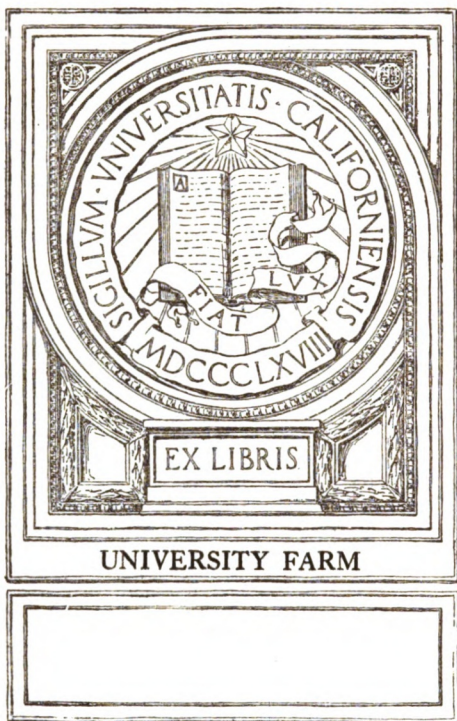


HARE
and
TORTOISE

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HARE AND TORTOISE

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By
PIERRE COALFLEET,
Author of "Solo"



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To
R. M.

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HARE AND TORTOISE

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CHAPTER I

KEBLE EVELEY'S voice, rising and falling in graceful patterns, had lulled his wife's mind into a tranquil remoteness. She had got more from the sinuosity of the sentences he was reading than from the thesis they upheld. Walter Pater had so little to tell her that she needed to know. This vaguely chagrined her, for Keble thought highly of Pater; Pater and he had something in common, something impeccable and elusive, something—

She checked her musings in alarm at the menacing word "affected."

Was it affectation on Keble's part? Or was there perhaps a winnowed level of civilization thousands of miles east of these uncouth hills and beyond the sea where precious phrases like Pater's and correct manners like Keble's were matter of course? In any such *milieu* what sort of figure could *she* hope to cut?

No doubt a pitiful one. And her thoughts drifted wistfully but resignedly down the stream of consciousness.

It was not the first time she had failed to keep

stroke with Keble in the literary excursions he conducted on cool evenings before a log fire that had been burning since their marriage in the autumn, six months before. Only a few evenings past he had read a poem by Robert Browning, who was to Louise merely a name that had fallen from the lips of her English teacher at Normal School. She had felt herself rather pleasantly scratched and pommelled by the lines as Keble had read them, but they had failed to make continuous sense. And next morning, when she had gone to the book-shelves to read and ponder in private, she hadn't even been able to identify the incoherent poem among the host of others in the red volume.

Once, too, when he had been playing the piano she had been humiliatingly inept. For an hour she had been happy to lie back and listen to harmonies which, though they had signified no more to her than a monologue in a foreign tongue, had moved her to the verge of tears. Then he had played something he called a prelude, a pallidly gay composition utterly unlike many others called preludes, and on finishing it had turned to ascertain its effect upon her. She hadn't been listening carefully, for it had set an old tune running in her head. "It's pretty, dear," she had commented. "It reminds me of something Nana used to hum."

Her remark was inspired, for the suave prelude in question was no more than a modern elaboration of a folk-theme that was a common heritage of the com-

poser and Nana. But the association between a French-Canadian servant-girl and the winner of a recent *prix de Rome* had been too remote even for her musically discerning young husband, who had got up from the piano with a hint of forbearance in his manner. That had cut her to the quick, for it had implied maladdress on her part, and gradually, through an intuitive process that hurt, she had gained an inkling of the incongruity of her comparison. She had wished to state the incongruity and turn it off with a touch of satire aimed at her headlong self, but chagrin had held her mute. It was one of those occasions where an attempted explanation would only underline the regrettable fact that an explanation had been needed. Her ideas, she felt, would always be ill-assorted; her comments, however good *per se*, irrelevant. Her mind was a basket tumbling over with wild flowers; it must be annoying for Keble to find pollen on his nose from a dandelion in the basket after he had leaned forward at the invitation of a violet.

Rising from her couch she crossed the room on tiptoe and sat on the arm of Keble's chair, leaning her head on his back as he continued to read.

"After that sharp, brief winter, the sun was already at work, softening leaf and bud, as you might feel by a faint sweetness in the air," read Keble.

The faint sweet airs of a Western Canadian spring,—the first after a sharp *long* winter,—were at the black open window, stirring the curtains, cool-

ing her cheek; and Keble was with Marius the Epicurean in Rome, seven thousand miles and many centuries away.

“. . . Marius climbed the long flights of steps to be introduced to the emperor Aurelius. Attired in the newest mode, his legs wound in dainty *fasciae* of white leather, with the heavy. . . .”

Louise placed her hands across the page and leaned forward over Keble's shoulder to kiss the cheek half-turned in polite interrogation. “Are *fasciae* puttees, darling?” she inquired. Not that she really cared. Indeed she was dismayed when he began to explain, and yawned. Penitently she sank to an attitude of attention upon a stool at his feet. Keble got up for his pipe, placing the book on a large rough table beside neat piles of books and reviews.

Louise remained on her footstool looking after him; then, as he turned to come back, transferred her gaze to her hands, got up, biting her lip, and crossed the room for her needlework.

Keble's influence during the last year had been chastening. Her own ideas were vivid, but impetuous; they often scampered to the edge of abysses—and plunged in. At times she abruptly stopped, lost in wonderment at her husband's easy, measured stride. Keble, like Marius, mounted flights of thought in dainty *fasciae*,—never in plain puttees,—and always step by step. She dashed up, pell-mell, and sometimes beat him; but often fell sprawling at the emperor's feet. Whereupon Keble would help

her up, brush her, and pet her a little, only to resume the gait that she admired but despaired of acquiring. Beyond her despair there was an ache, for she had come to believe that, as Lord Chesterfield put it, "Those lesser talents, of an engaging, insinuating manner, or easy good breeding, a gentle behavior and address, are of infinitely more advantage than they are generally thought to be." Even in Alberta.

She herself had written pages and pages of prose, and had filled an old copy-book with incoherent little poems of which Keble knew nothing. They sang of winds sweeping through canyons and across sage plains, of snowy forests and frozen rivers; they uttered vague lament, unrest, exultation. Through them surged yearnings and confessions that abashed her. She kept them as mementoes of youthful rebellion, shut them up in a corner of the old box that had conveyed her meagre marriage equipment hither from her father's tiny house in the Valley, and then watched Keble's eyes and lips, listened to his spun-silver sentences in the hope of acquiring clues to—she scarcely knew what.

Keble had come to the second lighting of a thoughtful pipe before the silence was broken. He looked for some moments in her direction before saying, "What sort of tea-cozy thing are you making now, dear?"

Tea-cozy thing! It was a bureau scarf,—a beautiful, beautiful one! For the birthday of Aunt

Denise Mornay-Mareuil in Quebec. And Louise sacreligiously crossed herself.

“So beautiful,” he agreed, “that Aunt Denise will take it straight to her chapel and lay it across the altar where she says her prayers. You know your father’s theory that despite oneself one plays into the hands of the priests. How are you going to get around that, little heretic?”

“By writing to Aunt Denise that it’s for her bureau! *My* conscience will be clear. Besides, I’m making it to give her pleasure, and if it pleases her to put it on the altar where she prays for that old scamp, then why not? She loved him, and that’s enough for her,—the poor dear cross old funny!”

“Would an atheist altar cloth intercept Aunt Denise’s Roman prayers? Perhaps turn them into curses?”

Louise ignored this and bit off a piece of silk. “Besides, I’m not such a *limited* heretic as Papa. I’m a comprehensive heretic.”

“What kind of thing is that, for goodness’ sake?”

“It’s a kind of thing that pays more attention to people’s gists than to whether they cross their *i*’s and dot their *t*’s. It’s a kind of thing that’s going out to the pantry and get you something to eat before bed time, even though it knows it’s bad for you.”

2

From a recalcitrant little garden in front of the log house, Louise could follow the figure of her hus-

band on a buckskin colored pony which matched his blond hair. He was skirting the edge of the lake toward the trail that led up through pines and aspens to the ridge where their "Castle" would ultimately be built. Keble had still three months of his novitiate as rancher to fulfil before his father's conservative doubts would be appeased and the money forthcoming from London for the project of transforming the mountain lake and plains into something worthy the name of "estate": a comfortable house, a farm, a stock range, and a game preserve. He was boyishly in earnest about it all.

When Keble had disappeared into the trail, Louise's eyes came back along the pebbly strip of shore, past the green slope that led through thinning groups of tall cottonwood trees to the superintendent's cabin and the barns, resting finally upon the legend over her front door: *Sans Souci*. She remembered how gaily she had painted the board and tacked it up. Had the blows of her hammer been challenges to Fate?

She sighed and bent over the young flower beds. At an altitude of five thousand feet everything grew so unwillingly; yet everything that survived seemed so nervously vital! She dreaded Keble's grandiose projects; or rather, the nonchalance with which he could conceive them intimidated her. There was something jolly about things as they had been: the cottage and the horses and dogs, the two servants, the rattling car, and the canoe. She thought, indul-

gently, of the awe in which she had originally held even this degree of luxury.

Her ditch was now fairly free of pebbles, and she placed the dahlia bulbs in line. As she worked, the thin mountain sunshine crept up on her, warming, fusing, gilding her thoughts. Spring could do so much to set one's little world aright. In the winter when the mountains were white and purple and the emerald water had frozen black, when supplies from the Valley were held up for days at a time, one was not so susceptible to the notion of a universal benevolence as one could be on a morning like this, with its turquoise sky, its fluffy clouds that seemed to grow on the tops of the fir trees like cotton, and its rich silence, only intensified by the scream of a conceited crane flying from the distant river to the rock in the lake where he made a daily "grub-call" at the expense of Keble's trout.

There was one other alien sound: the noise of a motor, a battered car from the Valley that brought mail on Tuesdays and Fridays. But this was Monday. The driver was talking to one of the hands; and a young stranger, quite obviously a "dude" and English, was looking about the place with a sort of eager, friendly curiosity. Then Mr. Brown appeared, and after a short consultation took the stranger in the direction of a road that led around by another route to the ridge.

An hour later, from her bedroom window she saw Keble approaching the cottage, his arm about the

shoulders of the visitor. They might have been two boys dawdling home from school: boys with a dozen trifles which they had saved up for each other, to exchange with intimate lunges and gesticulations. She had never seen Keble thus demonstrative. Indeed, she had never seen him before in the company of a friend. She ran downstairs two steps at a time.

“Oh, Louise, here’s Windrom out of a blue sky, —you know: Walter Windrom who was at Marlborough with me.”

Keble had become suddenly casual again and shut off some current within him in the manner that always baffled her. She knew Walter Windrom from Keble’s tales of school life in England, and she had a quite special corner in her heart for the shy young man who had been his friend. She envied him for having been so close to Keble at a time when she was ignorant of his very existence. Walter could remember how Keble had looked and talked and worn his caps at that age, whereas she could only imagine. She remembered that Keble had marched off to war instead of going up to Oxford with his chum, as they had planned, and that Windrom had recently been given a diplomatic post in Washington. The image of Keble in a Lieutenant’s uniform awakened another memory: Keble had once told her that he and Windrom had played at warfare with their history master, and with her usual impetuosity she got part of this picture into her first remark to

the new man: "You used to play tin soldiers together!"

"And Keble always won the battles, even if he had to violate the Hague conventions to do it!" Walter's tone was indulgent.

"Oh!" exclaimed Louise. "But he would break them so morally! Even the Hague would be fooled."

"The history of England in a nutshell," agreed Walter. "We played battles like Waterloo, and I had to be Napoleon to his Wellington."

"But you didn't mind really, old man, you know you didn't."

"Not a bit! The foundation on which true friendship rests is that one of the parties enjoys to beat, and the other rather enjoys being beaten."

"Walter has turned philosopher and poet and says clever things that you needn't believe at all."

"Oh, but I do believe him," said Louise quickly, alarmed at the extent to which she *did*. To cover it she held out her hands with an exuberant cordiality and drew them into the house.

The luncheon table was drawn near windows framed by yellow curtains which Louise had herself hemmed. Through them, beyond the young green plants in the window-boxes, beyond the broken trees that Keble called the Castor and Pollux group, from their resemblance to the pillars in the Roman Forum, the two mountains that bounded the end of the lake could be seen coming together in an enormous jagged

V, one overlapping the other in a thickly wooded canyon.

“And to think that all this marvel belongs to you, to do with as you see fit!” exclaimed Windrom. “It’s as though God had let you put the finishing touches on a monument He left in the rough.”

“We’re full of godlike projects,” said Keble. “This afternoon I’ll find a mount for you and take you over the place.”

“Let it be a gentle one,” Windrom pleaded. “Horses scare me,—to say nothing of making me sore.”

“Sundown won’t,” Louise quickly reassured him, then turned to her husband. “Let him ride Sundown, Keble . . . He’s mine,” she explained. “The only thing left in the rough by God that I’ve had the honor of improving, apart from myself! Like lightning if you’re in a hurry, but wonderfully sympathetic. I’ll give you some lumps of sugar. For sugar he’ll do anything. He’s the only horse in Alberta that knows the taste of it. But don’t let Keble see you pamper him, for he’s getting to be very Canadian and very Western and calls it dudish and demoralizing and scolds you for it.”

She paused, a little abashed by the length to which her harmless desire to help along the talk had taken her, and smiled half apologetically, half trustfully as her husband resumed inquiries about the incredible number of unheard of people they knew in common: people who thought nothing of wandering from

London to Cairo, from New York to Peking: rich, charming, clever, initiated people,—people who would always know what to do and say, she was sure of it.

3

If it was the natural fate of a tenderfoot that Sundown should have been lame from a rope-burn that afternoon and that his understudy should be a horse that had not been ridden since the previous summer, it was carelessness on the part of Keble Eveley that allowed the visitor to climb the perpendicular trail to the ridge in a loosely cinched saddle. In any case, when Windrom, in trying to avoid scraping a left kneecap on one pine tree, caught his right stirrup in the half fallen dead branch of another, the horse, reflecting the nervousness of his rider, began to rear in a manner that endangered his foothold on the steep slope, and almost before Keble knew that something was amiss behind him, a sudden forward motion of the horse, accompanied by a slipping motion of the saddle, threw his friend against a vicious rock which marked a bend in the trail.

Keble turned and dismounted anxiously when Windrom failed to rise. The body lay against the rock, the left arm doubled under it. Keble lifted his victim upon his own horse and after great difficulty brought him to the cottage, where an astonishingly calm Louise vetoed most of his suggestions, in-

stalled the patient as comfortably as possible in bed, and commanded her husband to get in communication with the Valley.

Despite the halting telephonic system, the twenty miles of bad road, the prevalence of spring ailments throughout the Valley requiring the virtual ubiquitousness of the little French doctor, it was not many hours before he arrived to relieve their flagging spirits. For his son-in-law's naïve wonderment at Louise's efficiency, Dr. Bruneau had only an indulgent smile. "But why shouldn't she know what to do?" he exclaimed. "Is her father not a doctor, and was her mother not a nurse?"

When the broken ribs had been set, Louise remained in the sick-room, and the two men were smoking before the fire downstairs. The situation had put the doctor in a reminiscential humor. His daughter grown up and married, in the rôle of nurse, set in train memories of the epidemic that had swept through the Valley when Louise was nine years old. Her mother had insisted on helping, had gone out night and day nursing and administering.

"And I was so busy tending the others that she went almost before I knew she was ill. . . . Until that day, Death had been only my professional enemy. . . . It was an excellent woman, very *pratique*. Louis is *pratique*, too, but *au fond* romantic. That she holds from me. I'm not *pratique*. I don't collect my bills. But out here, at least, the priests don't get what I should have, as they did in Quebec.

Down there they take from the poor people whatever there is, and nothing is left to pay the bills of a heretic *médecin*. The priests thought that was fair, since the *médecin* gave them nothing for their embroideries and their holy smells!

“Here at least one is not molested,—if one were permitted to enjoy one’s freedom! All my life I have wanted to sit by my fire and read, one after the other, every book discouraged by Rome. . . . But always when I get out my pipe and take down Renan or Voltaire there is a call: little Johnny has a fit, come quick; *Madame Chose* is having a baby,—*Cré Matin*: *Madame* who has had already twelve! If the baby lives they thank God; if he dies they blame me. And that’s life. . . .

“All one can do in this low world, my son, is work, without asking why. We are like clocks that Nature has wound up to keep time for her, and it’s enough that Nature knows what we are registering. The people who are always trying to read the hour on their own dials keep damn poor time. Witness my excellent sister. Denise burns expensive candles for her *drôle* of a husband, that *rusé* Mareuil who marched his socialists up the hill to give him a fine showing, then, unlike the King of France, stayed on the hill and let them march down by themselves when they had served his ambition, and got himself assassinated for his treachery. And his devout widow, after fumbling her beads in the parlor, goes into the pantry to count the gingersnaps for fear the

hired girl has taken some home to her family. Denise is too spiritual to be a good human clock, and too full of wheels to be of any use to eternity. It's a funny world, *va!*"

When Dr. Bruneau had gone, Keble reflected that it was indeed a funny world. Not the least ludicrous feature of it being that he, the product of many generations of almost automatic gentility, should have happened to make himself the son-in-law of a garrulous, fantastic, kind-hearted, plebeianly shrewd, Bohemian country physician, who, more like his sister than he knew, was too spiritual to be successful in his profession, and too close to the earth to be a valid sage,—a man of the people, of the soil from which Louise had come forth as the fine flower.

He recalled with a faint smile the pretexts he used to devise for dropping into the doctor's little house on his long ski-journeys to the Valley: a fancied ailment, the desire to borrow a book or offer a gift of whisky from a recently-arrived supply. He recalled his reluctant leave-takings and the very black, mocking eyes, tantalizing lips, and jaunty curls of the girl who accompanied him to the door. He recalled the shock of his sense of fitness on realizing during the spring the significance of his visits; his abrupt pilgrimage to the family fold in England to repair his perspective; the desolating sense of absence; the sudden cablegram; and her proud, challenging reply. It had been brought to him just before dinner, and he could yet feel the thrill that had passed through him

as he entered the dining room formulating his revolutionary announcement.

He recalled with a little twinge the scared expression that had come over his mother's face, the hurt and supercilious protest voiced by his sister, the strained congratulations offered by Girlie Windrom, Walter's sister, who had been visiting them, and the ominous silence from the paternal end of the table. A few days later his father had seen him off to Southampton, with the final comment: "Till the soil by all means, my boy. I can understand a farmer. We've all farmed. But we've never gone so far afield for our wives."

Then, with a more sympathetic impulse his father had said, "Your mother and I had rather set our hearts on Girlie Windrom for you. One of these days you will have to assume responsibilities as head of the family, whether it bores you or not, and it is not wholly reassuring to know that our name will be handed on to nephews of a French Canadian traitor." Keble had reflected that Louise could scarcely be held to account for her aunt's marriage to a man who had brilliantly satirized some of his father's most pompous Imperialistic speeches, but he had seen that nothing would be gained by pointing this out.

He could almost wish he had had a brother who might have satisfied the family by marrying Girlie, understudying his father in the ranks of the die-hards, and going through all the other motions ap-

propriate to the heir of a statesman, a landlord, and a viscount.

4

Walter was at first embarrassed by having his chum's wife assume all the duties of a nurse, but gradually under her deft régime the two men, and later Mrs. Windrom, who had set out from Washington on receiving news of the accident, took Louise's ministrations as matter of course. Louise saved her pride by announcing that she was a born Martha, but privately resolved that, for the future, her Mary personality should not so easily be caught napping.

Except for strangers who at rare intervals had strayed thither on hunting trips, Mrs. Windrom was the first woman of Keble's world who had entered their house. After her first maternal anxiety had been allayed and she had been assured that Dr. Bruneau had not mis-set her son's bones, Mrs. Windrom made a point of being pleasant to the young woman who was filling the place she had always expected her own daughter to occupy. Unfortunately, Louise *felt* that Mrs. Windrom made a point of it. Being a woman of restricted imagination, Mrs. Windrom was at a loss for ways and means to be friendly with a girl who had scarcely heard of the routines and the people comprising her stock-in-trade. There was not much to say beyond "good-mornings" and "my dears," and the very lack of an

extensive common ground made it necessary for Mrs. Windrom to fill the gap with superfluous politenesses. She never failed to commend Louise's tea and cakes, her pretty linen patterns, and her bouquets of wild flowers, but for the quick intuition, the embarrassed private cogitation, and the tortuous readjustments of manner by means of which Louise achieved absence of friction, Mrs. Windrom had necessarily only a limited appreciation.

Once or twice Louise, whose patience was particularly tried by Mrs. Windrom's incomprehensible habit of remaining in her bedroom until eleven, experienced a sensation of deep, angry rebellion, for which she ended by chiding herself and went on grimly fulfilling her self-appointed tasks sustained by an undercurrent of pride that would not have been lost on Keble had he not been caught back into the past for the moment, to rebreathe the faded but sweet odors of the hawthorne hedges and the red-leather clubs he had abandoned nearly three years ago.

Walter, towards the end of his recovery, more than once sensed the loneliness of Louise's position. Being conscientious as well as shy, he was at some pains to conjure up discreet words in which to couch his feeling. Meanwhile his glances and gentle acknowledgments gave her the stimulus she needed to carry her through.

On the day set for their departure, Walter made a meticulous avowal of gratitude which reached a chord in her nature that had never been made to vi-

brate. "Sometimes, at least once in the course of a woman's married life," he said, "I imagine there is some service, perhaps trifling, perhaps important, that only a man other than her husband can render. If such an occasion ever arises for you, I shall be there, eager to perform it. I think I can be impersonal and friendly at the same time. It's my only real talent. Moreover, I'm older than Keble, in imagination if not in years, and am more acutely conscious of certain shades of things that concern him than he can be."

The unspoken corollary was that Walter was also more acutely conscious than Keble of certain shades of herself, and in that moment a ray of light penetrated to an obscure recess of Louise's mind, a recess that had refused to admit certain unlovely truths and heterodoxies,—a recess that had declined, for instance, to put credence in the change of heart of so many women in books and plays: Nora Helmer, Mélisande, Guinevere; and for the first time in her life she understood how there could be a psychology of infidelity. For the first time she understood that one might have to be unfaithful in the letter to remain faithful in the spirit. Just as one might have to break a twenty-dollar bill to obtain a twenty dollars' worth. It was a strangely sweet, strangely unhappy moment, but only a moment, for almost immediately she was recalled to a consciousness of hand-bags, cloaks, veils, and small, nameless duties of eyes and hands and lips. Then Mrs. Windrom kissed her

goodbye, with an emphasized friendliness that only set her mind at work wondering what it was that Mrs. Windrom had left unsaid or undone that she should feel obliged to emphasize the kiss. Louise could find no words to define the gap that lay between them; but she was sure that Mrs. Windrom defined it to a T, and had stated it to a T in letters to Girlie, who would restate it to Alice Eveley and the Tulk-Leamingtons!

As the car mounted the hill beyond Mr. Brown's cottage, Keble turned to her, with the absent-minded intention of thanking her, following the cue of the others, for everything she had done. The visit of his friends breaking into their long days had been for him an exciting distraction, and he could be only cloudily conscious of the strain it had put upon her, whose life had been socially humble and barren. His face still bore traces of the mask which people of his world apparently always wore. He found Louise pale, with brows slightly drawn together, the mouth with its arched lips relaxed, as of one suffering a slight with no feeling of rancor.

One instinct, to take her in his arms and reassure her by sheer contact, was held in abatement by another, an instinct to stop and reason out the elements that had produced the momentary hiatus. This procrastination on his part had an almost tragic significance for the impulsive girl. She lowered her eyes, pressed her teeth against her lip, straightened her arms, and walked into the house. If he had followed

more quickly on her steps she would have succumbed to a passionate desire to be petted. As it was, he reached her side only after she had had time to put on her pride.

There was still a chance, had he been emotionally nimble enough to say something humorous about the visit, something gently satiric about Mrs. Windrom's exaggerated fear of missing connections with the stage from the Valley to Witney, something natural and relaxed and sympathetic,—if only her old nickname, "Weedgie,"—to reinstate her in the position to which, as his most intimate, she felt entitled.

A great deal, she felt, depended on what his tone would be. She held herself taut, dreading an echo of the hollow courtesies that had filled her rooms for days with such forbidding graciousness.

Keble had a congenital aversion to demonstrations. Tenderness might coax him far, but it would never induce him to "slop over." As he went to the table for his pipe, his eyes encountered an alien object which he lifted thankfully, for it served as a cue.

"Hello, Mrs. Windrom left her *pince-nez* behind . . . I'll have them put into the mail for Sweet to take out this afternoon. Hadn't you better write a note to go with them, my dear?"

She turned and faced him. In her eyes he saw something smoldering, something whose presence he had on two or three occasions half suspected: a dark, living subtlety that he could attribute only to her Frenchness. Her nostrils were slightly dilated, her

lips quietly composed. She walked very close, looked directly into his eyes, and with a little sidelong shrug that brought her shoulder nearly to her chin, whipped out the words, "If I weren't so damn polite I'd smash them!"

The slam of the door, a few seconds later, drove her exclamation at him with a force that, after the first thrill, left him vexed and bewildered.

CHAPTER II

LOUISE had wondered why Katie Salter had not appeared to do the weekly washing. In the light of a report brought by the mail carrier the reason was now too frightfully clear. Katie's son, a boy of twelve, had accidentally killed himself while examining an old shot-gun.

Keble was sitting at his table filling in a cheque. Louise had been silently watching him. "I'll give this to Sweet to take to Katie on his way back to the Valley," he said. "It will cover expenses and more."

"Give it to me instead, dear. I'll take it when I go this afternoon."

"Oh! Then what about our trip to the Dam with the Browns?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to be excused. I must do what I can for Katie. She has nobody."

"She has the neighbors. Mrs. what's her name, Dixon, is taking care of her. Besides, all the women for miles around flock together for an occasion of that sort. It will be rather ghastly."

"Especially for Katie. That's why I have to go."

"Oh, Lord! if you feel you must. I'll come with you."

She rose from her chair and picked up the cheque

he had left on the edge of the table. She had thought it all out within a few seconds, and in none of the pictures she had conjured up could she find a place for her husband. The fastidiousness which persisted through all his efforts to be "plain folks" could not be reconciled with the stark details of the tragedy ten miles down the road.

"No, Keble dear," she replied with a firmness she knew he wouldn't resist. More than once she had secretly wished he would resist her firmness, for every yielding on his part seemed to increase her habit of being firm, and that was a habit that bade fair to petrify the amiable little gaieties and pliancies of her nature. "You know you've been anxious about the Dam. It won't do to put off the trip again. Katie will understand your absence, and she will feel comforted to have at least one dude present. You know I'm considered a dude, too, since my marriage. Nowadays my old friends address me as stiffly as we used to address the schoolma'am. . . . It's strange what trifles determine the manners of this world."

"Was our marriage such a trifle?"

Louise came out of her reflective mood and smiled, then said, as if just discovering it, "Why, yes, when you think of all the big things there are."

"What about Billy's death? Is that a big thing?"

"A big thing to Katie, just as our being together is a big thing to us."

"What a horrid way of putting it!"

“. . . Marriage is being together, though.”

He let that pass and returned to his point. “A big thing to Katie, but negligible in the light of something else, I suppose you mean?”

“Exactly.”

“In the light of what, for example?”

“I don’t quite know, dear. I’ll tell you when I’ve had time to philosophize it out.”

She kissed him and went out to the saddle shed.

Sundown knew his mistress’s moods and decided on an easy trot for the first few miles of the route, which lay through groves of pine and yellowing cottonwood. Eventually the road emerged into a broad stretch of dust-green sage perforated with gopher holes, and Louise set a diagonal course toward the stony river bed which had to be forded. A flock of snow-white pelicans sailed lazily overhead, following the stream toward favorite fishing pools. A high line of mountains, pale green, violet, and buff, merged into the hazy sky. The heat was oppressive and ominous.

For an hour not one human being crossed her path. The only sign of habitation had been the villainous dog and three or four horses of a not too prosperous homestead owned by one of Keble’s horse wranglers. All along the road she had been preoccupied by the tone of her parting talk with Keble, vaguely chagrined that her husband seemed to deprecate her identifying herself too closely with the life of the natives. Strangely enough he sought to identify

himself with them, while, presumably, expecting her to identify herself with the class from which he had sprung, as though, gradually, she would have portentous new duties to undertake.

She couldn't help dreading the prospect. Not that she shrank from duties,—on the contrary; it was the menacing gentility of it all that subdued her. When Keble had first come to them, disgusted with the old order, he had persuaded her that the younger generation,—his English generation,—had learned an epoch-making lesson, that it had earned its right to ignore tradition and to build the future according to its own iconoclastic logic. He had determined to create his own life, rather than passively accept the life that had been awaiting him over there since birth. She had thrilled with pride at having been chosen partner in such a daring scheme. Only to find that, in insidious ways, perhaps unconsciously, Keble was buttressing himself with the paraphernalia of the old order which he professed to repudiate. She could love Keble without gloating over his blue prints and his catalogues of prize cattle, his nineteenth century poets, and his eighteenth century courtliness. The natives might gape at her luxurious bathroom fixtures and other marvels that were beginning to arrive in packing cases at the Witney railway station. She had almost no possessive instinct, and certainly no ambition to be mistress of the finest estate in the province. Her most clearly defined ambition was to be useful,—useful to herself, and thereby, in some

vague but effective way, to her generation. Her father, for all his obscurity, was to her notion more useful than Keble. Wherever Keble went he drove a fair bargain: took something and gave something in return. Wherever the little physician went he left healing, courage, cheerfulness, and in return took, from some source close to the heart of life, the energy and will to give more.

She dismounted to open the gate of the Dixon yard and led Sundown past a meagre field of wheat, past straggling beds of onions and potatoes, towards a small unpainted house which struck her as the neglected wife of the big, scrupulously cared-for barn. Two harnessed farm wagons were standing before it, and a dirty touring car. A group of men were lounging near the woodshed chewing tobacco with a Sunday manner, and some small boys, bare-legged, were playing a discreet, enforcedly subdued game of tag. Two saddled horses were hitched to the fence, to which she led Sundown.

One of the Dixon children had run indoors to announce her advent, and as she stepped into the kitchen she was met by a woman dressed in black cotton and motioned into the adjoining room,—a combination of parlor and bedroom,—where two or three other women were sewing together strips of white cheesecloth. All eyes turned to her.

The walls were covered with newspaper, designed to prevent draughts. There was a rust-stained print of Queen Victoria and a fashion plate ten years

out of date. At the two tiny windows blossomless geranium stalks planted in tomato tins made a forlorn pattern. The centre of the room was occupied by a rough box in which lay a powder-scarred little form clad in a coquettish "sailor suit" of cheese-cloth.

Louise drew near and looked wonderingly at the yellowish-white, purple-flecked face and hideously exposed teeth of the boy who had a few days since run errands for her, and who had planned to grow up and "drive the mail."

The women expected her to weep, and in anticipation began to sniffle.

"At what time is the burial?" she asked, dry-eyed.

"As soon as we can git this here covering made. We've had to do everything pretty quick. We can't keep him long."

Louise shuddered and was turning away when she remembered the flowers in her hand,—dahlias and inappropriate, but the only flowers to be had, the only flowers on the scene,—and placed them in the coffin, with an odd little pat, as if to reassure Billy. Then she threaded a needle and set to work with the others.

When all the strips were sewn together and gathered, they were nailed to the boards and to the cover of the coffin. Perspiration rolled from the forehead of Mr. Dixon, and his embarrassment at having to make so much noise caused him from time to time to spit on the floor.

The sound of hammering stirred Katie's drugged imagination, and overhead thin wails began to arise. With the continued pounding the lamentations increased in volume, and presently the sound of moving chairs could be heard, followed by indistinct consolations and footsteps on the uncarpeted stairs. The door burst open, and Katie lurched in, her face twisted and swollen behind a crooked veil. Clawing away the man with the hammer, she threw herself across the box. A long strand of greyish-red hair escaped from under a dusty hat and brushed against the redder hair of the boy.

It was some time before Katie could be drawn away. Finally, with a renewed burst of sobbing she let herself be led by Louise into a corner of the kitchen. Mixed with her sobs were incoherent statements. "It was for his health," Katie was trying to tell Louise, "I brought him up here. And I was workin' so hard, only for his schoolin'."

Louise kept peering anxiously out of doors. Black clouds had gathered, and a treacherous little breeze had begun to stir the discarded pieces of cheese-cloth which she could see on the floor through the open door. A tree in the yard rustled, as if sighing in relief at a change from the accumulated heat of days.

After long delays the time arrived for the fastening down of the lid. To everyone's surprise, and thanks largely to Louise's tact, Katie allowed the moment to pass as if in a stupor. The coffin was

placed in one of the farm wagons, and a soiled quilt thrown over it. The outer box was lifted upon the second wain, and served as a seat for the men and boys in the gathering. Katie and the women were installed in the dirty motor, which was to lead the way. And Louise, unstrapping her rain-cape, mounted Sundown and galloped ahead to open the gate.

As the clumsy procession filed past her, the clouds broke, and a deluge of hailstones beat against them, followed by sheets of water into which it was difficult to force the horses. It persisted during the whole journey toward the mound which was recognized as a graveyard, although no one but Rosie Dixon and an unknown tramp had ever been interred there.

On the approach of the bedraggled *cortège* two men in shirtsleeves and overalls, grasping shovels, came from under the shelter of a dripping tree to indicate the halting place. Louise dismounted at once and led Katie to a seat on some planks that rested near the grave. Mrs. Dixon, a glass of spirits of ammonia in her hand, pointed out Rosie's resting place and for a moment transposed the object of her sorrow.

The grave proved too narrow for the outer box, and there was another long wait on the wet planks while the grave-diggers shoveled and took measurements, with muttered advice and expletives. The rain had abated. A mongrel who had followed them

ran from one to another, and yelped when some one attempted to chasten him.

