

**FLAMING
YOUTH**

WARNER FABIAN

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NEW YORK

THE MACAULAY COMPANY

Copyright, 1923,
By BONI & LIVERIGHT, INC.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing, January, 1923
Second Printing, February, 1923
Third Printing, February, 1923
Fourth Printing, March, 1923
Fifth Printing, March, 1923
Sixth Printing, April, 1923
Seventh Printing, May, 1923
Eighth Printing, June, 1923
Ninth Printing, June, 1923
Tenth Printing, July, 1923
Eleventh Printing, August, 1923
Twelfth Printing, August, 1923
Thirteenth Printing, September, 1923
Fourteenth Printing, October, 1923
Fifteenth Printing, November, 1923
Sixteenth Printing, December, 1923
Seventeenth Printing, February, 1924
Eighteenth Printing, March, 1924
Nineteenth Printing—Special Popular Edition—July, 1924

A WORD FROM THE WRITER TO THE READER:

“Those who know will not tell; those who tell do not know.”

The old saying applies to woman in to-day's literature. Women writers when they write of women, evade and conceal and palliate. Ancestral reticences, sex loyalties, dissuade the pen.

Men writers when they write of women, do so without comprehension. Men understand women only as women choose to have them, with one exception, the family physician. He knows. He sees through the body to the soul. But he may not tell what he sees. Professional honour binds him. Only through the unaccustomed medium of fiction and out of the vatic incense-cloud of pseudonymity may he speak the truth. Being a physician, I must conceal my identity, and, not less securely, the identity of those whom I picture.

There is no such suburb as Dorrisdale . . . and there are a score of Dorrisdales. There is no such family as the Fentrisses . . . and there are a thousand Fentriss families. For the delineation which I have striven to present, honestly and unreservedly, of the twentieth century woman of the luxury-class I beg only the indulgence permissible to a neophyte's pen. I have no other apologia to offer.

To the woman of the period thus set forth, restless, seductive, greedy, discontented, craving sensation, unrestrained, a little morbid, more than a little selfish, intelligent, uneducated, sybaritic, following blind instincts and perverse fancies, slack of mind as she is trim of body, neurotic and vigorous, a worshipper of tinsel gods at perfumed altars, fit mate for the hurried, reckless and cynical man of the age, predestined mother of—what manner of being?: To Her I dedicate this study of herself.

W. F.

FLAMING YOUTH

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE room was vital with air and fresh with the scent of many flowers. It was a happy room, a loved room, even a petted room. There was about it a sense of stir, of life, of habitual holiday. Some rooms retain these echoes. People say of them that they have character or express individuality. But this one's character was composite, possessing attributes of the many who had come and gone and laughed and played and perhaps loved there, at the behest of its mistress. A captious critic might have complained that it was over-crowded. The same critic might have said the same of Mona Fentriss's life.

Though a chiefly contributory part of the room's atmosphere, Mona Fentriss's personality was not fully reflected in her immediate environment. The room was not a married room. It suggested none of the staidness, the habitude, the even acceptances of conjugal life. The bed stood outside, on the sleeping porch. It was a single bed. Unfriendly commentators upon the Fentriss ménage had been known to express the conviction that marriage was not a specially important element in Mrs. Fentriss's joyous existence. Nevertheless there were the three children, all girls. There was also Fentriss.

The mistress of the room lolled on a cushioned chaise longue near the side window. She was a golden-brown, strong, delicately rounded woman, glowing with an effect

of triumphant and imperishable youth. Not one of her features but was faulty by strict artistic tenets; even the lustrous eyes were set at slightly different levels. Yet the total effect was that of loveliness; yes, more, of compelling charm. One would have guessed her to be still short of thirty.

"This is final, is it?" she asked evenly of a man who was standing near the door.

"It's final enough," he answered.

He shambled across the room to her side, moving like a bear. Like a bear's his exterior was rough, shaggy, and seemed not to fit him well. His face was irregularly square, homely, thoughtful, and humorous. "Want to cry?" he asked.

"No. I want to swear."

"Go ahead."

Downstairs a door opened and closed. There followed the rhythmic crepitation of ice against metal.

"There's Ralph home," interpreted the wife. "Call down and tell him to shake up one for me."

"Better not."

"Oh, you be damned!" she retorted, twinkling at him. "You've finished your day's job as a physician. I need one."

As he obediently went out she mused, with the instinct of the competent housekeeper:

"Gin's gone to twenty-five dollars a gallon. That'll rasp poor old Ralph. I wonder how much this will jar him." By "this" she meant the news which she had just forced from the reluctant lips of Dr. Robert Osterhout. She pursued her line of thought. "Who'll take over the house? The girls know nothing about running it. Perhaps he'll marry again. He's very young for fifty."

The two men entered, Fentriss carrying the shaker.

He set it down, crossed the room and kissed his wife. There was an effect of habitual and well-bred gallantry in the act. He was a slender, alert, companionable looking man with a quizzical expression. Dr. Osterhout poured out a cocktail which he offered to Mrs. Fentriss. She regarded it contemptuously.

"Bob, you devil! That's only half a drink."

"It's more than you ought to have."

"Pour me a real one. At once! Ralph; *you* do it. Come on."

With a shrug and a deprecatory smile at the physician, Ralph Fentriss filled the glass to the brim. The Fentriss cocktails were famous far beyond the suburban limits of Dorrisdale for length as well as flavour.

"Here's to Prohibition," said their concoctor in his suave voice, before drinking; "and to your better health, my dear."

"A toi," she responded carelessly. "Leave the shaker, will you, Ralph? Bob and I are talking."

Fentriss nodded and went. A moment later the concert grand in the big living room below stairs responded to a touch at once delicate, strong and distinctive.

"How I used to love his music!" said Mona Fentriss half to herself; "and still do," she added. "Bob." She turned upon her physician with laughing reproach in her eyes. "Don't you know better, after all these years, than to try to keep me from doing anything I want to do? I always get what I want."

"If you don't, it's not for lack of trying."

"I don't even have to try very hard. Life has been a generous godfather to me. But I've always wanted more. Like Oliver Twist, wasn't it? Or Jephthah's daughter?"

Dr. Osterhout grinned. "It was the horse leech's daughters that were always crying 'Give! Give!'"

"Why cry for it? Reach out and help yourself," she said gaily. "Them's my principles. And now the fairy godfather is going to cut me off with a shilling. Or a year. Or less."

"Unless you obey orders it'll be considerably less."

"Let it! I'd rather do as I please while it lasts.

" 'I've taken my fun where I found it,
I've rogued and I've ranged in my time,' "

sang Ralph Fentriss at the piano below to music of his own composing.

"So have I," murmured his wife. Her eyes grew brilliant, craving, excited as they wandered to the flower-decked mantel upon which stood half a dozen photographs. All were of men. Though they varied in age and indications of character, they presented a typical similarity in being well-groomed and attractive. They might all have belonged to the same club. "Bob, do many women confess to their doctors?"

"Lots."

"To you?"

"No. I don't let 'em."

"Why not? I should think it would be interesting."

"It's only a trick to gratify the senses through recollection," said the blunt physician. "Reflected lechery."

"You know too much, Bob. Then you won't be my father confessor?"

"I doubt if you could tell me much," he said slowly.

A smile, unabashed and mischievous, played upon her lips. "That's an ambiguous sort of answer. Sometimes I suspect that very little gets past you."

"I'm trained to observation," he remarked.

"And to silence. So you're safe. I think it would do

me good to confess to you." She grew still and pensive. "Bob, if I'd been a Roman Catholic do you suppose I'd have been—different?"

"Doubted. Would you want to be?"

"I don't really know that I would. Anyway I'm what I had to be. We all are."

"Fatalism is a convenient excuse."

"No; but I am," she insisted. "It's temperament. Temperament is fate. For a woman, anyway," she added with a flash of insight. "You don't blame me, do you? I couldn't help it, could I?"

He smiled down at her, tolerant but uncompromising.

"Oh, don't stand there looking like God," she fretted. "Do you know what I'd resolved to do? Will you laugh at me if I tell you?"

"Probably. Therefore tell me."

"I was going to be a pattern of all the proprieties after I turned forty."

"Too early," he pronounced judicially.

"Why? What do you mean?"

"Make it fifty."

She knit her smooth forehead. "Because I wouldn't be pretty then?"

"Oh, you'd charm and attract men at seventy. But you wouldn't have such a—well, such an urgent temperament. That passes, usually."

"Bob! You beast!" But she laughed. "You're very much the medical man, aren't you?"

"It's my business in life."

"Well, the whole discussion is what you call an academic question, anyhow. If you and your hateful medical science are right, I'll never see thirty-eight, let alone forty, I don't feel thirty-seven. There's so much life in me. Too much, I suppose."

"No. Not too much."

"No more flutters for pretty Mona," she mused. "At least she's had her share. Do you think Ralph cares?"

"You're the one to know that."

"If he does, he's never given any sign. But then, it's years since he's been true to me."

Her companion made a slight, uninterpretable gesture.

"Shall I tell him? Your verdict, I mean."

"Great Judas, no! Why stir him up? It's going to be hard enough on him anyway."

"Is it?" she said wistfully. "He'll miss me in a way, won't he? I *am* fond of him, too, you know."

"Yes. I understand that."

"But you don't understand why I've gone trouble-hunting, out of bounds."

"Yes. I understand that, too."

"Perhaps you do. You understand lots more than one would think from your dear, old, stupid face." She paused. "Tell me something, honestly, Bob. Has there been much talk about me?"

"Oh, there's always talk and always will be about anyone as brilliant and vivid as you."

"Don't evade. Some of the older crowd look at me as if they thought I was the Scarlet Woman come back to life. I'm *not* the Scarlet Woman, Bob. Only a dash of pink."

He smiled indulgently.

"It's strange," she mused, "how the tradition of behaviour clings in the blood, in that set. Your set, Bob. Ah, well! Discretion is the better part of virtue, as someone said. And I haven't been discreet, even if I have been virtuous. You believe I've been, don't you, Bob?"

"What, discreet?"

Again she laughed, showing little, even, animal-like teeth.

"No; the other thing."

"I believe whatever you want me to."

"Meaning that you reserve your own opinion. But you're a staunch friend, anyway. . . . The trouble with me is that I was born too soon. I really belong with this wild young age that's coming on the stage just as I'm going off; with the girls. Listen!"

Below stairs Fentriss, still at the piano, had swung into the rhythms of the Second Rhapsody, wild and broken as white water seething through a rock-beset gorge.

"That's the measure they dance to, the new generation. Doesn't it get into your torpid blood, Bob? Don't you wish you were young again? To be a desperado of twenty! They're all desperadoes, these kids, all of them with any life in their veins; the girls as well as the boys; maybe more than the boys. Even Connie with her eyes of a vestal. Ah!"

A new note had merged with the music, a hoarse, childish croon, following the mad measure with an interwoven recitative.

"That's Patricia. She's dancing to it."

"How can you tell?" asked the physician.

"By the way she's singing. Little devil! I wonder what it'll be like by the time she's grown up," mused the mother.

"Which won't be so long, now."

"So it won't. I keep forgetting that. She seems such a baby. What a queer little creature it is, Bob!"

"She's a terror. But there's something lovable about her, too. A touch of you in her, Mona."

"Of me? She's no more like me than I'm like my namesake of the well-known Lisa family. Nor like the older

girls, either. Well, why shouldn't she be different from them? Coming five years after I'd supposed all that sort of thing was over. She was pure accident. How I tried to get out of having her! Perhaps that's why she's such a strange little elf. But Ralph's crazy about her—as much as he can be crazy about anything. I thought for a time she'd bring us together again."

"But you found variety more amusing than pure domesticity," suggested the physician.

"I? It wasn't I that began it; it was Ralph. You know I never went in for even the mildest flirtation until long after Pat was born; until I began to get bored with the sameness of life."

"Boredom leads more women astray than passion," pronounced the other oracularly; "in our set, anyway."

"Oh, astray," she fretted. "Don't use mid-Victorian pulpit language."

"I was only philosophising about our lot in general."

"We're a pretty rotten lot, aren't we! Though I suppose the people you don't know, the people that nobody knows, are just as rotten. Ah, well, so long as one preserves appearances! And Ralph has no kick coming. He'd gone on the loose before I ever looked sidewise at any other man. They say he's got a Floozie now, tucked away in a cozy corner somewhere."

"Do they?"

"Has he?"

"Ask him."

"Too good a sport," she retorted. "I shouldn't be asking you if I thought you'd tell me. Very likely you don't know. *He* hasn't been boring you with confessions, I'll bet! Men don't, do they?"

"Only of their symptoms."

"But they confess to women."

"The more fools they!"

"Can't I wring a confession out of you?" she teased.

"Why haven't you ever made love to me, Bob?"

"Too much afraid of losing what little I've got of you," he returned sombrely.

"How do you know you wouldn't have got more? How do you know that I wouldn't have given you—everything?"

"Everything you could give wouldn't be enough."

"Pig! You don't want much, do you!"

"Have you ever really cared for any of your partners in flirtation?"

"You speak as if I'd had dozens," she pouted.

"It isn't a question of the quantity but of the quality of your attachments. If I'd ever asked anything of you it would have been—well, romance." He laughed quietly at himself. "Something you haven't got to give. You see, I'm a romantic and you're not. You've sought excitement, admiration, change. But not 'the light that never was on land or sea.' You're adventurous and passionate, but not romantic. It's quite a different order of thing."

"And you're brutal. Besides, you're wrong; quite wrong."

"Am I?" His glance ranged the faces on the mantel.

"Which one?"

She gave him a swift smile. "He isn't there. You never saw him. His name was Cary Scott."

"Was? Is he dead?"

"He's out of my life; or almost. He's married. He was hardly more than a boy when I knew him. Nine years ago in Paris. He was studying at the Polytechnique, doing his post-graduate work and doing it brilliantly, I believe. He went mad over me. My fault; I meant him

to; it amused me. I was attracted, too. There was a vividness of youth about him. I didn't realise how much I was going to miss him out of my life, though, until we came back. I did miss him. Like hell!"

"He was the one to whom you really gave?"

"Hardly so much as a kiss. I wanted to keep it that way, and he was slave to me. He was an innocent sort of soul, I think. Every year he sends me a card on my birthday—that was the date of our first meeting—to remind me that sometime we are to take up our friendship again. I never answer but I never quite forget."

"Ah, that's the sort of thing that I'd have asked but never expected of you."

"No; you never could have had it. That's the sort of thing that one gives but once." Suddenly she shot out her white, strong hand and gripped his wrist. "If you'd ever been really in love with me," she said fiercely, "you wouldn't let me die. You'd find some way to save me."

His rugged face softened with pain. "My dear," he said, "don't you know that if there were any way in the world, any sacrifice——"

"Yes; I know; I know! I'm sorry. That was a rotten thing to say."

"You've taken it all like such a good sport."

"I'm trying. Let's not talk of it any more. Let's talk of the girls. Bob, how much is there to heredity?"

"Oh, Lord! Ask me to square the circle. Or make the fifth hole in one. Or something easy."

"I was just thinking. Who's going to look after them? Ralph won't be of much use. He's too detached."

"Well, the family physician can be of service in some ways," he said slowly. "Particularly if he chances to be a family friend, too."

"Would you?" she cried eagerly. "They'll be a hand-

ful. Any modern girl is. But I'd rest easier, knowing you were on the job. Speaking of resting, I had rather a rotten night last night."

"What were you doing in the evening?"

"We had a little poker party here in the room."

He shrugged his heavy shoulders. "If you won't pay any heed to your doctor's orders——"

"You know I won't."

"Then you've got to pay the piper."

"Haven't you got anything that will make me sleep?"

"Were the pains bad?"

"Pretty stiff. Will they get worse?"

"I'm afraid so, my dear."

"More dope, then, please."

"Dangerous."

"Well?" She smiled up into his face, pleadingly, temptingly. "Well, Bob?" Her voice dropped. "What's the difference? Since it's a hopeless case. Don't be an inquisitor and sentence me to torture in the name of your god, Science," she whispered.

He yielded. "All right. But you'll stand it as long as you can?"

"Good old Bob!" she murmured. She reached for his hand, twined her fingers around it, nestled it into her firm and rounded neck. Then she laughed.

"Well?" he queried.

"Association of ideas," she answered. "I was thinking of Cary Scott."

He winced and drew his hand away. "What of Cary Scott?"

"If he doesn't come back pretty soon, what a joke it will be on him!"

CHAPTER II

THE Fentriss house stood high on a knoll overlooking the Country Club which constituted Dorrisdale's chief attraction as a suburb. Mona Fentriss had built it with a legacy of \$25,000 left to her just before Patricia's birth, and Ralph had put in the \$15,000 necessary to complete the work after the architect's original estimate had been exhausted, leaving the place still unfinished by one wing, all the decorations, and most of the plumbing. The extra cost was due largely to the constantly altering schemes of Mona. She wished her house "just so," and just so she finally had it from the little conservatory off the side hallway to the comfortable servants' suite on the third floor. If the result was, architecturally, a plate of hash, as Ralph called it, nevertheless the house was particularly easy to live in.

To Mona Fentriss belonged the credit for this. What she had of conscience was enlisted in her domestic economy. As Ralph Fentriss's wife she might be casually unfaithful. As mistress of his household she was impeccable. The effortless seductiveness of her personality established its special atmosphere throughout the place. It made the servants her devoted and unwearying aids, and broadly speaking, a household is much what the servants make it. People gravitate naturally to a well-run place. Life seems so suave and easy there. Guests of all ages came and went at Holiday Knoll, mostly men. Mona cared little for women, and her own strong magnetism for men had been inherited by her two grown daughters.

There was no special selectiveness about the company. All that was required of them was that they should be superficially presentable and contribute something of amusement or entertainment to the composite life of the ménage. At least nine-tenths of them were making love to Constance or Mary Delia or Mona herself, openly or surreptitiously as the case might be.

It made a pleasantly restless and stimulating atmosphere. In the city itself there would have been criticism of the easy standards; indeed there was more or less which drifted out to the Knoll. But judgments in the suburbs are kindlier. And Dorrisdale is quite fashionable enough to establish its own standards.

Any week-end would find half a dozen or more cars bunched on the driveway, having brought their quota of pleasure-seeking youth out from New York or from Philadelphia or Baltimore or Princeton. The girls had *carte blanche*, within reasonable limits, for invitations, which they were careful not to abuse. A few errors in judgment had reacted unpleasantly not only upon themselves but upon their undesirable guests. Mona Fentriss could act with decision and dignity within her own walls. Her social discrimination was keen if not rigid, and she possessed a blighting gift of sarcasm, mainly imitative, the most deadly kind used against the young. Neither of the girls was likely ever to forget her imitation of Connie's friend from Minneapolis whose method of handling a fork, according to Mrs. Fentriss's theory, had been derived from bayonet practice in camp; nor her presentation of a steamship acquaintance of Dee's who had too pathetically bewailed his losses at bridge.

Partly from theory, partly as a trouble-saving device, the mother seldom attempted any exercise of direct authority upon the children. A system of self-govern-

ment was established, or, rather, encouraged to grow into being. It was ordained that each of the girls should have her own room to hold like a castle, into which not even the parents might intrude unbidden, and for which the occupant was held responsible. Constance's room was luxurious, lazy, filled with photographs mainly of groups in which her charming face was always central. The special mark of Mary Delia's was its white and airy kemptness. Patricia's was a mess of clothing and odds and ends, tossed hither and thither and left to lie as they fell until a temporary access of orderliness inspired the child to clean up. It suggested a room in which no window was opened at night. Fentriss called it the hurrah's nest.

Through this feminine environment he moved like a tolerant but semi-detached presiding genius. His profession as consulting engineer took him early to the city and that, or something else, often kept him late. Being a considerate though rather selfish person, he invariably telephoned when detained over dinner time, which made the less difference in that there were always two or three men dropping in after golf, hopeful of an invitation to stay: Harry Mercer or the Grant twins, or Sam Gracie, or one of the Selfridges, father or son. Envious mothers whispered that Mrs. Fentriss was trying to catch Emslie Selfridge for Constance, and that it might not be as good a match as she supposed; things weren't going any too well at the Selfridge factory since the strike. They also wondered acidly that Ralph Fentriss was so easy as to let his pretty wife go about so much with Steve Selfridge, who was almost old enough to be her father, it was true, but whose reputation was that of a decidedly unwithered age. It would no more have occurred to Fentriss to raise objections over Mona's going where she pleased, with

whom she pleased than it would have occurred to her to ask his permission. All that was past long ago.

The outside member of the family was Robert Osterhout. He lived near by in a small studio-bungalow where he conducted delicate and obscure experiments in the therapy of the ductless glands. Thrice a week he lectured at the University, for he had already won a reputation in his own specialty. Having inherited a sufficient fortune, he was letting his private practice dwindle to a point where presently the Fentriss family would be about all there was left of it. Into and out of the house on the knoll he wandered, casual, unobtrusive, never in the way, always welcome, contributing a quiet, solid background to the kaleidoscopic pattern of its existence. In the most innocent of senses he was *l'ami du maison*. If he was and had for years been in love with Mona, the fact never made a ripple in the affectionate friendliness of their relations nor in the outward placidity of his life. It was accepted as part of the natural scheme of things. Fentriss recognized it, quite without resentment. Mona wondered at times whether Constance and Mary Delia were not aware of it—not that it would have made any difference. She herself made little account of it, yet she would sorely have missed the stable, enduring, inexpressive devotion had it lapsed. Bob was the intellectual outlet for her restless, fervent, exigent nature, too complex to be satisfied with physical and emotional gratifications alone. One could talk to Bob; God knows, there were few enough others in her set with any understanding beyond the current chatter of the day! After her sentence was pronounced she talked to him even more frankly than theretofore.

“If Ralph had died, Bob, I’d probably have married you.”

"Would you?"

"What do you mean by that? That you wouldn't have married me?"

"I probably have done as you wished. I always do."

"So you do, old man! That's the reason I'd have married you. That, and to keep you in the family, where you belong."

"I'll keep myself in the family, Miss B., just as you are here."

"You shall not, if I can help it. You shall not, if I can help it."

"Not that, sir."

"You shall not, if I can help it."

"Not that, sir."

"You shall not, if I can help it."

"Not that, sir."

"You shall not, if I can help it."

"Don't be so particular. You shall not, if I can help it."

"Not that, sir."

"You shall not, if I can help it."

"Not that, sir."

"You shall not, if I can help it."

"Not that, sir."

"You shall not, if I can help it."

"Not that, sir."

"You shall not, if I can help it."

"Not that, sir."

"You shall not, if I can help it."

"Not that, sir."

"You shall not, if I can help it."

"Not that, sir."

"You shall not, if I can help it."

"Not that, sir."

"You shall not, if I can help it."

"She's unawakened. There's hot blood under that cool skin."

"I wonder what makes you think that?"

"Oh, a medically trained man notices little things."

"So does a woman. But I haven't seen—— Has Dee begun to awake?"

"Oh, no! She's quite unaware of herself in that way. Very likely she won't until after she's married."

"After? Won't that be a little late?"

"It's the first awakening a lot of women have. And a harsh one for some."

"What a lot of unpleasant things doctors know about life!"

"Life's got its unpleasant phases."

"Particularly for women. . . . Yet I'm glad I've been a woman." A little, sensuous quiver passed over her tenderly modelled lips. She smiled, sighed, and reverted to her other thought. "But you're going to have your hands full with the Fentrisses. Really, you'd do better if you married one."

"Perhaps I shouldn't do as well. I might be too taken up with the one."

She darted a glance at him, full of shrewd questioning with a touch of suspicion. "You *could* care for Dee," she interpreted. "I'd be more flattered if it were Connie." She pressed an electric button. To the trim maid who appeared she said, "Send Miss Dee here, please, Mollie."

"What are you going to do, Mona?" demanded Osterhout in some alarm, for he knew the devastating frankness with which she was wont to deal with those nearest her.

"Wait and see."

There was a rhythmic, swift footfall on the stairs, the

door was thrown open, and Mary Delia Fentriss swung in upon them.

"Hello, mother!" she said. "Hail, Lord Roberts! What's the summons?"

Her bearing attested poise, careless self-confidence, and a brusque and ready good humour. She was tall, rounded, supple, browned, redolent of physical expression. At first sight one knew that here was a girl whose body would exhale freshness, whose lips would be cool, whose breath would be sweet, whose voice would be even, whose senses and nerves would be controlled. A student of humankind might have appreciated in her the unafraid honesty and directness which so often go with the consciousness of physical strength, in women as well as men. Her nickname in the family was Candida. She was not beautiful; not even pretty, by strict standards. But there was about her a sort of careless splendour.

"Been playing golf?" asked her mother.

"Yes. Cantered in with a forty-seven."

"Nice going! How would you like to marry Bob?"

Neither the expression nor the attitude of the girl altered, but her cool and thoughtful eyes turned upon Osterhout. "Has his lordship been making proposals for me?"

"No; I haven't!" barked the gentleman in the case.

"Watson, the strait-jacket! He's growing violent."

"It was wholly my idea," proffered Mona.

"I thought Bobs was your special property. Why mark him down? It isn't bargain day."

"He's a fairly good bargain, though," pointed out her mother.

"Don't mind me if you want to discuss my good points," said Osterhout, lighting a cigarette and seating himself upon the window sill.

"I don't," said Mary Delia. "Let's consider him as a market proposition. His age is against him. You're forty, aren't you, Bobs? . . . He doesn't squirm, mother. That's a bad sign; shows he's reached the age where he doesn't care. Or is it a good sign, showing his self-control?"

"Dee, I'd beat you if I married you."

Her eyes lightened. "Would you? I believe you'd try." With a bound she was upon him. One arm crooked under his shoulder, the heel of the other fist was thrust under his chin. "Improved jit," she panted. "You'd have your work cut out."

There was a quick shift, a blending of the two figures, and the slighter was bent backward almost to the floor. "Give up?" demanded Osterhout, his face close above the laughing lips.

"Yes. Lord, you're quick! Thought I had you. Take your penalty and let me up."

Ignoring the invitation he set her in a chair and restored his deranged necktie. "I'll apologise for the forty," said Dee. "You're not so old and feeble! To resume, as we say when serious; you're homely as a scalded pup——"

"Thank you!"

"—but it's a nice homely. You've got a lamb of a disposition. *And* money enough. Haven't you?"

"Enough for me."

"How passionately he pleads his cause! You play a nasty round of golf, too; I mustn't forget that. But—no. I don't think I would. Not even if you asked me."

"What's the obstacle, Dee?"

"Well, for one thing, there's Jimmy James."

"What!"

"Quite so," said the girl sedately.

"You're engaged to James?"

"We haven't got that far yet. But I've got him on the run."

"Dee!" expostulated her mother, laughing.

"Does he know of your honourable intentions?" queried Osterhout.

"He hasn't expressed his own yet. But he will."

"When?"

"Next time I kiss him."

"Next time, eh? How many times will that make?"

"Haven't counted, Grandpa," mocked the girl. "We haven't pulled many petting parties, though."

"Well, I'm good-and-be-damned," muttered Osterhout.

"Modern stuff, Bob," remarked Mona.

"Being an ancient fossil, I'd say dangerous stuff with a fellow like Jameson James."

"Not with a girl like me," returned Dee with superb assurance. "Bee-lieve muh, I've got a hand on the emergency brake every minute."

Osterhout, who had returned to his window seat, gave a sharp exclamation.

"What's the matter now?"

He rubbed his cheek, growling. A hoarse, childish voice from below, which had in it some echo of Mona Fentriss's lyric and alluring tones, served to answer the question:

"Where did I hit you, old Bobs?"

"It's the Scrub," said Dee.

"Don't you call me 'Bobs,' you young devil."

"Oh, *all* right! *Doctor* Bobs. Come down. I've got a fer-rightful gash in my knee."

"Well, don't show it to the world. I'll be there immediately."

"If you want to be the family benefactor," said Mary

Delia as he was leaving, "marry Pat. Nobody else ever will."

"You're a liar!" came the hoarse voice from outside. There was a pause as for consideration. "A stinkin' liar," it concluded with conviction.

"Pat!" called her mother.

"Oh, very well! But I bet I'm married before I'm Dee's age. And to a better man than Jimmy James. He's a chaser."

"We've got to send that child away to school," said Mona Fentriss in amused dismay as the door closed behind Osterhout. "She's growing up any old way, and she seems to know everything that's going on. . . . Dee, are you really going to marry Jimmy James?"

"I think so. Any objections?"

"Well, Ada Clare, you know."

"He's through with her."

"She's the kind that men don't get through with so readily. It's gone pretty far."

"It's gone the limit probably. Well, I never thought Jimmy was President of the Purity League, Mother."

"Do you really care for him, Dee?"

"Of course I do. I don't mean that he gives me an awful thrill. Nobody does."

"Perhaps the right man would."

"Then I haven't seen him yet. Mother," she turned her cool regard upon Mona, "tell me about it."

"About what?"

"The thrill. The real thrill. You know."

Mona's colour deepened. "You're a queer child, Dee. There are some things a woman has to find out for herself."

"Or get some man to teach her," supplied the girl

thoughtfully. "The whole thing's mostly bluff, *I* think. Men are queer things. I could laugh my head off at Jimmy sometimes."

"That's a good safeguard."

"Yes; but I don't need it. . . . Mother, aren't we going to pull a big party this spring?"

"Of course. And we ought to do it pretty soon, too."

"What makes you say that so queerly?"

"Nothing," answered Mona hastily. "I was just thinking."

For though she was up and about again, she knew that she was weakening under the heart attacks which she endured with silent fortitude, due partly to natural pride, partly to her belief that a complaining woman lost all charm for those about her, winning only the poor substitute of pity instead of admiration. Upon Dr. Osterhout she had imposed silence; she was determined that her household should know nothing so long as concealment was possible. In her way she was an unselfish woman.

She was quite aware that this would be the last of her parties in the house on the knoll.

Pat's voice floated upward in tones of lamentation. "Oh, damn it, Bobs! Go easy, can't you? That stuff's like fire."

"Patricia's fifteen," reflected the mother. "I'll enter her at the Sisterhood School next fall."

CHAPTER III

THE party was a Bingo. Before midnight that had been settled to the satisfaction of everyone. The music, good at the outset, soon become irresistible. (A drink all around every seven numbers was the Fentriss prescription for the musicians; expensive but worth it.) The punch was very special. Several of its masculine devotees had already faded, and one girl had been quietly spirited to an upper room, there to be disrobed and despirited. There was much drifting in and out of the French windows to the darkness of the lawn, and plaintive inquiries for missing partners were prevalent. Lovely, flushed, youthful, regnant in her own special queendom, Mona Fentriss sat in the midst of a circle of the older men, bandying stories with them in voices which were discreetly lowered when any of the youngsters drew near. It was the top of the time.

Upstairs in her remote bed Patricia sat with her pillows banked behind her, her knees propping her chin, her angry eyes staring into the dark. The strong rhythms of the music, barbaric, excitant, harshly sensuous, throbbed upward, stirring her to dim and uninterpretable hungers.

"Damn! Damn! Damn!" she whispered in shivering wrath.

She had been banished from even the earliest part of the festivities. It was mean. It was rotten. It was stinkin' rotten. Why should she be treated so? She wasn't a baby. She wouldn't stand it!

Leaving them to do the rest to her troubled child, she
 hurriedly to get them on. In unobtrusively and quick-
 ly, she swept across to Doc's room, locked and unlocked.
 This was a gross violation of the law of the household,
 but she was desperate. Searching a night drawer for
 rather light-colored Doc, she felt in vain, for the
 developer had, indeed, that it would be the best with
 her body to her own use. Putting it on before the glass,
 she became emphatically conscious of several things in
 her face. She was always looking people! The others
 never had them. She wondered why, naturally. Should
 she pick the one to the side of her nose? Or would that
 only make it the more striking? She decided on the
 basic method, performed a change operation with a slip
 and periodic to make that she would have more powder.
 This time it was Connie's room that she searched, and
 while she was there in the house, she added a touch of
 color. It was by no means the height of artistry, but
 she approved it as eminently satisfactory. She did not
 really approve Doc's dress. There was too much of it
 in important spots. She hurriedly pulled the old one
 from her wardrobe. A dress, she is not sure of,
 a number three. Contemplating her toilet cabinet
 she realized that it would do.

She lit a candle, the universal signifying. The
 household all in the wrong place.

That the gown which Miss Doc's hands brought to
 perfection would appear the same in the usual light
 showed that her is a major violation of the law
 of the proper quality of clothing, which it was. The
 material, though—indeed, she was grateful of her un-
 restrained appetite—had that a little and was obviously
 angry. She searched it impatiently. The others, the
 Colonel, would do as they were. Not unduly, the

touched the area around them with little dabs of Mme. Lablanche's Rose-skin.

"I'm going to have one dance," she decided, "if they send me to jail."

The back stairs and a side window gave her unobserved exit to the odorous shelter of a syringa.

"I'll wait until I can catch Bobs," she ruminated. "He'll dance with me—old bear! But first I'll do a little scouting."

She peeked into the big living room where most of the dancing was in progress. As was invariably the rule at Holiday Knoll, men held the superiority of numbers, and therefore, girls that of position. Every girl had a partner. To the ungrown waif outside of fairyland the dancers seemed ethereal beings, moving in a radiant and unattainable world. How beautifully the girls were dressed! How attractive the men looked!

"I wish I was pretty," mourned Pat. She thought forlornly of her blotchy skin. "I never will be, though." Then she recalled the deep, eager lustre of her eyes as seen in the glass, and how one of the boys at school had once made awkward and admiring phrases about them. She had not liked that particular boy, but she was grateful for the phrases. Maybe if she paid more attention to herself she might come to be attractive like her lovely mother. No; that was too much to hope; never like her mother, nor like Constance, who was just then whirled by in the arms of one of the New York guests, all aglow with languorous triumph, easily the beauty of the party. Perhaps like Dee. Lots of men were crazy about Dee. Would any man ever be crazy about her, wondered Pat. . . . Wouldn't she look a smear if she did venture on the floor among all those human flowers? She left her window to prowl further.

The glass door of the breakfast room gave her a view of the proceedings within. Sprawled upon the tiles five of the youthful local element were intent upon the dice which one of them had just rolled toward a central heap of silver and bills.

"Seven! I lose again," said the thrower cheerily. "Who'll stand for hiking the limit to a dollar?"

Opposite Pat's vantage point sprawled Selden Thorpe, son of the local rector. Pat knew they had not much means and, marking the pale, strained face of the boy, wished with misgivings that he wouldn't. The misgivings vanished when she heard him say:

"I'm an easy hundred ahead so I can't kick. Let 'er go."

She stepped back into the darkness to round the conservatory wing and brushed the mudguard of a lightless limousine. A girl's voice strained, tremulous, and laughing lent caution to her retreating steps; but she stopped within listening distance.

"Don't, Freddie! I'll have to go in if you——"

"Oh, come, Ada! Be a sport."

"Do behave yourself. Get me another drink."

"All right."

As the man stepped out, Pat shrank behind the car. She had recognized the girl's voice as that of Ada Clare, who had the reputation of being an indiscriminate "necker." Pat passed on. But that whisper from within the limousine, with its defensive, nervous, eager, stimulated effect, troubled the eavesdropper with strange, disturbing surmises. She wanted, yet feared to return and wait until Fred Browning, a man of thirty, well-liked in the neighbourhood, not the less perhaps because of his reputation as a "goer," came back with the desired drink. What would be the next step in the unseen drama? A little stir of fear drove Pat onward. She stopped

abruptly at the end of the conservatory as she heard her mother's voice within.

"Oh, Sid, dear! I almost wish I hadn't told you."

Sid! That was Sidney Rathbone, a Baltimorean, much given to running over for week-ends. To Pat's mind he was stricken in years, being nearly forty, but the *most* distinguished looking (thus her mentally italicised characterisation) person she had ever seen and distantly adored. Furthermore there was a quietly knightly devotion in his attitude toward the beautiful Mrs. Fentriss which enlisted the submerged romanticism of the child's mind. Now she hardly recognised the usually smooth and gentle tones characteristic of him as he replied:

"My God, Mona! I can't believe it. I won't believe it."

"Poor boy! It's true, though."

"What does Osterhout know about it! He's no diagnostician. You must come to Baltimore and see Finney or Earle——"

"It's no use."

What Rathbone next said the listener could not make out, but Mona answered very gently:

"No, Sid, dear. Not again. That's all over. I couldn't now. You understand." And then the man's broken voice:

"Yes; I understand, dearest. But——"

"Oh, Sid! Please don't cry. I can't bear it."

Pat blundered on into the darkness, rather appalled. What in the name of bewilderment did *that* mean? Mr. Rathbone crying! And her mother's voice was so sad. Though she did not care much for her mother beyond a lively admiration of her charm and beauty, Pat experienced a distinct chill. It was followed by a surge of exultation; she was certainly seeing life to-night! And then came the climax. A blithe voice at her elbow said:

"Hello! Who are you?"

"Sh—sh—sh—sh!" she warned in startled sibilance.

"Shush goes if you say so. Not dancing?"

"No. They wouldn't let me," said Pat mournfully.

"Who wouldn't?"

"The family."

"Snoutrage," declared the stranger economically

"You're one of the family, are you?"

"Yes. I'm the kid. I hate it."

"Cinderella; yes? The lovely but wicked sisters—they're peaches, too." He spoke clearly but a little disjointedly. "But you're not rigged for the part. You've got your regal rags on."

"They're not mine. They're my sister's. I sneaked 'em."

"Snappy child!" he laughed. "Let's have a look."

He moved closer to her. A wale of light fell across his face. He was short and fair with a winsome, laughing mouth, and candid eyes. Drooping her chin Pat studied him covertly and decided that he was a winner. She herself was in the shadow; he could see little but contour. But the rich hoarseness of the voice pleased him.

"I'm glad I found you," he murmured.

Thrilling to his tone, all that she could find to say was:

"Don't speak so loud."

Naturally he took this as an invitation, and, moving still closer, felt for her hand in the darkness. Her fingers twined willingly within his. Instead of alarming her, his touch gave her confidence.

"What are you doing out here?" she asked.

"Cooling off. The family brew's got quite a kick in it."

"Has it? Get me some."

"You're too young."

"Don't be hateful."

"What'll you give me for it?" he teased.

It was the first spur that her instinct of conscious seductiveness had ever known. She replied instantly:

"Anything."

"You're on. Wait for me right there."

While he was gone, a long time as it seemed to her, she stood surging with an exultant inner turmoil. A man and a girl passed close to her, unseeing in the bar of light. The girl's eyes wore a strange, sleepy expression as if the lids were almost too heavy to hold open. The man's shoulder was pressed close upon her. They disappeared. Strange scents of the night crept into Pat's brain; made her remember things she had never known. The music, softened through intervening walls, was pleading sensuously, urging upon her something mysterious and desirable. She felt her nerves like strung wires already tingling with electric forces but awaiting the supreme shock.

"Drink, pretty creature!" The gay, insinuating, mirthful voice was close to her.

"You've only half filled it," she complained, taking the glass.

"Must have spilled some. In such a hurry to get back to you," he explained. "There's plenty more where it came from if you like it."

"I don't," she gasped. The liquid, of which she had taken a generous swallow, stung in her throat. She poured the rest out upon the ground. "Here," she said holding out the glass to him.

His fingers met hers again. The glass fell and crunched beneath his foot as he stepped to her. She was hardly cognisant of his arm drawing her. Rather what she felt was some irresistible power compelling her to itself. The face of the youth, still gay with laughter, drew down

upon hers, closer, closer, changed, seemed to become dimly luminous. Her arms, without volition, crept upward to his shoulders. She was incongruously and painfully conscious of something pressing into her bosom, one of his pearl shirt-studs, and drew away from it slightly. He bent his head after her. And then, as their lips met and merged—the shock!

She went limp under it.

After a long, long minute in which were blended the pulsations of the music, the undermining odours of the night, the look of the passing girl's eyes (how heavy were her own now!), the memory of that broken whisper overheard in the limousine, and the surge of the blood in her veins, she heard him say:

“Let's go.”

“Where?”

“I've got my car here.”

She was silent, deeply, passively acquiescent to his will. Misconstruing her speechlessness, he urged:

“Come on, sweetie! We'll take a fifty-mile-an-hour dip into the landscape. The little boat can go some.”

“I'll have to get a wrap.”

“Take my coat.”

His arm tightened, guiding her. She lifted a hungry face. He bent again when a door opened shedding a broad ray of light upon them. Against the glaring background moved Constance, a vision of witchery in her filmy gown, followed by Emslie Selfridge.

“Pat!” she exclaimed. “What are you doing here?”

Before the confused girl could reply, her escort came briskly to her rescue. “I caught it peeking behind a bush,” he explained, “and it wasn't a bur-gu-lar after all. So I'm taking it in to see what it is and whether it can dance.”

"It's my kid sister," said Constance. "Mother *will* be pleased!"

"Are you going to tell her?" demanded Pat.

"I certainly am."

"Then I may as well have my dance before you find her," declared the culprit calmly.

"The fourteenth, a foxy little trot; with Mr. Warren Graves," put in her escort cheerily. He drew her arm through his own where it nestled gratefully.

Armoured though he was in the careless self-confidence of youth, young Mr. Graves winced as his partner stood revealed under the full glare of the lights. She looked so awfully and awkwardly young! Her hair was so awry, her gown so ill-fitted, her skin so splotchy. But there was magic in the long, slanted, shy, trustful eyes looking into his own, and the tingling excitement of her kiss was still in his blood. Moreover he had had a steady succession of drinks.

"How old are you?" he asked in her ear as her cheek pressed close to his.

"Seventeen," she lied glibly.

"Sub-deb stuff," he laughed. "I love 'em young. You can dance, too. Can I have the next?"

"There won't be any next," said Pat tragically. "Here's Mother."

"Oh, Lord!" said Warren Graves. "Let me do the talking."

But no talking was called for. Mona Fentriss swept down upon her truant daughter, caught her in a laughing embrace, slapped one hot cheek, kissed the other, and delivered her verdict!

"Back to bed with you! Quick! How did you ever get out?"

"Can't I have just one more turn," pleaded Pat.

"Not a step. Where did this roost-robber"—she indicated Graves—"find you?"

"I was looking on and wanting in," replied the dismal and thwarted Pat.

"Wait three years, until you're seventeen. Away!"

"Let me escort you to your—er—baby-carriage," said the youth with an elaborate bow.

The feeble witticism, meant only to cover his own sense of being at a loss, stabbed Pat. She averted her angry and tearful eyes as they crossed the floor together.

"I hate you," she muttered.

"I'm crazy about you," he retorted close to her ear.

Instantly she was radiant again. "Good-night," she said softly and ran up the stairs.

The turn of the landing hid her from view. But, after a moment's struggle with herself against doubt, she stopped and leaned out over the rail. There he stood with the blithe expectancy of his face upturned. Queer looking, unkempt, ill-dressed she might be, and hardly more than a child at that, but the glamour of her youth and her passion held him.

"Don't forget me," he pleaded under his breath.

She nodded. Forget him! With the fervent assurance of the neophyte she was sure that she never would, never could forget him and the moment which he had deified for her. And herein her inexperience was a true mentor. For, whatever else may pass from her crowded memories, a girl does not forget her first kiss.

Pat had been mulcted of that dance which she had rebelliously promised herself. But there was compensation in overflowing measure.

She had had her taste of life,

CHAPTER IV

VAGRANT airs from the window of the small library playfully stirred the bright tendrils on Constance Fen-triss's neck. The girl was a picture of unconscious grace and delight as she sat, with her great, heavy-lashed eyes fixed in speculation, her curving lips a little drawn down, her gracious, girlish figure relaxed in the deep chair. Across the room Mary Delia was skimming hopefully the pages of *Town Topics* for scandals about people she knew. She lifted her head and asked carelessly:

"What doing, Con?"

"Figuring out a letter."

"Who to?" (Mary Delia's higher education, inclusive of "correct" English, had cost something more than ten thousand dollars.)

"A certain party." This was formula, current in their set and deemed to possess a mildly satiric flavour.

"Oh, verra well!" (Meaning "Don't tell if you don't want to.")

"It's to Warren Graves, if you want to know."

"Your Princeton paragon? Have you got something going there?"

"I'm going to give him hell."

"What for? I thought he was one of your best bets."

"For acting like a Mick Saturday night."

"What did he pull? A pickle?"

"A petting party with Pat."

"No! Did he?" Dee cast aside the professional organ of scandal in favour of a more immediate interest. "How do you know?"

"Trapped 'em. He put up a good front. Acted like he expected to get away with it." (Constance's school, also highly expensive, had specialised in "finish of speech and manner.")

Dee laughed. "That bratling! He must have been lit."

"Emslie said so. He was with me when we walked into 'em."

"As per usual. What was *his* view?"

"He said the Scrub ought to be spanked and sent to bed."

"Some job!" opined her sister. "She's starting in early. When did you have your first real flutter, Con?"

"Not at that age," returned the elder. "And not with that kind of a face."

Dee reflected shrewdly that Connie was a little sore over the young man's defection. "It must have been dark for Graves to take her on," she agreed.

"It was, till we opened the door on 'em. They were clinched all right. Dam' little fool!"

"Better go easy with the letter," advised Dee carelessly. "He'll think it's green-eyed stuff."

"Not from what I'm going to give him. He tried the half-nelson on me earlier in the evening and got turned down."

"Well, I had to tell him the strangle hold was barred, myself," remarked Dee. "He must have had a busy evening."

"Thinks he's a boa-constrictor, does he?" commented the beauty viciously. "He'll think he's an apple-worm when he reads my few well-chosen words."

"Cordially invited not to come back?"

"Something of that sort."

"That was a pretty husky punch, though," mused Dee. "Con, you don't suppose he fed the Scrub any of it?"

"Yes, he did."

"Dirty work!" Lighting a cigarette Dee took a few puffs, but without inhaling. "Going to tell Mona?" The two older girls habitually spoke of their mother and sometimes to her by her given name.

"I don't know. What do you think?"

"I think she'd laugh."

"Dad wouldn't."

"Dad's old. Mona's one of our kind. She's as modern as jazz."

"Dad may be old but it hasn't slowed him up so much, yet. He was the life of the party."

"Oh, Dad's all right. I'm for him, myself. But he's all for Pat. There might be fireworks if he knew she was starting in this early."

"There were never any about Mona."

"Meaning?"

"Well, Sid Rathbone. And Tom Merrill. And a few others."

"She doesn't interfere with his little amusements, either, if you come to that. Have you noticed anything about her lately?"

"Yes. She looks like a ghost in the mornings."

"Bobs has been trying to get her to put on the brakes."

"Funny old Bobs! He's pippy on you, isn't he, Dee?"

"Me! I should say not. It's Mona."

"Can you blame him? With her war paint on she's got us both faded."

"Sometimes when I catch him looking at her with that poodle dog expression of his, I wonder whether there's something really wrong with her."

"Probably it's just the pace. What'll we be like at her age, if we last that long?" Constance's soft mouth hardened as she seated herself at the desk and scratched

off the letter which she had been meditating. "There!" she observed at the close. "That will tell Mr. Warren Graves where he gets off."

"What about Pat? Someone ought to tell her where she gets off."

"I don't know why they keep her around anyway," said Constance discontentedly. "She ought to have been sent away to school last year."

"God help the school! She'll give it an education."

"Going to the club to-night?" asked the elder after a pause.

"No."

"I thought you had a date with Jimmy James for all the Saturday dances."

"So did he," replied Dee calmly. "He was getting too proprietary. So I turned him down."

"War is hell," observed her sister with apparent irrelevance.

"Besides, de Severin is coming over from Washington for an early round of golf."

"So that's it. Paul de Severin could give me quite a thrill if he went at it right."

"Not me. I've never seen the man that could, either. Something must have been left out of my make-up when I was built."

"Sometimes I wish it had been left out of mine," said the beauty. "And other times," she added gaily, "I don't. By the way, I'm likely to be in pretty late. So don't let Dad lock me out, will you?"

"I thought they still pulled the midnight rule for the Saturday night dances."

"So they do. But the Grants are having a small-and-early afterward. Somebody slipped Will Grant a case

of Bacardi." She sealed her letter with a thump and tossed it into a silver-wicker basket.

"Keep your rum," said Dee with an effect of disdainful connoisseurship. "It gets me nothing but perspiration and a bum eye next day! Not even the right kind of kick. . . . So your Princeton laddie fed Pat some of the party fluid. Did it make her sick?"

"No; it didn't make her sick," answered a resentful voice, all on one level tone. Pat entered by the rear door.

"Been listening in?" inquired Constance amiably.

"I have not. Wouldn't waste my time," declared the infant of the family. She cast an eye upon the journal which her sister had laid aside. "What's in T.T. this week? Anything rich?"

"Rapidly growing to womanhood," observed Constance to Dee in a tone of mock admiration.

"Talk-party, I suppose," said the intruder. "Don't let me interrupt."

She strolled purposelessly over to the desk, glanced in the letter box and picked up the letter.

"What are you writing to Warren Graves about?" she demanded.

"Put that letter back," said Constance.

"I'm going to look," declared Pat uncertainly. Her statement was followed by a yell of pain. The letter fell, inviolate, to the floor as Dee, who had leapt upon her with the swiftness and precision of a young panther, tortured her arms backward.

"If you try to kick I'll break you in two," muttered the athlete.

"Let go! I won't," wailed Pat, who knew and dreaded the other's strength.

Released, she massaged her aching elbows. "Dirty you,

though!" she said, scowling at Constance. "Sneaking a letter off to him that way."

"I suppose you'd like to censor it," taunted the writer. "Well, if you want to know what's in it, I told him just how old you are and what kind of a silly little ass. I don't think he'll come back for any more baby-kisses."

At this Pat grinned inwardly. Whatever else it may have been, that was no baby-kiss that had passed between them. With her equanimity quite restored she remarked:

"You lie."

"Tasty manners!" commented Dee.

"I don't know what you've got to say about it," said Pat venomously. "I noticed a sedan with all the curtains pulled down just after you disappeared from the house with Jimmy James." This was a random shot. It went wide of the target.

"Cut it, Scrubby! Cut it!" admonished her sister calmly. "I don't put on any snuggling sketches where everybody can see me."

"Don't call me Scrubby!" choked the girl.

"Look at yourself," suggested Constance, "and see what else you can expect to be called. Did you brush your teeth this morning?"

"Oh, *mind* your business."

"Then go and brush them now," said Mona's voice from the stairway in its clear and singing cadence. Whatever Mona said took on the sound and form of music. Pat's hoarse and unformed speech had an echo of the same seductive sweetness. The mother entered, adjusting her hat. "I'm lunching in town, kiddies. What's the row?"

Pat cast a sullenly appealing glance at Constance. In vain.

"The Scrub's been doing a hug with Warren Graves," announced the elder sister.

"I have *not*."

Mona regarded the flaming face with amused pity. She did not take the news seriously. "Did you like him, Bambina?" she asked with careless sympathy.

A quick, half-suppressed sob answered and surprised her.

"He fed her up on the punch," began Constance. "And then——"

"A very enterprising young man," broke in Mrs. Fen-triss. "I don't think we'll urge him to repeat his visit, Connie."

"Exactly what I'm writing to tell him."

"Because I pinched him from you," declared Pat in a vicious undertone.

Constance laughed, but not without annoyance. "It's likely, isn't it!"

"I made him give me the punch," continued the accused one. "I hated it. I only took one swallow. It wasn't his fault. He told me to go easy on it."

The defence of her possession by the girl moved Mona: it was so naively, primitively feminine. At the same time the look in the childish eyes, dreamy, remembering, unconsciously sensuous, stirred misgivings in the mother's mind. Conscious womanhood was perhaps going to burst upon the child explosively; was already in process of realisation, very likely. Mona recalled certain developments of her own roused and startled emotions twenty years before. Could it be as long ago as that? How vivid to her memory it still was!

