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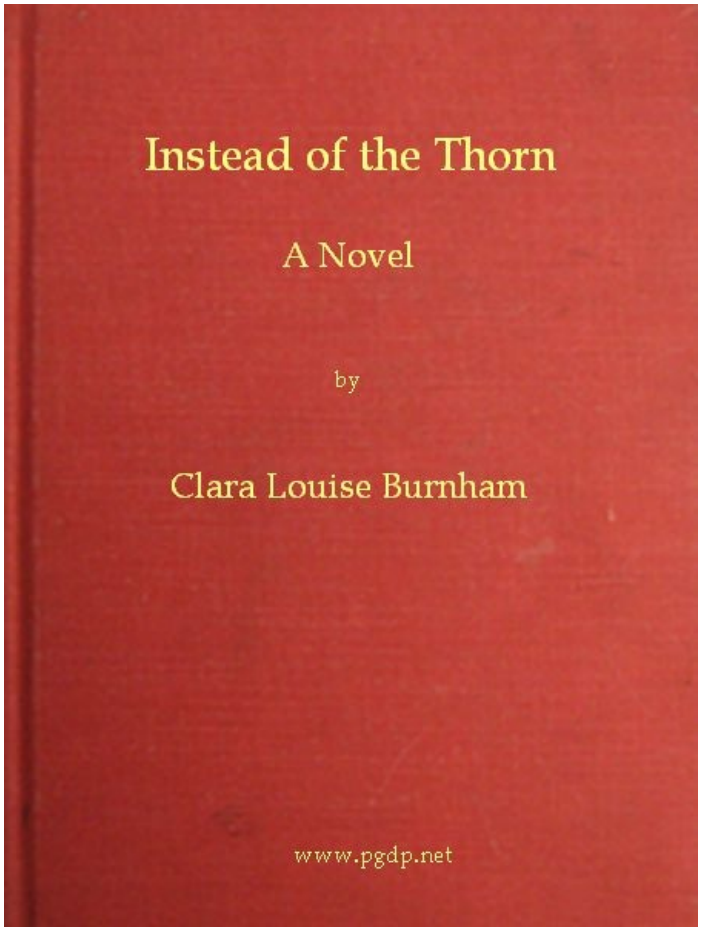

Instead of the Thorn

A Novel

by

Clara Louise Burnham

Boston and New York

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TO
C.T.R.
WITH LOVING AND GRATEFUL MEMORIES
OF JOCKEY HILL

Contents

Instead of the Thorn

CHAPTER I

AT THE SOUTH SHORE

On a June evening, Mr. and Mrs. Radcliffe were entertaining their New York friends the Lindsays at dinner at the South Shore Club. The dining-room, with its spacious semicircle of glass, is a place where Chicago may entertain New York with complacence, for the windows give upon Lake Michigan, whose billows break so close to the border of velvety grass that the effect is of dining on a yacht.

The Lindsays were enamored of the great marine view, lovely in the long June evening, and with many an admiring comment watched the white gulls hover and wheel above the sunset water.

Mrs. Radcliffe was a stout, white-haired woman, costumed with disregard of expense, and she habitually wore an expression of countenance which betokened general optimism.

Mrs. Lindsay, of about her friend's age, was spare and lined of face, offering a contrast to the hostess's plump smoothness. She again raised a jeweled lorgnette to watch the wheeling gulls.

"Oh, Chicago wouldn't be anything without the lake," remarked Mrs. Radcliffe complacently.

"And this clubhouse is such a perfect place to watch it," returned her friend.

"We have a very charming ballroom here," said Mrs. Radcliffe. "I'm sorry it isn't a formal dance night."

The orchestra was playing a Hesitation Waltz, which reminded her. For the Hesitation had not yet been driven from the field by troops who cantered, and those strains were always sufficient to people the spacious ballroom until it was alive with dancers, old and young. Indeed, as one comic paper had it that season, "He who does not hesitate is lost." Just when or why silver threads among the gold ceased to relegate advancing years to a shelf above the dancers, it would be hard to say; but certain it is that the rosy walls behind the pure white columns in the popular ballroom threw their diffused and becoming light that season upon sometimes agile but always determined middle age, as well as upon slender youth.

There is a point, however, where Terpsichore stands inexorably and says, "Thus far and no farther": a point where the wistful dancer realizes that all is Hesitation, and the Waltz balks. This is reached in the matron at the weight of two hundred pounds, and Mrs. Radcliffe had arrived there; so, like the spinster of the story, who settled down to contentment with her lot when she had "stopped strugglin'," Mrs. Radcliffe enjoyed peacefully her visits to the club, and invaded the ballroom only as a spectator.

She looked up now at her friend. "Have you and Mr. Lindsay joined the one-stepping legion?" she asked.

"No, we have not. We have children and rheumatism. You know that does make a difference." Mrs. Lindsay's bright, nervous eyes snapped, and she showed a set of artistic teeth.

Mrs. Radcliffe shrugged a comfortable shoulder. "Well, I have one child, but that wouldn't stop me. He has a child of his own. Let him attend to his own affairs. I haven't the rheumatism, but neither have I any breath to spare. You look at me and you see that."

The two ladies laughed and sipped their coffee. Their husbands, with chairs moved sidewise, were talking in low tones over their cigarettes.

"We have such a charming ballroom!" repeated the hostess. "It makes me hate my flesh to go in there; but Mr. Radcliffe says it's the terror of his life that I may lose an ounce and want to dance, and he is always urging delicious salads on me." The plump speaker shook again, till the diamonds on her ample breast scintillated. "He's the laziest man in Chicago. I suppose I ought to be thankful that he doesn't improve his slimness and the shining hour by coming and dancing with these buds. Lots of other gray heads do, and the buds can't help themselves, poor little things. Isn't that an attractive nosegay over there?" The speaker indicated the spot where twenty-four young girls and men were gayly dining at a round table, whose roses, violets, and lilies-of-the-valley strove with the material feast.

"My daughter-in-law, Harriet, is giving that dinner for her sister, who has just graduated from our University. If you want to see a spoiled child of fortune, look at Linda Barry now. That is she, holding up the glass of grape-juice. Aren't her dimples wonderful? Look at those brown eyes sparkle. Doesn't her very hair look as if electricity were running through the locks? I tell you she's a handful! I've always been so thankful that Henry chose her sister Harriet. Such a quiet, sensible young woman, Harriet is. She wouldn't let them have any wine, you see. She says it sounds like Fourth of July all the year around at this club, and she's terribly particular about Henry. That's Harriet, sitting with her back to us: the one with the velvet around her throat. I admire my daughter-in-law, but I always feel she thinks I'm too frivolous, and spend too much time playing cards."

The speaker's husband caught a part of what she was saying.

"Yes, Lindsay," he said. "You knew one of Barry's daughters married my boy, didn't you? That's the other one facing us."

Mr. Lindsay turned his iron-gray head until he could observe the smiling girl, offering a grape-juice toast. The family of the head of the firm of Barry & Co. was of interest to him.

Some one had stuck a spray of leaves in the thick, bright waves of her hair.

"Make a corking study of a Bacchante, if some one should paint her just as she is," remarked the New York man.

"Shades of my daughter-in-law—if she should hear you! She'd say that Linda had outwitted her after all." Mr. Radcliffe smiled across at his wife. "Harriet is the modern progressive woman,—goes in for Suffrage and Eugenics and all that; but with the reserve and quiet of a Puritan. She can't understand Linda, who is athletic, a comrade of boys, the idol of her father, and a law unto herself."

Mr. Lindsay was regarding the girl, who was smiling confidently and making a speech inaudible from the distant corner. "She looks as if she had the world by the tail," he remarked.

"That about describes her state of mind," responded the other. "Life has been a triumphal

progress for her, so far. She hasn't had a mother for ten years, and her father couldn't spare her to go away to school, so here she has been educated, right in our burg, though she's a millionaire's daughter. You've been in that old-fashioned stone pile of a house of Barry's up there on Michigan Avenue? I should think Barry'd be sick of keeping a boarding-house for servants, and I've told him so."

"He's sick of something," returned Mr. Lindsay quietly, "or so it seemed to my wife and me. We dined there last night."

"Oh, you did?"

"Yes. The daughter wasn't there. Her father said she was away at one of her graduation festivities. What's the matter with Barry?"

The speaker's eyes left the dimpling girl with the dancing eyes and came back to his friend as he asked the quiet question.

"Why, nothing that I know of," replied the other, surprised. "Cares of state, I suppose."

"No rumors on the street?" The slow question was put in a still lower tone.

"Haven't heard any," was the quick reply.

The other nodded. "Good," he said.

"Why, have you?"

"There's some talk in the East about the Antlers project. Probably nothing but gossip."

"Nothing else, I'm sure. All these big irrigation deals have something of a black eye just now, but Barry & Co. know what they're about. They never buy a pig in a poke."

"What are you saying about pigs, Cyrus?" asked Mrs. Radcliffe smartly. "You know it's a tabooed subject in our best families."

Mr. Radcliffe paid no attention to her in his disturbance. "You know my nephew, Bertram King? He came straight out of college into that bank, and has been there nearly ten years. Barry likes him, and he's had good luck, and I think another year'll see him in the firm. Everybody believes that Barry doesn't go into any big deal unless King approves. I see Bertram quite often. He's over there in that dinner party now: sitting on Harriet's right. You've met my daughter-in-law?"

"Oh, yes, and King, too. He dined with us last night. Seemed to be a brainy chap."

"Oh, he's sedate as they make 'em. I often think he's the one that ought to have married Harriet. See Henry sitting between those pink and blue girls, and keeping 'em in a roar? He gets his frivolity from his mother."

Mrs. Radcliffe drew down the corners of her lips. "Frivolity that captured Harriet Barry, you'll notice. There they go," she added, as the gay young people at the round table pushed back their chairs; "there they go to their dance. Happy young things!" Mrs. Radcliffe sighed. "With all their troubles before them," she added, and the perfunctoriness of the addition made Mr. Lindsay smile.

"I hope they all weather it as well as you have, Mrs. Radcliffe," he said.

The host smiled too as they rose from the table.

"So say we all of us," he remarked. "Let's go and have a game. Do you play nullos, Mrs. Lindsay?"

"I play everything I can get my hands on," she returned promptly.

CHAPTER II

HOT TEA

Linda Barry was looking in the glass. She liked her own reflection, and no wonder. She was coolly critical of her own appearance, however, and granted it her approval only when her costume and coiffure reached the standard of her own prescription. Whether any one else criticized her was a matter of profound indifference. She had been known in her class in the University as a good fellow, a good sport, carelessly generous, and confident of her own powers, physical and mental.

Emerson says, if you would have friends you must know how to do without them. Linda Barry was a born leader and took her friends for granted. She never went out of her way to make one. That sort of girl always has some enemies, impotently resenting all that she arrogates to herself and that her admirers grant to her. But such clashes as had taken place left no mark on Linda. Triumphant and careless of triumph, she emerged from college life and asked of an obliging world, "What next?"

She was looking in the glass now, this Sunday afternoon, because she had been romping with her nephew, aged five, and he had pulled her hat awry.

She had dropped in for tea at her sister's apartment by the lake. It was two days after the dinner dance, and she was still feeling high approval of Harriet for the way in which she had managed the whole affair.

Bertram King was sitting opposite her now, holding the panting small boy, whose cheeks were

red with exertion, and who chuckled with joy at having won a sudden and tempestuous battle by the simple move of jerking his aunt's hat over her eyes.

"I beated Aunt Linda. I beated her," he shrieked gayly.

"Hush, hush, Harry dear," said his mother from the tea-table. "Aunt Linda lets you get too excited."

Aunt Linda, whose very presence was suggestive of intoxicating rough and tumble to her nephew, winked and nodded at him from the glass.

"I'll catch you alone some day," she said, with a significance which filled him with ecstatic terror.

He jumped up and down in the encircling arms.

"No, you won't, no, you won't!" he shouted. "Uncle Bertram won't let you." The child's active arms caught the ribbon that held his protector's eyeglasses, and jerked them from his nose.

"Now, Linda, Linda," protested the mother, looking proudly at the lusty youngster, whose rumpled hair and floating tie-ends told of the bout just finished. "Listen, Harry, there's father coming. If I let you take him his tea, will you be very careful?"

Linda, rehabilitated, turned from the mirror and seated herself near the window.

"Let him bring me *my* tea," she said, gazing at the child with eyes that set him again to effervescing with delicious apprehension.

"No, *no*, she'll grab me!" yelled the boy, on a yet higher pitch of joy.

"Linda dear, it's Sunday. Let's have a little quiet," pleaded her sister.

At this moment, the head of the house entered, and his hopeful broke his bonds and, rushing to meet him, was lifted to a safe perch from which he looked down in rosy triumph on his dearest foe.

"Hello, everybody," said Henry Radcliffe. "If there isn't the girl that knows everything—including how to dance! You're a bird, Linda. How are you, Bertram?" The men shook hands, then the host approached the tea-table and kissed his wife.

"Put Harry right down here, dear. He's going to be a little gentleman and pass the tea."

"But not to Aunt Linda," shouted the child.

"No, no," agreed his mother pacifically. "You can take her tea to Uncle Bertram, and he'll pass it."

"Look out, Uncle Bertram, she'll tickle you," advised the boy out of long experience.

Linda, leaning lazily back in her armchair, met King's gray eyes and gave a low laugh.

"Just imagine such *lèse majesté*," she said, and the provoking arch of her lips made Bertram feel, as he always did, that she was laughing at him, not with him. He was too used to it to be disconcerted. He had a serious, even-featured, smooth-shaven face, light hair which would have liked to wave had its owner been willing, and short-sighted eyes, which, nevertheless, saw far enough to understand Linda Barry and deplore her.

"She'll catch your heels, too, if you go upstairs in front of her," continued the small boy, chuckling breathlessly as he watched his lazily reclining adored one, the sparks in whose eyes gave every hope that she was as ready as ever to spring.

"That sort of thing isn't good for a child. It overexcites him," remarked Bertram, unsmiling, dangling his eyeglasses by the ribbon.

"Dear, dear," said Linda. "Excuse me! I meant, Hear, hear!"

"Now, Harry darling," said Mrs. Radcliffe, "can you be careful? Father will sit between you and Aunt Linda, and don't go the other side of him *at all*. Do you understand?" Then to her sister, "You know how I value these cups, Linda. Please be good."

Linda stifled a yawn behind her white-gloved hand and looked very good indeed.

"Henry and I," went on the hostess complacently, "think we can't begin any too soon to make Harry at home in the drawing-room. Why, already he can stand and drink his cambric tea, and manage his cup as well as any of you, can't you, dear?"

Harry, finding himself under discussion, ceased smiling and scuffed violently across the rug.

"That isn't pretty, darling. Now, this is for Uncle Bertram to take to Aunt Linda. Come here. Now, be careful."

Henry Radcliffe took a seat near his wife's table, and the little boy seized a lettuce sandwich and took a bite of it before he attempted the cup.

"Oh, oh, put that down, Harry. You can have it in a minute." The mother laughed as she placed the cup in the child's hands. "He wouldn't eat a bit of lettuce at his own supper, but because grown-ups are having it he wants it!" she remarked. "That's a good boy," as the transit of the cup was made safely. "Now, come here and get one for Uncle Bertram."

As the child obeyed, his mother continued: "I must tell you a very good joke Harry made the other day. He was playing with the cat, and she stretched herself out on the rug, and he lay down with his head on her and said, 'This is my caterpillar.' Wasn't that clever?"

Harry glanced around the assembly rather sheepishly.

"Bully for the boy!" laughed his father. "Come here, Turk."

"Now, don't romp, Henry," pleaded his wife. "Here's Father's tea, Harry dear. Take it nicely. He's learning such a number of German words these days. Fräulein says he has a real talent for languages." The mother regarded her darling fondly. The child's gayety had entirely subsided, and he took his father's cup stolidly. Mrs. Radcliffe gave a low laugh as she continued, "*Now*, whenever he uses a big word in English and isn't quite sure that it is right, he says very carelessly, 'Oh, I said that in Germany.'" The soft laugh increased in merriment, and the speaker looked at her sister and King for appreciation. Linda laughed.

The subject of her remarks, having landed his father's cup safely in the paternal hands, eased his embarrassment by stamping again up and down the rug, making guttural noises in his throat.

"Now, dear, if you're going to do that you'll have to go away," said his mother, and, the German nurse appearing at that moment in the doorway, she accosted her: "Is Harry's supper ready? Yes? All right. Go on, then, darling, we'll excuse you. Fräulein has your nice supper all ready. I'll come and see you in a little while."

When the child, too self-conscious even to exchange parting hostilities with Aunt Linda, had left the room, Bertram King looked up from stirring his tea.

"Henry," he said shortly, "have I your leave to lecture Harriet?"

"Dear me, Bertram," ejaculated Linda, "are you going to take on another? You'll soon not have time to go the rounds, and the world will go to smash!"

King didn't look at her.

Henry Radcliffe closed his hand over his wife's as it rested on the handle of the teapot.

"Certainly, if you can think of anything to lecture her about."

"Can't *you*?" As King asked it he rose and, coming to the tea-table, took a plate of sandwiches and carried them to Linda, and then back to Henry, finally setting them on the table and helping himself.

His cousin shook his head. "Rather not!" he ejaculated. "I hope I know my place. I trip after Harriet at a respectful distance." This time he picked up his wife's hand and kissed it.

"This is fulsome," murmured Linda from her armchair.

"Then you share the lecture, that's all," returned King firmly, resuming his seat. "Here's my text: 'No one should ever talk about a child before him—or her.'"

"Harriet has only one, please remember, Bertram," protested Linda kindly.

Mrs. Radcliffe set down her teacup, and color began to come up in her cheeks as she regarded King. "Bertram, I never—" she began, for he paused. "It's the rarest thing! But here where we're all Harry's own people"—a little rigidity crept into the speaker's voice—"I didn't mean to bore anybody. Don't you"—with defiance—"don't you think that was very witty for a child of his age, that about the caterpillar? I keep his sayings in a book, and he's really a remarkable baby. It isn't at all because he's ours, is it, Henry? Oh"—with sudden impatience—"it's foolish of me to talk to you about it, Bertram. What do you know about children!"

"I've been one; and I see one occasionally; and I marvel to Heaven to see how parents cut themselves out of half the fun they might have with them. You don't seem to have grasped my text. People shouldn't talk *about* children *before* them."

"Of course, I wouldn't *scold* a child before others," said Harriet, with some excitement. "Now, Bertram, you know a lot about bonds that I don't, but I know a lot about children that you don't. I'm not just an animal mother. I've looked into pedagogy and kindergarten principles. Harry can work beautifully in cardboard already; but, of course, if it bores you to hear about him—"

"Yes," interrupted King, "parents should also take into consideration that the general public doesn't care a copper to hear anything about their children; but I'm not the general public where Harry is concerned. I'll guarantee to sit between you and Henry and listen to an antiphonal recital of everything Harry has said and done since he was born, and not yawn once—with one provision."

Harriet flashed him a look. "I don't care to hear your provision. You'll not be called to the martyrdom."

"And the provision is," went on Bertram equably, "that Harry shall not be present. Now, Henry, if you will kindly place your hand over Harriet's mouth, I will proceed."

Linda stirred. There was something about Bertram King's arrogation of superiority that always exasperated her.

"How about my placing my hand kindly over *your* mouth?" she suggested.

He turned and looked directly at her. "I should enjoy that very much," he returned.

Linda was disconcerted for only a moment, then her provoking smile shone.

"Wonderful facilities for biting me, I suppose," she remarked.

"Now, if the children will all be quiet a moment," said Bertram, turning back, "I will take up the cudgels for the rising generation. One of the most charming things on earth, probably the most charming, is a child, unconscious of itself; the most graceful, the most winning; untrammeled in

their little speeches as in their movements. Then some grown-up discusses them in their presence, no matter whether flatteringly or not. Their grace changes to awkwardness, their unconsciousness to embarrassment, their freedom to reserve or to resentful, meaningless noises such as those with which Harry lately favored the company. Under moments of flattery they show some chestiness and conceit at times, but for the most part they're stolid under the infliction, and their parents and friends have lost all the joy of their charm until they can forgive by forgetting. One of the bitterest leaves of their tree of knowledge is discovering that the well-meaning giants around them are laughing at them, not with them."

"Say, there's something in that, Harriet," remarked her husband good-naturedly. "Harry grew as red as a turkey-cock when you told about his excusing himself for using wrong words. I noticed it."

Linda nodded in King's direction. "It's surely a duty Bertram owes to a benighted world to marry."

He turned to her again with the same direct, quick movement as before.

"Very well. Will you have me, Linda?"

She met his gaze, finding some difficulty in giving her own just the right proportion of light scorn.

"I should like to see myself married to you!" she exclaimed slowly.

"Would you?" he responded with lively interest, and rising, strode across to her, while she retreated to the furthest corner of her chair. "Then we're of the same mind for once." He seized her hand, while the teacup in the other rocked and tinkled in a manner to cause the liveliest apprehension in its owner. "Witness, both of you. Linda and I are engaged."

The girl's strong heart pounded violently as she found that vigorous efforts could not free her hand. Color burned her cheeks. Her father's factotum had never seemed to consider her affairs or herself as of any importance, and her habit of thought toward him was an effort to assure him of absolute reciprocation.

"Let me go," she said sharply. "Don't be silly."

"Come on," he urged. "Let's give your father a pleasant surprise. Henry, Harriet, speak up. Tell her what's for her good."

Harriet, the conventional, was anxious under the growing anger in her sister's dark eyes.

"Behave, Bertram," she said severely. "I don't like joking on those subjects. Go back to your chair and I'll give you a lecture much more sensible than yours to me."

"I'm not joking. I believe I could make something fine out of Linda." He gazed down into the girl's face as he spoke.

Henry Radcliffe laughed derisively. "You poor nut," he remarked. "Better not try the Cave-Dweller stunt on Linda. The club would be likely to change hands."

The captured fingers struggled a moment more, while the two pairs of eyes exchanged their combative gaze.

There had never been any jocose passages between the girl and her father's favorite co-worker. There had been moments when she had even felt desire for his approval. The present audacity amazed and disconcerted her, and coercion was simply hateful.

Finding effort to free herself futile, she set her tea down on the arm of her chair, and quickly taking up the cup, deliberately poured the hot, creamy liquid over as much of her captor's cuff as was visible. The cuff collapsed, the tea was hot. King abruptly dropped the girl's hand, and set himself to wiping his own with his handkerchief.

"Now, will you be good?" laughed Henry; but Harriet fixed anxious eyes on the arm of the chair, hoping that Bertram's hand and cuff had received the whole of the baptism, and groaned within herself over the talents of her young sister as a trouble-maker.

"And who calls it 'the cup that cheers'?" remarked King drily.

CHAPTER III

COLD WATER

June heat dropped down on Chicago promptly that year and caused the Barrys to plan to leave town earlier than it suited the banker to go. Indeed, no weather condition ever made Linda's father willing to leave business.

One evening, a few days before their intended departure, Bertram King came to the house to see his employer. The heavy door stood open after the hot day, and with the familiarity of an intimate he stepped inside, intending to take his way to his old friend's den, but in the hall he met Linda: Linda, blooming, dressed in white, and altogether lovely to look upon. Over her arm she carried a silk motor coat and a chiffon veil.

The young man's face looked haggard by comparison with her fresh beauty, and he smiled unconscious admiration as he greeted the exhilaration of her breezy appearance.

"Father is out," she said, "and I'm so glad!"

"Why? Did you want to see me alone?"

"I can't see you at all. I'm going out."

"But he hasn't come yet."

"Who?"

"Your motoring friend. Why are you glad your father is out?"

"Because I think he sees enough of you in the daytime. Too much. Father's very tired. Can't you see it? I'm going to run away with him on Saturday."

"So I hear.—I'm somewhat seedy myself. I think I'll accept your urgent invitation to sit down until he comes."

"He isn't coming. He'll be out all the evening."

"I'm talking about your beau." There was an empty, nerveless quality to the visitor's voice which began to impress his companion.

"Let's set a spell, as they say in Maine," he added. "I've been thinking about Maine to-day."

Linda followed his lead into a reception room, where they sat down.

"A pretty good place to think about, when Lake Michigan sizzles," she replied; "but I've chosen Colorado. We're going to Estes Park."

"Yes, so Mr. Barry told me. I should like to go there too." King's tone was wistful.

"Perish the thought!" returned Linda devoutly. "I wouldn't have you within a thousand miles of father."

"That's what the doctor says," remarked King, his pensive gaze bent on the ribbon bordering of Linda's thin frock.

She started and leaned toward him. "The doctor!" she repeated. "Has Doctor Flagg been talking to you about father? Is he—is he worried about him?"

King shook his head. "I didn't go to Doctor Flagg. I went to Doctor Young. We've been getting some golf together lately, and he's a good sort."

"What's the matter with *you*, Bertram?" Linda sat up again, and her voice and manner cooled. "What do you want of a doctor?"

King shook his head. "Never in my life before: first offense. Everything seemed to go back on me all of a sudden. Sleeping, eating, and all the rest of it." The speaker scowled. "The mischief of it is, Young says I've got to get away for a month at least. He says—Oh, you don't care what he says."

Linda regarded the downcast one. He was speaking to her as to an equal, not, as usual, with tacit rebuke for some misdemeanor. This blunt reproach, if it were reproach, merely referred casually to her indifference.

"I care a great deal," she returned, with spirit. "I'm sure it will make my father very anxious to have you away at the same time he is."

King lifted his weary eyes to hers, eager and bright.

"I'm sure Doctor Flagg could give you a tonic or something to tide you over till we return in September," she went on. "You could go then."

Her companion leaned back in his chair with a long, inaudible breath. "We have arranged all that. Mr. Barry wants me to go."

The speaker did look rather cadaverous. Linda realized it now. It was a strange thing to have in any degree a sense of compassion for him: this masterful man on whom her father leaned, the man who alone in all the world had a hundred times without a word put her in the wrong, and whom as often she had fervently wished she might never see again. She had chafed against that chain of her father's reliance which bound herself as well. There was no escaping King, and when in her busy college life she thought of him at all, it was as a presumptuous creature who was continually making good his presumption; and what could be more exasperating than that?

King was a self-made man, one with few connections in Chicago, one of whom was Linda's voice teacher, Mrs. Porter. The girl never had exactly understood this relationship, but the fact that some of Mrs. Porter's blood ran in his veins constituted Bertram's only redeeming trait in the eyes of that lady's adorer. Now as she regarded him, staring with discontented eyes at the rug, a sense came over her for the first time that King was a lonely figure. It was all very well for a man in health to live at the University Club and have his mind and life entirely wrapped up in business; but when eating and sleeping became difficult and the brain was over-weary, the evenings might seem rather long to him.

"It serves a young man right," thought Linda, "when he will bind himself on the wheel of business and act as if there was not one thing in the world worth having but money!" Hadn't she seen to what such a course had brought her father? She spoke:—

"There's a lot of nonsense in all this kow-towing to business," she said. "Why do men make such slaves of themselves?"

"So their women can have a house like this, several gowns like yours, and a motor like the one you're going out in," responded King dully.

Linda's rosy lips curled. "Fred Whitcomb's motor is last year's model."

Her companion smiled.

"There, you see!" he remarked. "There's nothing for me to do but to keep on hustling so you can always have the latest."

Color flashed over Linda's face, but she shrugged carelessly.

"Oh, of course," she retorted, "everything is Eve's fault."

"Pretty sure to be," returned King, nodding slowly. "*Cherchez la femme. Toujours cherchez la femme.*" He regarded her for a moment of silence, during which she was so uncomfortable that she raised both hands to arrange an imaginary hairpin at the back of her head.

"Where have you decided to go?" she asked at last, continually warmer under his eyes, and wondering if Fred Whitcomb had had a puncture.

"Why, I thought it would be great to spend long Colorado days in the saddle with you."

"Did you really?" Linda's little laugh had a most discouraging note.

"Yes, but Dr. Young jumped on that. He said I mustn't go within gunshot of your father."

Linda shook her head. "I should advise you not to myself. I'm a pretty good shot."

King looked up. "It would be great, though. Think of having you through with all this college foolery, and having plenty of time to talk to you."

The girl's eyes brightened. "Pray, did you consider Yale foolery?"

"A lot of it, yes," replied King, wearily; "but never mind, Linda, we're through with all that. I thought of the long days out there in Estes Park, the divine air, 'the dark pilasters of the pines,' and you, sparkling and radiant, on a good horse, and I with time enough to tell you how I love you!"

"Bertram!" Linda shot rather than rose to her feet, and her eyes launched arrows.

"Sit down. Sit down. I shall have to stand if you don't, and I'm dog-tired. Didn't you know I loved you, Linda, honest now?"

The girl sank into her chair. She was trying to think of the cruelest way to crush him. She opened her lips once or twice to speak and closed them again. King regarded her immovably, his worn look meeting her vital gaze.

"Your taste in jokes is very poor," she said at last, and her tone was icy, "and you may rest assured that no regard for you will prevent my telling my father exactly what you have said."

"You needn't. He knows it," returned King. His voice, which had brightened, relapsed into nervelessness.

"My father knows it!" The girl could not restrain the exclamation.

"Yes, of course. I believed you did, upon my honor. I've had so little time, you see, and you've been so busy."

He seemed so innocent of offense that her anger gave way to the habitual exasperation.

"Bertram King," she said,—and if there is such a thing as stormy dignity her manner expressed it,—"I believe the grind of business has dried up your brains. I could count on the fingers of one hand the occasions on which you have expressed even approval of me." Her nostrils dilated as she spoke.

Her companion's solemn visage suddenly beamed in a smile. "You remember them, then," he returned, with a pleased naïveté which nearly wrecked her severity; but she held her pose.

"You dared to speak to my dear father—I think you have him mesmerized, I really do—you dared to speak to him seriously of—of—caring for me, when you have criticized nearly every move I have made at home for four years."

"Have I? I don't remember saying anything discourteous to you."

"You didn't need to," retorted Linda. She didn't wish to snap, she wished to freeze, but old wounds ached. "Your actions, your looks, were quite enough."

"My looks?" repeated King mildly. "I'm sure you exaggerate. It must have been these glasses: the wrong shape or something." He took them off and regarded them critically.

"I hate your jokes!" retorted the girl, hotly.

"Hate what you like so long as it isn't me!"

"It is you!" The words came with emphasis.

"Then you do like me." King nodded. "It's an admission."

"You disgust me with your silliness," she returned, turning away. "I wonder what has become of Fred Whitcomb." She rose and swept to the bay window.

King followed her.

"Fred's a good fellow. I always liked Whitcomb," he said.

Linda made no response to this. She scanned the road anxiously up and down.

There was another interim of silence; then:—

"Your father would be pleased, Linda," ventured King. "He said so."

"You hypnotize him. *I* said so. My father," she added with scorn,—"my father like me to marry a man who always disapproved of me?"

"Is that why you try to hate me?" asked King thoughtfully. "I have disapproved of you a good many times, but I do think that—considering everything—you've done very well."

Linda, the all-conquering, the leader, the criterion, turned upon the speaker a gaze of amazement; then she laughed.

"How kind! You overwhelm me."

"Yes, I do really think so. Considering your beauty, your strength, your easy finances, your college crushes, your empress-like reign, you've done pretty well to consider others as much as you have."

"Others?" the echo came crisply. "What others?"

"Your father mainly."

"My father!" Linda faced him now, and sparks were flying from the brown eyes. "Bertram King, I adore my father!"

"Yes, I know,—when you have time."

"What—what is it? Would you have had me not go to college?"

"No,"—King spoke in a reasonable tone,—"you did right to go to college."

"Thank you—a thousand times." The crisp waves of the speaker's hair seemed to snap as on a cold night while she bowed her thanks.

King played with his glasses; and she turned quickly back to the window in order that he should not see that sudden tears quenched the fire in her eyes. Her father's preoccupied face rose before her. Was it true that she had ever neglected him? A habit of sighing unconsciously had recently grown upon him. She had noticed that, and also that in late months new lines of harassment had come in his face. Never mind, she was going to run away with him, devote herself to him, far from this man who dared to comment, and to pick flaws in her behavior. He should never see her change.

"I did want to do some riding with you, Linda. The idea comes to me like a picture or a poem when I think of those forests:—

'—here and there in solemn lines
The dark pilasters of the pines
Bore up the high woods' somber dome;
Between their shafts, like tapestry flung,
A soft blue vapor fell and hung.'

Nice, isn't it?"

"On what bond issue did you find that?" inquired Linda, tapping the window pane with restless fingers, and watching impatiently for her laggard cavalier.

"I told Dr. Young I wanted to play with you and your father, but he said Mr. Barry and I didn't know how to play."

"He was quite right."

King regarded his companion's averted, charming head with a pale smile. "You know," he remarked after a little, "we can love people while seeing their imperfections."

"Not I! I love only perfection."

King gave a noiseless whistle, and raised his eyebrows. "I'm so glad I'm perfect," he said at last.

Linda looked around at him slowly. How pale he was! Ripples of the flood of tenderness that had bathed the thought of her father flowed grudgingly toward her companion, as he stood there in the long twilight, regarding her with lack-lustre eyes.

"There are pines outside of Colorado," she remarked.

"That's what Mrs. Porter says."

"Mrs. Porter?" Linda echoed him with interest; "but she has left town. I went to the studio yesterday, and she's gone; gone to Maine without letting me know."

"You've been pretty hard to locate, remember. She told me she was going."

Linda sighed. "If she could have gone West with Father and me, it would have been perfect."

"I'm said to resemble Maud very strongly," suggested King.

Linda regarded him with quick appraisement. "I never thought of it." She turned back to the window. "I can quote poetry, too, when I think of her. The other day I found a verse that fits her:—

'He that of such a height hath built his mind,

And reared the dwelling of his thoughts so strong,
As neither fear nor hope can shake the frame
Of his resolvéd powers; nor all the wind
Of vanity or malice pierce to wrong
His settled peace, or to disturb the same:
What a fair seat hath he, from whence he may
The boundless wastes and wilds of man survey.'

A man named Daniel wrote that. Isn't it perfect?"

"H'm," agreed King. "A Daniel come to judgment. Maud likes you very much," he added.

"She loves me, thank you," flashed Linda, against his tepid speech.

"Then it runs in the family. I've told her how I felt toward you myself."

"And told her all my faults, I suppose." The girl bit her lip.

"Oh, I knew she could see those. Maud is very penetrating." Fire and dew flashed at him again. "Linda," he added in a different tone, "Whitcomb can't be much longer. Do you know I'm asking you to marry me?"

An inarticulate sound from his companion, and continued drumming on the window pane.

"I came to your father's employ ten years ago. I climbed the ladder slowly, but just three years and eight months ago I reached the rung from which I could see you." A pause. "You've haunted me ever since."

"Unintentional, I assure you." But Linda, her cheeks burning, could not look around again. In her tumult of hurt pride and indignation there penetrated a strain of triumph.

"Certainly," returned King; "you had other things to attend to, and so had I. You've attended to them with vast credit, and your father will tell you that I'm not so bad. Now a new chapter begins. Probably no one will ever love you as comprehendingly as I do."

"I shouldn't think of marrying any one who didn't consider me perfect," announced Linda clearly.

"Remember the chromo that goes with me—Mrs. Porter. Maud would be your cousin." King dangled his eyeglasses as he made the suggestion, and regarded a short curl of hair that had dropped against his companion's white neck.

Linda was silent for a moment. "I suppose you'll poison her mind against me now," she said.

"No. You've poured hot tea and cold water on my budding hopes, but I'm strictly honorable; and besides, I'm going to remember that both douches are good for plants. Ask your father if I know how to hang on to a proposition."

Silence. Linda's strong heart beat against her ribs as the man came a step nearer to her.

"Don't you touch me!" she exclaimed.

"I wasn't thinking of touching you, Linda. I just wanted to fix your hair. Something has fallen down here; just wait, I see a hairpin."

The girl preserved her pose under the caressing hands for a second, but he fumbled the soft lock, and she suspected him.

"That will do," she said, jerking her head away.

"Oh, well, I fixed it. You might thank me, going out as you are."

"I should think Fred had fallen dead!" she exclaimed.

"Yes; Maud prescribes Maine for me. She knows the lay of the land pretty well up there. She says she has known it for thirty years. I think that's an exaggeration, don't you?"

"I don't know how old she is, and I don't care; I only know that it must have nearly killed her husband to die and leave her."

King rocked back and forth on his toes. "I've heard that it did, entirely," he responded.

Linda gave her head a quick shake. "No wonder I say idiotic things!" she exclaimed. "It's catching!—Fred! Fred!" The sudden call was a cry of relief, and the girl quickly stepped out of an open glass door upon the piazza, and hurried down the steps. A motor had stopped beside the walk. King caught up his hat and followed her.

"I thought you'd never come!" cried Linda, to the joy of the distracted chauffeur.

"Great Scott! I thought I never would either!" he responded.

"What have you been doing? Climbing trees?" asked King. "Linda and I had nearly decided to be reckless and go to a movie."

"Nothing of the sort," averred Linda, "but I had begun to believe all four were punctured."

"One was," admitted Whitcomb, "and I've had a dozen delays." And he gnashed his teeth over a wasted hour of June as he handed his fair one into the front seat.

"Whither away?" inquired King.

"To the North Shore," responded Whitcomb, with fire in his eye which portended speeding.

"Drop me at the club, then, will you, Freddy?" And without waiting for the assent Bertram landed

in the tonneau as the car started.

In front of the University Club he descended, and stepped forward beside Linda.

"I may not see you again," he said, standing between the wheels, hatless, and holding her hand. "Have a good time. If you send me a picture postal, it will be all off between us."

"What did he mean?" asked Whitcomb, as with a whirr and a jerk they were on their way again.

"Why, I'm going to Colorado with my father; or he's going with me. He's tired."

"Well, he has nothing on King," remarked Freddy. "Never saw any one run down as that chap has the last month. He'd better get some smaller collars. Don't you care, Linda! Send *me* a picture postal, and I'll frame it."

The look that accompanied this outburst was lost on the adored one. She was trying to remember if Bertram King's collar had looked too large.

The University Club was a lonely place!

CHAPTER IV

THE JUNE NIGHT

Linda enjoyed the long flight under the June stars between the waves of the freshwater sea and the star-filled lagoons of Lincoln Park, and returned late to the dark house on the avenue.

"Did you ever see anything look so inhospitable!" she exclaimed, as her escort ran with her up the steps. "I wonder why Sedley didn't light up."

"Do you want me to go in and look under all the beds for you?" asked Whitcomb gayly.

"No. Father's bound to be in one of them by this time. I'm afraid to look at my watch. You shouldn't have kept me out so late, Freddy. You know it was against my will."

He could see her dimples in the starlight. They had been dear to him in grammar school; dear to him all the years while he was bereft of them at Harvard.

"If I could keep you always!" he ejaculated, in a lower tone.

"Against my will?" she laughed. "How about your promise, Freddy?"

"Yes, I know I did," was the incoherent response, "but you're going away—and—are you sure you don't feel a bit—not the least bit different, Linda?"

She shook her head at the pleading tone, and its low vibration set some chord within her to stirring. The sudden vision of Bertram King rose before her, dangling his eyeglasses and watching to see what she would say and how she would say it. Freddy had none of Bertram's hateful way of taking things for granted. He was all that was manly and humble and appealing. She could see in the dim light his square, strong hands clenched, and she felt again King's slender fingers on her hair; insolent, presumptuous: a man who had never courted her.

She liked Whitcomb so much. She approved of him so deeply.

"I ought not to have gone with you to-night," she said, and the gentle, regretful voice was so unlike Linda Barry that it frightened her devoted suitor.

"No, no. No, no!" he exclaimed quickly, taking a fresh grip on the situation. "I assumed all the responsibility. I haven't forgotten it."

His teeth closed, and the two regarded one another. She again contrasted his athletic build and efficient effect with King, very much to the latter's disadvantage.

"Oh, Freddy!" she exclaimed appealingly, and her fingers locked together, "there are so many nice girls." She paused, but he was silent. "I should just love your wife, I know. What fun we would have together!"

"Afraid not, Linda. Three's a crowd." A sudden thought corrugated the speaker's forehead. "Were you thinking—thinking of making it a quartette?"

"What an idea!"

The corrugation remained. "I've been suspecting that that dry-as-dust King would pounce on you as soon as you left school."

"Really, Freddy, your language—"

Linda's cheeks flushed. Were not the boyish words extremely graphic!

