for the remainder of the summer only, I shall be greatly obliged. Mrs. Lowell will make the list, I am sure, and you can help her if she gets lost. Have everything charged to me. Here is my card with the order, and here is a check for your traveling expenses on this trip."

[Pg 260]

"It is too much," said Philip as he saw the figure.

"Pretty accurate," said the lawyer. "I am calculating that you will stay in town over one night at least. If there is a balance you might send some roses to"—the door opened and a very dignified and extremely curious little lady entered: a quite plump and not entirely pleased little lady—"some roses to Mrs. Wilbur," finished the lawyer.

"Do you hear that, Mrs. Wilbur?" asked Philip. "Mr. Wrenn is telling me I may send you roses. Is that one word for me and two for himself?"

The lady shrugged her marvelously fitted shoulders, but she smiled. Even she could not help responding to Philip's vital spark. "It is my own private feeling that some attention should be paid to me," she returned, lifting her chin.

Philip approached her. "Name your color!" he exclaimed with an air of devotion.

[Pg 261]

"I think it will be a real pleasure to him, Mamma," said Diana, smiling, "to turn from an immersion in sublunary matters like socks and neckties to a poetic purchase."

"Why should Mr. Barrison be about to bathe in socks and neckties?"

"He is kind enough to take the matter off my hands, Mrs. Wilbur, and make our young friend fit," said the lawyer.

The lady lifted her lorgnette and surveyed the silent boy.

Mr. Wrenn approached him. "Herbert, you have no reason to like the name of Gayne. What do you say to dropping it? What do you say to being Herbert Loring, Second?"

"If Mrs. Lowell says so," he responded. He might have said: "What's in a name?" For the excited color had settled in his cheeks. Let them call him what they liked. He was going, boldly and unafraid, to have a pencil.

CHAPTER XVII THE HEIR

[Pg 262]

Luther Wrenn gave himself the luxury of calling at the Copley-Plaza the next morning, perhaps as a bracer for his afternoon appointment. When he sent up his name, he received a summons to come to a room on the floor above Diana's.

Entering, he found the group he had left yesterday, minus Mrs. Wilbur, chatting and laughing before a boy's wardrobe spread out on the bed. As he shook hands with the boy himself, the

lawyer looked him over with satisfaction. From the barber to the haberdasher, the lad had evidently been served well; and though pale and thin, Herbert Loring, Second, stood there a credit to his name already, and full of promise for the future. A wardrobe trunk in steamer size stood at one side of the room and a fine suitcase beside it.

"Is everything all right, Herbert?" asked Mr. Wrenn, with a hand on the boy's shoulder and his eyes wandering over the variety of apparel laid out on the bed. "Nothing seems to be missing."

"I have—I have blue pyjamas," said the boy.

[Pg 263]

"And did they sleep all right, eh?"

"They did not," said Philip. "I had the other room opening off Bert's bath and I prowled once in a while to see how the land lay, and the electric light was evidently too easy. He was always examining his box."

"What box is that?" asked Mr. Wrenn.

The boy was keeping lifted eyes on him, not quite sure whether this dispenser of gifts was going to be displeased at the burning of midnight electricity. At the question he hurried to a table and brought the new sketching materials which had interfered with his dreams.

Mr. Wrenn gave the boy's shoulder a little shake and laughed. "They won't run away in the night," he said. "Better sleep and keep your eyes bright. When do you plan to return to the island, Mrs. Lowell?"

She was sitting with Diana by the bed, where they were sewing markers on Bert's new possessions. "If your afternoon interview proves satisfactory, and you can arrange that we shall not be molested, I think we might go to-morrow," she replied.

"Want to go back to the island, Herbert?" asked Mr. Wrenn. The appealing eyes, so like Helen Loring's, were winning him more and more with their trustfulness.

[Pg 264]

"I—I don't care where we go if he—if nobody takes me away from—from Mrs. Lowell."

"You dear youngster," said that lady, her swift needle stitching busily.

"Well, it is my intention that nobody shall, for the present. Of course, when these charming ladies hamper themselves with husbands, it brings in an element of uncertainty. What sort of a man is Monroe Lowell, now? I suppose his wife is entirely impartial."

Mrs. Lowell laughed. "The finest ever," she said, "but I see signs of impatience beginning to show in his letters. So I hope he will soon join us. Probably I know what you are thinking of, Mr. Wrenn, but let us not cross any bridges until we come to them. The right way is sure to open."

The lawyer nodded. "I will let you have a bulletin as soon as the final farewells are said this afternoon. I hope to secure the island from further intrusion."

Diana looked up from her work. "Would it not be well to offer him money not to return?"

Philip, who was engaged in snipping the markers apart, spoke: "If he comes, I can take the bone of contention to my place until the hurricane is passed."

[Pg 265]

"I am quite certain he will not go," said Mrs. Lowell quietly.

"Why is that?" asked Mr. Wrenn. "I must confess to some qualms myself."

"Because it is not right for him to go," said Mrs. Lowell.

"My dear young lady," the lawyer smiled, "if that is the only ground for your belief, my limited observation of the gentleman suggests that he never has done anything right in his life unless by accident. But no money, Miss Diana. Start that once with that individual and you will be purchasing something from him at intervals the rest of his life. I must be off. Good-bye, Herbert."

The boy started. He had been hanging over his treasures and handling them, oblivious to everything around him. This gentleman, who knew his mother and had showered upon him so many benefits, was looking at him now with kind, serious eyes, and Bert became mindful of a little talk Mrs. Lowell had had with him this morning.

He walked up to the lawyer and held out his slender hand. "I thank you—sir," he said.

"Good boy. I will see you again before you leave," and, bowing to the others, Mr. Wrenn went out, Philip accompanying him to the elevator.

[Pg 266]

"Thank you, Mr. Barrison, for your good offices," he said as they shook hands.

"Never had so much fun in my life," said Philip. "Made me wish I had half a dozen of my own and the coin to treat them like that."

The lawyer bent his heavy brows upon him and smiled. "Are events shaping themselves toward that end? That extremely charming young woman who has been making you the slave of the lamp is enough to turn any man's head."

Philip flushed. "Any man's head *would* be turned," he responded quickly, "if he thought of her as approachable. No, some common mortal for me some day, I hope, but she's a goddess, you

know."

The young fellow smiled and the lawyer still regarded him, and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Never let anything like money rob you," he said slowly and with emphasis. "Goddesses have been known to stoop to mortals before this."

"I think her parents would see to that," responded Philip, laughing.

[Pg 267]

The elevator came, and with one more nod of farewell the lawyer disappeared.

"Fierce job he's got before him," muttered Philip as he returned to the dry goods, refusing to allow his mind to dwell on his new friend's surpassingly ignorant suggestions.

Promptly at the appointed time Nicholas Gayne presented himself at the lawyer's office and was admitted to the sanctum. His air of assurance almost reached the swaggering stage, and his "How are you?" breathed a suggestion of a fortifying beverage. Without waiting for permission, he fell into the chair near the desk.

"Well, are you satisfied?" he asked triumphantly.

"Yes, I am satisfied that the boy is my old friend's grandson."

"I knew you would be. Now, how soon do you think you can fix it up?"

"Fix what up?"

"The inheritance."

"I told you the boy was not mentioned in the will."

"I know that, but what's the law for if it can't get justice done?" came the impatient question, and Gayne's chin shot out belligerently.

[Pg 268]

"It can and will get justice done," said Luther Wrenn slowly, "but it will take time."

"Oh, of course, I know it will, but you can advance money on a sure thing, and I'll make it worth your while as soon as the cash is in my hands."

"In yours?" The lawyer tapped his desk with a paper-cutter.

"Yes. I told you the boy's delicate. He needs care."

"I'm sure he does. It may take a year to straighten out the matter of the will."

"It don't need to," said Gayne angrily. "I've had the expense of Bert for five years and I ought to be reimbursed and provided with enough money to care for him right, until he gets all that's coming to him."

Luther Wrenn looked for a silent minute at the dark, impatient face and thick, powerful shoulders and hands, and recalled the boy's panic.

"I have obtained a good deal of information as to the occurrences of the past years as they affect Mr. Loring's grandson," he said quietly, and his visitor scowled at him, startled.

"I'm a poor man," he blustered. "I told you I hadn't been able to care for him right."

[Pg 269]

"If you would like," went on the lawyer slowly, "to be relieved of the boy, I am willing to take charge of him from now on for his mother's sake."

"For his mother's sake," sneered Gayne. "You know damned well that it's because you know you can get hold of the money that ought to be his."

"You have been drinking, Mr. Gayne, and the reason I don't have you put out of the office is because we shall never meet again, and it is always well to settle matters out of court if possible. I am going to tell you, instead of asking a judge to do so, why I am taking Helen Loring's boy away from you."

"Lambert Gayne's boy and my nephew!" roared Gayne. "Where do you get that stuff? Take him away from me, after all the expense—"

"Be quiet, Mr. Gayne, or I shall have to forego my peaceful plans. I have a man outside prepared to take you; so it would be better for you to listen to me."

Nicholas Gayne looked behind him in angry amazement.

"What have you done for that helpless boy?" went on Wrenn quietly. "Have you endeavored to have him properly taught and cared for? Have you allowed him the happiness, which would have cost you nothing, of exercising the talent inherited from his mother?"

[Pg 270]

"I'm a poor man,"—the declaration came with a loud burst. "He couldn't spend his time like a nabob."

"No. So you took no pains to have him educated. You allowed him to be made to scrub floors and wash windows and do any menial work which a lazy, dissolute woman could put upon him. You allowed a creature like Cora to be his companion, caring less than nothing for the possible

degradation of the boy's mind and body."

Nicholas Gayne started up from his chair, purple in the face with surprise and fury.

"All this you did with the one single base intention of so beating down any sign of mental efficiency in your nephew that in time you could get the handling of his heritage."

As the words fell clearly and concisely from the lawyer's lips, Nicholas Gayne's muddled brain worked fast. Where could this devil of a lawyer have learned so much in two days? The boy was at the island. It must be the women. That Mrs. Lowell! But how could she have connected Bert with Herbert Loring in the first place, and how could she, with her slight opportunity, have elicited so much from the dull boy and communicated with Luther Wrenn? Gayne wished his brain were clearer, but, looking at the stony calm of the lawyer's face and the cold accusation in his eyes, he realized that the combination of legal power and money made it very hard in instances like this for a poor man like himself to get his rights. [Pg 271]

"Now, I will detain you only a minute longer, Mr. Gayne. Herbert Loring, Second, as he will after this be called, is now at the Copley-Plaza with friends." Gayne stared and seized the back of the chair from which he had risen, apparently for support. "I shall provide for him as I think best. It is too early as yet to tell whether your criminal treatment of the child has worked permanent injury. Time and the tenderest, wisest care will be necessary to establish that, and, meanwhile, you will be left in freedom. We desire to avoid all publicity, and, if you keep out of the way and do not intrude and awaken in the boy brutal and sad associations, we may succeed in restoring him to a normal condition, but, I assure you, if you even show your face near the boy or interfere in any degree, you will be called upon to answer serious charges, and witnesses will be easy to procure." [Pg 272]

The purple had faded from Nicholas Gayne's face and it was ashy under the sunburn. He opened his lips to speak, but no sound came. Mr. Wrenn touched a button on his desk and the office door opened. Gayne started and looked toward it.

"I feel that we understand each other perfectly, Mr. Gayne," said the lawyer, pleasantly. "Good-afternoon."

Nicholas Gayne mumbled something and, moving as swiftly as his unsteady knees would permit, he disappeared from that office, fear engulfing all his other emotions. He wondered which of the men in plain clothes, whom he saw moving about outside, was the one who might have been his escort.

Luther Wrenn took up the telephone and called Diana.

"Mr. Wrenn speaking."

An excited voice answered, all serenity thrown to the winds. "Oh, Mr. Wrenn, is it over?"

"Yes, Miss Diana, and very satisfactorily. I'm a little tired and I believe I won't make you another call to-day." [Pg 273]

"I'm *sure* you must be tired," sympathetically.

