THE COURT OF LOVE

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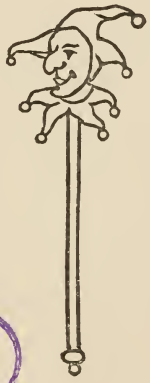
by

ALICE BROWN



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I

AT ten o'clock in the evening Peter Maxwell's library was a scene of organized flight. The great table, a third of its length covered by a card catalogue of alphabetical precision, was strewn with pamphlets, some of them tied in bundles and others cast about as they had fallen from rapid assortment. A portmanteau was near the door, and a pile of wraps lay on the sofa. A lady's

ulster hung over a chair. At one of the windows, where the velvet curtains hung trembling from the haste with which they had been pushed aside, stood Stirling, the butler, presenting to the room, where there was no one to observe him, an expansive back, sleek in plumpness under its stretch of shining broadcloth. The window was up, and he was leaning forward, watching for something which, it was evident, did not appear ; for, as he withdrew his head and closed the window, there was palpable disappointment on his smug face. He paused a moment in thought, his small eyes sharply ruminative, a finger on his lips. Then he went to the telephone at the opposite side of the room, and rang up the Charity Office in a business part of the town.

"Mr. Maxwell?" he inquired, with professional deference, when his call was answered. "Oh! Mr. Maxwell's secretary, sir? Only to ask when Mr. Maxwell is likely to be home, sir. To — to remind him, sir, that he is to take the midnight train with Mrs. Maxwell. Thank you, sir. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver, and halted a moment, again in thought. He straightened then, — a swift decision as visible in the act as if he had called and some inner cleverness had counseled, — hurried over to the window, threw up the sash, and looked. Apparently satisfied, he closed the sash, took a lighted candle from the mantel, returned, and began waving it about before the panes in a rhythmic signaling. There was a rustle of silk, but he did not hear it; and thus heralded, Mrs.

Maxwell appeared on the threshold and began looking at him in an amazement tempered by the kindliest feeling. She was a slender woman, hollow-cheeked and dark, with shadows under her violet eyes, and the hint of significant lines about her pretty mouth. She wore her traveling dress and her hat.

"Stirling!" she said, in a voice in which authority was qualified by surprise.

He turned with a twirl of his large yet agile person, and, faultlessly obsequious, set the candle back on the mantel.

"Stirling," said the lady, her voice now touched by curiosity, "what are you doing with that candle?"

Stirling replied at once, with ease and gravity.

"Gymnastics, Mrs. Maxwell. I find

myself a little relaxed after being in the house all day."

The lady advanced to the chair where her ulster hung, and probed the pockets for gloves and veil, which, finding, she returned again to their recess.

"Well, you don't need a candle, do you?" she asked vaguely; and Stirling answered with the same grave assurance:

"My clubs are in my room, Mrs. Maxwell. So I — I took a candle."

"Oh!" said the lady, her mind on other things. She walked to the table, and began displacing the manuscripts with uncertain fingers, while the man watched her in hot impatience. Suddenly she looked up at him.

"Does Mr. Maxwell intend to take these with him?"

"Some of them, I believe, Mrs. Maxwell. I was to leave them exactly as he did when he went away this morning."

She continued poking in an absent fashion, that, as Stirling knew, did her no good, and might cause him some harm.

"There 's no message from him?" she said at last, looking up from her desultory amusement.

"I took the liberty of telephoning the Charity Office a minute ago, mum. Mr. Maxwell was detained by a meeting. Mr. Maxwell is on his way home."

She was listening, but not to him.

"Did I hear the door?" she asked. The color had run into her face. It took years from her account.

"Yes, mum," said Stirling hopefully,

making as if to go. "I 'm sure you did, mum."

Instantly she was all hurry and zeal. "Strap them up!" she ordered, pointing to the rugs. "I 'll meet him."

The moment she was over the sill, Stirling seized the candle and ran again to the window. There he signaled fitfully for a moment, and then opened the window and spoke:

"They 'll take the midnight train, if he 's here in time. Doubtful, — doubtful, I say. Come round in five minutes and see whether he 's here. Three waves — so — means 'yes.' Bring the beer round the back way."

He closed the window in noiseless haste, and when Mrs. Maxwell, announced again by the sifting rustle of silk, entered the room, he was on his

knees rolling wraps fastidiously. All the color had gone out of her face.

"It was n't he," she said, with the indifference of one used to disappointment. "Stirling!"

"Yes, Mrs. Maxwell."

"Is my trunk strapped?"

"Yes, Mrs. Maxwell."

"If any one calls while we are away, say Mr. Maxwell has gone to Virginia. Say we shall be absent for two weeks."

"Very well, mum."

She was pacing back and forth.

"Stirling," she said irrepressibly, "do you think he 'll miss the train?"

The butler answered fervently:

"I hope not, mum."

It seemed friendly of him, and, in the community of their haste, she turned to him with an air of mature

importance. It suited a playhouse. It was the air of one who seldom did real duties, but innocently took the credit of them.

"Remember, Stirling, I leave you in charge of the house. I have implicit confidence in you."

"Thank you, mum," said the butler.

There was a bang of the door below, and again the color flashed into her face. There were running steps upon the stairs, and though she turned toward the door, Peter Maxwell had reached it first, and she had to meet him before the butler. Yet she did rush forward, crying:

"Peter! it 's after ten o'clock."

He did not see her. Settling his eyeglasses on his firm nose, after a dab at them with his handkerchief, he went at once to the table and, frowning over

their disorder, began sweeping up the papers she had troubled. Peter was a sandy man of medium height, inexplicably likable. His blue eyes were sharp and foolishly innocent by turns, behind the glittering bulwark of his glasses. His head was bald, with a tonsure of red crop, and in some fashion that also added to his lovable quality. He was a combination of the baby and the steam engine, a man cursed by an insatiable activity and gifted with a devotion to statistics and their attendant pains. It was a reactionary fever. He was not merely master of these dry passions. They mastered him. The owner of inherited wealth, he lived for tabulation and columns of figures. They were all meant to work out the good of men, for there brooded also, in his odd brain, a bashful love of his spe-

cies. He was a philanthropist, little as he looked it.

"Stirling!" he called; but before the butler could reach him, Mrs. Maxwell was at his side. Her attitude clamored for notice, not from mere egotism, but because, experience told her, if he were not reminded of earthly ties, he might escape her, and their trip die prematurely. At the touch of her hand on his arm, he looked at her, first absorbedly, then benevolently.

"Tie these up," he said, passing Stirling a bundle of papers. Then, as he rapidly assorted, tucking into drawers and pigeonholes, he remarked:

"Hullo, Kit! I've heard from Jack Silverstream."

"Your trunk is n't quite ready," said his wife, in the cheerful expansiveness of one who heartens herself, but vainly.

"Don't you want to run up and finish, dear?"

"My old chum, you know, Silverstream," continued Peter. "Most extraordinary piece of luck. Letter from him, written from London."

Mrs. Maxwell spoke soothingly:

"Yes, dear. Tell me about it on the train. You're not going to take a lot of papers, are you?"

"Jack's publishers want a book on Amusements for the Insane. Jack recommended me. In two months. I'm to rush it — rush it."

"Well, dear, see to your trunk. There's a good boy! Throat all right to-day?"

"Stirling!" said Mr. Maxwell.

"Yes, sir."

"Put a change into a grip. Chuck these in, too."

He thrust a bundle of papers into the butler's hand, and Stirling, transfixed for a moment with the unpleasant surprise of it, stared him in the face, looked wildly at the candle on the mantel, and then, conquered by circumstances, left the room. Peter Maxwell, when he had his own way, thought of statistics; but occasionally events were such that he had to consider his wife. This was a moment that must be met. He turned to her in a rueful yet dogged fashion, and began: "Kit!"

She was looking at him hotly. There were signs of tears in the angry eyes and about her tight-shut mouth. Peter grew sulky, as men and women must when they find themselves prejudged.

"I 'm awfully sorry, Kit," he said.

She was silent. He was aggrieved. It

seemed a shame to have a wife who would refuse him a hand when he was down.

"The fact is, Kit," he said irascibly, "I could n't any more take this trip than I could eat my head. I 've got to write my book. I 've got to write it now."

"Why have you?"

He stammered, and his bald head reddened. Then he answered, in immemorial phrase: "Because I have." That seemed deficient in warmth of originality, and he added, like a child in the sulks: "It 's the chance of a lifetime."

She smiled upon him speciously.

"Take your vacation, dear. Do your writing after we come back."

"Vacation! George, Kit! don't you see what I 've got to do? I' ve got to

spend the next two weeks investigating."

"You 've done nothing but investigate since I 've known you."

"No, I have n't, Kit, no, I have n't." He avowed it with a boyish eagerness. "I 've tabulated. This is different. It must be vivid, Jack says, vivid. What I need now is color. I must take two weeks for the asylums."

She melted. She could pardon him any misbegotten taste if only she might share it with him.

"We won't think of Virginia," she said, in sweet concession. "Have your old asylums. I 'll go with you."

His face fell disconcertingly, and, wise in signs of matrimonial weather, she understood.

"No, no!" she cried jealously; "you can go alone."

Peter spoke in that easy fashion which indicates the mind driven to elaborate defense.

"These are investigations, Kit. You know — investigations! The very things you hate."

This he presented her with an air of happy discovery. She was turning away in that finality he knew, deplored, and yet welcomed as a practical solution and time-saver. It was a pity, as much of a pity as anything he experienced; yet when she had swept away and had gone up to cry, he could undoubtedly return to his card catalogues and his printed blanks. She stopped. Hot blood came up in her.

"Peter," she said, "how long have I waited for this holiday?"

He was staring at her like a culprit sorry for countless things, all touching

himself: sorry it had been necessary to commit the crime, sorry the sentence is so long in coming.

"I have waited," said Mrs. Maxwell, "exactly three years."

"Well!" said Peter. He said it regretfully, yet his haste prompted him to add: "Now, Kit, you know the book has got to be done, and I 've only two months to do it in."

"And I," said Mrs. Maxwell magnificently, "have only one life on this planet."

But Peter missed that. The telephone bell rang, and he hurried over, as to a temporary refuge, and answered:

"Hullo! Hold on! Can't hear! Who? Silverstream? Well — Jack! Thought you were in London. Got your letter. Take their offer? Well, I

should say. Starting to-night — make a tour of the asylums — after material, you know. Vivid, something vivid. Run round here, can't you? All right. Good-by."

"Are you starting to-night?" asked his wife, in a tone of gentle interest. "Are you, indeed?"

He looked at her, shamefaced.

"I can't do better," he said speciously. "There's a train at eleven-forty."

"And you have invited Mr. Silverstream over to share your last half hour at home."

"Good God, Kit! I have n't seen Jack for years."

Two large tears gathered in Mrs. Maxwell's violet eyes, and rolled down her cheeks.

"Peter," she said, in a choking voice,

" this very day I had a letter from my old chum, Julia Leigh. She asked me to visit her. I telegraphed a refusal. I said you and I were going on a trip. Jack Silverstream has only to beckon" — She cast herself on the sofa, and buried her face in the pillows.

Peter Maxwell drew out his watch and stole a guilty glance at it. Then, as if mere ink and paper fascinated him, he took a pamphlet from the table and ran rapidly down it, while he laid a kindly hand on his wife's head. He patted the dark pompadour as if it had been a dog.

" I 'm awfully sorry, Kit," he improvised, reading absorbedly ; " truly, I am. There, you 're quite upset ! "

" That 's clever of you," came from the pillows. " Few persons would have guessed it."

"I 'll wire you," said Peter generously, folding the paper and putting it in his pocket. "I 'll wire you at once. You 're tired," he added, from a wider grasp of the situation. Then, with an air of bright discovery, "Why not run away by yourself for a week? There 's that Rest Cure you liked."

Stirling's step was at the door, and she sat up, turning a tear-wet face away from them both, and offering a back ostentatiously composed. It was the time to strike.

"Stirling," said Peter, "get me a cab."

"Yes, sir."

Again Stirling disappeared.

"I 'll run up and pack, dear. You be here when I get through. If Jack comes" —

She turned to him drearily, mop-

ping her cheeks, and he sped upstairs whistling. Peter always whistled when he was naughty. Mrs. Maxwell busied herself in composing her face. She wanted above all things to be a good wife; and a good wife, religion, not experience, told her, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Again there was Stirling, — this time with a card. The surprise of it helped to dry her tears, and with one sniff she took it, read it, and cried out:

"Julia!"

II

JULIA LEIGH had entered almost upon the butler's heels. She was tall, young, and sweet. Her plumed hat became her, and her blue-gray cloak was beautiful. Her face had the color of health, there were unexpected dimples in queer corners of it, and two living devils of mischief lurked in her brown eyes. The women embraced rapturously, Mrs. Maxwell with a certain abandon, as one who had longed for sympathy not five minutes before, and Julia in a freakish gayety.

"Julia!" she repeated, after her

friend's cry. "Julia Leigh, escaped from foreign watering-places. After nine years' imprisonment with hard labor."

"Where is he, dear?" asked Mrs. Maxwell.

"Great-uncle?" inquired Julia. Then she looked piously up to heaven, and the imps in her eyes made faces at the ceiling.

"Julia!" breathed Mrs. Maxwell again, this time in pretty censure.

"I can't help it, Kate," said the girl rapidly. "I can't regret him. I was nurse, companion, football, doormat. He's gone, his hypochondria with him."

Mrs. Maxwell brightened.

"I hope he left you something."

"My dear, he did. I am deliriously rich, and I spend his money like water."

"You wrote from Winterpool. Have you settled there?"

"I have."

"Alone?"

"Not to any great extent."

The dimples came out in droves. But at that moment it occurred to Mrs. Maxwell that it was late in the evening, and that on this topsy-turvy night anything might happen.

"Take off your things, dear," she said. "I 'll have a room made ready."

"No, no." Julia detained her with a hand. "There 's a train at twelve. I 've got to take it."

"You 're not alone?"

"My maid 's down in the hall, asleep, eating her head off. I started this morning, Kate, after your telegram. You said you were leaving to-night, and I thought it would be complete and clever

to make you a call. But there was a freight derailed, and I 've been sitting for hours with the morning paper in my hand and murder in my heart."

" But now you 're here ! Oh, stay ! "

Julia shook her head.

" No, child, no. I 've a houseful of guests."

" Where ? "

" In Winterpool. I 've been in this country exactly eight weeks, and I have a home and fireside. Kate," — she turned her ruthlessly to the light, — " when did you cry last ? "

Mrs. Maxwell dabbed at her eyes with a wet little ball of handkerchief.

" About ten minutes ago," she said savagely.

" Happy, Kate? " asked the girl, with a sidelong look upon her. Then she explained, with some condescen-

sion, like a fairy godmother: "That 's what I ask everybody now."

Katherine Maxwell had been made of sweets, sugar-coated, pleasant-hearted. Life had disappointed her, life as Peter presented it to her; and her gentle flavor had turned to an extreme acidity.

"So you ask people if they are happy?" she inquired. "What do you do when they say 'no'?"

Julia looked at her keenly, threw back her cloak, and settled easily among the pillows. She had some time to spare. "Interfere," she said. "Take their doll to pieces and stuff it over."

Mrs. Maxwell dabbed at her eyes again. She spoke impulsively.

"My husband is a philanthropist. He has one passion, — statistics. He has three interests, — paupers, lunatics, criminals. I am neither — yet. To-

night, as I told you, we were to start on our little trip. A man asks him to write a book — and here I am."

Julia was looking at her mournfully. It was a sympathy so exaggerated as to suggest that it might not be entirely sincere. But Kate was not the one to cavil at it. She was too hungry for compassion to stick at the brand.