"Well, wouldn't it occur to any one? He must have some human moments when the machine's resting, and he has eyes in his head. Each man of us wants the best of everything, and aren't you the best of everything? I don't care a hang for your father's money. I got a raise last week."

"Bless your dear heart, Freddy!"

"Don't!" The young fellow winced. "I abhor that big-sister tone of yours. King's hand in glove with your father. Everybody says Barry & Co. take on nothing that King doesn't sanction, and your father is some business man, as you may know. I only hope he won't ever regret such absolute

faith. I know I bought something, and—well, I believe it's shaky to tell the truth, and I've begun to wonder if, after all, King is such a wizard. But—all this is nothing to you. I just want to be sure that if I'm not the leading man it'll be somebody with more flesh and blood than King, somebody gaited more like myself, only a better man. If I've got to give you up, I want it to be to a better man, Linda; not to a long-legged, cadaverous, conceited prig!"

"Why, Freddy, Freddy!" Bertram was all that. Why should Linda object to hearing it in good nervous English? "I had no idea you disliked Bertram so," she said.

"Didn't you think he had his nerve to start out with us to-night? I don't understand how he was able to make me feel that way, but somehow it was just as if he said: 'Yes, you have my permission to take her driving this once. Be good children and enjoy yourselves.'"

Linda laughed. "Imaginative, too! Why, I'm learning a lot about you to-night; and here I was thinking you were an open book!"

"Not if you didn't know I was imaginative," declared Whitcomb. "If I should tell you of some pictures I draw—"

He came a step nearer, and the girl shrank.

"Good-night!" she exclaimed; "Father's pretty indulgent, but if he should wake up he might be worried. Good-night; I've had such a good time, Freddy." She gave him her firm, brief, boyish hand-shake, and glided within the door. It was still open and the house not lighted! Then her father—

"Linda, I'm in here, daughter."

The voice came from the reception room, where earlier she had talked with King.

With a swish of her motor coat the girl turned and entered the room, noting instantly and with relief that her father was leaning back in an armchair in the corner of the dark room farthest from the window. Then he had not overheard Whitcomb's talk.

"Why aren't you in bed? Were you worried, dear?" she asked repentantly. "These June nights are all like day, aren't they?" She hurried forward, and sitting on the arm of her father's chair drew his head toward her and kissed his forehead, taking one of his hands into her lap. "One hasn't sense enough to go in on such a night. We left Sheridan Road as lively as if it were noon. Really I don't know what time it is now. Is it awfully late? I'm sorry if I worried you."

"No, little one." The reply was gentle and abstracted. "I knew you were all right. I knew you were with Fred."

"Why, how did you know it?" The sprightly, fresh voice sounded gay after the tired one.

"Bertram told me."

"Bertram!" The ejaculation was accusing. "Where have you seen him?"

"At the office."

"The office! Of all places this glorious night! Father, dear," reproachfully, "I thought you went off with Mr. Radcliffe to paint the town. That's what he told me. How could Bertram get hold of you? I'd have made Freddy tie him to our machine if I had suspected such a thing."

"Mr. Radcliffe had some business to talk over, and the data were at the office."

The utter weariness of the reply made the fresh face cling again against the speaker's gray head.

"But Bertram came here to find you."

"Yes, I got him at the club."

Linda gave an inarticulate exclamation. "Oh, doesn't it just do me good to think how soon you'll be where offices and Bertrams are unknown!" she said slowly.

The man in her embrace lifted her hand to his lips in silence.

"You're the stunningest thing on horseback that was ever seen," she went on, "and the only time you'll be out of the saddle is when you're in bed."

Silence.

"Why don't you say something?" she mumbled against his hair. "Did you know I was good-looking?" she added after a pause, lifting her head and squeezing him.

"Yes, child."

"Oh, Father, don't be so meek! Say something nice and impudent, or I'll think you're *too* tired, and take you away to-morrow. I was leading up tactfully to thanking you for being the best-looking man in Chicago so your daughter could have a nice nose." She burrowed the feature into his thick hair, and kissed it again.

"You're my darling girl," he said soberly. "You've been a joy to me ever since you were born."

"Hurrah for us!" ejaculated Linda. "I've been no kind of a joy compared to what I'm going to be. Now I have all this school business off my hands, I'm going to trail you—just dog your footsteps. Now, don't say that I won't be near so much of a joy that way, because I can think of more ways to make you have a good time than you dream of now!"

"You aren't the sort of girl who stays with Father long."

"Do you mean marriage? My dear sir, don't you know that handsome girls are far less apt to marry than the nice, commonplace, cozy ones with turn-up noses? I admit coyly that I'm something of a peach, but I'm going to stay with you."

"Have you ever thought,"—the question came gravely,—"have you ever thought of—Bertram?"

Color mounted richly over the face against the gray hair.

"Thought of him! I should say so! The most critical, disagreeable, *nosey* man; always interfering and—and trying to make people over into his mold. It never occurs to him that his ideas could be anything less than perfection."

"I'm surprised to hear you speak so," came the monotonous voice, "and disappointed too."

"Father, dear, don't! You make me sad! When I know you've come into this tired condition, just working for me,—that's one of the pleasant things Bertram said to me to-night."

"He was wrong. It wasn't working for you, Linda. Remember that. Money-making gets to be a disease. A millionaire should be satisfied; but the multi-millionaires are ahead of him, and the game is exciting." There was no excitement in the colorless voice. "Mere prosperity palls. He takes chances, hoping and expecting to do great things for himself and every one involved with him. There's the pinch. He should never allow others to take chances with him. That's criminal."

"Oh, well." Linda opposed a light tone to what she considered the morbidity of over-fatigue. Her heart reproached her for not having seen the symptoms long ago. She should have thrown up college and taken her dear one away long ago. Resentment against King again flared up in her. His had been daily companionship with her father. How could he have let it come to this!

"If Barry & Co.," she went on, "should ever have a setback, they would simply deal out,"—she gestured as if dealing cards,—"deal out to the little people and make up their losses. That would be Barry & Co.'s way," she added proudly.

Her father's next words were irrelevant, and came after a short silence.

"I'm surprised that you give Bertram such a bad character. He is unconscious of offending you, I'm sure."

"Oh, Daddy, dear, don't bother about that. I don't hate him, you understand. It's only that he is flint and perhaps I'm steel. At any rate, there are fireworks when we mingle in society."

"Not flint at all, Linda. He loves you."

"A queer sort of love, then. It isn't so much what he says, dear,"—Linda's cheeks were burning,—"it's that compelling—oh, sort of—well, compelling's the best word,—that always wants to—to guide me; and I won't be guided by anybody but you. I'll tell you what, Daddy, you haven't any son, and I'm going to be your son after this. If you're very good for two whole weeks after we get out to Colorado, and don't say one word about business, after that I'll get you to tell me all about your affairs, and I'll put my whole mind on understanding them. You know, Daddy, I have a good head for mathematics and for business generally,—truly I have. This isn't bluffing. If you'll take a little pains with me, you'll find Bertram isn't the only one you'll confide in. I think I'd like business. My heart isn't much to boast of, but my head, now, when it comes to my head—Thank Heaven, Bertram will be where he can't write to you about anything but fish. Mrs. Porter has persuaded him to go to Maine. Just think what she did, Daddy. She went off without saying a word to me. I went down to the studio and there was no one there but a caretaker, packing up. The calendar hadn't been torn off, so I tore off a leaf and wrote her a message on the date I was there. It's a calendar of Bible promises, and this one was, 'When thy father and thy mother forsake thee, then the Lord will take thee up.' I added something about her inhumanity in forsaking me."

"Why—why,"—Mr. Barry's brow wrinkled,—"I'm afraid I've been remiss. I paid the bill for your lessons, and when she sent back the receipt she wrote something about having tried to get you on the 'phone, but that you were too popular, and that she was going East to tell your aunt that you were a good girl."

"Then she has gone to the Cape!" exclaimed Linda, with interest. "I remember when Aunt Belinda was here at Christmas Mrs. Porter talked about it with her."

"Yes," responded Mr. Barry, "and I think the plan is for Bertram to join her there if—when he can go."

"Right away, won't he?" demanded Linda eagerly. "His doctor says—"

"Yes, poor Bertram," said Mr. Barry slowly, "he does need it; but, little one,"—he patted Linda's hand slowly,—"we can't either of us go quite so soon as we expected."

"Now, Father!" exclaimed the girl acutely.

"Something very important, Linda,"—his voice increased as he repeated it,—"very important. I think we must—" he rose; "but it's late. We must go upstairs now, little one."

His repetition of the term of affection impressed Linda. It was associated with sadness. She remembered how often he had used it during the week that her mother died.

"I shall read you to sleep, dear. Please let me," she said as they rose.

"No, no need of that. Go to bed, little girl. I'll lock up. Good-night, daughter."

He put his arms around her, and she clung to him, kissing him again and again.

CHAPTER V

THE CAPE

Maine. Mrs. Porter loved the very word. Always when the train left the North Station in Boston she sank into her chair with a sense of shaking off the cares of life; and to-day the smile she gave the porter as he placed her suit-case beside that chair was valued, even by him, more than the coin she placed in his hand.

The cares of life in her case were represented by a busy music studio, where, luckily for her, every half-hour was a busy one; but there were the pupils who didn't supply their own steam, but had to be urged laboriously up the steeps of Parnassus; there were those in whom a voice must be manufactured if it ever appeared; and those whose talent was great and whose application was fitful; those whose vanity was fatuous, and those whose self-depreciation was a ball and chain; those who had been badly taught and who must be guided through that valley of humiliation where bad habits are overthrown. Taking into account all the trials of the profession, any voice teacher in Mrs. Porter's place to-day might give a Boston and Maine porter a seraphic smile as if he were opening to her the gate leading to Elysian Fields where pianos and *vocalises* have no place.

"That woman sure do look happy," was the soliloquy of this particular red-cap as he pocketed the silver and left the car.

The traveler leaned back in her chair with a glorious sense of unlimited leisure, and prepared to recognize the landmarks grown as familiar to her as the scenes on the Illinois Central suburban railroad.

Probably none of her pupils save Linda Barry, although there were other hero-worshipers among them, would deny that Mrs. Porter's nose was too short, her mouth too wide, and her eyes too small; but the kindly lips revealed such even teeth, and the eyes such light, that no one commented on Maud Porter's looks, nor cared what shape her nose was. One saw, as she leaned back now in her chair, that her brown hair was becoming softly powdered with gray. Her eyes half closed as the express train gained speed, flying away from care, and her humorous lips curved as she considered the mild adventure on which she was embarking.

When Miss Belinda Barry had visited her brother during the holidays, she had dropped some remarks concerning her home which had roused Mrs. Porter's curiosity and interest. The idea had been growing on her all the spring that, instead of going out as usual to one of the islands in Casco Bay, she would explore this corner of the mainland from whence had sprung the Chicago financier. She had not, however, communicated since with Miss Barry. She did not wish that lady to feel any responsibility for her.

A picture of Linda's aunt rose before her mind as she reflected. Tall, thin, with a scanty coiffure and long onyx earrings. These ornaments Miss Barry had donned in her youth, and declined to renounce with the fashion; so that when they began to be worn again by the daring, they gave her the effect, as Linda had confided to her teacher, of being "the sportiest old thing in town."

The naturally severe cast of Miss Barry's features, Mrs. Porter had always observed, rather increased in severity when the good lady looked at her niece, and that holiday visit had been a strain on both sides.

It was happy history repeating itself when the traveler alighted to-day at the Union Station in Portland. The same involuntary wonder rose within her that any face could look harassed, ill, or care-worn here. It was Maine. It was the enchanted land! the land of pines, of unmeasured ocean, of supernatural beauty in sunset skies; of dreamful days and dreamless nights.

She smiled at her own childish ignoring of the seamy side of existence as evidenced in the look of many of the crowd hurrying through the busy clearing-house of the station. She beamed upon a porter who took her to a waiting carriage—a sea-going hack, Linda would have called it—and drove to a hotel. She would not risk arriving in the evening in a locality where the only inn might be that of the Silver Moon.

Till supper time—it would be supper, she considered exultantly—she wandered up Congress Street to some of her favorite shops. Undeniably there are other streets in Portland, but to the summer visitor the dignified city is much like a magnified village with one main street where its life centers.

Maud Porter entered one shop after another, repressing with difficulty her longing to tell every clerk how happy she was to be back, and enjoying all over again the good manners and obligingness of everybody.

Next morning, as soon as breakfast was over, she made her inquiries and took her train. It was one that stopped at every station, and when, after three quarters of an hour of this sauntering, she alighted on a desolate and unpromising platform, her first thought was to inquire in the small depot for the first train back. The little house seemed to be deserted for the moment, however, and she observed an elderly man with a short white beard, who, with trousers tucked into his boots and thumbs hooked in his armholes, stood at a little distance, regarding speculatively the lady in the gray suit and floating gray veil. Near where he was standing a carryall was waiting by the platform.

In Mrs. Porter's indecision she looked again within the weather-beaten station, then across at the motionless, weather-beaten face.

"There doesn't seem to be any one in here," she said.

"I cal'late Joe's out in the shed luggin' wood," responded the man. His pleasant tone, his drawl, the sea-blue of his eyes, caused her to move toward him as the needle to the magnet. She knew the type. All the suspended Maine exhilaration rushed back upon her. How clean he was! How rough! How adorable!

"I've come," she said, gazing up into the eyes regarding her steadily, and said no more.

"Want me to haul ye?" he asked kindly, not changing his position.

"Yes."

"Where to?"

"I don't know." The sunlight of her smile evoked a grin from him.

"Come on a chance, have ye?"

"Yes, So did you, I should think. Nobody but little me getting off here."

"No, 't ain't time for 'em really to come yet."

"Who? Summer people, do you mean?"

"Yes. Folks is beginnin' to think they like it down here; but we don't take summer boarders to the Cape, ye'll have to know that."

A prodigious wink enveloped one sea-blue eye.

"Oh, I'm so sorry." Mrs. Porter's smile vanished in her earnestness. "Wouldn't—wouldn't your wife, perhaps—"

"Haven't got none."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"I ain't. Ben glad on't always. Hain't ever repented."

"Then you mean you never were married."

"That's what I mean." The speaker nodded as if to emphasize a triumph.

"But isn't there some one in your—your village—I suppose it's a village, isn't it?"

"Shouldn't wonder if 'twas."

The visitor tasted that "'t wa-a-as" with appetite, and echoed it mentally.

"Some one who would take a boarder if—if I want to stay?" The monotonous landscape was not inviting.

"Wall, for accawmodation's sake I cal'late they would; but it's only for accawmodation's sake, ye understand." The speaker winked again. "The Cape don't take boarders."

"Oh, I see," laughed the visitor. "But you must have expected somebody. You're here."

"Usually git somebody. I haul 'em for hard cash, not for accawmodation's sake, so ye see I'm on hand."

"I should hope so. What should I have done if you hadn't been here?"

"Oh, they'se a car you could git over there a little piece." The speaker unhooked one thumb and gestured.

"I'd far rather go with you, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Holt. Jerry Holt. Most folks forgit the Mister. Shall I take yer bag?"

It was standing where Mrs. Porter had descended from the train, and Jerry unhooked his thumbs and clumped across the platform in the heavy boots in which he had gone clamming that morning.

Maud Porter, her spirits high, entered the old carryall. She suddenly decided not to mention her acquaintance with Miss Barry, but to pursue her way independently.

Deliberately her companion placed her bag in the carriage, then lifted the weight which anchored his steed to duty, and took his place on the front seat, half turning with a sociable air to include his passenger. "Git ap, Molly," he remarked, and Molly somewhat stiffly consented to move.

"You have a nice horse," remarked his passenger fatuously. She knew her own folly, but reveled in it. Pegasus himself could not have pleased her at this moment so well as Jerry Holt's bay. It proved that her remark was the open sesame to her driver's heart.

"There's wuss," he admitted. "Ye see me lift that weight jest now? It's nonsense to use it, but Molly's a female, after all, and in-gines comin' and goin' might git on her nerves; but take her in the ro'd, now, that hoss, she ain't afraid o' no nameable thing!" The sea-blue eyes met his listener with a challenge.

"Not autos even?" with open admiration.

Jerry Holt snorted. "Shoot! She looks down on 'em. Miss—Miss—"

"Oh, excuse me. I forgot you didn't know me. I'm Mrs. Porter, from Chicago."

"Chicago, eh? We've got a neighbor out there. Barry his name is. A banker. Ever hear of him?"

"Oh, yes, certainly."

"Sister lives here still. We all went to school together."

They were driving on a good road between green fields, and Mrs. Porter scented the crisp sea air.

"There's a handsome new house started over there," she said, indicating a hill which was to their left. "Who's building that?"

"Wall, now," the driver responded in his slow, mellifluous tones, "I couldn't tell ye—sudden."

Mrs. Porter leaned back in the carriage with a sigh of ineffable contentment, and thought of the corner of State and Madison streets.

In a minute more the glorious blue of the ocean came in sight, and scattered cottages, which with delightful irregularity were set down at random, some of them surrounded with trees and shrubs.

Mrs. Porter leaned forward with sparkling eyes.

"Don't take me anywhere just yet," she said. "Drive about a little. Have you time?"

"Plenty," declared her companion. "Hain't got to go to the station only once more to-day. Git ap, Molly."

"Oh, let her walk if she wants to. This is beautiful!"

The Cape ran out into the sea, bearing lighthouses, and was bordered with high, jagged rocks among which the clear waves rushed and broke in gay, powerful confusion. As they neared the water the visitor observed on the side toward the ship channel a cottage whose piazza touched the rocks. The hill upon which it stood ended abruptly at the water, and daisies waved in the interstices of the natural sea-wall.

"Who is the lucky woman who lives clinging to the rocks like that?" asked Mrs. Porter, indicating the shingled house with her slender umbrella.

"That? Oh, that's Belinda Barry's cottage. Might's well live in the lighthouse and done with it, I say; but she's got a spyglass and likes to watch the shippin'. See the New York bo't out there comin' in now? There! Hear her blow? Bet Belinda's got her eye on her this minute. Seems if Belinda set on them rocks a lot when she was a girl, and had a cottage in the air, ye might say, 'bout livin' there some day; so when her brother began to have more money'n he knew what to do with, he give Belinda that place. Nobody else wanted it, I can tell ye that. When I'm ashore I'd ruther *be* ashore, myself."

A man with a bucket of clams passed their slow-moving carriage, and looked curiously at Mrs. Porter.

"Hello, Cy," said Jerry Holt, jerking his head toward the other's nod.

The visitor looked after the figure in the dilapidated coat. "That man had a fine head," she said.

"H'm," ejaculated the other. "A pity there ain't more in it."

"Oh, is the poor creature—do you mean—"

"Oh, no, not so bad as that; but ye know how there are some folks no matter what they try at, they 're allers poundin' and goin' astern. Cy's that kind."

"It's a mercy there are always clams," said Mrs. Porter, and Jerry Holt's sea-blue eyes twinkled at her.

The visitor's plans for independence suddenly weakened. That cottage clinging to the rocks was undermining it more swiftly the further the carriage advanced.

"I believe, Mr. Holt, you'd better leave me at Miss Barry's," she said suddenly.

He shook his head. "Not a bit o' use," he replied. "She won't even accawmodate ye, let alone takin' a boarder. Belinda ain't stuck up. Her worst enemy can't say it changed her a mite to have a brother that eats off gold plates. She was always jest that way."

"What way?"

"Oh, high-headed ye might call it. I dunno exactly what; but Belinda allers claimed to steer; and now she lives to Portland winters in any hotel she's a mind to, she don't act a mite different from what she allers did, though lots o' folks claim she does. 'T ain't no use, though, Mis' Porter, your goin' there. I'd—I'd kind o' hate to have Belinda refuse ye."

The speaker cast a kindly glance at his passenger, who smiled back at him appreciatively.

"Thank you, but I do know Miss Barry. I met her in Chicago, and I'll just stop for a call, and she'll advise me where to go; for I tell you I'm going to stay, Mr. Holt, even if you have to let me sleep in your carryall. Why haven't you a nice wife, now, who would take me in?"

"That's jest why. 'Cause that's the specialty o' wives, and I didn't want to be took in."

Mrs. Porter laughed, and the carryall drew up beside Miss Barry's sunlit piazza. She opened her purse. "How much, Mr. Holt?"

"Well, I'll have to charge ye twenty-five cents for this outin'," he returned with deliberate

cheerfulness. "One minute, till we see if Miss Barry's to home."

He got out upon the piazza and knocked on the cottage door, opening it at the same time.

"Belinda!" he called.

"Leave it on the step," came a loud voice from the back of the house.

"Hear that?" he grinned, turning. "She's home, and I'm to leave ye on the step."

"That's all right," said Mrs. Porter, alighting. Jerry Holt's clean, rough hand assisted her, and lifted out her suit-case "I'm perfectly charmed to be left on the step," she added, handing her guide a quarter, which he pocketed with a nod. "I'll try not to envy the girl who sat on these rocks and built a cottage in the air that came to earth."

"She's welcome to it, welcome to it," observed Jerry, as he climbed back into the carriage. "When I'm to sea I want to be to sea. When I'm ashore I druther be to shore."

"Did you ever go to sea?"

"Cap'n of a schooner fifteen year or more."

"Why didn't you tell me? You're Captain Holt, of course."

"Oh," he shook his head, "hain't got nothin' to steer but Molly now." He smiled, nodded a farewell, and turned his horse around with many a cluck of encouragement.

The sound of departing wheels was lost in the swish of surf on the rocks. Maud Porter stood looking seaward. Again the New York boat in the distance, lost to sight now, boomed its signal to smaller fry as it advanced to the harbor. The rioting wind carried her thin gray veil out straight. She heard the house door open, and turned to meet the surprised gaze of Miss Barry, in a checked gingham gown, but with her scanty coiffure and long onyx earrings precisely as she had seen them last.

Mrs. Porter smiled radiantly, and captured her streaming veil.

"I'm what he left on the step," she said.

Miss Barry's surprised gaze grew uncertain. There was a familiar look about this radiant face, but where—

"Was you one of the Portland Aid—" she began.

"No, no!" Mrs. Porter stepped forward and held out both her hands. "Don't let my suit-case frighten you, dear Miss Barry. I've only come to call. Remember last Christmas in Chicago, and Linda's teacher, Mrs. Porter?"

"Mrs. Porter!" exclaimed Miss Barry, letting her hand be captured in the two outstretched ones. "Do excuse me!" Her face beamed welcome. She had liked Linda's voice teacher, and when Belinda Barry liked a person it was once and forever. "Come right into the house this minute," she said cordially. "I'm ashamed o' myself!"

CHAPTER VI

THE SHINGLED COTTAGE

Miss Barry's hard, kindly hands helped remove the visitor's hat and veil, although Mrs. Porter repeated her declaration that she had come only for a call.

"You're going to stay to dinner with me," returned the hostess. "I always do have enough for two."

Her lips, which had returned to their rather grim line, twitched a little as she spoke, and Maud Porter glanced about the living-room with its old-fashioned furniture and rag rugs. Beyond was the dining-room, divided from this only by an imaginary line, and the table stood ready set for one.

"You live here all alone?" asked the visitor.

"Not half as alone as I'd like to be. I don't mind the fish and the barnacles, but it's the folks coming to the back door. Sit right down, Mrs. Porter."

"Don't let me detain you if you were getting dinner." The caller laughed. "How about these folks that come to the *front* door; the things Captain Holt leaves on the step?"

"Oh, I'm in no hurry. I'm going to sit right down with you now. Things are stewing out there. There's nothing to hurt."

Miss Barry suited the action to the word. Mrs. Porter regarded her with curious interest as she sank into a rocker with chintz cushions. The hostess's narrow face, usually as devoid of expression as a mask, was now lighted by pleasure.

"How comes it you didn't let a body know?" she asked.

"I was going to be so wonderfully independent! I was going to come to the Cape, and find a place to live, and then some day saunter over to your cottage bareheaded, and surprise you."

"And all you accomplished was the surprise, eh?"

"That's it, and it's entirely your fault. I was driving about with Captain Holt to see the lay of the land, when suddenly the rocks and the water, and this cottage perched on them like a gull's nest, did something to me. I don't know what. I think it gave me a brain-storm. When he told me you lived here, what could I do but rush in to congratulate you?"

Miss Barry's lips twitched again. "I ain't any gull, I will maintain that, but—it is sightly, ain't it?"

"Wonderful. Nothing less than wonderful. But in a storm, Miss Barry?"

"Yes, the windows are all spray then, and the waves try to swallow me up, and I can't hear myself think, but—"

"Yes,"—Mrs. Porter nodded as the other hesitated,—"I understand that 'but.'"

"How'd you leave my brother?"

"Very tired."

"That so? Wouldn't you think he'd come up here and rock in the cradle o' the deep awhile? You write him about that hammock out there."

Mrs. Porter looked out through the open window toward the end of the porch, where a hammock hung.

"The doctor says Colorado," she replied.

"Doctor? Is it as bad as that?" Miss Barry frowned questioningly. "Lambert never writes. I don't care for his stenographer's letters, and he knows it. If he can't take time to write himself, let it go." The speaker threw her head to one side, as if disposing of the matter of fraternal affection.

"Linda is blooming," remarked Mrs. Porter.

Miss Barry's lips took a thinner line. "Let her bloom," she responded dryly; and her visitor laughed again.

"Doesn't she write either?"

"I should say not."

"It will be less difficult now she's out of college," said Mrs. Porter pacifically. "Those girls are absolutely occupied, you know."

"Never play at all, I presume," returned her hostess, with a curling lip.

"Oh, I wouldn't say that."

"Better not if you care where you go to.—No," after a slight pause, "I understand my niece a good deal better than she thinks I do. It's enough that she scorns her own name. She was named for me. Belinda's been good enough for me, and she's no business to slight the name her parents gave her."

"Oh, Linda is such a free lance," said Mrs. Porter apologetically; "and 'Linda' sounds so breezy, so —so like her. 'Belinda' is quaint and demure, and—and you know, really, she isn't demure!"

"Not a great deal," agreed Miss Barry curtly. "I'm sorry my brother isn't well," she added.

"These business men let themselves be driven so. You remember my cousin Bertram King. He and Mr. Barry have been worn down in the same vortex, and both are ordered away. I told Bertram Maine was the best place in the world for him. As soon as I find an abiding-place I shall let him know."

Miss Barry rose suddenly. "I'm forgetting that you're starved. Just excuse me while I dish up the chowder," she said, and vanished.

Mrs. Porter clasped her hands and lifted her eyes.

"Chowder!" she repeated sententiously; then she too rose, went to the open window, and stood looking out.

The tide was rising, and the waves, climbing higher and higher, threw white arms toward the shingled cottage, as if claiming its boulder foundation, and striving to pass the barrier of daisies and draw the little house down to its own seething breast.

As the visitor stood there, a woman, bareheaded, stepped up from the grass upon the porch, and giving one glance from her prominent, faded eyes at the gray figure standing in the window, crossed the piazza to the front door, which was closed.

Mrs. Porter, advancing, opened it, and came face to face with a scrawny little woman, who stood with her head apologetically on the side. Her temples were decorated with those plastered curls of hair known as "beau-catchers," and across the forehead it was strained back and caught in a comb set with large Rhinestones. Her red-and-green plaid calico dress was open girlishly at the throat, around which a red ribbon was tied with the bow in the back.

"Why are they always thin here?" thought Maud Porter. "Is it eating fish? Do they never have to reduce?"

"Oh, pardon me!" exclaimed the newcomer, with such an elegant lift of her bony shoulders that it twisted her whole body. "I expected to see Belinda—that is—pardon me!—Miss Barry."

"She's in the kitchen just at present. Won't you come in?"

The newcomer accepted with alacrity, her prominent eyes openly scanning Mrs. Porter's costume.

"I wouldn't have thought of intruding had I supposed Miss Barry had a guest. I didn't notice Jerry brought anybody." Another writhe, and a rearrangement of a long necklace of imitation coral beads, which suffered against the red plaid.

"Yes, he brought happy me," returned Mrs. Porter, wondering whether, with the chowder so imminent, she should ask this guest to be seated.

The newcomer relieved her of responsibility by sinking into the nearest chair.

"Comin' for the summer?" she asked hurriedly, as though she felt that her time was short.

"I don't know. It's a place to tempt one, isn't it?"

"The views is called wonderful," returned the other modestly. "Of course, 't ain't for *us* to call 'em sumtious, but artists *hev* called 'em sumtious."

"They deserve any praise," was the reply, and Mrs. Porter gave the speaker her sweet smile.

"It's very difficult, one might almost say comple-cated, for visitin' folks to find any place to reside on the Cape. We ain't got any hotel."

Pen fails to describe the elegant action of shoulders and eyebrows which accentuated this declaration, and Mrs. Porter's smile broadened.

"I've understood so," she replied.

"My name's Benslow," said the visitor, casting an apprehensive glance toward the dining-room. "I've got one o' these copious houses with so much more room than I can use that sometimes I *hev*—I *hev* accawmodated parties. I suppose you're from the metrolopous."

"Well, we think it is one. I'm from that wild Chicago!"

"Oh, I s'posed it was Boston."

Here Miss Barry entered, bearing a steaming tureen, which perfumed the atmosphere temptingly.

"Hello, Luella," she said quietly.

At the word the visitor started from her chair with guilty celerity, and brandished an empty cup she was carrying.

"I hadn't an idea you was entertainin', Belinda, and you must excuse my walkin' right in on—on—"

Miss Barry kept her eyes fixed imperturbably on the tureen, and turned to get a plate of crackers from a side table.

"Mrs. Porter is my name," said the guest, taking pity on Miss Benslow's embarrassed writhings.

"Oh, yes, on Mis' Porter. I just wanted to see if you could spare me a small portion of bakin' soda."

"Why didn't you come to the back door as you do commonly?"

"Why—why, the mornin' was so exhilaratin', I made sure you'd be watchin' the waves, and I thought it would expediate matters for me to come around front." An ingratiating smile revealed Miss Benslow's full set.

"Just go right out and help yourself, Luella. You know where 't is, and you can let yourself out the back door. Come, Mrs. Porter, the chowder's good and hot."

It was, indeed. Miss Benslow's prominent eyes rolled toward the white-clothed table as she passed it, and inhaled the tantalizing fragrance. She would presently go home and eat bits of cold mackerel with her old father, at the oilcloth-covered table in the kitchen. Neither he nor she was a "good provider."

Miss Barry laughed quietly to herself as she and her guest sat down.

"Luella did get ahead of me," she said appreciatively. "I don't know how she slid by. Her uniform never blends with the landscape, either. Perhaps she climbed under the lee of the rocks."

"Oh, *why* does she wear those beads with that frock?" asked Mrs. Porter, accepting a dish of chowder.

"I guess if we could find that out we'd know why she does lots of things," returned the hostess.

"Simply delicious," commented Mrs. Porter, after her first mouthful. "Do show me how to do it, Miss Barry."

"Surely I will; but serve it after an early start from Portland and a ride across country with the wind off the sea. That's the sauce that gives the finishing touch."

"Why are all the people in Maine thin? Is it fish? You all have the best things to eat, yet you never get cushiony like us."

Miss Barry cast a glance across at the round contours, so different from her own angles.

"I think a bit of upholstery helps, myself," she remarked.

"Now, that Miss Benslow—why, she's really—really bony."

"Yes," responded Miss Barry, eating busily, "but she's got beauty magazines that's full of

directions how to reduce, and she's delighted with her bones. Unlucky for her father, because she might do more cooking if she believed flesh was fashionable. Luella's dreadfully slack," added Miss Barry, sighing; "but so's her father, for that matter. He goes out to his traps twice a day, but he wouldn't mind his chicken-house if he lost the whole brood; and just so he has plenty of tobacco the world suits him all right. You know folks can just about live on this air."

Mrs. Porter regarded her hostess thoughtfully. "Then," she said, "I don't believe their house would be a very good place to board."

Miss Barry looked up suddenly. "Board!" she repeated explosively. Then, after a silent pause, she added, "Is that what Luella came over for?"

"Probably not; but she mentioned—"

"Yes, I guess she did. She saw Jerry bring you—"

"No, she said she didn't see him bring me."

Miss Barry snorted. "Luella says lots o' things beside her prayers, and if she uses the same kind o' language for *them* that she does for other folks, I doubt if the Almighty can understand her half the time. I often think the futurists ought to get hold of her and her clothes and her talk."

Mrs. Porter laughed. "Perhaps she was born too soon."

"Indeed she was for her own comfort. Luella's as sentimental as they make 'em, and she still feels twenty. Board with her, indeed! You'd reduce fast enough then, I assure you. Folks have lived with her till they were ready to eat stewed barnacles; and the only way they got along was finally to get her to live somewhere else and let them have the house to themselves. They've done that sometimes, and Luella and her father camped out in the boathouse, I guess; I don't know exactly what they did do with themselves. Tried to get you! Well, I do declare! Luella's nerve is all right, whatever else she may lack."

"What *I* want to know," laughed Mrs. Porter, "is, when she says the view is 'sumtious,' whether she means 'scrumptious' or 'sumptuous.'"

Miss Barry smiled at her plate. "Luella ought to write a dictionary or a key or something," she said.—"Oh, I don't know what's the matter with women, anyway," she added with a sigh of disgust.

"Why, Miss Barry, what do you mean? They're finer every year! There are more of them every year for us to be proud of."

"A few high lights, maybe," admitted Miss Barry, "but look at the rank and file of 'em. Look at the clothes they'll consent to wear—and not wear. Just possessed with the devil o' restlessness, most of 'em, and willing to sell their souls for novelty. Isn't it enough to see 'em perspiring under velvet hats and ostrich feathers with muslin gowns in September, and carrying straw hats and roses above their furs in February? I get sick of the whole lot. Do you suppose for a minute they could wait for the season to come around, whichever it is? H'm!" Miss Barry put a world of scorn into the grunt.

Mrs. Porter, as she accepted a second helping of chowder, had a vision of Linda, capriciously regnant, and realized the status she must hold in her aunt's estimation.

"Oh, I'm an optimist," she replied, "especially when I'm eating your chowder. I don't see how you can look out of these windows and not love everybody."

She regarded her vis-à-vis as she said it. It was hard to visualize this spare and hard-featured woman as the young girl who used to sit on these rocks and build castles in the air.

"Mortals are ungrateful, I guess," was the reply. "I'm glad you like it here."

"It's a paradise to one who is tired of people and pianos," declared Mrs. Porter.

"Think you could look out of these windows and love 'em all, do you?" inquired Miss Barry dryly.

Mrs. Porter laughed. "At this distance, certainly," she answered. "Some of them I could love even if they were in the foreground," she continued. "I'm very fond of Linda, Miss Barry."

"A point in her favor," remarked the hostess, with a cool rising inflection.

"Thank you for saying so. One must make lots of allowance for a girl so pretty, so rich, and so overflowing with life."

"Let her overflow, only nowhere near me."

"Don't say that. She'll settle down under the responsibilities of life. Do you remember my cousin Bertram King?"

"Oh, yes. The long-legged, light-haired fellow that aids and abets my brother in overworking."

"That's the very one. I must tell you that he's heart and soul in love with Linda."

"H'm. I suppose so. I only wish she'd marry him and live out on Sheridan Road somewhere, then I could live with my brother and take care of him winters. He'd get some care then. Are they engaged?"

"Oh, no. She's just out of school. He hasn't asked her yet."

"What's the matter with him? Is he the kind with boiled macaroni for a backbone?"

"No, Bertram's backbone is all right. He wanted to let her get out of school. He has no relations

but me. He had to confide in somebody."

"Well, he'll get all that's coming to him if he marries her." Miss Barry sniffed. "I guess if there was a prize offered for arrogance she'd get it. I speak plain because you're fond of her, and you're aware that you know her much better than I do, so I couldn't set you against her even if I wanted to; and *I* need somebody to confide in too."

Mrs. Porter smiled. "You'll change your tune some day. Linda has lots of goods that aren't in the show window."

Miss Barry nodded. "If she keeps her distance I may change in time. It all depends on that."

The visitor could picture how in little things the high-spirited, popular girl might have shown tactlessness during the holidays, and created an impression on the taciturn aunt which it would be hard to efface. Words could never do it, she realized, and wisely forbore to say more.

Dinner was over, and the visitor was just considering that during the process of social dishwashing she could broach the subject of a boarding-place, when Jerry Holt's steed again approached the shingled cottage. Both women discerned him at the same moment.

"Did you tell Jerry to come back for you? You can't go yet," said Miss Barry.

"I didn't, but it might be a good plan for him to take me the rounds."

"What rounds?"

"Of possible boarding-places."

Miss Barry did not reply, for she had to answer the knock at the door. There stood Captain Holt, holding a telegram gingerly between his thumb and finger, and his sea-blue eyes gazed straight into Belinda's.

"I want you should bear up, Belinda," he said kindly. "There ain't no other way." His voice shook a little, and Miss Barry turned pale as she took the sinister envelope.

Mrs. Porter heard his words, and hastening to her hostess stood beside her as she tore open the telegram. Captain Holt's heavy hand closed the door slowly, with exceeding care, as he shut himself out.

Mrs. Porter's arm stole around the other woman as she read the message:—

> Mr. Barry died last night. Please come at once.
>
> Henry Radcliffe.

Miss Barry's limbs shook under her, and she tottered to a chair.

Captain Holt sat on the edge of the piazza and bit a blade of grass while he waited.

In the silence a pall seemed to fall over the little house, broken only by the sharp rending apart of mounting waves against the rocks.

Mrs. Porter knelt by her friend and held her hands.

"What can I do for you?" she asked.

"Look in the desk over in that corner, and find the time-tables in the drawer."

"I know the Chicago trains, Miss Barry. Let me arrange it all for you. You wish to leave to-night?"

Miss Barry nodded without speech.

Mrs. Porter went out on the piazza and sent Jerry to telegraph, telling him to return.

"Did you know my brother was ill?" asked Belinda, when she returned, still without moving.

"No. I thought him just overtired."

The other nodded. "That's the way they do it. Rush madly after money and more money till they go to pieces all of a sudden."

The bereft sister's eyes were fixed on space, seeing who knows what pictures of the past, when a barefooted boy romped with her over these rocks that held the nest he had given her. Suddenly her far-away look came back, and focused on the pitiful eyes regarding her drawn, pale face.

"I'm glad you're here," she said simply.

"And I am so glad," responded the other, her thoughts busy with Linda and Bertram, and longing to fly to them.

"Will you stay here in my cottage till I come back? I have a little girl that comes every day to help. She cooks pretty well. She'll stay with you."

"Yes, Miss Barry." It was on the tip of the visitor's tongue to say, "You'll bring Linda back with you," but she restrained the words. This common sorrow would do its work between aunt and niece, she felt sure.

There was no further inaction. A trunk was packed, and Mrs. Porter accompanied the traveler as far as Portland, spending the night again at the hotel where she had left her belongings; and Miss Barry pursued her sad journey.

Henry Radcliffe met her at the station in Chicago; and when they were in the motor Miss Barry turned to him with dim eyes.

"What was the matter with Lambert?"

His pale face looked excited and sleepless.

"You haven't seen the papers?"

"No. My head ached and I didn't read them. What do you mean?" Her voice grew tense.

"Barry & Co. have gone to pieces."

"What do I care for that? Lambert! My brother! Tell me of him!"

"But it carried a lot of innocent ones down in the crash."

"Oh, my poor brother! What of him, Henry? Tell me. Tell me."

The young man turned his head away, and his voice grew thick. "He died down in the office."

"Heart trouble?"

"Yes. He never told us if he knew he had a weak heart. The shock was terrible."

The young man took his companion's groping hand.

"Linda is prostrated. We have had to save her in every way. Poor Harriet! She has had to be a heroine."

The speaker's voice thickened and choked again, and hand in hand the two kept an unbroken silence until the motor drew up before the house on Michigan Avenue, where lilies and ferns hung against the heavy door.

CHAPTER VII

THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED

During the monotonous days following the funeral, Miss Barry and her niece dwelt alone in the big, echoing house. Harriet had gone home to her husband and child. The papers still resounded with the Barry tragedy, but it was not difficult to keep them from Linda, whose stormy grief had changed to utter listlessness.

One morning Miss Barry sat by the window in her niece's room with some mending, while Linda, in her white négligée, dragged herself about the apartment as if all the spring in her supple young body had grown flaccid. Occasionally the older woman glanced over the rim of her glasses at the girl's expressionless face. Miss Belinda herself felt numbed by shock, but there was present with her the instinctive necessity which all had felt, of standing between Linda and a complete understanding of the situation.

Ever since the girl's breakfast tray had been removed that morning they had remained here in silence.