"I just wanted you and Mrs. Lowell to know that you may plan to take the nine o'clock train for Portland to-morrow morning with as much freedom as if our precious uncle had passed away from the planet."

"Thank you, thank you."

"And, by the way, Miss Diana, you may tell Mr. Barrison, too."

"Oh, of course, I should."

"Do you know, I find him a very engaging young man. Why, why are your cheeks blooming so? Can't one say as much as that for relaxation after a nasty quarter of an hour?"

A soft gurgle of laughter went to the listening lawyer.

"I did not know you ever condescended to such play, Mr. Wrenn."

"Well, don't tell, will you? My best wishes to you all, and especially to Herbert, and tell him I shall come to the island to look him over in a short time."

"Do. Mr. Barrison will take you fishing."

"Is he always successful? Does he know just what bait to use?" [Pg 274]

Another soft gurgle. "You don't understand, Mr. Wrenn. He uses too much bait. He catches too many fish. Good-bye. My mother has just come in. She is going with us to Maine." A pause. "She hopes to see you there. Good-bye."

Before the arrival of the Copley-Plaza contingent at the island, Matt Blake received the following letter:

Dear Matt:

You know the business that brought me to Boston. I proved my position all right. The

old man's lawyer couldn't deny it, but the boy, not being named in the will, as, of course, I knew he wouldn't be, the lawyer said it would take a long time before he could get anything for Bert, and advised me to put the boy into his hands. So I'm going to let him run matters to suit himself.

I'm asking you if you will be good enough to pack up my stuff at the island and send everything on C.O.D. to the address on the card I enclose. You know what I found at the farm, but I've got to wait till I can get some backing before I can do anything about it. Keep it under your hat, though. You know what I left at the farm, too: out in the kitchen. Take that for your trouble. I don't know what I'm going to do next. What I do know is that a lawyer has no more blood than a turnip, and that a man can go to the expense and trouble of taking care of a boy for five years and then be asked to hand him over to those that know he'll have money, without even a thank you for all he has done. I'm disgusted with the world.

[Pg 275]

Your friend,
NICHOLAS GAYNE

When he read this, Matt Blake looked off thoughtfully, his thin lips twitching.

"I hope Phil Barrison can tell me all that's between those lines," he thought.

CHAPTER XVIII

DIANA'S IDEAL

[Pg 276]

"Come here, Aunt Priscilla," called Veronica at the top of her lungs. It was a joyous call, and Miss Burridge hurried into the dining-room where, a few minutes before, she had left Veronica sweeping, and found her standing still and confronting a boy who stood, hat in hand, while on the floor beside him reposed a new and handsome suitcase.

"Would you know him, Aunt Priscilla?"

Miss Burridge pulled down her spectacles and gazed at the trim figure with the immaculately brushed and parted hair.

"It ain't Bertie Gayne? Why, it is! Where are the other folks? Somebody has been being awful good to you."

How could it be possible that the boy they sent away a few days ago could be the same one who looked at them now with happy eyes and a faint smile.

"They're coming," he answered. "Mr. Blake brought me up—in his wagon, and the others had to wait—for the car, and they were going to take a drive."

Matt Blake here appeared in the open doorway from the piazza, bearing on his back a shining new trunk.

[Pg 277]

"Where's this going?" he asked.

"I'll show you," said the boy, and they made a procession up the stairs, Bert leading and the women bringing up the rear, full to the lips of questions ready to pour out upon Matt, who was smiling, eyes twinkling under his burden, at the amazed countenances of Miss Burridge and Veronica.

"Where's your Uncle Nick?" asked Veronica when they reached the bedroom.

"No," said Bert quickly; "no, he isn't coming."

"Isn't?" cried Miss Burridge as Blake set the trunk down. "Matt, has Mr. Gayne come into money?"

"This Mr. Gayne has," returned Blake, grinning and indicating the boy.

"No, my name isn't Gayne any more," said Bert gravely. "I am Herbert Loring, Second."

"That so?" said Matt. "There you have it, ladies. You've read about the Prince and the Pauper, haven't you? You sent away the pauper and got back the prince."

"Yes," said the boy; "my grandfather gave me all these things because he didn't need money any more."

[Pg 278]

While the boy spoke, Blake noticed that he was looking at Nicholas Gayne's trunk.

"Kind o' in the way, ain't it? That's a good place for yours to stand. We'll pull Mr. Gayne's trunk out here where I can pack it. He wants me to send him all his things."

Bert's face looked as if sunlight suddenly struck it. It was as if now only he entirely credited the fact that there was nothing to apprehend in the way of a reckoning.

"You are going to send all Uncle Nick's things to him?"

"Yes, everything but you," replied Matt jocosely.

"But I—I don't belong to him any more," explained Bert eagerly. "He gave me to—to the lawyer."

"Good work," said Blake, and, lifting the lid of the old trunk, he fell to opening the dresser drawers.

"Matt Blake," said Miss Burrridge, "*will* you tell me what has happened?"

"Ever hear of Herbert Loring, one o' Boston's rich men? Well, he died suddenly and this boy's his grandson, and the lawyer has persuaded Mr. Gayne to take his hands off." As an addendum to his explanation, Matt bestowed upon Miss Burrridge a wink which seemed to say: "More anon." [Pg 279]

"And Mr. Gayne isn't coming back?" asked Miss Burrridge, sundry financial considerations occurring to her.

"I guess he'll pay up all right," said Blake, reading her thought. "You make out what he owes. I'll see to it. Come on, Herbert Loring, help me to get your uncle's duds together so I won't be packing any o' yours."

"That wouldn't make—make any difference," said the boy, "because Mrs. Lowell said for me not to wear them any more." And he turned to with a will, emptying dresser and closet while Matt packed.

"I hear the motor," said Veronica suddenly.

Miss Burrridge had been in a flutter ever since Diana's telegram, saying that her mother and maid would return with her. Miss Priscilla's outlook on life was placidly democratic, but somehow the prospect of having to care for the wife of the steel magnate loomed as something overwhelming. She and Veronica hurried downstairs to meet the guests. Mrs. Lowell and Diana were in high spirits. Léonie had fortunately discovered some resemblance in the island to a fishing village of her childhood and had sat with Bill Lindsay on the front seat coming up. He understood her trim appearance, even if half of what she said so volubly was lost to him. [Pg 280]

The springs of the machine were not reminiscent of Mrs. Wilbur's Rolls-Royce, and her lorgnette had not yet been able to discover what charm this corner of the world had exercised upon her daughter. She had been predisposed, from her first view of Philip Barrison, to give him the credit, or discredit; and during the trip from Boston, she had kept one eye upon every move he or Diana had made toward the other. But the examination had revealed nothing. Philip had not even been assiduous toward herself. She would have suspected that instantly. As a matter of fact, almost all the way to Portland, he had concentrated his attention on a book of Brahms' songs, which were welcomed effusively by a curly-headed Irishman in white sweater and trousers who met them when they landed from the island steamer.

"Is it the mother of the goddess, then?" he said when he was presented. "You lost your heart, I'm sure, to that ride down the bay, Mrs. Wilbur." [Pg 281]

"It was very lovely. I should like to come around here in the yacht sometime. The rudder chain, or whatever it was on that little boat, nearly banged a hole in my head."

Diana smiled on Kelly. "Mamma has begun roughing it, that's all," she said. "I warned her."

Philip had telephoned down to bespeak the motor in order that the august Mrs. Wilbur might not be obliged to linger on the wharf where, on account of the adjacent fish-house, the odors were not always of Araby, and the only seat was a weather-worn board a little wider than a knife-blade.

Diana leaned out of the car just before they drove away and offered him her hand. "Have I thanked you nearly enough, Mr. Barrison?" she asked, and Barney Kelly observed her melting eyes. "You have filled in every need and been an untold help to us all in this affair. Even Mr. Wrenn said the nicest things about you."

"And about you," returned Philip pressing her willing hand. "I think Mr. Wrenn has had the time of his life the last few days."

"It has been very exciting, very happy—"

"Had we not better start, Diana?" put in Mrs. Wilbur. "I just caught a glimpse of a dreadful fish over there by a post. Do they catch whales here?" [Pg 282]

"They stop at nothing, Mrs. Wilbur," Barney assured her. "Good-bye, good-bye."

The motor sped off with a grinding noise.

"You've put in your time well, eh, Barrison?"

"What makes you think so?"

"My word! If Miss Wilbur ever turned those lamps on me with that look in them, I'd fly right in and singe my wings for life."

"I don't intend to singe mine," said Philip quietly. "They think I've been useful in this one-act play they've been staging and they are grateful, that's all. The goddess is as transparent and honest as any child that ever lived. She doesn't want to light any flame for the moth, she has far too big a

soul. Did you notice that the boy I took away looked different from the one we brought back today?"

"It wasn't the same one, was it?"

"Yes, with a few renovations in mind and body. I'll tell you about it as we go along."

When Mrs. Wilbur went out on the Inn piazza and was assailed with the island sights and odors, the snowy daisy drifts, the dark evergreens, the rock-lashed foam dragging at the pebbles and flinging them back with a never-ceasing crescendo and diminuendo, the soaring, sweeping gulls above and beneath the blue, she did not speak for a time, and it was a place where her lorgnette failed.

[Pg 283]

Léonie, however, kept up a joyous undertone. "Mais, c'est comme chez moi. C'est vraiment comme chez moi, et Mr. Beel, he will take me to see ze poisson."

"Mr. Beel" kept his word, and not once, but many times, did Mrs. Wilbur look about vainly for her maid in a place where there was no bell to ring for her, and no clocks for her to see when she was without, and Bill's motor was running up and down the road in such a convenient way for him to stop and take on an eager passenger, for whom no fishing boat was too dirty, and who could swim as well as any fish in the bay.

"Do let her go, Mamma," Diana said one morning when they were alone. "She is having a real vacation. When you are once attired and your hair is dressed, can I not perform any other office for you?"

"But I don't know which is the maid, Léonie or I," said Mrs. Wilbur. "First she had to have a sweater and I sent for that. Then she wanted a bathing-suit and I sent for that. Then she bought herself some fishing tackle and, if she can't get out in a boat, she sits on the wharf with her feet hanging over and fishes for those—those—"

[Pg 284]

"Cunners?" suggested Diana.

"Yes; and she knows every one of the island boys, and how does she know when I need her? She doesn't think anything about it."

"That's it," returned Diana, nodding. "She has lost her head. That is what we all do. You will, too, Mamma. I heard you laughing and laughing with Mr. Kelly yesterday."

"He is such a droll creature," said Mrs. Wilbur, with a reminiscent smile. "It's such a queer place here," she went on with a puzzled brow. "You could put this whole Inn into the ballroom at Newport, and there isn't space enough to turn around in the little rooms; yet out of doors it is all space, and something in the air makes you want to run and jump. I might as well tell you, Diana, my mind is just getting set at rest on the subject of Mr. Barrison. Your craze for this place seemed unnatural, and when I first saw him in Boston, I suspected that he was the cause." The lady met her daughter's calm eyes which contradicted her changing color.

[Pg 285]

"What should have disturbed you about that?" asked the girl quietly.

"Disturbed me! That you should have come off here alone and fallen in love with nobody knows who?"

"Oh, a good many people are learning who. That is really the chief trouble with him: I mean from a girl's standpoint. He is rapidly becoming one of the stars of the musical world."

"And why is that a drawback?" Mrs. Wilbur began to feel somewhat bewildered by her daughter's attitude.

Diana's color was rather high, but she turned toward her mother with entire calm. "I am not going to marry a man whom other women besiege. My husband will be rather short. I think he will stoop and be nearsighted and wear spectacles. He will incline to baldness, but he will be very charming—to me, and he will be mine." The smile that accompanied this declaration was so winning that Mrs. Wilbur was startled.

"Diana, have you met any such person?" she returned. "I don't like the sound of him at all!"