"Never mind," she said in her equable tones. "I dare say the punch was too strong. And the Graves boy had more than one swallow. *He* didn't hate it."

"I wrote to him," said Pat suddenly.

"You did?" The three incredulous voices blended.

"Yes, I did. He wrote to me. He asked me to answer. He was terribly sorry."

"Sorry for what?" asked Dee.

"For—for acting that way. He seemed to think he'd hurt my feelings or something. I told him it was just as much my fault as his."

"Did you, little Pat?" Her mother leaned forward to look into the queer, defiant, chivalrous little face. "Perhaps you're older than I thought. But I shouldn't write any more, if I were you."

"I won't."

Mona went out, followed by her youngest. In the hallway, Pat gave her mother a light, familiar, shy pat on the shoulder. "Thanks for standing by me," she said awkwardly.

"Did I stand by you?" returned Mona. "I wonder if I stand by you enough."

Inside the room, Dee mused with a thoughtful, frowning face.

"Think of the Scrub!" she muttered.

"What of her?" asked Constance.

"Feeling that way. Already." There was a hint of unconscious envy in her manner. "About a man!" She sighed and shook her head incredulously. "It gets me," she confessed.

"Don't you like to have a man you like kiss you?" inquired Constance curiously.

Dee meditated. "I don't mind it," she answered. "But I'd rather run down a long putt, any day."

To Dr. Robert Osterhout, whom she sought out after her return from luncheon (with Stevens Selfridge) Mona detailed the conversation with and about Pat.

"Yes; I know," said he.

"How could you know?"

"Pat told me about young Graves."

"What! The whole thing?"

"So far as I could judge, she didn't leave out much."

"Why did she tell you? Confession? Remorse?"

"Not in the least. She enjoyed the telling. She's very feminine, that child. And very curious about herself."

"I hope to God she isn't developing my temperament," reflected the downright Mona after a pause. "It would be a dismal joke if the ugly duckling of the flock had that wished on her. Poor, simply little gnome."

"Ugly? I wouldn't be too sure. The fairy prince from Princeton seems to have been quite captivated with her."

"And she with him."

"That of course. It was a very awakening kiss for her."

"Does she realise——"

"She said, 'Bobs, it made me go weak all over. Is chloroform like that?'"

"Diverting notion! What did you tell her?"

"I told her that it wasn't, precisely. Then she said, 'What does it mean?' And I said that it might mean danger."

"She wouldn't understand that. I've never talked to her." Mona, like many women of broad and easy attitude toward sex relations in so far as went her own life, had a reticence in discussing them with other women.

"Yes; she would. Pat's over twelve, you know."

"Yes; I know. But does she?"

"Perfectly."

"Why? She didn't say anything——"

"No; she didn't go into the physico-psycho-analysis

of her emotions, if that's what you mean, Mona. I shouldn't have let her. There's a touch of the morbid in her, anyway. That's the Irish strain from her father. But there's a lot of your saving grace, too—your most saving grace."

"And what may that be?"

"The habit of facing facts squarely; even facts about oneself."

"Is that a gift or a detriment, Bob?"

"It's a saving grace, I tell you. Little Pat is going to look right clean through the petty illusions of life, clear-eyed."

"But illusions are the bloom and happiness of life," said Mona wistfully.

"To play with; not to trust in. Oh, she'll have her illusions about others; she's begun already. She's a romantic, as you are not. But her dreams about herself will all be subject to her own detached scrutiny. If ever she comes to dream about a man——"

"Well? You're being very subtle and analytical, Doctor."

"—she'll make heaven or hell for him."

"Bob! Men aren't going to waste time over her with pretty Dee and lovely Connie around."

"Aren't they! Ask young Graves. She'll make 'em dream. Wait and see."

"Just what I can't do," said Mona quietly. "Ah, I didn't mean to say that, Bob," she added quickly, catching the contraction of pain that altered his face. "Well," she mused, brushing her hair back from her broad brow, "I can't quite see it in Pat myself. But perhaps you're right. You ought to know. You're a man."

CHAPTER V

DAWN was tinting the high clouds when Mary Delia awoke. She had the gift of coming forth from sleep in full and instant possession of her faculties. Now she felt that something was amiss; something insistent and troublesome going on below her window. She jumped from bed, crossed the room, and looked out upon the shrubbery-encircled driveway. Voices came up to her, restrained and cautious, a man's and a woman's. She recognised the latter.

"Hush, you two!" she called, low but imperiously.

The man stepped into view. To her surprise it was not Emslie Selfridge but Fred Browning. He was in evening dress, a little wilted, and his eyes looked hot and anxious; but he retained evident command of himself.

"That you, Dee?" he whispered loudly, peering up.

"Yes. What's the matter? Anything wrong?"

"No. Connie can't get in."

Dee smothered an exclamation. With dismay she recalled her sister's request that she leave the door unlocked. But she had not dreamed that the party at the Grants' would last as late as this.

"I'll be right down," she promised.

Turning the dim corner from the stairway she stumbled upon a smoking-stand and overturned it with a din which made her heart stand still. Expectant and fearful she halted, poised and listening. No sound or stir came from above. Cautiously she felt her way forward and unlocked the door. Constance was standing at the corner of the porch. Her hair was dishevelled and luminous,

her eyes softly heavy. There was a stain across the bodice of her evening dress. As the door opened she was releasing her lips from the man's kiss.

"Take care of her, Dee," said Browning, and was gone.

"And what do you think of *that*?" challenged Constance as she paused by the threshold.

Dee's answer might have seemed inconsecutive. "You *are* a beautiful thing, Con."

"Am I? Perhaps it's just as well that I am." There was a grimness in the sweet voice.

"Why that?"

"I'd be out of luck if I weren't."

"The Grants' party must have been a hurrah."

"Not so much. It got too slow for me before two o'clock."

"Did it? Where have you been all night?"

"Motoring."

"You don't look very dusty," observed the shrewd Dee.

"Perhaps you think I'm not telling you the truth."

"It's no affair of mine," returned Dee easily.

"Well, I'm not," continued the elder sister. "Come into the conservatory." She led the way across the living room, dragging her feet a little as she walked. "Now, if you want to know," she continued defiantly, "I'll tell you. I've been in Fred Browning's rooms."

"That's nice!" observed Dee. "What's the idea?"

"I had to go somewhere. I couldn't come home."

"Drunk?" Dee shot out the monosyllable with a sharpness which made the other wince. But she answered promptly:

"I was that. And I wasn't the only one. That Bacardi rum is hell."

"Who was with you?"

"Nobody."

"You and Fred? Alone?"

"Yes."

"Con!"

"I know. But I was so sick."

"At the party?"

"No. I wasn't any worse than the rest. Everyone was going strong. Emslie had a wonder!"

"What will he think?"

"He's done his thinking," returned the beauty obstinately. "He pulled a rotten grouch because I danced too much with Freddie at the club, and after we got to the Grants' he wouldn't pay any attention to anything but the punch. Not that I cared. I was enjoying life with Freddie. So we decided to pull out at two o'clock."

"Yes; but if you were all right then——"

"I was until we got into his car. Then the punch hit me. It was the change into the air, I suppose. I went all to pieces, just as we were passing his apartment. So he took me in there. It wasn't his fault. I was terribly sick and then awfully sleepy, and when I woke up——"

"Woke up?"

"Yes. Fred was bathing my face and telling me that I had to pull myself together and go home. . . . What are you looking at me that way for, Dee?" she concluded plaintively.

"Con, did anything happen?"

"Anything happen?" repeated the other in a dreamy voice. "I—I—don't know."

"You don't *know*! You must know."

"Yes; I would, wouldn't I? Though I was completely sunk. Anything might have happened," said she, slowly nodding her lovely hair-beclouded head.

"Con! Think!" urged Dee with impatient anxiety.

"I wouldn't care," declared the beauty recklessly. "I'm crazy about Freddie. . . . But it didn't; no, I'm sure of that now. Freddie's an awfully decent sort, Dee."

"He hasn't too pious a reputation. And when did you take on this sudden hunch for him? I thought it was Emslie."

"So did I. Until—Dee, did you ever have a man that you've always known suddenly look different to you?"

"No. Not enough different, anyway, to make any difference."

"It's hard to explain. Something in the way he affects you changes and all the world changes with it. That's how it was with Fred, and, I suppose the same way about me with him. Though he claims he's been mad about me for months."

"That's a blessing, considering," remarked Dee grimly. "Suppose you were seen going into his place?"

"We weren't."

"So far as you know."

"If we should have been, it's a sweet little scandal for the cats, isn't it!"

"In that case it's up to Freddie. It's up to Freddie anyway."

"Freddie's all right," declared Connie with conviction. "If he hadn't been—Dee, when I came to, I told him I didn't want to go home."

"You wanted to stay?" said the sister slowly.

Constance nodded. "I wasn't quite sobered up. But anyway I did want to stay. You can't understand that, can you?"

"No; I can't."

"Because you're a cold-blooded little fish. I'm still feeling that dam' Bacardi or I wouldn't be talking to you this way."

"Was Fred feeling it, too?"

"If he was, he had a grip on himself all right. He's a lot squarer man than people give him credit for, Dee."

"Lucky for you he is."

"Oh, I don't know. What's the difference!" retorted Connie perversely. "I guess those sort of things happen a lot more often than any of us know about."

"What sort of things?" interpolated a voice new to the parley.

The two sisters whirled about. Just outside the door stood Patricia in her tousled nightgown, hot-eyed with curiosity. "What sort of things?" she repeated.

"How long have you been there?" demanded Mary Delia.

"Long enough to hear a lot," answered the unperturbed Patricia. "Since before you asked Con did anything happen, and she said first she didn't know and afterward that it didn't. What did you mean? *What* didn't happen?"

With a sudden pounce the lithe Dee was upon her and held her, half-choked against the wall. "If you breathe a word of this, Scrubs, I'll half kill you."

"Leh—heh-heh—me alone!" whimpered Pat. "I'm not going to tell anybody."

"See that you don't, then."

"You told on me about Warren Graves."

"That was different."

"How, different?"

"You're only a child. You've no business playing silly tricks like that."

"Wasn't it a silly trick of Con to——"

"Go back to bed," ordered Dee with a powerful shake which seemed to the unfortunate victim to loosen her eyes in their sockets.

She crept away but paused at the door to say wistfully and sullenly:

"Just the same, I think you might tell me what didn't happen."

Late the next afternoon Fred Browning came to the house, having called up Constance at noon. Dee came down to him.

"Is everything all right, Dee?" he asked anxiously.

The girl nodded.

"Yes. The family didn't wake up. I'll send Con down, right away."

But before Constance arrived, little Pat entered the side room where he was nervously waiting. She looked at him solemnly, entreatingly, hesitatingly, then burst out:

"Mr. Browning, will you tell me something?"

Her earnestness amused him. "Why, of course," he said, quite unsuspecting. "I always like to help the young to knowledge. But don't make it too hard."

"What was it that might have happened to Con last night, that the girls wouldn't tell me about?"

He stared at her, completely aghast. "You young devil!" he breathed.

Constance's quick footsteps sounded on the stairs, and the inquirer was fain to flee, unsated of her curiosity. But she peered back, and her breath came quicker as she saw her pretty sister walk straight, eager, and unashamed into the man's waiting arms. Pat deemed it the part of prudence to keep herself aloof the rest of the day.

Later Fred Browning had a cocktail with Mr. Fentriss and a brief talk on the subject of Constance.

And so they were married.

CHAPTER VI

MOTH-LIKE, Patricia hovered around the mystic radiance of Constance's wedding festivities. They had let her come home from school for the occasion. Reckoned too young for a bridesmaid and too old for a flower-girl she occupied an anomalous and unofficial position in the party. Dee, who, as maid of honour, had opportunity to exercise her executive faculties in managing the details, found her irritatingly in the way.

"Under your feet all the time," said she to the bride. "The kid is crazy with curiosity. I never heard so many questions."

"Yes," assented Constance fretfully. "She keeps asking me how I feel and staring at me as if I were going to die or have an operation or something."

Dee laughed. "She got hold of Fred yesterday and put him through a catechism while he was waiting for you to come down. He actually looked rattled."

"She's a pest, that child! School doesn't seem to have toned her down a bit."

"At least it's taken the slump out of her shoulders. She's got a kind of boyish swagger that isn't bad. For her kind of style, I mean."

"Oh, style!" repeated the elder sister contemptuously. "She'll never have any more style than a kitten. I wish you'd keep her out of my way."

To accomplish this, however, would have entailed an almost continuous vigilance. The elaborate ceremonial of marriage and giving in marriage with its trappings and appurtenances, its vestigial suggestions of sexual-sacri-

ficial import, its underlying and provocative symbolism had stirred in the youngest member of the family an imagination as inflammable as it was unself-comprehending. Constance's matter-of-fact mind could not interpret the eager and searching scrutiny of her sister, though it made her restless and uneasy and vaguely shamed her. The afternoon before the wedding, Pat tiptoed in upon her as she was resting on Mona's sleeping-porch.

"Connie," she half whispered.

"Well?" returned the bride crossly.

"Where are you going?"

"Going? I'm trying to rest."

"Where are you going after you're married? To a hotel?"

"What do you want to know for?" demanded the elder sister, raising herself on her elbow to look at the younger.

"Nothing. I just wanted to know."

"Well, you won't. Not from me."

"Oh, verra-well! You needn't get all fussed up about it."

"Oh, *don't* be hateful, Pat. I want to rest."

"I'll go in just a minute. But—— Con?"

The bride sighed, a martyred sigh.

"What is it?"

"When you get back—when I get back from school, will you tell me?"

"What is the child getting at! Tell you what?"

"Everything."

"I don't know what you mean," fended Constance.

"Yes, you do. You know."

The older girl flushed a slow pink, then laughed. "You're a funny little monkey! Why should you want to know?"

"Well, I've got to go through it sometime, myself, haven't I?" reasoned the girl.

"Oh, have you! Well, you can find out then."

"I think you're mean. You'd tell Dee if she asked you."

"I wouldn't tell *anyone*. It's disgusting to be so—so prying. Where do you get such ideas?"

Pat reflected before answering. "Don't all girls have 'em?"

"If they do, they don't talk about them."

"Oh, that's all bunk," declared the cheerful Pat. "If you've got the idea inside you, you might as well spit it out. . . . I'll bet men tell."

The bride looked at the clever, eager, childish face with sudden panic. "If I thought they did," she began, but immediately broke off, taking a plaintive, invalidish tone. "Do go away, Scrubs! You're making my head ache. And for heaven's sake, don't stare at me to-morrow like you have to-day. It gives me the creeps."

"It gives me the thrills," returned the alarmingly outspoken ingénue, as she danced out.

Throughout the ceremony of the following day, Pat's interest was divided between the bride and an equally absorbing prepossession. She had, so she told herself, fallen desperately in love with one of the ushers, a Boston man named Vincent. To her infatuated eyes he was *adorably* handsome, and *so* romantic looking, though quite old. Probably thirty! On the previous evening he had chatted casually with her for five minutes, finding the odd, eager child with the sombre eyes and the effortful affectation of grown-up-ness mildly amusing. Going up the aisle he had made her heart leap by giving her a little friendly nod. During the ceremony she brooded on him, building up the airiest of vague and roseate sentimentalities for the far future, and for the near, nursing the belief that he would surely seek her out as soon as

possible at the reception. When she saw him, later, quite forgetful of her in his interest in Virginia Platt, a slight, flashing brunette of the wedding party, she was both chilled and infuriated. He did not even ask her to dance, though once he crossed the floor toward her, only to turn aside at the last, hopeful moment. It was terrible to be young and queer looking, though she had done her careful best for her elfish little face and immature figure.

Others came for dances, however; Selden Thorpe, the rector's son, the most often. Him she deemed "interesting looking," with his pale face, bristly hair, and hard, grey eyes, typical of the unconscious egotist. Though he danced well, here Pat could overmatch him, for she had the passion of rhythmic movement in her blood.

"You've got the fairy foot all right, little one," said he, investing the epithet with his conscious sophomoric superiority.

Pat felt offended. She wanted so much to be grown-up that evening. But she feared to alienate her escort's budding interest if she showed any resentment.

"Anyone can dance with as good a dancer as you are," she replied sweetly.

He gave her an appreciative glance. "Can they? I guess we could enter for a prize all right."

"We could make some of 'em hustle to beat us," she declared gaily.

"Could you make a getaway some evening, and we'd slip over and try it out at one of the big places?"

"Would you take me?" she cried, delighted. But her face fell. "There won't be time. I'm going back to school."

The talk languished after this disappointment. The number was over and they were seated in a remote corner

of the little conservatory. Thorpe wondered what he could find to talk to this kid about.

"Engine completely stalled," he thought ruefully.

On her part, Patricia experienced a sense of dismal vacancy. What was there in her mental repertoire to interest this worldly collegian? The memory of the party at which she had seen him gambling came to mind as a hopeful bridge over the widening conversational chasm.

"Been winning much lately?" she asked brightly.

"Winning?" He looked puzzled. "At what?"

"Craps. I heard you stung the crowd for a hundred dollars at our party."

He was flattered and lofty. "Oh, I did pretty well. Where'd you hear about it? You weren't at the party."

"Not for long," confessed Pat. "But I was among those present for a little while."

Connection of ideas recalled to her Warren Graves and his light-hearted allure. She wished he were beside her on the settee instead of Selden. She could almost hear his voice, bantering and tender, "Sweetie," and feel the warm pressure of his arm. With him there would have been no anxious necessity of searching for topics of conversation, whereas with Selden—— Why not experiment a little, she thought, daringly. She let her hand slip carelessly from her lap to her side. It came into touch with his. The contact gave her a shock as unexpected as it was painful. She had failed to notice that he held a lighted cigarette.

"Ouch!" said Pat, and licked the wounded knuckle with a sharp, pink tongue like a young animal's.

"Let's see," said the youth.

He took her hand, glanced at it, and set his lips to the reddened skin cavalierly enough. "That better?" he asked.

Pat nodded. She stared intently at the solaced spot wondering what the progress of the game would be. In Thorpe's inured mind there was no room for surmise. To him this was all formula, the parliamentary procedure of casual love-making. He drew the yielding fingers into his left hand and slipped his right arm across the slim, girlish shoulders. She leaned back a little from his embrace.

"Well?" he questioned, an easy laugh on his lips.

"Well, what?" she whispered.

He bent and kissed her. It was a quick kiss, adventurous and playful. Not so had Warren Graves's eager and searching lips closed down upon hers. Pat was both disappointed of her expected thrill, and unaccountably relieved and reassured. A queer, inward fluttering which had unbalanced her thoughts for the moment when the appropriative arm encircled her, was stilled. Suddenly she felt quite mistress of herself and the situation. She proceeded now according to a formula which she was improvising, and which millions of girls had improvised before her.

"What did you do that for?" she murmured.

"Didn't you want me to?"

Pat abandoned her formula before it was fairly under way. "I suppose I did," she admitted.

Expectant of the usual "No," he was startled, amused, and a little roused. "Did you?" he said.

He drew her closer, bent his mouth to hers again, felt a swift stir at the sweet, soft pressure, followed by a sensible chilling as she turned away to say thoughtfully:

"I wonder why I did."

"You're a queer kid," he observed genuinely. "But there's something mighty sweet about you."

"Is there?" she cried, charmed with the direct flattery.

"I suppose you wanted me to because you like me," he pursued. "Wasn't that it?"

"I don't know. I like being petted."

"Oh! Do you? By any-old-body?"

"I don't know," she repeated. "I've never been but once before."

"Did you like that better than this?"

"It was different."

"Different?" His interest and curiosity were piqued: his vanity, too. "Well, I can make it different, too."

"No," choked Pat in sudden panic as she felt his lean, sinewy arms encircle her crushingly. "Don't, Sel!"

She twitched her face away from his. Immediately her alarm gave place to a stimulus of sheer delight. She had distinctly felt him tremble. An epochal discovery! For she was, herself, quite cool. She possessed then the mysterious power to arouse men out of themselves, while remaining self-possessed, to affect them in this strange manner more than she herself was moved.

"Pat, dear!" whispered the youth, avid and insistent.

He had ceased to seem formidably old to her now; she was his superior. She kissed him again, but lightly and pushed him back.

"Bad bunny!" she mocked. "We ought not to, Sel."

"Oh, what's the harm?"

"Someone might come in."

"Come outside, then."

"Oh, let's go back and dance. I'm afraid of you." She gave him a sidelong glance with this gratuitous lie. "Come, I love this trot."

They danced it out, he holding her closer than before, she letting her cheek press his from time to time. She yearned to the feeling of his young strength, yet was quite content for the time, with the experience of the

evening as far as it had gone. When they returned to the conservatory again, she made him sit in a chair opposite to her. His sophomoric assurance was quite tempered down; the unformed child whom he had danced with condescendingly and as a kindness earlier in the evening, was become imperatively desirable now. He chafed at her aloof attitude.

"I'm coming to see you," he said with an attempt at masterfulness in his tone. "I'll come to-morrow. Keep the evening open."

She shook her head. "I'm going back to school."

"Are you?" He looked dispirited. "Will you write to me, Pat?"

"Can't."

"Well—you'll be home for vacation, won't you?"

"Of course."

"So'll I. I was going to a house party on Staten Island. But if you'll be here I'm coming back."

"Will you?" Her tone was almost indifferent, though she was aflame with triumph, inwardly. "That's nice of you."

"I will if you'll be glad to see me."

"Of course I will."

"Awfully glad?" he pressed.

"Oh, I don't know about all that," replied Pat, the coquette.

"You're going to kiss me good-bye?" he pleaded.

"Perhaps. Just a little one."

When she had slipped from his embrace, her gaze was far away.

"What are you thinking of now?" he asked jealously.

"Of Connie."

"What of her?"

"I wonder where they are now. I was thinking," she

continued as if speaking to herself, "that I'd like to see her to-morrow morning."

"Why to-morrow morning?" asked Thorpe. He was a youth of slow imagination, but he was not stupid. Suddenly he laughed. "Oh!" he cried. "So *that's* the idea! You little devil!"

"No; it isn't," denied Pat, her cheeks flaming, and ran back to the ballroom.

At the entrance she collided with Scott Vincent, who was looking for a vanished partner.

"Pardon!" he said, cleverly saving her from a recoil against the door! "Oh; it's the *infanta!*" He looked into her vivid face with appreciative amusement. "Don't you want to give me this dance?" he asked.

Her hot cheeks cooled. She considered him appraisingly though her heart beat quicker. He was so very good to look at!

"No; I don't," she replied.

"No?" he laughed. "You're frank, at least. Perhaps you'll be franker and tell me why."

"Because you didn't ask me earlier."

"Indeed! But I hadn't seen you," he protested, surprised at himself at being put upon the defensive by this child.

"I don't like ~~not~~ being seen," retorted Pat, with a calmness worthy of an experienced flirt.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Vincent softly, under his breath. He began to be interested in this quaint specimen. "Oh! come! Give me a chance to make amends. How about a little supper?"

"No," answered Pat with perverse satisfaction. "I'm going to bed. Good-night, Mr. Too-late."

She darted away from him, triumphantly satisfied of having left a barb behind her. He wouldn't forget her

soon, *she'd* bet! At the turn of the stairs she peeped down expectantly. Sure enough! there he stood staring after her, his comely face clouded with perplexity and disappointment. It gave Pat a sudden heating of the blood; but this was the thrill of satisfaction, of something achieved, quite different from the unsated yet delicious longing experienced when she had looked down before from that same vantage point upon Warren Graves.

Even more than before she was aware of a power within herself, perhaps greater than herself, to allure men. And subtly, profoundly, she felt that the touchstone of that power was denial.

Scott Vincent would remember her, Selden Thorpe would think of her with longing, because she had denied them both. Pat slept happily that night, the sleep of a little Venus Victrix.

CHAPTER VII

It was to her second daughter that Mona Fentriss made, after due thought, disclosure of her condition. Dee was shocked and incredulous. She had no profound affection for her mother. None of the girls had. But Mona had always been *bonne camarade* with them in her casual and light-hearted way. And she had made, as few women make, the atmosphere of her home. Without her the house was almost unthinkable; it would not be the same place; not only sadder and duller, but essentially different. In this way chiefly would she be missed.

"You'll have to be the one to carry on the house-keeping job, Dee."

"I?" said Mary Delia. "Mother, I don't know the first thing about it."

"You'll learn. You're clever."

"Besides, I can't believe that you're going to—that you're right about yourself."

"Ask Dr. Bob."

"He's been hinting at something. But he seemed afraid to come out with it when I tried to follow up. Is that the reason why you wanted me to marry Bobs?"

"Partly."

"I can't seem to think of him in that way. But then, I can't seem to think of any man in that way."

"Not even Jimmy James?"

"Not even Jimmy, much as I like him."

"When we talked about this before you said——"

"Yes; I know. Probably I'll marry him one of these days. But when he tries to make love to me, I curl up a little. Am I abnormal, Mona?"

"I don't know," answered Mona reflectively. "We women are queer machines, Dee. Perhaps it's just that Jimmy isn't the right man."

"Then I haven't met the right man yet. It would be pretty weird if he came along afterward, wouldn't it? So perhaps I'd better wait."

"No; I think perhaps you'd better not, if you really like Jimmy. There might not be any right man for you, in that sense. Some of us are made that way."

"Yes; I suppose so. But why choose me to run the house? Con would do it better, wouldn't she?"

"Possibly. But if she's to do it, I'd have to tell her what I've just told you. And I don't want to break in on her happiness."

"Oh, happiness," murmured Dee in a curious tone.

"You don't think she's happy?" queried the mother. "Or perhaps you don't believe in that kind of happiness. Cynicism at your age is a pose."

"It isn't that. But I don't believe Con and Freddie are going too well together."

"Why not?"

"Freddie's hitting the booze quite a bit. Besides, he hasn't as much money as Con thought. Not nearly. And she's a high-speed little spender, you know."

"Yes; she's certainly that," agreed Mona, bethinking herself of the monthly bills which came in after the eldest sister's allowance had been expended in a variety of manners for which the spender was cheerfully unable to account.

"Doing fifty thousand dollar things on a fifteen thousand dollar income won't speed 'em up the Road to Happiness," opined the shrewd Dee. "She'll make a hash of it, if she doesn't pull up."

"Doesn't she care for Fred, do you think?"

"In one way she's crazy about him." Dee's curled lip suggested the way; also that she neither comprehended nor sympathised with it. But Mona laughed, relieved.

"Well; that's rather essential, you know, in marriage. I'll talk to Connie about extravagance when I come back."

"As a preacher on that text," began Dee wickedly; then bent over to give her mother's hand an awkward and remorseful pat. "I'll do the best I can, of course. And don't think I'm not—not feeling pretty rotten over this," she continued, huskily and a little shamefully, like a boy caught in a display of emotion. . . . "You say, when you come back. Going away?"

"Oh, just a run over to Philadelphia to spend a couple of days with the Barhams," replied Mona carelessly. "You and I will have to do a little figuring about the housekeeping, too, on my return. And you can pass it on to Pat when you get married."

"Pat! She'll be a grand little housekeeper when her turn comes. I pity poor Dad."

"She and your father understand each other, though, in a way," mused Mona.

Having meditated over this conversation with dubious feelings, Dee, who had a sane instinct for facts, went to call on Dr. Osterhout at the little laboratory attached to his bungalow. This was on a Tuesday. Her mother had left the previous noon. Osterhout emerged from rapt contemplation of a test tube to find the girl standing over him.

"Hullo," he said. "What are you invading a bachelor's quarters at this hour for?"

"Afraid of being compromised, Bobs?" she retorted.

"Hadn't thought of it. Why put such alarming ideas into my head? But my reputation will stand it if yours

will. Besides, a physician is immune. One of the perquisites of the profession."

"It's as a physician that I want to talk to you."

His face changed; became grave and solicitous. "What's wrong?"

"I want to know about Mona."

"Has she told you anything?"

"Yes."

"I've wanted her to for some time."

"Then it's true."

"Yes; it's true."

"How long, Bobs?"

"Uncertain. It isn't progressing as fast as I feared. But—not very long, Dee." He spoke with effort.

"A year?"

"Perhaps. If she's careful."

"But she isn't careful. You know Mona."

"No. She isn't. It isn't in her to be."

"Ought she to be running off on trips?"

"Of course not. But I can't stop her." A note of weariness, of defeat had come into his brusque voice.

"Poor old Bobs!" The girl went to him and set a hand on his shoulder, brushing his cheek with her fingers as she did so. There was nothing repellent to her sensitiveness in contact with him, nothing of the revulsion which she experienced under the eager touch of men, tentatively love-making. Bobs wasn't like a man to her so much as like a faithful and noble-spirited dog. "It's hard on you, isn't it?" she murmured.

His eyes thanked her for her understanding and sympathy.

"It isn't easy," he confessed.

"I won't hurt you any more. But just one question; is it quite hopeless?"

"I can't see any chance of cure."

"Poor old Bobs!" she said again, this time in a whisper. "If I were a man I'm sure I should be wild about Mona. I can see that even if she is my mother. She's so lovely; and she's so young; and she's"—Dee smiled—"she's such a bad child."

"No; she's not," he defended doggedly. "She's just a little spoiled because life has always petted her. And now the petting is almost over."

"Yes. That's hard to believe, isn't it? Of Mona! She's always had her own way with everyone and everything. But she's got courage. She won't flinch. Bobs, do you remember a talk we three had, months ago?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to do something for her before—something that she wanted. And for you, too. It wouldn't do any good, would it," she asked wistfully, "if I were to marry you?"

"Not a bit."

She smiled, awry, but withal, relieved. "What a bear you are! Isn't that your phone ringing?"

"Let it ring. This isn't office hours."

"A hint for me? Having proposed and been rejected, I'm off." She brushed his cheek again. "Old boy," she said, "it *is* going to be tough going for you. Worse than for any of us. Good-bye."

Concentration upon his work being dissipated by this disturbing visit, Osterhout threw himself on the settee and dropped out of the world into a chasm of dark musings. If Mona had ever really cared for him, he mused—if he had been her lover—might he have been her lover, as she had hinted?—had she lovers? Or were the other men merely playthings of her wayward moods, of her craving for excitement, for adulation, for the sunlit warmth of

being loved? At least he had not been a plaything; her regard for and trust in him were true and sincere. Better these, perhaps, than the turmoil and uncertainty of— Yet, that temptation that she had held out to him; was it just an instance of her wicked bent of coquetry? . . . Or could he have made her care? . . . Damn that telephone!

He roused himself with a wrench and went into the next room where the intrusive mechanism was thrilling. Long-distance had been trying to get him . . . Wait a moment . . . A man's voice, low, eager and strained came to his ear over the wire.

"Dr. Osterhout?"

"Yes."

"Can you come to Trenton immediately? By the next train?"

"Who is speaking?"

"It's very important," went on the nervous and insistent voice. "It's a—a very important case. Critical."

"Who are you?"

"Is that necessary?" queried the voice, after a pause.

"Certainly. Do you suppose that I am going out on any wild-goose, anonymous call?"

"Then I was to say," said the voice, "that Mona needs you."

"Mona! Is she ill?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Here, in Trenton."

"Where in Trenton?"

"At the Marcus Groot Hotel. You'll be met at the train. For God's sake say you'll come."

"I can get the one o'clock," said Osterhout. "Good-bye."

Going over on the train he had time for scalding meditations. Mona in Trenton! At the Marcus Groot Hotel. When she was supposedly visiting the Barhams at their Philadelphia apartment. And all this atmosphere of secrecy thrown about it by the unknown man. But was he unknown? The voice had seemed dimly familiar to Osterhout. Surely, he had heard it before. Feverishly he mustered in his mind Mona's admirers, canvassed them over, vacillated between this and that one, and shook with a jealous and amazed rage which horrified while it tore at him, as Sidney Rathbone hurried up the platform to meet him. But in a moment he had mastered himself.

"Thank God, you're here!"

"How is she?"

"A good deal easier. She's been terribly ill."

"Heart?"

"Yes. She wouldn't let me call any local physician."

"When was she taken?" inquired Osterhout as he stepped into the waiting taxi.

"This morning. About eight o'clock."

In his anxiety Rathbone was beyond any considerations of concealment; the revelation was absolute when, at the hotel, he took Osterhout directly to the suite of rooms, as one having the right. Mona greeted the newcomer with a smile, grateful, pleading, pitiful. Mutely it said: "Don't be too harsh in your judgment of me."

Hardening himself to his professional state of mind, Osterhout made his swift, assured, detailed examination.

"What's the verdict?" whispered Mona.

He nodded encouragingly. "You'll be all right," he said reassuringly. From his case he produced some pellets.

"Not an opiate?" she asked rebelliously. "I want to talk to you."

"No. It's a stimulant. But I think you'd better not try to talk for a while."

"I must . . . Sid, dear, go into the other room, won't you?"

Rathbone nodded, speechless for the moment. His hollowed eyes were full of the slow tears of relief. He bent over the sick woman's face for a moment and was gone, obediently.

"I want to tell you," said Mona, as soon as the door had closed, "about this."

"There isn't any need," returned Osterhout.

"No. There isn't," agreed Mona. "The situation explains itself, doesn't it?" She smiled at him, equably but without hardihood.

"It does."

"Are you being my wise doctor or my reproachful friend? Are you thinking to yourself: 'Mona, I wouldn't have thought it of you!' Because, if you are——"

"I'm not."

"You mean that you would have thought it of me. How dare you, Bobs!" she demanded elfishly.

He did not respond to her raillery, which he recognised for the expression of tortured nerves. "I wish you wouldn't talk," he said.

"I will," she retorted mutinously. "It won't hurt me. At worst, it won't hurt me nearly as much as to hold in what I want to say. Bobs, was this attack brought on by——by my foolishness?"

"Very possibly. It certainly didn't help any," he replied grimly.

"Suppose I'd died here," she mused. "I very nearly did."

"So I should judge."

"What a scandal there'd have been! And what a text

for the pious! 'The wages of sin is death.' D'you believe that, Bobs?"

"It's a useful bogey to scare people who are more timid than they are wicked."

"I'm not timid," she proclaimed. "And I don't feel particularly wicked. Only anxious over how this is going to turn out."

"What did you do it for, Mona?" he burst out painfully.

She gave him a sidelong glance. "Oh, I don't know. Boredom. And he begged me so. Poor Sid! He does love me."

"The dirty scoundrel! If he loved you, would he——"

"Of course he would!" she broke in, with impatient contempt. "Don't indulge in cheap melodrama. It's because people are in love that they take risks like this."

"Then you love him," said Osterhout dolorously.

"I don't know. He sways me. But—I don't think I'm in love with him, as you mean it."

"Yet you——"

"Yet I came here with him. Does that seem so terrible to you?" She spoke in a tone of half-tender mockery.

"I can't understand it, except on the ground that you love him."

"Because you don't understand me. And there are twenty-one different definitions of love."

"Do you understand yourself?"

"Yes; I do," she asserted thoughtfully and boldly. "And I'm not afraid to accept myself as I am. I don't shut my eyes to the picture just because it's my own. I'm not a sneak."

"No. You're not that."

"And if I take the chances I'm ready to face the conse-

quences," she said without defiance, but as one who enunciates a principle of life.

"The consequences? Of this?"

"If necessary. It isn't the first time." He winced and shrank. "Ah, I'm sorry if that hurt you!" she cried contritely.

"Never mind. There are others than me to be thought of."

"You do the thinking, Bobs. I'm not up to it."

"I will."

"That's like you," she murmured gratefully.

"Where are you supposed to be staying?"

"At the Barhams', on Walnut Street. Only Sue is at home."

"Can you arrange it with her?"

"To back up my lies? Yes; Sue will stand by." It was characteristic of Mona Fentriss that she should use the short, ugly, and veracious word.

"Then I shall take you to a Philadelphia hospital."

"Am I as bad as that?"

"It's the simplest way to cover the trail. You were taken ill at the Barhams'; you wired for me to avoid alarming the family, and I had you transferred to the hospital. But there's a risk."

"Of being trapped?"

"Not that so much. Of bringing on another attack."

"You'll be with me, won't you?"

"Yes. We'll get a car and take you over."

"Then I'm not afraid," she said trustfully. "But—'we'; do you mean that Sid is going along?"

"I supposed you'd want him."

"I don't."

Wise though he was in human nature, Mona was always surprising Osterhout. He made no comment, but went

into the front room. Rathbone, his finely cut face mottled and livid, lurched heavily out of his chair.

"Is she going to die?" he asked, looking pitifully unlike the traditional villain of such a drama.

"Perhaps," returned the physician shortly.

"Because of—was it this that brought on the attack?"

Osterhout eyed him with grim distaste. "It didn't help any," he answered, as he had answered Mona.

"Good God! If she dies through my fault——"

"You should have thought of that before."

"I love her so!" groaned the man. His face changed. "I'll know what to do," he muttered in quiet, self-centred determination.

"And what's that?" demanded the physician.

"Nothing," replied the other, startled and sullen.

Osterhout reached him in three steps. "Suicide, perhaps," he said.

"That's my business."

"It is. If you're a low, dirty coward."

Rathbone straightened. "I won't take that from any man."

"Lower your voice, you fool! And listen to me. If she dies and you kill yourself, do you realize what that would mean? It would be advertising this situation to the world. Scandal and shame for the family. Oh, it's an easy way out for you. But can't you be man enough to think of others a little?"

"Isn't it scandal and shame anyway?"

"No. It isn't," returned the doctor energetically. "I'm going to get her out of it. All you have to do is to obey orders."

"I'll do that," said Rathbone eagerly and brokenly. "I'll do anything you say. And if ever I can repay you——"

"If you try to thank me I'll kill you!" retorted Osterhout, snarling and livid, suddenly losing control of himself in his jealous anguish of soul.

The other stared in his face, amazed but unalarmed by the outbreak. "Ah!" he breathed. "So that's the way it is with you. Well—God help you! I'm sorry. But I know now you'll do your best for her. That's all I care about."

He turned toward the door of the room. For the moment Osterhout started forward to intercept him, then drew back with a face in which shone the bitterness of yielding to a superior right.

When Rathbone returned, both men had recovered their self-command.

"Get your things together; send for a maid to pack hers; settle your bill, and get the easiest riding car you can find to go to Philadelphia," were the physician's brief directions.

"Where are you going to take her?"

"To a hospital."

"When can I see her?"

"That is for her to say."

"Then you don't think she's going to—that there is any immediate danger?" said the lover hopefully.

"I think she'll pull through this time, though there is still danger."

"I'm glad you're with her," said Rathbone simply, and went.

Quite as much time was devoted by Dr. Osterhout in the days immediately following to covering the devious trail of his patient as to treating her medically. After a consultation with Mrs. Barham, in which each solemnly pretended that the other entertained no suspicion of Mona's slip, he wrote a heedfully worded letter of misinformation and assurance to Ralph Fentriss, explaining

that his wife had been taken to the hospital after a mild attack, more for rest than anything else; that no member of the family was to come over, and that she would be in condition to return home in a few days. This latter was true, for Mona's recuperative powers were great. None of the family came. But to Osterhout's surprise, he ran upon Patricia while walking down Broad Street on Sunday. She was with a pretty and smartly dressed girl a little older than herself.

"What are you doing here, Pat?" he demanded.

"Week-ending with Cissie Parmenter." With an aplomb amusing in one so young she indicated her companion. "She's my b.f. at school. Cissie, this is Dr. Bobs. You know about him."

"Yes, indeed. How d'you do, Dr. Osterhout."

"And what manner of creature is a b.f.?" asked he quizzically, taking the extended hand which was ornamented with a valuable ruby.

"Best friend, of course, stupid Bobs," returned Pat. "What kind of a bat are you on down here?"

"Your mother's been ill. She's in hospital here," he answered and immediately wondered whether he had not spoken unwisely.

"Hospital?" Pat opened wide eyes. "Is it dangerous?"

"No. She's coming along very well."

"Take me to see her." She turned to Cissie. "I'm plunged, Ciss, but the luncheon's off for me. Tell the boys. You may have my c.t. See you this afternoon."

"I don't know that you ought—" began Osterhout, but was cut short by a quick:

"Then she's worse than you pretend."

"No; but I don't want her excited. However, you may see her," he decided.

He took her to the hospital and left her there with her mother. On his return for his evening's visit he asked:

"How long did the bambina stay?"

"We had a long talk. Bob, did you notice any change in Pat?"

"No; I don't think I did. I wasn't thinking about her."

Mona's beautiful eyes grew pensive. "But you were right about her; what you said before."

"As to what?"

"She is going to be attractive to men in her own queer style. There's something about her, a femininity—no, a sheer femaleness that's going to make trouble."

"For her or for others?"

"For her possibly, because of its effect on others. She understands it a little herself, already, for she's very precocious. And she's proud of it. But she's afraid of it, too. Such a talk as we've had! She's a frank little beast. Your respectable hairs would have stood on end. I've been frank with her, too. I had to be; there may not be much time. *Morituri te*—what's the silly Latin, Bob? . . . Oh, don't look like that, my dear! I didn't mean to hurt you. And I've hurt you so much, haven't I?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Because you're so good to me. So it does matter. Why are you so good to me, Bob?"

"You know, Mona."

"But I want to hear you say it. . . . No; I don't! That's my badness coming out again. And I'm going to be good now in the time remaining to me. Can't you see me, with a saintly expression of face and piously folded hands, waiting submissively like—like somebody on a sampler? Somebody very woolly?"

In spite of his pain he smiled.

"That's better," she cried gaily. "Cheer up. I want you in good mood because I've something to ask you. There's something I want you awfully to do, and you won't want to do it."

"Is it very foolish?" he asked indulgently.

"Imbecile to the verge of asininity. . . . Do you believe in spiritualism?"

"No."

"What a flat and flattening negative. But I'm not to be flattened. If you don't believe in it, there couldn't be any harm in carrying out my silly little scheme."

"Which is?"

"I'm going to want to know about Pat. If I don't, I'll worry."

"About Pat?" he queried, not comprehending. "But, as she's away at school I'll be no more in touch with her than you."

"I'm talking about afterwards."

"Afterwards?"

"Yes. After I'm dead. What makes you so slow, Bob? I want you to write me."

"What? Spirit letters? Through some cheap fraud of a medium?"

"Oh, no! Direct."

"Do you believe they'd reach you, my letters?" he asked sadly.

"Not the letters themselves, certainly. I don't know that I actually *believe* anything about it. But what is in the letters might sift through to me in some way we don't understand. It *might*, Bob," she pleaded. "I've heard of strange cases. And, anyway, I should think you'd like to write, in case you miss me."

"Miss you!" he repeated hoarsely. "Yes; I'll miss you."

"Then wouldn't you give up just a little, tiny time to writing me?" she cajoled. "Just a promise to please silly me. After I'm dead you needn't keep it, you know, if you don't believe that I'll know."

"Any promise I made you I'd keep, living or dead. What would I do with the letters if I did write?"

"You know the built-in desk-safe in my room? You could put them there. You'll have the combination, for you're to be executor of my will. There's a large drawer at the bottom. . . . Of course it's all foolishness. But—won't you?"

"You know I'll do anything you ask."

"Yes; I know. Poor old Bob! Write me about all the girls; but principally Pat, just as if she were yours, too; all that you'd hope for her and fear for her; her problems and growth and dangers. She'll have 'em. Perhaps I'll come back, a haunt, and read your letters—you must make 'em very wise, Bob—and whisper your wisdom in the ear of Pat's queer little soul, and warn her if need be. . . . Bob, do you know what I really want for the girls?"

"I might guess."

"Not goodness; that's for plain girls. Nor virtue, particularly; that's more or less of a scarecrow. I want happiness for them."

"Only a little, easy thing like that?" he taunted gently.

"Well, I've had it; a lot of it. 'I've taken my fun where I found it.' Bob, I'm a pagan thing! And perhaps after I've gone where the good pagans go, I'll send word back to you and invite you to follow—if it's a proper place for a dear old foggy like you. It may not be an orthodox heaven, old boy. But there'll be something doing if Mona goes there!"

But it was not until six months later and from her own house that lovely, pagan Mona Fentriss went to her own place. Went with an expectant soul and a smile on her lips, unafraid in the face of the great, dim Guess as she had been in every threat that life had held over her.

PART II

CHAPTER VIII

THE front door-button was out of commission. Since Constance had come to live at Holiday Knoll, bringing her husband with her and taking over the management of the place, the bell had developed a habit of being out of order. So had many other fixtures, schedules, and household appurtenances. Constance always meant to put them aright, and sometimes did. But they never seemed to stay put. As a housekeeper, Ralph Fentriss used to remark with humorous resignation, Connie was a grand little society beauty.

Of the beauty there could be no question. As she sat now, on this winter's night, the glow of the reading lamp showing warm and soft upon her loose, rose-coloured lounging robe and her dreamy face, she was a picture which, unfortunately, lacked any observer. Fred Browning was out. Fred was often out in the evenings now, though they had been married less than two years. Not that it mattered greatly to the young wife. Fred had ceased to stimulate her senses; he had never stimulated her imagination. She got along well enough with him, and equally well without him. Substitutes were not wanting. But just at the moment she rather wished he were there, because she thought she heard someone at the front door, though it might be only the beating of the blizzard, and it was so much trouble to rouse herself from the easy chair and the flimsy novel. That so many things were so much trouble was the bane of Constance's life. Her

soul had begun to take on fat. Presently her lissome body would follow suit.

Yes; there certainly was someone at the door. She could discern now an impatient stamping. Probably Bobs, although he had said that he could not come before nine to see the baby, who was constantly fretting. Another superfluous trouble in a world of annoyances! We-ell; on the whole it was less bother to go to the door than to look up a maid. Tossing her book aside she walked into the hall. As she passed, she pressed an electric light button. Only one globe out of the cluster responded, and that weakly.

"Damn!" said Constance. "I forgot to phone the company."

She threw open the front door. In the storm centre stood a man. He wore a long coat lined with seal, a coat which the luxurious Constance at once appraised and approved, and an astrakhan cap which he lifted, showing fair, close waves of hair. He peered into the dim entry.

"Is this——" he began, and then, in an eager exclamation, "Mona!"

Constance drew a quick breath of shock and amazement. "What!"

"A thousand pardons," said the stranger. "A stupid error." He spoke with the accent of a cultivated American, but there was about him the vague, indefinable atmosphere of an older, riper, calmer civilisation. "Am I mistaken in supposing this to be Mrs. Fentriss's home?" he asked courteously.

"No. Yes. It is," answered Constance, still shaken.

"I would have telephoned before presenting myself, but the wires are down. What a furious storm! My taxi," he added cheerily, "is stalled in your very largest and finest local snowdrift. Is Mrs. Fentriss in?"

"My mother?" faltered Constance.

He gazed on her keenly, incredulously. "Your mother? That's hardly possible. Yet—yes. You are wonderfully like her." There was a caressing intonation in his voice as he said the words. "Permit me; I am Cary Scott."

"Oh!" gasped Constance in dismay. Cary Scott, the old romance about which she had heard her father joke her mother more than once, concerning which all the children had felt a lively curiosity because it was supposed to be "different" from Mona's other little adventures; Cary Scott here in the flesh and in tragic ignorance of her mother's death! Commanding herself, she drew aside with a slight, gracious gesture which bade him enter. Bowing, he passed into the hallway and shook the snow from his coat. Not until he had reached the door of the library did she gather her forces to tell him.

"Hadn't you heard about Mother, Mr. Scott?" she asked very gently.

Her tone stopped him. His eyes were steady as he raised them to the lovely, pitying face before him. But hollows seemed suddenly to have fallen in beneath them. "Not—?" he whispered.

She inclined her head. "Nearly a year ago."

"Why haven't I heard? Why was I not told?" he demanded.

"Father wrote you, I think. You must sit down." She pushed a chair around for him and, laying light hands upon his shoulders, slipped his coat back. "Take it off," she said.

He obeyed. He was like a man tranced. Seated under the lamplight he stared fixedly into a dark corner of the room, as if to evoke a vision for his appeasement. Sharply intrigued, Constance took the opportunity of observing him at her leisure. He was, she decided, a delightful

personality, all the more engaging for that touch of the exotic, that hint of potential romance which the men of her acquaintance did not have. No woman would have called him handsome. His features were too irregular, and the finely modelled forehead was scarred vertically with a savagely deep V which mercifully lost itself in the clustering hair, a testimony to active war service. There was confident distinction in his bearing, and an atmosphere of quiet and somewhat ironic worldliness in voice and manner. He looked to be a man who had experimented much with life in its larger meanings and found it amusing but perhaps not fulfilling. Reckoning him contemporaneously with the implication of that betraying "Mona!" of his first utterance, Constance thought:

"He must be nearly forty to have been one of Mother's suitors. But he looks hardly over thirty."

She heard him sigh as he drew his spirit back from far distances, and was sensitive to the power of control implied in the composed countenance which he turned to her.

"You should be Constance Fentriss."

"Constance Browning," she corrected. "I'm an old married woman of two years' standing."

"Grand Dieu!" he muttered. "I think of you always as hardly more than a child. As I used to hear about you. One loses touch."

"You had not seen my mother for a long time, had you?"

"Very long. Many years. But one does not forget her kind."

Constance, who had not seated herself during this passage of speech, crossed to the mantel, and lifted from it a heavily framed photograph which she placed in the visitor's hands.

"That was taken a few months before she died."

"Unchanged!" he breathed.

Something imperative in Constance's burgeoning interest in the man drove her to ask: "Did you—were you very much in love with her?"

There was daring in her tone; but there was compassion also. Because of his sense of the latter he answered her frankly:

"No. Not, perhaps, as most people understand it. Love asks much. I asked—nothing. It was not," he smiled faintly, "as one falls in love and falls out."

"Ah?" she returned, questioningly, tauntingly. But he held to the graver tone.

"She was all that dreams could be, and as unattainable as dreams. If she was like an angel to me, I suppose I was like a boy to her. She used to tell me about you and your sisters." Again he smiled. "Once she said, 'Wait and come back and marry one of them.'"

"But you did not wait," accused Constance.

"Nor did you," he retorted with that swift, ironic eye-flash which she was to know so well later.

She welcomed the change to a lighter and more familiar vein.

"How should I know?" she mocked. "You sent no word of your claim. Is Mrs. Scott with you?"

"No," he answered shortly. Then, in suaver tone: "It is more than a year now that I have been out of the world. The East; wild parts of Hindustan and Northern China; and then the South Seas. I have a boy's passion for travel."

"But not for your native land. You *are* an American, aren't you?"

"I have been. And I want to be again. But I shall need help."

"We Fentrisses are terribly American. Don't you want us to reclaim you?"

"Would you? Then I may come back?"

"You must. Father will want to see you."

"And I him. He is well?"

"Very. Where can he find you?"

"At the St. Regis for a few days."

"Do you think a few days enough to re-Americanize you?"

"Say a few years, then." He rose and turned to give a long look at the portrait of Mona Fentriss which he had set on the table. "You have been more than kind to me," he said gravely. "I cannot thank you enough."

"I'm afraid I was clumsy and abrupt." He shook his head. "It must have been a shock to you."

"Yes. But—dreams do not die. And I still keep the dream. And perhaps"—he lifted an appealing gaze to her—"perhaps, as a legacy, some little part of the friendship. I may hold that as a hope?"

"Yes," said Constance.

Her fingers stirred in his as he bent and touched light lips to her hand.

Out into the tumultuous night Cary Scott carried two pictures, mother and daughter, strangely alike, strangely different, which interchanged and blended and separated again, like the evanescence of sunset-hued clouds. But it was the visual memory of the living woman which eventually held his inner eye, the pure, smooth contour of her face, the sumptuous curves of the figure beneath the suave folds of the clinging robe, the chaste line of the lips contradicted by the half-veiled sensuality of the wide, humid, deer-soft eyes. A delicate, but unsatisfied sensuality which might yet, as he read it, break down under provocation into reckless self-indulgence. Sensitive by nature

to beauty in all its implications, inner and outer, he felt the enveloping atmosphere of her youth and sweetness, and sought, to match it, the swift intelligence, the eager responsiveness which had been Mona's. Had the daughter inherited these qualities of the mother? If she had, she would be irresistible.

