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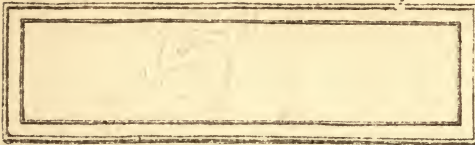
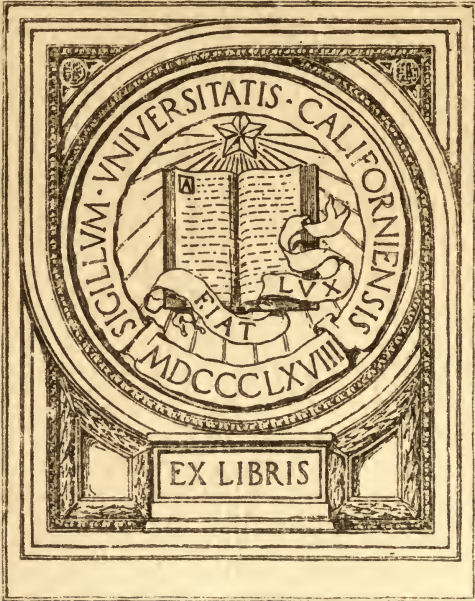
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FULFILLMENT  
*by*  
EMMA WOLF

GIFT OF

*Class of 1900*









# FULFILLMENT

A CALIFORNIA NOVEL

By

EMMA WOLF

Author of "Other Things Being Equal,"  
"The Joy of Life," "A Prodigal in Love,"  
"Heirs of Yesterday," etc.



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BOOK I

THE MAIDEN

“ ‘My face is my fortune, sir,’ she said.”

*Old Song*



## CHAPTER I

### THE TRANSIT OF VENUS

GWEN HEATH and Laurence Martin—met by chance—sauntering out of the soft obscurity of a Post Street Art Gallery where they had been tilting their wit at the Cubist mysteries on exhibition there, came into the definite glitter and glare, the battle and rattle of the street crisp with spring, potential with adventure, she still tingling with enjoyment over both her own and his witticisms, he openly drinking in the radiance of her vibrant, glowing youth.

The insistent, near note of an automobile horn drew their attention. From a waiting car a girl leaned out holding the door wide and smiling directly toward Gwen.

“Nothing vague about that,” Gwen laughed, drawing a step from him. “The Life motif—a raucous motor horn—calls! I follow.”

With a bright smile and a nod to Martin, she



moved, a slender, black-clad figure, to the curb.

“Won’t you get in? Are you going home?” asked Elizabeth Lathrop eagerly, and another voice from the tonneau echoed equally eagerly, “Oh, do!”

“Well,” Gwen considered, successfully swallowing her surprise and amusement, her hand touching the door tentatively. “Yes, I’m going home, but I had intended walking. You know I love nothing as I love to hike.”

A strained smile of acknowledgment drew Miss Lathrop’s features. “I’ve seen you on the Ingleside Links,” she agreed sweetly from the tip of her smile, “but there’s no match on now, and we have something so thrilling to tell you. Haven’t we, Sally?”

“Rather,” said Sally Lane, reflecting the gleam in her companion’s eyes.

Gwen, on the curb, measured the smiling antagonism in the automobile, and rose gallantly to the fray. “Really?” she laughed, and stepped gayly in. “Let me sit here.” She swung round one of the smaller seats and sat down fac-

ing the other two, feeling, with a mental grin, that she was facing a jury not of her peers.

The car swung off with a whirl. "Guilty or not?" Gwen wanted to challenge, but only exclaimed with lively interest, "And now for the thrill."

Not Gwen Heath, but her exquisite, disturbing beauty interrogated Elizabeth Lathrop with its maddening coolness, not the girl, the interloper from an outside sphere, but the proud little ivory oval of the face opposite, looking out so lightly from the glinting shadows of the chestnut-gold hair framing it,—this, with its indubitable lure, cocked the pistol. "Guess who's engaged," she cried.

Then Gwen knew. "Oh, an engagement!" she dallied. "You—yours? Miss Lane's?" She glanced from one to the other, ignoring the pistol pointing from their eyes.

"Nothing so commonplace," Miss Lathrop tantalized, "we are only the—the——"

"Erynnes," thought Gwen, clairvoyant.

"Reporters," quoth Elizabeth more vernacularly,—and touched the trigger. "We've just

come from Mrs. Wells,—a little telephone-tea, you know, at which she announced her son's engagement to Lucy Hammond. Awfully surprised you weren't there."

The shot struck, leaving a rosy trail on the surface of the face of the target. "I scarcely know Mrs. Wells," she explained with quickened breath and a swift smile, "it's only her son and I who are friends. But it is surprising!" She met her opponent's searching eyes frankly.

"Isn't it? Everybody's surprised—as you are. Yet why should one be?"

"Why indeed!" echoed Gwen, accepting the cue.

"Simply because he's never been attentive to her," suggested Sally Lane flatly. "And that's why——"

"His mother has been," completed Elizabeth with a laugh. "The Hammond estate was always there at Burlingame adjoining the Wells's, you know, and—they naturally met, in every particular."

"Greek and Greek," flashed Gwen, not to be

stayed. "When wealth meets wealth—such wealth—then comes the nuptial knot. It is absolutely logical—from the premises."

"Socially logical," snapped Elizabeth, brutally snipping at Gwen's nonchalance. "Anything different would be—fiction."

"And out-of-date fiction at that," mused Gwen. "It would be absolute romance, wouldn't it?" she ran on, heedless of her hearers, as was her wont when once started. "What an anachronism in this mechanistic age! Realism laughs at the absurdity. You surely have a 'story,' journalistically speaking, Miss Lathrop,—it's almost yellow, interesting alike in either the *Society* or *Trade and Commerce* columns. Lansing Wells is a fine fellow—everybody likes him, in spite of his money,—I know I do,"—she was smiling now very winsomely into the other's addled sweetness,—“and I hope he and Miss Hammond will be very, very happy. Thanks for the ride and the thrill—they were both unexpected. And—may I continue my walk?” She and Elizabeth Lathrop were mere acquaintances—why continue the *durance vile*?

“ Reading something good? ” put in Sally Lane suavely, attempting to divert the threatening waters.

“ Just Wells,” laughed Gwen, hugging her books tighter under her arm. “ Isn’t that a funny coincidence? Well, Wells is modern enough and good enough for me any day.” Her perfect poise as she stood up, ready for flight, her hand on the door, confused the foe.

“ Oh, for anybody,” declared Sally Lane precipitately. “ I’m so surprised, Miss Heath, that you haven’t joined any of the lecture classes we’ve been forming. Being so high——”

“ Don’t say high-brow, please,” begged Gwen, making a wry face. “ The compliment is so insulting to one’s sense of humor. Which reminds me of a woman, the author of an insignificant novel, who sat glowering during a discussion on the insanity of genius and, at its close, rose haughtily from her place and, with a tart ‘ Thank you!’ swept indignantly from the room.—No, I haven’t joined any of the classes simply because I hate being read to, or lectured to. Thanks again, Miss Lathrop,—my congratulations to you

both on the success of the thrill,—and good-by. Will you tell the chauffeur?"

She stepped to the curb again, waved a bright good-by, and moved on in girlish fleetness as the car shot ahead. The two in the tonneau measured her as they sped past.

"She's wonderful in mourning," ventured Sally Lane, noting her friend out of the corner of a dancing eye.

"Mourning! And those smiles? Her hilarity is in astoundingly bad taste, considering her father's not dead two months."

"Hilarity? She was only acting—opposite you. What did you expect? Stung, my dear!"

"Exactly," declared Elizabeth Lathrop, with lifted chin.

"Who?" wondered Sally Lane in astonishment.

"Why, Gwen Heath, of course," snapped Elizabeth crossly.

"H-m-m——" hesitated Sally Lane.

"Huh!" breathed Elizabeth Lathrop.

"Squelched," laughed Sally Lane.

"Who?" flashed Elizabeth Lathrop.



"Me'n you," whispered Sally slyly.

"Oh, shut up!" finished Elizabeth flatly.

"I will," agreed her confidante.

"That ends her glory," triumphed Elizabeth, in epilogue.

"The transit of Venus," chortled Sally in amen, and the car sped on.

So did Gwen, dumped down, according to their conclusions, on her broken potsherds, on the débris of her Dream of Empire.

Vulgar!

The thought lashed. Those girls in their automobile had as much as branded her—*her*, Gwen Heath! She, who prided herself on—what? Everything. Her young, intolerant spirit stamped on the implication.

Those—cats!

And yet, up from the depths of her turmoil, gushed a laugh, comforting, comfortable, a laugh to hug in her heart. She didn't care! She could laugh at the elaborate business of their "news." The prick of it had left only the ghost of a scratch. Healthily, joyously, she knew that, knew the scratch was only to her vanity and that



it would heal as soon as she would let it alone. And that she would let it alone presently, she knew too, because she had realized for several days that she had come to her cross-ways and was about to turn her back on "all that,"—meaning what those girls, and their automobile, and their "news," represented. They had never been a part of her real life, they were only an interpolation. But now, walking homeward to Deborah with the little flesh prick upon her, she could not let it alone.

In the swift X-ray of her supposed débâcle, she saw the whole "history" of her case, and diagnosed it "vulgarity,"—which self-judgment was typical of Gwen, hot, swift, and absolutely unprejudiced. Had she been pressed, then and there, on her way home to Deborah, to state the facts in that history, she would have launched forth somewhat in this wise, hot, swift, and absolutely just—according to her temperament:

"The truth of the matter is this:—We are neither poor people nor rich, we're the kind of people to whom a phrase of Wagner or a phrase of Browning is a feast, the kind of people who have

aspirations. At least they were aspirations up to a certain day and hour when they slipped down and became mere ambitions. Now, aspirations have to do with heights, and we, my sister Deborah and I, have lived all our lives, not only on a height, but with a height,—we are the daughters of Horace Bradford Heath, distinguished Greek scholar and late Professor Emeritus of Greek of the University of California, who never had an ambition in his life—save to live freely. So free was he of taking thought of the morrow, or even of today, that, if my sister Deborah had not been peculiarly ballasted—through the untoward circumstance of becoming both my mother—and his—at the pathetic age of twelve, owing to the death of my own mother at my birth,—we might have come a cropper through his spiritual aeronautics. But, as it was, she kept our bodies, at least, to the levels of reality. But throughout my child life and college life—of course I went to college—I subsisted on aspirations. What sort? Why, the sort aimless young girls have who believe in ideals, in the perfectibility of humanity: one has only to frown on vice and it will

become virtue, one has only to put out a helping hand and weakness will become strength, one has only to seek beauty and one will find it. And, of course, out of it all, some day, vaguely, inevitably, would rise the one and only, the knight without reproach,—none other would do,—through whom the veiled, but glorious, meaning of life would become manifest. (And now, this very day, old as I am—I am nearly twenty-four—I know, beyond all doubting, that that last clause of that under-graduate credo will justify my faith!) Most of which—*not* that last clause, however,—but perhaps that, too!—was born of the atmosphere in which I have always lived and had my being.

“All this until, last year, came the day and hour when we—ah, Deborah!—became ambitious, that day when Mabel Goddard, just back from a two-years’ trip around the world, saw me at a concert, ‘Sitting there,’ as she excitedly put it, in my ‘incredible hair,’ and claimed me as Lady Godiva for some *tableaux vivants* to be given for charity. So it was Mabel, my girlhood’s chum,—who had married oil-lands three years before,—who in-

troduced me, in the Fairmont ballroom, into the ken of the very rich. And we became ambitious. For, ever since, they—I mean some of the men—with Lansing Wells in the lead with his mad attentions,—have raged about me. Principalities and Powers, in my intemperate dream of conquest, took the form of Limousines and Country Houses, to say nothing of Town Mansions and unlimited travel and all the *etceteras de luxe*. And there was nothing to break the delirium—not even my sister Deb. You see, she believes in me—I mean in the power of my beauty, which is all there is to me to believe in, and I am neither so blind nor so deaf not to know it exists. But had Deb——

“But there! You see me as those girls see me, an adventuress, foiled in her designs by the more powerful machinations of a plutocratic mother.

“You agree with me? Vulgar? Certainly.”  
Thus Gwen, homeward bound to Deb.

And meanwhile the laugh in her heart gushed on. She didn't care! Oh, she didn't care! What was Lansing Wells to her—what could he be to

her after *he*, Austin Dane, had come? Austin Dane—Austin Dane! His name was enough to overwhelm every other. All the world knew his name, but to her, as to no one else, was given the knowledge of the man behind the renowned playwright.

“Austin—Gwen,” so he had strung them together only last night, holding them up to her, thus joined, for approval. And she, laughing unsteadily over his obvious meaning, had told him how, as a little girl of ten, she had stormed against her fanciful name, Gwendolen, because “all the girls made fun of it,” and Deb, reluctantly, had consented to the diminutive. She did not tell him that Deb’s repeated argument against her childish rage and weeping had been that she had been so named after her paternal grandmother, who, “Father says, was as beautiful as the dawn, and whom you resemble in every particular.” But she had remembered it—phrasings always left their trceries in Gwen’s æsthetic make-up. “So I became Gwen, and Gwen I intend to remain to the end of the chapter—Gwen for short,” she had summed up with a faint dis-

play of the tenacity which often capriciously assailed her.

“Gwen for love,” he had instantly murmured, and had abruptly taken his departure, leaving the afterglow to daze her.

It dazed her still, walking out Sutter Street in the waning afternoon, the little winds exhilarating even her fleetness, whipping up the dance in her blood, and completely blotting out her surroundings.

But just ahead, moving very slowly toward her, she beheld a small girl, reading as she advanced, her head hidden in her book. Gwen’s eye, attracted by the pose, sought the cover of the upheld book, recognized with a leap of delight the familiar green cloth with the red-and-gold clover-leaf in the corner, saw the little tear-stained face bent over the page, and she made straight for the absorbed little reader.

“Oh,” cried the startled child, backing away and swallowing a trickling tear as she looked up in wonderment at the girl who had almost run over her. “I——”

“Don’t tell me,” cried Gwen with a gulp in



her voice, her own eyes swimming, "don't tell me! I knew it long ago. Beth's dying!" And she went on, chuckling joyously to herself over Louisa Alcott, over the amazed expression on the face of the child into whose abstraction she had so irresistibly bumped, and who stood gazing after the "beautiful, funny lady" in wistful excitement. Perhaps she was *Jo* herself!

But Gwen was almost run down in turn by a well-known, flying figure as she turned the next corner.

"Why, Jean!" she exclaimed gladly.

"Haven't a second, Gwen,—a lesson at five," nodded Jean Wickham, backing reluctantly away from her.

"I won't keep you, dear,—I'm coming for the kiddies some morning this week," and they separated, Gwen continuing on her way, the memory of a childhood's literary worship banished by the realistic encounter with Jean Wickham—that mother!—widowed, left penniless—after affluence—at twenty-five, with two small children to feed, and clothe, and house, going joyously, gratefully, trudging and drudging from music lesson to music



lesson, in the pride of her strength and love.

“Oh, brave, brave, brave!” thrilled Gwen, walking on with a glow at her heart over the girl she knew and held so high.

After crossing Van Ness Avenue through the whirl and whir of flashing motor-cars and trucks, she paused a moment in answer to a greeting from a pretty, charmingly dressed woman descending the steps of a fashionable modiste’s establishment. At the curb waited her exquisite electric brougham.

“I’m so disgusted,” she began at once, fretfully, as Gwen met her at the foot of the steps, “I really don’t know what I’m going to do about it. I’ve been depending on that gown for the Forsythe wedding, and today Madam tells me she has to cable to Paris for another half-yard of the material! The wedding is only nine days off now, and of course it won’t be here for two weeks! You can imagine how I feel about it.”

“How perfectly horrid,” sympathized Gwen, keeping the dance of amusement out of her eyes. “But you have so many dresses—what about that gorgeous gold thing you had on——”

“That! *My dear*, that’s worn to a rag long ago. You know what dancing does to skirts these days. It just makes me sick, and Madam’s as cool as a cucumber about it. Can’t I take you home?”

Gwen, moving away, shook her head in refusal. “Thanks, I’ll be there in a minute. I’m so sorry for you, Mrs. Farwell.”

“I’m at my wits’ end about it,” bewailed the other, sweeping on to her jewel-box.

Over Gwen swept the irony of it all,—Jean Wickham, Laura Farwell,—life’s disharmonies. And a tide of shamed color flooded into her face at the echo of certain persistent rumors regarding the same dainty bit of femininity she had just parted from, rumors in which the name of Larry Martin and the ugly word “divorce” held clamorous prominence. The girl, frowning, thrust the distasteful thought from her, and the next minute was exulting in a sudden overwhelming enjoyment of the maze of things.

“The world is so full of a number of things,  
I’m sure we should all be as happy as kings!”

“Life’s a banquet, isn’t it, R. L. S.?” she apostrophized as if to a mental companion.

And just then, to her surprise, she found she had reached “The-peanut-on-a-height,” her own school-girl sobriquet for the loved, rambling bungalow perched on the summit of a steep, high lawn, the only home she had ever known. “The Heights,” they called it after that, for many secret reasons. Even now its ivy-framed, leaded windows seemed to stoop to her in greeting as she went musingly up the long flight of worn steps, and a wave of devotion to it passed over her as if out of the suddenly recalled new look she had surprised in Deb’s quiet face several weeks before. It had remained an inscrutable look because Deb so willed it, but, coming as it had a few days after their father’s gentle, unheralded passing out, it had filled her with a haunting sense of attendant loss, of irreparable change, of a sharp turn into a strange cross-roads.

She stood on the top step and turned about with misty eyes to look south to the line of purpling hills, under the wondrous silvery-blue San Francisco sky,—Twin Peaks in the ascendant,—

sweeping grandly across the horizon only to lose themselves abruptly in the dense mystery of Sutro Forest. How often had she stood there with her father in the evening light watching the panorama of the encircling hills as they turned from glory to glory, he with uplifted silvery head as if in cathedral worship,—how close they had been to him in his silences, she and Deborah——

With a swift swoop down to the present, she shrugged off the gray cloak of sadness and turned to the old, dark oak door, the open sesame and barring sentinel to all the intimacies of her young life, and, after touching the bell-button, began a sprightly tattoo upon the panel.

But before it could be opened, a child's shrill prattle from the street below whirled her about, and, dropping her books, she went helter-skelter down the steps, her arms outstretched.

"Nora, Nora, wait a minute," she besought the dragon-visaged guardian holding the child's hand who only half-turned at her call.

"We haven't a minute——"

"*Will* tiss Gwennie!" declared the little one, standing stock-still in the dragon's hold, and she

flung herself into Gwen's arms as the girl snatched her up and hugged her to her.

"I'm a robber and I stole a kiss," she whispered close. "Jeanie mustn't tell Mother,—it's a secret 'tween you and me."

And she put her down as suddenly as she had seized her, waving kisses, as Jeanie, wrinkling her little nose and patting her tightly closed mouth with a comprehending finger, was summarily pulled on by Jean Wickham's grim, but trusted, servitor.

"Some day I'll steal her," Gwen announced breathlessly, mounting the steps to Deborah awaiting her at the top.

"Kidnapper!" denounced Deb, noting her ardent face with a whimsical smile. "I belong to the Juvenile Protective Association and I'll have you arrested as dangerous. Look where you've dropped those books!"

She picked them up, and Gwen followed her into the house.

## CHAPTER II

### IN THE PRIDE OF HER YOUTH AND BEAUTY

“MARTHA out?” This last from Gwen, closing the front door behind them.

“Uh-m-m,” Deborah assented absently, moving toward the library, scanning a title page as she went.

“That check for a hundred-thousand come today from my Uncle in Brazil?” Gwen called back on her way to her room.

Deb’s faint laugh answered her and Gwen laughed to herself over the mythical relative she had evolved for herself, out of her needs, who some day, some way, was going to make them “live happy ever afterwards.” At that particular moment she had quizzically decided that a windfall of money was all that was wanting to that devoutly desired consummation.

Divesting herself of her outdoor things, she



was back again with Deb, who was still standing by the library table, lost in a book. Gwen, seating herself in one of the shabby leather arm-chairs, watched her intently.

Large she was, this Deborah Heath, deep-bosomed, poised in quietude. Her face was dark, but when the lovely mouth smiled,—as it did presently in answer to an impatient sound from the spirited figure in the deep chair, and showed the pretty arch of white teeth, it was like a flash of light in a dark place.

“What you looking at?” she asked, dropping into the chair near which she was standing and, after another amused glance at the girl, returning to her book.

“Mayn’t the cat look at the queen?” returned the other, bolt upright in her chair, looking reflectively at her.

“Only don’t purr,—I’m busy,” vouchsafed the queen, settling herself comfortably with her book held high.

“Put that down, Deb. Want to know something?”

Deb looked up, closed her book over a retain-



ing finger, and sat attentive. She knew nothing better in life than just to sit attentive to the compelling charm of the beloved face regarding her now with a kindling in the long, dark gray eyes set deep under the fine, straight brows, nothing more wonderful to look at than the proud little head weighted by the mass of softly knotted chestnut hair.

“Shut your mouth, and open your eyes, and I’ll give you something to make you wise.”

Deb did as commanded.

“I’m the one who was kidnapped.”

“So?” Deb was used to her melodramas, her rags and tags of the promiscuous reading in which she had always reveled, and she awaited the dénouement calmly. “Bandits masked or otherwise?”

“Masked.”

“How?”

“As girls.”

“And you think——”

“No. I know.”

“Who?”

“The Eumenides.”

“Needs elucidating.”

“The Furies—*en automobile*.”

“A classic anachronism!”

“No, only classy. Cats, in modernese.” The faint color surged up under the delicate skin.

Deb felt her amused attitude change.

“Who was it, Gwen?”

“Elizabeth Lathrop and Sally Lane.”

“What happened?”

“‘They told me you had been to her,  
And mentioned me to him:  
She gave me a good character,  
But said I could not swim.  
They gave me one, I gave them two—’”

“Now you’re improvising,” interrupted Deb, attempting to stem the rising flood.

“They said, ‘Your face ain’t your fortune, ma’am,’ they said.”

The color mounted darkly into Deborah Heath’s face. She waited, speechless, however, knowing that Gwen must take her own fantastic

way to relate even an insult, as this threatened to prove.

“ They said, ‘ Anyway, what were you doing in that galley? ’ ”

The color beat, beat furiously under Deborah’s eyes, eyes that seemed to veil themselves as if to conceal something, and her lips pressed close against each other.

“ They said, ‘ Orchids may mean orchards, and attentions may mean intentions, and sons may be meaning to, but mothers may be mean, too,—and Wellses is Wellses, and Hammonds Hammondses, but Heaths, dear, Heaths is just plain heathen, and that’s the way the game goes: ‘ Eeny, meeny, miney, mo, catch a nigger by the toe,—o-u-t spells out. You’re out, Gwen Heath! ’ ”

She stopped her breathless gallop to gaze with shining eyes and mutinous mouth at her sister busily seeking to thresh the kernel from all this chaff.

“ Three guesses,” she offered, holding up three fingers.

“ You mean that Lansing Wells is engaged to Miss Hammond? ” said Deb quietly.

“Correct. Awfully disappointed?” Her gray eyes delved into the other’s.

Deb’s lips parted, showing her teeth set. “Disappointed?” she repeated, the word forcing her teeth apart. “I?” and the flame burned steadily under her eyes.

“You are!” cried Gwen triumphantly. “Confess—you counted on my carrying off the prize. Oh, Deborah Heath, Deborah Heath, and you used to be above sordid ambitions!”

The flame died out of Deborah’s face; slightly pale now, she answered her darling. “We mothers,” she said very low, the arrestive smile lighting her features, “we mothers, dearest, *are* ambitious for our daughters, comprehending, better than they, the whole of life. We like to see them well settled.”

“Settled! What a word—what a mid-Victorian speech! Settled to what? Spending money? As if marrying for money meant settling!”

Deborah ignored the modern note. “My dear, you accepted all Lansing Wells’s attentions, didn’t you?”

Gwen turned reflective. "Not all," she murmured softly.

"All I know of. Why shouldn't I infer you cared for him—not his money?"

"I don't know why, but you should have. You knew my position was false in that set, didn't you?"

"Not at all. I thought you were giving more than for value received."

"Shucks, shucks! You dreamed dreams, Deb, and they went out with sentimentality and—and tidies on the backs of horse-hair chairs, you know."

Her playful insouciance finally caught Deborah's attention. "Then, Gwen, you—you are not—disappointed, as you call it?" she ventured wistfully.

"Perhaps you have noticed that the—orchids—stopped coming several weeks ago," Gwen reminded her gently.

"Yes, I know. Did you know—why?"

The flush spread up from the lovely throat to the dainty ear almost hidden under the glinting hair. "Yes, I know why," she answered steadily.

“It was because—for some time—I have showed him—told him—I didn’t want them.”

For some time! Deb did some rapid arithmetic and her heart sank with a sickening thud. “In that case,” she said, getting up, “you couldn’t expect them. And since you evidently don’t care——”

“Care! I don’t give a hoot! And what’s more, I’m glad he’s out of my way.” She sprang up too. “Where are you going?”

“To get supper. Martha’s out and——”

“No, let me.” She pushed her sister back into her chair, laughing as Deborah slid from the arm into the seat. “Bumpity-bumpty—ay!” she sang. “What’s for supper? You know, Deb, when you allowed me to pursue my aimless way at college, you overlooked my one and only talent: a chef, you should have made me, and my children chefs unto the third and fourth glorification of artistic food. What’s for supper, mum?” She stood with dainty arms akimbo and face raised saucily. “Biscuit, I suppose? I could give you an old master and you demand—Hallo! Where did those come from?” She ran to the low



bowl on the table in the window crowded and running over with pale pink and deep red roses. "What gorgeousness! Where's the card?—Oh, of course!" She glanced at it and flipped it into the basket. "Georgie-porgie," she let fall with a roguish grimace, and turned to the door.

"Mr. Leland?" Deb stayed her. "I might have known, by the lavishness."

The girl flashed round on the threshold, her eyes laughing. "Mr. Leland," she mimicked grandiloquently. "He's still your pet, isn't he, Deb? Well, dear, you may have him!" And she was gone.

Deb sat where she had shoved her, in a chaos of thoughts—memories, hopes, fears, resolutions. Tomorrow she would tell her, surely tomorrow.

"Aimless." The laughing, innocent taunt had sunk deep into Deborah's conscience. Unquestionably the fault was hers, banking all her child's future on her irresistible loveliness of personality. It was so indubitable, Deb assured herself fiercely. Just now, there in the doorway—— Ah, what a



baby she had been! Thought slipped into a vista of far, long-passed moments:

The day of her mother's passing and Gwen's coming—anguish lost in ecstasy—when her father, taking her by the hand, had led her to the mite of humanity in the bassinet, and said, very low, "See, my daughter, you will have to be all the mother the baby will ever know." She, Deborah, aged twelve! She had wrung her little devotee's hands hard together in a child's fanaticism of consecration. Mother. The only mother the baby would ever know,—the only baby—Deb strangled that straying thought harshly. Well, and what of the years, the years glorified by Gwen,—her, Deb's, debt to the inopportune gift of accident? What if the wayward little feet had required constant running after, could she forget the passion of joy which had assailed her every time the radiant willful baby face flashed around to her with, "Dwennie bad dir!" Whip her? Not Deb! What if Gwen's education, Gwen's social obligations, Gwen's pretty clothes, their traveling in Europe with their father during his sabbatical year, had been an economical battle

which only Deb had fought,—had they not been a joy as well?

A strange, creeping sense of what her responsibility had been stole over her as she remembered how the child and growing girl had always peered into her eyes, seeking her approval or disapproval, the very roots of her opinions. Impressionable as Gwen had always been, had she, Deb, had any right to let the questing eyes take their changing lights and darkneses from her, Deb's, very soul? Had she guarded her treasure too jealously, fashioning her indeed into her mere reflection, the reflection of the girl Deborah Heath might have been had she had no Gwen to live vicariously for her? No, no, close as they had always been, Deb knew the individuality that had escaped from her tutelage, knew there was the unknown quantity, the personal equation, with which, in the final count, she would always have to reckon.

What had been the outcome of her own materialism born of Gwen's adventure into the halls of the potentates? The girl had held Lansing Wells in the palm of her narrow, exquisite hand, and suddenly, with incredible unconcern, had let

him, the acme of dazzling material and social eminence, slip from her nonchalant power, because——

She shivered. Upon the heels of her worldly commentary had rushed the great shadow separating her, hurling her, as it were, into space, out of communion with the center of her universe.

Austin Dane.

Gwen knew of her opposition—and Gwen ignored it.

The bitterness of the one who no longer counts, burned deeply. She fixed the frowning eye of her mind upon the man.

He loomed big, dominant, in his Norse-like appearance and consciousness of power. He, the successful playwright,—whose drama, *High Lights*, was still holding the metropolitan boards and the skeptic enthusiasm of the intellectual public,—had, while on a tour of the world, come to her father with a question upon the Bacchic dance, and a letter of personal introduction from Professor Heath's own distinguished Boston publisher and editor. Deb would never forget that night. Her father had received him with stately

graciousness which had soon thawed into delighted warmth under the mental spell of the stranger, while Deb, in the shadow of the lamp, had felt herself irresistibly fitting the Englishman to his play,—strong, frank, free to libertinism. Unconscious at first, the antagonism of her puritanic virginity had grown insidiously, until she had felt herself rearing a wall against his fascination, stern and implacable.

And, suddenly, Gwen in the doorway, just returned from a dinner at Mabel Goddard's. And the man on his feet, and the slender girl in filmy white coming forward in slow questioning.

Into Deb's consciousness had rushed with dizzying force a strange recognition of impact—soul, senses, sex—what?—And she had thrown up more fortifications.

“Mr. Dane, Gwen,” she had introduced in a hard, dry formalism. “Mr. Austin Dane. My sister, Mr. Dane.”

And Gwen, the light of delight in her mobile face, her quick hand outstretched, “Austin Dane of *Hight Lights?*”

“You know me?” he had asked as their hands

touched fleetingly, and Deb had felt all her instincts fighting against the subtle change in the man's voice and attitude, against a certain wistfulness in Gwen's, "A long-distance knowledge only."

He had left abruptly a few minutes later, only to come again, unannounced, the next afternoon, asking for Gwen.

So the man had lingered on in the far distant, western city. And Deb's efforts to keep them apart had fallen puny and futile against the tide of a stronger instinct. There were walks, always walks, it seemed to Deborah, mornings, afternoons, nights, and Gwen returning from them—glowing as she had never glowed before, with a nameless self-assurance that brooked no interference. Deb recalled the night when they had returned from a performance of *Antigone* at the Greek Theater at Berkeley, where they had all been spellbound under the magic of the night, the place, the drama,—the classic harmony and grandeur of the play with its surroundings. But, at the close, Deb and her father had been separated from the other two on the campus and

taken an earlier return boat, and Deb, waiting up anxiously for the tardy one, had been confronted by a far-away glory on her face and brow that had sent her irritability recoiling on her own heart with a grip of unaccountable, premonitory fear, and the few admonitory words she had purposed saying had died on her lips.

And two mornings later they had found their father asleep there in his chair, his silvery head against the old leather cushion, his face smiling over his soul's last great flight,—and the man, Austin Dane, unobtrusive, but always there, had, with his quiet, helpful sympathy, not of word, but of act, beaten his way through some of the outworks of the enemy.

Now, however, she looked with set mouth and denying eyes around the old familiar room, mellow with transfigured memories, beautiful with its careful refinement rather of comfort than of luxury, remembering with a sudden sense of imminent danger that Lansing Wells was "out of the way." It came like a wireless S.O.S. in the night.

"I must tell her tomorrow," concluded Debo-



rah to herself with a miserable accession of cowardly hesitancy as, across her dark abstractions, a light, girlish voice called out:

“Bread-and-butter!—come to supper!”

Deborah, rising and going to pick up the bowl of roses, stood a moment gazing through the window toward the hills where a ghostly line of vaporous white, like a wisp of tulle, was creeping across their wooded bases. “It will be foggy tonight,” she thought, and went into the dining-room.

Gwen had pulled up the blinds, letting the lingering, rosy light smile upon the dainty table. The warm smell of crusty biscuits fresh from the oven greeted Deb’s nostrils as she set the roses in the center, and took her place at the head. Outside, nodding roses smiled in at them, too, from the luxuriant old garden as if blessing a familiar scene.

For some time, save for a detached word now and then, the sisters ate in silence, reaction, after her outburst in the library, having settled upon Gwen, as well. It was not an unusual thing for these two to sit together in silence for long



stretches of time, but presently a low chuckling from the girl opposite drew Deb's attention, and she looked toward her questioningly.

"Well?" she prompted, leisurely eating asparagus.

Gwen, her cheek sunk in the palm of her hand, idly trailing a stalk through the sauce on her plate, continued to chortle a moment before answering. Then, her eyes bent upon the golden line she was tracing, she laughed out, "Did it ever occur to you,—the biscuits, you know, and Lansing Wells's disaffection now,—that you and I might go on, and on, and on, this way, day after day and year after year, till the end of our lives, two lone old spinster ladies together,—like characters out of one of Mary Wilkins's novels?"

"Never," returned Deb composedly.

"No?" pursued the other in meek wonderment. "Prithee, why not?"

"Manifest destiny," returned Deborah dryly, rising and picking up the plates. "Don't be absurd, Gwen."

"You conceited old hen!" Gwen called after her as she disappeared into the pantry, and, in

maiden meditation, she let her chin sink into both her encircling hands.

But at that instant the telephone bell rang from the hall and she sprang up to answer it. Deb, returning with a bowl of strawberries, heard the following:

“West 2100?” Followed an almost imperceptible pause, and then, with a slow, rich brogue, “Shure!”

“Miss Gwin? No, sorr, she’s out this avenin’. Anny missage?”

“Shure, I’ll remimber, Misther Layland.”

“Misther Garge Layland. L-e-y-l-a-n-d. Yiss, sorr, that’s phwhat I’m sayin’—Layland. No, I won’t forgit. At onct in the marnin’. Good-by.”

The receiver was banged into position and Gwen came back grinning.

“D’you know who that was?” she laughed, slipping into her seat and taking her strawberries from Deb.

“I heard you. You deserve a spanking.”

“Tut—tut. It’s the greatest fun! That’s the second time this week,—I might have known he

would follow his flowers. Don't I do it well?"

"Well! I wish you would stop playing with that man. You know he isn't playing."

"Well, then, he should be," Gwen declared roundly, taking the cup of coffee Deb passed her. "It isn't my fault if he's so stupid he can't take a hint."

"He is not stupid."

"He is."

"You know better. Mabel Goddard——"

"Oh, let her keep her old cousin. You and she make me tired with your matchmaking. You know I won't——"

"Nobody is matchmaking. But I like George Leland. I like his simple, direct, young manhood—strong and sound and clean, as though he were kept so by something outside himself. He is in a class by himself! What can you find against him?"

"Deborah dear, is it possible you don't know?" She spoke in grave wonderment.

"I certainly do not. What on earth are you talking about?"

"Dear, have you never felt, have you never

foreseen, that, if it should ever occur to him to quote, he would quote—Longfellow?"

Deborah received her solemn mockery with a glance of crushing scorn.

"Woman!" thundered the girlish voice irrepressibly. "Speak! Have you not seen—have you not heard?"

"You're too absurd to answer."

"Why, she's really and truly violent over it!"

"I'm really and truly disgusted with your measure of a man. Mere book-culture doesn't make a man,—mere book-culture is egoistic sterility, mere mental dry rot."

"Hear, hear!"

"If it doesn't inform your heart, if it doesn't move you to go out and give it to those who have never had the chance to taste the mental luxuries upon which you have gorged, if you don't use it, as Jane Addams says, 'To feed the mind of the worker, to lift it above the monotony of his task, and to connect it with the larger world outside of his surroundings——'"

"Who's quoting now?" broke in Gwen slyly. "And whom are you really attacking? Me?"

Who? We were speaking of George Leland, weren't we?"

"Exactly," conceded Deb, subsiding lamely.

"And I suggested that he and I never meet,—that we don't speak the same mental language, and so——"

"Did it ever occur to you to interpret the clean young strength of him, the glowing light behind his luminous eyes, the——"

"Didn't I just do it?" cried the girl, searching among the roses and, finding some loose buds, pelting her sister with them. "Take that, you militant partisan, you! What did my 'Long-fellow' mean, stupid? Don't you see you've been talking in a circle? Take that for your pains, and——"

The rain of roses ceased abruptly as the tinkle of the telephone sounded again, and Gwen danced into the hall, aiming her last rose at Deb's head, in passing.

Deb, sitting straight and still, heard this, too, heard, as well, the faint, quickly controlled tremble in the girl's voice at first, followed by the full-throated softness:

“ Yes, this is West 2100.”

“ Yes. It’s me.”

“ Yes, you always do recognize it.”

“ Yes, I knew—yours.”

“ Is it? I thought it was foggy this evening.”

“ Oh, has it cleared? ”

“ That sounds alluring.”

“ I’d love to.”

“ Yes. But—er—wait a minute—I’ll ask my sister.”

Deb, with contracted heart, did not need the starry look on the face in the doorway to enlighten her.

“ Mr. Dane wants me to go for a walk with him. Martha’ll be home in a few minutes, won’t she? ” Her voice lilted. “ Do you care, Deb? He has something to tell me—to ask me—about his play. May I, Deb? ” She was quite unconscious of the confession her face was making.

Deborah, picking up the fallen roses, repeated coldly, “ A walk? ”

“ Why, yes, a walk. For heaven’s sake, Deb, please remember he is waiting. I really don’t know why I ask you! ” She veered indignantly



about from her sister's frigid stare, and the next instant Deborah heard her agreeing to his coming.

With set features she stood waiting for the girl to return, suddenly resolved to express her doubts of the stranger who had found favor in her young, romantic imagination. Surely their father had not known, nor did they know, this man. Had she not questioned Gwen? A genius? Perhaps. But the man—his family, his past——? Trivial, lightning-quick protests flashed through her: Why need he carry his hat in his hand instead of on his head as other men are wont to do on the street? How dared he come that second day asking Gwen for a walk—Gwen with whom he had scarcely exchanged three words, flouting all deference and convention! And his talk—his "immodest" phraseology,—sincerity, he called it,—Deb shuddered,—his insidious smile at everything in the category of The Established. He was not according to type, the type accepted by the majority, therefore the right type, contended Deborah Heath intolerantly, drawing her moral skirts narrowly about her, prepared to express



herself unequivocally, inopportunately perhaps, but of necessity, to her infatuated young sister.

But Gwen, humming the latest, maddest rag-time, danced on to the fortress of her own room. Deb heard her turn the key in the lock. It was an unwritten law in the Heath family that the privacy demanded by a locked door must never be disturbed.

## CHAPTER III

### HER SOUL'S ADVENTURE

So it was Deborah who answered Dane's ring.

He flung his soft hat on to the hall settee as she, greeting him, drew back from his bigness as she might have from his canine namesake, and followed her into the softly lighted library.

"I've been standing on the doorstep listening to your music," he said characteristically, without salutation of any description. "What were you playing,—Brahms, I think? And then *Butterfly*?"

"I don't know. Just hodge-podge, probably."

He smiled upon her, showing two rows of perfect, white teeth, lightly set together in exact meeting, a smile of indulgent amusement.

"Neo-impressionism—Futurism?" he suggested. Deb saw the playful challenge behind the word, and, as usual, pitted herself against the anticipated impersonalities which she had come

to look upon as a deliberate buffer against any inadvertent personal disclosure.