"I 'm afraid, Kate," said Julia, with an extreme gentleness, "I 'm afraid you reproached him."

"No," said Mrs. Maxwell firmly. "I kept still."

The girl's pretty eyebrows went up.

"My conscience! you kept still! That 's bad. That 's very bad. Great-uncle used to keep still. Kate, have you discovered what every woman needs?"

"We need to be loved." The violet eyes brimmed over.

"Gammon! To mother something. Now you haven't a child."

"No."

"Nor I, worse luck. I 'll steal one yet. Can't you mother your house, go round stroking curtains and patting pillows?"

"The house keeps itself," said Mrs. Maxwell drearily. "Stirling is such a treasure."

"Stirling?"

"The butler. He runs the whole thing. Other people lose servants. We never do. Stirling keeps them contented. There 's just been an epidemic of burglaries. Our house was n't entered. That was Stirling, too."

Julia, her eyebrows furred into knots, her lips parted, was considering.

"You don't care for charities?" she asked, "mothering the poor? Or

clubs — stepmothering the committees?" Her face flashed all over into an absolute delight. "Kate, I know what you do. You mother your husband."

"Peter?" said Mrs. Maxwell sedately. "I hope I should if he required it. However, Peter is usually well."

"Quite well?" inquired Julia slyly. "Don't you worry a little from time to time?"

Mrs. Maxwell weakened.

"Peter has a delicate throat," she owned.

"I thought so. And you bandage it, and you make him bandage it, till he wishes Old Nick had you."

"Julia!"

"And you're always here when he comes, and ready to wilt when he goes, and he's lived on sugar till it's turned

his stomach. What did he say, Kate, when you sulked? No, no! while you kept still?"

Mrs. Maxwell paused a moment, ire piling up on her brow.

"He said he would wire me."

"That's lavish," said Julia tolerantly. "What else?"

"He advised me to go to a Rest Cure."

"Intelligent man!" Julia laid a monitory finger upon her friend's knee. "Kate," she said, "you are coming with me to the Court of Love. What's that man doing?"

Stirling had entered with padded footfall, and was before the window, candle in hand.

"What is it, Stirling?" asked his mistress.

"Nothing, if you please, Mrs. Max-

well," said the man despairingly, "nothing." He put the candle back in its place and went out droopingly.

"Stark mad!" commented Julia, with the air of one impervious to surprise. "Now, listen. Kate, up to this present time nobody has been happy. For that reason I founded the Court of Love, and since I did it, the temperature has visibly gone up."

"Don't say love to me," remarked Mrs. Maxwell, making more epigrams now that she had an auditor. "I'm married."

"Do you think you've drawn all the blanks?" inquired her monitress. "Look at me. Those years of mine with great-uncle were infernal. I went to him twenty. I came away twenty-nine."

"He could n't help that," said Mrs.

Maxwell, dazed, from habit, when it came to figures.

"He never tried. I made no friends. He would n't allow it. I had no liberty, no lovers, except on the sly."

"Julia!"

"Yes, I did. I did, I tell you. Not the ones that stared at me on the promenade and tossed flowers into the garden. But there was one" — She paused, whether for effect or because the recollection moved her, no one could have told. "We looked at each other twenty-five minutes at intervals every day for a month while I walked behind great-uncle's chair and he followed after."

"He?"

"Yes, dear, the man."

"Who was he?"

"I never knew."

"What became of him?"

"He went away."

"Without speaking!"—she had the solution at last. "Then," she concluded sentimentally, "you lost faith in him."

"I did n't lose a particle," cried Julia, with indignation. "I adored him."

Mrs. Maxwell was looking at her owlishly.

"Yet," she reasoned, "you 're absolutely cheerful."

"Yes, my dear, I know," said Julia, with an incidental acquiescence. "However," she added brightly, "it broke my heart. Then great-uncle died, and I vowed every penny he left should be spent in buying for somebody the fun I 'd missed. I found an estate at Winterpool, and turned the

house into Aladdin's palace. Once there, wish and you get it."

"Get what?" asked Mrs. Maxwell practically, out of her fog.

"Your heart's desire."

Mrs. Maxwell mused.

"The Court of Love!" she said.

Julia had clasped her hands over her knees. She sat there looking extremely well satisfied with herself.

"Pretty name, is n't it?" she asked. "I chose it — well, I 'll tell you exactly. Because love 's the nicest thing there is, and there 's going to be more of it than anything else."

"Love is n't made to order," said the embittered wife.

"It 's going to be. There 's going to be moonlight all the time" —

"Julia!"

"Well, mostly, Kate, mostly. And

balconies and secret drawers and yellowed letters and ringlets and harps and pressed flowers — and maybe nightingales. That's when things get to running. But," — she nodded her head with the air of knowing more than she might choose to speak, — " we 're doing very well now."

Mrs. Maxwell looked at her blankly. It was a pretty tale, but she had not taken it for earnest.

" It is n't going on now ! " she said. " This madhouse is n't actually going on now ? "

Julia threw back her head and laughed becomingly, showing two rows of white teeth in a pink mouth.

" Madhouse ! " she cried. " Madhouse ! That 's what they call it in Winterpool. We vie with the asylum there."

Mrs. Maxwell looked at her as if she could shake her to get hard facts out of her.

"Is it going on now?" she asked.

The dimples all came out.

"This very minute."

"Who is there?"

"An opera troupe gone to pieces for want of funds. Maggie Hallisy,—you know her, my old nurse,—a newsboy with a wooden leg (he wants to learn modeling), old Jakes that used to be in the bank with uncle—he came to see I don't disgrace myself, but really he's cock of the walk—lovely people!" Stirling and his candle were again at the window. "There's that pyrotechnic man. What's the matter with him? He makes me nervous."

"Stirling," said his mistress sharply, "what is it?"

"Nothing, mum," answered the butler, again returning the candle to its place. He was patently agitated. "Nothing whatever."

Julia stared at him, and then at his back as he left the room.

"His coat is the coat of a butler," she remarked, "but his eyes are the eyes of a highwayman. Now, Kate! Slip on your things. You are coming with me to the Court of Love."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Maxwell, "no. It's very interesting, dear. I like to hear you tell about it; but just now I couldn't possibly leave Peter."

"Very well," said the temptress coolly; "stay at home, then, and let him leave you."

The implication stung.

"I know it, Julia, I know it," cried the wife. "But after all, it isn't quite

the same thing. Peter is subject to a relaxed throat."

Julia got up and went to the mirror, where she began to tie on her veil with a pretty deftness.

"He's going away," she assented, in pauses of preening herself. "You said so. And he'll take his throat with him."

"I can't help his going," burst out the duteous wife, "but I can be here when he comes. It might easily be that he had to give up and come home."

Julia saw the opening for a neat retort.

"My dear," said she, delighted with herself and her nimble thought, "men don't come home. They give up — and go somewhere else."

"Oh," cried the wife indignantly, "how cynical you sound!"

"Precisely. I 'm striking an average. Do you know how you sound yourself, treasure?"

Mrs. Maxwell was in the hands of one stronger than herself. She knew that, and sought to save the day by a late loyalty.

"Julia," she began, with a manufactured firmness, "in spite of anything I may have said, I am devoted to my husband."

"Yes, my dear, of course. But if you continue to be devoted in this particular way, you won't have any husband to be devoted to!"

"Julia!"

"You 'll have simply a dull man eating breakfast at the same table, and looking at his watch to see if it 's time to get away."

"Julia!"

"Didn't you write me when you were engaged that you meant to observe Peter's lightest wish?"

"Oh, I try! I try!" breathed the wife.

"Well, you've tried too hard. You don't know what his wishes are now. He doesn't venture to have any, poor chap! Come on, Kate! Brace up. Get your blood to moving. Show your husband you can live without him. Do that, and the chances are you'll live with him as long as you like—longer!"

Again Stirling appeared, with his air of unexplained discomfort at finding any foreign life existing on his grounds. He took up the wraps, and put them down. Then he looked involuntarily at the window. Mrs. Maxwell stood considering, her gaze upon the floor.

"I must tell Peter," she said, at length. "I owe him that."

"Stirling," said Julia briskly, "what is Mr. Maxwell doing?"

"Packing pamphlets, miss."

"You see," said the temptress to her friend. "Statistics! If you tell him, he won't hear."

"I' ll go," said Kate unflinchingly.

"Good girl!"

But Mrs. Maxwell, adjusting her coat upon her arm, was weakening visibly.

"Julia," she began, "Julia! You won't understand, but — well, I had this little thing ready." She took a paper from her chatelaine bag, and opened it, while Stirling, the picture of discretion, moved away. Then she read, tearfully and with much expression:

"To-day, dear heart,
We shall not part.
Nor will the morrow — morrow" —

"Yes," she concluded, her voice breaking, "it is 'morrow.' Oh, Julia, to think what this was to be! I meant to lay it beside his plate in the morning, perhaps with a flower" —

Julia was looking at her in honest horror.

"It 's not" — she was whispering the dread supposition — "it 's never poetry!"

"Of course it 's poetry!" cried its author, with ready indignation. "What did you think it was?"

But panic still pervaded Julia's face and tone.

"You don't do that to him?" she cried. Then she added firmly, "Come along, Kate. Come along at once."

Mrs. Maxwell hesitated. With an irrepressible impulse of tenderness she tucked the paper in Maxwell's great-coat pocket, straightened, and, sniffing, began to tie her veil. With the completed knot she weakened.

"I might," she faltered, "I might say good-by?"

Then Julia took possession of her.

"No," she said, "you 'd flood the house and lose the train. Send a message by that masquerading highwayman. Stirling, it won't be necessary to disturb Mr. Maxwell. Mrs. Maxwell will wire him."

Stirling's eyes were on the floor. He had an exemplary pose, the essence of respect.

"Very good, miss," he said.

Then, as he was preparing to follow them from the room, the wraps in

hand, a bell rang violently. Mrs. Maxwell seized upon the wraps.

"Mr. Maxwell's bell," she cried. "Go, Stirling, go. See that he gets off comfortably, won't you, Stirling?"

"Yes, mum, thank you, mum."

"Remind him of his spray. The antiseptic tablets. You know, Stirling."

"Yes, mum."

"And, Stirling, remember I trust you implicitly."

"Thank you, mum."

The bell kept on ringing, and the two women, as if it were an alarum to stop their flight, fluttered out of the room and down the stairs. But Stirling did not answer it at once. He hurried to the window, opened it, and leaned out.

III

TIRLING, magnificently deaf to the bell, was at the window. He was still leaning out as far as his respectable person could stretch.

"Not yet! not yet!" he was enunciating, with cautious violence. "Come back in ten minutes. Got the beer? Got" —

He heard a flurry behind him, and drew himself into the room again as Peter Maxwell, who had entered, carrying his portmanteau, dropped the bag to the floor.

"Stirling," said his master, "why

the devil don't you come when I ring?"

Stirling closed the window in decorous haste.

"I beg pardon," sir, said he. "There was a draught."

Peter brought out more papers from a table drawer.

"Where 's Mrs. Maxwell?" he demanded, from that trance of activity wherein he saw and heard nothing not appertaining to his trade, and waited for no answers. "Gone to her room? Ah, that 's right. That 's right. Here, Stirling, tie these up." Tying another bundle himself, he knelt and crammed the two into the portmanteau. "See if the cab has come." As he rose from his task, hot and blown, Stirling was back again, and with him a man, moderately young and entirely good-look-

ing, with the charm of a frank, free spirit added to the blessings of a firm profile and martial eyes. He was delightfully made for the rougher uses of the world, campaigning and endurance, and it might be fancied that the subtle air of melancholy about him would fit him to the wooing of my lady's lute.

"Mr. Silverstream," announced Stirling, looking as if he hated him for existing and blocking the wheels of the evening's progress.

Peter's face was at once suffused with radiant pleasure.

"Well, old man!" he cried, and advanced upon his friend.

"How are you, Pete?" inquired Silverstream.

They shook hands and looked at each other briefly, but with great goodwill. Peter thought of several things

to say: that he was amazed at finding at his side a man whom he thought in England, that he was deuced glad, that Jack was looking fit; but he condensed it all into the speaking order, "Stirling, bring a Scotch."

They sat down together, and Silverstream pulled out his watch.

"You said you were taking a train," he suggested. "When do you leave?"

"In half an hour or so. No hurry, Jack. Talk for all you 're worth."

"I 'm not worth sixpence, Pete. I 've made an awful mess of things."

"No!"

Maxwell took a swallow of the drink Stirling had brought them, folded his plump hands, and looked benevolently interested. "No, Jack, I can't think that."

Silverstream sat for a moment in

thought, neglecting his glass. His face saddened, and Maxwell thought how old he looked. But he glanced up suddenly with a quick smile, and Maxwell at once decided he looked young.

"Forget it," said Silverstream. He put on a fictitious gayety. "Well, Pete, you're a married man. Fancy! I've never met your wife."

"Never met her?" repeated Maxwell. "Why, so you haven't. That all happened while we were in New York. I did my courting by letter."

"By letter! I should rather say you did," pursued Silverstream mirthfully, as the memory of it surged in on him. "By Jove! *I* wrote those letters."

Peter was smiling unwillingly.

"No, Jack, no," he demurred, "you never did. I may have asked you what sort of letters were usually written" —

"You did, Pete, you did, and I told you. I said you 'd got to be chivalrous and valiant, and prove yourself a devil of a fellow, now did n't I?"

The slow smile on Maxwell's face was gradually widening.

"Well, something of that sort," he owned.

"I told you if there was ever a time for you to oil your feathers and set up your crest and step high, that time was now — or then. Did n't I, Pete?"

"You did."

"Well, that was writing the letters, was n't it? Virtually! I was the power behind the throne, the stoker down below. Tell you what I did do, though. I withdraw the letters. You did write 'em, Pete. You chewed your penholder and blotted like a hailstorm. But there 's one thing I did do. Do

you remember that night you sneaked in after two o'clock and flashed a light into my eyes and asked me if there was n't some special pet name I could think of that a lady would like to be called, — something not worn threadbare?"

Peter looked his honest shame.

"Well, yes, Jack," he owned, "maybe I did." But immediately he summoned virtuous pugnacity. "Well, what if I did?" he demanded; "what if I did?"

"Well! well!" said Silverstream, relapsing into his gloom, and brightening again as Maxwell's good pink face reminded him that it was a benevolent world, after all. "Anyhow, you married her," he concluded; "and you 're as sleek as a bear in summer quarters."

Maxwell also sobered. He spoke with a dignified and likable gravity.

"Jack, I 'm very fortunate. You must meet my wife."

"With all my heart. Delighted."

"We must see you married yet, old man."

There was fat philanthropy in the tone, the patronage of the successfully placed. Silverstream raised his brows.

"That 's the matrimonial commonplace," he returned. "You all say it. Well, your geese are swans."

"My wife has n't a thought apart from me," said Peter. He had not been called upon in years to formulate the married state, but now that he did, a glow of grateful pride came over him. His chest indubitably swelled. He began to think himself a good deal of a fellow to have evolved so accept-

able a pact. "We have n't a difference," he said. Then some echo of an argument may have returned to him from the walls, and he hedged a little, throwing a sop to conscience. "She —she's of a nervous temperament," he added weakly.

"Well," said Silverstream, "marrying and giving in marriage are not for me at present. Pete, I'm in a devil of a hole."

Peter was immediately the solicitous companion in arms. "What is it, Jack?" he inquired. "Broke?"

Silverstream shook his head.

"It 's a good long stretch since I 've been home," he began.

"Yes, about the time I 've been married."

"Just before I went — you remember my sister?"

"Yes. Nice girl. Nice pretty girl with brown hair."