"There's one way I can't make any mistake," thought the aunt, "and that's by holding my tongue. She knows I'm here, and that if I can do anything for her I want to do it."

The housekeeper had answered her appeal for something to keep her hands busy, and so she worked while Linda moved languidly about, apparently forgetful of her presence.

While they still remained thus, a card was brought up.

Miss Barry took it from the maid.

"Bertram King, Linda," she said. "Will you see him?"

She was surprised by the life which sprang for a moment into the girl's eyes.

"No," answered Linda clearly.

Her aunt stood undecidedly, the linen in one hand and the card in the other.

"Shall I see him, then?" she asked.

"I don't care, Aunt Belinda."

The maid waited, casting curious glances from one to the other.

"Henry says Mr. King's been wonderful," said Miss Barry, after a moment of waiting. "The greatest help in the world: always kept his head, and thought of the right thing to do, though he was suffering so."

"I'm not—" Linda tried to reply, but her lips quivered, and she bit them. "I can't see him," she ended abruptly.

Miss Barry nodded comprehension. The associations would naturally be overwhelming.

"I'll go down, then," she said, sighing, and laying down her work. "I suppose I shall tell him you thank him for all he has done, and for the flowers every day."

"No." Linda faced her aunt, and again life leaped in her eyes. "I'm not sending any message. Remember that."

Miss Barry frowned in perplexity, thinking of Mrs. Porter's confidences concerning King.

"Oh, law," she thought wearily, "I suppose she's refused him."

So downstairs the good lady went, her black dress trailing after her, to the reception room, where stood a hollow-eyed young man. His face had become familiar to her in the past days.

"Good-morning, Mr. King."

"Good-morning, Miss Barry." His eyes interrogated her hungrily. "I suppose I should apologize for coming at this hour, but I'm so anxious to know how Linda is."

"She's up and about. Sit down."

"Would it be impossible for me to see her?" The speaker did not sit, though Miss Barry did so. His wistful eyes were still fixed questioningly.

"Yes, Mr. King. Just impossible. She hasn't seen anybody. She doesn't even see me." Miss Belinda smiled ruefully. "I just sit there with her. I don't know whether she knows I'm there or not."

Now King did sit down, and his companion proceeded:—

"To tell the truth, I need to see you alone, Mr. King. I need to know what Henry means when he says Barry & Co. have gone to pieces. That isn't so, is it?"

"Yes, practically." King looked at the floor, and locked his hands together. "A very big undertaking has failed, and it was the knowledge that it was impossible to satisfy all the investors that killed your brother. A run on the bank put the finishing touch to our misfortunes; but I am taking every step which I know Mr. Barry would wish to have taken, and the excitement will abate when the public sees that we are fellow sufferers."

"Then Linda is—Linda will be poor?" Miss Barry asked it in hushed tones.

"Comparatively, yes; she will call it poor, but I know Linda. She would wish justice done. I want to see her. I must see her, in fact, as soon as she is able to meet me with Harriet. I know what Mr. Barry would wish, but it must be a mutual agreement. I'm not forgetting, Miss Barry," added the young man, kindly, "that this hits you financially too."

"You mean my allowance? I'm very thankful, Mr. King, that I've spent but little of it, and I have the home my dear brother gave me. I never felt perfectly certain that there wouldn't be any reverses. Business men when they get as rich as Lambert are like aëronauts. Who can tell when some current of wind they didn't count on will strike their ship?"

"I'm glad you've been so wise. I assure you that since the catastrophe I have often thought of you."

Miss Barry regarded the speaker kindly. The difficulties of his position surged upon her.

"Have I told you I left Mrs. Porter in my house?"

"I knew she expected to see you."

"Yes; she was there when the message came, and she helped me in every way. Best of all, she was willing to see that nobody ran off with my cottage while I was gone."

"I wish she were here with Linda, though," said King. "I believe she could get nearer to her than anybody."

"I suppose there isn't any doubt," returned Miss Barry without enthusiasm, "that my niece will go to her. There don't seem any doubt that I ought to take her home with me and let the sea tone her up. She may prefer to stay with Harriet. I shall give her her choice. I suppose this house will be sold."

"I suppose so. That is one of the things Linda will have to help decide."

They sat for a moment in silence, Miss Barry liking her companion better and better, finding it easy to believe on general principles that Linda had been cruel to him.

King rose suddenly from his brown study. "Will you give her these flowers, please?" he said, indicating a box that lay on a chair. "I shall get Harriet to arrange a meeting for us to discuss the matters that are pressing."

Miss Barry rose, and they looked into one another's eyes.

"I had hoped that it might be some comfort to Linda to see me, as one who stood so close to her father," said King wistfully.

Miss Barry found him pathetic.

"Seems to work the other way," she answered curtly. "Some folks would think of your side of it. I can tell you, though, Mr. King, the rest of the family appreciates all you have done and are doing."

Miss Barry's hand gave the young man's a decided squeeze as they parted. Her handshakes ordinarily were of the loose and hard variety.

She turned and took up the box of flowers. King's offering had come daily among others since the funeral, but Linda would not allow any flowers to be left in her room.

"I'd like to know just what she means by flashing up at the mention of that poor fellow's name," soliloquized Miss Belinda, as she mounted the stairs. "Lambert's gone and left him to take the brunt of the situation. Shouldn't wonder if going down to that office every day is some like going to a torture chamber."

She entered her niece's room. Linda was sitting before the dresser, pulling over with languid

fingers the contents of a drawer. Each article in it was associated with happy, remote days separated from the present by a cold, dark, impassable gulf—the gulf of grief, remorse, and despair. Nothing could bring her father back. Every interest that had kept her from him loomed hateful in her eyes. Just as Miss Barry entered the room her hand had fallen on a morocco box. It contained the necklace which had been her graduation gift from him. She had worn it at the dinner dance at the South Shore Club.

What had her father been doing that night? Why had she not insisted on his presence at the dinner? How she loathed each of those triumphant hours when the gems had risen and fallen on her happy breast. Her head suddenly fell forward on the dresser, and her shoulders heaved in deep-drawn sobs.

Miss Barry dropped the flower box on a chair, and her cheeks flushed as she advanced uncertainly. Her niece's previous reserve made the older woman feel that Linda might resent her presence now. She retreated a step toward the door; but no. The girl was her own flesh and blood. She didn't know what to say to her, and her own eyes dimmed under the repressed agony of those despairing sobs; but she approached and put a timid hand on the convulsed shoulder.

"Linda, Linda," she said. "I wish, poor child, I could do something." And the tremor in her voice carried to the young aching heart.

The girl did not raise her bowed head, but she reached up one strong, smooth hand, and quickly it was locked in Miss Belinda's.

The latter's eyes regarded the open morocco box on the dresser, and noted the lustrous pearls lying on their white velvet. "That necklace means something special, I suppose," she thought, and winked away big drops from her own sight.

"Maybe it'll do you good to cry, Linda," she said. "Did your father give you the beads, dear?" she added tenderly, and the smooth hand clutched hers tighter.

After a minute more of the sobbing silence, Miss Belinda reached out her free hand and closed the morocco box.

"I wouldn't look over these things yet," she said; and Linda freed her hand, and crossing her arms on the dresser rested her head upon them.

"I never did anything for Father," she declared in a choked voice.

Miss Barry thought this was probably true, and she winked hard in a big struggle with her New England conscience.

"He didn't think that way," she replied at last.

"Yes. Yes, he thought that way."

"What do you mean, child?"

"He left me." The words seemed wrenched from the depths of grief.

Again Miss Barry's conscience objected to making the sweeping contradiction for which the occasion called.

"How could he help that?" she asked at last, gently.

"He couldn't help it, but perhaps I could have helped it," came the weary answer. "If I had been more to him—filled a larger place in his life—been a companion instead of just his pet—"

Miss Barry felt coerced to extend meager comfort. "But your school, Linda. I know your time was all taken up."

"Yes, because I let it be. I've wasted four years when I was old enough to have been a companion to Father."

"Why, you had visits with him once a week. Supposing you had gone East to college."

"That is something, no doubt," returned Linda, slowly lifting swollen eyes and looking listlessly out of the window; "but I didn't make myself count with him."

"Nonsense, child," said Miss Barry, trying to speak stoutly. "That's morbid, isn't it?"

Linda shook her head slowly, still with the dreary eyes looking into space.

Miss Barry sank into the nearest chair, and regarded the stricken girl helplessly.

"I know you suffer, too, Aunt Belinda," said the girl, at last. "I know I'm selfish, but life—everything—seems blotted out for me. It is only once in a while that I can feel anything."

Linda recalled her far-away gaze and looked at her aunt. She saw her now, not as a negligible figure with too-long earrings and too-thin hair, brushed with a New England thoroughness which concealed rather than exhibited what there was of it. Aunt Belinda was a fellow sufferer, and Linda recognized it, but without sympathy. She turned back to the sorting of the articles in the open drawer. Her handbag lay there, and a piece of paper projected from it. She took out the crumpled leaf, and remembered how on one of those remote happy days she had gone to Mrs. Porter's studio and discovered her departure. She had torn off a leaf of the calendar, and seeing no place to bestow it had crumpled it and placed it in her bag. She straightened it now, reflecting on the date, and how little she had known then that it was one of the days she would now give half her life to recall. The clearly printed words looked up at her, and her eyes rested on them heavily.

"Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree; and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree."

In the present passionate longing to escape from her nightmare, the words seemed significant. Oh, if they could be anything but words! If there were any hope! Her lips moved as she read the verse again. Her aunt was watching her, motionless, helpless, dim-eyed.

"Did you ever hear this, Aunt Belinda?" she asked, and read the sentences aloud in her colorless voice.

"I think I have," responded Miss Barry. "It's in the Bible, I think."

"Yes, it's in Isaiah," returned the girl, her eyes on the paper. "I tore it off Mrs. Porter's calendar. It's a calendar of promises. What's the use of promises made thousands of years ago?"

Her breath caught in her throat.

"Mrs. Porter is very fond of you, Linda," ventured Miss Barry.

The girl nodded. She seemed to see the soft light in her teacher's eyes. The calendar message would probably find response in her optimism.

"We took a course in the Bible at school," she went on. "We had to; but Mrs. Porter says she reads it because she likes to. I gave her this calendar as a kind of a joke."

Miss Barry made no comment on the dreary irreverence.

"I haven't told you," she replied, "that Mrs. Porter is keeping house in my cottage."

The girl turned her slow regard upon the speaker.

"When the right time comes," went on Miss Barry, "I want you should go back with me, Linda."

"I wish to stay here," returned the girl quickly, "and, Aunt Belinda, I don't want you to wait. I know you must long to get home, and there's nothing, really nothing, for you to wait for here. All I wish is to be quiet and just stay where—" her throat closed. She glanced once more at the calendar leaf, and started to drop it in the basket, but changed her mind and put it back in the open drawer.

"All in good time, Linda," was the reply. "Here are some flowers Mr. King brought you."

The girl turned with a frowning glance toward the long box. "He seems to have plenty of money to waste," she said, "in spite of Barry & Co.'s troubles. Probably his own nest is well feathered."

"Why, my child!" exclaimed Miss Barry, bewildered at sight of that strange fire which again illumined the heavy eyes. "What can you have against that poor young man?" Linda's lassitude seemed to drop from her like a garment. She rose suddenly, took the flower box, and moving to the door pushed it into the hall with her foot, and closed the door upon it. Then she stood, her back against the wall, tall in her white garments, and pressed a hand to her throat, choking with her sudden passion.

"Not much against him," she said in a stifled voice, her eyes shining upon her bewildered companion. "Bertram King murdered my father. That's all!"

CHAPTER VIII

A BUSINESS INTERVIEW

Miss Barry's brow was troubled as, that afternoon, in much harassment of mind, she wended her way to the home of her elder niece. Miss Belinda had always approved of Harriet. She was wont to declare with energy that there was no nonsense about Harriet. To-day when she went into the apartment she found the young wife in a violet tea-gown sorting a pile of little stockings.

"Harry does go through his clothes so," were her first words after their greeting.

"Give me a needle, for mercy's sake!" exclaimed Miss Barry avidly, pulling off her black gloves. "If I could feel for five minutes that I was of some use, it would put flesh on my bones."

"Then take off your hat, Aunt Belinda, and in a few minutes we'll have a cup of tea. Selma has taken Harry down into the park, but he'll be back before you go. Do you know, he misses Linda dreadfully? You must tell her when you go back. He was asking for her again this morning. There's scarcely been a day since she left school that she hasn't had a romp with him until—and he adores her. Perhaps it would divert her if I should bring him over. What do you think?"

The traces of grief and strain were still in Harriet's face, and she asked the question with solicitude.

Miss Barry seated herself by the dainty workstand, and seizing the little stockings with eagerness shook her head.

"I find my best way is not to think, Harriet," she said emphatically. "Linda acts like a sleep-walker most of the time, but this morning she got to looking over some things in her bureau drawer, and she's been crying her eyes out."

Harriet dashed away a quick tear as she sat opposite her aunt, replacing a button on a little white blouse.

"I do want to get her away from here, and I broached the subject this morning, but she took fright at once." Miss Belinda's busy needle ran in and out of the spot where a small active toe had peeped through.

"I wish," replied Harriet, "that there were something in the world she *must* do. There's no such blessing at a time like this as not to be able to brood. A husband and baby have rights that can't be put aside. I do wish Linda cared for some one of the men who admire her. I don't believe there's one who would let the changes in her fortune weigh with him at all. I hope, Aunt Belinda, it doesn't hurt your feelings to see me wearing this colored gown." The speaker lifted her eyes to her aunt's somber black. "Father never believed in mourning, but he was a prominent man, and I want to wear the badge of respect before people who would expect it. I'll wear black in the street, but Henry and little Harry would feel the gloom of it in the house, and though Henry hasn't said anything about it, I have decided not to wear mourning at home."

"You've got a lot of sense," was her aunt's response. "I believe in that."

"We can't mourn any less," and Harriet dashed away another tear. "No girls ever had a better father than ours."

Miss Belinda lifted her eyes from her work.

"Mr. King called this morning, and brought more flowers for Linda. If flowers would heal hearts Linda would never shed another tear, but she can't seem to bear them. She won't let one blossom be in the room."

"I suppose they look too cheerful," said Harriet. "How is poor Bertram?"

"Thin as a rail. Looks as if he had the weight of the nation on him, and I suppose he has. I guess from what I hear these days are terribly hard on him."

"Terribly," echoed Harriet. "Henry's just heart-broken over the situation."

"Has Henry lost money in Barry & Co.? Don't tell me if you don't want to."

"No. Of course Henry's young, and has never had much money to invest, but Father never wanted family connections mixed up in his business. I know that sounds as if he didn't feel certain of his propositions; but there isn't a man who knew Father and Barry & Co. who wouldn't tell you he believed in their absolutely honest intention. I've had only one talk with Bertram about the business since—but he called me up this noon and said he must see Linda and me together as soon as she is able."

Miss Barry dropped her work again, and regarded her niece's dark head, drooped over her work.

"You like Bertram King, don't you?"

"Indeed I do." Harriet looked up in surprise. "Henry and I both love him like a brother."

"Well, I just wanted to know if you felt him worthy of all confidence."

"Oh, you've heard that talk, have you?"

"What talk?" asked Miss Belinda cautiously.

"About his being the moving spirit of Barry & Co. That always irritates Henry and me beyond everything. As if my father were invertebrate, and couldn't think for himself."

"Well, Linda believes it. That is, she believes Mr. King had an abnormal influence over your father. In fact, she blames Mr. King for the disaster."

"She's in an abnormal state herself. That's what's the matter. I know her grief at losing Father is profound, and no doubt the money loss means more to her than it does to me. Henry and I have talked it over, and we feel it will be just as well for Harry if he doesn't have so much money to look forward to as we expected. With Linda it's different. It does deprive her of much that perhaps she expected to do. We don't know what her thoughts have been all these days she has lain there so quiet. She thinks Bertram is to blame for taking on that irrigation business?"

"To blame for everything. She—she used some pretty strong language this morning."

"Oh, but that's Linda," responded Harriet quickly. "She's always extreme."

"Do you think Mr. King is in love with her?" asked Miss Barry bluntly.

Her niece looked up curiously. "Why? Do you?"

Miss Belinda made a protesting gesture with one stockinged hand.

"My dear! You'll never prove anything of that sort by me. I think he's all stirred up about her, but if she's right, that might be remorse on his part. He looked to me this morning as if some able-bodied woman ought to take him in her lap and rock him."

Harriet smiled and returned to her sewing. "Bertram has always seemed too wrapped up in business to care for girls. He likes to tease Linda and play with her, but her interests have all been apart from him. Henry and I have often talked about it, and said how nice it would be if they should care for each other. I should dislike to believe that he was the cause of our misfortunes; but Henry says that is the rumor and the general feeling. Even Father Radcliffe credits it, but I'm too loyal to Daddy to believe that a young man like Bertram could sway him."

"I think," said Miss Barry, "that you girls should give him the interview he wants, and soon. He needs all the help he can get."

"I know he does. I promised him we would see him to-morrow."

Miss Belinda glanced up. "But you haven't Linda's consent."

"She must consent. It will be good for her. It's what she needs, to have something she must do."

"She's so fond of Mrs. Porter I thought she'd be glad to go home with me and join her, but she shrinks from everything like a sensitive plant."

"She has leisure to think of what she wants, you see," returned Harriet. "I haven't. Perhaps she will come and make me a visit."

"Well, you come back with me to the house this afternoon, anyway, and make the plan for to-morrow. I think an interview with Mr. King is just what Linda needs to make her sense what the poor fellow is going through."

Accordingly, a little later Harriet donned her black street clothes, and accompanied her aunt to the house on the avenue.

They found Linda in her room, stretched in a *chaise longue* and looking out of the open window at the June sky. An incessant whirr of motors filled the spacious room.

"Don't get up," said Harriet, as the white figure moved to rise. She kissed her sister. "I'm so glad to see you dressed. You must soon get over to us. Harry talks about you every day."

As this declaration called forth no answering smile, Miss Barry left the sisters together, shaking her head as she went.

"I'm glad it isn't my job to persuade her," she thought.

Harriet came straight to the point. "I can't stay long, Linda, for I'm never away when Harry has his supper, but I came over to tell you that we must meet Bertram to-morrow."

"I can't," returned Linda, her eyes looking startled but determined.

"Yes, you can, dear. We can see him right up here if necessary, but it isn't fair not to answer his questions, and help him as much as we can."

"He doesn't need to ask any questions. He knows a hundred times as much about it all as we do; and no one can help him. He never wanted any one to help him."

"Well, we won't discuss that, dear. He must have our sanction about certain things, and every hour counts. Surely you'll bestir yourself for the honor of Barry & Co."

"For the honor of Barry & Co.," repeated Linda, in the tone of one whose fires have burned out.

So when the appointed hour arrived next day, it found Linda dressed and ready to descend the stairs at her sister's summons. Any effort was better than to allow King to come up to her room. A stranger he was and a stranger he should always remain.

The first sight of her, white and tall in her thin black gown, was a shock to King. The lips held in a tight line, the colorless face and manner, were in such marked contrast to the exuberance of the Linda he had last seen, that he marveled at the change, with a sinking of his tired heart and brain. She might well have been disturbed by his own appearance, but she scarcely looked at him.

Miss Belinda was present. The four sat around the massive table in the den; while King slowly and carefully outlined the business situation. Lambert Barry's will left bequests to various charities, ten thousand dollars to his sister in addition to the investment from which for years she had drawn what he called her allowance, and the rest of his fortune was to be divided equally between his two daughters. Bertram paused, and Linda met his hollow gaze.

"I judge the chief thing you wish to know from us," she said, "is whether we wish to give more than the law compels, to satisfy creditors."

King wondered whether grief could be responsible for the inimical look in her eyes.

"Mr. Barry, the day before he died," he returned, "expressed a longing to prevent as far as possible suffering resulting from the—the—misfortunes of Barry & Co." "I'm sure of that," returned Linda. "We spoke of it together one evening. I said that would be Barry & Co.'s way."

"Did you see trouble coming, Linda?" asked King gravely.

The girl was sitting straight and tense, and her eyes did not drop from his tired gaze.

"No. I thought at that time there was no trouble in the world that could touch my wise, honorable father."

Miss Barry moved uncomfortably, watching the girl's expression.

"I'd like to say," she put in, "that the ten thousand my brother left me I want should go to make up arrears as far as it can."

"Dear Aunt Belinda," said Harriet, putting a hand on her aunt's knee as she sat next her. "Now, we don't any of us want to be quixotic," she went on in her moderate manner. "We want to be calm and sensible."

"Harriet," her younger sister turned to her, "we do want to be quixotic, if that is what the world calls returning money secured under false pretenses. So far as I am concerned, there is only one possibility for peace for me, and that is to keep our father's memory as clean before the world as it always has been. I can speak only for my share, of course, but my wish is this: that this house, the motors, and all these belongings, be sold—"

"You can keep your electric, Linda," interrupted King.

She brought her eyes back to him.

"You cannot tell me what I may keep," she answered, slowly and incisively, and the young man frowned wonderingly at her tone.

"I want everything sold," she went on. "I want my share of money, property, life insurance, everything, added together, and applied *pro rata* to the losses of every one who put a misplaced trust in Barry & Co."

"Linda—" began Bertram gently.

She rose suddenly and turned upon him, her nostrils dilating.

"Tell me this, Bertram King. Have you a dollar invested in the Antlers Irrigation Company?"

King started to his feet, and viewed the girl in amazement. Her brow was furrowed, and the eyes in her white face blazed.

"Speak," she insisted.

A flood of color rushed to the man's very forehead as he realized her open enmity. In silence they stood thus for a moment.

"I refuse to answer you," he said at last.

Her gaze swept him scornfully. "It is what I expected." Then she turned to her sister, speaking gently. "Settle it between you now, Harriet. I suppose I may dispose of my own, and you know my wishes. They won't change."

After she had gone out, Harriet seized Bertram's hand as he stood dazed.

"Forgive her, Bertram," she said anxiously. "I do believe she's nearly crazy."

He sat down again, very pale, and with no comment proceeded to sort his papers.

Miss Barry's earrings were trembling, and she thought with longing of the peace of her "Gull's Nest."

CHAPTER IX

CORRESPONDENCE

Before Miss Barry's train had reached Chicago, Linda had received a telegram conveying sympathy from Mrs. Porter. A pile of notes and letters lay now unopened on her desk. Her sister had read the telegram at the time of its arrival, and left it on the table beside Linda's bed, where one day she read it; but the girl refused the least pressure on her wound from even the most friendly and delicate fingers. This very afternoon, when, tingling with excitement and antagonism, she swept from the room, she passed the maid who was at the door, just bringing in the mail. Somewhat hesitatingly the girl offered the letters to her young mistress. She and all the other servants stood in awe of the suffering that had so altered the jolly, careless, imperious young woman.

Linda, her heart beating tumultuously with its indignation, accepted the package automatically, and went on upstairs to her room.

She raised her hand to her throat in the effort to stop its choking, and threw down the letters. The handwriting on the top one was familiar and full of happy association. Here was one person who loved her, and understood her, and whose patience had never failed.

With the picture vividly before her of the faces of her scandalized sister and aunt, she caught up this letter and held it to her breast, her large gaze fixed straight ahead. The kindly expression, the humorous smile, the loving eyes of her teacher as they had rested on her hundreds of times, strove with the other picture. She felt she could bear to have Mrs. Porter talk to her. She moved to the door and locked it, conscious suddenly that she was trembling; then she sank into a chair and opened the letter.

> *My dear Linda* (it began),—
>
> I have waited a full week to write to you because I felt that at first you wouldn't care to read a letter even from me. Do you notice that "even"? Yes, I feel sure you love me as I do you, sincerely, and it gives me courage to talk to you just as if you were lying beside me on these sun-warmed rocks, with the cool wind trying in spurts to snatch off the duck hat that is shading my eyes. It can't succeed, for the hat is tied on with the white veil you gave me. There is a little scent of orris in it still, marking it as yours, and giving me the pleasant feeling of one of your "bear's hugs."
>
> I am sorry to be a thousand miles off from my little girl's troubles, and so all this week I have been trying to know that the opposite of this sense of separation is the truth; that all that I love in you is mine still, and that the greater part of what I could do for you if I were there it is my privilege to do here. The personal touch, the interchange of loving looks, is dear to our human sense, but sometimes even

these get in the way of the loftier, broader mission which God's children may perform for one another.

I have been thinking much about your father, a man whose keen sense of honor, and large charity, will be discerned more and more clearly when the present confusion is straightened out.

Linda's suddenly blinded eyes closed, and she again held the letter to her breast a minute before going on.

He is incapable of wrong intention. Do you notice that I say "is"? I wonder if you are feeling that sense of continuous immortal life which is your rightful and best comfort at this time. All that you loved best in your father were traits which your hands could not touch. Your heart and mind only discerned them. They are yours still, and they were that real part of him which God sustained and now sustains, and which were the reflections of His Light and Love.

I cannot touch your body now, any more than if it had ceased to dwell upon this earth,—any more than you can touch your father's,—but that makes you no less real to me. My tall little Linda speaks to me in her generosity, her lovingness, her gayety, as vividly as if you were beside me this minute, and it would be so if I knew I was never to look upon your face again. "The flesh profiteth nothing," the Bible says; and it is one of those lightning flashes of truth that glance away from us until the trained thought is sensitized to receive it; but after that, little by little it proves itself.

Perhaps I am talking too long, but please know that I am thinking of you daily, with thoughts full of love.

The Comforter that Jesus promised us is a real Existence, and "underneath are the everlasting arms."

"As one whom his mother comforteth so will I comfort you, saith the Lord." How I love to think of that when I think of my dear girl.

I found those words a few weeks ago on the calendar you gave me, and now I give the wonderful promise back to you. Say it over to yourself, dear child, even if you don't now see how or when it will come true, for His promises are sure. It only rests with us to open our hearts to receive them.

Your loving friend,

MAUD PORTER.

Linda's lip was caught between her teeth, and her brow frowning, as she finished reading. She turned the letter back to read again the sentences about her father. Here was no uncertain note.

She crumpled the sheets between her hands and closed her eyes.

"Oh, God, You have taken away my father. Help us now to clear his name!"

It was a cry from her heart, the first time in all this eternity of days that her thought had turned to the Higher Power with any feeling save resentment. She saw her friend lying on the sun-warmed rocks in the sunlit atmosphere of a joyous June day, longing to help her, longing to impart to her the sustaining calm of her own faith, and gratitude woke feebly in her.

She rose, and carried the letter to her bedroom, folding it again in its envelope. It did not belong in her desk. Such a message from the woman who had long been her ideal was a thing apart. She placed it in the back of a drawer in her dresser, and there her hand encountered a scrap of paper which she drew forth. Its clear lettering stood out against the ivory-white background.

"Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree—"

She read no further. The calendar again! She recalled also that leaf which in the studio she had marked for Mrs. Porter's reproach:—

"When thy father and thy mother forsake thee, then the Lord will take thee up."

She dropped the papers and covered her eyes again with her hands.

"Oh, Mother, Mother!" she moaned above her breath. "How could God, if there is a God, comfort me as you would!"

Supposing immortality, in which every Sunday in church she declared her belief, were really true. Supposing her father and mother were together. Supposing her mother were now consoling him for his mistakes,—for Bertram King's mistakes,—would that thought not bring consolation? Her worried father! Her lonely father! She sank into a chair, weeping helplessly. She had worn his pearls and danced, while he was lonely! If she could only die and go to her father and mother. Life here was ruined, and no one needed her. Harriet was engrossed with her family. Aunt Belinda's heart was in her home, stern duty alone holding her in this place.

After a few minutes the mourner lifted her bowed head, pulled a sheet of paper toward her, and wrote:—

I am bleeding. Please write to me again.

LINDA.

When she had addressed the note to Mrs. Porter, she washed her face and made herself ready for the tête-à-tête dinner with her aunt, which would shortly be served in her sitting-room. She had never entered the dining-room since the last meal she ate there with her father.

She set her door open in order that Aunt Belinda should not be afraid to come in, and shortly the much-tried lady did appear, her lips set in a line of endurance. Miss Barry had never approved less of her niece than at the moment of the girl's exit from that business interview. She gave a sharp glance now at her, sitting as usual with eyes gazing from the window at nothing, and hands loosely folded in her lap.

"Harriet left her good-bye for you," she said. "She had to hurry home for Harry's supper."

"Yes," responded Linda.

Miss Belinda sat down, and the gaze she fixed on her niece waited for an explanation or an apology. None came.

Miss Barry cleared her throat. "Harriet wishes to put herself on record," she said distinctly, "as entirely disowning any such feeling toward Mr. King as you expressed."

"You know he is her husband's cousin," returned Linda passively. "One must keep harmony in a family."

"More than that, Linda Barry," continued her aunt crisply, "that young man would have had to be guilty of designing your father's downfall to deserve such words and such a manner as yours."

The girl eyed the speaker steadily, and again the fire of excitement glowed in her look.

"You saw that he could not answer my question."

"I saw that he would not."

"It would be a good plan for you to talk with some of the prominent business men of the town," remarked Linda, the light going out of her eyes.

"I don't need any business man to tell me that that poor boy is about used up—and in whose service, pray? Answer me that, Linda Barry."

"Mammon," was the sententious reply.

"Pshaw!" ejaculated her aunt. "A clever man like your father didn't trust that man for no reason. Harriet's and my heart just ached for the poor fellow this afternoon. I thought for a minute after you went out that he was going to faint."

"Yes," returned Linda listlessly; "I suppose he had been sure no one would hold him in any way responsible."

The servant here came in to spread the little table for dinner, while Miss Barry, her hands tightly locked together, gave her indignant thoughts free rein, and followed Bertram King to his room at the club.

Had she really been able to see him, she would have witnessed his finding upon his arrival a letter in Mrs. Porter's handwriting.

His white, stoical face did not change while he read it:—

Dear Bertram,—

I want to send you a few lines to the club, because I feel sure there will be a quieter atmosphere there than at the office these troublous days. There is never an hour in which my thoughts do not go to you and Linda, fellow sufferers and both so dear to me. I can scarcely wait for the day when your duties will let you leave Chicago and come here. Doubtless Linda will arrive soon, and here you will both find healing for your sorrow, and if it is right, find each other. She will have a double reason for nearness to you as the chief earthly link with her dear father, and here in this simplicity and quiet the real things of life are more easily discernible. Complications seem to have no place in these broad, harmonious spaces, and both you dear ones can forget the fevers of sorrowful excitement.

Let me hear from you.

Yours as ever,

MAUD.

It was by return mail that Mrs. Porter received the answer to this letter. She opened it with eagerness:—

Dear Maud,—

Thank you for your letter and far more for your affection. It is some comfort, while I am locking horns with enemies, or endeavoring to untangle labyrinths, to know that there's a good little woman ready to coddle me when I have time to be coddled.

I see you remember the heart-to-heart talk you drew me into one day—and I admit I was easy to draw. Now I ask you to forget all that I said if you can. My wishes and plans have undergone a complete change, and I am glad you are the only person living who knows what my designs and hopes were, for they have vanished.

Pardon brevity. I'm "that druv," as your Maine friends would have it, that I don't know whether I'm afoot or horseback. I'll look forward, however, to an hour when you and I can elope to some Arcadia for a few weeks, and I'll let you know when such a day looms on the horizon.

Your devoted cousin,

BERTRAM.

Mrs. Porter's face had slowly undergone a change from eagerness to dazed and sad surprise.

"I wouldn't have believed it!" she soliloquized, as she let the sheet fall. "People have so often said that Bertram cared for the dollar mark above all else, but I laughed at them. How I hope she doesn't care! How I hope it!"

CHAPTER X

THE SPELL BREAKS

That spot in Miss Belinda's heart which had softened toward her niece in the latter's misery of bereavement bid fair to harden over again every time she thought of Linda's attitude toward Bertram King. It was bad enough to harbor the absurd theory that so young a man had been able to mould the opinions and actions of his employer; but it was unthinkable that in this time of grief and stress the girl had been able to sneer at him, and so evidently cut him to the heart with her accusation. Every time that scene rose before Miss Barry's mental vision her earrings quivered again. What did these weary days that she was undergoing amount to? Linda was civil to her, but indifferent to everything and everybody. The girl made no effort to conceal that the visits of her own sister were a weariness, and, unthinkable to Harriet, she made excuses not to see little Harry.

Day after day of the big empty house and the silent girl, the constant whirr of motors through the wide-open windows, caused Miss Barry to find that she was guilty of nerves. Again and again she hinted to Linda that the sea air was what she needed. The girl was usually deaf to the suggestion, or else returned, gently and civilly, it is true, to pleading with her aunt not to remain longer, protesting that she was entirely recovered and able to be left alone.

One day her answer became more frank.

"Mrs. Porter has written me that she is trying to get Bertram to come there to rest," she said.

Miss Barry gazed at the speaker. "Sits the wind in that quarter?" thought she. Her earrings quivered again, and she counted ten. Of what use was it to contend with a statue? At last she spoke.

"I only wish we could do something for him," she said, "but it won't be that. I met him on the street yesterday, and he said it wouldn't be possible for him to get away before autumn."

Linda making no reply to this, Miss Barry stared at her for a minute more, then sought her own pleasant, spacious room. Hers was not the pen of a ready writer, but she sat down now at her well-appointed desk, and wrote a letter.

Dear Mrs. Porter,—

I begin to see a loophole of light on our situation. I wrote you a week ago how crazy I am to come home. I'd like to burn every devilish automobile in Chicago, I'm so sick of their noise; but Linda's kept on just as obstinate as a mule, saying she must stay, but wanting me to go. I can't go unless she does. She's taken against everybody. Harriet thinks she's out of her mind because she refuses to see the wonderful baby; and I assure you I'd be squeamish about leaving her, for I couldn't be sure she wouldn't do away with herself, she's so morbid. I haven't told you the greatest proof of her morbidness (perhaps it ought to be morbidity, but no matter) —she acts like the devil incarnate to your cousin Bertram King. You know you told me he wanted to marry her. Well, I guess he's graduated from that notion. At any rate, it seems she thinks he led her father into the business deal that brought on most of this trouble—that big irrigation project out West. My brother wasn't anybody that could be led by the nose, but Linda won't hear to reason, and my patience with her is exhausted. Well, this morning when I returned to the charge about going home, it came out that she was afraid Mr. King was going to you. Now he isn't, because he can't get away for months to come. So won't you write her that

you've given up trying to get him, and that you want to see her—if you can make up your mind to a whopper—and that you hope for my sake she'll exert herself and bring me home! That's a good one! Bring me home! If any one can persuade her, you can, for so far as I can find out you're the only person on earth she hasn't taken against. Sometimes I speak of you, sort of carelessly, and say I hope you ain't feeling it too much responsibility to take care of the cottage when you'd *hoped* to have an entire rest! And if she hears what I say she looks at me real human for an instant.

Once I asked her if she wouldn't sit down to that little piano in her sitting-room and let me hear her voice. Law! You ought to have seen the way her eyes turned on me. Truly I never saw anybody who could look so near as if they had a knife in their heart as she can.

I'm getting as nervous as a cat. After we've dragged through a day, then comes on the night, when everything on wheels goes past our house. If Gatling guns came small enough I'd rig one in my window and do some of the shooting myself.

Now, you do your best to fix it up, Mrs. Porter, and if you can just get us to the Cape, then you can go off somewhere else where there won't be any wet blanket to spoil your fun. Linda ought to be outdoors; but I've never got her out once since we came back from the cemetery. She asks every day if the cars are sold. She has it on the brain to pay back everybody who lost anything in the catastrophe.

I'm hanging all my hopes on you, and am

Yours truly,

BELINDA BARRY.

While reading this letter Mrs. Porter's cheeks grew pink, and upon finishing she fell into a prolonged brown study. So it was not mercenary considerations which had altered Bertram's aspirations. Her heart went out to him. She had never known till now how much she cared for Bertram. The impulse attacked her to leave this peaceful scene and take the first train for the spot where her loved ones were in such distress; but Miss Barry's adjuration must be heeded. To get Linda away from those scenes and associations was surely the first necessity. Mrs. Porter found she had to meet and banish some resentment toward the unhappy girl who could so ruthlessly add to another's woe. But she had Linda's appeal. When one is bleeding one may be ruthless without realizing; so again Mrs. Porter sat down and addressed herself to the task of helping the sufferer:

My dear Linda (she wrote),—

I'm not on the warm, breezy rocks to-day. A nor'easter is gathering, and I am sitting in Miss Barry's living-room, where her good little Blanche has let me build a roaring, glorious fire of birch logs. It seems almost wicked to burn anything so beautiful as the white birch, and yet anything so airy and poetical should not, perhaps, be allowed to wither and fall into decay. Better, perhaps, that it should be caught up in a chariot of flame.

If you knew how lovely it is here, how sweet the smells, how pure and clear the silence of all save Nature's sounds, you would, I am sure, take the first train out of Chicago. I have given up the hope of persuading Bertram to leave. He would far rather die right there than leave one duty to your father unperformed. I shall hope to go back in August and get him to go West with me for a time before my teaching begins.

I think of you every day, my little Linda. I received your note. We do bleed when we are wounded; but blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. The blessing of mourning is the finding of real comfort—spiritual comfort; the oil of joy for mourning; the realization that we need never mourn; that this world is not all; that no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly; that no blessing is ever taken away from God's child.

We hear people say, "Shan't I believe the evidence of my own senses?" I once heard a lecturer enlarge upon that theme, showing that our whole education is largely for the purpose of instructing us away from the evidence of our senses, from learning that the sun does not rise or set,—through the whole list of deceitful appearances. If I believed what I see now, I should say that the sun had left the world to storm and darkness, but we know that the glorious sun and cloudless firmament are there to-day as truly as on the brilliant yesterday, and we have no fear that we shall not see it again.

The deceitful appearance which you have now to recognize is that your father has died and left you. Life never dies, and Love is immortal. Life is progress, too, and he knows more and greater and happier things than he knew here. Every right motive and act of his life is receiving its logical reward, and opening out new channels for progress. Let us not think of him in the flesh, but in the spirit. Let us not dwell sadly on his mortal harassment or disappointments. How do we know but such thoughts are a drag upon his spirit? Let us speed him on with our own love and courage, and let us try every day to harbor no thought that will hamper our souls and make us less fit to join him.

It is easier to sink down under a blow than to rise and go on; and yet rising and going on is what will make you keep step with your loved one and not be left behind. Your sister has an advantage over you, because she *must* rise and go on. If you are finding that the strong leading-spirit, Linda Barry, is faltering and weak now, you are making a blessed discovery; finding that the strength of the human will is not the true strength, and that like a little child you can turn to your Heavenly Father, and receive from Him strength which no mortal blow can destroy. Keep the fire of Love glowing in your heart, and you will find that it is the fuel that will make strong and bright every faculty. Unselfishness follows where that fire burns; but withdraw the fuel and the heart is cold, and those about you feel the chill.

I am hoping daily to hear that you are ready to bring your aunt home. Has she ever told you the pretty story of her girlish day-dreams on these rocks, and how her barefooted brother resolved mentally that he would be a prosperous man some day, and give her a home right here? He was able to fulfill that boyish resolve, and somehow this cottage is to me very full of him. Many men would have forgotten in the rush of business to carry out such a plan, but not your father. I can imagine with just what refreshment his thoughts flew here from the clatter of the city. I am sure Miss Barry's come here every day, and I am sure she will be very happy when you decide to leave. I know you are not detaining her willingly, but in her place I should feel as she does about coming without you. Do you know that I want very much to see you? Here in the nest of your dear father's generous, loving thought, I am resting, and waiting for you to rest too. You'll feel nearer to him than in the crashing city. Come and try.

Yours lovingly,

MAUD PORTER.

Miss Barry had brought this thick letter to her niece, and though her hands were busied with some work as she sat at a distance from her, she glanced furtively at the girl from time to time, striving to glean from her face some hope as to its effect.

When Linda finished reading, she dropped the sheets and looked up so quickly that she caught her aunt's inquiring glance. Miss Barry flushed guiltily, and looked back at her work.

"How soon do you think we could go to the Cape, Aunt Belinda?"

In her excitement and eagerness Miss Barry's words stuck in her throat.

"Why—ahem!—how about—how about to-morrow?"

"Let us go to-morrow," said Linda.

CHAPTER XI

EASTWARD HO!