Mona Fentriss, whatever relations she had maintained, in her wayward, laughing course of life, with other men (wholly unknown and unsuspected by Cary Scott) had been to him all that was demanded by the ideal which he himself had formed of her; had given him a friendship infinitely wise and sweet and clear in spirit. Of Constance he had asked the chance to win a like friendship. Yet in his heart, at once hopeful by instinct, and cynical by experience, he knew from the evidence of those hungering eyes, that if she gave at all it would be more than friendship. And, if she chose to give, would he choose to take? From Mona's daughter, at once so subtly like and unlike Mona? Was he already a little in love with her? The question was still unsolved when he went to sleep.

After he left, Constance returned to her book. Presently it dropped from her hand. Dreams seeped into the craving eyes.

Her husband found her so when he came in at midnight.

"What are you mooning over, Con?" he said testily. He was prone to the impatient mood when he had had too much to drink.

"I?" answered his wife. "Oh! Ghosts."

"Rats!" said Fred Browning. "Come to bed."

CHAPTER IX

"Who's the princely party holding Con's hand in the library?"

Patricia, home from school for the Easter vacation, slouched against Mary Delia's door as she put her question. The child had begun to take on the florescence of the woman. Her meagre face had filled out; the lines of her slim figure had become firmer, more gracious; the knowing eyes deeper of hue, more veiled of intent. She was still sallow, but the reproach of "pimplly little gnome" was no longer applicable. Her trusted Dr. Bobs had promised her the complexion of a peach if she would hold to his stern regimen of diet for a year, and as she had been fairly faithful, though with an occasional lapse into her besetting sin of gluttony, the clarification of her blood already showed in a soft lustre underlying the duller tint of the skin. Her teeth had whitened in perceptible degree, and her tongue reddened from its former furry grey of replete mornings. She glowed with a conscious and eager vitality.

Startled by the form of the question put to her so abruptly, Mary Delia looked up from the golf glove which she was mending. "Is he holding her hand?" she said unguardedly.

"Figure of speech," returned the airy Pat, perceiving, however, that there was something in this. "They look pretty chummy, though. Who is he, Dee?"

"Cary Scott."

"Meaning little or nothing to meh. Where's he from?"

"All over. He was a friend of Mona's."

"Old like that! He doesn't look it. Visiting our flourishing village?"

"He's come back to live, I believe."

"Here? And Connie's annexed him, has she? Married?"

"No; not here. He comes down week-ends. Yes; he's married, I believe, but not very much."

"Business?"

"He's invented some new mechanical thing that the mills have to have, and he makes a lot of money out of it."

"Crazy about Con?"

"He's here a good deal."

"How does Freddie take it?"

"Between cocktails," returned Dee laconically.

Pat thought for a moment. "Is Con getting tired of him?"

"Wouldn't you be?"

"I? Oh, I'd be sick to death of any man in a month! But I thought Con would turn into the domestic breeder kind."

"I don't blame Con so much. Freddie's quit his business for drink. They're miles in debt. Con's more extravagant than ever. That's the reason they're living here on Father. Pretty boring for him. He's getting sore, too."

"No wonder. The house is like a pig pen."

"Con doesn't pay any attention to it. She hasn't any interest in anything except clothes, and men—principally Scott."

"Then she *is* nuts about him."

"I don't know. You never can tell with Con. But I know this; Bobs is worried."

"Poor old Bobs! He has his troubles with us. But I don't see that this Scott party is any Francis X. Bush-

man, the male beauty-spot of the movie screen. How does he work his little game?"

Dee tossed the repaired glove into the basket and regarded her sister. "Why all the eager questions, sweetie?"

"Don't be nawsty, pettah," retorted Pat, who well knew what "sweetie" in that tone meant. "I'm awaking you."

"Not thinking of organising a rescue party, are you?"

"I might at that."

"A fat chance you'd have against Com. Why, he'd chuck you under the chin and tell you to run away to your crib."

"Then I'd put up my innocent, childish lips and ask him to say mighty-nighty nicey-nicey."

"Yes; you're pretty good at that innocent, childish lips stuff," remarked Dee placidly. "About time you were outgrowing it, I'd say."

Pat glowered. "Oh, you go to hell," she snapped. "No man would ever want to kiss you. You—you dead fish."

Dee laughed. "Wouldn't they? I wish they didn't. It's a rotten nuisance."

Pat's ill humour vanished in interest. "You are a queer one," she said. "How does Jimmieson James like your views?"

Dee shrugged her slim, clean-muscled shoulders. "He dangles along."

"Better haul him in before he wriggles off the hook," advised the worldly Pat. "Come on down and show me the new suitor."

"Do your own butting-in," yawned Dee. "I won't."

"Oh, verra-well! Here's trying."

Finesse did not mark Pat's irruption upon the *solitude à deux* in the library.

"'Lo, Con," was her opening. "Seen T. T. around here?"

Constance's companion arose and viewed the new arrival with surprise, amusement and expectation. The latter was not immediately fulfilled.

"No," said Constance with significant brevity. "It's in the conservatory." Which was a guess.

"I've looked," said Pat. Which was a lie. She directed a guileless gaze at Cary Scott. "I think you must have been sitting on it," she said; "my copy of *Town Topics*."

"No; I assure you," he returned. There was a moment's pause which he relieved by turning to Constance. "This is Miss Patricia?" he asked.

"Yes; that's the infant," returned Constance so disparagingly that Pat at once decided to see it through.

"Only half an introduction," she said, greatly fancying herself for her aplomb. "What's the other half?"

"Cary Scott, at your service, mademoiselle." He made her an elaborate bow, twinkling.

She held out a hand, large, firm, and nervously modelled. "Oh, yes. Dee's been telling me about you. Such a lot."

"A charming historian. I hope the history borrowed some of the quality."

"It wasn't so dull. Con, are you driving down for Dad to-day?"

"No. You are."

"Oh, *very* well. I can take the car, then. Good-bye, Mr. Scott. It was really an awfully interesting history. I'd like to hear more of it some day."

"That's a precocious child, Stancia," said Cary Scott, giving to the special name which he had devised for Constance a caressing quality.

"She's a terrible brat," replied the other.

"She is your sister and therefore has for me a shadow of your delight about her."

"How foreign you sound when you say those things! I love it in you."

"Do you? But you use the word 'love' so lightly."

"I don't think of it lightly. No," she whispered, reading the swift fire in his eyes and holding him back with a light hand upon his shoulder. "Not again. Not now. That other time—it frightened me."

"Don't be afraid of me," he murmured. "I can wait."

"Ah, but I'm more afraid of you when you wait than when you seek," she smiled, and he reflected, with warm recognisance, that for once she had shown a gleam of subtlety, that subtlety which had so enthralled him in the mother, for which he was ever eagerly looking in the daughter. "You'll be at the club dance Saturday?" she added.

"Since you are to be there. *Cela va sans dire.*"

Scott, delayed from reaching the club house early, found the dance in full swing when he got there. It was one of the largest and gayest of the season. The eleventh commandment as promulgated by Mr. Volstead, "Thou shalt not drink except by stealth," had made every man a walking bar-room. Having neglected to provide himself with a flask, Scott was quite discomfited when Constance, sitting out one of the three dances which were all that she had allowed him, railed at him with a charming air of proprietorship for his negligence.

"I might pass out on your hands and you'd have nothing to revive me with."

"Possibly I could borrow some from this youth," said he as a young fellow with his shirt gaping open where a stud had deserted its post, wavered toward them.

"That's Billy Grant, Pat's latest flame," said Constance. "He's got a wonder, hasn't he!"

The youngster steadied himself to approach them. "Miss-zz Brow-owning," he said politely, "could you tell me whe-ere Patiz?"

"No, Billy. I haven't seen her," replied Constance promptly.

"I've los' her. And thissiz my dance wither. Seccon-extra."

Onward he lurched on his quest. "Do be a dear, Cary, and get Pat out of Billy's way," begged Constance.

"Of course. Where can I find her?"

"She's coming through the further door now. Go and stop her. Tell her this is your dance and why."

Pat greeted the applicant with her quick, wide smile. "Yes, I know," she said. "Billy is rather sunk. Come on. I'm all for this music." She slipped into his arms, her body already swaying to the impulses of a half-barbaric, half-languorous waltz. . . . "I would never have thought you'd dance so beautifully," she presently hummed, setting the words to the consonance of the music.

"Why?" he asked, amused.

"Men of your age don't care much about it. Bridge for them."

"Do I seem so stricken in years?"

"Grandfather stuff!" She laughed up at him impudently. "You do and you don't." Ever alive to physical impressions she added: "You're terribly strong, aren't you?"

"Rather. It was the fad to be in my set in Paris."

"Your muscles are like steel; I like the feel of them. No; they're not like steel at all. That's just one of the things people say because other people say them. They're like rubber, hard, live rubber."

"I see that you're of an independent turn of expression," he commented mockingly. "You seek the just word."

"But they are, aren't they? How do you keep that way?"

"A little riding. A little fencing. A little boxing. A little swimming. At my advanced age, you see, one must preserve oneself."

"Now you're laughing at me. I like it. . . . Why don't you applaud?" she demanded indignantly as the music fell silent. "Don't you *want* any more of this dance with me?"

"Certainly I do!" He clapped violently, she joining him. "Will that serve?"

Contentedly as a purry kitten she nestled to him as the drums signalled the resumption of the tune. "Let's not talk this time," said she.

They merged silently into the current of physical rhythm about them. Responsive to the music by instinct, guiding with the intuition of the perfect dancer, Scott looked about him on the crowded scene. The measure had swollen to a fuller harmony, taken on a throbbing, suggestive quality, and he sensed the reaction in the close-joined couples around him. The girls danced by him with their eyes drooping, their cheeks inflamed, a little line of passion across their foreheads. They seemed to cling to their partners with tightening grasp, each couple a separate entity, alone with the surge of the music and what it covertly implied, the allegro furioso of tumultuous, untamable blood. He glanced down at the young girl in his arms. Her lashes, long and fringed, all but touched the swell of her cheek; her lips were lightly parted for the rapid breathing; a little pulse beat in her neck.

"Good God!" he thought. "This child! Does she know what it is that she is feeling?" He felt an access of sheer pity; thought that he must speak to Stancia of this.

The music panted itself to silence. Pat lifted smiling, unfathomable eyes to his and let them drop. "Oh!" she breathed ecstatically.

"What shall I do with you now, Miss Pat?" he asked.

"Oh, stick me anywhere. This is the supper number. Billy's my provider. I think he's on the veranda."

Misgivings beset Scott that the errant Billy would prove a doubtful source of supply, but he took the girl out into the dimness. Propped against a corner pillar, young Mr. Grant gazed upon the moon with an expression of foreboding, which was almost immediately justified by the event. H. leaned upon the railing, and it became evident that he would not be supping that evening. Quite the contrary.

"Down *and out*," commented Pat, equally without surprise or resentment. "Let's go. Take me back to Con. Someone will come and get me; I've turned down a couple of the boys for supper."

"Perhaps," said Scott formally, "you would honour me by accepting me as substitute for the recreant Billy."

Pat gave a little, hoarse crow of delight. "How *divine* of you!" She was at that stage of articulate development where only the highest-pressure adjective would serve her facile emotions. "Come on. I know the best corner in the place if somebody hasn't snitched it already."

The corner proved to be unsnitched. Established there, Pat gave her cavalier a large and varied order, only to countermand half of it. "I almost forgot Bobs's darn diet," she grumbled. "You know Bobs?"

"Dr. Osterhout? Yes. We have become quite friends."

"I'm glad of that," she said gravely.

"Are you? Why? You like him?"

"I *adore* him. I would have thought that you two would be friends," she added thoughtfully.

"Now I wonder why you should think that?" he smiled, but instead of awaiting her reply he set out for the food.

Pat wondered, too. By the time he had returned, however, her restless mind had taken another turn. "How long have you known us?" she asked.

"Us?"

"The Fentriss girls. We're us."

"Ah? Some two months or more."

"And you're almost one of the family."

"How do you arrive at that flattering conclusion?"

"From Dee, and Dad. And you say Bobs has taken you in. *And* Con. Especially Con. Why aren't you having supper with her?"

"Because I happen to be here." Quietly though the words were spoken a palpable hardening of his manner warned her against further impertinences along this line. For the moment she shied off, and, removing a macaroon which she had filched from his plate after once denying it to herself, from between her teeth, inquired casually:

"Got anything on your hip?"

Not yet fully initiate in the argot of his native land, Scott looked his inquiry.

"A drink. A flask."

"Do you want a drink?"

"Why the amazement, Grandfather dear?"

"Is that a recognised part of your dear Dr. Bobs's diet?"

"Bobs would have a fit. He doesn't know little Pat is out. But wouldn't a touch of hooch put a bit of a dash into the proceedings about now?"

"I assure you, I am finding no lack of interest in the proceedings," he returned drily.

"Meaning, 'Don't get fresh, little child.' Well, I'm no rum-hound. By the way, do you take that patronising tone with Connie?"

"Suppose you satisfy your curiosity on that subject by asking her."

"Now you're trying to flatten me out like a worm." She contemplated him with mischievous daring in her eyes. "I don't see it," she stated deliberately. "I don't see it at all."

"What don't you see? I should have thought that very little escaped your singularly sharp faculties of observation."

"You and Connie. I don't get it."

His stare met her glance and turned it aside. But she persisted, half laughing: "If you weren't old enough to be her father—— Yet you're not clever enough to be onto her. She's got you going. Do you know what's the matter with Con?"

"While your views are doubtless valuable, I am not aware that I have invited them."

"Blighted! But I'm going to tell you just the same. Nothing above the ears."

"Above the ears?" Scott stared in puzzlement at the two blobs of sub-lustrous, dark hair which effectually concealed his youthful partner's organs of hearing.

"Oh, no brains!" she cried impatiently. "Must I talk baby talk to you?"

"You might talk comprehensible English," he said sternly. "And you might also find a more suitable topic than criticism of your sister."

She was daring enough to try to meet the cold fire of his gaze, but not steadfast enough to endure it. "Now

you're angry with me," she accused, her breath catching a little.

Truly Cary Scott was angry with her. But anger was secondary to a sudden, startling realisation. He felt as if a clear, blinding, chilling light had pierced to a cherished place of illusions, betraying its voidness. No brains! It was sickeningly true. All through these weeks of his yielding to Stancia's physical charm he had unconfessedly harboured the knowledge, met and denied its disappointments, its deadening negations in a score of phases, by refusing to think them out. Now this bratling of the devil had thrown the ray of her withering and brutal candour upon his false spiritualisation of a gross attachment. Stancia was gentle, she was sweet, she was provocative, she was adorably lovely to look upon; but—no brains! For a man of Cary Scott's fastidious type of mind, it was a disenchantment beyond all hope of restoration. *Nulla redintegratio amoris*; the ancient philosopher was right; there was no such thing as a return upon the road of love. And now he knew that it never had been love. However potently the attraction of Stancia's beauty might draw him, he would always know it for what it was; not the true fire, but a baser flame. Enlightenment! And in time, thank God! But he was in a still rage with the little prophetess who had revealed the omen. Out of the long silence came her half whisper:

"I am a little rotter, aren't I! But I just couldn't help it!"

Inadequate though the plea was, he felt inexplicably appeased of his wrath. When he was still meditating what he should say to this amazing child, footsteps, heavy and not all of them steady, sounded on the veranda immediately outside the window at which they were seated.

Voices, unmuffled by any considerations of caution, came clearly to them.

"*Quelque* chick, what!"

"I'll telephone Mars that she is! And coming every minute."

"Too easy, say I. You can hug her to a peak."

"Something to hug, too, that little Treechie. She's got a teasin' little way with her."

"Guess she teases herself as much as she teases the other feller."

"That teasing game is likely to be double-barrelled," put in a deeper voice. "What was it the old woman in that play said about the flapper? 'Precarious virginity.' Pretty wise, that."

"It might also be wise," cut in Cary Scott's chiselling voice, "for you gentlemen to air your opinions in some less public spot."

"Oh, Gawd!" said one of the voices. "Who the devil's that?" another. "Le's beat it," a third. The footsteps chudded away.

"Chivalrous young America!" commented Scott to Pat. "A companion piece to sisterly loyalty."

He had meant to sting her, but he was amazed at the spasmodic constriction of the face which she turned to him. He had not expected that she would be so much affected by anything he could say; in fact, he had reckoned her rather a thick-skinned and insensitive little person. But now her eyes were set, and her cheeks sallow with ebbing blood.

"The girl they were discussing," he pursued, with a view to giving her time for recovery from his too successful stab, "is presumably some man's sister; perhaps the sister of one of their friends. If he had been sitting here——"

"She isn't any man's sister," said Pat chokingly.

Then he understood. "But they called her 'Treechie,'" he said stupidly.

"That's one of my nicknames."

"My dear!" said Scott pityingly, at a loss for the moment in the face of her shamed and helpless fury. He laid his hand on hers.

"Do you believe it? What they said?" she whispered.

"No; no. Of course not," he answered soothingly.

"You *do*. Anyway, it's true."

"Can you tell me who those fellows are?" he asked grimly. "I'll find a way to stop their foul chatter."

"You can't mix in it. What good would it do if you did half kill them?" For she had read the formidable wrath in his face. "Besides," she concluded sullenly, "I tell you it's true."

"Why is it true, Pat?" he asked gently.

"Because I'm a cheap little idiot. I never realised—I never knew men talked—that way—about girls."

"Men don't. Those were callow boys."

"Not all of them. The one that—that spoke about the play——" She stopped with her hand to her throat.

For a moment he studied her working face. "It's hardly worth while, is it?" he said gravely. "You've come to the end of that phase, haven't you? How old are you, Pat?"

"Eighteen. Almost. And I've been a terrible necker ever since—since I began to be grown up. Most girls are."

"Are they? Why?"

"I don't know. The boys sort of expect it," she answered childishly. "And it's—it's fun, in a way." She wriggled like a very schoolgirl. "I got Billy away from Celia Bly that way. And now look at the damn thing!"

She laughed and the tension was temporarily relieved. "Anyway," she declared resolutely, "here and now is where I quit. There's nothing in it. Unless," she added with an astounding naïveté, "it's somebody that I'm quite crazy about." Anger and pain had left a faint fire still in the eyes which she turned to his. "I'm glad it was you that were with me when it happened, Mr. Scott."

"I was afraid that it only made it the harder for you."

"No. Because you understand." He was by no means sure that he understood at all, but he made no denial. "Have you got any daughters?"

"No."

"I wish I'd had someone like you that I could talk to," she said wistfully. "Dad's all right. I adore Dad. But I couldn't talk to him like this. I can to you. Isn't it funny! Do you like me a little, Mr. Scott?" Her face, upturned to his, was one anxious, honest, hopeful plea.

"Yes. I like you very much," he returned soberly.

"You might adopt me," she pursued. "On account of mother. You were fond of her, weren't you?" He regarded her with a slight frown which vanished as he realised that this was no adventurous impertinence such as her references to Constance. "I don't see how you could help but be; she was so beautiful. . . . But no; I couldn't be anyone's daughter but Dad's, even adopted."

"Granddaughter," suggested Scott mockingly.

"I take it all back!" she cried, her spirits quite restored. "You aren't nearly as old as I thought you were; and twice as nice. We'll just be friends, won't we? And I'll be awfully good and never say anything catty about Con again. Come on; there's the music. Let's dance. This is somebody else's but I don't care."

At the door she stretched her arms above her head in a long sweep, a hovering, expectant gesture as if she were

going to give herself into a profound and enduring embrace, then leaned to him as the swirl of the rhythms caught them. He felt her fresh young cheek pressed to his, close and warm, and drew away a little.

"What's the matter?" she asked naïvely. "Don't you like it?"

Perplexed for the moment and a little startled by the sweetness of the contact, he did not answer at once.

"I thought we were to be friends," she murmured mournfully.

With a sudden understanding he realised that she had nestled to him as unconsciously as a kitten; that her natural expression of the merest comradeship was physical. In a manner, innocently so.

After that dance he did not see her again until, just before her departure, she dashed up to him to say, "I've been *terribly* good all evening. It isn't so hard." Then, peering at him anxiously: "You don't despise me, do you, Mr. Scott?"

The innate pathos of it made it hard for him to control his voice, though he answered easily but sincerely:

"How could I? We're friends, you know."

"Yes," she assented with deep content. "We're friends."

At home Dee asked her: "Did you try your rescue party, kid?"

"What rescue party?" returned Pat dreamily. "Oh, *that!* I trow some not! *He* won't be the one that needs help when the water gets deep."

"I suppose not," acquiesced Dee. She thought that Pat meant Constance.

CHAPTER X

WANDERING into the drawing-room on one of her infrequent and languid tours of inspection, Constance was astonished to find Mary Delia contemplating herself in the full-length mirror. She was clad in a new and modish bathing suit.

"What do you think of it?" she asked her elder sister, turning slowly about.

"There's certainly plenty of it," was the disparaging reply. "Where are you going in it; to church?"

"To the Dangerfields' round-robin tennis."

"Going to play that way?"

"Yeppy. We're going to fool the hot spell. After the tennis we christen the new swimming pool. It's the biggest private tank in captivity."

"I thought Wally Dangerfield was that. I don't see why you want to mix up with that set, Dee."

"What set? They're the same set as the rest of us. What's the matter with Wally and Sally?"

"Nothing much except their pace and the way they get talked about. You know there have been half a dozen near-scandals at their place already."

"Not near me," returned Dee cheerfully. "I can take care of myself."

"I grant you that. But won't Jimmy be awfully sore? He doesn't like the Dangerfields."

"Jimmy is sore," was the indifferent response.

Indeed, Mr. Jameson James, an insistent formalist in his ideas for women though not at all in his ideas of men, had most unwisely essayed a veto upon Dee's at-

tendance, only to be reminded by that untamed virgin that they were not yet engaged, and that, even if they were, it was by no means certain that she would meekly take orders from him. She spoke with unruffled good humour. Mr. James had departed in great ill humour.

"I like Jimmy when he's furious," remarked Dee. "He's so much more human."

"You'll lose him yet," warned Constance. "Who's your partner for the tennis?"

"Paul de Severin was to have been but he's held up in Washington. I thought I'd borrow Cary Scott if you don't mind."

"Why should I mind?" returned the other moodily. "He isn't my property."

"Had a scrap?"

"No." Constance brooded for a moment, then made one of those disclosures characteristic of the peculiarly frank relations existing between all three of the sisters. "Dee, Freddie's been borrowing money from Cary."

Dee whirled and stared. "The devil!" she ejaculated. "He'll never pay it back."

"I don't suppose Cary expects it back."

"What does he expect, then?"

"I don't know," answered Constance slowly.

"Humph! I do. Are you going to pay, Connie?"

"If I did pay—that way—would I be half as rotten as Freddie?" demanded the wife savagely.

"That depends. Are you in love with Cary?"

"I don't know," muttered the beauty. "I thought I was. Then I found out about Freddie and it sickened me so that I don't know where I stand."

Dee ruminated. "Perhaps that's why Freddie did it. He's no fool."

"He's a drunkard. That's worse."

"Poor old Con! I wonder what Cary thinks of it all."

"That's what I'm afraid to think about."

"Then you *are* in love with him. See here, Con; have you been borrowing from him, too?"

Constance's exquisite, self-indulgent face was set and hard as she stared past her sister. "He's paid a bill or two. I didn't dare take them to father."

A soft whistle on a single, low note issued from Dee's lips. "That's not in the book of rules."

"I know it. But he was so wonderful about it. You'd think that I was the one conferring the favour by taking his"—Constance gulped—"his money."

"Yes. Cary's a thoroughbred. Whatever happens I can't see that Freddie has any kick coming. *Maquereau!*"

"What's that?"

"Tasty French slang. The English is shorter and uglier. Con, how much are you in for?"

"Too much. . . . You marry money, Dee," counselled Constance fiercely. "It lasts. The other thing doesn't."

"With me it doesn't even begin. Then I can take Cary?"

"Of course. I almost wish you'd never bring him back."

"It might be safer," agreed the other. "I'll go and wire him."

Dorrisdale knew the elaborate establishment of the Dangerfields, built out of war profits at the back of the golf course, as "The Private Athletic Club." Everything about it was based upon sports, and the clique which frequented it was linked in a common bond of physical fitness, a willingness to bet any amount on anything, and capacity for hard drinking. It boasted expensive stables, an indoor and two outdoor tennis courts, a squash and racquets building, and, in the middle, the sixty-foot

swimming tank just completed. Sally Dangerfield, a big-eyed, softly rounded brunette whose air of rather amorous languor concealed a feline vitality and strength, had a penchant for small parties, many in a season. This opening tennis party of the season included but eight couples. Walter Dangerfield, robust, hairy, loud-voiced and generous of hospitality, announced to the arriving guests that there would be first and second prizes worth striving for, also that, while it was a long time between sets, it would be a shorter period between drinks, in proof of which he indicated tubs of ice housing bottles of the famous Dangerfield punch.

The intense, unseasonable heat bred an immediate thirst, appeasement of which enhanced the joyousness of the occasion if not the quality of the tennis. Thanks to a quality of comparative abstemiousness on the part of both, Dee and her partner won against a pair who were normally their betters. The prize was a magnum of champagne apiece, and that they should celebrate by opening it immediately was, of course, *de rigueur* in the Private Athletic Club. The swim which followed was signalled by the appearance, upon a specially constructed raft, of a "submarine cocktail" invented by the host for the occasion. By dinner time the party had accumulated what was universally regarded as a highly satisfactory start.

Over the luxurious repast the heat settled like a steamy blanket. It was too hot to talk, it was too hot to sing (though several ambitious souls tried to pretend that it wasn't), it was too hot to dance between courses, it was too hot to do anything but drink. There was a gasp of relief when the hostess announced that coffee would be served outside, and a groan of disappointment when a splash of lukewarm rain heralded a thunderstorm which

came booming and belching up from the west. Pent within the stagnant house the guests established themselves in the big living-room and offered various suggestions for amusement, each of which was promptly rejected as calling for too much effort.

Wally Dangerfield was just saying, "The time has now arrived, children, for a new and spine-tickling drink which—" when the crash came.

It seemed to precede rather than follow the blinding stab of radiance which ripped through the outer darkness, dimming the electric lights to futile sparks for the thousandth of a second before they went out. The great, stone structure rocked with the concussion. One thin, high shriek sounded. Then silence. Wally Dangerfield's voice boomed through the blackness:

"Anyone hurt?"

"I'm alive." "Present." "Battered but in the ring." "Missed *me*." "Whose hair is that singeing?" "Kamerad! Call off the Big Bertha." The replies came, shaky, flippant, with forced laughter, with bravado. It seemed good sports to show a front under fire, and they did it.

Matches were struck. Servants came with two feeble candles. The entire electrical establishment of the house was out of commission. The host promptly dispatched a car to the local plant with instructions to bring back an expert if it was necessary to kidnap him.

With that one terrific discharge the storm had spent its greatest fury. It retired, leaving the steaming world immersed in humid heat, and the air full of rotted electricity. The guests tingled to it; it thrilled in their senses as well as their nerves. After the sobering sense of peril escaped, there followed a relaxing reaction of solvent ties and conventions, of sudden and reckless au-

dacities. A warm puff of wind doused one of the feeble candles; the other was only sufficient to produce a provocative twilight. A silence significant and languorous, broken only by murmurs and snatches of soft, protesting laughter settled upon the dim room. Even Dee's nerves of iron responded. Leaning back on her divan to catch a wandering breath of air she felt a man's hand pressing upon her shoulder, a man's breath soft upon her neck. With her ready young strength, she pushed back the wooer.

"Not for me," she said quietly.

"Oh, don't be a prude," implored a straining whisper. "Everything goes to-night." She thought it was Harry Mercer's voice.

Evading him she got to her feet, made her way toward the door, and stumbled upon a chaise longue occupied by two close-clasped figures.

"Beg your pardon," she said nonchalantly; but she was vaguely stirred by all this suggestion, not to disgust, which would have been her normal retroaction, but to a wistful wonderment. *What* did they see in it? *What* was it that she was missing out of life? Was she abnormal? Or just fastidious? Across the room she could discern the sumptuous outlines of Sally Dangerfield's figure, dark against the background of a flannelled figure.

"Why not start something, Sally?" she suggested.

The hostess laughed. "It's starting itself, isn't it? Haven't you got your self-starter working? But I guess you're right. Help me find some more lights."

"Why lights?" murmured a sleepy-toned protestant. "It's more comfortable as it is."

"Who said 'comfortable'?" growled another. "It's hotter than ever."

"Wish I were back in the pool," said a woman.

"Grand little idea!" boomed Dangerfield. "Let's all go in!"

"What! In our wet things?" objected young Mrs. Redfern. "I wouldn't put my clammy stockings on again for a million swims."

"Why wear stockings?"

"Why wear anything?" cried someone in a tone of inspiration.

"That's an idea!" shouted Dangerfield. "A swimming party, *à la* Adam-and-Eve in the warranted respectable darkness. Who's on?"

"Come off it, Wally!" said a woman's voice. "You've got only one pool."

"We'll splice two tennis nets together and run them down the middle for a barrier."

"Why not?" cried the high-pitched, excited voice of Mrs. Carson. "We're all married here."

"Not that I know of," remarked Dee.

"Not that anybody knows of for me," added Emslie Selfridge in a voice of mincing propriety. "Wanted, a chaperon."

"You two can stand on the bank and be policemen," suggested the hostess. "One on each side."

"Not on your life," objected one of the men. "One go, all go!"

The popping of a champagne cork expressed the explosive quality of the neurotic atmosphere. "Come on, Dee," whispered Sally Dangerfield. "If you quit now it will gum a good game."

"Oh, well, you can't bluff me," returned Dee aloud. "I hate bathing suits anyway."

There was a shout of acclaim. The party organised and moved forward across the dripping courtyard under the guidance of a pair of lights. The men rigged the

nets while the women retired to the squash court, designated as their dressing room. There they disrobed with feverish laughter and jerky bits of talk. This adventure had given a fillip to even their sated appetite for sensation.

"Who'll go first?" asked one in the gloom.

"Match for it," came the answering suggestion.

"Oh, piffle and likewise pish!" cut in Vicky Carson's shrill giggle. "I'll be the goat. Put a dimmer on that light, someone."

A moment later Dee heard her call at the end of the passage: "Anybody present in case I fall in?"

Several male voices answered: "Stout sport!" "Who's the pioneer?" "Sally." "No; it's little Vicky."

"Shinny-on-your-own-side!" called Mrs. Carson. "Listen for the splash. Come on, you girls!"

"We're coming." Two splashes almost simultaneous echoed sharply against the bare walls, followed by others mingled with shrieks, laughter, chokings and gurglings. Dee, reluctant, found herself alone in the passage way.

Like many women of unaroused temperament she preserved a sort of remote and proud consciousness of her body, a physical reticence. The gross implications of contact, the prurient stimulus to the imagination in what was going on in the pool, held her back. Yet she was conscious of some participation in the excitement, too; the lewd mob-psychology of that mixed group spurred her while it revolted her finer instincts. But it was her sportsmanship that finally urged her forward. After all, she had agreed to join. Backing out now would be pretty yellow. Her hand was fumbling along the open door when another burst of merriment checked her.

"I've caught me a mermaid over the net."

"Reel her in, Bill."

"So've I. Mine's got a bathing cap on."

"No fair, bathing caps. This is the Garden of Eden."

"No; it's the fountain of Eternal Youth. Steady on the net, there!"

"Students! Students!" cried Sally Dangerfield in a voice of chiding laughter. "Care beful!"

"Who's who in this part of America? Call the roll."

The roll! Dee's hesitations were resolved. She must go forward now. She stretched out a groping hand and held it, stiffened in mid-air. Footsteps were close behind her; heavy, shod footsteps.

"Who's there?" she challenged sharply.

No answer. She turned, angry and uncertain. The footsteps had stopped. She had gathered her forces to call when the appalling thing happened.

Over her burst a great flood of light. Every globe in the passageway and the court back of it was sending out its pitiless rays upon her nakedness. A bisected bar of radiance shot forth into the tank-room, illuminating it from end to end. Pandemonium broke out; shrieks, flounderings, catcalls, and above it all the thundering profanity of Wally Dangerfield calling down vengeance upon the fool who had played the trick. With the trained athlete's readiness of action in a crisis, Dee turned, leapt backward, tore the heavy door loose from the clamp which held it open, and slammed it.

"Saved!" yelled a gleeful voice outside.

Dee heard a short, deep, dismayed exclamation behind her. She bent forward against the closed door, her proud little head bowed against her wrists. With a click the darkness shut down again. The footsteps came toward her, but she was no longer afraid, for she had seen; she was only bitterly ashamed. Folds, cool and light, enveloped her shoulders; she smelt the odor of wet

rubber and gratefully drew the long raincoat about her.

"Turn on the light, please," she directed quietly.

It flashed, intolerable to her eyes. When her vision could bear the strain she looked up and saw the man standing a few paces away with his kitbag of implements beside him, dressed in working garb. His face was pallid, amazed, and beautiful.

"I never thought to see you again," he said breathlessly.

"You've seen all there is of me to see," giggled Dee with the inanity of sheer nerve-shock, and could have killed herself for hatred and fury at her untoward response.

He made no comment upon this; only looked at her with incredulous pain.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"Repairing the electric plant. I'm a workman. As I told you."

"I thought it was a joke."

"No." He listened to the confused sounds from beyond the door. "I seem to have been inopportune," he remarked with quiet grimness. "A swimming party, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"More or less informal, I judge."

Dee felt a hot wave submerging her. "You could see for yourself."

"Quite so. You were on your way to join it?"

"Yes, I was," she retorted defiantly but with an incredible inclination to weep.

"Pray don't let me detain you."

"Please," whispered Dee.

His face changed. He took a step toward her, and stopped.

A shriek, too authentic in its terror to be misinterpreted, penetrated the heavy door, followed by a babel. "Turn on that light!" "Open the door." "No! No!" "She's drowned, I tell you." "Damn it, where's that ditch?"

The electrician threw the door open, made a quick movement along the wall, and every detail of the scene leapt forth into bold significance. The women were huddled along the side of the pool, all except plump Mrs. Grant who was absurdly striving to draw an end of the net about her, and Sally Dangerfield who was bending above the slim, motionless nudity of Vicky Carson, stretched along the stairs.

"I stepped on her," wailed Sally. "She was lying on the bottom."

Half of the men had scattered for their clothes. The others stood, shamed and uncertain, except Cary Scott. In the face of reality in this calamitous form he had remembered an early emergency regimen, thrown himself down beside the woman, and with lips pressed to her inanimate mouth was striving to stimulate her flaccid lungs to induce breathing. Desisting for a moment he called:

"She's alive, I think. Get a doctor."

"Phone for Osterhout, somebody," shouted Dangerfield.

"Wire's down," groaned Grant.

"Then get a car and go like hell!"

"My car is outside," said the electrician. "Where am I to go?"

"I'll show you," said Dee. "Quick!"

Together they darted into the night. Crossing the pebbled courtyard, Dee involuntarily cried out.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"My foot. I forgot I had no shoes. It doesn't matter. Go on."

He swung her strongly into his arms and did not set her down until he had reached the car, when he lifted her to the seat. It was as well that he had. Such was the yielding of her body in every nerve and muscle as he took her that she could not have stood upright.

A light in Dr. Osterhout's laboratory showed him at work over some test tubes.

"Bobs!" called Dee. "Come out. There's been an accident. We've got a car."

In less than a minute they were retracing their course at wild speed, the electrician driving with consummate control while Dee acquainted Osterhout with the main facts. As they came to a stop in the yard Dee turned to the volunteer chauffeur.

"Will you wait for me?" she asked in a tone that made Osterhout turn to look at her.

"Yes."

Within they found the victim violently ill in the midst of a half-dressed and vastly relieved group.

"None the worse for it," Osterhout reported to Dee after attending the victim. "A little too much water for comfort. And something besides water, wasn't there?"

"Yes."

"A good deal of it?"

"Plenty for all hands."

"A rough party?"

"About the usual, at this house."

"Don't you think you're out of place in that gallery, Dee?"

"Oh, don't lecture me, Bobs," said the girl wearily.

"I'm through." But it was another, not Bobs, who was the inspiration of that resolve.

To the other, patient in the sighing darkness, she returned. "She's all right," she informed him. "But it was a close call."

"Scott saved her, I expect," he replied absently. "He knew the method."

"Do you know Cary Scott?" she asked, startled.

He hesitated. "I did once. I should hardly have expected to find him at this kind of an orgy."

"It isn't as bad as it looks," she defended weakly.

"You told me, didn't you, that you were going into the pool with the others?"

"Yes. But you don't understand. Will you wait until I go in and get my clothes on?"

"I—don't—think—so," he said with palpable effort.

She gathered all her resolution. "Aren't you going to take me home?"

Through the darkness came the sound of a deep-drawn breath.

"No," said his voice, both hard and sad. Only the sadness remained as he continued. "You see, I had idealised you."

"You needn't have," she retorted bitterly. "I'm just like other girls."

"So I see. I wish to God I'd never seen you!"

"There's no reason why you should ever see me again," she answered with rising spirit.

"Not the slightest," he agreed dolorously. "Good-bye."

She turned and went into the building.

As Dr. Osterhout had no car, Scott and Dee drove him back to his place.

"Who was your friend in the service car, Dee?" asked the physician.

"His name is Wollaston."

Cary Scott gave a start. "Wollaston! You know, I thought I caught a glimpse—— Then I supposed that my eyes had gone wrong in the sudden light. He was in working clothes, wasn't he?"

"Yes. He was the electrician from the plant."

"Stanley Wollaston? Electrician? It can't be the same."

"It is. He recognised you and said that he used to know you."

"Know me! Good God! I should say so! We were in hospital together for weeks in the war. Afterwards I visited him at their place in Hertfordshire. He was a poet and a dreamer then. I remember now. I heard that his branch of the family went broke."

"Where did you know him, Dee?" asked Osterhout.

"Oh, it's a long story, Bobs," said the girl lightly.

Herein she said what was not true. It was a short story; short and vivid and bewildering. In the darkness she ran over the whole scope of it, every detail as clear as if it had not occurred nearly a year before: the breakdown of her motor car in the open country near Rahway; the stranger on the bank of a stream who had put down his rod and come to her aid, a roughly dressed stranger with questing eyes and a quaint turn of speech; the long and patient tinkering, with the mechanism, ending in a second collapse; the luncheon offered and shared, the talk that followed, a long, long talk such as Dee had never before known, running through luminous hours, touching all the realms of fancy until the incredulous sun turned his face from them, and went down; the drive back to the village where she left him; his final words, "I am resisting an

intolerable temptation when I say no more than good-bye and thank you," and then nothing until now.

Scott's voice broke in upon her meditations. "I must find out where he is."

"I don't believe I would, Cary," she advised after Osterhout had bidden them good-night.

"What? Not look up old Stanley? Why not?"

"I think he's cut himself off from all the old life. He—he's a queer person."

Until the car drew in at Holiday Knoll Scott thought that over in silence. Then he laid a friendly hand over Dee's. "Old girl," he said gently, "you seem to know a lot about him."

"So I do. You can learn a lot in an afternoon."

"There's a lot to learn. He's a wonderful person. Pretty tough to find him like this. . . . Are you really interested in him, Dee?"

"Who? Me? I should *say* not!" returned Dee hardily "I'm going to marry Jimmie James."

CHAPTER XI

RIPPLES from the swimming party spread to wash far shores. Although the participants had been sworn to secrecy, the details had of course been whispered confidentially, adorning themselves with rich imaginings as they travelled. For this, the inopportune electrician was blamed, the indictment against him being strengthened by the astounding fact that Wally Dangerfield, seeking to bribe him into a promise of silence, had been effectually snubbed. To the indirect procurement of the outsider was attributed a specially lively brace of paragraphs in *Town Topics*, even less veiled than was typical of that journal's transparent allusions. Penetrating within the virginal confines of the Sisterhood School where it was naturally upon the Index Expurgatorius, the publication entranced Pat and also contributed in no small degree to her prestige. Having a sister who was involved in a T.T. scandal was feather for any girl's cap!

Pat cherished the glittering ambition of one day appearing in those glorifying pages herself.

She wrote to Dee begging to be told all about it. In return came a letter informing her of her sister's engagement to Jameson James. Connie also wrote saying that it had come off at last, it was a very good thing, and everybody was satisfied. But the genuine opinion of the betrothal went forth from the pen of Robert Osterhout to, or perhaps only toward, the dead Mona.

"I do not pretend to understand it, my dearest," he wrote, "and what I do not understand I do not like. The scientific spirit of resentment. Dee is still unawakened.

James has no appeal for her; of that I am satisfied. It will not be he who interprets for her her womanhood. Perhaps it will not be anyone. Nevertheless, our proud Dee has grown inexplicably docile, almost meek. And Jimmy inspires me with a daily desire to kick him, by adopting a condescending attitude toward her, as if he were doing quite a noble thing in marrying her. Such is the position in which she has been put by that infernal 'Dangerfield Dip' episode, as it is generally called. In some way, though I don't know how, the engagement was the result of that party. From what I can learn, the swim *au naturel* was playful rather than vicious; but the scandal has been lively. There was a strange passage between Dee and a workman who seems to be a gentleman under cover, which puzzled me. Disturbs me, too, a bit. . . . How you may be laughing at all this, my darling, with your wider, deeper vision!

"Holiday Knoll will be duller when Dee leaves. To me it has been an empty shell since your bright spirit went out of it. Yet I derive my sad satisfactions in looking after the girls as best I may and in trying to make myself hold to the belief of some intangible contact with you through these letters. Ralph is at home very little. When Pat comes back the place will liven up again. Perhaps my tired old ears will recapture from her some of the music of life with which you filled the place. . . . I wish that Dee were less still and self-contained. She doesn't talk to me any more; not as she used to."

To all the Fentriss household Dee was a puzzle in the days following her engagement, not less to herself, Osterhout suspected, than to the others. Home early from school, because of an outbreak of scarlet fever there,

Pat complained to him, sitting perched on an arm of his chair with a hand on his shoulder.

"Bobs, Dee is moony."

"Is she? And what is 'moony'?"

"You know she is," returned Pat, scorning to waste time on obvious definitions. "Isn't her engagement going all right?"

"So far as I can judge. She hasn't confided in me."

"Bad sign. In some girls it would be a good sign. Not in Dee," pronounced the oracular Pat with her head on one side like a considering and sagacious bird.

"Has she talked to you?"

"No; she hasn't. Bet you she will, though. Dee's a lot more chummish with me than she used to be."

"Because Connie is married. That throws Dee back on you."

"It ought to throw her back on Jimmiejams. I'm not wild about T. Jameson James, Bobs. He's rather a sob."

"What have you got against your future brother-in-law?"

"Oh, he's so stiff and bumpy. So darn impressed with his own correctness. And it's mostly bluff. He tried to kiss me last night."

Osterhout's face darkened for the moment, but he said: "Why not? You're only a child to him, and one of the family."

"Brotherly stuff; I know. Only it wasn't too brotherly. Well," she laughed knowingly, "I don't suppose he gets much of that sort of thing from Dee."

"Dee's a strange little person," said the doctor absently.

"She'd be my idea of nothing to be engaged to if I were a man."

Which opinion she later expressed, in slightly modified terms, to the subject of it.

"Oh, well, Jimmy understands," responded Dee negligently.

"I don't believe any man understands. I don't believe you understand anything about it yourself."

"Don't I!" muttered Dee.

Pat stared with all her big eyes. "Well, *do* you?"

"Pat," said the other, fidgetting with an unlighted cigarette—she had taken to smoking, although it was bad for her golf, since her engagement—"you've kissed men."

"What if I have?" retorted Pat, instantly on the sullen defensive. "Everyone does. You have."

"Men have kissed me. It's different."

"I'll cable the Emperor of Japan it's different," chuckled the slangy Pat.

"What do you get out of it?"

"You've got a nerve to ask me that; you, an engaged girl!"

"I'm asking because I don't know."

"Tell you one thing, then," said Pat earnestly. "I wouldn't marry any man that couldn't make me know."

Dee murmured something that sounded like "Might just as well."

Thus interpreting it the younger sister returned: "Yes; you might. You're different."

"I'm not different. I always thought I was, until——"

"Until!" cried Pat in great excitement. "Until what? Who's the man? And when did it happen?"

"It never happened."

"Then you're a dam' fool," replied the other with conviction. "If I was crazy about a man I bet I'd kiss him if it was only for—for experiment."

"I've always thought that sort of thing was imbecile. Sort of sickening."

"Do I know him?" demanded the practical Pat.

"No."

"Evens and odds I do. Tell Pattie," she wheedled.

With face gloomily averted, Dee pursued her main preoccupation. "Do you feel when you kiss a man as if all your nerves were strung wires and an electric shock went flaming along them and then died out and left you *plah?*"

"Oh!" jeered Pat softly. "And you claim that you've never been really kissed."

"I haven't. But he—he lifted me in his arms once. And I felt his heart beating. . . . And then afterwards, do you hate and despise yourself for letting it affect you that way?" queried the neophyte of passion, interpreting dimly the sharp revulsion of her undefeated maidenhood against its own first weakening toward surrender.

"No. Of course I don't. Why should I?" Pat reflected. "I have been ashamed, though—a little. But that was because of what someone said to me about it. A friend. He made it seem cheap."

"Cheap? Oh, no: it wasn't cheap. But that's what I felt; that ashamedness afterward. As strongly as I felt the other. Stronger."

Instinctive psychologist enough to know that the rebound is never as powerful as the impact Pat disbelieved this. "Just the same I think you're taking a big chance marrying Jimmy. Why don't you marry the—the thriller?"

"Don't!" snapped Dee. "You're making it cheap now."

"But why don't you?" persisted the junior.

"I couldn't."

"Is he married already? That *would* be binding!"

"No. I don't know," Dee amended with a startled realisation of how little she did know in comparison with what she felt. "He might just as well be. I'll never see him again."

"I would," asserted Pat. "If it was that way with me. If he was the only one."

"Of course he's the only one. Could you feel that with any man? I can't understand that," marvelled Dee.

"Oh, no! Not with just anyone. I'd have to like him. Quite a good deal. It isn't so hard to like 'em when they make love to you. But I'm off'n that stuff," sighed Pat, turning demure. "There's nothing in it." Again she thought of Mr. Scott and that evening of disastrous revelation at the club. His influence had persisted. She quite prided herself that it had. She had thought much about him as one might think of a benign guardian and had written once to bespeak the continuance of their friendship. "How's Con's affair coming on?" she asked, as a logical mental sequitur.

"With Cary Scott? He's away. Back in Paris for a couple of months' stay."

"Do you like him, Dee?"

"Yes. A lot."

"He isn't the man, is he?" demanded Pat sharply.

Dee's laughter was refutation enough. "Catch me poaching Connie's game. It couldn't be done."

"Oh, I don't know," replied the other airily. "Mr. Scott's got too much brains for old Con. Do you think she's crazy over him?"

"I think she misses him."

"When's he coming back?"

"In time for the wedding, anyway."

"The wedding! When is it, Dee?"

"Second week in July," said Dee without enthusiasm.

"So soon! Am I going to be a bridesmaid?"

"No."

"Oh-h-h-h-h!" wailed Pat. "Pig!"

"You're to be maid of honour."

Pat gave her little, hoarse crow of ecstasy. "How darling of you! That's *too* divine! Are you going to give me my frock?"

Dee nodded. They talked clothes, absorbedly. When she got up to go Pat leaned over and kissed her sister, the first time since they were children that she had done this except as a formality of family life.

"I almost wish you weren't going to do it, though, Dee," she murmured.

"I don't," said Dee resolutely.

CHAPTER XII

"IF I could find it in my heart, dearest one, to blame you for anything, it would be for sending little Pat to the Sisterhood School." (So wrote Robert Osterhout to Mona Fentriss.) "With the best of intentions they wreck a mind as thoroughly as house-wreckers gut a building. It was your choice and I dare not change it. Even if I could persuade Ralph to take her out of that environment and send her to Bryn Mawr or Vassar or Smith, which is where she ought to be, she would rebel. She has a contempt for 'those rah-rah girls,' a prejudice bred of the shallow and self-sufficient snobbery which is the basic lesson of her scholastic experience. To be sure, they have finished her in the outward attributes of good form, but most of that is a natural heritage which any daughter of yours would have. She can be, when on exhibition, the most impeccable little creature, sparkling, and easy and natural and charmingly deferential toward the older people with whom she comes in contact—when she chooses. For the most part she elects to be calmly careless, slovenly of speech and manner, or lightly impudent. To have good breeding at call but not to waste it on most people—that is the cachet of her set.

"But these are surface matters. It is the inner woman—yes, beloved—our little Pat is coming to conscious and dynamic womanhood—which concerns me now and would concern you could you be here. Appalls me, too. But perhaps that is because my standards are the clumsy man-standards. What is she going to get out of life for herself? What does all this meaningless preparation,

aside from the polishing process, look to? If hers were just a stupid, satisfied mind, a pattern intellect like Constance's, it would not so much matter. Or if she had the self-discipline and control which Dee's athletics have given her, I should be less troubled. But Pat's is a strange little brain; hungry, keen and uncontrolled. It really craves food, and it is having its appetite blunted by sweets and drugs. Is there nothing that I can do? I hear you ask it. Yes; now that she is at home I can train her a little, but not rigorously, for her mind is too soft and pampered to set itself seriously to any real task. In the days of her childish gluttony I used to drive her into a fury by mocking her for her pimples, and finally, by excoriating her vanity, got her to adopt a reasonable diet. The outer pimples are gone. But if one could see her mind, it would be found pustulous with acne. And there can I do little against the damnable influence of the school which has taught her that a hard-trained, clean-blooded mind is not necessary. The other girls do not go in for it. Why be a highbrow? She is so easily a leader in the school, and, as she boasts, puts it over the teachers in any way she pleases. In the days before she became aware of herself it used to be hard to get her to brush her teeth. To-day I presume that her worthy preceptresses would expel her if she did not use the latest dentifrice twice a day. But they are quite willing to let her mind become overlaid with foul scum for want of systematic brushing up.

“Dynamite for that institution and all like it! Nothing else would serve. With all your luxuriousness, Mona, your love of excitement, your *carpe diem* philosophy of life (Pat, who has ‘taken’ Latin, does not know what *carpe diem* signifies), your eagerness for the immediate satisfactions of the moment, you never let your brain

become softened and untrained and fat. The higher interests were just as much a part of the embellishment of life to you as were flowers or games, music or friends. What inner friends will little Pat have? Not literature. Shakespeare she knows because she must; the school course requires it. But he is a task, not a delight. Thackeray is slow and Dickens a bore. Poetry is a mechanical exercise; I doubt whether a single really beautiful line of Shelley or Keats or Coleridge remains in her memory, though she can chant R. W. Service and Walt Mason. Swinburne she has read on the sly, absorbing none of the luminousness of his flame; only the heat. Similarly, Balzac means to her the 'Contes Drolatiques,' also furtively perused. Conrad and Wells are vague names; something to save until she is older. But O. Henry she dutifully deems a classic and is quite familiar with his tight-rope performances; proud of it, too, as evincing an up-to-date erudition. As for 'the latest books of the day,' she is keen on them, particularly if they happen to be some such lewd and false achievement as the intolerable 'Arab.' Any book spoken of under the breath has for her the stimulus of a race; she must absorb it first and look knowing and demure when it is mentioned. The age of sex, Mona. . . . Her standards of casual reading are of like degree; she considers *Town Topics* an important chronicle and *Vanity Fair* a symposium of pure intellect.

