

NEDL TRANSFER



HN 1ETB 9

*The*  
**ROAD TO LOVE**

**ELENORE MEHERIN**

KD 12727

Love from

Mama + Papa

Xmas. 1926.

Gift of the People of the United States  
Through the Victory Book Campaign  
(A. L. A. — A. R. C. — U. S. O.)  
To the Armed Forces and Merchant Marine



# THE ROAD TO LOVE

The Story of Denny Brooks

BY  
ELENORE MEHERIN

AUTHOR OF  
CHICKIE, A SEQUEL TO CHICKIE, ETC.



NEW YORK  
GROSSET & DUNLAP  
PUBLISHERS

Made in the United States of America

100 12727



**COPYRIGHT, 1921, BY  
ELENORE MEHERIN**

**COPYRIGHT, 1926, BY  
GROSSET & DUNLAP**

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I HIS MOTHER . . . . .	1
II QUEENIE'S FAREWELL . . . . .	7
III THE BORLEYS . . . . .	12
IV THE TRAGEDY . . . . .	17
V GRIEF . . . . .	22
VI GOLDEN HOURS . . . . .	27
VII UNCLE MATT . . . . .	32
VIII THE LASHING . . . . .	38
IX THE WHITE DRESS— . . . . .	42
X KATY'S ANGEL . . . . .	47
XI THE LITTLE CRIPPLE . . . . .	51
XII THE GIBSON MAN . . . . .	56
XIII "TURNED OUT" . . . . .	60
XIV FIRE DAYS . . . . .	64
XV THE NEW HOME . . . . .	69
XVI DENNY'S CHANCE . . . . .	74
XVII THE LEGACY . . . . .	79
XVIII DREAMS . . . . .	84
XIX THE BARN . . . . .	89
XX DENNY IN HIGH LIFE . . . . .	94
XXI THE DANCE . . . . .	99
XXII THE SNUB . . . . .	103
XXIII FANCIES . . . . .	109
XXIV THE DINNER PARTY . . . . .	114
XXV NEW TIES . . . . .	119
XXVI DENNY IN LOVE . . . . .	123
XXVII JOAN PASSES . . . . .	128
XXVIII THE BIG GAME . . . . .	130
XXIX TWO FRIENDS . . . . .	135

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXX	VIOLET RETURNS . . . . .	139
XXXI	THE SEARCH . . . . .	144
XXXII	KATY'S FAITH . . . . .	149
XXXIII	A PLEA . . . . .	153
XXXIV	THE ANSWER . . . . .	158
XXXV	SEPARATION . . . . .	163
XXXVI	BITTER-SWEET . . . . .	167
XXXVII	THE HOMECOMING . . . . .	172
XXXVIII	PRIMROSE PATH . . . . .	177
XXXIX	LURE . . . . .	182
XL	AFTER THE BLUEBIRD . . . . .	186
XLI	STEPHEN'S CHOICE . . . . .	192
XLII	COMMENCEMENT . . . . .	197
XLIII	NEWS OF VIOLET . . . . .	202
XLIV	STARTING OUT . . . . .	207
XLV	FAREWELL . . . . .	212
XLVI	THE JOB . . . . .	217
XLVII	DENNY'S GOAD . . . . .	221
XLVIII	PETRA . . . . .	226
XLIX	MAN AND MAID . . . . .	231
L	BY-PATHS . . . . .	235
LI	WILES . . . . .	239
LII	THE RETURN . . . . .	244
LIII	AWAKENING . . . . .	249
LIV	WHICH WAY . . . . .	253
LV	DENNY'S CHOICE . . . . .	257
LVI	THE CLASH . . . . .	261
LVII	ACCUSATION . . . . .	265
LVIII	OUT OF THE PAST . . . . .	270
LIX	JOAN AND DENNY . . . . .	274
LX	THE WEB . . . . .	278
LXI	COURTING FATE . . . . .	283
LXII	VISIONS . . . . .	287
LXIII	THE GREAT HOPE . . . . .	291
LXIV	THE VERDICT . . . . .	295



# CONTENTS

vii

CHAPTER		PAGE
LXV	THE PROMISE . . . . .	298
LXVI	PETRA'S VISIT . . . . .	304
LXVII	THREE GIRLS IN LOVE . . . . .	308
LXVIII	THE OFFER . . . . .	313
LXIX	LAWYER'S STAND . . . . .	318
LXX	AT THE DAM . . . . .	322
LXXI	PEDRO FRANCITA . . . . .	326
LXXII	UNSEEN HANDS . . . . .	330
LXXIII	THE NIGHT'S HAVOC . . . . .	334
LXXIV	TWO WOMEN . . . . .	339
LXXV	FASCINATION . . . . .	344
LXXVI	JOAN'S VIGIL . . . . .	348
LXXVII	DENNY WINS . . . . .	351
LXXVIII	PETRA'S INSISTENCE . . . . .	355
LXXIX	THE ACCIDENT . . . . .	359
LXXX	THE CLEW . . . . .	363
LXXXI	JUDGMENT . . . . .	367
LXXXII	VEILED CHARGES . . . . .	372
LXXXIII	UNDER FIRE . . . . .	377
LXXXIV	ULTIMATUM . . . . .	382
LXXXV	FORCED OUT . . . . .	387
LXXXVI	THE STOLEN BOOK . . . . .	391
LXXXVII	WAITING FOR JOAN . . . . .	396
LXXXVIII	DENNY'S SUSPICIONS . . . . .	400
LXXXIX	NEW OFFER . . . . .	405
XC	THE THREAT . . . . .	407
XCI	KATY'S CHANCE . . . . .	411
XCII	THE BLOW . . . . .	415
XCIII	THREADS OF HOPE . . . . .	419
XCIV	LIZZIE'S MESSAGE . . . . .	422
XCV	THE RETURN . . . . .	427
XCVI	THE REUNION . . . . .	431
XCVII	STEVE'S CONFESSION . . . . .	436
XCVIII	SHADOWS . . . . .	441
XCIX	THE CRISIS . . . . .	445

CHAPTER		PAGE
C	EACH MAN HIS PRICE . . . . .	451
CI	THE OPERATION . . . . .	455
CII	WAITING . . . . .	460
CIII	SURFEIT . . . . .	465
CIV	CLEWS . . . . .	469
CV	BETROTHAL CARDS . . . . .	472
CVI	PETRA ENLIGHTENS KATY . . . . .	475
CVII	PETRA OR KATY . . . . .	479
CVIII	DISILLUSION . . . . .	483
CIX	PETRA'S HOLD . . . . .	485
CX	HOME AGAIN . . . . .	488
CXI	KATY'S PRAYER . . . . .	492
CXII	THE LITTLE SHOES . . . . .	496
CXIII	THE SUMMONS . . . . .	501
CXIV	THE ANGEL'S WING . . . . .	506
CXV	KATY'S LETTER . . . . .	511
CXVI	THE FIGHT . . . . .	516
CXVII	THE BRIBE . . . . .	520
CXVIII	STONE WALLS . . . . .	524
CXIX	JOAN'S DISCOVERY . . . . .	528
CXX	AFTER DUNLAP . . . . .	533
CXXI	THE PROOF . . . . .	537
CXXII	DUNLAP EXPOSED . . . . .	542
CXXIII	VINDICATION . . . . .	546
CXXIV	PETRA'S DEMAND . . . . .	550
CXXV	PLEADING . . . . .	554
CXXVI	DREAMS . . . . .	559

# **THE ROAD TO LOVE**

Digitized by Google

# The Road to Love

## CHAPTER I

### HIS MOTHER

QUEENIE BROOKS had the face of a madonna, the heart of a gypsy and a voice that was pure song. She was 28. For ten years she had followed her creed with unflinching devotion. This creed was Love. She took it wherever she found it—she walked wherever it led.

At nineteen it brought her into marriage with Jim Brooks. He left her a few years later with two children and no money. Queenie worked a little. But neither heart nor slim white hands were fashioned for toil. So Queenie looked for kindness from the world. And she found it. She couldn't keep her husband but there were others willing to take his place even though it meant supporting two children.

Once Queenie went off for a trip and left her children—the boy, nine; the girl, six. When she returned the next week the court had taken them. Queenie was haled before the judge, declared an unfit person and her son and her little girl awarded to their Aunt Josie, the sister of Jim Brooks.

Queenie, moist-eyed, sweet-lipped, accepted the judgment mutely. Denman Brooks didn't.

Denny was Queenie's son and to him she was without fault. She was some beautiful, gay fairy with her dark eyes and fragrant hair and she always put sugar on his bread, let him run around with dirty hands and holes in his stockings, laughed when he tore his coat. Even once when Prince Jerry came bounding in out of the rain to shake mud all over the new carpet, Queenie thought it was funny. She took a clean towel and dried Prince and told him to sit by the fire and get all warm. That's the way Queenie was.

So Denny ran away from his aunt, and back to his unfit

mother. It was seven o'clock and dark when he pushed the door of the kitchen, coming face to face with Queenie and Sid. Sid was the big fellow who lived at the house, wore chamois gloves and always had money in his pockets.

"I came back. I thought I'd come back," Denny smiled valourously, twisting his cap, looking from one to the other, wide-eyed, frightened. He smiled more openly: "Hee—you didn't think I'd think to come back?"

Queenie laughed and jumped from her chair, sweeping her arms about him.

That night he went with Queenie and Sid to the old Grove street theater, and Sid bought him a bag of marbles.

Sid often had things in his pocket for Denny. Every night he used to come home with a lot of bundles. Then he'd cook the steak and say to Denny: "Call Queenie." The three of them would sit down together and they always laughed. At his aunt's no one ever said a word at the table. They were all afraid of Uncle Matt. Denny was mighty glad he ran away.

Dinner was the happiest time. Afterward Queenie used to get up, toss back her head and say gayly: "Leave the dishes, Sid." She always said that as she ran off to her room to spend a long while combing her hair. She'd come out with the reddest lips and a bright cherry hat that showed just a little of her black, curly hair.

Then she'd stoop down and kiss Denny. She always smelt so good—like flowers in the sun. His aunt's lips were rough and smacked of cabbages. He hated to kiss her.

But Queenie was like the lemon verbena that Denny picked and put in bottles to make cologne. If she'd only stay home and tell him stories the way she did on Sunday nights!

Sometimes he shut his arms tight about her neck and told her he'd never let go. But she'd just press her soft cheek against his and laugh: "'Fraid-cat, Denny, darling? You're not afraid! Go right to bed now and don't you be frightened."

Just the same Denny was afraid. He'd pull the blankets up to his chin and lie staring into the darkness until it became peopled with terrible images. Then his heart began to pound high up—almost in his throat. He wasn't afraid of Matches Burke and he could lick the kid next door, but he crouched under the covers and gulped when those formless shadows pressed along the wall.

There was one big black shape with horns curving from its shoulders. Every night it was the last to plunge out of the darkness. Denny hid from it.

One night after he'd been back home a long time, he woke up suddenly, saw a light glowing against the window and in that pale illumination made out Queenie's slender figure. Or he couldn't be sure. Perhaps it was his guardian angel passing in the night. He lay very still. The figure came over to the bed and leaned down. He knew it was Queenie from the fragrance and the black curls and the lace like a white cloud at her neck. Even this, as though it were something mystic, frightened him. He could scarcely say: "Mamma, mamma?"

Queenie laughed: "Scarecrow! How you kick the covers." She tucked him in. As she stooped down to kiss him he wound his arms about her neck, clinging to her. He felt tears against his cheek.

"You crying, Queenie?"

"Laughing. Go to sleep, Denny."

She seemed to float on that beam of golden light until the hall door swallowed her up, leaving a faint perfume drifting over Denny's pillow. He went to sleep happy.

Queenie wasn't up for breakfast. She never was. But she always set out a glass of milk and three or four doughnuts or snails and jam. Sid often scrambled eggs for him. This morning he ate alone.

It was a great day in Denny's life. The report cards were given out, and incredible as it seemed, he was number one. This had never happened to Denny before.

He couldn't believe it. He was afraid to ask Miss Linden for fear she'd say there was a mistake and take the mark away from him. There she was coming down the aisle right off to snatch it from him. She stopped at his desk. Denny trembled.

Miss Linden put her hand on the brown, curly head, and, there, if she wasn't saying: "Now, Denny Brooks, you see what you can do when you come to school every day. I want you to be number one next month, too."

At that Denny doubled up his fists and sat very tight for he didn't want the sissy behind him to hear his heart thumping. He was almost bursting with triumph. Gee! Number one! Wait till he told Queenie and Sid. Gee!

He tore home holding the white card in his hand and never stopped running till he reached the kitchen door. It was locked.

Denny yelled: "Mamma, open it. Hurry!" There was no answer. Prince Jerry, his tongue and his tail both wagging in enthusiasm, came bounding up and licked Denny's hand. Denny paid no attention.

"Darn it!" he gulped, tears running into the corners of his mouth. "Darn it! Coulda left the door open. Leastwise coulda left the door open!"

He got tired kicking, so he sat down and let his hands hang limp between his knees and could hardly keep from crying when Prince Jerry licked them.

"Quit it, Jerry," he said in a big voice. "Quit it, I tell you."

There was no one home and Queenie forgot to unlatch the kitchen door. But she must have left his lunch somewheres!

Denny went around to the front door, pressed his thumb on the bell and kept it there.

Sylvia Morton, who lived next door, came flying through the alleyway with a big hunk of bread and jam. Denny could have pounded on her and grabbed the bread. Then he remembered his report, and yanked it out, pretending to be reading it.

"'Lo, Denny," Sylvia called, sticking her fingers in her mouth and licking the jam clean. "What's that? Get your report?" She came up the steps and poked an inquisitive nose over Denny's shoulder: "Oooh! Number one! You ain't number one, are you, Denny?"

For the moment he forgot his hunger, inquiring mildly:

"Well, what does it say, Sylvie? It says number one, doesn't it? Guess I can be number one if I feel like it. Guess she came right up to my desk and said so!"

"Miss Linden?" Sylvia asked, vacuously, and as some other children came rushing along she cried out: "Denny Brooks is number one! By, Denny!"

When he was alone Denny'd like to have buried his head against Prince Jerry and cried. Lotta good it was to be number one. Queenie coulda stayed home. She mighta known he was going to surprise her.

He went hungry, like a ravenous little wolf, to school. In the middle of the afternoon he could feel a terrible clawing like a big hand twisting him into a knot. Then he began to think of the good things Queenie would have ready for him. She often made a little feast after school. His heart softened toward her and he ran all the way home. The door would surely be unlatched now and there'd be snails and doughnuts



and maybe pancakes—great mountains of them, with butter and molasses dripping from the edges.

The door wasn't opened and Queenie didn't answer. Denny caught the knob in both hands and shook it, bitter tears racing down his cheeks.

Then he sat down with his head in his arms and he didn't care if he did cry. He was just dying of hunger. Nobody but Prince Jerry, rubbing a wet nose against his little hand, cared a bit. He forgot now the triumph of the morning. The report card was doubled up and dirty in his pocket.

All Denny wanted was something to eat—even a piece of bread. There must be some way to get it.

He climbed to the window where he could see the table with the empty milk glass and the snails he had left at breakfast. He tried to raise the window. It wouldn't yield. And right inside was that big sugary snail!

At the sight of it the gnawing beast in his stomach leaped up in fury. Denny banged on the window—called and called. After a long while he let himself slide miserably to the walk, clenched his fists resolutely. He guessed he'd die all right. Then Queenie'd be sorry! You bet she'd be sorry when somebody came and told her he died because she didn't leave his lunch out for him!

He sat a long while until Prince, growing impatient, ran up with a stick and kept dropping it at Denny's feet, whining for him to play. Denny started down the alleyway, the dog at his heels.

They passed the vacant lot. Matches Burke called to Denny to "git in the game." Denny went over and sat on an empty barrel and swung his feet. He couldn't stop thinking of that sugary snail, and the more he thought the greater was the gnawing in his stomach. He leaned over and folded his arms.

Suddenly he remembered that Sid had given him a nickel and he began to search his pockets. He turned them inside out and not finding it, searched again. Then he remembered he'd put it in his sweater pocket in his own room. He jumped from the barrel and ran home. Maybe Queenie had come in.

But no. He climbed again to the kitchen window. It was dark. He couldn't see the table or the butter or the half-eaten cake.

An inspiration came to him. He went next door to Sylvia Morton's. Sylvia's older sister Alice was in the kitchen. Her

hands were all covered with flour and there was the warmest, sniffling odor of baking biscuits any one ever smelled.

"Hump—guess you're cooking biskits?" Denny remarked wisely, his glance on the oven.

"No—jelly roll," Alice answered.

"Smells orful good."

"I'll save you a piece, Denny."

"Ain't it most done, Alice?"

"Lawd, no—just this minute put it in."

Denny waited, then he added sadly: "S'pose I better be going."

He waited for Alice to protest. She didn't. Denny was forced to leave. He didn't want to mention that Queenie forgot his lunch. They might send him back to Aunt Josie.

He went to his place on the front steps and, when Prince crouched at his side, put his arms around the dog's neck and began to cry.

When it grew dark Denny was frightened and took to pound-  
ing the door again. A hand was laid on his shoulder.

"What's the matter, Denny?" It was Sylvia's father.

"I can't get in. Gee, I don't know where my mother is. She ain't anywheres!"

"Haven't you a key?"

"No."

"Well, now let's see." Sylvia's father took a ring of keys from his pocket, tried half a dozen. Miracle—the door swung open and Denny cried out: "Queenie, Mamma!" as Mr. Morton touched the switch and flooded the small hallway with light. The shrill cry echoed through the silent hall.

"Gee, she ain't here! Gee!" Denny pressed close to the neighbor, pushing him toward a closed door. "There's her room!"

Mr. Morton twisted the knob. It gave readily, the hall light flooding the room, falling directly across the bed and the figure lying there. A shudder chilled him.

"Go back, Denny—go back." He tried to shove the child from the room.

But Denny, too, had seen.

## CHAPTER II

### QUEENIE'S FAREWELL

THE light fringed with shadows of the darkened room lay quietly across the bed—quietly and gently. Under its touch the black curls, the lips, cherry-red, and all Queenie's wanton beauty softened so that she was appealing and wistful as a child. She had her two hands clasped, resting on the covers.

On a little table within arm's reach was an empty bottle. Mr. Morton trembled.

But Denny darted to the bed, caught Queenie's white hand, shaking it and calling: "Mamma, wake up. Queenie, you just wake up. Please, please!"

"Come away! Here, don't do that, Denny!"

But the boy held fast to the soft, sweet hand, growing hysterical in his demands. Suddenly he flung his arms about the still form, crying brokenly: "Oh, mamma! Wake up! You're not dead! Stop fooling! You will wake up!"

"Don't—here!" Mr. Morton shuddered.

Denny was pushed into the hall. Other neighbors had come in. Soon the rooms were filled with them. Denny's heart thumped with fright—with a still terror of the thing that had happened to Queenie.

Why had they pushed him away? He stole back, keeping close to the wall, and tried to enter the bright room with its gay little ballets dancing on the walls, its tassels tying back the flaunting drapes. As he twisted the knob, low voices whispered and Old Lady Traynor from across the street opened the door just a crack to say: "Go away, Denman. You can't come in."

"I want to. My mother's in there." Denny edged into the crack. "I'm coming in."

"No, no—there's a little man, now!" Mrs. Traynor let herself skillfully out, put a kind hand on Denny's shoulder.

Then he knew.

"Well, she ain't—she ain't—" He turned against the wall and cried with all his heart, for, though he was but nine and

had no idea of the finality of death, Denny knew that the sweet, joyous thing who had laughed so much and kissed his curly head was gone. He was terrified with grief.

When Mrs. Traynor took him to her house for dinner, despite the clawing hunger of his day's fast, he could scarcely eat. Tears kept dropping into his plate. He wanted to ask where Queenie was, what they would do with him. He was afraid and too awed to speak.

Then the old lady gave him three cookies to take to bed, and she tucked him in. But he wouldn't touch the cakes. He had the notion that Queenie might be looking at him from somewhere in the dark, and she would feel terrible if she saw him eating cakes when she was dead. He cried until there were no more tears in his eyes—waited, cried again, until he fell asleep.

In the morning Aunt Josie came, took him back to the flat. She told him to put on his best suit and be very quiet. Katy, his little sister, was with her. Katy was all dressed in white, with a dusty black bow on her elbow. Denny thought she was almost as pretty as Queenie, and her lips were just as red.

As soon as he was ready, Aunt Josie with a whacking movement brushed out his tangled hair. "There now, and mind you hold your tongue!" Denny hung back, shivering with reluctant dread. She shoved him before her into the dingy parlor.

There was a pale coffin, not a flower anywhere. Aunt Josie lifted him up and he saw Queenie, her eyes closed, the lashes lying so gently on her pale cheek, but her lips getting ready to laugh. Denny had often seen her with that arrested mirth on her face. Only now—he began to cry, for he knew he wouldn't hear her laugh—knew it and knew it. But Katy only smoothed out her dress, held a clean handkerchief very primly like an old-fashioned bouquet in her hand.

After that no one paid much attention to Denny. He went in and out as he pleased, but always wearing his best suit—always with that feeling of awe as though he should speak in a whisper. Sometimes he went down to the vacant lot and sat on a barrel. Once Eddie Summers began to tease him about being dressed up like a sissy; Matches Burke gave him a nudge, "Shet up, can't yer? His mother's dead." Denny had an odd sense of superiority.

But usually he stayed in the dining room and listened to the mysterious whisperings of the neighbors sitting around the old

walnut table. They talked of Queenie though they didn't mention her name. Denny understood far more than they troubled to think. Things they said made him cry; made him feel worse than ever.

"Poor thing!" he heard some one say to Sylvia Morton's mother; "I don't believe she did it on purpose."

"Humph!" Mrs. Morton answered. "Why doesn't he show up, then?"

"Why, you don't say! Hasn't he been around?"

"Not a sign of him! Of course, I don't say it wasn't an accident. And they do say this chloral is dangerous. But it looks queer to me, seeing as what kind she was."

"Yes—there's something in that. So it was chloral, was it?"

"Yes. Seems she used to take it when she couldn't sleep. At least that's what Josie says. But, as I said, if that's the case, what's become of him?"

"It is queer, all right."

"Hush—there's her boy."

"Oh—pretty little fellow—God pity him!"

Even in the fresh outburst that now shook him, Denny felt himself marked out—a person of importance. He wanted to defend Queenie; to say that she was the best mother in the world and he loved her, but the two women were leaning on the table, no longer noticing him.

He grew so used to the people coming and going; so accustomed to the coffin in the parlor with Queenie lying there without ever a word, but so lovely with that ruffle of lace at her white throat and her pretty hands folded, Denny had a vague feeling she might always be there. He would go out to play, come in and there she was.

One night as he was climbing into bed at Old Lady Traynor's Sid came into the room. His face was gray. He stood without saying anything—just leaning against the wall and slapping his gloves against his palm.

With a cry of delight Denny ran into his arms. Still Sid didn't say a word, but kept his head bent down against Denny's shoulder.

"Queenie's dead," Denny whispered. "She's over in the parlor."

At that, Sid dropped on the bed, put his hands over his face and kept saying: "God, God!"

After a while he looked up, kept squinting his eyes: "She

didn't mean to do it, Denny," he said in a queer voice. "Queenie wouldn't treat us like that. She never did it on purpose, I know. Oh, God!"

All of a sudden he pulled Denny to him, crying terribly. Denny cried, too.

The next day the parlor was filled with flowers and there were millions of violets on the coffin, the whole room laden with fragrance. Denny felt glad.

That afternoon strange men came, talked together and presently every one left the parlor except Denny and Sid. Sid had his arm around him, and he leaned on the coffin saying over and over: "Darling, darling. Oh, God!"

He lifted Denny up and the smile on Queenie's face was more beautiful than before . . . like a moving light on the chiseled sweetness of her face. Denny hid his head against Sid's shoulder, and yet that silver light from his mother's lips was before him. Sid took him from the room. They walked down the steps after the coffin and got into a carriage. The happiest influence in Denny's life—perhaps the best, for a joyous heart is never a very bad one, was gone.

Denny had buried a bird once and a kitten. But it seemed such a cold and cruel thing to put Queenie in the ground. He stood at the open grave, clinging to Sid, begging him not to let them do this to her. Sid didn't answer but he moved a restless hand over Denny's head. That night he took him to a restaurant for dinner.

Afterwards they went back to the house where the door of the parlor was closed. Sid shoved a couch into Denny's room and slept there.

In the morning when breakfast was over Sid took out his suit case and began dumping collars, shirts, neckties from the bureau to the middle of the floor. Denny watched; his throat tightened.

"Where we goin', Sid?"

Sid pretended not to hear. For a breathless moment Denny held his peace, then he came over, twitched Sid's sleeve, asking with an engaging snicker:

"Say, what you doing with the suit case, Sid?"

"Oh, putting my things in it."

"Humph, Sid—I can see that. You ain't goin' away?"

"Have to, Denny. But I'll be back. I'll blow around soon."

"Then I ain't goin' with you?" Denny tried to catch a look at Sid's face, but he kept it bent down over the packing.

"Not this time, Denny. It's business." Sid rammed down the cover of the suit case and, without looking up, added: "Buck up, Denny, boy, you'll be all right. They'll look after you."

Terror smote Denny. His words ran together: "Where'm I goin', Sid? You goin' to leave me here alone? Is Old Lady Traynor coming to take me?"

Denny twisted the hole in his stocking until his knee came through. For he knew that "they" was not kind old Mrs. Traynor. "They" were Aunt Josie and Uncle Matt. He'd as leave die as go there.

Sid lifted the suit case, thrust his hand in his pocket, brought up two silver dollars and his big penknife with the four blades. "What do you say to these, Denny? Like that knife?" Sid put them in his hands. Denny was overjoyed. "And keep your eyes open, Denny, boy. I'll blow round again."

That was the way Sid left him. Denny was alone in the empty house with its parlor door closed.

He sat on the steps whittling a stick with the new penknife. Prince Jerry sniffed at his feet.

A car passed. Denny looked up, saw a bulky woman with trailing brown skirt and a straw hamper get off. His heart turned cold. It was Aunt Josie and she was coming straight to the flat.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BORLEYS

THERE was no Queenie to shield him now. Even Sid was gone. Denny threw one swift glance at Aunt Josie's lumbering figure, dashed to the gas meter. As he ran, Prince Jerry barked. That ruined the only chance. For Aunt Josie heard and hurried.

"Denny, come here!" She reached out and caught his arm. He hung his head, but that didn't repel Aunt Josie. She leaned down and pressed the coarse lips that always smelt of cabbages on his. He shivered.

"Come in and be quick, Denny. There's not much time. Come along!"

Denny didn't budge.

"Don't stand there like a little stone, Denny. Have you lost your tongue? Ain't you glad to go with your aunt and your little sister?"

Denny's chin doubled: "No, I ain't!"

"Shame, Denny. That's not a nice thing to say. Hurry now!"

So Denny marched in and stood with breaking heart as his shirts, his few ties, stockings and overalls were folded and placed in the straw hamper. Aunt Josie, her bulky figure seeming to bulge over the whole room, talked incessantly.

"You ought to be thankful your uncle said you could come. Don't go making trouble. Gawd knows we've had our share of that. Gawd knows your own father don't bother his head. Just remember that, Denny, even if your uncle ain't the gentlest man in the world. He's doing more than I expected, what with three of his own, let alone feeding you and Katy."

Denny, his voice breaking, blurted out: "I ain't goin'!"

Aunt Josie sighed wearily, looked in reproof at Denny. His courage fell.

"Leastwise I better stay here, Aunt Josie. Sid's coming back. He told me he was. Sid'll be awful disappointed if I ain't here. He tole me to stay."

"Oh, he did, did he? Well, don't worry none about that. Come along now, Denny." She sent a roving glance over the



disordered room, took his hand between her grubby palms. "Got all your things, now?"

But there was the piece of coral on the top shelf of the sideboard, his sling shot and magnifying glass in the kitchen drawer and the tool chest Queenie gave him the day after he came running back to her and home. Aunt Josie followed him, and at last even Denny could find no more excuses.

"Hurry now and don't drag your feet," she cautioned.

At the steps Prince Jerry bounded to Denny's side.

"Come awn, Jerry. We're goin'!" It was a despondent order that brought Aunt Josie to a stiff halt.

"What! You ain't planning to bring the cur along?"

"Prince?" Denny was on the verge of tears again. "Prince ain't a cur!"

"He can't come!" Aunt Josie panted.

"You mean I gotta leave Jerry?"

For answer Aunt Josie pushed the dog so that it was half shoved down the steps. Denny's heart bounded to his throat.

"Don't you hurt him! Come awn, Jerry." He looked to the bulky woman and his lips quivered: "I couldn't leave him, Aunt Josie, please. I tell you and tell and tell you—please."

"Come along then. Gawd knows I've nothing against the dog. Your uncle won't have it. It'll mean hiding it in the basement and no end of trouble."

But Prince Jerry went along. Katy and his cousin, Lizzie, were just coming home for lunch as they reached the house. Katy's cloudless blue eyes danced, but she lowered her head shyly saying in a distant, polite voice: "'Lo, Denny." Then she ran up and whispered excitedly: "O-o-oh! You'll ketch it if Uncle Matt sees Prince!"

Denny pulled so hard at the strap that Prince Jerry yelped. His young master turned with a gulp: "Shut up, Prince, I tell you, shut up! Kin I help it?"

That first night of his return to his uncle's house Denny never forgot.

In Queenie's flat even the kitchen smelt nice. At night after Sid fried the steak she used to light little cones of incense to make it "sweet and fantastic." That's what she often said.

But Aunt Josie's kitchen was a hubbub of odors—the soup boiling over or the potatoes burning, the meat smoking and the everlasting hangover smell of cabbages. The room was canopied with murk.

In one corner was the granite sink with a closet for the pots and pans built underneath. Next to the sink was the stove and in the opposite corner a battered sewing machine. The table, always covered with a spattered brown and white cloth, was set near the stove so that Aunt Josie could reach over and bring the blackened pans right to the table. Denny hated to see her do this.

He sat between his sister, Katy, and his cousin, Lizzie. Next them was the baby in a high chair and opposite was the oldest of Matt Borley's children—Violet.

Violet was fifteen. She wore her hair turned under, with a great taffeta bow that was a source of delight and annoyance, for she was constantly spreading it out with vain, self-conscious little touches, as though to say, "See what a pretty thing I am!"

Pretty and dainty, she was but a pathetic uncertainty with her winsome chin, the eyes overlarge and far too eager, the curved mouth that was at once childish and willful. One could look at Violet and feel sad.

She was at that age when she liked to imagine herself fine and beautiful. Matt Borley's kitchen continually interrupted her airy fancies.

Just now she came over and kissed Denny, doing it very graciously, as though she were a princess. Denny liked her and looked up to her.

Aunt Josie, puffing a great deal, evidently in a state of suppressed excitement, served the meat. She kept looking toward the door and repeating, "Hurry, children—hurry."

"Ma," Violet frowned in disdain, "do we have to choke down our food?"

"Violet," Aunt Josie pleaded, "you know better."

"I'm getting sick of it, ma! I'll not stand it!"

"Vee!" Then suddenly, "Hush!"

The door was flung open. Uncle Matt came in. A troubled, uneasy silence. The bulking form, with its undershot jaw clinched, its little pig eyes gleaming, stood in the center of the room sneering at Aunt Josie's red, anxious face.

"You would do it, wouldn't you? Had to fetch the brat! Couldn't rest till you got him, fool that you are!"

"You said I could bring him, Matt."

"I did, did I? Did I think you were going to rush at it like a lunatic? I haven't enough mouths to feed, have I? What's the matter with our fine Sid?"

Denny's chin puckered. He caught his small hands together as Uncle Matt's grimy finger shook almost in his nose.

"Watch out, young feller! There'll be no nonsense this trip. Try any capers and I'll take it out of you, my fine lad! Let me catch you running away, and out you go for good!"

The big finger caught Denny under the chin, forced his head back.

"Hear that, do you?"

Denny tried to jerk his head free, to wink back the tears. He started to speak. Katy kicked him under the table, but the words were out.

"I didn't wanter come! Sid's coming back for me. He told me to wait. He gave me two dollars and told me he was coming."

"He did, did he? Two dollars, eh? Where are they?"

Again came Katy's warning kick.

"I got 'em," Denny answered.

"You got 'em, have you? Let's have a look." The hand caught Denny by the shoulder, brought him to his feet: "Now, my fine millionaire!"

The second thrust into Denny's pocket brought out Sid's parting gift. Matt laughed.

"That pays for your dinner, brat!"

Denny shut his eyes quick, doubled his lips together and, as Matt Borley strode from the room, he shook both fists after him. Katy stuck out her tongue as far as it would go.

"Mamma!" Lizzie yelled, "Katy stuck out her tongue at papa. She made a face."

"Shut up, you little tattle-tale!" Violet's pretty face was white and all the curves gone from the willful mouth. She turned indignantly to her mother. "It's a shame, ma. I'd not stand it." Then she got up in disgust and left the room.

Aunt Josie jabbed a comb into her coarsened hair, scraped bones and meat into a newspaper and let Denny take them down to Prince.

As soon as he reached the basement where it was dark, Denny began to cry. He put his arms around Prince Jerry and let him lick the tears away.

It seemed a year since yesterday; years and years since Queenie had knelt at his bed whispering gay little stories in his ear. Denny thought of that moving light across her red lips. He grew frightened and went dashing up the stairs.

That night he lay in a little crib next to Katy's, his eyes peering into the darkness. There was a step—a slim form leaning over him. Denny shook from head to foot: "Queenie—mamma?"

"Denny." It was only Violet. She pressed a dime into his hand. "Don't you care, Denny. Sid's sure to come."

"I know," Denny gulped. "He tole me he would."

Denny believed it. Every morning he woke up thinking: "He'll come to-day." Every night he went to sleep hoping: "He'll come to-morrow." He'd run home from school, saying to himself: "Maybe Sid's there. Gee, I bet he is!"

But there was no Sid.

A month passed—two, three. One Saturday he was playing hop-sotch with Katy and Lizzie. The postman called out: "Package for you, Denny!"

Denny was all chuckles when he saw that flourishing "Master Denman Brooks." His heart jumped with triumph—a real message from Sid!

Even when he was a man grown Denny counted that day the most tragic of his life.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE TRAGEDY

DENNY thrust the short scrawl in his pocket but something else he clutched in his hand, opening the fingers every few minutes to look. After an hour he went up, twitched Katy's sleeve and nodded to the alleyway. She followed him.

"Wanter see something?" He opened his hand. Two silver dollars lay flat and shiny on the palm. Katy's eyes darted.

"Oooh! You got 'em back?"

"Humph!" Denny sniffed. "They ain't the same. They're new ones."

"Where'd you get 'em?"

"Sid."

Katy's eyes widened with awe. Suddenly she leaned over and pressing her lips against Denny's ear whispered loudly: "Gonna buy the boat?"

"No. Gonna save up for a bicycle or a coaster."

At that Katy tingled. Her secret was so profound she had to cup her hands over her mouth lest any one overheard: "Doncher do it, Denny! Uncle Matt'll take them. See if he don't. I'd buy the boat."

But Denny put the money in his pocket and walked off. His confidence waned as the afternoon brought nearer the moment of Matt's homecoming.

"Guess I'll buy the boat," he told Katy. "Wanter come?"

The Borleys lived in a dingy gray house on Octavia, near Fell. There was a whole row just like it. The Borley's gate was broken, but the landlord wouldn't repair it, nor would he paint the steps, nor fix the leak in the dining room. Let the Borleys move if they could get a better place for nineteen dollars and fifty cents, water included!

Around the corner and down Hayes street was "Isaac's," a red-painted bazaar kept by a round, short man with terrifying beady eyes and a mild, scraggly mustache. He wore a skull cap and carpet slippers. Denny used often to drop in on his way from school and look at the trains, and ask all manner of

questions. He thought he had a right to do this, for he had once spent a nickel here on comic valentines, taking an hour for the purchase. This made him a friend of the proprietor.

In the window was the sailing boat with a white tag marked "\$.95." This was the boat Denny dreamed of owning.

Katy held his hand and he let her, just for this once. Prince Jerry scampered along at their heels.

"Kin we see the boat?" Denny asked, standing on his tiptoes. The man with the beady eyes nodded patiently, took down one after another of his five, ten, twenty-five cent sailing craft. Denny examined each with a critical eye. After fifteen minutes he admitted loftily:

"Well—I meant the one in the window—the one with three sails."

"Can't take that out."

"Ain't it for sale? It says for sale right on it."

When he had finally shown his money the boat was produced. But Denny wasn't ready to terminate negotiations yet. He felt the sails, rubbed his finger on the paint, then his mind turned to trains and he had the entire stock hauled out, then tool chests and building blocks and the game of "Nellie Bly." After that he decided on the boat.

Katy was busy with a Chinese doll that squeaked when she pinched it.

"Hee, hee," she giggled, "ain't it sunny, Denny?" Katy couldn't pronounce her "f's."

Denny did the magnificent thing.

"Close your eyes, Katy. Now turn around," he ordered in a singsong voice, putting the doll in her hands.

Still there was money left. Suddenly Denny spied a big blue card with dog collars fastened to it and he danced up and down while the man reached them from the hook and let him try them on the unappreciating Prince.

"Set still, can't yer, Jerry! Gee, ain't you mean! Hold yer head quiet, Prince!"

Seven were buckled on and off before Katy finally prevailed on him to take a distinguished-looking thing with brassy knobs that looked strangely out of place on poor Prince Jerry's mongrel scruff.

There was forty cents left.

"Like ter have some jelly beans, Katy?" Denny asked.

"Lemon drops. Like lemon drops better."

They went into a candy store where a dish of ice cream with two spoons was served for a nickel. But Denny ordered a dish for each. They took turns in dropping a spoonful on the floor for Prince.

"He likes it," Denny chuckled merrily. "Jest lookit him, Katy, he's laffin'."

Katy giggled: "Dogs can't laff."

"Can't they though! Well, I guess dogs has jokes to themselves. Guess Jerry has, all right!"

"How do you know, Denny?" Katy inquired sweetly, slowly licking her spoon.

"Never you mind, Katy-kid, I know!" Denny shook his head, indicating a large communion with canine mysteries. "I guess I do know what goes on inside Jerry's head. Guess I know all right!"

He leaned forward whispering momentarily: "Jerry hates Uncle Matt. He hates him!"

"Oooh!"

"En' I hate him, too, Katy. En' I'm gonna knock him down! You wait and see!"

Katy's pure blue eyes grew big.

"Doncher say that, Denny. Doncher tell anybody!"

"Well, I am all right! Me and Jerry hate him!"

Prince Jerry had been turned out of Matt Borley's house. One Sunday the stevedore had come home, his face red with liquor. Jerry was on the kitchen porch happily gnawing a bone when Matt's rough boot caught him viciously between the legs. Denny's eyes blazed and he doubled up his fists. Matt saw.

"Ho, yours, is it?" He took hold of Denny's ear, tweaking it scarlet. "Yours, eh? Well, this is what I do to curs, young feller!"

Prince was lifted by his short tail and pitched headlong down the steps.

If Denny had been a few years older Matt Borley would have paid richly for that. But he was a little fellow and he had to stand there with red, smarting ear as his uncle blew an ugly breath in his face and warned: "Don't let me ketch him here again! Hear that!"

So Prince Jerry was kept in Jimmy Foley's back yard, and both he and Denny hated Uncle Matt.

"Aunt Josie says we should love him," Katy hinted demurely. "She says it's good to love, even bad people."

"Well, I don't," Denny persisted. "I love Sid. Gee, ain't he a peach? By'm-bye I'm gonna have a cane and lots a money like Sid."

"I fought he was coming back, Denny?"

"He is! I guess if he says he is, he is!" Denny balanced the two dimes left after all his purchases, on his thumbs. He was planning further extravagance: "Guess I'll buy some ginger-snaps for Lizzie."

If only he hadn't thought of that! Lizzie was nine, with little pig eyes like her father's, a pudgy nose and streaky molasses hair. She was Matt Borley's favorite—the only one of the children who didn't fear him. Denny didn't like her, yet they played together.

She was in the back yard jumping rope when he offered her the bag of cookies.

"For me, Denny? All for me?" Lizzie started, and added in an awed whisper: "Where'd you get 'em?"

"In a ash barrel! Got 'em outer a ash barrel."

Lizzie closed the bag in terror.

"Doncher want 'em, Lizzie?" Katy piped. "They're good as they can be and he bought 'em. He bought 'em right wif' his own nickel."

Lizzie had already stuffed her mouth. She ate seven without stopping, but began to lag at the eighth and took to tossing bits to Prince Jerry. The little dog danced merrily for each morsel. Suddenly a shrill cry, Lizzie held up a trembling hand, screaming at the top of her voice: "He bit me! He bit me!"

Denny's heart froze, for he saw a thin trickle of blood running from Lizzie's hand.

"Lizzie! Shut up, please! He didn't mean it. Prince didn't mean it. Gee!"

Lizzie shrieked louder: "He bit me! Ooooh! He bit me!"

At that moment Matt Borley came through the alleyway gate.

The huge fellow stood a moment, his cruel eyes blazing at Denny. As he saw the torn flesh on the back of Lizzie's hand his face grew purple.

"You would, would you!" He caught Denny by the collar, sent a smashing hand ringing against the young cheek. "You would, would you; I'll fix you."

"Don't! Oh, Uncle Matt! Don't. Jerry didn't mean it. He didn't mean it!"

But the massive hand had reached down, lifted Prince Jerry



by the brand new collar. The dog cringed, its soft brown eyes, beseeching and terrified, rolling at Denny.

And Denny flung himself against his uncle, pulling at his coat.

"Don't! Uncle—you're choking Jerry. Let him down—let him go. Gimme my dog!"

Matt's free hand swept him. "Get out!"

He went into the basement, slammed the door. Lizzie forgot the scratch on her hand. Children scrambled over the fence from the next yard, stood petrified with eager, astonished eyes as a frantic yelp, then another and another, shrilled and quivered.

Denny hurled himself against the door, kicked and pounded. Katy helped him push it.

A tortured cry

"Oh, he's killin' him! He's killin' him!" Denny beat with his fists, tears streamed down his cheeks. "Jerry—oh, Jerry," he yelled.

Silence. Then Matt Borley came out, tramped up the stairs, leaving the basement door open.

Prince Jerry dangled from a rope swung over the rafter.

## CHAPTER V

### GRIEF

THERE was a ghastly hour in Matt Borley's back yard. An instant Denny covered his face, then he dashed to a chair and, with the penknife Sid had given him, cut the heavy rope.

"Ketch him, Jimmy!" The voice quivered in sobs. "He ain't dead! He can't be dead yet! You got him?"

And then Denny was kneeling on the ground—Prince Jerry stretched between him and Jimmy Foley, and not a throb in the little dog.

"He's breathin'. Can yer hear him, Jimmy?" Denny's hands went gently about Jerry's neck. He tried to open his mouth and force down the water Katy brought. Then in a wild desperation they stood Prince Jerry on his feet.

"No use!" Denny's chin doubled up. "Tain't no use. Gwan away, Katy. Jerry's dead. He's dead, too!"

It was a long time before Katy dared to speak. Then she edged close to her brother, sitting with poor, stiffening Prince Jerry in his arms, and she put her soft lips against his cheek.

"Doncher cry, Denny. Doncher do it. Maybe we'll get another dog—"

That was the worst thing she could have said. Denny shook her off. But she went sneaking upstairs and came back quickly.

"Here, Denny, you can bury him in this." It was Katy's treasure—a little doll's trunk about half as big as Prince Jerry. Denny was putting leaves and grass into an old fruit box.

"Wouldn't fit." He went on tufting the leaves. Jimmy Foley helped him lift Jerry into the box.

The covering was the hardest part. Denny knelt there, his tears raining on Prince Jerry's nose. Then he lifted the dog out, held him quite awhile. Finally he let Jimmy nail on the cover and set the box in the hole they had dug.