Fred Whitcomb felt his eyes sting, but he scorned to wipe them as he strode manfully up Michigan Avenue. Instead, he scowled and set his teeth and threw his shoulders back, as one who yearns to meet the foe hand to hand. His opportunity was near, for Bertram King, having forgotten some papers, was walking hastily toward the club, and Fred, blinded and distrait, turned a corner and ran directly into him.

The lighter and taller man seized his assailant.

"Don't do that again, Freddy. It's a wonder I didn't go over like a tenpin."

"I didn't see you," growled Freddy, winking hard.

"I gathered that," remarked King, and was hurrying on, but Whitcomb held him.

"Why weren't you at the station to see them off?" he demanded. "I thought of course you'd be there."

"More room for you, Freddy," returned the other, looking steadily into his friend's belligerent eyes.

"I don't see how you could neglect Linda at such a time."

"Do you think she missed me?" asked King quietly.

"Of course she did," hotly. "I found out only by accident by what train they were going. They didn't let anybody know, Miss Barry said; but of course you knew. I'd—I'd hardly know Linda."

A terrific lump rose in the speaker's throat, and blinded again by grief he turned hastily away to continue his march.

This time Bertram detained him. Freddy tried to escape, but it was a grip of steel on his arm. "Come into the club a minute," said King, and his companion obeyed the leading. At least it would be a place where he could use his handkerchief secure from observation.

"Now, you're not taking me to your room," objected the younger man, as his captor, not relaxing

the hold on his arm, led him toward the elevator.

"Guess again, Freddy," said Bertram; and the visitor, after a moment of holding back, found himself in the elevator.

When they were in King's room, and the door closed, the host indicated a chair, but the guest remained standing.

Bertram smiled a little wistfully as he regarded the other's youthful strength, thinking his face, in its present condition of repressed emotion, looked as it must have done when he was ten.

"What do you want with me?" asked Freddy, his head held high.

"I wish I knew what you use for a hair tonic," said Bertram, passing his hand over his own fair locks, beginning to feel thin at the crown.

"Don't be a—What have you brought me up here for?"

"To let you pull yourself together for one thing. You were in a fair way to assault and batter all down the avenue."

"You—you *fish*!" ejaculated the visitor, changing his mind suddenly, and dropping into the offered chair. Quite frankly he covered his flushed face with his handkerchief and choked into it.

King sat down near an open window, and waited for the paroxysm to pass.

"It breaks me up completely to see Linda like that," said Whitcomb at last, wiping his eyes and shaking his shoulders impatiently. He faced his host, and realized the latter's appearance. No one could look seedier than King, he thought. "Of course I know you're rushed," he added, "but in your place I'd rather have sat up all night than not to see her off; and the humorous part of it is that I've been believing you were crazy about her."

The two regarded each other for a silent space, and for the first time there crept into the younger man's mind the cold suspicion that the change in Linda's fortune had affected Bertram King. Even so, it could not have made such a brute of him as to let Linda creep off alone!

"Harriet was there, and Henry," he said, just for the sake of speaking, while he strove with this strange idea, one which had elements of relief for himself while it added fuel to his indignation with King.

"Of course," answered the other coolly. "So that was a pretty good bodyguard, for you're always a host, Freddy."

"There was very little I could do for her," declared Whitcomb, "and I'm sure you—you hurt her feelings."

"I'm glad you were there," said King.

"You've no right to be glad," retorted Freddy.

The older man smiled. "Isn't it magnanimous in me to be glad she's wearing your violets instead of mine, eating your chocolates instead of mine, reading your magazines instead—"

"Stop!" said Whitcomb, raising his hand imperatively. "It's sacrilege to joke about her."

"You're a nice chap, Freddy," declared King slowly.

The visitor rose. "Don't you dare to patronize me," he said. "Thanks to your cursed bank I'm a *poor* chap. I'd begun to hope—to hope—What do you care what I hoped? You're as cold-blooded as that irrigation swindle that's fooled us all."

A little slow color crept over Bertram King's lantern jaws.

"Sit down," he said briefly. "I brought you up here to talk about that. You didn't attend the meeting of the stockholders last night."

"No. I was doing errands for Miss Barry; and I didn't care to sit there and listen to empty platitudes."

King hesitated a moment, but he put constraint upon himself. Freddy was desperately in love, and had had a desperate disappointment.

"I don't blame you for feeling sore," he said at last, "but I believe I have good news for you. The irrigation proposition would have gone through all right if the panic in that region hadn't suddenly knocked the bottom out for the time being. It's a legitimate thing, and we were able to show the stockholders last night that if they would be patient and give us time, we would issue notes and the bank depositors would be paid."

"What?" asked Whitcomb incredulously, and again sat down.

King nodded. "The bank closed, but it didn't fail, and if Barry & Co.'s people will trust us, I firmly believe everybody is going to have his own—say in a year or two."

"Two!" echoed Whitcomb, the hopeful light fading somewhat.

"Of course. Money in the bank, boy." King rose and advanced to him and slapped him on the shoulder. "You don't need it to live on."

"No, I need it to get Linda," returned the other bluntly.

Bertram smiled wanly, and balanced back and forth on his heels and toes.

His visitor regarded him curiously. "I'll bet you've done some tall working on this," he said slowly.

"No fish ever worked harder," admitted Bertram.

"But when you knew it was your own fault—" suggested Whitcomb.

King's quizzical eyes regarded the speaker. "That conviction does always make a fellow rather hump himself, Freddy."

The caller rose. He didn't like the look in his host's face. All this heart-breaking business should be treated seriously. King looked worn, but he didn't look humble; and as Mr. Barry's factotum he had been frightfully neglectful of Linda this morning. No, Whitcomb didn't feel like shaking hands with him, even after King had lighted for him a beacon of hope. The caller suddenly assumed an abrupt, businesslike manner.

"This won't do for me," he said. "So long, King," and he started precipitately for the door. One backward glance at his host, who was still standing with feet wide apart and thumbs hooked in his vest, gave him pause. King's face showed so plainly the battle he had fought. Freddy returned and took Bertram's hand and wrung it.

"Do you know, I was sure you wanted Linda," he said, with sudden frankness.

King's slender fingers gave his a viselike grip, and his lips smiled calmly. "It isn't so much a question of what we want as what she wants, is it?" he said.

A cloud passed over Whitcomb's face, and again Bertram thought he could see exactly how Freddy had looked at the age of ten.

"Don't you believe she'll ever want me?" he asked naïvely. Now that he knew King was out of the running—whether from mercenary reasons or otherwise—he could put the question as to an intimate friend of the family.

King laughed softly for the first time since Lambert Barry's death.

"Don't know, Freddy. If I were a girl I'd want you, I know that. You're all right."

Whitcomb blushed and scowled; and as he took the elevator on its downward trip he reflected on Bertram King's power to irritate his fellowman.

Ensconced in their stateroom on the train for Boston, Miss Barry heaved a sigh of relief scarcely concealed by the mutter of the moving wheels. They had not taken a stateroom without protest from Linda on the ground of extravagance. Linda considering economy! It was a wonderful circumstance; but Miss Barry, anxious as she was to be gone, delayed their departure a few days to secure the room. Instinctively she felt that a door which she could close on her niece would give her a sense of security. She regarded her now, while the train gained swiftness, with something of the triumph the captor of an elusive, valuable wild animal might feel at seeing it safely in his possession.

Linda, passive and white, did not resemble a wild creature at the present moment. The first thing she did after the train started was to withdraw the pin from the huge bunch of violets she had put on to please Whitcomb, and toss them over on the divan. Miss Barry, taking off her hat, watched her furtively.

"Put my hat in the bag when you do yours, will you, Linda?"

The girl looked vaguely surprised. It was long since she had performed a service for any one, and she even held her own hat a moment uncertainly, after she had removed it, as if she expected her aunt to take charge of it; and she looked at Miss Belinda questioningly.

"Yes, put them both in, and hang them up over there."

Miss Barry handed her the bags, leaned back in her corner, and sniffed. A dog wags its tail to express emotion. Miss Belinda sniffed—a dry, sharp little sound, which just now expressed determination.

"It's time for her to give up sleep-walking," she thought, and she looked industriously out of the window.

Linda's eyes fell to the hats, and she slowly performed the office, and more slowly climbed on the seat and hung up the bags.

As Miss Barry noted the languid motions of the erstwhile captain of a basket-ball team, she realized that her niece was like a person convalescing from a siege of illness. Was she convalescing? Was she improving or retrograding? No matter which; they were going home, home to the Cape, where Miss Barry would not feel at a constant disadvantage; and her heart sang. Linda was too feeble to jump off the train, and they were as good as there. Miss Belinda sniffed again.

Her eye fell on the violets. Linda had sunk back into her corner, her lips apart, her eyes languid. The train was very warm. An electric fan whirred above their door.

Miss Barry leaned across and took up the violets. Whitcomb's face had been vibrant with emotion as he left them.

"The poor boy!" thought Miss Barry. She had learned a number of masculine names through reading the different cards coming repeatedly with boxes of flowers for Linda; but Fred Whitcomb had been more pushing and insistent than the others. He had, as it were, often put his

heart in Miss Belinda's hands to be offered to Linda on a salver; and in the stress of emotion this morning Miss Barry had been afraid once or twice that her niece was going to be kissed by proxy. She certainly felt sorry for Freddy Whitcomb, almost as sorry as for Bertram King, whose absence had moved her keenly.

"Wouldn't you like to hold these? They're so refreshing," she said, holding out the violets toward their owner. The girl made a faint, protesting gesture with one hand, and shook her head. Miss Barry plunged her nose into the velvet depths, and looked over the bouquet at the white, immobile face in the opposite corner.

"Ch-ch-*choo*, ch-ch-*choo*," went the wheels, faster, faster. Welcome sound. Sweet violets. The scattered fragrance of woodland places, massed together for the joy of woman, offered by an eager heart to a cold one.

"Violet time is over at the Cape," she remarked.

"What?"

"I say, violet time's over at the Cape. Daisies and clover now, and the wild roses swelling up and getting ready."

Even the preoccupied Linda observed a new vitality in her companion's face, and life in her eyes in place of endurance.

"You're riding backward, Aunt Belinda. I didn't notice till this minute. Change with me." The girl leaned forward.

"Sit still, child. It makes no difference to me."

"Then come here beside me." Miss Barry hesitated. Once she would have declined on the ground of mutual comfort, but an overture from her captive was remarkable.

"Well, if it won't crowd you," she said, and after a moment of reluctance she obeyed.

"Don't you want to sit by the window?" asked the girl.

"Law, no. I wish the artists who do the Castoria signs would adopt futurist methods." As she spoke, Miss Barry made herself as small as she could against the arm of the seat, and again caressed her nose with Freddy Whitcomb's violets. The divan opposite was filled with American Beauties, magazines, and bon-bon boxes.

"I ought to put the flowers in water," she remarked.

Linda's large, somber gaze rolled toward the display.

"Yes, please do," she said.

"H'm," thought Miss Barry as she rose. "One word for the flowers and two for herself. She wants 'em out of sight."

"I think we ought to enjoy the violets," she said aloud. "Such a cabbage of 'em must have cost that boy a pretty penny, and they won't live only so long, anyway. Poor Mr. Whitcomb, didn't he look pretty near ready to have apoplexy when he got off!"

"He's got over it by now," said Linda, in her quiet expressionless voice.

"He's the kindest boy that ever lived. I didn't realize how many little things there were to attend to in leaving, or I'd have had Henry do them; but Mr. Whitcomb came and put himself at my disposal, and I certainly disposed of him, the good boy."

"He is a good boy. He ought to hate us," declared the girl languidly.

"Why's that?"

"He told me a long time ago that he had invested in—in—" the speaker caught her lip under her teeth.

"Now, now," returned Miss Barry soothingly, as the other paused. "He's young, and able to stand a few knockdowns. Every business man gets them sooner or later, and they're lucky when disaster comes early in their career instead of late. Now, now, Linda!" for the girl's handkerchief dried a drop stealing under her eyelid. "He adores you, the nice lad."

"Don't you see that makes it harder—as if I ought to marry him to make up?"

"Now, now!" Miss Barry tried to speak lightly. "He'd be worse than Shylock. I'll bet it's a hundred and thirty pounds when you're in good case. Aren't those candy boxes wonderful! I must take 'count of stock."

She started up and laid the violets on the vacated seat. Linda looked at them. She could hear Freddy Whitcomb's voice as it broke boyishly on that last evening of her life:—

"I don't care anything about your father's money, Linda. I had a raise last week."

Her hand fell gently on the velvet mass, and rested there. Miss Barry's Argus eyes observed the movement.

CHAPTER XII

Miss Barry took the rest of the flowers and placed their stems in the washbowl, where the lovely blossoms lolled over awkwardly in an increasing haze of dust, after the manner of train flowers; then she stepped back to the divan and inspected the boxes of bon-bons, stuffed dates, mints, and so on. A flat tin box met her eye, and a note was tied against the cover.

"I didn't notice that preserved ginger," she reflected, and picked up the box with satisfaction, for the confection was her favorite. Her own name appeared on the note in a small, close chirography which was unfamiliar. She slipped off the metal cord and opened the letter. Its beginning brought a smile to her lips, and a recollection of jocose passages between herself and the writer, away back in the Christmas holidays.

Dear Lady of the Earrings (she read):—

> If you knew the circumstances under which I stopped to buy these coals to send to Newcastle, you would never doubt my devotion. However, I'll not pose, but hasten to tell you of the meeting to-night of stockholders and depositors from which I have just come. There was much antagonism to be overcome, and I'm beginning to feel a little dull in the upper story, so it wasn't an easy experience; but the outcome was so good that I slight my bed to tell you briefly that I now feel the first relief from the crushing pressure of the last few weeks. Those people could have put Barry & Co. in a hole out of which we couldn't climb, and some of them were bitter and inclined to do it; but the majority were willing to listen to my representations, and the minority were finally persuaded.
>
> We shall issue notes to everybody concerned, and they have agreed to wait and give Barry & Co. a chance to turn around, and I have good ground for hoping that the memory of that grand man, Lambert Barry, will be cleared of every particle of the reproach which some angry and disappointed people have been flinging about. This night has been a great epoch in my career, and if I anticipated that there were any more such coming to me, that little crib out in the lake would suit me for a downy couch. As it is, I will now surprise my neglected bed by getting into it before three G.M.
>
> Bon voyage, dear lady, and I hope you will sleep the better to-night for this message. I shall not communicate with Harriet until after you have gone.
>
> Sincerely yours,
>
> BERTRAM KING.

Miss Barry had stood in the aisle during the reading of this epistle, too absorbed to notice the discomfort of lurching about. Now she held the letter for a space, in excited thought. Her thin face was flushed. She looked at Linda, whose gaze was fixed on the flat, flying landscape. The violets lay on the seat beside her, disregarded.

Miss Barry's lips tightened. "She doesn't deserve to know," she thought. "Oh, that wonderful young man! That poor boy!"

She seated herself opposite her traveling companion, and Linda languidly turning her head at the movement, her attention was caught by the fact that her aunt was wiping her glasses, and that her eyes were wet. An open letter lay in her lap.

Miss Barry was keenly aware of King's failure to mention Linda in this matter so nearly concerning her. It was only the relief of the news to her own heart which softened her sufficiently not to be glad of this punishment to the cruel young sufferer opposite. She hoped remorse would follow the reading in Linda's case.

She held out the letter in silence. The girl shrank and made a quick, protesting gesture.

"I can't—I can't bear any more!" she said.

"You can bear this," returned Miss Barry.

"But you're crying!"

"With joy, Belinda."

When her aunt gave the girl her full name it meant either a climax of indignation or a moment of sacred solemnity. That she knew well.

She regarded the letter with apprehension as she accepted it, and at once recognizing King's writing a sort of hard strength stole over her expression as she instinctively prepared to resist his statements. He was smooth and self-contained and clever. He could deceive Aunt Belinda and Harriet, but he could not deceive her.

After a moment of vigorous application of her handkerchief to her eyes, Miss Barry put on her spectacles again, and leaning back in the seat deliberately prepared to watch the effect upon her niece of Bertram King's letter.

Linda's lips, set firmly as she began, slowly relaxed as she read on, and her eyes grew darker. She began to breathe faster, and before she finished such an expression came over the young face that the older woman could no longer look, but closed her eyes and waited. It seemed to her a long time before she opened them again to find Linda regarding her. Life had revived in the large mourning eyes.

"Thank you, Aunt Belinda. May I keep it a little while?"

"You may keep it always," said Miss Barry solemnly. "It is more yours than mine. Isn't that a wonderful young man, Belinda Barry? Didn't I always say your father was too clever to trust the wrong people?"

"Bertram is clever," said Linda simply.

Miss Barry eyed her curiously, far from satisfied. "It's just," she thought, "as if some mental starch had gone all through the girl."

She wondered if her niece had no regret, no shame, that she had put herself so beyond the pale that Bertram ignored her.

"Really she is a handsome creature," thought Miss Barry, still regarding her vis-à-vis with some sternness.

"I hope as soon as we get home you will make haste to tell Mr. King that you appreciate all he has done."

"I do appreciate all he has done," said Linda, still with the exalted look in her eyes, "but he is doing his best to make up for it, Aunt Belinda." She leaned over far enough to put her hand on Miss Barry's knee, "If this comes out as Bertram hopes I will believe in God."

"Why, my dear child!" exclaimed the other.

"I tell you if a man like my father could be remembered in Chicago as touched by the faintest shade of dishonor, I should know that there couldn't be any God of justice."

"Very well, Belinda," replied Miss Barry warmly; "if you think so highly of justice you'd better try to practice it more yourself." Her nostrils dilated.

Linda relaxed and gave a little one-sided smile as she shook her head and leaned back again.

"Well, I never did!" thought Miss Barry; and she too leaned back in the corner, where her niece forgot all about her.

What a gift, what a wonder, to dare to think about her lost one! Hitherto to dwell upon the thought of him was to be cut with knives. The only peace possible had been negative; had been to harden herself to insensibility.

"It is the Spirit Flower," she thought, and her lips took a tender curve that matched the melting eyes above them. The association of ideas brought thoughts of Mrs. Porter, for it was the song Linda had last studied with her teacher whose words flowed now through her mind.

"My heart was frozen, even as the earth
That covered thee forever from my sight.
All thoughts of happiness expired at birth;
Within me naught but black and starless night.

"Down through the winter sunshine snowflakes came,
All shimmering, like to silver butterflies;
They seemed to whisper softly thy dear name;
They melted with the tear-drops from mine eyes.

"But suddenly there bloomed within that hour,
In my poor heart, so seeming dead, a flower
Whose fragrance in my life shall ever be:
The tender, sacred *memory* of thee."

Linda's eyes closed, and slow crystal drops stole under the lids, but for the first time they were not bitter tears. The journey would now not be wearisome. For a long time she sat motionless, her eyes on the flying clouds, nurturing that spirit flower.

She had put Mrs. Porter's letters in her traveling-bag, and after a time she took them out and read them over, this time with more open vision. She could not realize how recent was her bereavement. She seemed to have lived years in this new world into which she was born the day they brought her father home. It was to look back ages to think of their last breakfast together, his last embrace. She had asked that morning to come downtown to lunch with him, and he had told her that he couldn't spare the time. At least she had been assiduous that last week. With that world she had had nothing to do for so long. It was with this world, this world without her father in it, that she had now to deal, a world in which it seemed to her she had had time to grow old.

Her mind roved busily to and from the lines of Mrs. Porter's loving letters as she read. This new liberty to think, this hope contained in Bertram King's letter, endowed her with an unrestraint which seemed wonderful, and she sometimes read a line six times before the roving mind grasped its meaning.

Miss Barry had fallen asleep in her corner. How weary and haggard her face looked in its repose. Linda's wakened heart went out to the signs of her aunt's unregarded sorrow.

An express train going in the opposite direction crashed suddenly by the open windows with a deafening racket. Miss Barry started and waked.

Blinking, she realized her surroundings, and sat up. She met her niece's eyes. Linda had taken up the violets and her nose was buried in their soft fragrance.

"That was too bad, Aunt Belinda," she said, leaning forward. "It's growing very warm. Can't I get you a drink?" she said.

"Glory be!" thought Miss Barry. "Yes, I wish you would," she said aloud. Her eyes followed the girl, as she slowly rose and moved away to get the water. "At last," continued Miss Barry mentally, "she isn't walking in her sleep."

She accepted the glass when it came, and drank thirstily, although she had not been thirsty.

When Linda returned, moving slowly and holding by the seat, she did not take the place she had vacated, but sat down beside her aunt.

"Tell me something about Father," she said.

"What sort of thing? What do you mean?"

"Not the things the newspapers have printed, about his beating his way to Chicago on the trains, and being an errand boy, and having no education, and all that—his phenomenal rise to fortune. Not that."

Miss Barry snorted. "No education! Absurd! The newspapers make me sick. He had education enough to make him one of the smartest men in the country. I should think folks would know better than to believe such stuff."

"And you took care of him, didn't you, Aunt Belinda? I never used to want to know anything about his childhood. I grew tired of hearing people say he was a self-made man, and I was ashamed to know that he was barefooted and poor. That was another thorn," finished Linda, under her breath.

"Another what?"

"A thorn."

Miss Barry looked around at the speaker. "Oh, a thorn in your side, you mean. I guess you have always been some high-headed, Linda." She used the past tense instinctively as she viewed the pale, languid face leaning back beside her.

"You took care of him like a little mother," persisted the girl. "He has told me so."

"Yes, I was only ten when Ma died, and I guess the papers would 'a' been right about your father's education if I hadn't saved her slippers."

"You mean figuratively? You stepped into them."

"No, I don't. I mean it just as literal as anything could be meant. Pa was easy-going and had enough to attend to, black-smithing and selling flour and feed, so if anybody was going to spank Lambert it had to be me."

Linda's lips, pressed tightly against the violets, quivered against them.

"I'm sure you loved him tremendously," she said unsteadily.

Miss Barry sniffed, with a one-sided smile. "I didn't have much time to think about that. I had to get breakfast and get to school myself, and spank him when he ran away, and when he hitched on trains, and robbed apple orchards, and so on, but mostly when he wouldn't go to school. Ma's slippers were 'most done for, when one day I caught him, and took one of the old tattered things and was going to give him what he deserved, when he just caught my arms in his two hands, and began to laugh. I noticed then for the first time that he was as tall as I was, and his eyes looked straight into mine the fullest of mischief you ever saw. I could feel myself getting as red as a beet. 'Let me go this minute,' I yelled at him. 'Let me go, Lammie.' That's what the schoolboys called him when they wanted to be mean. He fought a lot o' boys for that before they learned better, and I remember exactly how he managed to get both o' my calico sleeves into one hand, and boxed my ears with the other; not real hard, he was laughing all the time.

"'Come on, Belinda,' he said, 'let's bury the slipper.' I knew what he meant, because the boys were always playing Indian, and burying hatchets; but, do you know, he made me bury that shoe then and there? He took me outdoors and made me take the hoe and bury that slipper in the garden. He stood over me, and before I finished I was crying, I was so mad. I was fifteen then, and he was eleven, but I was small for my age; and that was the end of the spankings. But you see by that time," continued Miss Barry complacently, "I'd made him a real good boy."

"Yes, yes, you did," agreed Linda warmly. "What then?"

"Oh, then it was lobster traps, and I helped him with them, and I got Father to buy lobsters off him, and buy his clams, too, and I think Lambert was always sort of sorry for me even when I was scolding him. He knew I had a lot to do for a young one."

"Yes," said Linda, with eagerness, "and he resolved to make it up to you, I know."

"He did make it up to me. He was the best brother in the world," answered Miss Barry simply.

The girl's lips trembled again against the violets, and the two watched the flying landscape in silence.

CHAPTER XIII

Often during the remainder of the journey Linda questioned her aunt about her own and her father's childhood. Hitherto she had avoided as far as possible all mention or knowledge of his antecedents and the struggles which preceded his success. Again she felt the relief consequent upon opening a mental door until now painstakingly kept closed. Instead of the thorn again came up the fir-tree, as her thoughts, led by Miss Barry, roved about the hard but wholesome past, and she acquainted herself with the good stock which had produced her lost treasure.

"Don't grieve. Speed him on," had been Mrs. Porter's tender and strong admonition. Linda tried to remember it every time that submerging wave of realized loss went sweeping suffocatingly over her head.

Miss Barry, rousing from practical thoughts of her home and housekeeping, or waking from a nap, usually saw her niece poring over letters, and occasionally it was Bertram King's that she held in her hands.

Once when this was the case Miss Belinda held out a metal box. "Try some of this ginger," she said. "Coals to Newcastle! Did you ever? Isn't Mr. King the impudent one?"

Linda leaned politely toward the confection, then drew back again.

"Don't waste it on me, Aunt Belinda. I don't seem to care for sweets."

"Well, I hope Mrs. Porter will. I can't eat all these things alone," replied Miss Barry, casting a glance toward the varied boxes.

At the same time she let that eagle glance come back to her niece.

"I hope you're going to remember," she said impressively, "that that fine man to whom we owe so much is related to Mrs. Porter."

"What?" asked the girl absent-mindedly. "Oh," suddenly gathering her aunt's meaning. "Yes, certainly."

Miss Barry sniffed. "Linda," she said, "I don't know but I'd ought to go and dig up your grandmother's slipper!"

The girl smiled, and the older woman shook her head. "She is a handsome thing," she thought.

Mrs. Porter thought so too when she met them in Portland. In spite of the change wrought in her pupil's appearance during the last month she reflected how beauty at twenty-one will be beauty still.

"There's no place like home!" exclaimed Miss Barry, as she accepted Mrs. Porter's embrace. "I'm aching for one look at the ocean."

"Isn't she saucy to our grand lake?" asked Mrs. Porter, putting her hand through Linda's arm, and leading the way to the motor waiting outside.

"What does this mean?" asked Miss Barry. "The train's good enough for us."

"No, it's such a beautiful afternoon. It will rest you both to motor home," said Mrs. Porter. She supported Linda's arm, noting the feebleness of the girl's movements.

The two black-clothed women entered the car, the porter put in their suit-cases, Mrs. Porter jumped in, and they started. As yet Linda had scarcely spoken. It was curious to her to see her teacher thus, off duty, wearing an outing hat and corduroy. She, who had always been surrounded with a wall of delicate formality which no pupil save herself had ever had the audacity to break down, now smiling, tanned and rosy, girlish in her soft white hat, seemed another identity. Linda regarded her teacher gravely, while the latter responded cheerfully to Miss Barry's questions. The sun shone, the breeze was crisp.

As they emerged into the suburbs and countryside, all the joyousness of June smote upon the travelers' tired senses.

Linda turned her wistful eyes away when Mrs. Porter met them, a reassuring strength in her regard.

"Jerry was so disappointed when I told him he needn't come to the station for us," she said. "All your neighbors are excited over your home-coming."

"H'm," sniffed Miss Barry in a one-sided smile. "Luella accommodatin' any boarders?"

"Yes, a mother and daughter from New York."

"H'm. Their bones beginning to show yet?"

Mrs. Porter laughed. "If it is as you say, why shouldn't Miss Luella advertise a reducing establishment? I'm sure it would pay."

The speaker's cheer covered a pang. Linda's slenderness and pallor spoke eloquently, and made her forget the girl's probable injustice to Bertram King.

Linda had made but one visit before to the Cape. That was ten years ago, when her aunt's cottage was first built. It had been a flying trip with her father and mother, and she had slight recollection of the place. Her mother had cared more for mountains than sea, and Linda had visited them on both sides of the ocean. It was now to a practically new place that the motor was carrying her.

She straightened herself with interest when the settlement came in sight, and her large gaze

sought for the little house that had been her father's gift of love to his sister.

Mrs. Porter saw her eagerness. "Just about three minutes away now," she said.

"Is that it? The brown one?" asked the girl as they neared the rocky point.

"Yes, the Gull's Nest," replied Mrs. Porter. "I don't know what Miss Barry calls it, but how could it have any other name?"

"Lambert was always telling me to name it and he'd give me some writing paper, stamped."

"And why didn't you?"

"I did." Miss Barry tossed her head a little toward the welcoming waves.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Porter eagerly.

"Oh, no matter," returned Miss Belinda.

"You haven't told? Do you mean you haven't *told*?" Mrs. Porter's eyes twinkled at the proof of New England reticence.

"What's in a name, anyway?" returned Miss Belinda evasively.

Her niece regarded the flush on her aunt's thin cheek wistfully, and wondered what bit of sentiment she was concealing.

The wonder heightened the interest with which she entered the cottage. The little house was unexpectedly roomy within. Lambert Barry had given his sister *carte blanche* as to coziness, provided she would have room enough for him and his when they could arrange to come; but the nearness to the great diapason of the waves had repelled his wife, and after he lost her the engrossed business man could make only flying visits to the scenes of his childhood. There were the rooms, however, and Linda was soon led to hers.

"It's the one I always called your father's room, Linda," said Miss Barry, as she ushered her in.

Mrs. Porter, after brief explanation of her preparations, had remained below stairs to leave them alone.

Linda looked from the windows on the limitless ocean, dotted with distant sails; on the fleecy islands of cloud in a sky as blue, as limitless.

She turned back to her companion. A look of satisfaction had overspread her aunt's wan face.

"You've been very good to me, Aunt Belinda," she said deliberately. "I've known it all the time, but I shall appreciate it more and more."

"Well, well, that's all right, child," returned the other hastily. "I think there's everything here to make you comfortable. The bathroom's here, between your room and mine; and if there's anything you want that you don't see, just let me know."

She went out and left Linda standing there, her wide gaze fixed on the open sea and ships. Islands were but distant scenes from the Cape. Here the granite cliffs rose high and higher. She could get glimpses along the shore of their hollows, which soon would shelter luxuriant deep-pink wild roses, but now waved with snowy daisies, flirting with the foam which ever sought to reach them.

An hour afterward she went downstairs, and found Mrs. Porter sitting with a book in the glassed-in end of the veranda.

"See? I've been saving this hammock for you," said Mrs. Porter, looking up.

Linda stood still and smiled, looking with fascinated eyes at the sea.

Mrs. Porter remained quiet, watching the girl's face grow grave.

"It's very wonderful after the city, isn't it?" she asked at last.

"Yes. The noise on the avenue was constant, then the banging and confusion of trains. This is like being born into a new world. I was wondering just now if Father felt that same great contrast and peace when he waked up."

"I'm sure he did," replied Mrs. Porter. She said no more to urge her friend to lie down, but dropped her book and took up some sewing that lay on the table beside her.

Pretty soon Linda came over to the hammock and seated herself on its edge, and at that moment Miss Barry appeared with an armful of neglected bon-bon boxes.

"This is day before yesterday's candy," she announced, "but most of them haven't been opened at all, and any that you don't want will find a market in the neighborhood." The speaker raised her eyebrows significantly.

Mrs. Porter smiled. "Poor little Blanche Aurora, for instance. She's been a good little helper."

"You don't mean to say she hasn't broken dishes."

"Well, not so very many, really. She's been very much excited over your home-coming."

When Jerry came with the trunks, his sea-blue eyes regarded Linda with respectful interest, while he shook hands with her aunt.

"Ye look some faded, Belinda," he remarked.

"I'll pick up," was the reply. "This is my niece, Cap'n Holt."

Linda brought her absent-minded gaze back with a start, realizing that the "expressman" was being introduced to her.

He put out his rough hand kindly, and she saw by his expression that he was acknowledging her bereavement. She put her hand in his in silence.

"Cap'n Holt knew your father, Linda," said Mrs. Porter.

The girl's eyes met his. "Did you work for my father?" she asked.

"Dunno 'bout that," was the good-humored response. "I was the oldest, and I guess mebbe he worked fer me some."

Cap'n Holt's lips twitched as if a humorous continuation of his declaration was imminent, but Linda's grave looks and her black gown restrained him. A faint color mounted to the girl's cheeks. She must remember hereafter!

"He was well liked around here, your father was," finished Jerry Holt warmly.

"Thank you," said Linda, and Jerry dropped her smooth young hand awkwardly.

"Sometime you must tell me about when he was a little boy," she continued, still gazing at him.

Jerry Holt winked hard as he drove his team away from those appealing eyes. "She takes it hard," he said to himself, "she takes it hard."

Luella Benslow had seen him drive by with the trunks, and she was working in her garden as he returned. Luella had not succeeded in entirely breaking down the reserve of that pleasant-faced Mrs. Porter, who had been keeping house for Belinda. The socially experienced musician had known how to awe her. Luella was by no means certain that Belinda Barry's loss had dulled her speech, so she restrained the curiosity which urged her to create an immediate errand at the Barry cottage.

Jerry must pass her house on his return, so she set herself to work at piling some wood, her father not being amenable to the performing of such an arduous task.

Her regimentals for such labor consisted of a deep shaker bonnet provided with a flowing collar, in which her complexion was shielded. She also wore a complication of capes, and a terraced arrangement of aprons, one above the other, the whole giving the strong, sportive sea wind an assorted lot of banners, which it tossed in all directions.

As Jerry's wagon approached, Luella was too deafened by the wind and her shaker to hear the wheels on the soft earth. She was at the roadside, gathering the smaller wood which had fallen by the way, and the back view of her stooping figure presented an appearance which Jerry's steed, mentally consulting a long experience, could not remember to have seen paralleled. Deciding that it would be on the safe side to approach no nearer, Molly planted her forefeet, and all Jerry's adjurations failed to persuade her to move. Her eloquent ears went forward and back.

At last there came borne to Luella a stentorian yell.

"Git up! Git up, I tell ye, Luella."

She slowly lifted her head, turned, and brushing her hair out of her eyes beheld Molly with feet planted and ears laid back. Jerry was standing up in his wagon, gesticulating with his whip.

"Git up, I tell ye! The hoss won't go *by* ye!" he yelled.

Luella arose with alacrity, but slowly, her arms full of kindling. This she dropped incontinently, and Molly shied as the fluttering figure ran forward.

"I want to speak to you, Jerry. Don't go till you tell me about 'em!" she said breathlessly. "Do excuse my looks," she added with a simper.

"I can overlook 'em if Molly can," replied Jerry.

Both Molly and Luella seemed to be indulging in a return to the skittishness of youth.

Jerry had twice taken Luella home from singing school in days gone by, and he had been ticketed as one of her beaux ever since! A might-have-been with whom she consistently played the game.

She pushed her shaker back. "Have you seen the orphan?" she added, again brushing stray locks of hair out of her curious eyes.

"Yes."

"What's she like? Awful proud, I s'pose."

"Mebbe. She favors Lambert. He went some on looks, you remember."

"How should I remember?" returned Luella with a coy smile, which showed dentally the evenness of piano keys. "I was so *much* younger than you and Mr. Barry."

"I wish Luella's teeth wouldn't kind o' drop," reflected Jerry Holt. "It makes me dizzy."

He snapped his whip gently, while Molly, reassured, rested in the first position.

"I think I'd ought to call real soon," said Luella. "Don't you?"

"Well, 'f I was you I'd let 'em ketch their breath," remarked Jerry impersonally.

"The Mrs. Lindsay and her daughter stayin' with me, they're related to a young man in Chicago that's a dear friend o' the Barrys," went on Luella eagerly. "I think 't would make the orphan feel more to home to know she had a mewchal friend in the neighborhood. Don't you?"

"Couldn't say," drawled Jerry.

"*Sh!*" hissed Luella, lowering her voice portentously. "The ladies are about sure their relation had all his money in Lambert Barry's bank. *Sh!* They think from all they've heard he was a scoundrel. You can't talk about folks that's dead, though, can you?"

"Well, some folks find it's the safest time."

"Well, what do *you* think, Jerry?" she asked, still low-voiced, pressing close to the wagon.

"I think I got to be goin'. Careful there, Luella. Don't let Molly step on ye."

"Well," she returned, retreating, "I've always believed I could write a play as good as anybody else for those here emotion pictures, and this'd be a splendid story, with Lambert Barry for the villain, and his beautiful daughter believin' in him; don't you think so? I'd make her beautiful, you know."

Jerry Holt's lips twitched as he gathered up the reins.

"Well, one thing sure, Nature's saved ye the trouble there, Luella. Git ap, Molly."

Luella looked after the wagon, her mouth open in her interest. Her friend's meaning slowly percolated. Then she hurried toward the house, removing aprons as she went, to inform her boarders of the arrival.

CHAPTER XIV

BLANCHE AURORA

When Linda waked next morning, she had been dreamless for nine hours; sunk so deep in slumber after weeks of restless, fitful naps that the return to earth was a slow, scarcely credible process. A soothing, rhythmic sweep of sound seemed saying, "Sleep *on*, Sleep *on*"; but a song sparrow perched on the corner of the sloping roof above her window was loudly declaring that it was ecstasy to waken. The rapturous burst, often repeated, won her slow attention. The sun shone through the rosy curtains and a breeze fanned her opening eyes. She turned her face into her pillow. Her first thought as ever of her father, she seemed to commune with him.

"I'm here in your room, dear. I dare think about you. The insults are going to cease, dearest, *dearest*!"

Her rested brain recalled those sentences in one of Mrs. Porter's letters, prophetic words of what the public verdict would be when truth began to appear. Then had come King's reassurance. She knew each phrase of both letters by heart.

Mrs. Porter had put Miss Barry's best photograph of her brother on the dresser in this room. Turning, Linda again opened her eyes and they rested upon it. For a moment she gazed, then rose with a sense of refreshment. How quiet the house was! She took her bath and dressed, still without hearing a human movement, and at last went downstairs to the empty living-room. The old-fashioned clock above the fireplace pointed to nine forty-five.

"I surely am a petted child!" thought Linda. She moved through the dining-room and was going to the kitchen when the swing door suddenly opened, nearly striking her, and a girl of thirteen years appeared. By dint of peeking around the corner of the house, Blanche Aurora had obtained a glimpse of the tall slender figure in black when aunt and niece arrived yesterday; and of the two, Linda was the more surprised at the sudden encounter now.

In any case, Blanche Aurora was not easily daunted. She had spent years in twitching smaller brothers and sisters into the path of duty. Perhaps the necessity of her being "careful about many things," notwithstanding her youth, had drawn Miss Belinda to her in sympathetic remembrance of her own childhood; but if that was the case, it had resulted in no tenderness given or received. Theirs was a relation of armed neutrality in which neither ever got much the better of the other.

Blanche Aurora's eyes were round, expressionless, and light blue. Each of the two pigtails of her red hair had a string braided in with it to discourage relaxation, and this cord was twisted around their ends with a determined hand, the whole so tightly reined that each braid turned up at the end like a fishhook.

A dozen times this morning she had pushed open the swing door under the impression that she heard the guest descend: the wonderful guest, who never had to touch foot to the ground, but rolled around in carriages and ate off gold plates. Blanche Aurora had vaguely expected something so overwhelming in the appearance of the millionaire's daughter that the apparition of Linda in a plain white gown, not glittering at any point, was somewhat disappointing. The flat-chested little maid viewed the tall girl's shining, waving hair and her large, grave eyes for a moment; then she spoke:—

"Pretty near hit you, didn't I?" she said airily.

"My aunt—" murmured Linda.

"They've gone to see the chickens, and I'm to give you your breakfast. There's your place."

Blanche Aurora's businesslike, no-time-to-spare finger pointed to the white table which bore a dish of fruit and a single goldbanded plate with its complement of silver and napkin.

Linda sat down meekly.

"I s'pose you'll want a finger-bowl," said Blanche Aurora.

"If—if it's convenient," replied Linda.

The other actually smiled. "Ho! We've got lots of 'em," she returned, and stalked to the sideboard, where she poured water into a bowl and placed it close by Linda's elbow.

While the guest opened an orange, the light-blue eyes watched her white ringless hands. "She don't look a bit rich," thought Blanche Aurora, "but I'll bet she's stuck-up."

She withdrew against the wall, from whence Linda felt her unwinking, round stare.

"Are you my aunt's little maid?" asked the girl, after the silence began to be embarrassing.

"No," came the prompt reply, "I'm her help." All Blanche Aurora's remarks were made in a loud tone as if she were talking against the sound of the sea. "I come after I git the children to school."

"Children?"

"My brothers and sisters."

Linda glanced up at the short, slight form clad in a faded gingham dress that was outgrown.

"Don't you go to school yourself?"

"Ho! No! I got through last year; I'm thirteen."

A pause, during which the help reluctantly admired Linda's hands and her deft manner of manipulating spoon and orange. As the guest laid down the empty rind, her companion's voice rent the air.

"Oatmeal, wheatena, and all the cold cereals!" she vociferated.

Linda started. "I—I don't really care—"

"One's jest as easy as the other. They're all handy."

"I'll take the—oatmeal, please," replied Linda under the pressure of that strenuous reassurance.