"She married, and after a couple of years they went over to England. She and her husband died there. They left a boy, a little fellow three years old. Pete, did you ever have occasion to think you'd behaved like a brute?"

Peter hardly remembered any such incident, but for a comprehensive answer he pushed the decanter across the table.

"There you are," he said.

Silverstream went on, in a remorseful musing.

"I was in the Soudan. I cabled them to put the little fellow into a school."

"Of course."

"I did n't think how young he was. Hang it, Pete, I did n't think."

"No," said Peter, in a vague and all-embracing sympathy, "of course not."

"Then when I came back, I ought to have gone to England, straight as a string, to look him up. I did n't. I went to Spa, to settle one of our fellows, invalided, and — I saw a woman there."

"Ah," said Peter indulgently. "Very attractive, very, after Africa."

"No, no, Pete, you don't understand. This was — you can't imagine the kind of girl she was."

"Of course not!" replied Peter cheerfully. He was returning to the epoch of the letters.

Silverstream talked now, not as if it were a confidence, but a worried musing over the irreparable.

"I did n't know her. For a time I

did n't want to. Have n't you ever held a thing away from you because it was too precious, — you know you 're not half fit? Well, in the midst of it all they wired me from England. The boy was lost."

"Lost?"

"Plainly, stolen. I started for England within half an hour, and stirred up Scotland Yard. I worked with them, and made more mistakes than they did."

"Stolen!" meditated Peter. "Now what for?"

"Money, we assume. The boy inherits something, and the papers have kept me rather prominent of late. I made some lucky hits, you know, through the campaign."

"Well! well! Any clue, Jack, any clue?"

"They think it's a clue. I don't. They swear such a boy, with a woman in black, sailed ten days ago for New York. Now our men have got hold of it, and I've offered a reward."

"It's a bad case, old man, mighty bad."

Silverstream passed his hand over his eyes.

"He's such a little fellow — and his mother — and if I'd gone straight back to England —" He sat up and shook himself free of miserable imaginings. "My nerve is gone, you see," he owned impatiently. "I can go through one campaign on the top of another, but a thing like this — well, it breaks me up, and there's no use saying it does n't. Now let's talk about something else. You'll do the book?"

"Tickled to death," said Peter,

tickled also to grapple with less disturbing facts. Peter never knew what to do with emotions. They made him nervous. "The only trouble is," he continued, "I don't — frankly, Jack, I don't feel altogether sure I 'm equal to it."

"Gammon! of course you are."

Peter reflected, and wrinkled up his brow.

"I 've got cords of statistics. I 'm all right there. But I 'm not an observer, Jack, — not as you are. You look at a thing and write it down so it bites. I can't do that."

Silverstream had sunken into his absent brooding.

"Oh, that 'll come," he said indifferently.

Maxwell also mused.

"By George!" he cried, with the

pale semblance of envy which was the only sort generated by his kindly soul. "The picture you could draw out of the things that go on in institutions! Now with me it's different. When I get 'em into print," he added mournfully, "what are they? Figures!"

"It's a trick," Silverstream assured him. "You 'll learn."

"Well," said Peter, rousing himself, "I may, but I don't hope it. I 'm only afraid they have n't got the right man. The one thing I can do is to take the first step. That means visiting the asylums in course and getting my picture."

"Does Mrs. Maxwell go?"

"No! oh, no!" said Peter guiltily, adding, in a pugnacity addressed to his own erring self, "She 'd hate it— absolutely hate it."

"I'll go along, if you like," said Silverstream indifferently.

Peter beamed. Even his spectacles seemed to glitter the more bravely.

"You would n't!" he exclaimed. Dejection as quickly seized him. "No, you 've got this other thing on hand."

"It is n't on my hands. That 's the devil of it. I 'm absolutely useless. When I meddled, as I told you, I did more harm than good. I 'm giving them a free hand. They wire me at the club."

"Well, Jack!"

"Yes, it 's all right. I 'm glad of the chance. It may keep me from going off my head. I won't take a very wide radius with you. I sha' n't want to be out of New England."

"No, oh, no," said Peter gayly, rising. "I mean to take the institutions

in course and bring up at Winterpool. Winterpool is the only one I have n't seen. They have an excellent system there, excellent!"

Peter was putting on his light overcoat, for the night was chill. A thought struck him, and he paused, midway in the act, and thrust his hand into a pocket. What he sought was not there, and his face cleared slightly. But when he had settled himself in the garment, something seemed to counsel him to greater care, and he went through the pockets more deliberately. He drew it forth, the paper left there by a loving wife. Peter ran it over frowningly:

"To-day, dear heart,
We shall not part —
Mm — mm — —mm —"

Silverstream started out of his abstraction.

"What?" he asked. "What is it, Pete?"

The beloved husband answered brusquely, as one defending a position to the last.

"Only a — a little verse, Jack. From my wife. She is in the habit of — of commemorating occasions with verse." He bustled up to the table and pulled out a drawer under the card catalogue. "V—V—Verse. Yes. Verse." From the drawer he took a package of similar slips, tucked the paper under the rubber band, and put poesy back into its retreat.

Silverstream was watching him, irrepressibly amused.

"By Jove!" he ventured. "You must have a good many occasions to commemorate!"

Peter was craning his short neck

and looking anxiously over his own person.

"You don't see any more?" he inquired. "Sometimes she pins them on."

"Not on your clothes!"

"Now, why not?" cried the loyal Peter irascibly. "What's the matter with having verses pinned on your clothes — or your pillow either, if it comes to that?"

"Now! now!"

They looked at each other fixedly. Silverstream had to laugh. Peter feebly and antiphonally joined him, and presently they were roaring together. Silverstream contributed a fraternal slap on the back.

"Good old Pete!" he interjected. "Good old man!"

There was Stirling again, with a prompt, almost an imploring:

"Cab, sir?"

Silverstream sobered, as a man for whom there is a time to laugh and a time to go on journeys.

"I 'll run over to the hotel and get my traps," he said. "What train is it? Eleven-forty?"

"Eleven-forty."

He nodded, and left the room with the air of a man used to starting at short notice. Peter stood, apparently lost in thought. If Kate could have known what was in his mind at that moment, her soul would have flown back to him on wings of haste and love. He was musing upon her, a sane, sweet vision unclouded by discontent. The memory of courting time was on him.

"Dear girl!" he said to himself. "Dear old girl!"

But having made the remark, he

saw no reason for repeating it, even to her who had evoked it.

"Stirling!" he called cheerfully.

"Yes sir."

"I won't disturb Mrs. Maxwell."

To Stirling it seemed better not to disturb anybody.

"No, sir," he returned.

Maxwell spoke with an air of hopeful generosity.

"Tell Mrs. Maxwell I 'll wire."

"Yes, sir," agreed Stirling, seeming to contribute to the same fund. "Mrs. Maxwell, sir, said she would wire."

"Very good. Now, Stirling, I leave the house in your charge."

"Yes, sir."

Peter had taken his hat in hand. He fixed Stirling with a mild yet mandatory eye. "Remember," he said, "I have implicit confidence in you."

"Thank you, sir," said Stirling.

Peter, having delegated responsibility over his house, left the room with a light heart; but Stirling, portmanteau in one hand and candle in the other, flew to the window and signaled madly.

"Stirling!" came his master's voice from without. "Stirling!"

"Coming, sir," called Stirling.

He set down the candle, and followed, running.

IV

ITHIN the great lower hall of the Court of Love were signs of high expectancy. The house Julia Leigh had bought for her masque, her fantasy, her pathetic earnest, — for no one yet fully understood her mind, — had been built for a millionaire by an architect who was a man of dreams. It was the completed work of his life, the product of his imagination and his heart. In this hall was a great oaken door, leading out through a pillared porch to the driveway and the lawn. At the back ran a line of marble pil-

lars, and beyond them, across a wide recess, were the door and windows opening on the garden from a central court. The triumph of the room was its stairway, sweeping up from the oaken door to a broad landing, where it turned, and, after the space above the pillars, went on again. It had a spring and sweep of great magnificence and beauty. It invited to pageants and delights, the pathway for gallants and noble dames.

To-night it was high festival, as it was always, in some fashion. The room was bowered in green leaves and delicately alive with countless flowers. The scent of them was in the air, the spice of pinks, rose perfume and bitterness of autumn garden plants. Julia, at nine o'clock in the evening, was walking back and forth through the

width of the hall, from oaken door to window. She was alone, while her unassorted guests, in the rooms above, dressed for the fancy ball. In her soft white, with a golden girdle, she looked, not merely young, but pathetically sad. That was the charm and mystery of her. Nobody knew whether she was sad or merry, whether she was turning life into a fantasy because she was herself fantastic, or playing hard to drown dull thoughts. The guests, who adored her, did not know. They called her the Lady, by an ardent unison. They smiled when she bade them, and frolicked as she invited, but they kept a scrupulous distance, and wondered at her. Even Kate had failed to learn. She felt that they were living in a dream, and could never, by seeking, assure herself whether to Julia

the dream was earnest. Now Julia, as she walked, shut her lips hard upon thought, and knotted wistful brows. Voices rose without, and she hastened to the window. What she saw there absorbed her, and the dimples came. The first newcomer in the room, a moment after, found her merry. This was a wiry, small old man, dressed scrupulously in the black of service. He was smoothing his thin gray hair and pulling down his cuffs after some dishevelment.

"Jakes," said Julia, "Jakes, you bloodthirsty old rascal, what have you been doing?"

He muttered at some length, and shook his head. Then he cocked a piercing eye at her, and answered:

"Nothin' that I 've got to account for. I can tell ye that now."

"I saw you under the lantern." She spoke reprovingly, yet with indulgence. "First I heard you. I looked out of the window. An innocent cab-driver had stopped before the door, and there were you up on the box, punching him. Actually punching him!"

Jakes had smoothed his person, and he now faced his mistress like a friendly equal.

"He ta'nted me," was his defense.

"What about?"

"He said this was a madhouse."

Julia laughed, in a mellow undertone.

"Well, you 've said that yourself," she reasoned. "I 've heard you. What was it he called when he drove away?"

"He said he 'd be even with me — consarn him!"

Julia dismissed the driver as one who,

in a world of freedom, must be allowed his little joke.

"Who came in the cab?" she asked.

"The actor that went in town for more wigs." Jakes spoke habitually in the aggrieved manner of one who finds himself in a position he cannot approve, and yet, under protest, must remain there.

"Yes. For the ball. Are people still arriving?"

"Yes," he answered, out of a renewed exasperation, "yes, Julia, they are."

She looked at him sweetly.

"Jakes," said she, "you really must n't call me that. If you 're going to be a butler, you must be a butler."

"I ain't a butler," averred Jakes. "I 'm a freeborn American citizen. I swep' the bank out for your uncle, an' if you 're goin' to make ducks an' drakes

of the property, I 'm goin' to stan' by. I 've known ye ever sence you was knee-high to a grasshopper, an' I 've always called you Julia, an' I always shall."

Mrs. Maxwell, superb in blue and silver, was coming down the stairs. Julia waited until she was within ear-shot, and then concluded the argument warningly.

"Very well, Jakes. But not before folks. Jakes," — this she added with a malicious dignity, — "are the costumes laid out?"

He swallowed his ire, and answered as if the prescribed word were bitter to him:

"Yes — miss."

"Have all the guests selected?"

"Yes — miss."

But the by-play was lost on Mrs.

Maxwell. She was walking up and down, absorbed, like a peacock, in her train.

"I had two minds," she said, with an anxious brow, "between this and the gold brocade."

Julia stayed her, to arrange a fold and smooth a ribbon.

"You are a dream," said she. "Jakes, how many costumes are left?"

"Thirteen — miss. Six ladies', seven gents'."

"Dear me! we must order more to-morrow."

Mrs. Maxwell came awake to the solid world, and momentarily dismissed her train.

"You 'll be swamped with strangers," she observed.

"Yes," said Julia, with ingenuous delight; "is n't it lovely?"

Mrs. Maxwell had lived, in her unmarried state, on an income not unlimited, and she had served on charity boards. Money, she knew, did wane. An occasional misgiving had sometimes come to her in the midst of Arcadia.

"But," said she, "where is it going to end?"

"Oh," said Julia hopefully, "it need n't end. It won't end. If we 're crowded out of the house, we 'll go into the orchard. I call it fun."

"It 's fun. It *is* fun." She added thoughtfully, "I can't help wondering what Peter is doing!"

Julia rose to wholesome banter, as she had done a hundred times in the last two weeks.

"Peter!" she scoffed. "You know what he 's doing: putting down figures in columns."

But Mrs. Maxwell looked a wistful anxiety.

"I hope he sprays his throat," said she.

"Consider your own throat, missy," cried Julia, spurred to extremities. "You must wear pearls with that gown. Run up to my room, open my box, and get the necklace you find there."

"May I?" cried the faithless wife. "Not the antique setting!"

"Yes, the antique setting. Run."

Mrs. Maxwell gathered her petticoats about her, and fled up the stairs like a madcap boy. Jakes came in, with the air of driving before him a tall and melancholy man of middle age, dressed in a gay plaid suit.

"Here 's somebody to see ye," said Jakes, with scant courtesy, yet making it apparent that his derogation was for

neither person before him, but for the mad circumstances where they all found themselves. Julia went forward, hand extended, with the air of the perfect hostess. The man was loosely made and bony. He had a high-cheeked, cadaverous face, a hook nose, and sad, sunken eyes. He looked upon her, her grace and beauty and the gentle sweetness of her attitude, with an incredulous wonder. He did not touch the hand, but said instantly, as if he could not get the words out fast enough:

"I 'm a clown, lady. We 've had a week's stand here. Maybe you know."

"I 'm so glad to see you," answered Julia, with an added warmth. "We 're having a ball to-night. You 'll stay, won't you?"

He twirled his hat in both uneasy hands. She read his hesitation.

"Or," said she graciously, "perhaps you 'll stay the night." Her face brightened with what seemed rare discovery. "I know!" she cried. "You 've brought your luggage. You 've come to stay."

Jakes made an inarticulate noise in his throat. It sounded like the moan of a choking animal. The visitor flushed at her words, and his eyes brightened.

"Lady," said he, "I 'll tell you how 't is. My name 's Eleazar Bumstead. I'm a Vermont man. I ain't had a day off for twelve year. I 've got an old father, an' I send him my pay reg'lar, an' glad to git it, though he 'd ruther I 'd gone into the kag factory. Well, it ain't no rest to go home."

"I see," she interrupted him, "you want a vacation."

His eyes brightened incredulously.

He nodded, his doubting gaze upon her."

"Jakes," said she, "show this gentleman a room. If you feel like coming down to the ball," she added, to Mr. Bumstead, "we shall be so glad. Jakes will give you a costume, unless" — she paused smilingly, and he nodded.

"You 're right, lady," said he. "I 've got my own make-up. I shall feel freer in it."

He bowed before her as if he would gladly have prostrated himself, and made his way to the stairs; but she called him back. She was smiling at him as if he had the power of doing her the greatest possible favor.

"You know what kind of a place this is?" she said.

Again Jakes gave his remonstrating grunt, but neither noted him.

"I heard what kind of a place it was," replied the clown, in a burst of warmth, "but I never 'd ha' believed it."

"You know you 've only to ask for a thing, and you have it, if it 's to be found. Now, Mr. Bumstead, what do you want most?"

He eyed her for a moment, as if asking pathetically whether indeed she could be trusted. She looked, she seemed, too good to be true. He dared it.

"Lady," said he bashfully, as one owning to first love, "when I was a boy up in Vermont, there was a book in the house, an' I never 've seen it anywheres else. It was Gibbon's 'Decline an' Fall of the Roman Empire.' You ain't got any of the other volumes?"