Lizzie, oppressed with guilt and fright, watched in sulky obstinacy. Now the tears spurted into her eyes and she began to cry:

"I don't care! He had no right to bite me. He hurt me. He hurt me, he did. Look, Jimmy!" She held out her hand with the small red mark, but none of the children would speak to her.

Jimmy covered up the hole; Katy stuck daisies all around the edge, made a little mound in the center and dotted that with daisies.

When she looked up, Denny, his lips trembling, said brokenly: "By, Katy."

She caught his hand: her tears dropped faster:

"Where you goin', Denny? It's supper time now. Where you goin'?"

"That's all right, Katy. I'm goin'. By."

Aunt Josie was calling. Denny ran out the alleyway gate. Katy, mute with awe, leaned on the little trowel, then she flung it down, darted after him. There was no sign of Denny when she reached the street. Trembling with the momentous tragedy, she went to the kitchen.

"Call Denny," her aunt said quietly.

"I called him," Katy answered.

Uncle Matt was sitting at the table, his underslung jaw resting on his elbows. Opposite was Violet. Her enormous eyes like live coals burned in the ashy pallor of her face. She stared at her father with a look of hate and accusation as though she would have brained him. But she said nothing.

"Quit staring at me!" he roared, glancing up suddenly: "Quit it!"

Violet gave no answer, except that her eyes blazed more hotly against his. He pushed his plate, jarring all the dishes on the table, strode out of the room, slamming the front door after him.

"Violet! You know better," Aunt Josie complained bitterly. "Now he'll get drunk."

"I wish he'd drop dead."

"Vee—your father!"

"I hate him. Lord, I hate him. The big brute!" Violet, too, pushed away her plate. Aunt Josie turned to Katy:

"Where's your brother?"

"Gone."

"Where is he?"

"I said he's gone, didn't I?" Suddenly Katy began to sob loudly: "En' he ain't comin' back."

Aunt Josie dropped the spoon into the pot of baked beans, her broad cheeks growing white.

"Violet," she said in a low plea, "go look for Denny."

Denny had no idea where he was going or what he might do. He ran wildly for three or four blocks, then he went along dragging his feet, too wretched even to stop the tears that tickled as they ran into the corners of his mouth.

He thought he would keep walking and walking until finally he died. For a while he didn't think, then an abrupt pang shivered through him. He saw Prince Jerry jump for the morsel of gingersnap, heard Lizzie's frantic scream, then the new collar and Uncle Matt dragging Jerry into the basement. Denny was crying out loud, stumbling along.

Even when Queenie lay dead he hadn't felt so lonely. Under the shock of grief and outrage was the sense of helpless and furious resentment. Matt Borley could kill Prince Jerry; he could beat Denny to death if he liked and the boy was helpless against that cold brute power.

Pity for himself overwhelmed him. "Couldn't even have Jerry!" he said half aloud and began crying again. Nobody cared about him!

He thought of Sid and his mother and he fancied he saw Queenie looking down at him, knowing what he thought, yet with that lighted smile on her lips. She didn't care either!

It grew cold and very dark. A light rain was falling. Denny hurried along, edging close to the houses. Frightened. He was alone and hadn't any place at all to go.

Then he began to wonder about Katy, remembering the tears in her eyes and the sad little way she caught his hand. Poor little Katy-kid! She'd have to stay with that Uncle Matt—

Unconsciously he turned and his steps were toward the mean gray house on Octavia near Lily Avenue. A definite idea shaped itself. He would creep into the basement, stay there until morning and before any one was up, would start off. It was better to run away in the day time. His steps redoubled. He was at the broken gate, hiding in the shadow. Voices reached him—Violet's:

"No, Ned—oh, don't—" He saw the bright bow on her hair, then her face, indistinct yet haunting. She had her hand on Ned Andrew's shoulder, laughed softly, recklessly as he leaned toward her. The next instant the two figures sprang apart, Aunt Josie opened the door:

"You found him, Vee?"

"We looked everywhere, ma. Didn't we, Ned? Can't imagine where the poor kid's gone."

Violet seemed scared that her mother had opened the door so suddenly, but Aunt Josie, a shawl flung over her shoulders, hurried down the steps. As she passed Denny he thought he heard her cry.

That melted him. She was almost running. He followed. Jimmy Foley turned the corner.

"Jimmy, Jimmy," Aunt Josie commanded: "Have you seen Denny?" That time there was no doubt about it. She was crying.

As soon as Jimmy was gone Denny ran up and caught his aunt's billowing skirt. Seeing who it was, she started, clapped her big hand over her face. But she held fast to his shoulder. All at once she said:

"Come home, Denny. Poor child!" Aunt Josie stooped down, her dress trailing in the wet street, and kissed him. He felt kind toward her, not thinking of her coarse lips.

Nearly all night—so it seemed—Denny lay awake listening to the rain rattling on the tin roof, watching a strip of torn wall paper twisting in the wind that whistled through the broken pane. Sometimes he imagined Prince Jerry sitting erect on his hind legs and looking with mute reproach at him and he said half aloud: "Gee, Jerry, I couldn't help it. Gee, didn't yer know that?"

There were nights and nights like that but the lying awake wasn't as stabbing as the waking up and remembering. There was no escape from the pain of the dismal recollection.

Denny couldn't bear to see a dog on the street. He turned his head quickly, struggling against tears. Every day Katy put fresh daisies on the grave but Denny never looked at it.

At supper he used to feel his uncle's mean eyes boring at him and the hatred, the helpless sense of outrage grew. Wait—just wait—

One thing comforted Denny. He had written to Sid, telling him gauntly the thing that had been done—

"—n' please, Sid," he ended, "long as yer comin' back, won't yer hurry up? Gee, Sid, don't seem like I can stand it much longer. You couldn't ever guess how I hate Uncle Matt, en the way I miss you en Queenie. I'll be orful good, Sid. Please come. Leastwise you always said we were chums, didn't yer?"

Even Denny's hope was not proof against months and months of silence. Then one day as he was coming out of school, his eyes almost danced out of their sockets. There at the gate, yellow gloves and cane, stood Sid.

## CHAPTER VI

### GOLDEN HOURS

"Sid! Gee—yer came!"

Sid laughed and took Denny's hand. In the other he was carrying a big box.

"Feeling pretty good, Denny? And how's Prince Jerry?"

Denny started, his eyes widening with shocked accusation, the corners of his mouth drawing down. "Are you laffin', Sid?"

"Laughing, Denny? Why, what's the matter?"

"Well, I tole yer, didn't I? I wrote and tole yer—tole yer the whole thing."

"What did you tell me? Been moving around and never got the letter. Did you write to me?"

"Sure I did. You don't know? Jerry's dead. That ole Matt killed him—hung him. Went and hung Prince Jerry!"

It might have been an hour ago, so blasting was the memory, so piercing it opened the freset of Denny's grief.

"Hung Jerry?"

"That's what he did. Went and hung him!"

For quite a while Sid said nothing, then he asked:

"Got another dog?"

"No."

"Would you like one, Denny?"

"No! Never want another!"

They passed a candy store and Sid said, "Let's go in, Denny."

When they were seated at a table Denny kept wondering when Sid would say, "Ready to come with me right off, Denny?" Sid was in no hurry. They had almost finished their ice cream when he pointed to the big box.

"Got something in there for you, Denny. Guess!"

Denny thought it might be trains or marbles or a donkey engine. Finally Sid opened it. There was a football and boxing gloves; then a tiny box for Katy. In this was a ring with a pansy and three little pearls in the center.

"Gee. Katy'll scream, she'll be so glad!" Denny was overjoyed.

Still Sid said nothing about taking him.

"Got something else for you, Denny." From his breast pocket he drew out an envelope, opened it. "Do you know what this is?"

Denny recoiled in a stifled fear. On the tissue paper, tied with a cherry-colored ribbon, was a soft black curl. Denny was ready to cry.

"Queenie's hair?" he whispered.

"I thought you'd like to have it, Denny. You save it. No matter what any one says, Queenie was good to us, wasn't she? Remember, Denny, Queenie was an angel to us, wasn't she?"

Denny was frightened.

"You keep that, Denny."

"You ain't going away again, are yer, Sid?" It was a whisper forced from Denny's overcharged heart.

"Have to, Denny. Going to Alaska. Know where that is? Going up to stake a gold mine. Then I'll come back and we'll have a fine time. I'll give you half. How's that?"

Denny pretended to shake back his unruly hair. He wrinkled his eyes into funny shapes. So he wasn't to go with Sid.

"You couldn't take me with yer, could yer, Sid?"

"Not very well, Denny. Not now. But I'm sure to come back." Sid stooped over the table, pointed to the white envelope. "Don't let any one know about that, Denny. Put it away where it's safe."

"Sure!" Denny murmured in a low tone. "Sure!" Quickly he tucked the silky curl in his pocket, kept his head lowered until he got his lips going up instead of down. It was pretty hard to have the hope he had treasured all these black months snapped in a minute.

"Sid's gone. He ain't comin' back," he told Katy-kid that night. Then he took out the ring, put it on her finger. And true enough Katy screamed in a panic of delight.

Katy was such a little thing with the bright chestnut curls bobbing all over her head. And she could make the funniest faces, crossing the deep blue eyes, rolling them upward and wrinkling back her nose till Denny, doubled up with mirth, rubbed his hands, imploring: "Oh, Gee! Stop, Katy-kid, stop! Don't make me just die laffin'!"

Then there was the day when Katy stole a plum as they passed a vegetable store.

"He saw me, Denny. The man saw me!" she cried in terror, dropping the purple fruit into Denny's hand.



Denny threw a swift glance behind him: "Run, Katy-kid, run for yer life!"

They raced up the hills together. Denny's excited imagination thrilling in the pursuit.

"They're after us, Katy-kid. They're after us! Hide!" They were at a church, the door was open. Denny shoved Katy in. Seated in the big pews he whispered: "Gee, you'll go to hell for this, Katy—right straight down to hell!"

Katy began to cry: "O-oh! Let's bring it back. Bring it back, Denny?"

At that, he burst out laughing, church and all: "Gee, Katy-kid, I ate it! Ate your sin right up!"

There was lots of fun playing with Katy. Even to go with Sid, Denny would have hated to leave her. How the blue, blue eyes would have filled and run over with tears.

"Guess we gotta stay here, Katy-kid," he said, looking up at the murky, tan ceiling. "Guess there ain't no place else for us to go—"

"Doncher care, Denny. Doncher fink Aunt Josie loves us? She says she does."

"Guess maybe she does—but Him."

Yet there were happy times before them—many of them. Denny had far too much of his mother's light-heartedness to be forever saddened. The dream of Sid was gone—others came to take its place.

"Pretty soon I'll have lots of money, Katy-kid. Then you and me'll get a little house and live all by ourselves and have cream puffs every night for dinner."

Denny made this announcement on the triumphant Saturday when he earned a dollar for driving the fruit wagon. Katy, arrogant as a little queen, climbed up to the seat with him and held the whip.

Denny hid these dollars away until he had four, then he went to Isaac's and bought the wonderful red coaster. In the long school vacations he and Katy got up very early, dragged the wagon to the top of the Fell street hill to come flying down bumpy-bump, Katy's hat flying and Denny crying: "Hold on fer death! Gee, hold on!"

The first morning Lizzie woke up: "Can I come, Denny?" she asked quite humbly. Denny had never forgiven Lizzie for her part in Prince Jerry's death.

"No!" he snapped. "No, yer can't! You betcha can't!"

Katy was touched by the blunt refusal: "Poor Lizzie, she has sich a pug nose," she interceded as they climbed the hill. "She's orful sorry, Denny. Lizzie didn't fink—she never fought Uncle Matt was coming that day."

So the next morning Lizzie was allowed to come.

"Jest for this once, Katy-kid," Denny warned: "I tell yer she ain't comin' every morning. That's all!"

After that Katy crept out so softly Lizzie didn't hear. Pity for her cousin was a small matter compared to worship for her brother. No one was quite as smart as Denny, growing so tall and freckled-faced now. He made the best stilts, owned the cave where they roasted potatoes and told hair-raising stories; was number one nearly every month, and once he even had a theater in Jimmy Foley's basement, charging a bottle or a sack admission. This venture netted him fifty-five cents—a handsome sum reckoned in ice creams.

But the glory of Denny's career came with the guessing contest in the candy store. In the window was a great jar of red-hots. With each five cent purchase came a ticket and the chance to guess the number of candies contained in the jar. The best guesser could take first choice of the prizes—a big doll dressed as a bride, all white satin and veil and orange blossoms; a set of boxing gloves, a box of dishes, a baseball bat.

"I'm gonna win the prize," Denny informed Katy.

"Gonna take the boxing gloves?"

"Well, sure! Think I'd take the doll?"

Katy's heart and soul were poured out in longing to possess that lovely bride. She had no dolls except the squeaking Chinese maid, that was all tattered by now, and another old sawdust thing that couldn't close its eyes and had no joints.

"Maybe you won't win," she whispered almost hopefully.

"Well—I will!"

Denny had an inspired confidence in his own ability. He had skipped a grade at school and was now in his last year, though he was but twelve. Guessing the right number of red-hots was easy.

He got a jar the same size as the one in the candy window, saved up and bought twenty-five cents worth of red-hots, used just enough to fill the jar one-eighth. Then he began to count, hours and hours, night after night, till all the red came off the candy, streaking hands, hair and blouse. But he had it figured right at last. There ought to be exactly two thousand nine hun-

dred and seventy-eight red-hots in the candy store jar. Denny made all of his guesses within ten of this number.

The thrilling day came. Outside the store was a throng of wildly excited youngsters waiting for the announcement. It would be made at 5:30.

Denny held Katy's hand, his eyes almost popping out of his head. "Gee, Katy, if they don't hurry I'll just bust!"

"Aw, say, them gloves are mine! I know it!" Jimmy Foley declared with a confident swagger.

"But I want the doll," came a ladylike little smirk. "I have twenty-five guesses."

In a panic Katy nudged Denny. "She's gonna win it! Oh, Denny!"

"She ain't! Look—they're coming!"

The net curtain parted, the candy store girl looked out, smiled. A mad buzz of excitement, youngsters pushing, shouting, then a big white card with this in heavy black writing: "Correct number is 2996."

Denny squeezed Katy's hand, shaking from head to foot—2988 was his best guess. For a moment he couldn't speak, then he whispered in awe: "Gee—aw, gee—lost!"

Then came the card with the prize winners' names.

"Read it, Katy—quick!"

"You! You!" Katy flung her arms about Denny's neck, shrieking: "Goody, oh, goody!"

In a daze he walked into the store, mighty with triumph.

"Boxing gloves or doll?" the girl asked.

Katy's heart was in her throat. She heard Denny's voice, "Doll," and she began to laugh, then to cry.

"Silly! Think I needed more gloves?"

On wings of joy Katy floated from the store, the bride in her arms—the shouts of the youngsters, their envious pushing, music to her tingling ears.

"Oh, Denny! Ain't you wonderful! You're smart! You're the dearest, goodest brovver in the world!"

"Pooh! That's nothing!"

They had to run to reach home for supper. As they turned the corner a little knot of men and women were standing at their steps. They came closer. An ambulance had stopped at the door. Men were carrying a stretcher into the house. Denny saw the form lying on it— "Uncle Matt, Gee!"

This was the end of Denny's boyhood.

## CHAPTER VII

### UNCLE MATT

"DON'T make any noise, children." Violet Borley, a sweetness in the pretty, willful face, stepped into the kitchen and began filling a great basin with boiling water. Her dark hair was now piled on the top of her head in a big, soft pompadour that made the great eyes more pathetic and haunting in their young eagerness. Violet smiled dreamily and when she spoke it was in a low, beautiful tone after the manner of the leading lady then playing at the old Central Theater. How Violet longed for airy grandeur!

The children seated at the supper table in a state of hushed yet tingling excitement watched her expectantly.

"Is papa gonna die?" Lizzie asked, the little pig eyes glinting.

"I don't know, Lizzie," Violet answered with mild indifference. "But you must be quiet. You may serve the stew, dear."

"I wanter know! I don't want papa to die!"

"Hush!"

At that Lizzie flopped her head down on the table and made a great show of tears. But as soon as Violet was gone she looked up, saying abruptly: "Let me hold it, Katy—just for a minute?"

The bride doll stood in the center of the table.

"No, yer can't!" Denny answered. "Lizzie Borley, that's not your doll!"

"Oooooh, ain't you mean to me, Denny!" Lizzy began to blubber, "and papa's dying, too!"

The soft hearted Katy was moved and pushed the doll toward her: "Please—let her hold it, Denny?"

"All right now, Miss Katy-kid, all right!" Denny hinted darkly through shut teeth, his freckled nose wrinkled almost to extinction. "Jest wait and see!"

Violet called him, sent him to the drug store. When he returned the door of the front room, where they had taken Uncle Matt, was open. Denny hid in the corner and peeked in.

His uncle's huge form lay flat, almost motionless, on the bed, his right foot raised and resting on a box. He kept turning his head restlessly, a throttled moaning coming from his throat.

A friend of Matt Borley's, a stevedore, was telling Aunt Josie of the accident. They were loading iron safes when the rope snapped and the safe pitched against Matt, striking him in the back and against the foot.

The low voices seemed to disturb the patient. He tried to speak. Then Violet, standing at a little table near the bed, took a cloth, moistened it and with an exquisite gentleness ran it over her father's lips. She took another cloth and laid it on his forehead, as though she wished to soothe him. Denny thought this mighty good in Violet.

"Say, is his foot off?" he asked, breathlessly, when she came from the room.

"No—it's crushed."

"Will he die?"

"I don't know, Denny. But he'll be sick a long time. I hope it isn't going to make any difference to you."

It was months before Denny understood what she meant. Matt Borley lay helpless, an air of suspense and uneasiness in the sick room and on Aunt Josie's face, but over the rest of the house there settled gradually a tone of peace, of lightness that was almost joy.

The children began to laugh, to talk gayly at the table in the kitchen; even the baby—a broad-cheeked, stodgy little girl of four—becoming animated. Violet, for the first time in her life, brought out all her fanciness, all her little graces. To the younger ones a wonderful and superior creature. They thought it magnificent when she said beautifully: "May I trouble you for the butter, Lizzie?" or "Will you have a little more milk, Denman?" Something in her manner stirred recollections that were at once pain and sweetness to Denny.

No one missed Uncle Matt except perhaps Aunt Josie. Her coarse, heavy face grew anxious—gradually it looked almost pinched. Sometimes she spoke sharply to the children and lately she ate very little.

But Denny became more light of heart and took no heed of Aunt Josie's harried face. At supper he remembered all kinds of funny things and told them delightedly to Violet.

It was his last term at grammar school and high ambitions

glowed in his young heart. One afternoon he stayed late to feed the tadpoles. The teacher was sitting at her desk making out the reports.

"Denman," she said, looking up with brisk suddenness, "I guess you'll win the medal."

This was one of Denny's dreams. His face turned scarlet.

"What are you planning to be, Denman?"

Confusion that was almost panic tied his tongue, then he blurted hastily: "An engineer."

"Fine—that's just what you can be. Study hard at high school, Denman. Make up your mind to be the best engineer in America. You will!"

Exultant as though the medal were pinned on his coat; as though he were already the greatest expert in the country, Denny hurried with the vast news to Katy, making her cross her heart to die before she heard one word of it. He studied ten times harder than before, the responsibility of greatness weighing heavily upon him.

A few days after this he came home to find men taking away the gas meter. Aunt Josie was sitting in the kitchen, the old shawl flung over her face, crying.

She said very little to Denny. When she was finished he stood motionless, feeling that he had been trampled.

"You mean I gotta quit, Aunt Josie?" He spoke breathlessly, fighting to hide the quivering break in his voice. "Can't I finish this term? Can't I graduate?"

"Three months more, Denny? Oh, I can't help it. I can't help it. I can't do any better." She wound her head in the shawl, covered it with her arms. Her big shoulders went up and down.

Denny bit his lips, kept winking his eyes. Then he went up and touched her hair: "Don't cry, Aunt Josie. I don't care!"

When he was alone he grit his teeth till the edges hurt, yet the tears popped into his eyes and raced down his cheeks like any baby.

"Gee! En I woulda got it! I was sure to get it!" He ground his fists together.

There were no jokes and not much laughter at supper that night. The next day the boy who was to have been the greatest engineer in the country; who was to have won the medal and gone to college, went down to the grocery store and became

delivery boy. Early in the mornings he got up to carry a paper route.

There was a clerk with flat eyes and a pointed scalp who waited on the grocery store—Emmet Goss.

"Work hard, Denny," the owner said to him, "and some day you'll be a clerk like Emmet."

Denny was insulted, feeling himself immeasurably superior to the lean Emmet. He felt like shouting to the grocer what the teacher had said.

Sometimes he passed the school and heard the children shouting at recess. He turned his head and made the horse trot faster.

Not even Katy knew the biting ache of his disappointment in those first few weeks. There was a little comfort on Saturday nights when he turned over his pay to Aunt Josie and she said in her patient voice: "God bless you, Denny—poor child!"

Violet, too, turned over her envelope. She was a salesgirl in a downtown department store. "Sorry it isn't a hundred, mother!" she said with the indifference of a queen. Denny thought that very fine.

Sometimes, when he was driving the delivery horse to the stable, he used to see Violet, after she got off the car, stand at the corner near a poolroom and talk to a very dandy looking fellow in a tight-fitting suit, a carnation in his buttonhole. Once the man swung Violet by the elbow and stooped over as though he were going to kiss her. Denny saw that and heard Violet laugh. With the exaggerated conventionality of childhood he felt ashamed and guilty for his pretty slip of a cousin. That night he didn't look at Violet.

Denny had been working four or five months before his uncle was able to get up. The first night he came out to the kitchen for supper Violet came in late, her cheeks flushed, her eyes brilliant. When she saw her father the willful mouth straightened, the gladness went out of her eye. He noticed it. When she sat down his little eyes glinted at her. Suddenly he reached across the table, with a rough smear ran the back of his hand across her lips.

"Take off that paint, you young chippy!" The carmine stained his hand. Violet drew back in a white fury.

"Ma!" she cried indignantly. Matt Borley pulled her to the chair. "Take it off!" he roared; "do you hear? Where

have you been? Answer me! Standing at a street corner? Speak up!" His face pushed almost on top of hers though she tried hard to bend from him. "Talking with that cheap dude? I'll fix you! Paint your face again and see what happens!"

It was a week later that Denny saw Violet talking to the same young man in the tight coat.

"Denny!" she called as he passed. He thought Violet never looked so sweet, never so tall and graceful. "Tell ma I had to work. We're taking stock. Say I told you this morning. But don't let him hear. Will you do that, Denny? And tell ma to be sure and leave the latch off the door."

"You better come home, Vee! Come home!" Denny pleaded.

"I can't, Denny. You do that for me."

The lie troubled him but he loved Violet. When he reached the kitchen Matt Borley was seated at the table. There was no chance to tell Aunt Josie.

"Where is she?" Matt demanded, his massive thumb pointing to Violet's empty place.

"She must be kept late." Aunt Josie's face trembled with anxiety.

"She has to work," Denny lied stoutly. "They're taking stock. She told me this morning."

"Ho, she did, did she? Told you this morning, did she?" Matt was leaning over the table, shaking Denny by the shoulder. "Told you that this morning, eh? Or did she tell you that at the street corner half an hour ago, eh? What did the damn dude say, eh?" His face was getting purple, and the children, white-faced with terror, crouched down to the table.

"This is your doing, Josie!" he roared, flinging Denny from him. "Proud of your daughter, ain't you!"

"Violet's a good girl, Matt," Aunt Josie dared in a shaking voice.

"Good! By God, she'll be good, or I'll know why! Good—when she makes a liar of this brat and a fool of you! We'll see!"

Seven o'clock came, 8, 10. Violet had not returned.

Denny, sleeping nervously, awakened suddenly. He heard his aunt and uncle talking. They were quarreling. Then Aunt Josie began to implore, "Don't! Oh, for Gawd's sake, Matt, don't!"



There was a sound like a slap, then Aunt Josie crying. Denny crept to his door, peeked out. He heard a fumbling at the front door, then a light tapping, as though with a hat pin. The next moment Matt Borley strode into the hall, a horsewhip in his hand, and flung the door open. Violet, her enormous eyes dilating, was pulled into the passage.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LASHING

"WORKING late, were you!" Matt Borley held both Violet's small hands in one of his. She doubled down, tried to pull from him, her eyes blazing and frightened as an animal's.

"Working late, were you! Working till 1 o'clock, were you! I'll teach you!"

The whip swept out. Violet saw it and a queer, terrible little cry broke from her. She threw her head back, all her white slender neck showing, and challenged her father:

"Don't! Don't dare!"

The massive, ugly face thrust toward her: "You chippy! You hussy! I'll teach you!"

The whip cut across shoulders and arms, curved, fell again.

"Ma!" Denny heard Violet scream, saw her crouched in a corner, heard his uncle's taunting voice:

"I'll teach you to stand on street corners! I'll teach you to paint your face. Take that, you chippy!"

Denny watched with bursting heart, saw Violet's face, with the frightened, challenging eyes covered with her arms, the lash curving swifter, more violent—again and again. Not a sound from Violet.

But suddenly a shrill, piercing gasp: "Oh, mamma! He's killing me! Denny! Denny, come!"

Denny flew into the hall, sobbing, grabbed his uncle's shirt: "Stop! Let her alone! Run, Violet!"

Violet, her head bent, darted along the wall, flung herself into her room. The raised whip struck full on Denny's bare legs, switched out and cut again:

"Want some, do you? Want some?" Matt Borley caught Denny by the shoulders and struck him in the face.

"Take that, you brat! Let me ketch you in another lie!" He was flung down the hall. The huge fellow stalked into his own room.

Stillness, weighty, throbbing, closed over the uproar. As he ran past her room Denny saw Violet half lying on the floor, her head pressed against a chair.

Smarting with pain and fury he threw himself on his bed, his hatred of Matt Borley focussing in wild dreams of revenge. He would throw a hammer at him. He would give him a push some day that would send him bumping down the steps. He would get a pistol— Then he began to wonder what Violet would do and he knew that the outrage to her pride was far greater than to his.

The injury to Violet's flesh was slight compared to the brutal hurt to her spirit. Her dignity as a girl of 17—a pretty, aspiring girl longing for beauty and tenderness—was viciously wounded. The beautiful myth she had created of Violet's sweetness, Violet's loveliness, was destroyed. She was shamed and humiliated before Denny, before Lizzie and Katy. The next day—a Sunday—she wouldn't come out of her room.

Aunt Josie tried to smuggle a tray to her.

"No yer don't!" Matt Borley shouted, thumping his big forefinger on the table. "Let her come out! I'll teach her to walk the streets! I'll give her all the lesson she needs!"

Late in the afternoon when Matt went out, Denny called through the keyhole: "Lemme in, Violet."

No answer.

"Aw, go on, Vee. Got cream puffs here. Lemme come in."

She opened the door, turned her face from him.

"Doncher care, Vee." Denny put the tray his aunt had given him on the bed. "Gee, I'd laff!"

She sat with her hands clasped in her lap, her face so white, her eyes so dark and wild, Denny forgot all the brave things he was going to say. He stood terrified before the quiet intensity of Violet's passion. The silence became oppressive.

"Say—eat! He's gone out," he began uncomfortably. "Gee—well, ain't you gonna say anything, Violet?"

The girl's lips trembled. She raised her sleeve to the shoulder, held out her arm, the red welts throbbing, tears leaping to her eyes.

"If it wasn't for ma! But wait till I'm eighteen! He'll pay for this. Just wait!" She lowered her voice. "I hate him! Lord, how I hate him! I wish he'd drop dead—the big bully!"

But Violet knew she was defenseless even as Denny against her father's brute strength. He had no right to this power. But he possessed it—this was enough. She went back to the department store and Denny returned to the delivery wagon.

He wondered if he would have to do this kind of work for-

ever or if he would go back to school when Uncle Matt was well again. Once he asked Aunt Josie, but she only said, "We'll see, Denny, we'll see."

Jimmy Foley was going into the second year of high school and he was playing on the football team. He brought his suit and let Denny try it on, thrilled him with tales of stars and team captains.

"Think I'll play when I go to high school," Denny remarked, in a large offhand tone.

"You going?" Jimmy cried in excitement.

"Aw, sure! Soon's my uncle gets round again."

Toward the end of the year as he was driving past the school Miss Southwick, the teacher in his last year, stood at the curb. She beckoned him.

"I've seen you pass, often, Denny. Why haven't you ever come in to see me? Well—but perhaps you'd rather be a grocery boy than engineer?"

She said it all lightly enough, but the blood raged into Denny's cheeks; for a moment his eyes stung.

"No," he answered manfully, "I'd ruther be engineer."

"Have you opened your books since you left school, Denny?"

"Yes, I have—gone through the 'rithmetic and history."

"Indeed! Then you come and see me to-morrow night and bring all your books with you."

It was a startling event in Denny's life. Rebecca Southwick, a brusque tall woman with snapping gray eyes and a large, kind mouth, sat at a little table, pens, pencils, books before her. She smiled good-naturedly: "Now I'll see what's in you, Denman Brooks."

That was the beginning of his lessons. Three times a week for two months Miss Southwick coached him. He took the examinations and won his grammar school diploma.

"Keep your paper route in the morning, Denny—get another in the afternoon. But go to school if you have to work your nails off to do it. Remember a grocery wagon is no place for an engineer!"

In the glow of her praise, Denny would gladly have worked his nails off. He showed the diploma to Aunt Josie. Her coarse cheeks flushed with pleasure. She wished she could have a big gold frame for it, but she said nothing about high school.

Even when Matt Borley went back to the docks things went

on as before. Saturdays came. Denny turned over his pay envelope—so did Violet, though not with her old queenly grace. At supper she sat opposite her father and never spoke to him. When her eyes met his they defied him. This heightened his antagonism. The great eighteenth birthday dawned, passed. No new glory enfolded Violet. Her father grew more tyrannical and at nights locked all the doors at 9 o'clock. If Violet dare to be out—she could stay out!

Violet was in. She was home every night at 9 o'clock, but many a time she was out afterward. It was Denny who let her in.

He was sleeping in a small room off the kitchen—a dark, smoky hole with its window just above the porch. Whenever Violet went out he tied a long cord to his wrist, threw the free end out of the window. When she returned home Violet pulled the rope, waking Denny from his sleep. He sneaked to the kitchen to open the door for her.

But he no longer saw her talking near the poolroom to the man in the tight fitting coat. Yet she was often late for dinner. One night Matt Borley demanded the cause of her delay. She remained silent, though her mother's frown pleaded.

"Answer me!" he bawled.

Violet's cheeks stained and she flung her head back in the reckless way she had. Her father hunched toward her.

"Want what you got before, do you?"

Still no answer.

"Lizzie! Get me that whip!"

Denny clenched his fists together. Aunt Josie's face turned ashen.

Then Violet spoke, her lips drawn but her eyes in flames:

"I was talking to Ned Andrews!"

"Get here on time after this! And speak when I tell you to, hear me! Take that miserable face off you!"

He went down to the saloon after dinner.

"Ma! I'll not stand it. I'll not!" Violet cried with aching bitterness. "You'll see, ma. I'm past eighteen now. He can't order me around! Just wait—"

It was a pity Violet waited too long.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE WHITE DRESS—

KATY, a bit of old lace curtain tucked around her waist, twirled before the mirror, fluttering her hands now this way, now that. She began to sing in a gay, childish treble:

“Flowers—sweet flowers,  
All pure and so pearly;  
Showers—spring showers,  
Get up early—get up early.  
Showers and flowers  
Pearly and early—Oh!”

The “Oh,” prolonged and mighty, ended abruptly and Katy, pink from her neck to her hair, giggled. Denny stood in the door.

“Gee—you crazy little kid!” he rubbed his hands together, “Gee, you make a feller laff, Katy! Wanter ride to the stable?”

Katy was plucked rather swiftly from her dreaming. She wondered whether to tell Denny now or to wait. She decided to wait. For a great honor had come to her.

There was to be a Christmas festival at school. Katy, little and perfect with her cloudless blue eyes, her bright chestnut curls, was chosen to lead the dance of the flower fairies. She was carried away with joy and had spent the entire afternoon dancing and singing before the little mirror in the room she shared with Lizzie and Violet.

“Wait a minute for me, Denny.” She pulled off the curtain, folded it carefully. “Like that pome I was singing. I made it up all by myself!”

“Gee, what a silly kid! Aw gee, Katy!”

“But do you like the pome, Denny?”

“Sure, ain’t you a Longfellow, though! Oh, Lord! Hurry up!”

Katy decided this was not the moment for her great secret. She climbed to the seat of the grocery wagon next to Denny. Every night he let her ride to the stable with him, for this was

his last month at the store. He had gained a paper route in the afternoon and would keep the delivery job for Saturdays, earning with both as much money as now. So he was to enter high school.

They walked slowly from the stable. This was the hour when they painted with limitless and brilliant vision a thousand happy futures.

"Gee, poor Violet—she's getting sad, Katy-kid—notice?" Denny asked.

"She's orful good to us, ain't she, Denny?"

"Ain't! Humph, there's no such word!" Denny, growing slim and tall, careful of his grammar and excessively proud of his long pants, was beginning to act the elder brother to Katy. She took it meekly and gayly.

"Well, isn't she, then?"

"You bet she is. Gee, she hates him!" "Him" always meant Uncle Matt.

"He hates her! That what I fink!" Though she was eleven Katy's quick tongue still slurred the "f's" and "th's" if she wasn't particular. "He looks at her with the meanest old eyes."

"She's the one that can look!" Denny's thoughts were filled with vague alarm for Violet. Sometimes it was 12 o'clock when he sneaked out to open the kitchen door for her. He wanted to talk about it now, but Katy, perhaps, was too young or too happy in her own glee. She pulled Denny to the window of the dry goods store.

"See that, Denny—the white dress? Ain't it beautiful?"

"Humph. Good enough."

"Wouldn't I love it, Denny! Wouldn't I love to have a dress no one ever wore before. Lizzie tears everything. When I get to be a lady I'm gonna have ten hundred dresses, all new. No one else is going to wear my clothes first. I'm gonna have a white dress with a big train a mile long."

"Aw, come. Maybe trains won't be the style."

Katy's eyes glanced tenderly at the frilly white organdie. She fancied it would be just the thing for the leader of the flower fairies.

"I know somefing, Denny," she said, rubbing her chin on her shoulder; "somefing wonderful! En it's about me! Guess!"

But Denny couldn't—then she told him.

"En I have to get a white dress."

"Aunt Josie say you could? Gee, she won't let you—she can't."

"I fink Violet can fix up a dress. I fink she can. That's why I made up the pome, Denny. I was practicing."

Denny looked at the pretty little creature and became all at once very sober. "Aw, gee!" he said out loud; then again, "Aw, gee!"

Violet tried to fix up the dress. That night she had Katy stand on a little table in the bed room as she pinned up the limp white embroidery Lizzie had worn two years before. And Katy, overjoyed at this effort, balanced on one foot, then on the other.

"For goodness sake, stand still!" Violet cried, growing impatient with her hopeless task.

"Oh, 'scuse me, Violet, you dear sing!"

"It's nothing but an old rag! There goes another rip! You might be careful of your clothes, Lizzie. You know Katy has to wear them."

Lizzie, twisting the ends of her straight, yellow hair into a curl, drew in her breath as though she intended to cry, but thought better of it.

"You're just nasty, Violet Borley. Just nasty's you can be because papa's not here. As if I can help it if my clothes wear out. Katy didn't need to be in the play—she didn't need to at all!"

"But I am in the play," Katy answered gayly. "Lizzie didn't want me to be in it, but I'm in it just the same."

Lizzie was three years older than Katy but only one grade above her. With all her heart she envied Katy's funny little ways, Katy's beautiful little face, and she imagined herself small and winsome as her cousin. The part given Katy Lizzie coveted for herself. She would have been half glad if Violet couldn't make the dress do.

Denny stood with his hands in his pockets volunteering advice. "Say, couldn't you turn it up the other way, Vee? Say, put those two ends together—"

"Oh, she'll look more like a rag picker than a fairy!"

Katy laughed. "See, Violet, I pull out the edges like this and the flowers'll cover all up the holes."

Violet had a sunny heart. She was one of those fanciful, imaginative natures who delight in giving joy especially to littler



and humbler beings. She worked hours on the dress for Katy. When it was finished Katy threw her arms about her:

"You're so good, Violet. You're just the goodest sing in the world. Me and Denny love you—true and honest we do."

But the dress had to be starched and ironed. There was the tragedy of it. The weak spots Violet had labored so long to cover gave way—the little creation came out of the tubs literally in tatters. All Aunt Josie's efforts in ironing failed to cover the holes.

"You can't be in it, Katy," she said in her drab, weary tone. "Poor child."

Katy wasn't a cry-baby, but just the same she ran into the room, hid her face a long time in the pillows. The tears wouldn't stop.

"I have to tell the teacher I haven't any dress," she told Denny that night as they walked home. "Oooh, she'll be mad. She'll be madder than anything cause I'm the leader and it's too late now, en I have to tell her the dress fell to pieces—went and fell all to pieces. That's what it did." Katy ran her fist in her eye.

"Don't you do it, Katy-kid. Don't you tell her that. Wait. You don't know. Maybe Violet can fix another—"

They were at Ramsay's, the drygoods store on Hayes street where the fluffy organdie Katy loved was still in the window. Denny stopped.

"That's it, ain't it, Katy-kid?"

"Come on, Denny, hurry. I don't care."

A battle waged in Denny's soul. The dress was marked \$4.75. He had the money, but it was to buy a sweater for himself. Nearly a year he'd been saving up. And now—just his luck—Katy's dress had to fall to pieces. He wondered if Katy really cared an awful lot.

"Say, Vee, ain't it too bad about Katy?" he suggested that night.

Violet turned the willful face with its defiant, exaggerated eyes.

"That's what you get when you're born a girl," she said abruptly, sudden tears running down her cheeks. "Poor little Katy!"

"Aw, say, Vee—" But Denny was touched—touched to the heart, though he couldn't tell why.

That evening he and Violet walked down Hayes street. Denny showed her the dress.

"Would that do, Vee—think that would do?"

"It's a dream, Denny, a dream. And I'll get some pink silk and make a little underslip. Oh, Katy'll go crazy—the dear little thing."

Coming home the next evening, Denny stepped into the store and bought the dress. The young girl who sold it said they'd fit it, or change or make it all over to suit. With a joy tenfold what the purchase of the sweater would have given him, Denny marched home, thinking to himself, "Gee, Katy'll just scream! Gee, won't she be glad!"

Poor little Katy! She was never to wear the dress—never to dance with the flower fairies.

## CHAPTER X

### KATY'S ANGEL

DENNY hid the box behind him as he brushed into the kitchen:

"'Lo—say, where's Katy? Gosh, tripe again, Aunt Josie?"

Aunt Josie was stirring tomatoes into a steaming iron saucepan whose contents filled the room with the heavy, sweetish, overpowering odor of boiling tripe. Denny felt a stir of repugnance. He wouldn't touch tripe nor would Violet, yet they had it at least once a week, for it was Matt Borley's favorite dish.

"Your uncle asked for it, Denny. But I've baked potatoes and a nice pie"—she wiped the steam from her damp, reddened face, her dull eyes smiling—"an apple pie, Denny, because you like it."

"Gee, you're a peach, Aunt Josie. Katy ain't here?"

"She's around the corner, playing over to Mason's."

Denny took the box. He had it all planned that he would make Katy guess and guess. She would have to roll the dancing eyes up and down before she'd find out.

As he went through the alley to the Mason's back yard the big acacia waved its topmost branches. There was shouting and high piping cries, then Katy's voice—all song like her mother's. Its joyous fling caught Denny with a sudden pang: "Just like Queenie," he thought, trembling—"Just like her!"

Denny thought often of the bright fairy creature who had filled his young life with sweetness; remembered her that last sad night as she had seemed to float away on the beam of golden light, the smile on her red lips. He remembered piercingly the things he had heard of her. But he did not judge her—never.

Yet, when Katy laughed like that, a pang had caught him—a pang, because Katy was just like Queenie.

The laughter rippled again—down from some far height in the air. Denny pushed the gate.

Terror froze the heart in him. Katy, her hands fluttering like gay white wings, her voice singing, balanced on the outflung

limb of the tall acacia, stood thus a moment, gleeful, unheeding—a fearful moment. Suddenly her hands grabbed wildly—a cry that struck into Denny's soul forever—the small form plunged headlong to the ground.

The children hung back in panic. But Denny was at Katy's side, her head in his arms.

Her eyes were closed, her lips still, the chestnut curls falling back from the sweet child face.

"Katy, open your eyes—can you hear me? You're not hurt—say something!"

The children began to crowd about, talking in shrill whispers: "Is Katy dead? Oooh—ain't she white!" They pressed around the motionless figure.

"Get away—can't you see—go way!" Denny's cheeks were colorless, his lips shaking. He raised Katy in his arms, crying into her ear: "Katy—Katy—open your eyes—"

The lashes lay unquivering.

Then Mrs. Mason was in the yard and Aunt Josie, with the shawl over her head, and Violet kneeling at Denny's side, rubbing Katy's hands, whispering: "Katy—dear little Katy—oh, Denny!"

"Aw, Vee—she's not dead!" Denny stooped down, scowling back the terrible tears: "Look, Vee! She's waking up. She's all right."

Violet only repeated: "Dear little Katy!"

But the blue eyes opened, bewildered:

"Denny—Denny!" A sob of relief broke from him.

"Aw, Katy—gee, you're all right! Can you get up, Katy?"

They tried to raise her, tried to set her on her feet. A spasm of pain shot over her face. She clung to Denny.

They carried her to the Borley home, laid her on a bed. Denny tried to rouse her, showed her the frilly white organdie without making her guess at all.

"Look, Katy-kid, it's for you—for the play. Glad?" He touched the limp, small hand. She didn't seem to notice. That night the doctor came.

"She'll be all right for the festival, Vee?" Denny asked as Violet came from the room. "Gee, she'd feel terrible to miss that—just terrible—"

"Maybe she'll be up, Denny." Violet was crying. "The doctor doesn't know."

"Aw, gee! I don't know what to do. She can't miss that!"

Katy lay on a cot in the hospital, her little body in a plaster cast the day she was to have sung her "pome" and trouped so gayly in the lead of the flower fairies. Her spine was injured.

For months she lay there. Denny was at high school now but he went every day to see her. Eyes darkened with pain sparkled when he entered the room. Katy put down the dolls or the books the nurses were always bringing her and laughed just for the joy of seeing him. The other children in the ward watched enviously.

"Ain't you jest the goodest sing in the world, Denny!"

"Aw, Katy, quit saying 'ain't,'" Denny grinned sheepishly. "Gee, you look fine to-day, Katy."

"En I feel fine, too. What's in the bag, Denny? Cream-puffs?"

"Chocolate wafers." They ate them together—but first they gave some to the mournful little girl in the next cot. She'd been there a year and never had laughed till Katy was placed next to her and in the mornings double-crossed her eyes and wrinkled her chin up like a nut to amuse this unhappy little Flora Michels.

Denny told Katy all his triumphs. He won the debate at school, and he guessed he'd make the football team. Katy's thin, white face grew rosy with pride, for Denny was so tall and mighty looking it seemed to her. She longed to walk down Hayes street with him and have every one turn around to stare.

"Like to come home, Katy?"

"En I'm coming pretty quick, Denny! Soon's ever they take this cast off. I'll just run and run and run. Violet didn't come for a long time, Denny."

"She's pretty busy, Katy. She's got a surprise for you—"

Violet, growing prettier yet more restless and willful with each year that passed leaving her still in Matt Borley's crude home, had taken the little parlor—it had never been used—and fitted it up as her "sitting room." To herself she called it "my boudoir."

There was a golden oak folding bed bought at an auction for \$6.75; two golden oak rockers, a table with a scarf Violet had embroidered in orange and brown and in the corner a bureau with pictures of actors and actresses in silver frames.