During the brief absence of the small maid, the girl leaned back in her chair, and looked through the open windows fronting the sea.

Presently, Blanche Aurora's foot kicked open the swing door and she advanced with the cereal and noted that the guest shivered.

"Be ye cold?" she questioned sharply; "I can shet the winders."

"Yes, I wish you would. This is like eating on a boat."

"I hate bo'ts," vouchsafed the help, and crossing to the windows slammed them down, after which she resumed her position against the wall while Linda served herself with oatmeal.

"There's coffee and rolls and eggs," shouted Blanche Aurora after half a minute of dead silence during which the clock ticked.

Linda jumped again. The help was so very responsible and so clean and wiry that she smiled as she lifted her eyes.

"I've got an hourglass and you're to tell me when you want 'em put on."

"What?"

"The eggs; they're good and fresh. Luella Benslow's hens laid 'em."

"Are those the hens Aunt Belinda has gone to see?"

"Yes; Mis' Porter wanted to see the hens that have hot-water bags."

Linda kept on smiling.

"Dear me!" she said. "What is your name, please?"

"Blanche Aurora Martin," came the prompt report; "but you don't have to say the Martin. It's Blanche Aurora for short."

"I see; and I am Miss Barry."

"Yes, I know," was the prompt reply; "but I made up my mind to call you Miss Belinda 'cause if there was two Miss Barrys, I couldn't stand it."

"Really? Very well; but what did you mean about hens with hot-water bags?"

"Why, Luella puts 'em in every nest when it comes cold, and Mis' Porter, she laughed and laughed when she heard about it; Luella's some slack about lots o' things, but she's got real good ideas about helpin' the hens along and Mis' Porter wanted Miss Barry should take her over and see 'em." Blanche Aurora's sharp gaze noted the guest's languid appetite as evinced by the slight diminution of the oatmeal. "The eggs is real good," she continued, "and I've got an hourglass."

Linda lifted her somber eyes and showed the tips of her white teeth again.

"I hope you don't boil them an hour, Blanche Aurora?"

It wasn't very often that Miss Barry's maid was offered a joke, but the relaxing of her thin cheeks now showed that she could take one.

"No danger!" she returned smartly. But the suggestion of eggs, even those laid luxuriously in the proximity of a hot-water bag, could not tempt the pale guest this morning.

"Coffee and toast sound very good," she said. "No eggs this morning, I think."

"Hev it your own way," returned the help; "we cal'late to give you what you want," and at once she attacked the swing door. The little creature's sudden energy of motion after absolute repose was like her stentorian tones breaking dead silence.

When coffee and toast were set before the guest, Blanche Aurora again supported the wall and watched her charge with an unremitting stare.

"You don't need to wait," said Linda.

"I druther," returned Blanche Aurora with a finality which admitted of no argument.

The guest followed the line of least resistance.

"Is Mrs.—— is the hen lady one of your neighbors?"

"Luella Benslow? Yes, she and her father. Her father's a wonderful man—Luella's father is."

"What does he do?"

"Well, he don't do nothin' much. He never did support his family nor anythin' like that; but he has such wonderful 'complishments. There ain't nobody can ketch a frog like Cy Benslow can."

Linda looked up and felt color coming into her cheeks in the novel desire to laugh.

"How does he do it?"

"Like this." The round light eyes gained a spark of interest as Blanche Aurora began describing large circles in the air with her right hand, and advancing toward the table with a stealthy tread. As she approached, the circles contracted gradually, until close to the guest they had narrowed to a small ring out of which the hand made a jab toward the victim's face, and Linda jerked her head back.

Blanche Aurora smiled in triumph and returned to her place.

"I—I really thought you had my nose!"

"That's jest it. Ye see the frog's got to look so many directions, he don't know which way to jump, so he's jest kind o' par'lyzed and gits ketched."

"Very ingenious," laughed Linda.

Yes, she laughed. Blanche Aurora, unconscious that she had performed a feat eclipsing Cy Benslow's, warmed to her theme.

"And you jest ought to see him git worms for bait."

"Now, Blanche Aurora, it was bad enough to be a frog. I positively decline to be a worm."

"You don't have to be. I'll jest tell ye about it. He goes up to a post, Cy does." The speaker moved forward, and Linda put out a warning hand.

"Nor a post either, Blanche Aurora. I firmly decline to be a post."

"And he takes a board and scrapes it back and forrard across the post; it grits somethin' awful, and the shakin' gets to the worms somehow and they begin comin' up out o' the ground to see what's goin' on, and"—Blanche Aurora nodded significantly—"and that's the last they *do* see, I can tell ye. They go whack into Cy's pail and ketch his dinner for him."

"What a wizard!"

"No, he don't get no lizards, and I'm glad we don't have 'em. There was a lady once boardin' to Benslows' and she had one with a chain to its leg and she let it run all over her. Bah!" the speaker shuddered. "I'd hate to feel their scrabbly feet, wouldn't you?"

"I've finished, Blanche Aurora," said Linda hastily. She pushed her chair back from the table. There was pressure in her throat and in her eyes. She rose abruptly.

"Say! you forgot your finger-bowl," shouted her waitress after the figure swiftly retreating toward the piazza.

CHAPTER XV

THE HARBOR

Blanche Aurora's prey could not so easily escape her. She had been left in charge of Linda and she followed her now to the porch: that exciting porch surmounting a castle wall of rock, with soft niches of green where Nature's mother-hand found vulnerable spots to plant her lovely ferns and flowers.

To Blanche Aurora the situation of the cottage was objectionably noisy and windy, and she often wished her employer's house could be moved back on the road where one could see the passing. She scowled now against the dazzling sun and boisterous wind.

"Be you goin' to set out here?" she roared at Linda.

"How beautiful it is!" escaped involuntarily from the guest.

"Then I'll git you some warm things. You're sick and delicate!" yelled Blanche Aurora as one whom the roar of old Ocean could not down.

Linda looked at the slim child in the faded gingham. The salt air went through her piercingly.

"I'm not delicate at all!" she protested, but little cared her mentor for her defense.

She straightway brought a steamer-rug, shawl and pillows from a near-by closet.

"There!" she said, depositing them in the hammock on the glassed-in end of the porch. She gave her queer little grimace of a smile and again her thin cheeks wrinkled. "Miss Barry said you looked like a hothouse plant, so I guess you'd better stay under glass for a spell."

"Aren't you cold yourself in that cal—that thin dress?" asked Linda.

"I dunno. I don't believe so."

Linda's eyes grew softer. It was so evident that the little caretaker had small leisure to think of her sensations.

"Lay down and I'll cover you," commanded Blanche Aurora.

"Lie down? No, indeed. I'm just up."

The help paused with the rug in her thin arms. She was undecided as to whether to humor this rebellion.

"Blanche Aurora, do you like candy?"

The slender face lost its worried expression and grew younger.

"There ain't much sense to that question," she returned.

"Then come into the house with me," said Linda.

The wraps were dropped in the hammock and willing feet followed the guest.

From a cabinet in the corner of the room Linda chose the reddest of red boxes, generous in size, and placed it in a pair of eager hands.

Blanche Aurora viewed the prize, amazed. "I ain't ever in my life had all the candy I wanted," she said in such awed tones that Linda smiled and reached for a violet box which she piled upon the other.

"Oh!" gasped the recipient. She looked up at the pale guest with a new realization of what it meant to be a millionaire's daughter. Gold plates and carriages sounded fine, but it was only like hearing about Cinderella and other impossible maidens. Here were tangible chocolates given away recklessly and with nonchalance. What a consciousness that bespoke!

As they stood there, Linda, watching her erstwhile mentor endure an ecstatic paralysis, Miss Barry and Mrs. Porter entered.

"What are you doing, Linda Barry!" exclaimed her aunt. "I'll keep those boxes myself and give the child a few at a time. She'll make herself sick." She hurried forward, but Linda pressed her back.

"Let her make herself sick," she pleaded. "I'll take care of her."

Miss Barry looked from one to the other undecidedly. She recognized this surprisingly good symptom in her niece, but such a wholesale relaxation of discipline toward the most willful, stubborn child on the Cape was unheard of.

While she hesitated, Linda stepped to one side and made room for the "help" to pass, which Blanche Aurora made haste to do, the wonderful boxes clutched in her arms, and the fishhook braids vibrating with the double excitement of her gift and getting the better of her employer.

Mrs. Porter watched Linda thoughtfully. When she and Miss Barry a few minutes ago had left Luella Benslow and her pampered hens, and their hilarious mood had quieted, the younger woman had at once brought up the subject of Bertram King, whose situation dwelt much in her mind. As they walked across the soft grass she took Miss Barry's arm.

"Tell me about my cousin, Mr. King. How does he look?"

"Like the last run o' shad," returned Miss Barry promptly.

"I never met a belated shad."

"Well, you've eaten 'em, haven't you? I'd just as soon eat a fried paper of pins."

"You mean that Bertram is thin?"

"Just so. He looks as if he'd been through the war, and so he has."

"I feel as if I ought to go back to him."

"Law! Don't leave me yet!" exclaimed Miss Barry in a panic. "You're the only person Linda can stand the sight of. Oh! if I'm not glad to get home!" The speaker inflated her lungs and stepped lightly.

"You say she blames Bertram for her father's misfortunes."

"Yes; and I guess she ain't the only one, from what Harriet says. Lots o' folks think my brother pinned his faith to Mr. King's judgment in taking on a new proposition."

"Yes," returned Mrs. Porter thoughtfully. "I've heard it said."

Miss Barry glanced around at her companion quickly. "Well, I hope you didn't take any stock in it," she returned sharply. "Lambert Barry had a backbone of his own. I'm surprised at his own daughter's not knowing him well enough to scout such a notion."

"Bertram is very clever. He had been with him a long time."

"Clever! I guess he is clever. I could just about worship that man for all he's done," was the warm rejoinder; "and if that cock-and-bull story was true about Bertram King dragging the bank into that Antlers thing that broke the camel's back, he's made up for it with pretty near his life's blood, working night and day to undo the damage."

Mrs. Porter's eyes glowed with interest and surprise at such heat from the reserved New England woman.

"You do feel that way! I'm so glad. Then, why doesn't Linda?"

"Because if Mr. King laid down and died it couldn't bring back her father," returned Miss Barry slowly.

Mrs. Porter looked away and shook her head. "How dreadful it seems," she said in a low tone. "Then you have no blame for Bertram?"

"Not a particle."

"What is the situation now? What has he been able to do?"

"Wonders," returned Miss Barry sententiously. "He sent me a letter to the train. I ought to have given it to you as soon as I touched home. I ought to have realized that you were so close to Mr. King that it would mean a lot to you as well as to us. You'll never see the Linda that was before that letter came. It gave her new life."

"Then didn't it make her feel kindly toward Bertram?" asked Mrs. Porter.

"No. She just accepted it as penance and the best restitution the poor fellow could make for a tragic and unpardonable—mind you, *unpardonable* mistake."

"Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," murmured Mrs. Porter.

"I know it," returned Miss Barry; "and you'll see when you read that letter that he has some forgiveness to do himself. He never mentioned Linda in it, and good enough for her. She had flouted him and refused to see him for days before he rightly sensed how deep her feeling was against him. It was at a business meeting we had that she came out flat with her suspicion and meanness. Oh, it was perfectly awful. I just have to remember and *remember* how much provocation she would have had if all she believed was true. That poor boy nearly fainted away in his tracks, the way she spoke to him."

Mrs. Porter bit her lip. She could picture the scene and her eyes filled.

"He loved her so!" she said softly.

"Yes, and there's that Fred Whitcomb, too: as nice a boy as ever lived. He just adores Linda; and it seems there's lots of others. I didn't believe before that I could ever get sick of arranging flowers; but really they were a pest. Linda wouldn't look at one, and I got so I passed them over to the waitress. She fixed them perfectly awful, too. They looked like crazy quilts when she got through—such colors together! Linda was a buxom, healthy girl, and good-looking enough, but for the life of me I can't see why she's such a snare."

"Poor child. She shows how she has suffered, but why didn't it soften her? How could she inflict suffering at such a time? I can hardly wait to see that letter," added Mrs. Porter, unconsciously hurrying her steps.

"I haven't got it. I gave it to Linda for her comfort, and hoping, too, that she'd get some punishment out of Mr. King's ignoring her. Never mentioned her name, you know."

"And didn't she feel it at all?"

"Not a mite."

"Then I suppose, after all, she never did care anything for Bertram," mused Mrs. Porter. "It was as well, perhaps, for him that she shocked him out of his dream. As well for him—not for her, poor child, it wasn't well for her to be cruel."

"I don't want to be too hard on her," said Miss Barry. "Maybe she wasn't really responsible. Land! What we went through! Well," she added, briskness coming into her voice, "that chapter's closed."

"Let me," said Mrs. Porter, "let me be the one to ask Linda for the letter. You have been so tried, Miss Barry. I don't want to ask you to reopen the sorrowful chapter; but I long to see what Bertram has to say. I have always thought him an extraordinary young fellow and respected him as much as I loved him."

"Just so. Just so," responded Miss Barry warmly. "All right. You ask for the letter. I pass my niece over to you now."

They had reached the porch of the shingled cottage and in another minute they walked in upon Linda's presentation scene.

Miss Barry was quite prompt in following her maid into the kitchen, but the minute's delay in

hanging up her hat and coat was sufficient for all sign of the candy boxes to have disappeared. When she opened the door Blanche Aurora was at the sink letting floods of hot water into the dishpan and singing with vigor, "A charge to keep I have," meanwhile rattling pans and china, the whole giving an amazing effect of clatter.

Miss Barry involuntarily clapped her hands to her ears.

"You needn't sing," she remarked loudly.

"All right," returned the help, ceasing, "but you told me 'twas good for my lungs."

"That's all very well when you're alone, Blanche Aurora; but I'm going to be busy out here seeing what shape you've got the closets into while I've been gone and how many dishes I've got left. To-morrow I'm going to begin putting up strawberries."

Miss Barry was in the habit of preparing in the summer time of peace for the war of winter, when boarding-houses could not supply her with home-prepared fruit.

Meanwhile, in the living-room the light of amusement had died from Linda's pale face and she sank into a chintz-cushioned wicker rocker. Mrs. Porter took a neighboring chair.

"You had a good sleep, I hope, Linda."

"Wonderful. I went completely out of the world for the first time in—I don't know how many weeks." The girl met the kind regard fixed upon her. "I can't get used," she added, "to seeing you far away from your busy life. It seems as if I must hurry to say what I wish because in half an hour I shall be turned out by another pupil."

"Vacation is astonishingly pleasant when you've earned it," replied her friend. "I fancy that a lot of people who thought it would be great fun to retire from business soon made the discovery that when one stops working he stops playing too, because vacation has lost its zest. Familiarity breeds contempt in lots of ways."

Linda's large eyes rested upon the speaker, who had retained an orange silk sweater over her white waist and white corduroy skirt. The hero-worship that for two years she had laid at the feet of this woman was among the enthusiasms of that vital past, now gone forever. Once it would have meant wild elation to claim unlimited companionship with the adored one in this isolated, romantic spot. To-day, as she gazed at the wholesome, calm face of her teacher, it was that other teaching she had received from her, those words of balm that had proved the first comfort in her affliction, which gave her friend value.

"I owe you so much, Mrs. Porter," she said suddenly, after a mutual silence, full to each of them.

"I'm glad," returned the other as simply. "My heart cried out to help you, Linda."

The speaker knew that if the hurt, groping soul can find something for which to feel gratitude, healing has begun.

She came no nearer to the girl nor took her hand. It was a new Linda, cold, white, and undemonstrative except for her cruelty to Bertram King. Mrs. Porter steadied her own thought as it fled to him, and tried to think only of the needy one before her.

"You believed in my father—believed in him from the first. Bertram says now that he will be vindicated to all before very long; but I shall never forget those who believed in him from the first."

Mrs. Porter listened quietly to the low, vibrating voice. She saw the girl swallow and exercise self-control.

"Miss Barry tells me that my cousin wrote a letter to her, telling of hopeful conditions. She says that you have it. May I see it?"

"Yes. You deserve to see it. It is in my envelope of treasures: your letters." Linda's heart spoke through her eyes, then she arose.

"Let us go out of doors and read it," said Mrs. Porter. "We waste time in the house on such a day. Bring a warm wrap when you come down."

Linda went upstairs slowly. Her friend's eyes followed her inelastic, slow movements. Could this be Linda Barry!

She returned wearing a white sweater and Mrs. Porter pinned a white corduroy hat on the dark head and flung a polo coat over her own arm. She also took a cushion from the hammock as they passed.

"We won't sit on the piazza this morning," she said. "I have a surprise for you."

Leading the way around the corner of the house, the two walked away from the blue breakers, across a wide, grassy field.

"Your father did a fine thing in buying so much ground for his sister," said Mrs. Porter. "She says when he built the house he was afraid she would be lonely and he planned to build other attractive cottages through here, but she told him she didn't want any one near enough to shoot. She says he laughed and gave her the deed to all this land and told her to go ahead and suit herself. Do you see that mowing machine at work? That is Cap'n Jerry, who brought your trunk. See him mounted on his little throne and driving Molly—that wonderful horse that he says 'ain't afraid o' no nameable thing.' He is opposed on principle to doing anything 'sudden,' so he has taken his time to get at the mowing; but how sweet it will smell here to-morrow! Passengers will

have to get over from the train the best way they can to-day. Cap'n Jerry says, very reasonably, that he can't be 'in two places to once,' and he's just a little bit afraid of your Aunt Belinda. He won't put off her work too long."

Linda's grave lips were parted as she looked across the field toward the machine where Captain Jerry was cheering Molly on and calming her disgust when the clipping knife encountered a stone, balking her efforts.

"He is the one who went to school with my father?"

"They all did. You'll meet others." They crossed the field, then Mrs. Porter turned inland. "Now, down this path, Linda. See, it is a path. I made it myself. Partly by constant use, partly with a sickle. I wish Miss Barry would sell me this spot. I don't believe she could shoot as far as this, do you? And—what do you think of it?"

Mrs. Porter paused and regarded her companion in triumph. She had led her around a clump of white birches, the advance guard of a forest of pine and balsam which held back the prevailing south wind. The zephyrs, forcing their way through, here and there, brought delicious odors of the firs. The ocean was sufficiently distant for its roar to be muffled, and an enchanting spring bubbled up in a natural rock pool, falling like liquid crystal over the granite barrier, and meandering away toward the steep bluff where it fell in a narrow rivulet down to the sea. The brooklet had worn a rut for itself and was bordered by greener grass and larger flowers than dotted the surrounding field. It made a gurgling sound, dear to its discoverer, and one of the gray, slanting rocks of a New England pasture rose in the bower of the birches, rising to a sufficient height to serve as a comfortable back for two people sitting side by side on the green couch, secure from the wind.

"See what a proof of my affection," said Mrs. Porter, "that I bring you here. I sneak away—I steal away! Not even Blanche Aurora knows where I am when I come here."

"I should incline to doubt that," returned Linda.

Mrs. Porter laughed. "Those round eyes do see about all that's going on, I admit; but I like to believe in my own cleverness sufficiently to feel that I have guarded this."

The speaker proceeded to spread the polo coat in front of the rock. "Sit down," she said, and when Linda obeyed she fitted the pillow in behind her back.

"No, indeed," protested Linda. "Blanche Aurora cried aloud that I was sick and delicate, but it's nothing of the kind. You must take the pillow yourself."

"Oh, to please me," urged Mrs. Porter. "I never bring a pillow. This sun-warmed rock just fits my back. We haven't tried it on yours yet, and I wanted your first experience to be positively sybaritic."

"My first," returned Linda; "then you do intend to let me come again?"

"Indeed, I do," was the cheery reply. "I don't know a better object lesson in the fact that nothing is too good to be true."

CHAPTER XVI

THE VOICE OF TRUTH

"And I," returned Linda, clasping her hands behind her head as she leaned back beside her friend, "I have felt that nothing was too bad to be true."

Mrs. Porter did not speak; and after a short silence, the girl continued:—

"In the happy days, I tore off a leaf from your Bible calendar, and one morning, when everything was black and despairing, I found it in my bag. It read, 'Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree.' I suppose I was like the drowning man, and this promise, impersonal and silent, was a straw to be clung to blindly. At any rate, I couldn't throw it away; and it persisted in ringing through my confused head. Soon your letter came. Oh, Mrs. Porter—" Linda choked and ceased.

Her companion laid a comforting hand upon her for a moment and withdrew it.

"You will never know what you did for me," went on the girl presently: "do you know what it means to a despairing one to be given a gleam of hope? You can't, unless you know it by experience."

"I know it by experience," returned Mrs. Porter quietly.

Her companion glanced around at the calm face for a fleeting instant. Could it be possible that such poise would ever be won for herself?

"It was a willingness to listen to you, and the hope that I could believe you, that brought me, shrinking and shuddering as I was, out of my home and into the train and here. Then, on the train, came this letter that Aunt Belinda told you about. It brought me more of peace and hope than I had dreamed of. I have dared to think since then. Here it is."

The speaker passed to her companion the envelope she had been holding tightly.

Mrs. Porter accepted it in silence and took out the letter. As she read, a deeper color mounted to her cheeks, but Linda did not observe this. She had dropped her hands in her lap and her eyes were fixed on the clear-cut horizon line.

"Dear Bertram!" exclaimed Mrs. Porter as she finished. Then she read the letter again. Finally, she folded the sheet, put it in its envelope and handed it back to Linda. Her face wore the radiance for which her pupils were wont to watch as the highest reward for achievement.

"Splendid," she said. "Tell me why news so vital should have been addressed to Miss Barry instead of to you."

Linda's grave gaze met hers.

"I don't like to tell you, Mrs. Porter," she answered.

"You needn't fear, dear child."

"Oh, I can't go into it again, I can't!" exclaimed Linda, suddenly averting her head.

"As you please, dear. I don't want to force you; but I know so well that what you quoted a few minutes ago is as true as that two and two make four. Instead of the thorn *will* come up the fir tree, as soon as you cease to give the thorn nourishment."

"I give it nourishment?" Linda's brow contracted. "Do you mean that I nurse grief? You're mistaken."

"No, I didn't mean that. I love Bertram, and something very wrong must have occurred to cause him not to mention you in that letter. I want you to be happy. I want for you just what your father is getting now: greater knowledge of God and His love and wisdom and guidance. You see that guidance is the most everyday thing in the world: the closest; not anything far away or mysterious. If it is your fault that Bertram ignores you in this—"

"Oh, no, no!" interrupted Linda. "It is not my fault. It is poor Bertram who brought us all to this. I appreciate more every time I read that letter—and I know it by heart—how valiantly he has worked to undo the mischief. At first I didn't pity him in the least, because the crime of getting my father into all that trouble overwhelmed my thoughts at every turn; but, of course, I can see now that it has been a hard experience for Bertram as well."

Linda ceased, catching her lower lip between her teeth.

"I know something of what you refer to," rejoined Mrs. Porter. "I know Bertram's reputation for influence in Barry & Co."

"And you have been so good to me," said Linda hurriedly, "and Bertram is your cousin, and, as you say, you love him, I—I can't bear to discuss him with you."

"But I can bear it, Linda, if you will allow me to ask you one question. Do you believe that Bertram intended any harm to your father?"

"No," came the quick answer; "but he is so conceited and so opinionated—"

"If you believe him innocent of wrong intention, should you become his enemy—"

Linda's pale cheeks flushed and she straightened up.

"When a person strikes you a murderous blow, Mrs. Porter, can you, before recovering breath, care much whether it was accidental or intentional?"

"No! but after recovering breath, you can. What do you believe your father would say to your treatment of Bertram?"

Linda glanced around at her companion quickly. "Aunt Belinda has been talking to you," she said.

"She wrote me something of it before she came home. This letter that I have just read tells me most, however. You were very dear to Bertram, Linda. This double and treble sorrow of his appalls me." Linda saw her companion's eyes fill. "You are right," added Mrs. Porter, not very steadily, "we would better not talk about it at present. Better thoughts will come now that, as you say, the clouds have cleared sufficiently for you to think."

They both leaned back against the rock for a silent minute and Linda saw her friend press her handkerchief to those brimming eyes. Tears and Mrs. Porter! Impossible connection of thought.

"I would like you to tell me one thing, Mrs. Porter," she said. "Are you pitying Bertram, or me?"

The older woman turned to her with a sudden flashing smile.

"I am not going to pity the devil in any form," she returned, "because there ain't no sech animal. All this discord is no part of the reality of things."

Linda frowned in her earnestness and grasped her friend's arm.

"I know all that you have written me by heart too. I'm trying to believe in God; but even if I do, that stupendous fact arises—He took my father away from me."

"No, little Linda"—Mrs. Porter shook her head slowly. "This world is very full of awful happenings at the present day. Mankind is confronted with the choice between a God of Love or none at all. Love doesn't send war and unspeakable suffering, yet such is existing now in this mortal life of ours. Aren't we reduced to finding some philosophy which will give us an anchor? The arbitrary will of a God of war is no anchor of hope. It would be a cause for apprehension—even terror—to believe in such a power. To come to your own individual loss, your father has gone from your sight like thousands of other girls' fathers, dead on battle-fields; but God, who created man in His

image and likeness, knows nothing but the unbroken current of life."

"Then, why—where do all these awful things come from? What is the source?"

Mrs. Porter smiled. "Where does darkness come from? Did you ever think of trying to trace darkness to its source? Every minute of the day we are called upon to divide between reality and unreality."

Silence fell between the two friends in the wide sweep of peace that surrounded them. The heaped foam of cloudlets sailed across the blue and a crow cawed in the neighboring wood.

"We had such an amusing visit this morning, Miss Barry and I," said Mrs. Porter at last. "One of the neighbors is a character."

"I heard that you went to see her hens."

"Yes. Oh, it is funny to see your aunt brought up against the kind of person who lives in a lax, slipshod sort of way."

"Yes," assented the other; "Aunt Belinda has no half-tones. Everything with her is either jet-black or snow-white; and if there is anything she can't bear it is a thing she doesn't like."

Mrs. Porter smiled and sighed. "That is true; and poor Luella Benslow is such a mixture of airy affectation and slack housekeeping that Miss Barry is obviously on the eve of explosion all the time they are together. Her hens are her fad, and she has hot-water bags for them, Linda. Can you believe it! She puts them in the nests during a cold snap." Mrs. Porter's laugh rang out as merrily as though sorrow had never entered the world.

Linda smiled. "Blanche Aurora told me so. It seems that the ingenious lady belongs to a very talented family."

"Really? In what way?"

"You must get Blanche Aurora to tell you that. I couldn't do the subject justice."

"Well, I'm afraid it isn't a talent for cooking. Luella has a couple of boarders; a Mrs. Lindsay and her daughter from New York. Fortunately, they have a sense of humor. It's quite necessary that Luella's boarders should have a sense of humor. Mrs. Lindsay walked with us to the gate when we came away and told us some of their trials; but she is one of those efficient women who are capable of managing, and she and her daughter have funny times. It seems that Miss Lindsay has just been enjoying her first winter in society and has overdone it so greatly that the doctor ordered a dry-land sea voyage, like this, in an uninhabited spot like this, and told her to live the life of a vegetable. Mrs. Lindsay is one of these thin, snappy women, strung on wires, and I judge nervous to a degree. She has a busy time trying to dominate the circumstances. She says if they only were vegetables and didn't have to eat, or to care whether their rooms were swept, it would all be quite simple. The daughter is rather skin-and-bone-y too; but she's the sort who would look smart even in bed. You can see that she is a New Yorker of the New Yorkers."

"Oh, why did you visit them, dear Mrs. Porter! You want to get away from people too, don't you?"

"No danger, I fancy, of their troubling us. Vegetables don't return calls. Mrs. Lindsay was very much interested, though, in knowing that you were here. She and her husband dined with your father last June, and they are related distantly to that friend of yours—Mr. Whitcomb."

"Fred?"

"Yes; Mrs. Lindsay said he had told them a great deal about you. Isn't the world small!"

"Too small," sighed Linda. "I hope they'll not try to see me."

"Miss Lindsay was quite lackadaisical and seemed to have no interest beyond her hammock; and I can easily defend you from the mother," said Mrs. Porter reassuringly.

That evening Linda received a letter from her sister.

> *Dear, dear Linda* (it began)—
>
> I can hardly wait for the word that will tell us that you are safely at your journey's end. You had such a hot trip; I hope you bore it well. I'm sure the good news Bertram sent by letter helped wonderfully. If Bertram has any sin of commission on his conscience, he has done all he could to make up for it. He looks so badly. I wonder, at times, if he worries at night over misleading Papa instead of sleeping; but Henry says he has had a lot to do nights, beside worrying or sleeping either. Henry thinks Bertram is one in a thousand, even if he has made mistakes. He came to us the evening of the day you went away—it's such a blessed thing Henry wasn't an investor in the Antlers, because it does away with embarrassment—and he told us what he has accomplished for Barry & Co. He didn't express any regrets,—sometimes I think it's strange that he never does,—but he just told us, in a rather light way, the arrangements he has made and I assure you Henry shook hands with him hard. I could see that if he had been a girl he would have hugged him. So I hope that as you grow stronger you can see things more temperately and come to the place where you can write a letter of acknowledgment to Bertram. He deserves it, Linda; he really does. I referred to you once in our talk, but he made no response and I could feel my very ears burning. He knew, and I knew, that we were both thinking of that moment in the library when you rose and left us. You mustn't think I blame you too much, dear, but remember, to err is human—to forgive, divine, and Bertram was young for such heavy responsibilities. If he made

mistakes which in any way hastened dear Papa's end, can't you see he will carry the scars forever? We don't need to add to his punishment.

Harry is standing by me, and ‿ ‿ ‿ there, he made those wiggles. He says they are his love. He has grown a lot since you saw him, etc., etc., etc.

Linda could not keep her mind on Harry. She was standing in the living-room reading her letter by the twilight, and she looked up now far across the ocean. The darkness fell while she stood there and a great planet began to ascend the sky. Its brilliancy sent a narrow path across the sea. The isolation and peace were healing. A great thankfulness filled the girl that she was far from those scenes called up by her sister's letter. She wished fervently that she need never return to them. Here was peace: consolation: relief.

CHAPTER XVII

THE RAINBOW

Bertram King, in all the years she had known him, had not dwelt in Linda's mind so often as in these days. She felt aggrieved to have the thought of him thrust upon her as it had been by her aunt and Mrs. Porter and now by Harriet.

It had been a settled fact in her thought that she and Bertram could never again be friends. The mental picture of his haggard face as he made love to her on a June evening, again as he bade her good-bye before the University Club, and later, the dazed look in his eyes under her accusation in the library—all these pictures of him were a gallery apart from the remembrance of the successful man whose unspoken criticism had so often piqued her.

She thought also of that Sunday afternoon at Harriet's when he had laid his teasing admiration at her feet. She had admired him too, reluctant as was her approval. She exulted in achievement, and Bertram King stood high among young Chicago men who had achieved. Considerable jealousy had entered into her feeling for him. The words, "Bertram thinks," or "Bertram wishes," were often on her father's lips, and occasionally she had felt that she herself was gently set aside in deference to some plan of Bertram's. An unwilling secret acknowledgment of his superiority had fled in the cataclysm of her wild resentment and despair; and now that she was made to feel that she stood alone in her condemnation, and was silently condemned for it by those who loved her, Bertram's image persistently arose as something to be reckoned with.

Fairness had been the characteristic upon which, in school, Linda had greatly prided herself: fairness which excluded preferences. She had so impressed her impersonality upon her classmates that she had won a high reputation as social umpire and was often called upon to decide vexed questions. Now, therefore, she looked Bertram King's insistent image straight in the tired eyes, with her grave, severe estimate, and sustained no pricks of conscience. Time, the wondrous healer, brought her, however, as weeks went on, to raise him from the status of a mere criminal to the rank of a fellow sufferer. All the same, they could never again be friends. The thought of her wronged father, her beloved, must rise between them to the end of their lives. It went without saying that the young man must suffer, even though his pride would not permit him to confess his error. He was not a callous person. Doubtless his punishment had been heavy. Thus her thoughts would run on in the hours that she spent alone.

She was granted the boon of utter freedom. Mrs. Lindsay and her daughter Madge had essayed to be neighborly, but Mrs. Porter acted as an effective buffer between Linda and all social assaults, and as the weeks went by, slowly they brought the girl back from morbid dwelling on a dead past to recognition of the living present. She remained subdued and quiet, but elasticity was returning to her mind and body.

Miss Barry, busy about her home duties, left her niece, with lessening anxiety, to her own devices, and Mrs. Porter was careful to allow Linda to make every advance; but the steady shining of the older woman's happy personality was a magnet toward which the girl was constantly attracted and they were often together.

Blanche Aurora was also a little unconscious missionary. There was something about her youth, her intrepid spirit, stern practicality, and scanty wardrobe which continually touched Linda's sense of humor and compassion.

One day she sent for the child to come up to her room. Blanche Aurora was always glad when duty sent her to sweep and dust this apartment. The hint of violets in the air, the dainty toilet articles on the dresser, the filmy lingerie, which she put in place caressingly with her tanned hands, all bespoke the world of which she had read. She had adored Linda from the moment when unlimited chocolates had been pressed upon her acceptance, but never before had the guest sent for her to come to her room.

As she ascended the stairs, Miss Barry's "help" swiftly reviewed her own sins of commission, but decided that neglect of any duty toward Linda had not been among them. Indeed, her mistress often reprimanded her for lingering over her duties above stairs where perhaps the small chambermaid was hanging hypnotized over a wrist-watch with tiny sparkles that caught the light,

or endeavoring to decipher the monogram on a handbag, or examining some other object in the fascinating room from which her round orbs could scarcely detach themselves.

To-day as she entered, Linda in her black gown was sitting by her charming window, reading.

She looked up as Blanche Aurora, conscience-free, and expressionless as ever of countenance, stepped inside and stood waiting.

The faded gingham was getting more outgrown and hueless every day. Linda wondered that her aunt never seemed to observe or care about the child's clean forlornness.

"What do you want?" asked the "help" bluntly.

Harriet Radcliffe, at this moment rowing her small son around a Wisconsin lake, would have enjoyed seeing her sister's eyes suddenly sparkle and match the little laugh that fell from her lips.

"You should say," she remarked to the small maid, all wrists and with her thin legs looking long above the sneakers she wore,—"you should say, 'Did you call me, Miss Linda?'"

"Well, you did, didn't you?" returned Blanche Aurora.

Linda regarded her for a silent moment, appreciatively.

"Are you in a hurry?" she asked then.

"If I wasn't I'd get fired," returned the "help" promptly.

Linda laughed again. "I do really believe you exaggerate," she returned. "I'm sure Aunt Belinda thinks a great deal of you."

"She knows I'm the only kind of a girl she can keep," said Blanche Aurora coolly, "Grown-up ones won't stand it."

"What do you mean by 'it,' you naughty child?" asked Linda, her eyes laughing toward the fishhook braids and the freckles. "Aunt Belinda is a very kind woman."

"Oh, yes, if you was sick she'd call the doctor, but even if you was sick you'd have to hang each rag on its own separate hook and let her smell o' the fish-pans after you'd scrubbed 'em."

"It's nice to be particular," returned Linda, laughing again.

"Huh!" vouchsafed Blanche Aurora; but her eyes, roving around the magic room, had seen something unusual.

"Good," she thought. "She's goin' out o' mournin'. I'll bet she looks pretty in them." Her round gaze cleaving to the bed saw three gowns lying there; one of blue, one of pink, and a tailored skirt and coat of a small black-and-white check.

"Do you like those dresses?" asked Linda, following her regard.

"Yes, they're real sightly."

"Come here, Blanche Aurora."

The child advanced slowly until she stood beside the black-clothed figure. Linda indicated her father's photograph in its silver frame on a neighboring stand. Before it stood a single wild rose in a small glass: a wild rose of the sea: deep in color and twice the size of its inland sisters.

Linda took one of the child's hard tanned hands in her satin-smooth one, and Blanche Aurora started and held her own imprisoned hand stiff and straight.

"Every morning when I come upstairs I find a fresh rose like that in front of my father's picture. At first I couldn't speak of it." Silence. "There are some things too precious to speak of. At last one day I thanked Mrs. Porter for the lovely thought. She said it was a lovely thought, but not hers. Then I wondered if Aunt Belinda could possibly—but one day I met you as you were coming downstairs." Silence. "Blanche Aurora"—Linda's voice stopped again.

Had Blanche Aurora been accused of highway robbery she could not look more guilty. Not one freckle was discernible in the sea of red; but her unwinking stare was fixed on the window.

Linda placed her other hand over the one she held.

"I thank you," she added.

"You gave me the candy," blurted out Blanche Aurora. "I couldn't think of anything else to do. My Pa's dead, too. He drinked, though," she added in a tone which seemed to suggest no flowers.

Linda squeezed the hard little hand and released it, to its owner's relief.

"Your mother has so many children, and so little time to sew. Have you a suit at home, Blanche Aurora?"

"What do you mean—a suit?"

"A coat and skirt alike."

"Not alike. I've got a brown skirt that was Ma's and a jacket I wear to church when it's cold. 'Tain't cold now, though. I wear a white waist on Sunday."

No suspicion of Linda's intentions enlightened her.

The girl arose and walked over to the bed and the blue eyes followed her.

"I sent to Chicago for these dresses of mine."

"I seen the big box come yesterday," returned the other, gravitating toward the bed, and gloating over the color of the fine fabrics.

"Yes, I thought perhaps I could fix some of my things for you."

"What things?" returned Blanche Aurora mechanically.

"These," indicating the bed.

Blanche Aurora gasped.

"For me!" she cried, the loudness of her usual tones restored, with a crack of excitement added. "They ain't serviceable nor durable."

Linda bit her lip. "This one is," she said, picking up the black-and-white checked skirt.

Blanche Aurora handled it reverently. "Why, Miss Linda," she said in the same high key, "how can you give away—"

"You'd better ask how can I fix them for you. I'm such an ignoramus, and yet I'm just conceited enough to try. Aunt Belinda has a machine."

"Oh, yes,"—eagerly,—"she's got a real good one. I can run it, too, if you want me to, and she can spare me."

"All right, child." Linda patted the bony shoulder. "Run along now." Her eyes had a humorous light as she observed the string woven tightly in the tortured red braids. "I'll have to do some ripping to these dresses first, and then I'm sure Mrs. Porter will help me, though probably she doesn't know much more than I do."

The child's reluctant feet drew slowly away from the bed, but not before she had laid her hand lovingly on the pink and blue gowns.

"Miss Linda," she said, looking beatifically at her benefactress, "I used to think that more than anything in this whole world I'd rather have that teeny clock o' yourn that you punch and it tells you jest what time it is; but now I don't even want that!"

Without another word she walked on clouds out of the room, and Linda went up to her father's picture, and lifting it, pressed her cheek against the cool glass.

"'Instead of the thorn,'" she murmured.

Blanche Aurora tripped downstairs, the red still obliterating the freckles on her cheeks. She was too absorbed in her daydream to observe her usual caution in opening the swing door, and simultaneously with her energetic shove a cry sounded from Miss Barry accompanied by a clattering of glass on tin.

"Blanche Aurora, will you ever remember to come through that door carefully? You knocked my arm and I nearly spilled all this jelly."

Miss Barry glared at the help as she spoke. She had just sealed a trayful of glasses and was about to deposit them on a shelf near the swing door.

"I'm glad—I mean I'm sorry!" said the culprit, her eyes still looking far away.

"Well," snapped Miss Barry, her elbow still smarting, "it would be well for you to be certain *which*. I *was* going to give you a glass of this jelly to take home to your mother, but now I think I ought to punish you."

"Yes'm," replied Blanche Aurora, gliding through the pantry into the kitchen.

Her employer caught her expression as she passed.

"Come here," she said sharply, and the little maid obeyed.

"Help me set these glasses on the shelf. Don't they look good?"

"Yes'm.—Real pink, some of 'em."

"Aren't you sorry I can't give you one?"

"No'm. Yes'm. I'm tryin' to be."

"Let them alone! I never knew you so awkward. You'll break one yet,"—as the glasses tinkled together dangerously.

Again Miss Barry scrutinized the flushed face and shining eyes above the flat-chested little figure.

"Where have you been, Blanche Aurora?"

"Up in Miss Linda's room."

"What doing? You got through up there hours ago."

"She hollered to me down the stairs to come when I got through in the dinin'-room."

Miss Barry's eyes wore their extracting expression. She wondered what form of intoxicant Linda had been administering now. The Scylla of the chocolate gorge had passed safely. What was this Charybdis that threatened?