"Yet she has been taking a course in Literature at the school!

"Science has no thrill for Pat; therefore she ignores it. Futile little courses in 'How to Know' things like flowers and birds and mushrooms have gone no deeper than the skin. No love of nature has been inculcated by them. She hardly knows the names of the great scien-

tists. Einstein she recognises through having seen his travels chronicled and heard vaudeville jokes about him. But mention Pasteur or Metchnikoff and you would leave her groping; and she doubtless would identify Lister as one who achieved fame by inventing a mouth wash. However, she could at once tell you the name of the fashionable physician to go to for nervous breakdown.

“Her economics are as vague as her science. Politics are a blank. But to be found ignorant of the most recent trend of the movies or the names of their heroes, or not to know the latest gag of some unspeakable vulgarian of the revues—that would overwhelm her with shame. Her speech and thought are largely a reflection of the contemporary stage. Not the stage of Shaw and O’Neill, but of bedroom farce and trite musical comedy. Thus far she compares unfavourably in education with the average shop girl.

“In music and art the reckoning is better. But this again is largely inherited. If the sap-headed sisterhood have not fostered, they at least have not tainted her sound instincts in these directions. She has followed her own bent.

“As it is a professedly denominational school she has, of course, specialised or been specialised upon as a churchwoman. A very sound and correct churchwoman, but not much of a Godwoman. No philosophy and very little ethics are to be found in her religion. Worship is for her a bargain of which the other consideration is prayer. She gives to God certain praises and observances and asks in return special favours. ‘I’ll do this for you, God, and you do as much for me some day.’ Her expectancy of assured returns she regards as a praiseworthy and pious quality known as faith. Blasphemy, of course. Not the poor child’s. The sin, which

is a sin of ignorance and loose thinking, is upon the sanctified sisterhood. They have classified the Deity for Pat: God as a social arbiter.

"The sisterhood are purists. Naturally. But purists only by negation. All the essential facts they dodge. True, there is a course in hygiene. It is conducted by a desiccated virgin who minces about the simple and noble facts of sex life as if she were afraid of getting her feet wet, and whose soul would shrivel within her could she overhear the casual conversation of the girls whom she purports to instruct. All that side of knowledge and conjecture they absorb from outside contacts. A worse medium would be hard to conceive. From what Pat indicates of the tittle-tattle of ingénues' luncheons, it would enlighten Rabelais and shock Pepys! And the current jokes between the girls and their boy associates of college age are chiefly innuendo and *double entente* based on sex. Pat cannot say 'bed' or 'leg' or 'skin' without an expectant self-consciousness. Some reechy sort of bedroom story has been lately going the rounds, the point of which is involved in the words 'nudge' and 'phone.' Every time either word is used in Pat's set, there are knowing looks and sniggers, and some nimble wit makes a quick turn of the context and gets his reward in more or less furtive laughter. It is not so much the moral side, it is the nauseous bad taste that sickens one. The mind decays in that atmosphere. Once Pat said to me: 'Bobs, you and Mr. Scott are the only clean-minded men I know.' Think of what that means, Mona! The viciousness of such an environment. Yet the youngsters themselves are not essentially vicious; not many of them. They are curious with the itchy curiosity of their explorative time of life, and they have no proper guidance. The girls are worse off than the boys who do gain some

standards in college. But our finishing schools, churchly or otherwise! Hell is paved with their good intentions. Pat's is not worse than the others, I suppose. But the pity of it; the waste of it for her. Hers is such a vivid mind; such a brave, straightforward little mind; at war with that hungry, passionate temperament of hers, yet instinctively clean if it could be protected from befoulment. I have been talking biology with her and she absorbs it with such swift, sure appreciation. The day of trial for her will come when the lighter amusements pall and her brain demands something to feed on—unless before that time it becomes totally encysted.

“Cary Scott's influence on her is good. She likes and respects him and is a little afraid of him, too. He has a quality of quiet contempt for cheap and shoddy things to which she responds, though not always without bursts of her fiery little temper. If he were less of the natural aristocrat in all the outer attributes he would not impress her so. Meantime I am glad to see him take some interest even though it be but a playfully intellectual one, in anyone who will divert his mind from Constance. Sometimes I have thought disaster imminent in that quarter. Disaster! How readily one falls into the moralist's speech, and how your dear lips would quirk at that tone from me, dearest. Yet a liaison between those two would be potentially disastrous. For Connie has nothing to give to a man like Cary Scott except her beauty. If he is the man I think him, he will never take her for that alone; or, if he does, be long satisfied with it. Yet her charm is terribly strong. . . . I wonder whether you really loved Cary Scott, Mona, as I have loved and still love you. . . .”

Coming downstairs after writing this letter, from the dead woman's room where a desk had been set aside for

him as executor of her estate, Osterhout found Cary Scott, dressed in evening clothes, waiting in the library. On his return from his trip abroad Scott had unobtrusively resumed his established place at Holiday Knoll. He had seen as much of Constance as before, perhaps more, because Dee, between whom and Scott a very frank and easy friendship had grown up, was occupied with Jameson James to the partial exclusion of other associations, and therefore Scott was less with her than formerly. He did not like James.

Scott and the doctor greeted each other cordially.

"You have a festive air to-night," remarked Osterhout.

"Yes. It's the special symphony concert this evening. I'm taking Constance."

"No, you're not," contradicted a hoarse and gay voice. Pat smiled upon them from the entrance.

The two men turned to look at her. She stood, one hand above the tousled shimmer of her short, dark hair, lightly holding by the lintel. In her eyes were laughter, anticipation, and a plea. Her strong, young figure preserving still much of the adorable awkwardness of undeveloped youth, had fallen into a posture of stilled expectancy. She wore a sweater of some exotic, metallic blue, a short, barred skirt, and woollen stockings, displaying the firm, rounded legs.

"You're taking *me*. Aren't you?" she added in the husky, breaking sweetness of her voice.

Into the minds of the two men darted diverse responses to the appeal of the interrupter. Cary Scott thought, "What a child it is!" Wiser and more cognisant, through experience of the years, Robert Osterhout said within himself, "Good Lord! It's a woman."

"Why the charming substitution?" inquired Scott in

the manner which, to her unflinching delight, he used toward Pat as toward any of his older associates.

"Con's got a headache."

Cary Scott understood perfectly. This was subterfuge on Constance's part. She was unready to face the issue. There had been a preamble between them on the previous evening; tacitly it was understood that this evening was to determine their future relations. And now she was shirking the crisis. Or was she merely playing the part of the "teaser," drawing back the more to inflame his ardour—and perhaps her own? Of the two hypotheses Scott inclined to the former. It was more in consonance with her natural inertia of character. If she were in love with him it was not the kind of love which justified itself by daring, by taking the risks, by boldly facing sacrifice. Inexplicably he felt a quality of relief mingling with his natural pique. He was well satisfied to postpone, to let the decision go, to find relaxation in taking Pat to the concert. In the companionship of this eager, acute, vivid child he would breathe a clearer atmosphere, with something of a mental stimulus, a tingle in it, that which he most missed in his association with the married sister. All of this rapid cogitation was quite without reflected effect upon his imperturbable manner as he said:

"Tell Constance that I'm so sorry, won't you? And that I appreciate her sending so delightful a substitute."

"Oh, she didn't send me," answered Pat composedly. "It's all my own idea."

"A very good one," grunted Osterhout. "Pat's a connoisseur of music. But don't keep my infant out too late, Scott."

"All right, Pop," returned Scott with mocking deference, as the older man left.

"How long can you wait?" demanded Pat of her escort.

"I can't wait at all. My car is champing at the leash now."

Pat's illumined face fell. "But I can't go this way."

"Why not? I like you that way."

"But you're always so awfully correct. I look like a mess."

"You look like"—he searched for and found the picture—"like a mediæval page."

She made a grimace. "Yes. A boy." In frank unconsciousness she set her hands with spread fingers against her breasts. "Flat, like a board," she said consolately.

"I like it," he reassured her. "It's part of the charm."

She gave her characteristic soft crow of pleasure. "That's the nicest thing you could possibly say to me. D'you mean it? Really?"

"Of course I mean it. Why not?"

"I thought men liked girls to be just the other way. All rounded." She peered at him doubtfully. "Perhaps it's because you're old," she surmised.

Taken aback for the moment he interpreted the innocent speech too literally. "I'm not as old as that. Though I don't suppose—I rather wonder what you meant by that."

"Oh, nothing! Just that the point of view must be different. Isn't it? Less personal."

"It's very personal in this case," he retorted with a real warmth of friendliness for this strange and appealing child, "and quite simple. You're a very delightful little Pat. I like your type. *Petite gamine.*"

"What's that?"

"Isn't French taught in your school?"

"It's taught; but it isn't necessarily learned," she an-

swered, summing up in that flash of criticism the essential falsity of the whole finishing school system.

"I see. You know what a gamin is?"

"Gamin?" She gave it the English pronunciation.

"Oh, yes."

"*Gamine* is the feminine. But there's a suggestion in it of something more delicate and fetching; of verve, of —of diablerie. As there is in you. It's hard to say in English. I could describe you better in French."

"Could you? Then I'll learn French. And I think it's divine of you," said she, employing her favourite adjective, "to like my funny, flat figure. You know," she added, sparkling at him mischievously, "you're taking a chance on this concert thing."

"Any special chance other than that of being late?"

"Oh, I shan't be a minute, now that I needn't dress. Yes; you're taking a big chance. I'm an awful nut over music. It does all kinds of things to me. I'm quite capable of falling on your neck and bursting into sobs if they play anything I awfully like."

Beneath the lightness he sensed a real emotion. "Are you really so fond of it? Then I'm doubly glad that you're going."

"I *adore* it. Really good music, I mean. Oh, I do wish I could play or sing or do something worth while."

"Have you ever tried?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Too lazy. If it wasn't for the boring practice I might do something." She raised her voice and sang the opening bars of the Hindu Sleep-Song.

"The devil!" exclaimed Cary Scott.

All the huskiness had passed from the voice, which issued from the full throat, pure, fresh-toned, deep and effortless.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," he declared so vehemently that she pouted.

"Now you're scolding me."

"Because you're letting a voice like that go untrained."

"Lots of people like it as it is," she said resentfully.

"Then they don't recognise what a really lovely thing it might be, properly handled. Why haven't you taken lessons?"

Again the shrug. "I did. But I stopped. Too much trouble. Will you teach me?"

"I? Heavens, no! You want a professional."

"What! and practice an hour every day?" cried the horrified Pat.

"Two hours. Three probably. It would be worth it."

"I'd be bored to a frazz."

"You're bored with anything that means work, discipline, self-restraint. Aren't you, Pat?"

"Are you going to lecture me again? I love it," she observed unexpectedly and with a brilliant smile.

In spite of himself he laughed. "No. I'm going to take you to the concert. Get your hat."

Settling herself in the car like a contented kitten, Pat presently said: "There's something I want to tell you, Mr. Scott. Only it isn't too easy to begin."

"Why not? We're friends, aren't we?"

"Right! That makes it easier. You remember at the club; what we talked about?"

"Yes."

"I've been awfully good—about that. I haven't, at all. At least, nothing serious."

"I am flattered to have been so good an influence," he remarked with his faintly ironic inflection. Constance would not have caught it. But little Pat's ear was truer.

"Don't josh me about it," she protested. "Nobody's

ever tried to be a good influence for me really. Except Bobs. And he doesn't know."

"Why doesn't he know?"

"Too old. But," she added in afterthought, "you're old, too, aren't you!"

"Terribly."

"I'd almost forgotten that," she said thoughtfully.

CHAPTER XIII

COMING out of the concert hall after the last, culminating burst of harmony, Cary Scott drew a deep breath of the night air. Lover and connoisseur of music though he had always been, never in his recollection had it so penetrated his being as now. Better programmes he had listened to, more perfectly rendered. But the companionship of the intensely responsive young girl, her superb and poignant vitality concentrated upon the great waves of sensation which had swept over their spirits, interpreted the numbers for him in a new measure. Timidly, tentatively at first, then more boldly as the ardent influences took hold upon her, Pat had yearned to him in the semi-darkness which surrounded them. The sweet, firm curve of her shoulder first, then the close pressure of her knee; soon her fingers, creeping to his hand, clasping and being enfolded, the fragrance of her light, quick breath, rhythmic upon his cheek. It seemed as if she had become subtly the medium and instrument of all the splendour of sound, as if the music were flowing in the currents of her woman's body out upon him and around him in a submerging flood.

Now they were in the open air. She walked beside him, her face dreamy and demure, the faintest of smiles implicit in the up-slanted corners of her mouth.

"Wasn't it—magic!" she breathed.

"Yes, magic," he assented.

They located and entered his car. For a time the intricacies of the traffic engrossed his attention. As they passed into the light-shot spaciousness of the park he turned to her.

"Well?"

"Don't let's talk. I want to just remember."

He nodded and she leaned to him momentarily again, kitten-like, caressing, grateful for his understanding. He, too, was glad of the respite, for, man of the world though he was, he had been strangely, unexpectedly shaken. It was Pat who, long minutes later, sighed and broke the silence with the hoarse, enticing sweetness of her tones.

"What did you do it for, Mr. Scott?"

"I? Do what?" He was surprised by the directness of the attack.

"Oh, well! I, then. You know. What did you let me do it for?"

He made no reply. In his stillness was a sense of expectancy to which she responded.

"I warned you what music did to me. But you—you needn't have let me——" She paused. "Do you like me a little?" she murmured.

"Yes. A little."

"Only a little?" she teased, half child demanding the comfort of affection, half conscious coquette. "Not more than that?"

"Perhaps a little more," he smiled.

"But not half as much as you do Con," she said deliberately.

He was silent, his attention apparently engrossed in a heavy truck which gave them bare passing room.

"Do you?" she insisted, daring greatly.

"Do I what?"

"Like me as much as you do Con? Half as much, I mean."

"If I did do you think I should tell you?"

"Why shouldn't you? But I thought you were crazy over Con. She thinks so."

Scott hummed one of the passages from the final number of the concert.

"Oh, *very* well. I'm only making conversation. I don't really want to talk at all. I'd rather think. All the rest of the way home."

Arrived at Holiday Knoll, he stepped from the car and held out a hand to her. "Good-night, Pat."

"Aren't you coming in?"

"I think not."

"Ah, do," she wheedled. "Just for a minute."

He turned to look at the broad, rambling house. A dim light burned in the library; a brighter one in Dee's room overhead. Constance's room was dark. He was vaguely glad of that.

"I haven't even thanked you yet," she observed.

"You needn't."

"Then you ought to thank me," she asserted daringly, "for taking Connie's place. Do come in. Perhaps I can find you a drink."

"I don't want a drink, thank you," he returned; but he followed her through the door.

"It's us, Dee," called the girl, projecting her voice up the stairway as she led the way to the library. "Mr. Scott and me."

"All right," Dee responded. "I'm in my nightie or I'd come down. Have a good time?"

"Gee-lorious!" said Pat. She took off her hat, fluffed up her short, heavy hair with a double-handed scuffle characteristic of her, and moved forward to the table.

In the diffused soft radiance of the one light, Scott stared at her. Her pose was languid, her eyes sombre

with the still passion of lovely sounds remembered. Slowly the lids drooped over them. She tilted her chin and in her effortless, liquid voice of song gave out the exquisite rhythm of a melody from the Tschaikowsky Fifth which they had just heard.

"Don't, Pat," muttered Scott.

"Don't you like it?"

"I love it. So—don't."

She moved toward him, her throat still quivering with the beauty of sound, and lifted her hand to the bright, curt waves of hair at his temple, brushing them lightly back. A dusky colour glowed in her cheeks. As the dim echo of the music died, she leaned to him. Her lips, light, fervent, cool, softly firm, met his, lingered upon them for the smallest, sweetest moment as a moth hovers in its flight from a flower. Then she, too, was in flight.

"Good-night," she whispered back to him from the doorway.

Pat's challenge to Stancia's supremacy gave Scott plenty to speculate about. His first sentiment was amusement that this daring child should have deliberately elected to enter the lists against her older and more beautiful sister. But what was Pat's interest in him? Flirtation? Evidently. He guessed that it was the dash of diablerie in her that had inspired the experiment. Nevertheless, he was conscious of a rather excited interest in and curiosity about her, not as a precocious child, but as a reckonable woman with distinct provocations of person and mind. In comparison with her, Scott reflected (and was shocked at his own disloyalty in so reflecting) Stancia was becoming insipid.

He discovered, in thinking it over, that there had grown up an impalpable embarrassment between Stancia and himself, and that it seemed to have been growing for some

time; an inexplicable thing between those two who had approached so near to embarkation upon the love-adventure perilous. Had she noticed it? He wondered. Had he been so bold as to put the query to her, she would have hardly known how to reply. She was conscious that at times she failed to hold his interest; that his mind seemed to wander away from her; but, in the self-sufficiency of her beauty, she set that down to a quality of vagueness in his character. He was unfailingly gentle, considerate, and helpful wherever, in her luxurious and hard-pressed life, she allowed him to help. And he asked nothing in return.

This piqued, even while it relieved her. For she was no longer adventurous. The layers of fat were insulating that soft and comfort-enslaved soul. Scott, striving to maintain the appearances of a loyalty which he did not really owe (how he thanked his gods for that now!) found her loveliness growing monotonous, her inertia of mind, irritant. "Nothing above the ears," Pat had said; wicked little Pat, whose vividness so far outshone the mere beauty of the elder. The harsh truth of the slang had stuck.

His next encounter with the girl was several days later when he was keeping an appointment with Stancia in the library at the Knoll; the merest fleeting glimpse of the boyish girl-figure as it passed through the hallway, followed by the heart-troubling, deep thrill of her voice raised in the Tschaikowsky melody. . . . "I've asked you twice," he was conscious of Stancia saying plaintively, "and you don't pay any attention."

"I really beg your pardon," apologised Scott. "Awfully stupid of me. Of course, I shall be delighted to stay to luncheon."

As he was leaving early in the afternoon, Pat hurried after him to intercept the car.

"Take me down to the village with you, Mr. Scott?"

"Indeed I will."

She jumped in. "I don't want to go to the village," said she in quite a different tone, as the car took the curve. "I want to talk."

"It's a worthy ambition. So do I. Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere."

He whirled the car around an abrupt corner and headed for the open country.

"I cried that night after the concert," Pat informed him. She was staring straight in front of her.

"My dear!" he murmured.

"I'm *not* your dear."

"No. You're not. I must remember that."

"Not a bit—to-day. I've had time to think."

"So have I."

She whirled on him. "Have you changed, too?" she demanded with animation and dismay, quaintly negligent of the implied inconsistency.

"No. I haven't changed."

"I'm glad," said she naïvely. Then, stealing a glance at him, "Do you still like me—a little?"

A little? How much did he "like" this bewitching child? Was "like" a sufficient word at all for the feeling which had taken such puzzling growth within him? He could not have answered the query to himself satisfactorily, and had no intention of defining his attitude for her benefit.

"Tell me," she whispered. "I think you might."

"I have many things to tell you, little Pat," he replied with his foreign precision of speech; "but that is not one of them."

"It's the one I want to hear," said willful Pat.

"First, do you tell me: why did you cry that night?"

"Conscience. No," she contradicted herself thought-

fully; "that's a bluff. I don't know. Sort of nervousness, I expect."

"That is what I feared for you; that you would brood over it and make yourself unhappy——"

"It wasn't that at all," interrupted Pat simply and promptly. "But I did want to see you again and know that you didn't think—that I wasn't too awfully—that I didn't seem just a fresh kid to you."

"No. You didn't."

"Was that being '*petite gamine*'?" She threw a side-long glance at him.

"Was it? You should know."

"After all, it was only a white kiss."

"A *what*?"

"White kiss. There are white kisses and red kisses," she explained unconcernedly.

"You have no right to that kind of knowledge," said he sternly. "Where did you come by it?"

"I told you," she muttered gloomily, "that I used to be a terrible necker."

"Yes. But—that sort of thing! Don't you know that's dangerous?"

"Would it be with you?" she asked with direct and naïve curiosity.

"There is no question of it with me," he answered rigidly. "But, so far as that goes, no. I am old enough to know how to control myself."

"Then you're different from most men," she returned bitterly.

"Good God, child! Have you learned that already? At your age?"

"Since we're telling each other our real names," said Pat in her levellest tones, "the first time I was kissed I was hardly fifteen."

"You seem to have been unfortunately precocious."

She flashed a smile at him. "Are you jealous?"

The amazing realisation came to him that he was. But he answered steadily: "What right should I have to be jealous of what you might do?"

"Suppose I *want* you to be?"

This he chose to disregard. "I don't believe that you understand yourself, your temperament." He was trying to hold himself to a tone of cool diagnosis. "I wish I were your Dr. Bobs for fifteen minutes."

"Well, I don't," she retorted. "Bobs's middle names are Sterling Worth; but I'd rather have you lecture me. *You* understand."

"I understand that you are of a very high-strung, neurotic, excitable temperament."

Gloom overshadowed her face again. "You're not telling me any news about myself."

"Then you must see how perilous it is for a girl like you to be what you call a necker."

"Oh, as far as that goes," she answered coolly, "I've always got my foot on the brake. Every minute. If things get too hectic I can always see the ridiculous side of it and get up a laugh. It's a grand little safeguard, being able to laugh at yourself."

"I suppose it is. As long as you *are* able."

"Anyway, I've been terribly proper ever since you talked to me that night at the party. Wise virgin stuff! Do you know you've got a lot of influence over me, Mr. Scott?"

"Have I? I'm glad of that."

"So am I. But I don't quite know why you should have." She pondered. "Unless it's because there's something about you that makes the other men seem clumsy and—and *local*."

He laughed. "I'm very flattered."

"Don't make fun of me," pouted Pat. "I'm serious. Particularly about your having influence over me. Since our talk I've passed up all sorts of chances to have a flutter. I don't believe I've kissed three boys, in all."

Despite himself Scott queried acidly: "And were they red or white kisses?"

"Well, one of them might have had a dash of pink in it. No; I just said that to tease you," she added impulsively. "I really have been boringly good. It isn't too easy, either."

"Pat, why don't you talk to Dr. Bobs about yourself?"

"I will if you want me to," said she submissively.

"It would be a good thing, assuming that you would talk frankly."

"Where shall I begin? By telling him about us?" she inquired demurely.

Upon this Scott's inner commentary was, "You little devil!" Aloud he said composedly: "If you think it significant. But what I said was about yourself."

"Oh, I'm well enough," said she carelessly.

"Are you happy enough?"

She gave him a startled glance. "Why should you think I'm not happy?"

"I didn't say I thought so. I simply asked you."

"Well, I am." But there was a hint of defiance in her tone. "And you *do* think I'm not."

"I think you're restless and discontented."

"What makes you think that?" she asked, curiously, leaning over to him so that the warm curve of her arm pressed his.

He glanced not at her but at her encroaching shoulder. "Because of just that sort of thing."

She snatched her arm away. "I hate you!"

"Better hate me than yourself. As you did that night at the club."

Tears welled up in her eyes. Her chin trembled and there was a soft, heart-thrilling catch in the huskiness of her voice, barely controlled enough to enunciate: "I don't see why you're so mean to me."

"Why, it's a child!" he exclaimed in mock self-reproach. "And I keep forgetting and treating it like a grown-up."

"That's why I love to be with you. I want to be treated that way."

"Oh, no! You merely think you do. In reality you want to be petted and flattered and coddled and approved in all your cunning and silly little ways. That would be very easy. Only—it isn't part of our compact."

With one of her mercurial changes she flashed a smile at him. "I'd nearly forgotten. You were to be my wise and guiding friend, weren't you? Is that why you're telling me that I'm restless and discontented?"

"Well, aren't you?"

"Not more than the other girls."

"Is that an answer?"

"No. Yes, it is, too! Why should I be different?"

"Because you're you."

"'Be-cause you're you,' " she sang gaily to the measure of an elderly but still popular song. "I like to have you say that. How do you think I'm different?"

"Ah, that I can't say. You see, I don't know the girls of your age much."

"No; you're always playing around with the married women," she remarked calmly. "Well, you don't miss much. They're a lot of dimwits, the girls of my age here. No snap. If they can get a couple of rounds of bridge in the afternoon and a cocktail before dinner and a speed-limit whizz around the country in somebody's car, or a

few hours of jazz, or a snuggling party with some good-looking boy on the porch, that'll keep them from suicide for quite a spell."

"I see. They seek the same distractions from the prevailing restlessness——"

"You needn't finish," she broke in. "Yes; we're all alike. There isn't a girl that doesn't go in for spooning if she likes the boy—and a lot of 'em aren't even too particular about that—except maybe the Standish girls, and they've been brought up as if their house was a convent. At that, Ailsa Standish told me the conundrum about why girls wear their hair covering their ears. D'you know it?" she enquired with a palpable effect of brazen hardihood. But she turned her head away from the quiet disgust of his look as he answered:

"Yes, I know it. But you've no business to. It strikes me that you're in a pretty rotten set."

"It's the only set in Dorrisdale," defended Pat sullenly. "And we're slow compared to some of the other towns."

"Well, if you think it's worth it," he began slowly when she cut in, with a sort of cry, throwing out her hands, those large, supple, shapely, capable hands, in a gesture of despair and appeal. "But what's a girl to do?"

"Doesn't your school give you anything?"

"Not a dam' thing that I don't want to get and get easy. All they try to do is make it easy for you to get through. They won't even issue diplomas for fear some of the girls couldn't pass the exams and their people would get sore on the school. I study when I feel like it, and that isn't too often."

"Will you do something for me, Pat?"

"Yes; I'd love to," was the eager reply.

"Make something of your voice. You can do it with a little work."

At the last word she assumed an expression of distrust. "How much work?"

"Two hours a day, perhaps."

"Two hours a day! For how long?"

"A year of it would give you a start."

"Two whole hours out of every day for a year? What do you take me for; a machine?" Scott's nerves quivered with the strident rasp of the voice, like the squawk of a dismayed and indignant hen. "Why, I wouldn't have any time for anything else."

"Some days have as much as twenty-four hours in them," he pointed out. "However, you might make a start with an hour."

"I might," she admitted dubiously, "while I'm in school. But when I get out I want to have some fun. And I'm going to."

"So, it seems this influence which I am supposed to have over you doesn't go very far."

"Now you're disgusted with me again. But I can't help it. I'm not going to be a *slave* just to be able to sing a little."

"It might be more than a little. And it seems to be the one quality you have which might be susceptible of development."

"Now you're talking like a school teacher. And you're not too flattering, are you? Don't you think I've got any brains?"

"Yes. But I don't think you're going to find them of much use."

"I suppose you'd like me to go to college," said Pat contemptuously, "and learn the college cheer and how to play basketball."

"You might even learn more than that. However, if

you're satisfied with your present status, that settles *that*. Suppose we talk of something else."

This did not suit Pat at all. She promptly said so. "I want to talk about me. You almost always do talk to me about myself. I wonder if that's why I like to be with you more than anyone else," she concluded with one of her accesses of insight.

"It's an extremely interesting subject."

"Now you're laughing at me again. And a moment ago you were angry. But you're still disappointed, aren't you?"

"A little."

"I think that's rotten of you!" she murmured. "I suppose we ought to be going back." She sighed. "I don't want to a bit. Can you turn here?"

It was a narrow and tricky road. As the car came to a stop after backing she laid her hand on his. "Kiss little Pattie and tell her to be a good child and she'll be awfully good," she murmured elfishly.

Scott completed the turn before he answered: "No, little Pat. No more of that between you and me."

On the return journey she was silent and thoughtful. At the post office in the village she asked to be set down, and, getting out, looked up at him, her eyes limpid with sincerity.

"Please, Mr. Scott, keep on liking me," she said. "It's awfully good for me."

CHAPTER XIV

SEMICIRCLES of weariness hollowed Robert Osterhout's eyes as he opened the door and entered Mona's room. It had been a hard night for him. Memory had been delicately dissecting his nerves. Striving in vain to lose himself in his experiments he had turned, early in the morning, to his communion with the dead woman. The letter, that pitiful solace for the unremitting pain of loss and loneliness, was in his hand now as he closed the door behind him.

“. . . As for Pat," he had written, "she is one of those born to trouble the hearts of men and to take fire from their trouble. Of the tribe of Helen! If I could see her safely married—— Safely! As if there were any safety in marriage! Not under our present system. Look at Connie. Though, for that matter, my misgivings about her and Cary Scott seem to have been misplaced. That flame has flickered out. She will perhaps settle down from sheer inertia. But hers is hardly what one would call a safe or successful marriage. Dee's may be better. Not that she is specially in love with James. But her training at sports will stand her in good stead. She will go through with it. Dee is first and last a good sport. Nevertheless, I sometimes wish she had waited for the really right man, if there be any such for her.

"Mona, there are times when I could believe in trial marriage, with suitable safeguards, of course, against children. If I were a philosopher instead of a medical man I should certainly favour the system. But my technical training prejudices my judgment. Of course, we do

have trial marriages, and commonly; or trial alliances, which is the same thing without the same name. If the truth were known I suppose that most men who marry the second time, marry their mistresses. How many other experiments may previously have gone into the discard as having proved unsuitable, is another question. Selection of the fittest. The notion that men never marry the women who give themselves is fictional cant, one of those many falsities which society propagates under the silly delusion that they are safeguards of virtue.

“What an experiment it would be to bring up a young girl in an atmosphere clear of all the common lies and illusions! You had begun to do it with Pat, I think. I wish that I could carry on. But it is too blind a venture for a worn and uncertain bachelor like myself. Nevertheless, when Pat does put questions to me I give her the truth. And she has a flair for truth. An enquiring and pioneering sort of mind, too, which would be a fine equipment if only it were trained and disciplined. As it is, it is a danger. She will explore, and exploration, with her temperament—Pat ought to marry some man much older than herself; a man of thirty at least, clever enough to understand her, patient enough to bear with her caprices, and strong enough to compel her respect. He could make something real of her, for there is essential character in Pat. Or is it only the charm of her personality that makes one think so? I could wish that Cary Scott were not married. Though, of course, he is too old for her. He takes a great deal of interest in her and has much influence over her mind; but his interest is not that kind of interest, naturally. He has been talking to me about her; very shrewdly, too. He thinks her of the dangerously inflammable type. I fancy that she has been making a confidant of him. He thinks that I should talk

to her plainly. I feel rather alarmed at the prospect; the modern flapper knows so formidably much!"

Opening the safe to add this letter to the accumulating pile in the centre compartment, Osterhout was conscious of a subtle and troubling impression. He felt that some alien hand had intruded there, some alien eye had seen those words, so sacredly confidential, sealed in the inviolable silences of death. Yet that, he knew, was impossible. No one in the world except himself had the combination of the safe. Could Mona herself, Mona's spirit, returning to the room she had so loved and so permeated with her personality, have entered there to absorb the essence of the confidences which she had demanded of him? But if that were so, why should he feel that sense of invasion, since the letters belonged more to Mona than to him? Nevertheless, the thought was a blessed appeasement to the thirst of his heart. He clasped it to him. But presently his underlying materialistic hard sense reasserted its ascendancy. He set it all down to imagination; smiled tolerantly at himself for a sentimental self-deluder.

For a long time Pat did not come to pay him the expected visit. But the day before her return to school she appeared in his laboratory.

"Bobs," she announced pathetically, "I've got a sore throat."

"Let's have a look at it," he directed, leading her to the window.

She tilted back her face, while he explored the recesses of the accused organ.

"Sore throat, eh?" he remarked. "At least your mouth is clean, which is more than could have been said of it a year ago. You've got a breath like a cow."

"Snice," purred Pat. "I'm a good little dieter. But what about my throat?"

"Well," answered the physician judicially, "it might be diphtheria or it might be scarlet fever, but *I* think it's that guilty feeling that comes of telling lies about itself. Your throat is no more sore than my pipe."

"I know it isn't," admitted the unabashed Pat. "But I'm kind of wrong inside. Way-way inside, I mean."

"The patient must be more specific if the physician is to be of use."

"Bobs, am I a fool?"

"I suppose so. Most people are."

"Am I a dam' fool?"

"As to degree we come to a consideration of definition which——"

"Mr. Scott thinks I am."

"Hello! Who's making this diagnosis? Cary Scott, or you, or I?"

"Do you think I ought to go to college?"

"Too late. You couldn't get in now, thanks to that infernal, mind-coddling, brain-softening school of yours."

"It isn't! I love the school. They let you do whatever you like."

"Which is, of course, the best possible course for a finished product like you."

"Oh, *well!* Who cares? I don't."

"Then why come to me?"

"I don't think I'm getting everything out of—of things that I might," said Pat plaintively.

"That's the beginning of wisdom. Why this divine discontent? Have the movies begun to pall?"

"Oh, *have* you seen Doug Fairbanks in his last? He's *too* flawless."

"Evidently they haven't begun to pall. If I could be assured of its being his last I would gladly go to see the *too-flawless* Doug. But my dull artistic appreciations

do not rise above Charley Chaplin. But we wander. We were discussing your way-way inside, weren't we? Why its sudden discomposure?"

"I thought you could tell me. You know so much, Bobs. I'm getting bored with the things I used to like. I think it's talking with Mr. Scott. He's so different, and he makes the rest seem dull."

"Yes; Scott is a bit of a prig," said Osterhout with intention.

"He isn't!" flashed Pat indignantly. "He's the best dressed man at the club. Jimmie James says so." As the physician smiled at this naïve refutation she added: "Well, a man can't be a prig and look the way Mr. Scott always does, can he?"

"Obviously not."

"It's only because he's been about the world so much and knows such a lot about music and art and books and—and things."

"Well, you've had the advantages of a liberal and lady-like education yourself. Kindred spirits. Don't fall in love with Cary Scott, Infant. Remember he's a married man," smiled Osterhout.

"Fall in *love* with him? Why, I'd as soon think of falling in love with you! He's old enough to be my grandfather! But I think he's awfully good for me," she added naïvely. "Don't you love to talk with Mr. Scott, Bobs?"

"Oh, I just *adore* it!" simpered the doctor, clasping fervent hands.

"Now you're laughing at me," she pouted. "He's always laughing at me. That doesn't help much."

"Sometimes it does, Bambina. It might even teach you to laugh at yourself."

"I do that, too. And sometimes I cry at myself. All night."

"Do you?" He scrutinised her. "At your age? What do you cry about?"

"Just about myself. Because nothing seems worth while except—except queer things."

"That's morbid. Or else it's a pose."

"It isn't a pose. I even don't like school as much as I did. Bobs, I want to leave after this term. D'you think if you went to Dad you could talk him into letting me?"

"Much more likely that you could. What's your plan? Launch yourself socially on a waiting world?"

"Don't be spit-catty; it doesn't suit you. No; I want to come back home and run the house for Dad and have some fun. I've been taking domestic science, and I know I could do it better than Con. She'd be glad to be rid of the bother, anyway. I thought I'd work at music, too. Do you think I could do anything with my voice, Bobs?"

"Don't ask me. Any crow knows more music than I do. I think it would be good for you to tackle anything steady and regular. It would keep you from being too introspective."

"Nice Bobs, to give me all the big words for nothing! That means that I think too much about myself, doesn't it? I know I do. And I talk too much about myself, too. I came over here just to talk about myself and to get you to talk about me," she confessed simply. With an air of considered maturity, she added: "It isn't much fun for me to talk to boys of my own age. They're always wanting to tell you about themselves, or else to make love to you. Generally it's love-stuff."

"Indeed! Do you go in much for that particular indoor sport, Pat?"

"Oh, it isn't all indoors. There's porch swings, and limousines; all that helps. Are you shocked, Bobs?"

"I'm interested. The habits of the young of the species are bound to be interesting to a scientist."

"You said something when you said 'habits.' Everybody does it. Didn't you when you were young?"

"It's so long ago that I've forgotten. But I don't think my sisters did. Not promiscuously."

"If they did you'd be the last one that knew about it," the sapient Pat informed him. "And I hate the word 'promiscuously.' Besides, it isn't true. I don't. Not any more."

"Great grief, Infant! You talk as if you'd been at this sort of thing for uncounted years!"

"I've been over twelve for some time, you know," she observed lightly.

"Perhaps it's as well that you reminded me. You seem so permanently young to me. However, speaking medically, I should say cut it out, Infant. Cut it out for good. It's no good for you. It's no good for any young girl; but particularly not for you."

She knitted her pretty brows at him, thinking it through. "I get you, Stephen," she said presently. "Though I'm not so different from other girls, only a little more so than some, maybe. But you're right. Sometimes I've felt like a nervous wreck. I wish that I didn't know so much about myself. Or else that I knew a little more."

"You know quite enough. At any rate you spend quite enough time thinking about yourself. Where do you suppose all this leads to, Pat?"

"I don't know. Lots of time to think about that, isn't there? I suppose I'll get married and have a lot of kids some day. I like kids."

"It would probably be the best thing for you."

"Do you think so? But I'd be a rotten wife, Bobs," she added, a cloud settling down upon her expressive face. "What kind of a training have I had to marry and have children to bring up?"

"About the same as most of your set, haven't you?"

"Yes; and look at them! There isn't one of them that's true to her husband."

"Great Lord, Pat——"

"Now, I *have* shocked you."

"Yes, you have. Not the fact—though it isn't a fact so sweepingly—but that you at your age should know it or think it."

"Oh, I don't mean necessarily that they go the limit. But they're all out for a flutter with any attractive suitor that comes along. Bobs, tell me something; if a married woman goes necking around isn't she more likely to—to go farther than a girl is?"

"Depends on the individual. It isn't the safest of pastimes for anyone, as I've suggested to you."

"But it's such fun to make 'em crazy," returned the irrepressible Pat. "Only," she added pensively, "it isn't such fun when you feel kind of crazy yourself. Yet it is, too. When I get married I'm going to everlastingly settle down and never look sideways at any other man. Bobs, what makes you think I ought to marry a man thirty years old?"

"It's about the right age for you. It will take a man of some wisdom and self-control to manage you, little Pat."

"More grandfather stuff!" she muttered fretfully. "I don't want to marry a settled old thing. I want someone with some fun left in him."

"Two or three years from now thirty won't look so senile."

"Probably not. Dee's marrying a man over thirty. Bobs, do you like Dee's engagement?"

"No; I don't," he answered, and straightway wished that he had not been betrayed into that frankness.

"Neither do I. Jimmie James thinks he's first cousin to the Almighty. Dee won't stand for that."

"She seems devoted to him."

"Oh, she'll see it through. Dee's a good old girl. But I wish she wouldn't. Have you told her what you think about it?"

"Certainly not!"

"Well, don't bite me. Would you have if she'd asked you?"

"Perhaps. I doubt it."

"I'd have thought she'd have come to you. Dee's awfully impressed with you, Bobs. Lots more than I am. Would you tell *me* if I came to you?"

"Of course."

"Why the difference, I wonder? Never mind, old dear. I'll make you a promise right here that I won't marry anyone without your consent. Only, you'll have to give your consent if I want it very much, you know. Won't you, Bobs?"

"Probably," he said.

She waved him a kiss and was gone. He returned to his interrupted task.

In the midst of a test which should have absorbed all his attention a sudden query jarred itself into his brain. How had Pat known that he thought it desirable for her to marry a man of thirty? Certainly he had never told her so. He had never told anyone so. Except Mona.

CHAPTER XV

CONSCIOUSNESS of virtue warmed Pat's heart as she jumped from the train at Dorrisdale and sniffed the shrewd October air with nostrils that quivered like a kitten's. She had been working hard at school, ever so much harder than there was any real need for, on her music and domestic science, and now she was to enjoy some deserved recreation. For this was the week of Dee's wedding and she had five days of unmitigated gaiety in prospect. She peopled her plans with the figures of those who were to be participants of and ministers to her pleasuring, nearly all of them, it is significant to note, of the masculine gender. There were the local youth of her own "crowd," with half a dozen of whom she had "had a flutter" more or less ardent, in the last year; the out-of-town contingent whom she had long known from the viewpoint of childhood and upon whom she aspired confidently to try her burgeoning charms; and two or three unknowns who were to be of the wedding party. Cary Scott had a place in the mosaic, too; but not an overshadowing one. The easy effacements of time, so potent upon a youthful mind, had dimmed, though they had not erased, his image. She was expectant of livelier excitements than association with him afforded. Nevertheless there was an abiding feeling of assurance in having him for a secure background: she looked forward happily to being approved by him for having worked so hard, much as a playful puppy looks for a tidbit as reward of a trick cleverly performed. Furthermore she had a surprise in store for him.

"What's doing to-night?" was her first question of Dee, after their greetings.

"Dinner-dance at the Vaughns'."

"Everybody going to be there?"

"All that are on hand. Some of the party aren't here yet."

"Who's back of my crowd?"

"Selden Thorpe, Billy Grant, Monty Standish; he was asking to-day about you."

"That stiff!" commented Pat, doing a pirouette. "No more pep than a jumping-jack."

"Neither would you have if you'd been brought up in a handbox. But he's begun to lift the lid and look around. And he's a winner to look at."

"Maybe I'll have a shot at him. Dee, I'm out for trouble this trip. I've been being good so long it hurts."

"You look it; the trouble-hunting, I mean," commented the elder, appraising her maid-of-honour. "They ought to put a danger signal over you, Pat. Where do you get the stuff that you work on the men? Your features are nothing to hire out to an artist, you know. And yet——"

Pat laughed delightedly. "Aren't they? Well, you and Con have got enough cold and haughty beauty for the family. Being a bride is becoming to you, Dee. You look stunning."

Indeed, Dee's clean-cut, attractive athleticism seemed to have taken on a new quality. Her eyes had grown more brilliant; there was a higher glow of colour in the clear skin; but a more analytical observer than Pat might have discerned in the little, straightening lines at the corners of the firm, sweet mouth, a conscious effort at nervous control.

"Oh, I'm all right," said she, carelessly. "When's Cissie coming?"

Cissie Parmenter was the Philadelphia schoolmate whom Pat had adopted as "b.f." "To-morrow night. You're a peach to let me have her. What'll we do with her Wednesday, Dee? Only the actual wedding party are asked to the Dangerfields', aren't they?"

"That's all. I'll get Cary Scott to run her in town for luncheon."

"Isn't Mr. Scott one of the ushers?"

"No. He and Jimmy aren't very strong for each other. I'm using him as my general utility man for the show. Dad's no good for that, and Bobs is too busy."

"Cissie'll be all fired up about Mr. Scott. I've told her about him."

"Did you tell her he was married?"

"Of course. You don't think that would cramp Cissie's style, do you? She'll show him some thrill if he gives her half a chance. Not that he's too brisk a pacer, himself. How's his little flutter with Con going?"

"All off," answered Dee, laconically.

"Does Con miss it much?"

"No. She's having a mild whirl . . . Emslie Selfridge. He's safer."

"Safer than Mr. Scott? Couldn't be. I think Scottie invented Safety First."

"Do you?" returned Dee drily. "Well, you've still got *something* to learn about men, Infant."

"I've got something to teach 'em, too," laughed Pat impishly. "Will he be there to-night?"

"Who? Cary? No; he's in Washington. Gets back to-morrow noon."

This suited Pat well enough for her projected surprise. It went with her temperament that she should have a taste for dramatic effect. Assuming that Mr. Scott would report himself at the house shortly after his ar-

rival, she planned to keep the early afternoon free. Watchful at her window, on pretence of taking a nap, she saw his car come up the drive and hurried down to the music room where she seated herself at the piano and began to strum casually, taking up the accompaniment of a song as he entered the front door. It was sketchy and sloppy, that accompaniment, the performance of a jerry-trained hand, but it served as background to the fresh, deep, unforgotten voice, which met his ears and checked his footsteps.

"If love were what the rose is
And you were like the leaf."

She completed the stanza, conscious, through her woman's sense, of every slow step that brought him nearer to her. All the falsity of method, the cheap trickery of intonation which had been coached into her for the song, could not wholly devitalise the velvety passion of the voice. As the final word died away she whirled about.

"Mr. Scott! I didn't know *you* were there."

"Didn't you?" He smiled down into her eyes with that quietly ironic look of his which seemed to mock at himself as much as at that to which it was directed, taking her outstretched hand. "I'm glad to see you, Pat. But—didn't you?"

"You know I did," she confessed. "I was singing at you. Did you like it?"

"Yes."

Unsated of her lust for praise, she persisted: "Don't you think my lessons have done me good?"

"Have you been taking lessons?"

"Certainly I have. You told me you wanted me to. I've been working *terribly* hard."

"How hard?"

"A whole hour, some days. Or pretty nearly."

"That *is* toil! Under whom?"

"One of the teachers at school. She's *very* good."

"A professional?"

"She used to sing in a choir. She says," Pat dropped her voice impressively, "there are lots of voices on the stage not as good as mine."

"Doubtless."

"I wish I knew what you mean when you say that, that funny way," she said pathetically. "I think you're awfully queer to-day, anyway." Her manner changed from petulance to pleading. "Do you think I've got a terrible lot to learn before I could try?"

"Try? What?"

"Going on the stage."

"I think you've got everything to unlearn," he said calmly.

Silently she gazed at him. The tender upper curve of her lip quivered. She turned back to the piano, jangled a discord which was intended to be a sad and melting harmony, and told her little, feminine lie in a muffled voice:

"And I did it all on your account, too."

"Were you going on the stage on my account?"

Around she whisked again, jumped from the seat and went to him, her face alight. "That's what I *adore* about you. You never let me put over any bunk. What makes you so awfully clever about girls, Mr. Scott?"

"Not clever at all," he disclaimed. "I'm simply being honest with you. And," he supplemented, "hoping that you're one of those rare human beings with whom one can be honest successfully."

"Oh, I am," she averred fervently. "But you simply

*smear*ed my feelings. I thought you were going to be perfectly thrilled and I get no come-back at all! Don't you like my voice even a little bit any more, Mr. Scott? You did, before."

"There's a quality in it that—that—— But what's the use! You won't do any honest work with it."

"You don't think I'm any good at all, do you?" she said peevishly.

"We were talking about your music, weren't we?"

"Ah, but I've done a lot besides music since I saw you. And I've been fearfully good and proper. Aren't you proud?"

"Of you? Very," he smiled.

"Of your influence." She took a fold of his sleeve between finger and thumb and idly pleated at it, keeping her intent gaze fixed there. "Nobody's ever had half so much over me. I've always done exactly what I liked and never done anything I didn't like."

"It's a delightful world, isn't it, Pat? But sometimes those things have to be paid for."

At this she raised her eyes, thoughtful and honest eyes, now a little shadowed. "I've always known that. And I'll always be ready to pay. Whatever else I may be, I'm not yellow, Mr. Scott. I'll take what I can get, and if there's a—a come-back, I'll take that, too."

"Yes. You've got courage. *Ça se voit*. That sees itself." He had dropped unconsciously into the emphatic French idiom.

"Does it? How can you tell? You don't know me so well."

"No; I don't."

"Yes, you do," she contradicted him and herself. "I think you know me better than anyone ever has." Again she let her glance fall.

"I know that you will face whatever comes, unafraid. That is in your face. No; it's in the way you bear yourself. In any event, there it is."

"But you did hurt my feelings. Terribly! I thought you'd like my music—and maybe pat me on the head—and say 'Nice little girl'—and give me a kiss and a stick of candy." She slipped her fingers down to his wrist, let them creep to the palm of his hand where they clung. "Say you're glad to see me again, Mr. Scott," she murmured.

"Very glad."

"But"—she tilted her face toward his, turned it away, whispered—"I don't think you act so—very."

His free hand clamped strongly, friendlily down upon hers for a moment, then released it with a tap. "Are you trying to flirt with your grandfather, Pat?" he mocked.

Not for the first time in their intercourse Pat said savagely, "I hate you!" But this time she said it to herself, with the wrath of disappointment and shamed uncertainty. She turned to take her music from the piano. It fluttered from her grasp to the floor whence he retrieved it. Pat's heart gave a bound of exultation. She had seen his hand shake as it held the sheet out to her.

"Wouldn't Grandpa like a dance with Granddaughter this evening?" she challenged gaily.

"As many as Granddaughter can spare from her little playmates."

"Come early then and avoid the rush," she advised. "I'll keep what I can out of the wreckage. Now I must send Dee down to you. She's got a million things for you to do."

The million things proved exacting enough to keep Scott in town so long that the dance was well under way

when he reached it. Pat passed him on the floor, floating beatifically in the arms of this or that partner, never for more than a few turns with anyone, for the rush was on for her favours. After dancing contentedly enough with such partners as he could pick up, for several numbers, Scott looked about to see whether there was any hope of his cutting in on Pat, but failed to find her on the floor; so, as the rooms were rather close, he wandered outside to smoke a cigarette. The soft carpet of the lawn tempted his tired feet. He strolled around the house, intending to re-enter by the far end of the vine-shrouded piazza, when, turning the corner, he came abruptly upon a couple deep in shadow which did not prevent his making out that they were close-clasped. Noiselessly though he stepped back he saw the girl's face strain back in attentiveness. Pat's startled eyes peered after him in the dark, unrecognising.

Cary Scott swore. Then he laughed. The laughter was more bitter than the curse.

CHAPTER XVI

MISS CISSIE PARMENTER strolled down the broad stairs at Holiday Knoll, looking neither to the left nor the right. She was freshly painted with considerable taste, and arrayed with such precision and perfection that she would have suggested a handsome and expensive species of toy but for the sleepy and dangerous eyes which were as profoundly human and natural as the rest of her was delicately artificial. In their depths one could surmise volcanic possibilities. She was small, daintily made, and languid of movement, not without a hint of feline strength. Though her regard was apparently fixed upon far-away things, she had at once observed the man in the library.

"You're Mr. Scott, aren't you?" she said in a cool and lazy voice, advancing with hand outstretched.

"Yes." He took the hand. "And you're Miss Parmenter?"

"Yes; I'm Cissie. You know, Mr. Scott, I'm a social outcast for the afternoon."

"It wouldn't strike one as having weighed on your spirits."

"Buoyed up by the prospect of meeting you. Aren't you appalled at having a total stranger on your hands all afternoon?"

"On the contrary, I'm thrilled," he returned with the conventional answer.

She let her slow gaze sweep over him estimatingly. "You're not a bit like I figured out," she murmured, having decided upon the direct-personality gambit, as promising the best and promptest returns.

"No? Well, youth survives these disappointments."

"Fishing," she retorted. "No; I shan't tell you how much nicer you are than the prospectus. What are you going to do with me?"

"Whatever you permit."

"Oh, have a care of yourself! That might take you far. But I can decide better after eating. Where do we go for that?"

"How would the Ritz do?"

"Music to my ears. Can you get a cocktail there?"

"I think it might be managed, confidentially."

"That'll do nicely for a starter."

"A starter? I see. And for continuance?"

"I'm feeling a little down to-day. What would you prescribe?"

"I've heard that that medicine with bubbles in it possesses a self-raising quality."

"From now on you're my family physician. But I'm sinking rapidly."

He contemplated her curiously. "Believe me, Miss Parmenter, I don't want to spoil sport before it begins, but—how old are you?"

"Twenty-one. Beyond the age of consent—for drinks. It's all right; I know how to say 'when' to a bottle. And I'm not so old but that you might call me Cissie if you like. I think it would help pass the time."

"And as I'm still short of forty, I suppose, on the same principle, you'd better call me Cary."

"How nicely you play back! And Pat told me you were slow; nice, but slow."

At the mention of Pat's name a little surge of anger and contempt went through Scott's veins. But he answered lightly: "I'm a plodding old party, it's true. But I do

my best. Now, as to practical details I'm afraid that the Ritz would draw the line at champagne."

"That's a blow."

"But I bethink me that there's a locker at a Country Club up toward the frozen north that I have entry to, if that isn't too far."