[Pg 286]

"Not yet," admitted Diana. "But I keep him in mind. He fights off other types."

"Supposing," said Mrs. Wilbur sharply, "some very desirable man, as attractive as Mr. Barrison, for instance, were to say he wouldn't marry you, because you are too pretty—other men would look at you."

"You do think he is attractive, do you, Mamma?"

"Why—certainly," returned Mrs. Wilbur, not quite sure even yet that the admission was safe.

"The cases are not parallel," said Diana. "Women as a rule are more faithful, and men are conceited. The average man must have severe lessons before he believes that the woman who has loved him will turn to some one else."

"Why, Diana, I am surprised at you. You talk in such a sophisticated way; but, my dear, let me

remind you that you have some one beside yourself to please when you marry. Your father may give you an unlimited check-book, but he won't give you *carte blanche* when it comes to marrying. He isn't going to welcome into the family any insignificant little scarecrow such as you are counting on."

[Pg 287]

If Philip wanted to hear Diana laugh, it was a pity he wasn't near now, for she burst forth so merrily that Veronica peeped out the window.

"I see you are going to be as difficult as I am, Mamma," she said at last.

It was soon after this that the cottage people with one accord begged Philip to give a recital in the hall. The summer colony was an appreciative and cultured one. Many of them had known Philip from his boyhood, and were watching his career with interest. So it was an occasion of intimacy and delight.

When the evening arrived, the hall was decked with flowers, and the singer and his accompanist appeared in white flannels. Philip was his own programme, announcing his songs and receiving at times stentorian requests for special encores.

Mrs. Wilbur, as she looked and listened, felt that she gained an understanding of Diana's arguments: not that, in any case, she desired this young man for a son-in-law, but she was greatly surprised at the beauty of his voice and his art. It was a feast he gave them that night in the uncalculating opulence of his youth and strength: Arias from "Bohème" and "La Tosca"; the "Dream Song" from "Manon"; ballads; a group of modern French songs; another of old English. Barney Kelly's accompanying was perfect. He was among strangers, and he was as serious throughout as if they were performing in Carnegie Hall. Despite the fact that the piano was an upright, he played a group of Chopin, Palmgren, and Debussy with great charm, and the contingent from the Inn led the strong applause. As he bowed, Kelly recognized Veronica's rosy, serious face and wildly active hands.

[Pg 288]

At the close of the recital, Mrs. Wilbur was more excited than she had been for years.

"He's *wonderful*, Diana," she said, standing up while she was still in the throes of hand-clapping. "*Wonderful!* We must try to get him for an October date in Pittsfield. Our room is quite large enough. He will make a sensation."

"Yes," said Diana, rather faintly. "That is the easiest thing he does." Her face was pale. The possible charmer with the bald head and spectacles had had a hard fight to-night.

Barney Kelly disappeared through some back door while Philip's enthusiastic friends gathered around him, and Veronica dashed out on the front piazza, cleared the steps in two bounds, and the July moon aided her progress between the bushes to the back of the hall where a figure in white was straying.

[Pg 289]

"Mr. Kelly," she called breathlessly, "you were perfectly splendid. Why didn't you stay and let the people tell you so?"

"Oh, I don't know them," said Barney carelessly. "And they want to eat up Barrison."

"But they want to eat up you, too. Didn't you see how crazy they were about that last funny out-of-tune thing you played?"

Kelly laughed.

"And don't you go away; they're going to dance."

"Oh, do they want me to play?"

"Don't you dare to play! Don't you dare to let them know you can." Barney laughed again. "Well, of course, they know now you can, but not dance music."

"You're a very nice child, Veronica." Barney looked at her little dimpled rose face, and the pale green dress she wore.

"Well, if I am, then come around to the front piazza with me. They're setting back the chairs."

[Pg 290]

Meanwhile Mrs. Wilbur was drawing Diana toward the group surrounding Philip. "I don't know what to say to you that won't sound too effusive," she said as soon as she could get his attention and his hand. "Will you come to us in October and sing a recital?"

"I shall be glad to, if I can. I will see about my dates." As Philip replied, he looked at Diana. She gave him a pale smile and said nothing. More people approached and Mrs. Wilbur drew away, her daughter with her.

"Miss Diana," said Philip, across the heads of the crowd, "they are going to dance. Will you stay?"

Diana nodded. "You like to dance, Mamma. You stay, too."

"Oh, not in this little place where everybody will be stepping on every one else. Beside, Léonie's beau is waiting outside to take us home. I will go with Miss Burr ridge and tell Bill to come back for you in an hour. I suppose you don't need a chaperon for I don't see your ideal here to-night, Diana," in a lowered voice. "You were right about Mr. Barrison. Let us pray that women don't make a complete fool of him. You don't look just right, dear. Don't stay late. I'll tell Bill to come

[Pg 291]

back in an hour. Oh, there is that comical Mr. Kelly." Mrs. Wilbur sailed up to him. "Thank you so much for this evening. You were delightful, Mr. Kelly, and Mr. Barrison is most fortunate in having you."

"But you're not going, Mrs. Wilbur?"

"Yes; good-night."

"No, not until you've danced once with me. There, the music is just going to begin." And, sure enough, Miss Burr ridge stood back and waited while Mrs. Wilbur's little satin-clad feet tripped lightly around in the dance with the volatile Barney, and she talked to him about the date in October and promised she would dance with him again at that time.

Mrs. Lowell and Herbert had been enjoying the concert and had told Philip so, and now stood back watching the dancing.

"Would you like to learn to dance?" asked Mrs. Lowell.

"No."

"It sounds better to say, 'No, Mrs. Lowell,' or, 'No, I thank you.'"

"Then I will," said the boy.

"I like to dance," said Mrs. Lowell, "and I wish you would learn."

[Pg 292]

"Then I will," said the boy again.

The music had thrilled his artist soul. It seemed all a part of the entrancing night, a part of the safe world of love into which he had been guided.

CHAPTER XIX MOONLIGHT

[Pg 293]

Mrs. Wilbur looked back into the hall from the piazza before she stepped into the motor. Diana was already dancing with Philip Barrison. She watched their smooth movements for a minute, then turned to Mrs. Lowell who had just emerged with her boy.

"This—this gathering, this settlement here, seems rather like a family party, doesn't it?" she said, with a sort of troubled curiosity.

"Yes; nearly all of these people have known each other for many summers."

"I feel a little strange to go and leave Diana."

"I don't think you need," replied Mrs. Lowell.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Wilbur, "if the steed were going to be stolen, it would have happened before this. The stable door has been open for weeks."

"Quite so," said Mrs. Lowell, laughing. "It is so light, Bert and I are going to walk up to the Inn."

"I am going to send the car back for Diana in one hour," declared Mrs. Wilbur. Her daughter's theories were all very well, but this was a distractingly beautiful night and the echoes of that marvelous voice were even yet thrilling her own nerves. Léonie was sitting at the front of the car with Bill Lindsay, and Mrs. Wilbur mounted into the back seat with Miss Burr ridge.

[Pg 294]

"I suppose Miss Veronica will return with my daughter," she said.

"I only hope so," returned Miss Burr ridge resignedly. "Mr. Kelly has promised to see to her."

"I don't feel like dancing," said Diana, as her partner guided her through the narrow spaces.

"No one would suspect it," he replied. "I was just thinking that this night was to be superlative in all directions."

"But how can one endure this silly music when '*Manon! Manon!*' is echoing through the heart!"

Philip did not reply, nor did he release her until the gay strumming at the piano ceased. Then they went out on the piazza. The laughing, chattering young people were streaming out into the air, and occupying every available seat. The field surrounding the hall was light as day.

"Let us go down to the rocks," said Philip.

[Pg 295]

"I mustn't because my mother is going to send the car back for me in one hour. You've no idea how firmly my mother can say 'one hour' and mean it."

"There should be no rules on a night like this," Philip regarded his companion, pale in the moonlight as her pale, filmy garments. "I feel like quoting a choice spirit of my childhood days. He was trying to get me to go on a tear of some kind with him, and I told him my mother would worry. He said, 'Oh, come on. Scoldings don't hurt, whippings don't last long, and she da'sn't kill

you."

Diana smiled. "Now that she is here, she likes to tuck me in," she said.

"I would she had waited until after the moon. Well, let us go to the near rocks. I will keep watch of the time."

They went down the populous steps.

"Oh, Mr. Barrison!" exclaimed a woman upon whom he nearly trod. "What ecstasy you have given us!"

It was Miss Emerson. She was cooling off from a dance with Mr. Pratt, and was in high feather, because neither he nor Mr. Evans knew another woman present, save Veronica, and her acquaintance, though not wide, seemed intensive. [Pg 296]

"Yes, that was corking," said Mr. Evans. "We sure do thank you. Say, folks, I'm tired. I'm going to trot along."

"Back to the Inn?" asked Philip with interest.

"Yes. Anything I can do for you?"

"If you will be so kind. Mrs. Wilbur has just gone. Will you be kind enough to tell her not to worry if her daughter is a little later than she expected? Tell her you left her in good hands and we are going to walk up after a while."

"Certainly. Be glad to," replied Evans.

"Oh," breathed Diana, softly, as they moved on into the glory of the night, "I'm quite sure you should not have done that."

"Do you want to be shut up in a tin Lizzie to-night?"

"No, nor anywhere."

Philip led her to the shore and found a corner among the rocks from which they could watch the beaten silver of the billows rushing tumultuously landward, breaking in foam about their eyrie, and slipping back in myriad bridal veils.

"There is always one night in the summer, and this is the night," said Philip. "Think of viewing the moon in company with the goddess herself! If you only wouldn't mind leaning against my arm. I'm sorry to have that rock cutting into your dandy gown." [Pg 297]

"Thank you, but it doesn't. I have a very good place here."

"Comfortable enough to tell me that you liked the music?"

Diana looked around at him slowly, and he laughed softly.

"Yes, I know you did. I know if I ever could sing, I sang to-night. There was something new in it. It taught me something, something I've been waiting for. They've always told me, my teachers, that the one thing I needed was to fall in love. It must have happened—happened, somehow, when I wasn't looking." Philip crossed his arms behind his head, leaned back and looked at the high sailing moon. "Thank you, great goddess Diana, I am at your feet. You have dropped upon me a spark of the divine fire. I build you an altar. The flame shall never go out."

The girl beside him bit her lip and silence fell between them. The bright billows swept in and crashed apart.

"I suppose that is what love means to an artist," she said at last. "The nourishing of his art. That is all." [Pg 298]

"That is all it can mean to me," he answered; "but isn't it enough? An object to worship with all a man's strength, receiving the return of inspiration?"

She looked at him as he lay there reclining against the rock, his upturned face not seeking hers. This evening had shown her in miniature the truth of all she had felt and, because her heart was beating fast, she clung more strongly than ever to the spectacled gentleman with the scanty hair.

"Say something, divine one," he said suddenly, turning to her.

"Don't confuse me with the moon, Mr. Barrison," she warned him.

"But at least can't you congratulate me?"

"Yes, I can, on many things; but—don't fall in love with any ideal less impersonal than a planet."

"I don't intend to, but why these words of wisdom?"

"Because any—any mere mortal girl married to you would be miserable."

"Oh, come, now!" Philip sat up, and frowned at her with a quizzical smile. "So you think I ought to try kindness first, do you? Why?" [Pg 299]

Diana turned her fair moonlit face directly to him. "Because you cannot ever belong to yourself,

even. Much less to her."

"I don't quite get that."

"I can't speak for all girls, but for myself, if I ever have a husband, I want—I want to creep off into a corner with him."

"A corner like this rock?"

"This is big enough."

"How would that suit the great Charles Wilbur?"

"It would not suit him. I know that. The homely little stoop-shouldered man, with the lovely soul, whom I mean to marry, will not altogether please my father."

Philip's eyes grew big in the moonlight. "Have you picked him out?"

"Yes, as an ideal. Other women will leave me in possession of him."