At length the box splashed into place, scraping shrilly against projecting pebbles, and the assembly drew near to assist or watch the lowering of the white cheese-cloth box. Katie was reviving for another paroxysm.

With a shock Louise discovered that they were preparing to put the cover in place without a sign of a religious ceremony.

"Is there no one here to take charge of the service?" she inquired.

The man with the shovel replied for the others. "You see, Mrs. Eveley, Mr. Boots is away from the Valley. We couldn't get a parson from Witney. We thought perhaps somebody would offer to say a prayer like."

To herself she was saying that not even her father could let poor Billy be buried so casually.

"Let me take charge," she offered, with only the vaguest notion of what she was going to do.

Mrs. Dixon took her place beside Katie, and Louise proceeded to the head of the grave, making on her breast the sign her mother had secretly taught her.

"My dear friends," she commenced. "We poor human beings have so little use for our souls that we turn them over to pastors and priests for safe keeping, till some emergency such as the present. In French there is a proverb which says: it is better to

deal with God direct than with his saints. If we had acquired the habit of doing so, we shouldn't feel embarrassed when God is not officially represented. With our souls in our own keeping, we could not be so cruelly surprised.

“As a matter of fact, priests and parsons know no more than we do about life and death. Truth lies deep within ourself, and the most that any ambassador of heaven can do is to direct our gaze inward. Although we know nothing, we have been born with an instinctive belief that the value of life cannot be measured merely in terms of the number of years one remains a living person. We can't help feeling that every individual life contributes to an unknown total of Life. Our human misfortune is that we see individuals too big and Life itself too small. We forget we are like bees, whose glory is that each contributes, namelessly, a modicum to the hive and to the honey that gives point to their existence. We do wrong to attach tragic importance to the death of even our nearest friend, for their dying is a phase of their existence in the larger sense, just as sleeping is a phase of our twenty-four hour existence.

“The real tragedy is that we build up our lives upon something which is by its nature impermanent. The wisest of us are too prone to live for the sake of a person, and if that person suddenly ceases to exist the ground is swept from under us. To find a new footing is difficult, but possible, and it may even be good for us to be obliged to reach out in a new

direction and live for something more permanent than ourselves.

“We are too easily discouraged by pain. We should learn from nature that pain is merely a symptom of growth. Trees could not be luxuriant in spring if in winter they hadn't experienced privation. What we have derived from life has been at the expense of others' privations and death; if we are unwilling to be deprived in our turn, we are stupidly selfish.

“Instinct tells us that, in a voice that can be heard above the voice of grief. It also tells us to be courageous and neighborly. In that spirit we can say that Katie's loss is our opportunity. It affords us an occasion to prove our human solidarity by giving her a hand over the barren stretch and helping her to a new conception of life.

“In that spirit let us put a seal on the last reminder of the soul which has passed into the keeping of forces that direct us all, and let us do so with a profound reverence for all the elements in nature which are a mystery to us. Some of us have grown up without an orthodox faith. But we can all be humble enough to bow our heads in acknowledgment of the great wisdom which has created us mortal and immortal.”

Stepping back to make way for the men, Louise, on some incongruous urge, again made the sign of the cross with which she had superstitiously precluded her address. From the faces around her she

knew she had spoken with an impersonal concentration as puzzling to them as it had been to herself.

One of the grave-diggers suddenly said "Amen," and Mrs. Dixon, in tremulous tones, added, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away."

The ceremony over, and Katie installed in the home of a neighbor until she should feel able to remove with her belongings to a cabin on the Eveyley ranch, Louise rode away in the twilight towards the Valley, to spend a night with her father.

The air had a tang in it that suggested October rather than August, and the storm had deposited a sprinkling of white on the summits of the mountains. Not a sign remained of the landscape which only a few hours earlier had been drooping under a sultry heat. Her knuckles ached with cold as Sundown trotted on toward the town which was beginning to sparkle far away in the gloom.

2

When Louise and her father were alone they dropped into French which gave them a sense of intimacy and of isolation which they liked. The little doctor was greatly pleased on his arrival from a trying case that night to find her in possession of the library. Her first question, issuing from some depth of revery, was even more unaccountable than her presence.

"*Bon soir, Papa,*" she greeted him. "Can you tell

me exactly how much money I have in the bank, including what Uncle Mornay-Mareuil left me?"

Dr. Bruneau opened his eyes, made a bewildered grimace, went to a desk in the corner, and rummaged for a bank-book. "Including interest to date," he gravely replied, "eleven thousand, two hundred and thirty-three dollars and thirty-three cents."

He came to his own chair opposite her, picking up the pipe which she had filled for him. "What's in that black little head?"

"Many things. More, really, than I know,—or, at least, than I knew."

"Nothing wrong?"

". . . I even wonder if there is anything right."

He was at once reassured. "You've been with Katie Salter. How is she?"

"She's bearing it. Papa, *penses-tu*, I delivered the funeral oration."

"*B'en vrai, tu en as!* . . . What did you say?"

"I talked over their heads, and a little over my own, as though I were under a spell. I thought I was going to say something religious; but it was scarcely that. It was rather like what the cook scrapes together when people turn up for dinner unexpectedly,—philosophical pot-luck. Everybody seemed puzzled, but I wasn't just inventing words, as I used to do when addressing my paper dolls. The words seemed to make sense in spite of me. . . . And I had a strange feeling, afterwards, of having grown up all at once. I don't think I'll ever

feel sheer girlish again. And the worst of that is, I don't quite know how a woman is supposed to feel and conduct herself. It's very perplexing. . . . Papa, what do you believe comes after this life, or what doesn't?"

"Precisely that,—that nothing does."

"I told them that we were infinitesimal parts of some mighty human machinery, and although life was the most valuable thing we knew of there was something beyond our comprehension a million times more valuable; that even though we as individuals perished, our energies didn't."

The doctor was chuckling. "I hope they'll take your word for it! . . . We may be immortal for all I know. But if we are, I see no reason why cats and chickens should not be. In the dissecting room they're very much like men."

"They are; they must be! Though not as individuals. The death of a man or the death of a cat simply scatters so many units of vitality in other directions! *Tiens!* when our dam broke, up at the canyon, all the electric lights went out. That was the death of our little lighting plant. But the water power that generated our current is still there, immortal, even if the water is rushing off in a direction that doesn't happen to light our lamps, a direction that makes Keble grieve and Mr. Brown swear. . . . That's a rock on which Keble and I have often split. I think he sincerely believes he's going to a sort of High Church heaven, intact except for his clothes

and his prayer-book. I wish I could believe something as naïve as that."

"*Pas vrai!* You are too fond of free speculation, like your poor Papa. . . . And now, those dollars in the bank?"

"Oh, I was just wondering. . . . Besides, you never can tell, I might decide to run off some day and improve my education."

Her father shot a look of inquiry across the table, but her face was impassive. "You're not exactly ignorant; and certainly not stupid."

She laughed. "*Ah ça!* . . . Will you please get me a cheque book the next time you call at the bank?"

The next morning Louise passed in helping Nana dust and straighten the accumulation of books and knick-knacks in the house. She relieved the old servant by preparing luncheon herself, and the doctor arrived from the little brown shingled hospital opposite the cement and plaster bank to rejoin her, bringing with him a new cheque book, which she carelessly thrust into the pocket of her riding breeches.

"What a sensible Papa you are, not to warn me against extravagance!"

"I've never doubted you, my child. It's not likely I shall commence now. You might have gone far if you hadn't decided to marry; I always maintained that. As it is, you made a match that no other girl in the Valley could have done,—though I for one never guaranteed it would be successful."

"*Hein ça!*" she mocked, absent-mindedly. "I've made an omelette that no other girl in the Valley could have done, and it's too successful for words. Keble is upset for days if he catches me in my own kitchen."

She divided the omelette into three parts, one for Nana, who, more than any other person in the Valley, was awed by the fact that Weedgie Bruneau had turned into the Honorable Mrs. Eveley.

3

During several days Louise's thoughtful, suddenly grown-up mood persisted, but it was destined to be violently detracked by the chance reading of a poem which had been marked in blue pencil and cut out, apparently, from the page of a magazine. It was lying on Keble's table, among other papers. It was unsigned, and the title was *Constancy*. With a sense of wonderment that grew into fear she read:

*You cry I've not been true,
Why should I be?
For, being true to you,
Who are but one part of an infinite me,
Should I not slight the rest?*

*Rather are you false to me and nature
In seeking to prolong the span
Of impulses born mortal;
In prisoning memories
Impalpable as the fluttering of wings.*

*If I'd been false,
I have but mounted higher
Toward a spacious summit,
Bourne of all soaring vows.
The buds we gathered in the vale have perished.
Branches that offered roofs of shimmering green
motley,
Their summer service rendered,
Divested themselves,
Framing rude necessary heights.
Yet you sit plaintive there while I aspire,
Intent upon a goal you will not see.
Must I descend to you?
Or shall I venture still?—My staff
'An accusation of inconstancy.*

What did it mean? Why was it marked? Who had written it? Why was it lying on Keble's desk? She stood cold and still, her gaze returning again and again to the paper in her hand.

Unable to answer the questions, she sat down and made an ink copy of the brutal lines. When the last word was written she replaced the original on the table and took the copy to her bedroom, reading it, unconsciously memorizing it, making room in her philosophy for its egoistic claim, and finally locking it in the box that sheltered her youthful manuscripts.

Although she did not refer to the enigmatic poem, she knew that to its discovery could be traced a

breach that began to make itself felt, a breach which she knew Keble associated in some vague way with the funeral of little Billy Salter. Keble, for his part, had made no mention of the poem, and day after day those accusatory blue marks continued to peer through the unanswered correspondence that rested on his table. Although she argued the lines out of countenance, though she watched for Keble's polite mask to fall and reveal some emotion that would disprove her interpretation of them, they ate into her heart.

The poem might have been a hint from Providence. She *was* an impediment to Keble's progress, a poor creature unable to comprehend the hereditary urges that bore him along in a direction that seemed to her futile. How often must he have been legitimately impatient of her deficiencies! How often must he have starved for the internationally flavored chit-chat with which a wife like Girlie Windrom would have entertained him! With what a bitter sigh must he have read his thought thus expressed by an unknown poet! That would account for the marking and the clipping. She promised herself to profit by the hint, if hint it were.

As the breach widened, Keble maintained the deferential attitude he had always assumed in the course of their hitherto negligible misunderstandings. Technically he was always in the right. Her acquaintance with people of his class had been large enough to teach her that good breeding implied the

maintenance of a certain tone, that in divergences of view between well and dubiously bred people, the moral advantage seemed always to lie with the former. It was a trick she had yet to learn.

There was a sort of finality in the nature of this breach that made it unlike any other in their relationship. This was a conclusion she admitted after days of desperate clinging to the illusion that nothing was amiss. Meanwhile Keble waited; and she sank deeper into silence.

In the midst of her self-analysis a letter arrived for Keble from the friend of the early spring. Walter Windrom had spent the intervening months in England, but was returning to his post in Washington.

The renewal of this link with the outer world had a stimulating effect upon Louise. It suggested a plan which ran through her veins like a tonic.

That night, through a blur of tears, she wrote the following letter, while her husband lay uneasily asleep.

“Hillside, September 16.

“Dear Walter: Before leaving the ranch you offered to do something for me. You may if you will. I’ve been miserable for months at the thought of what a very back-woods creature I am. I can never be what I would like to be; therefore I’ve decided to be what I *can* be, so *hard* that I shall be even with Fate. I can’t go away, but I can afford a tutor with my very own money. So will you please im-

mediately pick out the most suitable girl you can find. Above all things she mustn't be a teacher, or anything professional; she must simply be somebody nice, and too well-bred for words! I'll learn *by ear*; I never could learn any other way.

"I will pay all expenses and whatever salary you suggest. And I'd rather it be a big salary for a paragon than economize on a second-best. She could come here as a former friend of mine, for Keble must know nothing about my conspiracy. Do you think that is too much like not playing the game? After all, it's only that I wish to play the game better, —I mean his sort of game. Not that I especially like it; but I've let myself in for it.

"Would you do that, Walter, please, without making fun of me? Address me in care of Dr. Achille Bruneau."

CHAPTER III

IN Keble's new car, purchased with a recent birthday cheque from the family, Louise was driving swiftly over the lumpy road that wound its way down the hill, beside the river, across sage plains, around fields of alfalfa, toward the distant Valley. There was an autumn crispness in the air, and the rising sun made the world bigger and bigger every minute. She rejoiced in the freshness of the earth; and the fun of goading a powerful motor over deserted, treacherous roads made her chuckle. Most of all, she was excited by the element of adventure in the journey. She welcomed most things in life that savored of adventure. What mattered chiefly to her was that she should go forward. And this morning's exploit was a leap. If she were ever to get out of her present *impasse* it would be thanks to the unknown woman she was hastening to meet.

As she swung into the long main street, passing the post office and the drug store, the bank, the hotel, and the hospital, scattering greetings among stragglers, she was conscious of the wide-eyed interest in her smart blue car. The inhabitants made capital of their intimacy with her. In the old days she was "Doc. Bruneau's girl;" nowadays she was, in addi-

tion, the wife of a "rich dude" and a liberal buyer of groceries and hardware.

"As though that made me any different!" she reflected, and drew the car up before the doctor's white-washed garden fence, sending a bright hallo to an old schoolmate, Minnie Hopper, whom she had once passionately cherished for their similar taste in hair-ribbons and peppermint sticks, and who was now Mrs. Otis Swigger, wife of Oat, the proprietor of "The Canada House" and the adjoining "shaving parlor and billiard saloon." For Minnie marriage was nine-tenths of life. She was the mother of two chalky babies; she had an "imitation mahogany bedroom set"; and her ambition was to live in Witney, beyond the mountain pass, where there was a "moving picture palace" and a railway station.

Even Keble,—Louise pursued the thought as the gate clicked behind her,—seemed to think marriage nine-tenths of life. For *her!*

She was burning with curiosity.

A tall, lithe, solid young woman was standing before a heaped bookcase,—a fair-skinned, clear-eyed woman of thirty-two or three, with a broad forehead over which a soft, shining, flat mass of reddish-brown hair was drawn. She wore a rough silk shirt with a brown knitted cravat; a fawn colored skirt, severely simple but so cunningly cut that it assumed new lines with the slightest motion of her body; brown stockings and stout brown golf shoes of an indefinable smartness.

Louise had never seen a woman so all-of-a-piece, and of a piece so rare. As a rule, in encountering new personalities, she was first of all sensitive to signs of intelligence, or its lack. She could not have said whether this person were excessively clever or excessively the reverse. It was the woman's composure that baffled her. The wide-set grey eyes and the relaxed but firm lips gave no clue. She swiftly guessed that in this woman's calculations there was a scale of values that virtually ignored cleverness, as such; that cleverness was to her merely a chance intensity that co-existed with other more important qualities in accordance with which she made her classifications, if she bothered to *make* classifications; and something suggested that for this woman classifying processes were automatic. What her mechanical standards of judgment were, there was no gauging: degrees of gentility, perhaps. That was what Louise would have to learn.

The lips, without parting, formed themselves into a reassuring smile, which had the contrary effect of making Louise acutely conscious of a necessity to be correct, of marshaling all the qualities in herself that had aroused approbation in the most discriminating people she had known.

The stranger replaced a book she had been inspecting and took a step in Louise's direction. Louise shook herself, as if chidingly, and let her natural directness dispel the momentary awkwardness. She went forward quickly with outstretched hand.

"You are Miss Cread, of course. I am Mrs. Eveley. I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting overnight here."

"Your father has been more than hospitable. He delighted me last night with his quaint ideas."

"Oh dear,—about priests and things?" Louise was inclined to deprecate her father's penchant for assailing the church in whatever hearing.

Miss Cread laughed. "Partly. I dote on this little house, and all *its* things."

"Papa suggests that after he dies I transport it to a quai on the left bank of the Seine in Paris and knock out the front wall. He says it would make a perfect book stall. . . . Papa once won a scholarship to study medicine in Paris. It rather spoiled him for a life in these wilds. I do hope you won't die of boredom with us. I've never been to Paris. Indeed I've never been farther than Winnipeg, and that seemed thousands of miles. Of course you've been abroad."

"A great deal."

"You're not a bit American." Louise was thinking of camping parties that sometimes penetrated the Valley in cars decorated with banners bearing the device "Idaho" or "Montana." She had motioned her new friend to a chair and was leaning forward opposite her. "Do you know," she suddenly confided, "I'm terribly afraid of you."

"Good gracious, why?"

“You’ll laugh, but never mind. It’s because you’re so distinguished looking.”

Miss Cread reflected. “A distinctive appearance doesn’t necessarily make one dangerous. It is I, on the contrary, who should be afraid.”

“I’m sure nothing could frighten you!”

“Oh, yes. Responsibility. You see, this is my first post. I’m quite inexperienced. I do hope Mr. Windrom made that clear.”

“Oh, experience! Why, you’re simply swimming in it,—in the kind that matters to me at this moment. I mean your life, your surroundings, all the things that decided Mr. Windrom in his selection of you as a companion, have done something for you, have made you the person who—bowled me over when I entered this room. My husband is brimming over with the same,—oh, call it genuineness. Like sterling silver spoons. I don’t know whether I’m sterling or not, but I do know I need polishing. . . . It may be entirely a matter of birth. Papa and I haven’t a crumb of birth, so far as I know,—though I have a musty old aunt who swears we have. She endows convents, and her idea of a grand pedigree would be to have descended from a line of saints, I imagine. . . . For my part I have no pretensions whatever, not one, any more than poor Papa. He thinks it rather a pity to be born at all, though he’s forever helping people *get* born. . . . I was rash enough to dive into marriage without holding my breath, and got a mouthful of water. Sometimes I

feel that my husband wishes I could be a little more sedate, a little more,—oh, you know, Miss Cread, what I called distinguished-looking, though I could feel that you disapproved of the phrase. One of the very things you must do is to teach me what I ought to say instead of distinguished-looking. That's what Minnie Hopper would have said, and at least I'm not a Minnie Hopper."

"You're like nobody I've ever seen or heard of!" This was fairly ejaculated, and it gave Louise courage to continue, breathlessly, as before.

"It is for my husband's sake that I'm trying this experiment. At least I think it's for his sake: we never quite know when we're being selfish, do we? He will soon be a rather important person, for here. He's getting more and more things to look after: I can hardly turn nowadays without running into some new thing that sort of belongs to us. We shall have guests from England later on, and I can't have them dying of mortification on my threshold. . . . When I married I was blind in love, and somehow took it for granted that I'd pick up all the hints I should need. But I haven't. . . . Am I talking nonsense?"

"Not at all. Please go on."

"If you have any pride you can't ask your husband to instruct you in subjects you should know more about than he,—don't you agree? I'm sure I know more about baking bread than any of the Eveleys back to Adam, but I don't know a tenth as much

about when to shake hands and when not to, and that's much more important than I ever dreamed.

"It may be silly, but I've made up my mind to be the sort of person my husband won't feel he ought to make excuses for. Not that he ever would, of course! I've never admitted a word of all this to a soul. I hope you understand, and I hope you don't think such trifles trivial!"

"My dear! . . . Aren't you a little morbid about yourself? I know women of the world who are uncouth compared with you. . . . As for creating an impression, you are rather formidable already! There are little tricks of pronunciation I can show you, and I shall be delighted to tell you all the stupid things I know about shaking hands and the like. . . . I'm already on your side; I was afraid I mightn't be. One can never depend on a man's version, you know, even as discerning a man as Mr. Windrom; and a woman usually takes the man's part in a domestic situation."

Louise had a sudden twinge.

"There is only one thing that worries me now."

Miss Cread waited, with questioning eyebrows.

"How *am* I going to pass you off? I've told my husband I knew you when you taught at Harristown! I went to Normal School there for a year, you know. He'll see with half an eye that you're no school teacher. What are we to invent? I can't fib for a cent."

"Well. . . . Shall we invent that my family lost

its money and I had to work for my living? And that things are better now, but my family have all perished, and I've come here for a change. That statement doesn't do serious violence to my conscience."

"There's a little two-room log cabin you can have to retire to whenever you get bored with us. . . . And of course we'll have to call each other by our first names. You don't mind, do you?"

Miss Cread smiled sympathetically.

"She's nice," decided Louise, in relief, then said, "I'll go out and help Nana now. After lunch, *en route la bonne troupe!*"

This phrase, more than anything Louise had said, afforded Miss Cread the clue to their relationship. Louise had reverted into French with a little flourish which seemed to say, "At least I have one advantage over you: I am bi-lingual." Miss Cread saw that it was characteristic of Louise to underestimate her virtues and fail to recognize her faults, and for her, who had spoken French in Paris before Louise was born, Louise's accent was unlovely, as only the Canadian variety can be. She would let her pupil make the discovery for herself. Miss Cread was pleased to find that her mission was going to be a subtle one.

"I shall be fearfully nervous for a few days, until we get into swing," said Louise at the table.

"Then my first task is to restore your composure."

"Your second will be to keep it restored. . . . I'm growing less and less afraid of you. Wouldn't it be

funny if I should get so used to you I answered you back, like in school?"

"There's no telling where it will stop. You're a venturesome woman."

Louise laughed merrily. "Don't you love adventure?" It was an announcement rather than an inquiry.

2

Late in the afternoon they reached the fields where the men were cutting the scanty crops. Keble on his buckskin mare was in consultation with the superintendent, and on hearing the honk of the car wheeled about, came toward the road, and dismounted.

"Miriam dear, this is my husband. His name is Keble, and he's frightened to death that you'll notice, though not call attention to, the muddy spot on the breeches that Mona cleaned this very morning. Keble, this is Miriam Cread, who is coming to stop with us as long as I can force her to stay."

Keble took a firm white hand in his. The stranger's smile, the confident poise of her head, the simple little hat whose slant somehow suggested Bond Street or the Rue de la Paix, amazed him. It was as though Louise had brought home a Sargent portrait and said she had bought it at the Witney emporium.

"What I can't forgive you for, my dear," he said blandly enough, "is that you should have kept me so long in ignorance of such a charming friend's existence." He turned to the guest. "I've heard all

about Pearl and Amy and Minnie, but next to nothing about you. Don't you think that's perverse? My wife is sort of human *feuilleton*: something new every day."

He was surprised to hear himself using a term which would certainly have conveyed nothing to Pearl or Amy or Minnie, but he knew the allusion had registered.

"I suppose that's the first duty of a wife," Miriam laughed. "Besides, Louise Bruneau is nothing if not original. All her friends recognize that." She patted Louise ever so gently on the shoulder.

The modulation of the voice, the grace of the little pat, the composure, the finely-cut nostrils, the slant of the hat!

They chatted, then Louise started the engine, and in a moment the car was zig-zagging up the long hill that lay between them and the lake.

Louise was conquering an unreasonable pang. To herself she was explaining the freemasonry that existed among people of Keble's and Miss Cread's world; there was some sort of telepathic pass word, she knew not what. It was going to be the Windrom atmosphere all over again: permeated by exotic verbal trifles. But that was what she had bargained for; the stakes were worth the temporary disadvantage. Walter needn't, of course, have sent quite such a perfect specimen.

What "stakes"? Well, surely there were objects to live for that outweighed the significance of petty

jealousies, petty possessions, the rights of one person in another. She brought the car around to a point from which the lake spread out under them in all the glory of deep emerald water and distant walls of sun-bronzed rock. The cottages and farm buildings grouped themselves beneath, and along the pebbly shore a rich league of grey-black and dark green pine forest linked the buildings and the mountains. Two frantic sheep dogs came barking to meet them.

An exclamation of delight escaped from the travel-weary guest.

"I'm glad you like it," remarked Louise, relenting.

"It's superb," Miriam replied. Again she gave Louise's shoulder a discreet pat, as the latter began the winding descent. "You very lucky woman!" she commented.

3

Riding, fishing, and hunting for the winter's supply of game enlivened the autumn months, and when the snow arrived, drifting through the canyons, obliterating all traces of roads and fences, there were snow-shoe and ski journeys, skating on a swept portion of the lake, and dances before the great fireplace. Self-consciously at first, but soon without being aware of it, Louise reflected the sheen of her companion, and acquired objective glimpses of herself. There had been long discussions in which tastes and opinions had been sifted, and Louise's speech

and cast of thought subtly supervised. Throughout the program Keble made quiet entrances and exits, dimly realizing what was taking place, grateful for, yet a little distrustful of the gradual transformation. It was as though, in an atmosphere of peace, unknown forces were being secretly mobilized. There was a charm for him in the nightly fireside readings and conversations. When he was present they were likely to develop into a monologue of daring theories invented and sustained by Louise,—a Louise who had begun to take some of her girlish extravagances in earnest. In the end Keble found himself, along with Miriam Cread, bringing to bear against Louise's radicalism the stock counter arguments of his class.

This was disconcerting, for he had been in the habit of regarding himself as an innovator, with his back to the past and his gaze fixed upon the future; and although it was pleasant to find himself so often in accord with a highly civilized and attractive young woman just appreciably his senior, it was a set-back to his illusion of having graduated from the prejudices and short-sightedness of conventional society. For the sum total of his mental bouts with Louise was that she serenely but quite decisively relegated him to the ranks of the safe and sane. And "safe and sane" as she voiced the phrase meant something less commendable than "safe and sane" as he voiced it. For Keble "safe and sane" was of all vehicles the one which would carry him and his goods most adequately to his mortal destination. He had always

assumed that Louise had faith in the vehicle. Now he seemed to see her sitting on the tail-board, swinging her legs like a naughty child, ready to leap off at the approach of any conveyance that gave promise of more speed and excitement.

During his later school days, Keble, by virtue of an ability to discriminate, had arrived at a point of self-realization that rendered his conformity to custom a bore to him but failed to provide him with the logical alternative. For this he had consulted, and responded to, the more refined manifestations of individualism in contemporary literature and art, to the extent of falling under the illusion that he himself was a thoroughgoing individualist. A victim of a period of social transition, he, like so many other young men of his generation, made the mistake of assuming that his doubts and objections were the effect of a creative urge within himself, whereas he had merely acquired a decent wardrobe of modern notions which distinguished him from his elders and, to his own eyes, disguised the inalterably conservative nature of his principles. Hence the almost irreconcilable combination: an instinctive abstemiousness and an Epicurean relish.

Whenever Louise, after some brilliant skirmish with the outriders of orthodoxy, came galloping into camp with the news that a direct route lay open to the citadel of personal freedom and personal morality, Keble found himself throwing up his cap in a sympathetic glee, but then he fell to wondering

whether the gaining of the citadel were worth the trampling down of fields, the possible breaking of church windows, the discomfort to neutral bystanders.

At such moments he suspected that he was in the wrong camp; that he had been led there through his admiration for daring spirits rather than a desire for the victory they coveted. It alarmed him to discover that the topsy-turvy fancies that had endeared Louise to him were not merely playful. It alarmed him to discover that she was ready to put her most daring theories into practise, ready to regard her own thoughts and emotions as so many elements in a laboratory in which she was free to experiment, in scientific earnest, at the risk of explosions and bad odors, all for the sake of arriving at truths that would be of questionable value. Certainly, to Keble's mind, the potential results, should the experiments be never so successful, were not worth the incidental damage,—not where one's wife was concerned. For him "safe and sane" meant the avoidance of risk. For Louise he suspected that "safe and sane" smacked of unwillingness to take the personal risks inevitable in any conquest of truth. That brought him to the consideration of "truth," and he saw that for him truth was something more tangible, and much nearer home, than it was for his wife. And he was in the lamentable situation of feeling that she was right, yet being constitutionally unable, or unwilling, or afraid, to go in her direction.

Miriam caught something of the true proportions in the situation, and it was her policy to remain negative in so far as possible, pressing gently on either side of the scales, as the balance seemed to require. She had a conscientious desire to help the other two attain a comfortable *modus vivendi*, but as the winter progressed it became increasingly evident to her that her efforts might end by having a contrary effect. Reluctantly she saw herself saddled with the rôle of referee. Furthermore, it seemed as though the mere presence of a referee implied, even incited, combat. Their evenings often ended on a tone of dissension, Louise soaring on the wings of some new radical conclusion; Keble anxiously counseling moderation; and Miriam, by right and left sallies, endeavoring, not always with success, to bring the disputants to a level of good-humored give and take.

On two or three occasions she had been tempted to withdraw entirely, feeling that as long as a third person were present to hear, the diverging views of husband and wife would inevitably continue to be expressed. But on reflection she realized that her withdrawal could in no sense reconcile their divergences. From Louise she had derived the doctrine that views must, and will, out, and that to conceal or counterfeit them is foolish and dishonest. As Miriam saw it, these two had come to the end of the first flush of excited interest in each other. Their ship had put to sea, the flags had been furled, the sails bent. They had reached the moment when it

was necessary to set a course. And they might be considered fortunate in having a fair-minded third person at hand to see them safely beyond the first reefs. It hadn't occurred to Miriam that she might be a reef.

With Louise nothing remained on the surface; the massage that polished her manners polished her thoughts, and with increasing facility in the technique of carrying herself came an increasing desire to carry herself *somewhere*. As a girl she had too easily outdistanced her companions. Until Miriam Cread's advent there had been no woman with whom to compete, and her intelligence had in consequence slumbered. Keble had transformed her from a girl into a woman; but Miriam made her realize the wide range of possibilities comprised under Womanhood, and had put her on her mettle to define her own particular character as a woman. Now her personality was fully awake, and her daily routine was characterized by an insatiable mental activity, during which she proceeded to a footing on many subjects about which she had never given herself the trouble to think. She had read more books than most girls, and had dined on weighty volumes in her father's library for the sake of their sweets; but under the pressure of her new intellectual intensity she found that, without knowing it, she had been nourished on their soups and roasts. The unrelated impressions that she had long been capturing from books and thrusting carelessly upon mental shelves now formed

a fairly respectable stock-in-trade. Every new book, every new discussion, every new incident furnished fuel to the motor that drove her forward.

But there was one moment, during the Christmas festivities, when the boldness of her recent thoughts, the inhibitive tightness of her new garments of correctitude, the fatigue of standing guard over herself, became intolerably irksome, when she looked away from Keble and Miriam and the Browns towards her tubby, bald-headed, serene little father, twinkling and smoking his beloved pipe before the fire: a moment when she longed to be the capricious, dreamy girl who had curled up at his feet during the winter evenings of her first acquaintance with the English boy from Hillside.

If Keble had divined that mood, if he could have stepped in and caught her out of it with an expert caress, if he had read the thought that was then in her mind,—namely that no amount of cleverness could suppress the yearning that her conjugal experience had so far failed to gratify,—if his eyes had penetrated her and not the flames, where presumably they envisaged the air castles he would soon be translating into stone and cement, then the yards of the matrimonial ship might have swung about, the sails have taken the breeze, and the blind helmsman have directed a course into a sharply defined future. At that moment Louise might have been converted, by a sufficiently subtle lover, into a passionate partner in the most prosaic of schemes. All she needed was

to be coaxed and driven gently, to a point not far off. It was too personal to be explained; and if he couldn't see it, then she must do what she could on her own initiative, at her expense and his.

The dreamy girl faded out of her eyes, and a self-contained, positive young woman rose from her seat with an easy directness, crossed the room to switch on the lights, and said, "Keble, I've just decided how I shall dispose of my Christmas present." For the benefit of the Browns she explained, "I had a colossal cheque in my stocking from a father-in-law who doesn't know what a spendthrift I am."

"What will you do with it?" asked her husband.

"Something very nice. You're sure to object."

"Is that what makes it nice: my objecting?"

"That makes it more exciting."

"Then let me object hard, dear."

Louise withstood the laughter that greeted Keble's score. "Do it immediately," she advised, "and have it over with; then I'll say what it is."

"Why not spare us a scene?" suggested Miriam.

"We know what a brute he is."

"You're concerned in it," Louise replied. "I hope *you* won't object, for that would be fatal."

This gave Keble his opportunity for revenge against Miriam's "brute." "Mayn't we take Miriam's compliance for granted? We know what a diplomat she is."

Louise was now seated on the opposite side of the table, facing them. "Do you object, Papa?"

“On principle, yes, because it’s sure to be something rash. As a matter of fact, no, because you’re the only sensible rash person there is.”

Louise was delighted. “It’s Papa’s stubborn belief in my common-sense, more than anything else, that gives me the courage of my enlightened rashness,” she proclaimed.

At this Keble turned with a smile to Miriam. “Now I see what you meant by brute. It’s because I won’t always acknowledge the enlightenment of rashness.”

Miriam colored a little, to her great annoyance. “Really, you mustn’t seek meanings in my random words.”

“Oh, then it wasn’t meant literally?”

“There aren’t any literal brutes left; only figurative ones. Must I do penance for a levity I admit to have been uncalled for?”

“I’ll let you off,—with the warning that I shall watch your remarks more closely in future.”

“Then I can only defend myself by becoming the objectionable thing you called *me*!”

“Diplomat! Is that objectionable?”

“Rather. It implies the existence of things to be connived at. Once you’ve admitted diplomat you’ve admitted stakes, and rivalry.”

Mrs. Brown was on what she called tender hooks. Her husband was waggishly of the opinion that the cheque would end by being spent on wagon loads of sugar for Sundown, that pampered circus beast.

“Has everybody finished objecting?”

Everybody had.

“Well, then, Miriam and I are going on a jaunt,—to New York and then South where it’s warm.”

“It’s a sort of holiday from me, I gather?” said Keble when the others had done exclaiming.

Miriam’s eyes turned in warning towards the speaker, whose lips broke into a smile, in relish of the “brute” which, diplomatically, was merely flashed across the room. This little passage arrested Louise, who had been for the twentieth time reminded, by Keble’s detachment, of the inexplicable poem.

“Or yours from me,” she replied. “What’s sauce for the gander—”

Keble judged the moment opportune for bringing forth his best Port, and while the three men took a new lease of life, the women chatted excitedly about resorts and itineraries.

Louise’s announcement had been especially welcome to Miriam. It promised an escape from umpiring,—from neutral-mindedness. Her cheeks burned a little.