"If you'd said Albany it wouldn't be too far for me."

"What would be too far for you, Cissie?"

She gave him her eyes, alight with gleams of mirth and appreciation. "Don't let me stop you," she laughed. "There are days when my brakes need re-lining. Let's go!"

Throughout the drive, Cissie alternated between urging her companion to put more speed on the car, and light, slangy, clever, suggestive chatter about theatres, athletics, movies, and the sort of thing that fills the society columns of the daily newspapers. At the luncheon she drank two cocktails, half of the pint of champagne which was all that she would permit to be provided, and then declared herself fit for life again. "What'll we do now?" was her way of putting it.

"What time do they expect you back?"

"Five sharp. So, of course, I shan't be there. I never am. Play golf, Mr. Scott?"

"Just an average game, Miss Parmenter."

"All right, Cary; I'll take you on for twenty on our handicaps."

"You bet fairly high, don't you?"

"Yes; and what's more, I pay up when I lose. If the bet isn't good enough, just to make it more interesting, I'll throw in the odds of a kiss if you win. Do you know anyone here who'd loan me a pair of shoes?"

That matter being arranged, Cissie, playing with cool precision, proceeded to beat him by three and one.

"Now I'll have a highball, please, and we'll trail for home," she directed. "We won't be more than an hour late if you hit it up with that hearse you drive. Are you going to claim the loser's end of the purse?"

"The loser's? Oh, I see. But I thought that was the winner's."

"Don't fall all over yourself with unbridled enthusiasm," she jeered. "You've got to give three more rousing cheers than that to wake me up."

"Just at present I'm busy with the car. But to-night is coming. What dances will you give me?"

"The lucky numbers. Seven and Eleven. Aren't you flattered?"

"Almost as much flattered as I am delighted."

She twisted in her seat to confront him. "Cary Scott, you're a good bluffer, but it doesn't go with me. You haven't fallen for me one little bit!"

"I? Like an avalanche," he protested. "I find you as charming as you are—startling."

"Ah, that startling stuff; you know what that is, don't you?"

"I'm not sure that I do."

"I'm showing you my line; that's all."

"And now I find you bewildering. Be kind to the stupidity of one who has not yet become fully acclimated to his own amazing country."

"Yes; anyone could tell that you don't fully belong with us. You see, every girl has her special line to show, nowadays."

"Like a commercial traveller?"

"You've said it! It's whatever is supposed to fit her personality best. You go to a character reader—there's a wiz in Carnegie Hall, who lays you out a complete map

for twenty-five dollars—and she sizes you up and lays out your line for you.”

“Is this line, perhaps, equipped with a hook?”

“Eh? Oh, sure!” Cissie laughed. “Hook and bait. Yes; it’s a fish-line, all right.”

“And what is your specialty?”

“Haven’t I shown it plain enough? It’s the lively and risky with just enough restraint to lead ’em on. I’m supposed to have passionate eyes, you know.”

Scott laughed aloud. “I like you, Cissie.”

“It’s about time!” she exclaimed. “You haven’t, up to now. And I’ve been working pretty hard on you.”

“That’s very shrewd of you. I mean it, this time. It’s realer than the thing we’ve been playing at.”

“Good man! It’s mutual. You can have the kiss if you want it, just for liking.”

“But you’d rather I wouldn’t.”

“And *that’s* very shrewd of *you*. You’re right; I like you that much . . . Cary, I don’t wonder Pat’s batty over you.”

“Pat? You’re quite wrong.”

“And I’m wrong in thinking you’re crazy about her, I suppose.”

“Equally.”

“Pat’s line,” remarked the astute Miss Parmenter thoughtfully, “is the Minnesota shift up to date; all tomboy, you’re-another, take-it-or-leave-it one minute, and the next you know she’s a clinging vine and you’re it. She can do it with those wonderful eyes and that throaty, croaky, heart-breaky voice of hers. It knocks the boys cold. And I’d think it would be just the line to catch an old—a man of the world like——”

“An old man like you, you started to say,” prompted Scott. “No occasion for embarrassment on my account.”

"Don't fool yourself by thinking that age makes such a difference to girls, these days. They think it does at Pat's age, but a couple of years more makes a big diff. Most of the boys I used to be crazy about look like sap-heads to me now. They're too easy. There's more pep in experience; and," remarked the youthful philosopher, "the bigger they are, the harder they fall. Pat's a pretty wise kid, at that. She isn't all '*petite gamine*.'"

"Evidently she has no secrets from you," said Scott, vexed.

"We're b.f.'s, you know. I suppose you think Dirty Me for trying to cut in on her with you."

"I don't know that I'd thought of it at all."

"Now we're very old and stately," said the girl with mischievous alarm. "It makes us coldly dignified to be teased . . . Heavens! Are we home already? Good-bye, and thank you for a corking afternoon. See you to-night."

She waved him a farewell, but reappeared as his car came back around the curve at the side of the house. "Don't forget the lucky numbers, Cary," she called, in her high, sweet drawl.

"No danger," he answered, wondering just why she had come back to say that.

He understood when, in the hallway back of Cissie, he caught sight of Pat's surprised and frowning face.

"The little devil!" he chuckled. But, he thought the moment after, was Cissie playing her own game, or Pat's?

Within doors Pat rushed the tardy guest upstairs and followed into her room.

"Do hustle," she said crossly. "You're gumming the game."

"Hustle is my ancestral name," stated Cissie. "I'm right in high to-day."

"I'll bet a bet you are," was the reply with a tinge of bitterness in it.

Miss Parmenter's pleasantly decorated face took on an expression of innocent frankness. "What ever made you tell me that your Scottie man was slow? I think he's a winner. I've fallen for him like—like an avalanche."

"You can have him. But where do you get that Cary stuff you were working?"

"Start a bath for me, will you, Mike? Oh, *that*. He asked me to. We're awful pals. Just like that." She crooked her two perfectly manicured little fingers together.

Fat grunted.

"You know you told me to go as far as I liked, *dee-rie*."

"Well, you did, didn't you?"

"Oh, not half," cooed the b.f. "He's going to drive me back home after the wedding."

"That won't break up my summer!" shouted Pat, from the bathroom, above the seethe of the foaming faucets.

She felt a definite sense of injury, not against Cissie so much as against Mr. Scott, who represented, to her annoyed mind, a defection on the part of her own presumptive property. Had Cissie really lured his interest away? Or had he lost interest in her, Pat, anyway? Upon this point her misgivings were allayed by calling to mind the tremulous hand with which he had recovered that sheet of music. Yet he had resisted the lure of her touch, the mute offer of her lips. Accustomed to the potency of physical appeal upon men, she felt at a loss. True, what had drawn her to Scott had been his enjoyment of that in her which underlay the surface, his capacity for appreciating in her qualities and potentialities which she herself felt only dimly and doubtfully when the influence of his presence was remote. Yet that he should find her

attractive on this side, while holding himself under restraint against her more direct advances, puzzled and discouraged her. Especially if he were, in fact, embarking upon a whirl with Cissie Parmenter. Pat knew Cissie's methods—or thought she did. In truth she decidedly underestimated the b.f.'s acumen as well as her adaptability to various kinds of camaraderie.

Pat determined to make herself extra-specially attractive to Mr. Scott that evening at the dance.

Unfortunately to be extra-specially or even ordinarily attractive to a person, you must first draw that person within the radius of attraction. To Pat's discomfiture Mr. Scott evinced no interest whatsoever in her; barely any cognisance of her existence and presence at the dance. With the other girls in the wedding party he had early dances, to their obvious satisfaction, for in some occult way, though not of the party proper, he had come to be a central figure of interest. He was deemed "unusual," fascinating, "relieving"—a word which had recently come much into vogue in that set. Cissie Parmenter had been exploiting him.

The party was notable for its pretty girls; but Pat, though on the score of actual beauty she was far behind in the running, glowed among them with her dark, exotic radiance, like a flame among flowers. She was beset with admirers competing for such fractions of dances as they could get. Every man in the room had been a suppliant except Mr. Scott. In that atmosphere of adulation Pat seemed to become more quiveringly, femininely, alluringly alive. She exhaled delight, like a perfume of her ardent soul. Yet in all the excitement of her pleasures, she was waiting and hoping and manœuvring. . . . Twice Cary Scott had danced with Dee: three times with Connie, who was her old, lovely, wistful self for the occasion: Pat didn't

feel any too comfortable about that. Once he had danced with Cissie, and once sat out with her on the piazza; and Pat didn't feel at all comfortable about that. Here it was the twelfth dance and he hadn't come near her. Between two numbers she caught sight of him just outside a door, and then and there deserted a lamenting partner.

"*Mister Scott!*"

He turned, and, in spite of himself, felt his breath quicken. She was so superb in the sure luxuriance of her youth; so appealing in the poise of her body, the turn of her head.

"Having a good time?" he asked courteously.

"Gorgeous!" she said mechanically. "Who you taking in to supper?"

"Your very charming little friend, Miss Parmenter."

"Oh!" said Pat. "That's terribly nice of you. If it weren't for you," she added viciously, "I'm afraid Cissie'd be having a dull time."

"I haven't noticed that she's had many dull moments," he answered, smiling slightly.

Pat stamped her foot. "Then you've been watching her all the time. I think you might have——" She choked a little.

"Night air too much for you, Pat?" he inquired solicitously.

"No; it isn't. . . . *Aren't* you going to ask me for a dance, Mr. Scott? You didn't last night, either."

"Surely your programme is already full to overflowing."

"It is. But I might do some shifty work with it."

"Thoughtful of you. But you would doubtless find it more amusing to sit out, or perhaps I should say stand out, the later dances in some remote nook with some attractive youth." He was speaking quite slowly and softly. "I might even say . . . any attractive youth."

She moved closer to him, with puzzled eagerness in her eyes. "Won't you please tell me what you mean?"

"Consult your memory," he suggested. "Surely it will go back for twenty-four hours."

Illumination came to her. "Was it you who came around the corner last night?"

"It was."

Pat's eyes fell. But there was a light in them which he would have found hard to interpret, harder than he thought her next plaintive, exculpatory words: "It's been so long since anyone has petted me."

"And you require a certain amount of petting to keep you up to form," he remarked with cold contempt.

"You've got the *meanest* way of speaking," she muttered, before making direct response. "Well, if nobody ever pets you, you get to feeling like a social leper; as if nobody cared about you. That's a ghastly feeling."

"I'm sure you're quite competent to guard yourself against it."

"Well, you wouldn't pet me," she said very low, "when you'd hurt my feelings. In the music room."

"How very remiss of me!"

Her attitude changed. Her boyish shoulders straightened. Her firm little chin went up. "How much did you see last night?"

"Sufficient to suggest that I was in the way."

"Were Monty and I clinched?"

"Quite so."

"And you went on right away?"

"Naturally."

"If you had stayed," she said calmly, "you might have been of some use. Monty was pickled. He was just going to crash when I grabbed him."

"Is that true, Pat?"

She met his searching look with unwavering eyes, her nostrils wide with pride. "Do you think I'm so afraid of you—or of anyone—that I'd lie about it?"

To look at her and disbelieve was impossible.

"Besides," she added, her voice breaking a little in self-pity, "I told you I was through with that necking game."

"How do you want me to apologise, little Pat?"

Her unerring instinct for the charming, the compelling move inspired her. "I don't want you to apologise. I want you to dance with me."

"Any and all that you'll give me—and with all gratitude and contrition."

"I'll filch out two; the fifteenth and the fifth extra. You must be watching. And—about supper—couldn't you?"

"No. Not possibly. How could I?"

She smiled, ruefully yet with a shining quality in her disappointment. "Of course you couldn't. It wouldn't be you if you did. I don't care—now."

Until the fifteenth number Scott did not return to the ballroom but wandered outside in dreamy and restless expectation. What he expected, he could not have told. He was conscious chiefly of an enormous relief in the discovery that Pat had not gone back on her good resolutions. But this was only part of what he felt. The callowest sophomore could hardly have found himself more eager or less certain of his ground, than did Cary Scott, man of ripened wisdom and wide experience of women though he was, as he entered to claim his appointment.

"But I tell you, Monty," Pat was saying to a tall and particularly handsome youth who stood before her, programme in hand and a look of almost ludicrous dis-

appointment on his face, "you've made a mistake. You've mixed your dates with cocktails."

"I told you last night I'd stay off it," muttered the youth, "and I've done it. And now you're throwing me down."

"Oh, come around later," said Pat carelessly. She slipped into Scott's arms, whispering:

"Don't let *anyone* out in." After a few turns she continued: "Do you know it's ever and ever so long since we've had a dance together."

"It might be a thousand years in its effect on you. You were almost a little girl then and I—what was it you called me?—your wise and guiding friend."

"Aren't you that now? You must always be," she returned quickly. "And for me only. Do you like Cissie, Mr. Scott?"

"Immensely. She's charming."

"Better than me?" challenged Pat.

In the measure of the dance he caught her close to him for a moment and felt the little, excited access of laughter which ran through her body like a tearless sob. "What do you think?" he queried.

Her cheek fluttered against his. "Then that's all right," she breathed.

"You dear!" whispered Scott. He felt himself losing his head; told himself that this was inexcusable foolishness, unfair, unworthy, sterile trifling with evil chance. Yet he lacked the force to draw back.

"Would you mind very much," asked Pat deprecatingly after a pause, "if I remigged on the fifth extra?"

"Indeed I should! Unless"—he tried for a light tone—"there's some special reason for it, such as that you don't want to give it to me."

"Oh, I want to *terribly*. But I'm in such a mix-up and that dance would straighten me out . . . I thought per-

haps you'd wait and take me home. I'm going quite early; about three. Will you?"

"Yes."

"We'll walk through the lawns; it's only three minutes. Watch out for my signal."

She was giving him orders as one with a proprietary claim. Scott thrilled to it. He would not let himself think to what it was leading. His mind was absorbed in the delight of her, that dark radiance of personality, the sweet compulsion of her charm. He would have waited all night, though a little time before he had thought himself beginning to be bored. It did not seem long when he saw her coming toward him, her wrap over her arm.

"Quick!" she directed. "Or there'll be a howl about my leaving. I'm not even going to say good-night."

Then they were in the autumn-spiced darkness together, her arm linked in his. It seemed quite natural that her fingers should slip into and twine themselves about his palm.

"Isn't it a grand little world!" she chuckled softly. "I've had such fun to-night."

"You're a wonderful little Pat," he replied unsteadily.

"D'you really think I'm wonderful? Sometimes I think so myself. Other times"—she hunched her shoulders in a gesture peculiar to her—"I think I'm just like everyone else."

"Like no one else in the world."

"Because no two people are alike, of course. I'd hate to be exactly somebody's twin. . . . You're that way, too. You don't remind me of anyone I've ever seen. Most men do."

They had come to a gate which resisted Pat's attempt, being locked. "Oh, very well!" she said, addressing it, "I'll just climb *you*."

She attained the top, agile as a cat. But in getting

down she tore her frock. "Oh, hell!" she cried lamentably. "Are you shocked, Mr. Scott? You don't like me to swear, do you?"

"I like you to be your very self, Pat."

"It's easy to be that with you. You're an easy person to be with," she meditated.

She stopped under the shelter of a small arbour spanning one of the sideyard paths of Holiday Knoll. Clematis in full glory covered it. The faint, rich odour of its late blossoming, dewy and fresh and virginal as if the aging year, after all its fecund maternity of summer, had again put forth its claim to imperishable maidenhood in the blooms, enveloped them. She turned upon him the slant challenge of her eyes from beneath the clouding mass of hair.

"Do you truly like me," she wheedled, "better than Cissie?"

As if the words were torn from the depths of him and forced through his constricted throat, he answered:

"I'm mad about you."

"Oh-h-h-h-h," she crooned, and there was both dismay and delight in the sound. "I didn't *want* you to say that."

"I didn't want to say it," he muttered. "I didn't mean to say it."

He stared intently before him; his brain felt numb. There was an appalled sense of inner catastrophe, wholly unforeseen, inherent in the impossible situation.

"Oh, why did you have to go and say it?" she wailed in childish resentment. "It spoils everything."

He made no reply. Her intonation changed, became daring and seductive. "It's just a—a—sort of fatherly interest, isn't it?"

"No."

"Now you're angry. But it ought to be."

"Do you want it to be?"

"No. I want it to be—as it is. Yet I don't."

He gathered himself together. "I'm sorry, little Pat. Suppose we agree to forget it."

"I won't," she mutinied. "I don't want to forget it."

"I do," he said moodily.

"Then I won't let you."

Slowly she lifted her hands and held them out to him. The finger tips were icy cold to his clasp. He could hear her quick, unsteady breathing.

"Pat! Little Pat!" he whispered.

A smile blossomed upon her curved mouth, tender, tremulous, persuasive. She swayed forward, lifting her face, half closing her eyes.

With the gasp of a man whose last strength of restraint is shattered, he enfolded her, crushing his lips down upon hers.

Only the one long, slow kiss in the breathless silence, and all the world forgotten in its ecstasy.

Then Pat pressed herself gently back from him, looked eagerly, curiously, triumphantly into his face, and stood clear.

"My God, Pat!" he groaned. "I didn't mean to do that."

"I did," she said.

From the roses drooping below her breast she detached a bud, crushed to a perfumed splotch of colour in the fierce pressure of their embrace, and held it out to him.

"Keepsake," she breathed. "It's red, red, red. It's the colour of life. My colour. Pat's colour. Good-night, Mr. Scott."

"Mister" Scott! After that fusion of lips and longings

CHAPTER XVII

INSISTENT jangling of the telephone woke Scott next morning at the club. He was prepared for the rough sweetness of Pat's voice in his ear.

"Is that you, Mr. Scott? Aren't you up yet? Lazy!"

"Good-morning, little Pat. What time is it?"

"I did wake you up, then. It's terribly early—for me. Only nine. Aren't you surprised to hear me?"

"Not a bit."

"Oh! You expected me to call up. Boasting, aren't you? I didn't intend to call you."

"But I intended to call you. What changed your mind?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said evasively. "I woke up early myself, and I suppose I felt lonely. When are you coming out?"

"Just as soon as I can get there."

Her soft, elfin chuckle was the reception which this announcement got. "Quick, then! I want awfully to see you now. And I might change my mind later."

Throughout the hurried processes of dressing while he breakfasted, Scott strove to quiet and command his thoughts, to find some clue to this tangle of passion wherein he had become ensnared. Incredible that he should so have lost himself, after the warning of the earlier experience. She, too, had been carried beyond her depth by a feeling presumably uninterpretable to her inexperience; so he believed. True, she had been through sentimental encounters before, by her own admission, but he too fatuously assumed that these were of minor and

transient import, that it had remained to him to awaken her. "Boasting," Pat would have said.

She was awaiting him in the music room. "I thought you were *never* coming," she sighed. "But the others aren't up yet." She half lifted her arms, expectant, enticing.

"Wait," said he.

She gave him a quick glance, puzzled, apprehensive, a little angry. "You're going to scold me. It was all your fault."

"Absolutely. If there is anyone to be scolded it's I."

"It *wasn't*," she declared with one of her vehement and point-blank reversals. "I did it." Her face took on its most impish expression. "Bad bunny! I don't care."

"I care," he said evenly. "More than I could have believed it possible to care. I love you, Pat."

"Oh, no!" she protested. "I didn't want you to say that."

"What did you expect?" he demanded, taken aback. "Did you want this to be just a cheap and easy little flirtation—a flutter, as you call it?"

"No-o. I didn't want it to be that. I wanted you to—to like me. But why did you have to say *that*?"

"As a justification. No, not quite that; nothing can justify me. But as an excuse, not for myself, but for you."

"For me? I don't understand."

"Think, Pat." His voice was very gentle.

Her dark, delicate brows drew down in concentration. "Yes; I think I do see. You mean you would not have kissed me that way without—without thinking a lot of me."

"I mean that I should not be here now if I were not deeply and wholly in love with you."

"And you're telling me to keep me from feeling ashamed of myself."

"Yes. There is nothing shameful in my feeling for you, inexcusable as it is."

"I think," she pronounced slowly, "you're *the* most divine man I've ever met."

"Oh, no," he refuted bitterly. "Just a weakling. But I give you my word, dear love, if I could have foreseen this I would have gone to the farthest corner of the earth rather than have it come about."

She lifted startled and wondering eyes to his. "Why?"

"You know how things are with me, Pat. You know I'm not free."

A lively interest animated her expression. "Oh, yes. Though I've never thought of it much. Tell me about your wife."

He winced. "What is there to tell?"

"Tell me what she is like? Is she dark or fair? Are you very much in love with her?"

"Pat!"

"Well, you must have loved her or you wouldn't have married her, would you? Doesn't she care for you?"

"I will tell you this much," he said after a pause. "We are completely estranged. But as she is still my wife in name and likely to remain so, I cannot discuss her. Not even with you."

"Oh, very well!" Pat's familiar imp had taken possession of her face again. "It's none of my business, of course."

"That is not quite fair of you, is it?"

"Of course it isn't." She caught his hand, pressed her cheek down into it, and was violently crushed into his arms, her mouth quivering beneath his kiss.

"My God, how I love you!" he groaned.

This time she accepted it. "Do you?" she crooned. Releasing herself she drew him over to the divan, where she snuggled close to him. "I believe you do. It seems so funny. But I don't see that it makes much difference, your being married."

"This difference; that it's all wrong, and unfair to you, and only means suffering later on."

"That isn't what I meant." With lowered face she plucked nervously at his coat sleeve. "I mean—suppose you were free; you wouldn't want to marry me, would you?"

"Good God, Pat! I want it more than anything else in the world."

"Little Me?" she crowed in delight. "That seems awfully funny. You're so—so different, and you know so much, and I don't know anything." She pondered the matter. "If I was ten years older, or you were ten years younger I think it would be *thrilling!* But of course there's nothing in that," she added briskly. "You're married and that's settled. Am I acting like a rotter?"

"I am," he answered hoarsely. "I'm sorry, little Pat. I've been a beast. But I think I've got your point of view, now. It's rather a shock—but there won't be any more of that kind of love-making from me."

Like a little, lithe tigress she pounced upon him. "There will!" she panted rebelliously. "I want it to be so. I love to have you pet me."

"And I haven't even the strength to resist that," he muttered. "I love you so."

"Then you must be very nice to me all the rest of the party, and I'll save out as many dances as I can for you, and you can take me home again to-night. Couldn't you come back a little while this afternoon, late?"

"I'd go anywhere in the world and give up anything in the world for a moment with you, Pat."

"Then be here at five o'clock. All the others will be dressing or bathing or gabbling. We'll have the place to ourselves again. Aren't I nice to you, Mr. Scott?"

"How can you call me Mister, after this?"

"I don't know," she said pensively. "It seems more natural. But I suppose I *could* call you Cary. Cissie did. I was furious at her."

"No-need. There's no room for anyone else in my heart or thought but you."

"But you're going to run her over to Philadelphia in your car."

"Am I? I hadn't heard about it."

"Aren't you? What a liar Cissie is! Then you're going to run me over when I go back to school. Will you?"

"Of course. But what will the family think of all this?"

"Nothing. I'm only the Infant to them. If they did think anything about it it wouldn't make any special difference. They'd think it was a lovely joke."

"You mean even if they knew that I am in love with you?"

She gave him a glowing glance. "They'd say, 'Little Pat's gone and snared herself a real live man.' You don't know this family." Suddenly she drew away from him, jumped to her feet, and darted to the door, where she stood smiling and poised. "What's it all coming to, anyway?" she laughed.

What, indeed? Scott put the question to himself, but in no spirit of laughter.

Toward womankind Cary Scott had much of the continental attitude. Since the separation from his wife

and the freedom of action which it implied, he had played the game of passion, real or counterfeit, in sundry places and with sundry partners, always married women hitherto, and always within the code as he interpreted it. But there remained in him enough of the American to inhibit him from the thought of a purposeful siege upon a young, unmarried girl of a household wherein he was a professed friend. Besides, he loved Pat too well, he told himself, to harm her.

It was incredible; it was shameful; it was damnable; but this child, this *petite gamine*, this reckless, careless, ignorant, swift-witted, unprincipled, selfish, vain, lovable, impetuous, bewildering, seductive, half-formed girl had taken his heart in her two strong, shapely woman-hands, and claimed it away from him—for what? A toy? A keepsake? A treasure?

What future was there for this abrupt and blind encounter of his manhood and her womanhood?

He could find no answer. But of one fact he was appallingly certain: that all the radiance, the glamour wherewith he had surrounded the figure of Mona, all the desire which the soft loveliness, the reluctant half-yielding of Constance had inspired in him, were merged and submerged in the passion that had swept him into Pat's eager and clinging arms.

To what bitter and perhaps absurd end? For he was bound, and she hardly more than a playful child. He recalled her strange look as she had left him. What might one read in it? A glow of possessiveness? A gleam of bright mockery? Or the undecipherable Sphinxhood of the woman triumphant who knows herself loved?

CHAPTER XVIII

WITH unwearied strategy Pat made opportunities for being with Scott thereafter. Each time they were together alone she came to his arms as sweetly and naturally as if she claimed him of right; each time until the evening before the wedding when, as he drew her to him, she twitched away with a boyish, petulant jerk of the shoulders.

"What is it, Pat?" he queried.

"Nothing. I don't want you to pet me. That's all."

He had the acumen to suspect that this might be a first crisis in their newly established relations, though he did not fathom her purpose. "Very well," he assented quietly. "You are quite right, of course."

This did not suit Pat at all. From her youthful suitors she was accustomed to woeful protests. "Am I?" she retorted perversely. "I'm *not*. There's nothing right about it."

"No. But there is this. I shall never make any claim upon you except as you wish it."

"Well, I don't wish it. Not now." A dart of lightning flashed through her clouded look. "I might to-morrow."

His brows lifted, enquiringly. Mockingly, too? Pat wondered. You never could tell with Mr. Scott. What would he say? He said nothing.

"D'you know what I mean?" demanded Pat, who didn't clearly know herself.

"Perfectly."

"What?"

"Coquetry. That's a form of dishonesty between us.

And between us there is no reason nor place for anything but honesty."

She came to him then, encircled him closely, drew her lips from his, after a time, to murmur: "You understand me so. When you say things like that I'm crazy about you."

Against his better judgment he said: "I wonder how much you really care for me, Pat?"

"Oh, an awful lot! Or I wouldn't be acting like this. But," she added with pensive frankness, "I've been just as crazy about other people before."

"I see. It's the normal thing for you to feel this way toward someone."

"Oh, well; you expect to have somebody in love with you," she explained. "Think how *lost* you'd feel without it. And it's natural to play back, isn't it? Now I've hurt you." She spoke the words with a kind of remorseful interest as an experimentalist might feel pity for the animal under his knife.

"That doesn't matter. One gets used to being hurt."

All woman, at this she tightened her embrace. "I don't *want* you to be hurt. I *do* love you. Only with me it doesn't last. But there's never been anyone who *interested* me as much as you do. I don't see what you find in me, though."

"Said the rose to the bee." He forced himself to laugh as he gave the quotation. But within, the cold disillusionment of whatever blind hopes he may have felt, which had underlain his passion from the first, asserted itself. What constancy could he expect from this will-of-the-wisp girl? And what could a lasting attraction mean for her except such unhappiness as he knew himself fated to suffer? He took his resolution. Whatever might come to him he must so command himself and his actions

as to safeguard Pat in every possible way. Already, he knew, his intellectual influence over that unsated, groping, casual mind was strong enough to outlast any change in the more purely physical attraction which she felt for him. If he could find the strength to crush down his own passion, he might still mould her to make something of herself, direct her ardent temperament into channels through which she would eventually come to safe harbour. There lies in every man of strong mentality a trace of the pedagogue. Scott had it. If he could not be Pat's lover, he might find some self-sacrificing satisfaction in being her guide and mentor. That he was prepared for self-sacrifice was the best evidence in his own mind of the quality of his love for the girl. In his lesser affairs he had sought only self-satisfaction.

"My dearest," he said, "I think we have come to a turning-point. We've got to stop this sort of thing."

She cuddled closer to him in the remote darkness of the swing where they sat out two successive dances which she had contrived to save for him. "I don't want to!" she rebelled.

"Do you think I want to! But I'm thinking of the risk."

"You said there wasn't any danger with you," she teased. "Boasting, were you, when you claimed you had self-control enough for both of us."

"I'm not thinking of that kind of danger."

"What then? Oh, of our being trapped! But there's only one more day after this," she pleaded, "and then I go back."

"But you'll be coming home again before long."

"By that time I may be crazy about someone else," was the calm reply.

"Which is pleasant for me to contemplate," he replied grimly.

"It's a mess, isn't it? What d'you expect me to do? What do you *want* me to do?"

"If it's a question of the best thing for you," he said, speaking slowly and with effort, "that would be for you to fall in love genuinely with some man who would understand you and safeguard you——"

"You *want* me to marry? Do you, Cary?"

"It will almost kill me," he said between his teeth. "But—it's the way, for you."

"Probably it is. I'll make a rotten wife," she said, as she had said to Dr. Osterhout.

"You could make heaven or hell for a man. But marriage alone isn't going to be enough. There are other things."

"You mean—children?"

"That, too. But what I meant was some background for yourself. Your music, or reading, or some interest to fall back on."

"Why?"

"Because you've got an eager and active mind, Pat. A half-starved mind, if you only knew it. It's going to demand things when the novelty begins to wear off."

"When I get tired of my husband?"

"I hope you're going to marry a man of whom you won't tire," he said gravely. "But there's a certain monotony about marriage. Many women tire of that. Then is the danger time."

"Then I'll send for you." A devil sparkled in her eyes.

"I wouldn't come."

"Not come! Not when I needed you?"

"From the ends of the earth if you needed me. But not for any caprice. I'd put you on honour there. Hap-

piness doesn't lie in that direction, little Pat. What I want for you is happiness."

She brooded upon this darkly. "I believe you do," she whispered after a time. "More than for yourself."

"More than for myself," he repeated. "Why not?"

"Don't make me cry," she said. "It tears me to pieces to cry. And then, I'm such a sight!"

"Nonsense!" he returned brusquely. "You're not going to. What is there to cry about? 'Men have died,' you know, 'and worms have eaten them, but not for love.'"

"What's that from?" she asked, seeking relief in the turn. "Ibsen?"

"Not exactly," he smiled. "It was said as a reminder by a charming and rebellious Pat of her time named Rosalind."

"Oh, I know! 'As You Like It.' Aren't I clever! The Rosalind reminds me of something. Aunt Linda's here. Have you seen her?"

"No. Who is she?"

"My very pettest aunt. She's an old peach. I'll take you to her if she's broken away from the bridge game. But first——" She lifted pleading and hungry eyes to him.

"Well, Pat?"

"Our being so——so *dam*' good and proper doesn't have to begin until I go, does it?"

He swept her into his arms, held her close and long. "Oh, Pat! Little wonderful Pat," he breathed. "What am I ever to do without you?"

"I don't want you to do without me," she murmured. "I want you to be always somewhere——somewhere where I can find you if—— Be careful! Here comes some butt-in."

They returned to the dancing floor, where Pat after a survey drew Scott by the hand across the room to a group in a corner. "Here she is," she announced. "That's Aunt

Linda." Before she could go further with this informal presentation a circle of importunate claimants had swept about her.

"How do you do, Mr. Cary Scott?" said the lady before whom he found himself standing.

"Mrs. Parker!" he ejaculated.

Pat's description of "old peach" was decidedly overdrawn as to the adjective, though not as to the noun. Aunt Linda was a slim, twinkling, rose-complexioned woman of thirty-five, gowned in a work of art and characterised by a quality of worldliness which, like Scott's own, was a degree above mere smartness. She carried with her a breath of the greater, outer world. Moreover she was, if not beautiful, extremely attractive to look at by virtue of a sort of eternal fitness.

"You've forgotten me," she accused lightly. "Or at least, my name. I'm Miss Fentriss."

Not a muscle of Scott's face testified to his surprise at this unexpected denial of a perfectly remembered name. "So stupid of me," he confessed. "Won't you try a round of this dance?"

"No; I'm not dancing. But you may take me to some cooler spot, if you know of any."

No sooner were they beyond earshot of the crowd than she said: "So you have not forgotten Taormina."

"I have forgotten whatever you wish me to forget."

"Always the perfection of tact," she mocked. "It would be more flattering that you should remember. Though not too much."

"A cliff of beaten gold overlooking a sea of shimmering silver, a waft of perfume on the air, the charm of beauty and mystery, both of which still endure after these seven years."

"Shall I dispel the mystery? I was Mrs. Parker then

only because an independent-minded vagrant such as I am finds travel in Europe more convenient under a married name than as a Miss. So one does not take, but invents a husband. Here and now I am Ralph Fentriss's half-sister and Patricia Fentriss's aunt."

"Something of an occupation in itself," he reflected aloud.

"It is. What, if one may ask, are you doing in that gallery? Pat curled herself on the foot of my bed this morning and discussed the universe for an hour. Chiefly you."

"Vastly flattered! *Et après?*"

"Afterward? That is for you to answer, isn't it? Why are you laying siege to the child's mind?"

"Because I dislike waste. It is too keen a mind to be frittered away on nothings."

"Has Pat been making love to you?" The question was put without the slightest alteration of the easy tone.

"Really, that's a question which——"

"Don't pretend to be shocked. Women always do make love to you, don't they?"

"You didn't," smilingly he reminded her, "at Taormina. Hence my blighted life."

"No. I preferred to have you make love to me. You did it so expertly."

"And wholly unsuccessfully."

"What did you expect? A correct young married woman going on to meet her husband by the boat! Would you have been so vehement if you had known me to be an unmarried girl?"

"I haven't made it a practice to make love to unmarried girls."

"Why select Pat, then?" She paused, giving him time to speculate upon what Pat might or might not have unin-

tentionally revealed to this shrewd observer. "I was twenty-eight then," she pursued, "and I found you a dangerous wooer, even though I knew it was not *pour le bon motif*. Pat isn't nineteen yet."

"Mademoiselle has taken the ordering of this matter into her own hands?" he queried mildly.

"*Dieu m'en garde!*" she laughed. "It is as an old friend of yours that I speak."

"Then I am prepared for the worst," he sighed. "Strike!"

"Still of a pretty wit." She spoke sharply, but her eyes were not without kindness for him. "Danger, Mr. Cary Scott! Danger!"

He did not pretend to misunderstand. "Let me assure you that I am not wholly without principle, Miss Fen-triss."

"You? Granted. But what of Pat? Has my scape-grace little witch of a niece any principles whatever? I doubt it."

So, after all, he had misunderstood. "Are you, then, warning me of danger to myself? *C'est à rire, n'est-ce pas?*"

"It is not to laugh at all. I am serious. I have been watching you this evening when you were with Pat and when you were only following her with your eyes. Your expression is not always guarded, if one has learned to read the human face."

He flushed. Then there came upon him the reckless desire to ease his soul of the secret which filled it. She had invited it, and he instinctively knew that to this serene, poised, self-sufficing, sage woman of the world he could speak in the assurance of sympathy and without fear of incomprehension or betrayal.

"It's true," he said beneath his breath. "I love her. I love her as I never dreamed it possible to love."

"And you've told her so." He made no reply. "I know you have because I know Pat. She's as greedy as she is shrewd; she'd know and she'd never be happy until she'd had it out of you. And then she'd be sorry and blame you for speaking."

"Yes. I've told her," he muttered.

"Inevitable that you should have. Not that it makes any particular difference, but you're still married, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Any prospects of change?"

"Prospects? No!"

"Ah, well; I haven't an idea that Pat would marry you anyway. She appears to regard you as rather an elderly person, quite delightful to play with, but belonging to another world. Her infatuation will probably die out."

"Give me credit for being decent enough to hope and know that it will."

"Yet there is no certainty about it. Your appeal to her senses may be temporary, doubtless is. But you have taken hold upon her mind to a degree which she herself does not appreciate, and that is a more profound and lasting influence. I wonder if you did it deliberately."

"No. Yes. I don't know whether I did or not. It may have been at the back of my brain all the time."

"That sounds more like Pat's honesty than your own diplomatic way of looking at things. It would be quite incredible that she has exerted a counter-influence upon you."

"Why incredible, since I love her?" was the quiet reply. She gave him a swift, estimating glance before she went

on: "I'm very fond of Pat, Mr. Scott. Most of my money will go to her eventually, unless I marry."

"Which is inevitable," he put in.

"Which is the most improbable thing in the world. And I want to see her happy. She has great possibilities of happiness, and great possibilities of tragedy. It is a tragic face, rather; have you noticed that?"

"It is a face impossible to analyse."

"True enough. It has the mysterious quality that quite outdoes beauty. Men go mad over that type of face, though one doesn't find it in poetry or painting. I wonder why? Is it because genius doesn't dare that far, because it is untransferable even for genius? Perhaps it is genius in itself. Didn't some poet say that beauty of a kind is genius? . . . What are you going to do with Pat, Mr. Scott?"

"Nothing. What is there to do?"

"*Laissez faire?* There's danger in letting things take their course too. There is danger everywhere in this sort of affair. Let me interpret a little of Pat's mind for you. She is a combination of instinctive shrewdness, ignorance, false standards and beliefs, and straight thinking. There's an innocence about her that is appalling, an innocence as regards life as it really is. One might say that her ideas of the more intimate phases of life are formed mainly from the trashy, sexy-sentimental plays and the more trashy motion pictures that she loves. She believes that sin is always punished in the direct and logical way. If she should surrender to a man she would expect first, to have a baby at once; second, that the man would naturally despise and abandon her; that's what the modern drama teaches, on the ground, one supposes, that it's an influence for safety. And perhaps," continued the analyst

thoughtfully, "it is. Though I'm rather for the truth myself. But there are other things taught in the same school that aren't so safe. Did you happen to read a fool book called *The Salamander* some years ago?"

"Yes; but I didn't think it so bad."

"Because you're a man and don't understand what the effect of it has been. A Salamander school of fiction and drama has grown out of it. The central idea is that if a girl is 'pure' she can get herself into any kind of situation, take any kind of chance with any kind of man, play the game of passion to the limit and yet come out unscathed; virtue its own safeguard, and that sort of thing. Why I saw a play this winter which was written to prove that a girl of to-day could spend a night alone in a house with a man with whom she was in love without any thought of harm. Yet the censors suppress honest portrayals of life as it really is. It's a great little world, Cary Scott, if your mind doesn't weaken. But I think mine *has!*"

Pat, passing by on the arm of a worshipping partner, stopped to give them a smile.

"What are you talking about, you two?"

"You've guessed it; about you," returned the young aunt.

For a hidden moment Pat's eyes met Scott's and shot forth their ardent message before the sweeping lashes curled down. "Leave me a few shreds," she called back gaily.

"Pat considers herself a miracle of astuteness and knowledge," pursued the aunt. "Having been taught the gospel of lies and trash, she is sure of her own natural inviolability. If anything in the world ought to be banned from the access of Pat and her kind, it is the Salamander-story of the Girl Who Always Comes Out Right. It isn't

true; it never will be true; it never has been true. Women aren't that way."

She let her pensive, grey gaze wander to the doorway wherein Pat had vanished, then return to meet Scott's.

"I know," she said coolly. "I've tried."

CHAPTER XIX

SLOW and stately, the measure of the Lohengrin Wedding March pulsed through the church; much slower and statelier than Herr Wagner ever intended that it should be delivered, unforeseeing that his minute directions would be universally disregarded off the stage in order that the bride might make her progress up the aisle less like a human being with a happy goal in sight than like a rusty mechanism directed by a hidden and uncertain hand. Even to that halting rhythm, however, Mary Delia Fentriss, owner of her own name and her own maiden self for the last time, managed to walk like a proud and graceful young goddess to the accompaniment of something more than the usual hum of admiration and excitement. T. Jameson James stood awaiting her, looking handsome, well-groomed, perfectly self-possessed, and even more self-satisfied.

As Dee turned she raised her head slightly and let one slow look range over the gathered congregation, a gesture inscrutable to many, though the more romantic among the women deemed it conventionally suitable, as a farewell glance proper to the drama of marrying and giving in marriage. But two men in that assemblage, both observers of humankind, both genuinely caring for Dee in diverse ways, read that look and were secretly disturbed.

The rector caught his cue and swung into his part with all the empressement due to a highly fashionable occasion, the ceremony proceeded, its gross symbolism of sex worship, broad paganism, and underlying acceptance of women's slavery as a divine system, thinly cloaked in the

severe beauty of the words; and Dee Fentriss was Mrs. T. Jameson James.

Returned to her father's house for the post-ceremonial festivities, Dee admitted Pat to her room where the last packing was going on, and was caught in a swift, hard hug.

"Oh, Dee! You looked lovely."

"Did I?" said the bride indifferently.

"You surely did. Where are you going on your trip?"

"Secret. Washington first, if you want to know."

Pat lowered her voice though there was no one else in the room. "Dee, aren't you scared?"

"Of course not. Don't be an idiot!"

"I'd be. No; I don't know as I would either, if I was crazy about the man." Pat, thinking aloud, did not see her sister wince. "I'd be too curious about—about what came next. You'll tell me, won't you, Dee? *Everything?*"

The bride laughed not over-mirthfully. "Wait till you're older, Infant. Though I believe that's what they always say and I don't know why they should. Had a good time?"

"*The* most priceless time!"

"That's right. I wish I could always be at the top of the heap, as you are."

"Sometimes I'm at the bottom. I'll have a poisonous grouch after this."

"Will you? You're a queer kid. By the way, do you know that Mark Denby is quite nuts over you?"

Denby was best man, an attractive but not highly intelligent Baltimorean. Pat shrugged her shoulders affectedly to hide her satisfaction. "He's all right in his way."

"Be nice to him to-night, will you? You haven't shown him much."

"Low speed," remarked Pat.

"I wouldn't think Cary Scott was specially high speed, though he's a dear. You've been playing round with him quite a bit."

"Well, that can't hurt me, can it?" said Pat, a little impatiently, as one suspicious of criticism.

No such notion was in the mind of Dee, who answered promptly: "No. Best thing in the world for you, I'd say. But do give Mark a run for his money this evening."

"Oh, very well! I don't have to marry the bird, do I?"

Dee laughed. "You might do worse. He's got lots of money and you could manage him like a lamb."

"I don't want a lamb. I don't want anything yet but to have a good time."

"Shoot along and have it, then."

Thus it was that Cary Scott was mulcted of several expected dances with no other explanation than a whispered "I'll tell you why later," which, however, left him not ill-content. Just before the bridal couple left he got his first private word with the busy maid-of-honour. They stood together on the tile of the loggia, now a bower of greenery and a narrow thoroughfare for the guests going outside to smoke. Pat's first words were:

"Oh, Cary; did you *see* Dee's face?"

"Yes." He did not need to ask her when.

"What did it mean?"

"I don't know. Nothing probably."

"You know it did!" Her confidence in his understanding, her appeal to him in this, the most intimate of family matters, thrilled him with a new sense of their rapprochement, was stronger testimony to his claim upon her inner self than a thousand kisses. "You're fond of Dee, aren't you?" she pursued.

"I'd be fond of her anyway, aside from her being your

sister and the person closest to you in the world. She is, isn't she?"

"But she doesn't know as much about me as you do," murmured Pat. "In some ways she does, though. After all, you're only a man. . . . But Dee's a wonder, isn't she?"

"She is a fine and high personality."

The jealous coquette in Pat asserted itself. "Finer than I am?"

"Much." His answer was grave and sincere. Pat made a little face at him.

"I don't think it's nice of you to think anyone is nicer than I am."

"I love you, Pat." She quivered a little with delight of the words. "It would make no difference if another woman were as far above you in character as the stars are above the earth; it would still be you and no one else in the world for me. Is it enough? Or do you want rather to be flattered?"

"No," she breathed softly. "I want you to—love me." There was the faint hesitancy over the committing word which she always evinced. "Just your own way. But Dee—— Oh, Bobs!" she exclaimed as the doctor entered the place. "Come here."

"Hello, Bambina. Ah, Cary." Osterhout's face was moody.

"What's on *your* mind?" demanded Pat. "You look grouchy as a bear."

"Nothing," he disclaimed.

"Did you notice Dee, in church?"

Osterhout's heavy gaze lifted to study Pat's face, then passed to that of Scott. "Did you see it, too?" he muttered.

"Bobs, *what* was she looking for?"

"What could she have been looking for?" he fenced.

"It was so helpless, so hopeless," went on the girl; "and yet as if she had one hope left and weren't going to give up without—without looking."

Osterhout had his own private interpretation of that last, long quest of the bride's eyes before she turned them to her bridegroom, but he was not going to betray it. "All of us are a little high-strung," he opined. "Imagining a vain thing. Dee's all right."

He passed on his way. As if by thought transference there flashed into Scott's mind the strange passage between Dee and the electrical repair man, his old acquaintance, Stanley Wollaston, at the famous Dangerfield "*swim au naturel*," and the memory of her possessed, dream-haunted face. Could T. Jameson James ever evoke that yearning? Scott knew that he could not, and a great pity for Dee filled him.

Pat left him, not to return until the party was dispersed, all but a few heavy-drinking remnants who had stood by to help Ralph Fentriss finish up the punch. Later Pat and Cary passed them on their way to the clematis arbour. The girl's face was sombre and thoughtful.

"I wish she hadn't married him," she burst out.

Scott sought to reassure her. "It's all right, dearest. As Osterhout said, we're all emotionally stirred up——"

"I wish she hadn't," persisted the girl. "It must be terrible to go away—like that—with a man—when you don't love him!"

"Oh, nonsense!" He strove for a light tone. "She does love him. Otherwise why on earth should she have married him?"

Pat's brows were knit, her gaze far away, fixed upon

visions. "I wish it was us," she murmured. "You and I. Going away. To-night. Together."

"My God! Pat!"

"I *do*. I wish there weren't any laws. I hate laws."

The terrible, fiery desire seized him to claim her then and there, to bid her leave everything for love and go with him to the ends of the earth, to overwhelm her with the force of his desire; to make her believe that with him she would know a happiness greater, fuller, more real than anything in her petty and tinselled prospect of life; seized and scorched and convulsed him, until she felt, through the hand which she had let fall upon his arm, the tremors shake his strong frame; felt them and exulted, through her woman's dim alarms.

"No!" he said hoarsely, in a voice which told how spent he was by the struggle against himself. "Not that, Pat. Not for you. I'd give the soul out of my body to take you away with me. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes," she assented. She was daunted by the depths of passion which she had evoked. But only for the moment. The reaction brought back to her her hoydenish flippancy. "You don't for a minute think I'd go, do you? I was only wishing!"

"For God's sake, don't wish!"

"I *do* wish there weren't any laws. There ought to be a world where we could go when we're tired of this one, where laws and rules and things don't count, and we could come back when—when things got too hectic there."

"Fools think there is, and go there. But they don't come back."

"Let's pretend that there is such a world," she besought childishly, "and that we can go there whenever we want to. There you could kiss me as much as you liked whether

people were around or not. . . . There's nobody around right now in *this* world, Cary. . . .

"I've got to go in," she sighed at last. "And I don't want to at all. Tell me good-night."

His last kiss was very tender, very gentle, long and almost passionless. "That's good-bye, my darling," he said.

"I don't want it to be good-bye." She stretched out her arms to him. "Oh, I do wish it was us!"

He took her hands, pressed them to his hot eyes and released them. "Good-night, Pat. Go in. Please!"

"I will," she acquiesced, obedient for once before the pain in his voice. "But you're driving me over to-morrow, aren't you?"

"To-morrow is another day," he said.

Almost was Pat convinced on the morning following that she had made a mistake in commandeering Scott and his car for the trip. The train would have been far quicker and possibly more amusing. For Scott was unaccountably silent all the early part of the drive. Having arrayed herself with much selective thought for the occasion, and being conscious of her charm as set forth by a gown that clung to her budding form, and a tight little, bright little hat imprisoning her dusky, mutinous hair, Pat resented the lack of attention she was receiving and thought proper to "jolly" her companion into a more fitting frame of mind. She elicited little response in kind.

"You're about as gay as a hearse this morning," she observed with annoyance as the car swung aside from the main highway to a more sparsely travelled back road. "This isn't anybody's funeral that I know. Where are we going, anyway?"

"By a route I like to take when I've plenty of time.

We'll reach the Maple Swamp in time for luncheon. I've packed a hamper. I'm sorry if I'm dull, dear."

"You're quiet. I don't know that you're dull, exactly. I don't quite see you ever being dull. But I don't want to be quiet to-day. It gives me too much time to think. And thinking's the very thing I want the least of right now. I just want to be happy—because I'm with you. There's nothing to be solemn about, is there?"

"Nothing!" he agreed. But though he talked with his usual charm thereafter, she was resentfully conscious of the effort it cost him.

Arrived at the luncheon place he ran the car up beside a stone wall enclosing a coppice which was all ablaze with the last, defiant splendour of the year. Autumn was going down with all colours flying. Pat snuffed the keen scented air with nostrils that quivered.

"Oof!" she cried. "I'm ravenous. What a spiffy luncheon! Coffee? Hold out your cup. When and where shall we lunch together next time, I wonder? Isn't there an old song or something, 'When Shall We Two Eat Again?' Oh, no; it's 'When Shall We Three Meet Again?'" I'm glad there aren't three of us here; aren't you?" she chattered on. "You don't look glad about anything. What are you thinking about so hard?"

"Only that we aren't likely to see each other for some time."

"Some time?" Her face showed alarm and suspicion. "You're not going to see me any more at all," she accused. "Is that it?"

He smiled wanly. "Hardly as bad as that."

"When, then?"

"How can I tell? Business——"

"Business!" she echoed scornfully. "You're going away—from me."

"For a while."

"Why?" she demanded, "when I need you so much?"

"No. You don't really need me."

"When I want you, then?" she said imperiously.

"Isn't that just a little selfish of you?"

"Of course it is. Have I ever pretended to be anything else? I always get what I want if I can, and I never give up anything I want without trying for it. Why should I?"

"An unanswerable proposition," he made reply, with his subtly ironic smile. "But the tide never runs all one way; I'm afraid that you've got some harsh disillusionments in prospect."

"I don't care. If I have to pay, I'll pay."

"It may hurt."

"Let it! I'm not afraid."

"Because you've never been hurt. If I were a praying man I'd pray that you never may be. But that's foolish of course. Life will hurt you. It hurts all of us."

"Has it hurt you, Cary?"

"It is hurting me now—a little. Not more than I deserve."

"Why do you deserve? You couldn't help liking"—he smiled—"being in love with me, could you?"

"I could have helped making love to you."

She had a superb gesture. "Could you, though! When I wanted you to? What harm has it done?"

"So long as it hasn't harmed you——"

"It's helped me. That's why I can't bear to think of your going. I'm going to miss you so terribly!" There followed the little, slighting, boyish, devil-may-care hunch of the shoulders. "Not for long, though. I never do. I go crazy over someone and think he's the whole thing and I can't see anything in the world without him, and then, pouf! It's all over."

"So may it be with you now."

"You *want* it to be?"

"I don't want you to have the pain of missing me as I shall miss you. But I'm afraid you're going to feel it more than you think."

"Boasting!" she retorted, but there was no conviction in the word.

"No; I'm not boasting. But I've given you something, Pat, that you haven't had from your minor flirtations. Much that you won't readily forget. Nor do I want you to forget it all. But—I want it to drop into the background for you."

"Background? I don't understand."

"When the real man for you comes along into the foreground of your life——"

"You want me to compare him with you?" she broke in quickly.

"Perhaps that wouldn't be quite fair to him. I've had more opportunities, more experience of the world than your younger lovers are likely to have had; you can't expect quite so much of youth in some ways. But before you commit yourself finally, suppose you ask yourself whether you care for the man more than you have at any time for me; if, in case you married him, you would miss out of your life together certain phases that we have known."

"But of course I shall!" she cried. "What boy do I know that could understand me as you do?"