“I hope not,” she smiled back from the tips of her lips. “I hate the cult. I’m too deadly earnest, I suppose, to admire such sheer affectation—just dibs and dabs at things, without direction.”

Dane quelled the laugh in his mind, thrusting back the unruly lock of tawny hair which had a trick of tumbling over his brow and which Deb considered another affectation. “But that’s life, isn’t it?” he deferred to her. “Broken lines—suggestive of purpose—maimed half the time, half the time left dangling—to be interpreted according to our individual light—or interests?”

Deb set her lips. “No,” she replied. “That is not like life. Not like sincere life. You are speaking of fads and whims. That isn’t real life—life among our fellows—life with its goals.”

“Always the capital letter,” he bantered.

“Yes, always the capital letter,” she returned him steadily.

He bent his head. "You humble me," he said, and his swift frankness brought a flush of contrition to Deb's brow.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked.  
"Gwen——"

But he had turned his face from her toward the door, listening.

"Atalanta," he half-spoke, half-smiled. A light, quick footfall was approaching, and Deb, disturbedly, saw the whole man at attention.

Gwen came in, in radiance, despite the soft black cloud of her gown.

He met her with a quick stride, taking her coat from her.

"Ready?" he greeted, but their eyes had had their meeting.

"All but my gloves," she answered, and prepared to draw them on.

He took them from her quickly, stuffing them into his pocket.

"What do you want those for?" he asked, and held her coat for her slender shoulders.

Deb noticed the masterfulness and tapped the

table with restive fingers. "Don't be long," she admonished with curt intention, following them to the door.

The sweet night air, rife with adventure, stole in to her for a moment before she closed it out, and them with it.

Gwen's light laugh punctuated the click of the latch. "Deb's way," she said, flitting beside him down the long flight of worn steps. "One's always on schedule with her."

"Ah, schedule," he returned, and for a second a frowning sense of loyalty roused her against him. Was he scoffing at Deb? But the next instant he was saying simply, slightly raising his hat, "It has been my privilege to know a fine woman—though a consistent one!—knowing Deborah Heath," and with a thrill of joy over his laughing recognition, Gwen wished that he could have said as much of her.

They took the hills, walking silent, the girl fleet as a nymph, the man covering the ground with long, easy strides. A light wind struck them in the face, frolicking with tendrils of Gwen's hair, with the hem of her clinging skirt.

The air was clean and keen, after the lifted fog. Stars danced in a pale young sky.

Now, as always, Gwen was wholly alone with him, detached from all others, responsible to nothing. Now, as it had always been when with him, she came into her own, individuality came from under cover, she walked in her own womanhood, proud and free. Here Gwen Heath's story was all-sufficing, here she was the wonderful protagonist—he the other. Nevermore could she be without significance, knowing this,—knowing this, she held the knowledge of all time within herself, and could face the world fairly, on any terms. Thus, in elemental fearlessness, under the stars, over the heights, went Gwen, in paradise with her mate, for, wherever two lovers wander together, there is the Garden of Eden.

As often before, they spoke no word, neither did they pause, but communion was absolute between them. They reached the Presidio, the Reservation grounds, and the faint soughing in high boughs went with them. They walked through dim avenues of eucalyptus, tall, austere, druidical, and Gwen, fantastically, felt a sudden



stillness of heart, as though she were running the gauntlet of strange, grim judges. But she knew no fear—the eyes in her heart looked out at them in joyful faith and self-assurance. And, as if in intuitive answer, the man beside her put out his hand and, his fingers closing about her small wrist, slipped down and, hand in hand, they moved on, all-sufficient. Selflessness took her. “Anything, dear,” her silent accord seemed to be saying. “Anywhere. ‘Whither thou goest, I shall go,’”—the eternal womanly.

Then they came to the open and stood above the Gate that leads to the Sea, the Infinite of Waters. He drew her arm within his and they stood looking out. Below them leaped the breakers running dim and white to dash themselves in futile, ghostly foam against the rock-bound shore. Opposite, a line of shadowy mountains encircled the cove, girdling the Gate in divine protection, guarding its misty beauty with mystery. The waves beat ceaselessly against the shore, systole, diastole, like a heart.

His arm slipped from hers, he took her face between his hands, bending worshipingly to its



purity. "Gwen," he whispered, and he held her.

The waves beat ceaselessly, systole, diastole, like a monstrous heart.

She drew from him, turned from his crushing arms, from his passionate kisses, his inarticulate whispers, and hid her face in her hands. But within the chaos of her swaying senses, a still voice was repeating over and over, as if in assurance, as if for all time, "This is my husband," quite simply, like a child at prayer.

But when, laughing reproachfully, he sought to draw her back, she broke away, saying capriciously, "Let's go on," and drew him with her.

They walked over endless hills and stretches, for mere caprice, it seemed to Dane, and, as she would have no speech, he sang to her, in a tender, teasing undertone, a garbled medley of sentimental old love songs mixed grotesquely with dramatic snatches of Wagner and Strauss. Gwen never heard the least of those strains in later years, without a memory which leaped to the knowledge that the human soul may glimpse heights undreamed of in the smooth, sweet se-

curity of average daily existence. But presently, without prelude or preface, he began to murmur, more to himself than to her, *Their Last Ride Together*, but as his brooding voice chanted,

“What if the world should end tonight?”

she stopped him peremptorily. “I won’t listen,” she said, her hands to her ears. “Besides—here we are!”

“Where?” he asked in bewilderment.

They were standing on a high, rocky cliff. Below them the diapason of thunderous waves boomed and broke and echoed and boomed again in endless titanic music.

“Land’s End,” she answered with a laugh, and moved toward the edge.

“Land’s End?” he echoed, following her, and seizing her words as part of her mood,—was she not a sprite, the very spirit of the madness clashing through sea, and sky, and air, into their very senses? “Land’s End!” he repeated. “Then here our freedom begins.”

“No, no,” she hurriedly protested against she knew not what. “That’s the name of the spot, truly. Just a little way down——”

“Take care—you’ll fall!” His arm went around her quickly as they picked their way down the shelving rocks.

“I know the way in the dark,” she laughed again, the wild, salt air filling their nostrils, beating around them in their precipitous descent. “Now.” She stood on a ledge, free of him for a second, the cutting wind whipping her garments tight about her slight, almost boyish figure, poised in mutinous daring. Then she stepped over and seated herself upon a boulder and leaned her back against the cliff, and he, springing down, threw himself beside her, and drew her face down to his.

They were alone with the elements—booming sea, and scurrying, whimpering winds, and stars palpitating through thin, drifting veils of fog. And Gwen Heath in sudden strange abandonment, raising her drooping head, drew him up to her, holding him close for one deathless moment. Then, as passionately, she thrust him from her,

pressing her slenderness against the wall of rock behind her, and turned her face away.

Dane let her have her way.

Presently she turned toward him, clasping her hands upon her knee in signal of desistance. "I thought," she explained with burning, girlish self-consciousness, "that, knowing how I loved this place, you'd know me better—know my whys and wherefores better—here. That's why I came."

"I couldn't know you better, Gwen."

"I wonder!"

"You know, Gwen."

"What do I know?"

"Why, I know you absolutely. How it is with me—between you and me."

"Say it simply—once."

"That we love each other."

"That Holy Word, Austin."

"Say it, Gwen."

"I love you. You can never know how I love you, Austin."

"Say after me, Amen."

"Amen, and amen, and amen."

The running chords of the sea took up the refrain.

"It's like a marriage,—eternal, Austin."

"Eternal, child."

"*Ad infinitum.*"

"So, little classic."

"Even the grave can't write *Finis*. I know that now. Do you remember Browning's *Prospice*?"

"I only remember you."

"I was thinking aloud. He was such a lover, too."

"Though a realist."

"Like you, Austin."

"Well?" he clasped his arms behind his head and turned his uplifted face toward her. Accustomed now to the dark, she could even discern the expression on its strong lineaments. He seemed to be waiting.

"About the Play?" she ventured. "Have you finished it?"

He hesitated a moment. "You have just finished it for me," he said almost roughly.

Startled at the tone, she searched his face. "I?" she murmured.

“ Who else could ? ”

“ But she—Lola——”

“ You are Lola.”

“ And she—— ? ”

“ Goes with him.”

“ I knew it, I knew it ! ” She clapped her hands ecstatically.

“ There was no faltering.”

“ How could there be ? ” Her voice was lifted proudly.

“ She left her father and mother, and followed him.”

“ Father and mother ? But she had none.”

“ Conventions, traditions, truisms—the soul’s provincialisms. Was she not born of these ? She flung free of them—became Herself. In one moment—triumphant.”

“ Triumphant. The inspiration of that word, Austin ! Yet why marvel ? If great faith can move mountains, why not the little hillocks round the summit of a woman’s great love ? ”

“ Ah, faith, my love, my darling ! ”

“ Surely, dearest. Love includes faith.” She spoke quietly, with the tranquillity of finality.



How peacefully the booming sea sounded now, deep, tender, how little seemed its turmoil in view of eternity. She sat still, in sphinxian silence.

He turned more squarely toward her, putting his hand over her two clasped so tightly upon her knee. "Then you will come with me, Gwen?"

"To the ends of the earth. Did you doubt it, dear?" She spoke gently, as a mother to her child.

His hand over hers pressed hard. "In spite of convention, tradition, public opinion—the whole grinning brood of philistine thought—the tyrants of slavish souls?"

She laughed merrily. "Still harping on your Play! Happily we don't have to struggle with that. Unless," she laughed adoringly, drawing her hands from under his hold and twining her fingers about his, "unless you don't believe in marriage, like unreal people in books. Oh, I know,—you, and G. B. S., and Galsworthy, and Wells,—all your tribe with your theories that you wouldn't dream of putting into practice. All that



'liberty' you hint at or talk about so openly means libertinism in reality, as you know very well,—all that 'individualism' you acclaim so nobly—on paper!—means temperamental irresponsibility, doesn't it, dear? Novels is novels, but you and me is you and me, aren't we?—part of the dear world. I know, that though you may write upside down, you live straight, and you could never really think that such a simple thing as the sanction of our dear world could spoil our sanctuary, or that a pretty, filmy, wedding veil even, could stand between us and happiness." She laughed again in adoration, bending slightly nearer to him.

For several seconds he did not stir.

Then the trenchant voice made answer.

"But I cannot marry you, Gwen."

The elements boomed and echoed in salvo. Echoes, and more echoes, crazily, meaninglessly, dying finally into nothing.

Then a frightened, groping sound. "You——"

"I have a wife and child in London."

The sea thundered it to her, the hills reverberated it, again, and again, and again.

“But that is nothing—can have nothing to do with our love. I——”

“I do—not—understand you.” Her wail pierced the moan of the sea.

“Hush, Gwen, hush, sweet,” his gripping hand almost broke hers. “There is nothing more to understand, now that it has come to this between us. My boy is ill, and I must leave post-haste tomorrow. That is why I told you tonight. I thought perhaps,—you would not make me wait. Answer me, Gwen, answer.”

Imps held her. Imps beating the air about her, beating into her brain, invading, burning, pillaging her maidenhood with fire and sword.

Then, out of the roots of her, voiceless, came the cry:

Deb! Deb! Deb!

She hurled away from him, springing like a wild thing to her feet, dragging him up with her.

“Stand away,” she commanded hoarsely. “You deceived me—I don’t know you—let me pass.”

She strained against the rocks, her foot groping upward. He caught her arm.

“You’re mad, Gwen. Just one minute, darling. You—you who could rejoice with Lola, you, triumphant! Gwen, Gwen, don’t judge——”

“Let go!” she cried fiercely, tearing at his iron clasp. “You insult me—you defile me. Let go, or—I’ll *kill* you!”

She wrenched herself free with a strength born of frenzy, and fled up the rocky steep, a soul possessed.

The sea boomed in eternal struggle. The little salt winds whimpered like a beaten child.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINIS

AN hour later Deborah opened the door for her.

The girl turned a white, strained smile upon her and walked past her, straight, and stark, and silent, to her room.

Deb leaned against the wall, one hand upon the great bronze knob of the front door—holding out the world.

In the distance something snapped, and a grating sound followed.

It was Gwen locking her door between them.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CROSS ROADS

DEBORAH said, "I have something to tell you, Gwen."

She chose this mode of announcement deliberately. Something had to be done to startle the girl from her piteous abstraction. It was not a listless abstraction, not a sinking down as under a heavy blow, rather she seemed to be driving herself from it, to be tearing from it with all her might as from the hold of a vampire, startling Deb with an abrupt, "What was I going to do, Deb?" Or, "What were you saying?" Or, "Let me do it." Or, "I'm going—let me go," spasmodic pretexts to keep herself from herself in a white heat of determination.

This had gone on for three days, Deb seeing it all, knowing nothing save the recollection of that deathly smile she had encountered that night in the hall. Gwen had come out of her room

the next morning at her usual time, with sunken, swollen eyes, to be sure, but only Deborah knew that a terrible silence lay behind her ordinary comings and goings and all her fevered activities. She knew that a message had been brought to her early that morning, that the boy had waited for the answer for an unconscionable time, and when, a moment after his departure, Deb had come inadvertently upon her, she had seen that her face was stricken as with death. But her silence was peremptory, repelling all questioning.

Nevertheless, she had answered Lansing Wells's announcement of his engagement over the telephone with a Spartan nonchalance, almost with gayety, the voice masking what the face could not hide. She had kept an appointment at the Old People's Home to read to blind old Granny Dowd, and had kept that old lady in a gale of merriment with her usual drolling. The second day she had gone on a promised shopping expedition into Chinatown with Mabel Goddard and had had tea at the St. Francis, and only the latter's alert watchfulness for a sign of constraint over Lansing Wells's engagement, had discovered

an intangible blight on the girl's fair radiance which, she had to acknowledge to her husband later, was so vague she *may* have imagined it.

Judge Harrison had come in that evening with three or four of his brood of strapping boys and girls, all tennis or golf enthusiasts and great chums and admirers of Gwen, and while she had smiled and answered responsively to all their glad talk of outdoors, Deb had seen that the look of crucifixion had never once died out of her darkened eyes.

Yet, sitting there in the mellow lamplight, the shadows resting in the gentle comfort of the harmonious old room, touching it with an abiding tranquillity, Deborah was far from divining what was passing with persistent inexorability in and out of the brain of the slim, white figure sitting moveless in the deep chair, the slender feet crossed before her, one elbow on the chair-arm, her head sunk in her hand, her eyes plunged into the open book which she held upon her knee. But she knew that the shadow Austin Dane had cast between them had become impenetrable substance.



For almost an hour she had sat so, and she had not turned a page.

But she was reading,—reading with unseeing eyes the message which had seared itself into her life:

“ You are mine. Nothing you can do or say can take you from me. You gave yourself freely—I intend to hold you. Don’t mistake yourself, Gwen,—you are not of the stuff that would allow itself to become the victim of a smug virtue that would sacrifice your simple purity in the name of its relentless, licensed immorality masquerading in a uniform of morality made to fit the measure of the masses. You are not the masses—one does not *live en masse*! Be true to your individual, broader vision—and to the truth of our absolute faith in each other. Only you can annihilate that. Do we need a verbal oath to bind us? What is such an oath but a key designed to lock one in? Are we children that we need such surveillance? There are many doors. I entered one seven years ago for ‘ the passing passion of a lax temperament,’ as you moralists phrase it. And the State and the Church, in all solemnity,

looked upon it and called it good, and being told that I wished to stay, locked me in. Do you suppose that for one moment *I* did not know upon what common, shifting, human heritage I had entered in? Do you think that for one moment I gave it the ineffable name of that which binds us, my mate, my inspiration, my treasure beyond price——!

“But then came the child. Gwen, down through your girl’s heart, I reach to the woman in you:—he is a weakling, a broken flower. Do you count me any the less your lover when I tell you that *because* of his maimed life, I hold him immeasurably dearer than if he did not need me,—that *she* holds me legally bound through thought of him,—that for his sake alone I am rushing across the continent today?

“You accuse me of having deceived you. In the first sweet flush of the beginning, did I know to what limits we were tending? And, later, weighing the consciousness of all your surrounding influences and traditions with my own demands, I decided to wait until I had probed to your deeper potentialities. And, in the issue, I

know I have not over-estimated you. The shock of my announcement to those same surrounding influences and traditions which withheld me in the beginning, is past. Look out now with your own quiet, brave eyes. Take the one austere, noble step, and, beautifully and simply true, step out to me.

“ I will come for you—as you choose—or will meet you at the ferry in time for the eleven o’clock train. The boy will wait for your answer.

“ Forever yours,

“ AUSTIN DANE.”

And then her passionless answer :

“ I have no love, I have no faith. But perhaps, that’s a lie.

“ But this is true: I am not brave, I am not true,—I cannot come.

“ I am only

“ GWEN HEATH.”

Over and over, strophe and antistrophe, like a Greek chorus :

“ Beautifully and simply true—step out to me——”

And then, her answer. After her long hour of madness, what an answer! What——

“ I have something to tell you, Gwen.”

Promptly, cunningly, Gwen wheeled to attention.

“ Oh, have you? What? ” Dimly she knew that away back in another life, she had awaited this moment. But, frivolously, as if goaded to a befuddling unconcern, she laughed.

“ Awfully bromidic, isn't it? ”

“ What? ” Deb raised her eyes from her embroidering, steadily regarding her.

“ That. Your thread going in and out without stopping. Seems as if you could go on, and on, and on, till kingdom come. Doesn't it feel tired? ”

“ What? ”

“ Your arm.”

“ Why should it? ”

“ Just because. The stupid monotony of it.”

“ That's why it doesn't.”

“ Heavens, what a logic! What did you do downtown all day? ”

“ I wasn't downtown all day.” Deb ran her

needle through her work, laid it with a gesture of finality in her lap, faced the girl squarely.

Gwen met her eyes with dulled, yet dawning, curiosity. "May one be permitted to inquire whither away so secretly?"

"I was at work."

"Slumming?"

"We haven't any slums, you know."

"Provincial we. What then?"

"But we have plenty of poverty and misery, and my work is there."

"You mean you've been up at the Settlement with Grace?" Grace Partridge, Deb's intimate friend, was head-worker at the North Beach Settlement of which Deb was a valued non-resident assistant.

"No, I can't afford to work for Grace now, Gwen. I have taken a position with the Investigating Board of the Associated Charities at seventy-five dollars a month."

She who thought she had done with life, felt life bump up against her with malicious force. And, for the first time, through jaundiced eyes, she seemed to see it in reality, in all its inherent

ugliness, and the spirit of its ugliness communicated itself throughout her being, finding outlet finally through her voice.

“What are you saying?”

Deb shivered. The voice, the look, were the first inkling she had had of the changeling who faced her. Her heart sank with foreboding but she struggled to maintain the old relationship, and smiled winningly. “You see, dear, what father left is merely nominal,—not enough for our daily bread, to say nothing of butter or jam,—through an unwise investment of his—in friendship.”

“And you are earning your living?”

“Trying to,” said Deb, striving to ignore the unrecognizable revelation before her.

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“I thought it better to wait till I had everything arranged and well started.” She met the harsh, categorical hold-up with grief-stricken bravery.

“What is there?”

“What do you mean?”

“What did he leave?”

She, Gwen, could speak thus of the father she



had worshiped! Deb's face set sternly. "Hush. Don't use that tone. You have no justification. Whatever is, is inevitable, and not to be judged by you."

"Oh, fudge!" the girl retorted shortly. "Why isn't it to be judged by me? Not having been insured against catastrophe with a paying profession, it behooves me to know just where I stand—or, rather, fall, doesn't it? Would you mind enlightening me?" She ended in suave irony.

"It is quickly told," Deborah answered in blunt reproof. "There are a few loose hundreds which I have saved up. The life-insurance money will bear interest amounting to thirty-five dollars a month. Then there is the house——"

The girl jumped to her feet, straight as a dart, facing her sister. "You wouldn't dare——" she began fiercely.

"To sell it? To let it? Never, dear, while my strength endures—unless you think it best." She let her gaze enfold the girl with that unswerving assurance which affects quivering emotion like a prop.



Gwen, standing, did not turn her head, but Deborah, reading the look in her eyes, knew she was envisaging the whole room in detail, the low book-cases upon which one might lean as upon a friend's shoulder with their old familiar books, the mellow prints on the mellow walls—the sun-steeped Bacchus of Leonardo over the mantel—the worn, storied chairs, the piano in the corner, the deep, cozy sofa,—the ghostly memories filling and making the place immortal for them—making it sanctuary,—Gwen not so much changed but this loved thing was part of her, was the bridge across which Deb might reach out and rescue her old self.

“No,” she went on cheerfully, “all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't drag it from us, could they? And, you see, it won't be necessary——”

“What about Martha?” The staccato voice threw her back, shattered the bridge she had conjured between them.

She answered to the point, as the intolerant voice commanded. “She has been with us for twenty-five years—she was here before you came.

She begs not to be turned out of her only home."

There was a brief pause.

"And the wages?"

Icy-cold now as her interlocutor, though for different reasons, Deb answered, "She says she wants no wages—that she has saved enough through all these years for her few needs. I told her we could afford only fifteen dollars a month. We finally compromised—we to divide the housework with her. We will save that much on the washing."

"Washing? What washing? People in our circumstances do their own washing."

A faint laugh escaped Deb—the drastic conclusion was so characteristic of headlong youth, so absurd in the face of the beautiful, pampered young thing proclaiming it. "Not necessarily," she returned lightly, "if one knows how to manage. Though we may not be able to afford cakes and ale, we won't have to eat dry bread. No need for melodrama. With the thirty-five dollars insurance money, rent free,—taxes and fire-insurance considered,—and what I bring in, we ought to get along nicely."

She spoke quietly, looking steadily into the eyes glooming from the pale, graven face. A sound came, very like a sob, but the girl did not seem to have stirred. Still, upon that slight suspicion of softening, Deb leaned nearer, her whole attitude a silent yearning to draw the rigid figure to her. "Beggars can't be choosers, darling," she added, smiling in playful tenderness.

A shrill laugh greeted her words, startling her roughly. "Thru for you, Deborah Hathe," cried the girl wildly in a painful travesty of her usual merry manner. "And phwhat's it ye've chosen for this beggar—which rock-pile for her lily-white hands?"

Deb answered hurriedly, with an attempt at a smile. "No rock-pile for you, Gwen. Why should there be? There'll be loads for both of us, and I shall love my work, dear."

The girl stared into her glowing face, a sneer slowly distorting her own. "Indeed?" she drawled imperiously. "Don't you think you are taking a great deal upon yourself to assume that?"

Deb was quickly on her feet and moving with

outstretched hands of love toward the combatting figure, but Gwen, retreating at her approach, found her chair, drew back into its depths, and put out an arresting hand. Deb, repulsed, stood looking down at her.

“Being neither crippled nor imbecile,” Gwen continued in a deliberately level tone, “I desire to be treated with accordingly. What is the job you have decided on for me?”

“I have told you that I have decided on nothing for you.”

“Oh, yes, you have. Seeing that the ‘manifest destiny,’ to which you played such excellent hand-maiden, has gone glimmering, it is quite inevitable that your energetic executive propensity has not lit upon some other accessible, refined, unskilled form of labor for this refined, unskilled human dynamo, long before this. I am all attention.”

Deborah’s only answer was the stern searching of her eyes.

“No?” the other continued caustically. “Why, I have a much better opinion of my abilities than that. To begin with the nearest: think

what a good cook I am! Oh, I don't mean to be a 'cook-lady' for the altogether—nothing so heroic for me. But the dainties,—the entrées, desserts,—not a bad idea to provide people with their deserts—one gets them so seldom, it would be almost altruistic." Fairly launched now, she sailed on, ignoring the rebuking form before her, gazing beyond her with dilated eyes. "Or, how about playing secretary to some suddenly-elevated lady whose culture—I think the much-abused word is culture, isn't it?—whose culture couldn't stand the sudden high social altitudes and is still in reduced circumstances? You know I write a stylish hand and have collected an incredible job-lot of odds and ends of useful information, fanciful and otherwise. Or, come to think of it,—books. I surely ought to be able to do something with books, having such a wide bowing acquaintance with so many. Quite like royalty when I go into a library—hat off at every turn. Why, to be sure, there's the Pub!"

She waited in bitter challenge for Deb's denouncing echo, but no echo came.

"The Pub, may it please you to know," she

went on with rapt expression, "is the sporting name for the Free Public Library. One passes a civil-service examination, and then one passes in—forever. At least that's the way it happened to the girl around the corner. I can see her at it from my bedroom window. Every morning, just as the clock strikes eight, she opens her front door and comes out and goes down the steps. Rain or shine, in sickness or in health, every day in the week, every week in the month, every month in the year, every year in her life, till youth—I mean till death shall them part. Sounds like a marriage ceremony, doesn't it?"

With a step, Deb was beside her, her hands on her shoulders, her face convulsed with grief. "Gwen," she murmured hoarsely, bending down to her, "Gwen, don't act like that—don't take it like that! Poverty's nothing—it's only what you do with it—what you let it do to you—that counts. You——"

But Gwen flung her off. "Bosh!" she flashed. "This isn't Sunday-school, this is the everyday dem'd grind of things,—this is reality with the halo off. Don't be flowery, Deborah."



Then Deb saw the hideous distortion which had befallen her treasure, and she fell upon her knees. She wound her arms tight about the fighting figure and held her close with desperate strength. She laid her dark head upon the golden one, drew the defiant face to hers, "poored" its deathly loveliness, smoothed the wonderful hair, patted the slender "lily hands," calling her all the little old endearing names welling madly from the depths of her distraught love. "Hush, my darling, hush. Old Debbins is here. Old Debbins is always here. Tell it all to Deb, precious. Deb's little world, Deb's little sunbeam!" She could hear the sobs rending the slight body held so close, and she plunged wildly back into a sweetness long past.—"Tell it all to Debbins—what's happened to mother Deb's baby?"

One word, and the charm was lost. The dry, convulsive sobbing ceased abruptly. Gwen struggled from the pleading arms, thrusting her away.

"Happened!" she echoed harshly, getting to her feet and facing Deborah arrogantly. "Happened! What do you suppose has happened?"



One would think I had committed some crime. What are you talking about?"

Dumfounded, Deborah stared into the frustrating eyes commanding her, and could only shake her head in negation.

"No, I don't suppose you do know," came with a short, sharp laugh. "And as to mothers,—you know, when all's said and done, you really aren't my mother, are you? Good-night." The last word was carelessly flung.

Deborah, blinded by the stinging, unaccountable blow of revolt, stood bereft.

## CHAPTER VI

### DERELICT

HAVING thus ruthlessly shattered her icons, Gwen found her way to her room through a fanfare of emotions. Led by the spirit of anarchy seething within her, she would have encountered any obstacle in her path with a mad thirst for annihilation, but only the rugs presented themselves to her trampling feet and, as they lay smooth, she could not kick them out of her path, and she reached her haven unconscious of movement.

Once there, an intense quiet took her. She knew the hideous thing she had done and she looked upon it with hardened indifference, the while she mechanically prepared for bed as if driven by a hidden, sardonic demon. Habit had her in hand. She moved from bedroom to bathroom, from bathroom to bedroom, with her accustomed precision, stood before her dressing-

table, shook down her shimmering, silken mane, divided it, plaiting it loosely before her shoulders whence it fell in two soft, heavy ropes to her knees, all without volition, sight, or direction.

She turned off the light and got into bed oblivious of its downy peacefulness. She lay back, her hands clasped beneath her head, straight and motionless, a breathless figure of immobility. The lavender-sweetness of her nest, the dainty, ordered luxury with which love had always managed to surround her, enfolded her unrecognized. Through the deep, wide-open window which gave upon the garden came the breath of mingled roses, sweet-peas, and mignonette, and the pale, quiet moonlight came in with it. It transfigured the fine scrim of the curtains into silken cloth of gold, laid its long, golden fingers along the chintz of the chairs, fell in pools of liquid gold upon the soft carpet, climbed up and over the tiny Dresden flowers of the wall, transmuting them into sheaves of gold, and arrived suddenly upon a picture—the only one upon the walls—where it rested in halo.

It was a portrait of Deborah Heath, hung above the low white mantel and just facing the low mahogany bed in which lay the statue of slender young womanhood. Years before, when Deborah had surprised her with it, she had torn off all other prints and photographs in a frenzy of joy, and hung it there in its umber tones and frame, to dominate the room. And now the moonlit, tender, serene face, the moonlit, folded, serene hands did dominate the room,—but not the still figure upon the bed.

Yet it had dominated her four nights before, relentlessly. She had come in from her cataclysm, locking the door between herself and all the world,—but that from which she could not separate herself had glided in with her.

It had waited, a shadowy presence, there in the dark oval frame above the mantel, till the crouching figure in the big chintz chair had raised streaming eyes and given forth a low, bitter, laughing moan as if at grips with it, and the spiritual struggle had gone on, formless yet eloquent, intangible yet abiding,—like carven thought:

“ You, with your judgment face, what do you know about it! ”

“ Everything. ”

“ Pharisee that you are, snug and smug in your emasculated self-righteousness, your morality is the most heartless immorality under the sun. ”

“ My morality is far-seeing love. ”

“ Love that denies, and scourges, and wrecks! ”

“ Saves. ”

“ Saves! From happiness. ”

“ From despair. ”

“ You have given me despair. I hate you. ”

“ Hate me. ”

“ You stand between me and my love. ”

“ Between you and sin. ”

“ Sin! Sin! What is sin? Who are you to know? ”

“ I know that lawlessness is sin. ”

“ There is no law in love. ”

“ There is law for love. ”

“ Ho! Manacles. ”

“ Marriage. The symbol, the ideal, that stands for responsibility, that stands for self-mastery—

the stuff of which heroes are made—the stuff that *will* not add to the world's evil.”

“What has that to do with us?”

“Love that harms is not love.”

“I know of no harm.”

“He knows.”

“You lie. His love for me is marriage.”

“He is only a man.”

“I deny your doubt. And, if it could be true, at least I shall have had the perfect golden interim, the woman's glory, that is beyond count of time or price!”

“Be still.”

“But I deny your doubt. Our love is deathless.”

“He has one wife and——”

“Your ‘marriage’ could not make her his mate.”

“But her child could—somewhat. As your mating could—somewhat. This man belongs to another. I have taught you, ‘Thou shalt not steal.’”

“He is mine!”

“He is a married man. What have you to do

with a married man? What has a married man to do with you?"

She had crouched, crouched away from the pursuing, judging face, while desperate love strained in mad futility at the tyrannic leash of all her past. So the night had passed, and in the early morning she had sent her inevitable answer to Austin Dane.

Now, lying there, motionless, she envisaged the new twist in the path just before her. She had tasted life and it was bitter in her mouth with a terrible bitterness; now, in the hard, cold terms of reason, one word described what faced her:

Sordid.

Gray, grizzly, paralyzing, it filled the room.

She let it take her, let it pit the face of her youth with its remorseless needle, bringing other cinematographic words in its wake:

Cheap.

Shabby.

Can't-have-it.

Work.

Grind.

Ingratiate.



Grateful.

Kind.

Thank you—

The reel paused.

Kind,—people would be kind to her, Gwen Heath! Motionless, she contemplated it. And presently the waxen lids were slowly raised, the nostrils dilated, the blood beat furiously in her pulses, she sprang to a sitting posture, digging her clenched hand into the soft pillow. She breathed unevenly as though she had been running. “Thank you——!” smirking, perhaps, servilely,—for what? Food and drink. She thrust back the clinging gold of her hair, staring at her own caricature of the “dignity” of labor. Dignity? The goad of necessity, yes. For others—perhaps,—Jean, Grace, Deborah,—Deborah inured to sacrifice, seeking it as a miser his privations. But she, Gwen, was different—she was young—she——

The devastating avalanche of memory swept over her, leaving ruin in her soul. Between her and joy lay a dark morass over which she could not stir. She felt herself grown hollow-eyed,

furrowed with grief and years—— But suddenly she flung up her head, bringing down both fists full force upon the coverlet. “I won’t,” youth fought with the Furies, “I won’t!”

And straightway her slender feet touched the carpet. Without taking thought, as the needle to the magnet, with a touch of the push-button, she turned about in the glow of the pink-shaded light, and looked into her mirror.

(Nature, at her ancient, cunning maneuvers, chuckled exultantly, looking over her shoulder.)

Gwendolen Heath work? The preposterousness of the assumption was answered.

Beauty triumphed. Over the muted joy, the hollow eyes, the furrows of her agonizing, it reigned resplendent—they could not touch it.

“Queer thing, that,” thought the scarred soul, gazing in amazement at the mockery of its untouched body.

Her appraising eye passed over it coolly, detached, impersonal, noting the perfection of it all, from her exquisite head and shoulders down to her dainty feet.

Of course.

What a fool she had been to get into such a panic. There was her "position" all mapped out for her—"manifest destiny," as Deb had implied, even that night.

She would "get married," as nine girls out of ten "get married,"—for position, for a home, for independence. Nine girls out of ten entering into such contracts every day. The tenth? The exception which proves the rule.

Why not? Nine marriages out of those ten "turn out well," and the tenth may prove to be that exceptional one, the love-match. Why not? Let the Ellen Keys fulminate on of ideals, mates, harmonies, heights,—they only mouth dreams. Meanwhile there is—life. Ideals? Deals. Mates? Men. Harmonies? Disharmonies. Heights? Levels.—Your "C major," Robert Browning, eh?

She appraised steadily. Parasite? Oh, well, if one liked the term—it had a modish ring! There was another, if one was so minded, not nearly so nice, ugly in fact,—but names never did sinner or saint a thing. Custom was just as cunning a godmother, and custom called it

“marriage.” Good romantic name, that, mid-Victorian, moral. One sits in The Seats of the Mighty——

The Man? Vaguely she had mentally designated him, just glancing over to him in his place of waiting, as it were, against the wall. He would do,—nice fellow, nice to look at,—Oil lands,—Mabel had told her enough about that,—nothing special to cavil at, and—she had only to smile! She glanced carelessly away.

(But Nature, at her ancient maneuvers, hugged herself in huge content.)

Ugh! It was freezing standing there in her night-dress. She turned off the light, jumped into bed, and snuggled down for warmth. She shivered from head to foot. Words she had read subconsciously that evening in the paper flashed across her peculiar, phrase-retentive memory:

“The New York Vice Committee’s report on the most important causes of immorality among working girls, finds them to be ‘weakness of mind and will, individual temperament, lack of industrial efficiency, idleness, unwillingness to accept

available employment, love of luxury and of pleasure——' ”

With a wild sort of sob, she burrowed her head in her pillow as if to shut out the rush of words. What had that to do with her?

Racking sobs took her, rending the delicate frame and ending in long, dreary, hopeless weeping. But through the blinding mist of tears one name found its way, like a kiss to her lips. So hushed, she finally fell asleep.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE KNIGHT

“FOR instance,” Leland explained succinctly, flicking the ash from his own cigarette and nodding toward his cousin’s, “she wouldn’t do that.” And he met with a steady stare both her merry laugh and the cloud of fragrant smoke she blew into his face.

“Because she has never tried, silly, and doesn’t know what she’s missing, like all the others who are afraid to endanger their femininity. Look at me!”

“I’m looking.” He was regarding, with the impersonal smile of long intimacy, her provocative piquancy, the charm of her dark face with its tip-tilted little nose and challenging, uplifted chin as, with eyes half-closed against the hazy spirals she was making, she continued, daintily and deliberately, to smoke her cigarette.

They had come in from dinner, leaving Frank Goddard and Laurence Martin to their cigars and stories, and had been enjoying a desultory chat about nothing in particular but full of pleasant understanding, until Mabel suddenly pounced upon him by asking irrelevantly, what men found so "different" about Gwen Heath that made them employ a different tone in speaking of her. The question was born of a sudden recollection of Martin's inquiry, upon arriving, as to whether she expected Gwen that evening. She knew she was disturbing Leland's comfortable ease with her enigma, but she also knew that he enjoyed nothing more than that tantalizing discomfort. They had been sort of sentimental sweethearts from their early teens up to the time of Mabel's marriage, and although, in her drawing-room, he no longer bore with him the romantic lure of those old "cowboy" days on the ranch when, boy and girl together, they had ranged the country in long, dare-devil rides, he still carried in the well-knit energy of his supple length, in the swift snap of the blood under his thin olive cheek and the alert glow of his dark eyes, enough of



the remembered grace of his boyhood in those days of freedom in the open, to keep him inexpressibly dear to her. And if, in seeming inconsistency, she delighted to tease him about Gwen Heath, it was because she felt that the consummation he so much desired would never be more than a sweet mirage.

“ Well? ” she jogged his attention.

“ Well, what? ”

“ What about my femininity? ”

“ Oh, that. ” He made an effort toward sociability. “ That’s stylish, like the rest of you. It’s turned feministic. ”

She returned him a laughing grimace, dropped her half-smoked cigarette, and took another. “ That’s a compliment, though you don’t know it. ” She bent over the tiny flame of the spirit-lamp. “ And as to style, Gwen’s an out-of-date classic. ”

“ What do you mean by that? ”

“ I mean she sticks to simon-pure rule and line, in spite of her trashy leanings. ”

“ How do you know that she has trashy leanings? ”

“ I mean human, stupid! She’s the humanest human I know.”

Leland accepted this according to his own light. “ Have you seen her lately? ” he catechized.

“ I had tea with her a few days ago.”

“ How—is she? ”

“ You mean,” returned Mabel with a canny smile, “ how is she taking Lansing Wells’s engagement.”

He darted an angry look at her.

“ Yes, you do, George. Don’t pretend to me. Everybody’s wondering.”

“ Everybody be damned! ”

“ Tut-tut. These aren’t feudal days, my lord,—you can’t keep her in a keep from people’s observation. Even I had my vulgar curiosity about it. You know no girl lets a multi-million proposition slip through her fingers without a qualm, even if she isn’t madly in love with the promoter.”

“ Gwen Heath would—under that condition.”

“ Dear boy, do you belong to the twentieth century? ”

“ To the twentieth century—unlimited, yes.”

“Visionary!” she scoffed; and waited for his further cross-questioning, but only an impatient turning from her in his chair and a flinging of one knee over the other answered her.

“She wasn’t looking—herself, George,” she vouchsafed him, musingly.

He bit at the softly spoken bait as she had expected, turning, in quick concern, to look at her.

“It wasn’t her health. She looked as if—something—way back in her soul—had gone from her.”

“You women with your imagination!” But his heart sank.

“We call it intuition.”

“So you think——”

“No, it wasn’t Lansing Wells.”

“How can you be sure of that—with your skeptical valuations?” He spoke brusquely.

“Intuition again—plus a college education in the way of a maid with a man. She had no reserves in speaking of him.”

“You can’t be sure of that.”

“I can. I know all the subterfuges and subtle-

ties. Besides, something I have heard since, makes me think it was that."

"What?"

"I heard that Professor Heath left such a deplorably small estate that it has become absolutely and urgently necessary for Deborah to take a paying position with the Associated Charities."

She saw the blood mount darkly up to his brow, he almost rose from his seat, but subsided, holding on to the arms of his chair, the knight in him checked by the rein of convention.

Mabel, in her turn, experienced a queer little tightening about the heart. "You can't do anything about that," she hastened to say. "They're as proud as Lucifer."

"Why shouldn't they be?" he retorted hotly. "They haven't changed."

"No, but their fortunes have. Don't be quixotic, George."

"You're all such a pack of snobs!"