The doctor was drifting back, along with Keble’s superintendent, into the rigorous pioneer days of the Valley, the days before the branch line had been built into Witney, contrasting the primitive arrangements of that era with the recent encroachments of civilization. The logical development in the talk would be some reference to Keble’s ambitious designs, which the spring would see well under way. Miriam

glanced up to see how he would receive the cue, which usually roused him to enthusiasm. He allowed it to pass, and she was intrigued to see on his face a look of boyish, wistful abstraction, and loneliness.

He felt her eyes on him, and turned as she looked away. She knew he disliked to be surprised in a self-revelatory mood, and she had time to notice his features assume their usual impersonal cast. That she regretted; the wistfulness had been ingenuous and touching. At times she felt that he deliberately submerged his most likable traits. That was a great pity, because it gave Louise new incentives to go off on her independent courses. Miriam felt that his self-consciousness had begun by hurting Louise, driving her to protect herself against a coldness she couldn't understand. The unfortunate result was that Louise had rather more than protected herself: had gradually attained a self-sufficiency that took Keble's coldness for granted, even inducing it. That was a moral advantage which Miriam's femininity resented, though nothing could have drawn the admission from her.

She was glad when Louise, by a new manoeuvre in the talk, gave her an excuse to go into the next room. For there were times when nothing sheathed the sharp edges of life so satisfactorily as a half hour at the piano.

4

Only when she had waved Keble farewell from the back of the train at Witney did Louise allow her-

self to dwell on the significance of the step she had taken. Keble's generous acquiescence in her plan merely underlined the little question that kept irritating her conscience. For all her skill she hadn't known how to assure Keble that she wasn't turning her back on him; for all her love she couldn't have admitted to him that she was setting out for a sanatorium, to undergo treatment for social ignorances in the hope of returning to him more fit than ever. With the train now bolting east, she had the nervous dread of a prospective patient.

Yet as province after province rolled by, and the dreary prairie began to be broken first by lakes and woods, then by larger and larger communities, graduating her approach into civilization, her natural optimism asserted itself in a typically vehement reaction. Now that there was no turning back, the obvious thing to do was to wring every possibility out of the experience to which she was committed. Nothing should be too superficial for her attention. To Miriam's relief her despondency gave place to a feverish activity of observation. She began to notice her fellow-travelers and to tick them off mercilessly, one by one, with all their worths and blemishes.

"Let's leave no stone unturned, Miriam," she said, imperatively, as they neared their first halting place. "I won't go home till I've done and seen and had one of everything. Then for the next eighty years I

shall be able to out-small-talk the most outrageous dude that ever dares cross my threshold."

She kept rein on the excitement caused in her by the hotels, shops, museums, and theatres of Toronto and Montreal, for from Miriam's lukewarmness she divined that they were at best but carbon copies of the hotels, shops, museums, and theatres of New York. So she contented herself with watching the movements of her companion, marveling at Miriam's easy way with porters and chambermaids, her ability to arrive on the right platform ten minutes before the right train departed, to secure the most pleasant rooms at the least exorbitant rate and order the most judicious dinners, all without fuss or worry. Having learned that traveling was one of the major modern arts, she added it to the list of subjects in which she was enrolled as student. By the time they had reached Fifth Avenue and put up at a hostelry that was still imposing, though it had been half forgotten in the mania for newer and gayer establishments, Louise was imperturbable.

During the next few days the experience that made the deepest impression on her was the religious earnestness with which one was expected to cultivate one's exterior. On a memorable, but modest visit to Winnipeg with her father,—who was attending a medical conference,—she had "gone in and bought" whatever she had been in need of. Never had she dreamt that so much art and science could be brought to bear on the merely getting of oneself

groomed. But after a few seances in the neighborhood of Fifty-Seventh Street, Louise threw herself into this strange new cult with characteristic fervor. This was partly due to the fact that Madame Adèle, the dressmaker, and Monsieur Jules, the hairdresser, had accomplished what good portrait painters often accomplish, and thrown into relief properties of body and soul of which she had never been aware.

At the end of a fortnight she had mastered many rites, and when the last frocks, hats, gloves, and slippers had arrived, and she had adapted her steps and gestures and rhythms to the unbelievable new picture she made, Miriam, for the first time since their association, expressed herself as satisfied.

"I've been waiting to see you dressed," she announced as they sat in the tea-room of a fashionable hotel. "It's the final test. And you pass—*magna cum laude*. Opposite you I feel dull and not at all what you would once have called distinguished-looking."

"Don't be absurd, Miriam," returned her pupil in an even tone, with a purified articulation that would have made Minnie Hopper stare. "I may cost eight hundred dollars more than you at the moment, but I look *new*, and you know it. Whereas you will always look *good*, without looking new, no matter if you're straight out of a bandbox. If I've made any progress at all, the proof of it is that I recognize the truth of what I've just said. . . . Not only that, but you can console yourself with the knowledge that if

you sit opposite me till Doomsday you'll never utter a syllable that couldn't be printed in a book of etiquette. Whereas I,—well, the mere fact that they've pulled out my lopsided eyebrow doesn't mean that before the sun sets I shan't do and say some inadvertent *bêtise* that will proclaim the pit from which I was digged and make you say to yourself, 'Why does she?'. . . . One comfort is that most of these expensive people here are even more plebeian, at least in their souls, than I am, and you're almost the only person in the world whom I can't fool. . . . Fancy not having you there to be genteel to, and to shock,—especially to shock! At any moment I may deliberately say something vulgar, dear. The temptation often comes over me in hot waves."

"The 'deliberately' redeems you. Most people are vulgar without knowing it; they would bite off their tongues if they knew. . . . As for inadvertence, you've made only one *faux pas* in days."

"Oh, dear! What?"

"Yesterday, at that awful house."

"Mrs. Pardy's? Why, darling, you took me there yourself, as a treat."

"Yes, but it was Elsa Pardy we went to leave cards for. Elsa was one of the nicest girls in Washington when I knew her there. I would never have looked her up in that casual way if I had foreseen such a fulsome sister-in-law."

Louise laughed at the recollection, snuggling into the thought that Mrs. Pardy could not be laid at *her*

door. Then came the thought of her alleged remissness. "I hope I didn't out-*faux* Mrs. P. . . . I wonder how Keble would like me to call him Mr. E."

"No wonder Elsa doesn't stay there."

"But, Miriam, my *faux pas*! I won't be done out of my daily correction."

Miriam smiled indulgently. "It was the merest trifle. Indeed if Mrs. Pardy had made it, it would have done her credit. For that matter she did, effusively, and if we hadn't been such fastidious folk we should have lauded her for it. And I do!"

"Miriam . . . before I throw a bun at you!"

"Well, my dear, you invited the woman to pay you a visit."

"Jolly kind of me, too. Is *that* all?"

"Heavens, it's enough!"

"I was merely returning a hospitality,—the hospitality of your friends."

"Don't tease."

"After all, what less could I do when she practically gave us her house and her chauffeur and her marble staircase and diamond bracelets and ancestral lemon groves in California."

"None of which we wanted, you see. Nor asked for a thing! Nor accepted a thing except under compulsion. The mere fact that one strays into a house that looks like a glorified Turkish bath and has it, as you say, *given* to one, doesn't put one under the slightest obligation. We merely sat on the edge of her golden chairs, regretted Elsa's absence, heard

about Mr. P's kidneys and sundry organs, and drank a cup of tea."

"And ate a cream puff. Don't slight that delicious, cordial, luxurious, fattening, vulgar cream puff. I ate two and longed for a third. That made it a grub-call, and I had to invite her back. I'll never outgrow that primitive custom. Besides, I took care to say, if she was ever in my part of the world. That made it pretty safe."

"Ah, that's just what made it an error. Not only because it was gratuitous, but because Mrs. Pardy is the sort of woman who would charter a private train to be in your part of the world in order, accidentally, to drop in on a young woman who makes the sort of impression you make,—for you do, you know. Especially when she finds out,—and be sure she'll investigate,—who the Eveleys are."

"Well, darling, let her come. She didn't bother me a bit. It would be rough on Keble, I suppose."

"Rough and warm," said Miriam a little testily. "She had the effect on me of heavy flannels in mid-summer."

Louise gleefully pounced on her opportunity. "*Fi donc!*" Miriam Cread conjuring up such incorrect things as flannels,—and it isn't anywhere near Doomsday!"

"It's near dressing time. And we must pack a little before dinner. After the theatre we'll be too tired."

"How shall we explain our sudden departure to

Mrs. Pardy? Before she sends out invitations to all her friends to 'meet' us!"

"We can have the measles. Or you're moving to Alaska."

"And if ever she and Mr. P. are in the Arctic Circle. . . . Measles wouldn't do the trick. She would come right in and nurse us. And give us her doctor and her florist. Frankly, dear, I rather like Mrs. Pardy; she's so hearty. I thought that was going to rhyme but it didn't."

"Come along. We're going to walk home, for exercise."

"In these heels? . . . Is fifty cents enough to leave the waiter?"

"Enough, good gracious! Leave the brute a quarter."

They made their way through a thronged corridor towards the street, and Miriam felt a proprietary pride in her companion, whose present restraint was as instinctively in keeping with her tailored costume, unostentatious fur, and defiant little hat, as her old flamboyance had been with her khaki breeches and willow switch.

"Since I've begun to spend money," Louise reflected, "I've been more and more oppressed by the unfairness of my having access to so much,—though of course it's nothing compared to what one sees flung about in this bedlam. But all these exaggerated refinements, and people taking notice,—while it excites me, I don't honestly care for it. There's

something as uncomfortable about it as there would be about 'boughten' teeth. Sartorial hysteria; the rash known as civilization; I keep saying phrases like that to myself. . . . After about the fifth time I think I'd bite that beauty woman. I like my face too well to have it rubbed out once a week!"

They turned into Fifth Avenue and joined the hordes let loose at this transition hour of the day. Against the grey buildings women were as bright as flowers, fulfilling, as Miriam reflected, the decorative function that trees fulfil on European boulevards.

"I had a cheque from Keble to-day," Louise continued. "As if we hadn't heaps already! It came in a charming letter. Keble in his letters is much more human than he is in the flesh. If I stayed away long enough I might forget that and fall romantically in love with him all over again. Which would be tragic. . . . He says he's happy, poor lamb, to know that I'm beginning to take an interest in life! But I wish he'd be candid and say he's miserable. Then I'd know what to do. When he so obstinately pretends to be happy and isn't, I'm lost. Miriam, look at that creature!"

It was a bizarrely clad woman, so thoroughly made over in every detail of appearance that there was scarcely a square inch of her original pattern left: a weird, costly fabrication that attracted the attention of everybody within range of vision or smell.

“Do you know who it is?” asked Miriam, amused at the startled look in her companion’s eyes.

“No, do you? She looks Japanese.”

“Merely East Side. It’s Myra Pelter, the actress we’re to see to-night in ‘Three Blind Mice’.”

Louise yielded to a temptation to turn and stare. “Now there you are, Miriam: the *reductio ad absurdum* of hectic shopping and beautifying. Isn’t it enough to drive one into a nunnery! I’m glad we’re on our way to the seashore, where there are at least ‘such quantities of sand’ and sky and water.”

Miriam smiled doubtfully, a little wearily. “There will be quantities of transparent stockings and French perfumes, too, my dear.”

“Well, I like frivolities, as such,—but only as such, mind you. From now on I ignore them the minute they try to be anything more. I think I’m going in for human souls. I’m already tired of looking at people as Adèle looks at them, or as if they were books in a shop window. I’m going to open a few and see what they’re all about. . . . The worst of it is, you can’t look at the last chapter of people and see how they end. You can only read them, as you can only read yourself, in maddeningly short instalments. They’re always on the brink of new doings when you come to a ‘to be continued’. And I’ve reached a point where I must have gists and summaries, must see what things are leading to, what’s being driven at in this infuriating universe,—this multi-verse.”

They had by this time reached their rooms, and Miriam was making a preliminary sorting of objects to be packed. "Don't you think," she ventured, "that you are inclined to be a little headlong as a philosopher?"

Louise was deftly choosing the articles of her toilette for the evening. "Oh, no doubt of it! But I'm too deep in my sea now to care. I simply swim on and on, after a shoal of notions."

"And splash a little," commented Miriam, with an abstracted air that saved the remark from being censorious. She was wondering whether she had been over-scrupulous in refusing the gown that Adèle had privately offered her by way of commission. And a little resentful that Adèle should dare offer it to *her*. Miriam was old enough to remember a day when such transactions were considered off-color, and it bothered her that she should be so old-fashioned as to be unable to accept the place assigned her in the callous new order, as some of her former friends, with the greatest complacence, seemed to have done. Suddenly, bereft of credit in a society to which she had once felt herself a necessary adjunct, catching occasional glimpses of faces that recalled school-days to her, and Newport and Paris, faces now hard, bright and mercenary, Miriam felt abandoned.

Her thoughts strayed westward and hovered. In Alberta she had been an exile; but not so acutely alone as here.

5

The remaining weeks of their holiday accomplished even more towards Louise's worldly initiation, for she found herself dining and dancing and matching opinions in private palaces among an anomalous assortment of men and women. Before proceeding to Florida they paused in Washington, where friends of Miriam and Walter Windrom whirled them into the routine of that unique conglomeration of the provincial and the sophisticated. Left alone among them, Louise might for a while have been awed by pompous ladies whose husbands were senators from western states, and unimpressed by young men whose shoulders bore no trace of the burdens laid upon them by foreign governments. But Miriam's polite negativity towards the conspicuously grand, and her full and ready response to some of the unassuming furnished Louise with useful cues, and when Walter was of the party she was even more secure, for he had a faculty of accepting everything at its face value, while privately adding to or subtracting from the offering, with a twinkle in his eye, or a twinkle in his speech.

Walter's good-natured technique, Louise reflected, was more nearly akin to her own temperament than were Miriam's precisely graduated coolness and cordialities. Certain importunate people Miriam simply ignored, as though declining to give them a seat in her coach. Walter, while he was equally exclusive,

got over the necessity of inviting them into his coach by stepping out and walking a short distance with them. This method seemed to Louise not only more humane, but also braver than Miriam's, and certainly no less dignified. It was gentlemanly, too; and she objected, as only a woman can object, to feminine tactics.

At Palm Beach they were greeted by a free, open, careless life that suited Louise's mood better than anything their excursion had afforded her. She had decided that there was no hurry about "going in for human souls" and consequently spent many hours in roaming through deep-chaired hotel lounges, marble and wicker sun parlors, porches, pergolas, and terraces; and in strolling along the hot sands or across lawns shaded by flowering trees and edged with lotus pools. She also swam, played tennis, and chatted *ad libitum* with strangers.

On her return to Canada, under the escort of Keble, who had accepted her invitation to come and fetch them, she was brimming over with ideas for the embellishment of their projected home. Yet, though she knew Keble was eager to have her offer suggestions, she deliberately held them back. By declining to participate in it she would lessen its hold on her. It should be his castle, not hers.

CHAPTER IV

AS the days were told off one by one in anticipation of the arrival of Trenholme Dare, the young architect and landscape gardener of Montreal, with his army of workmen, Louise became more conspicuously reticent, more conspicuously addicted to her books on socialism and metaphysics, her chats with the wives of luckless ranchers, her Quixotic jaunts north, south, east, and west in search of lonely school-teachers to be befriended, sick cattle to be disinfected, odd lots of provisions to be acquired from hard-up settlers. On the very day that a site was to be chosen for the foundation of her private greenhouse, she fled from Hillside and rode sixteen miles over the muddy roads of early spring for a mere ice-cream soda; yet when she had heard of the recurrence of little Annie Brown's chronic earache, she had foregone a dance at the Valley to sit up all night and heat linseed oil, smooth pillows, and sing old French ditties.

She realized the extent of her hostility to Keble's plans one day when a particular adverb escaped from her subconsciousness apropos of her husband's look of boyish pleasure and surprise, a sort of diffident

radiance in his face, as he glanced through a budget of documents which changed his status from that of a dependent young rancher on probation into an independent estate-holder. He seemed odiously contented, she thought, then checked herself. "Odiously" was the adverb, and in fear and wonder she rode down towards the range to reflect, to read herself a long, abundantly illustrated sermon on heartlessness, and, if possible, reduce herself to a state of remorse and penitence.

In this attempt she failed signally, and indeed went so far over into the opposite scale as to say with a passionate flick of the reins which made Sundown leap, "Then if we must, we must, that's all, and I'll be Nero. The sooner Rome burns the better. *Vas-y donc, bonjour!*"

The spring rains had set in, and water coursed down the usual channels with a volume and roar that attracted one's attention to brooklets which in other seasons flowed by unnoticed. Water lurked in every depression, as though the earth were some vast sponge, red and brown and green. Near the river, the road was washed away. In some places rude bridges that had served the previous summer were now rendered ridiculous through a capricious change in the course of the stream. The bi-weekly mail wagon had left deep ruts now filled with water the color of cocoa. The mountains were still topped with thick white snow and reminded her of frosted cakes. There was a heavy, rich fragrance and vigor

in the air. When a hare darted across the trail into the miniature forest of sage bushes, she, in spirit, darted with him, in a glee. As she cut herself a switch from a bush of willows she welcomed the drops of water that showered over her face and ran up her sleeve, as though, like some intelligent plant, she knew that the drops would make her grow. Even the mud that spattered her boots and stirrup straps she cheerfully accepted as seasonable. And she rode on at haphazard, as carelessly, yet with as much vigorous assurance as had been manifested by the hare. Like the hare she had no idea whither she was bound. Like the hare she was swiftly, gracefully making for the unknown destination. Temperamentally she was hare-like; that would make Keble a tortoise; and according to the fable he would win the race; that thought would bear investigation,—but not for the moment. For the moment she chose to intoxicate herself with the conviction that nothing in the world mattered. The ills that most people complained of,—ills like little Annie's earaches and her own increasing estrangement from her husband,—merely lent life an additional savor, and she could conceive of acquiring a taste for chagrin, as one acquired a taste for bitters; if not a taste, then at least an insensibility. Her whole philosophy amounted to a conviction of the necessity of behaving as though the odds weren't there.

There was only one thing that could have brought her atonement with the spring world nearer to per-

fection, and that would have been to have Keble riding at her side. Not the correct Keble who studied blue prints and catalogues, who read prose that sounded like poetry and poems that sounded like prose, but some idealized Keble who, with the same eyes, hair, hands, strength, honesty, and "nice back-of-his-neck," could do what the actual Keble could not do: keep ahead of her, command her, surprise, shock, and seduce her, snatch her off her feet and whirl her through space with a momentum that prevented thought,—the Keble, in short, who failed to exist but whom she loved against hope. Love was a mystery to which she had gladly abandoned herself, but which, while appearing to receive her with open arms, had remained as inscrutable at close range as it had been from a distance. When the arms folded about her she felt imprisoned and blinded; when she drew back for perspective the arms fell, or, what was still more disheartening, methodically turned to some unallied, if useful employment, leaving her restlessly expectant and vaguely resentful. The consequence of which was that her great supply of affection, like the cascades pouring down from the hills, spread over undefined areas, capriciously turned into new channels, leaving, here and there, little bridges of a former season spanning empty river beds. That very morning at breakfast Keble had said to her, "Good morning, dear, did you sleep well?" That phrase was a useless old bridge over a flat stretch of pebbles. To Miriam he had

said, "I've had a reply from the cement people; would you like to type some more tiresome letters today?" And that was a new bridge over God knew what.

She forgot that she had just been glorying in the conviction that nothing in the world mattered. Once she had said to her father that she sometimes wondered if anything were right. She blushed at a sudden humiliating guess as to what might make *everything* right. Humiliating because,—for all her fine theorizing,—it might be, after all, more physio- than psycho-logical.

2

Keble's corner of creation had become a chaos of felled trees, excavations, foundations, ditches, scaffoldings, cement-mixers, tripods, lead pipe, packing-cases, tents, and Irish masons. Four years before, on returning to London from a journey around the world, he had heard his father say that a young man who had "anything in him" couldn't help desiring to exert himself even to the point of great sacrifice in the attainment of whatever most interested him. That remark had discouraged Keble, for he could imagine nothing for which he could have an overwhelming desire to sacrifice himself: least of all British politics, which was the breath in his father's nostrils.

The remark had sent him roaming again, not to see more of the world but to think. And, thanks to a hunting accident which confined him several weeks

to a log cabin in the wilds of Alberta, he had not only thought, but found the thing for which he desired to exert himself to the point of sacrifice. At the moment when the lure of a new country was driving from his memory the vapid gaieties of West End night clubs, he met a girl who seemed to be the human counterpart of all the mystery and spaciousness in nature which had cast a spell upon him. The acres which his father had acquired many years before for the mere fun of owning something in Canada were a jumble of forest primeval, clear waters, prairies, untamed animals. Louise was a jumble equally enticing. And the passion to reclaim the one became mextrically allied with a passion to reclaim the other. It mattered no more to him that his rivals in the latter case were cowboys than that, in the former, his opponents were inexperience and a sceptical family. In both cases he saw possibilities that others hadn't seen.

His forests and fields, being without a purpose of their own, yielded docilely to his axes and ploughshares and grouped themselves into the picture he had conceived of them. But his wife, after the first months of submission, had begun to sprout and spread with a capricious and bewildering luxuriance.

For some time he felt the change, but not until the arrival of Trenholme Dare did his feeling become statable. Not that there was any technical lack of affection or good will or loyalty; there was simply a great lack of common effort. The original trust and

enthusiasm had vanished, and since no one was to blame, he was beginning to be anxious about its return. At times he suspected that he ought, in some fashion, to assert himself. But, fundamentally humble, as well as proud, he could do nothing more than watch Louise's progress in a sort of despairing approbation, and go on cultivating his own garden.

What changes had taken place in himself, with increasing seriousness of purpose, he could not have said. The changes in Louise were multitudinous, in the sense that a tree in spring is more multitudinous than the same tree in winter. She had acquired foliage and blossoms. He trembled to see what the fruit would be. Once he had been priggish enough to wonder whether he could be contented with a wife brought up in such primitive simplicity; his priggishness received a final snub in Palm Beach, where instead of the impetuous creature whose cultivation he had once bumptiously promised himself to take in hand, he was met by a woman who had herself so completely in hand that she set the tone for everybody within range. Vaguely he suspected that the transformation was the result of a process undertaken with the intention of pleasing him. But to have claimed this would have seemed to him presumptuous. He now found in her a cautiousness, politeness, and undemonstrativeness that, to his dismay, he recognized as an echo of his own; and, their positions reversed, he had some conception of the hurt he must have inflicted on her. Whereupon he

longed for her old headlong assaults and gamineries, —longed for them for their warmth and for their value as examples to learn by.

The only encouraging factor in the situation was Louise's honesty. In that respect at least there was no change. He was convinced that she had told him only one lie in her life, and that was a pathetic fib for which he was more than ready to answer to Saint Peter, since it was a by-product of the process of self-improvement Louise had undertaken, as he suspected, to do him honor. Being the first lie, it was overdone: for Miriam Cread was, of all the women he could think of, perhaps the least like a Harristown schoolmistress. He had never challenged the story, and it had never been officially contradicted. Neither Louise nor Miriam knew that one day, in looking through a bundle of old illustrated weeklies, his eye had been arrested by the photograph of a group of people in the paddock at Ascot, prominent among whom was "Rear Admiral Cread of Washington, D. C. and his daughter," chatting with a dowdy old princess of the blood royal at the very moment,—as Keble took the trouble to calculate,—when Weedgie Bruneau was alleged to have been improving her acquaintance with Miriam in a remote normal school in the Canadian northwest.

How Miriam had got to Hillside, what she had come for, and why she stopped on, were questions whose answers were of no importance. Important was the fact that Miriam's presence had had the ef-

fect of an electrolyzed rod plunged into the chemical solution of his marriage. As a result of which Louise and he had separated into copper and NO_3 . In short he had relapsed into a rather flat solution, and she had come out a very bright metal.

Miriam was not a source of anxiety to him. Whatever machine she had dropped from, she had played fair. At times she was a positive boon: sweet, serene, solid. "I wish you could see her, my son," he had once written to Walter Windrom. "Even your flawless Myra Pelter's nose, if not put out of joint, would have to be furtively looked at in the mirror, just once, to see that it was still straight."

But the *man* from the machine.

He was entirely self-made, and, as Keble was the first to admit, a tremendously good job. Miriam's comment was that, though his thumbs were too thin-waisted for a Hercules and his shoulders too broad for an Apollo, he was undoubtedly of divine descent. Louise, on first seeing him, had shrugged her shoulders and said, under her breath, the one word: "Cocksure."

Keble's impression of Dare was recorded in his latest letter to Windrom, with whom, as a relief from his recent solitary self-catechism, he had resumed a more intensive correspondence. "He takes possession of you," wrote Keble, "Chiefly, I think, with his voice, which is more palpable than most men's handshakes: one of those voices that contain chords as well as single tones, that sink and spread,

then draw together into the sound of hammer on steel, and scatter into a laugh which is like a shower of sparks. If I were a sculptor I would model him in bronze fifteen feet high and label him the twentieth century, if not the twenty-first. If I owned a monopoly of the world's industry I would make him general manager. If I were the sovereign people I would cheerfully and in a sort of helpless awe make him dictator, all the while deploring and failing to understand his views. He would simply thunder forth policies in a voice full of chromatic thirds, and with frantic, nervous huzzahs I would bear him shoulder-high to the throne."

Dare struck Keble as a philosopher who through excess of physical energy had turned to mechanical science. Or perhaps a born engineer whose talent for organizing matter had a sort of spiritual echo. At one moment he would make his facts support his philosophical speculations; at the next his philosophy, like a gigantic aeroplane, would mount into the sky with tons of fact stowed away in neat compartments. The result was that Keble didn't know whether to marvel at the load Dare could mount with, or be alarmed at the whirling away into space of so much solid matter.

"Contact with this chap," wrote Keble, "has taught me this, that to me who,—it must alas be admitted,—am merely on the brink of understanding my epoch, individuality has seemed almost an end in itself, as though the object of life were achieved

when the flower blossomed. (I remember romantic nights during my furloughs in Paris when I paid mute tribute to long-haired, be-sandalled creatures who were, to my excessively English eyes, 'being individual'). But egos are *passé*; mass ego, it seems (or egi) have come in. For Dare the blossoming, even the fructifying, are incidental. His interest (at least in the reflective lulls after dinner, for during the daytime he's the most practical of men) extends to the cosmic activity which is (in some manner I have yet to comprehend) rendered possible by the virtually automatic living and procreating and dying of millions upon millions of violets and pine trees and rabbits and ladies and gentlemen and glaciers and republics and solar systems. He assaults the subject with these stimulating volleys of odds and ends.

"Now imagine, Walter, for only you can, the effect of all this on my wife. It's turning into 'a case unprecedented', and before long I may, like Bunthorne, have to be 'contented with a tulip or li-lie'. Louise long ago talked me into a cocked hat. Miriam, through the mysterious licence she had been endowed with, kept up a semblance of intellectual alto to Louise's dizzy soprano. But now, oh dear me *now*, Miriam and I aren't even in tempo with her, much less in key. My household,—I still claim it as mine through force of habit, which is always imperative with me,—has become a china shop for the

taurean and matadorean antics of two of the most ruthlessly agile products of the age.

“Louise is for the moment (and you can only define her momentarily) an interpreting link between Dare (twenty-first century) and me (nineteenth). Her original association with me awakened her consciousness to a delicate scale of weights and measures in matters of taste and opinion. When she had acquired my acuteness of perception she discovered that she was naturally endowed with Alpine talents that made my hilltop look like a mound. From her easy victories over Miriam and me she concluded that there were endless enterprises awaiting her. When she was alone she began to feel herself operating on a higher gear, making for herself new speed records. Now that I look back, I know that my cautiousness, in more than one crisis, gave her ample excuse for going her own gait. I have it from her lips that she has kept her love (whatever we mean by that enormously capacious word) for me brightly burning, as I, in all the welter, have done. Her religious nature, for want of a cult, has always centered round an exquisite instinct which I suspect to be a sort of sublimated eroticism: something that I suppose no man ever understands,—or would some other man? That’s the devilish puzzle of it. Yet almost without being aware of it she seems to have kindled new fires before an altar so much more important and all-embodying than her feeling for me or mere anybody else that the light of her little lamp

of constancy is like the light of a star in the blaze of noon.

“What one does in a case like that is more than I know. All I am sure of at this moment is you, my son, a lighthouse that flashes at dependable intervals through my fogs. Do you, for one, stay a little in the rear of the procession if every one else gets out of sight. I don’t deserve it of you; I merely exact it,—again through force of habit: the same habit that, in our school holidays suffered me to play with *your* yacht on the Kensington round pond after I had wrecked my own.”

3

Miriam, who had watched Louise as one watches an acrobat,—with excitement and dread,—felt herself in a sense frustrated by Louise’s continued apathy. If it had been punctuated by new verbal heresies, new feats of talk with Trenholme Dare, now the dominating figure at Hillside, Miriam, like Keble, would at least have been able to account for it even had she failed to sympathize. But Louise’s indifference seemed to have spread even to the realm of ideas, and there had been very few acrobatic displays of late. Possibly Louise was in love; but if so, it would have been much more like her to say so, flatly.

The effect of this on Miriam was to make her more sharply conscious of the anomaly of her rôle. More than once she had argued that her mission was

at an end, but in each instance Louise had induced her to remain. Having yielded at first with a faint sense of guilt, Miriam had come through custom to accept her position with all its ambiguities. As Keble's activities increased, she had stepped into the breach and relieved him of many daily transactions, delighted at being able to offer a definite service for the cheque which was left on her dressing table every month. Keble ended by turning over to her his ledgers and most of his correspondence.

But her feeling of guilt recurred at moments when the house seemed to be an armed camp, with Keble and herself deep in their estimates; and Louise inciting Dare to phantastic metaphysical speculation. At such moments her mind persisted in criticizing Louise. It was not exactly that she lacked confidence in her, for Louise was in her own fashion surefooted and loyal. But Miriam was a little appalled at the extensity of the ground Louise could be surefooted on, the sweeping nature of her conception of loyalty. Louise, scorner of the ground, was all for steering in a direct line to her goal and ignoring the conventional railway routes whose zigzags were conditioned by topographical exigencies not pertinent to fliers. Her loyalty would not fail Keble, for she could cherish him in the spirit without subscribing to him in the letter. Louise's loyalty might be expressed in idioms which were not to be found in Keble's moral vocabulary. Just as there were some eternal truths which could be expressed more ade-

quately in French than in English, so, conceivably, there might be vital experiences which Louise could obtain more adequately through the agency of some man other than Keble; certainly she would not acknowledge any law that attempted to prevent her doing so, had she a mind to it.

There were times when Miriam felt herself to be an interpreter; more than once in tête-à-têtes with Keble she had found herself de-coding some succinct remark of Louise's to explain away a worried line in his forehead, and it was on those occasions that she had felt especially guilty,—not because she ran the risk of giving an unfair interpretation, but because it was conceivable that, had she not been there to decipher, Louise would have taken more pains to employ a language Keble could understand.

This qualm she could dispel by reminding herself that at the time of her advent Louise and Keble had been drifting apart through very lack of an interpreter. Then it was Keble's language which had been too precious for his wife, and Louise herself had taken energetic steps to increase her vocabulary to meet the demand. Would Keble take steps to learn her new words? At least there was evidence that he suffered at not being able to speak them. But after all Keble was a man, and no man should be expected to grope in the irrational mazes of a woman's psychology. It was a woman's duty to make herself intelligible to the man who loved her; Miriam was tenaciously sure of this. Yet Louise nowadays

made no effort to share her ideas with Keble; she merely challenged him to soar with her, and when he, thinking of Icarus, held back, she went flying off with Dare, who certainly made no effort to bear any one aloft, but whose powerful rushing ascensions either filled you with a desire to fly or bowled you over.

Dare, for all his impetuosity, was, like Louise, prodigiously conscientious; but like her he was more concerned with the sense of a word than with its orthography. He was too certain of the organic and creative nature of experience to live according to any formula. You felt unwontedly safe with him, just as you did with Louise, but safe from dangers that only he had made you see, dangers on a remote horizon. As you ambled along, with nothing more ominous than a cloud of dust or a shower of rain to disturb your pedestrian serenity, Louise and Dare would swoop down, armed to the teeth, gleefully to assure you that nothing fatal would happen, that accidents to limb held no terrors for moral crusaders worthy the name; then, leaving you to stand there in bewilderment, they would swoop off again to catch up with unknown squadrons beyond the rim of vision, whence, for the first time, a muffled sound of bombing came to your ears. And your knees would begin to tremble, not on their account,—oh dear no, *they* could take care of themselves,—but on your own. Suddenly your pedestrian course

seemed drab to you,—long, weary, prosaic; but you lacked wings, weapons, zeal, and endurance.

Louise was a Spartan both morally and physically. She could ignore transgressions of the social code as easily as she could ignore bodily discomforts. Recently Miriam had seen an example of each. When Pearl Beatty, the schoolteacher, had been made the topic of scandalous gossip which echoed through the Valley, Louise in defiance of her husband and the public had fetched Pearl to the ranch for a week-end, and said to her in effect, "Pearl dear, I'll see that you don't lose your job, provided you don't lose your head. If it's a *man* you want, wait till you find the right one, then bring him here and I'll protect you both. But if it's a lot of men you want you can't go on teaching school in our Valley; it's too complicated. The only way to play that game with pleasure and profit,—and I doubt whether you're really vicious enough,—is to save your money, go to a big city, buy some good clothes, and sit in the lobby of the leading commercial hotel until fate's finger points." As a result of this manoeuvre some of Pearl's thoughtless exuberance rushed into a channel of devotion to Louise, who seized the occasion to build up in the girl a sense of her own value and then bullied the Valley into respecting it.

As for physical courage, only a few days previously Louise, uttering an occasional "Oh damn!" to relieve her agony, had stoically probed with a needle deep under her thumb-nail to release a gathering that

had formed as a result of rust poisoning, while Miriam stood by in horror.