The walls were Violet's joy. They were tinted a pale amber, and there was the picture of two lovers kissing in the moon-

light—a print of Joan of Arc, another highly colored copy of a bride coming down a broad staircase and several Gibson drawings of very handsome young men wooing beautiful girls.

This wonder room—Katy was to share. Denny had done the tinting and hung all the pictures.

The day the cast was taken off he got a horse and buggy to drive Katy home. He waited in the corridors with Aunt Josie. The doctor passed.

“She can leave any time now,” he said.

“How soon can she walk?” Denny interrupted. The doctor’s face blanched.

“Well, lad. Well, I don’t know—well, probably not for a long while—probably not at all.”

“Not at all! Never again—” The life went out of his voice—he leaned against the wall.

“Well, poor lad”—the doctor took his hand—“we can hope—”

But when Denny saw them bringing Katy to the buggy in a wheel chair and they lifted her to the seat he couldn’t look into the joyous violet eyes; he couldn’t stand that smile on her lips.

She caught his arm in her hands, pressed her cheek against it:

“Ain’t you gladder’n anysing, Denny? Won’t we have the good times, again!”

He bent his head down quick and cried. Katy wouldn’t have it.

“You ain’t crying for me, Denny? Doncher do it! I’m jest as glad as I can be. And last night, know what I dreamed? Oooh, the loveliest angel came right up to my pillow and luffed down and said: ‘Hello, Katy-kid—here, just touch my wings—now—you’re all better.’ En I touched them, Denny. En it’s true—every bit of it. En I believe in angels—you’ll see, you’ll see!”

There was Katy’s singing laughter. Denny pulled at the reins, ashamed of the trembling in his chin.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE LITTLE CRIPPLE

"WELL, she's here, Vee! We got her home anyhow!"

Denny, exerting all his strength, carried tiny Katy to the kitchen.

Violet threw her arms around Katy, kissed her happily.

This was even finer than Katy had dreamed. Clean cloth and marigolds on the table, and heavy little Martha pushing a stiff bouquet of marguerites into Katy's hand, and Lizzie, her yellow braid brought over her shoulder, saying loftily:

"Here's for you, Katy!" Done up in a paper package was the tiny sewing basket Katy had always wanted.

"For keeps, Lizzie? Do you mean it?"

"Yes, and I won't take it back."

They were so glad to have her with them. There was laughing as they began to eat. Only Aunt Josie seemed worried. Denny watched her, an angry light in his young eyes. He remembered, as though it were yesterday, and not six years before, that she had glanced just this anxiously toward the door, her big worn face flushed, when she had brought him to Uncle Matt's after Queenie died. He wondered what she feared now. All the fight in him rose.

Matt came in. A strained hush. Almost the identical words he used when Denny came:

"You would do it, wouldn't you!" His bulldog face lowered at Katy. She shrank back, all quivering and ready to cry with fear. "You would bring her! I haven't enough brats to keep. Who's to look after the lousy little cripple?"

As though the massive hands struck right and left, Denny jumped to his feet, lips drawn and trembling:

"I'm to look after her! And don't you dare call my sister a cripple! Don't you dare!" Matt's face grew purple with the shock. He doubled his fists, thought better of it and shook his finger in Denny's face:

"See that you do, upstart! By God, I'll see that you do!"

Violet's face was haunting in its white, stony defiance. As her father went into the hall, she put her arm around Katy. She said quietly to her mother:

"Some day I'll kill him!"

"Violet!"

"I will! Don't cry, Katy-kid. You're going to sleep with me—wait till you see where. Never mind that dirty bully!"

Because it was her nature to laugh and to please, Katy looked up, the violet eyes sparkling with tears:

"I can go back, Aunt Josie. The nurses said so; they said they'd love to keep me forever, didn't they, Denny?"

In the next few days Katy forgot her sorrow. It was summer. In the mornings Denny carried her into the back yard—all the children in the neighborhood thronged to see and to pay homage to this new Katy.

"I can't walk," Katy announced making her eyes wide and pathetic, but her heart thumping with great distinction. "Can only stand up—can't walk at all!"

She knew she was envied and reigned like a little Queen of the May, accepting the games, the flowers, pictures and books with a delicious grace. Katy found it a rare and wonderful thing to be the "little lame girl."

But there came a time when she was no longer a novelty. Then there were long, tiresome hours alone. Katy took to dreaming—she did fancy work for Violet and Lizzie. As she stitched, imagination carried her on bright, happy pinions.

"Guess, Denny," she cried one morning. "The funniest thing—I jest luffed right out in my sleep. I dreamed about the angel—the very same one and she said again: 'Hello, there, Katy-kid! You're all right!' And I touched her wings. Sure enough this morning I could walk. Honest—I took a step. Pretty soon you won't have to carry me any more."

Denny never looked at Katy when she talked in this blithe, happy way. He wanted to double up his fists and fight.

What would he fight? The chance that dashed Katy from the tree?

Yet he felt wronged, and when Katy talked of angels he could have mocked, but he wouldn't hurt her. He wouldn't take away her dream.

A year passed—two. Katy could take but a few steps, yet her hope persisted, sang and grew strong like a sweet, immortal bird within her. Whenever Denny asked: "Tired to death,



Katy-kid, staying around here all day?" she laughed gayly: "Tired? I pretend I'm a queen on a throne and you and Violet are my servants. Violet's so good to me, Denny!"

Violet kept her promise. Katy slept with her in the "boudoir," and every night she managed to be home to help Katy to bed. Sometimes the two of them went with Denny to the old Central, and once even to the Orpheum. The littlest joy kept Katy happy for weeks.

"When I'm married, Katy," Violet planned in her airy moods, "I'm to have a phaeton and horse. On Sundays we'll drive in the park."

To Violet marriage loomed as a luminous wishing-gate. She would enter and all gifts be given her. She was a stevedore's daughter and a salesgirl, yet there waited for her somewhere a magnificent hero like one of those Gibson drawings adorning her wall.

This she believed with all a pretty young girl's high-pulsing trust in the future.

Yet Violet was twenty-two, the hero hadn't appeared. The butcher and a young bricklayer paid her ardent though clandestine attention. Violet scorned this commonplace masculinity.

"I'd die," Denny heard her tell Aunt Josie. "I'd die twice before I'd marry such trash!"

Poor Violet with her sweet, willful graces—her young contempt for the mean and shabby—

That year the earthquake came and the fire with its thousand red, flaming tongues licking up half of Hayes Valley, leaving the dingy Borley home blistered and shaken in the midst of brick piles and ashes. This year of chaos and ruin brought **The Man to Violet.**

The store where Violet worked was burned; its new quarters not yet thrown together. So she was home.

No fires could be made in kitchen stoves. Nabob and hod-carrier alike had his terrapin or stew cooked on the streets.

Denny and his uncle built a rough shed on the sidewalk. There were rows of these sheds—one in front of each home. They moved out the stove.

In this little street kitchen Violet, delighting in the hubbub and excitement, the running to and fro, did most of the cooking. And here Clyde Dunstan did his courting.

Except that his chin was somewhat small and pointed, Clyde might have been one of those very Gibson men, dark and fin-

ished-looking, that Violet so admired, or he might have been a *matinée* idol.

Denny saw him one day leaning against the shed, his large, soft eyes laughing into Violet's. Then he raised his hand with a fine, gallant sweep and brushed back his heavy hair.

Denny, grown tall and big shouldered, with a square, fighting jaw and young, tender eyes like Katy's felt himself rough, uncouth, before the smooth charm of this older man. Besides, he was grimy with soot and ash, for he had been cleaning bricks; Mr. Dunstan had white hands and trim clothes.

"Well?" Violet asked when he was gone. Her face kept flushing. Denny had never seen her so pretty, never such a warm gladness in her haunting eyes. "Do you like Mr. Dunstan, Denny?"

"Handsome, isn't he? He's different."

"Isn't he, though! He's what I call a man—and educated, Denny!"

Nearly every afternoon after this Clyde Dunstan strolled by and spent an hour or so talking to Violet. Denny noticed that she wore her prettiest waists and her hair bewitchingly on the top of her head.

Once Matt Borley, out of work and drinking whenever he got the liquor, turned the corner. Violet dismissed her caller abruptly, tried to dart into the house.

"No, you don't!" her father roared. "I've had my eye on you, you chippy. Don't let that lazy dude come 'round here again or I'll fix him!"

Burning with shame, Violet's eyes flew after Clyde. He was beyond earshot. She faced her father, silent, defiant.

Often after this Denny noticed she had been crying. A week passed. He hadn't seen Clyde. The sadness in Violet's face pierced him to the heart.

"She must love him," he said to Katy one night when she was sewing a button on his coat. "What do you think?"

Katy looked up, her eyes full of tears.

"She did. But I'm glad. I'm just as glad as I can be he's gone."

Denny was puzzled and a little frightened.

"Why, Katy-kid?"

"He isn't good. And Violet is. And one day I saw him—I couldn't tell you—"

"What, Katy-kid!"

“Well, he kissed Violet. It was in the basement. He grabbed her in his arms and he said: ‘You little beauty, I’m going to run away with you.’ Violet laughed. Then he kissed her and kissed her. It made me cry. Oh, I don’t like him, Denny—

“Violet knew I heard. She knew I saw. Afterwards she came out and knelt down and pressed her face against my hands. I told her I thought it was wrong—just wrong. She looked up, oh, so sad, Denny, and said: ‘No, it’s not wrong, Katy-kid. I love him! Oh, how I love him!’ She hid her face again and said: ‘Pray to the angel for me, Katy—will you? Will you?’”

Violet had need of Katy’s angel and Katy’s prayers.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE GIBSON MAN

THE purest and the sweetest fibers of our nature are often those that make the noose to hang our spirit.

Had Violet Borley been created coarse-grained, destitute of fancy as her sister Lizzie, she would have gone doggedly from the dingy, ill-smelling kitchen of her father to an equally stale abode of her husband. Her days would have been unstirred by yearning; untroubled by remorse; lacking the imagination to step either up or down—a contented clod.

But into the fabric of her being were woven fine, sensitive threads. She glimpsed her vision of beauty, became one of those impelled to seek, to strive.

What if some must fail? What if they must see these holy strands defiled? There is a magnificence, at least, in having dreamed and hungered; a hope for the race, though a tragic one, in all these "might have beens."

Clyde Dunstan symbolized for Violet the noble—the men, gentle and strong, of romance. What she missed so poignantly in her father, in the butcher and the bricklayer, she thought to find in him.

There was something reckless in her nature, or perhaps only the young impulse to seize the little happiness that came her way. Despite her father's rough warning her visitor soon returned to the street kitchen. The fated happened.

Denny, coming home sometimes in the afternoon, would see her, flushed, high-spirited, wearing some pretty lace collar, some gay pink bow, talking intimately to this sleek, dark fellow with his indolent charm, his soft, almost feminine brown eyes.

Sometimes Denny listened to Violet's talk, laughing inwardly and afterwards twitting her. For she brought out all her fictions for Clyde Dunstan's consumption. For him she was the Violet of her dreams.

"Oh, yes, mother's people were quite wealthy,"—this was one of them—"but, of course, when she married father, they cut her off without a cent. It made it hard for her."

Even Matt came in for a glowing sketch or two:

"He thinks I'm a child. Mother says it's because he's really so fond of me that he gives me no liberty. I suppose he does love me—"

It made the disillusion all the more shocking in its gross brutality.

As Denny came home one noontime a scuffling, a fury of angry voices reached him.

He saw Violet, a great dish of mashed potatoes heaped in a snowy turret, recoil, laughter freezing in her throat. Matt Borley hunched over her, his fist shaking.

"What did I tell you! Damn chippy! Thought I was gone, eh! Beat it, you cheap dude!"

"Father! Why, father!" Violet's face blazed in an agony of shame, but she tried valiantly to save her dignity before Clyde Dunstan.

"Don't father me! Get in! I'll fix you!" He was cuffing right and left; the triumphant dish of mashed potatoes went flying to the street. Dunstan stepped back.

Violet ran into the house, crying, rocking her arms. Denny followed.

"Aw, say, Vee!" But she wouldn't listen. She was insensate with grief, talked wildly: "God—isn't this frightful! I could kill myself. Oh, God!"

"Gee, Violet, don't feel like this. Listen—he's drunk. Clyde won't care. It'll all blow over. Say, Vee—don't cry."

She was past comfort. The peak of injury and humiliation was reached.

That night Violet wasn't home for dinner. At midnight she had not come in.

Hours later Denny woke up frightened, imagining he heard a sob outside his window. The kitchen clock was striking three. Three o'clock—Violet had not returned.

He lay with his hands clasped under his head, listening with all his heart. And trying not to think.

But Denny was seventeen. He kept saying: "Wonder what can be keeping her? Wonder where she went." All the time he guessed terrible things. He bit his lips and said over and over: "Dirty shame—gee, what a dirty shame!" He could have sprung from the bed and throttled Matt Borley and laughed about it.

Suddenly he sat up, hearing voices—Violet's voice. It sounded as though Violet were shivering; as though she were

covering against the wall and shivering: "Clyde—oh, Clyde."

"Hush—they'll hear."

"What shall I do, Clyde? Oh, God—oh, my God!"

"Hush—go in—"

But this seemed to make her hysterical. She said, sobbing: "Go in? No, I can't. I never can."

"Then come back. Come with me—"

"Oh, NO! NO!"

At this moment the cord tied to Denny's wrist jerked violently. It sent a spasm to his heart. He crept to the kitchen and without looking at Violet, whispered: "Gee, you're late. Get in quick, Vee!"

She had her head down, and suddenly her hands—her two little hands, cold as ice, touched his pleadingly.

He gulped: "Gee, cold, Vee?"

She kept her head down and made some faint, sobbing assent. Suddenly she recoiled: "Look, Denny, look!"

Before either could turn, Matt Borley's huge form loomed in the doorway. He lurched drunkenly against them.

"Come back, have you? Come crying back! Crying outside the window. Three o'clock in the morning— Think you'll crawl back? No, you don't!"

Violet was caught like a bird in the maw of a beast. With his free hand Matt Borley struck. He struck Violet in the face. He cursed her and struck furiously on her white, helpless face.

Murder lit like a torch in Denny's brain. He flung between the two. He rained blows. And suddenly, enraged at his futility, he dashed behind, leaped and clung to Matt Borley's back, driving wild young fingers choking against the stevedore's massive throat. He sobbed: "Go, Violet. Run now!"

And for an instant, feeling that brutal throat yielding in his fingers, he went mad with exultation. . . . He pressed harder, laughing—

Suddenly Matt hunched. He made a blind, plowing run—ferocious—a gorilla meaning to smash Denny against the wall.

His bare drunken feet slipped on the wet kitchen floor. He went down with a resounding crash, striking his head against the table.

Denny held a basin of water while Aunt Josie, kneeling on the floor, bathed her husband's face. She wiped blood from his eyes. Her big, coarse hands were shaking.

Without looking at Denny, she said, frightened: "What have you done?" She said this again and again.

Denny gave no answer. His heart sang with a secret exultation. He had triumphed at last. And all that cruelty that had so outraged his youth was paid for now. Denny was the little boy again—a boy, kicking and screaming at a door. Behind that door Matt Borley was killing Prince Jerry. And a little fellow, nine, could only stamp piteously and cry— Now the score was evened. He had felled that hulking brute. A sense of triumph and power thrilled him.

Mechanically he brought fresh water. Matt opened his eyes. . . . Seeing Denny he began to curse—he struck out blindly with his fists. "I'll get you! Damn you, Josie, this is your doing. I'll fix her!" He made a reeling effort to stand. . . .

Aunt Josie threw herself against him, imploring softly—"Denny—go—lock Violet's door. . . . Stay there—"

Denny reached and barricaded Violet's door. Clothes were scattered about. All the bureau drawers were emptied.

Katy sat on the edge of the bed—wide-eyed.

"Where's Vee?"

"Gone. . . . She ran in here and cried and threw things in a suit case and I said: 'Oh, Vee, where you going?' and she said: 'God—God!' and put her hands over her face and went."

## CHAPTER XIII

### "TURNED OUT"

DENNY's mouth, just losing its boyish sweetness, set resolutely.

"Get dressed, Katy-kid! We can't stay here."

"Not now, Denny? Not going in the dark?"

"Now."

"You can't take me— Oh, can you take me, Denny?"

"Would I leave you here with him?"

A low frightened tap at the door.

"Violet, open it. He's asleep."

Denny pushed the bureau. Aunt Josie, her broad face streaked with tears, looked miserably at Denny. She had her hair pulled tight in a short braid; her dull, anxious eyes filmed with terror.

"Where is she, Denny? You must go—both of you before he wakes up. Quick—Gawd keep this house from murder! Violet, come here—oh, my poor girl!"

"She's gone, Aunt Josie."

"Where, Denny? Alone?"

"I don't know—"

She clapped her rough hands to her head, standing there in her nightgown, the tattered shawl drawn about her bulky shoulders,—shuddering and crying.

Denny turned his back. Finally he said:

"She'll be all right, Aunt Josie. Violet's all right."

She met his sympathy dumbly.

"Denny—poor child—get your things."

"Katy has to come—"

"Leave Katy with me—"

Man though he felt himself, Denny's chin doubled up: "You know him, Aunt Josie. He'd hurt her—"

"Let me go with him—dear Aunt Josie—poor, dear Aunt Josie—I better go with Denny— We'll find Violet and she'll stay with us too. . . ."

Without a word Aunt Josie brought Katy's clothes to the bed.



As Denny went into his own room he saw his uncle sprawled on the kitchen floor, a dirty red comforter thrown over him, his mouth open and the dark hair growing so low on his forehead matted with blood. He snored—hoarse, choking sounds like some huge, uncouth animal. With a wrench of utter loathing, Denny closed the door.

As he dumped his few clothes to the bed, wrapped them in a newspaper, he kept thinking, “Vee, poor Vee! Where’d she go? Wonder where she went—”

Not till he saw Katy with a little red hat that only half hid the bright chestnut curls and didn’t hide at all the fear on her sweet child face—not till then did a pang twist Denny. Then he thought dryly and with alarm, “Where’ll we go? . . . Lord—wonder where we’ll go—”

Aunt Josie brought Katy’s chair from the basement. She looked furtively to the neighboring houses, fearful lest any should see the leaving. Then she put a bundle in Katy’s lap.

“To-morrow or the next day you’ll bring her back, Denny. You’ll both come back. He’ll be over it then.”

Denny didn’t answer, but he let Aunt Josie hold him in her arms, let her kiss him, feeling a sudden rush of gratitude, of deep tenderness to the drab, inarticulate woman standing at the old broken gate—standing there pulling the shawl about her—immense tears filling her kind, dull eyes. . . .

She called Denny back: “If you see Violet— Oh, Denny—”  
 “Sure—We’ll find her. . . . Sure, Aunt Josie. . . .”

At the corner he turned and waved to the gray bulky figure mute as a shadow against the house.

He bit his lips—“Poor Aunt Josie.”

Across the street were the charred ruins of that whole row of houses. In the dim moonlight, chimneys stuck out darkly like the trunks of dead trees. Katy shivered. Her little hand reached up and covered his. “They look like ghosts, Denny,”

“Ghosts are white.”

But she kept her hand on his, afraid of the dark; afraid of the ruins and the bleak chimney piles; afraid of the gray encompassing nowhere into which they were rushing. They came to the hills.

“Where are we going, Denny?”

“To the park—just till morning.”

Alamo Square at the peak of the Hayes Street hills, dotted

with tents as some ancient war camp, was a little city of refugees. Denny pushed the wheel chair to a vacant space on the grassy slope.

"Not afraid here, are you, Katy-kid? You can even hear them snore. Gee, listen to that!"

From the tent just behind them came a thin, long-drawn wheeze, followed immediately by a shrill, angry: "Stop that!" The wheeze was repeated, prolonged. Again came the indignant order: "Stop!" The duet grew noisier, sending them into gales of laughter.

"Not scared now?" Denny wrapped a blanket Aunt Josie had given him around her, spread another on the ground for himself:

"Go to sleep, Katy. I'll stay awake."

"Not for anything!"

But her head was soon drooping on her shoulder. Denny sat at her feet.

The moon swam in dark, misty fogs, fogs drifted about the short trees with a still, ghostly rhythm—something sad and uncertain in their vagueness Denny watched. Suddenly he thought of Violet.

He had Katy's hand in his. A great pity stirred him. Poor Violet! Poor, little Katy!

The picture of his uncle with the dirty red comforter thrown over him, came forbiddingly before him.

One brutal recollection succeeded another in the epic of cruelty making up his boyhood. . . . Aunt Josie's patient face slapped; Violet, her full, white neck thrown back, the whip curving; most searing of all—Prince Jerry. Denny could still cry over that. Matt Borley was the living devil in a world that might have been clean and glad except for him. But Denny had closed the kitchen door on that sprawling form—closed it forever. He had shut out the bestial—the vicious.

A new world—strong, beautiful, was before him. This he believed with the untried, flaming zeal of seventeen. The forces that had made Matt Borley what he was would never again touch Denny Brooks.

Life could be a mighty thing. Joy in the days. Katy and he would find it. He'd take care of her. He'd find Violet too. An infinite tenderness flowed through him—a longing to do something kind; something great; something that would forever mark him apart from all his uncle was.

In the east leaden streaks widened to pale, dim bars of light. And these grew softly amber, flashed rose and blue and crimson. Katy sat upright:

“Oh, Denny, what’s that?”

“Why, Katy—the day coming up! Just a new day beginning.”

## CHAPTER XIV

### FIRE DAYS

THE seven o'clock bells were ringing. From the tents women with their hair down their backs, water pitchers in their hands, began a procession to the faucets. They laughed, yawned—their slippers shuffled. Babies were crying, dogs barking, mothers scolding—the park was going through the rasping ordeal of arising.

Suddenly the flap of the tent whence the nocturnal duet had proceeded was pushed open. A rotund little woman with very round eyes, her hair frizzed in heavy bangs, and wearing a tight black sateen waist, stepped out, knelt briskly on the ground and laid sticks for a fire. When she had fanned and blown it to a good blaze she set a coffee pot at the side and a frying pan on top. Into this she dropped half a dozen small meat balls.

Katy, tickled by the prim, abrupt movements, nudged Denny and began shooting her eyes east and west like the roly-poly woman in black sateen did. She stopped quickly; the woman had fixed her brisk glance on the two of them, announcing in a tight decisive tone:

“New neighbors! Do tell! Come in on us in the night! New neighbors!” She spoke in a sharp, exclamatory tone.

Immediately from the interior of the tent came very indignantly: “New neighbors! Do tell!”

The little woman poked her head behind the flap saying soothingly: “Hush, Louisa!”

“Hush yourself, Delia! New neighbors—do tell!”

Katy began to laugh—but Delia blushed, apologizing to Denny in a whisper: “Don't mind Louisa. My parrot, you know. Burned out. Were you?”

“Well, just about.”

“Do tell? But where have you been all this time? Oh, I see—the little girl was hurt. Didn't you save a thing? Not a thing?”

Her tone intimated that the less they saved, the higher she would esteem them. Denny was non-committal:

"We have some blankets and clothes."

"Lost everything else? Just like me. Oh, well—fewer burdens!" She stood up, resting her thumbs lightly on her soft, fat hips, went into the tent and came out with two slices of ham. "Bring the little girl over. Plenty here and welcome."

When Denny hesitated she bounced over to Katy, pushed her chair to the fire:

"The idea! Do tell!" Katy was overjoyed, warmed to the heart by the odd, explosive friendliness.

"This is very kind in you," she said politely: "Denny and I thank you."

"Oh—so his name is Denny, is it? And what's yours? Katy? Wonder they didn't call you Bluebell. My name is Terkle—Mrs. Delia Terkle. Have a meat ball." She dropped one on Katy's plate, two on Denny's: "So you're going to camp here, are you?"

Denny seized the suggestion: "Just for a while, Mrs. Terkle—until we can find rooms."

"Indeed! Rooms, indeed! Do tell—you'll have a search. As though Delia Terkle would be living in the park if rooms were to be had!"

The saucer-like eyes wagged this way and that and Mrs. Terkle chewed vigorously. Katy was a little alarmed.

"Course, Denny doesn't know, Mis' Delia," she offered in a soothing, confidential tone. "We don't know a bit whatever in the world to do—"

"If we could get a tent here for a while—" Denny suggested casually.

"Well, you can't!" Mrs. Terkle interrupted with an air of triumph. "Didn't the Conatys sleep on the grass for a week till strangers took them in? There's not a tent to be had in the city!" She put down her coffee cup, to pat Katy's hand:

"Don't worry, Bluebell! I've arranged things before; I'll arrange them now!"

Like a tin soldier, exuberant with authority, she went bustling into the tent. Denny whispered hurriedly to Katy. There was much making of faces, frowning and giggling between them, but they decided to accept the odd Mrs. Terkle's hospitality for a day or two. When she came forth Katy announced with sweet formality:

"This is orful good in you, Mis' Delia—just orful nice, ain't it, Denny?"

"We're much obliged," Denny added, manfully, but Delia breezed away his grown-up airs with an abrupt:

"Tut, lad, bring over the blankets." To the women who were passing she called familiarly: "New neighbors, folks. Think of it—slept on the grass all night. Burned out? Well, I should say!"

Mrs. Delia moved Katy into the sun, gave her a strip of linen with holly berries stamped on it to embroider and told a vivid tale of Katy's misfortune, Denny's heroism to all who would listen. The purely imaginative yarn was soon carried from tent to tent. Katy found herself a person of delightful importance.

"Think it's all right to stay here for a while, Katy?" Denny asked the second morning.

"Oh, I love it, Denny! Isn't Delia the angel? I'm gonna laff right in her face. I can feel it coming on. But where you going, Denny?"

He wore his overalls and cap.

"To work, if you're not afraid. Think you're all right here?"

"With Delia and those orful round eyes? Course I am!"

The sun made the bright chestnut hair glist with red and gold; the pure joyous eyes like soft jewels. Yet Katy, for her fourteen years, seemed childlike as the day Denny won the doll and put it in her arms. He looked at the sweet, winsome face and the tenderness that had astonished him the first morning, rushed to his heart. He would have to take care of her. You bet he would!

And Denny had only ten dollars. The rest, earned cleaning bricks, he had given Aunt Josie. He must make more. They couldn't live in a park forever.

Yet he was half afraid to leave Katy alone. He walked down the path—came back.

"Sure you're not afraid, Katy?"

Katy was sure.

The day was filled with excitement—young girls prancing in and out of the tents, their hair elaborately combed; babies toddling and falling; old men and women, wrapped in blankets, sitting on the ground, retelling in loudening voices, like ancient Homers, the lurid accounts of their experiences. Camp fires smoked, beans boiled, little boys kept running from the bread

line proudly displaying innumerable cans of corned beef and mackerel. Katy felt as though she were at a show.

There was the young man across the road who sang, without ceasing, "Just Break the News to Mother." And the robust girl in the garish pink waist and high French heels who stepped out with the air of a duchess, greeted Katy with a light, "Say, dearie, would you mind holding the baby for a while? I have to go on an errand." Without more ado, she flopped the child into Katy's arms, walked off without a care in the world and didn't return till seven o'clock that evening.

There was plenty to amuse and distract. Katy was happy as a bird. Denny no longer worried about her. He slept on a mattress outside the tent, feeling himself a man—the protector of Katy. Yet sensing no burdens in this fine, happy-go-lucky existence.

Life was much freer and gayer here than in the Borley kitchen. Denny had sneaked back the second day, eager for some word of Violet. Aunt Josie wiped the immense tears from her eyes, shook her head in her mute, piercing way. Matt was still on the rampage. She was afraid he might see Denny.

"She hasn't sent a word, Denny, not a single word. Oh, my poor girl! But I thought you'd see her, Denny. I was sure you'd see her."

Denny had no idea where Violet might be. Aunt Josie kept looking fearfully to the hall where her husband might enter.

"Go, Denny. Don't let him see you. He's wild. I can't let you in. Go now—"

He was glad to be away—felt a bonny gladness rising at the thought of Mrs. Terkle with her skimpy black waist, her generous heart; and Katy laughing right in her face, saying:

"Oh, you're so funny, Mis' Delia!" It was like a vacation in the country.

Katy was making friends with every one—why, she hardly needed Denny—

Toward the end of the week he came home jubilant. It was his duty to stand in line every evening for provisions. This night the man in charge nodded mysteriously.

"Guess you can take care of this, young fellow," he said with a pleasant wink, and gave Denny a big ham. As no one else received one, Denny took it as a special tribute to his winning manner and thought how he'd boast of it to Katy.

He was a block from the park. Some one was running

toward him. It was Mrs. Terkle. With a chill premonition Denny dashed toward her. She caught his arm, tried to speak, the frizzed hair bobbing.

“Wheeled away—Bluebell—wheeled away.”

Denny grew faint with terror.

“Not Katy—not Katy!”

But that was it. Some one had wheeled Katy away. Only a little girl of five had seen it—had seen a woman talking to Katy, talking quite a while and then, suddenly turning, wheeling her swiftly from the park.



## CHAPTER XV

### THE NEW HOME

"You looked everywhere—everywhere—sure?"

Denny didn't know what he said, but only that thought, life itself, went sinking in a wild, half-fainting despair. Katy wheeled away—was she sure? It was as though a hand, mysterious and shadowy, had reached from the nowhere and taken her from him.

"You must find her—find her—"

Denny dashed from the little woman, ran breathlessly to the park. Scores of women thronged about the tent, made way as he came. They brought up the little girl who had seen.

Yes, she knew. "It was down that way. Right down that way they went."

Denny followed the pointing finger. A youngster was sitting on the stone wall at the entrance to the park.

"Did you see a girl in a wheel chair go by?" He spoke so breathlessly he had to repeat it twice, then the child shook his head stoically.

Denny ran down the block, stopped every one he saw—told the policeman, demanding that Katy be found. A boy of ten volunteered:

"I saw her, mister. She went down Fulton."

A block farther on a woman had seen. She sent Denny in the opposite direction. Mad with fear, he darted up one block, down another. Others were searching. A little crowd followed Denny.

Suddenly a young girl caught his sleeve: "There! There!"

Half a block distant a woman pushed a chair. Denny closed his eyes, ran.

"Katy!" Unable to speak he caught her shoulders, looked frantically into the brimming eyes. The little hands, the little body trembled, but relief radiant as a smile shone on her face.

"I'm all right! All right!"

The woman who had wheeled her stood with white, stony face; white, set lips.

"Yes," she said grimly, "she's all right. My sister took her.

She lost her little girl in the fire. She thinks every child in a buggy or chair is hers. She didn't hurt her. We're sorry!"

She turned with a hard swiftness as the crowd, flurried, eager, pressed about Katy, asking a hundred questions. Denny shoved them off. Katy's hands pressed with all their might on his. She was crying.

At last they were in the tent; Delia Terkle, her round eyes twinkling with tears, had Katy in her arms, blaming herself, begging Denny not to be angry. Katy wasn't hurt, but she was hysterical with fright.

"It was my own fault, Denny. I never thought. I wasn't afraid a bit, at first. She talked nice and said her mother was lonely and would love to see me. She just wanted to wheel me around the block. She kept going and going. Then I said it was too far, but she stopped at the house and carried me in. She held me in her arms, wouldn't let me go. I tried to get away. She was so big I couldn't. I screamed and screamed. There was no one home till her sister came. She took me right out. Now, you're all worried. It didn't hurt me at all."

The incident, trifling though it was, shook Denny to the heart. He was a fine fellow to go strolling along and leave a little thing like Katy alone in a public park. Not what a man should do!

He sat laughing and cheering Katy, but his thought flashed with hot resolution. He'd have to find a decent home for her. To-night!

Where? With half the city burned—besides, he knew no one. His life was destitute of friendships.

After Sid left, there was no one but Violet and Aunt Josie. They were gone now. Who else?

Suddenly he remembered the woman who had given him cookies and taken him to sleep in her house the night Queenie died. Old Lady Traynor—he had noped she would take him before Aunt Josie came. Perhaps he and Katy could live with her. Denny would pay. As though it were settled he broke into a rollicking laugh and rubbed his hands together.

"Gee, Katy-kid, I've got it—remember the fat old woman that lived across the street?"

He wouldn't wait. As soon as they had eaten he took Katy and Mrs. Terkle, went out to the old block on McAllister Street where the carefree days of Denny's life with his mother were spent.

Queenie's flat looked the very same as that time he had stormed the door—that terrible day. As Denny passed, memory surged—memories he had for years evaded—Sid with his cane, his yellow gloves and the money in his pocket. To-night he thought gently of Sid; wondered where he was; if he had gone to Alaska and found the gold mine.

His feet lagged as he stood opposite the old home haunted by Queenie's witching image; Queenie's gay sweetness. He didn't want to face this every morning; every night. But he went up to Old Lady Traynor's and rang the bell.

The Traynors had moved. They were living in a small yellow cottage on Oak Street. So they went there.

"There'll never be room enough here," Denny thought with misgivings as the door opened and the ample figure of Mrs. Traynor filled the passage. Denny recognized in an instant the hearty kindness of the open face with its homey, comfortable double chin. She seemed younger to him now than in that long ago. But he was a stranger to her.

"Land sakes, Little Denman Brooks! You don't tell me—well, well!" She was all warmth and hospitality. "Do I remember—well now! Well, now—you've given me a start."

He gave her a bigger shock when he explained his errand. Yet it was arranged.

Hardest of all for Denny was to tell of Katy's injury. He could never say, "My sister is crippled," or even, "Katy is lame." He never thought of her as handicapped. Katy had been hurt—she was slow to recover but he saw her often standing before the little mirror in Violet's "boudoir" combing her hair—standing straight, slender as a tiny fairy. He saw her again taking her few steps, her eyes bright, filled with faith. It was thus he saw her in his mind.

"Why, the dear child, she's Queenie Brooks all over again except for the blue eyes and the light hair," Mrs. Traynor said, coming down to Katy. "But you don't remember your mother, Denny."

"Yes—everything. I remember everything about her."

"Ah, but Katy doesn't. So you want to live with Old Lady Traynor?"

"If you'd be so good." Katy's shy formality ended with an eager: "Oh, you're going to let us come?"

The next day they moved into the little yellow cottage. Denny was given the back parlor where Mrs. Traynor's son had

slept before his marriage. It was dark, but Denny wouldn't be there in the daytime.

Such a room as Katy had! The "company" room—not much bigger than a closet but the golden sun streaming through the ruffled dotted Swiss curtains, brightening the walls with their prim garlands of pink roses, their family pictures in round wooden frames. It was the hanging brass bowl with long streamers of wandering Jew—and the splendid crazy-quilt on the low mahogany bed that filled Katy's soul with rapture. The quilt was redolent with the essence of lavender, and the quaint room with the essence of peace.

"It's as good as being Cinderella," she whispered happily to Denny. "Don't you just hope she'll like us and let us stay forever and ever? Don't let's get put out again, Denny!"

It was such a home as Denny remembered in his childhood—full of laughter, of easy pleasantness; only here was order as well as joy. For himself and Katy, Denny paid Mrs. Traynor thirty-five dollars a month.

Old Mr. Traynor, a jolly, red-faced, bald-headed little man, reaching to his wife's shoulder, was a retired carpenter. He had a great store of flat but good-natured jokes and actually expanded now at the chance of telling them to a new audience. Every night after he finished his meat he would have two pieces of bread and gravy. He ate this slowly and with great relish, telling his yarns as he chewed. Katy laughed till tears ran down her cheeks. This tickled the old man mightily. But when Denny spoke he listened with the deference due a man of the world. Denny blushed with pride.

After dinner they sat around the dining room table and played casino. Precisely at ten o'clock Mrs. Traynor went into the kitchen, brought out cookies or cup cakes with cider, lemonade or milk.

"You're just spoiling us," Katy would say.

The old lady laughed with pleasure, answering always:

"Nonsense! Young bodies need building." Then she went to the little piano in the corner under the bird cage, smoothed out her white apron, rubbed her stiff fingers and played, "Lead Kindly Light."

Mr. Traynor, his hand on his chest, sang in a thin, quavering bass, sometimes stopping to listen as Katy's joyous soprano chimed with Denny's uncertain tenor.

All this gentleness touched the deepest springs of Denny's

nature. He felt that he had done something great in bringing Katy here. His spirits overran with young exuberance.

Especially after a hasty visit to Aunt Josie. One day he found her silent—bitterly cowed. There was word of Violet.

## CHAPTER XVI

### DENNY'S CHANCE

"WHAT does it mean, Denny?" From the pocket of her voluminous plaid skirt Aunt Josie drew a pale pink envelope, shoved it across the kitchen table to Denny. "Why did she go there?"

Denny read the pathetic sentences twice. Aunt Josie peeled an apple without breaking the coil of skin.

"Dear Mother," Violet wrote. "I would have written sooner but I wasn't settled. Don't worry about me. I have a job here, so I'm all right. I hated to leave without seeing you, but you know who made me do this. He's always wanted to hurt me—I guess he's done it now. I'm not blaming you, mother, but I didn't deserve to be treated this way. I always tried to do the best I could. I gave you all I ever earned. And he ran me out in the middle of the night. All I had was fifty cents. Well—don't think about it, mother, because I won't. It's passed now. I'll get along.

"I wish I knew what happened to Denny. I ran out as they were scuffling. Did he strike him? Sometimes I wake up dreaming that he killed Denny. And I feel like a murderer because it was my fault. You don't know how frightful this fear is, mother.

"I read the papers from San Francisco every day. I wish Denny would put in a personal and tell me he is all right. Ask him to, mother. In a few days I'll write again. Tell Katy I miss her. This is a little collar I bought for you. Love,  
"VIOLET."

Aunt Josie sliced the apple onto a pan spread with pie crust. Then she rubbed the back of her coarse, red hand across her eyes.

"Why did she go there, Denny?" The envelope was marked "San Diego."

"Well, there's not many jobs here. I guess some one must have told her there was a chance in a store there."

She shook her head, sat with the wooden bowl of apples in her lap.

"That's not the reason, Denny. What does she mean when she says he 'always wanted to hurt me, and he's done it now'?"

"Well, he threw her out. That's hurting her, isn't it?"

She rubbed her hands together in dumb helplessness. "Violet was a good child. There wasn't a selfish bone in her body. . . ." She got up suddenly, went to the stove and shoved back a pot of soup. When she turned, tears streaked to her lips, fell unheeded down the rough, broad chin.

"Do you think she went with him, Denny? Tell me the truth."

Denny wouldn't meet Aunt Josie's dull, beseeching eyes.

"She says she's got a job, Aunt Josie. I guess she has. If she was with him, wouldn't they stay here in the city?"

It was slight comfort. Denny wanted to say, "Sure, she's all right; I know she didn't go with him." He couldn't force the words to his tongue. Aunt Josie took the letter and the dainty lace collar, folded it with a measured quietness. Her chin was shaking.

"What a terrible thing to be a mother, Denny—a mother like I am—"

"Aw, gee, Aunt Josie, if it wasn't for you she'd have gone long ago. She often said so. Say, I think she's all right. The letter sounds good. And she sent you the collar."

The broad face puckered: "That's just it, Denny—just it—the collar. . . ."

She stuffed it quickly in her pocket. Lizzie came in. She was a broad, heavy girl of seventeen, yet she affected mincing little ways that were as ridiculous, Denny thought, as maiden-hair around a big white turnip.

Lizzie wore her streaked, yellow hair done up with an immense red bow, and her pug-nose was thickly powdered.

"Oh, hello, Denny. How's Katy? I'm coming to see her. Well, are you crying, ma? It's getting tiresome."

"I'm not crying, Lizzie."

"Humph, I suppose it's about Violet. Lot she cares—disgrace the whole family."

"Hush, Lizzie. I should think you'd feel sorry for your sister."

"Oh, yes; I suppose it's my fault Violet ran away. I suppose it's my fault she stayed out till morning! She had no right to

make papa mad. She was just too stuck up over her looks. . . ."

"Aw, dry up, Lizzie—if you were ever half as sweet as Vee!" Denny had never liked her. Now he had an impulse to clap his hand over her mouth and stop her speech. She laughed:

"Indeed, Denny Brooks! I wonder who you are to talk! If papa was to hear you—"

Denny turned his back: "I have to go, Aunt Josie."

She followed him to the door: "Could you put in the personal, Denny? The poor girl! Sent out with fifty cents! Gawd pity us!"

As he went from the grimy kitchen Denny clenched his fists, talking to himself. "The big bully." He longed to meet Matt Borley, longed to come smashing against the huge fellow. But he had only a consuming pity for Violet.

He went to the newspaper office and put in the personal—"Katy and I are fine. We are living on Oak Street. Do you need money? Please write me at Aunt Josie's. Denny."

It occurred to him that Violet might be in need. Maybe she was hungry. He could see her dark, enormous eyes haunting the white, willful prettiness of her face. Poor Vee! She could have been so happy—so beautiful—

Yet people like his uncle and that mean Lizzie would force her out in the night. Why was such cruelty permitted? Why was Matt Borley allowed power? Why was such a brute ever created? Denny grappled with the ancient, yet buxom problem of evil, and like all who have gone before, all who will come after, failed to vanquish it.

Though he found no answer to his questions, Denny regarded all this pitiless indifference of life as a thing that would pass. He left Matt Borley's home, taking refuge in dreams. There'd be a day when he, Denny, would have power; when he would be rich, generous as a king. He would atone to Violet; to Aunt Josie; to Katy.

In this image, the great Denny was a man of wealth, of great achievements, of vast learning. He had been through college—he had traveled—

Yet the Denny of seventeen went on cleaning bricks—

August approached; the schools were reopening with half day sessions. Denny had six months to finish. He lay awake, scheming, wondering how he might earn enough working in the afternoon to pay thirty-five dollars to Mrs. Traynor and still



have a little for clothes and the few things Katy would need. He figured forty-five dollars would do it.

Though he thought of a thousand jobs none would pay the required wage. Hope wouldn't down. When Denny had exhausted every practical chance he took to visions. There must be some way—gee, there must! Other fellows could do it.

But one morning after he had spent two days looking for the golden job, he pulled his necktie viciously, saying to himself:

"I'll go back next term. I can always save up. In six months I'll have enough!"

The building contractor for whom he had been working offered him a chance at fifty dollars a month.

"You'll make good," he told Denny. "You might even be a plasterer."

Denny, the great—a plasterer! He thought of Emmet Goss, the grocery clerk with the pointed skull, whose place he might have had and the same indignant resentment burned him. He'd show them!

He saved—went without his lunch that he might have money when the next term opened. In the middle of the year Aunt Josie was ill. Denny saw her gaunt and suffering, holding her side as she stood at the stove.

"I haven't much longer here, Denny," she said. "I'll be glad to go, glad to go—"

A few days later he found her in terrible pain. Denny went for a doctor. And he put in Aunt Josie's hands all the money he had saved. There would be no school this term!

"Not going back?" Katy asked, the red lips all trembling.

"Not this term, Katy. I've lots of time."

"It's all on account of me, Denny. If you didn't have me—" The dear, beautiful blue eyes ran with tears.

"Gee, Katy, why do you say that? Break a fellow all up. Not on your account at all. I didn't want to go this year. Anyway you know it's not on your account. You know about Aunt Josie. Gee, Katy, you're mean to hurt a fellow so—"

"Don't be mad, Denny—please—"

"As if I could—"

He brushed away her fear as though it were thistledown. But it weighed like an anchor on his heart. It might be a year—two. Gee, suppose he never could finish? Suppose he had to be a plasterer?

He wasn't sorry for what he had done—not for a moment. Whenever he visited Aunt Josie and saw the mute gratitude in her poor eyes, his heart melted. One afternoon she gave him a card stating there was a registered package at the postoffice for him.

The incredible had happened.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LEGACY

"WONDER what it can be?" Denny thought as he went to the postoffice. "Maybe something from Violet—"

She had written him a letter, much like the one to Aunt Josie, but had given no address. Months passed with no word at all. Yet she was often in his thoughts—a mystery, a fear, a pain.