"Who's 'you,' pray? In your defense of one you needn't commit wholesale injustice. This isn't war."

"Pshaw, Mabel," he sprang to his feet, his

hands thrusting deep into his pockets as he took a futile stride across the room. "I know the social view-point. Everybody is identified with his bank account."

"You just damned 'everybody,' so what difference can that make? Besides, I'm not everybody—I'm Gwen Heath's most intimate friend."

He veered upon her at that, the glow back in his eyes, when the door opened and Goddard and Martin came in, clamoring for bridge.

Throughout the game Mabel watched his concentration speculatively. But the stern line of his firm lips gave her no clue to the whereabouts of his thoughts.

Declining Martin's invitation to share his taxi later, Leland walked homeward, glad of the solitude in the bracing, muffling fog, and the long swing across the city to his downtown hotel. He welcomed the silent plunge in the dark as an outlet to the impulses seething within him.

"You can't do anything about that," Mabel had said sharply. Why couldn't he? He, with his unfettered affluence ready to pour into her lap!

He chafed at the social bit. "Absolutely and urgently necessary." How to protect her from the pinch of necessity? How to keep her in the soft, sheltered places where she had always belonged, where she, of all precious possessions, of a right, belonged! The thought of her beauty, of her dainty, high refinements, swept across his turmoil like a swift pain, like a call to all the chivalry warring within him for her. And the personal claim rose in a flood of color up to his brow, burning unseen in the dark.

Of course there was only one way, and of course, in his humility, the preposterousness of the suggestion caught at his breath. And yet—Lansing Wells out of the way—— The spirit of adventure took him, love's daring-do for the sake of the loved one pricking the egoism with star-points. If she would play the game, he would take the risks! Risks, with her for prize! —And then, into the splendor of his high emprise, rushed the knowledge of her careless indifference to him, and he stopped stock-still where he was, fallen to earth.

Cars sped by, mysteriously, through the fog, as



if to far goals. He happened to be passing one of the several harsh reminders of the historic disaster of nineteen-six—an empty lot on Sutter Street, halfway to town. About him hummed the solid, splendid city, builded in bravery over the ashes of a myriad hopes. Here the narrow, dark emptiness stood suddenly like an arrestive finger, bidding men remember. Strangely enough it hushed the clamor of sinking hope in his breast, telling him that life held for her sons other, greater heroisms than defeated loves, borne, too, in silence and victory. He walked on, quieted by the wider vision, not vanquished, the drums of youth still marking time distinctly, retreating, advancing, the dauntless “drums of the fore and aft.”

He turned into the electric brilliancy of Powell Street. The urge of the city of joy swayed about him with its irresistible message of well-being penetrating through its murmurs—its long-drawn-out honkings and clangings of warning to the surging, diverging, appearing, disappearing throngs and solitaries bent upon their thousand pleasures beyond the portals of imagination, and



Leland passed into the softly effulgent foyer of his hotel, the drums of youth still steadily beating.

So it was that he telephoned to Gwen the next evening, and her quiet, "I'll be glad to see you," should have prepared him for her quiet mood and aspect.

But it utterly failed to reconcile him to the obvious change in her reception and attitude toward him. Used to the witchery of her teasing denial of him, her pensive pauses and abruptnesses disturbed and irked him. Never a leader in converse, the effort to keep the interchange of comment within the bounds of conversation was so unusual in his experience of her, that the strain finally snapped, and he sat doggedly waiting for her to make some response.

He could not know that Gwen, face to face with her opportunity to use the crucial "smile" which was to solve her problem of the future, could no more drag it to her countenance than she could smoke cigarettes,—in the test it went against the grain of all her nature and sincerities. So, at the extreme of revolt against her own

cool-headed, well-laid plans, she sat, instead, quite smileless and let the silence take its course.

They were in the small den across from the library, once her father's sanctum sanctorum, and she sat in the corner of the old green rep sofa, a slim, straight, girlish figure, her hands crossed in her lap, her face gravely brooding above the shadow of her black gown.

The silence grew unbearable. Jumping to his feet, he came and stood before her, and she looked reflectively up at him in his sudden accession of assertiveness. What a nice, quaint boy he was, anyway, with that light in his eyes over which Deb had rhapsodized. She wondered, passively, how he was going to say what, after all, she could not prevent him from saying.

"I know all about it, Gwen." He had never before addressed her so, but she had no cognizance of the slip in the shock of his announcement which could mean only one thing to her—her dead romance. She gazed at him lifelessly, all the color driven from her face.

"How can you know?" she managed to ask.

"Mabel told me."

“ Mabel? She knows nothing.”

“ She heard it,—I don’t know where,—about your sister’s position.”

The color crept back, rosily, shamedly, gladly, up to the tips of the little ears hidden under the soft, burnished hair. She drew in a long breath of relief. “ Oh,” for the moment her pretty voice had found its silver edge. “ Yes, Deb was fortunate in finding just what she wanted.” Her eyes looked quietly up at him—in beautiful bravery, he thought.

“ Gwen——,” he began in blind impulse, and paused before the mad leap. “ All that I am, all that I have—is yours, to do with what you want.”

A shadow came over the eyes regarding him, her lips set proudly, forbidding him further.

He drove on resistlessly. “ Won’t you let me—— Won’t you marry me, Gwen,—and get out of it?” In the breathless pause he thought he could hear his own heart pounding out its astonishment at his speech.

She smiled in dim wistfulness. “ No, Cophetua, I won’t,” she said gently, and could have wept over her own pusillanimity.

“Why won't you?”

“For the best reason in the world.”

“You mean,” he said, undaunted, his direct gaze bearing down upon her defenses, “that you don't love me. I'm willing to take chances, Gwen.”

The smile had quite departed from her eyes and lips. “That's plunging, George,” she said dully, and, in the saying of it, the old Gwen, the Gwen of ideals and sincerities who had flown back to her in the hour of her peril, again separated from her as quietly as fell her quiet words.

“I don't think so,” he said very low. “You see, I'll stake everything on you, my darling.”

She had not repulsed his presumption! She had not even laughed it aside! In the incredible wonder of it, he was on his knees before her, body and soul, and laid his hands on hers, crushing them in his tense grip.

She had closed her eyes against his endearment, she opened them at his touch. “Please, don't,—you hurt me,” she said passionately, and his hold slackened but he did not let the exquisite hands out of his firm keeping.

“Marry me now, Gwen,” he implored in reckless intoxication.

“Let go my hands.”

“No. Answer me first. When will you marry me?”

“Never. I hate you.”

He did not realize how near, at that moment, her desperate words were to the truth. He gave them no credence, in fact, ignored them completely save as an expression of resentment against his hold.

“No, you don’t,” he said with an odd certainty which caught her curiosity. “And that has nothing to do with my question.” He caught his breath. “Listen, Gwen. Shall we run off tomorrow and get married?”

She gave him a quick look of incredulity. He meant it. The spirit of adventure was at gallop within him and caught her up before him. Recklessly, her youth answered to his. It flashed through her that he had found the only way in which she ever could marry him. It would avoid the hateful interim of courtship. It would be a sort of lark!

“But——” she laughed confusedly with brilliant eyes.

He seized her hesitancy, as it were, in his arms. “There are no buts,” he said, incoherently clear. “Leave it all to me. Tomorrow morning, the license,—at any hour,—you’ll have to come with me, you know,—then a Justice,—and in the afternoon, off to Europe. Say yes this minute, Gwen!”

His impetuosity carried her off her feet. Everything was blurred to her perceptions.

“Not tomorrow,—the day after, if you think——” she began, scarcely knowing that she spoke, but he saved her from committing herself.

“Think? No, we won’t think. It’s settled then, the day after tomorrow. Kiss me, Gwen.”

She drew back sharply from the tug on her wrists, from his importunate tone, from his flushed, adoring face. “Don’t,” she said harshly. “You know I won’t stand that.”

He eyed her doubtfully, dropped her hands, and stood up. She arose too. It was all over, then.



“You won’t kiss me, Gwen?” his persistent voice repeated in stupefaction.

She laughed, and it seemed to him she swallowed a sob. “You know I never could endure such things. You know I hate—demonstrativeness.”

“But—I love you, dearest. You are going to marry me.”

“The day after tomorrow, George. It’s such a short time to wait. Can’t you wait till then?”

In his simple worship of her it seemed to him that she was making a last desperate fight for her girlhood’s reserves and elusiveness, for the *noli me tangere* which had always kept her sacred in the thoughts of all men.

He stood before her, her sworn knight.

With infinite gentleness he took her face between his hands and looked deep into her beseeching eyes. “Yes, I can wait,” he laughed, his own eyes blazing. “But I give you fair warning: you’ll make up for it!” and he let her go.

Her eyelids drooped. She stood pale and humble as a nun under his consecrating gaze.



And so it was that the next morning, when Deborah Heath awoke, she found folded into a rakish cocked hat, the following little note upon her pillow:

“DEAR DEB,

“The top o’ the morning to you. George Leland and I are going to be married day after tomorrow. Tomorrow will be today when you read this,—as eloping girls write in novels.

“Full particulars when we meet.

“GWEN.”

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE EASIEST WAY

AT about half-past eight of the morning, Mabel Goddard, daintily capped, luxuriously reclining in her luxurious bed, leisurely scanning the morning paper, turned with a slight yawn to answer the ringing of the telephone at her side.

“Hallo!”

“That you, Mabel?”

“Yes.”

“This is Gwen. I——”

“Hallo, Gwen, you little wretch, where have you been hiding these last few days? I’ve rung you up——”

“Yes, Martha gave me your messages. I just rang you up to tell you I’m going to be married at noon today, and I want you and Frank to be present. Will you come?”

“You sphinx, you minx, what, in the name of all that’s holy, are you talking about?”

“ My wedding, dear. At twelve sharp. To your own cousin, George Warren Leland. We’re going to motor down to Los Angeles, where George has some business to attend to, and from there cut across to Europe. Isn’t it fun? ”

Fun! Gwen Heath talking about her own marriage as fun!

“ Really, Gwen, don’t you think one can carry cynicism too far? Facetiousness——”

“ I haven’t time for your confession of unfaith in my word, darling! But you may look among the marriage license announcements in this morning’s paper to bear me out and prove my invitation’s no practical joke. There’ll be no one here but you two, and Judge and Mrs. Harrison. Do you think Frank can come? Is he still at home? ”

“ You sound—almost—real! ”

“ If you could feel me, you’d see. I’ll expect you, then, if I don’t hear anything to the contrary. Good-by.”

Mabel turned from the gay voice with a dazed face. “ Fun! ” she repeated, her face furiously flushed, and she snatched up the newspaper where, after much turning and discarding and crackling

and scanning, she found the column and, midway, the item:

*“George Warren Leland, 32, Hotel St. Francis, and Gwendolen Heath, 23, 3390 Clay Street.”*

She read it with bewildered eyes which finally took on a gleam of cold, denunciating resentment. She looked off into the distance, weighing the sensational announcement with the evidence in hand. Across her flashed the memory of her talk with Leland three nights before. “That is the answer,” she decided with finality through set teeth, and pitched the offending newspaper into the middle of the room. Then she turned and rang up her husband’s office.

“Has Mr. Goddard come in yet?”

“Not yet. Oh—one minute—here he is now.”

“Yes?”

“Frank, it’s me—Mabel. What do you think I’ve just heard?”

“Yes?”

“Gwen Heath is going to marry George—our George—George Leland, at noon today. She just rang up to ask us to the wedding!”

“ Yes? ”

“ Yes! For heaven's sake what does that mean? Aren't you dumfounded—isn't it incredible? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ Do you believe it? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ Well, I don't, and I've just read the announcement of the marriage license in the paper. How can you believe it? I know he is terribly in love with her, but you know she has always ignored his devotion or tried to plague it to death. You know it as well as I do. ”

“ Yes. ”

“ Really, Frank, that cool 'yes' of yours is enough to drive one frantic! Can you go to the wedding? ”

“ Yes. ”

“ That's the one sensible remark you've made yet, you mean old thing. Go over and see George, and be home in time to dress—and don't you dare to give me another of your unfeeling yeses! ”

She cut off his hearty laugh, banging up the

receiver. She sat a few minutes with her hand over her eyes and then, more quietly, had herself connected with Leland's hotel. A moment later, he answered.

"It's Mabel, George."

"Yes, Mabel."

"Gwen has just told me."

"That I'm the happiest man in the world?" How he rushed to say it! To reassure her—or himself?

"I know you are, dear."

"I am, Mabel. Aren't you going to congratulate me?"

"George—are you crying?"

"Great Scott, what for? But I do believe you are!"

"I don't care if I am. George——"

"Yes, dear old pal?"

"I—I hope she will make you very happy, dear."

"Thank you. She has already. The question is the other way round."

"I haven't any doubts on that score. And I hope she'll keep you happy forever and a day."

“Can you doubt it—knowing and loving her as you do?”

“Nobody really knows Gwen—except you, perhaps, now, George. But she is the most wonderful, beautiful, bewitching thing I’ve ever met. She is the truest of friends. She can be anything she wants to be, and—and she’d never want to be anything that isn’t lovely and good to you if—if she promises to marry you.”

She had worked herself up to this pitch of loyalty for his sake, and, in her frenzy, believed every word of it.

“You’re an angel, Mabel. Talk about perfect friends! But now I have a number of things to attend to in town before——”

“Can’t I come down and help you, George? Please let me.”

“Help me? What about?”

“Oh, to pack, to dress,—anything.”

He answered with a shouting laugh.

“Then let me tell Frank——”

“All right. I’ll see him at the office in a few minutes. Mabel?”

“Yes?”



“That tone of yours just now brought back—memories. If *she* were here today!”

“George—I want to kiss you.”

“We’ll take a long distance one now,—have to wait for the real thing till—Kingdom Come—a few hours hence—for me!”

His joyous laugh ended the colloquy.

If only she had someone with whom to discuss it then and there! But how could she ever discuss it with anyone?—George Leland, peculiarly dear to her, Gwen Heath, her closest friend whom, all the world knew, she had always held on a pedestal. The world—oh, yes, of course the jealous, spiteful world would discuss it—she could hear it!—in its impersonal, cynical, vulgar way,—as it had every right to do. And with this acknowledgment, she bitterly contemplated the first rift in her love for Gwen Heath, who, by her one fateful act, had loosened the strong tie of many years. Disillusionment had come to Mabel through the one upon whom she had pinned her faith in womankind. It was well enough for her—Mabel—to have made a marriage of reason

(and it had turned out "well enough," her life with Frank, the old dear, she thought easily), but for a Gwen Heath, she who had always seemed to breathe a more rarefied air, from whom, in occasional departures from her accustomed reticences, she had caught glimpses of the loftiest ideals of life, the highest standards and demands of conduct!

Lansing Wells? Could it be that that experience had fatally maimed her? No, no, no,—she knew positively to the contrary. Therefore there remained but the mercenary, and, reasoning always in a malicious circle, her hand caught up the receiver again, and she sought out "the spiteful world."

"Hallo. Is this Miss Lathrop's residence?"

"Yes."

"May I speak to her, please?"

"Just a minute."

A pause.

"Hallo."

"Is that you, Elizabeth?"

"Yes?"

"This is Mabel Goddard. I have the loveliest

news to tell you. My cousin, George Leland, is going to be married today at noon."

"Why, you literally take away my breath. Who's the lucky girl?"

"You'll say he's the lucky man when you hear who's who. Can't you guess?"

"Haven't an inkling. He's never been attentive to anyone in particular."

"Oh, yes, he has—terribly particular. Only he has only been one of many bees round that particular flower. Can't you guess now?"

"Some belle? Don't tease, Mabel,—who is it?"

"Why, Gwen Heath, of course."

"Gwen Heath!" The conspicuous pause was followed by a tight little laugh. "Why, it looks like a heart caught on the rebound, doesn't it?"

"Not at all—to me."

"Well, well, so it's George Leland! Well, I still maintain she's the lucky one, although she's pretty enough—as far as that goes."

"Pretty! Gwen Heath pretty! My dear, you are pretty, and I am pretty. Gwen is not only

exquisite, but she has more personality in one of her little fingers than any one of us could ever have in our whole make-up if we studied her for a hundred years!"

"Exuberant as ever, Mabel. I grant you she's clever. It will be lovely for her, poor thing."

"Poor thing? What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, I just happened to remember—I didn't pay much attention when I heard it—that their father didn't leave them a cent, did he?"

"Not quite so bad as that, Elizabeth. Who told you that tragic myth?"

"Why, everybody knows that Miss Heath has taken a position."

"Indeed she has—a splendid position just made for her, and she for it. At last she's able to follow her bent, now that her other occupation's gone,—her father no more, and Gwen grown up and going to be married. Well, she's the most finely beautiful woman I know, and has only added another luster to her crown."

"What an idealist you are, Mabel! I wish I could put glammers on commonplace things, as you do."

“ But I don't, there's the beauty of it—and the truth—which you ignore.”

“ Dear me, you *are* funny. Well, I'm sure everybody will be *so* surprised, and I hope Mr. Leland will be awfully happy, and I do congratulate Miss Heath so very, very much. Thanks for ringing me up, Mabel. Going to the wedding, I suppose. Well, have a good time, and kiss the bride and the bridegroom for me. Good-by.”

Mabel kept her mouth to the transmitter after gently hanging up the receiver. “ Good-by, sweet kitty,” she softly murmured into the unresponsive instrument, “ good-by, little cat,—good-by, lady green eyes,—good-by, hateful snob,—good-by!”

And, having relieved herself, if but to desert air, she lay back upon her pillows and wept fitfully for a half-hour. She thought of “ Her ” whom George had wished with him—she thought of how she had equipped him for life and its pitfalls,—of how the mind could dwell upon him as upon few men.—How dared Gwen Heath use his splendid manhood and love for her material ends!

“ I suppose she'll wear that new blue suit she had to discard when her father died,” she mused

through her tears, and with an indescribable sense of personal loss. And she arose and proceeded to the protracted art of dressing for the wedding.

The sun had parted the veils of fog of the morning. The fine, worn old room seemed to have awakened to a shy self-consciousness. The blinds were raised halfway, and Apollo of the golden touch, peeping through the creamy folds of the curtains, had, by searching, found a thing to love. Even to the farthest corners where the time-seasoned mahoganies had been pushed, he lit upon line, and knob, and claw, and deepened them to a richer glow, beamed so adoringly upon the sun-steeped Bacchus above the mantel that the wine-stained lips almost appeared to burst into song as the boy, drunk with the glory, glanced out from the shadowing branches of the pale pink hawthorn which everywhere embowered and transfigured the place with its youth.

The mellow voice of the pastor flowed steadily on in the age-old ceremony, and Mabel Goddard



looked in deepest scorn upon the little assemblage gathered before the hawthorn-hidden fireplace,—upon Deborah Heath, stately and silent, blessing the scene with her countenance, upon Mrs. Harrison, ruddy, round, and radiant with her smile of matronly approval, upon Judge Harrison, fine and dignified, his dark eyes aglow under his curly white hair, as if presiding at the nuptials of two young gods, upon her own husband, big, easy, successful, taking it all for granted and smiling unctuously as over some delectable joke, upon old Martha in the background, weeping in buxom sentimentality;—upon herself, sleek and fashionably tolerant, upon the droning clergyman, professionally trite and impersonal,—but most of all her scorn brooded over the cynosure, the objective point of their presence there—the beautiful, pallid, soulless face of the bride. For soulless it undoubtedly was, with that set smile upon the lips, that dead look in the eyes fastened upon the face of the speaker. Oh, Gwen Heath knew well enough what she was about, knew well enough the fraud she was practicing upon the intent man beside her with the



light of happiness upon his brow. He alone, of all the group, escaped Mabel's contempt through her knowledge of what the moment meant to him. But Gwen Heath was coldly, deliberately, making a marriage of reason, Gwen Heath, the idealist, was selling herself for a seat in Vanity Fair! All through the short ceremony the withering denunciation clamored within her for utterance, in the inarticulate, futile, "I forbid!" of the human heart against fate.

And suddenly Leland was kissing his bride, lightly, fleetly, as if in response to the swift, scarcely perceptible glance the girl had given him. But Mabel had perceived it and her cheeks were hot with resentment, as, the next minute, she heard Gwen's silvery laugh and, like clashing bells all pealing together, the formalities and inanities tumbling over one another in excess of emotion.

Judge Harrison's oratorical, "My dear, I know you will be happy. Such a fine, sterling fellow! I must tell him about my old-fashioned habit of praying that 'prayer of Plato old' whenever I look at you." Frank's convivial, "Well, Gwen, at

last I'm going to get that kiss I've been waiting for all my life. By Jove, old George is the lucky dog. Look out for duels and things when this gets out."—" Roads fine—you'll get to Del Monte early in the evening if you don't have a blow-out—no fear of a falling-out so early in the day, of course!"—" Dear child, it was only yesterday you were a naughty little girl and Deb running over to ask me how she could punish you without hurting you!—and now you're a bride. I can't help crying, Gwen,—I'm always such an old fool at a wedding! And here's Martha, just as bad!"—" The top o' the beautiful day to me darlint——" All strung together on Gwen's silvery laugh, and the tinkle of ice in glasses, and Mabel silently putting up her lips to the expectant ones and, at her swiftly averted eyes, the blood rushing in a torrent over the bride's face, the first tinge of color it had shown that day. Gwen, as the other moved quickly from her to Leland, knew that Mabel, upon her loyal board of friendship, had turned down "an empty glass."

And presently there followed a murmurous pause and a sudden rush for the front door in

pursuit of two figures flying down the long flight of steps,—the slighter one well in advance,—a laughing, scuttling, and raining of rice, and Gwen safe within the tonneau of the car. George, arrested by the untimely postman poking two letters toward “Miss Gwen Heath,” straightway pocketed them while dodging the pelting rice, as he disappeared after her,—the throbbing machine sped forward and, amid wavings of handkerchiefs and echoing farewells, they were off.

Something whirled through the air and fell pat on the chauffeur’s hand at the wheel. He clutched it deftly and, with a road grin, but without turning, passed it back to them over his shoulder. It was a tiny white kid slipper, one of Gwen’s first shoes, from which fetish Martha had tearfully parted in an outburst of superstitious ecstasy.

A few minutes later the “peanut on a height,” sat deserted, blinking wistfully in the soft afternoon sun. The nursemaids with their arrested perambulators moved on, two boys on bicycles circled away, the builders at the corner returned to their hammering, curious heads at windows withdrew, the street resumed its wonted aspect.

Deborah, in the echoing hush of the house, abstractedly "straightening up" the unwonted disarray of the library, moved over to the windows and stood in amazement, looking out.

"Martha," she called excitedly, "Martha! Come here."

From her kitchen Martha came running, questioning.

"Look at that," said Deb.

Over the sidewalk, on the stone coping, edging the lawn, fluttering from step to step, flocks of pigeons, white, black, dove-colored, iridescent, had settled and were busily devouring the harvest of good wishes.

The two women gazed at the picture with smiling eyes, Deb's slowly filling from some vague fount of longing.

"Interpret it, Martha," she murmured.

"In——?"

"What does it mean, Mats dear?"

"It manes," pondered the faithful one in oracular solemnity, "it manes that the Lord's a better housekaper nor you nor me, Miss Deb. It manes that old Mats won't have to swape up anny

lavin's in the marnin', and that, in these days of extravagince, He never wastes a grain."

With which Delphic utterance she left Deborah to her thoughts.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE SNARL

THEY had sped over the familiar driveways of the Park and burst upon the misty splendor of the sea; down the ocean boulevard they flew, and on to and over the county line, leaving the city far behind. Down the leafy shade of glass-smooth roads, past the villas and suburban mansions of the peninsula glimpsed through arbors and avenues of meeting oaks and pines and eucalyptus, they passed into the sleeping foothills, the warm fragrance of new-mown hay breathing intoxicatingly into their faces, and so on and up into the mountain passes. The day soft, and with a faint, far mist in its eyes, lost its shimmer as the sun slipped downward and, with the approach of evening, wrapped itself in a fleecy mantle of fog which clung to the hillsides with long, silvery-gray fingers, enfolded in mourning veils the wind-riven cypresses they passed on the wayside, and

rushed upon them with damp, keen breath. Leland tucked the robes more closely about her.

They had talked all the way down of everything but the high moment through which they had just emerged. In the blunted condition to which Gwen had reduced all sensation, the stinging blow which Mabel's look had given her had left only a dull trace. She rode lightly on the crest of the wave of the present, looking neither forward nor back. She had rushed into a stream of words from the moment of departure, so persistent, so inexhaustible and incessant, that, to Leland, it seemed designed to hold him still beyond the ascetic barrier she had insisted upon, and which he had counted upon contravening with the first turn of the wheels. Resigning himself to the indulgence of only one tight squeeze of the small, unresponsive, gloved hand, he strained his overstrained patience to its limits.

They exhausted plans and counterplans of their itinerary with comment on the countries and peoples they already knew, and Gwen piled anecdote upon anecdote until the last hour of their ride, when, in the waning light, she fell into



sudden and complete silence, her mouth drooping in utter weariness.

He watched her with yearning solicitude. "Tired?" he ventured, his hand again seeking hers covered snugly under the robe.

"Just a headache," she murmured with an effort, and, with the slight, repeated repulse of the hidden hand, he, too, lapsed into silence, looking straight ahead into the gathering darkness.

The hotel was agleam with lights when they drew near. Here and there a couple or single figure could be seen sauntering through the dusky shrubbery. The verandas looked deserted,—to their unspoken satisfaction, it being the height of the season.

"We'll dine upstairs," he suggested as they prepared to alight.

"Why should we? We'll go right in," she returned positively, waiting for him to step out.

The color dashed to his face in his surprise but he put out his hand to help her without further protest.

However, just as they turned from the desk, she drew back quickly. "After all, let's have it

upstairs," she said hurriedly, and George, with a view of Lansing Wells's unmistakable back disappearing in the direction of the dining-room, turned again for an instant to the clerk, but with a sense of tightened attention upon the girl behind him who seemed fluttering from his grasp.

The waiter drew the table near the window overlooking the grounds, indistinct now in the night. Gwen drew near, keeping her eyes fastened upon the outer darkness while they waited.

"Aren't you going to take off your hat and stay awhile?" he asked, coming round to her, his smile seeking her eyes.

She started violently as if recalled from afar. "Oh," she said, putting up her hands, "I forgot it was there. You can't find the pins, silly."

"Oh, can't I!" he persisted, fumbling and drawing it off in triumph.

She ran her fingers through her flattened hair. "O-oh," she sighed brokenly, and covered her face with her hands.

He turned from depositing the hat on the sofa and, with a stride, was at her side.

“What is it?” he whispered, his arm about her, drawing her gently toward him.

“Don’t,” she resisted, pushing him forcibly away. “Can’t you see——” she pulled herself together. “I mean—I have such a headache, George.” Her voice pleaded for quiet.

“I forgot, sweetheart.” He stood at bay, helplessly regarding her as she slipped into a chair. “Perhaps when you’ve eaten something——”

“All I want is a cup of tea. There’s the waiter now.”

When it was brought, she drank with effort, nibbling at a piece of toast and refusing all his coaxings to taste, if only a bite, each of the several courses he had jocosely ordered for himself.

“George, do you mind,—don’t get up”—she was standing, her hands lightly touching the table, “if I leave you to your coffee? You’ll smoke, won’t you? And if I go inside and make myself comfortable—and just close my eyes for a while—my old head will stop bothering and behave itself more agreeably. You won’t mind, will you?”

She looked so exquisite in her pleading, but so fragile in her very evident suffering, that though he had sprung up and even made a movement toward her, again he desisted and answered playfully, looking into her darkened eyes.

“ ‘ Foiled again, said the villain!’ I hate to see you looking like that, Gwen. Can’t I do anything? There, don’t speak—I know every word’s an effort. I’ve had infernal headaches myself.” He moved beyond the dividing door into the farther room, switched on the light for her and came back to the threshold, holding the door open for her with one hand while the other thrust itself nervously into his coat pocket.

“ Hallo!” he exclaimed blithely. “ Here are those letters the postman gave me just as we were leaving. Perhaps they’ll stop the pain.”

She had turned for her hat and coat, and now, reaching the threshold, took the letters from him with a hasty glance at the upper address. “ Some old advertisement,” she commented carelessly, and passed in. He said nothing further, quietly closing the door between them.

She walked in, scarcely noting the wide com-

fort of the room, threw the letters upon the dresser, and stood a moment leaning there with closed eyes. "I *must* get out of these things," she decided finally, forcing herself to action, and half mechanically, but with a sense of relief, she slipped from her outer garments and into a loose, creamy *négligée*. She drew the pins from her hair, shook down the burden and with accustomed, though tired hand, gave it a few quick touches with the brush, divided it, and braided it loosely on either side of her face whence it fell, two broad, gleaming ropes to her knees. Whereupon she at once felt refreshed.

Looking down, her eyes fell upon the upper letter where she had dropped it. "Cronin's," she read in the left-hand corner, with an amused smile. "Want me to buy my trousseau, I suppose." Idly, she picked up the two missives together, and sank into the low chair standing near.

She tore open the top envelope and read the lithographed lines from first to last, a girlish interest holding her to the courteous announcement from the leading lingerie establishment of the city. Finishing it, she let it flutter from her

fingers to the floor and leaned back, closing her eyes wearily. Her hand coming in contact with the other envelope, she took hold of it without consciousness while her thoughts swam in a tumultuous sea. Presently, with a wrench of will, she opened her eyes and gazed somberly at the wall opposite, till, vaguely cognizant of something between her fingers, she held it up to view.

She sat up.

With both hands she pinned the square envelope fast to her knee, gazing with wild eyes. Furtively, she glanced over her shoulder. Nothing was there—no Fate-face peering through the shadows in grinning triumph, no ghostly, retributive lasso hurtling through the air to pinion her there with his letter. Her eyes evaded the door, fastening upon the unmistakable handwriting. She crouched together in her chair, a slow, incongruous ecstasy overtaking her limbs, her brain, her whole being. Her finger ripped open the thin paper. The letter unfolded at her touch. Her head bent lower. She sat in the very heart of silence, in infinite space, alone with him.

“Gwen,” she read, but unconscious that she



read,—conscious only that he spoke to her,—“ I ignore your response. I know that phase has passed.

“ The long watch is over, and my boy sleeps——

“ There is nothing now to divide us, dear love. Even the sanction of the law, so necessary to you, shall be ours. As soon as it is seemly, divorce proceedings will be instituted. That is arranged. After that it will rest with you how soon our separation shall cease,—at once, or not until the courts make it easier for you. I will not plead against your peace of mind. I await your bidding.

“ But there is no separation in love, beloved. Not in love for you. No man, once loving you, can ever wholly lose you. And I have more than loved you,—I have known fruition—I have held you, responsive, in my arms. I only. I know that, jealously, my dove, my sweet, my blossom of purity, as I know that I live and love you. Did you not tell me all in that kiss with which you gave yourself? My darling—my beautiful—— Again I stand with you above the murmuring



waters, and their eternal song is but the eternal echo of our love. Are you there again with me? Do you hear the sea—do you feel my arms about you,—mate of mine——”

Her eye took in no more. Far below her, yet very near, the waters swirled and flowed, and ebbed. Systole, diastole, like a heart. And the night held them. His arms enfolded her,—she could feel his heart beating against her own——

A faint tapping, followed a moment later by a clicking sound, drew her unseeing eyes. The door opened gently, and a strange man came into the room.

She arose slowly, fearfully, holding on to the chair. “What is it?” she said, her voice scarce above a whisper. “What do you want?”

“Your headache, darling. Is it better?” He came nearer, and as he came his arms went out to her.

“No, no,” she prayed, and pushed the chair between them. “It’s a mistake—a terrible mistake. I don’t know you—I——”

“Don’t know me! Ah, Gwen, I suppose every girl has said that since time began. Only, sweet-

heart——” he shoved the chair aside, snatched her to him with one arm, and catching up one of her silken braids, wound it about his neck as if binding her to him.

But her hands, pushing desperately against his shoulders, thrust him back. “Listen,” her raucous voice implored. “You *must* listen. I’m not like ‘all the girls.’ That isn’t it. I can’t be your wife. I thought I could—I’ve just found out—it’s impossible. I’ve done a terrible thing to you, I know,—but I thought I could. You are generous, you are kind—you’ll let me go now—won’t you, my dear? You——”

But, laughing in joyous tenderness, he strangled her words against his breast and, as he turned up her face and his lips sought hers in an unending kiss, suddenly her stunned, fleeing soul, stood still. Something, standing on the threshold of this doorway into a new life arrested her, its barring arms outstretched. Tradition, cunning, more powerful than passion of love or hate, caught her in its deadening grip.

The fighting golden head, the struggling hands lay quiet. She heard his voice in love’s murmur-

ous caressing, felt his heart beating against hers, felt his kisses raining upon her face, her throat, her hair, and though she did not know that, with every kiss,—as before, with every glance,—he re-dedicated his life to hers, silent and still as a figure of death she let him hold her in his impassioned embrace.

The gate had swung to upon her soul's adventure.

## CHAPTER X

### THE JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON

IT happened to be a Saturday afternoon and one of those deep, golden days of October when the exquisite sky of San Francisco lifts its fairy, invisible veil and gazes down in barefaced ardor upon the city's heights and dales throbbing under the dreamy haze of heat, and Deborah Heath came out of a little house in the Richmond district, with a sigh of relief and content.

She had found the place immaculate and the new foster-mother was going to be all right in spite of Deb's previous doubts, engendered by the woman's hardened expression, for it had sufficed for only one touch of the unconscious, little groping hand of the baby against her breast to bring a shy, glad softening over the "paid" mother's whole countenance, and when Deborah had left her she was swaying gently in her rocking-chair, holding the bottle of the Associated

Charities' certified milk at just the right angle, and, best of all, her lips had bent to touch the unconscious little hand upon her breast.

In the languorous heat Deborah walked slowly toward the car, her thoughts full of her work, but just at the Lake Street curve the sight of a certain lovely old-fashioned garden made her pause, a light of interest in her face, and she crossed over toward the pretty home just as a young girl came down the side-path and opened the gate wide.

"Oh, Miss Heath!" The girl's eyes glowed in her thin face.

"I'm not going to keep you a minute, Louise. I was just passing and I thought I'd say how-d'you-do to you. Busy?"

"Oh, Miss Heath!" Words failed her again, then rushed in happy overflow. "I'm taking her for a walk in the wheel-chair now. She says she *needs* me and my strength. Oh, Miss Heath!"

Deb beamed over her ecstasy. "Of course she does. She always will. You're such a dear to her. Run along to get her at once."

She turned to take the car, rejoicing. Three

weeks before the girl had attempted to "end it all" by throwing herself into the bay, because she was out of work, and "nobody cared." Rescued by a fisherman, the forlorn "case" had been called to the attention of the social workers, and Deborah, with the peculiar insight and sympathy which were already distinguishing her, had found just what the girl needed and what needed her.

Life's many disharmonies were calling to her splendid energies and abilities for re-adjustment, as if they had always been waiting for her, and she, always ready with the bounty of her richly stored soul, let the work claim her completely.

Yet the whole afternoon was practically free and she had planned to attend to certain domestic details, Martha needing her assistance. In pursuance of which, she rode to Fillmore Street and wended her way to market where, amid the bouquet of mellow melons, late mountain peaches, bursting figs, and burnished grapes, she listened to the fruit-man's pæan of joy over the end of his dull season now that "the quality" were returning from their country-seats and retreats to



enjoy the wealth of boughten lusciousness at hand. Deborah, having ordered her fruit, listened interestedly to the voluble Italian's dissertation on economics and, as she went out of the shop and a burst of melodious operatic song followed her from the other young "dago" busy over his crates in the rear, a realization of the diverse fullness of life animated all her senses.

Turning from the teeming thoroughfare into the quiet of Clay Street, she came almost full tilt against Mabel Goddard, and, "Mabel!" "Deborah!" expressed their mutual surprise.

"When did you get back?" asked Deb, conscious from the moment of meeting of a certain indefinable constraint in the greetings of the fair epitome of summer before her.

"This morning. How are you?"

"Splendid. You are beautifully brown. Been golfing all these months, I suppose."

"Almost. But I'll be glad to get bleached. Awfully warm, isn't it?"

"Have you—— Mabel, what has Gwen been writing you?"

"I've only had two post-cards from her,—one



from Venice in the beginning, and I forget where the other was from. George dropped me a line from Scotland."

"Yes. Then we've nothing to tell each other. I think they're motoring in Brittany now. I'm——"

"Deb!"

"Yes?"

"When will you have dinner with us or luncheon with me? I *must* have a talk with you. Come tonight."

"No. Some day next week. I'll telephone. You wrote Gwen, of course, Mabel?"

"Of course." Her eyes avoided the other's searching ones as she smilingly parted from her.

Deb, frowning, continued on her way, keeping close within the slight shade the houses afforded. Her sense of comfort was gone, the heat had suddenly become unbearable. She would not question Mabel Goddard's attitude—it was of no consequence whatever. As to the singular paucity of communication between the two friends, that was of small import also. Each was

fully occupied with her own doings, Mabel with a gay summer, Gwen with her honeymoon abroad. But she knew that her platitudinous explanation was only an evasive begging of the question. She knew that the strained correspondence between the two friends was only another phase of the strained correspondence between the two sisters. Not that she had not been kept fully informed of their wanderings. Post-cards had rained upon her, sometimes several in one day, if not to her, to Martha,—slap-dash, gay affairs without a personal remark save for a teasing Hibernianism to the latter.

But there had not been a single letter in spite of Deb's reiterated appeal. "Heavens, Deb," Gwen had flung back across the seas, "you don't want a guide-book supplement, or a 'Sentimental Journey' epistle, do you? I'm saving up all my original observations on things and things till I see you. Look-out for a tidal-wave!"

But the strangeness of it rankled and clouded the persistent hope which was always at the back of her thoughts. Meeting Mabel brought the hidden thorn to the threshold of consciousness,

and she hastened on, wondering whether there would be a post-card awaiting her. She had not heard from her for a week.

And as she touched the bell-button, the door opened and Gwen, in hat and coat, stood there before her.

With an abortive cry of stupefaction, Deb caught her in her arms. That was the only sound or sign of life for a dark moment, and then Gwen, slipping from her clasp, closed the front door.

"You!" stammered Deb crazily, staring at her. "How dare you—what—why did you surprise me in this delightful fashion?" Her trembling voice sank to incoherence as her eye grasped the devastation upon the wan face upon which she gazed.

Gwen, with a short laugh, raised a bored brow. "You know me and Solomon Grundy," she returned lightly, and went forward to Deb's room. "There's your funny old chair looking half-seas over, same as ever," she exclaimed jocosely as she walked in. "I do believe I have to plump down into the ridiculous thing," and she slipped

among the cushions of Deb's ancient steamer-chair and looked about her as if taking an inventory in the semi-obscurity, the blinds being lowered over the windows thrown wide to the still air.

"Hats off!" Deb was saying, her hands at the hidden pins, striving to keep her shocked heart out of her voice. She ran her fingers through the soft hair, smoothing back, with lingering touch, a loosened strand. "You're just about two months sooner than you counted, aren't you?" She forced a careless tone. "And where's George?"

"Oh, he's downtown tending to things. He'll be along." But Deb's furtive attention had detected a tightening of the lips, the smoldering gleam in the wide eyes.

"Thinner, aren't you, darling? Your coat is awfully loose." She dared not speak of the face. "Or is that the latest? It's a perfect love of a suit. There, take off your gloves while I get out of my things, and we'll have tea or——"

"No, no tea or anything, Deb, please. I've had luncheon and I'm not a bit hungry."