Far deeper than her dread of anything Louise might do was a dread engendered by lack of confidence in herself. Within herself there was some gathering of emotion for which, unlike Louise, she hadn't the courage to probe. As she had told Louise at their first meeting, responsibility could frighten her; and she now shrank before the responsibility of her inclinations. The most she dared admit to herself was that she was growing too fond of the life around her. In her first youth she had fancied herself a real person in a pleasantly artificial setting, mildly enamoured of glittering symbols of life; in this faraway corner, renovated by solitude, physical exertion, and obligatory self-analysis, she saw herself as an artificial person in a pleasantly real setting, enamoured of life itself. She had come to teach, and had remained to learn. In the old days a horse had been a sleek toy upon which one cantered in Rock Creek Park or Rotten Row or the Monte Pinchio gardens until a motor came and fetched one home to lunch. A dog had been a sort of living muff. Camping expeditions had been an elaborate means of relaxing overwrought nerves. Nowadays a horse was a friend who uncomplainingly bore one great distances, who discovered the right path when one was lost. A dog was a companion who escorted one through fearsome trails, who retrieved the grouse one hit, and kept watch by night at the cabin

door. Camping expeditions were a serious means to some explorative end; one slept on the hard ground under a raincoat simply because there was nothing else to sleep on, and eagerly looked forward to doing it again. Men and women whom one would once have sent down to the kitchen for a cup of tea were now one's convives. And far from losing caste on this level, one acquired a useful perspective of society and a new conception of one's identity. Association with a girl like Pearl Beatty, for instance, not only opened one's eyes at last to some blunt facts about one's own nature, but also furnished the clue to scandals concerning which one had been stupidly supercilious in the days when life consisted in the automatic fulfilment of projects announced beforehand on pieces of cardboard.

Yet for the first time in a dozen years she was not sure of herself. So far she had been loyal in thought as well as deed, but the present inventory of herself revealed claims for which she had also little rebellious gusts of loyalty. Louise herself counted for something in this development, since however much one might deprecate Louise's bold convictions, one couldn't deny that they were often ingratiating. "It's more honorable to hoist your own sail and sail straight on a reef than it is to be towed forever!" When Louise tossed off remarks of that sort one was tempted to lengths of experiment that one would once have drastically disapproved. Louise's philosophy might end by producing inedible

fruits, but meanwhile there was no denying the charm of the blossoms she flaunted under one's windows and virtually defied one not to smell.

As long as Louise was plying at verbal thunder and lightning, Miriam's confidence in herself underwent to qualms. For at such times, she, in comparison with Louise, personified all that was discreet. But when Louise's effervescences died down, when the last waterspout of her exultant proclamations had collapsed on a lake of apathy too deep and dark to be penetrated, Miriam felt the wavelets radiating to the shore at her feet, gently communicating a more daring rhythm to her own desires.

The first definite effect of these reflections was Miriam's decision to leave. Otherwise she would be forced to come to an understanding with herself and run the risk of discovering that she was ready to—steal.

It was late in September. Dare's army of workmen were fighting against time to complete the exteriors of the new house and outbuildings before winter. Miriam drew rein as her horse reached the top of the hill from which she had obtained her first glimpse of the lake more than a year ago. The sun was not yet up, but the world was expecting it. The lake which only yesterday had been an emerald was now a long, flat pearl encircled in a narrow, faintly amethystine mist which like a scarf of gauze broke the perpendicular lines of the farthest shore. In it were mirrored the colossal rocks forming the

jagged V of the canyon, and threadbare clouds of pale rose and jade, lemon and amber. The oily brown log cottages silhouetted near the outlet had the pictorial value of black against the living pearl of the water, and Louise's flower beds were banked with something mauve dulled by dew. Frost-bitten, orange-red geraniums in wooden urns raised high on crooked tree-stumps made hectic blurs on each side of the main cottage. Farther off, and higher than the tops of the pine trees which rose above the pervasive lavender mist, were clusters of yellow and crimson foliage and slender tree trunks that stood out like strokes of Chinese white. Higher yet were stretches of rusty gorse which finally straggled off to bare patches of buff-hued turf ending in the rock walls of Hardscrapple, whose irregular peaks, four thousand feet above, were faintly edged with silver light.

At the end of the pine ridge to the right of the lake, surmounting a broad meadow, standing out from the wooded slope of the mountain, and bringing the whole landscape to a focus, was the Castle with its severe lines, its broad balconies and high windows. One terrace dominated the lake, while another looked over the top of the pine ridge towards the distant valley where the river twisted its way for thirty miles through a grey-green sage plain broken by occasional dark islands of pine and bounded on the farther side by patchy brown and green risings culminating in a lumpy horizon.

Everything visible for fifty miles had been stained bright with the hues of the changing season, only to be softened by the clinging mist, which seemed to hush as well as to veil.

From three kitchens,—Louise's, Mrs. Brown's, and the workmen's encampment,—white ribbons of smoke rose straight up as though to reinforce the pale, exhausted clouds. Grendel, Miriam's retriever, was standing in the wet grass, one paw held up and tail motionless as though awaiting confirmation of a hint of jack-rabbits. An acrid odour gave body to the air: an odour whose ingredients included the damp earth, the bark of the firs, the bunches of rust-colored berries, the leather of the saddle, and the warm vitality of the horse. Once there was a sound of whinnying from the slopes beneath, and once a distant sound of splashing,—Keble or Dare at his morning plunge in the lake.

How splendid to be a man, with a man's vigorous instincts! Even the pipes they smoked at night were condonable, when you thought of the strong teeth that clenched their stems, the strong fingers that twisted the stems out during the cleaning process, and the earnestness that went into the filling and lighting, the contented bodily collapse, as of giants refreshed, that followed the first puff.

Splendid to be a man, certainly. But how much more wonderful to be at the disposal of some clean, earnest, boyish creature who would be comfortingly gigantic when one felt helpless, enticingly indolent

when one felt strong. As for being a victim to a capacity for tenderness which one had no right to indulge,—that was simply unfair.

The sound of loose planks disturbed by running feet came up to her on the motionless air. It was Keble, in sandals and dressing gown, returning from the boat slip to the cottage. She leaned forward and patted her horse.

Near the foot of the winding road she drew rein again. Grendel had dashed ahead to play practical jokes on a colony of hens. Joe was chopping wood. Mona was moving tins in the dairy. Annie Brown was at the pump, getting water on her "pinny". Some one was whistling. Grendel barked at the top of his lungs and came bounding back through the grass. The sun was beginning to turn the mountain peaks into brass and bronze. The flat pallid clouds were trailing away. A flush of blue crept over the sky.

Miriam's throat ached with the kind of happiness that is transformed at birth into pain. She remembered the remark she had made to Louise on first descending this road: "You very lucky woman!"

Half an hour later, at the breakfast table, she was struck by the pallor of Louise's cheeks, which normally glowed. Louise was chatting with a show of good spirits that failed to hoodwink her. She broke open an egg with a slight feeling of vexation, for it was nerve-racking to be faced daily with a human puzzle. She was more than willing to be sorry for

Louise, but one couldn't quite be sorry until one knew why.

A moment later their eyes met. Louise gave her a characteristically friendly smile, and suddenly Miriam guessed. She was assailed by a nameless envy, a nameless resentment, sincere compassion, then, by a strange relief that left her almost comically weak.

When breakfast was finished and the men were out of the room she went to Louise, grasped her by the shoulders, looked into her eyes with kindly inquiry, then, having been assured, said, "My dear, why didn't you tell me? Or rather, how could I have failed to see!"

To Miriam's amazement Louise bit her lips and trembled,—Louise, the Spartan! Miriam kissed her cold cheek and gave her arm an affectionate pat. She felt awkward. "What's there to be afraid of?" she scoffed. "You of all people!"

"It's not fear," Louise quietly contradicted. "It's disgust."

"How does Keble take it?"

"He is as blind as you were. And I haven't been able to bring myself to telling him. That explains better than anything my state of mind. He will be so odiously glad."

Miriam was shocked.

"Yes, odiously," Louise petulantly repeated. "I know it's abominable of me to talk like this. But he

will be so suffocatingly good and kind . . . Oh Miriam!"

She burst into tears and let Miriam's arms receive her. "I loathe hysterical women," she sobbed, then turned to Miriam with appealing eyes. "You will stay won't you?"

Miriam hesitated. The decision she had come to on her solitary ride broke down as other similar decisions had done.

"Why, yes, dear,—yes, of course I'll see you through it," she replied, and allowed Louise's grateful caress to silence a little exulting voice within her.

4

A singular, poignant peace brooded over Hillside through the long months of Miriam's second winter at the ranch. While the outer world stood transfixed with cold, its lakes and streams frozen and its heart stifled under the snow, the people indoors went about their tasks and diversions with an orderliness that recalled old times to Louise and Keble and tended to persuade Miriam that her doubts about herself had been exaggerated.

To break the monotony of correspondence, books, cards, and ski-ing trips there had been countless boxes to unpack in the unfinished house on the hill: boxes of furnishings and ornaments, music to try over and books to catalogue. To give unity to the winter, there was the dramatic suspense of waiting

for the human miracle. The attitude of Louise combined tolerance of Keble's solicitude with amusement at Miriam's half-embarrassed excitement. For the rest she accepted with common sense a situation which she privately regarded as an insult on the part of fate.

The apathy which Miriam had noted so uneasily in the early autumn had not disappeared, although it had lost its trance-like fixity, in the place of which had come a more regular attention to daily tasks, a quiet competence. Miriam's admiration for Louise had steadily grown, despite her distrust of Louise's intellectual "climbing" and her half-acknowledged envy of Louise's power to enslave Keble, to give Dare Rolands for his Olivers, and to bind maids and cooks, farm hands and horse wranglers, neighbors and creditors together in a fanatical vassalage. On none of her slaves did Louise make arbitrary demands. If she exhorted or scolded them, it was always apropos of their success or failure in being true to themselves. If Miriam's admiration ever wavered, it was on occasions when Louise, carried away by her own *élan*, cut capers merely to show what capers she could cut,—like an obstreperous child shouting, "Watch me jump down three steps at a time."

But recently Louise had not been cutting capers, and as she sat before a fire that gave the lie to the incredible temperature that reigned beyond the storm doors, calmly stitching garments for an infant whose

advent was distasteful to her, Miriam regarded her with the protective affection she might have felt for a sister ten years her junior.

"I can't make you out," she said. "In your place I would be obnoxiously proud of myself."

"When I was first married I wanted him. Then as time went on I hoped there wouldn't be any him at all. Saw to it, in fact. I've been negligent."

"Why *him*?" Miriam inquired.

"Because it's my duty to produce a member of the ancient and honorable House of Lords. His forebears expect it. As for me, I'd rather have a monkey."

Grimness had replaced the old zest and elasticity, and Miriam noted with surprise that this single fact completely altered the personality of the household. If the present mood proved permanent, she reflected, the Castle, for all their pains, would have the character of a house to let.

Dare had left in the late autumn and would return in the spring, perhaps remaining for the housewarming which was to be the occasion of a visit by members of Keble's family. At the time of Dare's departure Miriam had watched Louise with intense curiosity. She had longed to know the nature of the rôle played by Louise's heart in her relation with Dare,—a relation which both so freely acknowledged to be exhilarating. During one of their final evenings Louise had said to Dare, "When you leave Hillside I shall climb to the top of Hardscrapple, chant a

hymn to the sun, and dive head first into the canyon, for there won't be anything to live for, except Keble and Miriam, and they're only the land I'm a fish on, whereas you're the water I'll be a fish out of!"

To which Dare had instantly retorted, "Indeed I'm not the water you're a fish in. I'm the whale you're a swordfish attacking, and I shall be glad to get back east where there's nothing I can't either swallow or out-swim."

Miriam had been exasperated at not being able to read between the bantering lines. For there must be a situation, she reasoned; two such abounding persons, no matter how adroit, could never have got so far into each others' minds without having got some distance into each other's blood.

But the situation, whatever it was, was not divulged, and Miriam was denied whatever solace her own unruly heart might have derived from the knowledge that Keble's wife's heart was also unruly.

Whether Louise's sense of duty had a share in it or not, a "him" was duly produced and ecstatically made at home. Even his mother ended by admitting that he was "not a bad little beast." She had vetoed Keble's plan to import a nurse from England, and had trained Katie Salter for the post. As motherhood had once been Katie's passionate avocation, Louise could think of no better way to translate into deeds the spirit of her outlandish funeral sermon on neighborliness than to promote Katie from the wash-house to the nursery.

Keble and Miriam came in from an hour's skating one afternoon late in December to find Louise at the tea table submitting to Katie's proud account of the prodigy's gain in weight. She was mildly amused to learn that the tender hair on the back of babies' heads was worn off by their immoderate addiction to pillows.

Keble leaned over the perambulator, not daring to put his finger into the trap of his son's microscopic hand lest its coldness have some dire effect. He had an infatuated apprehension of damage to his child, having so recently learned the terrific physical cost of life. His tenderness for the infant had a strange effect on Louise. It made her wish that she were the baby. Tears gathered in her eyes as she watched him, still aglow from his exercise and fairly hanging on Katie's statistics.

She began to pour tea as Miriam threw aside her furs and drew up a chair. Miriam had hoped, in common with Keble and Katie Salter, that Louise's indifference would disappear as if by magic when the baby came within range of the census. She was forced to admit, however, that Louise was not appreciably more partial to her son than to Elvira Brown or Dicky Swigger.

"Could you desert him long enough to drink a cup of tea?" Louise inquired after a decent interval. She liked the solemn manner in which Keble talked to the future member of the House of Lords. Like Gladstone addressing the Queen, Keble addressed

the baby as though it were a public meeting. "You must make due allowance for the incurable knick-knackery of woman kind," he was saying, as he smoothed out a lace border in which two tiny fingers had become entangled and against which,—or something equally unjust,—a lusty voice was beginning to protest.

"He's not as polite as you are, if he does take after you," Louise commented when Keble had praised the toasted cheese cakes.

Keble judged this a fair criticism, and Miriam was of the opinion that a polite baby would be an unendurable monstrosity. "I like him best of all," she said, "when he kicks and twists and screams 'fit to bust his pram', as Katie says. Although I'm also quite keen about him when he's dining. Yes, thanks, and another cheese cake . . . And his way of always getting ready to sneeze and then *not*, that's endearing. And his dreams about food."

"You wouldn't find them half as endearing if you had to wake up in the middle of the night and replenish him."

"Oh I say, Weedgie! Must you always speak of him as though he were a gas-tank, or a bank account!"

"Pass me your cup. After skating you also want a lot of replenishing, like your greedy heir. Now let's for goodness' sake talk about something else,—the New Year's dance for instance."

Keble was always ready nowadays to talk on any subject in which Louise showed signs of interest. The recognized household term for it was "trying to be the water Louise is a fish in."

CHAPTER V

IN England there were several thousand acres which Keble would one day automatically take over. In Canada, creating his own estate, he could enjoy a satisfaction known only to the remotest of his ancestors. And as his wilderness became productive he acquired, atavistically, the attitude of a squire towards the people whose livelihood depended on him. He housed them comfortably; he listened to their claims and quarrels; he hired, discharged, and promoted with conscientious deliberation; and every so often he wrote letters to the provincial parliament about the state of the roads.

“Now it’s time to amuse them,” Louise had suggested. “People don’t remember that you have installed expensive lighting plants for their benefit, but they never forget a lively party.”

Thus was sown the seed of the New Year’s dance which was to be held in the hall and reception rooms of the empty new house. Invitations were issued to every soul at Hillside, and a poster tacked to the bulletin board of the Valley postoffice announced that anybody who cared to make the journey would be welcome.

Preparations for this evening revived Louise's spirits as nothing had done in months. No detail was left to chance. Keble, held responsible for the music, endeavored for days to whip up the sluggish dance rhythms of the Valley bandmaster. "I've done everything but stand on my head and beat time with my feet," he reported in desperation, "and they still play the fox-trots as though they were dirges. Fortunately the Valley knows no better."

Miriam superintended the decorating of the rooms, aided by the "hands", who, like Birnam Wood, advanced across the white meadow obliterated under a mass of evergreens.

Only one contretemps occurred. A few days after Christmas Mrs. Boots, the minister's wife, accompanied by Mrs. Sweet, wife of the mail carrier, made her way to the Castle and warned Louise that her dance would conflict with the "watchnight service" at the Valley church.

New Year's fell on a Saturday, and to postpone the ball one night would involve dancing into the early hours of the Day of Rest. Keble had made arrangements to leave on Saturday for the east, on a short business trip to London. To hold the entertainment over until Monday would therefore be out of the question.

Louise had a characteristic inspiration. "Why not turn the library into a chapel!" she exclaimed, kindling at the prospect of an extra dramatic item on her program, "And pause at midnight for spir-

itual refreshments! I'll make everybody file in and kneel, Mr. Boots can say a prayer, and we'll all sing a little hymn—perfect!”

“And then go on dancing!” cried Mrs. Boots, in horror.

Mrs. Sweet reflected the horror on her friend's face. Then her disapproving glances traveled to a corner of the hall where some noisy girls were making paper chains and lanterns under the direction of Pearl Beatty.

Louise saw that she had given pain to the minister's wife. “Forgive me,” she said impulsively. “I'm such a heathen! But if I were a Christian I'm sure it wouldn't disturb my conscience to dance and pray alternately; indeed each would gain by the contrast. What's the point of a religion that has to be kept in a cage?”

Mrs. Boots could have found answers if she had been given time to catch her breath, but before she had a word ready Louise was shaking her cordially by the hand and consigning her to a maid who was to take the ladies to the cottage and comfort them with tea and a sight of the baby before the mail sleigh returned to the Valley.

Whatever the concourse of the faithful at the watch-night service, there was never an instant's doubt as to the triumph of the forces of evil. From the moment when Keble and the wife of the Mayor of Witney, followed by Louise and the Mayor, stepped out at the head of a “grand march” until day-

break on the first of January when a winded band played a doleful version of "God Save the King", the festivities went forward with irresistible momentum. Keble made a speech, and then with true British fortitude danced with every female guest. Miriam, acting on orders, solicited dances from bashful cowboys, and once, in the grip of an honest lad who seemed to have mistaken her for a pump, she caught the eyes of Keble, in the grip of the new laundress, who was bolting towards a wall with him. And they hadn't dared to burst out laughing.

Louise darted in and out, setting everything on fire, making the dour laugh and the obstreperous subside, launching witty sallies and personal broadsides, robbing Pearl of her plethora of partners and leading them captive to the feet of girls who, after living for days on the exciting prospect, were now sitting against the wall with their poor red hands in their laps, enjoying it, vicariously.

For Louise the evening would have been perfect but for one disturbing remark which she overheard in the supper room. Minnie Swigger, whose brand new "Kelly green" satin had lost something of its splendor when contrasted with the simple black velvet in which Louise was sheathed, had watched Miriam pass by in company with Pearl Beatty and Jack Wallace, the proprietor of the Valley livery stable, and had vouchsafed her criticism in an ungrateful voice which carried to Louise's ears: "She's supposed to be his secretary. Either Weedge

is blind, or she holds Miss Cread over his head as an excuse for her own little game. Nobody but her could get away with it."

Louise wheeled about and walked up to Minnie. "Get away with what?" she inquired evenly.

Minnie was too startled to reply for a moment, then with the defiance born of a bad conscience she said, "I don't care if you did hear me. It certainly looks funny, and that's not my fault. And Pearl Beatty there, as big as life! When you make a fuss over her decent fellows like Jack Wallace get the idea she's all right."

"Isn't she?"

"If you call *that* all right!"

"Being all right is minding your own business. You're a nice little thing, Minnie, but you *don't*. Not always. Don't try to mind mine; it's far too much for you."

What the natives thought was in itself a matter of indifference, but if "things," as Minnie alleged, did "look funny", it was just conceivable that the natives, for all their ignorance, saw the situation at Hillside in a clearer perspective than any of the actors. Keble's departure was, therefore, in a sense opportune.

2

Although it meant twenty-four hours without sleep, Louise and Miriam next morning insisted on accompanying Keble as far as the Valley. The four

took breakfast, along with Dr. Bruneau, at the Canada House as Miriam's guests. They were weary, a little feverish, and inclined to be silent. Keble alone chatted with a volubility that betrayed his nervousness, his regret at the separation, and his excitement at the prospect of revisiting the home he had long ago abandoned. Louise was pale, and kept hiding in the depths of her fur coat. Miriam and the doctor sustained Keble's talk, but could not relax the tension. The stage was due in fifteen minutes.

Suddenly Louise jumped up from the table, which was being cleared by an ill-kempt waitress with whom Keble had danced a few hours previously. "I nearly forgot . . . the snapshots of Baby for his grandmother. They're still at the drug-store. I'll run over and get them."

"Let me go, dear," Keble had risen.

"We'll go together," Louise proposed, and Miriam noted an eager light in his eyes.

On the snowy road he tucked his glove under Louise's arm, and they picked their way across in silence to the drug-store.

When she had obtained the photographs and thrust them into an inner pocket of his coat, they returned more slowly towards the hotel.

"It will seem very strange," he said, "without you and the monkey. I can't tell you how disappointed I am at your refusing to come home with me."

"A change from us will do you good . . . You're

to give my love and the monkey's to everybody, and tell them I'm looking forward very much to their visit."

Keble stopped in the middle of the deserted street, to face her with appealing eyes, and rested a hand on her arm. "Weedgie, that's all so pathetically trite, for you! Tell me, *sans facons*, why wouldn't you come, and why wouldn't you let me take the snapshots of you as well as the monkey?"

She was a little timid. This was the Louise with whom he had originally fallen love, and whom he remembered even through her noisiest performances. "Because I'm perverse. I want your people, if they are going to make my acquaintance at all, to get their first impression of me in my own setting." She couldn't confess that she would have been gratified if his people had been a few degrees more pressing in their invitations to her. "If they like me in spite of it, or even if they don't, I shall feel at least square with myself. But if they were to find me passable in *their* setting, then come out here and pooh-pooh the Valley, I should be—oh, hurt and angry."

Keble shook her gently. "Rubbish!"

"Mrs. Windrom thought me crude," she said, entirely without rancor. In her heart she thought Mrs. Windrom crude.

"Walter didn't," Keble retorted. "And Walter's little finger is worth more than his mother's eternal soul."

"Walter is a man, dear. Mrs. Boots doesn't like

me, and her soul is worth thousands of little fingers,—or toes, rather.” She was stroking his coon-skin coat.

“Toes, rather? . . . Oh, I see—Boots, toes.”

Without warning he caught her in his arms and kissed her. “You preposterous person!” he laughed, a little abashed by his flare of passion.

They returned silently to the hotel porch, where they were joined by Miriam and the doctor. The stage had arrived and they were discussing the state of the mountain road. Keble climbed into the sleigh.

When everyone had said good-bye, and the horses had been set into motion, Keble turned to Miriam with a parting admonition regarding business letters, then added, “Keep an eye on Louise, now that she’s come to life again. And do give the monkey an occasional piece of sugar.”

The last injunction was a facetious allusion to a remark made some weeks previously by Mr. Brown, who had declared that Keble was spoiling the baby as much as his wife spoiled her circus horse.

When the stage had disappeared, Louise turned to Miriam with an air of being lost. “Isn’t it strange,” she said, “to think of going back alone! I never realized before how completely it’s Keble that makes the ranch go round. I feel like *la délaissée*,—you know the girl in the ditty: *qui pleure nuit et jour*.”

“Good gracious, Louise, don’t tell me you’re turning sentimental on top of everything.”

“It would only be *re*-turning. I’ve always been sentimental under the surface. At least I used to be with my dolls. And for some reason I’ve felt like a little girl this morning.”

A cloud passed over Miriam’s sky. Lack of sleep and the dissipation of the last week would sufficiently account for it. Faint lines indicated the inner boundaries of her cheeks, and her eyes had lost their agate-like clarity.

“You look like a tired little girl,” she said sadly. “I feel all of eighty.”

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

IT was the second anniversary of the death of Billy Salter. A summer breeze played over the hillock which was surmounted by two small tombstones. The branches of the trees which had sheltered the grave-diggers from hail on the day of the funeral were now tossing in a frantic effort to extend their shade to the rows of asters with which Katie and Louise had bounded the two graves.

“Seems less lonesome for Billy, don’t it, Mrs. Eveley, when Rosie has a flower bed too,” Katie had commented. Rosie Dixon had died before Billy was born, but her span of life had been as limited as his own, which had the effect of making them seem contemporaries.

As Katie had expressed it, “If both were living to-day Rosie would be twenty-nine and Billy fourteen, just going into long pants; but really they’re only the same age—both twelve, poor babies!”

Louise recalled the remark this August afternoon as she and Trenholme Dare tied their horses to neighboring trees and ascended towards the deserted graves. “I couldn’t help feeling that Katie had stumbled on an interesting idea,” she said.

"She had," Dare agreed. "If Katie was a savant she might have developed it into an epoch-making theory of time."

"How far ahead would that have got her?"

"Not an inch. Metaphysicians are higher in the air, and their altitude gives them a more panoramic view, but they are traveling towards eternity at exactly the same speed as Katie and not a whit faster. The value of intricate theories is that they are reducible to homely, concrete observations like Katie's. Conversely the beauty of Katie's homely discovery is that it can be elevated into a formula and re-applied, even canonized, along with Newton's apple and adventures of other scientific saints. It's like art: the glory of music is that it is made up of vulgar sounds, and the saving grace of vulgar sounds is that they can all get to a musical heaven."

Louise was sitting on the grass, gazing down towards grey plains which merged into the distant brown hills, which in turn merged into a sky whose blue gave an impression of actual depth. It was not a canopy to-day but an ocean of air, or rather,—since it was bodiless and unglazed,—an ocean's ghost, with small clouds, like the ghosts of icebergs, drifting across its waveless surface.

The breeze which tossed the branches and stirred Sundown's mane came to sport with her own hair. Her hat lay at her feet, and with an arm limply outstretched she wielded a switch, flicking the dusty toes of her riding boots.

“By all that,” she said, “you imply that philosophizing doesn’t get one anywhere. Yet you philosophize as never was, and you seem to be getting ahead like a comet.”

“Philosophy isn’t the propellor, it’s the log that records the progress and adventures of the mind at sea. If by philosophizing you mean the mental gymnastics which toughen thought for subsequent *applied* mentality, I dare say philosophy can be said to get one ahead; but it doesn’t make one wiser in any real sense. The savant knows more than Katie Salter about the nature of the ingredients of life, but that doesn’t make him a better *liver* than Katie. No doubt the man who can enunciate a theory of relativity is more commendable to God than the woman who can only prevent your son from eating angle-worms, for God’s evolution depends on intelligence, and *Herr Doktor* Einstein is more intelligent than Katie Salter, *unbedingt*. But God is strangely ungrateful; he treats them both alike, giving us all impartially the status of drops in the salty ocean of eternity. What we call our life is merely the instant when we are phosphorescent; the savant may be more luminously phosphorescent than you and me, but before he can say Jack Robinson he has relapsed into the ocean and new drops of salty water have formed, comprising left-over particles of dead hims and yous and mes, forming a new identity which is tossed up into birth to be luminous for a moment and say Jack Robinson and then disintegrate in favor of still further

combinations of remnants . . . The folly of regarding Socrates as sublime and me as ridiculous is that we are one and the same entity, just as those asters are merely a continuation of the first aster seed, which was merely the continuation of a continuation."

Louise recalled the discussion she had had with her father on the day of Billy's funeral, when they had agreed to grant cats equal rights with Billy in the matter of immortality. "Would you go so far as to say that Socrates and Sundown were parts of the same entity?" she inquired.

"Even further. I should include the fly that his tail can't quite reach, the worms under his feet, and the leaves over his head. It's all in the ocean . . . Stones and mud aren't as self-assertive as radium, but who is to say that they have no phosphorescent potentialities? If you eat a speck of mud on your celery, doesn't it, or something chemical in it, become a part of you and take a more distinguished place in the realm of things vital?"

"Then how to account for the fact that we can talk, Sundown can only neigh, and stones can't even sigh,—even if they *are* full of sermons."

"By the fact that stones are figuratively phosphorescent in an extremely negligible degree, that Sundown is phosphorescent in an infinitely greater degree, and that you and I are so surcharged with phosphorescence that we simply burst into hissing flames of intelligence. Or, if you prefer, we're not so tight-

ly packed as stones; our atoms are more free to roam and collide and become interesting. Human intelligence, with all its concomitants of reasoning and speech, is a sort of transformation which is analogous to the remarkable things that happen in a laboratory when certain combinations are subjected to intense pressures and temperatures. Degrees of vitality are like the gradations of electrical force: sluggish magnetic fields, live wires, dynamos, power stations. Everything has some vital status, just as everything has some electrical status."

"But you make everything seem so impersonal and arbitrary. Don't you believe that human beings can voluntarily increase or decrease their voltage and usefulness? If I determine to live up to my best instincts, can't I do so on my own initiative, without having been anticipated by Fate?"

"I think of it the other way round. Your strongest instincts, good or bad, will live up to you. They will determine your acts. The decision to live up to them begs the question, for it is they that prompted the decision, making up your so-called mind for you. You only said the words of your excellent decision after the excellent decision had surged and pulsated and battled and muscled its way through your system to the tip of your tongue. Taking a decision is like taking a train: in reality the train takes you."

"According to that theory there's nothing to stop the whole world from going to pot, morally speak-

ing. What if bad instincts obtain a majority in the house?"

"Ah, but thanks be to God they won't! Nature hasn't gone to pot physically, for all the efforts of plague and dyspepsia. She won't go to pot morally, either, though we may always need prisons, or their future equivalents. Nature is, in the long run, economical; she balances her books; and morality, like health, is merely a question of thrift."

"And religion? What is it?"

"Oh,—for a slouchy metaphor, call it the sparks struck off by moral friction."

"That's deep water."

"Moral: accept the concrete and don't try to formulate the abstract. Katie would never have expected an apple to fall into the sky just because she had never heard of Isaac Newton. And when she feels that Rosie Dixon and Billy, despite arguments to the contrary, are the same age, she has got just as far as the hypothetical metaphysician who would turn her experience into a revolutionary theory of objective and subjective time,—except that Katie won't get a Nobel prize. If she lives to be three score and ten, snug in her three dimensions, and never hears time defined as qualitative multiplicity, she will fulfil a sublime destiny; she will with unerring instinct and awe-inspiring virtuosity obey complex laws which are none the less urgent for being unformulated in her narrow skull. And when she dies, her soul, like John Brown's, will, though in fearfully di-

visible, microscopic, and unrecognizable particles, go 'marching on'."

"Thank goodness Katie is miles down the road by this time where she can't hear what a hash she is going to be!"

"Yes, that after all marks the difference between people like Katie who are close to the earth, and those who do get up in a metaphysical balloon. Katie comforts herself with promises of a red plush heaven full of harps, where she at the age of seventy-three will repair in a white robe to rejoin her Billy, still twelve; whereas the savants who see the world as an ant-heap are not appalled at the thought of personal obliteration. I for one think it's rather a lark to be a sort of caricature on a school blackboard for three score and ten years then turn into a thin cloud of chalk dust when higher forces rub you off; it's fun to speculate on the future of the particles of chalk in the cloud."

Louise confessed that she could not gloat over the prospect, but let it be understood that, for the sake of feeling herself floating in the air amongst a distinguished metaphysical crew, including Dare, she cheerfully accepted the principle. Then something made her lean forward and gaze towards a distant bend in the road.

"Look! That's them!"

"What's who?" Dare asked, and added, "grammar be blowed!"

Three touring cars, an unprecedented sight, were

winding their way up from the direction of the Valley.

"Keble's telegram said this evening," Louise explained, with a blank look at her companion, followed by a glance at her wrist watch. "And it's not three o'clock yet. Thank heaven Miriam is at home to give them tea."

"Them" referred to the English travelers, whose visit had been postponed in order that it might be embraced in a western tour which Lord Eveley and his assistants in the Colonial Office were scheduled to make on Imperial business. Keble had left the ranch a few days before to meet them in Calgary and guide them hither. All through the spring and summer he had been bringing his building work to completion, and Dare had been on hand several weeks now, partly in the rôle of contractor, partly in the rôle of friend. He had remained for the celebrations before proceeding to Japan, where he was to make notes and sketches for a commission in California.

"What a pity you won't be on hand to receive them," Dare sympathized.

Louise flicked her switch rebelliously. "If they say evening, they can't expect me to know they mean afternoon. There's no reconciling that discrepancy whether you call time qualitative multiplicity or plain duration. And they'll just have to wait." She smiled maliciously. "I hope they'll look blank at each other and say, 'Just as I thought'."

“Why? So you can fool them all by being excessively correct?”

She was delighted. “How did you guess?”

“The clue to you is always the same. You’re a born actress.”

To herself she was thinking. “Even the most enlightened men fail to understand that some women are capable of being the quintessence of themselves when they’re most outrageously play-acting.” And she was not at all sorry that Dare should fall into one of the traps laid for his sex,—there were so many he didn’t fall into!

“I adore acting. And love being caught at it. And always go on till I *am*.” This suggested a new thought to her. “That’s why Keble and I are so often a hundred miles apart. I’m acting, and he doesn’t know whether I’m acting myself or some other character, and that irritates me and I act all the harder, and it turns into farce or tragedy, and he still fails to catch me, and I’m too far gone in my rôle to stop, but yearn to be caught——”

“And spanked?”

“You and Miriam spank me sometimes. Then Keble *sees*, and laughs. But so distressingly late.”

“Hadn’t we better be starting?”

The procession had passed the Dixon ranch and was vanishing towards Hillside.

“In a minute,” she replied, without stirring. “We don’t have to have seen them, you know.” Then with an abrupt change of mood she surprised him

by saying, "I dread it, Dare. It's worse than going up for examinations."

"You'll probably find them delightful."

"You're not their wild and woolly daughter-in-law."

He shifted his position on the grass and sat facing her, with curious, intent eyes. There was something subduing in his regard, as in his strength and grace. "I wonder what I am, really. I wish I knew,—my degree of being accepted as your friend, I mean."