Julia's eyes moistened. She under-

stood him. It had not been a mere book to be sought for on shelves. It was a dream of his youth, and her hospitality to dreams had given it body.

"There 's a big library upstairs, Mr. Bumstead," she said gently. "I 'm sure Gibbon is there. If he is n't, we 'll have him to-morrow."

The clown bowed low to her, as if he bowed out fervent gratitude, and followed Jakes. Immediately the door behind her opened to admit another man, a short, stout, timid man in clerical clothes, alone. He had a large face, smooth-shaven, and it was overspread by a mixture of embarrassment and delight. He looked like a child who had escaped to some desired goal and found himself half doubtful of his welcome, half fearful of a just pursuit. But he

advanced, in a dash of boldness, holding out his hand.

"You 'll pardon me, I 'm sure," he said. "One of your maids let me in. She advised my waiting to be announced by the butler, but I was in rather a hurry, and I ventured to present myself. My name is Clifford, the Reverend George A. Clifford."

He was still very nervous, and Julia decided at once that he was lying or going to lie. She responded in a gracious haste.

"You 've come to the ball," she said, with effusion. "I 'm delighted, Mr. Clifford. There are several costumes left. My man shall take you to them in a moment."

The Reverend George A. Clifford had made up his mind to say that, taking a long walk out of town, he had

paused at her door to rest; but he found it unnecessary. He had taken the walk, indeed, but he had taken it to bring him to a goal about which he had unbounded curiosity. But he was a good man, and, since she welcomed him so generously, he was ashamed of subterfuge.

"The truth is" — he began involuntarily — and caught Julia's eye. The dancing imps he saw held him spellbound. She laughed, and he laughed also.

"Ah, Mr. Clifford," said she frankly, "this isn't a house for disguises — except pretty ones. Nobody needs them. Everybody's to have a good time here, and no questions asked. If I were told to read your mind, I should say you were a bit curious about us and came to see what we do, but

— no.! no! you need n't tell me. I 'm not curious, and you may be, if it makes you happy. Just stay a bit. Put on a costume. Have some supper with us. You 'll preach the better for it."

A little billowy thing, all drapery and color, had floated down the stairs. This was a flower-girl, her small, pointed face eager, her costume pretty as it could be: only it ended in black stockings and no shoes. She sped up to her hostess and stood on tiptoe, whispering. The Reverend George A. Clifford stared. But Julia listened.

"What?" she said. "I can't hear. What is it, child? Speak out."

Another eager whisper. A slender leg dramatically extended. This Julia regarded sympathetically.

"These do very nicely," said she. "Cotton? So they are. Silk? Never

had a pair? My stars! Run up and tell the maid to give you silk stockings immediately."

"Oh!" It was a cry of ecstasy. The lady's hand was seized, a bashful kiss was dropped on it, and up the stairs again ran the little cloud of brightness. The Reverend George A. Clifford found his heart quickening at this pleasing interlude. He felt as if he had taken up a pretty story-book and read a page in the pauses of his sermon. All the more must he return to his dull task. He frowned professionally, to hearten himself.

"Now, Mr. Clifford," said his hostess gayly, "here you are at the ball."

He interrupted her. He was forced to, to get in a word at all. She was too sweet, and his heart sided with her.

"Yes," he owned, "but I am here

as a minister of the Gospel. I am the pastor of a flock" —

"I see, Mr. Clifford, I see." She was all sympathy; though, he thought jealously, no more for him than the flower-girl. "I see. You want to know about us. That's natural. What is it, Maggie?"

Maggie had advanced from the door leading into the lower regions. She was a sweet old Irish woman, smartly clad in a short dress and a white cap. She carried a cane, and leaned upon it, and in the protecting shade of her skirts came a little lame boy, peering out adoringly at Julia. Maggie spread out her skirts and gazed at them quite worshipfully.

"Look at ut, darlint!" she commanded. She turned to Clifford, with no regard for his cloth, but adoration

for her own, and sunnily included him. "The rale ould Irish linen. 'T was the wish of me heart, and she got it for me. And a blackthorn stick."

"You see," said Julia to him, in whimsical apology, "we 're children here. We play. We have our toys."

"Play!" repeated the reverend gentleman. His resolution ebbed. He felt it going, and recalled it crudely. "What of work?" he quavered. "That is what we need to hear. Work, for the night cometh" —

"Work, is it?" queried Maggie, who had small reverence even for her priest, and none for a dissenter. She stretched a hand behind her and brought forth the boy, talking all the while as one who merely wanted to have her evidence ready when she needed it. "Is it work, then? Who is it works

harder than her, the darlint? And her pocketbook wid a hole in the bottom for the likes of us. Timmie, show the gintleman your leg."

But Timmie was absorbedly proffering a bit of clay to Julia.

"Say!" said he, so bashful that, now his chance had come, he yelled at her. "I told you I could make a rooster, fust go-off. Ain't that a dandy?"

"It is a dandy," agreed his lady, turning the object of art about admiringly. "Likewise a rooster."

"Timmie," commanded the old woman, "show the gintleman your leg."

Timmie, in an agony of propriety, looked at his goddess.

"Tim lost his leg under a car," said Julia gently, offering Clifford the explanation his round eyes demanded.

"He has a new one. We 're quite excited over it."

"*Has*, is it?" cried old Maggie. "Who paid down the hard money for it? 'T is no common shower that rains down legs from heaven. Timmie, will ye strip down yer stockin', or will I do it for ye?"

Desperately Timmie did it. The act disclosed a patent leg, whereon Maggie was the next instant tracing out sundry lines with an eager finger.

"Fwhat 's that?" cried she.

Timmie had lost his shyness. He pulled up his sleeve.

"J. L.!" he announced, in a burst of adoration. "J. L. That 's what it is. I carved it there. I pricked it into my arm, too. That 's Injy ink. J. L., same 's my leg. Them 's her initials. She can have me if she wants to." And

Timmie fled out of the room, jerkily, in a bashful spasm.

"That 's fwhat 's done here," announced Maggie to the Reverend George A. Clifford. She seemed to have probed his mood exactly. "Look at me, sir. I was one foot in the grave wid the bronkitties on me pipes and the misery in me back" —

Julia had a warning hand upon her shoulder, but Maggie could not heed.

"The charities come to me, bad scran to 'em. 'You 're a pauper,' says they. 'Come along to the Island. You 'll be very gay there,' says they. 'Maybe,' says I. 'Anny hill looks green at a distance.' Then she drove up in her carriage. 'Maggie,' says she, 'there's a soft bed waitin' for ye, and a pipe and a glass. Come along!' says she. Ah, well, well, well!" She dis-

missed Clifford and his curiosity. A smile ran over her old face, and wrinkled it delightfully. "Fwhat 'll I do for the party?" she inquired of Julia. "Will I jig for 'em? Will I sing? I 'll sing Foxy Daly."

The gentle hand persuaded her, and she turned about and hummed her way out of the room.

"Mr. Clifford," said Julia whimsically, "there 's no harm in us. Stay a bit, and play."

"You are extremely kind," answered Mr. Clifford stiffly. "I am not accustomed to large gatherings, except perhaps the League Meeting or the Ladies' Aid. But" — His coldness broke like ice that had been long melting. He glowed, and cast discretion to the winds. "If this," he said, "is the kind of thing you do here, I 'll

stay, by — I beg your pardon — I 'll stay."

Jakes, having installed the other guest, was pottering down the stairs. His mistress called him:

"Jakes, give Mr. Clifford a costume."

And as Mrs. Maxwell came trailing down, conscious of her pearls and of the fact that houses are erected for the exercise of trains, Jakes reascended with his air of deep distaste, Clifford following jauntily.

"Julia!" called her friend.

"Yes, my child."

"Julia, what do you think" — she paused, frowning, to formulate.

"Of the pearls, dear? Delicious."

"No, no, Julia! what do you think of a cycle of sonnets?"

"My child, I should n't know them from a cycle of Cathay."

"I thought of it as I was putting on the pearls. I wished Peter could see me. Then I said to myself, Why not a cycle of sonnets, a record of my absence? Listen, dear." She extracted a paper from her sleeve.

"Oh, we are parted, love. What shall I say?
We may no longer meet. Ah, well-a-day!"

She glanced up for praise, and there was Julia, lost in pure abstraction. "Julia!" she cried. "Julia, I was reading aloud."

Instantly Julia roused into repentant zeal.

"I was listening," she asserted eagerly. "I 'm sure I was listening." Then her eyes danced and begged forgiveness for her, while she owned: "I can't stand things when they are read aloud — *under*stand them. That's what I mean."

"Run it over by yourself," said Kate forgivingly. "I 've often wanted an impartial opinion on my verse. Nobody has seen it but Peter, and naturally he 's prejudiced."

"Oh, rather!"

"Julia!"

"What is it? Don't keep saying my name over and scaring me."

"I 've thought of something. Was n't that a clergyman here when I came in?"

"The Reverend George A Clifford. He came to preach. He remains to dance."

"O Julia, would you, could you just show him these two little bits? Ask him for an impartial verdict."

"Gladly." And Julia, in her turn, tucked poesy up her sleeve.

"Jakes," she called.

The old man was coming droop-

ingly down the stairs. He had shrunken and settled into his clothes. With every guest his face acquired a deeper gloom: this was not aversion to any individual, but to all strangers in the one disturbing part. Let them be guests, and to him they were anathema.

"I 've another here," said Mrs. Maxwell brightly, in the eagerness of creative throes, "a rough draft. I 'll run into the library and polish it a bit." She swept away, ever mindful of her pearls and her train, and Julia said abstractedly, as if her mind were elsewhere:

"Jakes, order the music to begin."

He was motionless, and she looked at him. Jakes had been slowly freezing. His mouth gaped, his eyes were wide. He was looking past her at the window behind her back. Now he pointed at it.

"Jakes!" she cried, "what ails you? Don't have a fit."

He still pointed, and Julia, frozen in her turn, could not look. There were two things Julia could never bear: to be shut up in a closet, and to have the unknown behind her back. She quivered like a frightened horse. "Jakes," she implored him, "what is it?"

Jakes was speaking, but not at first to her.

"It 's more 'n I can stan'," said he. "By gravy! Here 's the house overrun with ragtag an' bobtail, an' dark lanterns flashin' round the gardin — look o' there!"

The window had been slowly opening. Two gaunt hands had lifted a child over the sill and left him standing.

V

JULIA turned slowly. Whatever was behind her, she had to face it, because Jakes and the silence together were too terrible to bear. She glanced first at the open window, and then her eyes fell lower until they rested upon a reddish-brown head, a round face, snub nose, freckles, and a blue suit, — the equipment of an adorable child. Her fears fled in a whiff. She crouched, after the manner of motherly womankind, and held out her arms.

"Oh, you cunning dear!" she cried.

"Bedlam," remarked Jakes again. "Bedlam, by gravy!"

"Dear!" the lady murmured wooingly. "Come to Julia. Can't you talk, honey?"

The child advanced on steady legs, and Julia got greedy hands on him. She sat down on the floor, her back to the open window, and there she and the freckled newcomer cuddled each other with enormous satisfaction.

"Have n't you any folks, darling?" Julia asked him meltingly. "Well, never mind. You've got a Julia. Jakes, shut that window. We must n't have a draught on him."

But the window was in use. A leg, covered with a white stocking and ending neatly in a congress boot, had been stretched carefully over the sill. A woman followed. She was gaunt

and eager; her spectacled eyes were on Julia and the child. Jakes, petrified again, could only point at her. This time Julia, at that warning forefinger, screamed, with nervous irritation.

"Jakes, what do you mean?" she quavered. "Don't stand there like a showman, pointing out family ghosts."

Jakes opened his lips and spoke, himself too spectral to be wholesome:

"Look o' there!"

Julia rose, the child in her arms, and turned to face the new intruder.

"I've got to see you," said the woman briefly, "alone."

It was Jakes who answered pointedly:

"There's a door to this house."

"Go, Jakes," said Julia. "Go."

The woman, standing stark and still, broke a little there. A tremor moved her.

"Oh," she moaned, "he'll tell! he'll tell!"

"Jakes," said Julia firmly, "you are not to tell. I don't know what; but simply do not tell."

"Tell!" muttered Jakes, taking a circuit about the woman, as if she might infect him, and then pulling down the window. "I ain't likely to tell. I ain't particular about bein' measured for a straight weskit, my time o' life."

He went scornfully out, with an air of washing his hands of the entire business, and the woman, as if she had waited as long as nature could endure, darted forward and laid a jealous grasp upon the child. She drew him to her, and stood with both her hands upon him, guarding him.

"Don't you speak," she bent to

warn him. "You speak one word, an' the bad men 'll git us."

Julia, delightfully excited, pulled the curtain close, after a glance out at the night, and then motioned the woman to a bench. They both sat down, and the child stood patiently between them. The woman turned, with a suspicious, yet a challenging frankness.

"I s'pose," she began, "anybody 'd think 't was queer, to come in by the winder."

"Oh, no," responded Julia cheerfully, her eyes upon the child, "not in the least."

The woman wore the air of having made up her mind to some confession; but now, with an irrepressible shudder of faint nerves, she groaned again.

"Oh," she breathed, "them lanterns!"

"I did n't see any lanterns."

"I did. I was comin' up the front path, an' they flashed on me. Then I picked my way round amongst the bushes. I did n't dast to try the door."

"Poor dear!" said Julia meltingly. "You 're tired."

"I 'm beat out," she owned, in a piteous candor.

"You shall go straight to bed."

That wildness of entreaty at once came back.

"You promise," she insisted. "You promise you won't tell."

"Tell," said Julia scoffingly. "I never tell"—but conscience nudged her, and she added lamely, "everything. Come," she wheedled, beckoning to the child. "Come to Julia."

But his guardian kept firm hands upon him.

"No, no," she said. She continued her confession. "I 'm at the end o' my rope. I got some milk at the bakery down town, an' I heard talk about you. They said you helped folks out."

Julia was watching the child in a muse of adoration.

"Is n't he sweet?" she asked irrelevantly.

"If I told you nobody ever needed helpin' more 'n this little creatur'," said the other, watching her, "would you believe me?"

"Poor baby! Let me take him."

"No! no! I can't trust him to nobody. Them he belongs to neglected him, an' there 's others arter him. All I ask is to git down to Larkspur, on my farm, an' he 'll be as happy as the day is long. But how 'm I goin' to git there? They watch me. Oh, them lanterns!"

Julia recalled herself.

"Whose child is he?" she demanded.

"His father 's dead, an' his mother 's dead, an' them that had the care of him better be dead for all they done for him. Oh, my suz! if I could only git him down home."

Jakes had appeared again, with an air of abhorring the whole situation. He spoke, but with averted look.

"The circus clown 's got his face all painted up, an' now the minister 's stole his clo'es. They want to know if there 's any objection to their swappin' clo'es for the party."

"Not the slightest," said the lady absently. "Jakes, order a bath for this darling child."

But Jakes had more to offer, and his disgust was manifest.

"The circus clown wants to know if there 's any objection to his callin' himself the Vicar o' Wakefield. The minister put him up to 't."

"Not the least." But her eyes were on the child, and she remarked, at this point: "Julia's lamb!"

"The minister wants to know if there 's any objection to his learnin' to turn somersets an' callin' himself some kind of a clown."

"By no means. O pigeon-toed love and lamb-as-ever-was!"

But when Jakes had withdrawn his scornful presence, she turned, with a wholesome directness, to her guest.

"Now," said she, "tell me."

"Yes, yes," agreed the woman eagerly, "I 'll tell ye. I 've got to trust ye. My name 's Hannah Slate. I took care o' this baby's mother a whole summer,

an' him, too, down to Larkspur, in the State o' Maine. Then they went over to Europe, an' she died there, an' her husband died. Little Jackie here was left alone, an' his uncle was off in some outlandish place or 'nother, an' put him into a school, — this little mite! Soon 's I heard on 't, I sailed over to England an' got him."