“Martha’s making cookies. Smell ’em? They’re lovely and hot, and——”

“Will make the hurt place well?” The girl drew a long, laughing breath. “Oh, Deb, you’re the funniest old thing in the world! Cookies! You remind me of the treatment for broken heart in Mrs. Craigie’s book: ‘They fed it on chops the day that she died!’” She was drawing off her gloves, one finger at a time. “Why don’t you speak out—ask questions—have it over and done with?” She pitched her gloves over to the bed beyond and sat straight up, holding her sister rooted under her tempestuous gaze.

“Yes, Gwen, I’m going to, of course. Aren’t you well, my darling?” The tender voice stumbled pitifully.

“Oh, grand and well, as Martha’d say. Only don’t ‘darling’ me so insistently. I’m not a darling—I’m a devil. His Majesty’s keeping me these days, my dear, so prepare for anything hateful. I’m hateful—vile and hateful, thank you! But I thought to myself—when I was at the lowest over there—no matter how hateful I become, *she* won’t hate me. ‘If I were hanged

on the highest hill!' you know. It's the way some people feel about God,—so, you see, you're a sort of religion for me. That's why I've come back to you—for help—in the most religious step imaginable!" She laughed again, a sharp, hard sound, and Deb's heart contracted forebodingly.

"Why have you come home—like this?" she asked in a hoarse undertone.

"Had to. Couldn't stand it another minute. Took the next steamer."

"Why?"

"I've told you. Had to end it."

"End what?"

"Everything. Mrs. George Leland—her honeymoon—her married life—and all."

"Gwen!"

"Steady there, old Law-and-Order. You are up against it at last."

"I don't understand you."

"Oh, yes, you do. Put on your thinking-cap a minute,—a modern one, Queen Victoria, if you can find one in your mental wardrobe!"

Deb's face had grown as white and haggard as the one regarding her. "What has hap-



pened?" she faltered. "Have you and George quarreled?"

"Quarreled? No. But that doesn't keep me from hating him." Her face was at white-heat with her hate.

The sight frightened Deb. "Why do you hate him?" she questioned hoarsely.

"Because. Because—I told him I had made a mistake and—he—wouldn't *try* to understand."

Vaguely Deb guessed at the meaning behind the spasmodic utterance. "What mistake could you have made?" her dry lips formulated.

"The mistake of marrying him. What else? That's what I'm going to correct—now—at once."

"Why?"

"I've told you,—can't you understand, or won't you? Because I hate him."

"Did you hate him when you married him?"

"No, I didn't hate him when I married him. I tolerated him."

"But you thought you would learn to love him——?"



“What?”

“I say you thought you would learn to love him, dearest,” Deb repeated in sharp pleading.

Gwen stared at her incredulously. “A voice from the past!” she murmured derisively. “Holy grandmothers! Out of what old rag-bag of sentimentality did you dig up that ‘happy-ending’ relic, Deb? You thought I thought I would ‘learn to love him.’ Lord!”

“I did,” affirmed Deborah sternly, utterly ignoring her ridicule. “As I know you did.”

“Indeed? No, I’m sorry to disillusion you, but I never cherished your pretty illusion for a minute. I never gave it a thought, in truth. But neither did I give a thought to—this.”

“This? What?”

“Hell.”

“Who has made your hell? Not George Leland who loves you.”

“Oh, what do you know! What could you know about it anyway!” She flung her head back hopelessly against the cushion, turning her face away.

“I know,” came relentlessly from the woman

in the background. "A good woman tries to make heaven out of hell, but you——"

"I'm not a good woman, I'm telling you!" She had sprung to a sitting posture again. "Won't you listen—even with your preconceived conclusions?" She spoke in hoarse passion, beating the chair-arm with her futile fist. "I told him I had made a mistake—I discovered it—how great a mistake I had made—only then—and I wanted to go away——"

"How did you discover your mistake—and when?"

"That night. I had a letter."

"Oh. You discovered your mistake through a letter!" Clearly, through the exclamation, shone the doubting sneer behind it.

The girl's face, raised high above the sneer of her confessor, was sharp-drawn as a dagger. "Yes," she answered distinctly, "through a letter. A letter from the man I love."

"A letter from the man you love——" repeated the other dazedly, but through the dimness she knew at once of whom she spoke. "But—you were married to George Leland."

The smile answering her was pitiful in its patience.

“You”—Deb’s face flushed darkly as she strove for utterance—“you married one man, loving another?”

“And how I loved him!”

Deborah saw. The light of what she saw and heard, beyond the low-breathed words, blinded her for a space. Then her face resumed its implacability. “Why didn’t you marry the man you loved?” she asked harshly.

“Because you wouldn’t let me!” The abrupt response startled them both. They gazed upon each other with frightened eyes.

“I, Gwen, I? What could I have had to do with it?” came at last from the older in a choking whisper.

“Everything,” half-sobbed the other in her bitterness. “All your life, all your thoughts, all your narrowness was opposed to it. And I have always been your creature—the slave of your opinions. I obeyed you—as I have always obeyed you—to my despair.”

“For God’s sake, Gwen, of what are you

speaking? How have I ever influenced you—except unconsciously—against any man? Your accusation is cruel and childish. Why should I stand between you and the man you love?”

“Because he is married.”

Chaotic waves of light passed over Deborah’s consciousness. “The dog!” she ground out passionately. “The beast! The scoundrel!”

“Hush!” commanded Gwen.

And then it was that Deborah Heath became lyrical,—the day was destined to be an epochal one in Deborah Heath’s emotions. She did not move from where she stood, but she raised her head high in exultation.

“Let him go,” she said proudly. “What can such a man, without tradition or discipline, mean to such as you or I? Let him go his baneful, irresponsible, destructive, egoistic way! Such a man never gave a thought to another’s welfare in all his life, if it clashed with his. But let me thank God,” her arms folded themselves triumphantly over her bosom, “that you have tradition, that you have discipline—that you are my creature—that you are my slave—that you have

your limitations—that I, Deborah Heath, stand for your limitations, Gwen Heath!”

The other measured her ironically, slowly, from top to toe. “Don’t you think,” she questioned at last, “that that’s a queer thing to thank God for—to hug one’s self in gloating satisfaction over having been the instrument of destruction of another’s happiness?”

Deborah looked straight into her eyes. “Look at me,” she ordered quietly. “Look me squarely in the face, and answer me, thoughtfully, truthfully. Take your time—examine your heart. Do you think that you—being what you are—would ever have been happy as the mistress of another woman’s husband?”

She waited, watching the convulsive swallowing disturbing the slender throat although the hardened eyes continued to regard her defiantly, but no answer came.

Deborah came closer, bending over her in the intensity of her love. “Don’t cheat yourself, Gwen,” her restrained voice went on. “Such oblivion, such irresponsible egoism, such a moral perversion, such delusive happiness is not for the

highly sensitized creature you happen to be. Happiness! That's not the simple term it seems. Yes, to conscienceless creatures, perhaps,—to creatures—slaves of their passions, perhaps. Let them be happy in that way, if they can. But you, you would have eaten your heart out with anguish and regret."

Gwen's eyes narrowed. "Not with Austin Dane," she said through locked teeth. She uttered the name without hesitancy, and Deb heard with a sense of sickening defeat.

"Nevertheless," she said in rough finality, "you chose—otherwise. As you make——"

"No!" silenced the other peremptorily. "Fortunately I did not choose forever. Fortunately for the poor riff-raff beneath your notice, such as I, for the scum of the earth who are not infallible in their sense of choice, human afterthought has provided a human Amendment to their Divine Law."

"You mean—divorce?"

"What else?"

"And what about the man you've cheated out of his hope of happiness?"



“ I’m not thinking of him.”

“ No, you are only thinking of yourself, you dishonorable little egoist!” She caught her wrists in a grip of steel, her face distorted with anger. “ Don’t you know that, unless you have tried till the ninety-and-ninth time, you dare not fling up your moral obligations to this blameless man? What do these first months of adjustment to each other count for in the tie which every year must make deeper and holier? Don’t you know that unless you have tried with all your might and with all your soul——”

“ I have tried,” Gwen broke forth chokingly. “ I tried all the way—till that day at Chartres. But—I can’t—crucify—myself.” The words came singly, in deadly deliberation. “ I can marry Austin Dane now—he is free, or will be,—and—I—refuse—to become—the mother—of any child—but the child of the man I love. I’m made that way.”

Deborah recoiled, helpless, uncomprehending, questioning her with stormy brow.

The face before her seemed to grow sharper while she searched it, more pointed, more utterly



bereft of womanhood, and her voice was sibilant when she spoke further through scarcely parted lips.

“ I came home as soon as I understood. I came to you because I need your help—before I get a divorce.”

Deborah's eyes were slowly fixing in horror and, as Gwen saw understanding gathering behind the mobile brow, she enlightened her fully in a lifeless monotone. “ I want you to help me—at once.”

With an appalled cry, Deborah hid her eyes from the sight of her. “ Oh, you—Medusa!” her shuddering lips flung back.

Gwen laughed, a short, dreary sound. “ Not at all,” she pronounced judicially. “ Medusa was an ancient Greek myth—I am a very modern material reality. We moderns have learned a lot since then. You, no doubt, know more about it than I do. That should be part of your training. I have only heard whispers, but all the vagueness of it came back to me out there like a flash of hope. Deb, Deb, won't you help me?” She ended in a sharp cry, all her misery breaking

through her affectations, her body trembling from the sudden rupture.

Slowly Deborah's hands fell, slowly she raised her lids and looked across at her sister. "Are you going to have a little baby, Gwen?" she asked very simply.

"No," Gwen returned roughly, "that's just what I don't intend to have,—not George Leland's child."

"Oh, but," said Deborah dreamily, ignoring the other's fierce protest, "I should think it would be considered a sweet privilege for the wife of George Leland to be chosen to be the mother of such a man's children."

Again Gwen gave the sharp, ugly laugh. "That's eugenics," she sneered. "And I don't propose to pose as an object-lesson for the eugenists. That's not what I'm here for——"

"Ah, Gwen, *I* know what you're here for!" Deb, with the ringing cry, was standing with arms outheld, her face strangely radiant. "*I* know, Gwen. It's all been for me. You're to have your little baby—for me!"

In mystified attention, Gwen, arrested, gazed upon her extraordinary ecstasy.

“Don’t you see, dearest,” the low, full-toned voice went on in rapt measure, “that it is the nearest I can ever get to motherhood? Your child—almost my very own? I could make believe so easily with your baby, Gwen dear. Will you pay—a hundredfold—for the years—of which I have never spoken—for my dead youth which I have buried deep—oh, safe and quiet at last, my darling,—for the muted dreams, the stark, long, lone outlook? Will you give your little baby to me, Gwen?”

Gwen had risen, she was coming toward her, her hands outstretched. “Deb,” she was saying bewilderedly, “Deb, I never thought—oh, Deb, I never knew——”

But Deb had taken the outstretched hands and drawn them gently to her bosom, she was looking down deep into the blurred eyes upraised to hers. “You can’t dream how I shall love it, Gwen,” she promised. “The tiny, tiny feet, the little cuddley head, the baby eyes turned to me alone for help, the wonderful responsibility——”

“But, Deb dear, she’s *my* baby!”

The intuitive cry pushed them asunder with its thrill. Gwen’s upturned face was streaming with unnoticed tears, and Deb, looking upon her, saw that the wisdom of Solomon had prevailed. The babbling of her own long-sealed fount of crooning motherhood had borne unforeseen fruition. And Deb, falling precipitately to earth from her one, unprecedented sentimental flight, laughed in her heart over her unwitting subtlety.

She put the slender, overwrought figure back into the chair. “You keep her, Gwen,” she whispered gayly, “you keep her—for yourself and—for everybody.”

Then, after the speechless sobbing had subsided, and the girl had turned her face from her into the pillow, she stole lightly away.

## CHAPTER XI

### TEKEL!

WHEN the afternoon light was waning, Deborah met George Leland in the cool hush of the hall. He turned from putting down his hat and coat and took both her hands in his, meeting her welcoming smile with a pale, stern regard. She noted with a pang the settled fold between his brow.

“Well, George?” she said warmly.

He pressed her hands. “Is Gwen here?” he asked briefly.

“Yes, she’s asleep. At least she was a few minutes ago when I looked in. Let’s go in here.” She led the way into the library, where the quiet beauty of departing day was filling the room with a pale, golden glow. She raised the blinds and, turning about, found him standing stiff and upright near the door. She moved a step toward him, meeting again the peculiar hard regard which she made no attempt to parry.

“ I know,” she said at once, as if in answer to his comment. “ I know all about it.”

“ What do you know? ”

“ That you and Gwen have not been happy.”

“ Happy! ” He strode across the room, where he faced her again in brusque, business-like directness. “ What’s to be the upshot of this? ” he asked gruffly.

“ Why—I think it’s going to be all right,” she said, beaming upon him.

“ All right! Do you know what you’re talking about? ”

“ I think I do.”

“ And you think hell’s going to be all right, do you? Not if I know it, Deborah.” His somber eyes flashed in threat.

“ Not if—if everything is changed, George? ” she pleaded timidly. Timidity was a new phase of Deborah Heath, and Leland did not like it—he chafed under it.

“ Bosh. What’s changed? Hate been turned to love? ” he sneered. “ Miracles been performed? ”

“ Perhaps. Call it miracles.”

“Call it any name you please, only don't talk hieroglyphics to a man who's been on the rack for days and weeks!”

Her steady regard did not falter. “You see, George,” she said very quietly, “Gwen's going to have a little baby.”

His face went blank, then the color surged, surged in a mad riot over it. He shook his head, uncomprehending.

She turned her eyes away, looking toward the window, and went on in the same quiet undertone. “I should not be telling you this, but I know you will forgive the intrusion,—as I know you will forgive her. All her—unreasonableness has been due to a certain form of hysteria. That's Dr. Deb's diagnosis, George, and though you may consider said Deb a quack, it doesn't need a certificate to understand these symptoms.” She moved over to the window and stood looking out upon the sunset quiet of the streets.

Absolute stillness held the room for a space, but presently she heard him coming to her, and she turned about. He was quite pale and the fold between his brows seemed intensified, but he spoke



with perfect control of whatever perturbation he was suffering, or had suffered.

“ You’re quite sure of this, Deborah? ”

“ Quite sure, George. ”

“ Then I think I’ll go to her, if I may. ”

“ Surely. She’s in my room,—you know it, don’t you? Don’t forget she’s asleep. ”

He went down and across the hall with a firm, quick step. Only at the door he stood, hand on knob, moveless for several seconds. Then he went in, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

She was still asleep in the chair, her face turned away, one cheek buried in the chintz cushion, the other, white and delicate, half-hidden under a fallen wave of her hair. She was so still that Leland, looking down upon her graven, frail beauty, felt a sudden shock of terror. But that passed and he seated himself blindly in the chair standing near. The unconsciousness of her childlike pose filled him with pitying tenderness, he wanted to fall on his knees and gather her in his arms and assure her of his strength and his power to protect her from every danger. Instead, he sat still, clutching his knees,

regarding her with full eyes. And over his face crept the reflection of a thought, grave and glad, stern, yet sweet in its secret triumph——

He was startled to see, presently, that the up-curling lashes shadowing her cheek were raised, that, though lying motionless, as if still asleep, she was gazing open-eyed before her. Without moving, he watched the color wavering in and out of her cheek, watched a smile tremble to the corner of her mouth and brood there. She lay strangely still, he thought, interminably, till, with a slight yawn, she turned over and saw him.

Instantly she sat erect and he was on his feet, looking down at her, barely seeing her.

“Deb told me, Gwen,” he murmured, his hands going out to her.

But the quick, deep frown of her brows restrained him. “That’s nothing,” she said in swift incoherence. “I mean—it’s nothing to you. I—I choose to regard it as concerning me alone. In fact, it’s the only way I can and *will* regard it.”

Minute after minute passed while he stood considering her words. “That’s strange,” he

breathed, drawing his hand across his brow as if seeking understanding.

“Yes,” she agreed icily.

“It sounds—original, but it’s not very convincing—or practical, is it? In fact, it’s rather absurd.”

The blood stormed to her cheeks, her eyes darkened. “You know,” she said, her low voice stumbling in its hurry, “this knowledge is not of today—to me. It hasn’t altered my—anything between us, you know.” Her eyes dropped to her hands convulsively clasped on her knee.

His close-pressed lips and set jaw vouchsafed no response.

She was compelled, perforce, to continue. “Not that that makes any difference—about its practicality or practicability. I have discarded the idea of a separation now, that is,—unless you still wish it.”

He continued to regard her as if measuring her, without sign of response to her words.

She looked away, speaking more nervously. “We have to come to an understanding. Of course, if you agree, we can go on, conventionally

together, under the same roof, as long as it will be tolerable for you. I shall try my best—for my child's sake. I think we can bluff it out, don't you? Most lives are a bluff, you know, one way or another."

He fixed her then with a long gaze to which she was forced to hold. "I see," he said at last, laconically. After a pause he went on, slowly, as if speech were difficult, thinking it all out as he proceeded. "You've put me in my place—effectually. What you are seeking now is protection—nothing more. I see. Ye-es. I—think—I want to give you that. As you suggest, it's the only expedient—under the circumstances. I shall do my best—as you promise—'to bluff it out.' But, oh, Gwen, why does it have to be bluff—won't you *try* for the real thing, my love,—my wife,—mother of my child that is to be?"

She shuddered back from the resistless outburst, turning a white, relentless face from the quivering passion of his.

He drew a sharp, painful breath. "I see," he said, his teeth ground together. "That's over. Whatever you decide upon for domestic arrange-

ments, goes. It's indifferent to me. You know my income. I take it this is the commercial basis of our continuing together during a certain fixed period." He turned from her, moving over to the dressing-table, where he picked up a trinket, examining it with unseeing eyes. "From this moment," he added thickly, "I promise you that I shall cease to try to win you. That game's up. I also promise not to annoy you too much with my presence 'under the same roof' with you, as you put it. But, at the same time, you may as well understand that I am agreeing to this false position solely for the sake of *my* child!"

At the sound of the boyish retort she turned her averted face to meet the full force of the intolerant hate of his eyes.

The faint smile died on her lips. "I think," she began, and cleared her throat nervously, "I think I—I owe you an explanation. I think that in order to make things—what I have just said to you—clearer to you, more pardonable, if you will, it will be necessary for me to tell you in just what frame of mind I came home here. I"—she cleared her throat again with a little

nervous laugh—"I find I can bluff some things out, and not others. So—I am driven to tell you—that I did not intend to be—the mother of your child." Her low voice faded into a deathly silence. Only the gigantic shadows her words cast held the awful stillness of the room. Leland did not move.

Then the limping voice made an end of explaining. "I was as desperate as that. It was only—only through an unconscious fluke of Deb's—that I have decided—otherwise. She made me want my child—for myself."

He veered fully upon her, understanding only too well a clammy deadness touching him from head to foot. For a wild moment no sound came, then short, hard breaths prefaced his attempt at articulation. "So," he finally succeeded in saying drunkenly. "So—you're that kind of a woman. And I thought—I thought that you were the only one fit—I thought your beauty was you. I loved you. Damn it!—I loved you. I won't ask you why you married me. The inference is too vilely obvious. There wasn't one fine impulse in the whole act. But all the same—



all the same—you can see what you've done to me. You can see—that you've said the most brutal thing a woman can say to a man." He stopped to catch his gasping breath before he could go on in the outpouring of his bitter disillusionment. "Ever since I have known you, I have wanted to tell you about—about the one wonderful thing that has been in my life. But I never could. But today—now—when I came in here—I thought the moment had come— Now I know why I have never been able to. You—you with your heavenly face—you are not worthy!"

She sat stupefied under the labored lashings of his denunciation. A terrible trembling took her as he finished, she wanted to answer, to refute his estimate of her, but the egoistic joy of impulsive, free speech was to be hers no longer. Life had suddenly grown complex for her. She saw herself as she was in his eyes, but she saw more.

She turned up to him a white, proud face. "Anyway," she said finally, very low, but distinctly, "anyway, I shall be worthy of my child."





BOOK II

THE MOTHER

“What of the way to the end?—The end crowns all!”  
BROWNING.



# I

## A FRAGMENT

I SAID to him, " I shall be worthy of my child " (she wrote in the little black book). And I will.

I write this down—as record of my itinerary thither—for visual reckoning, as good housewives are wont to keep account of expenditures for their own personal satisfaction. I shall write from time to time—not from day to day. I shall hold reviews. And I shall hold the record up before the eye of my conscience as a cat-o'-nine-tails goad to keep me to my boast. That makes me laugh: as though I need a goad!

And there shall be no expenditure,—it shall be all income. Like a miser, I shall hoard the gold of my soul as it drifts in,—or is it only up?—to consciousness,—like a miser, I shall count it over, and over, and over,—to make sure that I am proving him wrong. I shall be worthy of my child.

And if one is worthy of one's child is not that being worthy of—everything? Of anything *he* could have meant to tell me? I remember old Carlyle digging down to the roots of that word. No, it was not “worthy,” it was “worship.” “Worship,” he said: “Worth-ship.” So, by a leap of will, and knowledge of power, I shall be worthy the worship of my child. I aim high. It shall be high, higher, highest:—Worship.

I shall not sit on throne, but in sanctuary. There are no bugles, no trumpets. Only “the still, small voice.” Now I know what it means to be in communion. Even I, I so “unworthy,” as he said. For, listen,—did not the Dreamer say, “Cannot a great thought enter a little room?” I am a little room—a shabby room—and unto me a great thought has entered. I lock the door. I throw away the key. My guest becomes my prisoner. But what if my prisoner prove to be—The Presence? Then, in this glorious durance, shall I not grow like unto The Presence?—I shall be worthy the worship of my child.

And I record, as the first quiver on the waiting, brooding silence: I no longer hate George Le-

land. That which was crooked has been made straight.

As soon as I had uttered those words to him, hate fled from me. Or, rather, it faded. As though a Hand had passed over it, and it was no more. That was queer. Now, what was that Hand? Whose?—I mean. Did I think, then it was—God's—that trite explanation of the inexplicable? Oh, no. I thought: I have begun. And I smiled happily, as one who, having burned her bridges behind her, knows her Great Adventure has begun. That is a thrilling moment—"to have begun."

I wonder (I write as the thoughts dart in, creep in, insinuate themselves in), I wonder whether his judging me has made me humble, and whether we have changed places. I was never humble before. I was never judged before. No one ever expressed scorn of me before—that is, no one but myself—and Deborah that afternoon. But Deb took it back,—by continuing to love me, she took it back. So there is only George Leland to account to. There is a wide difference between knowing one's own secret self,



and having another know it. That is where the great, cynical Disciplinarian comes in—Public Opinion. I used to think only weaklings and cowards kotowed to it,—now I see that the selfless, the responsible,—mothers, for instance,—crouch before it as well. George Leland's words were to me as the voice of Public Opinion shouting before the thick walls of my distorted egoism. George Leland, through making me crouch, put himself above me, made himself my overlord for one blinding moment. After that one moment had passed, I stood erect, though with a new survey of life. It was not a servile one. No, I am not humble. I have hidden wings.

That night at the hotel—he had taken rooms at the St. Francis—I said to him in a very quiet spirit, “Will you help me to find a house tomorrow? Don't you think a furnished house would be best? Or shall it be an apartment?”

I had come in from my bedroom after taking off my things, and found him sitting in an easy-chair reading the evening paper with an air of absorbed interest. He looked up at me over the edge of the paper as I stood near the table and

seemed to be leisurely taking stock of me or my proposition. He was quite cool. He has cast off a thrall.

“I have no ideas on the subject,” he said carelessly. “Please yourself.” But, upon second thought, he added, “Only be sure there’s a garage.”

I would not take this as a dismissal, neither would I sit down, but I wanted to be sure of his wishes. “Then I think a small house would be pleasantest, don’t you?” I asked tentatively.

“It’s all the same to me. Get the lists from the real estate people. Would you like me to get them for you?”

“Thank you, I wish you would,—in the morning, so as not to waste time. And there are several woman agents who have the finer homes. I can telephone to them.”

He made no comment. I do not know whether he was really reading, or studiously avoiding me. It was only a few hours after—what had happened in Deb’s room at home. His face looked gray and hard, as though an icy blast had just passed over him leaving him gaunt and bare. I,

in my madness, had devastated his soul. I, in my frenzied "honesty," had denuded him of youth.

The ugly truth confronted me abruptly. "Good-night," I said, and turned away.

He made some sound in response but did not stand up, until, just as I reached the door, I heard the dry rustling of the paper and his arresting voice.

"Oh,—one minute," he called in a frigid tone.

I turned about, waiting. He was standing now, facing me, one hand in his pocket, the other still grasping his paper.

"About money," he said. (Ever since, a sick feeling comes over me at sound or sight of the word.) "I'll get a check-book for you in the morning and——"

I stood stupefied a moment as I saw him coming toward me, a wad of bank bills in his hand. "Thanks, I have plenty," I managed to get out before he reached me. "Good-night!" And I fled, closing the door between us.

It was nothing,—it was everything,—that encounter. It held the whole bitter degradation of a marriage for money, in a nutshell. It fixed

us in our relative positions—he the benefactor; I the beneficiary. I stood on the rack, at the other side of the door. I said, crazily enough to myself, “I believe in the French dower system. I believe in the French dower system.” I said it over and over, but it did not solve for me the problem of the moment. Wave upon wave of excitement swept over me but left me no nearer a solution.

And then—I must write down my humiliations as well as my triumphs—I wrenched open the door between us and flashed in upon him, like a fury, I suppose, though I struggled to appear calm. Curiously, I noted afterward, he was standing exactly where I had left him, but in my loss of self-control, I know I did not clearly see him.

“I’ve made a mistake,” I stammered. “I can’t do it. I’m going away. I can’t accept your money. I’m going to Deb. I’ll find something to do. I know you’ll be glad. It will be better for both of us. I was crazy to think such things can be arranged in that way. I couldn’t endure it. We’re nothing to each other. Why

didn't you show me the folly of it at once? Why did you let me humiliate myself with such a proposition? Was it out of revenge—or hate?"

He stood motionless, letting me spend myself, and then, just as I felt a torrent of tears storming up to further expose my misery, he began to speak, very deliberately, in a gray, even tone, gray and expressionless as his face. "You are over-excited," he said. "There is no question about your going away. There can't be. And as to your not 'taking my money,'—that's nonsense. Any court would assure you of that, and any sensible person. Try to accept that view, because it's the only view possible. I intend caring for my child—now and always. That determination does away with the idea of separation, doesn't it?"

I shook my head, gulping down my tears, but he ignored my speechless denial, his voice moving steadily on. "At any rate, you don't need to worry about the immediate future. In all probability, I'll go to London now, as first arranged, instead of Sargent, to investigate that deal an English syndicate is negotiating with us in re-

gard to our Coalinga holdings. That may take months. Then, we're installing storage and pipe lines in different fields. As traffic manager, I'll be out of the city a good deal. Under those conditions, a formal separation, would, I think, be superfluous. I think it's an experiment worth trying for the present, don't you? Of course it may resolve itself into my staying away altogether. But afterwards,—my child is mine, you understand." His voice and face had suddenly turned inexorable, and I grew sick with fear, closing my eyes a second in recognition of his unknowableness.

"Shall we call a truce?" I heard him say with I-don't-know-what of authoritative reasonableness, almost gentle in its calm.

"Thank you," I answered, trying to smile, and, with a vague inclination of the head in good-night, I crept blindly into the other room.

Once there, with the door closed, I leaned my head against the hard casing, waiting for the excitement to subside from my trembling limbs.

Of course he was right from every practical view-point and, dully, I began to calculate from



his view-point, mine being *exalté* and, therefore, out of reason. It would be better for the child. I could regard myself as the keeper of his house. As the keeper of his house I was entitled to some sort of wage. It could be arranged according to a fixed allowance. I could say to him, "I can run your house for you upon so much," naming the minimum, after a little experience. Besides, he had himself declared, "I am agreeing to this false position solely for the sake of *my* child." Then the question was settled upon these reciprocal considerations. Was it? I drew a hard breath over the conclusion to my sordid sophistry.

No!—I was strong. Why could I not go out into the world of toil and do—what? for her?

Because—I took a firm grasp of the situation, looking it squarely in the face—because, first of all, I had not been trained for any useful occupation. I would never throw myself upon Deb's extravagant love, facing the uncertainty of a future, already mortgaged and, without vocational training,—and a child to support,—I would be that sorry figure, a woman striving to eke out



a meager existence through some amateurish work provided her by the charity of her friends. The bitter sordidness entered like an instrument of torture into my uncontrollable imagination. I hated sordidness—my intense hatred for it had brought me to this very issue. And along with the vision came the uncontrovertible realization that, whatever sustenance might accrue, it, too, would be at the price of independence—I would be dependent on the kindness of the stranger public instead of that of the man acknowledgedly responsible.

And here I register a vow: my daughter—I know I shall have a daughter—shall be trained for some vocation, some vocation always in demand, beautiful if possible, useful, if she shows no other bent. (Solely for your happiness, my beloved. Your mother, whose experience has been other, provides you with this accident-insurance policy!)

So much for my own limitations.

Secondly, dared I sell my child's worldly advantages and opportunities to satisfy my personal dignity? And, thirdly, he claims the right to

provide for his child as he sees fit—and, with the child, of necessity, for her prospective mother.

I stood lost in rapid thought, accepting, rejecting, in flashing succession, arguments both for and against his inflexible ultimatum, cynically aware of mixed motives in either decision. And the upshot was, I chose the obvious good—and with it, the line of least resistance! Yet flippancy, all sense of humor—my former ready weapon—had altogether deserted me. If, for a second, it vaguely insinuated itself, it was in anticipation of other people's ignorant sense of proportion—not of my own. And above the oppression of my resolution I raised my head with a dauntless will, swearing never to allow myself to grow embittered—for my child's sake.

And with that impulsive oath, I took a step across the room. Behold—a miracle! I was not cast in lead. I was light, I was swift, I was free. I raised my arms above my head—I felt their perfect, easy strength. I swayed this way and that—laughing at my fitness, at the consciousness of joyous health leaping through my entire being. What a gift I could give my child! What a

glorious inheritance! If, dimly, another's shadow moved before me, it did not detract from my supreme self-exultation, but far off, far off in the phantasms of the future, I made out a wavering picture, and I know that I shall move toward it through the intervening mists, as to a goal. But I cannot write it down.

Comfort, benignant, untroubled, stole drowsily over me. I sank into a chair, letting my face fall within my encircling arms, as a child seeks not only rest, but oblivion. (I saw a baby cuddle that way once under its mother's arm before falling asleep—so cunning, so cunning!)

Words passed before me like a pageant, iron words, words long since cast from out the fiery furnace of my life's experience and assuming the shape of Fates—indifferent, without design, yet designing all:

Deborah—Order.

Father—Beauty.

Deborah—Indulgence.

Heights—Ideals.

Love—Death.

Chaos—Order.

Mother—Creator.

Responsibility—Beauty—

Beauty with grave mien—holy beauty, inspiring beauty, beauty like music, not Greek music,—Hebrew music, deep, grand, leaving, as it passed, echoes of hallelujahs, hallelujahs of praying mothers, uplifted, on bended knees.

. . . . .

I said to myself, “I shall look forward, and not back.”

There was a short period in my life, not long ago, when that which was straight and fine in me became bent, and I went forward with soul turned earthward, seeking earthly things. I did not try to straighten up. I applauded the deformity.—Cover the figure! Look away!

I shall be the woman of today, not of yesterday. If I look back I shall be like Lot's wife, a pillar of bitterness, moveless—self-condemned. I have a life to live—I cannot stand looking backward. I will not be condemned—I who have straightened up. I escape from memory. When the woman of yesterday approaches me, subtly,

unannounced, like a ghost out of shadows, suddenly, silently, like a thief in the night, I will close my eyes, I will not see her, I will not acknowledge her. I am not that woman. When certain letters come with their firm, bold handwriting flaring my married name in my face, I shall destroy them unopened—as I did the one which came today. When a name sounds, unheard, like a far-away trumpet call, I will close my ears, lest the bitter flood pass over me. I will name no name—not even in my heart. Nevermore. One can do that. If one tries very hard one can annihilate one of one's selves without sinking into Nirvana. All one requires to do is to keep one's eyes set steadily forward to the goal. With each creative moment I become more like the woman I would be. And I believe that, in time, others will so know me. If not, it must suffice that I—and my child—shall know.

But George Leland will never know me so. He does not know that I have straightened up. When he looks at me he sees only that other one. That other one is stamped indelibly on the retina of his eye, and that stamping has also graven strange

lines upon his face. When he looks at me I can see that other one on the retina of his eye. What is she like, that other one? She is a woman with a flaming brand which has burnt and bent her soul. *His* child——!

I have murdered his youth. Hush—sh—sh——

He never forgets it—not for one minute. And because he holds her there and will not let her go, whenever he looks at me he forces me to look upon her too. He does not know that she is dead. And I cannot step over her body to him. He will not let me. Yet he stands by his flag of truce, and there is no warfare.

The morning after our return I looked out of the window, and behold! Window ledges, far as eye could see, flagstaffs, Union Square, all gay with streaming gonfalons and banners in scarlet and gold, thousands of Japanese lanterns in orange and red strung from high pole to high pole, and a stately joy-boat with a pagoda-like canopy amidships for the reception of royalty. It is Portola week. Through the vaporous, pearly curtain of sun-shot fog, I could see the crowds standing, waiting transfixed, like a dream army.



Presently, amidst boom of cannon and aërial bombs, fanfare of trumpets and martial music, the curtain of pearl rolled aside, rent by the sun and, as at some mighty signal, onward from the Embarcadero, came Balboa—king of the day—and his marching hosts. Oh, the sight of marching men, and the sound of marching music, moving onward, onward, as toward some high emprise,—oh, silent, marching souls moving silently onward to the strains of your own silent hero music, my soul shouts its companionship with you—

I watched till the pageant had passed, till, with the resumption of traffic, came flowers to my rooms, box after box of glorious, long-stemmed chrysanthemums and roses, and baskets of autumn fruits,—figs, white and black, bursting with honey, trailing clusters of golden, sun-browned, purple, and wine-red grapes—wealth of our sun-drunk land—a royal welcome. News of our arrival had traveled fast, and almost simultaneously with Mabel Goddard's roses came her voice at the telephone—very crisp, very light, instantly recalling our last meeting, the day of my wedding, when the veiled look in her eyes and the tone of



her voice had spoken like asterisks in a book: Frank had met George on 'Change yesterday—so glad we were back—sooner than we had planned, wasn't it?—and wouldn't we dine with them this evening and go to the ball at the Fairmont afterward?

A ball? The word had a foreign sound, as though I had journeyed far and away from its orbit, yet I think I gave no perceptible sign of the wrench back to her plane when I accepted her invitation with thanks, and the proviso that George would care to go.—Oh, she had already spoken to George and he would be delighted, if it pleased me.—So it was arranged and, with a few graceful nothings, we separated.

George would be delighted. I put my hands to my burning cheeks. No doubt he had seized the invitation as a deliverance. No doubt the sound of Mabel's voice had been balm to his ears. My eyes burned, like my cheeks, with the remembrance of his remembrances of me, but I literally and resolutely closed them against the flaying intrusion,—had I not sworn to keep my gaze turned forward? Ah, but the strain is like the curb of

the pillory!—For the first time a vague question—yet the thought was too fleeting to formulate a question—touched my knowledge of Mabel's feeling for George. But I closed my eyes to that too—what right have I to question?—and, a few minutes later, he came in with some lists from the real estate agents.

“Mabel just telephoned,” I said, “about this evening. She said you said you would be glad to go, so I accepted.”

“Oh, yes,” he assented carelessly enough, putting the papers on the table. “The ball promises to be very gay, and you like those things, don't you?”

Why should I tell him that “those things” had become peculiarly meaningless and remote to me, with his strong inclination to go staring me in the face? “It will be pleasant,” I assured him, and straightway felt better for the simple evasion. The immediate outlook helped to clear the atmosphere too,—there were trunks to unpack, flowers to be ordered.—How the little necessities of the moment push the big, abiding facts into the background!

He referred to the house-lists as he was going

out again. "I don't want to interfere with your plans, but hadn't you better get Deborah to go with you?" he suggested, turning at the door.

"Deborah is busy, you know. I'm not afraid to go alone." I found myself answering composedly, keenly conscious of the loosened tension.

"That's foolish. You don't want to be going into vacant houses alone. And you'll take a taxi, of course."

"Oh, no," I said hurriedly. "I'm used to the street cars, and I'll enjoy——"

He frowned in quick annoyance. "Nonsense," he said shortly. "I intend seeing about a car as soon as I can, but in the meanwhile——"

I felt the still rebellious blood rushing to my face as I rushed to say, "Please don't think of a car for me. I couldn't use it."

"Why not?" he demanded forthrightly, holding my troubled eyes with his frowning ones.

I could not speak the one word crowding to my lips, I would not brand myself anew with my spoken thought. I strove to make him understand with my held eyes.

And he did, flushing darkly. "That's quite ridiculous," he refuted whatever he had glimpsed. "I've always run a car and there's no reason for my not having someone on hand to run it when I'm not around. Economically there's no reason, and—I can't find the word, but no doubt you can supply it—and there's no other ground for your objecting."

I looked beyond him, submitting. He went off almost immediately.

In the eyes of the world, he meant to say, I am his wife. Accepting that status, I must live in accordance. But I alone hold the key to the truth and the proper nomenclature for the luxurious life he insists upon as the only rational one. I am Mrs. George Leland. Erase that unseen word. Be quietly matter-of-fact—as he is. Gwen Heath matter-of-fact? Surely, struggler, surely.

I did not take the taxi, but dear Mrs. Harrison went with me on my house-hunting chase. And the chase is already ended, the house found. It is the Ellery house, that small, red-brick Colonial home overrun with Virginia creeper, standing on its high Pacific Avenue corner, overlooking the

encircling waters. It has always seemed so distinguished, yet so darling to me. Surely the face of a house has a personality. And the interior bore out the expression of the exterior. It conquered me as soon as I entered the broad, dark-paneled hall with its stately, white-balustraded stairway, inviting one on and up. There was a sense of expectancy, of waiting, in the air, which excited me strangely. It could not have been only my own mood. And when I reached that one wonderful suite with its quaint daintiness of detail, the warm, burnished snugness of the sitting-room, and—leading from that—the deep sun-porch looking south and west,—I knew I had reached haven, I knew that here I was to dream my dream—I knew that my baby would sleep upon that porch.

We shall have to wait at least a week until it is put in order.

My house in order——!

I think of Deborah with her well-ordered life——

And so we dined at Mabel Goddard's and went to the ball afterwards—was it only last night?

The Palissers were there, brilliant and flippant, the Daytons, good clacquers, and Sally Lane, and Larry Martin. Mabel greeted me with gracious lightness as she might any slight acquaintance. The artificial front to our old intimacy is fixed now. I noticed the quiet joy with which she and George met. So let it be.

For the first time I heard the frank conversation of modern married society—with a young girl and a bachelor present. There was no subject too delicate, or indelicate, for discussion or comment. The sex question was the hub around which revolved all interest. Sally Lane aired her views most gallantly. They seemed agreed that there is no fixed standard for morality. There couldn't be. Life is too mixed, too complex. Therefore, the spirit of *laissez-aller* was the only logical and merciful wear. Of course there were some female marplots with hysterical consciences trying to set a congenitally crooked world straight by enacting laws—legislative surgery—which only robs Peter to pay Paul—and the novels—and the plays,—most particularly the plays. Of course everybody had read Brieux's



preachment. An eye-opener, eh? Oh, yes, to many. But, after all, such writings and plays reach only a certain class, while the masses——

Here Mabel broke in with curious roughness, “Well, that’s the point. What’s to prevent the certain class, who read and see and know, from going out and teaching those who don’t read or see or know?”