She was pleasantly conscious of the urgent need to evade the intentness of his eyes, but temporized by mocking. "Don't try to formulate the abstract. Those are your words, and if you don't follow your own advice you'll be in the predicament Katie would be in if she tried to go up in a balloon."

The forthcoming meeting had unnerved her more than she cared to admit. An attack of stage-fright had made her say "in a minute" when he had suggested returning. To that was added a twinge of vertigo, as though she felt herself standing on a precipice from which force of circumstances would make her presently retreat, but which for that very reason had an indefinable lure. The eyes and hands and arms and thighs of her companion were challenging her. Meanwhile, in her subconsciousness, the talk of "in-laws" had set in motion a tune from *The Mikado*, and as she flicked her boots she sang a paraphrase:

“They married their son,—
They had only got one,—
To their daughter-in-law elect.”

The ruse by no means succeeded in suppressing the rebellious desire to look over the precipice. “I wonder if they did right,” she said.

Dare looked away, and she breathed more freely, hoping yet fearing that he would immediately resume his disturbing, overpowering intentness. “Sometimes,” he said, “I resent it; at other times I’m thankful.”

As he was still looking away she ventured an emotional step nearer. “Do you mind explaining that cryptic remark?”

“It’s very simple. If their son hadn’t married you, I undoubtedly would have. And it would have been a gigantic blunder.”

“How do you know you would have?”

“I’m damned if we could have avoided it.”

“In other words, those strong instincts you were talking about,—good or bad,—would have taken that *funeste* direction,—the direction of bringing us smack up against each other for better or worse.”

“For a while it would have been heaven on earth. Then hell.”

“Why?”

He still avoided her eyes. “Because strong things must clash. Because you and I don’t permanently need each other; we’re too self-reliant.”

His unwillingness to look at her roused a demon. "I wonder if you believe that."

"Must one always say all one believes?"

She ignored the question and he continued. "Marriage, to be successful, must be entered into by one leading person and one following person. We were each born to lead. We could never play on the same team, but as captains of opposing teams we can be profoundly chummy . . . If the other element had been allowed in, the chumminess in the crucible would have flared up into a white flame, but the contents of the crucible would have been reduced to ashes."

"Like the Kilkenny cats," she assented, absent-mindedly.

She was now stubbornly determined to regain possession of that dangerous glance. "Isn't it grotesque," she went on, "that contemptible, weak-souled people repeatedly disregard scruples that give pause to the strong?"

Dare held his breath, and his profile showed that he was pressing his teeth against his lip. They had never steered so near the reefs in all their skilfully navigated acquaintanceship. Louise pulled weakly at the grass.

Frankness had been their support up to the present, and each was privately acknowledging that they could no longer depend on it.

Silence. Louise felt that she ought to do something to divert his emotions into more familiar chan-

nels. "I wish I were a man," she said, and the effort of uttering words made her conscious of the dryness of her throat. She also had a freakishness of breath to contend with.

Dare collected himself, sat up, with his back partly turned to her, so that his eyes looked over the plain. The breeze had gone down and the afternoon light seemed to be an intrinsic property of the objects it gilded rather than an emanation from the sun.

"What would you do if you were?" he asked.

"The incomparably splendid things you do," she promptly replied.

"I've come pretty near doing some incomparably asinine things."

"But you've stopped short. I would have, too, of course. Besides," she hesitated, then decided on one final plunge of frankness, "in a world full of people who don't do splendid things, you could almost have pleaded justification in not stopping short, I imagine.—if not actual provocation."

She saw his fingers open, then close. For once in her life, just once, she longed to see those strangely intent eyes fixed on her, wanted them to come closer and closer until her own eyes must close, yet she sat weak, watching the back of his head, then his fingers. For the second time in her life,—the first was during Walter Windrom's visit,—she saw deep into the psychology of infidelity: this time more specifically. Indeed with a crudeness that made her blush.

Suddenly he wheeled about. The look was there. She gave a strange little cry, raised her hands slightly from the ground, and in a flash found herself imprisoned by his arms, and mouth.

A few moments later he was on his feet, facing the valley again, his arms folded.

He walked to the trees and saddled the ponies. But as Louise made no move he returned and stood looking down at her. "There's still time to escape," he warned her.

She was again pulling at the grass. "There's only one way to escape from oneself . . . And that is not to acknowledge the danger."

"Even when mad things happen?"

"Mad things are no more disgraceful than the mad desires that precipitate them. If you admit the desires——"

"Yes, but—good God!" It ended in an explosive sigh at the futility of any reasoning faculty one might bring to bear on a problem that had its source somewhere so far beneath reason's reach.

He sat down again, at her feet, and their eyes met in a long, steady regard.

"Do you suppose it has been—just *that*, really, all this time?" he finally asked.

"Not *only* that . . . Partly."

He held out his hand and she placed hers in it, without hesitation. It was irrevocable. During the remainder of the afternoon time and scruples were burnt up in the white flame.

2

They rode side by side down the steep slope of the mound. The horses were eager to return, and once in the road their riders let them canter. Louise was ahead and as she came abreast of the Dixon ranch she reined in and waited. Her cheeks were still flushed, her eyes restless. She smiled with a blend of humor and frustration which Dare mistook for regret. In his face she saw a reply to her own countenance, a reply which took the form of a little plea for pardon, a plea grotesquely beside the point,—as if *she* hadn't manoeuvred the lapse from grace! Her frustration was physiological, the eternal waiting for an ecstasy which Keble and Dare could command at will, but which Fate still withheld from her. It was unfair and it was discouraging.

Dare drew up at her side. He was more handsome, more authoritative than ever, also more tender and humble than she would ever have guessed him capable of being. Yet also a little annoying. Men could be so insultingly sure of themselves. Here was a man who by all the signs ought to have been *the* man. She had assumed as much and behaved accordingly. But instead of bringing about the miracle, the duet for the sake of which she had been willing to risk Keble's dignity, he had merely achieved the old solo, with her as instrument. "Why can't they understand? Why don't they learn?" her outraged desires were crying in protest. She tried

to read them a moral lecture, but that was of no avail. She was, after all, an animal, and it was folly to pretend that she was not.

Dare smiled tentatively, inquiringly, waiting for her to speak.

She looked down at Sundown's ears. "I suppose that is what I would have done, if I had been a man. Just once."

He shook his head. "The 'just once' would have been like diving into a sea in which you would have to sink or swim. I hope you don't mean just once literally, for that would be as good as letting me drown."

She was too proud to explain, and she would not raise false hopes. "We must forget that it happened," she finally announced.

He was bewildered. "You mean, you *can* forget!"

She made no reply.

"It was you who said that the fulfilment is no more disgraceful than the desire."

At that moment she hated him for his masculine obtuseness.

She gave Sundown's head a jerk. "I'm glad you're going to Japan," she said, and dug her heels into the horse's sides. A moment later she was lost to view in a cloud of dust.

Like some parched and hungry wanderer who had dreamt of orchards, only to wake up under a bruising hail of apples and pears that startled him into

forgetfulness of his thirst, Dare gasped. "Already!" It was an ominously precipitate reminder of his theory that they were each leaders, that neither would be content to subordinate his individuality to the other's.

His mind bit and gnawed at the baffling knot in a tangle which a few moments since seemed to have yielded for good and all. As a psychologist he was somewhat too clever, and was capable of overlooking a factor that might have leapt to the mind of a kitchen-maid.

He took a trail that served as a short-cut to the ridge, and caught up with Louise on the new road that branched off towards the Castle. She turned in her saddle, and patted Sundown's flank. "Slowpoke!" she flung back at him, teasingly, but already relentingly. Men were such helpless, clumsy, cruel, selfish, amiable babies.

"Been thinking," Dare explained.

"To any purpose?"

"To excellent but piteously sad purpose. I've been breaking to my unhappy ego the meaning of your parting shot."

"What did it mean?"

"That I'm defeated."

"In a way, I'm sorrier than you are."

"For God's sake, why?"

She smiled with a trace of bitter humor, earnestly. "Well, *some one* ought to be able to subdue me. God, I need it!" Angry tears came to her eyes,

and she thrust her foot petulantly into the stirrup. Riding alone, she had just been marveling at the narrowness of the margin by which she had avoided the disruption of her present life. But for a grotesque trifle, she might have been riding at this very moment *away* from Hillside, forever, with Dare at her side. "That's where I score," he reflected, lugubriously. "For at least now I taste the desolate joy of capitulation to a stronger opponent. While we were opponents I wished to keep a few points ahead. The fact that I no longer wish to do so, but ask nothing better than to be trampled on till I can't bear it another minute,—well, what do you make of that?"

"You're off your game," she evaded. "Buck up!"

They rode on in silence until they came within sight of the broad meadow at the edge of the pine ridge.

"Louise!"

"What!"

"Do I have to go to Japan?"

"More than ever."

3

When they dismounted and walked towards the house the sun was already far enough below the mountains to give Hardscrapple the appearance of a dark cardboard silhouette against the rose and green of the sky. Around their feet grew patches of scarlet flowers with flannel petals and brittle stocks.

The lake below, seen through a clump of black pines, was grey and glazed. The Hillside crane, on his evening grub-call, flew over their heads towards his favorite island. As they watched his landing Louise noticed two white crescent-shaped objects on the dark floor of the lake near the stream which came down in steps from the canyon. It was as though some giant seated on an overhanging ledge had been paring his nails.

"They're on the water already!" she cried.

"Fishing. Quite true to type," Dare commented. "The minute rich old men get away from home they have an uncontrollable desire to kill."

Louise sighed at the prospect of unforeseen vagaries in her guests. "Will they be grumpy if they don't catch anything?"

"Probably,—and reminiscent."

"I'm glad the flowers came out so well," Louise remarked irrelevantly, with an affectionate backward glance at the garden as they reached the terrace. "With all due respect to your genius, I like my own roses better than all this."

"This" was indicated by a sweeping gesture which took in the Castle, the commodious outbuildings, and a pattern of roadways and clearings.

She was arrested by the sound of voices from the other terrace. A tall woman whom she immediately recognized appeared at the corner, leading a younger woman towards the parapet. With the air of a licensed guide she was pointing across the lake to-

wards the "Sans Souci" cottages now tenanted by the Browns, and volubly describing points of interest.

"Over there, to the right of those three tall trees. Keble calls them Castor and Pollux."

Half turning towards her companion, as though Girlie's eyes could not be trusted to find any spot pointed out to her, Mrs. Windrom caught sight of the advancing pair.

"Ha!" she cried, and turned her daughter round by the shoulders. "There you precious two are at last!"

Louise hurried forward, with kisses. Girlie seemed as slow to bring her faculties to a correct focus on Louise as she had been in respect of the trees. She was a lithe, willowy girl with soft, colorless hair, a smile faintly reminiscent of Walter, and limp white fingers that spread across the bosom of a straight, dark-blue garment of incredible spotlessness, considering the dusty motor journey from Witney. "Being less clever than her brother," Louise was reflecting, "she has tried to get even by taking up outdoor things, which really don't go with her type."

"I was so sorry that Walter couldn't join you in the east," she said, addressing Mrs. Windrom. "But he has promised us a long visit next year."

Girlie was getting a clearer focus. "He did nothing but rave about the ranch after he and Mother

were here," she contributed. "Now I see why. It's like a private Lugano."

Louise doubted it, but linked her arm in Girlie's. "The only way we could keep him here, however, was to give him a horse that broke his ribs. I hope you'll have better luck."

"Walter never could ride anything but a hobby,—poetry, or first editions. Nor play anything more energetic than croquet. As a partner at golf he's as helpful as a lame wrist."

"But a darling for all that," Louise defended.

"Oh, rather!" exclaimed Girlie, with an emphasis that seemed to add, "That goes without saying,—certainly without *your* saying it."

They proceeded towards wide window-doors and entered the drawing-room, where Miriam and the other two women had risen on hearing the hubbub. Louise went straight to the elder woman. "I'm Louise," she announced. "Full of apologies."

Her mother-in-law kissed her and presented Alice. "We arrived before we expected. Keble got a special locomotive to bring us through the pass, and couldn't let you know because the telegraph office was closed."

"It always is, in an emergency. And when it's open, the wires are down. We just guess back and forth. Please don't mind my get-up. You all look so fresh and frilly. Out here we dress like soldiers, in order to be in keeping with our slouchy telegraph service and other modern inconveniences."

"I'm sure you look very comfortable," said Lady

Eveley with a maternal smile. She was bird-like, with an abundance of white hair and a coquettish little moiré band around her neck to conceal its ruins. When she smiled, her goodwill seemed to be reiterated by a series of wrinkles that extended as far as her forehead.

“Oh, I’m anything *but!* First of all I’m dusty, and second of all I’m parched.”

“There’ll be a fresh pot in a minute, dear,” said Miriam. “Do sit here.”

Mrs. Windrom was asking Dare to confirm her statement that the pillars were Corinthian, which he could not honestly do, and by a monstrous geographical leap their discussion wandered to a region beyond Girlie’s focus. “Mother talks architecture as glibly as Baedeker, but she’s really as ignorant about it as I am,” she assured Dare. “I’ve been dragged to Italy goodness knows how many times, but the only thing I’m sure of is the leaning tower of Pisa.”

Louise presented Dare to Lady Eveley and felt that she was being studied by Keble’s sister. She went to sit beside Alice near tea, which Miriam had resuscitated. She gave Miriam’s hand a grateful pat, then turning to her sister-in-law, expressed the hope that she had found her right room. “After living so long in a log-cabin I assume that everybody will get lost in this warehouse. Keble is so methodical he refers to right wing and left wing, like a drill-sergeant. The only way I can remember which room

is which is by the color of the carpet or what you can see from the windows.”

Alice was laughing, her amusement being divided between Louise's mock-seriousness and the reckless velocity of speech which left no gaps for replies. She was a dry, alert, lean woman of nearly forty, who should never have been named Alice. She had none of Keble's grace, but something of his openness and discernment. Alice would make as good a judge as Keble, Louise reflected, but a less merciful jury. As to dress, she gave Louise the impression of having ordered too much material, and the white dots in her foulard frock merely emphasized her angles. Her hair had once been blond like Keble's, but was now frosted, and arranged in a fashion that reminded Louise of the magazine covers of her girlhood.

When there was a hiatus Alice assured her that they had all been safely distributed and had spent an hour running back and forth comparing quarters. “My room has a pale blue and primrose carpet, and I should think about forty miles of entirely satisfactory view! And gladioli on the table. How did you know, or did you, that gladioli are my favorite flowers,—and how did they ever get here?”

Louise accepted a cup of tea and motioned Dare to a seat nearby. Lady Eveley joined them and Miriam went out to stroll with the Windroms.

“I knew you liked them,” Louise replied, “because you once mentioned it in a letter to Keble; and they grew in the greenhouse, for whose perfections Mr.

Dare is to be thanked. Don't you think he has done us rather well?"

The two women agreed in chorus. Then Alice added, "Father couldn't believe his eyes. He remembered the lake from a hunting trip years and years ago. But when he saw what you and Mr. Dare and Keble have made of it,—my dear, he almost wants it back!"

"My husband said you had made the house look like a natural part of the landscape, Mr. Dare," Lady Eveley leaned towards him with her timidly maternal, confidential, richly reiterated little smile. Louise concluded that her individuality, at its most positive, was never more than an echo of some other person's individuality, usually her husband's.

"Most houses are so irrelevant to their surroundings," Alice interposed. "Our place in Sussex for instance. Of course it has been there since the beginning of time, and that excuses it, but it's fearsome to look at, and would be in any landscape. I wish Mr. Dare would wave his wand over it."

"Alice thinks Keblestone too antiquated," explained Lady Eveley. "But her father and I are deeply attached to it, and she and Keble were both born there. I do hope you will come and stay with us there next summer, with the baby."

"That priceless baby!" Alice exclaimed. "He pulled the most excruciating faces for us. Then I gave him a beautiful rubber elephant and he flung it square at his nurse's eyes,—nearly blinded the poor

soul. Where did you find that nurse, Louise? She's devotion personified."

"He took to his grandfather at once. Sat on his knee and watched him as though he had never seen anything so curious!"

"Baby is very rude," Louise apologized.

"Brutally candid," Alice agreed. "If an elephant offends him he throws it at his nurse, and if a new grandfather is substituted, he solemnly stares him out of countenance."

"We shall spoil him, my dear," said the monkey's little grandmother. "We're so proud of him."

Louise replaced her cup on the table, got up from her chair, and implanted a playful but wholehearted kiss on the old lady's forehead. "I'm dying to see the grandfather who was too big to be flung in Katie's eyes," she announced. "Shall we walk down to the lakeside and meet the boats? There's an easy path."

She led the way, with Lady Eveley. Two or three times as they descended the winding path the older woman patted Louise's arm and smiled, apropos of nothing, reassuringly. In the end Louise laughed and said, trying to keep her frankness within gentle bounds, "You know, I'm quite floored by your friendliness. I've been racking my brains to think how I could put you at your ease, and now I find that everybody's aim is to put me at mine. I wish you were going to stay longer. Four days is nothing."

"We should love to, my dear, but you see the men have so many speeches to make, and they must be back on a certain date. It has been very exciting. All along the way there were deputations to meet the train. The mayors came and their wives—too amusing! And brought such pretty flowers. Alice doesn't object to the cameras at all, though she says her nose is the only thing that comes out. Alice resents her nose. She says she wouldn't mind its size if she didn't keep *seeing* it, poor dear . . . And banquets without end. I don't see how they find so many different things to say. My husband just stands up there——"

"And the words come to him," interposed Louise "I know."

"Isn't it remarkable? When I can scarcely find enough words to fill up a letter! I'm terrified when they ask me to speak at the women's clubs. Canadian women are so intelligent. And so tireless. Mrs. Windrom is much better at that kind of thing."

"Mrs. Windrom is very clever."

"Oh, *very!* She always remembers names. I don't, and Alice nudges my elbow. She is such a good daughter. Never forgets."

"Alice seems very alert."

"Oh, *very!*" Lady Eveley had a soft little voice and a careful way of setting down her words, as though they might break. "Very! She takes after her father. Keble does too, though Keble likes quite a lot of things I like. Perhaps the baby will take

after me. Though I really don't see why any one should!"

Louise had an affectionate smile for this gentle grievance against creation, and slipped her arm about the black satin waist. "Of course Baby will take after you, dear," she promised. "I'll make him if he doesn't naturally. He takes after me when he throws elephants around, but he takes after his father when he opens his big blue eyes and grins a trustful, gummy grin. He's going to be quite like Keble when he acquires teeth and manners. Katie says so, and she's the authority on Baby . . . Perhaps you'll let me take after you a little, too. But I'm an awful hoyden."

"You're so clever, aren't you!" exclaimed Lady Eveley. "We knew it, of course, from Keble."

Louise was serious. "The worst of that," she mused, "is that clever people always have a naughty side. And I'm naughty."

"But if we were perfect our husbands would find us dull in the long run, don't you think?"

"There's that, of course," Louise agreed. How completely every one took it for granted that there would be a long run!

They had reached the new boat-slip, and were joined by Mrs. Windrom, Girlie, and Miriam. Dare and Alice followed, and the talk became topographical, Mrs. Windrom finding still more objects for Girlie to look at. Louise felt that Mrs. Windrom was even explaining the landmarks to her.

Girlie's attention, however, kept straying to the boats, which were hugging the shaded shores and advancing at a leisurely rate. In the first boat was an object on which Girlie's eyes could always focus themselves with an effortless nicety. This object was her fiancé, Ernest Tulk-Leamington, an oldish young man, who was Lord Eveley's secretary and a rising member of the Conservative Party. The first to step out of the boat, he was followed by Mr. Windrom and a freckled, orange-haired youth who proved to be Mr. Cutty.

"Any fish?" cried Mrs. Windrom. Her husband showed signs of becoming prolix, while Mr. Cutty, behind his back, stole his thunder by surreptitiously holding up a forked stick on which two apologetic trout were suspended.

When the necessary ceremonies were effected, Mr. Windrom declared that you could never be sure, in untried waters, what flies the fish would rise to. He went on the principle of using a Royal Coach when in doubt, but he had tried Royal Coach for an hour without getting a strike, and had ended by putting out a spinner, by means of which he had caught——

He turned. "Those two." But he saw that the irreverent Mr. Cutty had already displayed the catch, and he was a little vexed at the anticlimax, as well as at the showing, which was undoubtedly poor, viewed against a dark mass of water and mountain, with a half dozen animated ladies as spectators. Dare had

sought Louise's eyes, and they smiled at the fulfilment of her fears.

The second boat was nearing the slip and Louise had a moment in which to study her father-in-law. It was a reassuring, yet a trying moment, for she became unnerved and felt suddenly isolated. For two pins she would have cried. There was no definable reason for the emotion, unless it was due to her double reaction from the graveyard episode and the friendliness of her mother-in-law. They *were* all strangers, even Keble. In some ways Keble was more of a stranger than Dare,—less an acquaintance of her most hidden self. Her loneliness was associated, too, in some vague way with the easy, manly intimacy of the two figures in the boat, who were links in the chain of her own existence yet so detached from it. Keble was undeniably an integral part of her identity, yet as he sat at the oars he seemed to be some attractive young traveling companion she was destined never to know.

Lord Eveley, a lean, hale figure in tweeds, a fine old edition of his son, was reeling in his line, and speaking in a voice which carried perfectly across the still water. Keble made replies between the slow strokes of his oars. The yellow had faded from the light, and with its disappearance the dark shades of the trees took on a richer tone, and the water turned from glass to velvet. The grey of the pine needles changed to deep, blackish green, the narrow strip of shallow water was emerald merging into milky

blue, and the pebbles at the bottom were like ripe and green olives.

There was a lull in the chatter, and only the faint lapping noise of the oars broke the stillness. A wave of loneliness had engulfed Louise, despite the warm little arm that was still resting on hers. By some considerateness which only Keble seemed to possess, his eyes turned first of all to her. True, they immediately traveled away towards the others and his remarks were general, but the first glance had been hers and it had been accompanied by a quick smile,—a smile which seemed to condone some lapse of hers; she was too immersed in her present rôle to recall what the lapse had been. At any rate it was a most timely proof of Keble's reliability, and it rescued her. She smiled shyly as Keble directed his father towards her.

By one of those mass instincts that sense drama, every one had turned to watch. Being in the centre of the stage, she forgot her diffidence.

"Weedgie, here is a father-in-law for you. He's an indifferent angler, but a passable sort of pater . . . Father, this is Louise."

"Is it really! Upon my soul!" He bestowed a paternal kiss.

"You seem so surprised!" Louise laughed. "Did you think I was a boy?"

"By Jove, you know, you might have fooled me if it had been a shade darker. But if you had, I should have been uncommonly disappointed. Keble,

I take it, makes you disguise yourself in boys' clothes to protect you from irresponsible lassos?"

"Oh dear no, he hates my breeches. Besides, I can protect myself quite extraordinarily well. The fact is, I'm at a disadvantage in these." She was pulling sidewise at "them". "For when you're got up as a man you're always giving yourself away: your hairpins fall out or you blush. Whereas in feminine attire you can beat a man at his own game without his even suspecting you're using man-to-man tactics. That's fun."

"Yes. I suppose it would be," agreed Lord Eveley. "Eve did it without much of either, they say."

"They say such shocking things, don't they! . . . Didn't you catch *any* fish?"

"Only three. Your better half caught seven,—cheeky young blighter! One beauty."

Mr. Windrom needed to know what they had been caught with.

"Royal Coach," said Keble. "It's the best all round fly."

Mr. Windrom was incredulous and pettish. "You must have 'em trained to follow your boat."

"Better luck next time, Mr. Windrom," Louise ventured. "Keble shall go in your boat, then they'll have to bite. Meanwhile please show him how to make drinkable cocktails. He needs a lesson."

She looked at her watch, then smiled at the circle of faces. "It's just exactly 'evening', so we can con-

sider that the party has arrived. Dinner is in an hour. Nobody need change unless he wishes. I'm going to turn back into a woman for dinner, just to prove to my father-in-law what an awful failure I am as a boy. Meanwhile I'll race anybody up the hill."

"I'm on," said Mr. Cutty.

"Me too," said Dare.

"Any handicap for skirts?" inquired Alice.

"Ten yards," Louise promptly replied. "Measure off ten yards, Keble. Anybody else?"

"Come, Girlie," said Mrs. Windrom. "Any handicap for old age, Louise?"

"Fifteen yards for any one over thirty-five. Come on Mr. Leamington. Beat Mr. Dare. He wins everything I go in for . . . Grandfather, you be starter,—you're to say one, two, three, go. Miriam dear, you can't be in it, for you have to show Grandmother the easy path up. I showed her down, but one of the many delicious things she told me on the way was that she forgets things and has to have her elbow nudged." Louise shot a bright glance at Lady Eveley.

"Keble, when you've marked off the fifteen, sprint on up the hill and mark a line on the gravel so we won't go plunging on the bricks and kill ourselves . . . Oh!"

She stopped, and every one, toeing the line, looked around. Her nervous high spirits were infectious. Even Girlie was excited. Lord Eveley was holding

up his hand in sporting earnest. His wife, under Miriam's wing, beamed.

"I'm trying to think what the prizes will be. Wouldn't be a race without prizes. Any suggestions, Mr. Cutty?"

"Might have forfeits for the first prize, and first go at the billiard table for another."

"Bright head-work, Mr. Cutty. Prizes as follows: the winner must choose between making a speech at dinner or telling a ghost story before bed-time. The loser gets his choice between first go at the billiard table, first choice of horses to-morrow, or ordering his favorite dish for breakfast,—can't say fairer than that. But if anybody *tries* to lose, God help him! . . . All set, Grandfather!"

The servants who were arranging the dinner-table thought the party had gone mad when it came reeling up the slippery grass hill in a hilarious, panting pell-mell led at first by Mrs. Windrom, who fell back in favor of Alice Eveley, who in turn was superseded by others. Towards the end Dare and Mr. Cutty, closely followed by Louise, were leading, then Dare stumbled and Mr. Cutty toppled into Keble's arms, the winner. Louise was weak with laughter at the sight of Mr. Windrom brandishing his fishing rod and shouting instructions over his shoulder to his faltering helpmeet. Girlie, her skirts held high, was abreast of Mr. Tulk-Leamington, whose gallantry interfered with his progress. Alice was far down the line but doing as well as possible under the

disadvantages of high heels and foulard folds. In the end they all reached the line but Mrs. Windrom, who had collapsed on the turf, facing a noisily breathing throng.

"I'll have that big trout for breakfast, Louise," she gasped. "The one Keble caught. And no one can say I didn't *try* to win!"

4

At breakfast Louise counted votes for a picnic by the river. "Those who don't fish," she suggested, "can sit under the willows and pretend there aren't any mosquitoes, or play duck on the rock with Mr. Cutty and me."

They had all come down in comically smart riding clothes. Miriam, with her tanned skin and well-worn khaki, looked like a native in contrast to Girlie in her grey-green whipcord. Girlie, whose horsemanship had been loudly heralded, was eager to try out a Mexican saddle.

Mr. Tulk-Leamington stroked his prematurely bald head. "What will you do if your pony bucks?" he asked.

Girlie languidly buttered her toast. "Ernest," she chided, "you're always stirring up mares' nests."

"Dear me!" cried Alice. "Do they buck?"

"In wild west novels they do," said Girlie's fiancé. "What will you do, Miss Eveley, if yours does?"

"I shall hang on and scream for Louise."

Louise turned the tables on Ernest. "And you?" she inquired.

Mr. Cutty forestalled him. "He will soar into the firmament. You'll find him on some remote tree-top. Can't you picture a distraught owl trying to hatch out Ernest's head!"

"Mercy!" Lady Eveley exclaimed, in meek distress. "They don't really try to throw you, do they, Louise?"

This caused an uproar. Louise reached across the table to squeeze her hand. "Of course not, dear. They only try to throw teases like Mr. Tulk-Leamington and devils incarnate like Mr. Cutty. Sundown is a lamb; you'll like him so well that you'll be sorry when you arrive at the picnic. Besides I'll ride beside you all the way."

"Sundown wouldn't throw a fly," Mr. Cutty broke in. "Mrs. Eveley has to flick 'em off with her riding crop."

Groans drowned this sally and Mr. Cutty nearly lost a spoonful of egg as a result of a lunge directed at him by the prospective owlet.

Through the babel, Keble and the older men, having exhausted the immediate possibilities of prize cattle, were discussing the half-completed golf course, oblivious to frivolous issues. Only once did Mr. Windrom seek to intrude, having overheard something about "throwing a fly," and this sent the younger generation off into a new gale of unhal-
lowed mirth.

Late in the afternoon the picnickers returned in various states of dampness and soreness, but exuding a contentment for which Louise's vigilance was largely responsible. Dare and Mr. Cutty rowed to a secluded cove to swim; Ernest went to edit his official memoranda; Mrs. Windrom retired to sleep; Lady Eveley racked her head for words to fill up a letter; the old men resorted to billiards; and Girlie challenged Miriam at tennis.

Louise held court in the kitchen, where she had gone to make some special pastries and to wheedle, scold, encourage, bully, sting, and jolly the augmented staff into supreme efforts. She swore that the future of the Empire hinged on the frothiness of the mousse. The cream was not to be whipped a minute before eight; the grapes were not to be dried, but brought in straight from the ice-box in a cold perspiration, and Gertie was for heaven's sake not to bump into Griggs on her way to the side table, as she had the night before.

When her batter was consigned to the oven she ran out to the greenhouse for flowers, and saw Keble and his sister stretched in deck chairs near the tennis court. She waved her shears and speculated as to the subject of their chat.

The subject, as she might have guessed, was herself.

"Why didn't you give us an inkling?" Alice was saying. "Here you've been married nearly three

years, and you've kept this spark of the divine fire all to yourself."

Keble smiled with a mixture of affection and faint bitterness. "I didn't exactly *keep* her, old girl. There's no reason why you and Mother shouldn't have got yourself ignited before this."

Alice considered. "But we did ask her to come to us."

"There are ways and ways of asking. Do you suppose she can't feel the difference?"

Again Alice reflected. "You mean, I suppose, that if you had married Girlie, for instance, we would have commanded her presence, on pain of dragging her out of her lair."

"I'm glad you see it."

"Well, dear, wasn't it just a bit your fault?"

"No doubt."

"I mean, how were we to know what an original creature you had found out here? It isn't reasonable; there can't be another. We had nothing to go on but your laconic sketch,—'wild flowers', I remember, was your most enthusiastic description. But there are wild flowers and wild flowers, you know,—just as there are 'ways and ways of asking'. There were gaps and contradictions in your accounts, and the burden of proof rested on you. We didn't desire to place you in a false position. Even Claudia Windrom reported that Louise's tastes were very western. I might have known that she was prejudiced, and we certainly ought to have given you more

credit for perspicuity. But men are so blind . . . Then we were thrown off by Louise's temperamental trip to Florida. You wrote a forlorn sort of letter saying that she had gone off on a holiday, and it was just after we had invited you both to come to the Riviera with us. That seemed strange."

"What did you think I had married, for God's sake,—an Indian squaw?"

"Don't be horrid! . . . We weren't at all sure you hadn't married a hand grenade."

Keble laughed. "I'm not at all certain that I haven't."

Alice watched him curiously, then abandoned the flicker of curiosity and proceeded to give Louise her due. "It's not so much her brilliance,—though that's remarkable,—but her tact! My dear, she could run a political campaign single-handed. I've never seen the Windroms so beautifully managed in my life. You know *we* can't manage them; at our house one of the trio is always falling out of the picture. But Louise! the instant she sees an elbow or a leg or a Windromian prejudice sticking out she flips it back in, or widens the frame to include it, and nobody the worse. Her way of setting people to rights and making them feel it is they who are setting everybody else to rights is *impayable* . . . And the best you could say for her was wild flowers!"

"Since Mrs. Windrom was first here a good deal of water has flowed under the bridges."

"I'll wager it has. Louise wouldn't be found camping by a stagnant pool."

Again she watched her brother curiously. He was gazing into the distance, at nothing.

"Sometimes I feel stagnant beside Louise," he admitted, put off his guard by the unwonted charm of a sisterly chat.

Alice patted his shoulder, with a gesture tender but angular. "Father is purring with pleasure at the way you've stuck to your guns, sonny, although, naturally, he wouldn't say so for all the king's horses and all the king's men. In the beginning he used to shake his head in scepticism and sorrow. Now he never lets a dinner guest get away from the house without dragging in you and your colonizing enterprise. Mother, of course, has always doted and still does; but she would have, if you'd gone in for knife-grinding. She would never conceive the possibility of any one doubting you. I frankly did,—not you, but your schemes."

"There's plenty to be done yet," Keble said. "It will take twenty years. Sometimes the future looks as steep to me as Hardscrapple."

"It won't look so steep when you've got your second wind. I'm full of rosy hopes for you. What's more, I'm jolly comfortable here I thought I was going to hate it. I've been well fed and waited on. I've been amused and sauced by a witty child who isn't in the least awed by my accursed standoffishness. I think the most remarkable thing about

Louise is that she is kind, through and through, without *having* to be; she could always get her own way without bothering to be kind . . . I've also discovered the thrills of being aunt to the most entrancingly ridiculous and succulent infant I've ever beheld. Most of all I've seen Father and Mother exchanging furtive glances of pride. What more could any old maid ask for."

Miriam and Girlie joined them. "It's too warm for tennis," Girlie complained. "We're debating whether to go for a swim."

Alice thought it an excellent idea, provided she was not included.

"But these mountain lakes are icy!" Girlie shivered at the thought.

"Not if you dive in, instead of wading," said Miriam. "Louise taught me that."

"I'm too tall. I might stick fast. Besides one looks so distressed in borrowed bathing clothes."

"And the only secluded cove is pre-empted!" Keble sympathized.

"Oh, without a costume I'd be afraid of sinking. It would seem just like a bath, and one goes straight to the bottom of the bath-tub."

The bathing project having died of inanition, Miriam and Girlie went indoors.

"I'm trying to think where I've seen her before," Alice said, following Miriam with her eyes. "I keep associating her in my mind with white sails, and

strawberries. . . . Louise has known her a long while?"