"Well?" said Miss Barry suggestively.

"Well," returned the "help," dancing defiance in the round eyes which returned her employer's regard brazenly.

"Don't you be sassy, Blanche Aurora," warned Miss Barry.

"I ain't," answered the other; and as her mistress watched her radiant countenance, she had her first doubt as to whether Blanche Aurora was really so very homely. There were such things as ugly ducklings who outwitted their neighbors. "Has Miss Linda been giving you more candy?"

"No. Clo'es," returned the other in such a high key of ecstasy that Miss Barry recoiled and winked.

"How many times must I tell you that I'm not deaf!" she said sternly. "What kind of clothes?"

"Pink—and blue—and not worn out," was the blissful reply.

"Absurd. I can't imagine my niece having anything sensible and durable enough for a little girl."

"They ain't," declared Blanche Aurora, her eyes seeing visions. "They ain't sensible—nor durable—nor serviceable." Her smile was near-seraphic.

"Then they're not appropriate," said Miss Barry severely.

"No'm," assented the other sweetly.

Silence for a moment, then the mistress broke forth:—

"That's what came in that great package yesterday, then."

"Yes'm. She sent 'way to Chicago. She can't wear 'em 'count of her Pa dyin'," explained Blanche Aurora, with an evident tempering of grief at the loss of Lambert Barry, Esq., respected head of Barry & Co.

"Linda has no judgment!" The low vexed soliloquy was not directed at Miss Barry's "help," but she caught it.

"No, she ain't got no judgment," shrilled Blanche Aurora triumphantly, "but I bet she knows how a girl feels that ain't got anything pretty to wear, and has to go 'round lookin' like somethin' put up in the field to scare the crows."

The child's eyes glistened anew and her voice grew passionate.

"I tell you what I'm goin' to do, Miss Barry, the first day I wear that pink dress. I'm goin' to take this one,"—she plucked scornfully at a fold of the faded gingham,—"and I'm goin' to kick it into the ocean. Kick it—*hard*." She suited the action to the word, and the glasses tinkled again as she thumped the baseboard.

"That's very wrong, Blanche Aurora. That dress isn't ragged. Your mother mended that last tear very neatly. It would do quite well for your little sister."

"No, sir—I mean ma'am. Nobody else is goin' to have to hate this the way I have!"

"Pink," repeated Miss Barry disapprovingly. "The blue would look quite well on you, I dare say, but pink.—Don't you know your hair is red, and you'd look—"

Blanche Aurora winced. She was afraid to let her mistress go on for fear she was intending something crushing about freckles.

"I don't care—I don't care," she struck in wildly. "You don't know, *she* don't know, nobody knows how I love pink. Pink's happiness, pink is, whether you see it in the sky or in the roses or where! Don't, Miss Barry, don't!"

The loud voice broke, and two big tears suddenly overflowed from the round eyes and rushed down the freckled cheeks, while Blanche Aurora ran stormily through the second swing door into the kitchen.

The door swept back and forth under the swift impact, and Miss Barry stared at her jellies.

"Don't what!" she said to herself in silent amazement and injury. "Don't what!"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PINK DRESS

Mrs. Porter was Miss Barry's prop and stay in matters regarding her niece, and she turned to her when succeeding days revealed the fact that Linda had set out deliberately to spoil the "help."

The mistress of the house left the kitchen one morning after her plans were perfected for dinner and sought Mrs. Porter. She could hear the faint buzzing of the sewing machine which lived by the front window in the hall upstairs.

She ascended with a firm tread. "This is a shame," she announced warmly, as she stood beside her friend, viewing the lengths of silky soft pink stuff which were running beneath the swift needle.

"What's a shame?" asked Mrs. Porter, without stopping her work.

Miss Barry sat down in a chair opposite her.

"That you should be penned up in the house this beautiful morning stitching away hour after hour. You were doing the same thing yesterday."

"It's fun," returned Mrs. Porter.

"Oh, fun!" scornfully. "You always say everything's fun—walking to the village when Blanche Aurora has carelessly forgotten something, going out in the rain to take in the towels she's overlooked—everything's fun with you."

Mrs. Porter smiled without raising her eyes from her fine seam.

"I don't believe you ever taught music eight hours a day," she said.

"Where's Linda?" demanded Miss Barry, but she lowered her voice. She still regarded her niece as an uncertain quantity, possibly dangerous.

"Gone to Portland."

"For the land's sake!" ejaculated Miss Barry, her tone no longer *sotto voce*. There was no danger of Linda's hearing from the trolley car. "What takes her there?"

"Sh!" warned Mrs. Porter, still with her gay smile. "Underclothes for the little girl, I think. I'm only guessing."

"Now, look here!" responded Miss Barry. "Where is this going to stop? I understand Blanche Aurora better than any one else does. Doesn't Linda suppose I take any care of her? She's high-headed enough by nature. She needs a strong hand, and I've held a tight rein over her on principle. She's a loud, stubborn, willful young one who thinks she knows it all."

"I'm not sure, I'm not sure," replied Mrs. Porter. "I kept her here nights while you were gone and I used to read to her in the evening—'Little Women' and 'Heidi,' and so on. She was very gentle and nice and seemed to enjoy it."

Miss Barry sighed.

"I've had her two summers with me. This makes the third. I've taught her quite a little about cooking and I've nearly lost my immortal soul doing it; and I've taught her to be neat. Yes, Blanche Aurora's neat. I ain't afraid to eat after her. I've taught her to take proper care of herself, to brush her teeth and to use plenty of soap. I *give* her plenty of soap; and such things are enough to give her. This!" Miss Barry picked up a fold of the soft pink and rubbed its thinness between her fingers. "Why, she'll catch it on a nail the first day and it'll be in slithers in no time, and her taste for good tough calico will be gone too."

"There's plenty of pink calico," suggested Mrs. Porter. "It's color that makes the difference to a child."

Miss Barry continued to regard the zephyr gingham gloomily. That frenzied defiance, "Pink's happiness," seemed to sound again in her ears.

"Linda's just going to fill the child's head full of notions and make her discontented," she declared.

"Perhaps she has been more discontented than you realized," suggested Mrs. Porter. "Anyway, Miss Barry," she added, stopping the machine and looking up, "I fancy we are more interested in Linda than in any one else just now. Aren't we?"

"Well, of course, we are," acknowledged Miss Barry grudgingly, realizing whither the admission tended.

"To provide her with a wholesome interest is no small matter."

Miss Barry sniffed. "I don't know how wholesome it is. Blanche Aurora's as insubordinate a young one as ever lived. I'd hate to have her think any more of herself than she does already. All these expensive clothes now, and then next winter, nothing. That ain't going to help her mother any."

"That black-and-white checked suit can be made warm," returned Mrs. Porter, beginning to stitch the hem of the pink dress.

"What started her on it, anyway?" asked Miss Barry. "'Taint a mite like anything I ever knew of Linda."

Mrs. Porter smiled at her work for a silent space.

"Linda has been born again in some ways," she said at last. "In the school of this world you must have noticed that if people's eyes are not opened by truths vital to right living, they have to learn by suffering. Linda has suffered greatly. It has softened her heart. In this little experience right here she shows she longs to do something for another: to make the lot of another happier. This humble little girl happens to be to her hand."

"Humble! Not so you'd notice it," commented Miss Barry.

"I feel as if we could just lend a helping hand and be thankful."

"Of course, I'm glad she's stopped moping," admitted Miss Barry; "but I don't yet see what started her out on this. It really isn't Linda's business." The speaker was still smarting under the invasion of what she considered her own private and particular territory.

"Oh, I'm not so sure. We are our brother's keeper after all and our little sister's too."

"It don't do them any good to make them vain," declared Miss Barry. "However," she added, "Blanche Aurora's as homely as a mud fence. I don't know as there's much danger."

"Sh! Sh!" warned Mrs. Porter.

"Oh, she's outdoors, she won't hear me."

"You ask what started it," said Mrs. Porter. "Linda's awakened observation and her desire to add to the sum of happiness might have done so, but it really was Blanche Aurora's own thoughtfulness that did it." And Mrs. Porter told the story of the daily wild rose.

"Of all things," remarked Miss Barry when she had finished. "Well, I certainly never would have thought that of that sharp little thing."

"We're none of us such sharp things as we seem," returned Mrs. Porter.

"I don't know how it is with you," said Miss Barry presently, "but I think a great deal about that poor Mr. King," and her long earrings swung in a challenge.

"I do, too," returned the other quietly.

"Linda's clothed now and in her right mind, as you might say. I think instead of dressing dolls it would be more to the point, if her heart's so soft, if she'd write that young man a letter with some human kindness in it."

Mrs. Porter looked out over the sea which seemed as ever ready to encroach on the cottage and carry it off in triumph.

"Perhaps she has done so," she replied.

"No, sir. I don't believe it," was the energetic response, earrings swinging in the strong head-shaking. "If she had, he'd have answered, and I've seen every letter that's come to her. I know his writing."

"No one sees it very often," said Mrs. Porter, stitching steadily. "I should feel much easier if he would write to me, yet I don't urge it because I won't add a straw to his burdens."

"Well, I don't see how Linda, with some of the memories she's got of her own actions, can have the heart to think of clothes instead of trying to atone for her injustice."

"We don't have to take care of that," said Mrs. Porter. "I love Bertram so dearly that I've had something to meet, to conquer resentment; but the last thing we need worry about is that people won't get sufficient punishment for their mistakes. The law is working all the time, and when we strike against it until we're sufficiently hurt we turn to the gospel: Love."

"H'm," grunted Miss Barry. "Lots o' folks don't seem to get hurt. They just go ahead and flourish like the green bay tree."

"You don't see far enough," returned Mrs. Porter, smiling, "that's all. Everything isn't finished when we're through with this world; but many times you can see the working right here."

"I'd like to," snapped Miss Barry sententiously.

Mrs. Porter finished her hem and drew the dress from the machine. It had a tucked skirt, and narrow fine embroidery edging the sailor collar and cuffs. She shook it out and held it before the other's eyes. "Pretty, isn't it?" she said.

Miss Barry made some inarticulate response, arose, and went into her own room. She had some calico in her lower drawer now, designed as a parting gift to her "help" when the summer should be over. It was stone gray with white spots.

A little color burned in her cheeks as she opened the drawer and looked at it.

"Sensible and suitable," she said to herself: "sensible and suitable. She'll be glad enough of it some day when those flimsy things are in ribbons."

It was supper time when Linda returned from the city, and as soon as Blanche Aurora had done the supper dishes she always went home.

She kept her eyes on Linda, while she was waiting at table to-night, as nearly all the time as possible; and this evening there was no change in her expression; but she too had been listening for several days to the delectable music of the sewing machine. She had even been fitted to the pink and blue dresses and she saw them in a heavenly mirage floating above dishes, washtubs, and scrubbing-pails.

To do Miss Barry justice she never allowed the child to do any heavy work, and the latter's laundry efforts were limited to the dishtowels.

From three to five every day Blanche Aurora had two hours to herself; but she was expected to remain within call and to answer the door.

She had enjoyed the high happiness, therefore, of doing some of the ripping on these gowns of a millionaire's daughter which were designed to clothe her own slight form.

The way her ears listened for Linda's call now at three o'clock of an afternoon, and the celerity with which she obeyed the voice and fled up the back stairs, every freckle on her expectant face seeming to radiate, was observed by her mistress.

All the morning of the day following Linda's visit to Portland she received rebukes from Miss Barry for slap-dashing, as that lady called it.

Blanche Aurora felt, in every one of her small but evident bones, that the pink dress must be finished. Mrs. Porter had promised her that it should be the first one in hand. She panted for three o'clock to arrive while Miss Barry gave her sundry dissertations on the wear and tear on solid silver when whacked together and the sinfulness of chipping goldbanded china.

"You know I told you," she warned, "that I bought a stock set on purpose this summer, so that I could replace everything you break and take it out of your wages. You have fair warning."

"Yes'm," replied Blanche Aurora with the loud pedal down. She was possessed by a recklessness of anticipation. What did she care for wages! What had they ever brought her comparable to the treasures, unearned, which had descended upon her from a paradise named Chicago where a Cape boy had been able to pick up a million dollars in the golden streets!

It was her experience that three o'clock did finally come every afternoon; but this day was evidently going to be an exception.

At dinner, the weather being unusually warm, Linda looked like a dark-haired angel in a plain gown of white crêpe de chine. Blanche Aurora was faintly disappointed because her quiet manner was just as usual. Surely, if her dream was to come true, and to-day was the day, Linda and Mrs. Porter couldn't behave as if nothing had happened.

Wandering about within sight of the cottage, those vacation hours were the ones during which the little girl found the perfect wild rose designed for Mr. Barry's picture. She carried it always to the room at the back of the house which was hers, and where she slept when Miss Barry wished her to stay all night.

There was a closet there, curtained off, where her waterproof and rubbers and umbrella reposed in bad weather, and a dark calico dress also hung there in case she got wet and had to change. Three hooks in the middle of the closet had lately attained significance. No human being could be cruel enough to ask another to be separated from the new dresses all day by leaving them at home. Besides, her sister Letty was almost as tall as herself. She would be sure to try on those sacred habiliments and wear them all around the neighborhood. The thought was paralyzing.

Although Blanche Aurora was quite certain several times between one-thirty and three that the clock had stopped, it did finally laboriously drag its hands around until they looked like the legs of a ballet-dancer she had once seen on a circus poster. It was actually three o'clock. She tiptoed toward the stairs. No sound.

"If I don't get the rose I'm afraid I'll forgit it," she soliloquized. So she went out the back door and around to the front of the house to a great rock under whose lee some rosebushes cuddled out of the wind. The minute she felt herself out of sight of Linda's window, however, she panted back for fear by some tragic mischance her fairy godmother might call, and receiving no answer imagine that she had gone home for an hour as Miss Barry sometimes gave her permission to do.

Finally, after much darting back and forth, Blanche Aurora secured the rose, and returning to the house, placed it as usual in a glass in her own room to wait for the morning.

As she emerged she heard her name called at the head of the back stairs.

She landed on the lower step in two leaps.

"Yes, Miss Linda," she answered, the heart under the outgrown gingham going like a triphammer.

"I want you now."

It was as the voice of an angel in the yearning ears.

"Yes, ma'am," and Blanche Aurora ascended, two steps at a time. Her dingy sneakers would not have bent daisies had they been growing upon the staircase.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WILD ROSE

As the panting little figure approached and hesitated in her doorway, Linda turned from some white stuff she had been piling on the bed and met the round, expectant eyes, "Come here, Blanche Aurora," she said. "I want to show you something."

With long steps the beneficiary was beside her.

"Here are some things I found for you in Portland yesterday."

Blanche Aurora dragged her gaze from the pink and blue dresses that were lying there, finished, and beheld white underclothing, and large enveloping aprons—a pink-and-white checked one, a blue-and-white checked one, and one all white in a satiny-looking plaid. There was also a pile of stockings and some black low shoes and white sneakers. A bride, inspecting a complete trousseau just arrived from Paris, might experience in faint degree the elation that choked Blanche Aurora now.

"For me?" she uttered mechanically.

"For you, you good little thing," said Linda. "Now take these, and go into the bathroom and put them on."

Like one in a dream, Blanche Aurora accepted the underclothing, stockings, and sneakers put into her arms, and marched toward the bathroom, her head held high and the fishhook braids quivering down her gingham back. She went in and closed the door.

Linda smiled, and seating herself in her wicker rocker clasped her hands behind her head.

Mrs. Porter came to the door.

"What did she say?" she asked, smiling.

"Oh, nothing. She's far beyond speech. What did you do with Aunt Belinda?"

"Mrs. Lindsay arrived and Miss Barry is showing her her rockery and the ferns, so I thought she was safe and I'd come up for the fun."

"You certainly deserve to." Linda sighed unconsciously. "Wouldn't it be wonderful if everybody could be made happy so easily! I believe that is the only satisfaction there is in the world, after all —making others happy, whether you are so yourself or not."

Mrs. Porter came in and took another of the wicker chairs.

"I don't believe you can avoid the latter if you do the former," she remarked.

Linda regarded the speaker, a line appearing in her smooth brow. She often suspected Mrs. Porter to be thinking of Bertram. She had no right to ask impossibilities. The superhuman should not be required of the merely human.

"It is easier said than done, though, as a usual thing," said the girl aloud. "There is one man in Chicago, for instance, to whom I owe much kindness, whom I couldn't make happy except by marrying him."

"Not Bertram," returned Mrs. Porter quickly.

"Of course not Bertram," said Linda coolly.

"It may be some relief to you to know that Bertram no longer wishes that," said Mrs. Porter, after a moment of silence.

Linda's lip curled as she kept her lazy attitude, her hands clasped behind her dark head.

"Of course not," she repeated. "Bertram may make business mistakes occasionally, but he will not commit that of marrying a poor girl."

"Linda!" ejaculated Mrs. Porter. Color rushed over her face and she waited a moment to gain control. "How can you insult him in his troubles!" she finished.

"Please forgive me," returned the girl in the same tone. "It is the hardest thing in the world for me to remember your relationship."

"Your thinking it is quite as bad as saying it."

"Be fair to me, dear Mrs. Porter. You can't blame me for not having illusions, after my sledgehammer blows."

"You can feel compassion instead of hatred, if any one has wronged you."

"That isn't human nature."

"Of course not. We have to learn that we can't have any respect for human nature. Spiritual nature is the only thing we must nurture. We don't have to take care of punishing those who have wronged us. 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord.' In other words, the working of spiritual law brings inevitable punishment to all who violate it. We may well exercise compassion instead of hatred to wrongdoers. If Bertram has, humanly speaking, deserved all the contempt you send him, you can well afford to feel more kindly toward him than before. Nothing but his own repentance and amends can end his punishment; and rest assured you do not need to add to it."

"Mrs. Porter,"—the girl dropped her nonchalant attitude,—"I meant it when I asked you to forgive me. If I lost your friendship I should lose the greatest treasure I have left."

"You won't lose it, poor child," was the response, as the deep color faded from Mrs. Porter's face. "You strain it when you speak so of Bertram, but I have to remember exactly the truths I have been telling you."

"That I shall be punished?"

"Assuredly, dear child—just as far as you are wrong."

Linda leaned forward suddenly and laid an affectionate hand on the other's knee.

"But I'm right, dear," she said, her eyes bright.

Mrs. Porter patted the hand in silence and the bathroom door slowly opened.

Blanche Aurora, looking very young indeed, clad in white, with white arms and neck, and tanned face and hands, stood with the old plaid gingham over her arm. Her gaze fled to the bed, then returned to the rusty plaid. So might a butterfly regard the chrysalis from which it had just emerged.

"Do I put this on again?" she asked.

"No," returned Linda. "Fold it and put it on that chair over there."

Light scintillated in Blanche Aurora's eyes as she obeyed; a light which boded ill for the faded gingham.

Linda rose and placed a chair in front of her dressing-table.

"Come here and sit down," she said.

Blanche Aurora hesitated but for an instant before complying.

"What be you goin' to do?" she asked as Linda lifted the tortured braids and inspected the white string. "Goin' to cut my hair off?"

"Do you want me to?"

"I don't care. It's only a bother, anyway. I have to braid it every few days."

"Every few days? Oh, Blanche Aurora, you ought to brush it every night."

"I should worry," ejaculated the other. "Red hair don't deserve anything like that. If I didn't have red hair I wouldn't have so many freckles and I'd look nicer in the pink dress. I pinch it good when I braid it," added Blanche Aurora savagely.

"I should think you did," returned Linda, whose deft fingers were meanwhile unbraiding the hair and removing the disciplinary string. "It is kinky enough to stuff a little mattress. You have a nice lot of it. Mrs. Porter, will you hand me that box at the foot of the bed? I'm glad I remembered to get you these." And Linda opened the box, displaying a white brush and comb which she began using on the bright hair while its owner colored with excitement through all her tan at the possession of such grandeur.

She sat silent, watching in the glass the amazing vision of Linda combing and brushing the freed locks which seemed making the most of their escape to fly in all directions and encircle the excited face with a bright aureole. Linda turned and smiled at Mrs. Porter, who nodded appreciation. Many a fine lady would gladly pay a small fortune for the luxuriant shining waves that rippled now under Linda's brush.

"I suppose your hair is straight," she said.

"As a poker," agreed its owner promptly. "I douse it good when I have to braid it over and you'd better too, Miss Linda. You can't never braid it the way it is now; and it likes to git the best of you."

The speaker eyed her halo vindictively. Her hair was an ancient enemy and only her mother's commands had protected its existence.

"When did you wash it?"

"Last week. I don't never wash it winters, but summers Miss Barry makes me."

"You don't need to wash it often in this clean place; but brush it a lot with your white brush. Will you, Blanche Aurora?"

This was a more awful demand than Linda realized. Overwhelmed as she was with benefits her beneficiary demurred.

"I can't only once in a few days."

"But you're going to braid it every day now."

"Oh, Miss Linda," was the aghast response. "I ain't got time. I couldn't! You don't know my hair. It acts as ugly as sin; jest as if it knew it was botherin' the life out of me. I have to git the children off to school—"

"Not now."

"Well, not now; but Miss Barry wants me the middle o' May, and I have to git over early—"

"Yes, but it's July now."

Blanche Aurora ceased protesting and winced.

"Oh, did I pull? I'll be careful."

"Pull it good if you want to. Good enough for it."

"You must like your pretty hair," said Linda.

"Pretty!" uttered Blanche Aurora.

Of all the surprising things that had happened to her, that adjective was perhaps the most surprising.

"Certainly it is, and it deserves good treatment."

Blanche Aurora looked in the mirror at her friend's face. Could Linda, every tiny escaping hair of whose wavy locks curled in a curve of beauty,—could she call this red stubborn mane pretty? Then there was no more to be said.

Blanche Aurora leaned back and studied the narrow trimming on her new clothes and rubbed her hard hands surreptitiously against the soft fabric of her white petticoat. Linda divided the modified waves of hair into two parts.

"Now your hair will soon straighten out," she said. "Let it stay straight and smooth and well-brushed."

"I'd like curly hair like yours," returned Blanche Aurora; "but I guess I'd pretty near die tryin' to comb it."

Linda smiled. "You remind me of the tramp who said he didn't see how folks stood it to comb

their hair every day. He did his only once a year, and then it most killed him. Now, you mustn't strangle your hair with that string any more," she added.

"Strangle it! I think that's real funny," said Blanche Aurora judicially. She was radiant. There was only one small cloud on her horizon and that was the prospect of a daily wrestle with that hair. That hair! Why, angels couldn't go through it and keep their religion.

"Now, see what I'm doing?" said Linda. "You'll be glad to do this when you see how nice it looks."

With round and solemn gaze Blanche Aurora watched the braiding of first one half and then the other of her captured locks.

"Be sure to begin as near the middle of your neck as you can."

Linda swiftly doubled the two ends of the braids and fastened them.

She looked at Mrs. Porter again as the fluffy braids hung down the slender back, and again Mrs. Porter nodded.

"Miss Barry wants 'em tight," declared the child.

"Miss Barry will be satisfied with this," rejoined Linda. Then she proceeded to cross the braids and wind them around the small head, tucking the ends out of sight with hair pins. This loosened the hair at the temples and the round eyes took in the fact that the arrangement was becoming even to freckles; but the breath-taking moment was to come.

Linda opened a box on her dresser and revealed a fresh pink and a blue ribbon. She took out the pink one and soon a generous bow surmounted those braids, and Blanche Aurora gasped with pleasure. Her white, low-necked, short-sleeved reflection with the new coiffure held her happy gaze, and when Mrs. Porter brought the pink dress and slipped it on and buttoned it up, the red beneath the freckles was very deep, and the modern Cinderella was speechless.

At last she turned to Linda and threw her slender arms around her.

"I can't say nothin'," she gulped.

Linda pushed her gently back and took hold of the hard hands and her eyes were soft with an inner flame as they looked down into the glistening ones.

"I can say something, Blanche Aurora," she answered kindly. "I can say that you look like a wild rose. Do you understand?"

She put her arm around the happy girl and led her to the small table where stood her father's picture, and blooming before it, the child's offering. "Like a wild rose, Blanche Aurora," she repeated slowly.

The pink-crowned head lifted to her. "Oh, Miss Linda," she exclaimed breathlessly.

"Now, then," said the fairy godmother in a different tone, "you have a chest of drawers down in your back room; and after a while I want you to put white paper in them and come up and get these things," waving a hand toward the bed. "But first you go down and see Miss Barry."

"I'm 'most afraid," declared Blanche Aurora, wringing her hands together. "She thinks a pink dress and red hair is awful."

"She won't," returned Linda. "Run along. I think she's outdoors. Yes, I see her there, stooping over the rockery. Mrs. Lindsay has gone and she's alone."

Blanche Aurora left the room. She even forgot the chrysalis and her determination to kick it into the ocean. Seraphs, wafted on rosy clouds, forget such earthly longings.

Mrs. Porter and Linda stood at the window where they could see all that occurred, and despite Linda's assured words she was not sure that she wished to hear what would be said. Her college chums would have recognized Linda Barry again in the mischievous sparkle of her eyes.

Miss Barry, rising from her labors among the ferns, beheld a bareheaded little girl coming slowly toward her. The stranger was clothed in a pink dress with spotless white stockings and sneakers, and as she advanced the sun turned to gold the fluffy hair under a billowy pink bow.

Miss Barry pulled her spectacles down from the top of her head, and even then for a second she thought some summer boarder was straying too far from home. In another moment full recognition burst upon her.

"For the land's sake!" she exclaimed; and the two stared at one another for a silent space. It would have taken a hard heart to resist the beatified, yet shy, expression on the face of Blanche Aurora, and Miss Barry's was not hard.

"Pink's happiness. Pink's happiness!" Miss Belinda saw the statement exemplified.

"Come here, you little monkey," she said.

It wasn't so pleasant to be called a monkey as a wild rose, but Miss Barry's smile was different from any her "help" had ever yet received from her. Perhaps she liked monkeys.

Blanche Aurora came nearer, aware every moment of the fine materials touching her skin.

"Well, well, so my niece hasn't got by the doll-dressing stage," said her mistress.

The lenient tone restored confidence and unloosed an eager tongue.

"Oh, Miss Barry, I ain't a doll. I'll work just as hard. I'll work harder. I've got aprons to cover me all up and I won't break a dish nor slam the silver. The aprons is the most beautiful you ever see

and these stockings they feel just like silk."

The reference to the stockings flowed forth because Miss Barry was stooping and running her hand down the slim leg.

The watchers above were edified to see her lift up the pink skirt and examine the underwear.

"You're good clear to the bone," declared Miss Belinda at last, approvingly. "Pretty sensible things, considering that Linda bought them."

The speaker rose again to her full stature and looked curiously at her maid's head.

"What under the canopy—" she began slowly. "Have you got a wig on?"

The broad wavy braids, glinting in the sun as Blanche Aurora turned her head, seemed to bear no relation to the strained tightness usual over her temples.

"No'm, it's my same horrid red hair, but I don't look at it, I look at the pink bow," was the eager response. "The kids at school was always teasin' me,"—a gulp of hurting memory interrupted the speech,—"they said I was the homeliest girl on the Cape, and it's nice for homely girls to have somethin' pretty on their heads so folks can look at that instead of at them."

"H'm," returned Miss Barry, touched by the ingenuous burst. She had never suspected her willful help of feelings. "Well, you certainly look very nice, and I'm glad that you're happy."

"Oh, Miss Barry, may I put some of the white shelf paper in the burer drawers in my room? Miss Linda told me to, and I'm to go back and get the rest o' the clo'es and and fix 'em nice in the burer."

"You're going to keep them here, are you?"

"Don't you think I'd better?" Blanche Aurora wrung her hands together eagerly.

Miss Barry took a mental survey of the child's crowded home and the small marauders who would be likely to molest her treasures. She nodded.

"Yes, that's best," she agreed sententiously, and instantly there was a pink flash, and a twinkling of white pipe-stem legs across the grass, and Blanche Aurora was not.

CHAPTER XX

BEHIND THE BIRCHES

When Linda wrote to Chicago for the dresses to be sent on, she asked the caretaker of the house to send a photograph of her mother which she would find in her dresser drawer.

The woman had been in doubt as to which picture was wanted, as there were several in the box indicated, so she had packed box and all, and it now lay on Linda's table waiting to be opened.

When the radiant little Cape girl had carried downstairs the last of her possessions and Mrs. Porter had gone to her own room, Linda turned her attention to this box.

Taking off the string she lifted the cover, and straight up into her eyes looked Bertram King. The likeness was a striking one and color flowed over her face. As she gazed, the thought came to her that Bertram must have consummated a good business deal on the day he sat for this.

There was lurking humor in the eyes and lips. It was Bertram at his best: his most prosperous. A clean-cut face, she thought, as she looked, a well-born face: intelligent, full of character and confidence.

"Overconfidence," murmured the girl, and turned the picture face down. She closed her eyes in endurance of the flood of associations the photograph had evoked, and stood motionless thus for a minute before delving deeper into the box. It held pictures of several of her friends, among them one of Fred Whitcomb. Her sad lips smiled as she encountered his wide-awake countenance.

"Good old Fred," she thought. "Some day I must write to him."

She found her mother's pictures and those of several girl friends: also one of Mrs. Porter. Some of these she left out; but the one of Bertram King went back into the box. She took one more glance at it and the veiled humor in the eyes seemed to mock her. Face down it went in, quickly, the cover was put on, and the whole placed in her closet.

At the same time her thought was contrasting the pictured face taken one year ago with Bertram's appearance the last time she saw him.

At the supper table that evening Blanche Aurora, as she waited on table, was enveloped in the white apron with satiny plaids.

"She's not a bad-looking child," said Linda on one occasion when the girl had left the room to get more biscuit. "That little turn-up nose of hers is cute and her teeth are so white."

"Those teeth!" ejaculated Miss Barry. "The time I had! But I finally taught her to keep them properly."

"Everybody knows happiness is the best beautifier, anyway," remarked Mrs. Porter. "It looks as if

you would have an angel in your kitchen from now on, Miss Barry."

"Yes, 'looks,'" retorted the hostess. "Familiarity breeds contempt and I don't know how long Blanche Aurora can be subdued by her dry goods. I ought to make her put on her brown calico to go home in."

"Oh, don't, Aunt Belinda. Let her have all the fun there is in it."

So Miss Barry consented to leave her "help" in freedom; but the shrewd little brain under the fluffy red wig was working. Blanche Aurora knew about where the dividing line would occur in the bosom of her family between respect and ridicule. She felt instinctively that the limit would be reached before that crown of glory, the pink bow, should dazzle the irreverent vision of the home circle. She, therefore, when the dishes were dried, went to her room, took off the ribbon, and laid it reverently in her upper drawer beside the blue one. She gazed soulfully for a minute on the effect, then closed the drawer softly.

There was a clean towel on the bureau and upon it reposed the white brush and comb and near that a bottle of violet toilet water. Yes, the last thing the wonderful one had put into her hands was this bottle of green liquid which the child said to herself "smelled purple."

She hated to go home. A thief might break in during the night and bereave her. She lifted up the closet curtain and looked at the pretty blue dress hanging there.

Well, she thought, with firm lips, the thief shouldn't get the pink one, for she was going to wear it. Further cautious thoughts of rough, teasing brothers caused her to remove the hairpins from her braids and let them hang down her back as of old. Then she put on her new white sweater and started to run across the fields to a properly awestruck family.

A week later Blanche Aurora was alone in the house one afternoon cleaning silver. The day was beautiful, and no one stayed indoors who was not obliged to. She glanced up occasionally at the kitchen clock and saw that in half an hour she too would be at liberty to go out and get Miss Linda's rose, and hunt for four-leaved clovers.

She enjoyed finding these and placing them beside Linda's plate at the table.

"But," objected her friend one day, "I have to find them myself, don't I, in order that they should bring me luck?"

"Perhaps so," returned the donor; "but while you're waitin' I'd like to give you some o' my luck.—I got so much."

Indeed, Blanche Aurora was beginning to gain curves, and the round eyes to find expression.

She sang at her work to-day, the pink bow on her head shaking with her energy as she rubbed. Suddenly the iron knocker on the front door sent a sharp rap-tap through the house.

Blanche Aurora arose, laid down a fork, and moved through the rooms to answer the summons.

Pulling open the door she beheld behind the screen a broad-shouldered man with a bright, expectant face, and his seeking eyes saw a pink-and-white aproned figure with red hair, and a perky pink bow atop.

She was delighted at the prompt manner in which the stranger lifted his hat.

"I wonder if I have the right house," he said.

"I dunno. What house do you want?" came the stentorian response.

"What is your name, please?" asked the young man.

"Blanche Aurora."

He smiled, a nice gleeful smile. "I mean your last name."

"Martin."

"I'm sorry. I'm looking for Miss Barry."

"Oh, she lives here. I'm the help."

"Really? I didn't dream it. I thought you were the nice little daughter of the house."

"Miss Barry ain't married," replied Blanche Aurora practically, but she gave full credit to the pink bow.

"Is her niece—is Miss Linda Barry here?" The eagerness of the question and of the very good-looking visitor was fully appreciated by the little maid who recognized a kindred spirit.

"Oh, yes, she's here,"—the freckled face shone radiant. "Ain't she grand?"

"The grandest ever. I want to see her. Aren't you ever going to open the screen door?"

Upon this the screen door opened. "But she ain't in the house," replied Blanche Aurora, coming out on the piazza. "There ain't anybody in the house, so I can't leave it to hunt for her, but I can tell you where I bet she is."

"You're a good—a particularly good child," was the earnest response as Blanche Aurora's finger pointed across the field.

"Do you see that clump o' trees and then there's woods beyond?"

"Yes."

"Near them white birches you'll likely find her. Mrs. Porter and she's got a secret place."

The visitor laughed. "Secret from whom?"

"Everybody but me, I guess."

The man looked at the smile that was keeping his laugh company.

"What do you think they'll say to your telling their secrets?"

"Well"—Blanche Aurora gave a comprehensive glance at the city clothes and the gay face above her. "I kinder think Miss Linda might be glad to see you, and if she would, what's the use o' waitin'!"

"That's what I say," was the hearty response. "I can't wait. I'm going to scour this Cape till I do find her, and then if she *isn't* glad to see me, do you know what I'm going to do?"

Blanche Aurora's neatly coiffed head shook a denial.

The visitor grasped her small shoulder with a strong hand.

"I'm going out to that point of rock there,"—he pointed to the height of the cliff,—"and throw myself—dash myself into the sea!" He scowled portentously.

"Well, you might wait till she gits used to you," suggested Blanche Aurora. "She might like you better."

"I've been waiting two years, but your advice may still be good."

"Be you her beau?" the question was roared solemnly.

"I be; and if I don't find her this afternoon you tell her that her beau has come to town, and for her not to leave the house again till he arrives."

"All right, sir," answered Blanche Aurora, her eyes nearly starting from her head with interest as the caller jumped off the piazza and swung whistling across the field.

The soft turf was springy beneath his feet.

"'A vagrant's morning, wide and blue,'" he muttered to himself.

Gulls wheeled high over his head in the landward sallies from which they sailed back above the sea, their wings glinting like the distant

"Foam of the waves,
Blown blossoms of ocean,
White flowers of the waters."

Whitcomb strode along, the picture of Linda as he last saw her in the railway station still fresh in his mind.

Miss Barry's "help" had been galvanized into interest at the mention of the girl. She had called her "grand." It sounded hopeful.

Beyond the clump of birches, in their favorite spot, the two friends were sitting against their rock with their books and work.

Talk amounts to very little. It was Emerson who said, "Don't talk! What you are thunders so loud above what you say, that I can't hear you."

What Mrs. Porter was, had in their daily contact impressed itself so increasingly upon her young friend, that Linda, though reluctant, had, through very curiosity, come to be willing to look into the source of her friend's faith and strength. That little nook behind the birches had become dear to her. Near by rose the rich dark grove of firs and pines, the sea murmuring in their tops, and the spring bubbled with a silvery plashing.

Here Whitcomb found them. They both started at his sudden appearance and he halted, and rapped on a white birch stem.

"May I come in?" The gay, hearty voice set Linda's heart to beating fast. "Don't let me disturb you," and the visitor hurried forward, his hat off, and kneeling on the grass before her, took Linda's hand.

"You have met Mrs. Porter?"

"Once, I think," said that lady, shaking hands graciously with the young man. The devouring eyes with which he was taking in every detail of Linda's improved appearance made the older woman certain that here was the Chicago man whose happiness the girl had said she could not secure save by extreme measures.

"You look wonderful, Linda. Good for the Cape!" said Fred, seating himself comfortably on the grass, and continuing to observe her with huge satisfaction.

"But how did you know where to find us?" inquired the girl.

"Blanche Aurora told me. Happy name! Dickens himself couldn't have done better. Blanche A-roarer."

"But she didn't know about this place. Nobody knows."

"So she observed—howling it to high heaven; but you might as well try to keep a locality from the sparrows as from kids of that age."

"Well, I'm glad she did know," said Linda graciously, "It's good to see you, Fred,—you have a sort of a white, city look, as if a vacation couldn't hurt you."

"Mrs. Lindsay told me you were related to them," said Mrs. Porter. "I suppose you came through her."

"Yes, I did. I wouldn't have known there was any place to stay here except for her; and I did feel a bit seedy, as well as King, so I pulled up stakes—there being a strong magnet in this vicinity." He flashed a still further enlightening smile around at Linda.

But Mrs. Porter had suddenly lost interest in his possible romance. "Mr. King—Bertram," she said, leaning forward. "He has been ill?"

Whitcomb gave a soft significant whistle. "Rather!" he returned briefly.

"I'm his cousin, Mr. Whitcomb. Tell me all about it, please."

"I know you are. He has talked to me of you."

Linda's lips had gained the close line the mention or thought of King always evoked.

"Good old King. He's some fighter. You ought to be proud of him, Mrs. Porter."

"I am. Tell me all you know of him, please. How is he now?"

"On the upward way. He's going to come out all right, but"—the speaker cast an almost apologetic look at Linda—"you doubtless know that King was up against it for a while. It seems that one night there at the club when the strain was over, he felt himself going to pieces and he wrote me a note asking me, in case of his illness, to keep his papers—the contents of his desk—from Henry Radcliffe until he should recover."

The blood pressed into Linda's face. She was too charitable to her friend even to glance her way.

"The note was not finished. King had evidently taken the precaution to address and stamp the envelope before he began, and the last sane thing he did was to seal the letter inside it. By the time I received it and got over to the club, King was gone."

"Gone!" Mrs. Porter gasped. "You said—"

Fred nodded reassuringly toward her questioning face as she leaned forward.

"Yes, they had taken him to the hospital, you know."

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Porter, "and I here. Why didn't somebody write me?"

Linda sat erect, in an attitude of courteous attention.

"I never thought of it, Mrs. Porter. To tell the truth, I didn't know till he was convalescing that you were at all near to one another, and I didn't want to write anything to add to Linda's worries." He glanced at the girl's unmoved face.

"Did you keep his papers from Henry?" she asked dryly.

"I'll tell you about that."

"But you stayed with him—" There was a little break in Mrs. Porter's low, even voice. "You helped him."

"You bet I stayed with him, just as much of the time as my boss and the nurse would stand for. I was there every night."

"Oh, Mr. Whitcomb," exclaimed Mrs. Porter gratefully, "you don't know what that means to me. Bertram wasn't entirely deserted."

"No. Harriet was up in Wisconsin or she would have wanted to help, too. Henry kept King's illness from her; because even if she had been at home she couldn't really have done anything, you know."

CHAPTER XXI

REVELATION

Linda, looking at Mrs. Porter, saw in the light of their many talks that her friend was striving for the composure with which it was her wont to meet adverse circumstances.

Fred Whitcomb, too, recognizing that the older woman was the more interested of his listeners, began to address his narration chiefly to her.

"King was pretty badly off," he went on. "He was nutty for days, and some of the things he said in his delirium made me feel that—well, that perhaps he'd had a rather lonely time of it. At any rate, he had asked only that his papers should be kept from Radcliffe, so I made up my mind that I'd go through them myself."

Fred paused and gave a rather doubtful and wistful look at Linda's immovable countenance.

Mrs. Porter's eyes were shining in their attention.

"Well, I hadn't spent much time at his desk before I discovered why King had written me those directions. Henry can do what he pleases about Harriet, but I know Linda's a good sport. I know

she wants the truth."

"I do," returned Linda, with cold promptness. "What had Bertram against Henry?"