“The newspapers do that,” pacified Mrs. Palisser with a twinkling eye. “With the classes——as with the individual——charity should begin at home.”

I saw George, who sat next Mabel, change his listening attitude abruptly. “It takes something more than knowledge to produce virtue,” he said dryly.

Palisser laughed. “Now we’re going to get the straight goods.”

“What’s that?” asked Miss Lane with shining, intent eyes, her elbows on the table in an attitude of inexhaustible enjoyment.

I found myself concentrating on what he was about to say, but, with a sharp glance at Sally Lane’s interested face, he gave a slight nod to-



ward Palisser and merely said, "Ask Palisser what he means by 'the straight goods,'—that'll answer you."

I understood him intuitively and my heart beat hard and fast in vague partisanship, but his suggestion being out of line with the spirit of the moment the question laughed itself out in a lively argument over the graces and disgraces of the new dances. Once, during the discussion, in which I took no part, I caught a furtive glance from him and wished myself miles away, as, I believe, he knew. I believe in restraints, conversational as well as temperamental. I believe that modesty *does* make for morality and vice versa. And I knew, with a sense of amusement, that, had the garb of my mind been suddenly revealed, it would have appeared dowdy and "quaint" as a Quaker's, among all this smart modernity.

Larry Martin cornered me in the music-room before leaving for the ball. He and I had been gayly congenial in that now dim period, just before my marriage, when I had played at Empire-making. I had reveled in his clever cynicisms,

delighting in my own Rolands for his Olivers, but now, face to face with his lean, keen lineaments and inscrutable eyes,—remembering, with more enlightened vision, the coupling of his name with Mrs. Farwell's,—I wondered how I could ever have enjoyed anything so world-worn and disgruntled. A passion for youth and freshness was upon me, for a world of people glad with the bloom of springtime,—and the atmosphere about me was stifling.

“You don't inhabit these parts, do you?” he said to me. He was leaning against the end of the piano and so looked down at me where I sat running my fingers over the keys.

“Surely,” I answered. “I've come back.”

“You couldn't come back, never having been here before. You're not a native—you don't even speak the language.”

“But I understand it,” I assured him quietly with a smileless regard, “and——”

“Hate it.”

I let my gaze wander from him, still idly playing my running chords.

“Naturally,” he persisted, speaking in a low,

partly bantering, partly serious tone to the accompaniment of the notes. "You always did. Only now, more so. Which is singular. 'Clothed on in chastity.' I shall never forget. You burst like a beautiful epoch into my—into most of our—thoughts. What is that new look of abstraction on your face, Lady Poeticus?"

"Poeticus?" I repeated icily.

"In that slim, white shimmer of a gown. The flower, you know, with its small white wings held backward, ready for flight. There's the flight in your face."

I laughed, glad to be able to. "You're keen," I said lightly. "And I prefer your insight to your poetry—that's drivel—— I'm sure your ragging will be better timed."

He did not answer me and, glancing up with forbidding brows, I found him looking down at me very insistently, very disconcertingly. And at that moment George appeared in the doorway and the mere sight of him gave me a strange, nervous feeling of relief, and Larry Martin's surprising manner toward me ceased to trouble me.

The ball was brilliant. The music—I cannot describe the mad abandon of the dance music of today—but I am sure it is the throbbing rhythm of the music, not the motion of the dancers, that lends the greater part of the intoxication.

I danced only once—with Larry Martin, who alone insisted upon keeping me to my promise,—and I was glad when it was over. I sat out one with Lansing Wells, who was very eager and flushed, and diffident, and nice. Later he brought his fiancée up to where I was standing with Mr. Palisser. She is a tall, thin, stunning-looking girl with whimsical brown eyes. She said a queer, hurried thing. “I’m not a bit jealous. I would too, if I were Lanse. And I’ve always wanted to know you, but you were always so stand-offish, I never tried.”

I, “stand-offish”! What distorted conclusions we arrive at in our preconceptions of one another!

We left early. George came up behind me a little before supper and abruptly asked me if I wished to go home.

“Why?” I asked, surprised. “Do you?” I

was sure he did not. I had just seen him dancing with Mabel and he seemed to be enjoying it.

He frowned. "I thought you might be tired," he explained carelessly.

I *was* tired. I realized it acutely as he spoke, but more poignant was the darting thought that he had been watching me, had taken thought of me—not for my sake, oh no,—but I felt a faint flutter in my throat—I had felt so alone among all those people all evening!—as, laughing slightly, I did not deny his clairvoyance. But I am going to stop this habit of analyzing his attentions and intentions. It is ungenerous—it makes for ugliness and petty self-centeredness. I shall float lightly on the crest of the wave—safer so, sweeter so,—letting the deeper under-current bear me to my secret goal.

Before many minutes we were speeding down the hill. The windows of the taxi were open, the night was soft and brilliant with stars. It seemed to me I had left the gauds of life forever behind me, and were running back to life itself.

What have I to do with such gauds—I who am going to be a mother? Why do I mar this record

of deeper depths with this tinsel tale of stale vanities? I want to be free of it all, clear of the fever and the folly, of the innuendo in men's eyes.

Am I growing narrow, swaddled in my fixed idea? Who cares! I am what I am. Nothing shall touch me that I do not want to touch me. And just now I long for cool, white vistas, and people with clean, brave eyes. There are avenues and avenues. I did not choose this avenue over which I am traveling. Fate thrust me here and I must, perforce, go forward. And behold—the uncounted glory!—Fate, I am humble,—in my gratitude I am humble,—I kiss the hem of your gown!

When we sped down the hill that night, I felt like laughing aloud, I felt as if George Leland had taken me by the hand and was running away with me, away from intoxication into cool, sweet, silent vistas. Only he would not run away with me. It is I who would run away with myself.

A few days more and we go into our house. At least, I do. In imagination I mount those waiting

steps,—with winged feet, I reach my little snug-  
gery——

. . . . .

Months have passed since I looked at this fitful record. *Is* it a record? I meant it to be one—a record of growth, my “baby-book” of self-determined rebirth. Most growth is insensible, predestined, without our knowledge or consent. This one I thought to direct, to steer by the compass of conscious vows, but I find my eyes drawn forever from my star to my goal, I find myself leaping by the shortest route—my heart—between the two points. I know that, according to time, I am traveling from minute to minute, from day to day, toward the appointed hour, but soul outruns body and I live in the end, which I am nearing.

There have been milestones, one forever unforgettable.

A flutter—come, and gone! That first message from out the void, that first secret acknowledgment between mother and child. Silent call—silent answer.



Annunciation.

Oh, Wireless, oh, miracle of my day, what invention of man can equal *that* Invention!

It happened in the small hours of the night. I remember that even in that wondrous thrill I felt a blind impulse to run down the hall to George Leland's room—there was no one else—and whisper him the wondrous tidings even though it had to be through his closed door. But of course I got no further than the blind, human impulse to tell *some* one.

It was Deborah who sent Dr. Knightley to me. He came in in his bluff, kindly, professional way, drew his chair up before me—drew me down to kindly earth.

“Now,” he said, looking through me from under his bushy brows, “we'll have to do a little thinking for a minute, instead of dreaming.”

For a moment I felt as if all the blood in my body were rushing to my face—he was the first intruder into my sanctuary—but in another second the shock of his penetration had passed, and I was answering all his questions and listening to his explicit directions and suggestions with a

sense of unusual peace and comfort. I had had no fears before in my ignorance, now I had none in the assurance of his strength.

“And see people,” he said with a quick smile when he was leaving. “Don’t overdo it, but have a good time. Distract yourself. Think of something else.”

“I do,” I said, wondering over the whimsical insistence of his smile. “I see a world of people—all sorts of people.”

“That’s right,” he said emphatically. “All sorts. Differences,—the best sort of discipline. They keep us moving instead of mooning.”

“Why?” I laughed, troubled. “Do I look as though I were mooning?”

“Decidedly, and while that ‘one upward look each day’ isn’t a bad prescription, keep the dose down to one. Any more would be likely to give you a crick in the neck, which will be very painful when the time comes to change your position.” He smiled on me in big, understanding kindness, and I lent myself to it as to a big, warm coat, putting myself in his charge without need

of revealment or concealment, feeling his diagnosis sufficiently clear.

The next time I saw him he said, offhandedly, something which nonplussed me completely for several days.

“There’s no nonsense about that husband of yours,” he said jocularly. “He insists on the declarative sentence. What a splendid specimen of young manhood you’ve got there, Mrs. Leland.”

“Do you know him?” I asked, for want of something more to the point, in my perturbation.

“Oh, no, I’m merely judging by that one visit he paid me the day after my visit to you. Didn’t he tell you he had come to hear for himself?”

I don’t think I answered him.

That was a curious thing for George Leland to do. Often, often since, I wonder what prompted him to do it. It wasn’t as though I had been ill—I was feeling and looking perfectly well. But perhaps it was only what Dr. Knightley took it to be—a desire to inform himself at headquarters, all other means being closed to him.

Nevertheless, the knowledge of that visit helped me in a certain decision I made a week or so later. I have said there were milestones. This one I am about to describe carries, in the retrospect, little of the beauty of that other one.

One morning, while I was dressing, there came into my consciousness, suddenly, like a burst of sunshine through mist, the revelation that there was something I could and must do toward changing the unnatural conditions prevailing. I am speaking of George's successive absentings from town. One had followed so closely upon the other that they appeared like a continuous sojourn among the oil fields, and the biting thought that they were enforced, "in accordance with the terms," had been haunting me relentlessly. Then, in a flash, that morning, it occurred to me that it rested with me to alter the habit of discomfort to which he had bound himself. All I should have to do was to make him see, by my manner, that his presence did not irk me—that his unnecessary absence did,—all I should have to say was, "Do you really have to be so constantly on the field?"—and he would surmise, by

my manner, what I left unsaid, and accept it—as he would. I did not say to myself, “He is more comfortable away,” I have overcome that carping tendency, as I said I would. So, with the unquestioning determination, I experienced an inward glow past describing. But no, I can describe it—somewhat. It was the glow of conquest—self-conquest, than which there is no consciousness more inspiring.

He was at home—breakfasting. We never breakfasted together. If I hurried I could meet him just as he was going out. I gave a quick finishing touch to my hair, slipped into my long mandarin coat, and was almost down the stairs when he came toward the hall door, his hat in his hand.

Seeing me, he stopped short, as I had upon the last step.

“Oh—good-morning,” we said in unison, both awkward over the unusual early encounter. In the morning light his cheeks looked startlingly sunken to me and for a short second the perception gave me pause before I rushed into the break.

“Are you—off again?” I smiled with a slight raising of the eyebrow meant to be casual, light, as though the frequency had just struck me.

“Surely. It’s after nine,” he said, taking out his watch in verification and half-turning toward the door in the manner of one not wishing to detain or be detained. He obviously accepted the moment as accidental, and this assurance—that the idea of my “making advances” could not possibly occur to him—lent wings to my arrested impulse.

“Oh, no,” I said quickly, “I meant—leaving town.” I could feel my heart beating with strange, long beats, and he showed the shock of his surprise in the dark flush invading his disturbingly thin face.

“Oh,” he said heavily, as if faltering in his deduction. “Yes. Probably.” Then with a ferreting glance, he added sharply, “Any reason for——”

“No, no,” I interposed hastily. “I was only wondering whether you have to rush off every minute as you do,—or is it because—you like it?” I felt my lips straining at a miserable smile.



“Like it!” The exclamation shot from him uncontrollably, but with incredibly quick control he covered the inadvertence with the concise, business-like, “It isn’t a question of liking. I have to.” He turned again toward the door, but veered back, coming a step nearer. “Thanks,” he said, so rapidly the words were almost indistinguishable. “I appreciate the effort it must have been for you to say that. Don’t let it bother you. You’re not—making me do it, and it doesn’t hurt me in any way. As I said—I have to.” He drew breath, dropping the slight tone of mockery with the less personal observation. “And by the way, I’m leaving for London Friday.”

I saw that, as he finished speaking, he was rather pale, but that was all I realized as I stood stupidly repeating, “London—Friday?”

“I think I told you I would take Sargent’s place to meet the English syndicate—it’s a big deal and may take longer than we count to consummate, and Sargent’s glad to get out of it. It’s all arranged that I’m to go. Deborah has promised to stay here. Not that—— I’ll be



gone about three months. Unless—there's no——”

“No, no!” I cried impetuously, hushing his perfunctory explanation. “I had forgotten, that's all.”

He hesitated,—over my quick cry, I think—giving me a questioning look, but in the same instant he frowned and, with a brief “Good-by,” strode to the door, and out.

He had taken my protest at what, to him, was its face value, no more, no less: I had been “bothered,” and I objected to being bothered, so he had set things straight for me! The mockery of his tone had made his conclusion clear to me. The imputation of an egoistic motive hurt like a sharp pain with its menace of unforgivingness. But I resolutely closed my senses to it, almost smiling it away with my vindicating, beckoning vision to help me out of every bitterness. Vision! But without that, life, any life, is only marking time.

The fact that he was going to London hurt harder in its suddenness. Somehow I had forgotten that plan of his spoken in the hot spur

of a miserable hour. I had given it no attention. Evidently conditions had remained as unchanged to him as his intention. Writing about it now, I draw a hard breath over my Sisyphean labor. And his hard, thin face——

True to his announcement, Friday morning at about ten he appeared in the open doorway of my snugery, a suit-case in either hand. I knew what he had come for, but I sat still, dully wondering what sort of a leave-taking it would be. He stopped on the threshold.

“I’m rushed as usual,” he said in a quick, bright tone. “Just a second to say good-by. Hope you’ll keep well. I left the cable number on the telephone slate in case there’s occasion to communicate with me hurriedly. Not that there’s likely to be. But there it is. I’ll drop you a card when I arrive. Well—good-by!”

I looked incredulously toward him, tall and sinewy in his long, loose overcoat. “Good-by, George,” I heard myself saying mechanically. Impossible that he could go that way! But—he did. There was no other way.

“Good-by,” he echoed after me, and turned

his staring eyes away and marched straight down the hall. No. Not even the touch of a hand. A minute later I heard the bang of the front door behind him.

It happened months ago and he has been back more than two months now,—coming and going on his incessant business trips, as usual,—but the awful blankness that came over me then with the bang of that door, falls upon me again like a bolt of utter frustration.

But to be more consecutive—Deborah came to me during his absence and was with me as much as her work allowed. She has told me so much about the wonderfully-organized work for the babies—the carefully-selected foster-mothers, the certified milk, the weekly clinic, the clothing. Every day I sew for some one of those babies. I have a quick needle. Deb brings the work—flannel petticoats, dresses, rompers. I had intended embroidering a lot for my baby, but when Deb told me, I couldn't. I bought everything instead. You should see the inside of those wonderful chiffonier drawers! Especially the little

shirts—— It makes one laugh to look at those little shirts—if you put your fingers through the tiny sleeves you can almost—— But I *am* embroidering one long petticoat for my own,—it will be finished tomorrow,—and I rock and sing while I do it, rock and sing. The absurdest songs! I wonder where they all come from. I suppose a girl unconsciously gathers up all the nursery songs she hears—to be filed for reference. And the rhymes and stories—I think I must know a million! And sometimes I make them up—when I'm alone and stop singing. I never suspected having such a faculty. They simply dance into my head and I find myself smiling over them as I tell them—in imagination—to my precious. There's one about a pansy—I'll write that one down—I'll tell it to her when we're quite alone. She'll be almost four when I tell her that one. I've written one or two others. One is for a far-off day. She'll be fifteen when I tell her that.

I intend to do *everything* for my child—that is my great and glorious privilege. No strange nurse shall rob me of it and steal first place in

my baby's eyes! I shall bathe her, feed her,—perhaps, God willing, I shall nurse her.

(I had to put down my pencil for a moment then. I couldn't see. It frightens me to think how self-bound one can grow in the ecstasy of a great love.)

Except for a daily automobile ride—he insisted on getting the car—I never go out now. I generally call for Jean Wickham's children and we do have the jolliest times together in the Park at the playgrounds, or they bring their buckets and spades to make mud pies at the Cliff. I have not gone to read to Granny Dowd at the Old People's Home for over a month, and I miss her common-sensible, beautiful optimism: to her, every change is a change for the better—yesterday's sun never compares with today's.

During George's stay in London I received two post-cards from him, one about his trip across, the other about the London weather! I answered the first on a correspondence card. It was hard to write. I knew that Deb wrote him weekly—no doubt, on her own initiative. He came back one morning as unconcernedly as he had left. So

that disquieting interim has passed, and things move on as though he had never been away—yet the stinging memories associated with it endure.

Obedient to the doctor's orders I have been seeing a lot of people. It keeps one from "mooning," as he implied, and there seems to be a secret conspiracy against my solitude. But Deb said to me only yesterday, "What does that far look in your eyes mean, darling?" She often calls me by the old pet names these days and I like the tenderness of it—like it fiercely at times—but mostly I smile over it. Deb's afraid! For me! And I haven't the shadow of a fear!

But to get back to the people who come to see me. They come again and again. It is very interesting—watching their unconscious self-revelations, and musing over them afterward. "A man never speaks but he judges himself," but a woman judges herself by her omissions of speech. Lucy Hammond—she has been Lucy Wells for a month now—calls my house "Rest House," but I think it is her harmonious self who brings the "rest." She always chimes in with one's mood—very soothing in its gentle leading away from lazy



brooding. Like old friends we never make an effort at conversation—just let the words come. She is one of those who return again and again,—like Mabel,—but Mabel comes from some subtle sense of duty, or is it mere force of habit?

Often others come while Lucy is here and then she becomes amusingly different—abrupt, sarcastic, dryly humorous. Only this afternoon they were discussing divorce. They envisaged it inside and outside, before and after, for and against, false pride and false prejudice, causes and effects, weak security and brave freedom, individualism and unselfishness, the double moral standard and the single,—they left little unsaid and said more than they realized.

Pretty Mrs. Farwell, looking off into the distance with limpid eyes, said, as if in summary of all the pother, “After all, it depends on how much one can stand.”

“*Will* stand,” corrected Jean Wickham, sitting high and tight in her severely simple garb.

“*Should* stand,” put in Mabel quickly, and I caught her eye fleeting to and from me toward Lucy, upon whom she fixedly kept her gaze.



“There you are,” Lucy counted off on her fingers, “‘can,’ ‘will,’ ‘should,’—physical, mental, moral. It’s a paragon’s job.”

“Two paragons’,” added Mabel sharply.

“Yoked together?” insinuated Lucy.

“Mabel means,” I ventured, striving to draw her eyes toward me, “that if things are unhappy it’s always due to one or the other’s selfishness, don’t you, Mabel?”

And while Lucy was laughing, “Generally the other’s!” she, Mabel, turned her eyes fully upon me and I heard her murmur pointedly, “*You* said that, I didn’t,” and she looked away.

“Hate never reasons,” I answered her *sotto voce* through some perverse impulse of confidence.

“Well,” Jean was summing up flatly, addressing herself to Mrs. Farwell, “in nine cases out of ten it’s just a matter of having common sense or not having common sense. We’re not talking of the real, awful tenth case, but of the nine petty, imaginative others. It’s generally better, in spite of everything, to stay put, and wait another minute,—things may work themselves out, if one

isn't a temperamental fool. 'Put, you're somebody,—unput, you're less than nobody.'

"You're speaking of the woman," suggested Mabel swiftly.

"Certainly. Weren't you?"

"No. Why not try to put one's self in the man's place for a change? You know he needn't hesitate so long. While the woman is always taking chances on the future, a man can always find consolation whether he re-marries or not—as he pleases."

"But divorcees do re-marry, too," protested Laura Farwell with shining eyes.

"Of course they do," agreed Lucy heartily. "It's the popular parlor-game, you know. Sort of progressive uxoriousness."

"Why, Mrs. Wells!" objected Mrs. Farwell, flushing. "What ugly words!"

"Ugly words for ugly things," returned Lucy, showing her prettily arched teeth. "I always dot my i's and cross my t's. It makes things more legible."

"Oh, but people don't think in such terms," combated Mrs. Farwell.

“Exactly,” triumphed Lucy, and just then Molly came in with tea, creating a diversion.

When the others had gone Lucy followed me out upon the sun-porch, where the westering sun held the light spring atmosphere in a jeweled glow. Beyond, on the encompassing waters, just within the Gate, a sail was turned to cloth-of-gold, Alcatraz lay steeped in misty splendor, an isle of evening mystery, its wondrous white prison gleaming in beauty above the blue waters.

“I heard the children up at the Telegraph Hill Settlement talking it over the other day,” Lucy said in a low voice as we stood idly looking northward to the island, “and they finally decided that the white building over there *must* be the home of the fairies!”

“You didn’t undeceive them, I hope,” I said absently, my thoughts far away.

“Hardly. I only dot my i’s and cross my t’s for the Mrs. Farwells and her sort. Never for the little ones.”

“Ah, Lucy,” I said passionately, coming back to her, “if one could only go out and scrub the world clean and straight for our children! I’d

be willing to begin with myself," I ended with a wistful laugh.

"Ah, Gwen," retorted Lucy whimsically, with her cheek against my hair as she stood close behind me, "begin with me, not with yourself. You! Don't you see how we're all trying to rub up against you—even silly little Laura Farwell? Only—only, dearest, you've let that thought absorb you quite, to the exclusion of everything else. You're just a mother-woman, and nothing more."

"I?" I repeated bitterly. "Not even that. I am all egoism. No, it's the women like my sister Deborah, who do actual things for others, who are the real mother-women of the world, not the parasitic sentimentalists, like me. No doubt Providence—whatever it is that manages human affairs—knows what it's about when it keeps such women as Deb from having children of their own."

"Highly economical for Providence," said Lucy dryly, "but not quite so satisfying to the Deborahs,—don't you think, Gwen?"

But I was not thinking of Deborah then or later

when she left me sitting there in the evening light, wrapped in the long fur raglan George surprised me with when we were in England. Those gifts!—Lucy found it in the cedar closet and summarily tucked me into it before leaving. I should have felt very cozy there, sunk in the depths of the wicker chair, watching the setting sun changing to a ruby ball and presently staining the waters as with spilt wine, while across, on the Marin side, the grand cliffs and low-lying shores glowed like jewels in the rosy haze, but my thoughts had turned back to the echoes of the afternoon.

“A man needn't hesitate so long—he can always find consolation elsewhere.”

Swiftly, on the opportunity of the moment, Mabel had flung her dart as though her policy of “watchful waiting” had reached its breaking point. Was it a threat or—a boast? She has always sensed something—everything, perhaps. I *know* George Leland has never unlocked those stern lips of his to anyone, not even to Mabel, much as he cares for her, but she, in her love for him, is judging me about something which she

only feels to be true, but cannot know. I answered her, ambiguously enough, "Hate never reasons." No doubt she thinks *I* hate *him*. (I had unconsciously twisted my fingers so tight together as I sat there that, at that point of my meditations, I had to untwine them, finger by finger, they hurt so.) How could Mabel know that it is *I* who am the repudiated one—that I have given over hating—anyone—long ago? And if, as she wished to suggest to me, George Leland is finding, or will find, consolation elsewhere——

I don't know what hateful, confused images were crowding in upon me when his voice said close to me, "Aren't you cold out there?" and there he was, standing in the long, open window, looking out at me with his lean, smileless face.

His sudden proximity and the painful realization of the inscrutable remoteness of his life to mine, intensified by Mabel's barbed innuendo, gave me a curious sense of involuntary shrinking.

"Oh!" I exclaimed in actual pain, and had to close my eyes for an instant.



He waited until I had opened them before he asked quietly, "Anything wrong?"

"Only my fingers," I laughed brokenly, and held them against my lips. "I must have been twisting them again."

He came out and stood against the low balustrade, looking seaward for a few minutes in unusual silence. We did not enjoy the bond of silence which intimacy gives. "I'm home a little earlier than usual," he said presently, "and I came out here at once because I want to ask you something. Er—it's rather necessary for me to go down to Bakersfield tonight. That is, if there's no reason why I shouldn't."

I knew what he meant—looking away from me while he spoke—and his question irritated me with its false reckoning of three weeks. Besides, Mabel's words, still swaying about me in the soft air, drew me far from him, back into my inviolable sanctuary.

"What possible reason could there be?" I said in a small, cold voice, cold and wintry as I suddenly felt the air to have grown about me.

"Oh. All right," he said offhandedly. "I'll



go pack my suit-case then and get off on the Owl."

He could just as well have arranged to go on the Lark and have had dinner with me. Well, perhaps the earlier train was more convenient.

So he has gone.

It is after eleven—I have been writing for nearly four hours. It has helped to pass the time, and trying to remember in consecutive detail has distracted my hag-driven conscience.

He said, in parting, over his shoulder as he turned away, "Of course you'll send for Deb." But I have not. I want to be alone—with myself. Writing, as I have, has kept me from my rendezvous,—now I will face myself.

"Mother-woman," Lucy called me. "It has absorbed you quite," she said.

Yes.

Did she mean it in protest?

Yes.

As were Mabel's words?

Yes.

What have they sensed—each from her different point of interest?

That I am not a good wife. That I have forgotten my husband.

But what if my husband has turned irreconcilably from me—through my hideous insult?

Did I ever try to win him back?

Never.

Why not?

Because he has shown me it was useless,—because I never thought of doing such a thing.

Not much of a heroine!

No. I am only proud. I only thought of making him see I am not “unworthy”—that that was only a passing debasement. I have been hoarding up—against the day when I can—oh, what is the phrase?—when I can come, bearing largesse.

But that is mere selfish sensationalism—that was sacrificing everything for my “curtain”—what I blindly called, my goal.

Yes—I see that now. But—there was always the insurmountable wall of his not caring, facing me.

Did I ever try to scale the wall?

There was no foothold.

Am I sure of that?

I took it for granted. I never questioned—I never thought about it. I took it for granted. I turned myself heart and soul to my child—and to the mother of my child. I have been engaged in a deadly, silent struggle—with something stronger than myself—with something that was beautiful and beloved within me. I have beaten it to death, I have won—I have made no sound—I am very, very tired.

And so I missed my chance. But there was no chance. How could there be?

Now there is only the sound of a banging door reverberating upon my heart,—and a man going out—a stranger in his own home.

But, Mabel said, “A man can always find consolation elsewhere.”

My fault?

I will not think of it according to her light. He gave me no choice. I could expect none. I had only my child. All else was withheld from me. All but that final vision—that dim day of redemption—when I should come to him—carrying largesse.

Why has a veil of ashes fallen between me  
and my vision—why——

I have lifted my head from my agony. (Dear  
heart, it is no agony for your mother. See, I  
smile through it!)

I have telephoned the nurse and the doctor—  
almost a month—three weeks—before the awaited  
time.

Strange it should come tonight, in contradic-  
tion of my denial to him.

I have made all beautiful and ready for the  
coming of my idolized one.

I have not sent for Deborah—and I *will* not.

I let him go—I did not know. And if I had  
known?

I am all alone—and I rejoice in my loneliness  
with a fierce rejoicing.

I am not afraid. I need no one to help me over  
the chasm, wide and awful though it may prove.  
On the other side I shall hold my child. And I  
shall hold her as I hold nothing else—we shall be  
all in all to each other——

I have wiped the agony again from my brow.

Good-by, little book—I don't know why I keep on writing here—except that you are like a friend. Good-by, little book, I go to keep tryst.

There are strange announcements far away in the air—trumpets and bells, sweet and far—like New Year's Eve. Good-by, little book,—I go——

. . . . .

How strange to find you again, after all these months—nearly six, by actual count—and of all places, inside my green parasol!

I am eager to write, with this new restlessness upon me. Well, I'll turn the page and try to fill in time's hiatus—letting today stand “suspended,” as the author of *Evelina* might say.

But there has been no hiatus for me, though it was spring then, and now the wonderful Indian summer is almost over.

And today my baby turned herself round to me while I was putting her in nurse's arms, and said distinctly, “Mum-mum!” Of course I

had to snatch her back. That is wonderful—I don't mean wonderful—I don't want to be vain or silly about her—but I think that is very advanced—for six months. And how she looked when she said it!—her little flower-face flushed and sleepy and smiley from her nursing, her pale golden halo—her hair is really wonderful already—standing out at either side like Peter Pan's—No, no, *not* like Peter Pan's. What a foolish comparison!—There! I stopped to knock on wood then. Superstitious? Oh, no, only remembering possibilities.

I was to go back, was I not, little book, instead of stopping to rhapsodize over my exquisite, all-sufficing present.

Yet I have been through Creation. I have passed through the darkness of chaos, and through the travail of meeting eternities—the eternity of things that are ending and the eternity of things beginning. I have struggled through the blinding mists of the night of the one into the tremulous silvery mists of the dawn of the other. And in that dawning, up through the hushed awe of its mysteries, I have heard a cry.—

And I knew then not only why I was, but why all things were, and must ever be. I have glimpsed, in the thrill of one moment, Infinity.

I can remember little else of that night and morning, except of being dimly aware of Dr. Knightley's strong, kind face bending over me, and his strong, kind voice saying to me, "Cry out, little girl, cry out, it will do you good—nobody'll hear you." But I would not. Cry out against my baby's coming! And Molly, dear, good Molly, beseeching me to "Send for Miss Heath, Mrs. Leland,—please send for Miss Heath!" But I would not. All alone I would cross the bar. Had I not said, "I will be worthy of my child," and was I going to begin with cowardice? That was a nothing. But, presently, when other influences will begin to contend with me—— How big I shall have to grow to meet the needs and testings of the vandal years, the fecund, crowning years! Long stretches of time beckon to us—my daughter and me.

Ah, I knew it would be a daughter. How must it be to be the mother of a son——

I must go back.



There was that other moment when they laid her in my arm, and I drew her to me, and I became, of a sudden, very good. I think it was forever—without a vow, without striving, without anything on my part. Just—done. By something beyond me. Hush. I never thought to speak of those two moments. I had put them away into my holy of holies. Hush. It is between you and me, little book, you and me, and no other. Some people talk about those high moments among one another. How can they? Perhaps one could to *one* other—if one were very close to that one. Perhaps one does. It must be very sweet.

I must go back.

Deb came, of course, as soon as I let them telephone. All that is vague to me.

But what happened the next day is not vague, though darkness fell upon it.

I was feeling so gloriously well that I said, laughingly, to Deb, "I think I'll go for a walk!" And Deb said, "George is coming in to see the baby. Will you see him, dear?"

I felt a quick fluttering about my heart and

saw her beautiful face only dimly when I whispered, "When did he come?"

"I wired to him at once, of course. He has just come in. Will you see him, Gwen?"

I don't think I answered her at all, but she must have taken the look in my eyes for acquiescence, because she left me immediately.

At the other side of the room stood my dressing-table and, through the mirror, I could see into the sitting-room, which had been converted into a nursery in which lay my baby in her bassinets. I had had my face turned in that direction but, after Deb had spoken, I could see nothing for a few minutes,—because, in her speaking, I knew I had reached my great moment,—and then, suddenly, across the blank, I knew that I was looking at George Leland's figure bending over the baby. Deb was there beside him, but I did not distinguish her from the other surroundings, I only saw his bending shoulders and head, saw his hand go down to the little silken coverlet,—knew, but did not see, that he had straightened up and had turned toward the door leading into my room—and then I knew no more.

Deb told me months afterward, when I asked her about it, that his voice calling her name was like the sound of one trying to cry out in a nightmare. He thought I was dead. And so did Deb until she laid her ear to my heart. I was unconscious for eight hours. The doctor said it was nervous shock brought on by overstrain.

“You had been heaven-gazing against my orders so long, and the tension was so great, that when you fell to earth, everything went ker-flop,” he said with that illuminating smile of his, holding my hand in both of his. “You know you’re my star heroine and we can’t afford to let such things happen again, so we’re just going to keep you in cotton-wool for a while.”

And they did, and I let them—I was so dreadfully tired. For nearly three months I saw no one but my baby, and nurse, and Deb, and the doctor. They would not let me, and I had no desire to see anyone. But always, back in my dulled brain, I wondered about George Leland, but I was too weary to ask and no one mentioned his name.

The doctor let me nurse my baby. He never

opposed any of my wishes,—“ Because you are a good girl,” he said. He made me well with his trust in me.

One day when Deb, and I, and the baby in her buggy were on the sun-porch, I said to Deb, “ Why doesn't George come in? He could now.”

She waited a minute before she answered. “ George isn't here. He waited until you were out of all danger, and then went off to London again. It was necessary for him to go and—he thought it wiser.”

I asked her why “ wiser.”

She hesitated. “ He thought it was his presence that had upset you, and it would be better for him to wait to see you again till you were quite yourself.”

I asked if he were to be gone long.

“ About three months,” she said. “ I promised to keep him informed about you and the baby. You know, while he was at home—he only left day before yesterday—he never once missed holding the baby every evening when he came home.”

I said nothing, and Deb asked nothing.

Of course I know it was "his presence" that had sent me off. Not his presence exactly, but the memory of everything—everything that came with him when I saw him coming toward me. I know I wanted to say something. I know it was battling up to my lips in a terrible wave of feeling, but what it was I cannot remember, because of that awful pall of memory which came and covered me over. I wonder whether it was something about the baby, or myself, or himself. I search, and search, and cannot find it. Ah, well, chance does take a malicious joy in twisting us about from our first intentions, doesn't it?

So I have had a long, quiet time in which to come back. The doctor advised the country, and Deb, with my listless consent, took this place, here at Ross Valley, and, the lease having run out, I gave up my house-of-dreams in the city. And we have been almost four months in this beautiful, wooded retreat—everybody knows the old Searles place—and I shall be sorry next week when this gorgeous October ends and we close the gate behind us upon the lovely lawns and wide

verandas where the soft breezes have swept down to us bosky odors from Tamalpais and Lagunitas and the deep dells all about us, where Beth,—Elizabeth, after my own never-known mother toward whom I have yearned so wonderfully in these latter times,—where my baby has found all her dimpled beauty, where Deb has brought, in happy relays, five of her “children” to grow strong and rosy under these lovely outdoors, where I have let benign Nature do as she would with me, and where, for almost a month, I have been ready and straining at the leash for whatever Life may now ask of me.

The summer habitués have flown town-wards—all but the Laurences in Shady Lane—and in the tense quiet I have been waiting—with a time limit.

. . . . .

Tuesday:—One more reminiscence:

This afternoon—just a little after noon, as I was passing through the hall, the telephone bell rang and I sat down to answer it.

And the “Hallo!” that came to me over the



wires was George Leland's. I recognized his voice at once and, by an impish trick of memory,—sheer excitement, of course,—I almost answered him with Martha's brogue as I used to put him off before, in the days before—the flood!

But I didn't.

“Hallo,” I answered as composedly as I could, but I had some trouble in steadying my voice. Then we went on.

“May I speak to Mrs. Leland? Tell her Mr. Leland is in San Francisco and wishes to speak to her.”

“This is me, George.”

“Oh—Gwen.” His voice was quick and sharp and there was an appreciable pause after he spoke my name. It was the first time he had called me by name since—that afternoon when we came home from Europe. Æons ago. I think the unfamiliar sound must have struck him as it did me.

“I've just got back,” he caught up, in the same brisk tone. “How are you?”

“Very well. And you?”

“First rate. And—the baby?”



"She's—wonderful!" Yes, I exalted her, and the excitement which would not let me answer coolly and calmly as I wanted to, was all in my voice and he must have heard it. He could not know that I was trembling in every limb.

"So Deb wrote," he acquiesced bluntly. "Could I—would you mind my running over to see her?"

"Surely not." I was quite quiet then with a heavy lump in my throat. "When will you come?"

"At once—that is, on the next boat,—if convenient to you."

"Of course."

"How do I get there?"

"It's the Searles place on the Lagunitas road. Anyone can direct you. Either come up through the little wood by way of Shady Lane or straight over the road from the station. You'll know it by its two old pine trees at either side of the entrance to the grounds. I have no one to meet you, or——"

"How's that? Where's the chauffeur—where's Benton?"

“The car’s in storage, but the phaeton or something at the station will bring you up.”

“I’ll find it all right. Thanks. See you presently then. Er—that is—will you be there?”

“Yes. I’ll be here. In a little while, then.”

I had to close my eyes for a few seconds before I got away from the telephone, and as I went upstairs I only prayed that Mary would soon appear with the perambulator after their daily walk with the Laurence baby and his nurse. But I looked at myself in the glass in my simple white gown with the open sailor collar, fleetingly wondering if he would find me changed! Yet all the while I know I was saying to myself, “Now everything will be straightened out—everything.”

The practical thought gave me poise, yet when I went down to the veranda with my book I was still hoping passionately that Mary would come back with the baby before he could arrive. Sometimes she is gone an hour, sometimes three,—it depends on how long the baby sleeps.

I could not read. I took the shears and went down across the lawn into the rose garden and

began clipping off the shriveled blooms from the almost naked bushes. Here and there a lonely rose raised a lovely head and I gathered it reluctantly. On the lawns, beneath the tremulous golden haze of the afternoon, the old oak trees threw long shadows. The air was sweet as spring, warm with just a tang of crispness in its wings. I shall never forget the beauty of the atmosphere of that day.

I saw him coming up the road and moved across the lawn to meet him, standing still near the low flight of steps as he came up the walk. He walked briskly as if intent upon business. Even at a distance I noticed that he appeared older, and when we met and he held my hand in a close, quick clasp, I saw that the effect was due to a certain look of vested authority, the unconscious look acquired by a man to whom deference is due. He was indeed a stranger to me but, curiously enough, I felt myself, on the instant, rise to his level,—maturity, like a garment, fell upon me, enveloping me in its dignity.

“Quite well?” he asked pleasantly with the same under-current of detached business purpose

in his impersonal tone and glance which I had noticed in his walk.

“Quite,” I answered in kind. “Will you come up on to the veranda? The baby hasn’t got back yet.”

He followed me silently up the steps.

“They’ll be here in a few minutes, I hope,” I said, putting my few red roses through the open window into a glass which stood conveniently near, while he threw his hat and the paper he was carrying into a chair.

“They?” he questioned, turning about.

“Beth—the baby, and her nurse,” I explained. I *was* calm, and although I know I shall never be absolutely calm when I speak of her, I pray it will never again be with the horrible inner excitement with which I then spoke of her, looking away from him down through the trees of the climbing road.

He came a step nearer behind me.

“I came up through the woods,” he remarked as if there had been no pause between us, present or past, while I turned and seated myself in a deep wicker chair and he took another. “That’s

a bit of real forest round near the rustic seat under that huge old laurel tree. The birds were having it all to themselves as I came through."

"But you came by the road," I demurred. Did he realize as poignantly as I that this, the first bit of desultory conversation we had had together since—before the flood!—was merely the preliminary skirmishing to a decisive battle?

"Oh, I cut back through a short trail in the underbush when I heard a machine whizzing past. I always stick near to the main-traveled road. It saves time and bother. Quiet place—Ross."

"Most of the summer contingent has left," I explained.

"Where's the village?"

"There is none—properly speaking. None allowed except the one little necessary shop, and stables, and post-office down near the station. All trading is done *sub rosa* through the adjacent towns. The spot is destined for mere beauty."