"For years."

"Delightful woman! So sensible. How lucky that she is able to help you with your accounts. You never could add."

"Rather. I don't know how we could get on without her."

"Is she stopping long?"

"Well, we can't put her in a pumpkin shell, like Peter, and keep her forever."

"She must feel rather cut off from her own people, out here. Where is her home?"

"She used to live in Washington. She has seen what are known as better days."

"One guesses that . . . For heaven's sake, Keble, who is she? You know I'm only beating about the bush."

"She never speaks of her family. Most of it's dead."

"Cread—Cread." Alice was lying in wait for an image that kept eluding her, when suddenly she captured it. "Coves! Of course. Before the war, at the Graybridge place . . . You remember Aurelie Graybridge,—she was Aurelie Streeter of New York. It was a garden party, after a race, and Admiral Cread was there with the American Ambassador. How stupid of me to have forgotten! I must remind her."

Keble was uneasy. "I don't think I would, Alice, unless she does first. She's uncommonly reticent

about herself. She came out here for a complete change, you see."

"No, I don't see," said Alice, impatiently. "That's just the point. But I'll hold my tongue . . . I wonder why she hasn't married." It always seemed odd to Alice that other women didn't marry. "Some man like Dare. I suppose he's young for her,—yet not enough to matter."

"I've thought of that," Keble reflected. "Discussed it with Louise once. But they don't seem to be attracted . . . Dare is a splendid chap. There's no resisting him when he gets going. He has given us all a healthy fillip."

"You *have* been lucky in your companions, you and Louise!" Alice commented.

"Rather! Oh, hello, here's the car with the people from the Valley. We're going to show you some natives to-night."

"Who is the funny little man in front?"

"That is the best-informed and most highly esteemed 'character' within a radius of sixty miles,—and incidentally my father-in-law."

"The ominous lady in black looks like the Empress Eugénie come back to mourn her own loss!"

Keble was puzzled. "I haven't the faintest notion who she is,—good Lord! unless it's Madame Mornay-Mareuil, whom we've been expecting off and on for weeks!"

They had risen from their chairs. "Go and meet them," said Alice. "I shall lie down a while before dressing."

CHAPTER II

AFTER a hurried knock Louise burst into Miriam's room. Miriam was seated before the mirror brushing her reddish-brown hair. "Who do you suppose has turned up to the feast?" cried Louise, reaching for a chair and impatiently rescuing the filmy pink draperies of her frock from the handle of a drawer. "Aunt Denise, straight from Quebec! After all these months of dilly-dallying she stalks in when we're having a reunion of the men her husband spent half his editorial and political career in insulting!"

"Why didn't she telegraph?"

"Too stingy,—heaven forgive me for saying it,—and too old-fashioned. She arrived with Papa and the Bootses and Pearl and Amy Sweet. They were stuffed into the car like flowers in a vase, her trunk lashed on behind. Papa tried to telephone, but Aunt Denise said if her own niece couldn't take her in without being warned, she wouldn't come at all. That's her spirit. What am I to do?"

"Have you explained the situation to her?"

"Does one try to explain red to a bull?"

"Then tip the others off. We'll have to engage her on safe subjects."

“If you *would* Miriam. In French,—for she hates English. She behaves as though French were the official language of Canada. . . I’ve been waiting for something to go wrong, and now it will. ‘Claudia dear’ was difficult enough. There’s no keeping that woman off a scent.”

“What scent?”

Louise was vexed at her slip. “Oh, scents in general. Yours in particular is most refreshing. Is that the Coty?”

Without waiting for an answer she plunged on. “Now I’ll have to rearrange the seating. If I put Aunt Denise near Grandfather she may scalp him. His triumphant progress across the continent must have rubbed her the wrong way . . . I’ll have enough on my hands without that. If Papa drinks one glass too many he’ll tease Aunt Denise about the Pope. And the Bootses are fanatical teetotallers, and I wouldn’t put it past them to dash the glass from old Papa Windrom’s lips!”

“Make me the spare woman,” Miriam offered. “That will leave me free to shush Pearl and prompt Mrs. Brown. I’ll watch you for cues.”

Louise gave herself a final glance in the cheval glass, pulled Miriam’s skirt straight, and left a grateful kiss on her forehead to dispel any questioning trend that might have lingered as a consequence of the inadvertent “scent”. Then she made her way downstairs to readjust the place cards which Dare had decorated with appropriate caricatures.

This done she stepped out on the terrace. Dare was there, leaning against the parapet. He offered her a cigarette and lit it in silence.

"There's a dreadful ordeal ahead of you," said Louise, sending a little cloud of smoke skyward.

"I'm getting used to ordeals," he replied.

"This is a new kind. You have to take the pastor's wife in to dinner."

"I shall ask her to rescue my soul from the devil."

"She will be glad of the occasion."

In his eyes there was a shadow of the glance that had proved epoch-making the day before. "On second thoughts," he added, "I shall do no such thing. The devil is welcome to it." He looked away, and Louise for once could find nothing to say. "Except," Dare finally resumed, "that he won't have it at any price. Neither will God. That leaves me on my own."

"Isn't that——" Louise began, in a low voice, then was conscious of a step. Turning, she saw Mrs. Windrom, in purple satin, advancing from the front terrace, pinning to her corsage a pink rose which drew attention to the utterly unflowerlike character of her face. The last rays of the setting sun fell full upon the lenses of the pince-nez which Louise was once "too damn polite" to smash.

"What have you two got your heads together about?" she inquired with an archness that suited her as little as the rose.

"A plot," Louise replied, holding out a hand to

Mrs. Windrom, and noting with a little pang the half cynical smile which Dare allowed himself on seeing the ease of her transition. As if good acting were necessarily a sin of insincerity!

“We’re terrifically mixed to-night, and owing to the unforeseen arrival of my aunt I’ve had to throw everybody up in a blanket and pair them as they came down. I’ve done what your clever son calls playing fast and loose with the social alphabet: natives paired with dudes, atheists with Methodist ministers, teetotallers with bibbers, socialists with diehards. And all my tried and true friends have a duty to perform,—namely to keep the talk on safe ground. Poor Aunt Denise, you know, is the widow of that old man who was fined a dollar for libeling the king.”

During the last few weeks Mrs. Windrom had acquired a smattering of Canadian political history. Louise felt her stiffen.

“Aunt Denise has always lived under a cloud of illusions. First of all in convents, then with her husband whom she transformed from a village lawyer into a national *enfant terrible*. She wouldn’t believe a word against him, and I think it showed rather a fine spirit. We all idolize our husbands in some degree, though some of us take more pains not to show it.” Louise let this remark sink in, and felt Mrs. Windrom’s shining lenses turn towards Dare, whose gaze was negligently resting on the opposite shore of the lake. “Consequently, if Aunt Denise

should let her illusions get the better of her tact, I do hope you two will help change the subject."

Mrs. Windrom enjoyed conspiracies. "You may count on me, my dear," she replied. "Now I must run up and see if my husband has lost his collar buttons as usual."

Mrs. Windrom looked at the clock on the drawing-room mantle, crossed to a window to watch the retreating figures of Louise and Dare, then went towards the great square hall with its rough rafters and balcony, its shining floor, fur rugs and trophies of Keble's marksmanship. For no ulterior reason, but simply because she could not resist an open door, she peeked into the dining-room, then walked upstairs.

She had timed her visit to a nicety. Her husband's tie was being made into a lop-sided bow.

"Sore?" he asked, when she had straightened it.

"A little. But I'm used to western saddles. Madame Mornay-Mareuil has suddenly turned up. Louise is in a panic. For heaven's sake don't talk politics. I can't see why you leave the cuff buttons till *after* you've got your shirt on. It's so simple to put them in beforehand."

"Simple, old girl; I just forget, that's all."

"What I can't make out . . . now I've bent my nail! . . . is Louise's treatment of Keble."

"What treatment?"

"I mean she ignores him."

"Have you seen my other pump?"

“Do stand still. In favor of the handsome architect.”

“Steady on, Claudia dear. You’ve already dug up one scandal here. Isn’t that enough?”

“Scandal?”

“Didn’t you tell me the good-looking secretary was making eyes at Keble?”

Mrs. Windrom was indignant. “Most certainly not!”

“Well, those may not be the words you used. But the idea never came into my head all on its own.”

This was highly plausible. Tremendous ideas regarding revenues and tariffs found their way unaided into Mr. Windrom’s head, but not ideas having to do with illicit *oeillades*.

“If you deliberately choose to distort my words!” said Mrs. Windrom.

“I don’t choose to distort anything; I was only looking—Here I am like ‘my son John’ and it’s going on for eight.”

Mrs. Windrom tranquilly fished a pump from under a discarded garment which had been allowed to fall to the floor.

“Have you your handkerchief?”

Mr. Windrom nodded and followed his wife out to the balcony, which overlooked the hall. He was rubbing his hands together in anticipation of a cocktail when his wife seized his arm.

A tall, elderly woman in a trailing gown of rusty black crossed the balcony with a slow stride and

descended the stairs. She had large black eyes, a high nose, and tightly drawn white hair streaked with black.

“Lady Macbeth!” whispered Mr. Windrom, tapping his wife’s arm and making a face like some sixty-year-old schoolboy. “Mum’s the word, eh? *De mortuis*——”

Mrs. Windrom was nettled. “What I can’t make out,” she said, “is how a squat little doctor could have a sister like that!”

“You’re always running on to things you can’t make out Claudia. It’s scarcely for want of trying.”

“I have to keep my eyes open for two, for you never see anything, and Girlie’s blind to things she should see. If she’d had a little of Louise’s vim four years ago——”

Mr. Windrom came to a halt and made a queer grimace.

“What’s the matter?”

“I forgot my handkerchief.”

“Really, Charles! If I reminded you once I reminded you a dozen times.”

Mr. Windrom sneezed, loud and long, and turned back towards his room. “Come now, Claudie,” he protested, “make it six.”

2

Miriam, on the heels of the Windroms, paused to look over the railing of the balcony. All her coaching had been leading up to this event, and there was

Louise acquitting herself with a virtuosity that effaced Miriam from this setting as completely as Fate had effaced her from her own.

The grey-blue twilight which came through open doors and windows dimmed the orange of the lamps. An incredibly regal personage dominated the assembly, and above a discreet hum Miriam heard a penetrating, dark-toned voice saying, "*Vous allez me pardonner, ma chère Louise, d'être descendue un peu en retard. J'ai du défaire une malle. Voilà six jours que je voyage sans changer de robe. Vous jugerez si je suis contente d'être installée—et dans quel petit palais! Maintenant vous allez me présenter ces dames.*"

Slim and brown, nimble and compact, Louise brought her guests in turn to Madame Mornay-Mareuil. Miriam was annoyed that Louise should have failed to recognize in her trying aunt a grande dame of unchallenged authority. With instinctive deference, the company had grouped itself about her, and Miriam smiled with a trace of vindictive satisfaction, for she had been as quick as Louise to resent the unconscious patronage in Girlie Windrom's way of beginning a remark with, "Of course, out *here*——"

She went to Dare, who was standing aloof, near a window. "Have you kissed the queen's hand?" she inquired.

"Not yet . . . The little doctor seems to have put one over on the Eveleys!" Dare's lips went down

with a cynical humor which Miriam noted as new. There was also something new in his eyes. "I for one," he said, "am glad."

"Why?"

"Simply in the name of poetic justice. It's time Mrs. Eveley got a bit of her own back,—and Boadicea there will get it for her with a vengeance."

Miriam gave him a smiling nod and went to obey Louise's summons.

Dismayed by the astonished hush which had fallen over the hall when Aunt Denise had appeared on the staircase and come slowly towards her, Louise had quickly appreciated the dramatic value of the intrusion, and when she had manoeuvred every one safely to the table she acknowledged that the preliminary touch of solemnity had given her dinner party a tone which, instead of diminishing, would incalculably augment the triumph she had, for months now, determined that it should be. She had known Aunt Denise only as a formidable quantity in her background, an aunt she had seen during a single summer, after her mother's death, but with whom she had corresponded in a sentimental desire to maintain contact with the only relative she could claim, except for some half mythical cousins in Dublin. That her letters to Aunt Denise and her gifts of needlework had been seeds sown on fertile ground was now abundantly manifest; for Aunt Denise had assumed a protective kinship and had made that mysterious

kind of "impression" of which she herself, for all her success, would never learn the secret.

Of the whole company only Girlie, with her defective focusing apparatus, had failed to pay immediate homage. In a pretty white dress, she had perfunctorily acknowledged Aunt Denise's graciousness and begun to turn away, when the old lady transfixed her with relentless black eyes. "I suppose it is the fashion to walk with a bend nowadays," Aunt Denise had said. "It doesn't give the lungs a chance."

Girlie had blushed and straightened, but Aunt Denise had withdrawn her eyes and turned them more charitably on little Mrs. Brown.

A stock soup had been simmering on the back of the stove for two weeks. By the time she had tasted it, and found it perfect, Louise's spirits were at their highest voltage, and her eyes flashed down the table till they encountered Miriam's, which gave back a signal of felicitation. Miriam, between Dare and Jack Wallace, was beating time to an argument sustained by Lord Eveley and Pearl Beatty against Mr. Windrom and Amy Sweet, the latter lending her aid in the form of giggles, for which three sips of wine,—the first in her life, and drunk in open contempt of the pledge Mrs. Boots had once persuaded her to sign,—were responsible.

Aunt Denise was getting acquainted with Keble, treating him with a respect that struck Louise as being inherently French. She wondered whether

French women had a somewhat more professional attitude towards males than women of other races. Keble looked happy, but his French was buckling under the strain, and Aunt Denise did him the honor of continuing the conversation in English, an important concession.

Of all the scraps of talk Louise could overhear, the scrap which most gratified her,—and she wondered why it should,—was a homely exchange in which her father and Lady Eveley were engrossed. “It’s the pure mountain air,” Dr. Bruneau was explaining. “He couldn’t have a better climate to commence life in.”

“That’s what my husband was saying. You know, when Keble was ten months old we took him to Switzerland——”

“Isn’t it, Mrs. Eveley?” broke in a voice at Louise’s right.

“Isn’t what, Mr. Boots? Mr. Cutty was pounding with his fork and I didn’t hear.”

“Had to pound,” Mr. Cutty defended himself, “to drown Ernest. He’s telling Mrs. Brown I stole plums from her garden.”

“Well, didn’t you?”

“But justice is justice, and the point is, so did Ernest,—and his were riper!”

Louise leaned towards Mrs. Brown, “Do spray arsenic on the rest of the plums dear, and abolish Mr. Cutty. Wasn’t what what, Mr. Boots?”

Mrs. Windrom forestalled him. “Mr. Boots tells

me that the settlers are all turning socialists because farming doesn't pay. Do you mean to say you make no effort to combat such a state of affairs?"

"I dare say we ought to take more interest in politics."

Mrs. Boots, who was beyond Mr. Cutty, left Dare long enough to interpose, "Why not persuade Mr. Eveley to be a candidate in the coming elections?"

Dare had seized his reprieve to whisper to Miriam, "Does all this, to-night, make you feel fearfully alone?"

Miriam looked up as though he had startled into flight some bird of ill-omen, but made no reply.

Dare leaned a little closer. "I fancy we're lonely for rather similar reasons."

Miriam hesitated. "First of all I'm not sure what you mean. Second, if you mean what I dare say you do,—aren't you rather bold?"

"Oh yes," he replied. "Very likely."

He returned to his glass, then added, "Your acknowledgment that I was bold satisfies me of the accuracy of my guess. As we were in the same boat I couldn't resist the temptation of bidding for a crumb of commiseration. It would have been reciprocal. So my boldness wasn't more rude than it was humane."

"You're excused," said Miriam, "under the First Offenders Act."

Girlie Windrom, in a commendable spirit, took an opportunity to express the hope that Madame Mor-

nay-Mareuil, her vis-à-vis, had not found the long train journey too fatiguing.

Madame recounted her impressions of the trip and found that Lord Eveley was in agreement with her regarding the exorbitant prices charged in western hotels. Accustomed as he was to express his opinions in public platform style, he soon had Keble's half of the table as audience, while Louise gathered in loose threads of talk at her end. The back of her dinner was now broken and she was standing with one foot triumphantly resting on its prostrate form. When the ices arrived she couldn't resist announcing that the accompanying cakes had been made by herself. The exclamations were silenced by Aunt Denise who lifted her voice to complain of Louise's cheer.

"Your table groans with luxuries, my child. You have forgotten the lessons in thrift I taught you when you were a girl."

For the first time the little doctor turned from Lady Eveley. "I am to blame for that," he said. "You see, sister, after you had left us, Nana and Louise tried to make me eat wooden cakes made without eggs, according to your instructions. I can't digest wood, so I extracted from Louise's curly head, one by one, all the notions you had put into it, and we lived extravagantly ever after,—it's a sinful world, *va*."

To soften for his sister the laughter that greeted his defense of Louise, Dr. Bruneau added, "With

you it was different, since those who have rich spiritual lives don't need rich food. Louise and I, poor heathens, had nothing to indulge but our appetites."

"You are free to do so," returned Aunt Denise, in no wise discomfited. "My lessons were only the principles of economy and sacrifice our mother had taught me, the principles which, if you remember, *mon frère*, made it possible for you and me to have an education."

The company seemed relieved to find that royalty could, on occasion, be "answered back", and Lord Eveley's hearty laugh at the mischievous but not unkind sally had been followed by a scrutinizing glance which hinted that the statesman had found a mind worth exploring.

By the time the fruit had appeared, duly perspiring, Louise had only two worries left. First, the quiescence of the Windroms smote her conscience: she felt that she had been gratuitous in warning Mrs. Windrom, while leaving Aunt Denise a license to talk which Aunt Denise had been well-bred enough not to abuse. Second, she was not entirely easy in her mind regarding Dare's silence. He had done his duty by the pastor's wife, yet there was some boding unhappiness in his manner. Before the house was opened Dare had always set the key. Under the old conditions he would have taken the whole company into his hands and played with them. And while his moodiness was, in one sense, a deeply stirring tribute, at the same time there was in it something which

made her feel remorseful, and afraid,—not for herself. It was as though her conscience were pointing out to her the consequences of extravagance in her moral kitchen. In the intellectual cakes she had baked for herself and Dare there had perhaps been too many emotional ingredients. They were rich and many had been eaten. Dare was conceivably experiencing this evening the ill effects.

In the midst of her reflections Lord Eveley surprised her by rising and delivering a little speech which was at the same time a dedication of the house and a tribute to its mistress. Anything in the nature of orthodox ceremony intimidated her. There were toasts,—and Miriam had never told her what one was supposed to do in such a contingency. Moreover she hadn't meant to drink her last glass of wine, and rather dazedly wished she hadn't.

After dinner the company divided for bridge and dancing, and Louise seized a moment to lay a sympathetic hand on Dare's coat-sleeve.

"Are you so bored?" she whispered.

"It's not your fault," he replied, and the unsmiling negligence of his manner bore witness to the ease with which he and Louise could fit into each other's mood.

"It won't last much longer," she said. "It" referred to the house party, but Dare chose to misinterpret.

"No," he replied, "I'm going to Japan."

Her eyes fell. When she raised them again she

noticed, with a chill, that Mrs. Windrom, from the opposite corner, had been watching their tête-à-tête with hawklike vigilance.

"Come and dance," she said, drawing him toward the hall.

There another little shock was in store for her. Alice Eveley, flushed and flattered after a dance with Jack Wallace, was proceeding across the room, when suddenly she stopped short and chose a new direction.

On looking towards Alice's abandoned goal to see what had caused her to change her mind, Louise observed that Keble and Miriam were absorbed in an unsmiling tête-à-tête of the kind that had made Mrs. Windrom feign a sudden interest in Mrs. Brown's cameo brooch.

She raised her arms for her partner's embrace, and was swept into the dance.

CHAPTER III

THREE days later Louise stood on the terrace watching the departure of her guests. As the last car disappeared into the pines she thought of the day when Walter and his mother drove away from the cottage which she had named "Sans Souci." On that day she had tensely waited for some sympathetic sign from Keble, and he had withheld it. Now she knew that the balance was changed, that Keble was waiting for a sign from her. Yet all she could say was, "Thank God, that's over!"

Recently she had had no time to project her thoughts into the future. Until this family reunion was safely thrust into the past she had schooled herself to be patient, as she had done under the constraint of approaching motherhood. Both events she had regarded as primary clauses in her matrimonial pact, and the reward she had promised herself for executing them was complete moral freedom. She would admit nothing more binding in the pact, for she had made a point of benefiting as little as possible from it. If Keble had provided her with a home, she had managed it skilfully for him. If he had placed his bank account at her disposal, she had

gone disproportionately deep into her own. An element unforeseen in the pact was that either party to it might, in the process of carrying out its clauses, develop personal resources for which the other could have little use but which, on sheer grounds of human economy, ought not to be allowed to remain unmined.

Keble had warned her that grappling with ideas might end in one of the ideas knocking her on the head. Which was nonsense. The danger lay not in grappling with ideas but in trying to dodge them, in letting them lurk in your neighborhood ready to take you unawares. If you went at them with all your might they were soon overpowered.

Yet going at them brought you face to face with other ideas lurking farther along the path, and before you knew it you were in a field where no one,—at times not even Dare—was able or cared to follow. And at the prospect of forging on alone your imagination staggered a little; an unwelcome emotion,—unwelcome because more fundamental than you had been willing to admit,—surged up and insisted that nothing in life was worth striving for that carried you out of the warmth of the old community of affection. For, whatever might be achieved through adventuring in wider fields, a catering to new minds would be entailed, an occasional leaning upon new arms, homage from new eyes and hearts. That was inevitable, since human beings were of necessity social. And the overwhelming pity of it

was that you would always be conscious that the neatest mind in the world, though not the broadest, the most comfortable arms, though not the most expert, the most candid blue eyes, though not the most compelling, were those of the man from whom your adventurousness had drawn you away. The thought of entirely outgrowing them gave you a chill. When you had penetrated further into the forest of life's possibilities you couldn't go on indefinitely playing hide and seek among the trees with that old companion. He would stop at the edge of the forest, and you must make your way through it, alone.

As Louise sat on the terrace, a little weary after the continuous tension, recalling the appealing droop of Keble's lips as he had turned away from her a few minutes before, she was obliged to face the fact that some chord within her had responded to the appeal, despite her stern censorship. She was obliged to admit that even when her path became definitely distinct from Keble's, when she should finally throw all the weight of her personality into a passion worthy of her emotional possibilities, or that failing, into some project so vital that she would become oblivious to the trifles that filled so much of Keble's and Miriam's attention, she would not be able to extinguish the fragrance of the flower of sentiment that Keble had been the first to coax into blossom. Her feeling toward any new friend who might tread her path would exhale the odor of the phial of af-

fection labelled "Keble", though that phial lay on a neglected shelf.

Even in the recklessness that had overtaken her beside Billy's grave, there had been some purring *obligato*, a running commentary to the effect that her wanton experiment was in Keble's name, that all the thrills in the universe were reducible to the quieter terms of mere charm, that all the charming things in life were reducible to "Keble", and it was inherent in the nature of charm that it could not be captured and possessed, except in symbols, or by proxy. One could be so profoundly loyal to one's personal conception of life,—a conception which exacted unflinching courage at the approach of new ideas and high venturesomeness in tracking down concealed ideas,—that one could accept clues from a stranger even though the accepting might involve a breach of what the world called constancy. Incidentally, the fact that her first breach, whatever it may have meant to Dare, was an erotic fiasco as far as she was concerned, had by no means discountenanced further experimentation. Life should pay her what it owed her, even if she had to pay heavy costs in collecting her due.

On making the shocking discovery that marriage was no solution of her destiny, she had vigorously bestirred herself, only to make the even more shocking discovery that she was shedding her husband as a caterpillar sheds its cocoon. Now, poised for flight, she could cherish a tender sentiment for the

cocoon but could scarcely fold her wings and crawl back into it.

She recalled the cruel little poem, still unaccounted for, which had thrown open a door in her mind.

*For, being true to you,
Who are but one part of an infinite me,
Should I not slight the rest?*

Those lines had come at her with a reproachful directness. In them, or rather in the blue pencil which marked off the poem on its printed page, she had read Keble's impatience with her limitations. Her reason had seen in the lines a justification against which her heart rebelled. From that moment she had been disciplining her heart. So effectively indeed, that now,—were it not for that appealing little droop and for the sentimental fragrance which still clung to her,—she might have flung the poem at him and cried, "*Voilà la monnaie de ta pièce.* I've learned my lesson in bitter thoroughness. Now it is I who point to 'rude necessary heights' intent upon a goal *you* are unable to see."

The nature of the goal was not clear even to herself, nor could she exactly define the help that Dare had given her in mounting towards it. Certainly the upward journey had been easier since he had first appeared, and certainly her climbing prowess had seemed more notable in moments when she and Dare on some high ledge of thought had laughingly looked down at Keble and Miriam exchanging mystified

glances, in which admiration for the agility of the two on the ledge was blended with misgivings as to the risks they ran.

Although she was lured upward by the hope of wider views, there were times when she scrambled and leaped for the mere joy of climbing. There were other times when she was intoxicated by a sense of the vastness of causes to be advocated and the usefulness of deeds to be done. She had visions of jumping up on platforms and haranguing masses of people till they, too, were drunk with the wine of their own potentialities. She had only the sketchiest notion of what she or they were to accomplish. The nearest she came to a definite program was the vision of a new self-conscious world blossoming forth into unheard-of activity, giving birth to new institutions and burying the old. Any cause would be hers provided it were intelligent, energetic, and comprehensive. In the joy of being awake she needed to rouse the world from its lethargy, make it cast away its crutches. In her consciousness of rich personal resources she needed to make everybody else dig up the treasures latent within themselves. Most of all, she desired that the world should "get on", that its denizens should abandon their moral motor-cars and leap into moral aeroplanes until something still more progressive could be devised.

Despite the vagueness of her goal there was no lack of impetus in her pursuit of it, and every day, on a blind instinct which she had learned to revere,

she did deeds in point, deeds which, when done, proved to be landmarks, in a perfect row, on her route towards the unknown destination. This encouraged her to believe that the future would help her by showing a tendency to create itself.

The visit of Keble's family had proved a negative hint as to the nature of her goal, for clearly her direction was not to be one that led into a bog of kind, complacent social superiorishness. Whatever errors she might make she would not end by being gently futile, like her mother-in-law; she would not turn into a wet blanket like Girlie, nor a noisy, nosy Christmas-cracker like Mrs. Windrom. Alice Eveley had been the most satisfactory woman of the four, yet Louise particularly hoped she would not land in Alice's bog; for Alice, while intelligent, had turned none of her intelligence to account; while bright, she shed only a reflected light; while frank, she could politely dissemble when downrightiness would have been more humane; and while sympathetic, she held to conventions which had it in them to insist upon mercilessness. Alice was, one could sincerely admit, a jolly good sort, but only because she had not opposed favoring circumstances of birth, wealth, and privilege. Girlie was a less jolly good sort because she had avoided even the gentle propelling force of favoring circumstances and loitered in back eddies, —she had been "dragged" to Italy, for instance, and had brought back no definite impression save that of a campanile which had made recollection easy for

her by leaning! Alice at least floated down the middle of the stream. But neither had struck out for herself, and Louise's complete approval was reserved for people who swam. In that respect the men of the party had had more to commend them.

But even the men moved in a hopelessly restricted current. One could point out so many useful directions in which they wouldn't dream of venturing. That was where Dare had shown to advantage. Even though Dare had kept his tongue in his cheek, his real superiority had been manifest to Louise. Compared to Mr. Windrom, a renowned old Tory, Dare was a comet shooting past a fixed star. Mr. Windrom had undoubtedly swum, but only in the direction of the political current in which his fathers had immersed him. Dare, like herself, had swum against the current. Like herself and her father and Aunt Denise and misguided Uncle Mornay-Mareuil, Dare had emerged from obscurity and poverty. She and Dare had swum to such good purpose that they had attained the smoothly running stream that bore on its bosom the most highly privileged members of civilization. And while momentarily resting, they had caught each other's eyes long enough to exchange, with a sort of astonished grunt, "Is *this* all!" Was it to be expected that they should stop swimming just because every one else was contented with civilization's meandering flow? To have done so would have been to degrade the valor that had gone into their efforts thus far.

Yet the mere fact that they had reciprocated a glance of intelligence had been pounced upon by one of the privileged members as evidence of treasonous dissatisfaction with the meandering current, and Mrs. Windrom's last words to her, pronounced in a voice which every one was meant to hear, were, "Do say good-bye to Mr. Dare for me. I'm sorry he's not well; but I know what a devoted nurse you will be."

Of course Alice and Lady Eveley and Miriam and all the others *might* have good enough memories to associate Mrs. Windrom's remark with Walter's accident, but the chances were that they would not, and that left in their minds an equivocal association between her devotion as nurse and the particular case of Dare's indisposition. Louise was aware that Mrs. Windrom meant her remark to convey this hint, and while she didn't care a tinker's dam for Mrs. Windrom's approval, she did object to underhandedness.

Walter had swum, and although he might not have the prowess of herself and Dare, still he had shown enough independence of the complacent stream to qualify in the class which included Dare, herself, and,—by a narrow margin,—Keble and Miriam. For Miriam had not merely floated. If she had not made as good progress as Walter or Keble, she was none the less to be commended for the distances she had covered, for Miriam was handicapped in having no family or money to lean back on in moments of fatigue and discouragement.

Alice had lost some of her standing with Louise by saying to Miriam before departing, "I hope we shall see something of each other in the future, Miss Cread. I take it that you will be returning east this autumn."

It was natural enough for Alice to "take it" that Miriam would be returning. But, in the light of that trifling episode during the dance, Louise felt that Alice's express assumption of Miriam's departure was almost a hint; and having learned to read Miriam's countenance, she was almost sure that Miriam had felt the remark to be, if not a hint, at least a warning. And that Louise resented; for the fact that Alice had not been born athletic enough to strike out for herself gave her no right to curb the athleticism of others. And if it was a warning, and if Alice justified it to herself on the score of sisterly protection, then how did Alice justify her many sisterly neglects? Louise felt that if she had been in Alice's place when Keble, sick of the war, had first struck out into the wilds, no power on earth could have prevented her from following at his heels to fry bacon over his camp fires. If she had had a brother she would have guarded and bullied and slaved for him with the single object of making him what Minnie Hopper as a little girl would have called "the champeen king of the circus."

Whether Miriam's continued sojourn was in the best interests of all concerned was another matter. Obviously Miriam, despite her protests, desired to

stay. But that was none of Alice Eveley's business. It was a matter for Miriam alone to decide, and she should not be hampered in her decision. In a sense it was Keble's business too. Certainly not his wife's, though long before Keble's sister had appeared on the scene, Louise had sometimes arrested herself, as Alice had done, and chosen a different course in order not to break in on some apparent community of interest between her husband and Miriam Cread.

A perambulator appeared at the corner of the terrace, propelled by a stolid nursemaid. The monkey, rosy and fat, was making lunges at a white hillock in his coverings which he would have been surprised to know was his own foot. On seeing his mother he abandoned the hillock to give her a perky inspection. His bonnet had slid down over one eye, and the tip of his tongue protruded at the opposite corner of his mouth.

Louise broke into a laugh. "Katie! Make that child put in his tongue or else straighten his hat. He looks such an awful rake with both askew."

Katie missed the fine point of the monkey's resemblance to a garden implement, but, as Dare had recognized, Katie was as immortal in her ignorance as philosophers are in their erudition. She straightened the monkey's headgear, this adjustment being less fraught with complications than an attempt to reinstate his tongue.

"His granpa and gramma come into the nursery before breakfast," Katie proudly announced. "They

said it was to give me a present, which they done,—but it was really to see the monkey again.”

Louise had risen and gone over to shake the white hillock, an operation which revived the monkey's interest in that phenomenon.

“Any one would think he was *their* baby!” she said sharply.

2

As she was turning to go into the house she met Miriam, whose face was anxious. “Oh, there you are,” Miriam began. “I wish you would go up to Dare. They can't make him drink the things you left for him. Now he's arguing with Aunt Denise, who says he's in a fever. He says he's not, and he's saying it with feverish intensity.”

Louise gave a start. “Miriam! Papa had two cases of smallpox a few weeks ago. Those Grays, you know,—down the river.”

“Wasn't it one of the Gray girls that Dare rescued the day we went to Deer Spring? She had climbed a tree and couldn't get down.”

They hurried upstairs. “You wait here,” Louise ordered, leaving Miriam at the door of the bedroom.

“Thank God it's you,” said a half delirious voice, as she appeared, and Dare sank back into bed.

Louise made a rapid diagnosis, then turned to Aunt Denise. “I think it's smallpox,” she whispered. “Will you fumigate the nursery? You'll find every-

thing in the medicine chest. I'll have him moved to one of the cabins. *Je sais ce qu'il faut faire.*"

There was no timorousness in Aunt Denise. A competent, strong woman herself, she took competence and strength and a stern sense of duty for granted in any member of her family.

When she had gone Louise went to the door to report to Miriam. "Get somebody to take a few blankets over to your old cabin. Then find Mr. Brown and have him send up some sort of stretcher. Mrs. Brown will help you straighten the cabin and build a fire to air it. Then telephone Papa."

"What are you going to do?" Miriam ventured.

"Nurse. There's no one else. Besides he wouldn't obey a stranger. You won't mind keeping an eye on the house, will you? Don't let Aunt Denise be too thrifty. Above all, keep Keble from fretting. He rears like a horse when he's frightened."

"But can you keep from catching it?"

"I can do anything I make up my mind to. Now hurry, dear."

Miriam was seriously alarmed, yet Louise's confidence was tonic. Moreover this development gave her an elasticity of motion of which she was a little ashamed.

When Keble returned for luncheon he found the table set on the terrace and a strong odor of disinfectants issuing from the house. Miriam explained, and although Keble was familiar with his wife's

rapidity of organization, he was bewildered to find that she was installed in a cabin across the lake, and that his first visit to her was already scheduled. He was to accompany Miriam in the launch at three. Louise would talk to them from the boat-slip, where they would leave supplies.