The registered mail was not from Violet. Denny signed his name; the clerk handed him a heavy, small, square package. It was marked "Alaska."

Alaska? But it couldn't be from Sid—after all these years?

Oh, Sid had forgotten him long ago—that day he gave him the black curl tied with the cherry-colored ribbon. Denny's blood tingled with excitement.

He rode home on the outside of the car, whistling to keep from trembling with suspense. Without even calling to Katy or to Old Lady Traynor he hurried to his own room, closed the door softly.

There was a massive old desk with a bookcase set on top of it in the narrow bay window. Denny lighted a lamp, tore the heavy wrappings. Inside was a letter and a tin box.

The letter was signed "Tim Purdy, partner of Sid Lawrence." As Denny read, years dropped from him. Sid was again before him, the hero, the beloved friend. He was nine years old again with the affections and associations of nine; a little fellow waiting for Sid to come home, wondering what he'd have in his big pockets—marbles or peanut candy.

This was the letter:

"Denman Brooks—Dear Sir: Guess you know by this time what's become of Sid. Poor devil—the whitest pal a man ever had but too soft for this gaff.

"Most like you've never heard of Tim Purdy, but me and Sid was partners and we had a compact between us. I was to do for him and he was to do for me in case either of us didn't come back. I leave it to you if I ain't follerin' my part.

"Tim, there's a kid in Frisco I think a heap of. If I cash in, you'll do the square thing by me and send him what I've got left."

"That's what old Sid used to say, and many a night we sat up together and he told me what a lad you were and about the dog, Jerry, and he said there was no one like this kid's mother. And he was all cut up about it somehow. Sid was that soft at heart.

"Of course, both of us thought we'd come back. We reached the pass—most like you've heard of White Horse Pass?"

"The wind was hollering and shrieking like ten thousand doomed souls runnin' down the mountains. When it stopped the frightfulest hush froze the very air; then it went wild again, and the ghastly white snow drivin' and beatin' and pretty near blinding the two of us, blowin' the words right out of our mouths.

"You all right, Sid?" I shouted in his ear.

"Good God, Tim!" the poor devil answered, stumbling along. Sometimes we never bothered to speak—just flung ourselves under the rocks at night, tearing at the bacon, rubbin' and stampin' to keep from freezin' to death.

"Wasn't much for me. I'd been through it all a heap of times before. But it went tough with Sid.

"He didn't kick much, but the black moods had him. When I saw him wantin' to fight with me and callin' me names I knew it was comin' near the end for Sid. One night he grabbed me by the throat:

"Tim Purdy, speak up like the man you ain't! Are you gonna rob me? Are you goin' back on the word you've given?"

"I tried to jolly him along: 'Don't fight with your old pal, Sid. Tain't me as made this ice-cream cone. You ain't got enough for me to rob. Now, have you?'

"The old softy—pretty near cried then for he didn't mean a word of it.

"Give us your hand, Tim," he begged: 'I know you're straight. But you know I haven't seen that kid since he was no higher than your hip and I get to thinking that it wasn't right to leave him like I did seeing that his mother was gone and it eats at me.'

"That's the way Sid was, quick as a flash but kind. He never woulda fought with me but the ice was a-cutting at his nerves and a-jaggin at his heart and he wanted to be back in

Frisco with lights and the streets and a fire blazin' like hell—

“Aw, God, Tim, I'd die happy if I could step on a hot coal—just for a minute.’ That’s what he said that last morning.

“You’ll have all the hot coals you’re after, Sid.’ I tried to put a heart in him but you could as well ring a laugh from that shriekin’ devil of a wind; from that frozen, bloodless snow. Blindin’ white, blindin’ vast—that’s what it was.

“God, can we ever see? Gimme your hand, Tim!’

“I yanked him but the next I knew he was flat on his face.

“Aw, get up, you piker, you quitter!’ That’s what I said to him.

“I wish to God I hadn’t called him that. Poor Sid looked up with the damnedest grin, his face chatterin’ and blue with misery. But it got him to his feet. We went rockin’ and peltin’ from side to side like a pair of drunks. Sid couldn’t keep up. It got so I had to drag him.

“The snow piled up, swirled like as though all the starvin’, freezin’ ghosts rushed from eternity to close about us. You could feel their breaths freezin’ round your heart; and their icy hands slicin’ through your bones. God, how that snow came thicker, colder. We hid under a rock. Sid turned over in the drift.

“‘Lemme alone, Tim, I’m done,’ he moaned and wouldn’t stir himself and the blood half ice in his veins, but just a-moaning: ‘I’m done!’

“Nothing I could do. He was froze to the soul; froze till the breath was snow in him; stiff as a board in a minute. No use to jostle the poor devil. I buried him there in the ice.

“And I don’t mind tellin’ you, Mister Denny Brooks, that I didn’t look at Sid’s face and I didn’t like packin’ him there in the ice. No more did I like plowin’ on and leavin’ him behind. That’s a tough job when you come to know the man like I knew Sid and he was white clean through. I leave it to you if he wasn’t.

“I’ve stowed all he owned into this box. Most of the stuff he had packed in there himself the night we swore to the compact. I’ve done my part as I know Sid would have done his. A decenter pal a man never had. I bear witness to that and by that I swear this is an honest reckoning.

“TIM PURDY,  
“Partner of Sid Lawrence.”

Denny was so deep in the past; so close to that Sid who had brought home the steak and said to him when it was fried: "Call Queenie"; so near to the big fellow who had bought him a boat and taken him to the old Grove Street Theater the night he ran away from Matt Borley's, that he rubbed his fists in his eyes as a little fellow does and kept saying: "Gee—aw, gee!"

He forgot the tin box—remembered only that Sid was dead—frozen to death in the terrible north. And Sid had always been good to him. He went up to find the gold mine and he was coming back to share it with Denny. . . .

Denny had often recalled that promise, but never believing it. Here before him was all that Sid had made. His life was its price.

Denny opened the box. Sid's gold watch, bits of ore, his cuff links and other trinkets were scattered on the top. Underneath was a roll of bills—then another box. He pulled the cover—a little hail of nuggets rolled to the desk, piled in a small glittering mound. Denny's heart bounded—gold nuggets—pure gold—

He swept them back, picked up the tin, dashed into Katy's room.

Katy stood at the bureau, turning the sprightly head now to the right, now to the left, coquetting with her own radiant image. She blushed crimson that Denny should catch her at this vanity but he was too excited to notice. His hands trembled.

"Guess, Katy— Say, guess."

"Denny—you're crying?"

"Put out your hands, Katy—quick—Lord!"

He poured into them the shower of nuggets. Katy stared.

"From Sid, Katy. Sid's dead."

Denny turned his back, opened the tin box, began to talk quickly:

"Gee, he was a prince, lots of ways, Katy. You don't remember Sid?"

"I do—I remember him a little, Denny—" Mystified, Katy fingered the nuggets. "Is this ours? All this?"

"Yes—say, can you believe it? Say—"

He was poking through the box, came upon something wrapped in tissue paper, unfolded it and would have hastily tucked it back, a pang stabbing through his joy. But Katy saw.

"What's that?"

Denny twined it softly about a finger—a black curl tied with cherry ribbon just like the one Sid had given Denny.

“Queenie’s—that was her hair.”

Katy touched it with a gentle sadness. “Was she awful pretty, Denny?”

“Was she! Gee—it seems like yesterday. I bet she’d be glad now—”

“Maybe she knows, Denny. Maybe she’s looking right down at us and wants you to go to school and be something fine. You will, won’t you?”

There was no doubt in Denny’s mind. Sid had given him his chance. The future widened out in an avenue of glory down which Denny was to march, blithe as a young conqueror. He couldn’t fail. Not he!

## CHAPTER XVIII

### DREAMS

A TIN box—a handful of nuggets and a roll of bills totaling about five hundred and sixty dollars—this was Sid's legacy. Not much of a gold mine, but to Katy and Denny it was worth millions.

Romance touched them as though Aladdin himself had stepped jauntily from the Arabian Nights saying: "Here, boy, and you, little girl, just have a rub at my lamp! Help yourselves!"

Denny was omnipotent. The wheelbarrow of bricks, quite heavy last week, might now be feathers, so great is the strength of a light heart. Denny was never to be a plasterer. Soon the world would know that great engineer Miss Southwick had predicted.

Nights the two of them talked over their future; nights Denny figured. At last he decided. It would take too long and too much money to wait for a new term and finish high school. So he would study and coach at night. In August he'd take the examinations at the university— Pooh! Guess he'd pass them!

A boy with five hundred and sixty dollars fail? He guessed not!

Denny's dreams were mild compared to Katy's. She had always expected the angel or at least a great princess to visit her. In her earliest years she was quite chummy with the heavenly beings, referring to them all her troubles.

Once Lizzie had begged her for the doll's trunk. This, above all her treasures, Katy wanted for herself, but she was so tender-hearted, Lizzie so insistent, she would have yielded had not her guardian angel interfered. At least, indirectly, for Katy had written a little note:

"Dear Guardian Angel—Lizzie wants my doll trunk, and I want it orful bad myself. Shall I give it to her? Please answer.

"KATY."



In the corner she added the letters "R.S.V.P." These she had seen on notes sent to Violet. This solemn entreaty Katy pinned to the top of her crib after the light was turned out, hoping in the morning to see, written in letters of gold, a big "NO, don't give it to Lizzie."

The angel was a poor correspondent. Every night for a week the note was pinned on the post, where an angel ought to watch. No answer came. Katy took it as a sign. When Lizzie began teasing again, she stamped her foot.

"You can't have it, Lizzie Borley. You can't have anysing at all! It's mine. God said so right to me!"

There were other manifestations of divine favoritism. As Katy grew a little older she dreamed of being adopted by some tremendously rich lady. Often when she sat in her chair just outside the broken alleyway gate women passing would say:

"What a beautiful child—what a pity!"

Katy would fancy them coming back, begging Aunt Josie to give her to them, piling money on the kitchen table and taking Katy away in their carriage.

She was forever expecting the beautiful, the miraculous. Naturally she was prepared to accept it without great astonishment but with boundless joy. Out of the tin box and its contents she builded fairyland for herself and Denny.

She sat in Old Lady Traynor's garden with its neat grass plat, the heliotrope and roses climbing all over the fences—and dreamed. Perhaps they would buy Shetland ponies and go riding in the park; they might go to the country for a vacation where there was a river and boats; they might go all around the world. . . . Of course, she'd have to get better—well, she would—

Late one afternoon Lizzie came to visit her. Lizzie had a great secret and a brand new red ribbon on her hair.

"Like it, Katy?" This after much wriggling and fooling with her hair. She showed her hand to Katy.

"Oh—beautiful!" Katy drew the word out with a thrilled sigh. "Who gave it to you, Lizzie?"

"It" was a speckled little turquoise ring. Lizzie couldn't answer the question without blushing and making the coquettish faces that were so out of tone with her thick skin and cruelly pug nose. In the midst of her confidence, Denny, the jubilant, sauntered in.

"Hello, Liz!" he said gayly, including even his cousin in his happy spirits. "What's up?"

Lizzie looked at her hand, glanced upward in the coy manner that made her seem such a foolish turnip to Denny's scornful youth.

"You might look, Mister Denny," she said in an aggrieved tone, blushing and holding out her hand.

Katy nodded in excitement, made a hurried grimace:

"Engaged!" Her lips formed the word for Denny.

"Good Lord!" Denny was too surprised for gallantry. "Going to get married, Lizzie? Who in the world—"

Katy reproached him with a look.

Lizzie's small eyes snapped. "I'm sure you're nice, Denny Brooks. I should think you'd be glad—"

"Well, say, Liz—you just took me off my feet. How in the world did I know you had a beau? Of course, I'm glad. Who is it?"

"Emmet."

"Emmet Goss! The grocery clerk? That idiot! Lord, Lizzie, you don't mean it?"

Lizzie's wide mouth puckered: "I'm sure I'm glad I came. I wonder who you are to talk about Emmet? Guess if you earned eighty dollars a month you'd be pretty stuck up, Denny Brooks. Suppose if I ran away and disgraced the whole family and then pretended to be getting married, you'd think I was sweet—mighty sweet—"

"Lizzie, he didn't mean it. Denny didn't mean it that way at all." Katy reached up and patted her hand. "He just thinks you're too good for Emmet. Don't you, Denny?"

Denny had caught the sudden malice in Lizzie's tone—sensed what she meant.

"Who pretended to get married, Lizzie?"

"Well, I guess somebody did, all right. I guess I know what I'm talking about. Guess I'm not saying things just to be nasty—nasty as can be the way some people do—"

Denny ignored the taunt: "Did Violet pretend to be married?"

"Did she! Well I guess that ain't all she did, either! Guess Sadie Foley went down to Los Angeles on her vacation and met her. Met her with him!"

"Who?"

Lizzie gave him a spiteful dart from her little eyes and laughed: "Who? Well, who did she run away with? She

just deserved what papa gave her. As though you don't know who. . . ."

"Clyde Dunstan?"

"Yes, it was. Sadie saw them. And she had feathers in her hat and a silver purse. And she told Sadie they were going to be married. That's what she told her."

"Maybe it's true."

"And maybe it ain't! At least Sadie was mighty surprised that mamma didn't know. She thought sure we'd know. So I guess Miss Violet ain't so sweet. Sadie said she looked like a walking skeleton. And I guess she ain't so happy either—"

Katy's eyes were filled with tears. Denny wanted to push Lizzie from her:

"Getting cold, Katy, you better come in," he said bluntly, stooping down and lifting her in his arms.

"You come, too, Lizzie." Katy could never bear to hurt any one, but Lizzie had already overstayed. She would be late for dinner. This she never did, fearing to antagonize Matt Borley.

"Mean little wretch." Denny carried Katy to her room, set her on the splendid crazy quilt.

"Do you think that's true about Violet? Oh, poor Vee—don't you wish she'd come and live with us, Denny? She could, now. . . ."

Denny wasn't sure how much Katy knew or guessed of Violet. He hoped—not knowing why—that it was little.

That night and for many nights as he sat up studying, Violet's pretty face with the dark hair piled high, came before him. Why did she look like a "walking skeleton"? Could she be hungry?

How terrible if Violet should starve and he owning a tin box with five hundred and sixty dollars.

Aunt Josie heard nothing from her—not a word.

The examination time came . . . Denny sat up half the night studying. He was afraid of the Latin and French.

When the day for these came, he couldn't eat. Neither could Katy.

"You'll pass, Denny—I prayed. I'll hold my thumbs for you."

On the boat and train he kept studying. These were the last. He went home despondent, knowing that he had failed.

Two weeks later came the report. He was afraid to open it;

afraid to evade. At last the envelope was torn. . . . A mistake somewhere—he had passed!

That night there was a celebration—a high head and a high heart pushing a wheel chair along Fillmore Street. They went to a movie and afterwards to one of the brilliant candy stores opened the year after the fire.

Before her Katy had a banana special—Denny, a Coney Island.

“Remember when we used to have only one dish and two spoons, Denny?”

Denny didn't answer. He was watching the table next them—watching a dark young man with soft, dreamy eyes. Denny's heart chilled—grew burning hot.

Clyde Dunstan laughing into the eyes of a slim, pretty girl—just as he had laughed into Violet's.

Without knowing what he would do, Denny got up—walked over to that table.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE BARN

THE impulsive youth of him, raw, tender, clashed with the polished ease of Clyde Dunstan. Denny's hand, gripped in his pocket, shook. The other saw him coming, turned his head with a laugh to the girl. But Denny stepped to his side.

"Good evening, Mr. Dunstan." At the dry, breathless tone, Dunstan's face stained to the temples but he spoke with ready charm:

"Why, how do you do, Denny? I swear I wouldn't know you—you've grown so."

"I heard you were in Los Angeles," Denny answered grimly. The color sank from Dunstan's cheeks.

"Yes, so I was. Pretty warm down there, now. Well—glad to have seen you again, Denny."

It was dismissal. Denny stood obdurate, his lips trembling. The girl, sitting forward, eyed him indignantly, appraising his bulky suit, his big shoulders. As he didn't move, she glanced with disdainful question to Dunstan. Denny rested his hand on the table:

"You saw Violet in Los Angeles?"

Dunstan's soft eyes flashed, he mumbled something to the girl, stood up.

It was a warm August night, the place crowded. Half a dozen of the curious were already staring.

"Come outside!" Without waiting Denny's answer, he went swiftly to the door, turned with an angry flush: "Looking for trouble?"

"You saw Violet in Los Angeles," Denny repeated harshly, young eyes steadfast. Dunstan recovered.

"Yes, I saw her. She's looking fine."

"Did you marry her?"

An uneasy pause, Dunstan laughed discordantly.

"Marry her! Hump! She wouldn't have me. Violet's particular."

"You needn't lie to me. You're a big coward and a fake,

but you can't stuff lies down me." He held Dunstan's coat twisted in one hand: "Where is she?"

"Here, don't twist that coat. Just had it pressed. Don't get excited. How do I know where she is? What have I to do with where she is? Sure, I saw her in Los Angeles. Suppose I did?"

He was regaining his poise, speaking with indolent audacity, shoving Denny uncomfortably on the defensive. There was a patronizing sneer in voice and eye that shot through Denny with a confused sense of his own uncouth helplessness. He took a new start.

"You know where she is, Mr. Dunstan. That's all I want to know. I'll thank you to tell me."

"How do I know where she is? I met your cousin by chance in Los Angeles and took her out once. I tell you I don't know where she is or anything about her. I'm sorry if you've lost track of her."

He would have swung back to the store; Denny caught his arm. Inwardly his confidence was gone, but he clung on with childish persistence.

"You know where she was staying when you were there. Where was she living when you took her out?"

"Somewhere out on Fremont Street. I doubt if I could find the place again. I think it was Fremont, near Third, but I'll not swear to it. Well—good evening.

Denny felt small, whipped. He went back to the table where the "Coney Island" and the "banana special" were melted. Katy, white with excitement, sat with clenched hands too frightened to speak or to eat.

"Finished, Katy?"

"Yes."

As he pushed her before him, Dunstan passed, returning to the girl. Katy put her hand over Denny's.

"It was a mistake? Lizzie made a mistake, didn't she? They aren't married?"

"Course not." Denny was almost running, the joy gone from his night of festivity. His pride squirmed before the memory of Dunstan's easy superiority; he felt the man's cheapness and this made more humiliating his own defeat. Why hadn't he knocked him in the jaw? Why hadn't he swung on him? "What did he say, Denny?" Katy insisted, so he had to tell her.

"She would so have married him. She told me she loved him

ever and ever so much. I bet he didn't tell you the truth, Denny."

"Violet's lucky she didn't marry him, Katy. He's a low brow. Vee's better off. I'm going to write her. She's all right and has a good job. . . ." Denny filled in a picture of a satisfied, independent Violet that Katy might have no fear.

But his own heart brooded.

He wrote to the address Clyde Dunstan had given him—waited restlessly yet confidently. Violet would surely answer, for he had asked a favor she wouldn't deny. Denny was to enter college. He and Katy would move to Berkeley.

Yet he was afraid to take Katy from Old Lady Traynor's where she was so happy and leave her alone all day. He asked Violet to come and live with them.

On Sunday he went across the bay to find rooms. They must be cheap, yet nice. They weren't going to live in any place like Aunt Josie's. Not much! With the sublime and pathetic trust of ignorance Denny figured it would be easy enough to work his way through. He'd get jobs—easy, pooh!

It was three days before he found a place. Then he came home, bursting with excitement.

"Gee, Katy, wait till you see it. Say, wait till I swing a mean brush over the walls. You'll just double up when you see where you're to sleep. There's a kitchen and another big room. You'd never know it was a barn—only ten dollars a month."

"A barn, Denny!"

"You wait! I tell you it's going to be great. You'll see."

For the next week he was gone from morning till night. Old Lady Traynor gave him furniture from her basement and she bought splashy cretonne that Katy with fluttering fingers turned into drapes for the windows. Katy was more excited than a bride.

"Suppose Violet doesn't answer, Katy? Will you be afraid to come? You'll be alone all day."

"But she's going to answer, Denny. I just know it and know it."

Toward the end of the week the letter Denny had written was returned unclaimed. "No such person at this address," was stamped in three places. Denny's bright plans were dashed.

"You'll have to stay here, Katy."

"I will not! I'm going. You have to take me. Oh, I'll just

die—I'll die, I'll die! If you say I can't! After making all those curtains! I'm going!"

To Katy it might have been the trip around the world, for in all her life she had never been across the bay.

"Gee—then you're coming! You bet we can get along!"

Old Mr. Traynor shook his head over his bread dipped in gravy:

"Place won't seem the same with you children gone. What'll we two old uns do, Nora?"

"They'll come often to see us and what's to prevent sry folk like us from going over to see them?"

The old man took out his handkerchief and when no one was looking quickly mopped his eyes.

There were ham sandwiches and a cream chocolate cake for the last night's feast. When it came to singing the hymn, Mr. Traynor started out bravely, stopped abruptly with a long-drawn quaver; the old lady's fingers loitered on the keys. Denny and Katy finished it out alone.

In the morning when they were leaving, Mrs. Traynor gave them a basket filled with all kinds of cookies and cold meats. In Katy's hands she put a bulky package—the splendid crazy quilt Katy so admired.

"God bless you, children"—she held Denny's hand—"and give you success. Your mother would be a proud woman to-day, Denman Brooks. Rest her soul in peace."

It was a little solemn and made Katy cry, but Denny held his head proudly. On the boat he felt himself a blasé man of the world, naming off the islands to the enrapt Katy and laughing when she insisted on feeding the seagulls.

"I feel as if I were going to Europe, Denny."

"Maybe we will some day, Katy. Engineers travel."

He forgot his maturity as they neared the hill where the old house and its barn stood.

"Close your eyes, Katy! Don't cheat. Don't open them till I tell you. Now!"

"Here! I thought you said a barn!"

They were in an old garden, rather wild with a big weeping willow drooping over the lawn. To the left of this was the whitewashed barn.

"There's our shanty! Like it?"

Katy was speechless.

"Do you? Hurry up. Gee, don't you?"



"It's—oh—oh, I'm going to cry, Denny."

"Wait till you get inside and make it hysterics."

There was a great, unceiled room, with the rafters showing. To these Denny had hung immense Chinese lanterns that gave a bizarre color to the space, a warmth to the quaint, old fashioned furniture and dark redwood walls.

There was an immense window on the side looking down from the hills to the bay. Here Denny had builded a high bench, that Katy might sit and watch the boats far out on the waters.

"Well?" he said, breathless, eyes dancing.

Katy turned her head, half laughing, half crying. "Denny, it's the beautifulest place I ever saw."

"And it's ours!" He pushed her to the window. Then she did cry for pure joy of the beauty of the hills and water and leaves windward borne across the grass.

"You'll have to fix the curtains, Katy-kid."

She stood up, ruffling the drapes, holding them now this way, now that. Denny judged critically, then forgot to judge at all, for a sense of responsibility that was half pride, half fear, possessed him. He looked so earnestly at Katy she half read his thought and reached out her hand.

"You're just the goodest brother in the world, Denny! Well, I think you are!"

"Will you be happy when you're much alone, Katy?"

"And the whole wide world to look at? Know how I feel, Denny? As though I were made of birds and they were all singing at once."

Denny must keep them singing—a job, indeed!

## CHAPTER XX

### DENNY IN HIGH LIFE

To Denny, the campus with its stirring color, the excited rush of the new term, might have been the planet of Mars. Outwardly he was part of its spirited young endeavor; he was one of its time-pressed students hurrying from ivy covered library to red brick hall. Inwardly, he was lonelier, more bewildered and disheartened than he had ever been in his life. He was an alien.

Young men in bulging corduroys and disreputable hats lounged on the steps of old North Hall or sprawled on the bench in front of the campus store, drawing lazily on their pipes, enjoying the sun and the gossiping; girls in white skirts and pretty waists tramped down the paths. They smiled brightly to the young men and the young men nodded with supreme indifference. Denny noted all this with awe and a shrinking heart. If any girl had bowed brightly to him!

Every one else seemed to be surrounded with friends; to be dashing from one engagement to another; to possess inside tips on the right professors, the best courses, the shortcuts to knowledge and fun. In the midst of all this youth and vivid activity, Denny was a chill and isolated unit.

"Oh, well—" He squared his shoulders, walked with a little swagger into the store and over to the huge ink well where one might fill a fountain pen. Two girls behind him began to talk.

"Get your bid for Friday, Lou?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Pesky, of course."

"Well—Pesky's all right—"

"Suppose so. Oh, dear—" A rustle of papers, the girl's books clattered to Denny's feet. He picked them up, glanced hastily into the flurried brown eyes of the girl, Lou; noted her wonderful gold hair.

"Yours?" he asked, handing her the books.

"Oh, thank you." She must have liked the winning light in

Denny's eyes, the eagerness in his boyish, fighting chin. "Yes—thank you so much."

Such a trifle! Those contemptuous fellows sprawled on the bench wouldn't have noted it—wouldn't have stooped, perhaps, to pick up the books. They weren't starved for young companionship, as Denny was. He went out of the store with buoyant, singing heart.

Lucky Pesky! But Lou had smiled at him.

He wondered what courses she might be taking; if he'd pass her again; if she'd bow. Two or three times when he saw before him the flutter of light hair he quickened his pace, stole a glance at the face. It was never Lou.

He began to think he was doomed to loneliness. He looked down a blank four years without friends, without pleasures, and there were times when he mocked the folly that had brought him to Berkeley—the conceit that had made him rate himself above the grocery clerk, above the plasterer.

In his courses he spoke to the men sitting near him, compared problems and notes. There was one tall fellow with flashing teeth and quick, impulsive eyes who saluted Denny with a pleasant "Hello, there, Brooks!" This was Stephen Adams. But aside from these occasional greetings he went to his classes, to lunch, to his home—alone.

Not for a fortune would he have admitted his depression to Katy. He came whistling into the barn at night, pretending to be thrilled with college; trying to cultivate the magnificent arrogance of other young students, but to himself thankful to heaven that another day was over and he was here in this big, delightful room with a table set for dinner and Katy following him with worshiping, happy eyes. Here he counted; here he was somebody.

For Katy these first days flew—there were so many joys in this new home; so many tasks. It was such a problem to know whether the crazy quilt suited the couch in the great room where Denny slept or if it were better on her own bed.

Katy had a little space that was all sun and air, partitioned off in the north corner; pink matting on the floor; pink china bowl and wash basin—a rare treasure from Old Lady Traynor in the corner—and all over the wire screen that made the side wall, a joyous scarlet Rambler splashed its roses.

Here, in the long August afternoons, Katy sat on the bed, sewing, reading, making beautiful Irish crochet jabots that were

very much the style then and that Katy hoped she might sell. Why not—they were so smart and Katy was clever with her quick, impatient fingers.

Then there was the kitchen and each day the great problem of dinner. Would Denny like this? would he like that? She went over all the menus Aunt Josie had taught her, discarded tripe, codfish, liver. They'd never eat these again—not much! But plenty of apple pie, round steak, sliced tomatoes—well for Denny that he did the shopping himself or Katy, in her wish to please, would have made him a bankrupt.

He came home toward the end of the first week, his arms filled with books and bundles; his face sparkling with suppressed excitement. A great thing had happened. Denny had made a friend.

Katy was sitting at the sink, peeling potatoes. Denny unwrapped his bundles, soused some lettuce in water, tore off the outer leaves vigorously.

At last it was out. Stephen Adams, the breezy fellow who sat next to him at chemistry, had invited him to a fraternity dance. Denny was ashamed of his joy, so he pretended to Katy that he wasn't sure whether to accept or not. But he was jubilant as a girl; excitement ran into his voice:

"You know, of course, I've got to find a job over here and I didn't come to dance, but then it's on Friday night and a fellow ought to have some friends. What would you do, Katy?"

Katy, whose feet would have been wings, dropped the potato:

"What would I do? I'd just run there! I'd make myself a dress right out of those scarlet ramblers and flame into the room. Oh, wouldn't I love it, though!" The wanton beauty that was Queenie Brooks flashed a moment over Katy's winsome face, stabbed Denny and he whispered a sudden:

"Gee—aw, gee. Gee, it's tough for you, Katy. Wish you could go."

"Some day—look how fine I can stand now. I'm ever so much better. You're to go, Denny. Oh, you bet I'd go."

"I'd have to borrow Jimmy Foley's tux, I suppose."

"Well, didn't you give Jimmy that set of tools? He'll be glad to lend it—"

"Perhaps I don't dance well enough?"

"Oh, Violet said you did—you dance lovely."

So Denny allowed Katy to coax him into acceptance not

admitting even to her that college was a different world since Stephen Adams had offered his invitation.

He went to the city and got Jimmy's suit, brushed it, spread a damp cloth over it and pressed the creases stiff. There was a little tear at the pocket. Katy mended this, all but praying Denny would be the beau of the ball.

Such shaving and brushing and bathing. When he was ready he stood at the mirror in Katy's room, pulling up his suspenders, making her say a dozen times whether just the right amount of heel showed. Then he looked at his own exuberant image and chuckled with satisfaction:

"Humph! Ain't I the cholly boy, Katy-kid? Now, honest, did you ever see such a handsome build before?" He grinned happily, struggled with the bow tie and resigned the job to her. Katy's fingers fluttered with nervousness; as she pulled the bow deftly:

"I'll just die, Denny, if you come home a wall flower!"

"Pooh! I'll knock 'em dead, Katy-kid." He came back from the door: "Will you be afraid here alone?"

"Course not! I'll be in bed. But you wake me up the minute you get in. Cross your heart now, you will?"

He promised, stepped out bravely. As he reached the great white fraternity house his confidence wavered. He was in the hall—a witching fairyland, flowers, softened lights, streamers of smilax, the strains of music, the fluttering in and out of girls with their hair in puffs, long trains swung gracefully over their arms. Denny had never seen such beauty, such color, such gayety.

He stood motionless a moment and then was bitterly conscious of his shabby overcoat, the sleeves nearly two inches too short.

Denny had indulged in one extravagance—a tailor-made suit with a fine chalk line, at thirty-five dollars. He worried over this expenditure, deciding to do without an overcoat.

He shrugged it off quickly, looked anxiously for his friend Stephen, saw him across the hall scratching his name on a dance program, giving it back with some laughing remark to a midget of a girl in a puffy yellow dress.

Denny assumed a man of the world air—or this is what he meant to assume—walked casually toward Stephen. Girls, some shy as buttercups; others tall, cool as arrogant roses, swept by like queens. More than one looked archly into Denny's

young, glistening eyes. Gratitude swept through him, bringing a flareup of confidence.

Men were rushing up partners to groups of girls; the violins tuned for the first dance. Denny was flushed, but let any one detect a quiver in his resolute calm! He knew that he wished like everything he was home with Katy. What a blind chump he was coming here—

"Hello, old fellow!" Stephen's vital tone; Stephen's impulsive hand: "Well, fixed up, are you? Suppose you know plenty of girls."

This was too much for Denny's composure. He felt his face iron into a blank, then he laughed.

"Plenty—don't know a darned one!"

"Holy smoke! Babes in the wood! Come on!"

He took Denny's arm, edged through the crowd, rushed Denny into a group and demanded with an audacious ease:

"A dance, Mary?" took the girl's program, scratched Denny's name. Three times he did this. They were stopping before the fourth. Came a little exclamation of pleased surprise:

"Why, you!" It was the golden hair and the flurried brown eyes of the girl who had dropped her books—Lou.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE DANCE

DENNY's pulse quickened for the girl extended her hand with a bright friendliness:

"Mr. Brooks and I have met before, Steve."

"Oh, fine! Take him in tow, Lou. You know he's a pretty stepper. See you later, Brooks."

Denny was writing his name on Lou's program. As he felt himself alone with her, a panic of misgiving seized him; his tongue was dry as a bit of parchment. Lou laughed with a soft, lispng gurgle:

"Isn't that just like Steve! He takes it for granted we were wheeled in the same perambulator and ate each other's mud pies."

Denny grinned, seeking vainly for some bright response. None came. Lou seemed not to mind. She was glancing at the card where he had written his name.

"What does the 'D' stand for?"

"Denman."

"Oh, that's a good name. I like it." She looked suddenly up to his eyes, the lure in her own saying plainly: "You see I like YOU or I shouldn't bother at all."

Denny read the look and laughed in pure gratitude.

"The same to you, Miss Bendal," he answered with unexpected inspiration.

"But a man's name is more important especially if he turns out to be somebody."

"If he doesn't, he has the name anyway."

With his second remark, Denny's spirit strutted. He was actually getting along, feeling at ease with this golden-haired Lou, talking glibly of his courses, his ambitions.

"Strange we didn't meet before," she said abruptly.

"Lucky we met at all!" Immediately Denny was confused, wondering if this were a 'fresh,' bold thing to say, but Lou dropped her lashes prettily:

"Do you think so, Mr. Denman Brooks?"

At this interesting moment when the sparkling exuberance Denny usually saved for Katy was bubbling to the surface, a lanky fellow with glasses and a long, inquiring nose came toward them—"Pesky" Marsh claiming his partner. No wonder Lou had coquetted into Denny's eager young eyes.

"Until the fifth," she said with an arch smile. "Be here for me, Mr. Brooks."

Denny had no dance till then. He sauntered to a small room where a number of young men were smoking. He knew none of them. The cold feeling of isolation touched him, but he pretended a great interest in the dancers.

They glided past in a whirl of color, some talking easily, others not bothering to talk at all but so sure of themselves, so happily confident. The flutter of song like overtones to the music, mingled with laughter and the snap of light feet. A girl with Carmen-like eyes passed, tilted her head quickly, her partner smiled lazily, touched his lips to hers. Denny was astounded. He had thought himself daring—a man of the world because he managed to talk a little!

As the dance finished couples crowded into the smaller room. Snatches of their conversation reached him—all amazingly similar.

Yet to Denny it seemed a miracle of cleverness . . . just this flapping back and forth of tongues.

He wished some one would speak to him, then a girl brushing past, asked: "Where's Tom? Oh, I beg your pardon!" Even this mistake seemed to include him as one of these poised, disdainful fellows. Denny bowed gallantly.

There was another dance, an encore. At last Stephen came: "Where've you been, Brooks? Thought you'd eloped with Lou. An old friend of yours? Come and meet some of the fellows." Stephen with a familiar, breezy remark to nearly every one they passed, led Denny into a library where a dozen fellows, some brawny, heavy-shouldered; others slight, rather insignificant but all sleekly tailored, were lounging, curtaining the room with smoke.

They greeted Denny casually. Stephen made a place for him, stayed a few moments, left, saying:

"It's my job to see that things go off right. I'll be back."

Denny tried to appear at ease, listening to the conversation but no effort was made to include him. Some one told a joke. It wasn't so funny. But Denny laughed. And immediately felt



as though he had intruded. Indeed—as though he had committed an impertinence, presuming to be one of them and sharing their mirth.

This made him hotly uncomfortable. He wished to shrug angrily away. But he told himself quickly: "Don't be an ass! Who's bothering to snub you. . . . All in your head!"

The conversation turned to a party of the previous evening, then to a gay drinking escapade. Some of the fellows hunched close together, arms about each other's necks, roaring incontinently.

Denny smoked. It irked him to be sitting there dumb as a waiter—with them, but not of them.

Now they were talking about the fire. A dispute arose as to the boundaries. "It didn't cross Octavia," Denny volunteered. And he added two or three fugitive remarks about those thrilling days.

Merrit, a lanky, thin-lipped fellow sitting next Denny assented, "That's right. I watched the burning of St. Ignatius. The Hayes Valley fires didn't cross Octavia—" He turned to Denny: "Living in the city in the quake times? Burned out?"

"No—we just escaped."

"Oh—where was your home?"

With an abnormal sensitiveness Denny visualized the dingy grey house of Matt Borley. There was no compulsion on him to answer—but he did. He said with a faint challenge: "Octavia near Hayes. . . ."

He felt wronged because he had been led to admit that he lived in "Hayes Valley"—wronged as though a bandage were torn from him exposing an ugly sore . . . the sore of his cruel, impoverished boyhood. Now the dozen fellows formed in smaller groups. Inexplicably Denny found himself on the outer fringe. He thought furiously: "Why the hell did I come? I don't belong here! A bunch of fatheads and churls!" And he had a wish to show them as he had to show Matt Borley. . . . Make them eat their insufferable arrogance.

At last, Stephen's friendly voice: "Lou's waiting. Sorry you didn't have the earlier dances. You'll be all right from now on. . . ."

His dance with Lou was a waltz. She put her small hand in his. He looked down at her golden head—eagerly. And she looked up eagerly to him. She smiled—her eyes loitering taunt-

ingly into his. He drank her look like wine. She was glad to notice him— Much she'd care where he lived or how!

Denny, the son of Queenie, tossed aside the unpleasant and snatched at the bright. He had danced with Violet in the "boudoir": he had danced in Foley's basement with Sadie. But here on this polished floor, the enchantment of music and color and this lovely Lou so happy in his arms, why here, his senses swam in a sea of new delights. He swept along, gayest of the gay. . . . He thrilled Lou with his bonny exuberance. . . .

The dance was over. They sat in a little alcove, talking like old friends.

"You're not living here at the house, are you, Mr. Brooks?"

"No, I don't belong here."

"But you're pledged, aren't you?"

"No, not at all!"

"I thought Steve said you were. Well," she added with an air of finality: "you will be. They're a fine crowd. I think they're dandy fellows."

"Do you?" Denny evaded, for he had only a vague idea of fraternity pledgings and rushings.

"Yes, about the best." She glanced at his program. "Steve told me to look after you. Have you all the dances you want?"

"Have you any you don't want?"

With a sparkling lift of her eyebrow, she drew a line through a name on her program, "Want it?"

She was cutting a dance for him! For Denny Brooks who grew up in Hayes Valley and lived in a barn and had cleaned bricks in fire days. He was a conqueror.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE SNUB

"Now this shows what I think of old chums who used to eat mud pies with me!" Lou tied her program by a long pink ribbon to her wrist. Her flattery was balm in Denny's veins.

It was quite a swaggering youth who danced with the next three partners—no longer tongue-tied, self-critical, wondering after each speech if he had said a stupid or a crude thing. No need to worry. He was all right. Lou's approval was a seal on his charm.

So he grew buoyant, exuberant like the Denny who played with Katy-kid; the Denny who sneaked to open the kitchen door for Violet. He said whatever came into his head, making the shy freshman giggle with mirth and astonishing a tall, proud girl completely out of her disdain. Many another turned as his deep, infectious laughter hummed.

Then he was chatting with Lou again.

"Did you know Isabel Dalton before?" she asked, nodding to the proud one.

"I don't know her now."

"Don't be silly. You've just finished dancing with her."

"Is that her name? Never met her before. Don't care if I never meet her again. You're the only chum I have."

Lou flushed with satisfaction. Handsome, conceited Isabel Dalton didn't have much chance with her "Find."

She was fixing the flowers on her shoulder, trying to restore a crumpled petal:

"Are they all right, now?" she asked.

"Crushed a little. It's a pity to wear them."

"Oh!" Indignation in her tone: "Why, I love them. Orchids are my favorite flower. I always wear them."

Denny was unsophisticated in the ways of girls and the cost of orchids so he merely admitted: "Well, they are pretty spiffy-looking." Long afterwards the incident stuck in his mind.

Lou was a diplomat in her line: "You say you're not going to the dance to-morrow nor the one on Wednesday."

"No. I don't care about dances as a rule."

Lou tossed her head: "That's foolish. The first two weeks don't count so much. We're giving a party next week. Can't you change your rule for that?"

Denny was too astonished to answer. Inconsequently, a picture of Jimmy Foley demanding his suit flashed with comic detail through his mind. He laughed.

"Because," Lou added: "I'd like you to come."

"I'll come!"

"Then I'll send you the bid and maybe I'll ask you to take myself."

Denny walked home, his overcoat thrown open. What if it were two inches short in the sleeves! Lou Bental—dear little fairy—wanted him to take her to a dance!

If the barn had been a mansion he would not have swung more triumphantly toward it. Why, at night, with those vines and roses climbing all over the walls and that great weeping willow in front, it seemed homey, inviting. The moon sent a pale streamer of light that wavered from scarlet rambler to the white, peaked roof, touching the place with shadows and beauty.

Denny went in quietly—stood at the door of Katy's room, was just about to steal away when an airy voice called:

"No—you don't, Mr. Denny! Come in!"

He switched on the light. Katy saw the lilt on his face; she rubbed her chin against her shoulder, eyes dancing:

"I knew it! I knew it!"

"Oh, I'm the boy, Katy-kid!"

"Did you feel funny, Denny? Whatever in the world did you find to talk about with all those people you don't know?"

"Pooh! Easy, Katy—after you get started."

"But at first? Oh, tell the truth, Denny, and don't stand there grinning. I bet you were scared!"

So he began at the beginning and gave all the honest details, said Lou was a fairy with golden hair—a peach of a kid, friendly as could be. . . . But of his miserable aloneness in the room full of fellows he said nothing.

A pleasing sense of satisfaction warmed him. Glorious to be a college fellow—

"But I didn't come here for fun," he thought. "I've got to work." Immediately he dismissed self-reproach. Once couldn't hurt. Anyway he'd start working to-morrow—a builder had given him a job, offering two dollars for every afternoon or

morning he could spare. So he could afford a gay fling or two.

One thing about his tentative engagement with Lou bothered him intermittently. He had heard plenty of gossip. From this he gathered that it was the proper caper to send flowers to the girl one escorted. Orchids were Lou's favorite. He wondered uneasily about these.

One noontime he saw a rich purple flower in a slender tube. After considerable hesitation he walked into the store.

"How do you sell orchids?"

"Two dollars."

"A dozen?"

The man looked at him in surprise, "Each."

Denny frowned, pretended to take the information casually—"I suppose you'll have some toward the end of the week?"

"Most likely. Do you wish to leave an order now?"

"I'll be in again."

He walked out with his hands in his pockets, his forehead damp, "Whew! Two dollars each!"

Lou had worn three—six dollars! It would take him three afternoons to earn enough to buy her flowers. If he went out six times with Lou he would spend the price of a new overcoat.

At first he thought the man was guying him, then he wondered if Lou had orchids growing in a hothouse. But he remembered the comments he had heard and he knew that "Pesky" and other fellows paid for the decorations.

"She'll think I'm a tight." He weighed her criticism with increasing depression, imagined Lou's eyes flashing in scorn, reproached himself as a fool for having gone to the dance and then accepting another invitation.

There stole upon his thought the image of the tin box and Sid's five hundred and sixty dollars. He could take six dollars easily enough. As soon as he was aware of this insidious suggestion, a sense of guilt shamed him. He saw Katy's deep blue eyes fixed on him with sorrow and disappointment and he felt himself shabby—a bluffer.

After a few blocks of moody irritation he dismissed the irksome problem—he would certainly not buy orchids. He'd tell Lou—

He waited with ill-suppressed impatience the coming of her bid. Joyous to see her again! . . . Take her to a dance. Pretty angel looking up to him the way she did!

Tuesday afternoon he was working for the builder. Hauling

lumber. Down the street came three girls. They were laughing and chatting. Denny was just coming to the curb—just about to lift a big two by four. His heart bounded. One of the girls was Lou.

He snatched off his cap with the air of a king. And stood there baffled.

Lou's eyes were wide as though she were suddenly surprised or indignant.

When he finally said with an engaging smile: "How's an old chum to-day?" Lou blushed. She made some stammering remarks and then said airily: "I must run along now, Mr. Brooks."

Denny bit his lips. . . . Suddenly he was aware of his cap, covered with fine white dust, and of his blue overalls. The blood came burning to his face. Had Lou snubbed him for that?

He swept back his hair, yanked on his cap. Could she have done it on purpose? She might have been in a hurry—

Denny's egotism sought an excuse for her. She had liked him from the beginning. Hadn't she called him an "old chum" and cut a dance for him? Would a girl look at a fellow the way she did unless she was interested in him?

Abruptly, bits of their conversation intruded. Why had she asked all those questions about pledging? Why had she talked about the orchids?