"Sounds luxurious."

"It's gorgeous for summering."

Thus we dallied.

"Oh, for a resting place, yes," he assented

with a slight quickening of tone. "Now Palisser has a different idea of rest. He was telling me this morning of Wickersham's yacht—Nathaniel Wickersham, you know. Have you heard of it?"

I shook my head in negation, wondering how soon the spoken word—his or mine—would burn our bridges behind us.

"Swagger little boat, I hear. Palisser, it seems, has leased it from him for three months and is going to cruise in southern seas—South Sea Islands and all those places, you know. He's dippy with anticipation. Asked me to join them—knew I was a great sailor. I suppose—no, you said you know nothing about it—— Mabel and Frank are going." He spoke lightly, leaned back in the basket chair, and threw one long leg carelessly across the other, catching his foot in his hand.

Was this the entering wedge? I waited.

He veered about the next instant. "This must be pretty dreary in winter," he reconnoitered.

"So they say."

"You're not—going to stay?"

"Hardly. We go to town next week."



“Any plans?” He was intently watching the road at that moment.

I advanced to the breach. “That is what——” I began bravely.

“Ah, there she is!” he interrupted. He had sprung up, my words unheard, and taken a step to the edge of the veranda.

I looked,—Mary had indeed reached the brow of the hill, would be here in a minute,—and I followed his lead, only momentarily frustrated, I thought.

“I’ll hurry her along,” I said, and sped down the steps and over the walk, fleet as ever in my rampant health. It is such joy to skim over roads.

“Mary!” I called, waving to her down under the glorious west pine tree. “Ma-ry! Hurry. Someone is waiting to see the baby!”

She heard me well enough but changed her speed not a whit, continuing her talk with the baby whom she slowly wheeled before her.

I went down to meet her, and she gave me the buggy-handle, as was her wont.

“Mr. Leland is here,” I explained, and pushed



toward the house, talking to my little wide-awake flower sitting up like a big lady among her dainty pillows.

She was laughing and gurgling back at me as we came up, and Mary skirted off to the side entrance when she saw him standing—he seemed to loom up there, all alone,—at the top of the steps.

I stood still for him to take the fill of his eyes, my own blinded, though I knew he had come down a step or two. Refraining from my usual baby-talk to her, I lifted her out and carried her up to where he stood with outheld arms. I avoided looking at him.

“Do you know how?” I asked, tendering the precious little bundle.

“Deb taught me,” he returned in queer, muffled impatience. “It’s all right—give her to me!” The command came roughly. I held her out and he caught her in the hollow of his arm. I saw her tiny hand make a delighted grab for his hair as I turned from them into the ell of the porch. I could hear him walking solemnly up and down with her, could hear the baby cooing,

knew she was waving her little hands in response to the waving branches overhead, heard his low, awkward laugh, his attempt at unaccustomed baby words, and then I heard him go down the steps. The suggestion of kidnapping even flashed through me, but I smiled at the sensational word in connection with him, and in the same instant there flashed across my vision, like words thrown on a screen at the movies, the forgotten words I had intended saying to him that epochal day after the baby came when I saw him, through the mirror, coming toward me: "*I am glad she is your child, George!*"

Their sudden resurrection covered me with a burning blush—their sentiment belonged to the limbo of a morbid past against which my present buoyant strength rebelled, in the face of his obvious indifference to me. I stuffed them hurriedly, shamefacedly, from my memory.

For a long time, it seemed to me, I had heard no sound from those two making acquaintance together among the roses and chrysanthemums, and then came the fretful little cry. I emerged from my retreat, waited till I heard the sound

repeated, and then went down the steps. He came along reluctantly.

“She’s tired of me, I suppose,” he said, his eyes upon her face, as I came up to them.

At sight of me she held out her arms and I took her. “She’s too warm,” I reassured him, but knew otherwise. “We’ll run up out of the sun and take off her cap and coat.”

He followed in our heels.

I took off her coat and tiny Dutch cap, ruffling up her crest of golden curls as she lay on my knee.

“Why, it’s real fairy hair!” he cried excitedly, like a boy, bending over us. “It’s lighter than yours, isn’t it?”

I felt foolishly conscious of the unconscious personality. “It’s just a baby halo,” I answered lightly, but just then she began to scold and cry in a comical little way she has, and I drew her up against my shoulder, trying to hush her.

“What’s the matter with her?” he asked, standing troubled and awkward before us.

“Nothing at all. She’s doing the Little Tommy Tucker act, as usual,—crying for her

supper. You'll excuse us a few minutes, won't you?"

"But why don't you——" He stopped, drolly intuitive, and made a dive for his hat. "I'm going, anyway. But first I want a bite out of that dimple in her elbow." He took it, hungrily.

"Look at this," I said unsteadily, and turned her over to show her knees.

He snatched at the little leg in its fallen sock.

"She's all dimples," I said in a rush of trembling pride across his bending head. "You should see her in her bath. You never saw such splashing!"

His long, nervous hand still held the little leg close in spite of her sturdy kicking and crying. "I intend to see her," he returned in sudden fierceness through his teeth, let go his hold, and abruptly took his leave, striding down the long walk without once turning back.

I could not call him. The last few minutes had been too painful. There was a dreadful tumult within me—and the baby was crying. But—he has declared something—not war, please God.

Deb came over this evening—a few hours after his visit—for dinner.

“George is back,” I told her.

Her eyes dilated in amazement. “Who told you?” she cried, making no attempt to keep the joy out of her voice.

“He did. He was here this afternoon.”

I laughed resentfully over her unconcealed astonishment.

“*Was* here? Why didn’t he stay?”

Deb can be very raw—when she has a mind to be. I felt the blood mounting to my face. “I didn’t ask him to,” I answered swiftly.

“Why not?”

“He only came to see the baby.”

“But he saw you too, I suppose,” she returned sharply.

“Certainly.”

She gave me a long, indescribable look, but said nothing further about it until we separated for bed, an hour or so ago, when, rather inconsequently, she observed, “You know, Gwen, you never looked as you are looking now.”

I stared at her, failing to discover the analogy of her remark.

“I mean—beautiful,” she explained bluntly. “I have no doubt George will be over soon again—to see the baby! Have a care, Gwen.”

Her assumption has made me bitterly angry. What need had she to take open stock of my appearance again? It has meant nothing to me for so long. She has muddled everything now for me with that recall. I can't help thinking of it. I hate myself!

Wednesday:—It has been an abominable day.

Olive Harrison came over in the morning and added confusion to Deb's mischief. She came straight out to where I was sitting on the lawn, drying my hair in the sun, the baby asleep in her buggy a yard away under the tree.

“Is it asleep?” she whispered, tiptoeing toward the buggy.

“It is,” I laughed. “Wake her up at your peril!”

Olive is a darling—brimful of eighteen-year-old illusions and romance—and I have always

loved to have her with me, but she annoyed me today inexpressibly.

She began, of course, with my hair.

“Spun gold!” she exclaimed, flopping down on the grass beside me. “It’s an incredible dream, Gwen!”

“What?” I frowned, instantly on the defensive against all suggestion of that sort of flattery.

“Ooh—what a look!” She dropped the handful she had grasped and began taking off her hat and veil. “Tell me your love-story, Gwen.”

“I haven’t any, Ollie.”

“Love-stories, I mean.”

I refused to answer her.

“Of course,” she laughed in her breathless way, “I know there is never more than one. Of course I know that, Gwen—especially for you. You are such an idealist! Everybody says so. But you are so—— I was thinking of the many others—not your husband—who must have loved you madly. I know all about you and my own brother Bob—even if he was only a kid. But of course I know there can only be one real love-



story for any woman." She caught her breath, adding with starry eyes, "'They never loved who say that they loved once!'"

I could have hooted aloud in my cynical amusement, so suddenly came the swift rending of illusion with the voicing of the girl's tritely sentimental generality. Over me rushed the wider, staggering truth of individual experience. Me an idealist! Still I made no answer, carefully untwisting a snarl in my hair. Around us flowed the resounding silences of the golden morning. To Olive, dreamily looking off into veiled distances, my silence meant only acquiescence. To me the air was full of clashing discords—the innocent absolutisms of youth, the quiet, hidden, forgotten deaths in life,—the dim past, the vibrant present,—only then clamoring at the door of consciousness with peremptory challenge not to be denied! How could I look the romantic girl in the face with all this mocking knowledge thrilling me with its exquisite pain?

Instead, with a backward fling of the head, I gathered all my hair together, wound it round and round my head, sprang to my feet and stretch-

ing out my hands to her, cried gayly, "Get up, Olive, and teach me the one-step. I feel dance-y!"

In the afternoon came Lucy and Mabel—the latter explaining that she had come to say good-bye—and again we answered the call of the day and danced like Bacchantes, turning back the rugs in the spacious living-room which I have so rarely used, and again I felt wild, adventuresome youth rampaging through me as, with the others or by myself, I swayed in the romantic, graceful measures. I was always a "natural" dancer, one of the several manifestations of the power of rhythm over my imagination, and the girls applauded me enthusiastically. But Mabel, who has been over here just one other time in all these months, watched me in curious silence.

I walked with them down to the station, sauntering through Shady Lane because they love that long avenue of cloistral shadow under meeting boughs of high old elms. It was on that stretch of walk that Mabel maneuvered to hold me back while she stopped to shake a pebble from her low shoe.

“Wait a minute, Gwen,” she said, leaning against a tree. “We’ll catch up with you in a minute, girls.” Thus airily ordered to break ranks, Lucy and Olive sauntered ahead.

Mabel replaced her shoe, stood a moment to test its comfort, and we moved slowly on. For a few seconds there was silence between us. I felt a premonition of deliberate purpose in this obvious segregation, and waited with steeled nerves.

She began abruptly. “You know I came over today because we leave on the yacht Friday morning, and I can’t come tomorrow.”

“It will be a great adventure for you all.”

“Perhaps. I hear that George was asked to join us.”

I met her darting glance steadily, without answering.

“He was here, wasn’t he?”

“Yes,” I returned easily. “He came to see the baby.”

“Yes. And you.” Her sharpness of tone was undisguised.

“Oh, no,” I answered quietly. “Only the baby.”

She gave a short, ringing laugh, then suddenly turned a pair of flashing eyes upon me. "Gwen, don't be a fool. Don't pretend that you don't know that he is madly in love with you."

Everything swayed before me in a leafy confusion. "You are mistaken, Mabel," I answered, striving to speak calmly. "I can't explain to you. You are speaking of the past. He is quite indifferent to me now—to say the least."

Her brown eyes narrowed upon me as if to visualize something never met before. "Indifferent to you!" she broke forth. "You with your face—the whole make-up of you! Don't you know that you are lovelier than you ever were in your life? What do you take him for? I assure you he is very human. I saw him last night. I know he came out on purpose to talk about you. The baby, yes. But it was you he couldn't keep away from. Indifferent to you! No matter what's happened between you, no man is indifferent to a woman who looks like you!"

I could have struck her in my rage. "How dare you!" I whispered suffocatedly. "How

dare you say such a hateful thing to me, Mabel Goddard!"

"I dare," she flung back violently, "because it's true. And because George Leland is dear to me, very dear,—and I'm not going to stand by and see you wreck his life, without saying a word. I know him, though you who are his wife don't seem to. Men know him too—strong as a giant in his unshaken principles. Only *you* don't know who and what he stands for in a world of graft, and hypocrisy, and degeneracy. Why, you—you've led him a dog's life! Don't I know, haven't I seen it from the start? With that warm temperament of his craving love and tenderness, he'd have gone to the devil long ago if he weren't the stoic that he is. How dare *I*? How dare *you*, Gwendolen Heath!"

We blazed at each other, but I could not find utterance, and she could.

"You've ignored your responsibility," she hammered on. "You may be a good mother, but you've been a bad wife, so you're only half a woman. What's come over you? You who were so fine, so pure, you made every other girl seem

common next to you—you in whom I gloried because you gave me my girlhood's ideal—bah! What does it all amount to when tested by actualities? You're a married woman, and a man's a man, and it's up to you to send George Leland clean to hell,—or to come to your senses at the eleventh hour, and save him." She walked ahead as if propelled by her own violence.

The girls waited till we came up, and presently I was saying good-by to them at the station garden. I kissed Mabel Goddard too—that is, I lent my cheek to her kiss, my eyes averted.

That was my day.

It is evening now—after eight. The vitriol of Mabel's attack is still eating into me. What business is it of hers? Ah well, friendship is a business,—love, would better describe her feeling for him,—or it should be, and she does not understand. Perhaps she is right, perhaps every word of her denunciation is deserved. "Only half a woman." But I could be—whole.

But her insult! For it is an insult to be labeled as she labeled me—she, and Deb, and Olive. I do not belong in the mere physical category to

which they have consigned me, thinking to praise me. I will not be the light and prey of men's—any man's eyes! I have struggled beyond that level. I am more. My soul demands its taper. Once upon a time George Leland burned one to me, now——

I don't know what I was about to write then. The telephone rang and I had to run to answer it. It was George Leland. This is what we said:

“ Surprised to hear from me so soon? ”

“ No—not very.” Surprised!

“ Well, you see I've been thinking about that little mermaid of—yours. When does her aquatic exhibition take place? ”

“ Every morning at about half-past eight.”

“ So early! Might a fellow—would her majesty allow a spectator, do you suppose? ”

“ She wouldn't mind,” I laughed unsteadily—his gay diffidence was painfully comical. “ Are you—when will you come over? ”

“ Whenever you let me. I was wondering—how would tomorrow afternoon do so as to be on hand in the morning? ”

“ Perfectly.”



“ Good. Thanks awfully. I’ll find a room at the hotel, I suppose? ”

The slight pause was inevitable. “ There is no real hotel,” I finally said quietly. “ Besides this house is large—there are several vacant rooms.”

“ Thanks. I don’t want to inconvenience you.”

“ You won’t.—What time will you be over? ”

Again there was a silence, and then he seemed to speak with difficulty—I could scarcely hear him. “ Gwen ”—he said, “ what would you say—would you go for a ride with me in the afternoon? ”

I think my heart stood quite still, I felt icy—as I still feel. “ If you want to,” I answered in a very small voice.

“ Thanks. Thank you very much. I’ll bring the car over. Say at about—three? At the seat in the little wood? ”

“ Three—at the seat in the little wood,” I repeated mechanically.

I came back here and sat looking blindly down for heaven knows how long before I knew what I was looking at. It is ten o’clock now. To-

morrow afternoon—at three. I shall not put off. Life seems suddenly so uncertain, so precarious. “What if the world should end tonight!” Be still—Memory!

I do not know what I shall say,—but it will be everything—everything. I shall not wait for his leading. I shall not be proud—I shall only be true. Not “half a woman,” Mabel.

Perhaps, when the day is over, I shall have found another confidant, little book, little friend in need. Oh, pray for me, silent one! Whom do I beseech, and on whom do I lean? Who but myself!

I understand. I am strong. I have grown quiet, spacious with experience.

Old Law-and-Order is watching—having set her traps. Why did I write that?

Destiny. What is that? Goals—and meeting-places.

I am not afraid——

## II

### THE ELEVENTH HOUR

THE air brooded.

Gwen Leland in her white gown, holding her green parasol closed, looked dubiously down upon her child asleep in her perambulator upon the shady porch. She threw the light silken coat she was carrying over to the bench.

“Keep her here, Mary,” she said to the nurse. “I won’t be long. I shall not go for the ride Mr. Leland has planned. We’ll come right back. Not that I think it’s anything, but——”

“Anything!” Mary laughed her guttural laugh of good-natured ridicule. “It’s only the heat. Look at her now. Do you hear any heavy breathing?”

Gwen listened, her face clearing. “No,” she admitted, “but I have no intention of going far,” and, with a last intent look, she unfurled her parasol against the sultry sky and fared forth to her tryst.

She strolled across the stately, tree-shadowed lawn, a slim, white, purposeful figure. The lawn dipped directly at the farther end into the wood, or, rather, grove of eucalyptus interspersed with sycamore, oak, and laurel, making the air redolent with spicy fragrance. The sun filtered here and there down through lofty branches, here and there through naked boughs lifting gnarled, dead arms on high, and fell in pools of gold upon the fallen yellow leaves. Her feet passed lightly over the autumnal carpet and she came to the designated oak with its rude, dilapidated, circular seat. She stood and looked about her. The place was very still; save for an intermittent rustling among the topmost boughs, like the sound of a distant sea, no sound reached her. No bird flitted or broke the silence. She looked about her with listening eyes, a smile touching her lips at sight of the natural opening, high as a man's head, in the spreading old elm opposite. A capital place in which to play highwayman!

She sat down, crossing her slender white feet before her. She was glad to wait. Should she get up and go to meet him at sound of his

car on the road beyond, or should she wait and let him seek her? She decided to wait. The little spot seemed set, enshrined for some sweet secrecy. She turned her face toward the short declivity leading abruptly to the road, picturing his lean, alert face as he would come striding through the debarring boughs. A boyish face, after all—— She closed her eyes for a space till the high tide in her heart had ebbed.

A leaf crackled.

She turned her startled head toward the sound coming from the direction of the house. The soft crackling came nearer. From behind a clump of laurels there suddenly came into view the figure of Austin Dane, steadily approaching her.

She did not move. She felt strangely still. Kismet, her soul announced to her, silenced. He had been coming thus toward her from that far day unto this. Only she had not known. Goals. His goal—and hers! Or—was it a dream, a projection of mind—an ironic illusion wrought by the rebirth of a great emotion—love's relentless immortality?

Illusion or reality, he stood squarely before her, masterful as of old, unchanged in his blond masculinity, smiling down in possessive security at the slender, nymph-like creature straining backward against the tree.

For a second he did not speak, content to claim her with his eyes. Then the fear in hers arrested him.

“ You received my letter today?—You came here, expecting me, the maid at the house said.” His voice, constrained to gentleness, stirred her strangely, like a wind among dead leaves.

She shook her head in the dumb anguish of denial.

“ You received my letter—the many letters you have never answered, Gwen? You knew that, eventually, I must come?”

She shook her head again before the words could come in jerking whispers to her pale lips. “ Never read—all destroyed—only one—I answered.”

He smiled in forced amusement. “ Yes, you told me you were married. That all was ended between us,—but every word attested to your un-

dying love for me. Ah, Gwen, what nonsense from you, darling!"

Quickly over the blanched face he was regarding spread a mantle of flame. "Go away," she said in hurried excitement. "Go now—at once! You are nothing to me. It is over. Understand that—ended forever."

He laughed, incredulous. "What ended it?" he demanded roughly, his eyes plowing into her.

Her hand clenched against her breast as she met his dominance with darkened eyes of earnestness. "My child ended it," she answered simply.

He raised derisive brows. "What—you, a cave-woman?" he ridiculed.

She was on her feet, challenging him dauntlessly. "Call it what you will—elemental—primitive—it's myself.—Beneath the veneer of the moment—whatever the traditional power that—that turns a woman to the father of her child—to that—and to your sneer—I belong. Now I ask you to leave me—and at once, and forever. Go, I say!"

She was unconscious of self, of the maddening urge of her menacing beauty, all she craved



was to be rid of him, instantly, and, since he made no move, she turned to go, but was frustrated, swept into his arms with terrific power, strangled into speechlessness against his breast.

“Leave you?” he repeated, his lips upon her hair. “Leave you!” he laughed aloud, kissing her eyes, without releasing her. “Because of that poor little moral lie with which you’re trying to delude and mutilate your soul—and mine? You’re mine, you know, no matter what you say. You were mine before you were his. You gave yourself to me wholly, completely, as only——”

But Gwen, battling against him, heard no word of it all; her eyes were caught, transfixed by the sudden ghastly face glaring at her through the opening in the old elm tree just a yard from where she stood bound in her lover’s embrace, but as, as suddenly as it had appeared it disappeared, she tore herself free with the strength of madness, and dashed after the stricken face, the one face the world held for her in that appalling hour.

She was fleet, she was wild, and she gained

upon him, crying frantically, "George! George—wait!"

He gave no heed. His foot had almost touched the road when the wild thing reached him, flung herself upon him and, as he turned, caught at his coat lapel in speechless desperation.

"Let go," he choked out, blind to her misery, white with fury. "You—you——! Go back to your lover—and his child. I understand you now. What are you—and your child to me? Nothing. Let go, I say!"

He shook her off as an enraged mastiff might a clinging kitten, and she, stumbling over a gnarled root, fell headlong, her hands outspread against the passionless earth.

Stunned, she lay, unheeding time,—time, dealing out crises in the twinkling of an eye, time, the ruthless dramatist. She heard the chug-chug of his fleeing car, and that passed, and she heard nothing more. Except for one long, shuddering sob, she lay perfectly silent and motionless. Why try to get up,—what did anything matter? She closed her eyes against continuance, against the whole sorry scheme of things. Where had his

eyes been? Could he not see that she was struggling against the outrage of those violating arms? "Your lover—and his child!" A moaning laugh broke from her over his madness. That he could think, even for a passing, insane moment, *that* of her! But he had not thought—he had simply mentally *lynched* her and her child's fair name, asking no further evidence for condemnation than a half-glance,—the distorted vision of a cataclysmal moment. That was the "love" with which Mabel had confounded her. The bitterness of the irony overwhelmed her. But slowly, through the bitterness, stole the spirit of relentless justice with its writing on the wall, the inevitable witness for the prosecution, the further "circumstantial evidence," lying fallow for this day of judgment: those unforgettable days of her honeymoon,—her all too evident and vain efforts toward acceptance, her dumb rage before their return, her forever unpardonable repudiation of him that day in Deborah's room——

She twisted herself up to a sitting position, wiping her dusty hands on her white gown. She stared down at the gray stains in shivering loath-

ing. She hated stains. What a disgusting daub life was! What was the good of anything—anything? Everybody in everybody's way—everything muddled and snarled together. What melodramatic clap-trap trick of fate had brought Austin Dane to that particular spot at that particular moment? His letters—his unopened letters—sprang in swift vision to her battling defenselessness. No, there was nothing sudden, nothing melodramatic about his coming,—probably he had been warning her against this very day,—nature is never sudden, never melodramatic—"The mills of the gods grind slowly,"—only she had not known! Goals again? His, leading undeviatingly to her,—and hers, deflected unflinchingly away from him to another!

She sprang in sudden desperation to her feet.

Hark!

She stood listening, like an entrapped stag. What sound was that? There was no sound. The woods were still—deserted, save for her. No footstep— Not even an echo— *Was it an echo? Ah, the wail of a child!*

And over the carpet of leaves, and through the

besetting boughs, she flashed, as might a spirit, winged through with motherhood.

. . . . .

The red-faced, kindly country doctor pursed his lips together in important consideration. He solemnly shook his head. "Temperature high, but nothing pronounced, as yet. We must watch developments."

The eyes of the graven-faced mother bored into him.

"U-uh," he stammered, "it—uh—probably is the throat, but may not prove serious. The little Laurence child—did you speak, Madam?—the little Laurence child has a bad diphtheritic sore throat, but—I did not wish to alarm you——" He drew up a chair for her.

She had not spoken, she had only turned a shade more marble-hued.

Through the night she held her world in her arms. Through the night the sentinel pines at the gate swayed and moaned in wintry desolation, and wrung high, wild, futile arms against a pitiless gray sky.

Winter had suddenly encompassed her,—winter without, as within.

In the dawn, under the leaden sky, a limousine sped quietly away down the Lagunitas road, bearing within a woman holding her child in her arms. The sentinel pines waved high and long farewells after the departing vision.

The little house on the city heights opened wide its heavy, old, familiar door to receive them and, swallowing them up, closed abruptly, presenting an inscrutable front to peering curiosity.

Science came in, sure-footed. Love watched, devotion tended, idolatry sacrificed.

Only once, on the morning of the second day, her attention veered. "Telephone to George," she commanded Deborah. "Tell him that the baby is very ill, and he must come at once."

Deborah came back with the astounding information that he had left the morning previous on the Palisser yacht, bound for the South Seas.

Gwen stood gently swaying before her, her child in her arms, hushing its moaning. The blow arrested the swaying, otherwise she gave



no sign. "Send a wireless," she ordered in stern brevity.

Deborah came back, faltering, hesitant, with the further remarkable information that the yacht, intentionally, carried no wireless equipment.

For a moment the dilated eyes closed. Then, "That is finished," she said quietly, and went on with her swaying.

Science fought, love watched, devotion tended, idolatry sacrificed.

Came a day when neither love, nor devotion, nor sacrifice availed,—when Science stood back with humble head.

Then the mother knew God. In her impotence she knew Him. She fell on her knees and prayed.

She prayed the prayer which begins with "Our Father," and ends with, "For ever." "My daily bread," her white lips silently repeated in finale. "Oh, God, give me this day my daily bread," she prayed.

She arose, her empty arms groping back for their treasure. Deborah stood between, her



tender arms outstretched. Gwen looked into her compassionate face with eyes distended in horror.

Then merciful oblivion came and covered up the night in her soul.





## CHAPTER I

### “WATCHMAN, WHAT OF THE NIGHT?”

LOOKING back in after years at that dark interlude, Deborah never ceased to wonder at its utter calm. After Gwen had come out of the great torpor of mind and body—augmented by a slight infection of the ravaging disease—which at once fell upon her, only her appearance spoke of her heavy desolation. Silence enshrouded that abyss. There was no mention of the child, and, to Deborah, she moved as one who has said to herself, “I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul.” It was as if life, in its inevitable scheme of teaching, had at last seized her face between its hands and, ruthlessly peering down into her eyes, delivered its final lesson. And, from the awful chastening, the woman had emerged emotively stilled, fashioned to a nun-like quietude.

Illusion was dead, vanity was dead, emotion lay prostrate after its last great battle. Wisdom was hers and, with it, the fortitude born of experience. There remained to her now the passing of the days, and the choice lay with her whether the days were to pass over her, or she over the days. That she chose the latter was commentary of the strength of her abiding self—the residuum after the struggle, the residuum which, potential from the beginning, survives everything, and stands forth as character.

It did not declare itself at once. For a while, a week, perhaps two, her withdrawal within herself was fearsome in its absoluteness. Yet that she showed no interest in Deborah's little offerings of love,—a gown or hat sent home and tendered with scarcely a comment, a dainty dish to coax her lost appetite, fragrant flowers at her elbow,—was to be expected. Before her hushed austerity Deborah drew aside as if in the presence of dread sovereignty, and friendship, rushing to comfort, understood, when turned away at the door with the tentative formula, "Mrs. Leland is receiving no one at present," delivered

in laconic sadness by Martha, her faithful custodian.

It was Martha who watched,—Deborah having resumed her work,—furtively noting her daily goings and comings in the morning hours, knowing well whither she was driven, but reporting nothing of it to the older sister, and Martha who waited, in her canny reckoning, for the inevitable turning even of this apparently unending road.

She thought it was reached the day she heard her calling up Leland's office in inquiry as to the date of his return and severing the connection with the request that she be notified as soon as they should hear. But the short parley was not significant of change. However, it came sooner than looked for, and it was Martha herself who, without premeditation, cried the halt.

Returning one morning from her solitary pilgrimage, skirting the lower terrace and letting herself in by the side door, as was her wont to avoid meeting even the familiar face of her old nurse, Gwen found the latter crouching together in a chair by the kitchen table.

She stood still, in rigid impassivity, regarding

her with arrested interest. "What is it, Martha?" she finally demanded, finding it a wrench to speak.

"It's nothin', darlint. Don't be botherin'," Martha groaned apologetically. "It's only me back—I couldn't shtraighten it a while ago afther shtoopin' over the oven. An' I can't git up, now that I'm down."

Gwen had drawn off her gloves and had her arms about her middle before she had finished explaining. "Lumbago," she pronounced briefly. "Come up to bed. Yes, you can. Don't be afraid to bear on me. You must. Then we'll see the doctor."

She assumed charge at once, peremptorily silencing Martha's troubled protestations and getting her to bed with surprising dexterity. From the comfort of her pillows Martha set her trembling jaw and accepted her ministrations with a sudden cunning resignation and shining eyes of pride. When Deb came home she found her moving in quiet assurance about her self-appointed nursing, serving her servant with the calm understanding and grave gentleness which



henceforth was to inform her every act. Deb's and Martha's eyes met in swift eloquence, and when her nurse's back was turned Martha put an admonitory finger to her lip.

For three weeks Gwen, with the aid of a convenient “Jap,” managed the little household and tended her well-loved charge with beautiful care. During that time her daily pilgrimages were, of necessity, discontinued, and her terrible silences broken. Fitful though their conversations were in the beginning, Deborah hailed them with thanksgiving after the pall which had greeted all her efforts hitherto, and when Gwen's friends again presented themselves, scarcely hoping to be received, they found her, in spite of the wistful sadness of her eyes and lips, gently interested in everything which had claimed her before. The day's need had saved her.

On the night after her return from consigning Martha into the care of her “favorite niece” at Fruitvale, whither she had been ordered to take a long-needed rest, Gwen further broke through the wall of reticence behind which grief had entrenched her.

She had been standing a long time at the window, looking out at the night with its ribbon of flashing lights running down either side of the steep hill into a far beyond, when she partly turned toward Deborah and the peaceful, lamp-lit room, and said quietly, "I have decided what I am going to do, Deb."

Deb looked up from her *Argonaut*.

"To do when, dear?"

The peace of the room seemed interwoven with their voices, especially with Gwen's, from whose the note of joy which had always marked it, like the touch of a spring morning, had wholly departed.

"Now—always. I mean I have decided upon a profession." She turned more fully toward her, her hand still holding back the curtain.

The dove of peace took startled flight from Deborah's countenance.

"A profession! You? What for?"

"As an occupation—a means of livelihood."

"But—your husband, Gwen?"

"I have no husband, Deb."

The low-spoken words brought a white shadow

to Deborah's cheek and fear into her eyes. “I don't understand you,” she said helplessly.

“I mean that George has left me,” Gwen explained with painful exactitude.

“What are you saying?” Deb demanded fiercely, and the air was charged with battle.

“That George has left me, Deb.”

“How do you mean that he has left you? I know that he is off on that crazy yachting trip, but he is coming back.”

“But he has left *me*, never to return.”

“Left you how? Deliberately?—silently?—in anger?—how?”

“In violent, deathless hatred.” She spoke without expression, but directly, as of someone far removed from her interest.

Her unnatural calm struck Deborah with intolerable suspicion. “What had happened?” she accused in ugly hoarseness.

“A mistake. A singular trick of coincidence which can never be satisfactorily explained.”

“Why can't it? Words are cheap. You're not living in a book. Why can't you explain—at once—if you want to?”

“I want to. I intend to. I tried to, at my first opportunity. Unfortunately, he had already cut himself off from all communication.”

“Perhaps he has returned.”

“No, I have inquired. I must wait.”

“But then, Gwen?”

“He will not believe me, Deb.” The words were final as an epitaph in their stony calm.

“I’ll make him believe you,” blazed Deb, bringing her fist down on the table.

“No. It rests with me. Not to bring him back. Never that. Only to right a wrong he has done me—and another.”

The grayness which had only recently lifted from her face had settled again upon it. She came toward the light, a woman of many sorrows. Deborah beheld her in bitter forlornness.

“So,” continued the gray-faced woman in summary, a wintry smile just touching her lips, “one must buckle down to what the gods provide, and I have chosen a profession. I think I shall be successful in it. You can guess what it is, Deb.”

“No,” returned the other in harsh resentment.

"Nursing. I think I'll make a good nurse."

Quick, hot tears scalded Deb's eyes as she regarded her.

"It will be an outlet," Gwen vouchsafed from her reticences, and the grayness of her face was replaced by a sort of alabaster glow. "I shall specialize on children. I know so much about children." She was looking straight into her sister's eyes, ignoring their misty tenderness. "I am going down to Dr. Knightley's tomorrow." She drew a long breath, and added in brisk lightness, "You see how we move in circles, Deb. We're back to first intentions. Not quite back though—the parallel lifts higher. After all—perhaps because of all—I've found my vocation at last."

## CHAPTER II

### STRESS

THE morrow found her in the physician's office. Dr. Knightley rose in surprised concern at her entrance.

"Martha again?" he questioned, holding her hand with warm pressure.

"No, merely and strictly business." She took the chair facing his. "I won't keep you. Doctor, I want to train for a nurse."

"Cap and apron and all?"

She met his raillery intrepidly. "Mostly the all. Don't you consider me capable—after all your late encomiums?"

"Capable! You'd make pain a luxury! But whence this sudden inspiration? Martha too?"

"Partly Martha, partly other things. Will you use your good offices to get me into the Children's Hospital?"

"Dear lady, why?"

“For both moral and economic reasons. I must have something to do.”

He considered her keenly, shaking his head in refusal, but desisting in the face of her persistent gaze.

“Choice?” he ventured shortly.

“Yes. Choice and chance.” Always at ease with him, she went on, looking beyond him as if spelling out the writing on a wall. “I have discovered those two to be interchangeable terms. Blind chance leads us to unforeseen choice, blind choice to unforeseen chance. I did not start out with this goal in view, but I have come to it, as to a journey’s end, by divers chancings and choosings. I think it is my calling—my call from the children.”

His eyes were shining queerly upon her from behind his glasses. “You do, eh?” he said brusquely.

“Yes. One must devote one’s self to something. I could so gladly devote all my powers—and they are not few or to be sneered at—to this. You believe that, don’t you, doctor?”

“Believe what?”



“ In my powers.”

“ Only too well. You'd reach the ideal—if you could cut out the fanatic.”

“ Nevermore that, dear friend. I have out-lived that phase.”

He bent his head in deference to all she implied, the while, from under his pent brows, his eyes measured her whole personality.

“ It takes strength,” he warned.

“ I am strong.”

“ And endurance.”

“ I can endure.”

“ And renunciation.”

“ I have nothing to renounce.”

“ And ugly sights.”

“ I can face anything.”

“ And self-control.”

“ I am quiet.”

“ And devotion.”

“ That is what I am seeking.” She voiced the eternal feminine.

He got up impulsively, walking away from her, his hands thrust in his pockets. When he came back to stand before her again, he said gruffly,

“Have you considered this move from every view-point?”

She stood up straight and alert. “I have overlooked nothing,” she returned, meeting his scrutiny squarely.

“And your—your people consent?”

Her eyes did not waver. “I need no one’s consent,” she answered concisely. “My sister understands.”

He flushed under the obvious omission in her rejoinder, and bowed his head in comprehension. “Then I have nothing further to oppose. I will supply you with an application-blank, and you may leave the rest to me. It may take some little time before you are admitted.”

Her face fell.

“Besides, as your physician, I should prefer you to wait a while—till you get a little more nurse-ly looking. The strain at first is heavy. Get out in the air and gather roses.”

“I am well—I never have much color. I beg you not to make me wait unnecessarily. This is no whim.” She held out her hand and he took it in both his.

He turned away from closing the door after her, with a disapproving shake of the head. "A call from the children!" echo mentally repeated. "Whose children?" Thought, already filled with her image, flew to another. "Humph!" he grunted, and the disapproving shake of his head slowed to emphatic determination.

Gwen, in view of the enforced delay, was not quiescent. The day after her visit to the doctor she set her face townward armed with a stiff, flat package, and, mounting in the lift of the *Evening Messenger* building, she presented herself at the office of the business manager of that newspaper, and was admitted to his presence with unexpected celerity.

She found the dignitary half hidden behind a high desk, immersed in papers and writing absorbedly. She stood a moment waiting for him to look up but, as he gave no sign, she spoke.

"Mr. Martin."

The busy pen paused, the dark head jerked up and toward her.

"Miss Heath!" Laurence Martin was on his feet, coming toward her with welcoming hands,

like a ghost from another existence. "Mrs. Leland, I mean," he laughed. "I recognized your voice in the dark." He held her hand, his eyes enfolding her.

She withdrew her hand. "May I speak to you a few minutes, on business?"

He swung round a chair for her and sat down before her, attentive.

For a moment she seemed to hesitate to speak, sitting very erect, very austere in her simple black garb, her pallor, and her gravity, her slender gloved hands resting upon the flat package she held upon her lap.

"I wrote you," he bridged the pause, in low-voiced sympathy, but she quickly interrupted.

"Thank you," she said, briefly matter-of-fact. "It was kind of you to remember. I answered your note, I think. I came to ask your opinion, or, rather, your friendly influence in disposing of—this. You have a 'Children's Corner' every night in your paper, haven't you?"

He found the romantic beauty of her changed face very alluring, the grave set of her lip, the still, gray pools of her eyes, the rich glint of

her hair under her small, close black velvet hat, the utter aloofness of her slim grace. He had heard rumors of Leland's defection. In a certain sense she was Gwen Heath again, made to woo. He bent nearer. "I am yours to command," he assured her gently. "What is it?"

"I have brought two short—very short—stories I should like to sell—children's stories. I am troubling you because I thought you would see that they would receive prompt attention. I counted, you see, on our old acquaintance." She spoke incisively, tendering him the manuscript.

"You don't expect me to pronounce on them, do you?" he smiled, taking the package from her. "I'm as unregenerate as ever, and no judge of baby-food, you know, but I'll guarantee you the prompt attention from the editor of the 'Corner.' Thank you for trusting to our 'old acquaintance.'"

"It is I who thank you," she returned hurriedly. "And about the remuneration—if they are available?"

He flushed uncomfortably under the incongruity of this unblushing, straightforward de-

mand from George Leland's wife. "That will be according to space—unless otherwise stipulated," he was forced to answer.

"Whatever your terms may be. I need the money." She arose to go, her eyes resting on the package where he had placed it upon the desk. "It is a wrench to leave them," she submitted wistfully, and a faint color suffused her cheek, "but I think—the children—will like them."

It was the first sign of humanness she had evinced. He responded swiftly. "I am sure of it—since you wrote them. Must you go already?" His hand closed firmly over the one she had extended.

She withdrew it quickly again, the softness banished from her aspect. "Yes. Then you will let me know?"

"I'll come to tell you."

The severity of her mouth deepened. "I prefer to keep the transaction upon a business basis, Mr. Martin," she repulsed. "If it is necessary for me to call here, I will come. I expect no favors." She moved to go.

"Ah—Mrs. Leland!" She turned back at his

call, her eyes hardening under the soft fervor of his regard. "You will hear from me or the editor, of course. But," he begged, "are you quite inaccessible to—the old acquaintance?"

"I am—in retirement, Mr. Martin." There was a pathetic sound of sad dignity in the short rebuff.

"Pardon," he murmured, and stood aside.

He kicked a chair out of his path on his way back to his desk. "I used to call it chastity," he glowered inaudibly. "Now it's sheer asceticism!"

That there is no royal road to any undertaking Gwen realized more unpleasantly when, a few days later, she received the following note from the editorial rooms of the *Evening Messenger*:

"MY DEAR MRS. LELAND,

"Our reader pronounces them both gems of purest ray,—and forced them upon the editor, who, being a father, fell instant victim to their charms. He spoke of them to me with a suspicious moisture about the lids, but, while I defeated him in his attempt to initiate me into their



tender mysteries—which are not for the sophisticated likes of me—I prevailed upon him to allow me to announce their acceptance to you. Will you kindly call at my office Thursday afternoon, at three, to arrange about a proposition for future work which I should like to submit to you, and about your signature—*nom de plume*, anonymous, or what?

“Enclosed please find our check, and sincere thanks.

“Very cordially yours,

“LAURENCE MARTIN.”

The check was for one hundred dollars.