"You took this child?"

Hannah Slate faced her, defiance in her mien.

"I stole him. That 's what I done — stole him. Then I clipped it for home. I did n't dast to take the cars. I walked miles on my two feet. I slep' behind the bushes. They 're too lazy over there to fence. They have bushes high 's your head. Now they've offered a reward, an' there 's a gang of I-dunno-what-alls arter me to git the

reward, an' there 's the police arter the whole on us."

Julia rose, breathing power and pride.

"Stay here with me," she counseled. "Nobody shall touch you." She swept across the room and rang the bell.

"No! no!" cried Hannah. "I 've got to git into my own house down to Larkspur in the State o' Maine. That's the place for me."

Jakes had entered, with his accustomed rigor. Julia spoke rapidly.

"Jakes, see if Mrs. Maxwell is in the library. Ask her to come to me. Then take this lady to the red room."

Hannah Slate had fallen into her first condition of nervous tremor.

"Don't ye go an' let anybody else into 't. Don't ye try to take him out o' my hands," she besought. "I never

can let him go in this world. Never! I tell ye that now."

Julia was walking back and forth, thinking.

"Very well," she turned to say, with a simulated coldness. "Be arrested, then, and lose him."

"My Lord!" moaned Hannah. "What a world this is!"

Julia changed in a moment. She swept over to the meagre creature, and bent to her protectingly.

"Trust me," she pleaded.

"I 've got to trust ye," returned Hannah savagely. "I 've gone too fur not to."

"First," said the lady, "go to bed. At four o'clock I 'll come up and get the baby. I 'll take the five o'clock express with him, and be in Larkspur before noon."

Suspicion brooded upon Hannah. Her glance darkened.

"Where am I goin' to be?" she asked.

"Here!" cried Julia, with a delightful air of solution. "For an hour or two more. You were seen coming here with a child. You must go away by daylight, alone. Bless you!" she burst out in gay conviction, "did n't I read detective stories to great-uncle for nine good years? I fancy I know how it 's done. You 'll take the twelve o'clock train for Larkspur. You 'll find the baby and me there, — in the gloaming, — sitting on the doorstep, playing cat's-cradle and drinking milk."

Jakes had appeared again, to ascend the stairs with a mien of aloofness, as if he could not summon, but she who would might follow.

"Run along," cried Julia. "He 'll bark at you. He won't bite."

Hannah rose unwillingly, and took up the child. With the baby face nodding over her shoulder, she followed, her steps dragging as if she cursed the way. Mrs. Maxwell was coming in at the library door, and Julia pounced upon her.

"Kate," she cried. "Kate!"

"For mercy's sake, what is it?"

"Think of the most amazing thing that ever happened. That 's it!"

"You have n't heard from Peter?"

"Peter? Peter me no Peters." Julia's eyes were lustrous. Her air breathed haste and glad discovery. "Kate, wilt rise with me at four i' the morning, and take horse for you don't know where?"

Mrs. Maxwell answered patiently. She was bewildered.

"Anything you say, Julia. But we 're having an awfully nice time here."

"Good wench, before thou 'rt twelve hours older, we shall be living in a historical novel, — plunder, flight, stratagem, and spoils. There are thieves in the garden, and police under the porte-cochère." Then she dropped to earth. "All you have to do, Kate, is to have on your riding habit at four, hold your tongue, and come along."

Here was Jakes again, in his character of portent-bringer.

"There 's a kind of a pious devil outside. He wants to see ye."

"Show him in," said Julia promptly.

"Now, you hold on," said Jakes. "It 's my opinion he 's one o' them that 's be'n flashin' lanterns round the gardin. If he is, he 's a jailbird. That 's all."

"Nonsense, Jakes. You 're nervous. Show him in."

"I 've left my papers all over the table," Kate explained. "I 'll pick them up. Is n't the dancing ever going to begin?"

"Presently, dear." But Julia had fallen to reflecting, and Kate took herself away.

When Jakes entered he seemed to be propelling a man before him, a middle-aged man with smooth face and ingratiating pose. When the newcomer lifted his eyes and let them rest on Julia for an instant, he was plainly disconcerted. Then he raised his hand, rumpled his smooth hair, and advanced rapidly.

"Lady," said he, "they tell me this is the place where you ask and git."

Julia was thinking out the details of her coming flight.

"What can I do for you?" she inquired absently. Then she glanced at him. "Bless me!" said she, instantly awake, "is your name Stirling?"

He looked her merrily in the eye.

"No, lady," said he. "No."

"Cousin named Stirling?"

"No, lady."

"Or brother?" Her attention fled again. She was thinking.

"No, lady." Then he added, with bright assurance, "I 'm an orphan."

"Highwayman's eyes!" said Julia. "Well," — she roused herself, — "what do you want?"

"Lady," — he spoke with a gay conviction, — "I 've got one ambition. I want to be a butler. Some things I understand. Some I don't. If this

gentleman," — he made Jakes a bow which was received with deep disgust, — "if this gentleman would give me a few lessons" —

It was a legitimate ambition.

"Jakes," said Julia, "find this man some proper clothes. Let him help you to-night at the tables."

Jakes had, for an instant, no words. He had fought the enemy vainly from the borders, and now it was invading his own domain.

"By gravy!" he said weakly.

"Carry a tray to the lady upstairs," Julia was bidding him. "Be sure there's some milk on it, warm milk, Jakes, you know."

A little hum and murmur arose like the noise of bees and leaves together. There was the rustle of silk, and now and then a laugh. Down the stairs

came pouring a flood of revelers, ladies in shimmering silks, men in armor, and courtiers in velvet with swords and capes. At the same time there was a stir under the pillars where the musicians were taking their place. The hall was an ante-chamber to a ball-room. Julia waited until the throng had all descended. She tapped with her fan, and the murmur ceased.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said she, "to-night the dancing ends at twelve. At four to-morrow morning Mrs. Maxwell will elope — with me. Mrs. Maxwell was married at high noon, with six bridesmaids and a breakfast. She needs romance, adventure. We shall ride for miles and miles. If anybody asks where we are, you don't know. Meantime keep the castle, be as merry

as you like, and remember Jakes is my right-hand man."

Then the music began, the sweetest of minuets, and the beautiful satin puppets formed for it, — all the guests but two, and they came down the stairs arm in arm, absorbed in talk. It was the Reverend George A. Clifford and Eleazar Bumstead, the clown. Yet the difference was not appreciable, comparing them with their former aspect, for now the clown was a clergyman of melancholy mien, and the happy Clifford had become a clown. Eleazar carried a grave-looking book under one arm, and to the other Clifford clung, putting questions to him in eager haste and showing himself more fascinated with every answer. Bumstead was treating him with a gentle candor and compliance, telling

exactly what was asked of him and no more, and no whit understanding why any reverend gentleman should wish to know the inner workings of a show. They saw the lady standing there, lovely in her white and gold, and walked past her at a distance, impressed, as all these children of mirth and sorrow were, by her aloofness. She signaled graciously, and it was the real clown, not the fictitious one, who approached with deference. Clifford was before him, and to him the lady spoke, tendering him a paper she had taken from her sleeve.

"Mr. Clifford, one of my guests begs you to give an impartial opinion on these poems."

"A poet among you?" Clifford was repeating. "Not a poet! Really! really! I am truly gratified, I assure you. I am

gaining a great deal of most delightful information. Mr. Bumstead here is telling me the inner workings of the — ah — the show."

But Bumstead's hand was on his arm. He knew the audience was over, and Clifford was drawn away. They betook themselves to a corner, and there the clown seated himself with his great book, and the Reverend George A. Clifford stood gaping at joys he was untrained to share. A pretty page was beseeching Julia to dance, and in the act of starting, her foot out, her hand uplifted, holding her partner's, the lady stopped and waved the child away. Here was Jakes again, her guardian and her cross. He staggered under a long basket covered with white cloth. Julia thought she knew his possibilities, but now imagination failed her.

"Jakes," said she, "what have you there?"

He answered grimly.

"The silver—miss."

"What are you doing with it?"

At that moment he was pushing it under the carved oaken bench by the door.

"I 'm gittin' it out o' the dinin'-room," said he. "You 've let that jail-bird loose in there, an' I would n't trust the tine of a fork within gunshot of him."

At that moment the jailbird himself appeared, with a tray of food, and, deftly circling round the dancers, was about to ascend the stairs. Jakes fixed him with an eye incredulous of what it saw.

"There 's a back-staircase to this house," he announced. "Where should you say you was goin' to, anyways?"

Julia, meantime, was lifting the napkin on the tray, and appraising what she saw.

"Milk," said she. "That's nice."

But Jakes was at the stairs.

"Where be you goin', anyways?" he inquired belligerently.

The man appealed to Julia with a glance.

"I was carrying a tray to the lady and the little boy," said he.

"You give it here," commanded Jakes. "Now step yourself into the kitchen. There ain't no lady. There ain't no little boy."

The jailbird departed obsequiously, and Julia, watching his unpleasant back, said gently:

"You haven't forgotten the woman and the little boy, Jakes, have you?"

"I wa'n't to tell, was I?" said Jakes, the martyr. "Well, I ain't told. That's all there is to it."

Julia smiled upon him.

"Good boy, Jakes," said she. "Here, give me the tray. You'll only terrify her." She pulled up her long gown, tucked it under her arm, and went up the stairs, bearing the tray before her.

Meantime, Jakes knelt to his task of pushing the basket the more securely under the bench. A waltz began. The clown still read in the corner, but the Reverend George A. Clifford, unable to still his feet, painstakingly began practising steps by himself until a laughing flower-girl came whirling up and set upon him with proffers of instruction. He hesitated. It seemed harmless to take steps by himself. The devil was in it if he really danced;

but, "one, two, three," he was off, guided in a pleasing rhythm, and he liked it.

The hall was a tumultuous sea of whirling colors. Among the circling rout were two new figures, men in their traveling clothes, grave onlookers, — Silverstream and Peter Maxwell. They viewed the scene for a moment in some bewilderment. Peter was the first to recover himself. He confronted Jakes, risen from his hidden hoard.

"We have been unable to find the office," said Peter. "The maid was very indefinite"—

Jakes remedied that defect.

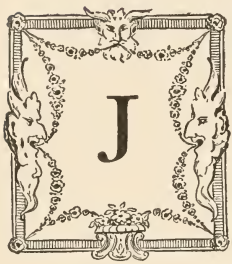
"Office!" he muttered fractiously. "What do you mean by office?"

Peter explained.

"The superintendent's office. Will you say to the superintendent that we

ventured to come direct from the station because a hackman told us there was a ball to-night? That was what we wanted particularly to observe."

VI



AKES and the two visitors confronted one another.

"Was it a hackman?" Jakes inquired gloomily.

"Yes," said Peter, with some impatience. "We asked to be driven to the asylum, and he said there was a ball there to-night."

Jakes relapsed into contemplation of the wonders of Providence in affording retribution swiftly.

"By gravy!" said he.

Peter addressed him in an undertone.

"Are these all patients?"

"I don't know," said Jakes, goaded beyond endurance. "I don't know what they be."

Maxwell looked his doubt of Jakes himself, but indulged only in a mollifying:

"If you 'll kindly take my card to the superintendent?"

Jakes accepted the card, looked at it vaguely, and laid it on a table. Things were growing too complex. He thought of the silver, wondered whether he had done well in the bourne he had sought for it, took a martial station in front of it, and wished for Julia. Maxwell, absorbed in the scene of light and color, had forgotten him. Silverstream, tired about the eyes, recalled himself peremptorily, being one who had learned that it never befits a man to mope.

"If you want to observe this thing,

Pete," said he, "you 'd better join the dance. I shall."

Maxwell detained him by a touch. He was gazing at the scene in honest wonder.

"Look at them, Jack," said he, "look at them, — each with that spark of madness in his eye."

Silverstream did look, rather drearily.

"They seem very much like other people, to me," he observed.

Maxwell answered warmly :

"That 's where you 're not a specialist. I 'm not one-half so keen as you are, in most things, Jack, but here I score. I do see it."

"Well," said Silverstream, "I 'm going to take a turn."

The pretty page accepted him, and they whirled away. The clown, now embraced by his insistent charge, the

Reverend George A. Clifford, came gyrating intermittently past. The flower-girl had expended most of her good-nature and all her breath on Clifford. She was in a corner now, being fanned by Romeo, and Clifford, madly ambitious, had besought his professional friend to give him one turn more.

"Only one turn, and then, by George, Bumstead! I tell you what, I bet I 'll catch it."

He had not caught it yet to any extent, for, in spite of Eleazar's strong right arm, he charged into Maxwell, and stopped, breathless with delight and dizziness. Peter beamed upon the clown, who faced him.

"Whom have I the pleasure of addressing, sir?" he asked expansively. When Peter spoke to foreigners, or such

as were touched in their wits, he always used Johnsonian phrases.

"The Vicar of Wakefield, sir," answered the clown, from deepest gloom. He was inexpressibly bored by the Reverend George A. Clifford, and sought about in his own mind for a way to escape to his corner, his Gibbon, and his pipe.

"You, sir?" said Maxwell promptly to the clergyman. "Might I ask"—

He was not permitted to ask. The Reverend George A. Clifford answered joyously:

"Grimaldi, sir, the clown!"

These were picturesque delusions. None so rich as Peter in finding them ready to his hand.

"This is a delightful scene," said he at random, looking about him, and pouncing on material for talk. "Do

you have these gatherings regularly?"

"To tell the truth," said the Reverend George A. Clifford, "I seldom have the chance to join any gayeties beyond the League or the Ladies' Aid. I am rather a hard student in my secular life. This is a sort of relaxation I have never sought before; but for once in a way I find it beneficial — truly beneficial." He put the tips of his fingers together with a professional delicacy, and looked at Maxwell as if he challenged him to prove that even a clergyman should not be a man. Eleazar Bumstead was meantime sneaking away somewhere to his book and the pipe of his desire. Maxwell turned.

"Did you choose your costume yourself, or was it selected for you?" he asked, beaming through his glasses.

Eleazar Bumstead had had enough of their lax, amorphous interference.

"Forgit it," he said abruptly, and strode away.

But Julia Leigh was coming down the stairs. The Reverend George A. Clifford lifted admiring eyes to her, and Maxwell, following his gaze, came also under the spell of her rich beauty. At once she saw him, and advanced graciously, reading the story of his dress and air.

"You have just come," said she. "Have you been offered a costume?"

Peter took the hand she gave, and bowed above it with a gallantry left over from his German student days.

"I am delighted to be here," he said. "I don't think I'll have a costume, thank you. It's a little late, and"— She looked so pathetically

young and sweet that his feelings overcame him, and he plunged. "Are you contented here?" he asked.

She laughed, a chime of bells.

"Well," said she, "if I 'm not, it 's my own fault, — now, is n't it?"

"Your own fault!" said Peter. "Poor child! poor child!"

But Jakes was drawing her aside.

"He thinks it 's the asylum," said Jakes, in an undertone of dread discouragement. "He 's asked for the superintendent. Here 's his card."

Julia looked at him as if it were difficult to estimate so rich a fortune.

"Well!" said she. "Well!" Then she read the card. Her manner changed. She was on fire. "Jakes," said she, "take this card into the library to Mrs. Maxwell. Tell her she 's not to come in here unless I send her

word." Then she turned to Peter. He was ready to propose his cardinal question.

"I suppose," said he, "the doctors are all friends of yours?"

Strangely she seemed to have changed. There was a wild mirthfulness in her demeanor.