"That's all very well," he agreed. "But what about Louise?"

"Nurses always protect themselves," Miriam reassured him. "And Louise would be the last woman to make a blunder."

It was harder than she had foreseen to keep Keble from panic, for every reassuring remark seemed merely to arouse new images of disaster. He was sorry for Dare but considered it clumsy of him to have collected Thelma Gray's germs.

"You would have done the same," Miriam reminded him.

"But I wouldn't have gone prowling bareheaded all over the northwest after a warm evening of dancing," he said with a sharper accent.

Miriam had been sleepless after the dinner party, and at dawn from her window had seen Dare, dishevelled, cross the meadow through the wet grass and let himself into the house. It came to her as a shock that Keble had witnessed this incident, of which no mention had been made. Had Keble, too, spent a sleepless night? Had that any bearing on his habit, more conspicuous of late, of nervously whistling, and leaving his seat to wander about the house?

Miriam was a little unstrung and was grateful for the presence of Aunt Denise, whose rigidity held the household together, even if it occasionally stood in the way of a free and easy routine.

Miriam and Keble were at pains to conceal from each other their consternation at the situation created by Louise's prompt retirement into quarantine. Aunt Denise, the most straight-laced person at Hillside, was probably the only person in the neighborhood who took Louise's step as matter of course. Keble was proud of his wife's medical talent; it emphasized her womanliness, and it was the essentially feminine qualities in Louise which he had unflinchingly admired. Yet he was tormented by the thought of her self-imposed duties, and if he had had to choose a patient for her he would probably have chosen anyone rather than Dare. He was also angry at her unconditional veto on a trained nurse from Harristown.

To Louise the fitness of her conduct was a matter of so little consequence that it did not enter her head. In the beginning she saw that she would have a trying case on her hands. Although her presence had a soothing effect on Dare, his unfamiliarity with illness made him a difficult patient, and Louise had to adopt drastic methods, a cross between bullying and ridiculing him into obedience. Her greatest difficulty came in changing his wrappings, an operation which had to be performed with the least possible variation in temperature. Dare obstructed the task

by struggling to free himself, and by trying to prevent her from bathing him with her lotions.

In one access of delirium he sat up, glared at her with unrecognized fury, and shouted, "Get to hell out of this room, before I break in your skull!"

Whereupon she walked straight to the bed, pinned his shoulders to the pillow, and retorted, "Don't you say another word till I tell you to; if you order me out I may go, and if I do there'll be no one to give you a drink. Now lie still."

She held his eyes until she saw a return of lucidity. He collapsed, and said feebly, "Have I been bad? I can't have you overhearing me if I ramble."

She had overheard many illuminating scraps of confession. "Listen, Mr. Dare dear," she said, with tears in her eyes. "If you're going to get well soon, you must be perfectly quiet. The rambling doesn't matter, but try to fix it in your mind that you mustn't be rough. You're so terribly strong!"

"What's the use of getting well?" he moaned.

A few moments later his good intentions were consumed in the heat of new hallucinations. "Is that Claudia?" he shouted. "Oh God, it must be a thousand in the shade."

Sometimes he hummed a few bars of a lively melody, in appallingly unmusical tones. With a remorse that closed her ears to the grotesqueness of the performance Louise recognized the tune of their dance.

In a few days the ranch settled down to the new

order. Miriam and Keble made daily visits to the boat-slip, the doctor came as often as he could arrange the long trip, sometimes remaining overnight, and Mrs. Brown, her mind on the nights when Mrs. Eveley had sat and held Annie's hand, cooked tempting dishes and brought them to the window. She also took turns at sitting outside Dare's window while Louise lay down in the tiny sitting room of the cabin. Twice during the doctor's visits Louise had gone for a short gallop, but gave up the practise on learning that Dare had asked for her during her absence.

At the Castle Aunt Denise ruled with a sway that awed the servants but failed to produce the industry that Louise could inspire with a much laxer code. Keble and Miriam, after faint attempts to restore an unanalyzable comfort that had departed with Louise, fell into step behind Aunt Denise and were always relieved when the time came to go out of doors or repair to the library on business. During the first days Keble had been haunted by a fear that illness would break out in the house. Once in the middle of the night when he had been awakened by the sound of crying he ran to the nursery, half expecting to find the monkey speckled like a trout. Katie, with a trace of asperity, persuaded him that Baby was only suffering from wind, and this seemed plausible, for at the height of their wrangle the monkey relapsed into an angelic slumber, broken only by a motion of

lips that implied health of the serenest and greediest description.

Miriam found a deep, wistful contentment in trying to keep Keble's mind occupied. In the evenings Aunt Denise played patience and retired punctually at ten. Miriam usually remained another half hour at the piano, then Keble went alone to read in the library with his pipe and a decanter. He grew more taciturn than she had ever seen him, and this mood she dreaded, for it stirred the rebellious ego within her which had grown during the past months to unmanageable proportions.

En revanche Keble had moments when a new side of him came to light, an amiable, tender side which Miriam had long felt he took too great pains to suppress. After mornings and afternoons during which each had been employed in personal work or diversion, after evenings of music or cards or reading, there was an indescribable charm for her in the recurrence of Keble's boyish moods, when his man's mask was laid aside. It might be the recounting of some lark at school; it might be an experience in the trenches or in a corner of Greece or China during his bashful tour of the world; it might even be an admission of incurable dudishness in the face of some recent native provocation. Whatever it was, it was the essential Keble, the Keble whom Miriam might have met in a London drawing-room. His wife induced playful moods in him, but rarely did the playfulness Louise provoked keep within the bounds of

veiled, correct irony. For his wife's delectation Keble rendered his playfulness ever so slightly frisky, exaggerating the caricature of himself; whereas for her, Miriam liked to persuade herself, he projected a more ironically shaded sketch of himself which amused without being distorted.

"It's such a blessing to have you here, Miriam," he confessed one evening. "I should have gone quite dotty alone with Aunt Denise; Louise and Dare would have come back and found me with a rosary around my neck, gibbering the names of saints. I believe you were sent to us by some kind providence of God to be a universal stop-gap in our strange ménage. I wonder you bear up under the strain."

She was tempted to say, "I was sent to you not by God but by Walter Windrom," but she couldn't. Nor could she smile, for his timid candor gave her a pretext for reading into his remark some depth of feeling for which the tyrant within her clamored. But she succeeded in replying, "Oh I bear up wonderfully,—so well, in fact, that if everything were to run flawlessly I think I should be selfish enough to pray for another gap, that I might stop it!"

The tyrant had forced the words into her mouth, but her anxiety was dispelled by his manner of taking them. He passed his hand over his hair and said, whimsically, sadly, "Well, I don't see any immediate prospect of gaplessness . . . I suppose most ménages are the same, if you were to explore into them. They muddle along, sometimes on an even

keel, more often pitching about in cross currents. And I suppose one half of the ménage always feels that the other half is at fault, and there's no way of judging between them, because no two people are born with the same mental apparatus."

Disconcerted at the length he had gone, with a characteristic desire to efface the self-revelatory words, he came abruptly out of the mood by adding, "Is it apparatuses, or apparati? I see I've been talking nonsense again,—good-night."

Miriam wished that he had not seen fit to go back on his semi-confession, but she could not deny herself the comfort his soliloquy had given her, and for some days it served as a sop to her tyrant.

She had moments of futile compunction as she saw Louise growing haggard. Twice a day Miriam appeared at the boat-slip, but quite often Louise had seized those moments for a short nap, and there was nothing to do but leave the packets and messages on the jetty and return, or go for a walk with Grendel. She found in herself a dearth of inspiration when it was a question of making the day less tedious for her friend. Louise with her resourcefulness would have thought out endless ways of diverting her, had she been Dare's nurse. Miriam had pleaded to be allowed to assist. It was not only that she wished to spare Louise; she envied her the opportunity as well as the skill that called into play such magnificent services. Her own life seemed barren in contrast. Although ten years her junior, Louise had

been at the very heart of life, had loved, been loved, suffered, given birth, and grown strong through exercise. Miriam envied her the gruelling experience she was going through. She blushed to think how incompetent she herself would be in Louise's place, and how prudish; but incompetence and prudishness could be outgrown, and she longed to outgrow them.

She resented the fact that Keble seemed not to notice the degree of strain on Louise, the dark rings under her eyes, the drawn mouth. Louise was partly responsible for his failure to see, for whenever he called at the slip she forced herself to be bright and facetious. But any woman would have seen through

She resented the fact that Keble seemed not to notice the degree of strain on Louise, the dark rings under her eyes, the drawn mouth. Louise was partly responsible for his failure to see, for whenever he called at the slip she forced herself to be bright and facetious. But any woman would have seen through Louise's brightness, and Keble as a man far less obtuse than most, ought to have seen through it, ought not to have wrung their hearts by his casual manner of calling out, in a recent leave taking, "Don't overdo it, Weedgie; we mustn't have *you* breaking down."

A night finally came when the little doctor announced that the crisis was passed, that the patient would recover. Only then did he admit that he had almost despaired. Had it not been for Louise's vigilance, Dare would not have survived a week, for he

was one of those giants who often succumb under the first onslaught of a complication of ailments.

“Louise has been splendid,” Keble acknowledged. “It’s lucky for Dare that they were such good chums.”

The doctor turned on him with a suddenness that surprised Miriam no less than Keble. “You don’t understand Louise,” he said. “She would take as much pains to cure a wounded dog as she would to cure the Governor-General. She would do as much for the stable boy as she would do for you; under certain circumstances, more. For she gives her strength to the helpless. Dare was helpless, body and soul. If you had watched him tossing and heard him moaning your eyes would have opened to many things. He was not only physically lost, he was lost in spirit. An ordinary nurse would have tended his body. Louise has tended his spirit. By a thousand suggestions she has restored his faith in himself, created him. For you that spells nothing but the service of a clever woman for a friend. What do you know about service? What do you know about friendship? What do you know about the sick man? What do you know about life? What do you know about Louise? Precious little, my boy!”

The doctor disappeared in a state of exaltation, leaving Keble bewildered. “There’s a blind spot in me somewhere, Miriam,” he said. “Can you put your finger on it?”

“I’m afraid we’re both blind,” she said feebly.

“At least we haven’t their elemental clairvoyance. The doctor is doubtless right in his flamboyant way, and we are right in our pitiful way. We can only try, I suppose, to be right at a higher pitch.”

“By Jove,” Keble suddenly exclaimed, with a retrospective fear, “it was a closer shave than we had any idea of. I wonder if Louise realized.”

Miriam smiled bitterly. “You may be quite sure, my dear Keble, that she did. If you have been spared a great load of pain, you may take my word for it that it’s Louise you have to thank.”

Keble was pale. In his eyes was the look which Miriam had seen on another occasion, just before the birth of his son. “Then I do wish,” he quietly said, “that my friends would do me the kindness to point out some of my most inexcusable limitations, instead of letting me walk through life in a fool’s paradise.”

Miriam was ready to retort that even such a wish reflected the *amour propre* that determined most of his acts, but she had been touched by the emotion in his eyes and voice;—an emotion which only one woman could inspire. “I think we’re all trying desperately to learn the ABC’s of life,” she said.

She was unnerved by the self-abasement that had stolen into his expression. For the first time in her life she went close to him and took his hand in hers. “Don’t mind if I’ve spoken like a preacher,” she pleaded in a voice which she could control just long

enough to finish her counsel. "The sermon is directed at my own heart even more than yours."

He returned the pressure of her hands absent-mindedly, and she sought refuge in her room.

Keble was restless and turned towards the library through force of habit. A book was lying face down on the arm of his chair, but after reading several sentences without hearing what they were saying, he got up and poured himself a glass of whisky.

He would have gone to the piano, but Miriam's superior musicianship had given him a distaste for his own performances. He wandered through the drawing-room to the dimly-lit hall, and found himself before the gramophone. Every one had gone to bed, but if he closed the shutters of the box the sound would not be loud enough to disturb the household. At haphazard he chose a record from a new supply.

A song of Purcell's. He threw himself into a deep chair. The opening bars of the accompaniment were gentle and tranquilizing, with naive cadenza. A naive seventeenth century melody, which was taken up by a pretty voice: high, clear, pure.

Those words! He leaned forward, and listened more intently.

"I attempt from love's sickness to fly—in vain—for I am myself my own fever—for I am myself my own fever and pain."

As though a ghost had stolen into the dark room, Keble started slowly from his chair. His eyes riveted on the machine, he paused, then abruptly

reached forward to stop it, inadvertently causing the needle to slide across the disk with a sound that might have been the shriek of a dying man.

For a long while he stood holding the disk. Only when he became conscious of the startled beating of his heart did he throw off the spell.

He was staring at the record in his hands—the ghost. He dreaded the noise that would be made if he were to drop it on the floor,—even if he were to lay it down carefully and snap it with his heel.

He got up swiftly, unbolted the door, and walked out in the cold air to the end of the terrace, past the stone parapet, down the grassy slope to a point overhanging the shore of the lake. Far, far away, through the blackness, were tiny points of light, marking the location of the Browns' cottage. His eyes sought a gleam farther along the shore, but there was nothing in all that blackness to indicate Miriam's old cabin.

They were there, perhaps asleep, perhaps wearily wakeful, with only their souls left to fight for them against some vague, sinister enemy. Perhaps she was watching over him as he slept; preparing his draughts; stirring the fire with a little shiver. Perhaps she, too, had been approached by spectres. Perhaps she was ill, despairing, afraid. Tears came into his eyes.

He could feel the disk pressing against his fingers, and the tiny hard rills through which the needle had traced its uncanny message.

“What do you know of the sick man!” Above the mysterious silence of the night a phantom voice, thin, clear, dainty, was singing the answer into his understanding: “I attempt from love’s sickness to fly, in vain; for I am myself my own fever and pain.” It could so airily sing, as though it were a toy song and a toy sentiment, words which were as irrelevantly indicative as flowers nodding over a grave.

Many years ago he and Walter had played a game called “scaling”. You chose round, flat pieces of slate and sent them whirling through the air.

He scaled, and waited for the splashing sound far out on the water.

‘Poor little record, it had meant well enough.

CHAPTER IV

KEBLE had received a petition signed by Conservatives throughout the county inviting him to present himself as candidate for the provincial elections. He had foreseen this, but hesitated to accept the nomination. In the first place he was barely thirty; in the second place success at the polls would mean protracted absences from the ranch; in the third place he was not sure that Louise would approve. He remembered her saying, apropos of her Uncle Alfred Mornay-Mareuil, "If he had only been able to control his ambition! Politics is as demoralizing as gambling." And Keble quite often took Louise's remarks at their literal value.

When it came time to select a candidate for the elections, the scattered Conservatives of the district, knowing that the only hope of making a showing against their entrenched opponents was to induce Keble Eveley, with his important holdings and the prestige of his name, to stand for them, had encountered opposition from the supporters of the mayor of Witney, who in several consecutive elections had suffered defeat at the hands of the Liberal candidate, but who had learned to look forward to his periodical worsting as an agreeable break in the monotony

of his days. The repeated success of the Liberal representative had resulted in over-confidence on the part of that gentleman. He had been weaned from his county, had invested his savings in the capital, and returned home only to collect rents or sell at a substantial profit stock which he had acquired at bargain prices. A feeling was abroad, among Liberals and Progressives, as well as Conservatives, that the electors were being "used for a good thing."

The Conservative leaders knew Keble through business dealings or hearsay. Some of them had joined in a deputation to receive Lord Eveley and Mr. Windrom at Witney. They all saw the wisdom of putting up a vigorous, intelligent, and earnest young man, and the supporters of the veteran Conservative candidate, in the hope of a change of luck, ended by yielding to the suggestion. The official invitation was brought to Hillside by Pat Goard, the campaign manager, and his henchman, the editor of the "Witney Weekly News".

It was on a mild October afternoon. Keble received the delegates in the library, heard their arguments, and asked for an hour to consider. Aunt Denise had bowed with frigid graciousness and withdrawn. Keble asked Miriam to show the visitors over the grounds, then ran down the path to the jetty, jumped into the launch, and motored across the lake, which to-day was an expanse of bright blue rippled by the most gentle of breezes. The slender white trees on the lower shore with their scanty rem-

nants of pale yellow foliage, the bare branches of other hardwoods, and the deep rust of the underbrush were the only tangible proofs of the season. Everything else was gold and sapphire.

As he neared the boat-slip Keble saw that Louise had set up a deck chair in a sunny patch before the cabin, and had installed Dare in it. It was his first glimpse of Dare in several weeks and he was shocked at the wasted face that appeared above the rugs. For the first time he had some inkling of what the other man had been through, and a wave of compassion and affection surged through him.

Louise was sitting at Dare's side, and they were talking quietly, intimately. Although there was almost a life and death contrast between the two, Keble was no longer blind to the fact that his wife had worn herself to a dangerous margin, and while he could approve of her act, in the sense in which Aunt Denise approved of it, he could not, like Aunt Denise, look on unmoved. Something in the languor of the scene, something in the intimacy which seemed to unite the two, aroused a throbbing ache within him. Like Miriam he had felt futile in the face of this struggle, and now he almost envied Dare the suffering that had opened to him a secret garden. He paid blind tribute to whatever force in Dare,—a force transcending mere personality,—awakened in Louise a spirit that he had never been able to evoke. "I blunder and obtain forgiveness," he reflected, "while Dare is right, and pays terrific penalties."

Louise came to the end of the jetty to meet him, and they talked about Dare's first day outside the improvised hospital.

"Only for an hour," she said. "Then he has to go back. But it marks the beginning of a new era."

Keble would not let himself speculate on the nature of the new era. "And you can soon rest," he said. "Be very careful now. This is the most dangerous time of all for you."

She waved away the fear. "Who are those men on the terrace?"

Keble explained their mission. "I'd like you to decide for me."

She remembered an occasion when Keble had wished her to decide upon decorations for the Castle, and she had hurt him by her indifference.

As she sat thinking, her arms resting limply in her lap, Keble noted with a pang the absence of her old elasticity. She looked older, and tired. He had an impulse to get out of the boat and take her in his arms. He reflected that a man like Dare, in his place, would have scouted her precautions. But there was the baby to think of, and,—cautious men were cautious.

"I'm hesitating," Louise finally said, "only because I'm timid about deciding for you. But I don't mind saying that if you accepted and were successful the monkey and his grandfathers and I would be highly gratified."

Tears came to Keble's eyes,—an indiscretion

which he lost no time in correcting. "Right-oh! . . . Tell Dare how glad we are to know he's on the mend, and find out if there's anything he'd especially like. The people in Vancouver wrote that his ticket to Japan will be valid for a reservation on any later boat . . . Good-bye dear. Miriam and I will call again after dinner."

"Bring a volume of Swinburne if you think of it. We've been trying to recall some lines."

He promised, and she laughed to see him make a methodical note of it.

"Good luck!" she called out, as he started the engine.

"Thanks, old girl. Awfully decent of you to think I may have a chance."

"It's in your blood!"

"It's a dyed-in-the-wool Liberal constituency," he deprecated. "And what isn't Liberal leans towards the Progressive."

"I'd despise a victory I hadn't had to fight for!"

"I believe you would," he laughed, as though her militancy were one of her amusing caprices.

Miriam's unwieldy charges were drinking whisky and soda on the terrace, in preference to tea in the drawing-room.

"How's the patient?" she inquired.

"Able to sit up and take a little Swinburne," Keble reported with a truculence that wasn't meant to be as unkind as it sounded.

“Consulted the missus, have you?” inquired a business-like campaign manager.

“I have. The answer is in the affirmative.”

Keble received a thump on the back that made him vividly conscious of the sort of thing he had now let himself in for. Could he thump, he wondered. The first attempt was not too great a success, but one would undoubtedly improve with practise.

“Now let’s get down to tacks,” said Mr. Goard, when further drinks had been consumed in honor of the event.

The delegates required a message to take back to party headquarters, and Keble dictated an outline of his political credo, the logic of which was warmed and colored in conformity with the ejaculated amendments of Pat Goard.

“Will that do the trick?” Keble finally asked.

“That’ll do for a start,” Mr. Goard replied, and Miriam went to transcribe her notes at the typewriter.

“Our best to the missus,” said the manager half an hour later as he got into the car that had brought him to Hillside. “You couldn’t have a better platform than *her*.” Mr. Goard went on to express the opinion that it would be the “best fight ever put up”, but added that “those birds took a lot of beating”.

Keble promised to fight his hardest, and had a final word for the newspaper man. “Be sure to emphasize that it’s a straight program of common

sense,—without flummery or mud-slinging or rosy promises that can't be fulfilled."

The editor acquiesced, but privately reserved the prerogative of serving up Keble's phrases at a temperature and with garnishings adapted to the Witney palate. He had seen elections won by lungs and knuckles.

"Well," Keble laughed on returning to Miriam's side. "That's done it! Do you remember the play, 'What Every Woman Knows'? You'll have to be Maggie Wylie and edit my speeches."

Miriam's tyrant exulted, but her honesty compelled her to say, "I doubt whether your supporters will appreciate my genius; it runs to neatness of copy and pluperfective subjunctives. Maggie Wylie put damns into her husband's speeches, and Louise is the only person who can find the Witney and Valley equivalents. Is there any occasion she can't rise to, for that matter?" This last remark was a trifle bitter.

In Keble's mind was an image of Louise sitting beside her patient, quoting Swinburne. "We'll submit our efforts to her," he agreed. "We'll pack Louise into an imaginary hall on the boat-slip, and I'll stand up on an imaginary platform and rant. Louise will be the proletariat and boo, clap, or heckle. Then we shall know where we stand."

"We are babes in the wood, you and I," Miriam observed, with a familiar sense of incompetence.

For days they collected statistics, held consulta-

tions with visiting politicians and office-seekers, wrote and answered letters, made rough drafts of speeches which were in turn delivered before the "vast audience of one" on the boat-slip. More than once Keble and Miriam, seated in the launch, glanced at each other in dismay as Louise tore their sentences limb from limb.

"It's beautiful *comme* argument," she once commented, "only it lacks drama. Remember, darling, you have to sway them, not convince them. Once you get inside the Assembly you may be as cool as a cucumber and as logical as Euclid, but if you wish the natives to *get* you there, you have to tickle and sting them! That argument about neglected roads needs to be played up stronger. Picture the perils of taking your best girl for a Sunday drive from Witney to the Valley, with the horse getting mired and the off wheel starting an avalanche down the side of the Witney canyon and your best girl rolling down the hill to kingdom come; then suddenly turn serious and describe what decent roads would do for everybody, including yourself. Don't be afraid to make the farmers see that you yourself have something to gain. Show them how the reforms you advocate would stimulate your trade as well as theirs and increase the value of your property."

After this comment a detailed overhauling of the address in question was commenced, with Keble dictating and Louise, insinuating metaphors in the local

vernacular. Dare from his deck chair in the distance watched or dozed until the boat had departed.

"How is the campaign progressing?" he asked after one prolonged consultation.

"Splendidly. Keble and Miriam are up to their neck in statistics. They go to Witney to-morrow for a preliminary duster . . . Papa says we'll be out of quarantine before election day."

Dare watched her silently for some time. "Why do you always bracket their names? You seem to do it deliberately, as though it were a difficult phrase which you were bent on mastering."

"It may be."

"You can confess to me, you know. We've proved at least that."

She patted his hand.

"May I guess out loud?" he asked.

She nodded.

He paused to choose his words. "You feel that Keble and Miriam have grown to depend on each other in some way analogous to the way in which you and I depended on each other."

She did not deny it.

"With us, our relation flared up one day into a white flame which for you seemed merely to cast a light over your past and future, but which for me burnt into me till I—began to rave."

Again she stroked his hand. Lines of fatigue showed in her face, and her eyes were fixed on the ground.

“For the sake of the good we had brought each other, you felt that when I,—the weaker of the two as it turned out,—collapsed, you owed it to me and to yourself to patch my life together again. You felt that we had gone into an expedition together, an intellectual expedition, and that one of us had succumbed to an emotional peril. Like a good comrade you stood by. When you had wrestled with the Angel of Death you made sure that the Angel of Life should have a fair field. When I was strong enough to realize what had made life too great a burden, you began tenderly, wisely, patiently to make me see that, even without the fulfilment of the greatest boon I had ever craved, life still held possibilities. You dug up all my old sayings, pieced together my damaged philosophy which had seemed sufficient in the days before the white flame burned my cocksure ideas to a crisp, and you made a more beautiful garment of it than I had ever succeeded in fashioning. You showed me how I could keep the fragrance of the flower without crushing the flower itself. You read me passages, God save the mark, from *La Nouvelle Héloïse* which a few years ago I would have dismissed with a snort, but in which you made me believe. You read me one of your early poems which bore to your present wisdom the relation of a chrysalis to a winged faith and you ended by persuading me that my collapse merely marked the transition of my old chrysalis of a philosophy into something winged and courageous like yours,—a

transition that cannot be accomplished without pain. . . . The patience, the love even, that you expended on me ended by making me see, as you intended it should, that this crisis, my overthrowing of my angel of selfishness, was a greater blessing than any blessing which could have grown out of a surrender on our part to the urge we both felt,—for you did feel it, too, I think . . . You led me back to my own path by quoting the lines :

*In the world of dreams I have chosen my part,
To sleep for a season and hear no word
Of true love's truth or of light love's art,
Only the song of a secret bird.*

Your faith in me,—a generous faith that wasn't afraid of caresses,—was a faith in life, in human decency. And now you are extending it, on some generous impulse, to another quarter. I think I'm guessing right?"

Louise showed no wish to interrupt him, and he ventured on. "In the companionship of Keble and Miriam you see something which suggests an analogy with our relation. We had adventurousness to offer each other; they have inhibitions to share. You feel that interference on your part would deprive them of a right you have claimed yourself: their right to work out some problem of their own; just as interference in our case would have denied us a privilege of deep understanding and sacrifice."

He paused for a moment. "That's my guess. Now may I offer a suggestion, for what it's worth?"

"Go on."

"You have one terrible weakness. In mending another's life you are infallible. You are less sure when it comes to taking care of your own. The thought that you might be prompted by selfish motives would be enough to make you refrain from interference. But have you the right to stand by and see two lives drifting on a course that might entail your own destruction? If you had been able to put yourself irrevocably into my keeping, that would have been one thing. But you weren't quite. At the same time you came far enough in my direction to jeopardize your old security. If you were to become lost, now, on no man's land, I should never forgive myself for letting myself be persuaded by you . . . I've put an extreme case because I know you're not afraid of facing any conceivable contingencies."

"There's more in it than that," she finally replied, and her voice announced a maturity born of suffering. "Because it's a relationship for which I am responsible. If I were to get lost on no man's land, which isn't at all likely, it would be a direct result of my objection to trenches, and no one but myself could be made to pay the penalty of my recklessness. I brought Miriam here for my own reasons, and kept her here. Keble and I were traveling independently; for I couldn't resist dashing off his pathway whenever the mood seized me. The more liberties

I took, the more obvious it became that Miriam and Keble had a similar gait. They were always *there*, together. I was glad for Keble's sake, and certainly, since I felt free to scamper about in any direction I chose, I couldn't deny him the right to the companionship of any one who could keep in step with him. People *have* to have companions.

"I have even been glad for Miriam's sake. Miriam gave me more than I asked of her. At times I must have got on her nerves. What had she by way of compensation? By way of penalty she had a gradual alienation from her old life. I could no more think of destroying her new sources of interest than I could think of destroying the new sources of interest to which she brought me the clue. The fact that Keble may have become the central figure of Miriam's new interests is an accident over which I have no control, just as the fact that you became a vital force in my new enthusiasms was an accident over which Keble had no control, over which no one but myself had any control, and not even until I had learned its full significance. Life is an uncharted ocean full of such reefs; only fools try to sail through them; wise people sail *around* them. If I've learned anything in the last two years I've learned that freedom, like everything worth having, costs heavily; every great happiness is bought at the price of a great unhappiness. That's only fair. And *I won't be niggardly* . . . When Keble and Miriam learn the full significance of their problem, as I have

already done, they will find their own solution. Human liberty means that, if it means anything . . .

“You and I fought out our issue and came to our conclusion, which happened to be that our ways lie apart. You have the song of your secret bird. I have something equivalent,—though it doesn’t exactly sing! If one has played the game according to one’s own rules, and not cheated,—not enough to count,—then that in itself puts a sort of backbone into one’s life . . . At times a lot of horrid little devils come tripping up through me, tempting me to be cheap and jealous, to interfere, to kick and scratch,—oh Mr. Dare dear, why do you let me say all these rubbishy things? I talk like a book of sermons to convince myself, but the real me is terribly wordless and weak and silly and bad and preposterous——”

She broke down, and Dare drew her head to his side, stroking her hair and patting courage into her shoulders.

2

Once Dare was safely on the high road towards recovery his progress was rapid. Before long he was able to walk into the maze of trails which led away from the end of the lake, and the day at length came when Dr. Bruneau lifted the ban.

Clad in fresh garments, Louise and Dare made a bonfire of the clothing and bedding and books from the cabin. “There go all the outlived parts of us,”

Dare commented as the flames leaped up into the frosty blue-grey morning air. "We'll be phoenixes. . . . I shall never be able to express my gratitude to you; a man has nothing to say to the person who has saved his life, any more than he has to say to the forces that originally gave life to him. He can only accept, marvel, venerate, and use!"

When the fire was low enough to be abandoned with safety, they turned towards the lake, sharing a sense of freedom and poignant exultation that could only find expression in a deep sigh. "There's no sign of the boat," Louise said. "Let's walk. We can take it slowly, and it's a glorious morning for walking."

It was; but Louise couldn't deny that it would have been pleasant to have been sought out, this particular morning, to have been called for and escorted back to the Castle. She would have warmed to some manifestation of extra thoughtfulness on the morning when all Hillside knew that she and Dare were to be released from their imprisonment. Besides, she was tired.

When, hand in hand, they reached the familiar short-cut across the meadow and saw the house standing out in cold sunlight from the base of Hard-scrapple, Louise felt more keenly than ever before what a beautiful home she had possessed. The broad terraces and frost-nipped hedges, the withered flower stocks, the pretty hangings behind polished plate-glass, the bedroom balcony with its tubs of

privet, the smoke ascending from the chimneys, the perambulator standing outside the door of the sun-parlor, the road bending away towards the dairy and barns,—it all held associations for her sweeter than she would have admitted, and her sense of joy in possession was flavored with a sense of the precariousness of possession. She recalled one of her introspective phrases, that “it was inherent in the nature of charm that it couldn’t be captured or possessed,—except in symbols or by proxy”. How terrible it would be to find oneself in possession of symbols from which the charm had departed!

A woman in black appeared at the door and came out on the terrace. Louise turned suddenly to Dare with a whimsical smile. “If you have only one funny, cross old lady in the world to represent your stock of sisters and cousins and aunts, and who really ought to have been a Mother Superior, you’re obliged to love her, aren’t you?”

Dare judged that you were.

“And if you love Aunt Denise, it’s perfectly obvious you can’t dote on people like Mrs. Windrom and Ernest Tulk-Leamington and lots of others. Don’t you agree?”

“I’ll agree fast enough, but I can only take your word that it’s obvious.”

“She really is pure gold under all that black,—but she’s so far under.”

Aunt Denise waited with outstretched hands. “You are both very welcome!” she cried, and turned

to congratulate Dare. "*Toi, mon enfant,*" she continued, with her arm about Louise's shoulders, and using the familiar pronoun for the first time since her arrival, "*Tu as bien fait. Tu es vraiment la fille de ton père, et de ta pauvre mère. Du Ciel elle t'a envoyé du courage.*"

Louise went indoors and her eyes feasted on the colorful tapestries, the shiny spaces, the blazing logs, the flowers, the vases and rugs and odors, the blue and gold vistas through high window-doors. As she entered the library Keble and Miriam looked up from a broad table littered with papers.

Keble came running to greet her. "Why, my dear, we weren't looking for you so early! We planned to take the launch and fetch you."

"Couldn't wait." She went to kiss Miriam. "It's quite all right, dear. There's not a germ left. We've exterminated the species. How is the campaign?"

"We're in the throes of final preparations," said Keble. "To-night is the big meeting in the Valley. The telephone has already been humming. Yesterday our enemies cut the wires; that shows that they dread us."

"I'll run off and let you work," said Louise, "till lunch."

"It's to be a gala lunch," Miriam warned. "Don't give a single order. They're all jubilant at your return,—so are we, dear."

"Have they been starving you?"

"Do we look starved?"

Louise surveyed them. "No, you look jolly fit. I believe you have got along quite comfortably without me; I rather hate you for it."

Keble kissed her. "Go see the monkey," he suggested. "We'll be out as soon as we get through this. Explain to Dare."

As Louise closed the library door she combated a desire to cry, then went out not to see the monkey, but a friendly band of slaves that happened to include Katie Salter, *ergo* the monkey.

Lunch proved festive. Keble was excited; Miriam played big sister; and Aunt Denise reigned with clemency. Dare was still far below par, and his smile was wan; but he was sufficiently his old self to enter the spirit of the occasion.

Talk turned to politics. "You'll come to-night, of course?" Keble invited Louise. "Your father has offered to put us up. We leave for Witney to-morrow morning. If you're too tired to go on you can stay at your father's till the tumult and the shouting die."

"What about my patient?"

Dare answered for the patient's welfare. "In the absence of his hosts, he will install himself at their table, take second helpings of everything, then pray for the speedy advent of the next meal, oblivious to the political destinies of the Dominion."

"Glad to see your appetite back," said Keble. "Does a man good to see you so greedy?"

After a stroll with Keble, Dare came back to the

sun-parlor, where he found Louise checking items in a mail order. He took up a magazine and lay in the hammock.

"I'm ordering some winter provisions," she informed him.

"You haven't let much grass grow under your feet."

"The grass has become knee-deep since I've been away."

Miriam came to the doorway, but hesitated a moment on hearing this last remark, which alluded to goodness knew what. "We're to be ready at four," she said. "Keble wonders if you could put tea ahead a half hour."