Then she didn't give a snap for what he was himself? He walked home so quickly, he came breathless into the kitchen where Katy was decorating a little plate of cold meat with sprigs of parsley.

"Hello!" he greeted, flinging his cap on a chair. He took a knife and began slicing the bread, cutting almost the entire loaf.

"Well—why so busy?" Then she saw the black resolution on Denny's face and grew frightened. "What's the matter, Denny? Did something happen?"

"Happen—what do you mean? Why I don't know of anything." He was at once on guard and began to talk feverishly. Katy waited.

"I suppose the work's pretty hard, Denny? And it takes so much time from your studies."

"Not so much. I'll get along. Other fellows have done it. Want that can opened? Let's eat."

He was extremely fluent until the tea came. He lapsed into silence, clenching his teeth, going through an imaginary but fiery scene with Lou, shaming her before every one with his caustic brilliance.

Katy leaned over, touched his hand:

"It wasn't about the fairy with the golden hair?"

"Aw, to grass with women. A fellow doesn't come here to waste time. I only went to that dance—well, just to find out what things are like. Girls don't interest me."

So Katy guessed and her heart ached.

The days passed. Lou's bid never came. It didn't matter that she laughed into his eyes, finding him a devil of a fellow. Yes, she had done this. That was before she saw him in overalls—hauling lumber.

So he wasn't and never would be "one of the best." She would ignore him silently as those fellows had done. In spite of his lordly youth and the joy this youth so imperiously craved, Lou Bendal and the scores with the same standards could push him out of the light and gayety.

Their word was law ultimate as Matt Borley's fist hammering against Violet's slim body. The muscle of the one was no more brutal an abuse of power than the money of the other.

Denny flung his shoe to the far corner of the room, the old childish hunger for revenge uppermost. He thought of walking up to Lou Bendal and saying: "So it was my purse and not myself you wanted as escort to the dance? If you went with me, you'd wear no orchids!"

He avoided Stephen, flinching at the thought that Stephen, so tall, genial might be of the same caliber.

Stephen sought him out. "Hello, Brooks. Where've you been these last few days?"

"Hauling lumber."

Stephen laughed, disregarding the defiant tone.

"You've made a great hit with Lou. Taking her to-night?"

"No."

"I heard you were."

Denny looked squarely into Stephen's eyes. "You didn't happen to hear that I'm living in a barn, Adams, and working my own way through?"

Stephen colored, "Oh, come off, Brooks. What's that to do with Lou?"

"Enough! I'm not her old chum now."

Stephen winced. "You don't say? Little snob."

They walked across the grass in silence.

"Working this afternoon?" Stephen asked. "What made you pick out such hard graft? I should think you'd go in for coaching in math. It means a dollar or more an hour. You'd be great at it. I could round up fellows for you—"

They reached the street where Stephen lived.

"And as for Lou, I'd not worry, Brooks. Lots of girls round about—"

Denny was won by the warm, impulsive good will; excited by the prospect of doubling his earning power. But as for the girls round about—he'd learned his lesson. He knew why he came to college. He was finished with women—finished for good and all!



## CHAPTER XXIII

### FANCIES

A YOUNG man waited at the side veranda of the big white house. Presently a girl in pink dress and soft, black picture hat flung the door wide, stepped back with a laugh. The man swept his arm about her. The door closed.

Katy, sitting under the great weeping willow, put down her sewing, a smiling wonder lighting the bright face. How sweet that was—to have some one come ringing the bell and to open the door, all glad expectance.

Fay Carleton was about two years older than Katy, the only daughter of the folks who owned the old barn. Katy used to watch her watering the garden in the morning, plucking roses, then a little later coming out with a tennis racquet, swinging happily up the street.

Sometimes in the afternoon five or six girls, all in summer dresses, like gay flowers, came to visit Fay. They used to sit on the porch, talking in eager, excited voices, embroidering, drinking tea. Early in the warm summer evenings the young man came. Often as not he and Fay sat at a window of the living room. Fay, thrumming a ukulele, singing. Katy was an enchanted spectator, charmed by the beauty of this living romance.

It awakened dreams, so vague they were but dim scribblings on her thought, yet sweet. She closed her eyes, fancied herself free, supple as Fay strolling about the garden; fancied herself running to a door, laughing into another face—

At this point the picture blurred. Katy returned to her sewing, the vision, like haunting, distant music, holding her spirit.

To-day and to-morrow, Denny might have to haul lumber, get up at six and study till midnight. But next week—next year this would all pass before the luminous joys awaiting them.

It was hard now. There were times when Katy saw traces of depression on Denny's face, times when the students Stephen introduced didn't pay for their coaching; other weeks when

building was slack. They had to take money from the tin box. There was only five hundred dollars there now.

"We'll stick it out for a year or so, anyway, Katy-kid!" Denny, pretending that he didn't care about using up their treasure, came home with a box of ice cream and three silk handkerchiefs "to celebrate the busting of the bank!"

But Katy knew that all his heart was in his work. She knew, too, that she was a burden. It saddened her. More busily than before she went on making Irish crochet, praying with her old, child faith in the angel that some miracle would happen and she could sell all these beautiful things.

One morning when Denny had wheeled her into the sun and she was busy on a collar, there, as nice as you please, came the angel's answer. Fay, swinging an apron filled with scarlet roses, stopped for a little chat.

She had her light, brown hair gathered, Grecian fashion, in a knot at her neck—a flat-chested, clear-skinned girl with a boyish gleefulness in her straight, short nose and wide, shapely mouth. Katy thought her immensely attractive.

Sitting on the bench at Katy's side, she let her fingers toy aimlessly with the heaps of lace in Katy's basket:

"You're the busy little thing. Oh, isn't this stunning? What in the world will you do with all those?"

Katy flushed. On many a morning she had made up her mind to speak to Fay about selling the laces. She had never quite summoned the courage. Here was the opening.

"Why, I thought, perhaps—well, I don't know—perhaps—do you think I could sell them? Are they done well enough?"

"Are they? They're perfectly exquisite—gorgeous. Let me show them to mother."

A palpitant half hour Katy waited. The porch door opened and Mrs. Carleton, quiet, fragrant of culture, came across the lawn. She had a box in her hand. Inside were sheer batistes, silks—the materials for Fay's trousseau. Could Katy put a fine edge on the lingerie? Could she make rose medallions? A lace bedspread?

To Katy's grateful imagination it was the beginning of that glowing future when all things she had dreamed of would be hers.

Many an extra stitch she wove into the delicate patterns, feeling herself drawn into the happy contact with love and the beauty of life.

At the end of a week she had sold to Fay's friends a half dozen jabots, four collars. Chafing with joy and suspense, she waited for Denny. On his plate were heaped silver quarters, dollars, halves.

"What's this? Robbing the bank, Katy-kid?"

She laughed, her cheeks pink: "I, Denny! I made it all myself!"

At first he couldn't understand, then a queer torment ran through him as though he had fallen short in some way.

"Aren't you glad, Denny? Aren't you orful glad? Just sitting in the sun and running a needle in and out, I made all that. And I made myself ten thousand times happier. Gee, Denny, why don't you laugh?"

So he did. He did more than that, not trying to hide the tears.

"You're a brick, Katy-kid. You're a peach. Gee, first thing I know you'll be sending me through college. Well, you will!"

"I can easily earn this much in a month, Denny—easily! And it's much better for me to have something to do. Then you know Fay keeps running over to tell me how she wants things. Oh, and that's lots of fun having some one to talk to. I like her; she's all made out of laughs. Remember you used to say I was that way? And she's so in love. It's beautiful—all that, don't you think?"

He laughed at her, yet the wistful beauty of her face, sweet as he remembered his mother's, troubled him. Poor little Katy—thrilled because she had some one to talk to. Humph! She must be lonely.

A dozen times he had resolved to take her for a walk every night, to attend a concert, but he never seemed to have a moment. His course was hard—he hadn't half time enough to study. Even getting up at six and going to bed at twelve he hadn't been able to earn more than thirty-five dollars a month.

This first term, brightened though it was by Stephen's friendship, was a dark, unhappy experience. Denny couldn't seem to fit in or to get his grip. He studied relentlessly, felt sure he had a better brain than others, yet even his marks were disappointing. In a chemistry "ex," a shallow fellow he had coached, received a first grade, Denny a second. He felt an insidious injustice in this as though one were rated not for knowledge, but for an ability to "show off." A falseness not

remote from Lou Bendal's standard when she judged him not by the man he was, but by the money he could spend.

Two or three times he had passed Lou, but she became at once preoccupied with books or companions. Once he came directly in her path. She tried to evade. But Denny, feeling himself cool and sophisticated in his contempt, stared at her, saw her cheeks flame. Abruptly she nodded: "How do you do, Mr. Brooks?"

He swept off his cap and laughed, thinking like a kid: "I made you do it, Miss Smarty! Miss Snob!" Afterward he was a little ashamed.

Katy knew nothing of Denny's bleak disappointments. There were times when he would have been glad if something forced him to quit, yet there was no trace of surrender in the brave, boastful Denny, who stopped in the middle of dishwashing to explain some experiment he had performed, insisting that she understand, berating her with a fierce:

"See here, Miss Katy-kid, you've got to study! Now, I mean it! You've got to have an interest in life."

He did mean it—Katy could send her thoughts on silver wings into the laughing future. But Denny saw only that she was nearing seventeen—prettiest thing a fellow ever saw—and that she could walk little better than in the beginning. Katy could rejoice in the sweetness of another's romance; Denny dreaded the moment when she might lose her faith, find before her only the shadow of an aimless, destitute maturity.

The way she talked about Fay and love clung in his mind. Did Katy really dream of these things for herself? Did she believe she was getting better?

He came home one evening with tickets for a concert.

"Now we step out, Katy. After this we're going out every other week. Get ready."

"You mean to take me, Denny?"

"Of course, stupid!"

She turned her head, brushed her hand quickly over her eyes. "It's better not to, Denny. I don't want to go."

He was dumfounded: "What do you mean?" He saw her tears. "What's the matter?"

"Oh—you go alone, Denny. I don't want you to—why, everybody'd stare and make you feel queer wheeling me—"

It hurt him like a raw cut when Katy spoke of herself. He talked at her through his teeth:

"That's a fine thing to say! Do you think I give a darn for any one's stares? Well, I don't!"

A few moments later she was singing at the top of her joyous voice, almost hysterical at the prospect of excitement, music, hundreds of people. Her gladness drew a pain across his heart.

Why should Katy be like this? Was any purpose served through all her suffering? Why need this thing ever have happened? Why need any one ever sorrow?

He carried her from the door of the hall to their seats. And as always his questions found answer only in a great rush of tenderness for her; for poor Aunt Josie; for a dog on the street—arresting pities in the blind competition that is existence.

There was no sadness in Katy's heart. In a dream she listened to the numbers. When they had ceased her spirit loitered among the echoes, building new rhythms, sweeter cadences.

Out of the dream came a face, a voice. Then some one with laughing eyes and breezing word looking at her, holding her hand: "Oh—so this is Katy-kid!"

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE DINNER PARTY

He came toward her out of the music and the dream, laughter in his eyes.

"You're Stephen?"

"Sure enough."

Katy's eyes shone with a frank joy. She extended her hand eagerly. "You've been such a friend to Denny. I think I like you already, Stephen. Denny and I are both happy to know you."

Katy was unaware of the naïve formality of her speech. Stephen's eyes twinkled.

"I'd rather you liked me on your own account, Katy."

"I shouldn't be surprised if I do."

Katy was exhilarated. The yellow lights, like a sun, entered her mind in fine, golden streams, pouring a sparkling warmth into her veins. She felt at home in the presence of happiness, and Stephen, sitting next her, was happy.

They waited till the crowd left. Then Denny raised her in his arms. "I'm heavy, but Denny is so strong," she said proudly. A sadness was in Stephen's eyes.

Katy saw it, and she would like to have reached out her hand, as she often did to Denny, and say: "Oh, don't be sad for me. I don't need any pity. And to-night—why, can't you see that in another minute I'm likely to go up like a skyrocket and burst—I feel so light with happiness."

She talked eagerly of the music, the people, the woman who sat in front of them with a funny black quill perched like a sentinel over her face; the cloud-limned beauty of the night. When they were parting she said with prim courtesy:

"Denny and I would be quite pleased to have you come for dinner some evening. You'd be surprised what a cook I am!" "You can surprise me all you like, Katy. I'll come!"

"Isn't he noble?" she said wistfully to Denny when they were in the big, scantily furnished living room. Denny rubbed his hands and chuckled.

"I don't know about that, Thelma! Would you say I was noble or heroic?"

But Katy had taken the word from the "Idylls of the Kings," and she had already mounted Stephen on a white horse, given him a rose and watched him gallop off on some quest of chivalry. Denny's mockery brought out a blushing denial.

"I only mean he's tall and nice looking."

"Hence, noble!"

From Denny's raillery Katy turned with a luxurious relief to her mind pictures. There was a new figure now to give a dash of color to her fancies, to fill with imaginary adventure and conversation the emptiness of her days.

Sitting in the Carletons' garden watching the moving specks on the distant bay—boats coming in, boats going out, she planned the dinner when their guest would come. Should they have asparagus salad or tomato? Should they have steak or a little roast? Perhaps Fay would let her gather a bowl of roses?

Katy was given to these idle speculations. A little kindness from Mrs. Carleton or Fay would unloose whole troupes of happy fancies. She imagined herself in the Carleton living room, sitting at the piano, playing, and Fay saying: "Oh—you're a musician as well as a lace maker, are you?"

Often in the midst of some particular extravagance she caught herself up with a laugh, shaking the dreams out of her eyes. Of course, there would be always just she and Denny—once in a while a concert . . .

One evening when she was experimenting with French fried potatoes as a great surprise, Denny hurried breathlessly through the living room. She heard him pause, shove the chairs, give a kick to the rug:

"Gee, this place is bare, isn't it?" He had an excited look as though he were bringing home a report card marked No. 1. He dumped half a dozen bags on the sink board, flung off his coat and began to open cans.

"Steve's coming!" He tried to make the tone matter of fact.

"Not to-night? Oh!" Katy was almost in tears. "And we've only got stew and carrots from last night! Why did you, Denny?"

"Get busy, Katy-kid—quick! I tell you he's coming! Look—" He began opening his parcels—a can of olives, green

peas, three T-bone steaks. "How's that? Pretty clever?"

"What'll we do with the stew?"

"To-morrow—fix up the table pretty. Gee—this house is empty, isn't it?"

They stood at the kitchen door looking into the dim oblong room with its three grandmother rag rugs, its black horsehair chairs, the couch with the gaudy crazy quilt. It had an air of austerity about it as though here was a fine old aristocrat come to the end of her days.

But the setting sun flamed through the immense west window, caught the barbaric colors in the Chinese lanterns and recast them fantastically on the dark walls. There was unexpected charm, as of darkness blooming with scarlet and amber flowers.

"I love this place, Denny—love it."

"It's not so bad—there, the spuds are burning!"

And Stephen was knocking.

"Dinner ready?" he called. "I'm starved, Katy-kid. Got any surprises to-day?"

"More than I counted on, indeed!"

She dried her hand on her apron. He caught it without waiting.

"Not more than you welcome, I hope? Humph! Potatoes burned?"

He pulled back the pan. Katy laughed.

"Make yourself to home, Mr. Stephen!"

"I'm a bit timid, Katy-kid, but I'll try."

Katy's spirits rose buoyantly. It was the very first time they ever had company. Denny was so smart to think of olives. How pretty they looked set on top of the salad.

"Do you think that's pretty, Mr. Stephen?" She held up the dish.

"Oh, very, Miss Katy-kid."

"Then you put them in the places and keep the one you think is nicest for yourself."

He began to rearrange the knives and forks.

"Oh, don't!" Katy warned, laughing.

"Why not? They belong this way."

"No—you don't know. You see the forks are the brides and the knives are the grooms. When you put them on the table they're going into church to be married. See this old pair that is so shabby and sad?"



"I suppose they've been married a long while and that's the reason they're so done up?"

"No—they're an old maid and an old bachelor and they've known each other over twenty years and I push them right into church, but they haven't sense enough to go up the aisle!"

Stephen laughed: "So you think the happiest people are the married ones, Katy?"

"Why, yes. Who can be happy alone? If you have no one you have to pretend people are around talking, bringing you beautiful gifts, laughing. It's much better to really have them."

She spoke unconsciously from the depths of her own loneliness, yet was unaware of the pathos in her words.

Denny came in with the bread. "Do you like our barn? They sat facing the window with the painted sky like a great masterpiece flung before them.

Stephen liked the barn, the cooking, the quaint chairs and Katy's quainter talk. He was surprised to find her listening eagerly, as though she understood, when Denny and he talked of their work. Especially he found himself waiting for her laugh that came bubbling merrily to her lips, lighting odd fairy fires in the clear blue of her eyes.

"Denny and I are glad that you came, Stephen, though you were quite a surprise on top of warmed over carrots and stew. Do you know we've never had company before—never!"

Then Stephen remembered he had brought a box of candy. Katy was quite overcome. Her gayety touched something deeper than amusement.

"Lonely kid!" he thought.

Katy had bright company in her memories for the next few days. She peopled the garden with glorified Katys saying bright things to laughing Stephens, telling what a fine fellow Denny was.

One afternoon the dream figures were routed as a very real Stephen crossed to the willow tree, slumped lazily at her feet with a familiar: "Hello, Kate! How's the view to-day?" He began to recount all the odd news of the campus, drawing her out about Denny, her housekeeping, her recreations.

After that he came often, bringing magazines, a box of candy, a book. His visits were wine to her.

Toward the end of the second term Denny sat studying, looking up every now and then to scan Katy's face. At last he said abruptly:

"Steve's folks are going East, Katy. He wants to come and live with us. He thinks this place can be fixed up fine. How about it? Would you like it?"

Katy trembled with excitement: "Would you, Denny?"

"Yes, we study fine together."

It was decided in Stephen's favor. In a few days he came. "Have you room in your heart for another brother, Katy?"

"I think I've room there for you, Stephen."

## CHAPTER XXV

### NEW TIES

"THINK I'll invite Lou Bendal over for dinner. Show her something new in the line of drawing-rooms." Denny could laugh at that old snub now. He put a final twist to the gaudy mandarin skirt draped over the piano, stood back, chuckling with artistic triumph: "Well, how's that?"

"Push it back a little—"

"I should say not! It's perfect—"

"Just a little—there. That picture's too high, Stephen; now it's too low—wonderful. Try the sofa against the other wall. Put the big chair in the corner. Oh, if this isn't scrumptious!" Katy, sitting in the middle of the room, excitedly hurling orders now to one, now to the other, directed the placing of the furniture Stephen had brought.

The old barn with its stiff horsehair chairs, its prim rag rugs, was transformed, keeping its ancient grandmother look, yet adding an ample, colorful luxuriousness. There was a fine steel engraving, an exquisitely framed copy of the Battersea bridge, four deep, "sinky" chairs, as Katy called them when she found herself buried in the soft cushions; a long table, the sofa and a piano. Good enough for a queen, Katy said to herself, or a princess. Aren't we lucky!

The best thing of all was the fireplace. In the first week of vacation Denny and Stephen builded it themselves, getting a load of old cobblestones—engineering a masterpiece in size and beauty. Now they were waiting, praying for wind and rain, even a blizzard, that they might listen in joy to the crackling of big pine logs.

There was a new brightness in their lives that gave Katy the feeling of being on a picnic or taking part in a never-ending play. In the mornings Denny started the breakfast. As she went out to set a little table in the kitchen or mix a batter, she heard them dressing, taking icy showers, Denny singing at the top of his voice as though to intimidate the cold; Stephen clapping his hands, sending a shrill, chattering "heeo!" through the house. They came dashing to the kitchen, fastening a cuff,

tying neckties, swallowing the coffee and hot cakes soused in syrup, calling for more. Katy felt herself drawn into a vivid, electric current that sent sparks of joy to every nerve.

After they had gone she cleared the dishes, set the table for dinner, putting flowers in the center, pretending that Denny and Stephen were two kings and she a queen shut off on a lonely island and there was no one else in the world.

Late in the afternoon when she had finished her sewing and while the dinner was cooking, she sat at the piano, picking out by ear all the tunes she had heard. She imagined herself a prima donna not yet discovered, and she would hold the long notes, raising her hands very high, very fancy, thinking: "Some one may pass, stop in astonishment, saying: 'Oh, what a voice! You must go to Italy and study.'"

It was usually Juanita that Katy sang for these fine effects, reaching a climax of tenderness in the line: "Ask thy soul if we should part." Her hand would strike a note, rise like a rubber ball half way to her shoulder. . . .

A rude laugh: "Gee, Melba!" Denny flung his hat on the sofa, sat down, sprawling out his legs: "You're a scream. It's a wonder you don't throw a fit laughing at yourself."

Katy giggled, her cheeks crimson: "You weren't supposed to hear. I only sing that for a special audience."

"Come on, now—who are your favored friends?"

"Just the same, you never can tell—"

"Oh—" Denny knew Katy's dreaming: "Some one is supposed to overhear and come rushing in to find little Jenny Lind?"

"Where's Steve?" Katy waved her hand, placidly changed the subject.

"Not coming to-night. I forgot to tell you."

"And I made the loveliest doughnuts—"

"You mean the elegantest doughnuts. Time was when I was worth cooking for—"

"Denny! Oh—now you didn't mean that? Honestly, did you?"

He pushed her over to the table, grinning, brought in the Hamburg loaf and the baked potatoes.

"But say you didn't. Denny—please."

"Stupid! Sure I didn't mean it. Think I'd say it if I did? You know what I'd like to know, Katy? Are you as happy now as you were before?"

"Aren't you, Denny?"

"I asked you first. You answer."

"Then I am. Indeed, I am."

"There's more work for you to do and we don't have so much time to talk. Do you wish I'd told Steve he couldn't come?"

Katy felt as though she were asked to attend the execution of a beloved friend. Steve, with his breezy laughter—the little gifts he brought—yet Katy wondered why Denny asked.

"I'm glad as I can be that he's here, Denny. Now you say what you think."

"I just wanted to know if you were satisfied. I am. Why, it's made all the difference in the world to me. You know that first year was awful. I'd never have stood it except for you, Katy."

"Me!"

"That's it, all right. I'd have quit if I were alone. Now things are different. Steve's done a lot for me."

The cruel sense of isolation no longer chilled him. With Stephen's coming, Denny's whole life expanded, warmed. Even his courses came easier, for, as he told Katy, "He'd got on to the hang of studying, at last."

And now he had friends. This was the best gift Stephen brought. Often on a Friday night, the big, comfortable room shouted with their arguments, the air floating a dense lavender smoke curtain.

These were festive occasions. At first Katy was bewildered and frightened in the presence of such great masculine brilliance. Soon she was waiting, from week to week, for their coming. She heaped a plate with sandwiches, decorating the edge with lettuce leaves, and made a cauldron of coffee.

Thus equipped, there was mighty talk of God and devil, evolution, the track team, women or love.

Stephen usually sat on a stool near Katy's chair, ready to do her bidding. She found opposite her always—his dark, steadfast eyes following every tilt of her head—an odd, sober fellow—Clay Andrews. Andrews terrified her with his talk.

"Pity means the doom of the strong, the end of progress," he was saying, this evening. "Suppose all the monkeys had passed a law that the least among them should have the same chance as the best, where would we be to-day? Monkeys still—all of us. Sacrifice by the sturdy to save the puny is only a senseless halting of evolution. If the swiftest runners must be forever pausing to aid the lagging, none will ever reach the goal. My

business is with Me and Me alone. We never help another when we cripple ourselves."

This was the signal for Denny's antagonism. He never heard Andrews talk but he felt himself the little fellow of nine again cowering as Matt Borley searched his pockets; screaming in anguish when Prince Jerry died; mute with terror when Violet's white face was struck. Before him went a long procession of Katys, Aunt Josies, Violets, struggling, perhaps starving, no one knew where; and on the other side were the triumphant Matt Borleys, Lizzies, Clyde Dunstans.

"That's cheap talk, Clay. Survival of the fittest doesn't mean survival of the best. Sometimes it's nothing but cruelty, greed, selfishness, that enables survival. The sensitive and the beautiful are crushed out in the struggle."

They went over to the fire—for they had a big one this month of November—to thrash it out. Stephen called for a song; he sat on the bench with Katy, turned the leaves. Clay Andrews came up and leaned on the piano:

"Will you sing alone to-night, Katy?"

"Oh, I can't, Clay. You know they all make fun of me."

"Just one song?" The seriousness of his tone made her nervous, but Denny chimed in: "Come on, now, Melba, give us 'Juanita' and raise your hands up good and high. Come on."

Katy could never refuse Denny anything—even the chance to ridicule her. She sang. Clay Andrews sat with folded arms, staring at the wall, unaware when she stopped till the others guyed him.

"Thanks," he said soberly. "Katy has a wonderful voice."

"What did I tell you, Mr. Denny, eh?" Katy laughed.

When they had gone, Stephen stood behind her chair, winked at Denny.

"Is Andy in love with our Kate, Den?"

"Humph, never saw him with tears in his eyes before."

"Nor I, either. You'll not go off and leave us, will you, Katy-kid?"

"Not ever as long as you want me, Stevie. Oh, it gives me the creeps to think of it."

For the first time Katy had a vision of the day when this gay home would close; when she and Denny and Stephen would no longer be together. Impulsively she caught Steve's hand.

"I'll never be the one to go, Stephen—never. It would break my heart."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### DENNY IN LOVE

DENNY opened the door of the Chemistry laboratory. And seeing a young girl sitting at the far end of the table, he chuckled silently. He could see her profile, white and delicate against all that fluttery dark hair. He took a noisy step hoping she'd look up startled—look up with those starry eyes all dewy with surprise.

He would have scoffed had Katy said it, but Denny was in love—jauntily, gayly, thrillingly in love. To himself he called her "Joan." She was slim and eager, with dark hair and a lovely mouth pink as coral. But for all this she was shy and very studious. She had dreams and a purpose in life. . . . Once they'd walked across the campus and she said so. But because her shiny eyes looked up to his with flushed, humble admiration, because her luring mouth said gravely: "You have a purpose, too, Mr. Brooks. I felt it the first time I looked at you." Because of this and her confused flush, Denny thought her deep and lovely.

Joan was the only student in the lab. . . . She heard Denny coming. With a sharp intake of breath, she bent over the test-tubes.

He stopped at the table. . . . "Working hard, Miss Lewis?"

"I'm almost finished . . . I got stuck on this problem—but I've got it now, I think . . . did you do it this way?"

She shoved her notebook toward him. Their hands touched. Joan looked up, then down and catching the flash of his white teeth she thought hurriedly and with an inward sigh, "Isn't he handsome!"

He wasn't, but the clean, sparkling youth, the young, happy eyes made him vital and beautiful to a girl just seventeen—a quiet, eager girl whose heart was all a-thrill for life but whose days were a little hard and destitute of pleasure.

Joan never dreamed that any one, especially a fellow all magnetism like this Denman Brooks, would find her appealing. Studying at night in the dining room of the little cottage in West Berkeley, her thoughts would wander; she would visualize

him in his blue apron working over retorts; rigging up apparatus. She fancied him working out these problems that baffled her with lightning speed. She wondered what he did on Friday or Saturday evenings. Did he have a thrilling time? Was there a girl he took to dances? A girl he loved? Did they go for walks on lovely moonlit nights? And did he stop and kiss the girl?

Joan blushed at the audacity of these thoughts— But—oh—how wondrous to be loved by some one strong and brilliant—some one all sunny, laughing charm! Instead she would be a teacher in a country high school. She'd earn one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month and be glad about it. There were younger sisters and the little brother. And it was costing plenty to educate Joan—oldest of the family.

Of course she wanted to be a teacher . . . she longed for the day she'd be earning and the everlasting pinching at home would be done with. Besides, Joan adored her father. When she was bringing in money he wouldn't have to fritter his great powers on short, radical articles. He'd have leisure to write his masterpiece—the book that was in his thoughts every hour of the day. . . .

So she had a purpose before her. . . . Just the same there came a fluttering in her pulse when a tan, shapely hand touched hers and a voice said, teasing: "I see we're smart, aren't we?"

She picked up her books . . . giving a bright laugh: "I've got to be. . . ."

"Because of your great purpose?"

"I guess you think me a prig, don't you, Mr. Brooks?"

Denny was astute. He knew Joan looked up to him. So he took advantage of her as a man of the world will. He said: "That I do, Joan." And thought himself a master of repartee and coolness. "And that's not all I think about you."

She glanced up startled. Unaccountably tears flew to her eyes but she said quickly enough: "You're in engineering, aren't you? Oh, I think that's a wonderful field. I suppose you dream of bridging the stars as Peer did in 'The Great Hunger.'"

"Who is Peer?"

"I have the book. You must read it. . . ."

"Bring it to me, will you?"

They walked down Bancroft Way where pink geraniums with waxy leaves grew all over the garden fences. In Joan's thought, the way he called her name kept thrilling like a song.



She couldn't study that night. She went over word by word all that he had said. She treasured his looks, that grin of his. She whispered to herself breathlessly "Oh" and even in the dark found herself flushing.

Denny, washing the dishes that night, was very absent-minded. He paused two or three times, hands deep in the suds. Cute little trick. Joan—what a thrilling name. Beautiful mouth and, gee, those eyes!

Joan was the first girl to lure him since Lou Bental trampled on his youthful pride. Two full years gone now,—the beginning of his junior term. He wasn't in love with Joan. Of course not!—But then, how swift and eager she was and how delightful to have her look up so wistfully as she did once and say—"You're the only man friend I ever had"—or again—"Oh, you'll be sure to make a mark. I'll be so proud watching you—"

Joan was like Katy, taking his greatness for granted. As they became more friendly, Denny liked to steal quietly behind, surprising Joan with a chuckling, "Hello, Joany." He formed the habit of doing this.

Joan, flushing to the heart because of the astonishing sweetness, came to wait for these interruptions. When they reached the vacant lots in West Berkeley and were sure no one might see them, he slipped an arm through hers.

Then the whole world seemed laughing to Joan. When she thought of Denny Brooks, she closed her eyes swiftly and found her breath coming hard. Sometimes in the morning as she combed and braided her younger sister's hair, she would stop abruptly, Denny's image coming before her eyes. She would think to herself, "I love him. Oh, I love him." She would be roused from this by the little sister's impatient: "Oh, Joan, you get slower every day."

Joan had never been given to "cases," so she took this friendship of Denny's with a romantic exaltation. He was brilliant, he was handsome, he was strong. She knew that he was working his way through college, and that he lived with his sister, and that awfully attractive Stephen Adams. Joan visualized their rollicky, bohemian existence. She pictured Katy as a perfectly entrancing girl of eighteen, with whom Steve, of course, was in love. Of Katy's handicap, Denny spoke never a word, but he used to say, "Joan, as soon as this term is over and I get a breathing space, you've got to come and see Katy."

The promise was never kept. Toward the middle of the term, Joan became more and more studious, more and more quiet. By this time she and Denny had talked very flamingly of the years before them. And Denny told how he was going to work hard and establish himself, then he and his sister were going to vagabond all over the earth. Once he said: "Joany, maybe you'll come along?" He grew red saying this and laughed, but for weeks Joan recalled the look of his eyes and whispered, faint with emotion, "Could it be? Does he care?"

Now this October twilight, Denny, stepping along at Joan's side, twitched her elbow. "Come through, Joany. What's worrying you the last two weeks?"

Joan's dark hair was parted in the middle and drawn quaintly from a face quite exquisitely shaped. She looked so sweet. She said suddenly, "I may have to quit, Denny—I think we're going away."

Joan's father had not sold any articles for two months and Joan's mother was ill. There was a chance as teacher of classical languages in a Seattle private school for boys. This chance had been offered to Arthur Lewis. Acceptance meant the surrender of his dreams, but it meant also an assured income of one hundred dollars a month. Joan would have to give up college for a year and take her mother's place.

A week later—she said simply, "We're going, Denny.—We may never see each other again—"

It was ten o'clock—warm Indian summer evening. They were coming down the steps of the library together.

They just looked at each other. Then Denny said: "Oh, Joany, I'm so sorry. Couldn't you manage to stick it out somehow?"

She shook her head.

"When will you go?"

"To-morrow."

"And is this 'good-by,' Joany? Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I only learned it at supper to-night."

Instinctively they turned eastward to the hills. Then Denny reached for Joan's hand. "I'll be lonesome without you." He laughed. "Because you're the only lady friend I've got, Joan."

"Oh, really?"

"The only one. Think you'll come back?"

"No—but I'll write. I don't make friends quickly. I'd hate to lose one. . . ."

"Me, Joan? You don't want to lose me?"

Her hand turned in his. They pressed on up the slope spongy with dead leaves and acorns. The eucalyptus trees above the columns of the Greek theater swayed and were pliant in the breeze.

Joan said: "I want to thank you, Denny."

"Why?"

"For—for your friendship. . . ."

"Why then I thank you back." Odd thing for a girl to say. Fancy Lou Bendal saying that!

Joan gave a queer, trembly laugh: "But you don't know how much it's meant to me. It's lovelier—" She paused. He heard the catch in her voice and was touched and warmed. Then Joan looked up; he was looking down.

"Is this your good-by, Joan? This is the last time I'll see you? You won't say good-by like this?" He suddenly framed her face in his hands: "Joan, can I? Please." She closed her eyes—moved toward him, felt his lips, sweeter than anything she had ever known, touching on hers.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### JOAN PASSES

HE missed Joan. She was the first girl he had ever kissed . . . kissed in that way. The memory of it dwelt with him warmly—a sweetness—a fragrance—a pure, dear loveliness.

And now in the late afternoons as he crossed the campus he felt lonely. Why did Joan have to leave—? Give up all her ardent dreams—close the books she loved so devotedly? He recalled her face as he held it in his hands, tears on her eyelids, lips half parted. He wished exceedingly that Joan were near.

He missed her more as the weeks went on and he returned to his previous isolation. He and Katy—Katy and he—always like this. He wondered if Katy too had longings. He often wondered this. . . .

One night they were talking. On Thursdays, Stephen had dinner at the fraternity house. So Denny and Katy talked. She began in a quiet, indifferent tone: "Fay isn't going to be married for a whole year. But she grows more and more in love. I wonder what it's like to be in love. You don't know, do you, Denny? You've never had any experience."

"Oh, haven't I?"

"In love now, Denny? Well I've guessed as much."

"You have! When do I see the fair one? Under the midnight moon? Look here, Katy, you're not half drying those dishes. Look at that!" He was blushing and knew it. By way of diverting conversation, he trailed a wet hand across the stack.

Katy grabbed them quickly: "They're done! They'll be dry by morning anyway." She began to sing.

The song dug a neat chasm between the past conversation and the present moment. So Katy felt safe in pursuing her meditations.

"So you are in love, Denny darling? And Stevie's in love. The whole world's in love. And I suppose Stephen will take his friend Alice to the big game, Denny?"

Denny caught the piercing, wistful note. He was immediately on the watch. "Yes, I guess he will. Why, Katy-kid?"

"I was just wondering. I'm so glad you're going, Denny."

"Not sure that I am."

"It will be the saddest day of my life if you're to stay home this year again, Denny."

It would be a mighty blue day for Denny too, but he didn't feel right about spending the money on himself. The big game was only a week off.

Every night after this Katy kept urging. Finally he bought a ticket with the rooters. Katy became wildly excited. She said impulsively: "Oh, isn't it terrible to think Denny might have missed the game again? Is it very thrilling, Stevie, dear?"

"Lord," thought Denny suddenly, "she's crazy to go—crazy to see the game herself."

Stephen thought the same but he answered lightly: "The greatest show and the finest day on earth, beautiful Kate."

The next day Stephen brought home a cane with yards and yards of blue and gold ribbon: "Fix it up joyous, will you, Kate? It's for my best girl."

Katy's fingers trembled but she made a flaunting, triumphant bow with long, gallant streamers.

"Oh, great, Katy-kid!" Stephen said. "Think my girl will like it?"

"Don't you? She ought to."

"But she's an awfully particular kind of girl, Kate."

"And pretty, Steve?"

"The only kind I draw. She has a peach of a name too."

"Alice?"

"Do you think that's a good name? Kate's much snappier."

"Oh, like mine? So her name's Kate?"

But Denny could brook no more. "You poor little Stupid! Think we were going to leave you home?"

"And who else is our best girl?" Stephen put the cane in Katy's hands.

She turned her head. Then she looked back at them, eyes full of tears, lips all brimming, half with laughter and half with prayer—a little prayer of thanks to the dear, good angel who gave her Denny and added Stephen for good measure.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE BIG GAME

KATY fastened the streaming ribbons first on one shoulder, then on the other. Pulses throbbed in every nerve. The pins kept dropping.

"There!" she said aloud. "Oh, stunning!"

There was still a moment; neither Denny nor Stephen was yet shouting for her to hurry. She pulled her hat closer over the chestnut curls, picked up Stephen's cane, waved it with a gay flourish.

"Ready?" That was Denny. For once he hadn't caught her in her absurdities before the mirror. "Well—we've got to move now!"

"Yes—come in, Denny. Now tell me, how do I look?" The red lips parted in arch, arrested mirth, the curls just showing under her small hat, the bright eyes and flushed cheeks—it might have been Queenie standing before him. He was startled by the sudden resemblance.

"Well? I don't look good enough? I didn't make a good job of the dress?"

"Come on. You're all right! You look the best I ever saw you."

She smiled happily. "That's what I thought myself. Stephen is coming with us? We're all going together?"

"Sure, I'm with you, Kate. Hop along."

They fell in with an excited beribboned throng on College avenue, pennants bobbing, yellow chrysanthemums flashing past.

"Oh," Katy kept saying to herself as she looked to one side, and again, "oh, oh," as she looked to the other.

People turned to glance from the vivid girl in the chair to the sunny-faced Denny pushing her swiftly, a little sensitive of all these covert glances. Yet he could not have Stephen wheeling Katy. That was his job.

Katy had no touch of shyness. Before her was the marching pageant of ribbons and flowers; beyond this, the gate and the great field, with its tumult of color and sound. The rooters

were in their places—on one side a meadow of blue, on the other a field of scarlet.

"Well, Katy-kid?" Denny wheeled her in front of the bleachers. "Well, what do you say?"

Big stains marked her cheeks. She was mute with excitement.

"Pretty good, Kate? and the show's not on yet." Stephen took a box of candy from his pocket, put it in her lap. "Now, look—there's my seat up there. Wave to me."

He was with the rooters, as Denny, too, was to have been. With a little pang, Katy watched him winding up the steps. When he was finally seated she waved the cane, calling to Denny as though it was a miracle "Look! There he is! I see him!"

The flare of music, the bleachers rising in one impulse; the team, shoulders hunched, running to the field.

"Now watch, Katy!" Denny's hand gripped her chair. He sat at her feet. "Look, there's Red—keep your eye on him."

For two nights he had been coaching her in the science of the game, drawing diagrams and placing the two teams in position.

But Katy was eyes, ears, finger tips for the crowds, the music, the yell leaders running to and fro, the beautiful girls with their red carnations or their violets hurrying to their places, smiling at the young men accompanying them. How graceful and swift they were!

"Aw, gee, Katy! Now!"

A momentary hush—the whistle—the kickoff.

"Gee, Katy!" Denny on his feet, shouting. Behind them a thunder of voices, a mad "Oski," a gasping: "Lord!" and Denny slumped back to his place. "Get that, Katy?"

She was sitting forward, lips parted, waving the cane in a wild fervor, not hearing a word Denny spoke. He was delighted. Katy got the play.

Then she was grabbing his shoulder, thumping him with the cane, calling "Goody! Goody!" when there wasn't a thing to be yelling about.

But her spirit rode high on this crest of flashing enthusiasm; just behind her the yell leaders on their long shelves dashed about screaming at the tops of their voices, a thousand flowers and pennants waved, the bleachers rose shouting to their feet, subsided and kept doing this like an excited and restless sea. Katy lost track of the game in the splendid distraction of the mob.

When the first half was over and Denny, feverish with alarm and excitement, kept assuring her: "We'll win! Not over yet! We'll win!" she laughed joyously, replying: "It doesn't matter! Doesn't matter!" For the band flung out the swinging strains of "Boola"; white pigeons, some with red, some with blue streamers circled tranquilly in the sun, and all at once the blue meadow of the rooters flamed with yellow as though a tide of buttercups rushed in, bowed gallantly and ebbed. Then, up there in that field, she traced again and again the laughing outlines of Stephen's face.

"Watch the other side. Gee—that's clever!" On the red field the white letters marched. "Gee—they're coming! They're here!"

It was a frantic Denny who yelled and stamped to his feet in the second half and finally flung off his cap with a bitter "Lord! Cooked! Gee!"

The grieved disappointment of his look went to Katy's heart. Why, he was almost crying. She touched his arm, "But it was wondrous. Even though we lost, it was uplifting. Oh, look—those hats!"

The victors were tumbling wildly to the field. The mad serpentine of victory began. Red hats tossed high—red hats over the goal posts.

Denny squared his shoulders, lifting his young voice in the piercing and beautiful solemnity of the college anthem. Katy too, sang. Her cheeks were wet. She glanced at all those boys with bared heads . . . all the girls and all the old graduates standing with lowered heads drawn together in a common emotion—filling the sunny November day with song—singing away the bitterness of defeat with a mighty: "Hail California!"

They waited till the departing crowds left, a strange hush sifting down over the turbulent field. Then Stephen was with them—very quiet. "Tough, wasn't it?" he asked forlornly, brightening as he gathered Katy's flowers and ribbons: "Like it, Katy-kid? Guess you did."

As they turned at Bancroft, Clay Andrews, the dark, sober face lighted, caught Katy's hand, exclaiming abruptly: "I saw you! This is great!" No one knew just what he meant. But he walked to the house with them, talking to Katy, surprising them all with his laughter.

Denny and Katy went in alone. Stephen was out for dinner.



It was lonesome—too quiet after the mad jubilation of the afternoon.

"You'll go out to-night, Denny?" Katy asked as they ate. "Please—I know you must be dying to be out with everybody!"

"No—" But there was a restlessness in him. He kept jumping up every few minutes to bring in water, the tea, more bread.

"You know I like to stay alone, sometimes, and I have a good book. Don't miss the fun. That makes me feel such a burden."

"Why do you say those things, Katy? Don't you know that's a reproach?"

"No—and you know I don't mean it that way. I just want you to go. You do too much for me, Denny—far too much. Will you go?"

"Maybe—I'll see—"

When finally four fellows were in the room insisting that he come and Katy, with glistening eyes, kept nodding to him—Denny went. She climbed to her bench in the window, watched the lights gleaming far across the bay. They were gone—both of them. Peace, like a sad song, dropped into her heart. She was thinking of Stephen.

Fugitive dreams—Stephen coming into the garden, sitting at her feet. Stephen and she walking arm in arm down an avenue of poplars like the print on the wall. In these images she was, of course, a lithe, proud Katy, moving with swift grace at his side.

He thought she was pretty—prettiest girl from sea to sea—that's what he had said. Emotion carried her out of the room; out of the present. She didn't hear the knob turn, the door open or the quick, "Hello! Anybody home?"

Katy quivered, shrank against the wall.

"Katy—you're not afraid of me? Didn't you hear me at the door? Where's Denny?"

It was Clay Andrews talking in a breathless, suppressed excitement. Katy saw the dim outlines of his figure leaning against the table as though he had been running.

"He's gone. . . . I made him go out with the crowd."

"Is it all right if I come in for a while?"

She would rather have been alone with her vague fancies than talking to this dark, earnest fellow whose creed banished sweet angels and fairies and called pity a weakness.

But he came over to the window and leaned there motionless. His attitude touched her pity.

"Of course you can stay. Don't the lights seem happy to-night—like dancing golden fairies? I like the water—do you?—and the ships going out. I like to wonder where they roam and what strange lands they touch and if, far, far away, there may be other girls like I am, watching boats."