"I'll tell you a secret," she said. "The doctors" — she whispered — "the doctors are under lock and key."

Peter did start.

"Bless me!" he breathed.

"Yes, all the doctors are under lock and key. All the attendants, too. Though some of them we killed. All but the butler," she continued, as Jakes appeared again. "But he's not a real butler."

"No, I ain't," volunteered Jakes, with unexpected readiness. "I'm a

freeborn American citizen. I can't find her," he added, to Julia.

"Hunt, then," she ordered. "Look in the garden. She 's probably stepped out of the library window into the orchard."

"A freeborn American citizen," Maxwell was repeating, making a surreptitious note in the little book he drew forth now and then. "Interesting delusion! My dear young lady," — he put up the book and added this suggestively, — "I suppose the doctors are some of them not quite — sane?"

"Mad," said Julia calmly, "mad, every one of them. That 's nothing. You 're mad yourself."

Then, before Peter could recover his equilibrium and betake himself to a maxim, she addressed him sweetly:

"I will tell you how it happened.

I was the sweetest girl in all the country round. I had blonde hair reaching to my feet, and my eyes were like sloes. My cheek it was the fairest that e'er the sun shone on. Well, what happened? One day I went into the tailor's — he lived next door — to ask about the prospect of new sleeves. What did he tell me? 'My dear,' said he, 'I speak to you with perfect frankness because your grandparent was my almost lifelong friend. My dear,' — But there it ended. Could a man do more?"

Peter was staring fascinated, and, well pleased, she was about to continue, when Silverstream, promenading now with the pretty page, crossed her vision. Her jaw dropped unbecomingly. She looked an image of perfect fright. Her eyes widened, and the color surged

slowly into her face. She turned her back on Maxwell, walked rapidly away from him, and stood looking into the window shade she had omitted to pull up. And Silverstream had joined his friend. Peter, he saw, looked nervous.

"Jack," said Peter, "there 's something queer here."

"It 's a party," said Silverstream indifferently. "That 's all it is."

"It 's devilish queer. Has it occurred to you the patients have got loose?"

"The better for the book."

"Well, keep an eye on 'em," counseled Peter briefly. "There 's a crowd of 'em. If they get unmanageable, we 're nowhere."

They turned by an impulse to watch the dancers, who seemed never to tire in their pretty whirling, and that in-

stant Kate Maxwell opened the door leading into the courtyard, and came innocently in. The eyes of her own Peter were the ones she met, and she stood staring. Peter stared also; but when she turned, slipped through the door again, and broke the spell, he gave one cry:

"By George! there 's my own wife!" and followed, hot-foot, after her.

The dancers scattered, and Julia, at the cry and closing of the door, turned to find herself face to face with Silverstream. Then the dancers, really astonished at nothing in this wonderful house, began footing it again, and Silverstream stood looking at her. Joy was in her heart, but her tumultuous soul bade it not to show itself. So she did not look at him. He spoke first, in an exquisite fervency.

"I 've found you!"

"Did you come to find me?" She could not deny herself that much, and said it softly, though still not looking at him.

"No, dear, no. But I 've found you." A horrifying thought struck him, and he added to himself, "But — in this place!"

She had forgotten her part. Now he had recalled her. She forced her eyes to look at him.

"Do I know you?" she asked vaguely.

"Know me! Dear," he said imploringly, "you must remember me."

Neither of them thought that, in their first hazardous acquaintanceship, she had not been called "dear," nor, in fact, by any name. The hard circumstance of the place made it natural to

him that she should be. The incredible joy of seeing him again made it natural to her.

Still she looked at him, bending her gaze as vacantly as she might, yet not able to deny herself that dear solace. Never had she seen him so near, face to face, the image in his eyes reflecting her. But she recalled herself.

"You are the King of Hearts," she said. "They shuffled the pack, and he fell out."

There was such honest pain upon his face that she almost forbore. Yet she thought of Peter Maxwell and what he must be taught, and steeled herself. What Peter's lesson was to be, she did not fully know; but she suspected that he must have some radical catastrophe of the emotions to show him what he dealt with ignorantly

"He went away," she said, with a sad vagueness, plucking at her gown.

"You knew I should come back," said Silverstream. "You must have known. Listen to me. I was called to England. A child had been stolen. It was a child left in my charge."

"What!" cried Julia. She straightened. "Were you good to that child?" she asked rapidly.

"I was a brute."

"Did you neglect him?"

"Yes, I did."

"You deserved to lose him." Joy and vengeance strove in her eyes. She longed to tell him what she guessed, though mischief counseled her, "Not yet." "You deserve a pretty lesson, and I warrant you'll get it. You deserve to be scared out of your boots."

"Now you 're talking," Silverstream

burst forth. "Now you 're like yourself."

She relapsed into poetic idiocy.

"Six selves hanging in the wardrobe," she murmured, "and not one to fit!"

"Dearest!"—he breathed it imploringly. "I 've got to call you so. I used to, in my heart. I shall take you away from here. You would n't be frightened, dear? You 'd go with me?"

"In a coach and four!"—she said it confidentially. "But the four must not be horses. Let them be mice. Do you know why I am here?"

"I don't need to know." His face had wakened into a boyish earnestness. Immediately she loved him as she loved the little boy upstairs, and, in addition to other fashions, somewhat in the same way. But she spoke portentously.

"I killed — Cock Robin."

"You are coming away with me," he assured her. "I shall take care of you. We 'll go abroad, and you 'll get well."

Maxwell, wild of eye and aspect, was before them.

"I can't find her," he said to Silverstream. "I saw my own wife, and I can't find her."

Julia answered:

"I know your wife. She lost her senses from neglect — neglect."

Peter was weeping. At least, tears stood in his honest eyes, and his glasses were bedimmed.

"Neglect!" he cried. "For God's sake, who's neglected her?"

Clifford was approaching, manuscript in hand. He had been forgetting poesy in the dance.

"This poem," he began, with sage emphasis, "written under the pressure of strong emotion" —

Julia took the paper from him ruthlessly. She presented it to Peter Maxwell, with the melancholy commentary:

"Her last sonnet!"

Peter read distractedly, not as he had read like follies in the last dull years:

"'Ah, we are parted, love. What shall I say?
We may no longer meet. Ah, well-a-day!'

Her poetry! I should know it among a hundred" —

"The use of the rhymed couplet in the sonnet is peculiar," began Clifford, matching his finger-tips.

But Peter was crying wildly, in a new suspicion:

"Parted! What does she mean by that? Parted!"

"Come, come, Pete," Silverstream was saying in his ear, "you're off your head."

Maxwell had turned on Clifford.

"You had this poem in your possession," he choked. "Where did you get it? I repeat, where did you get it?"

Clifford replied with dignity:

"These poems were entrusted to me by a lady. I hope we need not bring any lady's name into this discussion."

"He had it in his hand," blustered Maxwell, beyond the call of reason. "He's got another one there. I see it. By George, sir! if you were ten maniacs rolled into one, I'd call you to account for this."

"Sir," said Clifford, choking, "out

of consideration for my cloth "— His eye fell upon it, and he ended weakly.

Bumstead came up, put an arm through his, and walked him off.

"Don't make a scene, Pete," Silverstream was urging.

"He may go," said Peter. "I spare him for the present. But we've got to find her. Jack, this thing must be looked into."

"There 's a well in the garden," remarked Julia dreamily. "Look into that."

Peter turned to Jakes, just then on one of his fractious quests about the room.

"Give me a lantern," he commanded. But as Jakes merely cast a scornful eye on him, he concluded piteously: "Give me a lantern, for the love of heaven!"

"Let me alone," remarked Jakes brutally. "You 're all play-actin' together."

"Jack," groaned Maxwell, "Jack!"

Meantime Jakes announced to Julia:

"Supper 's served."

He said it as if he offered poison.

She remembered the hoarded silver.

"We can't eat," she remonstrated, in an undertone, "without forks and spoons."

"They can use their fingers," said Jakes. "It 's sangwiches." And he peered jealously under his guardian bench and pushed the basket a fraction of an inch within.

"Shall we go out to supper?" said Julia, with her grand air. She drew the clown from his corner and his Gibbon, and led the way. The two men, ignored, confronted each other.

"Jack," said Peter, in a wild fervor, "my wife is here, in that garden. Out in the night, in that garden!"

Silverstream was not thinking of such mild incidents. What was it to him that one man had lost a wife? He had found a wife that was to be. He slapped Peter on the back, and laughed gayly — boisterously.

"Nonsense, man," said he. "Your wife's at home, where you left her. You've lost your nerve."

Maxwell was interrogating the very walls.

"She may be under this roof now," he asseverated. "There are dozens of entrances we don't know. Some maniac may have gagged her"—

But here was Jakes. He had left the guests busy with the Spartan fare he had provided, and had himself returned

to the only sanity he found, as he had diagnosed it. His defiant air had cooled to humble suppliance.

"Gentlemen," said he, "if you 've got any feelin' for what 's right, you 'll hang round this house till mornin'! There 's a jailbird in the dinin'-room, there 's dark-lanterns outside, an' the silver" — he recollected himself — "the silver 's where I put it."

Both men turned upon him. They had him alone, and they knew what to do with him.

"Where is the resident physician?" cried Maxwell.

"Where are the house officers?" put in Silverstream.

"Where are the nurses?"

Loyalty and native candor strove together in the butler's breast. He answered the three questions together, in

a wholesale phrase born out of his distraction.

"I dunno nothin' about it. Find out by your learnin'."

Maxwell turned to his friend.

"Come, Jack," he said. "I shall summon the police."

Jakes melted to nothing appreciable to the naked eye.

"Oh, you can't do that," — he almost wept. "Her name 's got to be kep' out o' the papers."

"Whose name?" roared Silverstream. "Speak up. Are you an attendant here, or what are you?"

Jakes could not be bullied.

"I 'm a freeborn American citizen," he snarled.

Silverstream forgot that he had found his love. Pure exasperation moved him.

"Tell all you know," he cried, "or I 'll shake the life out of you."

Jakes squared up to him.

"Ye will, will ye?" he inquired.

Julia was there, but neither saw her. She had come softly back, like a cat upon a tempting scent.

"There 's nothing for it, Jack," said Maxwell. "We 've got to search the house."

"Search the house!" cried its mistress, in a trumpet tone. "Search my house! Gentlemen, good-night. Jakes, the door."

They could not be too hasty in their going. They knew they were misjudged, and yet vague shame possessed them. Jakes, tremulously undoing the door, was beseeching them:

"Gentlemen, if you 've got any

bowels in ye, you 'll hang round here till daylight."

His foot on the sill, Silverstream turned to her. He braved the lightning of her eye.

"Let me beg you," he said, "to go to your room — to get some sleep" —

Peter was reminding him, in a smothered tone:

"Don't rouse her, Jack! Don't rouse her!"

"The gardin," Jakes was saying. "Keep that in mind. The gardin."

"Good-night!" said Julia.

VII

T one o'clock the next morning the great hall was still. This was the time for Jakes to wander about and see that all was safe, and in the rare silence of the place recover his lost calm. In this perpetual pageant it was always lost. Sometimes he caught a glimpse of it when the whole party went singing out to frolic in the April weather, or when they were asleep and he caught a fugitive nap himself. Jakes slept little at this time. He used to look at his old watch with his sleep-

sick eyes, and wonder how long he could bear the strain. Then he winked them open valiantly. He was Julia's self-appointed guardian. So long as it suited her to play the fool, he must stand by and watch, lest something do her a harm. This morning he had not even the solace of being alone. The jailbird was with him, for the reason that Jakes dared not trust him anywhere else. On their way to the hall, Jakes had collected various articles he considered he might need, and now he arranged them on the great oak table: a coil of rope, a bottle, a large pepper-box, a bunch of keys, a pair of handcuffs.

The jailbird watched him with an absorption and delight calculated to flatter one not overpowered by sleep and worry. But Jakes had scanty notice

for him, so long as he kept silence and went where he was bidden.

"You set there," commanded Jakes.

He pointed to the bench.

The jailbird was instant in his obedience.

"Maybe I could assist you, sir," he volunteered.

"Mebbe ye could," Jakes responded, counting over his assortment of articles on the table, "by settin' where ye be. What 's your name?" he added tartly.

"Call me Stephen," said the jailbird, almost affectionately. "Stephen!" He cocked his head in the direction of the stairs. "Did n't I hear a child's voice up there?" he inquired solicitously.

Jake stopped his pottering toils, and regarded him with an ironical admiration.

"You 've got a bee in your beaver, ain't ye?" he inquired. "A child here, an' a child there! A phantom child, that 's what you 're ha'nted by — a phantom child."

Stephen put his head on one side, and spoke sententiously and with feeling:

"It 's a lonely house that has n't a child in it."

"You need n't concern yourself. The house ain't goin' to be no desert so long as the present population 's here." A look of exultation marked his dry old face. He raised the bunch of keys and shook them in high triumph. "Anyhow," he cried, "they 're locked into their rooms all right."

Stephen regarded him with a fulsome admiration.

"Now," said he, as if imploring

Jakes to spare his nerves so rich a wonder, "you have n't been and locked the ladies and gents into their bedrooms?"

"Ain't I?" said Jakes. "When *you* was locked into the pantry! Every man Jack of 'em. Every woman Jill. I took the keys out o' their doors afore dark. As soon as all was quiet, I locked 'em in. When I git things settled here, you 're goin' to your bed, an' you 'll be locked in yourself, that 's what you 'll be."

"Oh," lamented Stephen, "you 've no confidence in folks! I 'm sorry, sir, sorry, sorry!"

"Are ye? So 'm I."

Stephen, kicking his heels under the bench, met an obstacle there. It clinked betrayingly.

"Here! here!" called Jakes dis-

tractedly, "what are you doin' there? God sake! you goin' to kick the house to pieces?"

Stephen had put a hand casually down to investigate, but Jakes advanced upon him so emphatically that he rose.

"Beg pardon, sir," said he.

"You better. Now," said Jakes, regarding his little treasures outspread upon the table, "if anybody's goin' to break an' enter to-night, let 'em come on. There's kian pepper to throw in their eyes, there's household ammonia ditto, there's a rope to tie their legs, an' handcuffs as indicated."

"Handcuffs!" cried Stephen, in delighted interest. "Now, if you'll believe it, I scarcely ever see a pair, let alone touching 'em."

"It ain't too late," remarked Jakes,

not unmindful of his own importance in the possession of those naughty guardians.

Stephen was regarding him with the same admiring interest that Jakes had seemed from the first to awaken in him.

"Now," he said, "where could a gentleman like you fall foul of a pair of handcuffs?"

Jakes tripped happily into reminiscence.

"A good many years ago," said he, "I was porter in a bank, an' I done suthin' that got me in with the police. I had a friend that was a sheriff, an' he let me have these bracelets to kinder remember suthin' by."

Stephen was marvelously excited. His small eyes glittered. He also seemed to remember something.

"You wa' n't the porter in the Atlas Bank?" he cried.

Jakes thought he hid his pride, but it oozed through.

"Wa' n't I, though?" he remarked. "I ruther think I was."

"You wa' n't the man that was tied and gagged, and managed to work himself loose, and got out through the sky-light?"

"Yes, I was."

"And down to the next roof" —

"The Insurance Block" —

"And give the alarm" —

"For all I was wuth!"

Stephen sprang up and seized his guardian's hand. He shook it warmly and continuously.

"You old 'ero!" he cried raptly. "Why, I used to say to myself, 'If I could meet the man that done that

deed!' My little girl, she used to say to me, 'Tell me the story of the man that done the deed.'"

Jakes flushed all over his wrinkled face.

"Did she, now?" he asked. "Well, I certainly am obleeged to her. Did she really?"