Upon the naïve egotism of this he made no comment. "I haven't made myself quite clear. Before you decide, go back to our association, go back to all the associations you have had hitherto, and ask if the new one will take the place of all of them. If not—don't."

"You're trying to keep me from marrying someone else because you can't have me, yourself," she accused.

"Do you think that of me, Pat?"

"Oh, no; no! I don't. You know I don't. What makes me so hateful?" She threw herself upon him, pressed her face close to his, turned so that their lips met; then drew back with a questioning look in her eyes. "That was a *very* white kiss," she murmured discontentedly. "You're so strange to-day."

"There's more, Pat. It isn't so easy to say."

Her intuition leapt to meet his thought. "It's about this." She touched her cheek to his again. "With other men. I won't, if you don't want me to."

"I can't claim any promises from you. You wouldn't keep them anyway."

"I *would*," was the instant and indignant response. "No; probably I wouldn't," she amended, her voice trailing off, "after you'd been away from me for a while. But what's the harm, Cary?"

"I've told you; it's dangerous."

"And I've told you; it's not, for me. Suppose I'm in love with the man. Must I act like an icicle?"

"Ah, that is a different matter. If you're really in love."

"But how am I to tell whether I am or not without letting him make love to me?"

The naïve logic of it left Scott without adequate answer. After all, these direct contacts were the very essence and experiment of mating, the empiric method which inexorable Nature prescribes. Had the modern flapper, with her daring contempt of what older generations considered the proprieties if not the normal decencies of social intercourse, only reverted to a simpler, more natural method? Of course, carrying the scheme a little fur-

ther, there were obvious arguments against it, arguments which he did not care to advance to Pat.

"Only be certain," he said after a pause, "that it isn't merely a casual fascination."

"You know I'm past being an easy necker," she replied with a touch of self-righteous reproach.

"I know that you are of a sensuous temperament——"

"Oh, I hate that word!"

"I didn't say 'sensual,' my dear. I said 'sensuous.' You are one of those fortunate people who are vividly alive to all impressions of the senses. But with you, the sensuous beauty of life is linked up with imagination. That is why physical attraction alone won't suffice for you in the long run; sooner or later your mind is going to awaken and demand the things of the mind."

The morbid look of introspection darkened down over her face. "You talk as if I had a mind. I'm an awful fool. You make me forget it when I'm with you——"

"Because it isn't true. You're a woefully uneducated, untrained, undisciplined child. But you have the hunger of the mind, the discontent. Just now your senses are hungry" (she winced and flushed) "and so you don't feel the deeper hunger. You will in time. It is for that time that I am anxious. The time of the Second Dreaming."

"Tell me," she begged.

"The First Dreaming for you," he prophesied, "will be passionate and romantic. You may be carried away by mere physical beauty or superficial charm. I have known women of your type marry their chauffeurs or elope with gypsy fiddlers."

Pat gave a tiny snort of disdain.

"Probably you are fastidious enough to escape that extreme. But unless the man you choose can satisfy what is deepest in you, you will awake from that First Dream-

ing to an empty world. And afterward, unless you have found something to satisfy your craving mind, will come the danger and the seductiveness of the Second Dreaming."

"Will you come back then?" she challenged.

"I shall be a middle-aged man then; though I suppose you regard me as that now." He forced a wry smile. "No; I shall never come back, in the way that you mean."

"I'll make you," she laughed. "Unless you've stopped caring."

"I shall never stop caring."

"If I get engaged shall I bring him to you? And if you say not, I won't marry him."

Scott's face contracted. "No; my dear. I don't think I could quite endure being put in that position."

"I don't suppose I'll *ever* understand about you," she sighed. "We ought to be going on, oughtn't we?"

She looked at him expectantly, but he only set about packing the things into the hamper.

It was her turn to be thoughtful and silent when they re-embarked in the car. As they neared the city, she said suddenly, "Come to the Parmenters' this evening."

"I think not, Pat."

"Your voice sounds hard as iron. Why not?"

"I don't think it's wise."

She affected not to understand him. "They'll all be out. Cissie told me so."

"We said our good-byes last night. I don't think I could stand it again."

A long silence followed.

"I wish I'd never teased you," said the girl. "I wish there was nothing between us that I had to be sorry for—things that I've done to hurt you, I mean."

"They are nothing, compared to the sweetness and

magic of it," he said. "Don't let yourself think of what doesn't matter."

"Yes; that's like you." She went on with down-drawn brows and face darkened in thought: "Whatever happens don't ever think that this hasn't been the best thing I've ever known in my life. When I've been crazy over men before I've never had a thought for anyone but myself. . . . I wish there was something, anything that I could do for you, dear," she concluded with passionate wistfulness.

"There is. Be yourself; the real self that you are now."

"I'll try. Oh, I will try! But it's so hard with you gone."

At the door of the Parmenter house she did not raise her eyes to his, but her strong young hand clung within his fingers in a fluttering clasp.

"Good-bye, Cary, *dear*."

"God keep you, my darling."

She had to grope her way in past the astonished maid who opened the door.

CHAPTER XX

"WISDOM may be where you are, dear and lost one." So wrote Robert Osterhout, seated in Mona Fentriss's sun-impregnated room, which seemed still to be fragrant of her personality. "Certainly it is not here. All of us had the sorriest misgivings over Dee's marriage, and behold, it has turned out better than most matrimonial arrangements of this ill-assorted world. They have been married for nearly six months and all goes as smooth as machinery. One could not say that Dee is rapturous; but she is not a rapturous person. She seems to run evenly in double harness with James and makes an admirable mistress for his establishment. I wish I could really like James. If he makes Dee happy I shall have to like him. But he is so infernally self-content. And equally content with Dee, evidently considering her a part and portion of himself. Absorptive—that is what Jameson James is.

"I should have been equally skeptical of Pat's management of Holiday Knoll. Another instance of the fallibility of human judgments, for she runs the place excellently, as even Ralph, who prophesied a hurrah's nest from which he would have to take refuge at the club, now admits. I dare say the bills are something to shudder at.

"Connie also has a new occupation: another baby coming. At first she was querulous; now she is quite taken up with the idea. And the extraordinary Pat has seized upon this to bring Connie and Fred together again. Fred is cutting down on the bottle and showing interest in business. Connie has quit her nonsense with Emslie Selfridge; it was only a make-shift, stop-gap sort of flirtation.

anyway; the marriage may yet be a success. If it is, credit to Pat. But imagine the Bambina becoming the managing director of the family, the schemer for happiness, the adjuster of difficulties. She bosses Ralph within an inch of his life. All of this does not seem to interfere with her raids upon the male portion of the community, who clutter up the place largely.

“Cary Scott has quit us. Why, I do not know. Can it be that he was seriously interested in Dee? There is no doubt of her strong liking for him, but I would have sworn that it was quite unsentimental. Possibly his feeling was deeper; the abrupt cure of his infatuation for Connie has never been clear to me. In any case, I miss him. He has brains and charm and, I think, character. Atmosphere, too, which the men of our lot lack. I’ve had a letter or two from him from California. Through a friend who lives in Paris I have heard about his marriage, too. His wife is of the leech type, a handsome, heartless, useless, shrewd beast who hates him because he revolted against her taking everything and giving nothing, and who will never, out of sheer spite, give him his divorce. They say he has amused himself widely; yet he retains a reputation for decency even in the more rigid circles of the foreign community there.

“That queer little mystery of Pat’s mind-reading of which I wrote you, remains unsolved. I have tried to catch her napping on it; made careless mention of having talked with her before about marrying a man of thirty. But she is not to be trapped; maintains an obstinate reserve. It is too much for me. She is developing fast, but into what I cannot say. Conscious, conquering womanhood, I should say; yet she is still so much the simple, willful child with it all. What I fear for her is the difficulty of adjustment to life when she meets with

the severer problems. She is so uneven. Too much background and no foreground; the background of tradition, habit, breeding, *les convenances* (which she recklessly overrides yet always with a sense of what they imply), the divine right of being what she is, a Fentriss, and the lack of what should fill in, training, achievement, discipline, purpose, any real underlying interest in life. Cary Scott was, I believe, giving her something along that line; the more reason for regretting his defection. . . . Pat declares that she will keep a vacant place for him at the family dinner party which she is projecting for next week."

The dinner party was designed by Pat, to convince the Fentrisses, one and all, of her competence to run the house. "Mid-Victorian stuff," Fred Browning called it, but he announced himself as for it, as did also Dee James, while her husband was graciously acquiescent. Ralph Fentriss was humorously obedient to any whim of his youngest daughter's, while Connie was delighted with the idea. Osterhout was of course included, as was Linda Fentriss, bird of passage between winter sports in the Adirondacks and a yachting trip in Florida waters.

The gastronomic part of the dinner was a marked success, aided by a contribution of three bottles of champagne from the private and dwindling cellar of the head of the family. He summed up the verdict after his second glass in a toast proposed and responded to by himself:

"We Fentrisses! We're a damned sight better company for ourselves than most of the people we associate with."

To which satisfying sentiment there was emphatic response, participated in by Robert Osterhout. It struck him, however, that if there were any exception on this occasion, it was the second daughter, who alternated

between long silences and fits of febrile gaiety quite unlike her usual insouciant good humour. He thought that he caught a look of relief on her face when the men retired to the loggia with their cigars, since the new household tyrant had ruled against anything but cigarettes in the other parts of the house. The women took possession of the library and Pat established herself beside Dee, who sat on the lounge near the half-open door leading into the loggia.

"Who's the angel-faced athlete I saw you skating with last Saturday, Mary Delia Fentriss James?" was Pat's opening remark.

"Saturday? Where were you?"

"On the bank in my runabout. You were some conspicuous pair! He's as good as you are, almost."

"Were we so good?" said Dee, coolly.

"Meaning that you don't choose to tell."

"Wrong guess. His name is Wollaston."

"Not in my Social Register."

"A few people manage to exist without being."

"Don't be catty, pettah!"

"Don't be an imbecile, baba!"

"All right. I'm off'n him as a subject for airy persiflage. But I will say that he's a wonderful looking bird—for a skating instructor."

Dee laughed. "You didn't expect to get a rise out of me that way, did you?" But there was a harsh quality in her mirth which made Pat thoughtful.

"When are you going South?" she asked.

"I don't want to go till the first. T. Jameson wants to go next week. We'll probably go next week."

"Like that!" commented Pat. "But why be bitter about a jaunt to the Sunny? I wish it was me. . . . Give ear: what's old Bobs growling about?"

The heavy voice of Dr. Osterhout penetrated to them. "All very well for the club. But I wouldn't have the swine in my house."

To which Ralph Fentriss's musical and tolerant tones replied: "Oh, you can't judge a man solely on the basis of his business, can you, now?"

"If his business is that of a panderer, I can."

"Rough talk," murmured Pat to Dee. "Who's the accused?"

"Because Peter Waddington's newspaper," put in Browning, "has violated some technical rule of the medical profession——"

"Technical nothing! It isn't technicality. It's ordinary law and order and decency. Look at that column. Abortionists, every one of 'em."

"Oh, myo-my!" whispered Pat, vastly enjoying this. "They're waxing wroth."

"A very useful contribution to the social system," said Jameson James in his precise enunciation, with a lift obviously intended to be humorous.

"I always understood that those fellows didn't deliver the goods," remarked Fred Browning carelessly.

"Whether they do or not," retorted Osterhout, "has nothing to do with the question. That thing"—he snapped his finger against the offending print—"is an invitation to commit murder. But aside from that feature, if you men think that sort of stuff is decent to have lying around a house where there is a young girl——"

"Oh, Pat would never think of looking at it," said her father easily. "If she did she wouldn't know what it meant. It's veiled."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," remarked Browning. "Pat's a wise kid. Not much gets past her, nor any of the girls of her age for that matter."

"You make me sick, all of you," vociferated Osterhout. "You wouldn't talk about these things before young girls, yet you'd admit the stuff in this form. I'll see that this specimen doesn't befoul anyone's eyes." There was the rustle of a newspaper being violently crumpled. "Where's the damned waste-basket?"

"Chuck it in the wood-box and forget it. Have a drink," advised Browning.

Her quick and prurient curiosity stimulated, Pat made instant resolution to retrieve that newspaper and see for herself later how they did these things. Presently the men came in and joined the group in the library. Pat sang for them to her father's accompaniment, also to his delighted surprise, for, with his natural taste he appreciated the genuine quality of the voice. Then there was poker, family limit, meaning fifty cents. At midnight Dee called for a round of roodies, declaring that she was tired out. She had previously announced her intention of spending the night at the Knoll, as James was taking an early morning train to attend a sale at which he expected to pick up some polo ponies.

Pat, going upstairs last, as befitted the *châtelaine*, heard Dee moving about in the bathroom, and went to her own room to wait. When all was quiet she slipped on a dressing gown and tiptoed downstairs to rifle the wood-box of its denounced print. There was a single light on in the loggia. Astonished, Pat crept to a viewpoint and peeped in.

Dee, with an intent and haunted face, was smoothing out the newspaper upon her knee.

CHAPTER XXI

BEFORE she was fully awake next morning Pat had come to a daring resolution. To prepare her way she got up, went to the loggia, and looked in the wood-box. No newspaper was there. The maids had not yet made their rounds; therefore Dee must have taken it up with her. Dee did not appear at breakfast, but at ten o'clock she came down. Her face was weary and apathetic; her lithe body seemed to have lost something of its poise. Sorely compassionate and thrilling to the sense of secret and adventurous matters Pat seized upon the first chance of speaking to her alone.

"Dee, did you take a newspaper from the wood-box?"

Dee's expression was inscrutable. "Yes."

"The one Bobs was grouching about? I wanted to see it."

"You?" The exclamation was pregnant with astonishment and dismay. It crystallised Pat's suspicion as to Dee's motive in taking the paper. The older woman rose slowly, walked across the room and stared down into the thoughtful face of the younger. "What do you want that for?"

"Just cussed curiosity."

"Bobs is a nut," said Dee listlessly. "There's nothing in that paper. I tore it up."

"Dee, are you *that* way?"

"None of your business."

"Con told me when she was."

"Con's a cow."

"She's tickled pink. I should think you'd be."

"Oh, would you!" Dee's self-control broke. Her face worked spasmodically. "I'd kill myself first."

The badinage faded from Pat's lips. "That doesn't sound like you, Dee. I'd think you'd be a sport about it anyway."

"Pat, I can't have a baby."

"Rats! You're as strong as an ox."

"It isn't that. I'm not afraid that way."

"What else is there to be afraid of?"

"It isn't fear. It's—it's disgust."

"Disgust?" Pat stared. "I don't get you."

"Pat, listen to me," burst out the sister, her hands twitching, one over the other in a nervous spasm. "Whatever you do, when the time comes however much it may seem the thing to do at the time, don't, don't, *don't* marry a man you aren't in love with. It's a thing to make you sick of yourself every day of your life."

"Dee!"

"It is. I'll never talk to you like this again. But I tell you now; do anything, take any chance but that."

Pat's voice was hushed as she asked: "Do you hate Jimmie-James so much?"

"Not as much as I hate myself. But I've got cause against him. He hasn't kept to his bargain. He hasn't been on the level."

Pat's eyes widened. "You'll never make me believe that the correct and careful T. Jameson has been straying off the reservation."

"I wish to God he would! It isn't that. It's worse—for me. I oughtn't to be spilling this to you, Pat."

"Oh, go ahead! Get it off your chest."

"I married Jim under a private agreement. We were to live together for a month, and after that if either of us wanted to quit we were to just say so and stop being

husband and wife without any legal separation or any fuss of that sort. The house is big enough for two separate lives."

"No house is," denied the sapient Pat. "I don't know much about marriage, but I know that much. It's a fool arrangement."

"I thought it would be a clever sort of trial marriage. Trial marriage"—Dee gave a short and bitter laugh—"doesn't work out so well after the ceremony. If a girl is going to experiment, she might better make her experiments before—— Oh, damn it, Pat! I don't mean it. I think I've gone crazy mooning over this thing."

"What was wrong? Wouldn't Jimmie keep to his part of the agreement?"

"No."

"Bum sport," pronounced Pat. "And he knew you wanted to quit?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Dee's body writhed under its loose covering. "I can't explain."

"Has it got something to do with—with the other man?"

"What other man?"

It was not like direct Dee to fence, Pat reflected. She persisted: "The one you told me about."

"I never told you about any man."

"Oh, *well!* You talked about that thrill stuff——"

"Don't!" gasped Dee.

"I'm sorry," said Pat in swift contrition. "Is it as bad as that? Then I suppose it is the angel-face on skates."

The hard lines melted out of Dee's face. "Yes," she whispered. She seemed to find relief in the admission.

Pat took her courage in her hands. "Dee, is it his baby?"

"If it were, I'd want to have it," was the low, vehement response. "I'd be proud to have it."

For the moment Pat was awed. Passion she understood well enough; but not in this degree. She gathered her forces again.

"Is it Jimmie's, then?"

"Yes; it's Jim's."

"You say that," marvelled Pat, "as if you were ashamed of it."

"I am. God knows I am!" She bowed her proudly set head in her hands and rocked it to and fro. "Pat, there's nothing so rotten and shameful in the world as marrying a man you don't love."

"You didn't have to," said Pat, gaping. "What did you do it for?"

"The usual thing: convenience. And because I was afraid of making a fool of myself by—with someone else. It couldn't come to anything, the other thing. So I got reckless and took Jim. It wasn't a fool that I made of myself; it was something worse. Shall I tell you?"

"No. Don't think it. You did the right thing."

"Of course! As we figure it out. And I've paid for it. But I won't pay for it this way. I won't! I won't!"

"I would," said Pat slowly. "If I went into it I'd go through with it. You've got to be fair to Jimmie. Does he know?"

The smile called forth by the query disfigured Dee's mouth. "No. And he never will know, what's more."

"You're going to get out of it? You're going to one of those people in the newspaper?"

"Yes."

"Isn't it terribly dangerous?"

"What do I care if it is?"

"Dee, why don't you go to Bobs?"

"Bobs?" She hesitated. "I couldn't go to Bobs. He wouldn't help me out anyway. Doctors aren't allowed to."

"He'd do anything in the world for you, Dee."

"If he would, that's all the more reason why I couldn't go to him with this," muttered Dee obscurely.

Pat had an inspiration. "I could. I'll tell him. I'll tell him the whole thing. Except about Angel-face, of course. I'll tell him he's just got to get you out of it. Let me, Dee."

"Oh, go ahead! I don't care. I don't care about anything. I wish I were dead."

"Don't be an ass. We'll fix it." Pat was exuberant with the sense of great and delicate affairs in her hands. "I'll go right now and tackle him. If he sends for you will you come?"

"Yes," agreed Dee listlessly. "You're a good little sport, Pat," she added.

The response was curt and unexpected: "Are you?"

"For not going through with it, you mean?"

"Yes. On Jimmie's account. It's as much his as yours."

"Is it!" Bitter laughter followed. "He's no right to it. He's no right to *me*."

"Why didn't you quit him, then? I would have. In a minute."

"I couldn't. You don't know."

"You could have come home. Of course there'd have been a stink-up, but——"

"I wouldn't have cared. I'd have done anything to get away from him. But he found out—about Stanley."

"Stanley? Oh, Angel-face! Dee, *had* you?"

"No; *no!* There was never any question of that

between us," she said moodily. "I did meet him, though. It was accidental at first, for I never meant to see him again after I married Jim. After that we met once in a while, for walks and in places like the skating rink. That was all there was to it, but Jim found it out and used it to blackmail me and hold me to the marriage. White slave stuff, on the respectable side! But Bobs won't do anything," she added dully. "You'll see."

Pat caught her in a sudden, reassuring hug. "Leave it to me," was her commonplace but confident rejoinder to this baring of a woman's self-wrought and therefore doubly grim tragedy.

Having carefully rehearsed her form of attack upon the family physician Pat went to his bungalow.

"Why the face so solemn, Infant?" he greeted her.

"I've got something serious to say to you, Bobs."

"What devilment have you been up to now?"

"It isn't me," returned Pat, with her usual superiority to the laws of grammar. "It's Dee."

"Hello!" His expression changed. "Anything wrong?"

"Yes. She's going to have a baby."

"Dee," he murmured, "a mother." He lost himself in musing, seeming to forget Pat's presence.

"But she doesn't *want* to be a mother."

"Eh?" Osterhout quite jumped, startled by the emphasis which Pat gave to the assertion. "Oh! That's unimportant. They often don't in the early stages."

"Dee never will. Never! *Never!*"

The physician smiled tolerantly.

"And you've got to help her out of it."

"I?" The scandalised amazement in his expression tempted Pat to mirth, but she restrained herself. "Help her out! In what way, may I ask?"

"You needn't may-I-ask in that hateful tone. You

know perfectly well. Doctors do those things, don't they?"

"Oh, certainly! By all means. It's the backbone and mainstay of the profession."

"Now you're being sarcastic. And it's terribly serious."

"You go back to Dee and tell her not to be a damned fool. She ought to be ashamed of herself for sending you on such an errand. I don't understand it in Dee."

"Liar yourself, Bobs. She didn't send me. I came. And"—a little breathlessly—"if you don't do it for her somebody else will."

"Somebody else? Who?"

"I don't know yet. One of these people in here." She produced the newspaper page which she had extracted from Dee.

Osterhout swore vividly and voluminously. "Just what I said! Leaving such filth about where girls can pick it up." He rose, shuffled over to Pat, took her chin between finger and thumb and peered down into her limpid, troubled eyes. "What's behind all this foolishness?" came the stern question.

"Oh, Bobs! Be good and help us. She can't have the baby. Truly she can't. I mustn't tell you why, but you'd say so, too, if you knew."

His face darkened. "What's this? Isn't it James's child?"

Pat was virtuously indignant, notwithstanding that she had put a like query herself a few moments earlier. "Of course it is!"

"Then it's probably the very best thing that could happen to her."

"Won't you believe me, Bobs," Pat implored, "when I tell you——"

"I'm going to put you out of this house in a minute if you don't stop talking such trash."

"You won't help her?"

"Not by so much as stirring a finger."

Then Pat, offering up a silent prayer to the genius of histrionics, played her trump card. "Will you help—me, then?"

Her eyes were cast down; that was in the rôle she had assumed; but she heard his pipe clatter to the floor, felt the insistence of his stare fixed upon her.

"*Bambina!*" It was long since he had called her by the old pet-name of her childhood. The realisation of what the reversion implied almost broke down her resolution. But he instantly recovered his self-command; was wholly the physician. "Tell me about it," he said gently.

"What is there to tell more?" She threw out her arms in what she deemed the proper gesture.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Or I'd never have come to you."

"Who is the man?"

Pat shook her head. She had not invented the man even in her own mind.

"Tell me, Pat."

Her lips set firm indicating (as she had seen determination "registered" on the screen) that rather would she die than betray her lover.

"The damned scoundrel has got to marry you."

"He can't."

"Why? Is he married?"

Her head inclined slowly. She was quite pale with emotion now, living into her part thoroughly.

"Then I'll drive the dirty whelp out of town. Pat you're not going to leave this room until you tell me."

"Real old mellerdrammer stuff," thought Pat. Sadly she said:

"What's the use, Bobs? I'll never tell. He'd marry me if he could. Oh, you needn't go guessing," she added hastily. "You've never seen or heard of him. Word of honour."

He went over to the window and stood, staring out into the soft, grey drizzle of an early thaw. When he turned to her his face was set in a still resolution.

"Pat, you're absolutely certain that he can't marry you?"

"Absolutely," returned Pat, with the conviction of truth.

"Then, will you marry me?"

"Bobs!" She started to her feet, astounded, incredulous. "You're joking."

"I'm in dead earnest."

The irrepressible coquette within her seized upon and dominated her. "Do you mean to say that you're in *love* with *me*? With little Pat?" she crowed.

"No."

"Oh!" The coquette retired, discomfited.

"I'm offering you a marriage of safety; a marriage of form, only. I should never make any claim on you."

"I couldn't," she gasped, still in the grip of utter amazement.

"Do you see any other way out?" he asked with grim patience.

"But why should you do it?"

"Why shouldn't I? I'd do it for your mother's sake if for no other reason. It isn't as if I had anything else to do with my life. You needn't be afraid of my ever bothering you; and when the time comes, we can get a quiet divorce."

Pat fell back into her chair, her brain still whirling. "No. No. No. No. No! Never in this world! I couldn't even think of it."

"If the idea of me as a pretended husband is so repulsive——"

"It isn't. I think you're *divine*. I *adore* you. Not that way, though. And I couldn't mess things up that way for both of us. I'd kill myself, first." She was winning back, though badly jarred, into the drama of it again. "Bobs, you will help me through. The—the other way."

"What! A criminal operation? Why, I couldn't if I were willing. I'm no obstetrician!"

Pat had the grace to turn red. "No. Not you, of course. But if you'd just send me somewhere—to one of the men in the paper——"

"That would be just as bad."

"Then you'd rather stand by and see me ruined and disgraced," she cried hotly. With a swift change to beseeching softness she murmured, "Mona would tell you to help me if she were here."

Again Osterhout turned to look out into the colorless tumult of the storm: "You're wrong, Pat. She wouldn't. She'd know me better."

"Then what am I going to do?"

He prowled up and down the room like an anxious bear.

"I don't know. We'll have to get you away somewhere. Oh, Bambina! How could you be such an infernal little fool? Why didn't I look after you better?"

"Poor old Bobs!" said she softly. "How could you know anything about it?"

"One thing you absolutely must not do," he pursued vigorously, "is to go to any of those scoundrelly quacks in the paper."

"It's easy enough to tell me what *not* to do."

"You've got to go through with it. I'll make the arrangements when the time comes. Just try not to worry any more than you can help."

Pat nodded her assent and farewell. But inwardly her mood was anything but acquiescent. If Bobs, her trusted stand-by of so many years, wouldn't help, well— Outside in the drizzle she drew out the newspaper and scanned the second legend in the discreet looking column. It gave an obscure address in Newark and was signed "Dr. Jelleco."

CHAPTER XXII

WHAT work Osterhout was able to do in the two days following Pat's revelation was mainly mechanical. Neither his mind nor his real interest were enlisted. Pat's supposed situation absorbed both. There were so many phases to that problem! If only Mona were alive. That thought came to him with more poignancy than for a long time past. He would have taken Pat's secret to her at once, without hesitancy. Could he take it to any other member of the family? Certainly not Ralph Fentriss. Nor the helpless Constance. Dee? He shrank from that idea with an invincible reluctance. Life, he more than suspected, was not treating Dee over-tenderly.

He took his perplexities out into the bluster and whirl of a wild afternoon, and came back weary and a little quieted to find the subject of them stretched out on his divan, fast asleep. Her face, he observed pitifully, showed not only exhaustion but a deeper strain. He touched her limp hand and spoke her name softly. At once she sprang half erect, like a startled animal.

"Oh, Bobs! It's you. I'm so glad you've come. I'm afraid, Bobs."

"No, dear; you mustn't let yourself be," he soothed her. "There's nothing——"

"You don't understand. And I've got to tell you That's what I'm scared about."

"Haven't you told me the whole thing, Bambina?"

"No. I'll—I'll tell you on the way over to Dee's."

"To Dee's?"

"Yes. Dee's ill. You must come at once."

He caught up his hat and gloves; his overcoat he had not taken off. "What is it?"

"Bobs, it's—it's *that*."

"That? What? Can't you speak out?"

Out in the air she took a deep breath. "It wasn't me at all that was in trouble," she announced desperately.

"Not you?" Stupefaction was in his voice. Gathering wrath superseded it as he demanded, "Is this some kind of an infernal joke?"

"No. It was Dee all the time. As I told you at first."

"Then why in the name——"

"You wouldn't help her because she's married. So I thought you might help me, if you thought it was me, because I wasn't."

"An admirable little game. But I'm still not sure that I quite get the point of it." His voice was so ugly that Pat's shook as she said:

"The point was to get you to tell me, if you wouldn't help me yourself, about one of those men in the newspaper——"

"Dee went to one of them?" he broke in.

She looked up at him piteously, pleadingly. "Bobs, it was *terrible*. He was so—so ghastly business-like."

"What did you expect?" he returned grimly. "And now she's ill?"

"Yes."

"Fever?"

"I—I think so."

With a barked-out oath he increased his pace. Pat, striding fast to keep up said: "Bobs, dear; Dee doesn't know about it."

"About what?"

"About my pretending that I was the one. It was my own notion."

"Then you will tell her," he ordained with chill command, "as soon as she is well enough to hear it. If she gets well enough," he added.

"If? Bobs! You don't think there's any real danger——"

"Of course there is danger. What do you think fever means in such a case? You take things into your own hands, perpetrate a piece of criminal folly——"

"Bobs! I couldn't have stopped her."

"You could have told me the truth and let me handle the situation. She would never have dared if she knew that I knew. Now, if Dee dies——"

"Don't, Bobs!"

"It will be your lie that killed her."

For once the reckless soul of Pat shrunk back upon itself in awed remorse. "You've never spoken to me that way in your life," she whimpered.

"I've never felt toward you before as I feel now."

"I'm sorry, Bobs. But I had to do it. I'd do it again to save Dee."

"Save her? Aid her in a cowardly shirking of her first duty as a woman and a wife. It is bad enough to find you lying to me. But to find her a coward and a slacker——"

"You're more angry at her than you are at me, aren't you?" said Pat, in wonder and some resentment. She did not like to have anyone else put before her even for indignation.

He made no reply, but turned in at the gateway to the James ground. As they passed under the portico she stole a glance at his face. It had, by the magic of his

will, become calm, cheerful, self-possessed, exorcised of all wrath and dismay, the face of the confident, confidence-inspiring physician going on his duty of aid. Pat marvelled and admired.

For her it was a long and thought-haunted half hour before he emerged from Dee's room.

"Is it bad?" she whispered, striving to read his expression.

"No. A slight nervous shock. Nothing more."

"Oh, Bobs! I could cry with thankfulness."

"Save your tears," he advised, "for those on whom they might make an impression."

"You don't like me much, do you?" she sighed. "Did you tell Dee about my trick?"

"Haven't I made it clear that you are to make that explanation?"

"What if I don't choose to?"

"I think you will. Whether you like it or not."

Pat said with slow malice: "Shall I tell her that you asked me to marry you?"

"Why not?"

"Oh, *very* well!" She could think of nothing more effective to say.

He took his coat and hat from the chair upon which he had tossed them.

"Bobs."

He turned at the door, eyeing her with an uncaupromising regard.

"Don't look at me in that poisonous way. Say you're sorry, or I'm sorry, or something."

He did not move but seemed to be considering. When he spoke his voice shook her with its gravity: "It is not going to be easy to forgive you, Pat."

"How about Dee?" she shot at him.

"That is between Dee and myself. She at least did not lie to me."

Pat flamed with a sense of unmerited injuries. "Oh, you go to hell!" she muttered. But her eyes were wondering and frightened after he left her. Dee's voice calling gave her something else to think about. She ran upstairs.

"What were you and Bobs quarrelling about?" demanded the patient.

"Nothing."

"You were. Was it about me? Is he very bitter against me?"

"I'll tell you to-morrow. You must go to sleep now."

"There's something back of this." Dee jumped from her bed and set her back to the door. "You won't leave this room till you tell me."

"Get back into bed," implored the alarmed Pat. "I'll tell you. Truly I will."

"Tell, then."

Pat related the tale of the stratagem with increasing relish in the unfolding of the drama. "Pretty clever of little Pat, what?"

"I'm sorry you had to lie to Bobs, though."

"I've kept the best of it. When I told him, Bobs asked me to marry him."

"Asked *you*?"

"Yes. Isn't that a scream!" Between nervousness and exaltation of her diplomatic powers Pat burst into laughter.

"And you laugh?"

The mirth died on her lips. "Don't you think it's fun——"

"You—dirty—little—beast."

"What did I do?" faltered the younger sister. "Why

pick on me? I did it all for you anyway, and I think it's pretty rotten, if you ask me, to——"

"You didn't laugh at Bobs for me."

"I didn't laugh at him at all. I was too paralysed."

"If you had I hope he'd have killed you. I would."

A monstrous conjecture rose in Pat's excited brain. "He isn't the man, is he? It isn't Bobs that you're crazy about, and the other man just a bluff? It *couldn't* be."

"Why couldn't it?"

"Dee! It *isn't*."

"No; it isn't. But there's no reason why it couldn't be with any woman who had heart and sense enough to know him for what he is. He's the best and finest person I've ever known. And when he does the biggest and noblest thing a man could do and offers his name and honour to shield a little heartless fool, he gets laughed at."

"But it wasn't any of it true," cried Pat feebly. "Don't you see what a difference that makes?"

"No. He thought it was true."

"Oh, very *well!* I guess I'm pretty rotten. But I'm just as fond of Bobs as you are, Dee Fentriss. Only, the idea of marrying him—well, it's a scream. That's all; a simple scream."

"Oh, do get out of here," said Dee wearily. She slumped down into her bed and drew the covers up.

"Good-night," said Pat, and made her exit.

Before the hall mirror she paused to contemplate herself. "There you are, Pattie-pat," she remarked, with the little triple jerk of the head that set her shaggy locks rippling over her ears and neck. "You still look pretty good to me. But if this family was running a popularity contest with peanuts for ballots, you wouldn't get one shuck. Lord-ee! I wish Cary Scott was here for just one minute! I need moral support."

CHAPTER XXIII

SPRING was turbulent in the sap of young trees and the blood of young humans when Mary Delia James rolled along Fifth Avenue in the quietly elegant limousine provided for her special use by a correctly generous husband. Nothing about her suggested participation in the turbulence of the season. Rather, life with that most unvernial young man, T. Jameson James, would have served to allay any tendencies toward ebullience which she might otherwise have exhibited. She gave the impression of a cool impassivity.

The car had just turned into a side street when her languid expression livened. She signalled to her chauffeur, leaned out of the window and called:

“Cary! Cary Scott!”

The object of the summons turned in mid-crossing and came back, his eyes shining with pleasure.

“Dee! It is good to see you again. How’s James?”

“All right, thank you. What do you mean by turning up and not letting us know?”

“Unexpected,” he explained. “I hardly had time to find it out before I was here.”

“The telegraph, that useful invention, is still operating. Get in; we’re blocking traffic. You’re dining and spending the night with us, of course.”

“If I stay over,” he answered dubiously. “I don’t know yet. Tell me about the family.”

“As usual. We’re all flourishing in true Fentriss style.”

“Pat? And Mr. Fentriss? And the Brownings?”

"Separated. No; I don't mean Fred and Con," she amended, laughing at the dismay in his face. "Dad and the Brownings. Fred's sticking to business *and* to Con; they've got a cottage over beyond the Club; addition in June, not to the cottage, to the family. Pat's running Holiday Knoll like a veteran, though just now she's in Boston. She'll be sunk in desolation when she finds you've been here and she's missed you."

"Perhaps I'll be back again when she returns," he said carelessly, but his words belied his inward resolution so to arrange his schedule that he would run no risk of the peace-destroying encounter. As a minor determination, he decided to accept Dee's invitation for the night, since it involved no danger of seeing Pat.

"Yes; Pat's quite doing her job," continued Dee. "It's good for her to have the responsibility. But she's still a queer, restless, morbid kid. You saw a lot of her at one time, Cary. I always thought you had a steadying influence on her. What's the matter with Pat, do you think?"

"The fever of the age, perhaps."

"Oh, we've all got that. But Pat's temperature is particularly high. She rushes from one whirl to another, playing Billy-old-hell with Mark Denby one week, and Emslie Selfridge another, and Selden Thorpe, a third, and what does she get out of it? Not even excitement, or else she's a little liar. She's beaten it now because she says she's bored to suicide with this place."

"And you yourself, Dee? How is it with you?"

"Oh, I've everything I want," she said restlessly.

"Everything should include happiness; I'm glad."

"What's that? Don't know—yeh." Her voice was hard. "Please stop looking at me like a solemn owl, as if

you were probing for symptoms. Bobs does all that I need in that line."

"Osterhout? How is he?"

"Go and see him. He needs stirring up. You *are* coming to us to-night, aren't you?"

"Only too charmed. What's this place?" he asked, as the car drew to the curb.

"My tailor's. Will you wait for me?"

"Heavens, no!" he laughed. "I'm nearly forty now. Can't spare the time."

"Then account for yourself before you go. What brings you here so suddenly and without any announcement?"

"A peculiar mission."

"Private, for a guess. Not hooked, are you, Cary?"

"Nothing of that nature. It's private, but not secret, from you. In fact, you may be able to help me."

"I? In what possible way?"

"I want to find Stanley Wollaston."

At the name a slow colour rose in Dee's cheeks until it tinged even the broadly and beautifully modelled forehead. "He's gone away. To Richmond. I can give you his address."

"Good! I've some important news for him. There's no reason why you shouldn't know it. His aunt in England has died and left him the estate. Stan's lean days are over."

The rich hue ebbed out of Dee's face. "He'll go back, then," she mused. At once she recovered herself. "I *am* glad," she said.

"I knew you would be," he answered. But he thought with pity: "She still loves him"; and, with uneasiness, "and still sees him." He continued: "He'll be going back within a month at the latest. I'll go on to-morrow to find him."

He got out, bared his head, and helped her to alight

"At seven o'clock then," she said. "Shall I get some people in? Who do you want to see?"

"No one else in the world," he answered with such conviction that she smiled up at him.

"You *are* a dear, Cary. I can't tell you how much we've missed you. Pat almost went into mourning."

She did not see his expression change, ever so slightly, as he turned away. Business of his own kept Scott busy most of the afternoon. When he reached the club he found Jameson James waiting to motor him out. James was amiable in his stiff and carefully measured way.

Scott went to his room immediately upon their arrival, bathed, dressed, drank the preliminary cocktail which Dee had mixed with her own hands and sent up to him, and had started to go downstairs when he stopped, his breath piling up, as it were, in his throat from an emotion half dismay, half rapture. The unforgettable, luscious huskiness of a voice floated up from below.

"Dee; where are you? *Do* come and hook this last hook for me. I can't get the dam' thing to stay."

He took a step forward. Pat looked up. "Ch, *Mist-er* Scott!" she crowed. "It's too flawless to see you again. I thought you were *never* coming back."

CHAPTER XXIV

HE walked back with her to Holiday Knoll after dinner. Pat's face was thoughtful, moody. As they paced in silence he studied it intently, with passionate longings, with passionate misgivings. Out of a reverie she spoke.

"I've never missed anyone in my life as I've missed you. You were right."

"About what, Pat?"

"That day you took me to Philadelphia. You said I'd miss you more than I thought. D'you remember, I told you then what I thought about it. 'Oh, well, I'll miss him for a few days and then—pouf!'" There followed the impatient, boyish wriggle and hunch of the lithe shoulders. "It'll be all over.' It wasn't all over."

"For me it has never been over. Not for a single minute."

"Have you wanted me so much?" Beneath the conscious coquetry there was a more wistful note.

"Oh, God, Pat!" His voice sounded thick and rough. "There has been no colour or savour, no music or fragrance in life without you."

"Why did you go away?" she demanded accusingly.

"You know, I had to go."

"Why did you come back?"

"Not to see you. I didn't want to see you. Dee told me that you were away."

"She told me you were here. I'd phoned over about some clothes. So I just thought I'd like to see you again. Don't scowl at me. You look as if you think I oughtn't to have come."

"No; you oughtn't."

"Are you sorry I did?"

He looked away from her into the wind-swept night.

"Are you angry because I did?"

"I love you," he burst out. "God, how I love you!"

She laughed softly. Her hand slid down his arm, clasped for a moment the wrist in which his pulses leapt madly to her touch, wreathed itself, cool and strong and smooth, around his palm. "And I love you," she half-whispered gaily. "I'm terribly in love with you"—a pause of deliberate intent—"to-night. Because you've been away from me so long."

"Ah, yes, to-night!" He made no effort to keep the bitterness out of his voice. "But, to-morrow——"

"To-night's to-night," she broke in happily. "We've got lots of it to ourselves. It's only nine o'clock. I broke away early on purpose." Arrested by the look on his face, she added with exasperation and protest: "Cary! You're not going to play propriety to-night? When we haven't seen each other for so long?"

She shook the gleamy mist of her hair about her face, gave a gnomish bend and twist to body and neck and peered sidelong at him from out the tangle.

Suddenly her face darted upward. Her mouth met his in a grotesque parody of a passion-laden kiss.

"Oh, bad bunny!" she admonished herself in mock reproach. He stopped, gazing at her from beneath bent brows.

"You hated that, didn't you?" she said.

"Yes."

"Because it wasn't real?"

"Because it was mockery."

"*Petite gamine* stuff. But I'm not *petite gamine* to-

night; I'm something else. I don't know what I am. Do you?"

"No."

"Don't be cross with me. Whatever it is that I am, it's sorry that it kissed you that way. I didn't mean to make a josh of it."

He smiled. "One might as well try to be cross with a moonbeam."

They had come around by the side street, and now he held the garden gate back for her. The house was dim. Pat kissed her hand to the clematis arbour.

"D'you remember?" she murmured.

"Is there one moment ever spent with you that I've forgotten?"

"Would you like to forget?"

"There are times when I would give anything in the world to forget."

"But I don't *want* you to forget."

"You want me to have to bear this always?"

"No. I don't want you to be unhappy about it. I want—I don't know what I do want. Except now. Now I want to have this evening just to ourselves." She opened a side door, spoke to a servant, moving about in the kitchen. "It's all right, Katie." Then to Scott: "Aren't you coming in?"

He hesitated, but when she added impatiently, "Oh, don't be such a crab!" he followed her.

"Go into the small conservatory," she bade him. "That's *my* work. I've fussed it up into a sort of den."

She bounded upstairs and ran into her room, shook out her hair, gathered it, studied herself in the glass. Her eyes were brilliant, heavy-lidded, dreamy. She shook herself impatiently; her strong, supervitalised young body felt cramped and pent in the close-fitting tailor-made

which she had on. She plucked at the buttons with hurried fingers, wriggled out of the garment which she kicked from her feet and left lying on the floor, tossed her corsets after it, and exhaled a long, luxurious "Ooo-oo-oofff!" of satisfaction and voluptuous relief.

Opening the door of her clothes-press, she rummaged for a moment and pulled out a long, sweeping robe, which she drew about her, moulding it to the boyish set of her shoulders and the woman's depth and contour of her bosom. She caught up a cigarette, lighted a match, then, lapsing into thought, let it droop from her fingers until the scorching brought an angry "Damn!" of pain. She threw the cigarette after the expiring match. No; she wouldn't smoke, much as her tense nerves demanded it. She would keep her mouth fresh and sweet for Cary's first kiss.

She ran down to him, putting on the far light in the hallway, so that only a dim glow invaded the conservatory-den. Scott stood at the window in an attitude of attention.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

"Listening."

"Music! A violin. Oh, I know. It's a visitor at the Eastmans', next door. He's good. And how *flawless* of him to be playing just now. Open the window. Let's hear it all."

He obeyed. She drew in to him. Her ready fingers sought his palm.

"Want me to mix you a drink?"

"No, dear."

"That's better," she approved. "Though," she added, with her old air of *gaminerie*, "it might go further and not get a call-down. What is it he's playing?"

"The *Élégie*."

The violin was sobbing, panting, pleading like a woman in sweet distress. The wind swept the notes to them until the whole room was surcharged with the passion and grief of it.

Pat lifted Scott's hand, cuddled it to her cheek, flipped it away carelessly, turned from him, drifted out of the den into the hallway, back again, and to the divan in the far corner, where she threw herself, snuggling amidst the pillows. Her eyes grew heavy, languorous; in their depths played a shadowed gleam like the far reflection of flame in the heart of sombre waters. The long, thrilling, haunted, wind-borne prayer of the violin penetrated to the innermost fibre of her, mingling there with the passionate sense of his nearness, swaying her to undefined and flashing languors, to unthinkable urgencies.

"Oh, Cary!" she breathed, in the breaking seduction of her voice, a voice that blended and was one with the resistless pleading of the music. And again: "Oh, Cary!"

Her arms yearned out to him, drawing him through the dimness. With a cry he leapt to her, clasped her, felt her young strength and lissome grace yield to his enfoldment. Through her sundered lips he drew the wine of her breath deep, deep into his veins, until all his self was merged and lost in her passion.

Outside the great wind possessed the world, full of the turbulence, the fever, the unassuaged desire of Spring, the *allegro furioso* of the elements, and through it pierced the unbearable sweetness of the stringed melody.

The strain died. Was it after a minute, or an hour, or a night that was an age in their intertwined lives? He was back at the window, leaning against the casement, drawing the rushing wind into his lungs, his heart bursting, his soul a whirl of fire.

Behind him, in the gloom, sounded the shaken softness of her breathing. He bent his head upon his arms.

"Oh, God!" he said. "Pat. Little Pat!"

She came to him then, spread her gracious arms wide, flung the gleaming fog of her hair to the wind, enclasped him, claimed his soul with her lips.

"I'm *not* sorry," she panted. "I'm not! I'm not! I'm *glad!*"

CHAPTER XXV

NOTHING irked Pat more than being awakened too early. Consequently Katie's knock upon her door, at the third discreet repetition, elicited a plaintive growl of protest.

"Oh, *go* away!"

"Special delivery letter for you, Miss Pat."

"Shove it under the door and don't bother me." She flumped over in bed, burrowing her face among the pillows like an annoyed baby.

Very much did Pat wish to sleep. Until long after midnight she had lain awake, thinking excitedly. To be roused out of the profound oblivion which she had finally achieved, thus untimely, was a little too much. But that letter got between her and her rest. From Cary Scott, of course. She visualised the oblong blue stamp, insistent, intrusive, "immediate." Oh, *well!* Up she jumped, caught the envelope from the floor, and dived back into bed to read it.

It was mainly repetition of what he had said last night when they parted: nothing but the absolute necessity of going would have taken him away from her at such a time; he would be back in a few days at the latest; she must wait until then; must not let herself worry, must not make herself unhappy, must trust in him. It ended, "I love you, Pat." Through the quiet directness of the wording Pat felt the stress of an overwhelming emotion. It was not so much worry or unhappiness that filled Pat's thoughts as a confused and colourful bewilderment, a sense of unreality. There intervened a reflection from her mis-

education through the media of flash fiction and the conventional false moralizings of the screen. In a variety of presentations they all taught the same lesson, that when girls "went wrong" they invariably "got into trouble." She passed her hands down along her slender, boyish body and experienced a sharp qualm of fear and disgust and anger, a visualisation of gross and sodden changes in those slim contours. It couldn't happen to *her*. In spite of the movies, other girls "took a chance" and "got away with it." Ada Clare, for instance, according to common gossip; nothing had happened to her. Cissie Parmenter had lightly hinted at "experiences." Pat thought it would be exciting to tell Cissie. But would it be safe? She would like to have Cissie's reassurance that everything would be all right. But why should she need reassurance? She steadied herself with the thought, entertained wholly without idea of blasphemy or irreverence, that God wouldn't let anything like that come about, the God to whom she had paid such assiduous homage by going regularly to church and asking every night for what she specially wanted on the morrow or in the further future. It was her naïve idea of an unwritten pact with the Deity that the performance of her little ritual, be it never so self-seeking, entitled her, of right, to definite rewards and exemptions, claimable as required. This was one of them. Surely He would keep to His part of the bargain. Otherwise, what good would religion be to anyone?

It occurred to her uncomfortably that He had somewhere said, "The wages of sin is death," which she secretly deemed bad grammar even if it was in the Bible. But Pat did not really feel that this was sin; rather it was accident. Technically it might be sin; she admitted so much. But if it were really sin she would, as a sound Christian, feel

remorse. And she did not feel remorse. Therefore it could not in any serious sense be sin. Irrefutable logic! What did she feel? She asked herself. A sense of the fullness of life, of adventure boldly dared. She had met one of the great crises of a woman's life, *the* crisis, indeed. It must be so, since all the stories and movies and plays agreed on the point. The singular aspect of it was that she was conscious of no inner change. She was the same Pat Fentriss, only a day older than yesterday. Being a "woman," if this was it, was not so different from being a "girl."

And Mr. Scott. According to the conventions, as she had absorbed them through the sensationalised and distorted lens to which her intellectual vision had become habituated, the lover should lose all "respect" for the unfortunate girl, this being the first symptom of the waning of his love. Well, it wasn't working that way with *her* lover. The few, broken words of parting last night, the still passion of his letter, told a different story. Possibly, reflected Pat, the people who set forth what purported to be life, on screen, stage, and the printed page, didn't know so much about it after all. Or possibly she and Cary Scott were different from other people. She felt convinced that she was.

From this she fell to speculating upon Scott's probable attitude toward the ingenious and comforting theory of conduct and responsibility which she just had formulated specially to fit the present crisis. Somehow it did not seem quite satisfactory in the illumination of his imagined view. She had thought of him always and rather mournfully as a non-religious if not actually irreligious man; but it was disturbingly cast up from the depths of her mind that if Cary Scott had a God, he would never try either to make cheap excuses to nor shift responsibility

upon Him. And suddenly in that light her exculpatory arguments seemed shallow and paltering. This uncomfortable consideration she thrust determinedly into the background, and concentrated her thought upon her next meeting with Scott.

All things considered, she was not, on the whole, sorry that he had gone away, assuming, of course, that he came back very soon. It gave her time to think, to figure things out free from the immediate glamour of his presence and the disturbing gladness of his return after the long disseverance. Did she really love him? She supposed she must; otherwise—— Yet there was still strong within her the impulse toward the companionship of youth which had inspired her petulant remonstrance to Dr. Bobs over his opinion as to the desirable age for her husband: "I don't want to marry my *grandfather!*" Would she marry Cary Scott if he were free? Even now she doubted it. Not at once, anyway. She wanted her own freedom for a time yet, freedom to enjoy life, to range, to pick and choose. But she had made her choice. Tradition would hold that she had taken an irrevocable step, committed herself. Tradition be damned! She didn't believe it. Would Cary take that view? If, on his return, he should assume the proprietary attitude, evince a sense of possessiveness—Pat clenched her fists but at once softened with the recollection of his sure comprehension, his unerring tact, his instinctive sense of her deeper emotions and reactions.

So far as the immediate future went, he was not free to marry her, nor likely to be. That problem need not be faced now. Suppose later she fell in love and wanted to marry someone else; what would be her course then? Oh, well! Let that take care of itself when it came. Meantime she had something more immediate to look forward to

in Cary's return. She anticipated it with a mingling of trepidation, eagerness, warmth, and excited curiosity, the latter element being predominant.

On the following morning she had another letter, and still a third on the day after. She quite gloried in his devotion. But she did not answer the letters. She rather wanted to but found a difficulty in beginning. She preferred to plan out what she should say to him when they met again, and was in the act of building up a quite thrilling and eloquent statement of her feelings when the phone summoned her.

"Pat?" It was Dee's voice, queer and strained. "Can you come over at once?"

"Yes. What's happened?"

"Jim has been hurt."

"Jim? How?"

"Hit by a car."

"Oh, Dee! Is it bad?"

"Yes. I think so. They're bringing him here."

"I'll be right over."

Pat made a dash for her runabout. When she reached the James house there were two cars in the driveway, Dr. Osterhout's and a large touring car strange to her. There was blood on the steps which Pat mounted.

"Is he killed?" she asked, chokingly, of a maid who was hurrying through the hall.

"No'm," said the girl. "I don't think so." Then added in awe-stricken tones: "He was swearin' somethin' awful when they brung him in. The poo-er man!"

Pat followed her to the front room. Dr. Osterhout's head was thrust out, at her knock.

"What can I do, Bobs?" she asked.

He nodded, approving the steadiness of her voice and control. "Locate a trained nurse and bring her here."

"I'll have one in half an hour. How is he?"

"Bad."

Within the time prescribed Pat was back with the nurse. She found Dee in the library waiting. The young wife's face was sallow, her eyes wide and shining and fixed.