"Nothing, bless your heart. The telltale package of papers concerned the Antlers Irrigation proposition. Your father was out in the West on the spot and King was in Chicago and these letters and telegrams were their correspondence at the time. It seems that Mr. Barry was completely fascinated by the proposition, but King knew the people connected with it better than Mr. Barry did; and though it appeared entirely legitimate, King begged your father to have nothing to do with it. He admitted that if it succeeded it would be a fortune, but the whole thing was on such a big scale and would involve Barry & Co. so deeply that King advised strongly and even urged that they let it alone; but after an argument of days Mr. Barry decided against him."

Fred met Linda's frowning gaze. He waited while her face flushed, then watched while the red tide sank. In her concentrated look she appeared to be angry; and Fred hurried on defensively.

"I tell you, Linda, I thought you ought to know this. You've always stood for fair play, and there the whole business world has been knocking Bertram King for months. He was a good fighter—but they knocked him down at last. If you'd seen him as I did, lying there, burning up with fever, and babbling scraps of talk that showed how he has worried—"

Linda leaned forward and took Fred Whitcomb's surprised hand in one as cold as ice. Her brow still frowned, but the relaxed lips parted.

"Thank you for telling me; thank you," she said.

Mrs. Porter hurriedly gathered together her sewing materials, stuffed them into her silk workbag, and rose.

Whitcomb, much relieved by Linda's words, also stood up.

"Don't disturb yourselves," said Mrs. Porter; "I am going home to pack. I shall go at once to Chicago."

"Do you mean to King?" asked Whitcomb.

"Of course." Mrs. Porter also seized the young man's hand, and her moist eyes poured out their gratitude. "I can't tell you, Mr. Whitcomb, how I thank you, for befriending him: it's impossible."

Fred smiled broadly. "Oh, say," he returned, "you don't need to pack. King is here."

"What!"

"Sure thing. I wouldn't have come without him. Not on your life. He didn't care much about it, but then he didn't care much about anything, and Mrs. Lindsay had said it was doing Madge a world of good—and Linda was here,"—the speaker turned and looked down at Linda, leaning back against the rock with a face as stony as its gray wall,—"so I bundled the poor chap on the train, and here we are."

"At that awful Benslow place?" gasped Mrs. Porter.

"It isn't so worse," said Fred. "I'm a dandy camper and I'll take care of King myself. The doctors told me just what to stuff him with, and, believe me, I'm going to stuff him. He doesn't slide off this planet till he gets some of the justice that's coming to him. Not if I know it. I haven't talked to him yet about my discovery of the letters, but I told Henry Radcliffe all about it the night before we left and he can do as he pleases about telling Harriet."

"Mr. Whitcomb, you have earned my life-long gratitude," repeated Mrs. Porter. "Between us we will put that dear boy on his feet again. I'm off to see him. Good-bye."

Linda felt hurt that not by word or look did her friend recognize the misery Mrs. Porter must have known she was suffering. Lightly that lady sped away around the clump of birches and was gone; and Fred Whitcomb's sturdy shoulders dropped down again near Linda's rock divan.

"I thought you were looking great when I came up a few minutes ago," he said, examining her, "but it seems to me you might raise a little more color in this perfectly wonderful air."

"You've given me a great shock, Fred."

"Well, I hated to seem to disparage your father in any way," he returned tenderly, "but I knew—I just knew, Linda, you'd want to see King get fair play."

"I do. I have blamed him cruelly myself."

"How could you help it when everybody was feeling the same way? Does he know you blamed him?"

"Yes."

"I wonder if that had anything to do with his not seeing you off that morning in Chicago?"

"Probably."

"I blamed him for that; but now," added Whitcomb, happily, "everything is understood. We mustn't have another sorrowful minute." Linda's lips were looking as if there were only sorrow on earth. "There's a great reaction in Chicago in favor of your father," he added. "The excitement has calmed down, and when Lambert Barry is spoken of now it's with the same old respect, Linda; the same old respect."

"And Bertram has done that," she said slowly.

"Indeed, he has, and as he comes back to strength he's going to feel pretty good over it, too, I can tell you. So—take a brace, Linda. I'm so happy to see you, I can hardly contain myself."

"What a good fellow you are, Fred!"

"You mean for standing by King? Think what he's done for me. Snatched my savings like brands from the burning. My boss, too, is a big beneficiary by King's efforts, and he gave me an extra long vacation so I could come up here and look after him."

"Is he very weak?"

"Not any worse than you'd expect." Whitcomb's constitutional inability to look on the dark side shone in his happy eyes. "That Cap'n Jerry of yours is a dandy, though. He brought us over from the station and he whiled the time away telling how suddenly people either convalesced or died here. King coughs a little, and that inspired the genial captain to tell of his brother who'd been 'coughin' quite a spell'; and how 'sudden' he went off at the last. He said, 'Bill got up one mornin', et a good breakfast; then all to once he fetched a couple o' hacks and was gone!'"

"Fred!" Linda frowned and smiled.

"He did, for a fact. King says he positively refuses to fetch two consecutively."

"He jokes, then," Linda spoke wistfully.

"Oh, yes. He's as game as ever."

"Fred,"—Linda clasped her hands tightly together,—"you don't know how cruel—how beastly I've been to Bertram."

"Oh, forget it," Fred's worshiping eyes met the mourning gaze.

"I'd like to; and I could if Bertram would, but he never will, I'm afraid. He hates me."

"He'll get over it."

"Tell me, Fred,—you must have spoken to him about me. What does he say?"

Whitcomb looked off as if consulting his memory. "I can't remember his mentioning your name since Reason resumed her throne. He used to babble about you and your father, too, during his illness; but nothing connected: nothing that I can remember."

"I'm really surprised that he was willing to come where I was staying."

"I don't believe he knew it till we were on the train. I told him about the Lindsays and that I believed it was the right place for him."

"But he must have known this was where Mrs. Porter was, and that she was with Aunt Belinda. He must have known I was with them."

Whitcomb shrugged his shoulders under this insistence. "Perhaps he did," he admitted. "I spoke several times about you on the train, of course,—how I anticipated seeing you and all that." The speaker's eyes again sought some personal reassurance from his companion's distant gaze.

"And he didn't say anything?"

"I don't remember. I didn't notice. I don't think so."

"Fred,"—Linda leaned forward in her earnestness and wrung her hands together,—"you don't know how hard it is for me to sit here and wait instead of running—*running* to Bertram and confessing the wrong I've done and imploring his forgiveness."

"None of that: none of that." Whitcomb raised a warning hand. "You mustn't say things to King to excite him. He's glassware, remember, glassware." The speaker sank on his elbow, bringing his eager, boyish face nearer the girl's white gown. His hat was on the grass beside him and his thick hair fell forward in his movement.

"But here *I* am, Linda," he added, in a different tone, "husky to the limit. When it comes to me, go as far as you like. You haven't seemed conscious of me yet."

"Oh, yes, I'm conscious of you. I'm very grateful to you for finding out the truth and taking such care of Bertram." The girl's eyes were glowing in her pale face. "'Instead of the thorn';—Fred, did you ever read the Bible?"

Whitcomb sat up under the sudden question, and stared at her.

"The Bible!" he repeated. "Why, sure thing—some of it."

"There's a promise in it, 'Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree.' It struck some chord in me when first I read it and it seems to mean more and more. See those firs,"—Linda waved her hand to where on the other side of the little brook the soft variation of color in the evergreens stood against the sky. "Breathe the balm they send out in the air? Mrs. Porter has shown me how it just rests with us to do away with the wounding thorn, and receive the peace of the stanch, unchanging fir tree, with its soft, invigorating perfume and color, and the music in its branches. It has come to be a great symbol to me—the fir tree."

"Hurrah for the Tannenbaum," returned Whitcomb, mechanically, not knowing what to say to this changed Linda with the exalted eyes.

"You have done a wonderful thing for me to-day, Fred; and if only I could wipe out from my own and Bertram's memory my wickedness, the fir tree could at once begin to come up; but my father suffered for his mistake and I must suffer for mine. To be patient—to put down my willfulness—to

be willing just to guard my thoughts and to think right and to leave all the rest to God—that's my lesson; and you know how hard it is for me, Fred. You know how I've always managed, and dictated, and carried my point, and never had any patience."

"You suit me all right, whatever you've done," blurted out Whitcomb, upon whom Linda's matter-of-course mention of the Creator had made a profound impression. "You've changed a lot in some ways," he went on, rather dejectedly, "but in a certain line where I'm interested, you don't seem to have made much progress. I'm the biggest donkey this side of Cairo, I know that; but when I'm away from you, I forget all the discouraging things you've ever said, and I build a lot of castles-in-the-air, each one more attractive than the last, and then the minute I get with you, with a simple twist of the wrist you tumble them all about my ears."

"Oh, Freddy!"

"Don't you 'Oh, Freddy' me. I was awfully afraid of King at one time, but when I found he wasn't in the race, I felt there wasn't anybody ahead of me and Holdfast's a good dog. I made up my mind to win."

"Oh, Fred!"

"Why shouldn't my thorn be pulled up, too? Why shouldn't *I* have a nice Tannenbaum with just one gift hanging on it?"

"Because, Fred, we can't any of us outline. We must be faithful and unselfish and let things grow right, and they will, because we were created for happiness. Mrs. Porter says so."

"Oh, she has inside information, has she?" returned Whitcomb, with as near an approach to a sneer as his wholesome nature could come.

"Yes, that's a very good name for it," returned Linda promptly. "Even I, Fred," she added humbly, "even I have had some inside information. In not getting me," she added gently, "you will get something better if we're all thinking right."

Silence, during which Whitcomb gloomily uprooted such long grasses as grew near him.

"I have no expectation of marrying anyone," said Linda, "and you are a hero in my eyes to-day, if that is any comfort to you."

Whitcomb lifted a frowning, obstinate gaze to hers.

"Holdfast's a good dog," he said sententiously. Presently he spoke again. "It's time for King to eat. I must go."

"I'll walk with you as far as Aunt Belinda's."

Whitcomb helped her gather up books and work and they moved away together.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PENITENT

Blanche Aurora caught sight of the two strolling through the field toward the house and she called her mistress's attention to them.

"There's the man I told you come, Miss Barry," she said eagerly; and Miss Belinda pulled down her glasses and viewed the approach.

"Why, if that isn't Mr. Whitcomb!" she said. She groaned. "I don't think I've got a supper for a man; I do hate to cater for the great, walloping things."

She craned her neck, keeping well out of range of the window in the forlorn hope that the threat might pass by. Forlorn, indeed. What place was there for the visitor to go to?

To her surprise the young man's firm step lingered but a moment at the door, then from her vantage-ground she saw him lift his hat, jump off the piazza, and walk away.

From another window Blanche Aurora's round eyes were watching too, with an unwinking gaze. She wished to see whether the stranger would seek the rock cliff; but evidently Miss Linda had been glad to see him, for he swung energetically across the grass in the opposite direction.

Miss Barry, guiltily conscious of her inhospitable attitude, and remembering with a rush the helpfulness with which Whitcomb had smoothed her path away from Chicago, met Linda as she entered.

What meant the glowing expression in her niece's face? Had there really been more than appeared in her friendship for Fred Whitcomb?

"That was Mr. Whitcomb, wasn't it? Why didn't he come in? What a surprise to see him here," said Miss Barry. "After all," she added mentally, "those broiled lobsters would probably have satisfied him."

Linda put an arm about her aunt's shoulders and drew her into the living-room.

There was a roseate gleam in the dusky distance as Blanche Aurora withdrew through the swing door.

Miss Barry could feel a nervous tension in the arm about her, and as she looked curiously into the pale, excited face she felt certain that portentous news was impending.

"I don't care if she has,"—the swift thought fled through her mind. "He's young and only beginning life, but he's a good boy. I like him; and I grudged the poor fellow a meal!"

"Yes, it was Fred," said Linda, seating herself and her captive on a wicker divan.

"Why didn't you ask him in?"

"Because he had to go to Bertram."

"Mr. King here?"

"Yes, convalescing from a serious illness; a terrible illness, Aunt Belinda,"—the girl's voice began to shake,—"an illness I helped to bring on. If"—the voice refused to go further, but broke in a flood of tears as the speaker collapsed in Miss Barry's amazed arms. "Wait—wait," sobbed Linda.

"There, there, child. There, there," was all Miss Belinda could think of to say in the way of comfort while she, her curiosity effervescent, patted the sufferer. "Where are they, Linda?" she asked gently. "In Portland?"

"No, at the Benslows'."

"The Benslows'!" ejaculated Miss Belinda. "And I grudged that boy a meal!"

"Did you say Mr. King is convalescing from something, dear?"

"Yes—yes."

"Do they want to kill him, taking him to Luella's?"

"It's—it's the Lindsays' doings,—and—and—Fred thinks it's all right. He—he has a tent, and he's taking care of him."

Miss Barry's voice was very kind and she kept on her mechanical patting of the sobbing figure. "I didn't know they were such special friends, Linda."

"They were—weren't before; but everybody wants to help—help Bertram now. You were right all the time, Aunt Belinda. He was—was behaving nobly and—and protecting Father. It was—was dear Father's mistake about—about the Antlers. It has—has all come out now. Oh, why was I so cruel!"

"Now, now, dear. Now, now," soothed Miss Belinda, snapping her moist eyelids together. Feeling her helplessness to say the right thing brought to mind her ally. "Where's Mrs. Porter, Linda?"

"Gone to see Bertram. Oh, if I only could!"

"Why, you can, of course. He isn't in bed, is he?"

"I wouldn't care if he was in bed; but how can he ever want to see me again?"

Miss Barry pursed her lips and her head gave a little shake over the bowed one. The remorse she used to wish for her niece had evidently come in an avalanche; and the New England conscience could but admit that it was good enough for her.

"Oh, there's such a thing as forgiveness in the world," she suggested comfortingly.

"You know Bertram stood next to Papa. I don't think Papa knew any difference in his love of us and him. He was just like a son to him, always so faithful and efficient."

Miss Barry raised her eyebrows and pursed her lips. A few words longed to pass them, but she bit them back.

"I fought my admiration of him always because I thought he didn't admire me. I was jealous of him, too. I was the most selfish girl in the world. I wanted to be absorbed in my own trumpery interests nearly all the time; then when I had an hour for Father I wanted him to put me above Bertram in his confidence and consideration; whereas Bertram was always standing shoulder to shoulder with him."

"Now, Linda, do be reasonable. You had to go to school. Don't blame yourself too much."

The girl slowly lifted her head and drew a long, sighing breath. "I can't eat supper, Aunt Belinda," she said after a moment of gazing into space. "You'll forgive me, won't you? I feel as if I must rest and think until to-morrow morning, and then I promise to go on as before."

"How about Mr. Whitcomb? You don't say a word about him."

"He's been splendid—wonderful. We owe it all to him that we know the truth. Bertram would have lived and died and kept silence; but Fred read the letters in his desk while he was ill. His delirious talk had roused Fred's suspicions." Linda gave another sobbing sigh, the aftermath of the storm.

"I'm awfully tired, Aunt Belinda. I'll go upstairs and perhaps I'll go to bed. Don't think of me again until to-morrow."

"Suit yourself, child," returned Miss Barry kindly. "We shall miss you at supper."

Linda vanished up the stairs and Miss Barry went out to the kitchen, where she found her maid with a very red little nose and extremely dolorous wet eyes.

"What are you crying for, Blanche Aurora?" she demanded.

"'Cause—'cause *she* did." A loud sniff.

"You've been listening," said Miss Barry sternly.

The little girl fairly stamped in her outraged feeling.

"I guess you ain't got no business to say that," she returned, and the honest wrath of her gaze caused her mistress to clear her throat.

"Well, well, I don't suppose you did. Miss Linda has a friend who is ill."

"He's a-goin' to drown himself, that's what," gulped Blanche Aurora, the relief of speech overbalancing her righteous wrath.

"What do you mean, you crazy child?"

"He told me he would if she wasn't glad to see him; and if Miss Linda wants me to, I'll go after him, and stop him."

The girl's hands and feet moved restlessly as if she longed to be up and doing.

"Nonsense, child. Mr. Whitcomb is always joking."

"Oh, no, Miss Barry. He warn't jokin'. He said he was her beau, and Miss Linda wouldn't cry like that—" a spasm constricted the speaker's throat—"if she hadn't given him the mitten and warn't scared what he'd do."

"Law! Blanche Aurora, it's another man she was crying about."

The restless hands quieted and the little maid listened doubtfully. Her mind was so thoroughly made up as to the tragedy that it changed reluctantly.

"Wherever Miss Linda is," went on Miss Barry solemnly, "men spring up through the ground. Who'd ever think of those two coming here to have the finishing touch put on a sick man at Luella Benslow's! If I should hire a boat and take Miss Linda out there,"—Miss Barry indicated the sea,—"out as far as the eye can reach, mermen would begin coming to the surface and swarming up the side of the vessel."

"Oh, dear," gasped Blanche Aurora. The situation was worse than she had feared, thus complicated by a man so dear to Miss Linda that loyalty to her beau could not prevent her from sobbing her heart out about him.

"Let's take him *here*," she said as the fruit of her swift cogitation.

"Who?"

"The sick man."

"Mr. King!" ejaculated Miss Barry.

King! His name was King! That settled it. Blanche Aurora's heart bled for the gay, broad-shouldered young man who had gained her sympathy, but Miss Linda's wishes were paramount.

"Let's take him here and cure him," she repeated stoutly.

"You're perfectly crazy, child," was the startled reply. "I shouldn't consider taking a man into my house; and I think they'll make out all right at Luella's with our help. I shall let you take nice things over to him once in a while."

Blanche Aurora's breast swelled with excitement. She should see the King: see the wonderful person who could wring tears from the powerful and self-contained Miss Linda; but at the same time she felt very, very sorry for Fred Whitcomb. Going about to get supper she narrowly escaped scorching the biscuit and she poured the tea into the water pitcher.

The long evening had dimmed to twilight when Mrs. Porter appeared at Linda's open door. The girl had left it ajar as an invitation to her.

"What's this? What are you doing?" asked the older woman cheerily as she descried the face on the pillow.

"Hating myself," returned Linda briefly.

Mrs. Porter's pleasant laugh sounded. "There's nothing in that," she returned, and she came and sat on the foot of the bed.

"He's better, or you couldn't laugh," said Linda.

"Yes, he is. That nice Whitcomb is a regular steam engine. He has a tent with all the outdoor sleeping paraphernalia and they don't expect to spend many nights indoors. Of course, it's just the right season for the experiment."

"Does Bertram—does he look very—very ill?"

"Oh, rather frail, of course; but he looks very good to me with his nice gray eyes so care-free."

"He has the most lovely teeth I ever saw," said Linda with a gulp.

"Yes; they're just as nice as ever."

"I wish you were in a serious mood, Mrs. Porter."

"How can I be when I'm so relieved and grateful?"

"Can't you be a little sorry for me, who am absolutely miserable?" Linda's words were interspersed with catches in the throat, but she was determined to weep no more.

"No one should be that. Cheer up, girlie. That nice Whitcomb—"

Linda jerked her face around into the pillow. "Oh, don't go on calling him 'that nice Whitcomb!' It seems as if I was born just to make everybody miserable!"

Mrs. Porter squeezed the ankle by which she was sitting. "Not everybody. I'm sure Madge Lindsay will give you a vote of thanks if you don't absorb Mr. Whitcomb."

"Why? Has she come to life?" inquired Linda gloomily.

"I should say she has. Everybody over there is galvanized with all this excitement. Mrs. Lindsay says Luella nearly went out of her mind at first with two men impending, and she told Mrs. Lindsay she couldn't do so much cooking: that she'd have to get a 'chief' from Portland; but I tell you, Mrs. Lindsay is a general. She promised Miss Benslow to help her. She exiled Pa to his boathouse and hired Letty Martin to wash dishes,—that's Blanche Aurora's sister,—and Luella, from being desperate, is now on the top of the wave. That nice Whitcomb—excuse me,"—the speaker gave the ankle a little shake,—"I mean that strong, good-natured Freddy has kissed the blarney stone, probably. At any rate, Luella is his bond slave already."

"What relation are the Lindsays to him?"

"Mrs. Lindsay told me. She and Fred's father are own cousins."

"That's not too near," said Linda dismally.

"No, but don't order any wedding presents yet, though I assure you Madge looked very fetching this afternoon in a rose corduroy gown and hat."

"Oh, I shan't do anything pleasant yet," responded Linda. "Mrs. Porter, I don't see how you can keep me in suspense. Didn't Bertram speak of me at all?"

"I—I don't think so."

"Don't think so! Wouldn't you be certain if he had?"

"I'm sure he didn't, then."

"You know all you've said to me about our being punished for everything wrong we do."

"Yes."

"How long—how long do you think my punishment will last?" asked Linda naïvely.

"What does it consist in? What do you mean?"

"Bertram's not forgiving me. I have that awful feeling that Bertram never will forgive me—never can like me again, when—when"—the nervous excitement in the low voice increased—"he's the most important person in the world to me: the one Father loved best and who has helped him most. Think what I've done! Put myself beyond the pale of his liking: his forgiveness." A dry sob shook the speaker. "And Fred hasn't told him about the letters. He doesn't dream yet that we know the truth; and Fred says I mustn't tell him: that he mustn't be excited."

"Hush, Linda. Think, dear. You know enough truth to steer by now. 'Cast thy burden on the Lord, and He will sustain thee.' All your part is to think right and do right to-day. You don't want to escape punishment, do you?"

"Yes, I do. I've been punished enough, just in the last few hours. I want Bertram to know I suffer and to forgive me, and to accept my appreciation of all he has done."

"Look out there, Linda,"—Mrs. Porter indicated the starry firmament visible through the broad window, every golden point scintillating in the crystal clear air. "The marvelous order and peace of that sky will rest you and make you realize what it is to allow yourself to be guided by the same Mind that planned those unthinkable depths yet which notes the sparrow's fall. Turn to Him. Never mind Bertram King and Linda Barry. Just know that God is Love, and that to-morrow you will be guided to take steps in the right direction. 'Commit thy way unto Him and He will bring it to pass.'"

"Bring what to pass?" asked Linda eagerly. "What?"

"Ah, there comes in the temptation to outline. We can't tell what; but we must have faith that it will be the best thing, the happiest thing."

"Yes, I know," dejectedly. "I preached it all to Fred."

"That's it, dear. We don't really know these truths—they're not ours until we've lived them."

A few minutes longer Mrs. Porter sat on the foot of Linda's bed. The crescent moon dropped into the west, and the waves lapped the rugged shore in long, murmurous sweeps.

They talked no more, and when Mrs. Porter said good-night and went to her own room, had it not been so dark she would have observed that a photograph of Bertram King had found a place on Linda's table.

CHAPTER XXIII

A GOOD NEIGHBOR

Miss Benslow was wont to refer to her weather-beaten house, woefully in need of paint, as "the homestead." In her grandfather's time the place had been a small farm, but Cy Benslow had sold all of it but a couple of acres to Portland people who had put up cheap summer cottages.

The house was set back some two hundred feet from the sea and a few Balm-of-Gilead trees relieved the monotony of the wind-swept landscape.

Madge Lindsay had found places for a couple of hammocks, which Fred Whitcomb observed with satisfaction on his arrival with his charge.

"You're perfectly welcome to them," Miss Lindsay assured him. "Did you ever play the rôle of a head of cabbage for six weeks?"

"Is it anything like a blockhead?" inquired Whitcomb. "I've played that all my life."

"Yes, they're ever so much the same," drawled Madge. Perhaps she had affected a drawl to offset her devoted mother's snappy, nervous manner. At any rate, it was second nature now. "You're not allowed to have an idea when you're assigned the rôle of cabbage head; so it amounts to the same thing as your limitation."

"Thanks awfully," returned Whitcomb. "It's worth everything to discover sympathy." He was establishing King in a steamer chair on the piazza while they were talking: a precarious piazza it was, with a list to leeward.

Mrs. Lindsay looked on solicitously and held ready a steamer rug. "These slanting boards used to make me seasick at first," she said, "but after a while you don't mind anything here, the air is so divine and there's so much of it." She extinguished King's evident shiver with her rug.

"Thank you, Mrs. Lindsay," he said. "Do you guarantee that in a short time I shall act and feel less like a shaky old woman? Or, perhaps, I'm more like a baby. Whitcomb's brought everything along but a nursing-bottle, and his beefiness makes me feel like a rattling skeleton."

"Oh, just be a cabbage, Mr. King," advised Madge, "and you'll come out all right. You know how much stress is laid on *thinking* these days. Don't think a shaky old woman, and don't think a baby, but think a cabbage. It's the most restful thing in the world; and there's nothing and nobody here to inspire a thought."

"You have neighbors," said King, "according to Whitcomb. A cousin of mine, Mrs. Porter, is staying here with Miss Barry. Mrs. Porter is the sort to inspire even a cabbage."

"Not when she's being one herself," returned Madge. "She's a music teacher! Who can blame her? I know if I were one, I'd be a murderess too.—Yes, they are over there, and so is Linda Barry. I hope neither of you is attached to her, for I think she's the coldest, most impossible girl I ever met."

"Surely you know of her sorrow?" said Whitcomb, and his expression was a reproach to the girl's drawling speech.

"Oh, so you *are* attached! Forgive me, won't you? All the same, if I'm ever in mourning I'm determined not to freeze my sister-woman and slink away from her into by-ways."

"Madge, dear," warned Mrs. Lindsay.

"Oh, Mother and Miss Barry have had some traffic over ferns; and Mrs. Porter's offishness is different from Linda Barry's. She's a queen, Mrs. Porter is. I'd take lessons of her just for the companionship, only that she'd think *I* thought I had a voice."

"And so you have, a very nice one," chirped Mamma.

"Her goose is such a swan," exclaimed Madge, with a lazy smile. "No one should be without a mother."

"Shoo, all of you," said Whitcomb, motioning with his hands. "I want King to go to sleep."

The convalescent's eyes closed as his head rested against the pillow of his reclining chair. "There goes Whitcomb, again," he announced through his nose. "Baby always goes to sleep in his carriage when he hits the oxygen, you know."

"No, no, Mr. King. Cabbage, cabbage," exclaimed Madge in reminder, as she jumped off the rickety steps.

Her acquaintance with Whitcomb had been very casual heretofore. There had been a few hours in New York and a few hours in Chicago at various times when cousinly amenities were exchanged; and now, as her youthful vitality had reasserted itself, the rôle of vegetable was becoming a frightful bore, and this invasion of the two young men restored an interest in life.

There was a level plain back of Miss Benslow's house and Madge had discovered signs that previous boarders had essayed to play tennis there. She led Whitcomb to it now.

"Don't you think we might fix it up?" she asked.

He looked dubiously at the tufts of grass. "And crack a few tendons over these hummocks?" he suggested. "Do you play much?"

Her dark eyes gave him a provocative glance. "I might surprise you," she drawled.

"Good enough. It will be better than nothing."

"Which? A girl antagonist or the court?"

"I'll tell you that later."

"Then go and ask Luella for a scythe and a lawn mower. Let's begin right off. I'm aching to play."

"Don't believe I can this afternoon," returned Whitcomb, rather consciously. "I ought to go over to Miss Barry's and call the first thing."

"Oh, yes. I forgot the attachment." Madge's dark, tanned face lighted brilliantly with a gleam of white teeth. She feigned a shiver. "Be careful that she doesn't freeze you. To call on Linda Barry seems an intrepid act to me."

"You didn't grow up with her."

"I suppose she's really charming when one knows her," said Madge, as they turned away from the potential court and strolled toward the house. Whitcomb's manner as he replied had suggested danger. "She's certainly lovely to look upon."

"You haven't seen her yet in a normal condition," he replied, somewhat mollified. "People can't get over shocks like hers in a minute. This must have been a great place for her, though."

Whitcomb's eyes swept the vastness of sea and sky.

"If you don't find her much improved, tell her of the cabbage stunt," said Madge. Then she pointed out to her companion the low, broad, shingled cottage, clinging to the rocky shore, and turned away toward the house.

"To-morrow morning for the tennis court," said Whitcomb gayly as he left her.

"How tiresome," she thought. "That Barry iceberg will never like me, and now Fred will want to drag her into everything. If only Mr. King had his sea legs."

She looked disapprovingly toward the piazza, where the convalescent's clear-cut face showed, sleeping against the blue chintz pillow.

"Where has Fred gone, dear?" asked her mother's voice at her elbow. The sharp eyes had witnessed her child's desertion.

"Gone over to call on Linda Barry. I think that's all he came here for."

"H'm. Shows Fred's not mercenary. Still, you know, things aren't going to turn out so badly as people expected. I had a talk with Fred this morning and he's quite optimistic. It seems that that Mr. King is the hero of the whole affair. I'll tell you about it sometime. Hasn't he an aristocratic face!" added Mrs. Lindsay, with an approving snap of her eyes toward the steamer chair.

"I wanted to fix the tennis court. I wish that human Thermos bottle was in Kamchatka."

Mrs. Lindsay laughed. "They retain heat as well as cold, remember. Perhaps Fred knows what is inside that one better than you do."

Madge yawned and put an arm around her mother as they walked toward the house. They were excellent friends.

The following morning, when Whitcomb had finished ministering to the convalescent's needs, and had placed him comfortably in the hammock, he was ready for the tennis court proposition.

It proved that Luella's lawn mower was an antique whose working days were over; and she indicated to the young people a house where one could be borrowed. It was not Miss Barry's cottage!

When they had traversed some distance across the field on the errand, a demurely stepping figure approached them. It was a very young girl in a blue frock, bareheaded, and carrying with great solicitude a bowl covered with a napkin.

As she approached, Whitcomb recognized her, and it was with some relief that she recognized him, bareheaded, and in khaki trousers and sweater, with a general appearance of being long for this world. He was laughing and talking with Luella's boarder in a reassuring manner, and when his eyes fell upon her, he spoke. "Why, good-morning, Blanche Aurora."

"Good mornin', Mr. Whitcomb," she responded loudly in her best manner and with a sharp glance at the dark young lady in the rose gown.

"Whither away, Blanche Aurora?"

"I'm carryin' jell to the king," she announced.

"What's this?" Fred's eyes lighted curiously on the snowy napkin. "Something nice for King, eh? Bertram the first?"

"Lemon jell," announced Blanche Aurora, with a proud accession of lung power, and an evident desire not to be delayed.

"Well, Mr. King's over there in a hammock," said Whitcomb, looking doubtful. "I don't believe I need to go back."

"Go back? Of course not!" cried Madge.—"Ask for Mrs. Lindsay when you get to Miss Benslow's and she'll see to it. Come on, Fred."

Blanche Aurora gave the young lady one look, as cold and impersonal as china-blue optics are capable of bestowing, and moved on her way. Call for Mrs. Lindsay! Not likely, now that she knew the king was easy prey in a hammock.

"But poor King," protested Whitcomb, as he followed Madge's determined march. "Is it fair? No cotton for his ears."

"Oh, she probably won't see him at all. The young one will give the jelly to Mother and she'll attend to it."

Little Madge Lindsay knew of the swelling heart beneath the blue gingham frock. Blanche Aurora's confused and excited meditations had conferred royalty upon the mysterious stranger, and should she find him informally wearing a crown in his hammock, it would not astonish her in the least.

Arriving at the Benslow house, she cast glances askance toward piazza and windows, fearing that some one might inquire her business; but it was ten-thirty in the morning, a busy time for housekeepers, and she proceeded unmolested toward the Balm-of-Gilead trees.

One hammock hung empty, its fringes stirring but lightly in the protected nook to which the trees owed their life.

The visitor caught sight of fair hair on the pillow of the second swinging couch, and continuing from the head a long black chrysalis.

She approached eagerly. King, glancing around at a sound, suddenly saw beside him a blue-clothed figure with long, white, pipe-stem legs, and white sneakers. The newcomer's red braided hair glinting in the sun was surmounted by a voluminous blue bow.

As he turned his head, the better to see his visitor, she burst forth in one breath: "I'm Miss Belinda Barry's help, Blanche Aurora Martin, Blanche Aurora for short, and I've brought you a snack, O King."

The invalid turned, chrysalis and all, the better to view the bowl being extended to him.

"Why—why"—he said, exhibiting broadly the teeth Linda had commended,—"somebody is being very kind to me."

"It's Miss Barry; but I made the jell and she sent it with her compliments. Snacks is good for folks that's sick and delicate."

As she spoke, the visitor was devouring the royal features with intent to verify her suspicion concerning the new photograph, and to understand the great man's influence on Miss Linda.

"What did you say was your name?"

"Blanche Aurora."

"Well, you're a very kind little girl. Do you say that jelly is for me?"

"Yes, and you'd better eat it right off, O King, 'cause the middle o' the mornin' is the time for snacks. I've got a spoon in here,"—she took off the napkin and revealed it. "If you eat it now, you see, I can take the bowl back; 'cause if it once gits in with Luella's things, no tellin' when we'd ever see it again."

King's gray eyes twinkled. "Blanche Aurora, you're a joy," he declared mildly, "and never in my life have I seen anything look so good as that jelly."

"It is good, O King," admitted the visitor, stentorianly modest. "It's got orange juice in it, too."

"Then, get that chair over there under the tree, and bring it here where you'll be more sociable; and would you mind getting the pillow out of the other hammock so I can be royally propped up. If I'm a king, nothing's too good for me, eh?"

"Of course, nothin's too good for you," declared Blanche Aurora solemnly, as she carried out his directions.

"I'm afraid somebody has been—well—stringing you, to put it informally, concerning myself," remarked the invalid when his visitor had propped his shoulders to her liking. "If my head should lie any uneasier if it wore a crown, the game wouldn't be worth the candle. Could you pull that pillow a little higher—there, that's fine. Now, then, for the jelly."

The visitor took it from the chair, and handing it to him, seated herself, with her demurest company manner.

"One thing more, you good child. Can you tuck the end of that rug under my feet?"

"Is your feet cold?" asked Blanche Aurora sharply as she jumped up and complied. "Do you wish you had a hot-water bag?"

"I dare say Whitcomb brought one."

"But the hens can lend you all you want," declared Blanche Aurora earnestly. "They don't need 'em this weather."

"The hens? What sort of a place have I got into?"

So the visitor explained Luella's invention, and King laughed till he was weak, while the little girl eyed him solemnly.

"Do stop," he begged. "Spare me this last humiliation of being in the old hen's class. Now, Blanche Aurora, here goes." And he began an appreciative attack on the jelly.

CHAPTER XXIV

Blanche Aurora never removed her eyes from her beneficiary.

"The best jelly ever," he remarked between two mouthfuls.

"You don't talk a bit like a king," she declared judicially.

"Have you known many?"

"Only in stories."

"Somebody evidently has told you a fairy story about me,"—the speaker continued to eat industriously. "Who tried to induce you to believe that I was anything but an American rack of bones?"

"I knew you was a great man, and they said King."

"A great man, eh? How's that?"

"And I believed nobody but a king could make Miss Linda cry."

The gray eyes lifted for a look at the visitor before the eating recommenced.

"Not guilty," said King.

"She cried somethin' terrible 'cause you was sick."

The memory seemed to make the small piquant nose tingle, for Blanche Aurora wiggled it and snapped the china-blue eyes.

"She cries a good deal, I suppose."

"She never cries," declared the small maid indignantly. "Why should anybody that can have anythin' in the world and do anythin' in the world *cry*? I didn't know Miss Linda could cry; but her beau came over—"

The gray eyes lifted again, for a moment, but the convalescent's appetite appeared to be still ravenous.

"—And she was walkin' with him, and she come into the house and told Miss Barry you was sick, and—" Again Blanche Aurora's nose and lips wiggled in grievous reminiscence.

"Do you mean Mr. Frederick Whitcomb?"

"That's him. He told me he was her beau, but I guess he ain't no longer. I don't believe"—a shrewd look coming into the blue gazing eyes—"I don't believe she'd cry like that about *him*, 'cause she never does cry." The addition was made with a return of indignation. "She's the beautifulest, kindest lady in the whole world."

"H'm," mumbled King, over an extra large spoonful.

"She give me this dress"—the speaker grasped a fold of the azure gingham—"and a pink one, too, and ribbons. She used to wear the dresses herself, 'fore her pa died. When she come here first I looked like a scarecrow."

"My compliments, Blanche Aurora." King bowed toward his companion whose small white teeth gleamed in a face thrilled into vivacity. "You do Miss Linda credit."

"So I wondered what you was like, O King—I mean Mr. King. I guess you're just plain Mister, ain't you?"

"There never was a plainer."

"And so, when I seen this new likeness on Miss Linda's table, standin' by her pa's, I wondered if perhaps 'twas you, and it is!" finished Blanche Aurora with all the triumph of a Sherlock Holmes. "I put a wild rose front of her pa every day, and says I to her this mornin', 'Shall I git a rose for the new picture, too?'—but she looked awful sad and she shook her head and says, 'I'm afraid not, Blanche Aurora. We need pansies for that'; and we ain't got a pansy on the place. I'm awful sorry."

"Do you know, I don't believe I can quite finish this delicious jelly? I feel now as if my sweater wouldn't give any more."

"Well, you've et quite a lot," observed the visitor, looking into the bowl.

"I certainly have; and will you thank Miss Barry for me, and tell her that I feel in these noticeable bones that I'm going to be up and around before very long?"

"I'll tell her; and, oh, yes! Be you able to see folks?"

King's eyes twinkled. "Well, I seem to have seen you without any danger."

"Yes, but they didn't expect I was goin' to see you." There was a triumphant gleam in the speaker's eyes. "They told me to leave the jell."

"You think for yourself, don't you, Blanche Aurora?" laughed King, settling down comfortably into his pillow.

"I was bound I was goin' to see who it was could make Miss Linda sob, and *sob*, and besides, I wanted to see if the likeness was you that wasn't ever on her table before."

Long after the visitor's departure King lay, a deep line between his brows, his perplexed thoughts accompanied by the constant sound as of rain in the rustling Balm-of-Gilead leaves above him.

Linda in wild tears; Linda placing a photograph of himself beside that of her father and all following Fred Whitcomb's visit; there was something here to be inquired into.

It was nearly noon when the laborers on the tennis court returned. King could hear their laughter as they approached the house; and shortly Whitcomb appeared beside the hammock, exasperatingly robust and gay, and wiping his moist brow.

"How goes it?" he asked, grasping the rope and swinging the couch.

"Stop that, or I'll murder you," growled King.

"Sure thing. I forgot," said Whitcomb as he tightened his hold and brought the chrysalis to a standstill. "Madge Lindsay's a scream," he continued. "She's more fun than a barrel of monkeys. She knows every word of the Winter Garden and Follies songs for the last two years. I'll get her started so you can hear her one of these times."

"Good Lord, deliver us!" uttered King devoutly.

"Got a grouch, old man?" asked Whitcomb with a solicitous change of tone. "Did Blanche A-roarer, the human siren, blow her whistle too near you? We met her and she said she was bringing you jell."

"She did, and it's safely stowed away under my sweater. What are you going to do next?"

"Why, we thought we'd go into the water. We both took a Turkish bath out there on that Transgressor's Boulevard that we're trying to turn into a tennis court. It's high tide, and Madge says there's a beach down here where we can get a ducking when the water's high. That's the trouble with this place. It's so jagged and deep, only a submarine could go bathing here at low tide. Why?" added Whitcomb. "Did you want me for anything?"

"No. What should I want you for? Get out."

"All right. You'll be coming with us in a little while. So long. We're watching the time and we'll be on hand for dinner. Mackerel, the fair Luella told me. I can hardly wait."

King gazed after his friend as the latter ran across the grass and disappeared within their tent. He closed his eyes, and opening them in a few minutes at a sound, found beside him a figure in a long black cloak, with a dark face beneath a red bathing-cap. Miss Lindsay was smiling down at him.

"We're going for a dip, Mr. King. I wish you could come."

"Pardon my not rising," said the invalid.

"It's such fun to have somebody to play with. I'm so glad you brought Fred here. I was getting so bored."

"That's a consoling way of putting it," remarked King. "It's a proud moment when I am spoken of as taking anybody anywhere."

"Oh, you'll be out of that hammock in a week. Do you like the banjo, Mr. King?"

"I hate it," he replied distinctly; then seeing the dark face fall, "but not more than I do everything."

"So discouraging," drawled Madge. "I was going to promise to give you some perfectly jolly darky tunes to-night."

"Good Lord, deliver us!" again rose to King's lips, but he swallowed the phrase. "Don't mind about me," he said. "Just give me a few board nails to bite, and let it go at that. I'm not worse than other convalescents, I dare say."