"Yes, she did. What become of them bank thieves?"

"Sentenced, all but one. He got away." Jakes shook his head. "Consarn him!"

"Did he, now? And them handcuffs were a kind o' momentum o' that job?"

Jakes swelled with self-importance.

"That an' others."

"Now," said Stephen admiringly, "I'll warrant you know how they work."

Jakes knew perfectly. From his air, it might have been concluded that he knew everything on all subjects.

"Easy as pi," said he, flourishing the handcuffs in happy illustration. "You slip one hand in here. You slip t' other in there. That 's all there is to it."

Stephen bent over the thin, manacled old wrists.

"And snap 'em?" he inquired innocently, with a movement. "So?"

"By gravy!" said Jakes, regarding his fetters pleasantly, "you 've done it, ain't ye?"

"So I have," said Stephen, with a like urbanity.

"You feel in my pocket. Mebbe the key 's there."

"Maybe it is."

Stephen went through the pockets methodically, taking sundry articles

from them, and transferring them, with beautiful adroitness, to his own person: a watch, a purse, even a handkerchief. He spoke musingly: "My little girl used to say to me, 'Where 's the 'ero that done the deed?'"

"Found it?" Jakes was twittering. "Found it?"

"No," said the searcher soothingly. "Don't you be in a hurry, Mr. Jakes. The more haste the less speed." Meantime he deftly took the bunch of keys from the table and tucked them into his own pocket. "Don't you be in haste, Mr. Jakes. 'Where 's the 'ero,' that 's what she used to say. 'Show me the 'ero that done the deed.'"

Jakes was fidgeting.

"Mebbe that key 's in my t'other coat, out on the pantry nail," he quavered. "You look."

Stephen was gently making his way to the great oaken door.

"I don't feel it 's there, Mr. Jakes," he said suavely. "I really don't. I 'll slip down to the police station and see if I can't borrow a key."

"Don't ye do it," cried Jakes. "Don't ye do it."

"When I come back, Mr. Jakes," Stephen went on smoothly, "I 'll tap at the kitchen door. You be there to meet me. I could n't come the front way, not this way. I 'd feel like I was breaking and entering. You be patient, Mr. Jakes. Don't you be in haste. But you be in the kitchen."

And the jailbird slipped pleasantly out at the oaken door. It closed behind him with a click.

"You hold on," Jakes called after him almost tearfully, first through the

keyhole and then at the window. "You come back here!"

There were steps without, and the door from the garden opened to a violent hand. Maxwell appeared, almost falling in his haste. Silverstream followed, more deliberately. It was he who spoke, with an exasperated sternness:

"What's all this rumpus?"

Jakes held out his manacled hands.

"You jest look at here," he implored. "Only you look at here!"

"Handcuffed?" frowned Silverstream.

"You go through my pockets, sir," Jakes besought him, with a morsel of hope. "There's a key. Mebbe he's missed it."

"Key? What kind of a key?"

Jakes had not ceased from holding out imploring hands.

"To take 'em off, gentlemen. He 's put 'em on, an' we 've got to git 'em off. You search my pockets, gentlemen."

Maxwell took one side and Silverstream the other. They went through his pockets with a systematic haste, Silverstream as if it were a mad fantasy, which was, nevertheless, all in the day's work.

"Gentlemen," Jakes was quavering, "don't you slip away from here this night. There 'll be breakin' an' enterin' afore mornin'!"

"Tommyrot!" remarked Silverstream.

"How 'd ye git in this door, anyways?" inquired Jakes, with a sudden thought.

"We climbed the iron fence," returned Maxwell, with severity, "be-

cause we intend to remain in that garden all night — if we do not remain here. A lady belonging to this household fled into that garden" —

"Hark!" Jakes breathed portentously. "Don't ye hear a step?"

"Who do you think is going to break into a lighted room?" inquired Silverstream irascibly.

"He will," Jakes avowed. "That jailbird will. He's gone now to tell his mates. He'll tell 'em where the silver's put an' where my weepons be. There 's kian pepper to throw in their eyes," he recited mechanically; "there's household ammonia ditto, there 's a rope to tie 'em with, an'" — He looked despairingly down at his wrists. The handcuffs were unhappily there.

Silverstream, having finished with the last pocket, gave the suppliant's

shoulder an impatient farewell push, and turned away.

"There 's no key here," said he.

"It 's in my t'other coat," said Jakes hopefully.

There was a sound without, a crash. It was pottery in supreme overthrow.

"What the devil" — began Peter.

"I told ye so," said Jakes. "It 's the flowerpots I piled up to ketch 'em. You 'd ha' kicked 'em over yourself if you had n't ha' had luck." Another crash, a slighter one. Jakes whispered now portentously: "He 's comin' in from the gardin. You take that kian," he recommended Silverstream, pushing it toward him with his fettered hands. "You take the bottle," he whispered Maxwell. "Now you slip in behind them pa'ms and vines there, an' when you 've blinded him, you lay on."

They glanced involuntarily at the door, flanked, on each side, by ample coverts.

"Tomfoolery!" said Silverstream. Instantly he was on the way to the door, and Jakes, as promptly, was dragging him backward by the coat.

"Where you goin', sir?" moaned Jakes.

"I 'm going to open that door."

"Don't ye do it, sir, don't ye do it."

"He 's right, Jack," said Peter firmly. Peter was trembling all over from what might be called a conflict of the emotions. "He 's right. You hear to him. He knows more about this place than we do. It may be a patient with homicidal mania."

"Homicidal grandmother!" remarked Silverstream.

"Jack, my wife is on these premises." Piteous as Jakes appeared, his countenance overcast by dread anticipation, Maxwell, in sheer despair, went him ten better. "You owe it to me to do nothing rash."

Jakes stood regarding the door in a catalepsy.

"I hear a step," said he.

It was too much for the other men. Evidently it seemed to them both that it was best to play the play out as it had begun, and each of them stepped behind the sheltering leafage. Jakes tottered to the bench and sat there rigidly. The door opened. A woman entered. It was Katherine Maxwell. Jakes looked at her and gasped.

"Well!" said he. "By gravy!"

Kate advanced slowly, cautiously, as if she feared the very walls. She drew

a long breath, relaxed a little, saw Jakes, and promptly screamed.

"Jakes!" she cried. "What are you doing here?"

Jakes rose and stood, concealing his hands, so far as might be, behind the table.

"I 'm lockin' up, mum," said he with dignity. "There 's folks round the house to-night. You clip it up to bed."

But she had no idea of quitting him so soon. There were things for her to learn.

"Jakes," said she, with indifferent ease, "there was a gentleman here to-night, one that was not expected."

Jakes eyed her stolidly.

"Was there, mum?"

Mrs. Maxwell vouchsafed him a fascinating smile.

"Where did he go?" she asked.

"Can't say, mum."

"Jakes, you surely saw him!"

"Mebbe I did, mum. I dunno what I see in this bedlam. I dunno 's any of 'em are flesh an' blood. I 'm black an' blue, mum, where I 've pinched me to make sure I 'm alive myself."

She was regarding him now reproachfully. She spoke in eloquent earnest.

"You must remember him. A dignified, handsome gentleman with blue eyes and auburn hair. A stranger to Miss Julia. Jakes, you must remember."

"All strangers here, more or less, mum," Jakes conceded miserably, conscious only of his fettered hands. "Shake 'em up in a peck measure, an' you could n't tell the difference."

"I could tell the difference," she re-

marked, with dignity. "He was no stranger to me. Jakes, where is Miss Julia?"

He leaped at the diversion.

"Upstairs, mum," he cried eagerly. "You hear to me, mum, an' go quietly to your room." A sudden thought assailed him. "By gravy!" he muttered, "you can't git in." His gaze swept the table. "My keys!" he cried, in a shrill staccato. "Where's my bunch o' keys?"

Mrs. Maxwell promptly followed his cry with a successful echo.

"O Jakes! you frighten me."

"He's took my keys, the jailbird," Jakes was moaning. "He's took my keys. You listen to me, mum. I've got suthin' to tell ye."

"Tell it," she bade him miserably. "I can bear anything."

"Well, it's this, mum. You can't git into your room."

"Can't get into my room? Why can't I get into my room?"

"You go into the lib'ry, mum," he entreated her. "You go in there an' lay down a spell. I'll git your door open the minute I can."

"O Jakes, something dreadful is going on. There is. I know there is."

"You go into the lib'ry, mum," he implored her. "That's all you can do. You go into the lib'ry."

She trailed distractedly toward the door.

"I don't want to go into the library," she protested. "Jakes, if Mr. Maxwell calls in the morning — oh," she concluded, in desperation, "I can never see him." And, quelled in a measure by the determination of that advancing

figure, she did retreat into the library, and Jakes shut the door upon her.

By one impulse, with one stride, Maxwell and Silverstream appeared from their shelter.

"That was my wife, Jack," Peter announced distractedly. "My wife! What was she doing out in that garden at this hour?"

Silverstream passed a weary hand across his brow.

"If it comes to that," said he disgustedly, "what are we doing in the house here at the same hour?"

"You heard her asking for him?"

"For whom?"

"That damned mountebank in the calico pajamas. Did he look like that, Jack? Did he have auburn hair and blue eyes? Was he dignified? Was he handsome?"

"Muttonhead! She meant you."

"No!" cried Maxwell, in extreme surprise. Depression overtook him. "No, Jack, no," he brooded. "It does n't fit."

Silverstream regarded him with a momentary hilarity, — his woe-begone countenance, his crumpled state.

"No, Pete, no," he owned, "I can't say it does."

"'No stranger to me!'" Peter was brooding. "That's what she said, Jack. 'No stranger to me!'"

Jakes had been hovering near.

"Gentlemen," he besought, in the resulting pause, while Peter gloomed and Silverstream looked with a hawk's glance from stairway to upper corridor, as if to conjure up an impossible vision of his lady. "Gentlemen, you come with me into the pantry an' see

if you can't find that key in my t'other coat."

"'I can never see him,'" Peter was murmuring, in woeful reminiscence. "That 's what she said, Jack! my own wife said it. 'I can never see him.'"

"Gentlemen," Jakes implored them, "you come this way."

Silverstream, looking at him, uttered the one word:

"Damn!"

But they followed him.

VIII

THE library door opened, and Mrs. Maxwell came stealing in, cat-like, in her trepidation over the queerness of the house.

"Jakes!" she called, in a muffled voice, "Jakes!"

Another voice answered from the stairs, one sweetly resolute:

"That you, Kate?"

"Julia!" she breathed in answer. "O Julia! Are you really there? I thought everybody was dead and buried. Everybody but Jakes, — and Jakes is crazy. Julia, he won't let me go up-

stairs, and the library is dark." She ended in a fit of sobbing.

Julia had reached the foot of the stairs. She looked slim and tall in her riding habit, — fresh, too, as if a night's wakefulness had no power over a spirit such as hers. Fire was in her eye, the pretty bloom upon her cheeks. She carried her riding hat and crop, and looked about her as if she only awaited the opening of the great door and the inrush of morning air to give a huntsman's call and hurry forth. She glanced at Kate, set a lock of hair right on her friend's haggard forehead and remarked :

" I 've been pounding at your door."

" Julia," said Kate, in a mysterious undertone. She looked about her as if the walls had ears. " There 's something queer about this house. What

do you think?" she whispered. "All the locks are caught."

"Are they?" said Julia, with an unmoved serenity. "I knew mine was. I climbed out through the transom." She rubbed her knees ruefully, yet with an untouched good-nature. "Where have you been?"

"In the garden."

"All this time? Why, it's all hours."

"I was afraid of Peter. Where did he go?"

"I don't know."

"What did he say?"

"I don't know. Something delirious. Run upstairs now, and put on your riding habit."

Mrs. Maxwell looked at her aghast.

"My riding habit? I'm going to bed."

Julia looked back at her in quiet glee.

"You can't go to bed," she announced. "Your room is locked."

But Kate had her.

"Then," she cried, in an equal triumph, "I can't get my riding habit."

"Ah!" Julia reflected. In a moment she announced with determination: "You 've simply got to come as you are, paint, patches, and powder, to Larkspur, down in the State of Maine."

"Julia!" Her friend stared at her feebly and in despair. "Julia!" she ended weakly, "there 's nothing like you — unless it 's a tornado."

But Julia was not listening, save to the seething of her own mental cauldron. When she had a scheme afoot, the outer world was lost to her. She took a quick resolve.

"Kate," she said, "there 's a baby upstairs, and we 've got to steal it."

"A baby! How did it come there?"

Julia pointed, in solemn triumph, up the stairs.

"It was carried. Simple as you please. But it 's got to be brought down mysteriously veiled. It 's got to be conveyed to the stables by the back way. It 's got to be held before me, strained to me bosom, while I ride and me pursuers tumble over themselves in the far distance."

"Then what do you want me for?"

"I want you," said Julia firmly, "to cuddle the baby while I saddle the horses. I want you to fall behind and be captured if we are pursued, and let me get off with my prey — the blessed!"

Kate recovered her fainting spirit.

"Well, I won't, that 's all," said she. "Why, Peter 'd simply kill me."

"Yes, you will, Kate," said the lady, with unchanging firmness. "You know you will."

"Why don't you have a carriage, like a Christian, if you 've got to go?"

Julia looked at her and smiled, looked away from her and smiled again. Romance and adventure had her in their grip, one on each hand.

"Oh! oh!" sobbed her victim, in more or less calculated hysteria. "I see now what your great-uncle must have endured."

"Great-uncle? He had the time of his life."

"Besides, if there 's a baby up there — and I doubt it — you can't get him. He 's locked in."

"Confusion!" Julia breathed. "So

he is. And the police here by daybreak! I feel it. I know it. Kate, we must get that child away."

Kate was pacing up and down the room. Small regard had she now for her rustling train.

"Julia," she adventured, "I might as well tell you I don't mean to stay here another day. Peter will go home to find me. I must be there."

"Peter won't go home," said Julia sweetly. "He 'll come here by eight o'clock at the very latest."

Hope and fear flew together into the wife's eyes.

"Did Peter say that?" she cried.

"No! no! But he 'll come. The other man will make him."

"Who is the other man?"

"His name," Julia said demurely, "seems to be Silverstream."

"Jack Silverstream?"

"So I understand. And Jack Silverstream will come to find me, because, my dear, Jack Silverstream is *the man!*"

"Not yours?"

There was no answer emphatic or sweet enough, and so the lady closed her lovely lips, let an illuminating ray dart from each eye, and answered:

"Mm!"

"The one from abroad?"

"Mm!"

"The one that did n't speak?"

"The one that had n't spoken."

Mrs. Maxwell seemed to melt into a sea of anticipatory bliss.

"O Julia," she murmured, "are you happy?"

"I don't know," said Julia, emitting a general radiance.

"You don't know?"

"I don't know whether I 'm happy, Kate, or whether I 'm only crazy. And I don't care."

Mrs. Maxwell had a thought.

"But if you 're gone," she suggested, "he won't find you."

"Then," said Julia pleasantly, "he'll make the mistake of his life. As for you, Kate, if you don't want to go with me, you sha' n't. Stay here and face your Peter."

Kate considered.

"Peter will never forgive me," she lamented.

"Don't ask him. Forgive him."

The loyal wife was at once in arms.

"What for?" she demanded.

"Nothing, if you like. Only," Julia smiled at her enchantingly, "I 've always found that, if it 's a question of

forgiveness, it 's more blessed to give than to receive. Goose! Don't you know your Peter's half distracted? About you? There 's your ammunition. Use it."

"Distracted!" cried the wife. "Dear Peter!"

"Not dear Peter. Plain Peter. Let him do the endearing. What 's that?" Her eyes were on the garden door.