"Ah," Philip nodded, "I begin to see." They were both silent again. At last Philip spoke again. "I deny that that girl you are warning me away from would have such a rocky time. What do you suppose I should care for the babble, no matter how kind it was, how sweet even, of other women? I should see only her."

[Pg 300]

"You think so," said Diana. "I know you think so. And at first it would probably be so, but a singer's appetite for flattery grows. Of course it does. I'm not blaming you. It's just your career."

Silence again, until Philip spoke. "Very well, I shall hunt you out in your corner with your faithful gnome, and I shall beg: (he sang) 'Drink to me only with thine eyes, and I will pledge with mine.'"

Philip sang the song entirely through, slowly and deliberately, and Diana closed her eyes, and the laces on her sleeve trembled. The glory of the night, the glory of the voice were all one. She shrank into her corner and held desperately to her ideal.

When he had finished, Philip looked at her. Her head rested back upon the rock, her eyes were closed. The mysterious light lent her face a strange radiance.

"Diana," he said, and there was a thrill in his voice, "you are well named. Goddess of the moon you certainly are, and this night is an epoch in my life. I love, and in spite of your skepticism I shall be true." She opened her eyes and looked at him, and he drew a long, quick breath. "I can't let you stay here any longer. Your wrap isn't enough. Now we will sprint up to the Inn. Do you feel like it?"

[Pg 301]

"Oh, is it over?" she said softly.

"Yes, or else it has just begun. I am not sure which," he answered, and rising he gave her his hand and helped her to her feet. "The moon is no farther away from me than you," he said in the moment while he held her hand. "I am not going to forget it."

"Then it is I!" she thought, with a bound of the heart that turned her faint.

They scarcely spoke on the long, heavenly walk up the island. The sea was starry as the sky with the lights of fishing boats, and phosphorescence gleamed where the water was in shadow.

When he took her hand for good-night on the piazza of the Inn, she said: "I haven't thanked you for this wonderful evening. You know I do—Philomel."

He smiled down at her. "That reminds me of our first meeting here. 'Philomel with melody,' you said. I remember what I had been singing, too. It is still true." He kissed her hand, jumped over the piazza rail, narrowly missing the sweet peas, and strode away. The girl stood in the shadow watching the tall, white figure and listening to the waves of song that floated back through the moonlight.

[Pg 302]

"Thou'rt like unto a flower
So sweet, so pure, so fair—"

"What shall I do!" murmured the poor, bewildered moon-goddess on the piazza. "What shall I *do!*"

CHAPTER XX REUNION

[Pg 303]

There was one case of happiness without drawbacks on the island at this time. It was in the humble starved heart of Herbert Loring, Second. Each morning Mrs. Lowell came into his room after breakfast and made his bed, taught him how to take care of his belongings, and read with him from the books she loved. All traces of Nicholas Gayne's occupation having been removed, and every article the boy had used in the past dispensed with, his fresh new possessions were neatly arranged, and he waked each morning to a new and wonderful life. Mrs. Lowell

encouraged his artistic work and allowed him to spend as much time upon it as he wished. All fear being removed, his appetite revived, and one could almost daily see the flesh return upon his bones. His good friend, finding that his sapped energies recoiled from muscular effort, did not urge him to swim or to row, but fed his mind and heart and awaited his rebuilding.

His story became known on the island, and from being ignored or contemptuously pitied, the good-looking boy in the simple, smart sports clothes was the object on all sides of a friendly curiosity, which he could not understand and frequently rebuffed through his very directness and inexperience. It was his weekly duty to write to Mr. Wrenn, and this was a dreaded task, but Mrs. Lowell explained to him that he had his grandfather's name, and that he must begin to learn to fill his place in the world; and his pitifully childish writing and misspelling had to be corrected under the eyes that were still sad at such times.

[Pg 304]

"I'm so ignorant, such a baby!" he exclaimed one morning when this trial was being undergone.

"But you needn't mind it, need you, since it isn't your fault?" returned Mrs. Lowell cheerfully. "So many good years are coming for you to study and learn in."

"What will happen when the summer is over?" asked the boy. "Are you going to take me with you? Will Mr. Lowell like me?"

"Indeed, he will. I am going to have you live near me."

"Not with you?"

"No, Bert, that wouldn't be best. I have been corresponding with a very nice young man whom I have known a long time, and he will be pleased to live with you and give you lessons."

[Pg 305]

"In drawing?" asked the boy.

"No, sir." Mrs. Lowell gave him the gay, smiling look he liked: it was so full of everything cheerful and kind. "No, sir, reading and writing and 'rithmetic."

"Oh," returned Bert, looking very serious.

"First you must give your time to study. Education is the foundation. Then, later, when you have gone through college—Oh, how proud I shall be when I go to see you graduate!"

"Shall you ever be proud of me?" asked the boy slowly.

"If you will let me," she answered. "It all remains with you."

"Then—then I'll try. I would rather stay with Mr. Blake when you go away, but if you want me to, I'll live with the young man."

"You will like him. He is only twenty years old, and he wants to go to college when he gets money enough. So he is glad to do tutoring now. That means helping a younger boy to learn."

"He will laugh at me," remarked Bert, looking off moodily. "I would rather stay with Mr. Blake and paint the snow on the evergreens."

[Pg 306]

"Oh, no, dear," said Mrs. Lowell. "That wouldn't please your grandfather. Besides, wouldn't you miss me?"

"I don't like Mr. Lowell," remarked the boy.

His friend laughed and took his hand between both her own. "We shall all love each other," she said, "and I shall hope to see you every day."

Bert thoughtfully visualized the boat carrying her away without him, and decided to be glad of the other horn of the dilemma. He had learned to smile, and he did so now, looking at her so trustfully that she patted his hand as she laid it down.

"That's a good boy," she said.

On the morning after the concert, Mrs. Wilbur regarded her child rather anxiously.

"Is it ever considered malarial here?" she asked.

"The opposite extreme," said Diana.

"Well, you look pale. You stayed out of doors too long. The night air anywhere—"

"Oh, but it has such a pleasant way of growing warmer here at evening. I wasn't cold, indeed, Mamma."

[Pg 307]

"And I heard that divine voice going back through the field singing Rubinstein," said Mrs. Wilbur. She sighed. "I am glad you are so matter-of-fact, Diana. He made me feel like a matinée girl, that man." Mrs. Wilbur was already planning her autumn musicale, and in fancy saw the air dark with automobiles parked in rows about the Wilbur residence in Pittsfield.

She left Diana now to go upstairs to make her list, and the girl went out of doors to gather sweet peas for the living-room. Pausing when her hands were full of the color and fragrance, she turned

about to view the fresh morning landscape. As she did so she heard a gay whistling that grew louder as it neared.

"The owl and the pussy cat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat—"

The thrill of delicious terror, which had come over her on waking from her short sleep that morning, constricted her heart now.

Philip approached. "Good-morrow, fair one; posing for a study of Aurora?"

Diana looked around at him with deliberation. "I was deciding what individuals of the fauna and flora here were most marked." [Pg 308]

Philip ducked his face down into her bouquet. "You chose the sweet pea, of course."

"No, I decided on swallows and daisies. The swallows are ravishing: so fearless and so beautiful. Have you noticed how they dart past, nearly brushing our cheeks, and how the sun brings out glints of blue in their plumage? I often mistake them for bluebirds with that touch of color on their breasts."

"Daisies and swallows," said Philip musingly. "They do seem to belong especially. It makes me think of a song." He paused. "Did you hear that booming of a new whistle this morning? There's a stranger in the cove, a swell yacht. I thought you might like to come down and see it."

"Yes, I should. Let me put the flowers in water and I will be with you." She reappeared quickly, and they struck off across the field to the road.

"How could I know it was a strange whistle?" asked the girl.

"I suppose you wouldn't, but to us islanders every familiar whistle is like the voice of a friend. Kelly is waiting for us in his boat. We want to row out to the beauty."

"It was very kind of you to come 'way up here for me," said Diana. [Pg 309]

There came walking toward them along the road a man in white trousers, dark-blue coat, and cap with a gold insignia.

"That must be some one from the yacht now," said Philip.

Diana looked up, looked again, and with a cry of delight, ran forward straight into the arms of the man.

"Daddy, Daddy!" she cried, "how good of you!"

The tall, handsome stranger, with silver threads in his brown mustache, glanced up at his daughter's escort while he kissed her.

"I had to look you up, you know," he said while she held him tight, her arms around his neck.

Loosing him, she half turned to Philip. "This is Mr. Barrison, Daddy. We were just going down to see who was the stranger in the cove."

Mr. Wilbur shook hands with the tanned, blond youth in a perfunctory manner, scarcely looking at him.

"Mamma is here. Did you know it?" cried Diana.

"No. You don't say so! Kill both my birds with one stone, eh?" [Pg 310]

The girl held out her hand to Philip. "I shall have to go back, Mr. Barrison. Daddy, take your card and write an order for Mr. Barrison and his friend to go over the yacht. They were just going to row out to it, and I was going with them. How little I thought it was you, dearest." She kissed him again and fumbled at her father's buttons.

Philip thought there was some reluctance in the cool glance the yachtsman flung him again. "Don't trouble yourself, Mr. Wilbur. Another time, perhaps."

"No, this minute," said Diana. Mr. Wilbur got at an inside pocket. "Mr. Barrison will take you deep-sea fishing if you can stay a few days. You have often spoken of it."

"A fisherman, eh?" said Mr. Wilbur, as he took out his card and wrote upon it.

Diana laughed nervously. "Oh, no, Daddy, but he knows the ropes here." She handed the card to Philip. "The Idlewild is worth visiting," she said, "and you never can tell with these yachtsmen. They slip off sometimes in the middle of the night. A bird in the hand, you know." She smiled. "Au revoir."

Philip, holding his card, looked after them as they went on up the road. Diana was hanging on her father's arm. The young fellow's face flushed deeply under the tan, and his lips came together firmly. [Pg 311]

"That girl is worth all the adoration a man can waste on her," he thought. "I don't know that he is

such a fool at that."

"What a summer, Veronica!" exclaimed Miss Burridge when she found that Charles Wilbur was going to eat mackerel and sweet potatoes at her table that noon.

"Some do have greatness thrust upon them, Aunt Priscilla. First the arrival of Prince Herbert, then King Charles himself."

"Yes, my knees feel kind o' queer, Veronica, and I think we'd better have the lobster salad this noon instead of saving it for night."

The other boarders eliminated themselves, so that the Wilbur family could occupy the piazza after dinner. Mr. Wilbur had praised the cooking and Veronica had carried the good report to the kitchen. He sat now with his wife and daughter, one on each side of him, and, as he smoked his cigar, looked off on the glory that is Casco Bay.

"You're pretty nearly on a boat here, aren't you?" he said.

"It is the most wonderful place in the world," said Diana fervently.

[Pg 312]

He turned to her and pinched her chin. The excited color that had risen in her happy surprise had faded. "You're not a good advertisement for it," he said. "You didn't eat anything at dinner and you look as if you had been up all night."

"I do think Diana feels the effect of all the excitement she went through in Boston," said Mrs. Wilbur; and forthwith she proceeded to tell the story of the grandson of her husband's old friend, and Diana's part in it. He had met the boy at table and he listened with absorbed interest.

"Well, little girl, well," he said kindly, "that was some experience. You'll have to brace up now."

"Oh, I'm going to, Daddy, and I want to purchase some of this island. I love it here. It inspires me."

"Better hold on," was the quiet response. "Why not take this place next summer? Engage Miss Burridge as cook and housekeeper, then bring some guests and run up here for a week or so, off and on, when you feel like it."

"That might be pleasant," returned Diana.

Her father smiled and patted her. "You are not always going to be a tired schoolgirl. Home may hold out more attractions next summer than you think."

[Pg 313]

"You don't know the rocks and the walks here yet, Daddy," said Diana wistfully.

"How many walks shall I have to take before you are ready to go back with me?"

"Of course we're going back with Daddy," said Mrs. Wilbur warningly.

"You like the yacht, don't you, Diana?" he asked.