"Lemon jelly wasn't the thing to feed him," said Madge to Whitcomb, as a few minutes later they were scrambling down the bank toward a short stretch of pebbly beach. "He should be fed saccharine and nothing else. You never do know what to do with such people. You don't like not to be civil. You have a wonderful disposition, Fred. Yes, you have. I've always noticed it."

"I fancy I am something of an optimist," admitted Whitcomb, "but I need to be, as badly as anybody that ever lived. Now I'm trying to think that that sunny water will feel the way it looks."

"Come on, then," cried Madge, flinging aside her cloak, and seizing his hand she drew him, protesting and howling, into the icy flood. The wind was offshore, and Madge, thoroughly acclimated, had been anticipating mischievously the effect upon the tenderfoot.

He was game, however, and Lake Michigan had made him practically amphibious, so they had an exhilarating swim before coming out on the white pebbles for a sun bath.

"I'm afraid it will be a long time before King can stand that," remarked Whitcomb.

"What did you mean," asked Madge, "by saying a few minutes ago that you need a happy disposition more than other people? Is it because Mr. King is so difficult?"

"No," replied Whitcomb, gathering up a few pebbles and beginning to play jackstones. He avoided his companion's very good-looking but enterprising eyes.

"Well, aren't you going to tell me?"

"I don't know why I shouldn't. You're my cousin. I adore a girl who doesn't care a hang for me."

"The Thermos bottle," thought Madge acutely. "But you won't tell me who?" she hazarded aloud.

"Why should I?"

"You don't have to; but just remember this, Freddy Whitcomb. Look at this great ocean. It's like the great world. That saying, 'there's just as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it,' is true; and"—Madge captured Whitcomb's reluctant gaze with as bright eyes as ever sparkled under a red cap—"some people are only fish with gold scales," she drawled.

"She isn't," blurted out the young man defensively.

"Of course not," laughed Madge. "Want to go in once more?"

Whitcomb sprang to his feet. "Once more, and then what ho! for the mackerel!"

As he helped Madge up the bank a little later he said: "I must stay with King this afternoon."

"And call at the Barrys'," thought his companion.

"I'm afraid he got sort of down this morning, all alone."

"Well, we'll have another go at the court to-morrow," replied Madge good-naturedly. "Freddy needn't have worried," she thought. She was far too clever to satiate a man with her society.

King came to the dinner table and did full justice to the meal. "I'm quite sure," he said to Mrs. Lindsay, "that those hammocks were dedicated to the naps of yourself and your daughter, and I want to assure you that I've had my share of them for to-day."

The ladies protested kindly.

"I've had my eye on a big rock there is over there nearer the water," said King. "I'm going to try my rickety legs that far."

A chorus of approval of the plan arose, and after a short time of sitting about the discouraged piazza, he and Whitcomb rambled slowly off.

To King's disgust, his friend as they left had picked up a steamer rug.

"Oh, cut it out," begged the convalescent.

"Shut up!" returned the other cheerfully.

Arrived at their goal, he threw down the rug and King was glad to sit on it under the lee of the big rock.

"What did you do yesterday, Freddy?" asked King, going directly to the subject uppermost in his mind.

"I called on Linda and Mrs. Porter. Mrs. Porter told you, didn't she?"

"Yes. She came over, exuding gratitude to you at every pore, and adorably sympathetic and charming to me."

"Well, that's all right, isn't it?" returned Whitcomb, a little uncomfortable under his friend's gaze, which seemed more portentous than was necessary. "Women always overdo the gratitude business. Just like her to praise me for engineering an extra long vacation for myself."

"Freddy, you haven't told me everything," said King sternly. "Now, spit it right out in Papa's hand."

"What are you talking about?" asked the other uneasily.

"I don't know, but I'm going to find out. When Linda left Chicago I was the blackest sheep on her black list. What did you tell her to change her attitude? It wasn't that I had been ill, for she would have buried me cheerfully. Now, out with it!"

"Is this the third degree?" Whitcomb was gathering the daisies within reach.

"Yes. It wasn't any opinion you had of me contrary to hers. She thinks for herself; so give me the real stuff."

"Why do you believe she has changed?" Whitcomb returned the other's gaze now doggedly.

"Because, after you left, she wept;—according to impartial testimony, loud and long. Also she dug up my photograph and placed it on a table beside her father's. This information was fed to me with the jelly."

"Blanche Aurora!" exclaimed Whitcomb, scowling.

"Exactly. Now, then!"

"Well," said Whitcomb, "it seems the time to tell you. While you were in the hospital your jabbering aroused my suspicions. I wasn't Henry Radcliffe and I hadn't been forbidden; so I went through some of your papers. When I had found the Antlers correspondence I didn't need to go any farther."

King's thoughtful frown deepened and his face grew slowly and darkly red.

Whitcomb maintained his steady regard. "At that time I didn't know whether you were going to live or not, but I did know that justice was going to be done you."

Recollection of Whitcomb's devotion swept over the other man like a tide, submerging the first sensation of outraged privacy: of having been outwitted.

"You meant well," he said in a low tone.

"Yes, and I did well," said Whitcomb slowly. "I didn't tell Radcliffe till the night before we left Chicago. Harriet was in Wisconsin. I don't know her so well as Linda; but Linda is as fair-minded

as another fellow. There was only one thing to do in her case."

There was a short silence, then Whitcomb continued:—

"I'll tell you frankly that if I had had any idea of the depth of her feeling in the matter, I should have hesitated. This laying down your life for a friend isn't in my line. It's beyond me. You know how I've banked on seeing her. Well, she can't see me. I used to be awfully afraid of you and it passed. Now I'm afraid of you again."

King saw his friend's increasing difficulty of speech, and he put a hand on the big brown arm.

"No cause, Freddy. Absolutely no cause," he said.

There was silence for a time, then King sank back from the erect posture he had maintained.

"It can't be helped," he said, speaking low. "It can't be helped."

"No," said Whitcomb roughly, "and it ought not to be helped. There was no sense in your quixotism."

"Would you, do you believe," asked King slowly,—"would *you* do as much for Linda?"

The other looked up at him sharply.

"Did you do it for Linda?"

"Yes; every act of my life I believed was for Linda," returned King quietly.

"Then"—began Whitcomb excitedly.

"Yes; *then*," interrupted King, still quietly. "Then; not now. It's over. It's finished."

Whitcomb frowned off toward the illimitable sea; and Madge's attempt at consolation came back to him. He repudiated it. Linda Barry was peerless.

CHAPTER XXV

THE MAN AND THE MAID

King's improvement was slow, but steady, and the stretch of good weather upon which he happened on arriving at the Cape enabled him to live out-of-doors and was a great factor in his favor.

Miss Barry called on him very early in his stay, bringing with her an appetizing little custard. It was a form of food which King had always detested, but feigning polite enthusiasm he tasted it to please her, and promptly discovered that the gastronomic question was no longer, "What is it?" but merely, "Where is it?" He finished the custard.

Mrs. Porter was a daily visitor, and one afternoon, when they had walked over to the big rock and were resting there, she told him of her own Arcadian retreat beside the spring.

"In such a little while you will be able to walk as far as that," she said. "You will enjoy seeing Miss Barry's cottage, too. Did you know it was her brother's gift?"

King nodded. "She was telling me about it the other day."

The sun had already begun to paint hues of health on his face and his voice was gaining resonance. "I try to visualize Mr. Barry here in his rôle of 'barefoot boy with cheek of tan,' but it's a hard proposition."

"So it is for Linda. She follows up old Jerry or any one else she can find who went to school with her father, and gleans every possible anecdote of his boyhood."

King leaned his head back on the rock and gazed up into space. "Isn't it wonderful here?" he said. "I've thought many times since I arrived of the old woman who, when she first beheld the ocean, exclaimed, 'Thank the Lord, that at last He's let me see enough of something!'"

"Yes, it's emancipation. Linda and I have often remarked that it would seem impossible to have narrow thoughts here. She doesn't wish to intrude, Bertram, but she would like to come to see you."

King met the sweet, questioning expression of his companion's eyes. "I see plainly," he answered with a smile, "that you and I must have it out about Linda. Your persistent references to her each time you come show that she is very much on your mind."

"She is very much on my mind," returned Mrs. Porter gravely. "I wish you would send a kindly message to her by me, and say that you would be glad to see her."

"But I wouldn't, Maud," returned King mildly. "What would you do in that case? Of course, you know the whole situation, and know that Whitcomb with his grand little revelation bouleversed all Linda's fixed ideas."

"Oh, she is so changed, Bertram," exclaimed Mrs. Porter. "She's not the Linda you knew."

"Perhaps; but it's safe to say that she's still—still tremendous. I'm more or less shaky yet; and I must confess that the prospect of an interview with Linda in a cyclone of repentance makes me—well, shrink. It croozles me, if you know what that means. Sort of takes me in the pit of the

stomach."

"You're all wrong. She has been through the fire, and she has learned self-control." Mrs. Porter paused to choose her words. "She longs, Bertram—longs for your forgiveness.

"I've nothing to forgive her," he returned pleasantly. "She had plenty of company in the mistake she made."

Something in Mrs. Porter's loving look and wistful eyes caused the speaker to change his tone.

"I won't fence with you, Maud. I told you once I loved Linda. I did, with a depth which seemed to exhaust my power of loving. It's true that one doesn't feel a pin-prick when at the same moment he is struck a mortal blow. The fatal fact was not that Linda blamed me for the sorrow that had fallen upon her. It was that there was no desire on her part to give me a chance: to hear my side of the story: none of the extenuation which one ray of love would have naturally expressed. Instead, there was hatred in her eyes. That was the only thing that mattered."

King leaned back against the rock, breathing fast. "I tell you this, Maud. You're the only person in the world who will know it, and we won't speak of it again. I know Linda so well. I know how this revulsion of feeling would express itself with her. She would like to come over here and wait on me by inches. My wish would be her law; but that would matter no more than her mistake about the Antlers. The essential fact has been revealed, and—nothing else matters."

"Is your present feeling for her dislike, then?" asked Mrs. Porter.

"Certainly not."

"It would be no pain to you to meet her?"

"It would be a bore," returned King gently. "Isn't that enough? Of course, it will have to come some day; but I've been a good deal indulged lately, and I believe in putting off an evil day. I should like Linda to have worked off some of her repentant steam before we meet."

King, his self-possession regained, smiled again into his companion's face. "Whitcomb is devoted to her. Let her work it off on him," he added.

"She will never marry him," said Mrs. Porter.

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that," was the polite response.

Mrs. Porter leaned toward her companion with her broad, charming smile.

"Bertram King, that's a lie," she remarked slowly.

He winked and lifted his eyebrows.

"There's a lot for you to learn about love," she went on. "To love unselfishly is the best thing that can happen to anybody."

"There's no such thing as unselfish love," declared King.

"Oh, yes there is, and you proved that you experienced it. You put Linda's happiness above your own. You willingly endured injustice to mitigate her pain. Don't you know that your nature was enriched by that? Don't you know that your action, now that she understands it, reflects upon her, and uplifts her nature and her ideals? We can't crystallize, because we're the children of God; and God is Infinite Love, and Love is a divine principle which is ever active. You assume too much when you hold Linda to the narrow development of her school-girl days. You can remain behind your human defenses and refuse to forgive her if you choose—"

"I told you, and honestly, that I have nothing to forgive."

Mrs. Porter shook her head. "God doesn't treat us so when we turn to Him repentantly. He doesn't say there is nothing to forgive and leave us with the sharp thorn unremoved. That sweet sense that God is Love is borne in upon us after a genuine repentance, and gives the consciousness that we shall be upheld if we long to be, and guarded from a repetition of the offense."

"My dear Maud, you're way beyond my depth."

"No, Bertram, I am not. You reflected something of the divine in that tender protecting love you felt for Linda. I don't despair of you. In spite of all the things you have been saying to fortify your human self, I know, for actions speak louder than words, that a very lofty affection once found place in your heart, and that pure flame cannot die because it was a reflection of that which is immortal and eternal. Never mind Linda. God will take care of her, too. Your business is with your own thought, to keep it in a high place, trusting to be led to that happiness which God has prepared for them that love Him, without outlining what that happiness shall consist in."

King drew a long breath and smiled, looking long and affectionately at his companion.

"Isn't she the great little preacher!" he remarked.

"Oh, it's all so simple!" exclaimed Mrs. Porter softly, clasping her hands together. "Why can't everybody see it!"

When she went home to-day, she told Linda nothing of this interview. The girl had ceased to cross-question her friend on her return from these visits; for she never received any satisfaction, and the invitation she longed for never came.

Blanche Aurora was very much alive to the fact that her adored one was the only member of the family who had not called on the convalescent. She was not entirely satisfied to have it so. King's

photograph had been framed, and Blanche Aurora in the growing scarcity of wild roses made little bouquets of clover and daisies and placed them between the two pictures, and she noticed that Linda allowed the sharing.

Whitcomb came to call sometimes, but between his attentions to King and the carrying out of Madge's various plans, his time was pretty well occupied.

Late one afternoon Blanche Aurora found Linda in the hammock and alone. She seized her opportunity.

"Say, Miss Linda," she began, "we've got a real good Bavarian cream for Mr. King's supper. 'Tain't convenient for me to take it over. I wonder if you could."

Linda sat up, and regarded the white-aproned short figure. The pink bow atop quivered with the depth of its owner's imaginings and deep-laid schemes. The keen eyes observed that Linda flushed and hesitated.

"Mrs. Porter is still in Portland?" she asked.

"Why, yes, and didn't you know Miss Barry went too? I've got to get their supper, you see; and the cream come out awful good."

Linda rose. "Yes, I'll go," she said quietly; but there was no quiet within.

All the way across the field, her heart hurried. She had never called at the Benslow house. To go for the first time to see King, without his request, and risk his betraying, perhaps, before the others, that she was unwelcome, was an ordeal which she dreaded, but the desire to see him rose above the confusion of her crowding thoughts, and though her hands trembled on the covered bowl she pushed on.

The lovely late afternoon light struck across the field. Bertram King, wandering down from the piazza, noted the golden sheen upon the grass and the majestic cloud-effects in the vast arch above. His near-sighted eyes beheld a white figure advancing in the golden light.

He hastened his steps in welcome.

"Good for you," he cried. "I was getting very tired of myself. There's been an exodus from here to Portland to-day. I know I'm a big boy now, since Whitcomb was willing to leave me. Even Miss Benslow is out and I'm holding the fort."

All the time that his words were calling through the still air, he was walking toward the visitor. Linda's face from doubt grew radiant. The relieved, happy color rose in her cheeks. Her lovely eyes beamed. In her white gown and with her shining, grateful joy, she was very beautiful as her light springing step brought her near and into King's field of vision. His breath caught in the shock and he stood stock-still.

"I'm glad to see you, too, Bertram," she cried. Her eyes were starry, her smile enchanting.

"Why, Linda! I beg your pardon. I thought you were Maud," he exclaimed.

The change in his tone, his blank surprise and ebbing eagerness, set Linda's heart to beating wildly. The stricture in her bosom drew back the radiant promise from her face.

King saw the transformation with a pang. "Forgive my shouting at you like that," he went on, struggling for his self-possession. It was as if Linda's soul had been revealed to him for an instant, joyous, hopeful, humble: the new Linda of whom Maud had spoken.

"You have something for me, I'll wager," he continued. He could see the white napkin trembling in the suddenly unsteady hands. "Let me take it," suiting the action to the word. "I've grown arrogantly used to bowls coming across this field filled with something delicious, designed to upholster these bones."

Linda had made good use of the time he gave her. Her throat was free again. She could speak. "You look better than I expected," she said quietly.

"And you, too, Linda. You do credit to the place." King was trying to regain some of the plans he had formulated for their first interview; but they had been designed to baffle effusiveness, and this girl in the white gown seemed to radiate calm.

"Yes," she returned. "I have Blanche Aurora's word for it that the Bavarian cream in that bowl is good. There has been an exodus to Portland from our house, too, so she asked me to bring it over."

"Awfully good of you," said King, hot with mingled sensations. "There never was any one so spoiled as I."

"I must run back now," said Linda. "I can see that you will soon have the freedom of the neighborhood, and we shall be looking for you at Aunt Belinda's."

"Oh, don't desert me," begged King. It was as if he had obtained the promise of a wonderful gift: the lavish outpouring of a rich nature. A veil had fallen, concealing it: a veil, pure, white, impenetrable. Linda's eyes and voice were friendly, self-possessed.

"Blanche Aurora says snacks are good for you when you're sick and delicate," he went on; "but never have I been reduced to eating a snack alone. It's tea-time, too. Couldn't you make me some tea?"

Linda's dimple appeared. "I'm afraid the duty of a host presses upon you. I'd better not. I've never called at the Benslows'. Besides, you say there's not a chaperone on the place."

"There are the hens," said King eagerly. "Won't they do? You never saw so many in your life. Come. We'll have tea on the piazza. Whitcomb has rigged up an old sail across one end so Boreas shan't strike my frail form too roughly."

He turned back toward the house, beseeching her with his eyes, and Linda followed in silence. "I'm getting to know this bowl," continued King, lifting it and investigating its blue stripes. "It's a magic one, never empty excepting when I get through with it. We'll have two spoons. I'm not stingy."

As they ascended the rickety piazza steps, King continued: "The tea-table is in there in the living-room. I'll get—" he staggered, and stopped. Whitcomb had been right when he said that his friend couldn't yet bear excitement.

Linda, looking up, saw him grow ghastly pale.

"Oh, confound it!" he gasped.

The blue-and-white bowl fell from his hands down among Luella's sweet-pea vines. He managed to take a step toward the steamer chair, collapsed into it, and fainted away ignominiously.

Linda threw herself on her knees beside him. "Bertram, Bertram!" she cried in grief and terror. It was for her father and for her that the strong man had come to this. She slipped her arm around him. In her inexperience she thought he might be dying.

"Oh, Bertram, speak to me!" she cried. There was a pitcher of water on the neighboring table. She dipped her handkerchief into it and dabbed his brow and his fair hair, and softly between dry sobs she called his name. They were alone in the remote, tumbledown house. Even the ocean's mighty grasp of its rocks sounded distant. There was no one to call upon save the invisible Reality, and Linda turned her full heart to the very present help.

In a minute, which seemed to her an hour, consciousness began to return to King. Her arm was around him; she had drawn his cheek against her bosom. As he slowly realized his position and heard her low voice, he seemed again to see Linda as she had come toward him in her white gown across the green gold of the field. Every paining haunting memory was submerged in a strange, ineffable bliss.

Without opening his eyes he spoke her name.

"Yes, Bertram, yes," she responded joyfully.

"I love you, Linda."

Her heart bounded, and he felt it; and she did not change her position.

"I shall always love you. Whitcomb has stirred your gratitude toward me. I don't care for it."

"Yes, I know," answered the girl, still holding him close.

"You wouldn't palm that off on me, would you?"

"I want to be fair"—the response was low. King's hands lay loosely before him. "All that I am sure of is that I belong to you, Bertram."

"Are you certain that's all? It's a good deal, but it's not enough."

Linda's bosom labored. She remembered the longings of the last weeks, the many moments of despair.

"Father loved you so," she uttered.

"That's not enough, either."

She drew herself gently away from him, but remained on her knees. He sat up in the low chair, and their faces were on a level. Into hers returned that look of riches unutterable and her eyes poured their gift into his. She clasped her hands across her breast as she gazed.

The arms that had held him so close and protectingly felt empty.

"I love you, Bertram," she said, the words falling from her lips like a vow.

Instantly the man's loose-lying hands became vital. King clasped her to him. Their cheeks clung together and they kissed.

CHAPTER XXVI

A DIPLOMATIST

Luella Benslow had enjoyed her round of afternoon calls. She had paraded the importance of the guests she was "accommodating" and had swelled with satisfaction in the interest she had elicited.

In this complacent state of mind she was passing near Belinda Barry's cottage on the way home when she observed a strange object on the roof of the shed. The thing, whatever it was, moved, seeming to grow and shrink again before her eyes. Luella owned some spectacles, but they were worn only in private and reposed in these days in the kitchen drawer, from which they occasionally emerged stealthily when some exigency arose like the reading of a label on a spice

box.

It was out of her way to go nearer to the cottage, but that mysterious manifestation on the roof of the shed was too great a temptation for flesh and blood to resist.

She changed her route and approached. In a minute the object, recognizing her, rose to its full height and faced her cautious advance.

"For the land's sake!" exclaimed Miss Benslow in a minute more. She stood still.

"Blanche Aurora Martin, what under the canopy are you doin' up there? Don't you know you'll defame them shingles?"

Blanche Aurora looked down on the newcomer, who was dressed in her very best. About her neck hung chains enough to excite the envy of the aborigines. On her head she wore a hat with an ostrich feather which stood up bravely, although its appearance suggested that a sea-bath had been one of its many trying experiences.

"I'll bet Belinda ain't to home," went on Miss Benslow accusingly, and the culprit stood at ease, her arms akimbo.

"I should think you was old enough by this time not to go caperin' around on roofs. What you up there for?"

"Lookin' for my gum," replied Blanche Aurora.

"You needed a spyglass for that, did you?"

Indeed, the accused was balancing a long slender glass on one hip.

"You know the store Miss Barry sets by that glass, and I'll bet she wouldn't let you touch it. Your folks must be all out, the way you're actin'. The idea o' stickin' your gum up on that roof. Get it and come down this minute. It's dretful bad for them shingles."

"Oh, I don't care 'bout my gum anyway. I don't chaw no more 'cause Miss Linda don't like to have me."

With surprising ease and carelessness the speaker dropped to a sitting posture, slid down the low shed roof and landed upright at Miss Benslow's feet.

The visitor started back. "My heart!" she exclaimed, clapping to her breast the hand not burdened with a blue parasol. "A wonder you didn't drop that glass, you naughty girl."

"Oh, dry up!" remarked Blanche Aurora nonchalantly.

"How dare you address me so! Don't you know your sister is in my employ?"

"What's that got to do with the high price o' putty?" inquired the other in a swaggering manner.

"Well!" ejaculated Miss Benslow wrathfully. "Your wonderful Miss Linda don't seem to have improved your manners as much as she has your attire. I hope Letty Martin knows there's nobody at my house that's goin' to rig *her* up in pink ribbons. We ain't such fools over there: though I guess the Lindsays could buy and sell Linda Barry since her c'lamities, and the *gentlemen* that I'm accawmodatin'—" Miss Benslow raised her scanty eyebrows impressively—"is simply *made* o' money! Good gracious," she added in a different tone, "here I am wastin' my time with you, and Mr. King left alone all this time. He might want somethin'!" She turned with an air of pressing business.

Blanche Aurora had pricked up her ears at the last remark.

"Alone?" she repeated, with sudden interest. "Has your folks all gone too?"

The spyglass from the roof had discerned a white gown on the Benslow piazza, but the disturbing question had been to whom it belonged. Mrs. Lindsay or her daughter might have been keeping the invalid company, while Miss Linda wandered away for a walk. The little girl's brain worked fast.

"Say, I'm sorry I was impident to you," she said, with conciliatory meekness.

"Well, you'd better be," snapped Luella, pausing to loosen a point of her parasol from the fringe of her cape.

"Say, you don't need to hurry right off, do you? I'm all alone."

Miss Benslow looked suspiciously at the speaker. It was too much to ask one to believe that saucy Blanche Aurora, with her tip-tilted nose and her bold eyes, was really penitent.

"Yes, I do," she retorted, unmollified. "If this pesky parasol will ever let go that fringe."

"Let me fix it," offered the meek one; and she did fix it so effectively that for almost five minutes more Miss Benslow stood there, fuming.

"Oh, pshaw, let it go!" she exclaimed at last, jerking away; and with the jerk the parasol freed itself.

"Oh, say, Luella—I mean Miss Benslow. I feel so kind o' lonely. You've got a fireless cooker, hain't you? I don't see why you have to hurry so."

"Of course I've got a fireless cooker, and a new blue-flame stove, and a receipt book better than any thing *you* ever saw."

"Well, I was only goin' to say wouldn't you like some violet perfume on your handkercher? I've got

some perfectly ellergunt and you're a-carryin' such a pretty handkercher."

"That there handkercher," announced Miss Benslow proudly, "was brought me by a gentleman, the last time he was to Portland."

"Oh, I didn't know as Mr. King was strong enough to go to Portland," said Blanche Aurora humbly, touching the handkerchief admiringly.

"He ain't," declared the visitor, with a grand air. "'T warn't him. 'T was somebody quite different: somebody that calls me Luella." The visitor giggled. "He asked me if he might."

"I wonder," said Blanche Aurora with an awestruck air, "if it could 'a' ben that spullendid Mr. Whitcomb!"

"Well," returned the other, smiling and bridling, "that's jest who it is. He wants me to call him Fred, but I'm awful shy that way. I may some day, but I haven't yet. You needn't tell nobody, but Madge Lindsay is perfectly crazy over him. She tries to hide it, but she can't from me. I've got eyes and ears. She sings to him on the piazza these moonlight nights and plays on a thing that looks like a big potater-bug. She calls it a bandelin."

"I think you're real smart to get along with such a big family," said Blanche Aurora with the same admiring air.

"Well, I didn't know's I could, fust off; but you see, it was this way. Miss Lindsay she confided in me. Madge was gittin' strong and beginnin' to hanker to git away where things was gay,—the merry whirl, you know—"

Oh, yes; Blanche Aurora's nod, and her close, respectful attention showed that though young and inexperienced she did know.

—"So jest at that crucical time there come this appeal from Fred—I mean Mr. Whitcomb—in Chicago, and Mis' Lindsay says to me, she says, 'I b'lieve if my daughter had her cousin here to play with she'd settle down contented again. I don't want her to go away yet.' Cousin!"—contemptuously—"'T ain't any very near cousin, I guess; and I can tell you she does play with him—and *to* him—and *at* him. Oh"—with sudden recollection—"ain't I smart! I must go."

"Well, jest a minute, Miss Benslow. I'll bet it would please Mr. Whitcomb like everything to have that spullendid handkercher smellin' good. Jest come in my room a minute."

Once in the room Luella found her hostess so entertaining that she stayed another ten minutes, admiring the pretty things which closet and dresser revealed, and which under ordinary circumstances their owner would have guarded sedulously from these inquisitive eyes and loquacious lips. However, it was all for Miss Linda. Of course, Blanche Aurora couldn't be certain that her adored one wanted this extra latitude, but her absorption in Linda had made her preternaturally observing; besides, she remembered those sobs.

Her quick conclusion was that it were better to let Luella Benslow tell all over the neighborhood about her stockings and petticoats than to interrupt the interview which the spyglass had revealed.

"Why, it must be time for the folks to be gettin' home!" ejaculated Miss Benslow at last, with a return of panic. "I'll have to run every step o' the way."

Blanche Aurora gave a sweet smile of contentment and sought no further to detain her guest. She watched from the window, and laughed wickedly as the ostrich feather veered and swung in the half-lope, half-run of its conscience-smitten wearer.

Halfway across the field Miss Benslow met a white-clothed figure moving unhurriedly.

"Why, Miss Linda, I thought you was to Portland," she said, breathless from her race. At the same time a hope sprang within her. "Was you to my house?" she added.

"Yes."

"I'm real sorry we was all out, 'cause you ain't ben neighborly." Miss Benslow strove for easy elegance, but she was out of breath, and again that pesky parasol had caught in her fringe. "Did you see Mr. King?"

"Yes."

"I'd ought to ben home sooner to give him his tea, but I hadn't a time-piece with me."

"I gave him his tea."

"Oh, I'm so thankful! Now I can ketch my breath. You'll call again, won't you?"

The radiant young girl blessed Miss Benslow with a wonderful smile.

"Yes. I'll come again to-morrow," she answered graciously, and passed on her way.

Miss Benslow turned to look after the lithe, graceful figure crossing Elysian fields.

"It's the first time I ever got a square look at her," she soliloquized in surprise at her own impression. "She's a—a"—she hesitated for a simile for the perfect simplicity of the girl's appearance, and that enchanting smile. "I'd call her a sunlight beauty," she finished, and trudged on.

Blanche Aurora, watching the road at the back of the house for Captain Jerry's carriage, didn't see Linda until she had nearly reached the piazza. The child then ran to the front door and in her eagerness slammed the screen behind her and stood waiting.

As soon as she met her friend's eyes she began to flush. Yes, it had been worth while! It surely had been worth while! Her heart hammered.

The white figure came on out of the sunshine into the shadow where Blanche Aurora stood transfixed.

"You good little thing," said Linda slowly, and she put an arm around the small shoulders and stooping, kissed a burning cheek.

"Where's the bowl?" demanded Blanche Aurora, her emotion driving her to take refuge in the practical.

"Among Miss Benslow's sweet-pea vines," returned Linda, her dimple at its deepest. "He—we dropped it, and it broke."

"And that Bavarian cream?"

"I suppose the hens ate it up in no time," confessed the messenger.

"I won't trust you again," said Blanche Aurora, with shining eyes. "Mr. King must be starved."

"No, I fed him with tea and cakes. Please trust me again. Please send me back to-morrow."

The little girl and the big girl exchanged a long look; and during it the possibility dawned upon the elder that this infant had designed and carried out a plan!

She colored slowly, continuing to gaze into the shining eyes, but Blanche Aurora retired demurely with a word about supper, and alone in the kitchen executed a dance which threatened every stick of furniture in the place.

Linda was still standing there watching the violet sea, so different from its morning dazzle of blue, when Jerry Holt's carryall approached. His voice was loud and defensive.

"I telled Mis' Lindsay and Madge they could sqwut to the depot till I got back," he was saying.

"Why, Jerry," said Miss Barry. "I would have let you take them home first. I thought they decided to go in the street car and walk the half-mile."

"My rule's fust come, fust served," responded Captain Jerry inexorably. "I seen you git off the train fust."

"But they have an invalid over at their house," pursued Miss Barry.

"I know they hev. Thet Whitcomb feller seen a car comin' and he said he could make it quicker'n Molly could." The Captain's feelings had evidently been hurt in the most sensitive spot. "Says I, 'Go it then, young man;' and I made up my mind to haul you fust. Madge wanted to go with him, but her mother didn't want to sqwut alone, nor she didn't want to walk the half-mile neither, so Madge stayed."

"Why, we had room for Mrs. Lindsay," said Mrs. Porter.

"No"—the driver's response was firm. "Not with all them bags and bundles." He smiled a smile of satisfaction at the punishment he had meted out. "Now, I guess I'll go back and haul 'em," he added, as his passengers alighted. "They'll be tired o' sqwuttin'. They're dretful uneasy folks, anyway. What ye lookin' at, Linda?" he added, loud and cheerfully.

The girl turned toward him, and came to meet the arrivals. "My future," she answered.

He regarded her admiringly. He had never seen her like this.

"Seems to be a bright one," he remarked, grinning. "Ye'd better git some smoked glasses if ye're goin' to look at it long. Git ap, Molly."

With a grating of wheels the old carryall turned around and moved on its way.

"You bet the Cape agrees with them city folks," he soliloquized.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE FULL MOON

"I declare that was too bad of Jerry," said Miss Barry. "He's usually so"—her voice died away because she became aware of Linda, standing before her, a sort of glorified presence. "Hey?" she finished sharply.

The girl had one of Mrs. Porter's hands and with the other arm she now softly embraced her bewildered aunt, then drew away far enough to look into the questioning eyes of first one and then the other.

"You've both had so much trouble with me," she said.

"Well?" returned Miss Barry crisply. "Is it over?"

The girl nodded.

"Linda," said Mrs. Porter, with excited urgency, "what has happened, dear?"

The girl continued to look at them for a moment of silence, as if loath to let her secret pass her lips.

"Bertram!" exclaimed Mrs. Porter.

Linda nodded.

Miss Barry gave her niece a shake. "Speak out," she said, cross in the mounting excitement of the moment. "Has he been over here?"

"No. I went there. Blanche Aurora sent me with a snack. The hens got the snack; but—we had tea."

"Oh, you darling!" exclaimed Mrs. Porter under the eloquent eyes and dimples. "You shall kiss her first, Miss Barry. Hurry up. I can't wait."

"I don't see any reason for kissing her," said Miss Barry, and her earrings quivered with what she was repressing. "Feeding dainties to the hens. The idea!"

"Oh, there is a reason, there is a reason, Aunt Belinda." Her namesake spoke softly, and taking her in her arms kissed her. "How good you've been to me!" she said tenderly.

Then Mrs. Porter had her turn, and the eyes of both women grew wet in their long embrace.

"Well, give *me* some place to sit down," said Miss Barry desperately. She looked around and found a piazza chair, into which she dropped. "In all my born days I never saw such a girl. She's either got to hang a man to a sour apple tree, or else she's got to marry him!"

Over at the homestead Bertram King was winning golden laurels from his self-appointed caretaker.

At the supper table his novel vivacity and good appetite gave him the appearance of complete recovery.

"See here," remarked Whitcomb, "solitary confinement is evidently all you've been needing. We'll clear out soon again. Even you went away, didn't you, Luella?" The speaker turned to Miss Benslow, whom on his return he had discovered scrambling about to get supper in her robes of state. She was now waiting on table and blessing Jerry Holt for his dilatoriness in bringing the Lindsays home.

"I did step out for a spell," she returned in her best manner; "but I guess I warn't missed," she added coyly. "Miss Linda Barry gave Mr. King his tea."

"Really!" drawled Madge Lindsay. "How cleverly she chose the right moment for her first call."

"There are cats in the room," announced Whitcomb, helping himself to honey.

Madge lifted her eyebrows and made a defiant grimace.

"I met her as she was a-comin' back," said Luella. "I guess she felt dretful bad not findin' me home, 'cause she said she'd call again to-morrer."

This remark coming under the head of what Madge called "juices," she glanced at Whitcomb for sympathy, but he was preoccupied. He was looking curiously at King's debonair countenance.

"It's jest as well I warn't in, *I* think," continued Miss Benslow, casting Whitcomb her most kittenish glance. "Mr. King's tay-a-tay seems to 'a' done him a world o' good."

The object of her remark caught his friend's eye and laughed frankly. Whitcomb reflected the laugh with a smile, but his curious interest precluded much notice of Luella's sallies. He regarded King's good cheer and increased color questioningly. Evidently Linda had used tact and succeeded in making her peace, and the talk had relieved King as well as herself. He wondered whether his friend would tell him of the interview or leave it to his imagination.

"To-morrow, tennis!" cried Madge triumphantly; "and don't we deserve it, Freddy?"

"We do, we do," he replied, returning with gusto to the hot biscuit and honey and lobster salad.

When the meal was finished, Whitcomb pantomimed throwing a ball at Madge and raised questioning eyebrows.

"All right," she said, rising with alacrity.

"Oh, you crazy children," protested Mrs. Lindsay, "are you going to play ball? Can't you be satisfied to be still a minute? Freddy, you'll take all her nice new ten pounds off her."

But the young people only laughed. Though Madge Lindsay might drawl, she could throw a ball like a boy, and in default of King, Whitcomb, whose muscles were always crying out to be used, was glad to accept her.

Mrs. Lindsay went to the kitchen with Luella to bestow the provisions she had purchased, and King strolled out on the piazza and watched his friend and Madge.

The girl was still in her smart tailor gown. From previous observation of her tactics he believed that when the game was over she would change her dress before starting in on her evening; and he watched for that psychological moment when she should disappear.

The moon was full to-night, and with the marvelous obligingness of Maine weather the wind had gone down with the sun, making the out-of-doors even more attractive by night than by day. As the twilight deepened, the great planet changed from silver to gold.

When at last the ball players took off their leather gloves, Madge spoke wistfully.

"I wish we could go out on that moon path! Think of this heavenly night and no boat except that old smelly tub of Mr. Benslow's! When we come again, Freddy—"

She stopped, and he smiled down at her brilliant dark face, rosy with exercise and brown from the sun.

"Yes, next time sure," he said. "You see I didn't want to do anything about a boat so long as King couldn't go out."

"You're the best friend I ever knew," declared the girl. "Wait till I get on another frock. We'll drag him with us over to the rock. The Loreleis will be singing to-night, I am sure."

"One will, I hope," returned Whitcomb. She skipped before him. "You've never seen me dance," she said. "Before the moon goes I must dance for you on the grass. I have a costume here and my castanets."

"You'd be a wonderful Carmen," returned Whitcomb, regarding her lithe dipping and swinging, admiringly.

"Oh, mar-velous!" she rejoined. "So long," and taking the rickety piazza steps two at a time she disappeared into the house.

King immediately buttonholed his friend. "Come over to the tent, will you?" he said.

"Sure thing," returned Whitcomb, flinging an arm around the other's shoulders.

They crossed the grass and entering the tent sat down on camp-stools in the opening, where the increasing mystery and magic of the night was spread before them.

"I can see that you and Linda have fixed it up," said Whitcomb. "She has worried her head off for fear the old friendship would never be renewed. She thinks an awful lot of you, old man."

At the beginning of this speech King looked up eagerly. Could it be that his task was going to be so easy?

But as Whitcomb continued, his look veered away, back to the moon path.

"Yes, we fixed it up," he replied.

There was a space of silence during which he tried to decide how to go on.

"You've been frank with me, Freddy, at various times regarding Linda, and I've been rather surprised lately to notice that you're not very assiduous in your attentions over there."

Whitcomb's eyes also sought the moon path and a perplexed line came in his forehead.

"No," he admitted. "Something has happened to Linda. She's different. I can't say that she ever let me come very near to her, but now—since she left Chicago, she has grown away from me; far away. She seems to have a lot of new ideas that I can't follow. I don't seem to get on with her."

"And you do get on with Madge Lindsay?" suggested King.

"Isn't she a peach?" ejaculated Whitcomb, turning to his companion a suddenly bright face. "Why, it's like owning a whole vaudeville company to be with her. Little slender thing that looks as if you could snap her in two between your thumb and finger; but game! Gee, but she's game!"

"She is game," agreed King, the vapor-cloud which had obscured a trifle the full sun of his happiness melting away.

"Of course, a man doesn't connect sentiment with that sort of girl," went on Whitcomb, "but she's a comrade: just as good as a chap, you know."

"I understand perfectly," returned King, "but sometimes these delightful chaps in petticoats have very feminine hearts; and you don't want to break them in two between thumb and finger."

"Oh, rot," returned Whitcomb, trying not to look pleased. "There she is," he continued, starting up from his camp-stool as a figure in a pale wrap of some sort came out on the piazza. "That's another thing about Madge. She can change her clothes in a jiffy."

"Hold on a bit, will you?" said King quietly.

"Sure. Long as you like. Madge and I thought perhaps you'd come over to the rock with us and listen to the Loreleis."

"I haven't quite finished telling you, Freddy. You know I said something to you about the past being dead and all that."

"Yes."

"Well—I was mistaken. Linda and I—"

Whitcomb turned like a flash and dropped back on the camp-stool.

"What?"

"We fixed it up this afternoon for all time."

"*What!*"

"Yes. It's a trite thing for a fellow to call himself the happiest man on earth, but Linda has given me back everything I had lost. I am as much a new man as if I had been created to-day."

The quiet words thrilled through Whitcomb. He tried to answer and gulped. Tried again, and

shook his friend's responsive hand.

"You deserve it," was all he could manage to utter.

"I want to go over there to-night, Freddy."

"You can't walk that far."

"Try me. I've never seen Miss Barry's cottage, and I—well, I can't stay away."

"We'll walk over with you, then," said Whitcomb gravely. He walked toward Madge and called her, and she came springing across the grass.

"Ho for the rock?" she cried gayly.

"No. King wants to go to Miss Barry's. He thinks he's up to it. We'll walk over with him."

The three moved away across the enchanted field. The night was hushed. Even the tide whispered. Not yet sounded the *crescendo* which would culminate at midnight in a crashing, magnificent choral.

Madge scented something novel in the mental atmosphere. Her companions were grateful for her easy chatter.

When they neared the shingled cottage she protested tentatively.

"Oh, do we have to go into the house on such a glorious night?"

"You and I are not going in," answered Whitcomb quietly.

They stood a moment near the piazza steps.

"Good-night, King." The two men shook hands. "I think that is Linda now over there in the hammock. Give my love to her, will you?"

"I will."

Above the dazzle of golden water and under the pulsing beat of the stars, King moved up the steps.

There was a stir in the shadow at the end of the piazza and in a moment one word sounded on the still air.

"Bertram!"

The voice and its tone wrenched some deeply rooted fiber in Whitcomb's being and all his blood seemed trying to rush at once to his heart.

Madge, too, heard the revealing joy of the single word. As they turned to walk back, her clinging silken draperies stirred, and she slipped her hand through her companion's arm, and clasped it.

"It's a vast sea," she said softly.

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