The blood rushed in a flood of shame over her at sight of the materialistic outcome of the dream she had hugged to herself in such tender secrecy, but she dashed the tears out of her eyes in swift self-reproach. She could afford only dreams that paid, now. To the question of her signature she had given no thought. Gwen Heath? She had forfeited the right to that name. Gwen Leland?—What if it should meet his eyes? She had no lien upon his tolerance, no share in his name.

She had now to obey Larry Martin's genially veiled peremptoriness.

"Let them be signed 'G. H. L.,'" she said in conference with him the next day. "I should like them to retain the hall-mark, without publicity."

He sat before his desk noting her decision in writing. He had chosen the better part of discretion in communicating with her, however cunningly he had intrigued to bring her down again. They had a quiet half-hour together arranging for a weekly Saturday evening story, the arrangement to continue indefinitely unless her Hospital work should interfere. In this connection she was forced to tell him of her plan to train for a nurse.

He listened, puzzled, shocked, not knowing what to say. "I wish I were a child again!" he blurted out finally, with a comically deprecating glance.

"But not a sick one," she remonstrated almost gayly, comfortable in his attitude of good comradeship. "Nor a well one either, considering that you won't even read about a child."

“ Will you do me a favor? ” he demanded with startling irrelevancy.

“ I should like to very much. ”

“ Then submit your next one to my august consideration by reading it to me—here. ”

She frowned. “ But you’d hate it,—you wouldn’t understand. ”

“ Educate my neglected graces. ”

She looked past him with set jaw.

“ Is that understood? ” he persisted lightly, tightly holding the net of opportunity. “ From a business, as well as an educational footing? ”

“ If you insist, ” she said coldly, and a moment later took her leave.

She thrust the annoyance into the background of consciousness, hating what she termed to herself was his inveterate flirtatiousness, sternly resolved to accept the inevitable in the best spirit she could command.

She succeeded in curbing her impatience over Dr. Knightley’s remissness, with the reassurance that the application-blank would arrive as soon as practicable. She had promised herself to jog his memory presently, when, one afternoon, as

she sat over pencil and pad in the wide silence of the house, the ringing of the telephone startled her from her abstraction, and she went to answer it, still communing with the little creatures of her imagination.

“Hallo.”

“Is this Mrs. George Leland’s residence?”

“It is. This is Mrs. Leland.”

“Oh. This is Masterson, Mrs. Leland,—Masterson, the bookkeeper of Consolidated Oil.”

“Yes, Mr. Masterson.”

“I owe you an apology for not ’phoning to you yesterday when we received a letter from Mr. Leland from Los Angeles. I don’t suppose it made any real difference as, of course, you’ve heard, but——”

Gwen lost the rest of his statement in a blur of sensations. When she emerged from the fog, he was saying, “Are you there, Mrs. Leland?”

“Yes, I’m here. Did you say you had had a letter from Mr. Leland yesterday?”

“From the Los Angeles Office. There’s nothing in the letter, of course, to interest you. I only wanted to apologize for my carelessness in

not letting you know at once, as I had promised. No doubt he cabled you from Tahiti, where he left the yacht to take the steamer home, as his letter states. I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Leland. As I was saying——”

“It doesn't matter in the least, Mr. Master-son,” came the gentle reassurance. “Thank you very much,” and her quiet “Good-by” cut across his eager, “Thank you, Mrs. Leland.”

Quietly Gwen set about her preparations, quietly the day wore to evening.

. . . . .

Deborah's first thought at sight of the small traveling grip in the hall was that some unexpected guest had arrived, but a glimpse of Gwen from the dining-room doorway instantly dispelled that surmise.

“Where are you going, dressed like that?” she exclaimed, indicating the tailored effect of her attire as she stood filling the glasses with water.

“I'm going South—to Los Angeles—on the twenty-to-eight train this evening, Deb,” Gwen

explained, finishing her task with a tranquil upward glance at the figure in the doorway.

“Going to Los Angeles!” Deb echoed incredulously, coming into the room. “What——”

“I have just heard that George is there—he came back on the steamer. I went down and bought my ticket and berth this afternoon. I’ll leave the house a little after seven. As I’m all dressed to go, will you help Suzuki, please, Deb?”

Deborah strode over to the table, hastily drawing off her gloves. “But of course I’m going with you, Gwen,” she murmured breathlessly.

“Deb dear,” smiled Gwen quietly, “don’t you think I’ve reached woman’s stature yet?”

Deb silently received the gentle proclamation of emancipation. “At least,” she ventured diffidently, “you will let me go down with you to the depot.”

“But why?” came the firm resistance.

Then and there, in the simplicity of understanding, Deborah abdicated, without a word of protestation.

## CHAPTER III

### ABOVE LIFE'S TRAFFIC

SHE had merely said, "I should like to speak to Mr. Leland," and before she could give her name, the boy, inviting her to be seated, had left her.

Gwen sat in the broad light of the large, bare, outer office, partly turned from the traffic of the feet of men coming and going. If they glanced in curiosity toward the figure of the woman with the averted face, she was unaware of it, holding herself in a relentless calm, all her senses focused upon the awaited sound of a footfall which she knew she would instantly distinguish.

But he did not come. Men passed to and fro, generally singly, with brisk, hurried footsteps, again in pairs, talking absorbedly, but moving at a more leisurely pace. The two heavy doors down the farther side of the room giving upon the corridor, opened and shut at their touch with busi-



ness-like promptness and surety, agreeing to the law of time and place. Everything here belonged.

Gwen alone, far back in her corner, was the one note of disharmony. And even as the men, glancing in her direction, felt her so, she, too, knew it, but she severely shut to the door on her intuitive distaste of the situation, and sat doggedly on. She, also, had "business of importance" to transact—business of more significance to her than life or death, though it bore no relation to the ebb and flow of material affairs about her.

Patiently, unquestioningly, she sat through a half-hour,—she knew he would come when he could,—but the time seemed infinitely long. She reflected that he did not know who was waiting for him—or, perhaps, he did,—perhaps he had glanced out, recognized her, and was debating whether to receive her or not. At this thought the dryness in her throat threatened to strangle her, but she only pressed her lips more firmly together and continued to gaze at the two glass upper panels of the doors at the farthest end of the room, marked "Private," directly facing her.

One of these doors, the one to the left, opened and shut intermittently to admit of sharp ingress or egress, which is just what an office-door should do, but the one to the right remained persistently closed, like a deserted or sealed port. Gwen's tired eyes rested unseeingly upon this undisturbing haven. She was waiting for the footfall.

Suddenly her eyelids flickered, something had crossed her line of vision. Someone, a hatless, dark-haired young woman this time, with writing pad in her hand, issued from the friendly portal, walked toward the other, and swiftly opened and as swiftly closed it upon herself. The next moment a man came forth from the same enclosure and walked hurriedly away.

But he had left the door ajar.

A minute later someone from within advanced to close it. In that fleeting second something like a ball of fire leaped from Gwen's throat to her eyes and seemed to blind her very reason:

*She did not want him in that room with that dark-haired girl.*

But almost immediately she became still, with a portentous stillness. She knew that he had

sensed her as she had sensed him, that presently the door would open again and he would come out.

And he did, even while she was thinking it.

He came straight toward her, tall and spare, with stern face, seamed and beaten by forces stronger than tropic weather.

She saw it all as she arose, meeting his uncompromising eyes with level gaze.

“I didn’t know it was you,” he explained, distantly courteous. “The boy only said ‘A lady.’”

“Yes. May I speak to you alone, please?” Her voice was a mere thread of silvery sound, she was white to the lips.

He stood a moment considering, then turned sharply to a door just beside her which she had not noticed, opened it, and stood aside for her to enter.

Beyond a short passage-way, she found herself in a small, ill-lighted room containing a desk and two chairs. As he closed the door and turned toward her where she stood against the wall, she felt herself completely isolated with an opponent

in what was to be a mortal combat. From far below in the street rose the muffled roar of distant traffic.

He stood with his hands thrust in the pockets of his coat, his head stiffly raised in waiting attitude. There was no pretense at conciliation, he did not ask her to sit down.

“I will only keep you a few minutes,” she began in the same low, even tone which was all she could command. “I wanted to tell you—as soon as I heard you were back—that,” a scarcely perceptible pause revealed the effort she was making,—“that what you said—that day in the woods—was not true.”

He continued to regard her with immobile countenance, uttering no sound.

“That I know that you know—it was not true.”

She looked out at him as from a distance, wan and white, with proud, close-pressed lips, the pure waxen oval of her face framed in the shadow of her small, close-fitting black velvet hat. She waited, moveless, for him to speak.

It took him a long time. When speech came

his voice was dry, and harsh, and slow. "Why should I know it was—not true?"

"Because," came the proud, pained answer, her eyes never wavering in their hold of his, "you knew that I was I."

A short, mirthless sound, meant to be a laugh, escaped him, but his eyes, too, held to hers, somber, ironic.

"I don't—know—you," he said mercilessly.

She waited, unflinching, for the axe to cleave.

"I found you," he went on ruthlessly, each word decisive, distinct as a blow, "you—my legal wife, at least,—in the arms of another—a stranger to me. I heard words that would have been revelation enough to the lowest intelligence without the experience which had been mine—words which, when you discovered me standing there, brought the most incriminating of horrors to your face—the horror of being found out."

She closed her eyes for a second, the lowered, waxen lids with their upward curling lashes giving to her face a momentary aspect of death. When she opened them again she had found the strength to speak.

"I heard no words," she said. "I only saw your face."

He gave again the short, mirthless sound meant to be a laugh, a laugh of ugly incredulity.

"What were the words?" she asked.

His eyes drove into her steady gaze. "You want me to repeat them?" he challenged roughly.

Her undaunted attention spoke affirmation.

"Well," he said incisively, and his hands came out from his pockets and caught at his coat lapels, "he merely said—and I don't know in answer to what"—he gave a clicking sound with his tongue as though the words were weighting it—"he said, 'You were mine before you were his—you can never belong to him as you have belonged to me.'—That was all." He let the blade sink deep. Then, fiercely, coming a fraction nearer, "You never belonged to me," he accused.

Again the waxen lids fell, this time for a longer space, but he paid no heed to the appeal of her appearance.

"You," he drove on without pity, "you mar-



ried me for only one thing—as I knew well enough in my infatuation—you married me to escape poverty. You tried to be game at first, but it wouldn't work. It petered out in a few weeks. I wasn't worth the candle. Do you suppose I didn't know all along? Well, I shut my eyes, I pretended to myself it was going to be all right—until you faced about—over there in Chartres—and let me see that the game was up—that you were in hell. Well, if you were in hell, where do you think I was?—And that day of our return—after your sister Deborah had endeavored to explain it all—physiologically—and I, like a fool, took it all in and was ready to——” He turned from her, walking over to the desk, and leaned on it with bowed head, and back turned to her. Only the muffled hum of the distant traffic filled the deathly silence of the little room, before, without turning, he spoke again. “You know what you said to me there—in that room—about ridding—— Pah! The word won't come—— You know that you turned the world upside down for me then. Aw—what's the good of thinking of that!” He veered about to find



her shrunk against the wall, her face wild with appealing anguish, but he paid no heed, bound to make an end of it. "What else could I think after all that—what else could I think when I saw you there in that man's arms, with his words ringing in my brain—but that you had consented—no, maneuvered, for a hasty marriage because——"

"George!" Her hoarse cry, springing from the roots of her tortured being, smote him into silence. "No, no," she moaned, "you couldn't—you didn't think that."

"I could and I did," he returned brutally. "What else could the whole thing mean to me—you there, his words enlightening all the past for me? I didn't dream what I saw and heard, did I?"

"No," she said dully, "no, you didn't dream it. He—Austin Dane—and I—had loved each other—before I married you. But, for me, that was long since dead—and buried. I had lost account of him. He found me there—waiting for you. I told him to go. At that moment, when you came upon us, he—had seized me—before I

knew his intention. He was too strong for me—the sudden sight of your terrible face—paralyzed me. I couldn't even cry out. I had no consciousness of what he was saying or that he was saying anything. Now—that you repeat it to me—I see what it meant to you, though the words were purely figurative.” She paused as if finished, looking beyond him, then, very quietly, looking again straight into his bloodshot eyes, she added, “You believe me, don't you, George?”

He returned her gaze in dumb misery.

“You know,” she went on, a veil of stillness falling upon her voice, her face, her whole presence, making her, seemingly, remote, intangible as if separated from him by a mist, “you know that nothing—nothing of that nature—could ever have touched Gwen Heath, don't you, George?”

She looked toward him, a dim vision of pale purity, bodily removed, all spirit. And he saw her as she was in truth, and a violent trembling shook him as, for one moment, the Invisible was made visible and her spirit spoke to his.

“You believe that, don't you, George?” the low, singing voice affirmed.

He bent his head in speechless confession of faith.

“You know that Beth was your child, don't you, George?”

He mumbled something incoherent.

She moved then as if to go.

He stayed her with a motion of his hand, clearing his throat with difficulty. “She—the baby—how is she?”

For a few seconds no sound came, then, “Beth is dead, George,” she said very low.

He regarded her in imploring bewilderment.

“More than six weeks now. It was—diphtheria.”

He shook his head in stupefied denial. “No, no,” he protested, and the tears rained over his face as his hands went out to her. “You——” he muttered, “you——” He flung himself away from her into the chair by the desk and bowed his head within his arms.

Something touched his head lightly, but when, a moment later, he found his control and, lifting

his head, turned toward her, her name upon his lips, he saw he was alone.

. . . . .

In the soft gloom of evening Gwen flitted through the crowd at the River Street Station, and moved toward the waiting train.

A man detached himself from the others and came striding toward her, abruptly arresting her. He thrust flowers into her hand and the fragrance of violets stole up to her as, with raised hat, he possessed himself of her small grip. They moved together toward the train.

“I’ve been searching the town for you,” he said unsteadily. “The hotels, the boarding houses, the——”

“I hadn’t given my own name,” she explained quickly, her face still touched with the after-glow of the startled flood of color his unexpected appearance had enkindled.

They were within two feet of the train.

“I came down to meet the Owl,” he went on in headlong fashion, “but you weren’t there.”

She glanced up at him and away. They had

come to a standstill before the car, her foot was upon the step.

"Gwen, oh, Gwen!" broke from him irrepressibly, all his grief, all his pity, all his yearning in the strangled cry.

Her eyes flew up to his. "We——" She smiled bravely through a mist of tears, but the guard at her side held out his warning hand and as, with bent head, she stepped aboard, the whistle blew its shrill, long farewell.

The little grip was passed up to her.

The scheduled leviathan moved slowly onward with beautifully increasing swiftness, leaving behind it a faint trail of smoke in the upper air.

Leland, absently replacing his hat, turned townward with unseeing eyes.

## CHAPTER IV

### LETTERS

GEORGE LELAND TO GWEN LELAND

Hotel Alexandria, Los Angeles.

*Saturday night.*

DEAR GWEN,

It is twelve o'clock—four hours since you left—and I haven't found the words yet that I wanted to say to you. What can we do about it, Gwen? What can anyone ever do about it?

Don't cry, Gwen. You've cried so much— Can't I help? Would it help to talk about it to me? I'd understand—everything. But don't cry any more, please! It's washed all the color from your face, and from your heart, too, I'm afraid. It only takes your strength. Just be quiet now, and wait, and the sweetness of so many things you love will come flowing back to you. You can be brave, I know.

You were very brave and wonderful with me

today, Gwen. One thing I want you to remember—and that is what I wanted to say to you—that I am here now—that, no matter what the time and distance between us, you can never be alone in this grief again. Forgive me.

GEORGE.

GEORGE LELAND TO DEBORAH HEATH

Hotel Alexandria, Los Angeles.

*Saturday night.*

MY DEAR DEBORAH,

I have just finished writing to Gwen. I'm afraid it's a poor attempt at trying to tell her how I am suffering for her. I can never forgive myself for cutting myself off as I did, and I know you never will, although I approach you with the threadbare plea of madness. Madness, or whatever name I choose to call it, I was no lunatic, and a sane man can't cut himself loose from his responsibilities. I know that, as you know it, as the unpardonable sin,—so let it alone for a moment, please.

I am much worried about her—her appearance, I mean. Has she been ill, too, or is it only



sorrow that has given her that uncanny, spiritual look? I don't want to frighten you, Deb,—no doubt you have noticed it—but I am frightened. Has she seen a doctor! There's Newton, the specialist,—they say he's a genius at diagnosing nervous troubles. For God's sake, don't let her go into a decline, Deb.

Another thing—has she everything? I mean everything money can buy? You wouldn't let her deny herself any comfort or luxury through some hypersensitive notion of not using her check-book because—the money comes from me? The mere suggestion drives me frantic, but I know what an extremist she is and I don't know how far her imagination might lead her from solid practicality. I don't believe you would let her do anything so nonsensical, but there was something—it only harked back to me after she had left—something about her dress, something a man can't explain, that made me think of restrictions, economy, frugality. It wasn't that she was shabby, but she wasn't smart, and Gwen never let herself look like that before. I hope I am wrong in my hateful thought about the money—but at

any rate I can communicate with the bank.

How would a sea-trip strike you—just you and Gwen together—say to Japan or Honolulu? She's never been, and I think it would do her a world of good—those long, peaceful days on the water—besides diverting her thoughts. Will you think of it, Deb, and speak to her about it without delay—and let me know as soon as possible?

For everything you are, and everything you have always been and will be to her, I can only bow my heart and soul in thankfulness to you.

Yours faithfully,

GEORGE LELAND.

GWEN LELAND TO GEORGE LELAND

The Heights, San Francisco.

*Sunday evening.*

DEAR GEORGE,

I forgot to thank you for the violets, and I don't want the day to pass without doing it. As it is, this won't reach you till Tuesday when they will be quite dead, though they still send a breath of fragrance up to me. You know I have a certain sentiment and knack about keeping flowers

alive as long as possible. They are unusually sweet violets,—all through the night on the train—I didn't sleep very much—their sweetness was like a presence.

There is something else I forgot to say to you, something I had fully intended saying, but I was too overwrought. It is this: naturally, you will want to be divorced from me. I realized at the time, from every view-point, that you were only waiting until Beth came, and afterward you only hesitated through chivalry, but now there is nothing to hold you. You will let me know before you begin proceedings, won't you?

You were more than generous to me yesterday—so unquestioningly generous in the end. Ever since, I have felt at peace. It is a strange thing to feel that someone else is at one with you, wholly and utterly one, in a grief beyond the reach of words or time or forgetfulness—very strange, and very sweet. After that we can never hold any bitterness against each other, can we, George?

Good-night, dear.

GWEN.

## DEBORAH HEATH TO GEORGE LELAND

The Heights, San Francisco.

*Monday.*

MY DEAR GEORGE,

I have just received your letter. I think you exaggerate, my dear. Gwen doesn't look half so bad as you, coming suddenly upon her as you did, and noting the great change, would be led to believe. Yes, she was ill, but not for long. She took it from the baby, you know,—she never left her for a moment. And her grief was and is—unspeakable. We cannot expect otherwise from Gwen—she has the intensity of all her qualities. But every day, especially for the past two weeks or so, by her own brave efforts, she has made gallant strides toward self-recovery and, by comparison, is almost herself again, though a changed self. If one lives long enough, and deeply enough, one knows many selves. You must not lose sight of the fact that Saturday was a terrible ordeal for her, wrought up as she was to the highest pitch of controlled emotion. Knowing Gwen as I do, I know she was controlled.

But I want you to know that I have noticed, ever since the first moment of her return from seeing you, that she seems to have found something which I could not give her, something for which she was pining and which is now wholly hers. Her eyes have lost their strained yearning, she has relaxed her stern grip on circumstance, and twice I have surprised a *real* little smile playing about the corners of her mouth. She needs neither a doctor nor a sea-trip.

I regret to say that your surmise about the money is correct. Ever since the baby went—I mean as soon as she began to take up the problem of life again—she has refused to accept any maintenance from you. Though I know it is legally due her, morally she has not the shadow of a claim to it. Judged from that light you will readily understand that I must, in honor, uphold her. But we are quite comfortable in our simple way, and just the other day—though there was no necessity—Gwen found material independence by selling some children's stories to the *Evening Messenger*, with arrangements for more.

I have tried to answer all your questions clearly

and without bias. Whatever else you want to ask, remember I am your friend as well as hers and I will always answer in that spirit. And whatever I can do for you, regard me as standing here with both hands ready.

Always sincerely yours,

DEBORAH HEATH.

GWEN LELAND TO GEORGE LELAND

The Heights, San Francisco.

*Monday night.*

DEAR GEORGE,

Your letter came—it will always be a peculiar treasure to me. No, I won't cry any more,—instead, I will read your letter——

I have just read it again—— If ever I could talk about—it, it would be to you. But I can never talk about it——

George, do you remember that day when you carried her down into the garden? Was she dear, was she sweet?—Did you notice her eyes—two soft brown velvet pansies? I told Deb the other night how surprisingly like yours they were—I had never noticed it before. Those things are

so wonderful, aren't they? That day, when you came up with her in your arms, I noticed how you held her—close against you, in the hollow of your arm. Did the feel of her little warm body, her utter confidence in you, make you feel—good? Did you feel the push of unknown powers rising within you, did you feel that you could perform heroisms, conquer anything—because of her? I did——

Some day when you come to town, you will want to go there. She is lying at my father's feet, in Cypress Lawn. Perhaps you will see me there—I go very often, but not every day now—because Deb objects so.

She, Deb, told me today what you wrote about money and a trip. Thank you very much for the kind thoughtfulness, but I don't need a trip—I am very well—and you should see how my appetite is coming back! As to the money, of course I can't take that.

Always yours for friendship,

GWEN.



GEORGE LELAND TO GWEN LELAND

Hotel Alexandria, Los Angeles.

*Tuesday.*

DEAR GWEN,

I have never thought of getting a divorce from you, and I never will! I have just finished reading your letter. How could you write that terrible thing in the midst of your transcendent forgiveness? Why should I wish to be divorced from you? What advantage would it be to me? Do you think I could ever think of marrying another woman? You ought to know better than that. Being married to you—though I should never see you again—is the only thing thinkable to me. Nothing—no one—could ever really “divorce” me from you! I was one of the high contracting parties in that transaction which plunged you into so much misery—and I never willingly break a contract. Surely not the one under discussion.

Unless—perhaps—was that your tentative way of breaking the news to me that *you* want a divorce? Of course, that's it! Selfish ass that I am,

I began this letter without stopping to think. Of course—I see now. Naturally—that would be your first thought, everything considered now. Of course. Go straight ahead. No opposition from me. Sorry to have made such a blatant idiot of myself in the first few lines of this—thinking only of my own interests. Well, there I am!

Any further communication on the subject may be addressed to Archibald Ford of the law-firm of Fork, Peckham, and Ford. Anything you say, goes.

GEORGE LELAND.

GWEN LELAND TO GEORGE LELAND

The Heights,  
*Thursday night.*

DEAR GEORGE,

Your letter has upset me terribly. Never accuse me again of such an underhanded procedure. I shall never ask you for a divorce because, speaking from my own personality, I can never believe in divorce. Separation, surely,—in extreme cases,—but, to a woman of my sort, there could

never be "two husbands" in my life. So what would it profit me? I was thinking only of your future. Referring to our hurried marriage, I, too, was "one of the high contracting parties," but I gave no thought—then—to my high responsibilities. When you speak of transcendent forgiveness, what have *you* not to forgive *me*?

As I have told you, speaking personally, I do not believe in the efficacy of divorce, because—now—I understand what is meant by the consecration of marriage. In the face of all your memories of me, I dare ask you to believe that of me.

GWEN.

GEORGE LELAND TO GWEN LELAND

Hotel Alexandria,  
*Saturday.*

DEAR GWEN,

Forgive my impetuous conclusion. When the devil gets roused in a man it takes something stronger than the devil to kill his suspicions. I understand now that it was pure selflessness that prompted your suggestion. So—since we are

both of that mind—let's drop the hateful subject now and forever, or at least as long as you stay of that mind.

I am glad you are better. When I come to town I shall have to communicate with you in person about that money question. Your arrangement is one no man could tolerate unless, behind it, lay a knowledge of guilt or of unfor-  
givingness. Perhaps there is that—perhaps I said something unpardonable to you in the office that day. I don't know what I said. I only remember what you said. If there was anything then, or at any other time, anything said or done that has brought you to this decision, will you tell me? I might be able to explain.

Faithfully yours,

GEORGE LELAND.

GEORGE LELAND TO DEBORAH HEATH

Hotel Alexandria, Los Angeles.

*Saturday.*

MY DEAR DEBORAH,

Do you think, if I came to town, that Gwen would object to seeing me? I mean for a few

minutes' talk. An early answer would help me very much.

GEORGE.

GWEN LELAND TO GEORGE LELAND

The Heights,

*Monday evening.*

DEAR GEORGE,

You have never said anything or done anything to me that needs pardoning. It is only that you owe me nothing. You would not have me, an able-bodied young woman, become a pensioner, would you? Let us drop that question, too, please. It is of so little consequence.

Are you coming to the city soon?

GWEN.

DEBORAH HEATH TO GEORGE LELAND

The Heights,

*Monday.*

MY DEAR GEORGE,

Wait a minute.

DEB.

## CHAPTER V

### DEBORAH'S STORY

SHE had indeed remarked, as if out of a clear sky, on the night of her return, "George's eyes are just like baby's, aren't they?" and then had hurriedly covered the inadvertence with a quite inconsequential tale about Jean—and voting!

And now again, four nights later, as they sat together sewing for "Deb's children," the lamp raying between them, she broke a long silence by saying quietly, without looking up from her work, "Did you ever notice that Beth's eyes were just like George's?" as though the comment were quite new.

And Deb, also quietly, without looking up from her work, had answered, as before, "Yes, I knew it."

"But you never said anything about it."

"It was so obvious."

“ I mean—not only the color—the setting, the shape, the brows.”

“ Yes.”

“ And the expression. That's queer—the expression. When she used to look straight at me—straight through me—with such strange, penetrating questioning, I used to wonder about it so. Queer, isn't it?” She laughed, a short, confused sound.

“ Not so very queer.” Deb smiled, creasing a hem.

The silence lay between them again, intimate as speech.

After a while, the short, confused laugh was repeated, like a belated echo. Deb, glancing up, saw the head turned quickly aside, saw the rosy tide sweep up over the averted cheek. A light shot into Deb's face. Followed a smile, inscrutable, brief. She said nothing.

A sigh, patient, impatient, escaped and died upon the silence.

Deb said nothing.

Gwen pushed her work from her, her hands catching at the chair arms. She looked out be-



fore her, speaking slowly, with difficulty, but as if by impulsion, "I can't sew. They get between me and my work—her eyes, I mean. To kiss them—once! It's like a mania." Her teeth seemed set.

Deb's eyes clung to her sewing. She said nothing.

After a little she felt, rather than saw, the girl spring up. She heard her poke the fire. She knew she was not crying. From under lowered lids she saw her standing there, her arms drooping, her foot tapping the floor.

Suddenly she felt two soft arms tightening about her neck. Gwen was kissing her.

"Good-night," she said, and released her as abruptly as she had caught her. "I'm going to bed. I can't sit here. Perhaps I'll write. Or potter about in my room. Good-night."

She was gone. Deb heard her door close in the distance.

To Deb it was merely a climax.

She sat with idle needle, spinning more tenuous threads:

She—Gwen—had not been crying.

“ *Her eyes* ”——

A contemplative smile drew in the corners of Deb's mouth, got caught in the corners of her eyes, forming tiny, experienced lines there. She looked wise as age, still as mystery, sitting there.

Deb a-dream—yet purposeful.

Again she saw the solitary, slight figure in black coming in at the front door as she had that Sunday morning after her unexplained visit South, and she, Deb, with an inexplicable rush of disappointed love, running out to her with wide-spread, protective arms, and then stopping her onslaught in astonishment of the light upon the other's face.

In drawing her to her, a bunch of fading violets had fallen from her jacket. But Gwen had quickly caught them. “ Smell them. Sweet still, aren't they? George gave them to me,” she had said simply.

And that night—“ George's eyes are just like the baby's, aren't they? ”——and the surprised brooding in the gray eyes, instantly concealed.

And then the letters: Gwen coming from her

room, after long intervals, with drooping, swollen lids, and a deep wistfulness upon her lips.

George's letters to her—Deb.

The tie—unbreakable.

The tiny, experienced lines deepened in the corners of Deb's eyes.

“*Her eyes*”——

“To kiss them—once.”

But she had not been crying—Deb knew there had been no tears in the farthest depths of the gray eyes. Ah, Gwen!

Suddenly she felt a furious throbbing in her heart and clasped her hands tight over it.

If——

The “old maid” dreamed.

Lightening thoughts chased themselves across her brow, danced in vision before her. Her eyes widened. Thought snapped into plot. The beautiful, strong hands fell from her breast, lay apart, half curled for action, in her lap.

She arose, the little charity garment falling unheeded upon the floor. She, too, went and poked, poked at the glowing heart of the dying fire. Absently, she turned down the lamp.

Only the glowing heart of the embers lit the room.

Deb stood alone looking down into the dully glowing bed.

No one saw her face.

Deb was living.

## CHAPTER VI

### STRATEGICAL

It was a quarter-to-ten by the library clock when Gwen, passing through the hall, met Suzuki coming in from washing the front steps, bucket and broom in hand.

“Boy leave letter for you,” he said, handing her a square white envelope and making to pass on.

Gwen wondered. “Where’s the boy?” she asked vaguely, puzzling over the handwriting. “Deb’s, of course,” she decided the next instant. “The least she could do—leaving the house before I’m up!”—“Yes?” she turned a half ear to Suzuki’s explanation that “Boy depart fastly on bike,” and was already transfixed with amazement when he sauntered off to the back regions.

“Dear Gwen,” she stood reading, “I’m off on the morning’s train to Chicago to meet Jane Addams about our new Settlement House.

“Incidentally, I’m bringing home your Uncle from Brazil—he may arrive before me.

“You’ll find plenty of paper money under the powder-box on my bureau—use it *all*.

“*Don’t be stingy.*”

“DEBBINS.”

“Stingy!” Gwen had no words in her astonishment. The utter surprise of the act, the riddle of each oddly enumerated item, the unusual lack of consideration—“Why, she’s crazy,” Gwen gave up in desperation.

She began to re-read it, line for line. “To meet Jame Addams about the new Settlement House”—*what* new Settlement House?—and never a word to her about such an important commission in contemplation! “I don’t believe it,” Gwen declared to herself, dimly suspicious of mystery. “I’ll ring up the Associated Charities,—I don’t believe she’s gone at all.”—“Your Uncle from Brazil”—“Who on earth is that? Sounds like some practical joke.”—“Plenty of money”—“What for?” “Don’t be stingy”—“underlined; what can that mean? Sounds like

symbolism.”—“ Your Uncle from Brazil ”—“ oh, that old joke of mine! ” A laugh escaped her as she remembered that mythic Uncle of girlish romance who was to make them “ happy ever after,” and she wondered what twist of mind could have made Deb think of him in this incredible leave-taking.

“ It needs a key,” she concluded futilely, turning the paper over in search of further enlightenment.

Just then the door-bell rang and Gwen, a few feet away, moved to answer it, faintly noting at the same time the sound of a taxi-cab purring away from the front of the house.

She opened the door. On the mat stood George Leland.

“ O-oh,” she murmured in bewilderment and the color left her cheek, while he, between the two suit-cases he had dropped, showed a burning face in response to her greeting and stood, his hat in one hand, the other outheld.

“ You didn’t expect me,” he said confusedly as their hands mechanically met.

Speechless, she moved aside for him to enter,



and only after he stood within and the door was closed, did she find utterance. "I didn't know."

"Didn't Deb tell you?"

She shook her head in negation.

"She sent me a wire."

"Oh!"

"That you would be quite alone."

"Ye-es."

"She asked me if I would come and stay with you."

"I—see."

She did see. In a flash the whole scheme of the loving trickery burst upon her. They stood facing each other, both pale now, he breathing hurriedly.

"I have Deb's dispatches." He pulled out his pocket-book, fumbled for the yellow slips, and pressed them upon her.

"I believe you," she resisted.

"Please read them," he insisted stiffly.

There were two. The first read:

"Must leave for Chicago in day or two. Gwen quite alone. Will you stay with her. Deborah."

And the second:

“Will you take Lark Wednesday night and go straight to house. Deborah.”

He waited till she looked up, smilelessly.

“I answered her I’d come whenever and stay as long as she wished,” he explained, smileless as she, taking the slips from her. “I see you weren’t prepared. Queer piece of carelessness of Deb’s. I’ll go, of course.” He stooped to his suit-cases.

“Please wait,” she stayed him quickly, but said no more, frowning beyond him and biting her underlip in vexation.

The moment pressed. She felt his growing intolerance of the impossible situation, and as he stooped again to his luggage, she said precipitately, incoherently, “There is father’s room—and bath,” and his instant seizing of her acquiescence saved her further effort.

“I’ll just pitch these in,” he said lightly. “I know the way—don’t bother,” and he strode across the hall.

She stood where he left her, resigning the further solution of the singular problem to him, assured by his rough-and-ready bearing that he

would forestall every embarrassment. Whatever the unexpected manner of Deb's strategy, she felt that he was determined to be a party to it. Besides, except for the changed attitude their letters had wrought between them, she had not forgotten that they had lived under like conditions all those months before Beth's coming.

He was back again before she had fairly formulated these thoughts, but she faced him with grave composure.

"Is it all right, Gwen?" he demanded at once, standing purposefully before her.

"Yes. Will you be home for dinner?"

"Thanks. Yes."

There was no pretense between them. It was a momentous experiment Deb had thrust upon them, the obvious terms of which they must instantly and frankly accept or reject,—and they accepted.

"Then I'm off. Give me a latchkey, so that I won't have to bother Martha."

He left with a brightly nonchalant good-by, but all the way down the long flight of steps and into town he held in vision the quiet, girlish figure

standing at the back of the hall with pale, lovely face rising in stunned passivity above the dark serge of her gown. His heart yearned, but unyieldingly.

And Gwen, left alone, saw, with a tight command of herself, the definite nature of Deb's "experiment." There could be no shilly-shallying, no false sensitiveness. They had done with intangible ideas, they were to face brute fact. She had made for them this consummate opportunity, she had cleared the decks for their final action,—with them lay the rest.

Had Deb—understood? In the full tide of her sudden self-acknowledgment, Gwen buried her face in her hands, and there, under safe cover, she allowed herself the painfully surprising knowledge that he, too, was ready for this last chance to know each other, before drifting into a listless, inevitable disruption. Honor demanded the trial. Whatever the way to the end, whatever the end might prove, man and woman now, they must go straight to meet it. For, "God created man straight," she thought whimsically, and though "he has sought out many inventions,"

there shall be no inventions between us henceforth, she vowed in silence, in adoring accord with the beloved, self-exiled goddess outside of the machine.

At that moment there intruded into her musing the irrelevant memory of Dr. Knightley's unfulfilled promise of the hospital application-blank, but she sharply closed her mind to the irrelevancy, turning without delay to the more exigent recollection of George's innocent assumption that Martha was in the house. She resolved to correct the discrepancy at once.

The trip across the bay flashed like a dream among the more disturbing realities, but Gwen always retained of it a peaceful picture of a seagull cradling himself on a rocking billow, a snowy darling of the wave. "I, too, will let the current take me," she mused, and capitulation seemed sweet.

Among the clucking of chickens and the grunting of a solitary baby-pig, she found Martha wallowing in the joy of amusing her small grandnephew. Gwen hated to disturb her rustic contentment, but knew no alternative: Did Mar-

tha feel well enough to come home?—the Jap would stay and do all the work for her. All Gwen asked of her was to be there, in the house, Deborah having been called away unexpectedly for an indefinite length of time.

“For the land’s sakes—lavin’ you all alone o’ nights! Whoever heard o’ sich a thing! O’ course I’ll come, but to think Miss Deb——”

“Mr. Leland is there, Martha.”

“Misther Layland! Mis-ther Layland——! Then phwhat——”

“Don’t you feel strong enough to come, Mats?”

“Strong as a horse, darlint,—don’t you be lookin’ so feard. I’m glad to go all right, on’y I can’t git over Miss Deb, an’ she knowin’ how scairt you are o’ the dark, bless your heart, me darlint. An’ don’t you be talkin’ to me about your old Japs wid their deaf-and-dumb sass. Phwhat’d I want wid their smart-alecness? Is it the one o’clock boat we can catch, and phwhat did ye order for dinner?”

Toward mid-afternoon Martha, happily at



home in starched uniform, appeared before her, half hidden behind a huge box of flowers.

“*Some flowers!*” she announced breathlessly, depositing her burden upon the floor. “Seems like old times—turribly excitin’ after Miss Deb’s and my quiet days.”

Gwen laughed after her as she vanished in exaggeratedly discreet haste. Phrysiyas, snow-drops, daffodils,—Gwen wondered where and how he had forced the spring,—irises, lilies-of-the-valley, all a wealth of white and gold and tender green beauty. There was no card. Gwen’s heart gave a sharp throb at the delicate inference of the anonymity, and straightway she felt the far-away bells of youth pealing through her with their call to hope, felt the fetters of sorrow loosening from her soul and, on her knees before his prodigality, she hid her face a moment among the cool depths of fragrance. She transformed the house into a bower.

He came in late, a guest waiving all ceremony, yet maintaining a deferential distance. He had anticipated certain first awkwardnesses and hiatuses by providing himself with a handful of



illustrated periodicals over which they had a laugh or two before they went in to dinner. One of the illustrations launched him on a tale of the yachting trip in which Mabel Goddard had figured as a much-desired, terrified tidbit for one of the cannibal chieftains. That he was making a great effort against the dangers of silence, she knew, and she led him gently on. But conversation, later, in the library, languished, and she let it subside, picking up a magazine while he, following her lead, settled down to another, comfortably smoking and reading opposite her. They had never sat thus peacefully together before. But to Gwen the peace was only without.

Then a trivial thing precipitated turmoil, as trivial things do. Her slipper fell off—her slipper had a habit of dropping off as she sat—and he, glancing up at the slight sound, their eyes met, and their faces flamed in a rush of hateful memory. He averted his eyes quickly and she hastily stooped to recover her footgear.

Memory had played them a malicious little trick. The ugly thing had happened one night during their honeymoon days—the little fallen

shoe, his swift springing up and kneeling to replace it, his quick kiss of the slender foot caught close within his hand, and her tempestuous, "How dare you!" as she had kicked his hand away. He had laughed then, she remembered,—he had always laughed away her perversities.

She arose a few minutes later in her unhappy unrest, merely to adjust the lamp, but he, misinterpreting, was on his feet at once.

"Let me do the locking-up," he said briskly, as though no ugly ghost had just passed between them. "I'll feel my importance more and I know how you hate going into dark rooms."

She laughed. "Thanks for remembering my foolishness. Then, good-night."

Leland stood looking after her long after she had disappeared, but the smile had vanished from his lips.

## CHAPTER VII

### MARY BATES'S SON

LOWERING skies greeted the dawn and by noon a soft, persistent rain, announcing itself in silvery whisperings against window-panes and pavements, soon settled into a steady downpour. Mrs. Harrison, whom Gwen expected for a cozy chat, telephoned that her cold was so bad Olive forbade her leaving the house.

"But you come over here, Gwen. We'll be as snug as can be by ourselves. We have a roaring fire in the sitting-room."

"So have I, but I don't think I'll come today, dear." She was conscious of a flashing sense of escape. "I have a number of little homely things to do that I can't bring with me."

"Writing?"

"That's one."

"Well, then you and Deb come over for dinner."

"Deb's on the road to Chicago, you know."