"Indeed, I do. It was only that you were going to have such gay people this summer, and I couldn't be gay."

"I understand, dear. I've ditched the gay people now, and we will have a family party only, going back."

"That will be delightful," replied Diana.

"We haven't told you the most wonderful thing yet," said Mrs. Wilbur. "There is a most charming singer on the island. He gave a recital last night. Nothing commonplace. A very unusual voice. I'm engaging him for Pittsfield, Charles. He thinks he can come for a recital. He is young and little known yet, and so will be a novelty. I want you to hear him. You'll be wild, too."

"I promise not to be," responded her husband.

[Pg 314]

"But you can't help it, dear. Diana, why shouldn't we have a little dinner on the yacht and Mr. Barrison would probably sing afterward, and your father could hear him. Let me see now. Who would we have?"

"I don't care," put in Mr. Wilbur, "so long as you have that sparkling person who sat beside the boy at dinner."

"Mrs. Lowell," said Diana. "I'm so glad you appreciate Mrs. Lowell, Daddy."

"I'm not blind in one eye and I can see out of the other. I have my hearing, too, and her voice is as fresh as a robin's."

"But, oh, speaking of voices!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilbur, rolling up her eyes. "Well, then, Diana, supposing we have just Mr. Barrison and Mr. Kelly and Mrs. Lowell."

"And Veronica," said Diana.

"The young person who waits on the table," explained Mrs. Wilbur. "She and her aunt, Miss

Burridge, are very worthy people."

"Veronica and Mr. Kelly are such good friends," said Diana. "It would be too bad not to ask her."

"Mr. Kelly is Mr. Barrison's accompanist," put in Mrs. Wilbur.

"Barrison?" repeated Mr. Wilbur. "Isn't that the name of the husky I met on the road just now?" [Pg 315]
The speaker removed his cigar to ask his daughter the question.

"Yes, Mamma, Mr. Barrison came up to take me down to row out in Mr. Kelly's boat to see the stranger in the cove. So when we encountered Daddy on the road, I persuaded him to give them an order to go over the yacht."

In spite of herself, the missing color came back into the girl's cheeks while she related this, and Charles Wilbur, whom no circumstance connected with his daughter ever escaped, observed it.

When next he was alone with his wife, he asked a few questions as to Diana's regard for the singer.

"No, no, my dear," she returned scornfully. "You don't know Diana. We have an extraordinary daughter, there is no mistake about *that*, but she was telling me the other day of her ideal for a husband. He is a fright, I can assure you, but full of charm and all that. She doesn't want to marry any man who is attractive to women."

"Wants to fool the vamps, eh?" was the laughing reply.

"Why doesn't she look at her daddy?" was the affectionate response. "The most attractive being on earth and one who never gave me a heartache?" [Pg 316]

Charles Wilbur slipped his arm around his wife and kissed her. They were the best of friends.

"Don't you know, my dear, that a girl's father is always unique? He isn't a man."

"Oh," exclaimed Mrs. Wilbur, harking back to her find. "But, Charlie, you don't know how delighted I am to have such a prize for Pittsfield. I must show you my list."

She produced it and Mr. Wilbur, frowning patiently, looked it over. He hated lists.

CHAPTER XXI

GOOD-BYES

[Pg 317]

But before the dinner party came off, Philip Barrison did take the steel man deep-sea fishing. Barney Kelly was so overwhelmed by the luxury of the yacht that he refrained from saying a word against the nocturnal expedition. He happened to meet Veronica down at the post-office and gave her his reasons.

"I say it's only fair that Mr. Wilbur should be racked and tortured," he said. "Any man so deep in the lap of luxury should learn a little of how the other half lives. That yacht is the slickest thing I ever saw. The deep-cushioned armchairs on the deck are upholstered in a light-green leather that you would think a drop of water would deface, and the salt spray doesn't faze it in the least. Then the master's room with its twin beds is divided from the bathroom by a sliding door which is a huge mirror, and the dining-saloon is in mahogany with the exquisite china and glass all enameled with the yacht's flag."

Veronica's mouth always grew very small when she was deeply interested and her eyes very wide, and they looked so now as she listened. [Pg 318]

"Just think," she said, "I am going to see it."

"Good work. I wanted you to."

"I'm going to eat off those dishes and sit in the easy-chairs."

"What's happening?"

"A dinner party, and you are in it. Miss Diana told me."

"I shall be careful to eat nothing between now and then," declared Barney, "for I suspect that *chef* of being an artist. Let us not count on it too much, though, Veronica. Barrison takes Mr. Wilbur on that unspeakable expedition to-morrow morning. We all may be thrown out of that dinner party by the violence of his feelings."

As it turned out, however, Kelly's apprehensions were not realized. Mr. Wilbur's wife and daughter were on the yacht to greet him when he returned from his novel experience at nearly noon of the next day. He had changed his clothing at "Grammy's" and was full of praise of that old gentlewoman.

"Nice people as ever lived, those folks," he said as he stretched himself out in a *chaise longue* on the deck under the awning, and was served with iced drinks. [Pg 319]

"Mamma hasn't met Mr. Barrison's grandmother," said Diana as she placed the cigars beside her father.

"Oh, he comes of superior people, you can see that," said Mrs. Wilbur. "Charlie, I'm going to invite Mrs. Coolidge."

"All right. I guess she can stand it."

"Stand it!" echoed Mrs. Wilbur. "You don't know what you're talking about."

"He is still thinking about the fishing, Mamma," put in Diana.

"Yes, and young Barrison," said Mr. Wilbur. "He's a tonic, that chap. The way he went over that boat, regular Douglas Fairbanks stunts he did. He's a hundred-per-cent man, whether he can sing or not." The speaker regarded his daughter out of the tail of his eye as he talked, and he saw the slight compression of her lips and the glow in her eyes.

"I offered him a cigar, but he shook his head: 'My voice is my fortune, sir,' he said."

"Sensible," said Mrs. Wilbur, not looking up from the silk she was knitting.

"When are you giving your dinner party?"

"To-morrow night."

"That is good, for we must be on our way," said Mr. Wilbur. He yawned. "I'm dead to the world. I must go to sleep." [Pg 320]

"Daddy," said Diana, "are we really going away at once?"

He took her hand, and it was cold. "Yes, I think we shall have to be off." He regarded her with affectionate thoughtfulness. "I want to go somewhere and find some roses for you."

The roses suddenly bloomed in the girl's face under his searching eyes.

"You want to go with your old dad, don't you?" he added affectionately.

"Of course I do, dearest," she answered, and he forgave her the lie because she looked so pretty in her embarrassment. "But I have packing to do, you know. I can't go without any warning."

He continued to gaze at her and to hold her cold hand.

"That young Caruso of yours is quite a boy," he said irrelevantly. "No lugs, honest, substantial."

"He is more than that, Daddy. He is a self-made man."

"Did a good job, too; physically at least."

"No; more than that; he has been a hero to get where he is in his art."

"Told you so, eh?"

[Pg 321]

"No, indeed." The roses bloomed brighter. The hand twitched in his. "He gratified my curiosity one day by telling me his experiences. He thinks they were entirely commonplace. He was very poor and with no influence, but his persistence and determination won."

"That's the stuff," returned Charles Wilbur quietly. "I like the way he treats his grandmother, too."

"And, Charlie," said his wife, looking up from her work, "I believe I'll invite some people from Lenox. I'll have a house party."

"Very well, my dear." Her husband smiled toward her preoccupied face, and released his daughter's hand.

"Now, you run along up to the Inn, Diana," said Mrs. Wilbur, "and pack. Then have Mr. Blake bring the trunk and our bags aboard this afternoon."

"Not go back to the Inn at all, afterward, then?" asked Diana.

"No. There won't be any necessity. I told that perfectly crazy Léonie to have my things and hers ready and bring them aboard before dinner. She looked at me as if I had struck her down."

"Poor Léonie," breathed Diana.

[Pg 322]

Mrs. Wilbur shrugged her shoulders. "I shall be lucky if she doesn't tell me she has decided to marry Bill Lindsay and stay here." The lady laughed and looked at her husband. "I should have to invite them to take their wedding trip on the yacht, for I can't let her go until she has shown some one else how to do my hair."

"Let her teach me, immediately, to-day," said Diana quickly.

Her mother stared at her. "You don't want her to marry Bill Lindsay, I hope!"

"I do not care whom she marries," returned Diana with amazing spirit. "The important, colossally important thing is that she should marry whom she pleases, when she pleases."

Mrs. Wilbur continued to stare while her husband's closed eyes opened and he also regarded Diana as she stood up, her hands clenched.

"That was Helen Loring's creed," said Mrs. Wilbur dryly. "There is a better one. Don't forget that."

The girl's head drooped and the roses faded.

Ten minutes later she went down the awning-guarded steps at the yacht's side, and entered the waiting boat with its shining brasses and natty, white-uniformed sailors, to go ashore. [Pg 323]

Miss Burridge was quite touched by the feeling displayed by her star boarder at their parting.

"I do not remember any period of my life which has been so happy as the last six weeks," said the girl, her lip quivering. "Would you take care of me if I should take the Inn for next summer and come here with friends a part of the season?"

"Take the Inn, Miss Wilbur?"

"Yes. My father said that might be more sensible than for me to build here. I would make satisfactory arrangements with you. Perhaps Veronica would come with you, then you wouldn't mind if you had the place to yourselves much of the season."

"Of course, I should like an easy berth like that, Miss Wilbur." Miss Burridge laughed with a suspicion of moisture around her lashes at the pressure of Diana's hands, and the seriousness of her plaintive eyes.

"I must say good-bye to Bertie. I wonder where he is."

"Up in his room, I think. He came in a few minutes ago." [Pg 324]

There Diana found him. He looked up from the stretcher over which he was working and was surprised to see his friend in her street clothes.

"Are you going to Boston again?" he asked.

"I am leaving permanently," she answered, and she took his hand and drew him down to a seat beside her. He looked at her as she bit her lip while she smiled on him, and he thought she was going to cry. "We shall be here a couple more nights, but I shall be on the yacht. Have you seen it, Bertie? Would you like to come down with me now and go over it?"

"I'd like to make a sketch of it." The boy looked interested.

"Very well, you shall. Bill is coming for us in a few minutes. You drive down with us; but I want to tell you, before we go, how happy I am for you."

"You don't look happy at all, Miss Diana. You look sad. Are you sad?"

"I am a little bit—leaving here, and all the friends. Do you know that we are related in some far-off way, Bertie? You might call me Cousin Diana. You mustn't forget me."

"No, I won't forget you," replied the boy, noticing that her lip quivered. "Mrs. Lowell will write to you." [Pg 325]

"Yes, I'm sure she will," said Diana, touching her eyes quickly with her handkerchief, "and Mrs. Lowell is a wonderful friend. She has told me of her arrangements for you, told me about the fine, strapping young fellow, Mr. Lawrence, who is going to be your companion and tutor. I expect when I see you next that you will stand up, straight as a young soldier—"

"Straight as—as Mr. Barrison," said Bert, pulling his slender shoulders back hopefully.

"Yes, as—as he is, and I know you will like this young Mr. Lawrence, and do every thing just as Mrs. Lowell desires to have you. I am glad you can stay on longer here, for it is—it is a place to be happy, isn't it, Bertie?"

Diana's lips quivered again dangerously. "There, I hear the motor. Bring your sketch-book, and come."

They descended to where Léonie was standing beside the bags in her trim street clothes. Matt Blake's wagon was waiting, too, and he carried Diana's trunk, and the various and sundry suitcases and bags which represented the Wilbur party, out to his wagon. [Pg 326]

Miss Burridge and Veronica saw them off. Mrs. Lowell was away in the woods with her bird-glasses, and the other boarders were fortunately absent. Diana left her good-byes for them, and then with a lump in her throat got into the car. Léonie sat in front with her cavalier, and all the way down the road, her head was popping out and a stream of "adieux" pouring forth upon animate and inanimate objects alike.