She rested her head against the wall, the uplifted sweetness in red lips and brooding eyes drawing an eager pain in his.

"Oh, would you like to travel, Katy?"

"Right now I'd like to be wrapped up in a big steamer rug sailing off to the seven thousand seas."

"I'm going to do that soon. I've loafed around here long enough"—he broke off shortly, sat down on the high bench. Silence dropped between them like a curtain.

"Oh—I forgot—Denny and the fellows were meeting at Annie's. Maybe you want to go there?" Katy asked awkwardly.

"No—I didn't feel like a crowd to-night. Do you get lonely, Katy?"

"Sometimes. But I sit here and pretend the clouds are the ghosts of beautiful thoughts floating about in a bigger world, and—oh, there's lots to think about."

"Then you'd rather be alone?" He grew breathless again.

"No—I love people around. I dearly love it."

"Do you like me around, Katy?" A softness in his tone made her glance up hastily. The steadfast eyes touched hers with a sudden plea. "Because I'd like to know. Do you, Katy?"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### TWO FRIENDS

HE didn't stir, yet his words touched her as an eager, imploring hand laid on her arm. She was awed, a little frightened at the contact.

"Because I've thought sometimes that you didn't, Katy?"

"Of course I like you to come here, Clay. I look forward to Friday night, it seems so warm and dancing to have you all come."

"Yes—yes, I know that, but you feel more friendly to the others than to me, don't you? I've thought so."

"No—why not at all." Then she laughed. "I guess I've been a little afraid of you, Clay. You see I love the fairies and miracles and great, sweet people doing fine things for the incompetents. And you haven't any fairies to come prancing up the garden walk in the mornings. And then—well, there's myself—"

"What do you mean, Katy?"

She turned her face from him so that he heard only the light voice, the laugh:

"Well—you know I'm only a laggard in the race. You've made me think that. Poor Denny has to keep stopping all the time to give me a lift. Even to-day—"

She noticed that he kept opening and closing his hands. He leaned forward abruptly:

"I'd have given the world to take you there to-day, Katy. You aren't a laggard and Denny might not be in the race at all if he didn't have you to spur him. You do more for him than he does for you. You do more for every one. You don't know what it has meant to me coming here and listening to you; just watching you."

"You say that to make me feel happy, Clay, but you know that I could never get along alone; sometimes I grow afraid that I may become a burden."

"No. It's just as I say. Why, you might as well call a beautiful garden a burden because it requires a little care. Why—it might mean everything to be the same one who took

care of you. Perhaps it would be the greatest service if you would let another do for you. Why—”

The hurried intensity of his broken speech imparted a solemnity like a purple robe falling on her shoulders. Katy tried to shake it off.

“Oh, I was just fooling, Clay, because honest and true, it’s so much fun just being alive and wondering what in the world is going to happen next that I would just hate to be brushed up with the crumbs of yesterday’s supper and thrown in the ash can all on account of your mean, heartless theories.”

“Oh, Katy—that isn’t my theory. I was never thinking of such as you.”

“Ah, but theories can’t make exceptions, Clay. And you see, you mightn’t be the one to do the brushing away or even to be around and yell: ‘Help—there goes Katy-kid—save her—she’s a good crumb!’”

He seemed disturbed by her gayety and unable to track his way back to his thought. Half to himself he spoke:

“Emotion mocks at theories; we’re straws in the flood tide. Isn’t that so, Katy-kid? Our heart laughs and triumphs over our brain. Maybe it’s a good thing. Is it?”

“How do I know, Clay, for my brain is nothing but a little cur dog scurrying along wagging its tail at each thump of my heart.”

“Oh, we all sell out our brains, Katy, when they interfere with those same hearts. But do you really think I meant to hurt you? Do you think I meant what I said or dreamed you would ever pause over it? Why, Katy, from the first night I came here I’ve thought you were finer than anything—why, I’ve come just to look at you—to hear you sing; to listen to your laugh—”

“Have you, truly, Clay?” Katy grew nervous, defenseless, against the entreating passion of the quiet, yet breathless, figure beside her. She sensed that he was suffering. He had folded his arms, leaning forward a little in his suppressed excitement. It put a strain that was new and terrifying upon her. Not knowing what to do, she laughed; tossing her hand with a quick gesture:

“Why, look, Clay—how silly we are! We’ve been sitting here in the dark. And here if you haven’t talked so much I forgot to look at the view, and it’s gone now. You turn on the light and we can sing. There—it’s much better to see each other, isn’t it? There’s something mysterious about voices whispering and murmuring in the dark, isn’t there?”

In a glad rebound from the tension Katy's light happiness rose.

"How funny, Clay, that we should get all tangled up talking of things that never matter when we might just as well have sung. I like to play—do you mind when I strike wrong notes? Because, if you do, I'll have to stop. They're the only kind I strike. Now, if Denny were here he'd be making fun because you see how elegant I am. Is that fine?"

She skipped merrily from music to the game, to the books Stephen brought; to the poetry she had read. And did he like "Pippa Passes," and wasn't it sad to go floating down a river like "Elaine" because of a lost love?

At first he had been pale, uneasy—standing at the table opening and closing a magazine. Presently he stood beside her, joining in the song. Now he was laughing—even daring to make fun of her wandering caprice. They were going through a duet when Denny came in, interrupting them with a loud grin.

"Indeed! Pulling a party in a fellow's absence! And here I've busted home, Katy-kid, thinking you might be lonesome. Why didn't you come down, Clay? Gee—it was great!"

"Was it, Denny?—but you should have heard all the smart things that were said right here in this room in the last hour."

Andrew's face reddened. He began hastily talking to Denny, avoiding Katy's eyes, bidding her good-by in a hurried, unfinished manner.

Yet he dropped in to see her the next evening. And often after that.

"Do you mind my coming, Katy?"

"I think I like it, Clay. I'm glad to see you."

The dark, earnest face lightened and he began to talk about the travels he planned—a long journey through France and then one to Egypt. As he talked he watched her eyes as though waiting for some new gleam to light them.

"You're good to let me come here and bore you, Katy."

"You don't at all, Clay. You just say that to make me deny it."

He had succeeded in making Katy feel that he needed her—she was like sun to him. And Katy, always delighted to serve, was grateful for his demands. A sympathy grew up between them.

Yet she turned with a sense of radiant freedom when Stephen came; when he brought her a book or took her for a short walk.

Stephen had chosen to live with them when his family went East, because he would have more time to study than in a house where twenty fellows lived. He was a hard worker, but he had far more time than Denny, who was coaching or working in the laboratory each spare minute.

Sometimes in the late afternoon he would surprise her as she sat on the lawn. He would come swinging up with a gay: "Well, off we go for a lark, beautiful Kate!"

And he would push her up Prospect Avenue to the wall, resting and watching in silence the red sun riding like a bowl of flame into the Golden Gate. In these hours Katy felt a winged lightness.

"I think I could walk, Stephen," she said one day. "Just run down this hill all my dead might. Do you know that once—oh, a long time ago I was fleeter than Denny. I could beat him running?"

"Does life seem very hard to you now, Katy-kid?"

"No—and you see, Stephen, I'm better. Don't you notice that I am? I can get around much quicker. Does it bother you to think about me, Stephen?"

"How could it bother me, Kate?"

"Sometimes you look at me sadly. I wondered."

"It wasn't that, Kate. But you know I never had a sister or a brother, and when I met Denny I liked him right off."

"Me too?" she asked as a child might.

"You, too, Katy-kid. And I can't help thinking it's a darn shame."

"About me? Maybe not, Stephen. Who knows?"

"That's true, I suppose. Anyway, you make it mighty pleasant for us. What would we do without you, Kate? You're always making it jolly."

"Because I love you, Stephen. I love you and Denny so much."

"As much as that, Kate?" he mocked, looking down at her with laughing eyes as though she were some bright, astonishing child. "Oh, do I come that close? Do you mean it now? Am I next to the wonderful Denny?"

"At least next, Stephen. Who else is there?"

With impulsive joy Katy spoke the will of her heart. Steve, getting to his feet, tossed his head, laughed:

"Well, guess that's about all a foundling brother can ask."

## CHAPTER XXX

### VIOLET RETURNS

In the middle of the spring semester, there came word of Violet.

Every Sunday Aunt Josie sent a post card, scarcely changing the wording from month to month, but this week there was a postscript.

"Denny, could you come over? I don't ask it for myself. It will be a great favor. HE will not be home."

Some grave urgency impelled that request. Both Denny and Katy were sure of this, and in their secret hearts, both felt the favor Aunt Josie asked concerned Violet.

It was a year since Denny had seen his aunt. Every Monday when her postal came, he would say to Katy: "I ought to drop over and see her. Poor thing."

But he had never gone. Now he got off the car at Octavia Street and paused a moment before the drygoods window, troubled by a feeling of tenderness for the mute, suppressed woman whose spirit had been emptied of happiness. He would bring her a gift.

This was the window where years before there had been a ruffled white organdie dress. He and Violet had come to buy it for the little queen of the flower fairies. The memory passed, laying a cold hand on his heart. He shook it off, fastened his glance on a row of gloves dangling from steel hooks.

"She'd like them," he thought, pleased with the inspiration. Denny always remembered his aunt going to church on Sundays wearing a pair of black silk gloves, her forefingers sticking through holes.

He went into the store and bought a pair of gray mocha, taking the largest size the girl showed, smiling when he thought of Aunt Josie's surprised pleasure. She would be happy for a week in this new possession.

And Denny wanted happiness about him. By instinct he was a lover of life, seeing it as a beauty, a growth, a joy. The shabby streets and stunted hours of his childhood were blun-

derings, accidental and unnecessary. Happiness is the natural state, the only state where the human may exist. Outside of it there is not life, there are not people living, but only empty gestures moving nowhere.

Aunt Josie was one of these. There was something unkind about it; something blindly stupid. So Denny bought her a pair of gloves just as some apologist for the sun, going to the North Pole, might carry the natives a coal-oil stove.

The gray house was a little murkier; two more boards were kicked out of the alleyway gate and the shade in the room that had been Violet's "boudoir" flapped in strips against the half-open window.

"Humph," Denny thought, dismissing recollection with a swift shrug. He went up the back steps, taking deep breaths to insure against the laden, stale-cabbage breath of the kitchen. Within, he heard Lizzie talking in an aggrieved indignation:

"Well, I'm sure it's nice in you, mamma, to keep blaming me as if I could help it. I'm sure I made her a cup of tea and gave her all the biscuits that were left from supper. You just want to make me feel bad after how sick I've been and all—"

Denny whistled, opened the door noisily.

"Hello," he called, taking off his cap and laughing, "How's the old kitchen?"

Dingy, smoke-canopied, the sewing machine in one corner, the table with a coffee-stained red cloth in the center, grime on the window above the sink and pots crowding the stove.

Aunt Josie, wiping a red, moist face, not a smile, but something akin to it, lighting her stolid eyes.

"Why, Denny—" The coarse lips trembled, she stood uncertain, waiting for his greeting. He stooped down and kissed her. Tears crawled down her cheeks. "I thought you'd forgotten all about us."

"Not much, Aunt Josie. I've meant to come a dozen times, but I'm kept pretty busy. You look fine."

"You're still growing, Denny." She looked at him with a timid pride and seemed half afraid to speak.

Lizzie, sitting near the stove, a baby in her lap, waited with the air of being a very important person. She had her flat, yellow hair wound about her head, an insignificant blue bow perched like a mosquito in the center. This was a part of Lizzie's quest for daintiness and was as harmonious as a goose cavorting like a humming bird.



"Now," she said, archly: "I should think it's about time you came to see your new cousin, Denny."

"Husky little fellow, isn't he, Lizzie? Well, how's Martha, Aunt Josie?" Denny gave the infant a hasty glance, let the shawl drop over its face. Lizzie's small eyes flashed.

"Why, you didn't even look at him! And he was all ready to smile. Oh, I don't see how you can be so mean, Denny. I'm sure if it was Miss Violet's baby you'd make a fuss."

A few years ago Denny would have said: "Aw, go to grass! Who cares about your kid, anyway?"

But he was a man now—so he laughed though the allusion to Violet affronted him.

"Why, he's a young giant, Lizzie," he offered good humoredly. "What's his name?"

"Well, Emmet, of course! I'd like to know who better I could name him for than his own father."

"Sure enough. He looks like him, too—got a head just like him." Denny thought of Emmet Goss' pointed skull and laughed at the malice of his compliment. Lizzie was pleased.

"Did you know Emmet is head clerk, now, Denny? We're thinking of buying an interest in the grocery. Of course we have to save. We've got to watch the nickels." She threw a challenging glance at Aunt Josie. "But mamma thinks Emmet picks up money on the street. She thinks he ought to be glad to throw it away on anybody!"

"Who do you mean, Lizzie?" Denny asked. Aunt Josie got up quickly, stirred a pot of stew, frowning at him to be silent.

"It's all very well who I mean but it doesn't seem to matter if my feelings are hurt—" She raised the baby in her arms, reached for her hat. "Mamma doesn't care about me or little Emmet."

Aunt Josie had remained silent, the spoon poised over the stew. She went quietly and took the baby while Lizzie adjusted her hat. Looking down at the sleeping, pointed face, she smiled.

"Don't get yourself excited, Lizzie, I'm not blaming you."

"Excited? I'll be a nervous wreck. I should think you'd be more considerate than to cry all the time I'm here. There—he's waking up. Look at his eyes, Denny; they're just like Katy's."

"And he's got two of them, hasn't he, Lizzie? Lucky youngster!"

Lizzie blushed with pleasure, saying amiably: "Will you come over in the morning to help with the washing, mamma? And it's no use of your worrying. Guess she didn't bother about us in three years!"

So it was about Violet!

Snub nose and big hips, Lizzie went down the hall, calling: "Tell Katy I'll come over with the baby when I'm stronger, Denny. I'm glad you think little Emmet's pretty."

He didn't answer. Aunt Josie turned to him, the coarse, reddened face opening in a quivering grief.

"Violet's come home, Denny."

"Where is she?"

"Lizzie turned her out!" The heavy chin trembled until the lips were doubled together.

"Poor girl, if she'd come to her mother—" She rubbed the blue check apron over her face, yet her eyes, her rough cheeks, her lips, remained moist with anguish. There was something that lit the heart like a rage in Aunt Josie's cowed emotion.

Three days ago, on Friday night when Emmet Goss was at the grocery store, Lizzie's bell rang. Violet stood before her, smiling:

"Not expecting to see me, Lizzie, were you?" Smiling again.

Lizzie, too astounded to speak, gaped, and standing in the door, began to talk.

Violet had come from the south because she was out of work. She heard of a job in a candy factory and was going to apply for it. She just thought she'd call on Lizzie and see the baby and find out how "Ma and all of them were."

Finally, because Violet was shivering, Lizzie asked her into the kitchen, gave her tea and the cold biscuits left from supper.

She was thin, white as paper, her face all eyes. "I wish Denny could see her now; wonder if he'd think her so pretty now!" Lizzie had said that to her mother. Furthermore, Lizzie didn't believe she'd had such a fine time in Los Angeles, for she had no silver purse and no feather in her hat and no gloves!

And she half hinted about staying for the night with Lizzie!

But Lizzie had no room. And because Emmet would soon be home and because Emmet wouldn't like the extravagance of the tea and biscuits, Lizzie had been in a hurry to send Violet away. Violet had gone.

"She had no money, Denny. I know it. Violet was proud

She would never have gone to Lizzie if she could have helped it. Lizzie has a couch in the kitchen, but she wouldn't offer it. Oh, my Gawd—my poor girl—Gawd pity her!"

"Where did she go, Aunt Josie? Where is she now?"

Aunt Josie shook her head: "What can we do, Denny? Tell me what to do. Do something. What will become of her? Gawd—how I'm punished!"

"Listen, I'll go to the candy factory and find out about her."

"I've been there. She didn't get the job."

Denny put his hand on his aunt's shoulder:

"Don't cry, Aunt Josie. It ought to be easy to find her."

As Denny went out, an image of Lizzie with her complacent hips swinging, in her arms the young hope of the race, walked before him. And another image, shadowy, fleeting—Violet running in a dark street, keeping close to the wall—tormented him.

At the candy factory he went to the office. Perhaps Violet had filed an application, leaving her address.

She had—a rooming house on O'Farrel Street.

"She's left," the woman in a dirty wrapper, sitting at a desk, informed him. "Left without paying for her room!" She turned to another patron, belligerently eyeing Denny.

"She left her address?" he insisted coolly.

The woman laughed: "Guess she ain't got one!"

"When did she leave?"

"This morning!"

Denny could have leaped over the desk and strangled the sloppy, irate lump of flesh frowning at him.

Somewhere, without a room, without food, Violet was wandering. He swept down the steps after her.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE SEARCH

VIOLET'S eyes like black caverns in the moon pallor of her face floated before him. He flung down the street, scanning the faces of the girls hurrying past. Violet might be one of them. At any moment he might see her; at any moment he might miss her.

At the corner he dug his hands in his pockets, remembered Lizzie swinging down the hall, large head, flat yellow hair, humming bird bow. She had given her cold biscuits and tea—closed the door against her. Poor Violet—

What would she do? Had she earned anything since morning? Might she return to settle her account? Or to get her baggage?

A bare hope—Denny seized it, hurrying back to the rooming house. The woman glanced at him, tapped her desk, a dictionary of insolence in her silence.

"Miss Borley may return. I'd like to leave a note for her."

"Miss Borley ain't gonna return!"

"She may come to settle for her room."

A derisive laugh: "Say, was you born yesterday or was I?"

"Did she leave any baggage?"

"I'm holding that baggage!"

"How much does she owe you?"

"A dollar and a half."

Denny put two dollars on the desk: "If she comes will you give her the baggage and this note?"

"Now you're acting up like a gent. She'll get the baggage."

Denny scribbled:

"Dear Violet: Come and stay with Katy and me. We have plenty. Aunt Josie wants to see you. You can go out any time during the day. Matt won't be there. She's terribly worried since Lizzie told her about Friday night. I'd go out and see her if I were you, Vee. You don't know how much Katy and I would love to see you and to have you with us.

"DENNY."

He added the address on Piedmont avenue and gave careful directions for reaching the house.

The landlady stuck the envelope on the top of the alarm clock. "Guess I won't overlook that."

But Violet might never come for it. . . . There must be some way to find her. At first Denny had an extravagant idea of visiting all the rooming houses in the neighborhood and leaving similar notes, but nearly every building was a transient hotel.

In some of the doorways slim forms were standing, faces half averted or concealed under wide-brimmed "Merry Widow" hats. One of those figures might be Violet.

He walked near, caught the profile of a thin, white face and dark hair. He hurried, peered at the girl. She turned swiftly, smiled: "Looking for some one? Will I do, Bill?" He passed on.

Wherever Violet was; whatever terror dogged her, he could do nothing. The fear that had obsessed him for three years was a reality. Violet was hungry.

He tried to shut out the picture of Violet wandering in a cold despondency up one street, down another. She could surely get some job, sewing—nurse girl—waitress. There were always signs in restaurants saying: "Waitress wanted."

Violet must have tried those things before she went out to Lizzie. What had made her go there? How did she know Lizzie was married? Surely she must have been in a desperate plight when she took cold biscuits and tea from Lizzie.

How could Lizzie do such a thing! How could she sleep at night thinking of Violet? If she had only come to them instead—

He knew it was useless—yet the streets were magnets holding him. He tramped on; faces spun past like white disks, girls smiled; men with their hats cocked to the side, winked. To-night the tawdry game sickened him.

"She must be somewhere around," he kept thinking, unwilling to give up the search. It was one thing to fear that Violet might be in need; it was a living goad to know it . . . in need, and perhaps not a block away. It might as well have been a hundred miles.

Yet he felt like a traitor when he turned his steps to the ferry.

Aunt Josie would be sitting in the kitchen, the old shawl

wrapped about her shoulders, waiting for some word, perhaps even hoping that Denny would come, bringing Violet with him. Gee, how he would like to have done that!

Instead he went into a hotel and phoned to Aunt Josie through the Foleys. He said that Violet might come back for her baggage and that he'd left a note.

"Thanks, Denny—thanks," the drab monotone rang hollow as an empty tomb. He was hanging up when he heard her call: "Denny—you might put in another of those personals in the paper. Maybe she'll look. Will you?"

He went to the morning papers and inserted the small notice.

It was a warm spring night, the sky and waters a deep lazy blue, a soft haphazard breeze flirting with the dark. Another time, Denny would have sat on the forward deck of the boat, his legs stretched out, his mind drifting in a luxurious indifference, fine dreams of the future when he would be a great engineer directing vast projects or when he would be traveling to the ends of the earth floating about him.

To-night he stood against the rail in a moody restlessness.

"Lord, how some people get it in the neck," his thought ran after Violet, caught her hand, laughed, saying: "Gee, hello, Vee! Been looking all over for you!"

It was incredible that she should be even now seeking with a growing terror a mere place to sleep—perhaps not finding it.

He remembered the first night he had come to Matt Borley's with Sid's two dollars in his pocket. Violet, then but fifteen, turned livid as her father yanked Denny by the collar and took the gift from him. When Denny was in his crib next to Katy she came and knelt beside him, whispering as Queenie used to. Then she gave him two nickels. Denny winced with pain.

If he could do something!

He watched the papers. One morning there was a small item: A young girl found dying of starvation in a Third Street lodging house, name unknown. She was taken to the City and County Hospital.

"That was she—that's what she'd do!"

Denny cut his classes and went to the city. The nurse at the hospital glanced curiously at the frank, excited face—raised her brows.

"Do you want to see her?"

Denny nodded.

"Well—" She led the lad to a ward. On one of the beds was a limp form, a limp, haggard face, wasted hands hanging over the covers. Dark, stringy hair fringed the forehead and cheeks.

Denny turned away. Not Violet there.

Weeks passed. There came no answer to the personal.

"Easy if a fellow could adopt a belief like Clay's," Denny said to Katy one Thursday night. "Just look at it coldly and decide this is Vee's affair. If she's worth anything, she'll come out of it all right; if she fails, what of it! Nature has thousands to fill the gap."

"Clay wouldn't be so calm if some one he loved were the unfortunate one. It's easy enough to shout: 'Fellow citizens, let us abolish the unfit!' But if some one dragged up one of these weaklings and said: 'All right, abolish them. Here, stick the knife in his heart,' do you think Clay or any other theorist would do it?"

"Denny, I'm not afraid for Violet. She'll come to us. Perhaps she's on the train right this very minute!"

Katy gave her thoughts wings that they might soar to reach her faith. It would be beautiful to find Violet, therefore Violet must be coming.

So every night Katy set the table daintily. Violet so loved pretty things. Katy went through an imaginary conversation with her cousin. The door would open. In Vee would come blithely: "Katy—let me see—dear little thing." (Vee often called her that.) "You've not changed a bit."

But the soft golden days of spring lengthened into summer. Violet didn't come.

And toward the end of the semester a sad letter came from Joan. On the days when he expected Joan's large gray envelope, Denny made a practice of coming to lunch. He would go back to the campus gypsy-hearted. Dear, warm letters Joan wrote. She expected to return to college. All along she was sure that leave of absence would just be for a year.

Now she wrote: "I'm not coming back next term, Denny. I've decided to work. That will be better. But only for the present— Things will be fine by January. Oh, I'm sure of this. And there'll be time for a walk or two should you be straying my way as of yore, dear Denman Brooks. You won't stop writing to me, will you? Not if you know how much your

letters mean—From the only lady friend you used to have to the only man friend she ever had.”

It meant that Joan's folks were sorely pressed and Joan had to help. . . .

“I'll never see Joan again either,” Denny thought. . . . Queenie and Sid and Violet passing so sadly. And now Joan.



## CHAPTER XXXII

### KATY'S FAITH

"HERE you are, Kate." Stephen dangled a program, a small scarlet fan and a place card—favors from a dance of the previous evening—into Katy's lap.

Katy caught them with delight. "Oh, isn't this fan the cutest! Look, Stephen, how I could flirt if I were only Spanish. Well—begin—"

From every party Stephen brought these trophies; Katy hung them from her bureau. Then he must tell her about the musicians, the decorations, the supper.

"Did the girls look very beautiful, Stephen?"

"Mostly not."

"You always say that. Was there a lattice of roses for the musicians?"

"Nope—not that swell, Kate."

"Just a medium affair? Then you didn't sit down to supper?"

"Yes—good eats."

"What? Sandwiches? Chicken?"

With considerable gusto Stephen painted a picture of a groaning table, sandwiches cut in diamonds, hearts, checkerboards; coffee, ice cream. Katy drank in the details; gave her attention to the names on his program; wondered if the partner designated as "Green Bow" were pretty and if "Freckles" was interesting, but especially what Stephen found to talk about to all these different girls.

"Here's a sample, Katy-kid, and they're all alike. 'Oh, Mr. Adams, you're in Professor Tullywop's class, aren't you? Isn't he wonderful? I'm just crazy about him. I'm going to specialize in Egyptian mummies; they're so interesting.'"

Katy burst out laughing, elated that Stephen found his partners dull.

"Why, even I could say better things than that, Stephen, and I should think they'd be brilliant studying all the time."

"Some of them think they are—like 'Freckles,' piping forth in the middle of a tango with: 'Oh, you know, Mr. Adams, I'm a free soul. God is such an obsolete institution.'"

Half the partners were thus eliminated:

"But all these little crosses, Stephen? I'll bet you like her."

"Ah, Katy-kid!"

"Is she very pretty?"

"A dream, Katy."

"You've had so many dreams, Stephen, and afterwards they turn out to be nightmares."

"They're dreams till I wake up, Katy. This one is different—a beauty—black eyes—black hair."

"Last month you liked them golden."

"Last month is gone."

"Is she very interesting? I suppose she says wonderful, clever things?"

"It's the way she says them—"

Katy folded the program, sighed:

"Stephen—"

"What now, Kate?"

"Will you take me to a dance some day?"

Stephen's face grew sober: "When, Katy-kid? You want to see one? Sure we could take you to one of the big hops."

Katy's eyes grew misty with dreams. Then she began to laugh, glancing merrily at Stephen:

"You think I'd be a wallflower, do you? But that's not what I mean to be, at all. I don't want to watch. You know it's after a long while—then's when I want you to take me. I want to know if you will, so that I can plan."

Pain drew the blood quivering from Stephen's face. Katy saw, averted her eyes:

"You think it never can be, Stephen? Oh, yes, it can. You don't know it, but I'm getting better. You'll see before so very long. But wouldn't it be terrible, Stephen, if you wouldn't take me after all!"

Katy opened her hands in a little gesture of whimsical sadness, smiles lighting on the red, sweet lips: "That's what would be terrible, isn't it, Stephen? Smarty had a party and nobody came!"

Stephen got up suddenly, went over to a shelf and pretended looking for a book. When he came back he said quietly: "Katy, put me down for all the dances that ever were—Lord!"

"Honestly, Stephen? Even if the black beauty is still a dream?"

"Even if she's a trance!"

"Thanks, Stephen. And I think I'll have a dress with a big, long train. I've always wanted one."

Stephen looked at the soft chestnut hair, the vivid face, capricious now with its brave challenge. He winced.

Katy tossed her head, double-crossed her eyes the way she had to make the gloomy little girl in the hospital cot giggle with merriment.

"And that's for you, Mr. Stephen!" She reached over and took his hand. Her manner made her seem younger than her eighteen years; made her seem only a little girl to Stephen. "Stevie, dear—as long as I have you and Denny, we'll let poor Miss Freckles have the dance! Just the same, I mean it and you'll be the one to take me when I wear a great long train and a dozen gardenias in my hair."

"It can't come too soon, little Katy-kid."

A few days after this, walking home with Denny, Stephen asked abruptly: "Say, Den—does Katy seem better to you?"

Denny stopped short, as though cold hands assaulted him. Often at night he lay awake thinking of Katy, thinking till the tears trickled from his shut eyes and the whole of that tragic day when he had come rollicking home with the organdie dress; the smell of the tripe in the kitchen; Katy, poised a moment on the branch of the tree, was reenacted. How he had hoped! How he had whistled when he hired the horse and buggy. Then in the hospital corridors, the doctor saying: "Poor lad—she won't walk for a long time—perhaps never!"

Denny turned, pulled the covers resolutely, fought down memories— Well—it was all past now! What could he do? Any day he would have given—oh, was there anything he wouldn't have given to have Katy moving freely, blithely as she had when they ran up the Fell street hills to come bumping down on the coaster bought from old man Isaacs. But he didn't delude himself with hope.

"What makes you ask that, Steve? Does she seem better to you?"

"I don't know, but she's so sure she'll be able to walk again—I wondered."

"I think she's about the same, Steve. It's a good thing she doesn't believe it's for always."

For the first time Denny had admitted Katy's handicap was for "always." He felt as though he had plunged a knife in her throat.

That night he brought home an armful of French books.

"Say, Katy-kid," he said gruffly. "You've had it too easy. Now you're going to be educated."

"You mean ejicated, Denny. Don't be fawncy. What is it you've brought—poetry? Remember long time ago when I thought I was to be a great Sappho. I hope it's something I haven't read."

"Don't worry—you've never seen this before. No more slop for you, Miss. You're going to study."

And he began to think of a dozen ways to broaden Katy's interest, snatching half an hour after dinner to help her. She took his orders with a meek and teasing gayety and he was delighted with her progress.

"Gee, she's quick," he thought in admiration. "Well, it's a good thing. If she has to sit around all her life she ought to have lots to think about—"

Katy never dreamed she was preparing herself for tragedy.

"Now, you'll have to take me to a French ball, Stephen, else, why am I learning the langwidge!"

"To this ball, Kate, and anywhere else you want to go!" His voice laughed. Katy didn't note the sadness in his eyes.

In the morning when she had straightened her room she would stand at the bureau and sometimes look over the programs—especially at the little crosses, thinking to herself how fine it would be to go sweeping through a ballroom; to have little crosses on her program.

While the dinner was cooking, she would take two heavy canes, brace herself against the wall, practice her steps, saying to herself: "Help me, to-day—dear Lord—dear, dear Lord—I will—now I just will!"

One afternoon as she stood thus, Clay Andrews came into the room, stood motionless staring at her:

"Why—oh, come in, Clay—why, I'm just taking a little promenade."

She saw his lips trembling. She let the canes fall and dropped to her bench at the window.

Then he stepped swiftly, knelt down to pick them up, and still kneeling caught her hands, pressing them against his face.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### A PLEA

AWE, like the deep note of an organ, touched her. She let her hands rest in his, looked through tears at the kneeling form.

Then he was placing the canes in the corner; his face white, pierced with tenderness. She laughed.

"Why does it make people sad, Clay, because I mean to get better?"

He came over and sat down, saying in a hurried tone: "Why, what makes you think that, Katy? Why, it doesn't at all. How could you think it does?"

"But your eyes are wet, Clay, and Denny never looks at me when I make plans and Stephen tries to laugh and can't. Is it because you all think I'm just fooling myself?"

"I've never thought that, Katy. It's just the other way. Why, sometimes when I've heard you singing I've forgotten all about it, you seem so much alive, and—why, you know, Katy, there have been some wonderful cures. Why mightn't it be the same with you?"

He leaned toward her, his face caught with earnestness, yet so eager it seemed to smile.

"It might be that way with you, Katy. Of course, I don't know much about it—"

"Yes—it will be that way, Clay. I've always felt it."

"Well, I don't think you're fooling yourself, Katy. There's a doctor in Europe who has performed miracles—"

"Oh, indeed!" Katy arched her brows, laughed gayly:

"Do you think I'm going to Europe for that, Clay? Europe's so far away when I have an angel right here at my elbow."

"But you want to travel, Katy?" The dark somber eyes scanned hers as though the question were a momentous thing. "You've always said so. Why, there's so much to see—"

Katy was afraid of these quick, breathless moods when he sat so rigid with his arms folded yet seemed in such a rush to speak. She interrupted lightly:

"Yes, and I say so again and again. But some of us are so greedy we'd need ten lives to live out our dreams. There, if I haven't forgotten the dinner and Stephen and Denny will be mad as hatters if anything is burned. Terrible to have two masters! Would you just swing over that chair if you please—"

He followed her into the kitchen, began to talk of the symphony concert, the class election, the plays he had seen.

"The 'Chocolate Soldier' is good, Katy. I wanted to tell you about it. You'd like the music. If you heard it you could pick out the songs—they're tuneful. That's why I dropped in, Katy—to know if you'd come with me. Will you?"

"I? You want me to go?" Katy was beating cream for a pudding. She looked at him in astonishment, a sudden mist filming her eyes. Denny had taken her to concerts and several times to the theater. She had never gone with any one else.

"Why, I don't know what to say, Clay. I never go out like that. Don't you understand?"

"Yes, Katy, of course I do. I asked Denny about it to-day and he seemed willing enough. He said if you wanted to go it was all right. You don't know what a favor it would be to me, Katy. Why, every time I go to a show I keep thinking of you and how you would enjoy it and how fine it would be if you were there, too. So, will you come, Katy?"

"Well—Denny might think I'm not happy, Clay, and you know he takes me almost everywhere he goes. I've been to every concert with him and I think he's only been to a show once without me. He might be hurt and I wouldn't do that for anything. And—oh—it would make me feel queer, Clay, and you'd feel conspicuous, too. You couldn't help it. Every one would stare at you."

"Katy—why—" She had told him to cut the bread. He stood with his back to her. After a moment he came over, finished, quietly: "You don't know how I would feel, Katy, I'd be so glad. But if you wouldn't enjoy coming, why then, I don't want you to. But when I've seen you at concerts, I've wished that I was Denny."

"Well, then I'll tell you, Clay. . . . I'll talk to Denny and if I'm sure he doesn't mind, I'll go. But it can't help seeming strange."

So Katy took the matter to the highest court she knew.

"How do you feel about it yourself, Katy-kid?" Denny asked. "Do you want to go?"

"Not particularly. I'm perfectly happy without anything more than I have."

"That's all very well—but you ought to have a little diversion. I ought to take you out more but I never seem to get the time. Gee, it worries me. That's a fact now. It's a shame you're so much alone."

"Then you'd like me to go?"

"I'd like you to get out more. Oh, not with anybody!" He swung around from the shelf in the kitchen where he was hastily stacking cans of beans he had bought. Katy laughed:

"You mean I'm not to flirt, Denny? I'm not to try out my charms on the hoi-polloi?"

"But it won't hurt you to go with Clay, Katy. He's all to the good. And he has the money. It's different going in a machine than in the street car."

"He's so sober, Denny. And I'll feel out of place with any one but you."

"At first I suppose you will. Go once, and if you don't enjoy it, don't go again."

So Katy accepted, but she was nervous and excited; couldn't make the glinting curls stay in place or get the collar to set right on her coat. She had to call Denny in as she pinned on her hat.

"Tell me honestly, Denny—do I look terribly homemade?"

His eyes flattered her: "You look great. Pull your hat down more. More than that. They're not wearing them on three hairs any more."

Then Stephen was at the door, a cigarette in his mouth, a laugh in his eyes:

"A little powder on your nose, Katy-kid. You'll be the belle of Broadway." He gathered her gloves and purse: "I'll be your footman, Katy."

She looked at him swiftly, saying all at once: "I wish I wasn't going! I'd rather be home with you and Denny. You'll take me down, won't you, Denny?"

"Nothing to be nervous about, Katy." Yet as Denny carried her to the machine, a feeling of reluctance overcame him as though he were handing her over to another. His voice trembled and he stood on the grass staring after her until the car was out of sight.

"Think that moody devil's in love with Katy?" Stephen asked. Denny turned in alarm:

"Gee—no! Do you think he is?"

"I wouldn't be surprised."

"Oh, bunk. He knows better. Well—Katy's not in love. She's not thinking about it. She'd never dream of such a thing—not now, anyway."

Katy, tucked in a robe in the big automobile, the hills and houses flying past, the warm air fluttering against her face, became joyous.

"I feel queer, Clay," she said boastfully. And in one of his rare flashes of gayety, he answered:

"Oh, you do not feel queer, Katy-kid. You're happy!"

He was not broad shouldered or tall as Denny, yet he lifted her with ease, carried her without apparent effort to their place. They were almost the first to enter the theater.

Katy had soon forgotten her queerness, her reluctance, and was talking as happily to Clay Andrews as she did to Denny. The play delighted her.

She came home radiant, cheeks flushed, chestnut curls fluffing over her face.

"Oh, it was heavenly!"

Denny was so relieved to have her back—to find her laughing, that he began helping her with her coat, saying excitedly:

"What did I tell you about your hat? Look at it, hanging on three hairs—stupid!"

"Oh, 'scuse me, Denny, but we had the magnificentest time and to-morrer, just wait till you hear Katy at the pianner!"

The following week there was another show. During the acts Clay Andrews kept turning to her with eager, serious eyes. When he saw her laughing, his face relaxed.

"He pities me," Katy thought.

Afterwards as they were riding home he asked anxiously: "Did you enjoy it, Katy?"

"Oh, yes, Clay. You're kind."

"No, Katy. Why, I've never enjoyed a show more. That's because you were with me. It was glorious. You didn't feel strange to-night, did you?"

"No—"

"And next week—"

"Oh, you feel sorry for me, Clay. You want to make me happy. I think it's wonderful in you. But I'm not lonesome. Sometimes I think no one feels more songs in them than I. But you think I pretend and so you want to give me all this



pleasure. I've enjoyed it, but then—oh, I don't like to have you doing so much—”

“So much? Oh, that's not why I've done it, at all, Katy. You think it's pity? It isn't. Why, if any one had ever told me I could feel like this I would have scoffed, but now I just want to be near you and talk to you and I would like to carry you away and take care of you always. I can't tell you how it is, but when I'm with you I feel something melting in me. Sometimes I could cry and then again I could laugh. The other day when I saw you standing against the wall I don't know what moved me, but I wanted to kneel down and pray. I've never felt that way before. So it's not pity, Katy. It's just that I love you. That's all, Katy. I love you!”

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE ANSWER

THE rapid, low tones brought a trembling fear into Katy's heart. She wanted to reach out to him; to say: "Oh, don't tell me, Clay!" But she merely sat back, a hotness in her throat, her lips parted in white bewilderment.

Then he was driving more slowly, looking at her with eyes that pleaded and suffered and smiled.

"Does that frighten you, Katy? Does it trouble you that I love you? Does it? Because I won't say any more. I've been thinking all this for a year and I've waited to tell you. But I don't want to worry you or make you unhappy."

She could have wept, feeling the tenderness in his voice. "You haven't made me unhappy, Clay. Haven't we been the best of friends? And you've been so good to me—"

"It's not that I've been good to you, Katy. You don't know what a joy it's been to me seeing you and talking to you, and these last two weeks I've just waited for the night to come when I could take you out. And all this last year I've loved you and thought how fine it would be if you would let me take care of you. When I've talked of going to Europe I've thought of you and that you would be with me and we would go everywhere."

His hands gripped the wheel, but he looked down at her and smiled. "You haven't anything to say, Katy? You wouldn't like that at all?"

Tears dropped on Katy's white gloves. "I don't know what to say, Clay. I'm not sure that I know what you mean, because no one has ever talked to me like this before and I've never thought much about people loving me—at least—not now."

"Why, I mean that I love you, Katy; that you are more to me than anything else in life, that I'm always thinking of you. I hear you laugh; I see your eyes, then I want to rush over to the house and talk to you. And a hundred times I've wanted to tell you I love you, but I've been afraid. That day when you talked about getting better, Katy, I wanted to tell you then. Why—I would give everything if you would let me help you

get better. We could go to all the best specialists in Europe. But that wouldn't make any difference, Katy. I love you now. Just as you are. I would like to take care of you always. It would be the greatest joy if you would let me; if you would marry me. Do you think you could, Katy?"

The swift, broken speech rushed like a torrent at her. He drew a deep, hard breath as though he were exhausted. Katy wiped her eyes, and suddenly he reached over and touched her hand:

"Never mind, Katy-kid. I've only made you unhappy. Don't think about it. It's all right. I've known that you didn't love me."

"Yes—I think I do, Clay, in some ways. But I've never thought of marriage. I mean—not really thought of it. And now you mean that I would leave Denny and Stephen, and I couldn't do that. I could never leave Denny. Not now, anyway. Oh, I would die if I went away and left him. We've been together so much and he wants me with him. I'm sure he does and you can see I help out. You know I make nearly twenty dollars every month and so I'm not such a burden yet."

"No, you aren't a burden, Katy. You never will be. And I wouldn't take you from him now unless you were glad to go; unless he was willing. I don't want to tear you from the things that you love, but if there should be any change and if, some day, you might be ready to leave, then perhaps you'll think of me?"

"I can't promise anything, Clay, because I don't think I could bear it if the time ever came when things were all changed and I couldn't be with Denny. You see, Clay, he's looked after me so many years that I don't mind being a trouble to Denny. He's been so good ever since I was no bigger than I can remember. It's almost like having your left hand help your right. Now, are you hurt, Clay, because this isn't what you hoped I'd answer?"

"Why, no, Katy. I think I expected you to say this. And I didn't intend to trouble you, to-night, or to take you by surprise. I thought you guessed by a hundred things that I love you, so it wouldn't make any difference if I said it. Now I'm afraid you will be uneasy with me and always worried for fear that I will ask you again. But don't think that, Katy, because it won't be so. I won't trouble you like that, at all. You'll let me keep on coming to see you, won't you? You'll come out with me,

won't you, Katy? You won't let what I've said to-night make a difference?"

"You want me just to pretend you didn't say it, Clay, and not to think about it?"

"If that's what you want, Katy. Only to remember if ever you need anything or want anything the biggest favor you could do, would be to ask it of me. Would you do that, Katy?"

"Yes—well, of course, I would, Clay. And I feel grateful to you for all these beautiful things you've said and it makes me sad because I can't do what you want, but you see, don't you, Clay?"

"I think I do, Katy." When he stopped in front of the lawn he let his hand rest a moment on hers before lifting her out. His lips smiled: "My love won't hurt you, Katy. Don't be troubled by it."

But Katy lay awake that night staring at the window where the scarlet Rambler tapped in a fitful breeze. She remembered, stabbingly, the day Denny had first brought her to this glad old barn home, and the four years they were to occupy it spread out to a joyous eternity. Most of those years were already gone.

How full they had been with happiness! How gayly the three of them had lived here. But this gypsy existence would end. Stephen would go to some far off places—the mountains or a desert—he was always talking about it. He would be the first to go.

Katy hid her face in the pillow, winked back tears. She and Denny would be left. He would have to stay because of her.

Then she would truly be a handicap. Perhaps she ought to go with Clay?

And leave Denny? And leave Stephen?

Katy caught her hands together in a fervent prayer: "Dear God, don't make me do this! Let me stay here!" She shut her eyes, refusing to think.

When she slept she dreamed of Denny.

She woke up suddenly. It was morning. Denny was talking in a loud, gleeful voice: "Gee, where did these come from?" He was standing at a chest of drawers, looking for a collar, and had come across half a dozen linen handkerchiefs Katy had made and left there for a surprise. "Say, did you make these, Katy-kid? Gee, you're a peach! Roll out, Matilda, now. It's late!"

Katy observed him through a crack in the door, saw him

sniff the sachet she had rubbed into the linen. Her heart laughed. He needed her—

Yet she began to watch him, waiting for some indication of his thought—something that would say to her: "You're keeping me back, Katy." Ah—then she would have to go with Clay.

But Denny gave her no such looks. There was only one thing—when Stephen and the other fellows grew excited sketching plans of their future, Denny was silent.

"That's because of me," Katy thought. It weighed on her bright spirits. She went about finding more things to do for both of them, reminding herself, "We have a year—a whole long, joyful year. There's time enough to think."

One afternoon she was putting a pie in the oven when Stephen came home, puttering about in his breezy, inquisitive way, asking: "What's this, Kate? What's that? I do it like this. Here, you didn't put the fork marks in right."

"Stephen," she began, not worrying for introductions, "will you be sorry when we're not together any more?"

"My Lord, Kate, why the pre-mortems?"

"Well, I was just thinking about it. It'll be like having a heart cut out, won't it?"