"The latch!" breathed Kate. "The latch is lifting."

Julia gathered her habit about her, fled softly to the door, and as softly bolted it. Then she returned to Kate, and, hand in hand, they stood with their eyes upon the latch.

"It 's a burglar," Julia exulted.

"We must scream," said Kate.

"No!" Julia withdrew her hand from that clinging clasp. It looked as

if she needed it for action. "We must trap him."

Kate began wringing her hands. She looked at the stairs, at the walls and ceiling.

"Where is Jakes?" she moaned. "Oh, where is Jakes?"

But Julia had gone from door to door and locked them.

"In his bed," she answered, in a safe undertone. "Where he ought to be."

"Oh!" moaned Kate, "where 's Peter?"

"In the gutter, I should hope, where *he* ought to be. Healthy change for him." She had slipped the keys under the rug. "Now," she ordered, in that mandatory whisper, "stop talking. I'm going to unbolt the door."

"Julia! he 'll come in."

"Not if you keep chattering like a guinea hen."

"You 've locked the doors. He can't get out."

"I don't mean he shall."

"He 'll go upstairs. They 'll be murdered in their beds."

"They 're locked in. You said so. Now, wait a minute. Where can we hide ourselves?" She looked from point to point, finger on lip, reflection in her eye. "Ah!" she breathed. "It 's Heaven-sent! Kate, get behind there."

With one ruthless hand she pulled her toward the leafy screen, and with the other poked her in. She pushed the bolt noiselessly back, and, with the same motion, tucked herself also into hiding. For the moment there was silence.

"Don't breathe," whispered Julia.

Kate laid a hand over her mouth, and dropped her train.

"Don't rustle!" came from the other hiding-place.

Silence again. The latch lifted, the door swung softly open. A man stepped in. It was the jailbird, prettily decorated with a mask. He stood for a moment, listening. Then he ran his hand into his pocket, to make sure the keys were ready, paused to listen, and went up the stairs. When the pad of his footfall had ceased above, Julia stepped out from her shelter. Her eyes were brilliant, her cheeks scarlet. She was a picture of high determination. Kate stumbled from her hiding-place, shaking in a palsy. She put two trembling hands on Julia's shoulder, and leaned upon her.

"He *was* a highwayman," whispered Julia, in real delight.

"Who was?" Kate was chattering.

"Don't talk. He'll be back. He'll have to go the way he came. When his back is turned, we'll fall on him. Wait. That skirt rustles. Take it off."

The skirt was rustling because the woman in it shook from head to foot.

"I can't," Kate whispered, her teeth biting upon every syllable. "M–my knees are weak."

"Take it off, I tell you!" Julia fell upon her. She fought with hooks, and deftly conquered them, stripped off the skirt, rolled it ruthlessly, and bundled it under a table. Then she sprang on a chair, and unhooked a velvet curtain from its rings. "Take this," she ordered.

"To put on?" inquired Mrs. Maxwell weakly.

"No! no! Give it back to me. You'd miss fire. Here's a rope. Heaven bless the man that left it there! When we're close upon him, I throw the curtain over his head. You pass the rope round his legs and trip him up."

Mrs. Maxwell could only look about her in a daze. Panic had mastered her.

"Trip him up!" she murmured weakly. "Trip him up!"

"Now," said Julia, pointing to their shelter, "in you go."

Kate, smiling in the extremity of her terror, concealed herself anew.

"A burglar!" murmured Julia, as she sought the opposite recess. "A burglar all my own, and Jakes asleep! Oh, rapture!"

The moments passed. There was

the sound of some one stirring, — not the burglar, but poor Kate.

"Julia!" she whispered. On the heels of the word, she came staggering out. "Julia, I 'm going to faint."

"Faint, if you dare," said valor from behind the leaves. "I 'll cut your hair off."

Kate trembled back to covert. In a moment, there she was again.

"Julia," she quavered, "I shall have to scream."

"Well, he 'll split your head open," said Julia philosophically. "You 'll look nice to Peter, then. Get back there."

She did get back. The soft padding began above, the lightest of footfalls on the stairs. He was coming down. Julia, peeping from her covert, found herself also moved to scream, and con-

quered it. He had surprised her. Instead of returning disappointed from securely fastened rooms, he bore a child, the little man she had already, in impulsive passion, begun to regard as her own emotional property. One little hand, relaxed and lovely, yet bearing in its baby outline some hint of virile strength, hung over the man's shoulder. The round face was snuggled to his breast. For one instant, Julia's heart failed her. A panic of doubt came over her. It would have been better, she thought in a tumult, not to let him in. It would have been better to decline upon the base expedient of womanhood and scream for help. Why was it always better to do dull things, and, if you were a woman, stick to woman's ways? Could not a woman pluck adventure, then, even by the

mantle?—but as her poor heart whimpered down, it rose again exultantly. He had laid the child softly on the bench, and regarded him doubtfully while the little form relaxed and the sighing breath eased into a deeper sleep. Julia sighed, too, in relief and sympathy, and choked the sound. He had not heard her. He knelt, and laid his hand upon the basket. That was her moment. Her blood rose in a tide. Armed for vengeance,—with a velvet curtain,—she flew from her hiding-place, and as he moved, in answer to her rush, the curtain was over his head.

"Kate!" she called. "The rope! the rope!"

Kate and the rope had parted company. She had darted out of her retreat, and left it on the floor behind

her. There in her petticoat she stood, screaming rhythmically. Some one began beating on the door, the one by which Jakes had led his rescuers on the quest of the key. There were cries from above stairs. Doors were pounded upon. Voices distractedly demanded: "What 's the matter ?"

"Open this door!" came a piercing pipe without, the voice of Jakes.

"Open the door!" called Silverstream, from the same point.

"Open the door, Kate, open the door," shrieked Julia, now in-hand-to hand encounter with her adversary.

"Open the door!" called Peter Maxwell.

Mrs. Maxwell wakened from her trance of horror.

"Oh!" she cried, "it 's Peter! O Peter, Peter!" She darted to the rug,

pounced on the keys, and got the right one. She threw wide the door. There was a rush of feet. Silverstream and Jakes, by according impulse, fell upon the jailbird, still muffled in his curtain, and Maxwell, judging that they were enough for that encounter, confronted his shrinking wife. Julia, hot, blown, her hair tumbling over her shoulders in beauteous disarray, took a breath, and shook herself. Then, with the utmost composure, she seized upon the child, awake now and putting his manly fingers into his sleepy eyes, sat down upon the bench, and cuddled him.

"You darling love!" she remarked, in ecstasy.

Peter had made one majestic exclamation:

"Katherine Maxwell!"

At that instant, Silverstream, having tossed aside his captive's shrouding curtain, plucked at his mask also, and as it fell, Peter followed his wife's eye to the burglar's unveiled features.

"Stirling!" fulminated Peter.

Stirling fell at once into an attitude of professional grace.

"Yes, sir," he replied.

"Stirling!" cried his mistress.

"Yes, mum," responded Stirling, with perhaps the suspicion of a smile, "if you please, mum!"

Meantime Jakes, with an Hebraic justice, was snapping the handcuffs on his prisoner's wrists. He knelt now, and with great relish lashed the comely legs together as they stood.

"Stirling," pursued Mrs. Maxwell, with dignity, under the impression that some especial action was demanded of

her as an employer of the erring butler, "how did you come here?"

But no one noticed her, and Peter, recalled, demanded fiercely, in an undertone:

"Katherine Maxwell, how did you come here?"

Jakes meantime propelled his prisoner to an unoccupied corner, where he left him briefly while he allayed the turmoil above stairs.

"Katherine" — said Peter.

"Peter, dearest!" she implored him.

"Kate!" it was a ringing note from Julia, momentarily desisting from her occupation of cuddling "piggies and paddies" and searching out creases in chubby legs.

Kate plucked up courage.

"Peter Maxwell," she returned, with spirit, "how did *you* come here?"

"What is this house?" fumed Peter. "I insist upon knowing."

"It 's the Court of Love," responded Julia, "where everybody has what he likes and likes what he has."

Maxwell scarcely heard her. The words beat upon his ears like empty sounds. As he thought, he gathered indignation.

"Katherine," he said, "I leave you respectably at home. I find you here — here — in this place" — he descended to miserable fact — "without your skirt."

"O Peter!"

"Kate!" This again from Julia.

Sooner or later Kate must tell. She knew it. In the bravado of despair, she lifted her head, and spoke with an assurance that amazed her and gave her power to finish :

"Peter, you advised me to go to a Rest Cure. My cure is freedom — just like yours. My rest is — fun."

Peter seemed to go all to pieces. She saw him crumble. "Kate," he implored her, "is there a part of your life I don't know?"

She felt her triumph, and stood there, silent, smiling. It was Julia who took pity on his honest misery.

"Bless you, no!" she called. "Come here, Mr. Maxwell. I 'm her old chum. Shake hands. Kitty 's only visiting me. So are you, for that matter. Kiss now, and make up afterwards."

Peter looked at his Kitty. She was smiling, blushing, almost on tiptoe, ready if he called. Peter was at her side. He put an eager arm about her waist, and off they went to the library,

to talk it out. Meantime Julia was becoming aware that Silverstream, having left the prisoner safe, was standing before her, looking at her. Julia blushed. She did not look at him. Then she blushed more and more and cuddled Jack.

"Will you stop kissing that child?" Silverstream inquired imperatively.

Julia looked at him, and dimpled.

"No," said she, "not immediately."

"Who is the child?"

"Part of a loan collection."

"Put him down. I want to talk to you."

The little boy had lifted his head. He was looking gravely at the speaker. He spoke now, in a clear tone, very sedately:

"Hullo, Uncle Jack."

"By Jove, sonny!" cried Silver-

stream. He reeled a little from excess of hope. "By Jove, my son," he cried, "is that you?"

Julia held the little face away from her, and looked into the blue eyes.

"How do you know it 's Uncle Jack, precious?" she inquired.

Little Jack gazed at them both with a measure of the contempt due to older creatures when they insist on reasons.

"He 's the picture on my bureau," was his succinct and excellent reply, delivered in the same clear voice. "Did n't you know that?"

The voices above stairs had ceased with Jakes's reassurance. Whatever he had said had proved sufficient. But now there was a cry without — a woman's note:

"Help! help!"

It came from the court or garden,

and Jakes, secure now in the certainty of allies, threw open the door. A woman hung there from her hands. It was Hannah Slate.

"Be I near the ground?" she cried piercingly. "How near be I?"

"You le' go," Jakes admonished her. "Le' go, an' you 'll soon find out."

But she clung frantically. Beyond the exercise of patience, Jakes laid hold upon her hands and shook them free. She dropped miserably, and drew a happy breath at finding herself on earth. Jakes eyed her wrathfully. She seemed to be inaugurating the untoward events of the night all over again.

"There 's a flight o' stairs to this house," he remarked.

"Is there?" returned Hannah, with the fierceness of a tiger trapped. "Well, there 's locks to the doors, too, an'

thieves, an' cut-throats that git into the room while you 're so beat out you can't waken nor stir, an' steal away the child by your side, an' then lock you up again. An' if you have to strip up the sheets an' come down by the winder if your head *does* go round " —

" Hannah Slate!" Silverstream ejaculated at this point.

She was aghast.

" Mr. Silverstream ! " she breathed. " My Lord ! "

But in seeing him she saw also little Jack in his safe refuge, and gave a cry all human and yearning, pathetically unsuited to her gaunt virginity.

" Come, Hannah," Julia called her. " Come along. Sit down here with me ; we 'll eat him up together."

Stirling was speaking with a universal and perfect respect :

"If you please, ladies and gents, I should wish to call attention to the fact that it was me that found the child, and me that claims the reward."

"Nonsense, highwayman," returned Julia promptly. "*I* found the child."

Hannah, the boy in her arms, looked over his head at Silverstream defiantly, and yet as one whose nerve is shaken.

"Mr. Silverstream," said she, "be I goin' to be took up?"

"If you are, Hannah, they shall put us in the same cell," Julia announced with cheerfulness. She rose, remembered her hair was down, and hunted for her hairpins. Then she wound the mass upon the top of her head. "Go back to bed, Hannah," she commanded. "Jakes, find her the key to her room. Take the boy with you, Hannah. Don't you fret."

Jakes had extracted the keys from Stirling's pocket, and Stirling had suavely murmured in the doing, "My old 'ero!"

Jakes looked him in the eye.

"You can shet your mouth," he counseled, "or I 'll shet it for ye."

But Stirling communed absently, as if with a sympathetic inner self, "My little girl she used to say to me, 'Show me the 'ero that done the deed!'"

It was Silverstream who carried the child upstairs and delivered him into Hannah's arms at her chamber door; and when Jakes had produced her key and let her in, they both came down again, Jakes to his prisoner, the young man to his mate. Silverstream stood before her.

"Come and talk to me," he said.

She was Aurora, the goddess of the

dawn, not a hardworked young woman who had been up all night. She looked at him, blushed, trembled.

"To-morrow," she said.

"To-day!"

He offered her his arm. She took it, not knowing where he meant to lead her. They walked across the hall to the open door, where Silverstream had caught a glimpse of stars.

"Jakes," he said over his shoulder, "telephone to the police to come up and take that fellow in the morning."

Then he led his lady out into the garden.

IX

THE garden was dark, and a soft wind was stirring. There was the sound of plashing water at a distance, and the whole world smelled of April. It looked to Silverstream, what he could see of it, all enchantment, and he drew her into the shade of an arbor near. Outside that shielding dusk, the light from the house fell upon white pillars and trembling leaves, and made their seclusion the more deep. He took her hands, and drew her to him.

"Sweetheart," he said, "I am going to kiss you."

When he had kissed her, he still held her hands, and they stood trembling. Silverstream laughed a little then.

"I don't know your name," he said.

She laughed, too.

"But I know yours. It's a pretty name."

"Shall you like to wear it?"

She made him a little curtsy in the dark.

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir."

"When? How soon? To-morrow? It's to-morrow now. To-day!"

"No, thank you, sir. Not quite to-day."

"Why not, sweetheart?"

"I 'm in no hurry, sir."

"I 'm in a furious hurry."

"I don't even like to make up a frock as soon as I 've got it. I like to try the color against my cheek, and then put it aside in a drawer, and next day try it again. Besides, I want a lover."

"You 've got one, sweetheart."

"Ah, but that's why I don't want him to turn into that other thing."

"What other thing?"

"Oh, I don't quite remember what they call it! That thing Peter is."

"A husband?"

"Is that it?" she asked, with innocence. "Well, maybe it does sound like it."

He had her hands again, and held them hard.

"I don't believe you 're ever quite in earnest," he said, with a great emotion that sounded to them both like anger.

"Don't you?"

"You do nothing but play games here."

"It is the Court of Love," said Julia. She breathed a happy sigh, and smiled into the darkness. It was as if she wished divinely well to the great world.

"How do I know but this is a game, too?"

"How, indeed!"

"Shall I trust you?"

"Not if you don't want to."

"Do you love me?"

"I let you kiss me."

"You did n't kiss me back again."

"Do they do that, too?"

"Don't be cruel to me!"

He seemed to her about the size of little Jack upstairs.

"Come, come," she whispered, to herself, "I must conquer this."

"Conquer what? liking me?"

"I never said I liked you. Conquer taking you for Jackie."

"You 're not in earnest! Not about anything!"

"Am I not?"

"Are you?"

"Let go my hands. You hurt them."

He dropped them, and stepped a pace away from her.

"Good-by," he said. "I understand."

"Good-by! You did n't ask me why I wanted back my hands." She crossed the space, and lifted them to his shoulders. They crept on until they met. She spoke, and her breath touched his ear.

"Did n't I truly kiss you?"

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