Herbert Loring sat beside his friend and, feeling wonderingly her need for comfort, slipped his hand into hers, and she held it tightly.

Diana had many good-byes to say at the float, while her baggage was being lifted into the yacht's

boat, waiting with its picturesque crew. At last they were off, and Bertie's eyes were greedily fixed on the lines of the handsome white yacht.

After the trunks were placed on the yacht, she let Bert look about, but he was eager to get his sketch. So she allowed him to descend again into the small boat and put him in command of it. So he was taken to the point he indicated and remained there until he was satisfied with his sketch. Then the flashing oars fell into position and he was rowed back to the shore. Diana waved him a last good-bye. Her father was taking his much-needed forty winks, her mother was downstairs somewhere, and Léonie stood near her, straining her eyes toward the float and waving to a waiting figure thereon.

[Pg 327]

"Adieu, charmante, belle île," she murmured, sniffing audibly. "Mademoiselle, c'est comme si je quittais chez moi."

"Oui, Léonie. Nous reviendrons quelque jour."

There was a difference in their situations. Léonie had no hope of entertaining Bill Lindsay at dinner.

That function came off the next evening. Mr. Wilbur had spent much of the afternoon with Philip Barrison. The latter had taken him out to the pound and he had watched the drawing of the nets, and had had long confabs with the fishermen, listening to their stories, scattering cigars like hail, and enjoying himself thoroughly.

He returned to the yacht in high good humor and made ready for the farewell festivity.

"That's a regular fellow, Barrison," he said to his wife, as he was making his toilet.

"Oh, you wait," she replied.

[Pg 328]

"I don't care a darn how he sings," remarked Mr. Wilbur, "but in his case a man's a man for a' that. I don't wonder—" he stopped.

"What don't you wonder, dear?"

"Oh—at his popularity. My dear, dear Laura," he added after a pause, smiling at his reflection in the glass as he used his military brushes, "you're a wonderful woman."

"Why, thank you, Charlie. What have I done now?" As he did not reply, but continued to smile into his own eyes, she gave his arm a little squeeze as she passed him. "I won *you*, anyway," she said triumphantly, "and I need a compliment or two, for I never knew Diana to be so strange and changeable as she has been to-day. The dear girl can't be well, and I don't think I have realized quite the awfulness of her experience with Herbert Loring. She was actually in danger for a time of being accused of hastening his death. Why, it was dreadful."

"Poor Diana, poor little girl," returned Charles Wilbur ruminatively.

CHAPTER XXII THE DINNER PARTY

[Pg 329]

Mrs. Lowell and Veronica were the first of the dinner guests to arrive. They were received with remarkable effusiveness by Diana as links with the life she was reluctantly leaving.

"Did you see anything of our musician friends as you came down to the float?" asked Mrs. Wilbur.

"No, not just now," replied Mrs. Lowell, "but earlier in the day, I had occasion to go to the post-office and there I found Mr. Kelly in a state of great excitement. It seems that Mr. Barrison has been summoned to New York to have his voice tried out for the opera. There is some trouble and disappointment about a tenor who was expected."

"That *is* exciting," remarked Mr. Wilbur, looking approvingly at the lady with the fresh robin-voice and the charming costume.

"Miss Veronica and I are all eyes, Mr. Wilbur," she continued. "I'm sure you allow newcomers to stare as much as they please."

"Certainly. Let me show you some of our snug arrangements for 'a life on the ocean wave.'"

[Pg 330]

The guests followed him, and Mrs. Wilbur and her daughter regarded one another, the elder with some consternation, the younger with brilliant eyes and flaming cheeks.

"I do hope he won't have to break his date with me," said Mrs. Wilbur.

"Perhaps to sing with the Metropolitan is more important," returned Diana.

"You never have taken any interest in my plan," said her mother, her eyes snapping. "I'm sure I don't know what has come over you on this island. From the time you came back to the yacht yesterday, I have had to speak twice to make you hear anything, and I've been afraid every minute that you would let your father see that you were depressed at leaving this foolish place

and going with him."

"I am perfectly willing to go, Mamma," was the docile reply, the change of heart that had taken place in the last fifteen minutes not being explained.

"Well, I'm glad to hear it," declared Mrs. Wilbur, placated. "You are looking wonderfully well to-night, Diana. Clinging stuff suits you, and in that silver girdle you have quite a classical appearance." [Pg 331]

"Do I look statuesque, Mamma?" Diana smiled, but not pensively. Her eyes were alive with anticipation of this one more, this last evening. "To-day I have been remembering my first days at the island, all alone with Miss Burridge, the long, cold evenings with their wonderful coloring, the vesper songs of the hardy robins and sparrows; the grinding pebbles swept back and forth on the beach; the entrancing odors that one cannot name, so mingled of balsam and sea—the great spaces of earth and sky—" Something seemed to stop the rush of reminiscence.

Mrs. Wilbur regarded her child's kindling face with fond admiration. "Yes," she returned, laughing softly, "I know how all that captured you, but what has it to do with your being statuesque?"

"Oh,"—Diana seemed to come to herself with a little start,—"Miss Burridge used to say sometimes that I looked like a statue," she returned, rather lamely.

Motor boats were constantly putt-putting around the yacht.

"I'm glad," said Mrs. Wilbur, looking down upon them now, "that this is the last night we are to stay here. Didn't those inquisitive little things keep you awake all last night, just like gnats?" [Pg 332]

"I didn't sleep much," admitted Diana.

"There they come," said Mrs. Wilbur, suddenly, looking across at the float.

Two men in white flannels were stepping aboard the waiting boat whose brasses flashed in the light of the lowering sun. Diana's heart bounded toward her throat.

"Well, I shall make him understand that he must tell me just as soon as he knows himself," said Mrs. Wilbur rather fretfully, watching the approach.

The dinner party was a gay one. When the guests were seated at table, they looked out through a wide semicircle of glass at the familiar sights of the cove—its wooded shore, and the silhouettes of great waves far out against the horizon.

"I shall not forgive Kelly for giving me away," said Philip when his host congratulated him on his call to New York. "How shall I feel when you all hear that I didn't pass muster?"

"Believe me," said Barney feelingly, "if that proves to be the case, you'll all have cause to congratulate him. The life of an American singer in a Grand Opera Company is one fight, if it isn't an inferno. The call-boy forgets to call him, the prompter forgets to prompt him. Every curtain-call is begrudged him." [Pg 333]

"I'm glad you're husky, Barrison," remarked Mr. Wilbur.

"Yes," laughed Philip. "Kelly has been an industrious crêpe-hanger ever since the letter arrived. At the same time he shoves me on."

"Oh, certainly," said Barney, setting his lips energetically. "Must be done. I think he's safe to win."

"I am thinking about October and Pittsfield," said Mrs. Wilbur ruefully.

Philip turned toward her. "I think there is little doubt that I shall be with you," he answered.

"Mamma doesn't mean that," declared Diana of the steadily burning cheeks. "She wants you to succeed, of course."

"Yes, Barrison," added her father, "but when your voice fails, we know what you can do: skip around a vessel at sea for the movies."

"You rather liked that fracas, didn't you, Mr. Wilbur?" returned Philip.

"Indeed, I did. When you come here to recuperate from the atrocities of singer allies, I'll join you and we will repeat the dose." [Pg 334]

"Dose is the word," put in Kelly in an undertone.

When finally the party adjourned to the deck, they fell into groups: Mrs. Lowell and Diana, Veronica and Barney, Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur and Philip. The sun had gone down, and the western sky was still crimson.

Diana put her hand over in Mrs. Lowell's lap. "We know how violet the sea looks this minute from the Inn piazza," she said. "You will go on seeing it."

"And you will carry it away," returned Mrs. Lowell. "That, and many another picture which you will stop to look at sometimes on a winter day."

"Yes, they are mine," said Diana gravely. "Even this pond of a cove with the green banks and woods rising all about it. This is a picture that I love, too."

"Bert was quite troubled because he thought you seemed sad at leaving."

"Good little sympathetic fellow," said Diana. "I don't want to believe, Mrs. Lowell, that this is good-bye for us."

"I hope it is not. New York and Philadelphia are not far apart, but you will begin to be absorbed in other interests as soon as this yacht leaves the cove." [Pg 335]

Diana shook her head. "My memory is not so short."

Mrs. Lowell looked at her with thoughtful affection. "I hope they won't spoil you, my dear," she said wistfully. "It is very remarkable that you have come along so far with 'a heart at leisure from itself.'"

"Oh, do you think I have that?" returned Diana, looking up with seeking eyes.

"I do, my dear. The key note of happy usefulness is unselfishness. I have been surprised by your unselfishness, Diana—under circumstances that usually make for the other thing."

"But, Mrs. Lowell, I am frightfully selfish!" exclaimed the girl. "You don't know!"

Her friend smiled. "Well, if you see it, that is half the battle. The other half is putting it down—destroying it."

"It is usually about—about people," said Diana unsteadily. "I—I am afraid I am a monopolist—"

"My word, but you people are interested in each other," said Philip Barrison, suddenly appearing beside them. "Just lift your eyes."

They looked up and saw the moon rising majestically above the hill-road, and the cove beginning to glitter. [Pg 336]

"Now that mustn't make any difference," said Mrs. Wilbur firmly. "The moon won't run away and Mr. Barrison has consented to sing for us."

"The minutes are going so fast, so fast," thought Diana, "and there will be no more."

Mrs. Wilbur herded her group together and convoyed them to the music-room.

"This is really an especial treat for Mr. Wilbur," she said to Philip. "You know he is the only one of us who hasn't heard you."

"And you needn't imagine," added Mr. Wilbur, "that you are singing for the impresario of the Metropolitan, either. So long as I am the chief beneficiary to-night, it is only fair to tell you, Barrison, that musically I am very despicable. 'The Last Rose of Summer,' and 'Annie Laurie,' are where I am. So don't waste any *moderne* stuff on me."

Philip smiled as he moved to the piano, and the company chose their places. Mrs. Wilbur took a seat beside her husband, enveloped in the anticipatory glow of the *matinée* girl.

"I want to be where I can hold your hand if I need to, dear," she said. Her husband glanced at Diana, flushed and grave, as she placed herself on a low stool near the door, then back at the upstanding white figure beside the piano. [Pg 337]

Philip said a few words to his accompanist as Barney's fingers strayed softly over the keys—then a familiar strain began, and the heralded voice was heard:

"Believe me, if all those endearing young charms
That I gaze on so fondly to-day—"

At the close, the host was smiling and nodding while his wife's eyes challenged him in mute triumph. Philip discoursed with Barney a few moments and apparently the pigeonholes of the accompanist's mind were well-stored and the contents available, for the old favorite was followed by "If I but Knew," "At Parting," "To Mary," and so on, Mr. Wilbur growing more enthusiastic at each number.

"You can speak, young man, so as to be understood, and you're the singer for me," he said. "You have been very indulgent. Now if you don't mind, let us have 'Drink to me only.'"

Philip, for the first time, turned and looked directly at Diana. Her father noticed it. He was becoming every moment more alert as to the hundred-per-cent man in the white flannels.

The song followed. Diana, on her low seat, had her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands, and never once looked at the singer. [Pg 338]

"I have one more for you," said Philip when the applause had died away. "It is a song of Maude Valérie White's, which I think fits into your category, Mr. Wilbur. It has been haunting me of late."

He turned for a few words to the accomplished Barney, during which Diana looked up

questioningly, apprehensively. She felt she could not bear much more of the beating upon her heart-strings.

Philip turned back, and, after only one running chord of prelude, began to sing:

"Let us forget we loved each other much,
Let us forget we ever have to part.
Let us forget that any look or touch
First let in either to the other's heart.

"Only we'll sit upon the daisied grass,
And hear the larks and see the swallows pass.
Only we'll live awhile as children play,
Without to-morrow, without yesterday."

The last note was one of those high ones which Kelly had stated did such fell work upon the feminine heart, and Mrs. Wilbur's lips were tremulous as she met her husband's eyes.