"Oh, Dee! don't!" begged Pat. "You look so afraid."

"I am afraid," was the monotoned reply.

"Is he going to die?"

"I don't know. That's what I'm afraid of. I'm afraid he isn't."

"Dee!"

"I know, I know how it sounds. I don't care. When the word first came they said he was killed. I was glad."

Pat stared at her aghast.

"Why should I lie and pretend?" whispered the wife fiercely. "Why shouldn't I want to be free of him? You know how it is between us. I'm a marriage-slave to a man who has no thought of anything but himself." She gulped and writhed in an access of strong physical nausea.

Pat's strong hands fell upon her wrists. "Stop, Dee! You mustn't let yourself go that way. Tell me how it happened."

"I don't know anything about it. The Marburys' car struck him, down near the station."

"Poor Jimmie!"

"Poor Jimmie? Poor me! Shall I tell you what happened last week?"

"No. Not now, Dee. You're——"

"I'm all right, I tell you. And I'm going to tell you. We fought it out to a finish. He wants to have children. *Children*, after the agreement he broke! Well, I couldn't tell him the whole reason why I wouldn't; but I told him this, and it's true, too, as far as it goes. I said to him:

'Jim, if you'd ever had one single thought for anybody in your life but yourself I might feel different. But if there's anything in heredity I'd as soon hand down idiocy to a child as your strain. Now, if you want a separation, get it.' What do you think he said? 'Oh, no, my dear. That's heroics. I'm just about the same as other men. You don't get off so easily. As for selfishness, you didn't marry me in any spirit of altruism.'"

"He had you there, Dee."

"Yes; he had me there. Then he said, 'I'm going to hold you until you make good or break away yourself.'"

"'Then I'll break,' I said. 'I'll leave you.' He only smiled. 'You won't find it too easy,' he said. I could have killed him."

"Are you really going to leave him?" asked Pat, wide-eyed.

"I was. Now"— she jerked her hand upward—"how can I? What kind of a brute would I look?"

"Perhaps he will die. Poor Jimmie!"

"If you say 'Poor Jimmie' once again I'll scream at the top of my voice."

A man in chauffeur's livery came down the stairs. He looked beseechingly at Dee. "I couldn't help it, Mrs. James," he gulped. "I never seen him until he grabbed the kid an' then I couldn't turn."

"What kid?" asked Pat.

"Didn't you hear how it happened?"

"No. Tell us."

"I was comin' down the road by the turn above the bridge when a little girl run out from the curb. Mr. James must have been right behind her. I honked and the kid stopped dead. I give the wheel a twist and the kid jumped right under the fender. I knew there wasn't no chance, but I jerked her again and felt her hit some-

thin' hard, and the kid yelled once, and there was Mr. James under the wheels. He'd seen the little girl and he made a dive for her and shoved her out from under just as I—I got him. It was the nerviest thing"—the man's rough voice broke. "He must-a knowed he didn't have a chance. A—a—man's thinkin' little of himself to do that for a Dago kid he never seen before."

Dee was leaning forward with fixed stare and twitching lips which barely formed the words: "Did Jim do that?"

"Yes'm. He sure did. He'd oughta get the Carnegie medal for it."

"And the little girl?" said Pat, thrilled. "He saved her?"

The man shook a doleful head. "He shoved her out from under my wheels and she rolled right into a truck passin' the other way."

"Killed?"

He nodded, speechlessly.

Dee burst into laughter. She laughed and laughed and laughed.

CHAPTER XXVI

NEVER in all her career of coquetry had Pat devoted more careful planning than to her meeting with Cary Scott when he should return. At first sight of him all her elaborate campaign was dissipated in consternation.

"*Mist-er Scott!*" she cried.

He had come out from the city direct to Holiday Knoll and was standing in the library, as she came downstairs to meet him, the morning light brilliant on his haggard face. At her exclamation a wry smile twisted his lips.

"Still that, to you?" he asked.

She moved toward him slowly, a little shyly, with fluttering hands outstretched, lips upturned, rather from the wish to comfort his manifest suffering than from any impulse of passion within herself. He drew her into his arms, bent over her, kissed her gently. She felt him tremble in her clasp.

"What is it, Cary?" she whispered. "You look *too* appalling."

"I haven't slept very well."

She drew back to survey him. "I don't believe you've slept at all," she pronounced. "Have you?"

"It doesn't matter."

"It does! You mustn't take it that way."

His expression told her that her coolness amazed him. And, then, suddenly, by reflex from him, it amazed herself. It was so exactly the reverse of the programmed course of events as presented in the familiar media of her reading. She, the woman, the "betrayed," was striving to comfort and reassure him, the man, the "betrayed."

"Did you expect that I should take it lightly, Pat?"

"No, but——"

"I love you," he said. No more than that, hardly above his breath. But it was as if he had pronounced the final word of passion, of yearning, of devotion; his full confession of the bond which is at once primal and eternal between man and woman.

She dropped her head. The thick clusters of her hair rippled forward, almost concealing the eyes which she lifted, aslant, alight, mischievous, yet craving, to his.

"Do you?" she whispered. "Do you truly?" She nestled again, close in his embrace.

"And you, Pat?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered, troubled. "I've hardly been able to think——since. I suppose I must; but——"

"We have a great deal to say to each other," he began gravely, when she broke in:

"I've had so much else to think about. Have you heard about poor Dee?"

"Dee? No. What is it?"

"It isn't exactly Dee. It's Jimmie. He was run over by a car three days ago."

"Not killed!"

"Almost. It's his back. Bobs says they can save him but it would be kinder to let him die. He'll never be anything but a helpless log."

"Good Heavens! Poor Dee! I must go over there."

"We'll go over together. I'll tell you as we go." She ran to get her hat, returned at once, setting it in place on her matinous hair, stood studying him for a moment through half-closed eyes, then leapt to him, flung her arms about his body, pressed her cheek to his, murmuring, "It's too flawless to have you back, Cary!"

Outside, she said, "Dee was going to leave him."

"No! For what earthly reason?"

"I can't tell you. Yes, I can. I can tell you anything—now." She flushed, but looked at him unflinchingly. "It's strange, isn't it?"

"It's unutterably sweet," he said. "It's the companionship that is deeper and more lasting than any other association."

"But there's always been that between us," she mused. "Only, it's different now. I don't quite understand; there's so much I don't understand, Cary, dear. But I know that I want to tell you. I don't believe Dee would mind."

She repeated Dee's bitter protest over James's breach of faith, her refusal to accept maternity, her recent resolution to quit her husband at whatever cost of scandal. "And now she can't," she concluded.

"You mean that she won't."

"Yes. Dee's a good sport. She'll stick to a man when he's down. The worst of it is, she told him why she wouldn't have a baby of his; because he was just a bunch of pure selfishness. And then he goes and pulls a real hero stunt and deliberately throws his life away for a Dago brat—and doesn't save the darn thing, anyway," concluded Pat, her lips quivering. "Where does that leave Dee?"

"Was it what Dee said that drove him to do it?"

"No. It was too quick for that. He did it instinctively. It must have been in him all the while to do the big, self-sacrificing thing when it was put up to him. Like the men on the *Titanic* that everybody thought were wasters. That's what makes it so rotten for Dee. She ~~thinks~~ she's misjudged him all the time. I believe she'd give her life now to have a child for him."

"Well?" queried Scott.

Pat shook a mournful head. "No, never. Not a chance. Haven't I told you? He'll live in a plaster cast the rest of his life if he does live. I wouldn't! . . . I've had a hell of a time with Dee, Cary."

"Poor darling! Do you think Dee will want to see me?"

"Yes. I'm sure she will. Perhaps not to-day."

"Has this really turned her to James again, Pat?"

"Has it made her really love him, you mean? How could she? Women aren't that way. But all she can think of now is her remorse."

He paced along beside her in deep thought for a time before he said: "Was there any other reason for her leaving him?"

"The other man?" She gave him a quick look. "I suppose that had something to do with it. Cary, was it a rotten trick for Dee to marry Jimmie?"

"I'm afraid it was, rather. Poor child! She's paying for it."

"Do women always pay for it?"

"No. Sometimes the men do."

"You know Dee's man, don't you?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"Not at this moment. But I know he is intending to come back here in a few days."

"To see Dee?"

"I'm afraid so."

"He mustn't."

"No; he mustn't."

"Can't you stop him?"

"If I can reach him."

"Cary, you *must* stop him."

"Is she still in love with him?"

"Terribly."

"I'll do my best."

At the James house they found Dr. Osterhout. Pat went up to Dee after bidding Cary come to the Knoll directly after dinner. Going out with the physician he asked how serious James's case really was.

"As serious as it could possibly be," was the grim reply. "He'll live."

"Then Pat was right. He'll never be any better?"

"Not much. A paralytic. With a good deal of suffering."

"Can't you help him die?" muttered Scott.

The medical man turned an uncompromising look upon the other. "When I acquire the wisdom of Deity, then I'll assume the prerogatives of Deity. Not before."

"It's a merciless attitude. In a case like this——"

"In a case like this," the physician cut him short, "the man's life may be valuable to others if not to himself. And suppose after I'd killed him, as you so casually suggest"—the other's gesture of protest did not serve to stop him—"and some new operation was discovered that would restore this kind of case; where should I stand with myself?"

"Is that likely?"

"It's most unlikely. But it's possible. In any case, we doctors do not kill."

"You don't give a thought to Dee."

A ripple of pain twisted the harsh features. "I'm trying not to. My business is with my patient."

"Does he know?"

"Yes. He wormed the truth out of me. He wants Dee to get a separation."

"A separation? I don't understand. What is his idea?"

"To relieve her from being tied to a corpse, as he says."

He's taken to thinking of others besides himself at this late date, has T. Jameson James. A close look at Death sometimes works these miracles."

"Trying to make his peace with Heaven?"

"No. He's honest in this, just as he has always been in his selfishness. He's thinking only of Dee."

"Does he really care for her, Osterhout?"

"I think he'd die without her."

"Isn't there a good chance of his dying anyway?"

"Nothing to bank on."

"What does Dee say to the separation idea?"

"Won't listen. Just turns away and stops her ears."

More than ever convinced that Wollaston must be kept away from Dorrisdale at all costs, Scott put in the hours between his talk with Osterhout and his appointment with Pat, striving to locate the Englishman on the long-distance telephone, but without success.

Upon his arrival at the Knoll, Scott found only Ralph Fentriss in possession.

"Pat is just starting back from Dee's," said the ostensible head of the Fentriss household, after a hearty greeting. "She telephoned. Pretty rough on Dee, this, isn't it?"

"She's standing up under it like the sport she is," said Scott. They chatted of local matters, Fentriss being patently restless. At the sound of Pat's step on the threshold he said with relief:

"You'll excuse me, Cary. I've got a business engagement downtown."

The visitor repressed a smile. So Ralph Fentriss's evening "business engagements" remained a constant quantity. A casual sort of father. Had he been less casual, had Pat been less unprotected—a throb of remorse and self-contempt sickened Scott to the core of his heart.

How could he have let himself be so swept away! . . . Pat stood before him in the doorway, and at once his bitter self-accusation sank into nothingness before the delight of her victorious charm. How could he have helped being carried away, loving her as he did!

She tossed her hat on the table, her gloves at him and herself into the arm chair.

"Now we can talk," said she. "You begin."

At their morning meeting it had seemed to him that the indeterminate and hovering tragedy of the James household had aged and sobered Pat, given more of the womanly to her elfin fascination. Now she seemed again all *gamine*, provocative, elusive, challenging. He stood looking down at her gravely.

"Owl-face!" she mocked, protruding the tip of a red tongue.

"Pat, will you marry me?"

The smile died from her eyes and lips. "How could we? You're married."

"I'll get free."

"How can you?"

"I'd rather not tell you."

"You've got to tell me," she retorted imperiously.

"Yes," he admitted. "I've got to, if you insist. You've the right to know."

She softened. "Have I? Tell me, then."

"I have—evidence." He spoke with an effort.

"Against your wife?"

"Yes."

"Why haven't you used it before?"

"I haven't wanted to. And—I considered that it would not be entirely honourable."

"If it wasn't honourable before, how is it now?" demanded the keen Pat.

"I don't know that it is," he muttered. "But there's another question of honour now, a paramount question, between you and me."

"Tell me why it wouldn't be honourable to use your evidence," persisted Pat, ignoring the other issue.

"You're making it very hard. It's true that she—my wife—has been unfaithful. But that was after we had been long separated in everything but the formalities, and morally I was in no position to blame her."

"You'd been untrue to her?"

"Yes."

"With another woman. Were you *very* much in love with her, Cary, the other woman?" she asked wistfully.

For a moment he hesitated, too long a moment, for a flash of hateful intuition shot through Pat's quick brain. "There was *more* than one. There may have been a dozen. Oh, I think you're *revolting!*"

"I'm not going to lie to you, Pat. I regarded myself as free of all responsibility to her——"

"You're free of all responsibility to me," she choked. "Don't think that I want——"

"No. I am bound to you by the strongest tie I have ever known. I love you."

"You've loved a hundred other women," charged Pat, savagely revelling in her exaggeration.

"I've loved no one as I love you." Despite the banality of the words there was in his speech a quiet force that calmed and convinced her. "Not so that I ever wished to be free and marry."

"Of course," she said loftily, "there's no reason why I should be jealous of your past."

"It is your future that I have been jealous of always," he replied. "That is a thousand times harder to bear. And now I am asking you to give it to me."

"You'd do a dishonourable thing, a thing you consider dishonourable, to be free?" she asked.

"To marry you," he said doggedly. "Yes. There's nothing I'd stop at."

She gave her little, delighted crow. "I believe you wouldn't. But I'm not going to let you."

"You can't prevent me."

"I wouldn't marry you if you did."

His brows took on their ironic lift. "That is heroics, Pat; motion picture heroics. 'To save the other woman.'" Pat pouted. "It's misplaced nobility, my dear. She isn't entitled to it. She doesn't care for me. You do."

"Not enough to marry you, though. Not enough to be *sure*. It's all so puzzling, Cary." Her deep, soft voice shook. "I—I don't understand myself. But I'm just not sure. Is that terrible of me, dear, not to want to marry you?"

"Don't you love me, Pat?" he asked, incredulous of the doubt itself.

"I suppose I do, now. If it would only last, like this."

"But it can't go on like this," he cried hoarsely.

"Why can't it?" she murmured protestingly. The eternal feminine within her, eternally static, eternally conservative, eternally fatalistic where its own interests are concerned, was asserting itself. Better the thing as it is, however precarious, than a step in the dark. Change, to a woman's apprehension, is a challenge to the unknown.

"Surely you must know. Surely you must realize the constant risk, the constant danger——"

"Of being found out? I'm not afraid for myself. You know, Cary, dear, I never can quite believe in danger until it comes. I suppose I ought to. I suppose I ought to feel different in lots of ways. Yet I don't feel different. Not really. Tell me why, Cary."

He bent and kissed the sweet, troubled eyes, the soft, questioning lips. "My darling!" he said brokenly. "My little Pat! I wish to God, I'd never come back——"

"No; don't wish that. I think I'm glad you came, anyway. It's been very dull without you, Cary," she added with childish plaintiveness.

"Then why——"

"Don't ask me any more whys to-night. Please! My head's so tired with thinking. Throw open the windows. Wide! I want to breathe the spring."

He obeyed. The soft, odour-drenched, earthy wind flowed in, surrounded them, englamoured them, swept them into each other's arms.

"I'm so tired, Cary, dear," murmured Pat. "So tired! Just hold me. Hold me close."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE night was warm, moist, astir with vernal growth. The trees whispered tender secrets to each other. Flowers were being born in the grasses. Clouds formed a light coverlet above an earth too fecund of dreams to sleep soundly.

Dee emerged from the side door of the James house and moved down the cedar path, soft as a wraith. The still mansion oppressed her. For two weeks she had hardly stirred beyond earshot of her husband's petulant, pathetic need of her. Her young blood craved air, the expanses, the sense of space and quiet.

Definite verdict had been pronounced that afternoon upon T. Jameson James by Dr. Osterhout, after a careful résumé of the case with the consulting surgeon.

"He'll last indefinitely. As long, one might say, as he has the will to live. Five years . . . Ten. Twenty, if he can stand it. Much depends on you, Dee."

"Will he get better?"

Osterhout moved uneasily. "Better? Stronger, a little. Not really better. A wheel-chair existence at best."

"I can't conceive of it for Jim."

"He'll adjust himself to it after a fashion. People do. But he'll be difficult, dam' difficult. Have you thought any more of his offer to release you?"

"No. And I won't think of it."

"I wouldn't have supposed you would, being you. You're a good sort, Dee. And a good sport." He rubbed his forehead with a stubby forefinger. "As for your own status—you want me to be frank, don't you?"

"Yes, Bobs."

"It's a life of—well, practical widowhood for you. You understand."

Yes; she had understood, and with an influx of relief. Her loyalty would keep her beside her husband, helpless, whereas she would have left him had he been his normal self-centred, self-sufficient self. More; she would now gladly have forgiven him the breach of their private marriage agreement, have accepted the full regimen and responsibility of wifedom could she have borne him the child he wished, the child which might have brought an enduring and saving interest into his ruined life. But from that hateful duty she was absolved; the more reason for standing by him through his ordeal. At worst, she was now free to be faithful in thought and spirit to the man to whom, had he been husband or lover to her, she could have given her all in glorious surrender.

He stepped from the shadow of a cedar and stood before her.

"Dee!"

"Stanley!" Her hands flew to her breast. "How long have you been here?"

"Hours. Since dark."

"Why didn't you send word?"

"Would it have been safe to write?"

"Quite. Now."

"How, now?"

"Don't you *know*? Haven't you seen Cary Scott?"

"Not since I left Baltimore. I came the first moment that I could after making arrangements. Our arrangements."

They had stood apart. But now he reached forward, took her hands, crushed them to his cheek. At his touch she flamed and trembled.

"When can you come with me, Dee?"

"With you? Where?"

"To England. The divorce can be arranged, and our marriage follow. You can trust me."

"Oh, yes; I can trust you," she answered dully.

"Then, when?"

"I can't go with you, Stanley."

"Can't?" he repeated incredulously. "When I can feel your pulse leap when I touch your hand, when——"

"I love you with every breath I take," she cried low and passionately. She snatched her hands from his grip, wreathed them back of his head, drew his lips down upon hers. "I've never dreamed what it could be to love as I love you."

"Come with me," he said.

The wife looked about her like a trapped creature. "I've got to make him understand," she muttered to herself in travail of spirit. "I've got to make him see and— and help me. Stanley," she pleaded, "be kind to me and don't stop me till I've finished telling what I've got to tell."

She related the accident and its sequel in few and simple words. For a time of pulse-beats Wollaston was silent, then:

"Poor devil!" he murmured. "Poor, poor devil!"

"So, you see, dear love——"

"I see nothing but that we belong to each other. You can't deny that kiss and what it means. You can't let me go back alone, Dee. . . . Shall I stay?"

"Oh, no! No! I couldn't bear it."

"Then you must come with me. Now. To-night."

"For God's sake, Stanley, don't! Don't kiss me." She was fighting for strength, for breath. "Don't make me——"

"Dee! *Dee!* Where are you?"

The petulant, flattened voice of helplessness came like a stab of pain through the night. A light, tenuous and sharp, flashed out from the wrecked man's window. Its ray touched the cedar overshadowing them.

Dee answered at once. "I'm coming, Jim. Just a moment. Good-bye, Stanley."

He gathered her into a slow, overmastering pressure of body to body, face to face.

"Dee, I love you. I want you."

"I know. God, how I know!"

"As you love and want me. What does anything else matter!"

"Oh, love; don't make it so bitter hard for me! I can't leave him. He needs me so. I can't! I can't!"

"Dee! The pain has come back. Where are you?"

"Coming, Jim, dear!" She turned away from Wollaston without another look; heard him thrashing through the bushy growth like a man blinded; felt her knees sag and give way.

She toppled slowly forward and lay, face down upon the earth that gives life, that gives courage, that gives endurance to bear the deadliest hurt, her fingers tearing in agony at the young grasses.

Presently she heaved herself up and went into the house. Her mouth was firm, her eyes tearless.

A good sort. A good sport.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FOR two weeks Pat and Scott lived in a paradise of constant dangers and passionate adventure. Fate played into their hands; James, as he recovered a little strength, developed a strong inclination for Scott's society, and insisted that he remain at their house as guest. The two men played chess and bezique. To Dee, in her time of ordeal and sacrifice, it was a relief without which she must have broken to have the invalid taken off her hands for a good part of every day.

Twice daily Pat came over from the Knoll, often staying to luncheon on her morning visit and returning directly after dinner to make a fourth hand at bridge whenever James was in fit condition to play. As a matter of course, Scott took her home and ostensibly left her while he went for a long walk alone, before returning to the James place. In reality those hours were spent with Pat in her conservatory.

"When are you going to get tired of me?" she asked pertly, one gold-studded night of stars and soft winds as they sat together at the open window of the secluded room. She was perched on the arm of his chair, her hand overhanging the back to touch the short curls at his temple. He drew her palm downward and spoke with his lips lightly pressed upon it.

"When that planet yonder tumbles down out of the sky into your lap."

"But you ought to, you know. They always do."

"Still obsessed by the movies," he interpreted playfully. "This is the real world we're living in."

"Sometimes I wonder if it is. It doesn't seem too real."

"You're a phantasm yourself," said he jealously. "I never quite grasp and hold you."

"Yet I belong to you, don't I? Or is that just a— a silly form of words that hasn't any real meaning?"

"It's a phrase. You belong to yourself. You always will. There's that quality of the eternally unattainable, the eternally virginal, about you."

"Is there? I love to have you say that! Do you *truly* think it, Cary?"

"In the depths of my heart—where you live."

"But it wouldn't be so if we were married."

"It would always be so, my darling."

Ever keenly interested in her own character and its reflex upon others, she took this under thoughtful consideration.

"I've never felt that I could really belong to anybody. Not even to you. If I could think it, then perhaps I'd want to marry you. Does that mean that I don't love you, Cary? Or what?"

"Not as I love you," he replied with gloomy patience. "It means that I've got to wait."

"Here?" she flashed at him with her bewildering smile. "But you've been threatening to go away again."

"I ought to," he groaned. "I just haven't the will power. It would be like giving up hope to leave you now."

"Poor darling!" But there was a touch of mockery in her pity.

"If it weren't so terribly dangerous for you."

Her proud little head went up. "I told you long ago that I always did what I wanted. If I take a chance, I'm willing to pay for it. I'm not afraid."

"Because you've never suffered. You've never had to take punishment."

"Have you?"

"I'm taking it now, in the thought of our separation. Pat, for God's sake let me get free, if it is only to be ready, in case——"

"No; no; no!" she denied vehemently. "I won't be—captured, compelled. You can go if you want to, as soon as you want to."

"Pat!"

"Yes; I know." Her lips brushed his cheek in sweet contrition. "That was mean of me. But I just—don't—want—to—marry you." She spaced the words with rhythmic deliberation. "I don't want to marry anybody. . . . And have a lot of kids. . . . And look like Con does now. She *waddles*. . . . Cary, were you her lover?" she demanded abruptly.

"No!"

"I couldn't *bear* it if you had been. But you'd say that anyway, wouldn't you? Even to me?"

"It's quite true. I never was."

"If anyone asked you that about me you'd swear by all your gods you weren't. Wouldn't you?"

"Yes."

"You'd lie about it? I *hate* to think of your lying. I wonder whether I would if it was put up to me or whether I'd admit that we are lovers." She brooded darkly for a moment over the word. "I didn't mean to be, you know," she added naively.

"Whatever fault there was is mine," he claimed hoarsely. "If there is any just God——"

She slipped her fingers over his lips, cutting him short. "Don't, Cary. Don't say 'if.' Of course there is."

"Then He will hold me responsible; not you."

She rose, giving her shoulders the quaint, sliding wriggle with which she was wont to slough off, symbolically, problems too troublesome for solution. "Oh, if those things are going to happen, they happen," she muttered. "That's the fate part of it. But I do suppose we can't go on forever. We'll crash, some way."

"Does anyone suspect? Dee?"

"I don't think so. She's got troubles enough of her own these days. If it's anyone, it's Con. She's been asking some snoopy kind of questions."

"What questions?"

"Oh, I don't know. I told her to go to the devil; that I was over twelve, and she told me I'd better remember particularly that I was."

"I don't like that," said he.

"Oh, well; I don't like it much, myself. But what can she do?"

"Talk."

"Not outside the family. Con isn't that kind. She might tell Fred."

"That would be a pleasant complication," he observed grimly.

"There will be more and more complications all the time," she fretted. "If you only weren't married!"

"But I thought——" he began eagerly.

"Then there wouldn't be any kick. We could be supposed to be engaged. I suppose we *would* be engaged!" she added brightly, as if a new thought had struck her.

"Being engaged implies being married eventually," he pointed out.

"Not these days," she retorted. "It doesn't hold you up for anything and we could snap out of it when we got good and ready. Only—this isn't the kind of thing you can snap out of, is it?" A cloud darkened the vivacity of

her face. "We're terrible boobs, Cary. . . . Let's stop it."

"That's wholly in your hands, dear love."

"Yes," she said discontentedly; "you've always put everything up to me; let me go my own way—that's why I've gone so far. I wonder if you knew that was the way to get me. You're so dam' clever. . . . Like what's-his-name—Mephistoph—no, Macchiavelli, wasn't it?" She dropped to the floor in front of him, clasped her hands over his knee, turned upward a shadowy and bewitching face, speaking in a lowered voice. "Listen, dear. Next week I'm going back to Philadelphia, to finish out my visit with Cissie. But—I won't go to Cissie's, not till the next day. We'll have that time together; that'll be our good-bye. And then you must go away."

"If you wish it so," he assented steadily.

"I *don't* wish it so. But it's got to come some time. You say so yourself."

"Yes; it's got to come some time. Unless——"

"I know the unless. I don't say I'll never send for you to come back. I might."

"I'll never come back except with my freedom. And if you send for me it must be for good and all."

"I wish I could, Cary. I wish I were sure," she said wistfully. She jumped to her feet. "Tell me good-night," she commanded, holding out her arms. "And you're to come early to-morrow and take me for a long walk."

Overnight, luck, which had so befriended the lovers, turned against them. They returned from their morning's tramp, weary but elate with the vigour of strong sunshine and woodland air. Pat, her glorious eyes welling light, paused by the open library window.

"Is there anything in the world that we haven't talked to a finish to-day, Cary?" she demanded, laughing.

"Nothing, dearest."

"Yet to-morrow we'll have just as much to talk about as if we'd never spoken a word to each other. It's rather wonderful, isn't it? What makes us that way?"

"Companionship. The rarest thing in life or love."

She swung herself in by the window. "Come on, companion," she invited. As he followed, she detached a few sprays from the huge cluster of wild purple violets at her belt, and set them in his coat. "Decoration of companionship," she said. "And"—she stretched up and kissed his lips—"reward for a happy morning."

There was a stifled exclamation. Constance rose from the depths of the big arm chair facing away from them and confronted the pair. Pat burst into harsh laughter.

"Trapped!" she exclaimed.

Constance's face with its strained, expectant, apprehensive expression of imminent motherhood, was white. "Pat, I think you'd better leave me with Mr. Scott," she said.

"I don't," snapped Pat. "If you've got anything to say, say it." Her eyes burned sombrely, angrily. She was furious with her sister for having surprised her.

A puzzled, helpless look came over Constance's face. "I wouldn't have believed——" she began lamentably. "How long has this been going on?"

"None of your business," returned Pat coolly.

"It will be father's business. I shall phone him now."

"Wait, Connie," put in Scott with quiet authoritative-ness. "Wouldn't it be as well to consider consequences before making more trouble than can perhaps be undone?"

"You're afraid, are you? Well, you can run."

"I shall stay here, if you phone, until Mr. Fentriss comes."

Constance swayed, irresolute, uncertain on her feet. "How far has this gone?" she muttered.

Scott rallied his defences. "You're not to think that this is just a casual, cheap flirtation," he said. "If I could make you understand how deeply and honestly I love Pat——"

"Honestly!" echoed Constance with scorn.

"I won't split words with you. And for myself I've no excuses to make. I ought to have held myself better in hand. But as for this sort of thing—my kissing Pat—it's the first time and it will be——"

"Oh, piffle!" Pat's reckless voice broke in. "Tell her the truth, Cary."

Constance looked from one to the other. Her lips quivered, curled down at the corners like a grieved baby's. She began to sob in short, quick, strangled catches of the breath. Suddenly a dreadful look convulsed her face. She pressed her hands down upon her abdomen.

"Oh!" she cried. "Ah-h-h-h. The pain! Pat! I'm——"

Scott jumped to catch her, barely in time to break the fall. He eased her into the chair. Pat was beside him instantly.

"Phone for Bobs. Quick! Tell him to get Dr. Courcey. No You go for Courcey, it'll save time. Second house a-round the corner. Tell him to bring everything. All his instruments and a nurse. Don't come back. I'll write you."

As he hurried to the door he heard a shriek, then Pat's strong, soothing voice:

"All right, Con, old girl. The doctor'll be here in five minutes."

Such was their parting, one of life's sardonic emendations to the plots and plans of lovers.

CHAPTER XXIX

"**SOME** kind of internal explosion has taken place in our little family, dear one (wrote Robert Osterhout to his dead love); and is still taking place, which is rather a deliberate method for an explosion. They are keeping me out of it; even Pat will not confide in me. Therefore I infer that it is not so much her trouble as the others'. Con's baby is now six months old; she had a bad time of it but the son is a lusty creature. About the time of his birth there was a quarrel between Con and Pat not wholly made up yet. But while Con was so ill, Pat stood by, a tower of strength. From the way in which she gave up everything to look after Con and her household, I was almost ready to suspect a touch of remorse. But what about? There was the contemporaneous phenomenon of Cary Scott going away so abruptly, quite without explanation. I ask myself whether it is possible that the old fire flamed up between Con and him and Pat was in some way involved. A tangled skein!

"Dee troubles me, too. She has grown so subdued and inert. Her devotion to James would explain it, to a casual observer. It isn't enough for me. There is something else. She withdraws from me, too; but she has always given me less of her confidence than the others. It is a sort of shyness, and at times it hurts. I so long to help her. But you can't help another person who lives in a fourth dimension by herself.

"Pat is back in the rush and whirl of things, going faster than ever, but she does not seem to be getting as much fun out of it as of old. She is as little comprehensible as ever."

To Pat herself, her mental processes were difficult of comprehension. It was now six months since she and Cary Scott had so strangely and inconsequentially parted and he had gone back to Europe. On the whole, she did very well without him; but that there was a gap she could not deny to herself. Being uncompromisingly what she was, she filled it with other masculine interests. Rather to her surprise she did not find herself specially tempted to venture upon forbidden ground with any other man. The barriers once down, she had supposed that self-control would be more difficult. But curiosity is an important component part of sex-attraction to the untried, and her curiosity was appeased. Perhaps, too, Scott had been right in imputing to her an instinctive quality of virginity, constantly at war against but not incompatible with her passionate temperament.

Certainly the substitute interests seemed dull and insufficient as compared with her association with Scott. At times she missed intolerably that unique understanding and companionship which he had given her, and these times became more instead of less frequent as the weeks lengthened out, which was both unexpected and perturbing. She was seriously annoyed with him, too, because he had respected religiously her injunction against writing, and when, three months after his departure, she herself had written lifting the embargo, he had returned, after a long silence, a single sentence:

“When you send for me I will come; but you must be ready to accept all and give all.”

Choosing to interpret this as an attempt to bully her she was properly wrathful. By way of logical reprisal (though how it was to affect him she would have found it difficult to say) she “stepped on the gas,” as she would

have put it, and speeded up an already sufficient pace. Local eruptions followed.

"All the old cats are squalling their heads off at me," she complained to Osterhout.

"What would you expect?" said the philosophical doctor.

"Of course *you'd* take that side," retorted the aggrieved Pat. "Why should they?"

"For one item, the broken Vandegrift-Mercer engagement."

"I didn't do it!" disclaimed Pat. But she dimpled a little.

"You're popularly credited with having had a hand in it, not to say a face."

"Don't be coarse, Bobs. What right had Bess Vandegrift to be sticking *her* blotchy face between the curtains——"

"What right had you to be kissing Bess's best young feller?"

"Liar yourself, Bobs! I didn't kiss him. He kissed me."

"It's a fine distinction. Maybe a shade too fine for Bess."

"I haven't kissed a man," declared Pat virtuously, "that is to say really kissed, since—well, never mind that," with hasty but belated discretion. "I didn't want Harry to kiss me. Troo-woo-wooly, Bobs. Though I did suspect that he might get interesting and try. . . . She's a sob, anyway."

"Then, there's Stanley Johnston——"

"All off. Tackles too hard!" said Pat.

"And Mark Denby. You keep him rushing back and forth between here and Baltimore like a demented drummer."

"Oh, Mark's like the Pig that forgot he was Educated. He doesn't count."

"Who does count at the present moment?"

"Nobody. That's the big trouble," said Pat fretfully. "They none of 'em give *me* any thrill. I'm bored, Bobs."

"Pose of youth," opined Bobs.

Herein he was wrong. Pat really was bored, though she would not admit to herself the reason, deep and effective in the background of her willful soul. Life was flat, stale, tasteless. Men were either unenterprising guinea-pigs or bellowing rhinoceroses. Women were cats. She loathed the tame and monotonous world. It was boredom, combined with a provocative accidental discovery, that led her to the reckless adventure of the Washington Heights flat and Edna Carroll.

In an earlier age the Fentriss family would have referred to Edna Carroll with hushed voices, if at all, as "that woman." In this enlightened and tolerant time she was humorously characterised by the three girls as "Ralph's flossie." Little was known of her. She lived somewhere outside the social pale and Fentriss's liaison with her had endured for many years. Constance was sure that she was of the flamboyant, roystering, chorus-girl type. Dee inclined to the soft and babyish siren. Pat speculated rangingly, and had more than once endeavoured to pump Osterhout, with notable lack of success. From some unlocatable purlieu of gossip had issued the rumour that Ralph Fentriss was going to marry her, perhaps had already done so secretly. Constance was outraged. Dee was cynically amused, but skeptical. Pat was hotly excited.

Entering the city by one of the upper ferries one day in search of a dressmaker's assistant, recreant in the matter of a dinner gown, the youngest daughter was

startled to see her father's car drawn up opposite a pleasant looking apartment house on a quiet side street. At three-thirty in the afternoon! The truth leapt to her mind. Profusely blooming flowers made beautiful the third floor window ledge; there, Pat decided, was the nest of the bird. Fearing that her father might emerge and find her, she hastened away.

On the following morning, full of delightful tremors and keen anticipations—for this would be something, indeed, to tell the girls—she returned and pressed the third button in the entry. The light click of the release almost sent her scuttling out, but she gathered her resolution, composed a demure face for herself, and mounted the stairs. In the top hallway stood a slim, tailor-made woman with glasses pushed up on her forehead. Pat at once made up her mind that she was attractive in an alert, bird-like way.

“Whom are you looking for?” asked the woman pleasantly.

Pat liked her voice. “Does Mrs. Fentriss live here?”

“*Who?*” said the woman in a tone which made Pat regret that she had chosen that particular form of opening.

Pat faltered out the enquiry again, not knowing what else to do. The other's brown and dancing eyes grew formidably cold.

“Why do you ask for Mrs. Fentriss?”

“I thought this was where she lived.”

“There is no Mrs. Fentriss here.”

“Perhaps I've got the wrong apartment.”

“No. I think you have the right one. Who are you?”

Entire frankness appeared to the intruder the method of sense and safety. “I'm Pat. Patricia Fentriss.”

“I thought so. By what right do you come here?”

Two tiny spots of reddish flame shone in the wine-dark eyes. Pat decided that she was *very* attractive.

"Please don't be angry with me."

"You're hardly here as an emissary of the family, I suppose."

"No. I—I just came."

"In that case hadn't you better just go again?"

"If you tell me to," said Pat, downcast and humble.

The other hesitated. "I can't conceive what you mean by this visit," she said with severity, into which, however, had crept a mitigating quality. "Was it just vulgar curiosity?"

Pat nodded so vigorously that her hair flicked forward about her face like wind-whipped silk ribbons.

"You're frank, at any rate. I like that." Abruptly she stepped back. "As you're here, come in."

Pat obeyed. "You're awfully good to let me."

"Am I? That remains to be seen." She led the way to an airy, daintily furnished front room, a conspicuous feature of which was a big arm chair with a drawing board across the arms.

"What's that?" asked Pat with lively curiosity.

"My work."

"Oh! Are you an artist?"

"Of a sort. I make fashion drawings."

"How diverting!" Pat was recovering herself. "Can't you go on working while we talk?"

"Are we going to talk?" The corners of the firm mouth crinkled up, a dimple affirmed its existence, the brown eyes twinkled, and Pat incontinently and most improperly fell in love with her hostess.

"I think you're *too* delightful!"

"I can be quite otherwise, on occasion—to impertinent people."

"Don't scare me again," begged Pat. "I won't be impertinent. Though I want to be, terribly."

"As that is what you came for, perhaps you'd better be. Why did you ask for Mrs. Fentriss?"

"Isn't that what—what you're called?"

"Certainly not."

An inspiration struck Pat. "We heard that you'd married Dad."

The hostess replaced her glasses, seated herself, and began to ink in a sketch. "Did you?"

"Is it true?"

"No. We are not married."

No good, that line. A chilling thought followed. "He isn't likely to be coming here, is he?"

"Why? Are you afraid of being caught?"

"I can't think of anything more poisonous."

"Don't be alarmed. He couldn't get in if he did come."

Pat searched her mind for movie evidence. "Hasn't he got a key?"

"No. Why not be honest and ask directly what's in your mind?"

"I—I don't know how," confessed the visitor.

"For a singularly forward young person you don't get on very fast. How old are you?"

"Nineteen. But I know everything about—about everything."

"If you don't it isn't for lack of enterprise," was the grim reply. "And what you don't know, you suspect. In this case your suspicions are quite correct. But it doesn't follow that Ralph—that your father comes and goes at will here, in *my* place." There was the slightest emphasis on the possessive.

"Oh! I thought they—they always had—had a key, and—and——"

"And paid the rent, and filled the place with luxury and orchids, cigarettes and champagne. You've been reading cheap novels. The rotten-minded little fiction writers don't know everything. They don't know anything about women."

Pat leaned forward. "Are you going to marry Dad?"

The artist's face hardened. "You were sent here to find that out. Well, then, I am."

"I'm glad," said Pat simply and sincerely.

The older woman took off her glasses, rose, walked across to the lounge where Pat was seated and set her delicate hands on the girl's shoulders, staring into her face with an inscrutable expression. "Why do you say that?"

"Because it's true. I'm crazy about you—already."

The other sat down limply. "What kind of a person *are* you?"

"An honest one."

"Then I'll be, too. I'm not going to marry Ralph. I can't. I've got a husband. He's no good. I haven't lived with him for years. I had a devil of a life. I was going to kill myself when I met Ralph."

"Were you so poor?" asked Pat sympathetically.

"Poor? Do you think it was a question of money with me that took me to Ralph?" retorted the other with slow anger.

"No. I don't know why I said that. But you're so young."

"So is he," was the defiant reply. "He's eternally young. That's what I love in him. I loved him the first time I ever saw him and I've never stopped. But if you've come here looking for a common kept-woman——"

"I haven't. Oh, I haven't!" broke in Pat, squirming.

"Anyway, you know all about me now. All except my

name, Edna Carroll. What are you going to tell your family?"

"Not a word."

"Aren't you? You're a strange little witch."

"Do you like me a little?" asked Pat, slant-eyed and demure.

"Yes; I do. You're very like Ralph in some ways."

"Then may I come again?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I should have thought you might understand without my drawing you a diagram."

"Conventional stuff!" scoffed the girl. "How do you get that way? I'm coming anyway—Edna."

Edna Carroll laughed uncertainly. "I'm insane to let you. But I'd love to have you. What would your father think?"

"He's not going to think at all. We won't give him the chance. Will you ask me to your parties?"

"How do you know I give parties?"

"You're the kind that always draws people around them. Besides," added the shrewd Pat, "there's a violin and a clarinet on the piano. I don't suppose you play them *all*. And I'm mad about music."

"Inheritance," murmured Edna softly. She let her darkling glance rest on the piano bench where Ralph Fen-triss had so often sat to make his music. "Very well. I'll ask you sometime."

She was as good as her word. It was there that Pat met Leo Stenak.

CHAPTER XXX

THE episode between Leo Stenak and Patricia Fentriss was headlong as a torrent. She heard him before she saw him; heard, rather, his violin, expression and interpretation of his innermost self. The raucous sweetness of his tone, which he overemphasises and sentimentalises, and which is the cardinal defect of his striking and uneven style, floated out to her as she stood, astonished, in the exterior hallway of Edna Carroll's flat.

When it died into silence, she supposed that the number was over and entered just as he was resuming. Her first impression was of a plump, sallow, carelessly dressed youth with hair almost as shaggy as her own, and the most wildly luminous eyes she had ever looked into, who turned upon her an infuriated regard and at once pointedly dropped his bow. His savage regard followed her while she crossed the room to speak to her hostess.

This was no way to treat high-spirited Pat. Quite deliberately she took off gloves and wrap, handed them to the nearest young man and remarked to the violinist:

"It's very nice of you to wait. I'm quite fixed now, thank you."

A vicious snort was the only response. The accompanist who had trailed along a bar or two before appreciating the interruption, took up his part, and the melody again filled the air. In spite of her exacerbated feelings, Pat recognised the power and distinction of the performance. Nevertheless, she refrained from joining in the applause which followed the final note.

At once the musician crossed to her, which was exactly what she had intended.

"You don't like music," he accused, glowering.

"I love it," retorted Pat.

"Then you don't like my music."

"Better than your manners."

"I care nothing for manners. I am not a society puppet."

"If you were, perhaps you would have waited to be presented."

"I am Leo Stenak," said he impressively.

If not unduly impressed, Pat was at least interested. She remembered the name from having heard Cary Scott speak of a youthful violinist named Stenak who had appeared at a Red Cross concert the year before and for whom he had predicted a real career, "if he can get over his cubbish egotism and self-satisfaction."

"I've heard of you," she remarked.

"The whole world will hear of me presently," he replied positively. "Where did you hear?"

"From a friend of mine, Cary Scott."

Stenak searched his memory. "I never heard of him. An amateur?"

"Yes."

"Amateurs don't count," was his superb pronouncement.

"Any friend of mine counts," said Pat coldly, and turned her back upon him. He flounced away exactly like a disgruntled schoolgirl.

"Don't mind Leo, Pat," said her hostess, coming over to her with a smile of amusement. "He's a spoiled child; almost as much spoiled as you are."

"I don't mind him," returned the girl equably, but inside she was tingling with the sense of combat and of the

man's intense and salient personality. She was sure that he would come back to her.

Late in the evening he did, with a manifest effect of its being against his judgment and intention, which delighted her mischievous soul. Most of the others had left.

"They tell me you sing, Miss Fentriss," he began abruptly.

"A little," replied Pat, who had been devoting what she regarded as hard and grinding work to her music for a six-month.

"Rag-time, I suppose." Contemptuously.

"And others!"

"Know the *Chanson de Florian*?"

"Of course."

"Well, it's light sort of trash, but it has a melody. I've written my own obligato to it. If you like I'll play it with you."

"I don't like, at all, thank you."

"You owe me something for spoiling my andante when you came in. I played wretchedly after that. You did something to me; I was too conscious of you to get back into the music. Won't you sing for me?" His manner was quite amenable now; his splendid eyes held and made appeal to her.

"But I'm an amateur," she answered, still obdurate. "And amateurs don't count."

"It isn't every amateur I'd ask. Come on!" He caught up his violin. "Ready, Carlos?" he said to the accompanist.

Pat gave her little, reckless laugh. "Oh, *very* well!"

She sang. It seemed to her that she was in exceptionally good voice, inspired and upheld by the golden stream

of counter-melody which surged from the violin. At the close he looked at her intently and in silence.

"Well?" queried Pat, thrilling with expectancy of merited praise.

"You sing rottenly," he replied with entire seriousness.

"Thank you!" Pat's sombre eyes smarted with tears of mortification.

"But you have a voice. Some of the notes—pure music. Your method—horrible. You should practice."

"I've been practicing. A terrible lot."

"Pffooh! Fiddle-faddling. You amateurs don't know what work is!"

"Do you think my voice is worth working with?"

"Perhaps. It has beauty. You are beautiful, yourself. Where do you live?"

Pat laughed. "What's the big idea, Mr. Stenak?"

"I will take you home when you go. I wish to talk to you."

"I'm not going home. I'm staying with friends downtown."

"Then I will take you there. May I?"

"Yes; if you'll play once more for me first."

Though it was quite a distance to her destination, Stenak did not offer to get a taxi. He observed that as the night was pleasant, it would be nice to walk part way, to which Pat, somewhat surprised, assented. Immediately, and with no more self-consciousness than an animal, he became intimately autobiographical. He told her that he was a Russian, a philosophic anarchist, with no belief in or use for society's instituted formulas: marriage, laws, government—nothing but the eternal right of the individual to express himself to the utmost in his chosen medium of life. All his assertiveness had left him; he talked honestly and interestingly. Pat caught glimpses

of a personality as simple and, in some ways, as innocent as a child's; credulous, eager, resolute, confident, trusting, and illumined with a lambent inner fire.

"I was rude to you at first," he confessed. "I am sorry. But I could not help it. I am like that."

"You shouldn't be," she chided.

"Tell me what I should be and I will be it," he declared. "You could make me anything. When you came into the room, even though I was angry, there was a flash of understanding between us. You felt it, too?"

"I felt something," admitted she. "But I was angry, myself. How silly of you to give yourself the airs of genius!"

"I have genius," he averred quietly.

Such profound conviction was in his tone that Pat was ready to believe him. As they turned to the elevated stairs he asked:

"Will you come to my studio soon for music?"

"Who else will be there?"

"Nobody. Just you and I."

"No. I couldn't do that. Ask Mrs. Carroll and I'll come."

"Why should you not come alone? Are you afraid of me? That would be strange."

"Of course I'm not afraid of you. But——"

"I will not make love to you. I will only make music to you."

Pat reflected that it might well prove to be much the same thing. When she left him it was with a half promise.

Before the week was out she had gone to his studio. Within the fortnight she had been there half a dozen times. She was drawn back to him by the lure of his marvellous music—"I play for no one as I play for you," he said—and by the fascination of his strange and single-

minded personality. Not only did he play for her, but he made her sing, experimenting with her voice, pointing out her errors, instructing her, laughing to shame her impatiences and little mutinies, himself patient with the endurance and insight of the true artist. Ever responsive to genuine quality of whatever kind, Pat let herself become more and more involved in imagination and vagrant possibilities.

In the matter of love-making he was faithful to his word. While she was his guest he never so much as offered to kiss her, rather to her resentful disappointment, to tell the truth. But when, one November afternoon, he was walking with her to where her car was waiting, he said without preface:

"Colleen, I love you." He had taken to calling her Colleen after hearing her sing an Irish ballad of that title. Pat liked it.

She gave her veiled and sombre glance. "Do you *really* love me?"

"You know it. And you?"

"I don't know."

"I think you do."

"I think it would be very stupid of me to fall in love with you."

"Why?"

"We're not the same kind at all. Some day I shall marry and settle down and be good and happy and correct, ever after. You don't believe in marriage."

"I believe in love. And in faith to be kept between two who love. Don't you?"

"When you play to me I do. You could make me believe anything then."

"Then come back, Colleen, and let me play to you."

"No," said Pat, in self-protective panic. She could not make herself look at him.

"When are you coming again?"

"I don't know," she answered, and popped into her car as if it were sanctuary. Wayward thoughts of his flame-deep eyes, his persuasive speech, the subtle passion of his music made restless many nights for her thereafter. Edna Carroll, suspecting the progress of the affair, questioned her.

"What are you up to with Leo?"

"Just playing around."

"With fire?"

"He's got it all right, the fire. I wonder if it's the divine fire?"

"How seriously are you thinking of him, Pat?" Edna's piquant face was anxious. "You wouldn't marry him?"

"Are you afraid for me?"

"No. For him."

"You're too flattering!"

"I'm in earnest. You'd ruin him. You're too selfish and too capricious to be the mate of a genius. And he's going to be a great genius, Pat, if he keeps himself straight and undivided. You'd divide him. He's quite mad over you; told me so himself."

"How do you know I'm not mad over him?"

"God forbid! It would never last with you. Because he isn't your kind, you'd grow away from him and he'd be wretched and that would react on his music."

"And you think more of his music than of me," pouted Pat.

The artist in Edna Carroll, humble and slight in degree though it were, spoke out the true creed of all artistry which is one. "Not of him. Of his genius. Where you

find genius you have to think of it and cherish it above everything."

"Above love?" said Pat. She understood enough of this pure passion to be a little daunted.

"Above everything," reaffirmed the other.

"You needn't be afraid. He doesn't want to marry me."

"Whether he does or not, it's a dangerous fascination for both of you."

Vacillating days followed for Pat. There was a week in which she did not trust herself to see Leo. He telephoned and wrote frantically. She did not answer his letters. But one day she met him fortuitously on the street, and went to the studio with him. There he broke all bounds, poured out the fire of his heart upon her: he loved her, wanted her, needed her; she was part of his genius, without her he could never reach his full artistic stature. She loved him, too; he felt it; he knew it; he defied her to deny it, and she found that, under the compulsion of his presence, she could not. He was going to Boston on the following day, for a week. Would she come and join him, if only for a day? She could make up some tale for her family; pretend to be staying with a friend. And he would take her to a great singing-master, the greatest, a friend of his whom he wanted to hear and try her voice. Wouldn't she trust herself to him and come?

Pat denied him vehemently. But she was stirred and troubled to her own passionate depths by his stormy yet controlled passion. He had not so much as touched her hand.

In the hallway, as they went out, she turned to him and yielded herself into his arms.

"Oh, *well!*" she murmured, her voice fluttering in her

throat. "I don't care. I'll come. Only—don't rush me. Give me time."

They parted with the one kiss of that embrace. Instantly she had agreed, the spirit of adventure rose within her. She was recklessly jubilant.

Three days of alternating morbid self-examination and flushed excitement followed. She looked forward to the meeting not so much with conscious physical anticipation as with the sense of something vivid and bold and new coming, as relief, into the too monotonous pattern of life.

The rendezvous was arranged by letter. She was to take a late afternoon train, and he was to be at the Back Bay to meet her.

Looking from the window as the train pulled in she saw him restlessly pacing the platform on the wrong side. He had on a new overcoat which did not fit him and was incongruously glossy as compared with his untidy hair and rumpled soft hat. As his coat slumped open, she was conscious of an unpressed suit underneath. Probably greasy! At the moment he dropped one of the brand new gloves in his hand—she could not recall ever having seen him wear gloves—and bent awkwardly to recover it. His head protruded; his collar, truant from its retaining rear button, hunched mussily up, and she looked down with a dismal revulsion of the flesh, upon an expanse of sallow, shaven neck.

Unbidden, vividly intrusive, there rose to the eyes of her quickening imagination the image of Cary Scott, always impeccable of dress and carriage, hard-knit of frame, exhaling the atmosphere of smooth skin and hard muscle. In fancy she breathed the very aroma of him, clean, tingling, masculine, and felt again the imperative claim of his arms.

From the groping figure below her, glamour fell like a decaying garment. She forgot the genius, the inner fire; beheld only the outer shell, uncouth, pulpy, nauseous to her senses.