Louise got up, giving Dare's hammock a little shake. "Tea at four instead of four thirty, do you hear, Mr. Dare dear? Are you thrilled?"

"Couldn't make it three thirty, could you?"

Louise had caught Miriam's arm and was towing her into the hall. "Don't look so glum," she commanded. "Let's find Gertie and tell her tea at four, then pack our bags."

"What will you wear?" Miriam asked, surveying Louise's khaki and wondering what Louise had meant by "glum".

"What I have on," replied Louise.

"What! Riding breeches on the platform?"

"Pooh, everybody in the Valley knows my legs by heart! Besides, an election eve mass meeting isn't like a speech from the Throne."

Miriam was wondering whether she should ask for an explanation of "glum", but remained silent as Louise "told Gertie tea at four", then led the way upstairs. In Louise's room, however, the chatter irritated her, and again Louise intrigued her by saying, "For heaven's sake, Miriam, what's up?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"Something is."

"Well if it's anything," Miriam temporized, "it's so little that it's practically nothing. Besides it's none of my business."

"All the more, then."

"The more what?"

"Necessary to spit it out, darling. Excuse my vulgarity. It's only my real nature coming out in the joy of getting away from that shack. If not your business, probably mine. Fire away."

"You'll think me Mrs. Grundyish."

"Anything to do with the patient?"

"Thanks for helping me. With Mr. Dare *dear*, so to speak."

"Oh!"

"It's only that,—well, now you've brought him through, shall you need to be as attentive to him?"

"Conspicuously attentive?"

"It amounts to that."

"People been saying catty things?"

"People always do."

"You and I don't let 'people' dictate our actions."

Miriam stopped to ask herself how much terri-

tory Louise's "you and I" might be meant to cover. "No," she assented, "yet there's something to be said for not giving people unnecessary topics for gossip, especially now that the Eveleys are on exhibition. It would be a pity if your generosity were to be misinterpreted."

Louise snapped the cover of her bag and sat on a chair facing Miriam. Her face had become serious. "Miriam, dear, are you sure you know why you are so agitated about my attentions to Dare?"

Miriam bit her lip. Had Louise guessed that her appeal was in the nature of a final effort to make Louise intervene between herself and the tyrant which had been inciting her to snatch at any fact or appearance favoring the disloyal cause? "Whatever the cause of my agitation, as you call it, I hope you won't dismiss my caution as mere meddlesomeness."

Louise got up and came to place her hands over Miriam's knees, with an impulsive yet earnest directness. "Our lives are fearfully unstable, dear. We're constantly raising little edifices in ourselves which we think are solid; then along comes some trickle of feeling and washes the edifice away, leaving only a heap of sand. The problem is to find materials within us more reliable than sand, impervious to chance streams of feeling, with which we can reinforce our edifices, so that they will see us through a lifetime . . . Only after a series of washouts do we recognize the necessity of using a durable mortar.

and it takes still longer to discover what materials in us are durable and how to mix them. We've only experience to go by. I don't think I'm over-conceited in saying that I've learned my lesson; and I don't think I'm claiming too much for Dare when I say that he has learned his. In any case we're answerable only to ourselves, and I don't see why any one need worry."

Miriam's agitation was now undisguised, though its cause was not called into question. Only her impatience restrained her from weeping. "I don't understand you," she finally said. "You have outlandish moods which make you do outlandish things, then you offer outlandish explanations in the form of universal laws . . . How are ordinary mortals to be helped by your offhand statement that the solution of personal complications is to find some durable material to cement everything together? That's begging the question. If you have the durable materials within you, they should protect you from washouts; on the other hand, if you suddenly find yourself in a mess and discover simultaneously that you're nothing but sand and water, what are you going to do? You can't borrow concrete from your neighbors."

"Yes you can. That's what churches and philosophy and art and schools are for. The other name for concrete is Wisdom. There's heaps of it in the world; one has only to help oneself."

“Again you’re begging the question. That wisdom abounds doesn’t imply that everybody is wise enough to prefer it to folly.”

Louise got up and walked back to her dressing table. “But there, as Dare once reminded me, is where nature steps in. If people are hopelessly weak-willed, they have to be cared for and put up with; it’s not their fault. But nature’s average is quite high on the side of strength. Human beings are on the whole wise, just as they are on the whole healthy. And each human being who feels himself weak in spirit can take a spiritual tonic or go in for spiritual gymnastics, and if he doesn’t get better, why I suppose he just becomes a spiritual corpse . . . We’re getting almost morbidly serious about nothing on earth. I haven’t the vaguest idea what started us,—oh yes, your objection to my dearing Mr. Dare dear. Let’s go and see if tea’s at four yet.”

“Louise!” Miriam cried, in a half-choked voice. “What a treasure you are.”

“Don’t be prosy,” said Louise, brushing Miriam’s forehead with her lips. “That fawn thing of yours wears like iron, doesn’t it. I’m in rags. If Keble gets in we’ll make him stand us a trip to New York for some duds.”

Miriam was grateful for the delicacy which had led Louise to terminate her homily with a flippant flourish, thus giving Miriam an opportunity to withdraw intact from the compromising currents into

which she had nervously forced the interview. But the tyrant felt cheated, and only subsided at the teatable when Keble drew Miriam into a final consultation and Louise challenged Dare to a toast-eating competition.

CHAPTER V

BEFORE Louise had been an hour in the Valley she saw that the election was not going to be the "walk-over" that Pat Goard was predicting, despite the solid support which Keble was receiving at the hands of all the commercial interests. Although she could be contemptuously disregarding of public opinion, she seldom made the mistake of misreading it to her advantage, and as she moved about among groups of idlers in Main Street she intuitively discovered that there was a formidable undercurrent of opposition to her husband.

It came to her with a shock that part of the opposition was directed at herself. She knew there were people in the Valley who thought of her as a "menace". There were women who resented what they regarded as her superior airs, her new way of talking, her habit of dashing into town in an expensive motor. She found that her frivolous treatment of the far-off Watch Night service had not been forgotten, had even been exhumed by people who had boisterously profited by Keble's hospitality on the night in question. She discovered that sarcastic equivocations were being circulated regarding her "sick man" and Keble's "secretary". Further than

that, capital was being made of the fact that Keble had brought laborers from the east to work on his land. This was a particularly malicious weapon, since Keble had advertised months in advance for local workmen, and of the few who had offered their services, he had engaged all who qualified for the work in hand.

She made a rapid computation of her enemies, then a rapid computation of her friends. Luckily she had invited Mr. and Mrs. Boots to her house during the visit of her English guests. That had greatly strengthened the Eveley prestige among the faithful. Mrs. Boots recalled that she was the first to tell the Eveleys that they should go in for politics. Even the tongue of the mail carrier's wife had wagged less carelessly since Louise had invited Amy Sweet to dinner with a lord. Pearl Beatty, who had recently become Mrs. Jack Wallace, was a tower of strength for Keble's cause, for while the women of the Valley whispered about her, Pearl's respectability was now unchallengeable and most of her detractors owed money to Jack for ploughs and harness bought on credit. Moreover, Pearl, as a university graduate, could make the untutored respect her opinion, and she was phenomenally successful on the stump.

The opposing party had, early in the campaign, strengthened their cause by dropping the man who had represented and neglected them for so many years, and chosen as their candidate the much more

redoubtable Otis Swigger, proprietor of the Canada House, a director of the Witney bank, and the holder of many mortgages. Oat was a good "cusser"; he always had a chew of tobacco for any one amiable enough to listen to his anecdotes; he was generally conceded to be an enlightened citizen; and he was a typical product of his district. Moreover, he was popular enough to enlist the support of many Progressives, who had decided not to put up a candidate of their own.

For Louise, whose erratic ways of arriving at conclusions in no sense invalidated the accuracy of the conclusions arrived at, the factor which made Oat Swigger a dangerous opponent was that she had, for her own reasons, decided not to invite him and Minnie to what the Valley referred to as her "high-toned house-warming". In the drug-store Minnie had tried to pass her without speaking, her chalky chin very high in the air. Louise had grasped Minnie's shoulder, with a smile on her lips but a glint in her eye, and said, "You're getting near-sighted Minnie. How are you?"

"Oh, I'm all right, Smarty!" Minnie had retorted, and broken away. "Never better in my life!" she flung back.

"For God's sake touch wood!" Louise had screamed after her, with a wink for the man behind the counter. "You're going to vote for us, I hope," she said to him.

"Sure thing!" he agreed.

It was with these discoveries bubbling in her mind that she sought out Keble to present a hasty report before the "monster meeting" in the Valley town hall.

Keble and Miriam seemed to have taken stock of most of the points she had observed, but they had thought of nothing as good as the satirical counters which leaped to her tongue, and in the short interval before the meeting, Keble jotted down hints.

Of the three, Louise was the only one who was seized with misgivings when Pat Goard came to say that the hall was full and it was time to go on the platform. She held Keble back for a moment. "Do let me speak too," she pleaded.

Keble laughed and she saw a glance pass between him and Miriam which seemed to say, "That incurable theatricality cropping out again!"

"I'm afraid there's no room on the program," he said.

"As if that made any difference!" she retorted. "It wouldn't take me five minutes to say my piece."

"An extempore address might spoil everything," he remonstrated. "I'm using your suggestions; they will be the plums in my pudding."

She gave it up, but only because he glance between Miriam and Keble had abashed her. Perhaps it *was* mere play-acting, she rebelliously reflected, but it would be first-rate play-acting, and she had meant every word she had said weeks ago when she had

warned Keble that drama must be infused into politics if he wished to carry the mass.

She sat on the platform in her khaki riding suit and was startled by the volume of applause which greeted Keble when it came time for his speech. She was also cut by the hissing and booing which seemed to be concentrated in the back of the hall, where she recognized a number of hoodlums, probably paid.

She was also startled by the effectiveness of Keble's speech. It sounded honest, and she thrilled to a note of authority in his voice and a strength in his manner for which she had not given him credit. Miriam seemed not at all surprised,—but Miriam had heard him speak in public before.

The audience was attentive, at times vociferously friendly. There were occasional interruptions and aggressive questions, which Keble found no difficulty in answering. At the end there was some cheering, and as the meeting broke up scores of men and a few women came to shake hands with Keble.

Louise greeted friends and used every acquaintanceship in the interest of propaganda, but secretly she was panic-stricken. She had seen the Valley in all its moods, and she knew that this evening's hearty good will had not been fired with the enthusiasm that won Valley elections. She was afraid to meet Keble's eyes, and was glad that in his flush of triumph at the cheers and individual assurances, he failed to see her doubt.

They reached the doctor's house late in the evening, and went straight to bed in order to be fresh for the strenuous day at Witney. Louise did not sleep. She was haunted by the sight of earnest, slightly puzzled, friendly and unfriendly faces, and by the sound of jeers. Her brain revolved a dozen schemes, and before she fell asleep she had drawn up a private plan of campaign.

After breakfast she went to the bank and cashed a cheque. Then she made a round of the garages and stables and hired every available conveyance. While Keble was talking with groups of men in the town, she was using every minute, unknown to him, to collect influential members of the community and make them promise to travel to Witney for the final rally that evening. The cars and wagons were to leave an hour after her husband's departure. Nothing was to be said to him about the scheme, for she was reserving it as a surprise. Her conscience told her it was what Keble would spurn as "flummery". Well, it was a flummery world.

After dinner at the Majestic Hotel in Witney, followed by anteroom interviews, Keble and his band of supporters, to the blare of trumpets which made Miriam conceal a smile, proceeded to the Arena, a wooden edifice with a false front rising proudly above the highest telephone poles. Flags, posters, slogans, confetti, and peanut shells abounded. There were argumentative groups outside the doors, while within, every available seat was taken and already

there was talk of an overflow meeting. Louise had had the satisfaction of seeing her phenomenal procession of cars, wagons, and beribboned citizens from the Valley swarm into the town, headed by the Valley band. It had taken all her skill to prevent Keble from discovering the ruse. Later on he would find out and be furious. For the moment she didn't care what he thought. Besides, it wasn't bribery to offer people a lift over a distance of thirty-five miles to listen to a speech. She wasn't bribing them to vote; they could vote for or against, as their feelings should dictate after she had got through with them. Moreover, even if it was trickery, she had used her own money,—not Keble's. She smiled at the reflection that Walter's predictions were coming true; how it would have amused him to see her being, with a vengeance, "one decent member of society"!

The applause on Keble's appearance was not deafening. After all, Witney was less well acquainted with Keble than the Valley, even though it had pleasant recollections of the compliments uttered by his father from the back platform of a governmental railway carriage. Keble's address was similar to former addresses, though throughout this final day he had brought together concise counter arguments to new attacks, and had prepared a damaging criticism of his opponent's latest rosy promises. He was more than cordially received, but again Louise felt the absence of enthusiasm which represents the margin of a majority.

When he had resumed his seat, Mr. Goard, in accordance with a secret plan, called on Mrs. Eveley, to the amazement of Miriam and Keble, and to the wonderment of the big audience, who had had three serious speeches to digest and who sensed in the new move a piquant diversion.

“Last night,” Louise began, “I asked my husband to let me speak at the Valley mass meeting, and he objected. So, ladies and gentlemen, to-night, I didn’t ask his permission at all. I asked Mr. Goard’s, and as you all know, Pat Goard could never resist a lady.”

Already she had changed the mind of a score of men who had been on the point of leaving the hall.

“I wouldn’t give my husband away by telling you he refused, unless it illustrated a point I wish to make. The point is that no matter how hard a man objects,—and the better they are the more they do object,—his wife always takes her own way in the end. Not only that, ladies and gentlemen, but the wife adds much more color to her husband’s public policies than the public realizes. You’ve heard the proverb about the hand that rocks the cradle. I don’t for a second claim that the average wife is capable of thinking out a political platform; certainly I couldn’t; but she is like the irritating fly that goads the horse into a direction that he didn’t at all know he was going to take. What it all boils down to is this: when you elect Keble Eveley at the polls tomorrow, you’ll elect me too. And if you were by any mischance to elect Oat Swigger, you’d be elect-

ing Minnie Swigger. Minnie Swigger is a jolly good girl, one of my oldest friends. But the point is, ladies and gentlemen, I can lick Minnie!"

Shouts of laughter interrupted her. Miriam and Keble had ceased being shocked. However much they might deprecate her sops to the groundlings, they were hypnotized by her control of the mass which had a few minutes earlier been heterogeneous and capricious. Her direct personal allusions had dispelled a hampering ceremoniousness that had prevailed all evening.

"Once when we were girls together at the Valley school," Louise continued, seeing that her audience appreciated the reference to Mrs. Swigger. "I *did* lick her. I had more hair for her to pull, and she made the most of it. But I had a champion's uppercut. Now gentlemen, when you go to the polls tomorrow, don't back the wrong girl."

She took a step nearer the row of lamps and held them by a change of mood. "A little while ago somebody said that Keble Eveley was a dude. If he were, his wife would be a dude too; and though I've come up against a lot of rough characters in my time, nobody has yet been mean enough to call me a dude to my face; things said behind your back don't count. So now, man to man, is there anybody here who has the nerve to call us dudes? If there is let him say it now, or forever hold his peace."

There was a silence, then a shuffling sound directed attention to a corner, whence a facetious voice

called out, "His father's a sure enough dude, ain't he?"

Louise darted a glance to see who had spoken, paused a moment, smiled, and took the audience into her confidence. "It's Matt Hardy," she announced. "Matt's a clever boy (Matt was fifty and weighed fifteen stone), but like many clever people he overshoots the mark. Matt says Keble Eveley's father is a dude; and his obvious implication is that we are therefore dudes. For the sake of argument, let's admit that Lord Eveley is a dude——"

"A damn fine dude at that," interposed a friendly voice.

"A damn fine dude," echoed Louise. "We'll admit that." She wheeled around with dramatic suddenness, facing Matt's corner. "Now Matt Hardy's father used to live in Utah. The obvious implication is that Matt is a Mormon with six concealed wives."

There was a howl of enjoyment while the discomfited Matthew tried to maintain a good-humored front against the nudges with which his neighbours plagued him. The success of the sally lay in the fact that every one knew Matt for a bachelor who paid his taxes and enjoyed an immaculate reputation.

Louise's spirits rose as she leaned forward over the lights and focused attention again by a gesture of her arms.

"It doesn't in the least matter whether we're dudes or not," she said. "You're going to elect us anyway. Bye and bye I'll tell you why. My husband told you

some of the reasons, but there are a lot of others he hadn't time to touch on. Never mind that now. Before I get to the reasons I must sweep the ground clear of objections. That's the quickest way. I've disposed of one. Are there any other objections to us as your representatives in the Legislative Assembly? Any more objections, Matt?"

Matt was still smarting. He had been harboring a desire for revenge. But his wits stood still under provocation.

"Matt's cartridges are used up," she announced, turning away.

"No they're not," he shouted, with a sudden inspiration. "You're French."

His voice was drowned by a chorus of jeers. Louise motioned for silence, then smiled imperturbably. "That's what Minnie Swigger said, ladies and gentlemen. That's what we fought about. And Minnie was half right. But only half. She overlooked the fact that *me mother was Irish!*"

The success of this was almost too great. It threatened to rob the session of its seriousness. After the first delight had simmered down, individuals were suddenly seized with a recollection of the wink and the brogue and burst into renewed guffaws or slapped their legs with resounding thwacks.

Louise saw the necessity of counteracting this levity, and for several minutes talked straight at the issue, pointing out the practical changes that had come about as a result of her husband's efforts to

civilize and develop his district, and the far-reaching improvements that he, of all people, was in a position to effectuate. She heard herself enunciating facts and generalizations which had never occurred to her before. Once again, as in the case of Billy Salter's funeral, she found herself thinking in public more rapidly and concisely than she had ever thought in private. And under the surface of it all was a wonderment that she should be so passionately supporting Keble in a plan that had been distasteful to her.

Only once she relieved the tenseness by another flash of humor, when, referring to the candidature of Otis Swigger, she said that while Oat's barber shop in the Valley had always been recognized as a public forum, Oat would be at a distinct disadvantage in Parliament, because he couldn't lather the faces of the other members, consequently no one would be obliged to listen to him.

She brought her address to a climax with the instinct of an orator, just when the whole audience had settled down comfortably for more.

She paused a moment, exulting in the silence, then, changing from an earnest to a girlish manner, she dropped her arms and said quietly, "Well, ladies and gentlemen, you still have twelve hours to think over the truth of all I've said. Are you going to vote for us?"

The answer was in an affirmative that shook the rafters of the Arena and made Miriam turn pale.

The air was charged with an enthusiasm which for Louise, as she sank back exhausted, spelt Majority. Keble was forced to acknowledge the prolonged acclamation, and Pat Goard quickly followed up the advantage with a few words of dismissal.

Excitement and lack of sleep, following on her long ordeal, had overtaxed Louise. She felt weak and a little frightened as she walked towards a side door in a deserted back room of the building, followed by Keble, who came running to overtake.

"I know it was cheap," she quickly forestalled him, "but I couldn't help it." He seemed to have been subdued by the pandemonium she had let loose, as though suddenly aware that he had been satisfied with too little until she gave a demonstration of what pitch enthusiasm could and must be raised to. "It's my love of acting," she added. "I hope you weren't annoyed."

Keble was in the grip of a retrospective panic. "Why am I always finding things out so late!" he cried, with a profound appeal in his voice. "I'm always walking near a precipice in the fog. Why can't I see the things you see?"

Her fatigue made her a little hysterical. "Why do you keep your eyes shut?" she retorted.

A cloud of feeling that had been growing heavier for weeks burst and deluged Keble with the sense of what his wife meant to him. He saw what a jabber all social intercourse might become should she withhold her interpretative affection from him or ex-

pend it elsewhere. He had long been restive under her continued use of the weapon of polite negativity with which he had originally defended himself against her impulsiveness. Now he longed to recapture the sources of the old impulsiveness, to defend them as his rarest possession, and his longing was redoubled by a fear that it was too late.

“Why——” he commenced, but his voice broke and he reached out his arms. It was dark. She was dazed, and seemed to ward him off.

“Then what made you do it?” he finally contrived to say. “You’ve saved the day, if it can be saved. Not that it really matters. Why? Why? Why not have let me blunder along to defeat, like the silly ass I am?”

“No woman likes to see her husband beaten,” she replied, in tired, tearful tones, “by a barber!” she added.

“Louise!” he implored, in a welter of hopes, fears, and longings that made him for once brutally incautious. He caught her into his arms, then marvelled at the limpness of her body. He turned her face to the dim light, and saw that she had fainted.

2

Not until Dare had been driven to Witney, there to entrain for the coast, did Louise give in to the weariness with which she had been contending for many days prior to Keble’s election. Only her determination to spare Dare the knowledge that she had

overtaxed her strength for him kept her from yielding sooner. On the day of his departure she retired to her bedroom, drew the blinds, got into bed, and gave an order that nobody should be admitted. They might interpret her retirement as grief at Dare's departure if they chose; for the moment she didn't care a tinker's dam what any one thought.

Aunt Denise discouraged Keble's immediate attempt to telephone for Dr. Bruneau. "She doesn't need medicine," she said, "but rest. Leave her to me; I understand her temperament."

Once more Keble and Miriam could only pool their helplessness.

"We had better leave matters in her hands," Miriam decided. "The Bruneaus seem to be infallible in cases of illness."

Keble was only half reassured. "Usually when Louise has a headache that would drive any ordinary person mad, she goes out and climbs Hardscrapple. I have a good mind to telephone in spite of Aunt Denise."

"If you do," said Miriam, "Louise will be furious, and that will only make matters worse. It's merely exhaustion. Even I have seen it coming."

"I wish to God I'd fetched a nurse from Harristown when Dare was ill."

"Louise wouldn't have given up her patient if you had imported a dozen."

Keble was vexed and bitterly unhappy. "What are you going to do with a woman like that!" he

cried. "I don't mind her having her own way; but damn it all, I object to her doing things that half kill her. That's stupid."

One of the most difficult lessons Miriam had learnt in her long discipleship under Louise was how and when to be generous. She saw an opportunity and breathed more freely. "I think it's cruel of you to call her sacrifice stupid. If she breaks down it is not that she has undertaken too much; but that other people undertake so little. When Louise resolved to nurse Dare she did it because there was, as she said to me, no one else. But during that period she was putting the best brain-work into our campaign. The minute she was free she went to the Valley, worked like a horse, and turned the tide single-handed because, as she might have put it, there was nobody else. She thinks and acts for us all. It isn't our fault if we are not alert enough to live up to her standard, but the least we can do when she becomes a victim to our sluggishness is to refrain from blaming her."

"Well, Miriam, I give it up! I don't understand Louise; I don't understand Aunt Denise; I don't even understand you. You women have one set of things to say for publication, and then disclose amendments which alter the color of the published reports. Each new disclosure rings true, yet they don't piece together into anything recognizable. I no sooner get my sails set than the breeze shifts. . . . There's only one thing left for me to do, and

that is to go on as I began, just crawling along like a tortoise, colliding into everything sooner or later. By the time I'm eighty I may have learned something and got somewhere. If not I'll just stumble into my grave, and on my tombstone they can write, 'Poor devil, he meant well.'

Miriam had been laughing at the funny aspect of his misery, but her smile became grim. "That isn't a bad epitaph. I wish I could be sure that I'll be entitled to one as good."

Keble glanced at her curiously. "You're morbid, Miriam. I don't wonder, with the monotony of our life here."

"No," she corrected, despite the tyrant. "The life here has done more than anything to cure me of morbidness. Although, to tell the truth, I wasn't conscious of the morbid streak in me until after I'd been here for a while." To herself Miriam explained the matter with the help of a photographic metaphor: Keble's personality had been a solution which brought out an alluring but reprehensible image on the negative of her heart; Louise's character had been a solution which had gradually brought out a series of surrounding images which threw the reprehensible image into the right proportion, subordinating it to the background without in any way dimming it. Miriam was now forced to admit that one overture on Keble's part, one token of a tyrant within him that reciprocated the desire of

her tyrant, would have sufficed to overthrow all her scruples.

“I don’t see what you mean,” said Keble.

Miriam thought for a moment. “You deserve an explanation. I can’t explain it all; it’s too personal.” She had almost said too humiliating. “But I’ll make a partial confession. Louise imported me here long ago as a sort of tutor, at her expense. You weren’t to know; but it can’t do any harm to give the game away now. While I was supposed to be tutoring her, I was really learning. By watching Louise I’ve learned the beauty of unselfishness, trite as that may sound. I can’t be unselfish on Louise’s scale, for I can’t be anything on her scale, good, bad, or indifferent. But like you I can mean well, and since I’ve known Louise I can mean *better*.

“You sometimes speak of Louise’s play-acting. When your people were here we once said that she was having a lovely time showing off. I know better now. I’m convinced that she was trying, in her own way, to reflect distinction on you, just as I’m convinced that when she jerrymandered the proletariat she was going it in the face of bodily discomfort and your disapproval simply because she couldn’t bear the thought of your being disappointed. I don’t think either of us has given Louise enough credit for disinterestedness, chiefly because she doesn’t give herself credit for it. She prates so much about her individual rights, that we assume her incapable of sacrificing them. At times we’ve mistaken her

pride for indifference. Do look back and see if that isn't so. I'm inclined to think that even her present illness is merely the nervous strain consequent upon some splendid reticence."

Miriam paused, unable to confess that the reticence had to do with herself, as she suspected it had. She saw that she had permission to go on.

"Then her interest in Dare. That, you and I have avoided referring to, and I think we were a little hypocritical. But the core of the secret is connected with Dare, and I can't do Louise the injustice of not telling you. It was unpardonable of me to listen, but I did. I was in the sun-parlor, in the hammock, dozing, and she and Dare came and sat by the fire in the hall. The door was open."

"When was this?"

"Only yesterday. They were talking about the elections. 'When I saw all those idiots wavering between Oat Swigger and Keble,' she said, 'something snapped. From that moment I had only one determination: to make them feel the worth of all the things Keble stood for in the universe' . . . The conversation swung around to the monkey. She told Dare, as she had long ago told me, that before the monkey arrived she hoped he would be a boy, not for her sake, but to gratify his grandfathers. Then when he did turn out a boy, she was amazed to find herself thankful for your sake. The grandfathers were forgotten, but she was indifferent. Then after the elections she was for the first time

conscious of cherishing the monkey for her own sake. That feeling grew until she suddenly resented your rights in him. Then yesterday she took it into her head to bathe the monkey, and had an insane delusion that she could wash off his heredity,—scrubbed like a charwoman till the poor darling howled. ‘Then,’ she said, ‘I was sorry, and by the time I had got on all his shirts I felt that I had put his heredities on again, and was glad and kissed him and he flapped his arms and squealed. Then I cried, because, deep down, I was terrified that perhaps Keble might some day, if he hasn’t already, resent *my* contribution to the monkey.’”

Miriam waited. “I couldn’t resist passing on that monologue to you, for it seems the most complete answer to many criss-cross questions, and Louise might never have brought herself to let you see. It would be impudent of me to say all this had we not formed a habit out here of being so criss-crossly communicative, and if you hadn’t tacitly given me a big sister’s licence. Anyway, there it is, for what it’s worth. At least I mean well.”

Keble was too strangely moved to trust his voice, and walked out of the house to ride over the rain-soaked roads.

That was the most bitter moment that Miriam had ever experienced. She had come to know that Keble had no emotion to spare for her; but that he should fail to see into her heart, or, seeing, refuse

her the barest little sign of understanding and compassion,—it was really not quite fair.

She had letters to write. She had decided to leave, but apart from that her plans were uncertain. Her most positive aim was to avoid living with her old-fashioned aunt in Philadelphia. Grimly she looked forward to a process of gradual self-effacement. In two or three years she would probably not receive invitations to the bigger houses. Then there would be some hot little flat in Washington, on the Georgetown side, with occasional engagements to give lessons in something,—at best a post as social secretary to the wife of some new Cabinet Member full of her importance. Something dependent, and dingy. Each year would add its quota to an accumulation of dust on the shelves of her heart. And with a sigh she would take down from a shelf and from time to time reread this pathetic romance in the wilderness. From time to time she would receive impulsive invitations from Louise, and would invent excuses for declining. Perhaps, some years hence, when she could view the episode with some degree of impersonality and humor, she would write a long letter of confession to Louise. In advance she was sure of absolution. That was her only comfort.

Dare had guessed her secret, and she had been too hypocritical to take him into her confidence. Now that he was gone she regretted that she had not been flexible enough to enter into the spirit of his overture. By evading, she had not only screened her

own soul, but denied commiseration to him. In future she would try to be more alert to such cues. She wondered whether inflexibility might not have had a good deal to do with the barrenness of her life. She even wondered whether at thirty-five one would be ridiculous in vowing to become flexible,—would that be savoring too strongly of the old maids in farces?

From her window, as she was patting her hair into place before going down to tea, she caught sight of Keble's tall, clean figure dismounting at the edge of the meadow. Katie was passing along the road with the perambulator, and Keble went out of his way to greet the monkey. His high boots were splashed with mud. His belted raincoat emphasized the litness of his body. The face that bent over the carriage glowed from sharp riding against the damp air. The monkey was trying to pull off the peak of his father's cap, and Keble was pretending to be an orge. Katie looked on indulgently.

"Even Katie, thought Miriam, "puts more into life than I do." A few months before, Miriam would have thought, "gets more out of it."

The mail had been delayed by the state of the roads. Miriam found a letter from London. When tea was poured she read as follows:

"My dear Miss Cread: I don't know whether you are still at Hillside or whether you will be at all interested in the suggestion I am about to make, but I am writing on the off chance. My old friend

Aurelie Graybridge is leaving soon on a visit to America. Yesterday, during a chat with her, I happened to mention your name. She recalled having met you some years ago, and inquired minutely after you. She has been looking for a companion to help her keep the run of her committees, and so forth. For several years a cousin was with her, but her cousin married and that leaves her with no one. I suggested that you might be induced to go to her, and she asked me to sound you.

“You would divide your time between England and the continent. The duties would be light, chiefly correspondence. A good deal of spare time; traveling and all expenses provided, and a decent allowance.

“Aurelie plans to sail next week. I’m enclosing her address. Please write her if the idea appeals to you. I hope it may, for that will mean that I shall be likely to see you from time to time. You may of course have much more interesting plans, in which case don’t mind this gratuitous scrawl.”

It was signed by Alice Eveley. Miriam restored the letter to its envelope, and was thankful that Keble and Aunt Denise were too occupied to notice her face.

Her anger was redoubled by the realization that the offer was too good to be turned down. She knew she would end by despatching an amiably worded letter to Mrs. Graybridge, then write Keble’s

sister a note thanking her for her kind thoughtfulness.

"The cat! Oh, the cat!" she was saying under her breath.

3

In the third week of December Keble returned to Hillside after his first session in the Provincial Assembly. He had been loth to leave his wife at the ranch, but she had been too weak to accompany him and was still somewhat less energetic than she had formerly been. Keble found her on a divan in her own sitting room, with the monkey propped up beside her.

"It's just as you said it would be," he remarked. "Having to waste precious weeks in that dull hole makes the ranch so unbelievably wonderful a place to come back to!"

When the first questions had been answered, Louise held up a prettily bound little volume from which she had been reading. "Look! A Christmas present already,—from Walter Windrom. A collection of his own verse."

Keble admired it, then Louise, in a tone which she succeeded in making casual, said, indicating one of the pages, "That's a strange sort of poem, the one called 'Constancy'. Whatever made Walter write a thing like that?"

Keble read the poem. "I've seen it before. It's

quite an old one. Girlie clipped it from some review or other and sent it to me."

"What does it mean?" Louise insisted.

"How should I know?" he laughed. "Girlie had a theory about it. Walter was smitten with an American actress for a while,—what was her name? Myra something: Myra Pelter. She treated him rather shabbily. Took his present, then threw him down for somebody else, I believe, after they'd been rather thicker, as a matter of fact, than Girlie quite knew. Walter is romantic, you know, for all his careful cynicism; he's always singing the praises of bad lots, and that makes Girlie wild, naturally. Girlie said the poem was Walter's attempt to justify this Myra person's uppish treatment of him, an attempt to make her out a lady with duties to art,—all that sort of blether. It's Girlie's prosaic imagination: she can never read a book or a poem without trying to fit it, word for word, into the author's private life. I had quite forgotten its existence."

It was difficult for Louise to conceal her relief after years of pent-up unhappiness caused by her over-subjective interpretation of the poem's mission. "How could a man as clever as Walter ever take Myra Pelter and her art seriously. Miriam and I went to see her once. She's only a Japanese doll!"

"Dolls are an important institution. They have turned wiser heads than Walter's."

Louise looked again at the historical lines. "I hate it," she mildly remarked.

"Tell Walter so—not me!"

"Oh no," she sighed. "The poor little lines meant well enough."

While her remark did not make sense to him, it seemed an echo of something he had once said to himself; it brought a dim recollection of pain.

"But I *would* tell him at a pinch," she continued. "I'm no doll that says only the ugly things for which you press a button in its back!"

"Ungainly sentence, that!"

He remembered now. It was the ghostly little gramophone record, that had brought him a message about Dare.

"It's an ungainly subject," she retorted, absent-mindedly.

"Change it then. There's always the monkey."

"Yes, there's him. Aren't you glad?"

"Rather! . . . I don't suppose anything could be done about his legs. They're as curved as hoops. If he ever tries to make a goal he'll have to stand facing the side-lines and kick sideways like a crab."

Louise buried her nose in the monkey's fragrant dress and shook him into laughter. She was languidly wondering where her own goal was, whether it was still ahead or whether, as Walter had so discouragingly predicted, she would find it at her starting post. She was happy; but she suspected that she was happy only for the moment. The complacency with which Keble had accepted their revival of interest in each other was already stirring a little sing-

ing restlessness of nerves within her. He so had the air of having won the race. Perhaps he had, and perhaps he always would. But she was none the less hare-like, for all that! She looked into the monkey's eyes. "Tell your daddy," she said, "the important thing is to *make* the goal,—whether you do it sideways or frontways or whatever old ways!"

THE END

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