"Say, my dear," he said, while clapping his hands manfully, "you have Barrison sing that at Pittsfield, and I'll come to your party and make love to you the rest of the night." [Pg 339]

Philip smiled and nodded, and drifted away from the piano, while Barney got up and stretched his legs.

"Where's Diana?" exclaimed her father, and instantly condemned himself for drawing attention to her departure.

"Oh, but she heard it, I'm sure," said Mrs. Wilbur apologetically, still wiping her eyes. "I'm sure no one appreciates your singing more than Diana."

"Gone to look after her moon, probably," said Philip. "You know a goddess has her duties."

"There have been things going on," thought Charles Wilbur, with ever-deepening conviction. "Mr. Kelly, you are a wizard," he said, shaking Barney by the hand while Mrs. Lowell and Veronica were thanking Philip.

"You have both been so good to us," said Mrs. Wilbur warmly. "Why, Diana, where have you been? We missed you," she added, as the girl came into the room.

"I wanted to see if the steward understood," she replied. "I think, if we go on deck now, we shall have something else refreshing after this delightful feast." Her father watched the girl approach Barney. "Mr. Kelly, you are wonderful. I remember the comical things you said about your insignificance at recitals. I've seen again how apocryphal those statements are." [Pg 340]

Her father continued to watch for her thanks to Philip. Apparently there were none forthcoming, and fortunately Mrs. Wilbur was too busy talking to him herself to notice it.

"But won't Mr. Kelly play something before we leave?" she said supplicatingly.

"Oh, no, my dear lady," returned Barney lightly. "One has no appetite for dinner after dessert."

They went on deck, and the moon was glorifying the still cove. Apparently the motor boats had sated their curiosity as to the yacht, and all was peaceful. The company sat about in a social group and ate and drank. Barney Kelly told some amusing experiences which he and Philip had had on the road last season. Diana scarcely heard his anecdotes, but she laughed with the rest.

"Without to-morrow, without yesterday."

The words sang themselves over and over in her heart, and her cheeks still burned. The minutes were flying, flying, and Philip was sitting near her mother, who waited on him assiduously and rallied him upon his lack of appetite. [Pg 341]

"Say, boy," said Kelly at last, "do you know we have a cart-load of music to look over and we ought to do it to-night?"

Then they would go. She would not see him alone again!

"Mrs. Lowell, are you ready?" asked Philip. "We four will have a grand moonlight walk up to the Inn."

"No, indeed," replied that lady. "The faithful Bill is expecting us. I know how busy you and Mr. Kelly must be."

"Oh, dear!" burst forth Veronica. It was almost her first utterance of the evening. "Isn't it a shame that the pleasantest things in life are always the shortest!" She did wish Mrs. Lowell would not be so considerate of the men's time. "Miss Diana, don't you really feel just a little bit sorry to go and leave us?"

"I do, indeed," returned Diana, receiving the girl's offered hand in her cold one. "The best way probably is to remember Mr. Barrison's song and live as children play—'without to-morrow, [Pg 342]

without yesterday.' It has been a—a wonderful playtime."

"But there will be a to-morrow," said Philip, approaching her. "Will you come to the opera next winter and hear me peep a few lines like 'Madam, the carriage waits'?" He smiled radiantly. "That is, if I get in at all."

"Certainly, all your friends will be there," she returned, with palpitating dignity. How could he speak so gayly? Probably the dazzling possibilities of the future had effaced for him the memories that glowed in her. That is what life with him would be: a constant craving, and a constant disappointment.

"I want a word with you, Barrison, before we break up," said Mr. Wilbur. "You have been some star in this island visit of mine." He took Philip's arm and walked apart with him.

"Oh, Mr. Kelly, see the phosphorescence," cried Veronica from where she had moved near the rail. Barney followed her.

"What do you suppose Mr. Wilbur wants with Barrison?" said Kelly softly, as they leaned over the rail. "Going to write him a check for a million, maybe. He'd never miss it."

"I don't believe Mr. Barrison will need anybody else's millions. He made a lump come right up in my throat when he sang that last song about forgetting and sitting on the daisies. I just wished I was in love with somebody so I could be miserable all night like girls in books. But"—Veronica sighed—"I am the most unsentimental girl in the world."

[Pg 343]

"I wonder if that is what makes you so nice," said Barney, regarding her mignonne face instead of the phosphorescence. "You're a little brick. Do you know it? Are you coming back here again next summer?"

"Perhaps," returned Veronica demurely. "But meanwhile I live in Newark; quite near New York."

"I know, my dear, but when I get submerged, even little bricks can't make me come to the surface to breathe. Do you think your father would let you come over to lunch with me sometimes?"

"You can ask him," replied Veronica.

"Oh, dear, is that the way you feel about it?"

"Just the way."

"All ashore that's going ashore." It was Philip's voice. "Come on, Kelly, and Little V."

Diana had been talking with Mrs. Lowell. She kissed her now hurriedly, and stood rigid. The time had come. She would never go to the opera. She would never see him again. Meanwhile, she joined her mother's gracious reception of the parting courtesies, and shook hands with all the guests alike. They went down the guarded stairway. It was midnight, and the cove was very still. Diana could not watch the departure of the small boat.

[Pg 344]

"I'm tired," she said, stifling a yawn. "Good-night, dears."

She disappeared quickly. Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur stood by the rail and waved to the departing boat-load.

"What a delightful evening it has been," said the lady with a sigh. "But wasn't it strange that Mr. Barrison wasn't hungry after singing? I thought people always were. Didn't you think the sandwiches were as good as usual?"

"Better. I was as hungry as a hunter—or a sailor. Great air, this, Laura."

CHAPTER XXIII THE MOON-GODDESS

[Pg 345]

In the twin beds of the master's room on the yacht Idlewild two persons lay wide awake at one-thirty o'clock that morning.

One of them finally said softly and tentatively: "Charlie, are you awake?"

"I am, my dear," came the reply, "and I should like to ask whether it is simply insomnia with you, or whether you are suffering from incipient St. Vitus?"

"Why, I thought I had been keeping so still. It was the same way after I heard that man sing the last time. I couldn't sleep for hours. Isn't he all I said? I'll warrant he is keeping you awake, too."

"I think he is."

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilbur triumphantly. "You do consider him extraordinary, don't you?"

"I do. So much so that I have asked him to go out with us to-morrow night—Oh, it's to-night, isn't it? The Captain says we will leave at nine-thirty, and go as far as Portland."

"Why, I think that is fine," said Mrs. Wilbur, greatly surprised. "Well," she added, after a pause, "you could scarcely give a greater proof of your liking, for I know how careful you are not to commit yourself to being bored by anybody on the yacht. Why didn't he tell me when he left to-night?" [Pg 346]

"Because he did not expect to accept. He may do so yet, however. I told him he might decide at the last minute."

"Why did he hesitate? Perhaps because you didn't invite Mr. Kelly."

"Oh, but I did. I told him they might reign supreme in the music-room and work as much as they pleased."

"How delightful! Then why didn't he jump at such a prospect? I suppose because they wouldn't get to New York so quickly."

"No, he has considerable latitude concerning the date for arrival in New York. I'll tell you just what he replied when I asked him. He looked me straight in the eye and he said: 'Thank you, Mr. Wilbur, but it wouldn't do me any good to take such a trip. It's best for me to play safe. I've passed the age when it is permissible to cry for the moon.' He said it slowly, with pauses. He was perfectly willing I should know what he meant, and he saw that I did know."

"Will you kindly tell me"—Mrs. Wilbur sat up in bed and looked across at her husband, bewildered—"what the man was talking about?" [Pg 347]

"Can't you possibly think it out?" asked Charles Wilbur quietly.

She frowned into the darkness. "You don't mean—he teases Diana about being goddess of the moon—" She paused.

"You're getting warm, dear, very warm," remarked her husband.

"Why, Charlie, it's impossible!" Then hotly: "He is very wise. Nothing would induce Diana to think of him."

"You wouldn't like it, eh?"

"Why, the idea! It's an impossible idea! I was a little apprehensive at first, when I saw how attractive he was and knew that she had been up here alone with him so long, but I soon saw there was nothing in it, and you should hear what Diana says—"

"Yes, I know young girls say a great many things besides their prayers."

"Well, what did you say to him when he answered you like that?" Mrs. Wilbur's tone was tense.

"I told him that he might think it over, and that I should be glad to have him come."

"Charles Wilbur!" exclaimed his wife severely. She threw off a down cover as if minded to rise. [Pg 348]

"Cover yourself up, dear. It's rather cool."

"But that was encouraging him, Charlie."

"I think he perceived it dimly. He looked at me—a long gaze—by George, he's a good-looking boy—and he didn't say a word. Then we shook hands and rejoined the others."

"You have done very wrong," declared Mrs. Wilbur, pulling back the cover, but not lying down.

"What do you want for Diana, Laura? A title?"

"You needn't use that tone. I haven't thought out what I want for Diana."

"I *have*. I want happiness for her. From the day of my arrival here, I have seen signs. I'm a rich man, but there is one thing I can't buy for my only child, and that is happiness. Diana is a fastidious, carefully bred girl, unspoiled as they make 'em, yet, of course, just as liable to fall for an infatuation as Helen Loring was."

"But she hasn't, she has not, Charlie," interrupted his wife impetuously. "You don't know—"

"It is you who do not know, my dear. You have been so in love with him yourself, and so obsessed with the joy of springing him on Mrs. Coolidge and your other musical friends, that you haven't seen what was going on under your nose any more than if you were a dear little bat." [Pg 349]

"Don't you call me a dear little bat! Diana is much more my child than yours. A mother understands her daughter far better than the father can. The idea of your high-handedly taking this matter into your hands without even consulting me!"

"Don't get excited, Laura. I'm not forcing anything. You've had your innings. You didn't even notice what that last song of Barrison's did to Diana to-night."

"Mere emotionality. The same thing that keeps me awake after I hear him sing. That proves nothing. It should even make you pull away from him instead of pulling for him. You're crazy, Charles. He has hypnotized you. The idea that a mere thrilling tenor voice and a fine figure could make you lay down your common sense." Mrs. Wilbur's voice quavered and she felt under her pillow for her handkerchief.

Her husband smiled in the darkness. "Wait, dear. I don't care whether Diana marries a singer or not. I want her to marry a real man. I was on the lookout for infatuation when I saw you so captivated, and I began to inquire into the facts. I found an all-American chap who had had a struggle from childhood and won out over poverty and discouragement by hitching his wagon to a star. He volunteered during the late war and was slightly wounded. He has a clean inheritance, good muscle, and plenty of red blood. I don't care for the blue kind, myself. In short, he is the sort of man I am perfectly willing our daughter should marry, *if she wants to.*"

[Pg 350]

"I tell you—"

"Yes, I know. You tell me she doesn't want to. Now, I have an idea we shall very soon learn the truth about that. Barrison has shown that he knows how to get what he wants. In this case, I can see how our money will stick in his crop."

"Ho!" from the other bed. A tremendous aspiration.

"Don't blow me out of the room, dearie. I know people will laugh at that idea, but I have had lots of experience in reading character. Barrison will have a great deal to overcome in his own mind. He will not feel free to approach Diana. Perhaps, after all, the affair will amount to nothing. All right, if it does. I'm a passenger, now that I feel sure the boy is a clean specimen."

[Pg 351]

"Has it come to this!" ejaculated Mrs. Wilbur slowly. "That Diana Wilbur is to be given to a clean specimen!"

"If she so desires," returned the other. "Now I'm going to ask a big thing of you, Laura. It is not to speak to Diana on this subject until she speaks to you. She knows nothing of my invitation to Barrison. We can't handle the matter any further with good effect until the principals declare themselves. You know our girl. You know it is a hall mark of genuineness, a proof of pure metal when she likes a man or a woman. Can't you trust her?"

Mrs. Wilbur was lying down now. Her husband heard a sniff or two stifled in a pillow.