With cheeks afire and chin high, she walked up the aisle, turned into the ladies' room and found safe refuge there, until the train moved on. At the South Station she took the next train back to New York. The image of Cary Scott bore her unsolicited company. She went straight to Edna Carroll with the story. Edna was alarmed, relieved, puzzled.

"But, after going so far, why—why—why?" she demanded.

In response Pat delivered one of those final and damning sentences upon man which women express only to women:

"When I saw him that way I knew that his socks would be dirty."

CHAPTER XXXI

"I'm off of men," confidently wrote Pat in her diary. "There's nothing to it for me. From now on I'm going to be so nice and careful and mind-your-steppy that the place won't know me. All the old cats in Dorrisdale will purr when I come around. I think I shall take up slumming. Anyway, no more flutters for little Pat. I've reformed."

In proof of which she comported herself with great circumspection for a space of several months, to the surprise of all and the discomfiture of sundry amatory youths of her circle. The word went about that Pat Fentriss was slowing up. While as much fun as ever in a crowd, she was less approachable in a corner. Pat, her peculiar radiance deepening and ripening, was content with the crowd. Her quickening intelligence was impatient of the callowness and shallowness of her contemporaries among the youth of the suburb.

To fill her time a new and purely unselfish interest had come into her life; not so showy as the slumming which she had considered, but of far more practical beneficence. At the time of T. Jameson James's accident she had devoted herself with centred enthusiasm to the sufferer and his household. Later as the tragedy became a commonplace to her mind, she drifted wide of it. It was natural to the shallow fervours and shifting interests of her youth that she should unconsciously drop out of mind that silent and shadowed personality in the big house across the town. When she did think of it, temporary self-reproach would send her there two or three times in

a week. But there seemed to be "nothing that she could do"; and she would drop away again.

It was an episode of one of these visits that changed her attitude. On her arrival Dee had told her that Jim was probably asleep; she could creep up softly and see; the attendant who pushed the wheeled-chair was out. Tip-toeing to the open door Pat peered in at the crack. T. Jameson James lay very stiff and still on the window divan, apparently sleeping. Pat was just about to turn away with a sense of relief when she noticed the hand nearest her. It was so tightly clenched that the flesh around the nails was white. His head turned quite gradually, bringing the contour of the face into view. She saw that the eyes were closed, but in the corners two drops of water gathered and grew, slowly, slowly, as if wrung from the very core of a soul's repressed agony. The drops broke, darted, trickled down like rain along a windowpane. A slight shudder lifted his breast. Then he was immobile again.

Pat crept away until she reached the refuge of the lower floor. She ran into the garden, kept on running to the far extent of the grounds, flung herself down and so lay. She did not collapse; she did not cry. But presently—unpoetic and anti-climactic though it be to record plain facts—the stress of sudden emotion on top of a hearty luncheon had its logical effect. Pat was violently sick.

As soon as she recovered breath and poise, she returned to the house with a plan in mind, stamped noisily upstairs and entered the sick room.

"Hello, Jimmie-jams!"

"Hello, Pat." His face lighted up a little; she was miserably conscious that he had always welcomed her with a smile.

"How are you feeling?"

"All right." This was his invariable formula.

"Don't lie to me!" She closed the door, lowered the window, and turned upon him. "Jimmie!"

"Well?"

"Swear!"

"All right. I swear. What's the secret?"

"Not that kind of swear. Cuss. Rip it out. Blast the ceiling off the roof. Let yourself go."

He peered into her face. It was solemn, intent. "I don't know what——" he began. Then he broke off and let himself go. Such virulent, vitriolic, blazing, throbbing profanity Pat had never dreamt of. It comprehended the known universe and covered the history of the cosmos, past, present, and future. When he had finished and lay back exhausted, she enquired:

"Feel better, don't you?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"I saw you a few minutes ago when your eyes were holding in. But you couldn't help—there was——" She touched her own eyelids.

"You're a —— liar, Pat!" exploded the correct and punctilious T. Jameson James.

"That's right. Go to it if you haven't got it all out," approved Pat.

"No; I'm through. Lord, that did me good!"

"Cussing to yourself is no good. You've got to have somebody to listen. Ever let anyone hear you really loosen up before?"

"No. I've always been too—too"—he grinned—"hellish dignified."

"Well, you send for me when you need an audience."

From that time a bond of special sympathy and fellowship was established between the life so disastrously

wrecked and the life so triumphantly burgeoning. Every morning after breakfast Pat called him on the phone and every noon she came over for an hour's chat, until Dee, grateful beyond her self-contained power to express, threatened to sue her sister for alienation of her husband's affections.

Nothing, of however much appeal to Pat, was permitted to interfere with this regimen. Through this it was that she had her quarrel with Monty Standish.

After three years of hard-working athletic obscurity, Standish had suddenly blossomed out into flaming football prominence. His picture appeared in the sporting pages of the metropolitan dailies; his condition was the subject of commentary in the papers, as serious as that accorded to an ailing king. He was of a gallant and alluring type, a bonny lad, handsome, spirited, good-humoured, well-mannered, sluggish of mind as he was alert of body, but with a magnetism almost as imperative as Pat's own. He had quite withheld his homage from her, ostentatiously refusing to compete in the circle of her adorers, so she was the more surprised and gratified when he asked her to join his sister's party for the big game. It cost her a real pang to decline, but when he hotly resented her refusal and demanded an explanation—he was rather spoiled by all the local adulation and newspaper notoriety which were the guerdon of his prowess—Pat declined to be catechised. There was a scene, angry on his part, scornful on hers, and he departed, darkly indicating that if Princeton lost the game on his side of the line the true responsibility for the catastrophe would rest upon her contemptuous shoulders.

How T. Jameson James got wind of the controversy she never knew, but on the day of the game he called her to account.

"Why didn't you go down to Princeton?"

"Didn't want to," she said airily.

"Monty Standish asked you, didn't he?"

"He said something about it."

"They say he's the greatest end we've had for ten years." James was a Princeton alumnus. "He's a good-looking youngster, Pat."

The girl flushed and her eyes shone. "He's a winner to look at," she agreed.

"They tell me you've added him to your collection."

"That's all guff," replied the inelegant Pat.

"Is it? The point is that you wouldn't go because you felt you had to come here. Isn't that so?"

"I didn't want to go, anyway," lied Pat gallantly. "I'm worn with football twice a week."

"Well, you've got to stop spoiling me by coming here every day. It's bad for me; the doctor says so. I won't have it."

"Are you going to close the house to me?" retorted Pat saucily. "You'll have to hire a guard. Go on, swear, Jimmie."

"Oh, you go to the devil!" said the invalid, laughing. "If Princeton loses to-day——"

But Princeton won and Pat was saved from the undying remorse which should (but probably would not) have consumed her spirit had Standish "fallen down" and involved his team in defeat.

He came back the following week-end, a hero of the first calibre, and undertook to ignore Pat at the Saturday dance at which he was unofficial guest of honour. It would have been a more successful attempt if his eyes had not constantly strayed from whatever partner he was with, to follow Pat's pliant and swaying form in the arms of some happier man. On the morrow his stern resolution,

already weakened, was totally melted by a talk which he had with T. Jameson James, who had sent for him ostensibly to ask about the game.

For a front-page newspaper hero he was amazingly humble when he called up Pat to ask if he might come and see her. Pat, her heart swelling with pride and not without a flutter of other emotions, said that he might if he would apologise properly. Mr. Standish did apologise properly and handsomely, and, by the time the apology was concluded, Pat was mildly astonished at finding herself in his arms being fervently kissed and returning the kisses with no less fervour. She was further surprised to find, when he bade her good-night, that she was engaged to him.

But the really astounding feature of the whole matter came when she awoke the next morning to a sense of the prevailing luminosity of the world and the conviction that she was thrillingly in love. She had thought that she was through with all that. For a long time, anyway.

CHAPTER XXXII

THEY had been engaged for four months. On the whole Pat found the status highly satisfactory. Everyone heartily approved the match. Because of Monty's college duties, which pressed sorely upon him as he was having constant difficulty in keeping up, they saw little of each other, a fortunate circumstance, as the glamour of her lover's physical beauty and personal charm persisted in her mind when they were separated, creating a romantic figure, to which no special mental attributes were essential. Had they been thrown more constantly together she might have been disillusioned by the torpid and unimaginative quality of his mind. But in their brief association over week-ends they were surrounded by others, and when they were alone his ardent love-making eked out the scantness of his conversational resources. If, sometimes, Cary Scott's words, "companionship, the rarest thing in life or love," recurred to her, arousing unwelcome questions, she put them away. Scott's image had dimmed again, in the hot radiance of this new attraction; she determinedly kept it far in the background. But there was one unrelenting memory which refused to be permanently immured in the past.

When the time for the wedding was set, mid-June immediately after Monty's graduation (if he succeeded in graduating), she realised that she must face that memory and dispose of it, for her own peace of mind. Her uneasy thoughts turned to Dr. Bobs. Perhaps he could lay the ghost.

"Bobs, what do you really think of Monty?" She had gone to his office, nerved up to the interview.

Osterhout considered. "He means well," was his judicial pronouncement.

"What a rotten thing to say about a girl's best young man! What's the matter with him?"

"Stupid."

"Then you didn't really mean your congratulations."

"Certainly. It's an excellent engagement."

"Am I stupid, Bobs?" she pouted.

"No. But I think you'll be perfectly satisfied with a stupid husband."

"I don't know what makes you so *revolting* to-day!" complained Pat. "I'd be bored to death with a boob around the house, and you know it. He's not stupid."

"If you're satisfied, I am," said the amiable Bobs. "I don't have to live with him. He's a prize beauty all right. *And* rich!"

"There you go again. I don't care. (Defiantly) I love Monty, and that's enough. Anyway I didn't come here to talk about him exactly. It's something else. Bobs, do many girls confess to their doctors?"

Osterhout looked up sharply and frowned. Almost word for word Mona had put that same query to him years before. But Pat's face was more child-like, graver, than that of the lovely, laughing, reckless Mona had been.

"Probably more than to their priests," he made reply. "That's what a doctor is for."

"Yes!" she cried eagerly. "Please be just the Fentriss family physician for a few minutes. Make it easy for me, Bobs dear."

Indefinably his manner changed with his next words, became quietly attentive, soothing, almost impersonal as

he said: "Take your time, Pat. And when you're ready, tell me as much or as little as you wish."

"It isn't too easy—even to you. Can't you guess?"

"Ah," said he, after a pause of scrutiny. "So that's it."

"Don't look at me." She put her hands up as if to shield her face from flame. "Just tell me what to do."

"Are you in trouble?"

"Of course," said she impatiently. "Do you think I'd come bothering you—— Oh, no! Not *that* way. Though it might have happened. Now you *do* know."

"Go on, Pat."

"Aren't you shocked?" Her eyes darted up at him, at once supplicating and defiant, from out the tangle of her vagrant hair.

"Not a bit. We doctors don't judge. We help."

"Oh, Bobs! You *are* divine. I want to know—it's awfully hard to put it—to know whether—if *he'll* know—when we're married."

"He?" Osterhout groped in a murk of bewilderment. "Who?"

"Monty, of course. Don't be *dumb*."

"*Monty*? Isn't Monty the man?"

"Oh, no!"

For the moment Osterhout was startled clean out of his professional attitude. "Who is?" he said sternly.

Instantly Pat was mutinous. "I won't tell you."

"I'm sorry I asked it. It's none of your doctor's affair who he is. You want me to tell you whether your husband, when you marry, will know that you have had experience before."

"Yes," answered Pat under her breath.

"I'll answer you as I always answer that question."

"Always! Have you had it asked you before?"

A slight, melancholy, tolerant smile lifted the corners of the strong mouth. "My dear, every doctor who has had among his patients specimens of the modern, high-strung girl has had that problem put up to him. The answer is simple; no, he won't know—unless you tell him."

She drew a soft breath of relief, but almost at once her face darkened, as the import of his last words made its way to her quick sensitiveness. "Do you want me to tell him?"

"That is not a question for a physician to answer."

Pat stamped her foot. "Stop being one, then. Be Bobs again. Shall I tell him, Bobs?"

"Has he ever told you anything of that nature?"

"No. Perhaps there isn't anything to tell. Though I don't suppose he's exactly one of them dam' virgins. What do you know about him?"

Osterhout gave himself full time to debate the answer within himself before responding. "There was a raid last year on a notorious roadhouse near here. Several of our best youth—if you reckon them by family—were caught. Montgomery Standish was one of them."

"Ugh!" shuddered Pat. "A vile joint like that! Why didn't you tell me before, Bobs?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "You'd have to go pretty wide of your own set to find a boy with a clean record. Monty is no worse than the rest."

"What *beasts* men are!"

"He might say, if he knew anything: 'What crooks girls are!'"

"You don't mean that it's the same thing," said Pat beneath her breath. "He goes to a rotten place, probably drunk——"

"Undoubtedly."

"And—and—— Oh, it makes me sick to think of it! It

isn't the same. I may have been a silly little fool, but—oh, Bobs! Can't you understand?"

"Who was the man, Bambina?"

At the old term of affection her face softened. "Can't you guess, Bobs, dear?" she whispered.

A blinding, burning illumination lighted up his memory of a hundred small, vitally significant facts, against which the sudden certainty stood forth, black and stark.

"Cary Scott, by God!"

Pat's face was set. Her eyes, sombre but fearless, answered him.

"The damned scoundrel!"

"He *isn't*."

"Isn't? A man of his age to come into a house as a friend and seduce an innocent child!"

"He didn't seduce me any more than I seduced him."

"Don't talk infernal nonsense."

"It's true; it's *true*, and you've got to believe it. It was as much my fault as his."

"Was it your fault that he left you, like a coward?"

"He didn't. I sent him away. He wanted to get free and marry me, and he would have done it if I'd let him. He was terribly in love with me, Bobs. Monty doesn't love me that way. Nobody ever will again."

"Well, why wouldn't you marry him?" queried the amazed physician.

"Oh, I don't know." She gave her shoulders the childish petulant wriggle of old, again the *petite gamine* of Scott's patient love. "He's so old."

"Then why in the name——"

"You're full of whys, Bobs. It happened; that's all. Nobody ever knows why nor how in these things, do they? I—I just lost my footing and drew him with me, if you want the truth of it."

"I'm beginning to believe you. But I still think he's——"

She flattened a hand gently across his lips. "No, you don't. He's the best man I've ever known. Except, perhaps, you, Bobs. If you were in Monty's place and I came to you and told the whole thing you'd marry me anyway, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"But you don't think Monty would?"

"I didn't say so. He's very young and—and unformed."

Pat fell into a reverie. "It was really my mind that Cary seduced. He drew my mind into his and—and sort of absorbed it, so that I couldn't get any satisfaction out of other associations. You wouldn't call him a damned scoundrel for that——"

"I'm not so sure I wouldn't."

"—but it's the thing he's most to blame for. It's worse than the other. It goes deeper."

"You're getting profound, Pat, as well as clever." In spite of his perturbation, the doctor smiled. "Though you're talking casuistry."

"I don't know what that is. I'm talking sense. I've almost forgotten that Cary and I were lovers. But there's something way down deep in my mind that he'll never lose his hold on."

"You're in love with him yet, then!"

"I'm not!" she denied vehemently. "I'm in love with Monty. Violently."

"I wish he were ten years older. Or a thousand or so wiser. Then I'd say, 'Tell him the whole thing.' As it is, no. He's marrying your future, not your past. If you're going to play straight with him——"

"Absolutely!" she averred. "I won't look at another man after we're married."

"What about that restlessness of the mind, though?"

"All done with. What's the good? You have more fun if you're stupid. . . . You were always wanting me to marry somebody old enough to be my grandfather, Bobs, but——"

"Ah, yes," he cut in grimly. "Now you're going to answer me some questions. How came you to know that, about my wanting you to marry a man over thirty?"

"If I tell you, you'll be paralysed."

"Go ahead. Paralyse me."

"I read it in your letters."

"What letters?" he asked, stupefied.

"The ones to Mother. Oh, Bobs, I think they were too flawless. No one but a darling like you could have written them."

"Wait a moment." He put his hand to his head. His science-circumscribed world of materialism was toppling about him. "How did you know about them? That I was writing them? Where to find them?"

"Mother told me."

"Mona? Pat, I want the truth."

"I'm giving it to you. Before she died, when I saw her there in New York, she told me how she had made you promise to write and put the letters in the safe; and the real reason was, not that she thought she would ever come back to read them, but she thought you were the wisest and best man in the world, and she knew how fond you were of all of us, and she wanted me to know what you thought and be guided by what you said. I suppose she figured that you'd say more about me that way than you ever would to me. So you did."

Osterhout gave a great laugh, partly of relief, partly of tenderness. "That's so like Mona! Her passion for intrigue, just for the sake of the game itself; her eternal loving cleverness. There are mighty few people, Pat, in whom affection is a thing of the mind as well as the heart. Your mother was one of them."

"So'm I," asserted Pat promptly. "What's the matter now, Bobs?" For his face had altered again, his brow drawing heavily down, his eyes become still and brooding.

"It won't do, Pat. You're not telling me the truth. Not the whole truth. After your mother died, I changed the combination of the safe."

The girl's laugh had a queer, strained quality. "I know you did. What of it?"

"How could you get the letters to read?"

"I couldn't, at first."

"But you claim that you did. How?"

"Well—it was a dream. At least, it must have been a dream. Or else—I don't know. Mother came back one night and took me by the hand and led me into her room to the safe, and when I woke up the door was open and the numbers of the combination were in my brain as clearly as if someone had just spoken them in my ear."

"Were you frightened, Pat?"

"Not a bit. Isn't it strange? After that I could open it myself, any time."

"Pat, do you really think," he began hoarsely, and stopped.

"Do I think it was her spirit? I don't know. It was *something*."

"It was something," he repeated. "Something from the other side. A lifting of the curtain. For you; not for me. Well," he sighed, "no more letters."

"Why not?"

"Why should there be? Whatever I've got to say to you I can say direct, now that the secret is out. It was really to you that I was writing all the time, so it appears."

"It wasn't. It was to her. How do you know she doesn't know; doesn't read them—and love them? You must keep them up, Bobs."

He shook his head. But his veiled glance roved to the mahogany desk in the corner. Instantly Pat interpreted it:

"There's one there. An unfinished one. Let me read it."

"As you like. It's only just begun. About your engagement. It doesn't matter anyway now. A lost illusion."

From a locked secret drawer he took the letter, only a single sheet. An inspiration came to Pat. "I'm going to add a P. S. May I?"

"Yes."

Seating herself she ran through the few brief words, then wrote busily. Having finished she leaned back in her chair to consider her companion.

"Bobs," she announced with deliberation: "I think I'll let you read what I've written. Shall I?"

He held out his hand. She put the missive into it. He read:

"Dearest: Bobs thinks he is still in love with you. He means to be faithful, poor old boy. But he really loves Dee. She knows it, way inside her; the way women know. And she is coming to care for him, too. That is why she is so shy and stand-offish with him; not a bit like Con and me. But he hasn't the sense to see it. It's time he knew it; that both of them knew it. Poor, brave old Jimmie-jams is going to pass out one of these days, and

be rid of all his pains. He knows it; he told me last week—we're the greatest pals ever—that he wouldn't last a year. There was someone else that Dee was crazy about; but she's given that up. It's over. So when Jimmie-jams passes along it's up to Bobs, if he's a man and not an old fossil, to step forward. Dee's been a widow long enough. That is what you would want for them both, isn't it, dear? I know it is."

Osterhout walked over to the window. His face was white, his bulky frame trembling. The betraying sheet of paper fluttered away from his fingers. Suddenly warm arms were about his neck; soft lips were pressed to his cheek; a breath that wavered against his ear like a fragrant breeze of spring formed the words, gaily spoken:

"Oh, Bobs! Who cares a darn for a lost illusion when the reality is so much sweeter!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

FROM the time when Dr. Osterhout assured her of her secret's safety, Pat knew that she must tell her fiancé, before the wedding. Some quirk of feminine psychology would have justified her in concealment, so long as there was risk. The chances of the game! But to go forward upon the path of marriage in perfect safety and with an unsuspecting mate—that was, in her mind, *mean*. Curiosity, too, that restless, morbid craving to know what exciting thing would result, pressed her. The daring experimentalist was rampant within her. How would Monty take it? What would he do?

. . . How should she tell him? . . .

Opportunity paved the way. A group of her set were at Holiday Knoll on a Saturday evening, discussing the local sensation of the day. Generously measured highballs had been distributed, and in the dim conservatory, lighted only by the glow of cigarettes, they discussed the event. A betrothed girl of another suburb had committed suicide after the breaking of her engagement and gossip ascribed the tragedy to the inopportune discovery of an old love affair. With the freedom of the modern flapper, Margaret Thorne, half lying in the arms of Nick Torrance on the settee, declared the position:

"It was the Teddy Barnaby business. Two years ago we all thought they were engaged."

"Weren't they?" asked someone.

"More or less," asseverated the sprightly Miss Thorne. "Chiefly more, from all accounts. Then Johnny Dupuy came here to live, and she shifted her young affections to him and caught him."

"Do you think he found out about Teddy?"

"Sure—like—a—Bible."

"How?"

"Why pick on me for a hard one like that?"

"Perhaps she told him," suggested one of the other girls.

"She wouldn't be such a boob; no girl would," offered a languid girlish voice.

"It'd be the square thing to do." This was a masculine opinion, and jejune, even for that crowd.

"Don't know—yah!" declared Miss Thorne, meaning to express her contempt for this view. "It was up to Dupuy to look in the mare's mouth before he bought."

The discussion played about the subject with daring sallies and prurient relish, the final conclusion of the majority being that the fiancé had "got wise" and the girl had killed herself because he broke the engagement, "as any fellow would" (Monty Standish's contribution, this last).

"What if she did go to him and own up?" suggested Selden Thorpe.

"It'd be just the same," opined Standish. "He'd have to quit."

"Oh, I don't know. It doesn't follow."

"Wouldn't you?"

"I don't know that I would. It depends."

"You'd be a pretty poor sort of fish if you wouldn't."

"Maybe, if I thought as you do. But we don't all think the same."

"Some of us don't think at all," put in Pat acidly. "We just talk."

"Meaning which, Treechy?" inquired Torrance.

"Oh, nothing!"

"I know John Dupuy," proceeded Thorpe. "He isn't just exactly the one to draw lines too strictly."

"I grant you that Johnnie would never win the diamond-set chastity belt of the world's championship," said the daring Miss Thorne, and elicited a chorus of appreciative mirth.

Pat did not join in it. She was thinking fast and hard.

After the rest had gone Monty stayed on, as of right. Something in Pat's expression struck even his torpid perceptions, as he put his arm around her and drew her to him for the customary "petting party."

"What's all the gloom about, sweetie?"

She released herself not over-gently. "Monty, would you have done what Dupuy did?"

"How do you mean?"

"Broken off your engagement—on *that* account?"

"Why, yes. Any fellow would." A convincing reason for him.

"Selden Thorpe wouldn't."

"I'll bet he would. He's a bluff. He makes me sick."

"Well—then—you'd better break ours."

"I don't get you, Pat."

"It's been the same with me as with Elsie Dowden. I've been meaning to tell you."

"I don't believe it," he said violently. "It's a try-on. A trick."

"It's true. You've got to believe it."

"Who's the man?" bayed Monty like a huge dog.

"I'll never tell you."

He gathered his powerful frame together as if to spring upon her. If he did, if he beat her to the ground, choked her into helplessness, Pat thought, she would hate him and love him for it. But his rage ebbed, impotent of its culmination, a little pitiful, a little ridiculous.

"Wh-wh-what did you do it for?" It was almost a whimper.

"I don't know. I didn't mean to—at the beginning."

"Did you love him?"

"Yes. I thought I did."

"You love him now," he charged, his fury mounting again.

"I don't! I love you."

"This is a hell of a thing to tell a man you say you love," he faltered plaintively.

"You'd rather I hadn't told you. I'm not built that way! I had to tell."

Instantly he was suspicious. "Had to? Why did you *have* to?"

"Not for any reason that you'd understand." The slight emphasis on the "you" was the first touch of bitterness she had allowed herself.

"Wouldn't he marry you?"

"I wouldn't marry him."

Monty perceptibly brightened. Pat's womanly intuitions, supersensitised by the strain of the contest, told her why. If, to his male standards, she was a maiden despoiled, she was at least not a woman scorned; her rating had gone up sensibly.

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him for a long time. I'll never see him again."

"Pat," with an air of resolute magnanimity—"if you'll tell me who it was I'll marry you anyway."

At that her pale cheeks flamed. "I'm not begging you to marry me, Monty. I'm not that cheap in the market."

"You *want* our engagement broken?"

"That's up to you. Absolutely. If you think, now

I've told you, that you're so much better and purer than I am because I've done what I did——"

"What d'you mean, better and purer?"

"I suppose you've never had any affair with any girl——"

"Are you trying to pretend to believe that's the same thing?" His voice was incredulous, contemptuous.

"Why isn't it the same thing?"

Young Mr. Standish suffered a paralysis of scandalised amazement. "Because it isn't! For God's sake! You talk like one of those radical freaks that spout on soap-boxes."

"I'm not so ~~sure~~ sure they aren't right about this man-and-woman thing," declared Pat recklessly. In so speaking she felt that she had broken with conventionalities far more than in anything, however bold, previously enunciated in their talk.

Monty's square jaw became ugly. "I'm giving you your chance. You won't tell me the man's name?"

Pat preserved the silence of obstinacy. It was more convincing than any negative. Also more exasperating.

"Good-night!" bellowed her lover, and strode from the room.

Almost immediately he was back, endued with a sad and noble expression. "Nobody shall ever know about this from me, Pat. You're safe."

For three nights Pat washed her troubled soul with tears. Her family knew that there had been a lovers' quarrel; that was all. Pat waited for Monty to break the engagement formally or send her word that he wished her to break it. Through all her grief of bereavement which, she repeatedly told herself, was the most sorrowful depth that her life had yet touched, that any life could touch,

she impatiently awaited the definite solution. Relief from the strain of uncertainty; that was what she craved.

On the fourth evening Monty reappeared. All his nobleness was gone. He was haggard, nerve-racked, forlorn. He threw himself upon her compassion. He implored her. He would forgive everything; he would forget everything; he would make no conditions, if only she would take him back. Life without her——

“All right, Monty-boy,” said Pat, really affected by his suffering. “I haven’t changed. I love you, Monty. But if ever you let what I’ve told you make any difference, if ever you speak of it or let me know that you even think of it, I’m *through*. That minute and forever.”

Humbly, abjectly, the upholder of man’s superior privilege accepted the absurd condition. The stronger nature had completely dominated the weaker.

Back in his arms again, Pat savoured the delicious warmth of a passion the more ardent for the threat of frustration; the triumph of a crisis valorously met and successfully passed. But an encroaching thought tainted the rapture of the moment. What was it that he himself had so confidently said to Selden Thorpe? Was her splendid and beautiful young lover, holding the views which he had proclaimed and surrendering them so readily, indeed “a poor sort of fish”?

CHAPTER XXXIV

AGAIN Pat was happy in her engagement. She frequently and insistently assured herself that she was. Certainly she had no just complaint of Monty. He was all that a lover should be when they were together; he kept to his pact and never in any manner referred to Pat's confession. But when he was away she sometimes wished that he wouldn't write so often, or, at least, expect her to answer so regularly. His letters added nothing to his charm. They innocently bristled with I's; but it was the monotony rather than the egotism of his style that annoyed her. Her answers, at first ardent, vivid and flashing like herself, soon became mere chronicles of petty events, interspersed with protestations of love. They were temporarily genuine enough, these latter, since each time he was with her she was re-warmed in the glow of their mutual passion.

But she could not stifle all misgivings. Incompetent though she was to analyse comprehensively her changeful emotions, she nevertheless had disturbing gleams of self-knowledge which added nothing to her confidence in a future whereof Monty Standish was to be a large part. Pat dimly recognised herself for that difficult and composite type of girlhood which, though imperatively sexed, will never fulfill itself through physical attraction and physical satisfactions alone. For such as she there must be the double response; if the mating be not both mentally and physically sufficient, ultimate disaster is inevitable.

Brooding upon these self-suspicious she would fall into moods of silence and withdrawal puzzling to the matter-

of-fact lover who would sometimes grow quite petulant over her perfunctory responses to his good-humoured ineffectualities of companionship. Once when he rallied her upon this she burst into angry tears and snapped out: "I'm so dam' worn with piffle and prattle," and darted upstairs.

But at their next meeting she was so prettily contrite and yielding that his vanity was quite soothed.

As the wedding day drew near, Pat dismissed whatever doubts she may have had, in the excitement of fitting-out. It was on one of these shopping expeditions, when she had gone into town by train, her runabout having suffered an attack of nervous breakdown, that, crossing the station plaza she came face to face with an old but unforgotten acquaintance. She saw his keen pleasant face light up, could read in his half-dismayed expression the struggle to remember exactly who she was, and went to him, holding out her hand:

"You've forgotten me, Mr. Warren Graves."

He took the hand. "Indeed, I haven't! It's Pat. Little Pat."

She nodded. "Better than I gave you credit for."

"I'm awfully sorry, but I have forgotten the rest of it."

"Pat'll do," she laughed.

"No; but let me think back."

"Want any help?"

"It was a party, somewhere about here. A corking party. I'd had one drink that I remember and some more that I don't. A funny, delightful kiddie was floating around outside like Cinderella. She wouldn't go in and dance with me, but—let me think——"

"I wouldn't think too far," urged Pat, her face tinged with pink.

"Ah, but I've got the name now!" he cried, triumphant and tactful at once. "Fentriss. Miss Patricia Fentriss, alias Pat, alias the Infant, alias the Demon——"

"What a relieving memory you've got!"

"—who stood at the bend of the stairs and said good-night so sweetly that I never quite got over it. But, I say; you *have* grown up."

He looked at her piquant, provocative, welcoming face and continued, with a gleam of mischief in his eyes:

"Now that I'm recovering from the shock I seem to recall an older sister protruding from a door most inopportunately."

"Aren't you afraid you'll miss your train, Mr. Graves?"

"I'm not going to the train."

"You're carrying that satchel for exercise?"

"I'm wishing it onto the parcels stand while I take a delightful young lady to luncheon."

"Surely you must be keeping her waiting."

"I'm daring to hope she'll come with me while I pry myself from this baggage. Will you, Pat?"

"Oh; you're asking me to lunch with you?"

"Such is my dark and deadly purpose."

"I ought not to. But I want to."

He laughed delightedly. "You haven't changed a bit inside and most marvellously outside. Then you'll come?"

"You'd make a fortune as a mind-reader. There's a condition though."

"Name it; it's agreed to."

"That you'll forget all about that foolishness of ours at the party. I was only fourteen."

It was his turn to flush. "You make me ashamed of myself," he said with such charming sincerity that Pat let fall a friendly and forgiving hand upon his arm for a second. "But let me tell you this. When I left your

house that night I was more than a little in love with you. Oh, calf-love, doubtless. But—it makes it a little better, doesn't it?"

"Yes," answered Pat gravely. "It makes it a lot better—for both of us."

"Then we'll forget all of it that you'd wish forgotten," said he.

In her italicised moments Pat would have described the luncheon that followed as "*too* enticing." But Pat did not feel stressful in the company of Warren Graves; she felt quiet and attentive, and wonderfully receptive to the breath of the greater world which he brought to her. He had been in the diplomatic service since the war, in several European capitals, had read and thought and mingled with men who were making or marring not the politics alone, but the very geography of the malleable earth. After a little light talk, in which Pat was conscious that he was trying her out, the *rapprochement* of their minds was established and he settled down to talk with her as if she had been a woman of the international world in which he moved. Her swift, apprehensive intelligence kept him up to his best form. As the coffee was finished he said reproachfully:

"You've made me chatter my head off. And I'm supposed to have rather a gift for silence. How do you work your spells?"

"By being sunk in admiring interest," she answered, smiling up at him as she put on her gloves. "You've given me the most delightful hour I've had for years."

"But it needn't end here, need it?" he protested anxiously. "Don't you want to go to a *matinée*, or something?"

"There aren't any. It's Friday."

"So it is. But there are always the movies."

Pat knew that she ought not to go; there were a dozen important errands to be done. But: "Oh, very well," she said. Duties could wait. Pleasure was something you had to grab before it got away from you. The philosophy of the flapper.

At the "motion picture palace" they got box seats, the chairs suggestively close together. She wondered whether he would try to hold her hand; also whether she would let him if he did. Probably she would; there was no harm in that, and it gave a pleasant sense of companionship. Most of the boys with whom she went to the theatre or movies expected it. Apparently Warren Graves didn't. He made no move in that direction. Piqued a little, nevertheless Pat liked him the better for it. Monty might perhaps have objected if he knew. And, with a start, she discovered that only just then had she thought of Monty Standish. He had been, for the time, quite forgotten in the interest of a more enlivening and demanding association.

What the "serial" of the play was, Pat could hardly have told; "some hurrah about the West," she informed T. Jameson James afterward. At the conclusion of it there came a "news feature," showing scenes about the building where the League of Nations session was being held. Various noted personages appeared, walked with the knee-slung, unnatural stalk of the screen across the space, and vanished. Then it was as if a blinding flash had been projected from the square. An unforgettable figure stood out amidst the crowd, the face turned toward her, the eyes, with the faint ironic lift of the brows, looking down into her soul, arousing a tumult and a throbbing which left her hardly breath enough to gasp out:

"Cary Scott!"

"Do you know Scott?" asked her escort interestedly.

"Yes. He used to visit in Dorrisdale. Do you?"

"Quite well. Everyone on the inside in Europe knows him; he's one of the men who are doing big things under the surface at the conference."

"Tell me," urged Pat as they left the place.

He sketched Scott's career as confidential adviser to several of the most important of the protagonists in that Titans' struggle. "He's a sort of liaison officer, knowing France and this country as he does. He's had a rather rough time of it, lately, poor chap."

"Is he ill?" Pat had a struggle to control her voice.

"No. A domestic smash. His wife—that was—is a demonish sort of female. However, he's got well rid of her now. To be accurate, he let her get rid of him. Over-decent of him, all things considered."

"Perhaps she had cause, too." Pat hated herself as she said it. But she craved to know.

"Nothing of that kind," was the positive reply. "Scott has been living like an anchorite. They say he was hard hit here in America. As to that, I don't know. Certainly he has been devoting himself to his work with no room for any other devotion. Which is more than can be said of his ex-wife."

"I never met her," Pat heard her voice saying, and quite admired it for its tone of casual interest. "She didn't come to Dorrisdale."

"Speaking of Dorrisdale, I'm at Washington for a while. Mayn't I run up to see you?"

"No. I'm afraid not."

"That's a little—disappointing."

"You see, I'm going to be terribly busy until my wedding."

"Wedding? Oh! All my felicitations. I didn't know."

"Yes. I'm to be married to Monty Standish next month."

Even as her lips spoke the words her soul denied them. In the dominant depths of her, she knew that she could never marry Monty Standish now. Her thoughts, so lightly detached from her fiancé by the easy charm of Warren Graves, had been claimed, coerced, irrevocably absorbed by the swift-passing phantom presentment of her former lover. The bond created when she had given herself to him was as nothing compared to this imperative summons across the spaces.

After a night of passionate struggle, succeeded by resolute thinking, she wired Monty to come on. When he came, she broke the engagement. It was ruthless, cruel, unfair. Pat had no excuses, no extenuations to offer. She simply stood firm. Monty returned to college, failed of his graduation, and let it be known among his indignant friends and relatives that Pat had ruined his career. Hot and righteous though his wrath was, he never so much as hinted at Pat's secret. Stupid, unstable, self-satisfied, spoiled; the plaster idol of an athlete-worshipping age; but nevertheless a gentleman within whom one flame of honour burned clear and constant behind its dull encasement.

Pat's family variously raged, begged, and protested. Pat let them. They prophesied social ostracism for her. She shrugged away the suggestion as improbable in the first place and not worth worrying about anyway. But she would have gone away had it not been for her self-assumed responsibility to her broken brother-in-law. And it was from him that her main support came. From the first he stood by her unquestioning.

"You're awfully good to me, Jimmie-jams," she said one day as she was wheeling him in the garden, having dis-

missed the attendant. "What did you really think when I told you I wasn't going to marry Monty?"

A smile of justified cleverness lighted up his pain-worn face. "I'd never thought that you would."

"Cute little Jimmie! Why not?"

"Too much brains. He'd never keep you interested and you found it out in time."

"Not too soon," observed the girl with a grimace. "The family are still raising merry Hades about it."

"Naturally. You don't think you're entitled to any Sunday-school award for good behaviour on the thing, do you?"

"No. I don't," admitted Pat. But she pouted.

A silence fell between them. It lasted for a full turn around the garden. Tired of pouting, Pat broke it.

"Want to play bezique, Jimmie?"

"No."

"Want me to read to you?"

"No, dear."

"What the devil do you want? Oh, I'm sorry, Jimmie! I believe I've got nerves. Never knew there were such things before."

"Pat, stop the chair."

"What's the idea, Jimmie?"

"Come around here where I can see you."

"As per order."

"I know the man."

"What man?"

"The other man."

"I've been acquainted with several of 'em in my life."

"So I've been given to understand. I'm talking about the man on whose account you broke your engagement."

"You're seeing things, Jimmie. Monty himself is the nigger in that woodpile."

"What about Cary Scott?"

The look with which she faced him did not waver. "Well, what about him?"

"He's coming back."

"Coming back? Here?" Still her eyes were steady, but there was the faintest catch in her breathing.

"Well, no; he isn't. I just said that as an experiment. Though, of course, he might come if you wanted him. You do want him, don't you, Pat dear?"

"Sometimes. Other times I don't. How did you know?"

"When you've nothing to do but think," he explained, "you get tired of thinking about yourself by and by and begin to think about other people. I've been thinking a lot about you since we got to be pals."

"You're a dear, Jimmie-jams."

"I'm an old crab. But I'm fond of you. And Scott was good to me, too, when I was first laid up. When you think hard enough about people you're fond of you begin to see things about them, even things they may not see, themselves."

"Even things that maybe aren't there at all," she mocked.

"This is there," he asseverated. "There's no use your pretending. When we talk I'm always catching echoes of Scott's influence in what you say. You're a different Pat from what you were before you knew him. I don't think you get on so well with yourself."

"You *are* clever, Jimmie. I don't. And it makes me furious."

"At him?"

"Yes. I don't know. At myself, too."

"I had a letter from him last week. We've carried on a desultory correspondence since he left."

Pat's eyes livened. "What does he say about me?"

"How do you know he says anything about you?"

"Don't tease. Tell Pattie."

"You ought to know Scott well enough to realise that he isn't the sort to display his feelings in a show window. But there are lines that one could read between. Have you written to him, Pat?"

"No."

"Aren't you going to send for him?"

Her face darkened with troubled memories. "I couldn't. You don't understand. I couldn't, Jimmie."

"I could write."

"You shan't. You mustn't; if you do I'll hate you. Promise."

"All right. I promise. But don't you really want to see him ever again?"

"Sometimes I think I'll die if I don't," she said simply. "Other times—I don't know."

"Why not find out? Won't you let me write?"

"No; no. You've promised."

"Very well. I'll keep to it. Take me inside, slave."

He did not write. He cabled.

CHAPTER XXXV

FAINT spice of budding clematis was fragrant in the air at Holiday Knoll. On her way to the street Pat passed through the arbour with a little, warm shiver of recollection. How long ago that other October seemed, that night when, amidst the scents and seductions of the year's late warmth she had opened her arms and her lips to Cary Scott in that first, unforgettable red kiss of their passion; how far away; how deep buried under other, varied experiences! Would he ever come back? It was many weeks since James had talked of him, suggesting the possibility, and the subject had not again been brought up. Would she really want him back if she could have him? And what would she do with him if he came? Or he with her? Or fate with them both? Pat had become a good deal of a fatalist. It was a convenient theory and dovetailed neatly with her religion, enabling her to compound with her conscience at the smallest expense of self-blame. Fate, she felt, had saved her from marrying Monty Standish, which was a large count to its credit.

Chiefly because of Monty she was now going down to the village. For he was due back after a long absence for repairs to his damaged heart, and the local old cats had prophesied that Pat would leave town, for a time anyway, "if she possesses a grain of decent feeling." Pat purposed to do nothing of the sort. Neither Monty Standish nor any other living specimen of the male sex could run her off the public streets! For excuse she had some marketing to do, and she set forth with her most nonchalant air and independent shoulder swing. She'd

show 'em whether she was ashamed or afraid to meet Monty! After pervading the town for a while she would run over for her daily chatter with Jimmie-jams. Jimmie was growing very frail and weary and had a look of esger, anxious expectancy, these days. Pat thought that she knew what he was waiting for. There would be a big void in her life when Jimmie got his release.

Emerging from the fruit shop where she hoped to find an avocado pear for him, she saw a man standing on the curb. His back was turned, but there was that in the set of his shoulders, the slender grace of the figure, the poise of the head which startled her heart to one great throb of excited delight. Here, indeed, was relief from dull days, food for that greed of excitement, of "thrill," which life had not yet begun to sate for her.

"Mist-er Scott!"

He whirled about. His face lighted up. Taking the hand which she held out, he said, with the old, mocking half-lift of the brows:

"Still that, Pat?"

"What are you doing in Dorrisdale?"

"I've just been telephoning Miss Patricia Fentriss."

"She's out."

"So I was informed. I begin to suspect it's true."

Both laughed. Pat, quite charmed with herself for the light and easy manner in which she was carrying off this potentially difficult situation, committed the error of looking up into his eyes. There she read a hunger and a want that made her avert her gaze. She sought hurriedly for something to say.

"I didn't even know that you were in this country."

"I wasn't until last night." He had fallen into step beside her.

"I was going to the Jameses'," she remarked a little lamely. "I go there every morning."

"Yes; I know. James has written me. You make life bearable for him. It's rather wonderful of you, Pat."

"I like to go there," she said in disclaimer of his praise.

"Will you come with me?"

"Yes; if I may."

For two squares that was his only remark. Pat grew restless.

"You're not too conversational," she complained.

"I was thinking," he said quietly; "how very lovely you've grown."

"Have I, Cary?" The soft echo of the old, throaty crow was in her voice. "I ought to be a ruin. I've had troubles enough."

"Troubles? You? Haven't you been well?"

"D'you think that's the only kind of trouble a girl can have? There are others! I came near having the worst of 'em four months ago."

"Why then?"

"Date of my wedding," said Pat briefly, with intent to create a sensation. She failed.

"Yes; I heard you were to have been married," he remarked calmly.

"And the rest of it?"

"That you broke off your engagement? Yes."

"Who told you?"

"I found a letter when the ship docked. From James."

Pat's eyes snapped with suspicion. "Did Jimmie write you to come back here? From Europe, I mean."

"He cabled."

"Jimmie's a—— Never mind what he is. I'll tell him to his face, when we get there."

But when they got there T. Jameson James, it seemed, was not feeling very brisk. Well enough to have them come up to his room; oh, yes, that; and warmly glad to see Scott again. After a few moments' talk, however, he

displayed symptoms of weariness. He even hinted that he would be better off for the time without visitors.

Pat, with the perverseness of her excitement and anticipations, insisted on staying to read to her brother-in-law as usual. This he vetoed outright.

"No. I don't want you. I'm sleepy. Take Scott over to the Knoll for luncheon. He's probably famished. And Dee had to go to town, so there's nothing to be had here. Run along."

Her hand being thus forced, Pat issued the invitation, and she and Scott left the sick-room. But they had not reached the front door when she turned and darted upstairs again. Throwing herself down by the cripple's couch she caught his head to her bosom and cherished it there.

"Oh, Jimmie! You promise-breaker. You old liar! I adore you." She pressed a swift kiss on his cheek and was gone.

Mr. T. Jameson James made a face at the Devil and chuckled himself to sleep.

Rejoining Scott outside Pat commanded: "Tell me everything you've been doing in the big, big world."

He was unprotestingly obedient, cheerfully impersonal throughout the walk to the Knoll. But never had she been more conscious of the quiet compulsion of his charm. Her arms ached for him. They entered the house by the side door. Instinctively Pat turned toward the conservatory, but some inexplicable revulsion of feeling checked her.

"No; not there," she said. "Let's go to the library."

No sooner had the door closed behind them, than she turned to his embrace not so much yielding to as claiming him back. After the long kiss she stood away from him, but with her hands still clinging upon his shoulders.

"That makes it seem all real again," she breathed.

"Have you grown so far away from me as that, my darling?"

"Well, I was going to marry Monty Standish, you know," she reminded him.

"Yes. Why didn't you?"

"I couldn't. You were in the way."

"Pat! That's what I've feared and dreaded more than——"

"Wait. It isn't what you think. And it isn't all. Before I was engaged to Monty I ran away with a boy to Boston. And you spoiled that."

"I don't understand," he said dully.

"I left him before—well, before anything. Because"—she whirled away from him, flung herself upon the lounge, and blew him an airy kiss—"because I happened to think of you at the wrong time. Or perhaps it was the right time. Anyway, his collar gaped. Like a sick fish. And yours always set so beautifully. So I beat it." She was all *petite gamine* now. "You're always getting in my way, Cary. Aren't you 'shamed?"

He smiled at her his little twisted, tolerant smile. "You don't change much, do you, little Pat?"

"Oh, I'm fer-rightfully changed. Much more serious. Years older. Lost my girlish illusions. All that sorta thing. You won't like me nearly as much, you're so serious yourself." Her eyes blazed with enjoyment of the situation and the excitement of his proximity. "Most of the time I haven't believed it, though. Have you?"

"Believed what, Pat?"

"About us. All of it, I mean. That we were—lovers. It got to seem like a dream to me; something way, far off. In another life. Or like something that had happened to some other girl. It didn't seem real to me, not even when I told Monty."

"Ah, you told him?"

"Had to. What'd you think I'd do?"

"Knowing your courage and honour, that's what I'd think you'd do."

The hard, excited glitter softened out of her eyes. "I knew you'd want me to, Cary. Of course I never told him who the man was."

"And is that what——"

"What broke the engagement? It did for a while. Then he came back. But I couldn't stand it. Nothing above the ears, Cary. It wasn't even the First Dreaming for me. You remember what you said that day you drove me over to Cissie's about my marrying, and about keeping you in the background of my mind?"

"Yes."

"But you don't stay there," she complained childishly. "You're always popping out and spoiling things." She gave him a challenging look. "I was sort of keeping you for my Second Dreaming."

Scott laughed. "Pat, dearest, are you flirting with me after I've come four thousand miles——"

"What did you come for?"

"For you."

Her loosely clasped hands stirred and parted. "Well—— here I am."

"That's not enough."

"You don't want much, do you?" she murmured.

"Everything or nothing now. You know I'm free."

She nodded. "I can see what's coming," she said with a pretence of demureness. "If you've hopped across those four thousand miles from a sense of duty to the weeping girl that you left behind——"

"Pat!"

"Don't bark at me. It frazzles my nerves. I haven't done any weeping over you, Cary. Too busy with the thrills of life. Would you have come back, I wonder, if

you could have known everything that's been going on. Suppose I'd stayed in Boston that time?"

"Well?"

"Wouldn't that make a difference?"

"In my wanting to marry you? No."

"Suppose," she said more slowly, "I'd had an affair, a real affair with Monty. Like ours."

A spasm of pain passed over his face. "I shouldn't blame you. How could I?"

"Wouldn't it make any difference in your loving me?"

"Not an iota."

"Wouldn't you even *care*?" she flashed in resentful wrath.

"Care? Good God, Pat, if you saw a man in torture——"

"Oh, don't, Cary, dear," she cried, startled and remorseful. "It isn't true. It's just my sneaking, rotten curiosity to know how you'd feel about it." She pursed her lips, musing darkly. "I wonder," she began. "Have you been true to me? Not that I've got any right to ask or that it makes a bit of difference in my young life whether you have or not, but just——"

She broke off, leaning forward, studying his face as he looked at her in silence.

"*Cary!* Why don't you say something? I *would* care. I'd care like hell."

"I came back," he said slowly, "because you are the one and only woman in the world for me and always have been since I saw you. Is that enough answer?"

"From any other man in the world it wouldn't be an answer at all. From you it's enough."

"Will you marry me, Pat?"

She jumped to her feet, walked over to the window, and looked out to where the clematis blooms trembled in the wind.

"Oh, I suppose so," she said fretfully. "If you want to take the chance."

"What chance, dear love?"

"The chance every man takes that marries a girl of the kind you men all seem to want to marry. How many of the married set here d'you suppose are true to their husbands?"

"I don't like you cynical, Pat. You've been letting something poison your mind."

"Not me. I see things as they are; that's all. Ask Con. Ask Dee. Ask Bobs. Ask any of 'em. You know you could have had Con if you'd really wanted her. And then I butted in." Her chuckle was full of diablerie. It still persisted in her tone as she continued: "Cary, what would you do to me if I went straying off the reservation after we were married?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, don't be so calm and superior and noble about it," she fretted. "You'd tempt an angel to try a flutter just to see whether she would get by with it."

"What do you want me to say, Pat?"

"I want you to tell me honestly how you think you're going to hold me if I do marry you."

"Come over here."

She walked across to him, defiant, daring, provocative. "Well?"

"You love me, don't you, Pat?"

"You make me when you're with me."

"And when I'm not?"

"That's just the trouble. You're there all the time, parked just around the corner and you won't let me love anybody else enough to—to do any good."

"And if I asked you now," he said, low and insistent, "you'd come back to me and be to me what you were before. Wouldn't you?"

There was a quickening in her shadowed eyes, in her soft breathing. "You know I would," she whispered. "How could I help myself?"

"Then you couldn't very well marry anyone else, could you?"

"I've tried. It was a fliv, as you know. What's the answer?"

"Isn't it plain enough? Why not try me—on your own terms?"

"Where do you get that 'own term' stuff, Cary?" she demanded suspiciously. "Do you know about Dee and Jimmie; their arrangement?"

"No."

"It's a secret. But you belong to us," she added sweetly; "to the Fentrisses. So I'll tell you. They were to stay married for a month and after that if either of them wanted to quit, they were just to live like unmarried people without any fuss. Only Jimmie wouldn't keep to it. That's what made the row."

"Would you like to try that plan?" he asked in an inscrutable tone.

"Would you do it?" She looked at him doubtfully. "Would you really let me go after a month if I wanted to?"

"After a day. Do you think I'd try to hold you against your wish?"

"Then I don't think you can love me much," she objected with perverse jealousy.

"It strikes me as a perfectly fair bargain to both. I certainly ought to be willing to take the chance," he said reasonably, "if you are."

"If I am! Cary! You mean that you—might—want—to leave *me*?" A startled incredulity made the words jerky.

"One can never be quite certain how these things are

going to turn out, can one?" he observed with a fine air of judicial detachment. "Shall I have my lawyer draw the agreement?"

"Cary; you're laughing at me," she accused.

"Far be it from me, in a matter of such serious import——"

"You are! You're hateful! It isn't fair. You know that's the way to hold me and you know you don't mean to let me get loose for a single minute. I don't like your knowing so dam' much about women," she continued plaintively. "It makes it so uneven."

"I'm trying to be fair," he pointed out. He drew a chair up to the writing desk. "Suppose I just sketch out the scheme. 'This agreement,' he dictated to himself, speaking the words slowly, 'between Patricia Fen-triss——'"

"Scott," she interposed.

"—Scott—thank you, dearest—and—Cary—Scott—for—the—space—of—one—month—after——"

She bent across his shoulder, put a soft hand over his mouth, then slipped it aside to make place for the yearning of her own lips. When she finally leaned back from him it was to say judicially:

"I offer an amendment. Let's make it twenty years instead of a month. But, oh, Cary, darling!" Her eyes darkened, brooded, dreamed, grew sombre, subtle, prophetic as she gave voice to her warning. "As a husband you'll have to be a terribly on-the-job lover. There are so many men in the world!"