"No, I didn't know. What is she doing there?"

"Settlement work."

"Really? Then so much the more reason for you to pack right up and come over and stay while she's gone. You don't suppose I'm going to let you poke there all alone, and you so afraid of the dark!"

Gwen laughed. "My fear of the dark seems to be a by-word, but I'm much better than I used to be, I'm proud to boast. Besides, Martha's here."

"Oh, is she? I'm glad to hear that. But you come over to dinner tonight anyway."

"And—George is here, too."

"Who?"

"George. My—— Why, George Leland, you know."

"O-oh! Why—I see."

What did she "see"! A rush of furious irritation over the pregnant pause and tone made Gwen long to dash the receiver into its hold before the startled, smooth voice could resume its trail.

“But the invitation stands whenever you—and he—feel like running in, don’t forget, Gwen dear.”

“Thanks. Maybe I’ll run in tomorrow night,” she added with deliberate mischief, and it took her a few minutes to regain her equanimity after she had rung off. But her knitted brows soon straightened under a musing smile born of a vision of Mrs. Harrison’s excited and troubled wondering.

The afternoon was only two-thirds over when Leland came quietly into the library where she was sitting writing near the fire of blazing logs, and slipped into the old leather arm-chair before her, without a word of greeting or explanation. She accepted the simplicity of his directness with a curious sense of joy, sending him a fleeting smile in silent salutation. His first utterance was quite devoid of self-consciousness.

“How would you describe the smell of burning logs?” he said as though continuing a conversation, drawing in a deep whiff of the crackling woodsy warmth. “The room is full of it—it’s delicious.”

“Why,” she meditated, resting her pencil, “I should describe it—as—the smell of burning logs!” She glanced across at him in triumphant brightness.

He laughed. “Is that the best you can do? I expected just the right word from you. What are you doing?” He put out his hand to the writing-pad in her lap. “Have I disturbed you? May I put it away?” Without awaiting her leave, he took it from her and placed it upon the table at his side. She felt him mastering the moment, mastering her as he had mastered himself, by his very assumption of mastery.

She told herself with sudden insight that the diffidence he had always worn before her, in the vanished days of his wooing, had fled with the blindness of his worship, that now the imperiousness of the wiser male was asserting itself in all its primal self-assurance. She lent herself to the suggestion.

“Put out your hand again,” she said lightly, “and hand me that sewing-basket at the other end of the table. That’s it—thanks.”

“Feel better—doing something?”

“ I like to—while it rains.”

He watched her, leaning a little forward, his hands busily re-winding a spool of thread which had rolled from her lap, while she, with head bent over her work, explained to him their unremitting sewing for the Poor.

The rain lisped ceaselessly without, the fire crackled, the penetrating, piney fragrance filled the room. They spoke fitfully with long silences between. Gwen half-believed she would wake presently from a tantalizing dream.

Suddenly he put down the scissors and card at which he had been idly snipping, and asked her to play.

“ Play?” she questioned.

“ Why—the piano.” He nodded toward its corner. “ Chopin—a song—anything.”

“ I didn’t know you cared. Oh, yes, I remember now.” She put her work on the low tabouret beside her, ready to yield to his whim, started up, sat down again. “ I don’t think I can,” she pleaded. “ Don’t ask me, please. I haven’t played since—Ross.” He looked at her in quick contrition. “ You play,” she begged with a swift



smile. "I know you sing. Mabel told me so, years ago."

He sat moveless, lying back in his chair. He had never sung for her, she had never heard him sing,—she had only been "told" that he sang. "Was it really years ago?" he queried, musing.

"I don't know—I've lost count. Everything seems ages ago."

"And yet it's only——" His sentence remained unfinished. Rising abruptly, he went over to the old-fashioned rosewood chest and, half-kneeling, began to examine the piled-up sheets of music.

"Those are mother's songs in that pile," she directed, glancing toward him while he silently turned over the music.

He chose two and went over to the piano, straddling the stool and rubbing his hands vigorously. "Haven't seen these in 'steen years, or played a note since I can remember," he murmured as if to himself, and struck a chord.

Gwen sat up, wide-eyed. After the first hesitant notes she recognized a peculiar delicacy of touch, almost womanish. He played the prelude,

humming lightly to himself, then broke into the lingering sentiment of the old ballad, "Drink to Me only with Thine Eyes."

His voice was a sweet baritone carrying the slow measure and meaning of the lines with peculiar richness of tone, flooding the room with a harmony almost unbearable to Gwen. That she had known nothing of his gift! She had heard no music since the baby's death, and now, coming thus from him, it filled her heart nigh to bursting, and her slow tears fell, unperceived.

He sang both verses through, and immediately, without waiting for comment or seeming to notice the lack of it from the silent figure in the background, he struck into "Sally in Our Alley," and the quaint lilt of the melody restored her poise again before he swung around on the seat. He lounged back against the instrument, his arms stretched along the keys.

"Great songs, those old ones," he said, clearing his throat.

"It's your voice—and the way you sing them. That was beautiful."

The blood mounted to his brow. "D'you like 'em?" he asked, boyishly shy under her praise.

"Who taught you?"

He looked ahead of her without answering for a moment, then the words came with labored precision. "The one who taught me everything I know that's worth knowing."

His tone forbade prompting. She sat waiting. After a pause he straightened up, his hands on his knees. "My mother taught me," he answered briefly.

Shadows were gathering in the corners of the room. It seemed to Gwen a strange, new presence had come in with them and his words.

She leaned a little forward, speaking low. "Will you tell me about her?"

He sat without moving, his hands clutching at his knees, his head slightly bent among the clustering shadows as if listening to them. Yet she knew he had heard her.

"I don't know," he mused with an intonation of bitterness. "I don't know that I can, exactly. People have such a strong sense of humor these days, such a high-brow contempt for anything

approaching sentiment, that one naturally hesitates to open one's——" His jaws locked together over the word.

"Shrine," she supplied quietly.

He looked into her grave eyes quickly, the defiant expression of his mouth and chin subtly softening. "I forgot," he said swiftly. "I don't think you'd mock,—now."

Suddenly he got up, shaking himself as if pulling mind and body together. "Yes, I'll tell you about her," he said roughly, taking a stride across the room only to double back upon his footsteps and coming to a standstill near her, his elbow on the mantel, his head resting in his hand. "Yes, I'll tell you about her," he repeated deliberately, looking down into her uplifted face. He cleared his throat again. "She was the noblest woman I have ever known."

"Noble"—that word! It had a sound like a grand, old-time hymn. To have that word applied to one by one's son! She continued to look up at him, unblinking.

"She gave me everything she had."

"Yes,—she would have," breathed Gwen.

“ You—you can't know.”

“ Yes—I can know.”

“ No.”

She smiled in tender wisdom, silent under his passionate bigotry.

“ I knew her—as she never knew I knew her.”

Gwen paled, she felt something more here than blind worship.

“ She used to look away to the hills,” he went on, beating out his words, staccato fashion, “ she had a passion for the hills overlooking our land. One evening on the porch, when we were alone together, I heard her murmur as if quoting to herself, ‘ In the heart of their Majesty is peace—in the heart of their Majesty is peace.’ Then she noticed me, and smiled. Her smile was all herself.”

She listened as to a stranger. “ He does not have to find his words,” she told herself, “ he is speaking from his soul—he is exalted.”

“ She's lying there now,” he said. “ Alone.” His eyes burned into her dimmed ones.

“ Your—father?” she ventured, scarce above a whisper.

“ She had asked it of him as a last favor,— she said it was a whim. It was the only whim she had ever expressed, and, of course, he granted it as he would have, had she asked to be laid fathoms deep in the sea—away from him. I don’t believe he ever understood.”

“ Hush,” she murmured, both to his bitterness and because of the Presence which seemed to have drawn nearer with the deepening shadows.

He shifted his position and, with it, his voice slipped down to a quieter level. “ When I said her smile was all herself, I meant it seemed to hold all she had ever lived. Shall I tell you about her life? ”

“ Will you? ”

“ Her name was Mary Bates——”

“ I knew it would be Mary.”

His eyes spoke his amazement over her irrepressible interruption. “ How did you know? ”

“ I knew,” she nodded enigmatically.

He smiled over her artless accord and unconsciously took the chair before her, leaning a little toward her in the attitude of deep confidence.

“ She was a teacher in the public schools of Bakersfield. My father, plain farmer John Leland, fell in love with her along with many other suitors. He was twenty years her senior.”

It was on the tip of Gwen's tongue to cry out foolishly, “ But she didn't marry him! ” but recollected in time.

“ He wooed her for seven years,—like Jacob of old,—and God knows it must have been a silent wooing, because he was a man of few words,—and those not always grammatical,—before she consented to marry him. I don't know why she finally consented.” He spoke the unexpected comment in blunt directness.

“ Not,” he hastened to add, “ because he spoke ungrammatically and was untutored in social ways and manners,—I mean, that isn't what always made me wonder,—what I meant was I don't really know just what cause made her finally give in. But—sometimes—I thought I knew why.”

“ Why? ”

“ Because of me.”

“ But—George!—you weren't there! ”



“ I know. But she had dreamed me.”

He flashed his meaning upon her with uncanny simplicity of instinct. Gwen caught her breath, understanding, through his words, many things which had been dark.

“ And so,” Mary Bates’s son went on, “ she, the darling of all Bakersfield, married plain John Leland, a good man and true, with a heart as wide as his lands. She came to live on the ranch, and all the days of their married life she made perfect for him.”

Gwen’s face burned. “ She would have,” she murmured again tremulously.

“ How can you know that? ” he questioned in breathless seeking.

She let her grave gray eyes make answer and, under the spell of her unflinching sympathy, he broke forth without restraint.

“ When she was dying I told her—what she had been to me. She lay quiet a long time and then she said slowly, ‘ When I was a teacher, I aimed to be a perfect teacher,—when I became a mother, I prayed to be a perfect mother. Many would say that it is easy for one who loves much,

but had anyone said to me, "Is that all?" I would have answered, "That includes everything." " "

Wider and wider grew the vision of motherhood to Gwen while his voice rested upon his sacred mound of memory, wider and wider grew her vision of womanhood. They watched a log break and the flame leap high among the flying sparks. Anon, he picked up the thread of his story.

"She never gave up her interest in educational or helpful things, and whatever time she could find, she gave to them. Two or three times a week, as founder and president of the Child Welfare Association and director of the Kindergartens, she was in Bakersfield doing the work for which she was peculiarly fitted. And, up to my tenth year, she was my only teacher. Then, knowing that I was as much at home in the saddle as any of the cowboys, she let me ride in to town to school, on my pony. She must have had a terrible tussle with herself, letting me do it—I don't believe she was ever quite at rest when I was out of her sight,"—his smile was tenderly

reminiscent,—“but she always conquered herself when it was a question of someone else’s benefit, especially mine. It was in the evenings that she taught me to sing—and play, and dance. Those dancing lessons!” He laughed outright, in happy recollection.

“We had a music-box—it was long before the days of talking-machines—and a very good one of its kind it was,—it would grind out ‘The Beautiful Blue Danube’ and ‘The Blue Alsatian Mountains’ until further notice. But you should have seen her dance the Highland Fling! She was tall, but graceful as a willow, and she used to pretend she was dancing the unending variations in a trance. My father and I used to laugh till we cried.”

He stopped a minute, glancing back at those dim, dead days and nights of simple joys. He got up to throw another log on the andirons and stood leaning his elbow on the mantel again, looking down into the blaze. Outside the rain fell steadily.

“It was when I was sixteen that she came to me—I mean, that I came to know her wholly.”

He was speaking more carefully, as if choosing his words. "She used to come down to the edge of the alfalfa field to meet me, every evening at five, and we would go for a walk. She wore—for years, I think—a long, dark blue, military-looking cape, but she wore nothing on her dark hair. She was very noble-looking."

He paused to hold his picture before Gwen's gaze, and again, Mary Bates, "noble-looking" in her long, dark blue cape, walked down a country lane to meet her boy in the evening light.

"We put our arms across each other's shoulders and walked on, talking,—like comrades."

"Like lovers," came from Gwen.

"Like lovers——"

"I don't believe any woman ever talked to her child as my mother did to me," he exclaimed passionately, and then added, quieting down, "but there was one talk no man, who isn't a beast, could ever forget,—the memory of it often gave me the strength to fight out many a vigorous battle—with myself—and win. I—think—I want you to know about that."

He turned from the blaze and was looking squarely, with stern intent, down into her upraised eyes.

“It was an evening in June, and we turned and walked southward toward the wheat-field. Generally we chose the path together, but that evening she asked no questions—she led me. I know now it was a deliberate choice, though I gave it no thought then——

“There had been, between us, what seemed to me an unbridgable estrangement. I—I was coming into manhood—I was going to High School——

“So she took me down into the wheat-fields. The wheat stood high, almost to our waists, a sea of gently waving gold, heavy for the harvesting, the heads rustled against one another, as if whispering. You know the sound.

“She stood still,—she often stood still during our walks, and I thought nothing of it. ‘The full heads,’ she said, as if dreaming. ‘Sound and clean, sound and clean.’ She had a way of repeating, of lingering over anything she wanted to communicate to my understanding. So I saw the

wheat, as she wanted me to see it—sound and clean—sound and clean.”

(Was it in a dream Gwen had heard Deb crying, “He is so sound and clean, as though he were kept so by something outside himself. He is in a class by himself!” And her own scoffing laughter——)

Her face flamed up in ready understanding, went pale under his absorbed regard, absorbed in a memory in which she held no part.

“She spoke of the teeming earth—Mother Eve, she called it,—said how proud she must feel lying there under her perfect harvest. She spoke of the wonder of production and reproduction, and then she spoke of the miracle of human creation, and of the miracle of miracles—procreation.

“She spoke of the responsibility of giving life,—of the choice of handing on strength and cleanness, or weakness and—rottenness. She spoke of the power of control that shall some day rule the sons of men—for their sons’ sakes. She showed me my son——”

“Oh, God,” cried the heart of the woman listening, “give me a son, give me a son!” And



she longed to rise up and stand beside him, shoulder to shoulder, challenging the skeptic world,—but she sat quite still.

“All these things she told me—almost twenty years ago—twenty years in advance of her day and custom. But she knew no custom when it stood in the way of duty. Don't think it was easy for her,—I felt her trembling under my arm—as I was trembling.

“And then, on the top of that great purpose accomplished,—she spoke of you.”

She thought she had not heard aright, thought his thoughts were wandering, but he was looking down at her straight and steadily, without a smile. She smiled questioningly up into his grave face.

“But,” she hesitated, “how could she speak of me? She didn't know me.”

“No, she didn't know you. She called you, ‘The girl who is waiting.’” He laughed a little, briefly. “She said ‘Somewhere in the world there's a girl who is being kept perfect for you—she does not know it is for you, but it is,—as you shall keep yourself for her, because you are my son. I have lived all my life for that, I



think,—you won't let it be in vain.' All this she said that day, and much like it many times after, because there was nothing, no doubt, no struggle, no temptation, I didn't bring to her, after that. She became my mother-confessor——

“But she was, above all, a romantic woman. She made Love *personal* to me,—personal love, she said, was consecration, impersonal, desecration. She directed all my dreams to the One who was waiting,—we often spoke of her—wondering. It was fascinating talk.”

She wanted to cover her face with her hands, but would not, braving his words, his regard, with unwavering eyes, but quivering lips. For “*Tekel!*” cried the past across the chasm of time to this moment of judgment. *Tekel*—thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting! Was there, perchance, another, who had, in all encounters with life, kept herself perfect for him? Had he met her—would he ever meet her? Ah, but he had said, “You!” Humbly, her eyelids fell, and she found memory chanting, like a battle hymn, the refrain of the Unattainable, of Idealism:

“ Enough for me in dreams to see  
And touch thy garment’s hem;  
Thy feet have trod so near to God  
I may not follow them.”

A long silence had fallen upon them, and she knew that he had finished Mary Bates’s story, but she could not put her away.

“ How long ago—when did she die?” Her voice was low and spent with the emotions through which she had passed.

“ When I was twenty-four, nearly ten years ago. My father followed her a week later. The day after his passing, they struck oil on the ranch. And the old life was over.”

Still Gwen brooded upon her who was lying, “ alone,” among the hills.

“ Have you a picture of her?”

With a swift, accustomed hand, he drew from his breast-pocket a small object and placed it in her lap. Surprised at the singular response, she looked down and saw that it was indeed a dark leather photograph-case. They were in deep shadows now, so she took it over to the light,

close to the windows. He followed her, watching in silence while she opened it.

A low exclamation escaped her, a cry almost of recognition, so vibrant was the personality of the pictured face regarding her, a personality borne into her by the soft glow in the expectant eyes beneath the beautiful sweep of the brow, by the firm strength of the meeting lips, by the glad poise of the proud head, by the living radiance of the woman.

“What a woman!” breathed Gwen. “Oh, George, how gloriously alive she is there—expecting something splendid!”

“How you understand her!” breathed her son, in turn, carried off his feet by her absorbed enthusiasm.

“Understand her! Oh, yes, fully,—but to emulate her, to be like her, to approach her—I never could.”

“Why should you be like anyone—but yourself?”

She did not look up, caught in pained confusion by the gentle quiet of his answer.

“Will you let me keep her—just for one night?”

“Surely. I’ve always wanted to share her with you.”

Ah, the unintentional, deep rebuke of his words! Æons ago he had said, in different mood, “Now I know why I could never tell you—you are unworthy!” Was she less unworthy in his eyes now?

“But you won’t leave it around, will you?” He laughed lightly across her unshared, stinging memory. “I never do.”

For answer, closing the case, she thrust it into the surpliced folds of her gown. “Safe?” she questioned with an upward smile, and turned to throw open the window.

The rain had ceased, the damp, sweet air blew in on them laden with the fragrance of wet grass, and heliotrope, and rich earth, from the rain-soaked terrace below. She drew in long breaths of it, leaning out to pluck a sprig of the climbing fragrance. “Put it in your buttonhole,” she said, proffering it.

“George——”

He glanced up from inserting the pale flower, uncertain that he had heard her, her voice was so low. "Yes?"

"Will you—go down—there—with me tomorrow?"

"Shall we motor down?"

"If you prefer." They spoke in hushed tones.

"In the morning, then. You see, Strachan—Lord Strachan of London—is due to arrive tomorrow, and the directors have agreed to leave him on my hands for the rest of the day. I saw a good deal of him on the other side, and I'm afraid it's up to me to ask him and a few others to dine at the Club tomorrow night. But I won't be late. And, while I think of it, I'd better tell you that before I came home this afternoon I was at the Children's Hospital—to arrange about endowing a bed—in memory of—the baby. I made out the check in your name—so you'll understand if you hear from the Board, and——"

Her hand was too close for him to ignore it. He pressed her fingers numb, smiling deep into her swimming eyes before he let them go. "Dr.

Knighley happened to be there," he went on unsteadily for a second, but found his matter-of-fact voice almost instantly. "He most impressively asked to be remembered to you."

She laughed outright, to his great surprise, but offered no explanation, turning her eyes away and gazing out upon the scene without.

"Look!" she cried suddenly, and he came behind her in order to see. The west was a blaze of copper and gold shot through with out-rushing wings of rose, all laid over a bed of palest forget-me-not, while the low horizon's rim was a sea of jade. The glory beckoned.

"Put on your hat and coat," he exclaimed unexpectedly, "and let's go for a walk."

It was an inspiration. Gwen never forgot the wonder of that walk, the witching sunset hour, the pure, jewel-like ether, their quick, swinging gait together toward—almost as if into—the splendor of the sky which seemed to speed as with wings her feet, her whole body, her thoughts. His nearness, sweet, yet far——

They came back in the evening light, breathless, joyous as a boy and girl, she radiant. He,

in his policy of "watchful waiting," dared not look at her because of her girlish radiance.

"O—birdling, flying far"—

It was the meadow-lark's brief melody rising now and again from the hedges as they sped past, it was Gwen's yearning heart welling out with it into the unsung words.

A low, gray sky hung over them,—sky, and bird-song, and humans enfolded in a strange communion, infinitely tender, infinitely intimate, infinitely sweet.

"O—birdling, flying far"—

Again the broken plaint rose to the low-bending sky, calling it to witness, calling it to solace the two dark figures standing close together beside the little shrine. It drew their eyes, in a giving, in a taking,—a long gaze, like a dawning, like a meeting, like a merging, ending in a wild blur of tears.

Together they knelt and strewed their offering



of pansies, and very gently he pressed her hand down over the little flower faces into the sod, and, stooping, laid his lips upon it under her raining tears. Together, in a gray oblivion they moved away.

She spoke her first word when they sighted home again. "Don't get out," she said, and sprang to the pavement before the car had fairly stopped.

Two steps up the long flight she heard him behind her, felt his arm encircling, yet not touching her, as they went up. But she did not raise her swollen lids.

In the hall he drew both her hands to his breast, whispered breathlessly, "Wait for me tonight,"—and was gone.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A SONG OF SONGS

HE had broken the spell. His two days' "watchful waiting" had snapped, and he had declared for action. All Gwen's faculties stood at locked attention, her eyes looked out in steady survey, her lips set in a line of fine resolution for the awaited task.

All day she coned it in exaltation, but when evening approached, divining that he would be in to dress for dinner, she hurriedly made ready to avoid that awkward meeting. She slipped into a soft little gown of black and, looking at herself through his eyes, with a quick flush of gratitude over the reflected vision, she turned hurriedly away, and left the house.

She gave herself up to an hour of strange joyousness with Jean Wickham's children, and when they reluctantly escorted her to the gate, wafting "come back" kisses to her all the way down

the street as she went, with starry, smiling eyes turned backward to them, she felt her whole being thrilling with harmony and strength and fortitude for that dim, crucial hour which the coming night held for her.

Mrs. Harrison received her with open arms, but Gwen's color deepened under the loving question of her eyes which her lips refrained from framing. The young Harrisons pelted her with inquiries after Deborah, from which Gwen, surprised, inferred that Mrs. Harrison had, for once, kept her own counsel as to the peculiar situation reigning in the little house on the heights. She longed to speak lightly of George's advent but found she could not, and she was furious over her own self-consciousness. The more she essayed to find an opening the more she found herself engulfed within the shadow of her vague appointment with him.

Bob Harrison, walking home with her at about ten o'clock, wondered over her frank forgetfulness of his presence, and when, a fine rain beginning to fall, she said hurriedly, "Let's run, Bob, my shoes are so thin, and I have an

appointment," he thought her quite irresponsible.

"An appointment—at ten o'clock at night!" he teased, in the security of long intimacy.

She laughed, and the next instant he regretted his quizzing when she said simply, with a sharp-drawn breath, "With my husband."

"Pardon," he begged confusedly for he knew not what, and left her a few minutes later, unconsciously whistling as he went in the falling rain, absurdly jealous, with the jealousy of his boyhood's passion, of the "husband" from whom he, along with the rest of the world, knew she was irrevocably estranged.

She shivered as she entered the dark library. Quickly turning on the lights, she pulled off her gloves and, in hat and fur coat, knelt to light the logs ready for the match. But the wood refused to ignite and she was still kneeling, coaxing the blaze, when she heard his leaping step on the steps without, his key in the latch, his quiet entrance.

Would he notice the lighted room?  
"George!" she called irrepressibly.

He came in at a stride, in the act of drawing off his overcoat. "You there?" he called vaguely, and saw her kneeling on the hearth. He came over to her, tall and easy in his evening dress, and looked down at her.

"I can't get it started," she explained, and he was down beside her, taking the matches from her hand. That he was glad as she for the moment of truce she knew by his tense, flushed silence, and she sat back on the rug, her pulses throbbing, watching his capable manipulations.

Presently the sticks were alight, their dry crackling broke the breathless silence of the room, the roaring blaze lit their intent faces.

"It will catch in a minute," he said, and thrust the logs toward the draught.

She sprang to her feet, going to the end of the room to remove her hat and coat. When she turned about he was coming toward her with out-held arms, his eyes aglow with a long-forgotten light.

"Gwen," he was striving to say clearly, "can't we try again, can't——"

"No, no," she cried discordantly and, with

a step toward him, her hand covered his mouth. "Not you, my darling,—it's I who must say it. Don't you see it's I who must say it?"

She stepped back, releasing him, amazed, incredulous, gazing at her. "Then say it, love, say it!" he importuned, coming nearer.

She held him back, her hand against his breast, and he saw that she was deathly pale. "It's so much to tell," she said in hurried accents. "I thought I could say it in three words, but I can't. It's all—it's everything in my life——"

"Nonsense," he chided, his hand closing reassuringly over hers pressing him from her. "There's nothing more to tell. Do you suppose that there aren't things in my life——"

"Nothing that has to do with me!"

"No, nothing that has to do with you."

"But this has everything to do with you," she cried in low-voiced excitement. "It's all my hideousness to you—it's the explanation—oh, not the excuse—of all my unforgivable hideousness to you, and all——"

"I've forgotten it all—I won't hear a word—it doesn't exist—it never happened—it——"

“No, no. You haven’t forgotten. It’s alive and ready to spring out at us out of every corner, out of the hell of the past into whatever heaven we—oh, you remembered last night when my slipper——”

“Hush. Don’t struggle so to say it—it isn’t worth while—you’ll break your heart—and mine—for no good.” His heart labored with her dry sobbing.

But she drew her hand from his clasp. “Listen,” she said in a hoarse undertone, and she became suddenly calm. “Let me say it at once and be done. When I married you I loved him—Austin Dane—the man you saw at Ross—with all my might, and with all my strength, and with all my soul. I shall never love any man as I loved him.”

The harsh truth thus ruthlessly flashed in his face quenched the glow in his eyes, left his whole visage stiff and white and drawn.

She looked at him desolately and put her hand to her throat to stay its painful throbbing. “That was the wrong I did you,” her white lips made avowal, “not the marrying you ‘to escape



poverty.' If—if he hadn't been there—I, being I—Deborah Heath's child—would have learned to love you, oh, very quickly, dear,—I, being I. Weren't you my husband?—and hadn't old Law-and-Order—Deb, you know,—taught me that a good wife can always love her good husband—if she tries hard enough?" She smiled miserably up into his smileless face, and closed her eyes a moment against its implacability. Beautiful and pleading, she stood thus before him, but he made no move to help her. "So," she breathed, opening her eyes, "now you understand why I couldn't, don't you, George?"

He gazed upon her, imperturbable.

"I"—her hand again sought her throat—"I can't explain to you what he was to me. He was Austin Dane, the playwright, you know,—the author of *High Lights*."

A sardonic light touched the blankness of his expression.

The color burned up dully to her cheek under his wordless sneer. "It was much to me," she murmured with quiet dignity. "I think I have always lived a little above reality, above the com-

monplace, and even the commonplace, if I have loved it, I have tipped with the vision of it—the vision that beautifies, like moonlight. But I worshiped intellect, and he was a genius—acknowledged by the world. He was, to me, a god,—and he noticed me. He took me with him up to Olympus. When one has sat in the light of gods one is blinded to lesser lights.” She spoke on in simple monotone, striving only for the whole truth.

A grating sound greeted her generality. “And why,” he asked brutally, “why didn’t you marry your god—if gods marry—loving him as you’ve taken such pains to make me understand?”

“Because he was married already,” she said very low, but very distinctly.

His hand caught blindly at a light chair standing near him. “I don’t think I quite get that,” he said roughly. “You were in love with a married man?”

“No. I didn’t know he was married. When he told me—that night out at Land’s End—I ran away from him—I ran all the way home. But—before that—before I knew,—I had accepted

his love—I had—confessed—my love—for him—I had—kissed him—calling him—in my heart—my husband.”

He did not see her deathly face now, his own was distorted past recognition, the veins stood out like cords on his brow, his eyes bulged. He lifted high the slight chair in his hand and brought it down again with the might of fury. “God—damn him!” burst from him suffocatedly.

“Sh-s-s-sh!” The piteous, entreating sound trailed past him. “It’s all over now—dead and finished long ago.” His bloodshot eyes took in now her beseeching pallor, and a mist came before them while his hand tightened on the back of the little chair.

“I ran away from him,” her low voice repeated dully, “but I couldn’t run away from—my love for him.—God knows—if it hadn’t been for Deb—old Law-and-Order—I might never have run away from *him*—I—I loved him so. And today I might have been—— She saved me—from myself—my elemental self.”

The frail chair bent under his grip. He had nothing to say to this.

“And so,” the murmurous voice moved bravely on, “when I married you—‘to escape poverty,’ as you knew—when I married you, impersonally—for you were nothing to me but a means to an end, neither human nor inhuman, only something to be tolerated, something I thought I could, in time, learn to tolerate,—I loved Austin Dane. That was my sin—to both of us. For I found out, from the moment I married you—from the moment I stepped into the car with you—that, because I loved him as I did, I could not endure you. That, because I loved him, I must hate you. And the hate grew in intensity from the moment of our leaving the house down through my reading of his letter—the letter you handed me that night at Del Monte,—you remember, don’t you? No? ah, well,—till it reached its climax that day at Chartres,—when I realized that I was—that I was to be the mother of your child—not his.” She was looking up at him with burning steadfastness, but she buried her face in her hands to hide out the sight of his anguish.

“Oh,” she moaned, looking up finally, “bear it a moment longer, dear, and then—— Listen. I

went utterly mad then—criminally mad,—I told myself I had desecrated my love—myself—till Deb set me straight again that day we came back. She—she took my child out of my mind and put her into my soul. Deb did that for me. And she—my baby—was all mine—all mine, till you came in, claiming her,—and for one eternally irrevocable minute I went mad again—and I smote you . . . George! George!”

But he had neither spoken nor stirred, given no sign to call forth her wild prayer.

She drew a long, hard breath, recovering herself, “And you smote back. If you had struck the vile words down my throat—if you had answered me with physical violence, as a man of lower instincts would have been justified in doing—it would all have been ended, we would not have journeyed on to deeper hell—but neither would we have been standing here together tonight. But that is the secret—that is why we did not separate then and there—or afterward—forever. Because you were you—George Leland—Mary Bates’s son. The lash of your supreme contempt for me was as the knout to my soul—it

made me myself again—it made me Gwen Heath again—Deborah Heath's child with shame knouted into her soul. You could not know that, by merely saying, 'You are unworthy!'—you made me—worthy—again. You could not know that in throwing me down to the lowest depths in your regard, you drew me up. For I refused to grovel there, George. On the instant I found myself, and began the struggle upward, saying always to myself, 'I will be worthy of my child.' And those words were my spurs. For I said to myself, 'If I am worthy of my child, I shall be worthy of anything—and of anybody.' That is what motherhood came to mean to me,—the great career, the crux, the apogee, of my womanhood!"

Now she was indeed winged, now she was no longer humble before him, now she raised her proud head in victory before him. But the bitterness she had doled out to him without stint, still corroded, and the eyes meeting hers were dark with smoldering pain.

She came a step nearer. "When I told myself I would be worthy of—anybody," she said, so low the sound was almost a whisper, "I didn't



mean you,—that is, I didn't know I meant you. But now I know that was my one thought. I had put you on the pedestal from which you had flung me. We do that to our judges—at least, I do. I must have something—someone—to worship or beatify—someone—something—to live or die for,” her teeth were set in the intensity of her passion. “At first I thought it was my child,—I believe it was my child,—but now I know too that I could not live for my child apart from thought of my child's father. She, with her little dream hands, gently, firmly, turned my eyes from—that other—to him who had given her to life—and to me. And—I found my thoughts dwelling upon you with an undefined joy—I found it sweet to dwell upon you—my baby's father.” Her lifted face was wholly adoring as was her groping voice. “But,” her eyes grew visionary, “I know too, that, had you proven base, low, unlovable, I would have fought with you, unto the last ditch, to draw you up to manhood,—for I had lost count of myself,—for my child's sake! And I know, too, that the sweetest thing that could have happened to me then would



have been for you to lose all your worldly goods so that I could have come to you—to prove my wifehood. For all through those months when you kept yourself as far from sight of me as you could, I was marrying you, George, marrying you in indissoluble loyalty and—and yearning. With one sweep of triumph, motherhood had swept the past out of my life as completely, as naturally as I swept all Austin Dane's letters unopened into the fire. I found myself living for one crowning moment, the moment when I could lay my baby in your arms and beg you to say with me, 'Ours,'—and so wipe out the hate from your heart—and the stain from my soul."

She bent her head to hide her falling tears, and he made an indistinct sound to stop her, but she shook back her tears with a swift motion, whispering tremulously, "Do you believe me, George,—do you believe that I was no longer—vile?"

"Hush. Don't. For God's sake, don't say any more!"

"Do you see now why I have had to torture you with this tearing up of my life by the roots

—why it was necessary to make you fully understand—before you could fully forgive,—that you had to know that it was only a hideous zigzag I had taken away from my natural trail, and that I had come back—that you had brought me back—to Gwen Heath’s trail—with your contempt—that day in Deb’s room?”

“Oh, Gwen, Gwen,” he groaned, “the torture of those months! Why didn’t you say something to undo the——”

“Because, dear,” she interrupted eagerly, unable to endure his voicing of her ignominy, “I was proud—and weak—and I was *afraid* of you. I was waiting—waiting for the oblation. With her, I could face the hatred and disgust I had wrought in you,—with her, I could plead for another trial. No, no, please, please, listen. That morning when I lost consciousness, it was the sight of you, the knowledge that my beautiful, dread moment had come, which undid me. I was overwrought,—overwrought from too much thinking of you. And you—and Deb, too,—thought it was from revolt at your approach!”

“How could anyone think otherwise?” he questioned hoarsely.

“But you realized your mistake that day at Ross, didn't you?” she begged with brilliantly feverish eyes. “No? Yes, you must have! That day at Ross when I knew that there were just you—and she—in all the wide world for me. Ah, well.” She turned her eyes from the doubt in his faint smile. “Perhaps,” she drew a hard, unsteady breath, “perhaps it would have required superhuman imagination for you to have felt that I had so changed that I had only one passionate wish that day: that, by some magical stroke of fate, you would tell me that your worldly circumstances were so changed that I could say to you, freely, without material consciousness, without self-consciousness,—because you, too, seemed to have forgotten the past in the thought of the treasure that bound us—that I could say to you, ‘Come, then, you and I—and our darling,—and let us, together, try to find that wonderful road, the common road, the only road that leads to human happiness.’”

Her voice had sunk to a mere wisp of sound.

Stunned by her abandon, blinded by the unbelievable revelation, he could only stand speechless, motionless, doubting the evidence of his starved senses, waiting for her to turn her bewildering eyes again upon him. And she did presently, pale, but unashamed. "But I couldn't at once—I felt so—so foolishly shy—and then you went so quickly. But I told myself I would tell you the next time—— George, do you think it was punishment for——"

He strode into her agony, seizing her by the wrists. "That's enough now," he commanded fiercely.

"No, let me finish. When you threw me down——"

"I—threw you down!"

"I fell when you threw me off—there in the woods. I didn't want to get up again—what was the use when you could think *that* of me, even in your crazed state—me who had just told that unexpected, blighting ghost of the dead past all that you were to me—all he had ceased to be to me! I wanted to die there since you could think that horror of me. I even forgot her—

my darling—my treasure. No, no, let me finish—I'm not crying. Look—— And afterward—when she was gone—and you were gone—and I—I felt like a derelict. George—it was terrible.”

So was her strangled whisper to him, her wide, strained eyes. “Stop talking now, Gwen,” he whispered back hoarsely, still holding her by the wrists. “Let me——”

“But down there in Los Angeles,” a light flashed her face into strange radiance, “you believed me—now I know—not because I was I, but because you were you. And you were you because you were Mary Bates's son—as I was what you knew I could not be, because, behind me, stretched a line of good mothers, and close to me stood my other, more than mother, my Deb, to whom I was accountable. For mothers can give us beasts or angels for thoughts—— Oh, the mothers, George! The power and responsibility of mothers!”

“Hush,” he begged again, his hands straining at her wrists, his eyes misty with her rapture.

Her transfigured eyes came back to dwell in brooding tenderness upon his face which slowly

flushed in wonder under them. "Down there in Los Angeles—at the train—do you know how I felt?—as though you and I were alone in the world, set apart from all the rest, all the rest mere shadows. And I had a vision—and I knew then why marriage was—why men and women went, not singly, but in couples,—not only for the children,—but more, a thousandfold more, each for the other. Had I not lost my child? Must we not, in the end, somehow, some day, lose our children? Do you think it was only for the sake of your children Mary Bates dreamed The Girl Who Was Waiting for you, you—her loved one? Her love for you was farther-seeing than that,—she, too, had had the vision, she, too, saw in marriage the tender, protecting provision Law has made against the vandals, time and change, down the long, consecrating years——. Couples—each for the other's need—down the long, unifying years."

She held his eyes in a look, long, and strange, and beautiful. Her voice slipped on dreamily, almost without consciousness, for he was to her now as her very self. "I came home in a peace

that passeth understanding—for it was the peace of my very soul. But when your letters came—I—had no more peace”—her head drooped for all her bravery.

“Go on—for heaven’s sake, go on now, Gwen,” he urged crazily, his fingers utterly reckless of the tender flesh under them.

“Deb saw,” she whispered, turning her head from him as best she could. “She said—in her note—she would send me—my Uncle from Brazil.”

“Your Uncle from Brazil?”

She laughed brokenly. “Just happiness—just my silly girl-way of speaking of some unattainable happiness. I used to think it was money. But—Deb knew—it was—you.”

He could scarcely hear her, and for a moment he stood unmoved, then, slowly, he let go her wrists, turning from her, and covering his face with his hands. She stood with drooped head, terror-stricken, sick at heart. Finally his words came, with difficulty, one at a time.

“It might—have been—anyone—for all the difference it would have made—in the end.”



She raised her head, listening, catching her breath. "It might have been—then—but it isn't—it's you. I chose *you*. And after all, who shall say there is not the root of love in choice? And afterwards—after the promise of—— Ah, George, I have told you!"

He trembled under the passion of her reiterated avowal, and still, with head averted, he spoke heavily, as if in torture. "But—you said—that other—you said just now you could never love any other man—as you loved him——"

Her smile grew into laughing tenderness. "Jealous?" she murmured, drawing nearer. "Jealous, love?—of a memory, buried, and put away forever?" She was close to him, she put up her hands, turning his face to hers. "Still jealous, dearest, after all I have said? Ah, George, he was the love of my girlhood's imagination—than which there is nothing lovelier,—because it is a dream, but you are the love of all my womanhood—than which there is nothing holier, because it is real.—Don't you want it, dear? Don't you want to try to love me again as——"

"Love you again! Have I ever stopped——"

He took her now, in the might of his love.—And they had done with speaking, for love has other eloquences——

He drew her down with him into her father's old leather-covered arm-chair, and the noble old, firelit, memory-lit room made sanctuary for them.

And so they were married.

And many unseen guests were there, at this, their wedding. Fathers and mothers stretching far back, a shadowy line, down to these two,—fathers and mothers, those responsible for these two. And not the least among them, hovering very near, was Mary Bates, she who had kept him for her, and that other, Deborah Heath, sometimes called old Law-and-Order, she who had kept them together.

Nor was there wanting music. Silvery, and soft, and full, it fell upon the ear, like a voice,—the music of the rain,—singing of gifts, lowly gifts, human gifts, abiding gifts. Down to the pavements it fell, in incessant, echoing melody; in the near gardens it fell, warm, and fruitful, and fragrant; far and wide it fell, down to old

mother-earth—hungry old mother of all. In love and benediction it fell, fructifying to fulfillment.

Across her soul she felt the flutter of flown wings. . . .

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