"I wasn't anybody when you married me, Laura," he went on gently. "Weren't we just as happy when we economized on taking a taxi as we are in this yacht? Our boy would be nearly twenty-three now if he had lived. I would have liked my son to look at me with as clear eyes, to have known as little of self-indulgence as Barrison. It is all up to the children, but wouldn't there be points in being mother-in-law to that voice, when you come to think it over?"

[Pg 352]

No answer, and soon Charles Wilbur completed his infamy by a long and regular breathing that assured his wife that he was sleeping the sleep of the unjust and the outrageous.

Léonie arose a few hours later to a hard day. Mrs. Wilbur had a headache and did not leave her bed. Diana, with dark shadows under her eyes, came in to make a dutiful visit of condolence, and was well snubbed. She retreated to the deck, where her father was cheerfully watching the life of the cove.

"Good-morning, dear," he said, turning and putting his arm around her. "We have your mother laid out, haven't we?"

"Why, Daddy, what is the matter? The coördination of her nervous system seems entirely thrown out."

He smiled heartlessly. "She didn't sleep much, honey. Neither did you," regarding her closely.

"No, Daddy," she replied, rather breathlessly. "I seem to be more reposeful when the yacht is in motion."

"'Rocked in the cradle of the deep,' eh? Want to go ashore this morning?"

[Pg 353]

"No, I think not. Mrs. Lowell is coming out for tea this afternoon, a little good-bye visit."

"All right, then. What do you say to some cribbage?"

"Fine, if we cannot be of any assistance to Mamma. Are you sure?"

"Yes, my love. She has been drinking heavily of 'the wine of astonishment' and must sleep it off. If there is any humble pie on board, you might have Léonie take her some for luncheon."

"What are you talking about, Daddy? Poor Mamma!"

"Yes, she is absolutely one of the finest. I thought so when she was eighteen, and cute, with a little turn-up nose and dimples something like that Veronica girl, and I think so now; but the best of women must sometimes lie by until they get a new perspective."

"Daddy, I don't understand you. You and Mamma have—have differed about something, I fear."

"Well, it—it might be described that way. Morris,"—turning toward his valet who was near,—"*the cribbage-board, please.*"

Diana strove valiantly not to have a miserable day. She played cribbage with her father until luncheon was served on deck. Then she gave orders for her tea, and Léonie came to remind her of her promise that she might show Bill Lindsay over the yacht. He arrived about the same time as Mrs. Lowell, and Léonie, frightened to death of her mistress's strange mood, besought Diana

[Pg 354]

to remain with her mother while she should fulfill the promise to her island pal, and bid him a long and racking farewell.

So Diana left Mrs. Lowell with her father while she ventured to her mother's bedside and sat down, silently. A handkerchief, redolent of cologne, covered the sufferer's eyes.

"Who is that?" came faintly from the blinded one.

"It is I, Mamma," said Diana meekly. "Are you feeling a little better?"

"Diana,"—the voice was still faint but stern,— "have I been a good mother to you?"

"Mamma, dear, there never was a better. How can you ask?"

"Because no one else thinks so."

Diana threw herself on her knees beside the bed and took the hand that was outside the rosy silk coverlet. "Dearest, I am not feeling very well to-day and you will destroy my poise if you say such things. My heart feels sore for some reason, so do not give it any blows. You know how Daddy and I think there is nobody in the world like you. Daddy was talking about it this morning and telling me how cute and pretty you were when he first knew you,"—Diana's voice began to quaver,— "told me about your dimples and everything, and how you were just as attractive to him now as you had been then, and"—Diana succumbed and tears fell on the hand she held—"and if I am ever married, Mamma,—I do so hope that in twenty-five years afterward—he—he will feel that way about me."

[Pg 355]

One eye emerged from the cologne bandage and viewed the girl's lovely, bowed head.

"Now, don't cry, Diana," firmly. "Why in the world should you cry? You have a wonderful life opening before you. You've known nothing yet but school, and I want you to spend a little time thinking of the possibilities of the future. With your looks and the money at your command, there is no social experience among the highest-placed and most cultivated people abroad and at home that you may not enjoy. You've heard the saying: 'Of the unspoken word you are master, the spoken word is master of you.' It is the same with actions. You are deliberate by nature, and exquisite by breeding. Never commit yourself to anything impulsively. No mother would be a good mother who did not say as much as this to you."

[Pg 356]

Diana experienced a sudden stricture of the heart that dried her eyes and held her motionless over the hand she held. She knew all at once the cause of her parents' difference. She had never in her life been able to conceal anything from her father. She flushed deeply. Whatever he had said to her mother must have been in Philip's favor. With thoughts, humble, frightened, resentful, racing through her mind, she did not know how long she had been kneeling there when Léonie came in with soft step, and she looked up to see her mother's eye again eclipsed. She remembered Mrs. Lowell.

"Léonie is here now and I must go, dearest. Mrs. Lowell has come out for some tea. Shall Léonie bring you some?"

"No. I want nothing. I am feeling better, Diana. Don't distress yourself about me."

The girl kissed the forehead above the bandage and passing Léonie saw that her eyes, too, were red.

[Pg 357]

"I wonder if this day will ever be over", she thought dismally.

She found her father and Mrs. Lowell having a visit, charming to each of them, and tea was served at once.

While they were eating and drinking, the island steamer came into the cove and up to its landing.

"I suppose our delightful musician friends are leaving on that boat," said Mrs. Lowell. "Shan't we stand at the rail, and wave a good-bye?"

"No, I wouldn't," returned Diana hastily. "Everybody except the right ones will take the greeting to themselves, and—" Indeed, she would not wave to Philip after his cruelty in singing that song! And obeying it so literally as not to manage one word of farewell to her alone!

"Little snob, eh, Mrs. Lowell?" said her father.

The steamer was turning around to leave.

"He is going!" cried Diana's heart. The whole day to have passed with no sign from him! Cruel! Cruel! "You know, Daddy, Mrs. Lowell and I must see something of each other the coming winter if only for Bert's sake. He is related to us."

[Pg 358]

The passenger boat was passing near now. The yacht felt its waves. Diana turned her eyes toward it in spite of herself. Some people were waving handkerchiefs toward the handsome yacht, and the Captain whistled three times. The yacht replied, and Charles Wilbur stood up and saluted. Diana's heart beat hard and painfully. She looked back at the tea-table.

"Tell us, Daddy, just what relation Mr. Herbert Loring was to you."

"Why, it was this way. My grandmother and his mother were—"

Diana never knew what they were, for the island steamer was moving toward the mouth of the cove. Handkerchiefs were waving from the stern. It receded. It rounded the rocks at the farthest point, and disappeared.

"That is very interesting, indeed," said Mrs. Lowell. "I shall tell Bert. He will be glad and proud of the connection. I have a fine boy there, Mr. Wilbur. I am hoping my husband won't mind my taking such a responsibility." She rose to go.

"You have a good ally in Luther Wrenn," remarked Mr. Wilbur, arranging her wrap.

"Yes, and in you, I hope?"

[Pg 359]

"Certainly. At your service. A big responsibility awaits that youngster. Let us hope he will grow up to be as clean-cut and simply honest as young Barrison."

"You do like him, don't you?" said Mrs. Lowell with her direct look.

"Very much, so far. I don't know how he may carry sail in the prosperity before him, but so far he seems to be all to the good."

The small boat was summoned for the guest. Bill Lindsay had gone off in the dory that brought him. Diana went alone with her friend to the head of the awninged stairway.

Mrs. Lowell saw the marks of distress in the young face, and she held the girl's hand for a minute. "God bless you," she said, and kissed her lovingly. "Trust Him, my dear," she added meaningly. "He is taking care of you. Claim it and know it. Good-bye."

Diana watched the boat glide toward the shore. "This awful day is nearly over," she thought. "I feel as if my good angel was going away in that boat."

Mrs. Wilbur did not arise for dinner. Diana and her father ate it alone in state. Keen to do her duty and grateful to him for his attitude toward the man whom she must henceforth forget, she had dressed herself in her prettiest gown. At twenty, pensive eyes with shadows about them are not unbecoming, and her father looked across at her admiringly.

[Pg 360]

"The Count de No-Account or some other titles, should be here to-night, my dear. The moon-goddess is too lovely to beam upon no one more thrilling than her humdrum old daddy."

"As if any one could come up to him," rejoined Diana affectionately. "You remind me of the way Mamma was talking this afternoon, of all the possibilities money opens to a girl, abroad and at home. She did not stop to think what a standard she had set up by marrying you."

Her father nodded slowly, regarding her with a curious smile. "Indeed. So little Mamma was able to sit up with a comforter around her and show you the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them, was she? Well, well. Foxy little Mamma."

Diana blushed violently and busied herself with her salad. "I am sorry we have to sleep in Portland harbor to-night. It won't be quiet for Mamma."

There were no more personalities during the meal. The girl and her father went on deck and watched the sunset together, after which Mr. Wilbur said he would go down and see his wife, and Diana was left alone. She had a deeply cushioned seat moved near the yacht's rail in the stern, and leaned back to watch the cove darken and the lights flash out on the other boats. Her thoughts ran over a résumé of the summer. How long the weeks stretched out in retrospect! How they had fled in passing! Presently, the moon arose over the hill-road. She thought of last evening when their group had welcomed it. Philip had said that night on the rocks that he should not forget that she was as distant from him as that planet, and he had kept his word. Not to see his merry eyes again. Not to see the sensitiveness of his smile when he looked at her. Not to hear him call her a goddess, not to hear him sing except as others heard him.

[Pg 361]

"Only we'll sit upon the daisied grass,
And hear the larks, and see the swallows pass.
Only we'll live awhile as children play,
Without to-morrow, without yesterday."

She had heard the song all day, and her heart now felt sick and empty as she sat there, that golden moon beaming down upon her alone, and striking to silver the ripples across the cove. She leaned among her cushions and turned her face aside. Her eyes began to smart, and she closed them. The wind as usual had gone down with the sun, and the awning fringes were but faintly stirred.

[Pg 362]

Suddenly she felt that the boat was moving. So smooth and silent its motion, that, when she looked up, the yacht was halfway out of the cove. She leaned forward.

"Oh, good-bye," she murmured, and she held out her hands toward the wooded bank. "Good-bye. Oh, good-bye, Isola Bella. I shall always love you, and every blade of grass, and every daisy, and every swallow."

Tears veiled the shadowy woods. She dashed them away, and resisted the sob that rose in her throat. The yacht moved swiftly out into the waves of the summer sea. It was now only the end of

the wooded bluff which she could perceive in the moonlight. She leaned back again, and, covering her eyes, relaxed, holding her quivering lip between her teeth.

A neighboring movement made her look up, expecting her father.

Philip Barrison stood there.

She caught her breath. "It is impossible!" she gasped.

[Pg 363]

"Yes, it is." He took her outstretched hands and sank down beside her. "It is a midsummer night's dream; but I couldn't—I tried, Diana, but I couldn't resist. Your father asked me—said I might come—even at the last minute." At each pause Philip kissed the hands he was holding. "Are you—that is the one vital question—are you glad I came, my goddess?"

The look she gave him in the moonlight made him take her quickly in his arms, and she sank into them with the certainty of the bird that finds its nest.

"I don't know how I dared this, Diana,—dared the future, I mean. How can I be the right one to win the prize of the whole world?"

"Because you are the only man in the whole world for me, and you felt it, and I felt it. Oh, Philip, I won't be so selfish as in the way I have talked to you. I am never going to grudge that others should admire you."

"No, you never will," he answered. "The sparkle of what others may say is like the phosphorescence down there in the unlighted places. The radiance and glow filling my whole being now is an eternal thing. I can't believe it yet, it will take me a long time to believe it, but, oh, my beautiful one, I wish, I do wish you were a poor girl!"

[Pg 364]

She lifted her head from his breast, looking at him with glorified eyes. "I should be," she said slowly, "if you did not love me—Philomel."

They kissed, and the moon shone down on the beaten foam of the snowy wake in a long, ineffable silence.

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[Pg 366]

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE KEY NOTE: A NOVEL ***

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