Stephen, stirring apple sauce, looked down at her with a sudden seriousness. "I wonder if you and Denny know what a lot you've done for me, letting me come and be treated like one of yourselves, Katy-kid?"

"You are one of us, Stephen, aren't you? You seem like it to me. And then perhaps you don't know how much it's meant to us having you?" Katy was suddenly flushed. She added hastily: "It's meant ever so much, Stephen. It's lots happier since you came, and look how lovely you've fixed everything up, and that gorgeous mandarin skirt and the piannor where I'm so clever and the fireplace—oh, you're more than worth your keep, Stevie, dear."

"Well, you're an angel, Kate!"

She was winged again—ready to walk, ready to sing, to laugh.

Denny came in, walking on his toes, holding something in both hands against his shoulder. Without speaking to either of them, he began walking to and fro. When they tried to see what he had he turned his back, chuckling to himself and looking sideways to note their growing curiosity.

A queer, frightened little sound.

"Oh, I know! A kitten!" Katy cried.

"Smarty—ain't you clever, though!"

He uncovered just the head, and two eyes, like bright glass marbles, gleamed. Then he let her stroke the long, silky hair. It was a little tortoise-shell Persian kitten.

"Let me hold it, Denny—please?"

"Let me hold it, Denny—please?" Denny put it in her hands. "Like it, Katy-kid?"

She laughed, kept her head down. As if Denny and Steve would ever let her go! Very likely! They were always thinking of her.

Why, she'd stay with them forever and ever. This was where she belonged.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### SEPARATION

"HERE, Kate, put the buttons in this shirt, will you?" Stephen rumbled it into her hands, set the buttons on the table.

"Is it the black beauty to-night, Stephen?"

"Ah, Katy! A titian-haired Venus. You should see her."

"I might not like her!" She added wistfully: "You're too fickle, Stephen."

"That's the way to play the game, Kate. Say—got to wear the Lord Arthur to-night. Wonder if there's a tie around anywhere."

"In the top drawer. Right in the corner."

"Great. You've got 'em all skinned, Kate!" He went whisking around with "Where's this?" Where's that—the clothes brush, handkerchiefs—darn it—a needle and thread—clean socks. So that Katy was quite exhausted when he left.

Denny was sitting at the table, going over sets of notes. She saw that he wasn't studying so she offered him conversation.

"Must be interesting to be always falling in love."

He allowed the remark to pass, so Katy pricked him with a sweet, careless:

"But, of course, you don't know anything about it, Denny."

"I don't, eh? Well, what this lad knows, he keeps!"

Katy laughed. "But you never take them out, Denny."

"Watch them turn when I pass, Katy." Denny grinned.

Yet he had often hungered for social pleasures, often wished in a fleeting and secret impulse to be a great beau with the ladies; to be run after; bored with popularity.

He would saunter down Telegraph Avenue with Stephen, doffing his hat to Stephen's bright-eyed, smiling acquaintances. Then he would think: "Gee, I'm going to step out a bit. It's all in breaking in. No sense digging all the time. Fellow ought to have friends. Next month I'll begin."

But the time never came when Denny wasn't rushed with coaching, assisting in the laboratory, studying.

Sometimes he would pass a pretty girl; her eyes would toss

him a quick, flattering smile. His thoughts swaggered. Oh, he had the way with him, all right! They'd eat out of his hands if he held out a crumb or two.

But he didn't. There were girls in the chemistry classes. Denny talked to them, but none since Joan piqued his interest.

He glanced suddenly from his notes to Katy. She had put down the long strips of crochet that were to be made into a spread for Fay's trousseau and was watching him, a tenderness in her eyes.

"What's the matter, Katy? What are you thinking?"

"About you, Denny."

"Me? What do you mean?"

"Oh, you stay home so much and you work hard and I can't help thinking that you ought to have more fun. You love all kinds of gayety and remember how excited you were that night of the dance and how you must get all on edge sometimes and wish to be laughing and dancing and just not caring a fig for anything but a shouting good time!"

Katy's face sparkled and then grew sad:

Denny pushed the notes, took over a new set. "I'm doing just what I want to, Katy. You're a wild one, but I don't get that kind of a feeling. I came here to study."

"Oh, yes, but just the same, Denny, it's such a cram full world and there's so much to see and glorious long trips in boats and queer, distant lands to visit. And right here there are theaters and mountains and rivers and swimming and, why, you can't help but want these things."

She clasped her hands, the red lips parted, her eyes shiny with dreams. Longing trailed like white flowers in her words; like a sad, wistful fragrance.

"That's what you'd like, Katy-kid?"

"No," she interrupted quickly. "No, it isn't. But then when Stephen and all the others are here and begin to talk of tramping through the world and seeing everything and Cairo and the South Seas I look over and your eyes get black with excitement but you never say anything."

Denny ran his hand through his hair, back again, half hiding his face: "You imagine things."

"I see things, Denny, and you know what I want to say. Well, it's this—you'll want to go. Maybe you'll have to go far away and life will empty all kinds of bright, happy things before you, and I want you to take them—to go after them and not



stay behind on account of me. Why should there be two people staying back when there need only be one?"

Denny frowned, talked at her through shut teeth. "Say, now—" But his lips trembled. She saw tears in his eyes:

"Denny, don't be angry with me. Honest and true I didn't mean to hurt you."

"But you do, Katy. Gee, you ought to know a fellow doesn't stick around unless he wants to. You think you're the only one that has feelings. Say—how do you think I'd feel going off and leaving you?"

"I don't want you to go. It's only in case it were the best thing to do. And then only for a while. You see, I could go over and stay with Old Lady Traynor. Just promise me, Denny, that you won't let me stand in your way? I'd feel so glad if I only knew that. Please say it."

His face lightened. "Gee, you're a peach, Katy!"

"Now I knew it, Denny. You mean about the summer survey? Well, I just knew you should go this vacation and not keep putting it off. How could you let me keep you back?"

The thing had troubled him for weeks. A survey of the dam sites in northern California was to be made. The work was required in his course. Stephen was going this summer. Denny ought to go, yet he hated telling Katy she would have to stay alone. Now it had settled itself.

"But you'll be so lonely, Katy—"

"No—because I'll feel that I'm helping. It will make me ever so happy."

Yet the morning Denny was to take her over to Old Lady Traynor's and he and Stephen were racing about gathering their grips and papers, she felt as though tongs were pulling at her heart.

"We'll set the table all up elegant and look at the popovers," she called gayly. They had peaches and cream and ham and eggs and the steaming muffins: "Just for a farewell to ourselves!" And they were all talking in the highest excitement.

But when Stephen had taken down the grips, whispering "Good-by, dear, beautiful Kate!" and she was clinging fast to Denny's arm, all the laughter wouldn't keep away tears:

"Seems funny to be closing up this door, Denny. . . ."

"Only for a little while, Katy."

"Yes, we have another year—oh, don't you wish it would last and last and just keep on lasting?"

The sunny little room with the pink wall paper, the round walnut picture frames and the wandering Jew in the hanging vases waited and Mrs. Traynor was at the door saying: "Now I have my dear children back again, Lord love them!"

That night Mr. Traynor snickered over his bread and gravy, told his old jokes and afterwards they sang, "Lead, Kindly Light." Denny slept in the back parlor.

In the morning Katy was in his room, tremulous, excited, gathering up his comb and brush, rearranging his neckties. He kept walking up to her and saying again and again, "Now, don't forget, Katy, you'll write every day and tell me if you're lonesome."

And Katy kept laughing and answering: "Don't be so conceited, Denny, I'll not be lonesome."

Then he had to go. He kissed her and grabbed up his bag—ran down the steps. She watched at the door. He came running back:

"Say, did I give you my address?" How Katy loved the gentle look in his eyes.

"Course you did."

He laughed, kissed her again, looked back and waved.

"Gee, tough on her," he thought, winking his eyes. But Katy let the tears fall, praying, "Take care of him—oh, Denny!"

She strained her eyes after him. At the corner he waved. The world was between them.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### BITTER-SWEET

"You're going out to-night, Katy?" Lizzie Borley, sitting on the bed, mussing up the pink cretonne cover, stared in astonishment at Katy's hat and gloves.

"Yes."

"Mrs. Traynor takes you out at night?"

"No." Then as Lizzie continued to stare, Katy added reluctantly, "A friend of Denny's."

"A man?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Katy! Why, I don't think that's a bit nice. It's not proper at all. If you was to ask me about it!"

Katy's cheeks blazed. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Lizzie. Denny thinks it's all right."

Lizzie, giving herself the mysterious superiority of the young married woman, smiled, picked absently at her nail with a hair pin.

"Denny's a man. Of course, you can't expect him to be particular."

Katy's breath swelled. Not nice for her to go out with a man! She couldn't walk. So no man should look at her. But she said, smiling slowly, "Yes I can expect Denny to be most especially particular as far as I'm concerned. Why isn't it proper for me to be noticed, Lizzie?"

"Well it certainly is queer for a girl who can't walk to be going out with a man."

"Why is that queer?"

Lizzie moved her shoulder in a grieved truculence: "He has to carry you, doesn't he? Do you think such familiarity is very nice?"

"Yes, I do! I think it's beautiful when a man is kind enough to carry me. That's what I think, Lizzie."

The small eyes gleamed. "Oh, it's all very well to talk like that, Katy. Violet used to say those kind of things, too, about men being so beautiful. I guess she doesn't think so now!"

Katy shrank. Lizzie's face, with its snub nose and yellow hair, appeared suddenly spiteful and cruel.

She could have answered: "And maybe she doesn't think sisters are so beautiful, either! How can you sleep, Lizzie Borley, knowing what you did?"

Instead she laughed. Lizzie didn't know any better. It was like her pug nose—she couldn't help it.

"They are beautiful anyway, Lizzie. Maybe you don't think Emmet is, but I know about Denny and others. Maybe Violet Coes, too."

"Emmet is just as kind as he can be, and he's bought the interest in the store," Lizzie flashed. "I'm sure I only spoke for your own good, Katy. Because if you was to ask me about it I'd still say it's not a bit nice and I'm sure mamma would say so, too."

"Well, everybody can't be so awful nice, Lizzie." Katy pretended not to care. Yet she was uneasy when Clay Andrews came that night. These long, long weeks while Denny and Stephen were away, his visits, the new books that he brought, made a glad break in the kind monotony of Old Lady Traynor and her husband.

He would take her on rides about the city. Often they went to the beach. Katy, remembering the three times in her life Aunt Josie had taken them there on picnics, remembering with a vivid pang the thrill of dashing into the waves, skirts bundled about her waist, the icy water breaking above her knees, then the running back, shivering, shrill with delight, wet from head to foot—would sit in the car, mute, ready to cry for the piercing beauty of the night walking with mantle of purple on the sea.

To-night she put on her hat slowly. His dark, serious eyes, too ready to notice the hundred changes in her mobile face, saw the hesitation.

"What's the matter, Katy-kid? Don't you want to come?"

"Oh, yes. But I was just wishing we could take Old Lady Traynor and Mr. Traynor."

"Why can't we?"

"Oh, will you?" She was overjoyed. That would make it nice enough.

The old couple fluttered with excitement. Mr. Traynor, little important, hopped into the car first, remembered and hopped out to help the old lady. Katy heard him laughing, slapping his

knee; heard Mrs. Traynor saying: "Lord bless us, isn't this grand?"

So Katy forgot Lizzie and her proprieties. But the next day from every corner and wall this sentence echoed: "It's not a bit nice for a girl who can't walk much to be going out with a man. He has to carry you, doesn't he?"

She wrote a long letter to Denny, yet couldn't bring herself to speak of it. When the letter was finished she added an airy postscript:

"More, dear Denny:

"Now, don't sass back and tell me I'm stupid and a little ninny because I knew these things already. But yesterday when Lizzie was here she found out I was going out with Clay and she said it was 'terrible and not a bit nice' for me to go out with anybody as long as I had to be carried.

"And, of course, Lizzie can't help it that she says mean things and always did have a pug nose and pretends to be delicate, though she ate seven doughnuts and drank two cups of chocolate. But anyway, you write back quick and say what you think."

Denny wrote back quick. There were lofty paragraphs when he talked of the mountains "marching like a savage god" and of the valleys "sparkling up sudden and gentle where you'd never expect them." And next year she'd have to get up here. Wouldn't she love it, though.

Bang, next to this, came the manly pronouncement: "Let Lizzie Borley keep her face out of our affairs. Why do you let her come to see you, Katy-kid? You're too soft. When I get down there I'll tell that Mrs. Emmet Goss where to head in. Lot she knows about nicety. She never did a kind or decent thing in her life. You go out with Clay as much as you like."

This was the answer Katy wanted. For she was no longer afraid of Clay Andrews even when he seemed breathless and in a feverish hurry to speak. Since that night so many months ago he had not troubled her with talk of the future; of love. Katy, grateful to be left in careless irresponsibility, living happily from day to day, settled comfortably beside him thinking: "It was just to be kind that he said all those things. He knows it's much better for me to stay with Denny and Steve."

Yet there were moments when she was startled out of this confidence. Once he took her down the highway, driving slowly

that she might revel in the misty light wandering on the pallid hills. She put her hand impulsively on his, saying: "Oh, you've been so good to me, Clay." His eyes filled.

The vacation drew to a close. Katy counted the days when she would be singing about the old barn again. There were letters and snapshots from Denny and Stephen.

"Sweet, beautiful Kate" (Steve wrote), "we're coming back to you pretty soon, so have all the bubbles boiling in your laughs and the coffee on the stove and some jelly doughnuts in the tin.

"Denny, the beloved, is getting homesick; tired even of lying in the sun under a tree. Does that make you glad, Katy-kid? And as for me I've been pining ever since I left. Once we get back to the old fireside, black beauties nor green nor pink won't root me out again."

Katy read that, kept hearing the jubilation in Denny's voice; seeing the laugh in Stephen's eyes, when Clay Andrews came unexpectedly.

His dark face had an intent, anxious look. Wouldn't Katy please take a ride? She was so filled with the thought of the homecoming she didn't notice his excitement.

"Think, Clay, only a few more days and they'll be back," she said as they drove through the park, the black trees opening to let them pass.

"You've missed them a lot, Katy?"

"Yes, and if it wasn't for you I might have died. Honest and true. Think how lonesome I'd have been. You're the most awful sweet person I know, Clay."

He drew a short breath, laughed. "Next to Denny and Steve?"

"Oh, but they're like in the family, and of course, I expect things from them. But you come all the way across the bay just to make it pleasant for me."

"I don't. Everything I do has a selfish motive. I come because it gives joy to myself and for no other reason."

"I don't believe that, Clay. You twist ideas till there's nothing left but words. Even the words are empty like shells with the nut popped out. And if you call being glorious a selfish thing, it's glorious just the same. Look!"

They were at the water. The pale moon-folk were dancing on the waves. Suddenly a cloud swept like a chariot over the breakers driving the wistful sprites to cover. Katy sighed.

"I feel as though I had traveled all over the world, Clay.

You know I never drove to the ocean before and I was never down by all those trees and hills till you took me. That's what your selfishness did for me."

She glanced up, found his face white. Without moving, he spoke. "Do you feel friendlier to me, Katy?"

"Oh, yes—yes, I do."

"I came out to-night to tell you that I have to go East . . . perhaps to London. Katy, come with me."

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE HOMECOMING

A CHILLNESS fell upon her; froze the joy into an aching silence. She saw his hands gripping the wheel; his drawn face. With a melting tenderness she touched his arm. He looked down at her:

"Could you, Katy? Could you come with me?"

She lowered her head swiftly, avoiding the dark, suffering eyes.

"You can't? Is that it, Katy?"

"I can't, Clay. Now I'm hurting you. I'm making you sad, and, oh, I never wanted to do this, Clay."

"It's all right, Katy. Do you care for me at all?"

"Oh—I do—a great deal. I think I'm very fond of you, and I've been so glad to see you always."

"More than before? I don't frighten you now?"

"It's just that I'm happy as I am, Clay. And I don't want anything changed, and I don't want to be married. I've never thought about it for myself except that it was beautiful to love like Fay. . . . I've just thought that, in far away thoughts, you know—like clouds on a distant sky. I told you this, before, Clay. And you know, people like I am don't get married. You see it would be too much trouble for any one but Denny to take care of me."

"If you loved me, Katy, you would marry me. You would know you were giving me the greatest gift in the world. You would let me take care of you. That's all I want. I can't explain why this is, Katy, but you touch something in me I never knew was there, and if you were like other girls this wouldn't be so.

"I never believed in God or spirit before. Now you are these things to me. That's it—you are God to me; you are beauty. I worship you."

He spoke with hushed, passionate intensity as one murmuring a wild prayer. His white face and fevered eyes drew her like a chord of sorrow. Her heart seemed dripping away in tears.



Suddenly he sat forward, covered his face with his hands.

"Clay—dear Clay! What have I done? Oh, I'm so sorry."

He dropped his hands. "Don't be sorry, Katy. I had no right to say this. No right at all."

"Yes—if you wanted to, Clay. It hasn't hurt me."

"No one could love you more than I, Katy. No one could wish to do more. I could spend my whole life bringing you happiness. I want to be the one to take care of you. Will you think of me in this way and believe what I've said, Katy? Then if ever Denny doesn't need you or if ever you'd be willing to have things changed, perhaps you might want me? Anyway—I'll always want you, Katy—always."

"I believe everything you said, Clay—everything. I don't know what answer to make, but I'd like to cry because I've hurt you so."

"No, you haven't. Well—" He turned the car homeward. After a while he talked more easily; more slowly.

"Have you really enjoyed these rides, Katy?"

"More than I can say. It's like visiting the wonderful places I read about."

"Then you'll miss them a little?"

"Oh, a great deal. And you, too, Clay. Will you be gone so very long?"

"A few months. My father is sending me on business."

"Then you won't get your master's degree? You won't finish your work?"

"I've only been loafing this last year—killing time, Katy."

"You'll come back, though?"

"Yes. Will it bother you if I write to you, Katy? Would you answer?"

"Well, of course I will, and I'll tell you everything in the world that happens here."

A smile lightened the sober, sharp-drawn face. It touched Katy like a sob.

When he lifted her out there was a lingering gentleness in his arms. He set her in her chair, held her hand: "I'll miss taking you out, Katy. You will write to me? Now I won't see you for months and I'll be thinking of you every hour—every hour. Think of me a little, Katy, will you?"

The door closed, leaving a chill emptiness echoing. Katy folded back the pink cretonne spread, sat with clasped hands, closing her eyes against the image of Clay Andrews with his

white face, the wild prayer in his voice. A stillness entered her heart.

On the chair just as she had dropped them were the snapshots; the letter from Steve. Mechanically she picked them up. There was Denny kneeling over a fire, a coffee pot in his hand; the boastful, kid grin she loved sparkling over his face, and Steve sprawled against a tree, smoking a pipe.

Weren't they handsome, though! And they were longing to be home—tired of glorious mountains and streams—thinking of jelly doughnuts and her—

She would be there. The old barn made joyous for them. There was her heart and soul. With them—always.

The next day was a letter from Denny—just a short command:

“Dear Katy-kid: Don't bother fixing up the place. We'll do it when we get there. Gee, it'll be so darn good to be back and to see you. I mean it, Katy. We've had a wonderful trip and next year I'm going to take you up here on a vacation, only you're so stupid I'm afraid you might get thrilled to death with the bigness and the beauty of these mountains.

“We have lots to tell you and I'm going to study harder than ever next year, for I've got a good hunch. We're packing up now and you bet, Katy-kid, you won't be a darn bit gladder to see me than I'll be to grab you.

“But, remember—don't have a lot of work done and get yourself all tired out. As long as you want to be there and Old Lady Traynor will bring you over, it's all right, but leave the cleaning for us. We'll see about it.”

The warmth of Katy's joy sent a mist into her eyes. She had often wondered if Denny really cared for her, thinking as many women do that men are not prone to affection. Now she laughed. He cared, all right.

Stephen's letter was breezier:

“Darling of Our Hearth: I'm bringing the beloved home to you, but he's not the same lad I took away. I did the best I could, Kate, and saved him from divers country sirens, but he's gone wrong in the end and has turned reformer. His mission from henceforth is to banish the water wagon from polite society. In plain words the wonderful Denny is going to com-

pel you and me and all us higher-ups to do without electric lights and to bibble only one glass of water every other week. This will hoard the treasured snows of centuries that the farmers may melt them over their crops or lack of crops.

"But I'm bringing him home, anyway. And that's all you care about. And myself, too. Better have a hug for me. We're both mighty glad you've decided to be at the barn and we'll all have dinner together."

Old Lady Traynor took her across the bay, had the whole place put in order. Then there were cookies baked and the doughnuts. At five o'clock she put on her bonnet with the bunch of little purple flowers, glanced in satisfaction around the room:

"Could anything be cleaner, Katy? Well, Lord bless you children. Queenie Brooks might well be proud to-day; God rest her soul. Little I thought to see you both so well done for."

"You're so good, dear Mrs. Traynor." Katy was so nervous with expectation she hardly knew what she was saying, and kept rearranging flowers on the table, wheeling herself into the kitchen to make sure that nothing burned.

Then she was alone. And Lady Eglantine with tufted step prying about the room, rubbing her back against the chairs, stiffening her tail at a feather dropping to the floor.

At last—steps running up the lawn—voices—the door pelted open, grips dropped—Denny's arms:

"Hello! Gee! All right! Gee!"

Then Stephen, laughing, shaking her hands. Both of them kissing her. And all she kept saying was: "Oh! Oh!" and wiping tears from her eyes and laughing.

"Oh, oh! Why, how brown you both are—like Indians!" wiping tears from her eyes and laughing.

Denny went walking around, shoving a chair here, kicking the pine cones in the grate, smelling the roses in a big bowl on the window bench, taking the kitten in his arms.

"Gee—you did go and have things all fixed up. Hasn't Lady Egg grown? Hello, Cat. Don't you know me? I'm your father. Say, Katy-kid, it was wonderful! Finest trip. We had a bear of a time. Wish you were there."

Stephen came laughing back from the kitchen, stuffing a cookie in his mouth.

"Tastes like home, Kate. Glad to have us back? Did you miss us?"

Everything just as it had been—the happiness, the sparkle, one interrupting the other as they ate, as they did the dishes, as they unpacked grips. Every once in a while Denny glancing at her suddenly and saying, "You look all right, Katy-kid. Was it lonesome?"

"Yes—yes—no, but tell me now—" And she wanted to know everything that had happened, details for all the news in their letters.

It was midnight and still they were not half finished talking. Denny got up and stretched. "Gee, a nice, soft bed to-night!" Rocks would have been as down to Katy. She couldn't rest for happiness, kept seeing those two browned faces with the white teeth and young eyes. All the prayers she had ever said seemed answered.

She went to sleep joyous as though this were to last forever.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### PRIMROSE PATH

THE beginning of his last year—Denny sat at a table making out a rigorous schedule. With pencil and paper he divided the week into squares . . . representing the hours of each day. Into these squares he parceled his studies, his coaching, his laboratory job. Not a minute of any twenty-four hours escaped.

Stephen, looking over his shoulder, groaned. "Feeling strong! Aren't you going to give yourself one night a week off?"

"Can't—got to hump this term."

"Well, who doesn't? Lord, a fellow needs recreation once in a while. Thought you were going to step out this year? It's your last chance."

"I've figured it out and I can't afford it. I'm low on the finances."

"Lay you a new hat you'll never follow out that program."

Denny pasted the schedule in his note book, trimming the edges with his pen knife. Then he answered carelessly:

"Got to keep it, Steve, or go in debt and I know what that is."

The schedule was the result of deep meditations. Denny had come back to his course fired with ambition; he had come down from the mountains quickened in body and mind, stirred by a new and deepening sense of the beauty of life; the power of man.

Big things to be done in the world—big things for the fellow big enough for the job. He wanted to be one of those fellows.

The world was a vast storehouse of forces, limitless in wealth; infinite in variety. There they lie, hidden in mountain and valley, waiting for man to come and help himself; waiting for man to press the button that all life may be transformed.

No need of hunger and sordidness; no need of stunted childhood. Life should be glorious for all who own it.

Weeks of tramping through canyons, standing on high-flung peaks, where the ridges swept majestic, silent, peopled with trees, had filled him with a piercing wonder at the magnificence of this abode where humans live.

Waters of living blue caught in vast bowls of rock, gleaming like barbaric jewels on the breast of the mountains; waters rolling with a noble turbulence from granite heights; pines like dark pillars going upward; meadowlands at sunset bursting with flame and perfume of the evening primroses. This—the setting. Man can stage the drama as he will.

“It ought to be glorious,” Denny thought in the near presence of so much beauty. “Why haven’t we made a better job of living?”

And because he was young, with a tingling exuberance running through his veins, he decided that he would be one to march forth and help to make it beautiful.

One night he had lain on a bed of pine needles. Opposite, topping a far black peak, was a single tree, its branches etched on a white sky. A loneliness about it had suddenly brought to his mind an image of Joan with the intent eagerness in her face saying to him: “Oh, you can do so much good in the world—think of all the lonely people helped by a railroad.”

Yes—and he felt a supreme energy within him to accomplish whatever he wished. So he mapped out a course that left him no moment of leisure and he went whistling, his hands in his pockets, to begin it.

For three weeks he kept to that program with a swaggering self-confidence, thinking to himself: “Nothing like concentration. It’s all in getting the habit.” He felt himself immune to temptation.

There came a Saturday night when Steve was going to a dance and there was the usual clamor for necktie, clothes brush, socks, then Steve, his hair all slick, talcum powder in his eyebrows, laid the muffler over his collar, winked to Katy:

“Take care of the hermit, Kate. Poor dub!”

Denny, his feet on a chair, took a long draw at a cozy new pipe, answering: “Enjoy yourself, road runner!”

When the door closed, Katy began wistfully:

“Just the same, don’t you wish you were going, Denny?”

“I figure there’s not much to it, Katy. I’d only have to make up the time.”

“Oh, but once in a while, Denny? Just think, you’ve only been to one really truly dance in all your life. Don’t you often long for a lot of fun? You might grow old and never have it—”

"But I've got more now than I ever counted on. You can't study and have a good time, too."

"Stephen studies."

"He doesn't have to worry about the coin. That's easy. Anyway, I've doped it all out and I'm satisfied. I've had more pleasure out of this last month than from the whole three years put together."

So Stephen took his nights out— He went his laughing way, every now and then saying regretfully: "Come on, Lord Den! You're missing too much. Pays to sit in the sun once and anon."

Denny knew he dared not let down. Towards the middle of the term there was a big rally in the Greek theater. He had worked all afternoon on a chemistry problem without solving it. This irritated him. After dinner he went to the laboratory to look up some notes.

As he entered the building, fellows and girls were winding through the trees toward the great stone tiers of the amphitheater. Laughter drifted downward and already a curl of smoke rose from the bonfire.

Opening his books, Denny felt a sudden revulsion . . . a sudden longing to get out and mingle with all that high-hearted, bubbling youngness. He listened . . . the laughter and voices were distant now. The night grew mute, surrounded him with silence.

He pushed the books from him. What a fool he was passing up all the rollick of life! He'd find himself old and the chance, even the capacity for joy vanished.

With a childlike resentment he rustled open the notes, had just about conquered his restlessness when there came a hammering at the door. Jim Parks, a student of architecture, and Nick Breeden burst into the room.

"Say, come on! Knew you were here—it's going to be great."

Denny grabbed up his hat, a jubilation, as though he were going on an adventure, sparkling in his brain. Sure he'd go—was just hoping somebody'd drop along. All at once he felt a warm friendship for Breeden and Jim Parks—fine fellows.

They were in high spirits, Denny more boisterous than the others, for he was elated with a sense of freedom, of fellow-

ship, and stepped happily in tune with the band playing as they entered.

A bonfire made ruddy circles of the tiers of faces, gave a touch of intimacy to the vast, dark pit. Speeches, yells—singing. The bonfire flared, dropped down. More logs were added. Flames shot upward, opening a red path in the night. A lull—the eucalyptus trees behind the stage swaying in a mood of dreams. Wonderful—like the mountains.

Jim Parks nudged him: "Pretty good, isn't it?"

"Great!"

"Hear it all?" He squinted sideways and Denny was aware he was not speaking of the fire, the scene, but of the three girls sitting in the tier above them, giggling, keeping up a loud, merry talk. They were eating peanuts, letting the shells drop in the steps.

Denny caught a glimpse of the girl in the center. She was big—heavy, black eyes and a vivid mouth, shaded by an immense picture hat with a red rose on the brim. Next to her was a frowsy little blonde with a knowing face and a blue ribbon tied at her neck. The girl just above Denny was quieter, with an uncertain, fugitive look about her. This, like fragrance and daintiness, attracted him.

The girl with the blue bow was talking: "Say, who was the class I saw you out with, Opal? Leave it to you." The big girl laughed:

"Oh, I'm for the class every night. Spell it with a capital 'K.'"

"Catch that? Here's where I shine." Jim grinned. "Watch."

The crowd was standing, some already leaving.

"Stick around," Parks whispered.

"Not my style," Denny shrugged.

Just then the girl called Opal shook out her handkerchief, scattering peanut shells on Denny's shoulder. With a laugh, she reached down and began brushing them off, the frowsy blonde, standing next to Nick Breeden, giggling.

"That's all right," Denny said, somewhat embarrassed, brushing them off hastily himself.

Parks winked, began talking.

"Rather careless in you," he said to the tall girl.

She tossed him a quick, sidelong glance.

"Perhaps I should have dropped them elsewhere?"



He laughed, and as the crowd pushed took her arm. "Guess we better be on our way."

Nick Breeden fell in step with the blonde. The quiet girl hung back, hesitating. Then, with a hurried move, reached Denny's side, slipped her hand on his arm.

Parks turned with a grin. "You're on, Brooks."

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### LURE

As they started down the slope, Jim Parks and Opal just ahead, Nick and the blonde a little behind, Denny was disturbingly aware of the girl's hand pressed on his arm.

He began searching uneasily for conversation.

"Enjoy the rally?" he asked carelessly.

The girl turned a face like a bright flower to him—reddish hair, brown eyes, a clear petal-like skin.

"Yes, very much. I love crowds." She spoke in a slow, measured tone as though her words were of great importance.

This and the glimpse of her face piqued his interest. Why had such a pretty, quiet girl walked up and put her hand on his arm? Did she go to college? Was she in the habit of acquiring escorts in this manner? His curiosity was aroused.

"That was a great talk Roberts made, wasn't it?"

"Which one is Roberts? I don't know him."

"The yell leader."

"Oh—it was fine. But I like the singing better than speeches. You're a college student?"

"Yes—are you?"

"No—none of us are. We just came out for the rally." She seemed unwilling to talk further. A few feet in front of them Jim and Opal sauntered, arm in arm, laughing like old friends. The poise of them affronted Denny's pride.

They took the north path through the trees toward Ridge road. Jim called back: "Follow us!"

"He's going to make a party of this," Denny thought, remembering suddenly the unfinished problem and the work he had left at the chemistry lab. He grew restless.

Jim Parks had a big attic studio where he lived, studied, dispensed hospitality to a choice circle of friends. He was leading the way there now.

"Where are we going?" the girl asked, her hand tightening on his sleeve. The two others had started up a flight of narrow steps climbing fantastically up the side of the house to a great

octagonal room built like a belfry on the roof. These were Jim's quarters.

With her foot on the step, she drew back. She said, breathless, "I'm afraid."

Denny was ready to terminate the adventure. It had taken an unpleasant turn. The walk was well enough, but he had no particular wish to bring this girl whom he didn't know and who appeared so quiet, into Parks' studio. They would probably stay till midnight; he would never get his work finished.

With almost too quick a relief he faced about: "Don't go in. You don't have to."

The girl hesitated: "I can't leave them. I came with them."

Nick Breeden and the blonde reached the house, saw Denny starting down.

"What's up?" Nick asked.

Denny shrugged. The frowsy little blonde glared at the other girl.

"What are you pulling, Billie?"

"Nothing! Let's go in."

They went up the steps.

From the room came a sing-song rag . . . a husky contralto voice accompanying the phonograph to the tune of "The Oceana Roll." Opal, snapping her fingers, her shoulders swaying, stood before an immense fish net stuck with pictures. She turned as they entered, heavy black eyes and vivid mouth sparkling. "Say, isn't this some bird of a place Jim has?"

Jim was standing at a shelf built like a table against the wall. He was mixing drinks. He came over with a small tray, offered the cocktails.

The little blonde whisked hers down, began strutting about the room, looking at the posters, the photographs.

With a momentary sense of guilt Denny held the glass to the girl, Billie. She took it but didn't drink.

"A pose," he thought, with a touch of contempt. "What is she doing with these?" Yet her face was so fresh, so pretty.

"Don't you want it?" he asked.

She raised it quickly, drank it with a gulp, took the second that Opal brought over, then began to talk rather freely: "Let's have some more music. Oh, I'd like a big net like this. Isn't this fun? Do many of you have rooms like this?"

Denny wound up the phonograph. The others were sitting on a couch. Opal had taken off her hat, her black hair in three

buns, one at either ear, one at the nape of her neck. With their arms about each other the four were swaying back and forth in tune to the music. They were all laughing hilariously.

"Say, get in the party, Billie! Come on in! The water's fine!" The blonde whose name was Betty snapped her feet up and down. "Bring her over, Den! I'll show you!"

She jumped up, caught Denny's arm, pulling the two of them to the couch. Billie was delighted, and clung to his arm, repeating: "Isn't this fun! Betty's the limit!"

Betty was now looking over Jim's shoulder, giggling and saying: "Well, wait till you see the next one and the next!" They were looking over small snapshots Opal had taken from her pocket. The pictures were passed to Denny.

Photographs of Opal and Betty in diving costume. Billie blushed, tried to take them from him. It struck him as highly amusing. He closed his hand tightly on them.

"Well, they're just awful." Her face blazed.

"'Fraid I can't stand the shock?"

"Please don't look at them now." She put her hands over his, glancing up with a quick pleading. Without turning them he put the snapshots in her lap.

"Thanks!" She let her face rest against his shoulder, her hair brushing his cheek. He glanced at the soft skin, the softer mouth and wondered.

Opal and Jim had moved to a sofa in an alcove, the girl's husky voice singing dreamily. Betty and Nick Breeden sat with their arms about each other, drinking from the same glass.

Billie, with her fresh skin and pretty eyes, her uncertain manner, seemed out of place.

Betty got up—calling out suddenly, "Nicky and I are on our way."

From the alcove came a hearty "So long, then! See you next week."

With a distinct sense of relief, Denny turned to Billie: "Do you want to go?"

"Yes—Betty and I room together."

It was 11:30. Thank heaven, they were out in the air—a breeze. He would take the girl home and make the last car back.

They got on the car. There were but five or six passengers inside. The drink had excited Betty. She talked and giggled. Denny was abashed.

"Let's go outside," he said hastily.

"Yes, let's," Billie answered. She put her arm through his, settled herself comfortably against his shoulder.

"Didn't we have a swell time, though? And, you know, I was afraid going in there. Betty's the limit."

"Have you known her so very long?"

"Not very. You know about those pictures? Betty and Opal are in a diving stunt this month, and that's how they happened to have them."

"Are you in the diving stunt, too?"

"No—I'm going to business college now."

"How did you happen to meet them?"

"Oh, when I first came down, I met them at a dance."

"You're from the country?"

"Yes."

"If you're afraid to go places why do you chase around with these girls? They don't seem to be your style."

"Oh, I won't always be afraid. They're fine. They've been awfully good to me and they know a swell crowd. They have lots of fun!"

A wistful note in her voice. Her hand was soft in his.

As they got off the car, Breeden whispered: "We'll be along later. Don't be so slow, Den. You're in strong there."

He didn't answer.

They walked to a big two-story rooming house. He took off his hat, bidding her goodnight.

"Wait a minute," she held his hand. "Wait till I light the light. I'm afraid to go in alone."

## CHAPTER XL

### AFTER THE BLUEBIRD

THE house was old-fashioned with a deep front porch. Against the wall was a green garden bench. The girl leaned on the arm of this, making no further move to enter.

Her voice reached out in a note of yearning that touched his sympathy so that he was regretful, yet curious. Denny had heard countless tales of such incidents as this but he had never before been the principal in one. His heart beat quickly with suspense. He kept wondering: "What's up? What is she going to do? What is she thinking?" He wanted to know more about this pretty, quiet girl. Where did she come from? Had she any sense?

She kept her hand on his, raising and dropping her fingers as one playing a song. "Do you have fun like this every night?" she asked wistfully.

"Was this so much fun for you?"

"Oh, yes! The best time I've had. But Opal and Betty have lots of good times. There's always something doing. Where I come from it was dull as a grave; never anything but the moving pictures once in two weeks."

"Where was that?"

"Beyond Sutter Creek."

"Been here long?"

"A month. I've been going to business college. I don't like it but it's better than staying there. Anything is better than that."

"Was it as bad as all that?"

"Was it! The dearest place on earth! We lived 'way out on a farm and there wasn't a boy or a girl anywhere for miles. We never did anything but work. We didn't even talk. That's why I'm half dumb yet. That's what Opal says. And if I stayed there much longer I'd be all dumb. My mother is that way. It got so I just couldn't stand it and they let me come down here to the business college. That's when I met Opal

and Betty. It just seems like I've been buried for years and now I've come to life."

Her eloquence was like a hunger. "Opal says I'm half dead yet. She says I'm too slow."

"Why do you think so much of Opal? Is she such a success?"

"Yes, she is. She makes a hit with every one. All the fellows are crazy about Opal. She says I'll never get anywhere, I'm too skeery."

In the veiled, luminous moonlight, the red hair and brown eyes gave an eerie glow to her face. She looked away. He fancied her lips trembling. Then her face turned upward to his—eagerly: "I suppose there's nothing to be so skeery about, is there?"

Her face so near was soft like a flower; her eyes were full on his, an appeal and a sweetness. . . . He laughed and suddenly his arms closed about her. Their lips met.

The girl lowered her head: "You like me? Do you like me?" Without looking at him she whispered: "I'm not afraid—of you—"

His heart swelled. He felt the blood pounding to his cheeks. . . . And suddenly, perhaps because she kept her head down—because she gave an odd, reckless laugh and rolled her handkerchief between her palms, he recoiled and was ashamed. He said with uneasy haste: "I have to leave. Good-by, Billie—"

Her eyes opened wide, "You're going? Now?"

"I've got to catch the last car."

She twisted her hands and had a bewildered look that followed him as he ran for the car. It sickened him— Her standing there with her head down, laughing recklessly and rolling her handkerchief between her palms.

He came softly into the big, dim living room. Nearly two o'clock. . . . A note from Katy on the table and a little plate of sandwiches.

He stared into the fireplace where embers burned. For three years Denny had wondered about the gay times other fellows had. He had promised himself a look at the game one of these days. Not that he meant to go in for it. But he meant to glance about, gather a little first-hand information; have a squint or two at the world. From the tales he had heard, he was prepared for a daring spice, a fine brilliant abandon to these adventures. The cheap flatness of the affair offended all

his expectations. That pathetic: "I'm not afraid—of you" took all the zest out of it—made him more and more ashamed as though he had played a part in a shabby, brutal affair.

Denny didn't sleep well that night. He should have said something—should have told that poor little kid—told her it was better to be afraid.

A few days later Jim Parks met him. Parks said: "We're having the girls up to-morrow night, Den. Billie's yours. She's wild about you. Better come along."

"Can't. Got another date."

The next afternoon Parks met him again— "Coming to-night, Den? Billie's taken an awful fall for you. I'll have to get somebody else if you don't come."

Denny felt a sudden furious trembling . . . saw Billie's face soft as a flower in the moonlight, her eyes—her lips.

"Leave her out, Jim! Say, she's only a kid from the country . . . a kid of seventeen. It's a damn shame to lead her along—get her chasing with those other two."

"I'm not leading her. She rang up herself and said she was wild to see you again. Wear your own shoes. If you don't come one else will!"

Denny shrugged. "I don't see it." He walked off seething.

Jim Parks was a good fellow—no particular harm in him. Yet he would have this soft, ignorant girl and the other two up to his studio. There would be more drinking—a big party. Billie would have "such fun." She had been buried so many years. Now she was alive. Like Opal and Betty, with all the fellows crazy about them.

He heard her voice as she talked on the porch, the hunger gnawing as she pictured the lonely mountain farm where no one talked.

It had been this way at the Borley dinner table. Perhaps the girl had a father like Matt—Matt who had driven Violet out.

No wonder she wanted to run away. No wonder she asked so blindly for a little joy from life. In a few months Billie would be finished, for she wasn't hard-fibered like the knowing Betty, the seasoned Opal. Having contributed her filip to the mirth of life, she would be scrapped. What of it?

Not long ago Denny had stood on the mountain peaks, awed by the majestic beauty of ridge, lofty pine and falling water. Here was a setting wrought by an inspired God that man might



come and stage the play. The play should be a drama of stupendous joy.

So Denny, in a moment of solemnity, had dreamed. No need for suffering; no need for Aunt Josies and Violets. A blundering—all of this sorrow.

He and ten thousand like him just coming into power could change it if they wished; could make the world a place of gladness.

Now he was face to face with the rapacity of life and he knew that the viciousness was instinctive and more than half unconscious. Jim hadn't the slightest desire to hurt the girl. Yet it was inevitable that she would be hurt.

Denny reached the barn. It was Thursday. Stephen would not be home.

As he came into the big, colorful room Lady Eglantine rubbed her back against his leg. There were violets on the table. All this cleanness and sweetness unnerved him.

Why was Katy so different? He was suddenly disturbed, feeling as though Katy were a stranger to him. Perhaps she was always making believe; perhaps her heart was sad, perhaps she, too, thundered with longing for gayety, for excitement. Why—the way she had laughed with Stephen about going to dances and wearing gardenias in her hair and a train a mile long—that showed it!

All through dinner he kept watching her—he asked her a hundred questions. Was she lonely? Did Fay come to see her often? What did she hear from Andy?

His insistence on her loneliness gave her a sudden pang. And finally she told him. "He wants to marry me, Denny. He wanted me to go to London with him."

Katy waited as though she had taken her heart and put it in another's hands—waited to see if it would be crushed. Denny leaned against the window, looking out into the darkness, down past the willow tree, past the hills to the far black of the waters, the farther lights of the city. A sadness like petals falling dropped upon him.

Some one wanted to marry Katy—wanted to take her from him. It was as though some one wanted the laughter out of him; or the swagger; or the "pooh-what-do-we-care. Guess-we-can-get-along!" Why ever since the day she had come to Queenie's flat with the black ribbon tied to her sleeve and had

sat with her shiny blue eyes and red lips, the handkerchief held out like a prim old-fashioned bouquet; ever since he'd counted all those red-hots just for her—he'd thought Katy-kid was pretty good, all right. She was a crazy little kid, but gee, couldn't she make a feller laff!

All these years of serving her had knit the two of them in a thousand bonds of tenderness. It had never occurred to him that Katy would be confronted with the problem of marriage. So completely did he accept responsibility that he had never viewed it as an issue. It was as natural that he should take care of Katy as that he should keep company with his own thought.

The proposal of Andrews astounded him. Yet if this odd, earnest Andy loved her—and he must, since he said it; it was like Andy to do the incredible—had Denny a right to keep her from him?

"Did you want to go to London, Katy?"

"Maybe it would have been better if I had. Would it, Denny?"

"Why?"

She didn't answer. Her cheeks were wet.

"Why!" he demanded, the young chin thrust out.

She reached her hand to him, gave a sobbing laugh: "Oh, what shall I do when I'm to leave you?"

"You're happy, Katy-kid? Are you really happy?"

She looked up to him as though he were a God.

Denny gulped. How much Katy's need had done for him!

There came a whistle—Stephen on the porch. He came home early to study; generally managing to arrive in time for some dessert. Now he came breezing in with an imperious: "Cake all gone?"

He carried a square, paper package.

"Pink, Stephen?"

"Pink," he answered, opening the box. On Thursday nights, returning from the fraternity house he stopped at the candy store bringing home ice cream, for Katy had still her kid delight in it, especially if they ate it from one dish with two or even three spoons.

Stephen scooped it out, slapping it on the plates. He was quiet with a fevered excitement.

"Say, Den," he began suddenly, "there's a bear of a chance

to go to South America. Trumbull's brother was at the house. He's just come back and he says they're opening up in Brazil. An engineer can name his own terms. He's going to get all the dope. I'm strong for that. It's a great field down there."

He sat at Katy's feet, stretched himself toward the fire, letting the ice cream melt.

"Would you go soon, Stephen?" Katy asked softly.

"Not till I finish, of course. Would you write to me every day, Katy, to keep me on the straight and narrow?"

"Twice a day to do that, Stephen. And I'll send a piece of my heart to get in your way and trip you up if you dare to step off." Katy looked down at the fine head, the laughing eyes. Her own filled.

The breaking up of all these loved ties was not far off. Dear Stephen would go.

Denny was thinking the same things. There would be left Katy and he. She would miss Stephen.

Long after Denny closed his books that night he sat moodily before the fire. Up at Jim Parks' they were probably just leaving now. He began to make new schedules for himself—schedules that left no moment for larking.

Now he was glad he'd gone out that night—he'd always been curious; half promised himself that some day he'd break through all this restraint.

Well—he wouldn't. It was but a cheap, pitiful sham—a mockery of things sublime and holy—

Besides, there was Katy—there lay his purpose—there his heart.

In this moment of clear, exalted resolution, Denny was suddenly startled to find that there lurked warmly the memory of soft, red lips and glowing eyes.

## CHAPTER XLI

### STEPHEN'S CHOICE

"COME quick, Stephen. They've lighted all the lanterns. It's like the Arabian Nights. Oh, now, they're coming out to dance. I see Fay—she's gone."

Katy sat at her bench in the window, staring into enchanted gardens. Lanterns swinging from tree to tree, cutting the dark with luminous shafts of blue, crimson, gold; tall forms, like bright fairies coming from the shadows: laughter, song, a sudden burst of music. It was the evening of Fay Carleton's announcement party.

Stephen sat down for a moment at Katy's side. The two of them, with their faces pressed against the glass, began to whisper:

"Looks pretty good, doesn't it?"

"It's like a lighted poem or colors drifting into a song, isn't it, Stephen? I've never seen people dance—so many of them before. There—the one with the dress of flame—see, that's Fay. Doesn't she look happy? She's terribly in love. She told me she'd be willing to go off to the desert of Sahara and stay there alone with Donald forever. Would you?"

"With Donald?"

"With some one you loved?"

"I'd choose a cooler clime. Love would keep me warm. See that, Kate! Down there—Holy Gee!"

A girl and a man winding through the shrubs stopped suddenly under the willow tree—the girl's face raised, the man's lowered to meet it.

"Oh!" Katy gasped, clutching Stephen's arm. He laughed:

"Ah, that makes me lonesome, Kate. One second like that is worth seventeen hours of grind."

"Do you suppose they're in love?"

"Of course."

"You wouldn't kiss a girl unless you loved her, Steve?"

"It's so easy to love them, Kate."

"I suppose you're a flirt, Steve?"

"Only a great lover."

Katy sighed: "Some day you'll forget there are so many girls, Stephen, and only remember that there is one."

"Alackaday, Kate!"

"But you're forgetting them already. Poor black beauty! She must be lonesome. Do you know it's nearly a month since you've been to a dance. You're getting to be as great a hermit as Denny."

"Got to be—the way they're handing out the work. Don Juan himself couldn't get by in engineering without losing his rep with the ladies. Got to burn the midnight oil from now on."

"Yes—but anyway, a man doesn't think much of love, does he, Steve?"

He laughed: "He doesn't think much of anything else, Kate."

"Oh, I don't mean just foolish. I mean he'd rather dream of going off into savage places and building bridges and dams and all things like that than of—oh, for instance, being abandoned on a lonely island with the girl he loved."

The couple under the willow tree strolled back arm in arm to the table littered with books and papers:

"Cease, Kate, you make me mournful; you make my heart yearn for the primroses."

Katy turned from the garden with its soft streams of light, its music and bright swaying figures. From the shadow of the window she watched Stephen, with his legs stretched under the table, propping up his books. She smiled quietly:

"Well, I'm mighty glad, Mr. Stephen," she thought, "that you've turned hermit. I'm glad you have to work with all your will, and Denny, too. It's much better for you!"

The last term was drawing to a close: the work that made a dig of the breezy Stephen left Denny little choice in the keeping of his resolution. There might come images before him, like soft, beckoning fingers. He couldn't heed.

One evening as he was coming from the Mechanics Building, a girl and a fellow walked up from the Botanical Gardens, crossed directly in front of him. With a sudden warmth in his veins, Denny recognized the red hair and pretty eyes. He was about to greet her but she dropped her head quickly, her face scarlet, passed without noticing him.

Why did she do that? At the top of the slope he glanced back at the sunken path. Billie and her escort moved slowly,

their hands clasped. He might have been walking down there. . . .

He swung more quickly—a vague envy of the idle couple stirring him.

What was the use of all his grind? Where would it get him? Perhaps it would have been better to be satisfied with second-rate work and to have taken a few pleasures as he went along?

Denny was tormented with a feeling that he had overrated his abilities; that he had been far too cock-sure of his gifts. Now as it came time for the testing he was continually agitated with these uncertainties; continually baffled by his own changing moods. There were weeks when he threw himself with a buoyant passion into his work. Nothing like it—a fellow wanted to make a success—everything else was trifling—

There were other weeks when all his studying seemed profitless; when he seemed doomed to fail no matter how great the effort he put into his studies. Then a random laziness possessed him. When he passed fellows lying on the grass in the sun, he wished to heaven he had time to lie there too.

This evening as he came in sight of the barn, he saw Katy at the window. She tapped excitedly and beckoned. He dashed up the path, calling as he reached the door: "What's up!"

She flung a white envelope into his hands. Denny glanced at the name in the corner, blushed to the roots of his hair:

"Gee, say, gee!"

"Open it! I've been waiting three hours!"

There were three Greek letters in the corner—Tau Beta Pi, the national scientific and technical honor society. Katy knew what the envelope meant. She had been praying and praying that one would come to Denny—a reward and a recognition of all his relentless striving.

Denny tossed back his head, his eyes black with excitement, his fingers tearing nervously:

"Lord—gee, I can't believe it, Katy-kid."

"You can't? Well, I can! I can believe it!"

He began to laugh, staring at the notice that informed him he had been elected to the society: "I never expected this! Makes me feel funny!"

"Funny?" Half laughing, half crying, Katy took the paper from him. "Well, if you only knew how I've waited for this! When the postman handed it to me, I grabbed his hands and almost kissed him. I guess he thinks I'm crazy."

Denny went out into the kitchen, pretended to stir potatoes. He came back, squinting.

"I feel like the day we won the doll, Katy. I didn't think this was coming to me."

"After all these four years, Denny? I think a lot more than this is coming to you and you'll get it. I'm the one that's lucky, Denny, to share all these things. You know I'm just glad—to-day more than ever—for everything that's ever happened to me. Do you know that, Denny? I would never have had half as much and you would never care for me the way you do except for that—"

Denny turned his back, stuffed the letter in his pocket. Without answering, he dashed to the kitchen.

Maybe it was true—all that Katy said—

Now more than ever, he felt a sense of responsibility.

He could achieve—he must. It seemed to him that he was growing.

Yet he moved in the midst of hubbubs and uncertainties. Every fellow in the class began making plans. Every day there were new tales of big opportunities in South America, in Mexico, even in India and Egypt. The future opened wide, promising, a little terrifying.

Stephen was in a continual excitement—one night it was road-building in Brazil; the next night a bridge in Alaska. Katy wondered if he would go—and what she and Denny would do.

"I suppose we'll have to give up this good old barn, won't we, Denny?" she asked. "Guess we'll move to the city. Then you won't be so lonesome. I hate to move, do you?"

"In a way."

There would be no longer the distant view of the boats, the pale, soft fogs, the sun riding out through the Golden Gate. Katy kept watching Stephen in his moments of glowing talk. She saw his eyes feverish and she thought: "He doesn't care at all. He won't miss me. He's dying to be off—"

One afternoon Stephen came in early, found her sitting at the piano. He walked up and down, suddenly burst forth:

"Say, Kate, why do we have to tear this place up? Why can't we keep on here?"

"And you in Brazil and Alaska and Egypt?"

"Oh, I'm not sure. Heard of a new one to-day—looks pretty good."

"Where?"

"In the city."

"And you might stay!"

"For a while. Kind of hate to leave when it comes right down to it. Kind of tough, Kate.—And maybe it's better to stick around here and get a little experience first.—Well, what do you say about sticking on in the barn?"

Katy didn't answer. He walked around and looked at her:

"Lord, you're not crying, Kate?"

"I think I am, Steve. Well, I guess I am."



## CHAPTER XLII

### COMMENCEMENT

ATTAINMENT puts the star in our hand and a light goes out of our sky. So there is a sense of loss in all our triumphs.

The last weeks on the campus disturbed Denny with this feeling of something gone—something ended. When he had driven the grocery wagon; when he had cleaned bricks, the goal before him was college. Now achievement brought him to his goal—and left him without one.

He loitered with a reluctant fondness about the buildings, the paths, not realizing how much the scenes were to him, and he kept thinking restlessly: "Well—I wonder what I'm going to do now? Wonder where I start?"

But he assumed, as every one else did, a great eagerness to be finished; a fine impatience to be on his way.

"Don't you just hate to be leaving?" Katy asked the evening they brought home invitations to the commencement.

"Hate? Do you hear that, Steve?"

"Don't you know, Kate, the world needs us?"

"Guess I don't care much about world, Stephen, but only for a few people like ourselves. That's all the world is—just more people and who could be better than us?"

Denny was addressing his envelopes: "You can have these five bids, Stephen, if you want. Five is all I'll need."

Katy looked over the small list—Aunt Josie and Martha, Old Lady Traynor and Mr. Traynor, herself: "You've left Lizzie out," she said in surprise, "aren't you going to invite her, Denny?"

"I should say not!"

"Oh, you better."

"Not much! Let the molasses head stay at home and take care of Emmet Junior. She'd bring her kid and her lunch and begin eating in the middle of the President's speech. I know that dainty doughnut!"

"It's kind of mean, Denny. She'd feel so important."

"Oh, bunk! You wheedled me into taking Lizzie Borley

down the hills on a coaster, Katy-kid, but she's not coming over here to present me with a package of gingersnaps from the Goss grocery shop and earn my everlasting gratitude."

"She'll be hurt."

"I hope she'll hurt back by ignoring me for the rest of my life."

Katy fingered the five extra invitations. "I think it's rather small, Denny."

"Look here, Katy, wasn't it enough that we had to be inflicted with Lizzie Borley half our life without dragging her along the rest of it? I'm against the relation superstition. She's not coming! That's all!"

Katy put down the cards.

"Sore, Katy-kid?"

"No, and I don't care about Lizzie, either, only I think it will make it hard and unpleasant for Aunt Josie and she was always good to us and ever so proud of you, Denny."

He flipped an envelope toward her: "All right, then, you address it. Here, put in a postscript—you're good at them—and say 'Kindly omit infants, lunches, gingersnaps.' Now, any one else you'd like, Katy?"

Katy laughed: "Don't talk at me through your teeth, Denny, darlin'. Yes, I'd like Delia Terkle. Remember her? I wonder whatever became of her funny round eyes and her black sateen waist and maybe she'd bring the parrot to eat up Lizzie's gingersnaps. And I wish Jimmy Foley wasn't off to sea and perhaps I'll get up and make a speech myself about the brave boy who worked his way through—and Old Lady Traynor'll say: 'God bless you, children! Lord love you!'"

The ceremony meant more to Katy than it did to Denny. The last week she was in a perpetual excitement. Each time either he or Stephen came into the house she asked eagerly: "What did you do to-day? The procession—oh, the girls carried white parasols—pretty? What's that? The cap and gown? Try it on—"

As she made them walk up and down before her, cocking the stiff mortar-board caps down over their eyes or jauntily to the side, she sat there bursting with laughter, for no matter how they sauntered, they were ridiculous.

Old Lady Traynor was to come over early, for she and Mr. Traynor were to take Katy.

Katy was so unnerved that morning, the coffee boiled over,

the popovers burned and in the end Denny grabbed the frying pan from her and slapped on the flapjacks after a method of his own invention:

"Go on, Stupid; go and get ready. This is your day—not ours. We're only making monkeys of ourselves to give a thrill to you."

She came out a little later in a navy blue silk she had made for herself. It had a smart white collar that Denny had helped her fit. He looked at her critically—nodded:

"You'll get by, Stupe. Say, don't have Lizzie hanging around afterward. Now remember, and pull your hat down good. And wait up there near the marble chairs. I'll come up as soon as I can. Nick Breeden is going to be on the watch and he'll give you a good place."

Katy was ready and on the lawn waiting when the old Traynor couple arrived. And, sure enough, the first thing Mrs. Traynor did was to wag the little black bonnet with the purple violets and say: "Ah, God bless you, Katy! God bless both of you children! Is Denny gone?"

"Yes—we better hurry."

"Oh, it's just nine. We have plenty of time."

But Katy was in a feverish unrest. They were just turning the corner when she looked up. Her heart sank. There, rushing along, her white, pleated skirt billowing, came Lizzie. Behind her were Aunt Josie and Martha.

"Why—you were going without us, Katy?" she asked in her pouty dignity. "I'm sure that's nice in you."

"How did I know you were coming here first, Lizzie? The graduation isn't at our house!"

Lizzie tilted her big head and Katy noticed with a pang of alarm that she carried a long box that looked enough like gingersnaps.

"You didn't bring little Emmet, Lizzie?"

"I guess I know what's proper, Katy. Of course not."

Aunt Josie and the tall, square-shouldered Martha now came panting up. A big smile crossed Aunt Josie's broad face. She had the new gray mocha gloves Denny had bought her so long ago in her hands. She patted Katy's shoulder, saying quietly:

"Denny didn't forget me, Katy. Gawd knows he's the one that's been kind to me, if any one ever was. And it's little enough I did for him."

"He loves you, Aunt Josie. We both do."

Martha sidled up to Katy's chair: "Can I walk along by you?" she asked in her low, suppressed manner.

"Course you can, Martha, and I'm awful glad you came."

It was like the day of the big game, with hundreds of people already wending to the campus, only now there was a touch of solemnity in their excitement.

"Go quicker, quicker, Mrs. Traynor. We'll miss some—" Katy felt that she could get out and run. Lizzie and Aunt Josie kept talking to her. She was too distracted to answer.

Up the slopes between the slender eucalyptus, people hurried—down the slopes music drifted. A white, glaring sun arched and curved over the vast amphitheater.

"Hello, Katy—I've got your place." Nick Breeden, rather flushed, brought her to the very center, just above the lower tier. "How's that?"

"Can Mrs. Traynor stay near me?"

"I've got places for Mr. and Mrs. Traynor. The others will have to go up a little."

Katy was relieved. "Oh, that's fine!" she said almost too quickly.

The long columns of students in the black gowns were already seated. Katy looked frantically over the groups—no Stephen, no Denny. She saw a tall fellow stand up, look around. Of course that was he—looking for her. But it wasn't. Then there was another standing—Denny, sure as you live. Katy raised her hand—waved it. He grinned, sat down.

Abruptly a silence as though some one had whispered, "Hush!" The seats on the stage filled—the president speaking with an impressive weightiness—they were all to go out into the world now—carry with them the light and the truth. Success awaited their nobler efforts. Katy listened with inspired heart. Every word of that was just for Denny, just for Stephen. They would make the college proud of them!

Then the procession—some with splendid bands of gold, purple and crimson hanging like capes over their black gowns. At last the engineering college.

"Now, can you see him? Oh, there he is! No—oh, why don't they look over and wave a little?"

She tried to make out the two of them, but the faces were but white circles in the blinding sun. They were all walking back to their seats.

"All over. I didn't even see him for sure."

But there was a hymn, and Old Lady Traynor, wiping her eyes and whispering, "God bless the dear lads and the girls—all of them."

Then every one standing—girls with flying gowns running up; mothers, with proud wet eyes, kissing them.

How slow Denny was! What kept them? Then Stephen, grabbing her hands, laughing. "Show's over, Kate. Take care of this, will you?"

Denny, grinning, stooping down before every one and kissing her. "Cheer up, Katy-kid. I'll be home soon as I can."

So it was over—all over—an end that was but a bigger and braver beginning.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### NEWS OF VIOLET

"WHERE'S Denny? Where did he go?" Lizzie, with the box tucked under her elbow, sent the sharp, small eyes darting over the amphitheater. "I'm sure it's nice in him not to wait, and we came all the way over to see him!"

"He had to go, Lizzie. They have to be in the glade at noon. Why, he was so excited he didn't say anything. I didn't tell him you were here."

Lizzie moved her head in a hurt manner from side to side.

"And I've just put up the loveliest lunch, Katy. I thought we'd all go up to the hills and have a little picnic. And I'm sure Denny would have enjoyed that."

"Oh, he would have just loved it, Lizzie!" Katy raised her program quickly, shaded the laughter in her eyes. "He'll be orful sorry to miss it."

"You have a lawn where you are, haven't you?" Lizzie asked curiously. "I've meant to come over, but it's so hard with the baby. I suppose we might go down there."

"Why, of course!" the hospitable Katy answered, but she thought, "Now everything is spoiled! They'll stay all afternoon. They'll be there when Denny comes back, and I know he was going to take me for a walk."

Martha came up and whispered: "Wouldn't you let me wheel you, Katy? I saw Denny, but he didn't see me. Mamma saw him, too!"

Katy had prepared a lunch for three. She wasn't sure that it would stretch out for six, but once they were at the barn she grew lighthearted, eager to hear the comments Lizzie would make when she saw that joyous room of theirs.

Sun swept in a golden stream across the walls, making big splashes of color of the quaint grandmother rugs, the lanterns, the deep blue chairs.

"My," Aunt Josie said, her hands clasped tightly, "is this place all yours, Katy?"

"Mine and Denny's and Stephen's."

"Well, ain't you fixed up fine, though!"

Lizzie spied the mandarin skirt, the pine cones in the fireplace, the big sofa.

"A piano!" she gasped. "You have a piano!" Her tone was almost indignant.

"Yes, Lizzie, a piano, and it plays," Katy piped as though she were but twelve and Lizzie still jealous because Katy was to lead the flower fairies. "After a while I'll give a concert."

"Oh," Lizzie laughed. "I wonder where you'd learn how to play."

"Indeed our Katy can play," Mr. Traynor championed. "And it's she that can sing, ain't it, Nora? I'll add to the tune myself if ye like."

Old Lady Traynor was bustling around, putting the kettle on the gas, shoving chairs to the table. Aunt Josie sat on the edge of the sofa looking about in bewilderment.

"Now, don't mind fixing up things, Katy—we'll just have what Lizzie's brought in the box."

But Katy was in the kitchen pulling down lettuce, tomatoes from the cooler and Mrs. Traynor cut the bread, opened cans of beans, sliced some corned beef. Lizzie stood in the doorway.

"If I had an apron, Katy, I could help. I don't want to spot my new skirt. Oh, you're throwing too much of that lettuce away. We don't need so much to eat. I'm sure I've brought sandwiches enough for four. Oh, you're terribly extravagant, Katy."

"Yes, Lizzie—I just love to be extravagant! That's the way we keep house. Now—everything is ready. Table all set, Martha?"

"I'm sure I brought my own lunch, Katy." Lizzie opened the box. She had a dozen bologna sandwiches—no butter on the bread. The hot sun had dried them and the crusts curled back. Lizzie passed them. No one accepted.

"Save them, Lizzie, and you can eat them on the way home—because we have enough here."

Katy was busy passing salad, cold meat, asking Mrs. Traynor to bring the tea, the cake. Lizzie's eyes wandered greedily about the room.

"I'm sure it's real nice here, Katy. I'm sure I can't imagine how you could have such a place and Denny not making any money."

"Didn't you know we were rich, Lizzie?" Katy laughed.

"Denny earns more than we spend. We even think about taking a trip to Europe, don't we, Mr. Traynor? We've talked about going to Alaska and Brazil and Egypt. You know, engineers travel."

"I suppose Denny'll get pretty stuck up."

"Denny's a good boy," Aunt Josie interrupted. "Gawd knows where you'd find a better. He's the one that deserves all that he's got. Gawd knows I've said many a prayer for him."

"Lord love the lad!" Mrs. Traynor answered cheerily, clearing away the dishes. "Now just you have a little chat with your aunt, Katy. I'll have these done in a jiffy."

In a few minutes she was back: "Well, this was a great day, Katy. You and Denny must come over some Sunday night and it will be like old times." She was putting on the black bonnet, slipped a small box into Katy's hand. "That's for our Denny."

"And ye didn't sing the song for us, Katy. Now Lizzie'll be thinking ye can't. Give her a tune. Do!" The old man whispered, a facetious wink lighting the jolly red face. They went out—arm in arm—two roly-polys.

"Now we can talk!" Lizzie declared emphatically. "I thought they'd never go!"

"They were invited to stay," Katy flushed. "Why, they're our best friends, Lizzie."

"Well, of course, Katy, if you feel like that, I'm sorry. I thought you'd want a visit with me and you haven't asked me once about the baby and I didn't have a chance to tell you that Emmet is getting one hundred dollars a month now and he's going right up and I'm sure you'd be mighty hurt and think I was mean if I didn't ask all about how you got this place and you haven't even showed me your bedroom!"

In the midst of Lizzie's injured plaint Denny, whistling softly, pushed the door. Katy caught the blank astonishment in his brisk "Hello! Well!" Then he was kissing Aunt Josie and she was saying, "I'm glad, Denny," and patting his hand.

"I'm so disappointed, Denny," Lizzie offered graciously, "for I brought a lunch and thought we could have a picnic in the hills."

Denny chuckled. "Gee, Lizzie—well, now, that's too bad! And how's the son and heir? Why didn't you bring him over to see his cousin graduated?"



"Oh, you think you're smart, Mr."

"Is he as pretty as he was, Lizzie?"

"You did think he was cute, didn't you? He's the image of Katy—her eyes, her hair."

Denny, standing behind Katy's chair, grinned. "I thought he had a head like Emmet's."

Katy frowned, but Lizzie smiled complacently. "Well—of course, he has Emmet's good points."

"Yes, he has his points all right. That's natural enough."

Martha sat on the sofa, an ungainly quiet girl, like her mother. She was looking over a kodak album. "Oh, here's a picture of Violet, mamma, isn't it? Oh, I remember just how she looked."

Aunt Josie glanced at the picture, picked up the book and stared at it, slow tears gathering in her eyes.

"Yes, that's your sister Violet. That's just the way she was."

"Why don't we ever see her, mamma?"

"She's gone away, dear. She's working."

"I know she's gone, I remember when she left. You kept saying that she's coming back, but she doesn't come."

"Gawd knows, I'm praying for it!" The tears dropped.

Lizzie sat upright, little eyes gleaming. "Now, you're going to cry, mamma. I'm sure that's considerate in you, and you know what papa says—we're not to speak of her. Emmet says that, too!"

"Is that so, Lizzie Borley?" Denny's white teeth showed—the dignity of the morning was gone. "Well, this isn't papa's house, and it's not Emmet's. And Violet's name will be spoken here as long as there's a roof on the place!"

Lizzie's thick skin flamed under the heavy powder. "It's just like you, Denny, to fight with me, and what did I do? I only tried to avoid trouble. I'm sure that's all. And you wouldn't be so brave if you knew what I know, and I guess Violet Borley's not worth fighting about! She's too lazy even to work. She won't keep a job! That's what's become of her! Just going straight down and dragging the family's name in the gutter. Even borrowing money and not returning it. That's what she did! Borrowed two dollars from Sadie Foley and never paid it back!"

Aunt Josie's face was a broad anguished stare. "Lizzie, Lizzie, what are you saying? Is this true? Oh, my Gawd!"

"Well, I guess I don't tell lies, mamma. You ought to know that."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" Aunt Josie pressed her hands to her mouth.

"Yes, and have you crying and saying I was to blame. As if I could help it if she wanted to degrade herself!"

"Gee, Liz"—Katy heard the hard breath—"this is news. When did this happen?"

"Yes. Well, it happened months ago and I guess she's not worth much now. So I guess you won't be so glad to shout about her, Denny Brooks!"

"Well—Sadie knows where she is, Lizzie? Where's Vee now?"

"Very likely Sadie knows. Guess Miss Violet'll keep out of her way, owing her two dollars! I guess Sadie tried to find her and the landlady said she was put out of the house with her rent unpaid. That's what Violet Borley's come to!"

## CHAPTER XLIV

### STARTING OUT

LIZZIE, raising the pleated skirt free from the grass, the white taffeta bow on her straw hat flopping, picked her way across the lawn. Aunt Josie, in tight jacket and stiff black dude, with Martha carrying the lunch box, followed.

They had stayed half the afternoon, Lizzie poking into Katy's bedroom, thumbing the books, plucking an armful of scarlet roses, remarking how nice it was to be a "high brow," and finally when they were leaving, she asked:

"I wonder what I should do with the lunch?"

"Just dump it out there in the bucket," Denny answered.

The broad, yellow head gasped: "I suppose that's college smartness," Lizzie flared. "I'm sure it's nice to be millionaires and throw out good food, but Emmet has to work for his living!"

So the box was tied up and Martha went away, carrying it.

At the sidewalk Lizzie dropped her skirts—waved. Denny turned from the window, pressed tobacco in his pipe:

"Lord! I'd like to meet that one in a dark alley. I'd give her this," he doubled his fist, "right in her homely mug!"

It was always funny to Katy when Denny forgot that he was a man—a polished old cavalier of twenty-three—and talked through shut teeth like a pug-nosed youngster of twelve. Now she didn't laugh.

"I'm sorry I made you invite her, Denny. Spoiled your whole graduation."

"Any old time, Katy-kid. I saw that pillar of beef heading my way. That's why I dashed off in such a hurry. What did I tell you about the lunch?"

"Eeee!" Katy laughed. "And no butter on the bread. When I saw how stingy she was I threw away much more lettuce than usual and pretended to be extravagant just to show off."

"I wonder if it's true."

"About Violet?"

"She's mean enough to lie about it. Lord, what a dirty shame—she must have been pretty hard up if she borrowed two dollars."

Denny walked about the room, picked up a magazine, dropped it, shoved Lady Eglantine impatiently when she rubbed against his foot. The night he had searched the city for Violet oppressed him now.

He went to the phone. "I'll call up Sadie Foley and find out. She'll tell us, won't she?"

"She always liked Violet, I remember. But pretend you don't know about it and then she'll tell you more. Sadie likes to talk."

But Sadie was working and he had to call again. Then he began with a very elaborate bluff—when would Jimmy return? He wanted to see him about a trip. And how was all the old crowd on Octavia Street and was Sadie having a good time and did she ever run across Mabel Romer or Belle Kirk or any of the old timers?

"Say, you'd be surprised if I was to tell you who I did see, Denny," the voluble Sadie at length offered. "Guess—"

"Come on, Sadie. You're a good sport. Who was it?"

Katy sat on the edge of the chair listening with every nerve.

"Well, you'll just drop dead when I tell you, Denny. I saw Violet."

"Did you? When did you see her, Sadie?"

"Lemme see—well, it was just about Christmas time. Now I remember. The poor kid lost her job the week before. Gee whiz, I sure felt sorry for her. And say, she's wandered around some—"

Sadie, with no limit to her words, began to detail various jobs Violet had held, towns where she had worked in cafeterias and in hotels.

"Do you know where she is now, Sadie?"

"Say, Denny, I can't imagine. I went down to Folsom Street where she had a room, but she'd left. Ma thought we ought to ask her out to Christmas dinner. You know, ma thought it was a rotten shame the way Old Borley treated Violet, so ma says to me: 'Sadie, it's Christmas Day and that poor girl, like enough, won't have a holiday dinner and this house has plenty.' So I went out to invite her, but she was gone. The old beast that kept the place wasn't any too sweet about it when I asked for her."

Sadie went over the details, but she said nothing of the two dollars that had loomed as a thousand might to Lizzie, until Denny asked:

"Wonder if she had any money, Sadie?"

"Not a bean, Den. I gave her a couple o' bones. Course I thought she'd easy enough get a job and I guess she has, but I haven't laid a lamp on her since and you know we used to be pals. That's what I call rough, all right. Ma just feels awful. Only the other night she says to me: 'Sadie, I wonder where that girl is?'"

Sadie rambled on, but she had no idea what Violet might be doing now or where she was.

"Well, tell her if you run across her again that Katy and I'd give a lot to see her and we have plenty of room here," Denny ended, hanging up the receiver.

A gloom, not piercing and angry now, but quiet as the sad memory of a loved one long dead, entered his heart.

"We're never going to meet Violet again, Katy-kid—"

"Don't say that, Denny! I don't think anything as cruel as that could be. Why, often in the afternoon when the children forget to come up and the Carletons are away, I think of Violet. She was such a dear thing to us when we were little and letting me sleep in the boudoir and giving all her money to Aunt Josie—why, it wouldn't be right if she was always unhappy. So I think about her and I fancy she may drive up some day to see us in a big automobile like Clay's—and a pretty hat with a red feather in it. You know, she was so crazy for feathers! And wasn't she prettier than any girl you ever saw, Denny? I hope she looks the same—"

The clock in the old red library struck and the hours sounded faintly—dim, impressive finalities. Six o'clock. The light softened—a tender gold.

"This day is gone," Katy said wistfully. "I feel so sorry, Denny, there had to be quarreling. It started out so beautiful and you looked—oh, I don't know—but so all tingling. Stephen did, too, and you worked so hard all these years and you pretended all the time that—pooh, it was easy. Sometimes I knew you were pretending. That's why I thought to-day ought to go up gayly like a big, wide shout."

Denny stood at the window, hands in his pockets. Suddenly, shaking free from dreams and memories, he shrugged:

"Well, Stupe, suppose we get the dinner! Come on, now—"

quit mooning!" He pushed her swiftly, rushing her with a laugh to the kitchen.

When he was peeling potatoes, taking the skins off in big, clumsy gobs, he said with a return of gaiety: "Well, that fat wallop won't spoil a day for us in a hurry again. I'm going to write her a note and tell her so—"

"Oh, ain't you brave, Mr. Denny! Why didn't you give her the punch while she was squatting so gracefully right on our very best chair!"

"Say!"—he jabbed the knife into the sinkboard, rested his hand on it—"say, she'd have got it only I was afraid she'd have shut up, and I wanted to hear about Vee. That's all that saved her—that and Aunt Josie. Gee, I thought we'd have a feast by ourselves and a chance to talk over things. That's why I came home."

"Let's talk now then, Denny, darlin'. Do you feel kind of poetic—you know—as though you were turning into a sad song and things wouldn't be just the same, even keeping the barn? I mean as though we'd surely have to grow up now and be sensible forever and ever, amen!"

"Not much, Katy-kid! We'll begin to live now. After a while I'll be making money and you'll have an automobile and a chauffeur and you'll go driving every day and by golly—we'll know what fun means. Chisborough wants to see me tomorrow. It's about a job."

There was a glow in his voice but it didn't quite reach to his spirit. An unrest that was both reluctance and eagerness laid hold of him and in his most confident moments he found himself asking, "Wonder if I'll make the grade? Gee, now's the test. I've got to—just got to!"

Then he threw back his head, squared his shoulders with a buoyant, "Pooh, what's to life, anyway? Let it come! Guess we'll get by!"

Yet underneath, as he walked across the campus, noting the familiar trees, the ivy-lined red walls, there grew in him a hesitance, a fear, a brooding sense of farewell, as though he must put by forever the blithe, high-hearted irresponsibility of his youth; as though now in fact as well as in boast he must prove himself a man.

Chisborough was a professor—a brilliant engineer and consultant for several big corporations. He had taken an interest in Denny's work—talked to him several times about his plans

and finally promised to speak for him with a company that had several big power projects under way.

"I think we can place you, Brooks," he told him with a laugh. "We need good men. This is the field for you."

He gave Denny a letter of introduction to the manager, told him to see him that day.

Denny rushed home, dashed into the bathroom, pulling off his collar as he went and yelling to Katy, "Got to go to the city. Gee, say—here, fix this shirt, will you?"

Then there was great splashing and combing and "Gee, personality counts; got to make an impression. Well—how's this? Gee, Katy—maybe I'll land it!"

And as he went out—a deep, humming, nervous laugh:

"Watch at the window, Stupe! If I come dashing up with my hat off you'll know we're millionaires and have a job!

"If I come up with my hat on, the job is off. So long!"

## CHAPTER XLV

### FAREWELL

A YOUNG engineer, his degree in the chiffonier drawer, the world at his feet, Denny swung down the block, ran to catch the train—a bit nervous for all the lilt in his whistle.

Empires called to him—needed just such a man as Denman Brooks. The romance, the vastness of achievement that had reached like a great hand and gripped him to the heart as he tramped through the Sierras in the last vacation was now beckoning and waiting for him. He would be one of those master fellows directing great projects, flinging immense walls across the canyons to hoard in wide, silver pools the wealth and power of the mountains.

On the boat he caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror, stole another glance, pulled his tie and yanked his coat more snugly about the collar.

No need to get excited over a little thing like a job—yet, puff his cigarette as lazily as he would, his thought scampered hotly. Would the manager test his knowledge? Might he ask him for some designs of dams or bridges?

Would he ask him what salary he expected or would he merely inform him of the recompense? Another lift to his coat collar—well, he ought to get one hundred dollars a month. That was the usual pay. Some fellows had started with one hundred and twenty-five dollars. To avoid disappointment, Denny fixed his hope on one hundred dollars and then grew jubilant lavishing out that princely sum. Why, that was more than the combined income of the barn right now!

The interview was disappointing in its tameness—its casual brevity. Here came the young king to claim his crown and the old world didn't so much as sniff its nose.

The manager, a big, powerful fellow with a large dome-shaped head and a rough, iron-gray mustache, took Denny's letter, gave it an abrupt glance.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Brooks." The cool eyes went slowly from



Denny's face to his feet and back again. "Chisborough spoke of you. You don't want to leave town just yet?"

"No. I'm not in a position to leave."

"Well, we can use you in the draughting room for a while. Can you start the first of the month?"

"Yes."

"All right, then." Hugh Mason didn't move his eyes from Denny's. "All right."

Not a word about the salary, Denny's record, his knowledge, his ambitions. And not the shadow of a chance to make an impression!

"Am I to report here, Mr. Mason?"

"At the draughting room. Oh—your salary will be one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month. Chisborough speaks well of you. There's a big opportunity here if you're the type of man we're always needing. We want men with vision as well as ability; we need fighters with courage. If you can deliver, we can pay."

Into the cool eyes came a glint that was half smile, half goad: "I hope you make good, Mr. Brooks."

Unconsciously, Denny's head lifted: "Thank you, Mr. Mason. I'm going to try." To himself he added with an exultant chuckle: "And I guess I win, all right!"

He went out quickly, his mind strutting. Men with vision—fighters with courage! He wanted to turn round and shout: "Here's your man, Mason! Watch him!"

He walked along grinning—one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month! The words rolled on his tongue, jingled in his pocket. A hundred and a quarter a month; fifteen hundred a year. Gee!

The five dollars in his pocket now seemed like fifty. He could spend it; saunter into a shop and blow it all for neckties.

Wait till Katy heard—she would be waiting—gee, how she would be waiting! He stopped before a candy store on Post street. There was a big plate of French pastry in the window—big chocolate cream puffs—just the thing for a feast. He went in and bought a dozen.

Feasts belonged to the ritual of Denny's boyhood. Of all his memories the most gladsome was of the sugary snail and the cup of chocolate Queenie used to have ready for him in the afternoon when he came starving home from school.

Katy was like her in this—always a pie or a cake that a

fellow could set his teeth in at night when he finished studying. Over those treats the great problems of their lives were discussed and solved.

He was in a great impatience to get home, to go dashing into the barn with the mighty news. He forgot all about the signal—all about Katy, sitting at the window watching.

With a shove he pushed the door, walked up and down the room, swinging the pastry box, grinning.

"You got it!" Katy cried. "But your hat's on! Your hat's on, Denny!"

"So's the job!"

Then he went into all the details.

"Gee, think of it, Katy—means an awful lot getting the right start. This Mason's the kind that will push a fellow if he's got the stuff. Gives you a feeling of bigness—starting out like this."

He was dumping the cakes to a plate, scooping up bits of cream with his finger. Katy watched the flushed, excited eyes; the clinch of the square, fighting chin. Did any one in the world doubt Denny's courage, Denny's brilliance? He never failed—never. Why, she could tell Mason!

Yet her joy was a little tremulous. The big world where he longed to go striding with his head towering above the crowds called him from this gay, secluded room, called him and left her behind. With a passion of impatience he was answering.

Ah—but it wouldn't be all fun; all play, as their life had been. The woman in Katy shrank before change.

There was no reluctance in Denny's thought. He wished it was the first of the month; wished it were two months from now—already scheming on clever things he might do. He was bound to make a stir and pretty quick.

There were two weeks to wait. And Denny was now a man with an income of \$1500 a year. This thought was like some buoyant fluid underlying all other thoughts and keeping them bobbing merrily. Why, they had money enough to buy up a summer resort if they liked—let alone having two weeks of fun.

One morning he sauntered off after breakfast, leaving Stephen to help. In half an hour he came jogging back to the barn in an old-fashioned phaëton.

"Well, crazy, what now?" Stephen, sweeping the rugs, gave him a push.

Denny grinned and got in his way again. "Put by the mop, scullion. There's a picnic afoot!"

A ride in a phaëton was their earliest dream of grandeur. How Violet used to wonder whether to have black horses or brown; how she used to talk of racing through the park.

The three of them and the lunch basket crowded into the wide seat. Denny held the reins lightly, twirled his whip.

"Lord, is it getting a job that makes you so cocky, Den? Regular smart Aleck!"

Denny wagged his shoulders. "Hundred-and-a-quarter man, fifteen-hundred-dollar man!"

Stephen grumbled. He had a great problem on his mind. Should he go East as his mother requested to spend a month or two with his family or should he strike out at once in one of the jobs open to him? He debated this question as though the success of his entire life depended on the move.

Now, as they ambled leisurely over the Tunnel road, where the ravines with their rough shrubs against a background of hills gave a feeling of wildness and distance, he watched Denny, listened to his jubilant talk. Lucky dog! His problem was solved! That was the beauty of deciding a thing—getting it over with.

They found a grassy bowl swung like a hammock between the slopes and here under a big scrub oak they ate their lunch. Katy, laughing and planning, read from an old ballad book.

"Let's make up our minds to come on a picnic every Sunday." She closed the book dreamily, rested her head against the tree trunk. "But I suppose we couldn't afford that yet awhile."

"I guess we could with twenty-five dollars more than we expected. Say, Steve, what do you suppose Blanchard pulls down a year? Twenty thousand? That's what Chisborough told me. The Mountain Company believes in high-grade men and high pay. Well, Mason said so, too." Denny began a glowing list of big men and high salaries, sketching boldly as much as to say, "Well, that's no more than we'll be getting first thing any one knows."

"Say," Stephen broke in abruptly, "a fellow's a fool to let a good chance slip. Might wait a year before you get another. Lord, I'm not going to wait. I'd like to go East, but that job with the Mountain Company suits me. . . ."

"Then we'll all three be here right straight through the

summer?" Katy had urged him to go—now she was exultant that he had decided against it. "It'll be as good as it was before, only better. And a phaëton every Sunday!"

When they reached home that evening, Fay Carleton brought over a telegram from Stephen's father.

"Mother is ill. Come at once."

Stephen stared at the slip. "That settles it. I go in the morning."

They were all up early—quiet, chilled, scarcely speaking.

"Perhaps she's not very ill, Stephen."

"I don't know."

"Will you come back, Stephen?"

He was jamming shirts into his suitcase—turned with a sharp: "Will I, Kate? Well, this is my home—right here with you and Den. It's more home to me than anywhere else could be. Lord, Kate, you've been a lot to me—well, wasn't I almost as good as the wonderful Den?"

Katy's hair, only half pinned, fell in bunches of curls at her neck. She laughed, frank tears in the cloudless blue eyes, took his hand, saying in her quick, little-girl way: "Well, wasn't it orful nice here together, Steve? We had lots of good times, didn't we?"

"Did we, Kate? Say, you've been a darling!" He picked up the suitcases, Denny helping.

"And you'll write to say when you're coming back? Sure now. So we can have a holiday dinner? Oh, we'll be waiting and waiting and waiting forever, Steve!"

"You bet I will, Kate! Good-by!" He stooped down quickly and kissed her: "Kate, don't you adopt any other boarder while I'm gone, now will you?"

There wasn't much laugh in his eyes. Katy laughed for him: "We'll save the place for you, Steve—honest and true."

She watched them. At the street they waved. Katy sat with clasped hands—a paleness in her heart. He was gone—he was gone.

## CHAPTER XLVI

### THE JOB

At the draughting table near Denny was a lank man, clean-shaven, sandy-haired. His back curved amiably, giving an impression of indolence.

Denny had been watching him all morning, awed by the incredible speed with which he was figuring; making estimates.

"One of the big fellows," he thought. "Gee, what a wiz!"

It was his first day of work. He had crossed the bay in a tremble of excitement, standing at the prow looking to the hundred blue hills of the city; a feeling of nervous elation keeping his head high. Now was the big hour—now the proof.

All the dreams that had made him scorn the grocery clerk, the plasterer's job; that had kept his spirit buoyant as he cleaned brick—all these dreams were now to be realized.

He wondered if he would be set to work on designs for immense dams and power houses; plans for a bridge or a railroad—

Half the day was gone. He had done nothing but make a sketch for a small culvert. Only that and then sit and wait for the lanky man to ask his assistance.

Kane—that was the name of the wiz—got down from his bench, gave Denny an indifferent glance:

"Just from college?"

"Yes."

"Civil engineering?"

"Yes."

"Good luck." He nodded—went out, leaving Denny with a flushed, indignant feeling of unimportance.

That afternoon the great Kane gave him some figuring to do. In half an hour, and before Denny was finished; while he was still rather bewildered, Kane called for the results.

"In a few minutes," Denny answered, persistently bending over the sheets. Kane, with a faint curve to his lips, stood behind him:

"Look here, boy!"

Almost in a moment, it seemed—well, in ten minutes, he had the whole thing done. Denny's throat tightened. Fine booby he was! Fine way to begin—a nice chance to make an impression with one of the big fellows and he couldn't come through with the goods!

He could feel his heart swelling up to his neck.

"What was it like? Did you have a great chance? Quick, now, tell me!" That was the way Katy, all sparkling with eagerness, met him at the door—just the way she used to in the first depressing days on the campus.

"You think you'll like it, Denny? Every one has to be patient while they're just beginning! Were they pleasant to you?"

"Oh, yes! Had coffee and sandwiches laid at my place and a carnation to wear in my coat—"

Because his disappointment was so great he told her of Kane and the figuring—

She laughed with such tenderness he was shamed.

In the next week Kane paid little attention to him; the chief draughtsman gave him jobs that a first-year student could do. No more chance to show his skill to the big fellow came.

One noon he went to lunch with Frank Bliss, a young draughtsman, who had not been to college, but who had been working three years. He was an inquisitive, aggressive fellow who picked up all manner of gossip, due to his friendship for Miss Blanche Taylor, an assistant bookkeeper in charge of the office payroll.

"Kane's a wonder, isn't he?" Denny suggested.

"He's good at figures," Bliss admitted tolerantly.

"He's a wiz! Never saw any one to beat him. Has he been here long?"

"About twenty years."

"Gee—guess he pulls down a neat salary, doesn't he?"

"One hundred and seventy-five."

Denny gasped. One seventy-five after twenty years of service! Bliss must be guying him.

"Come off—you don't know any more about it than I do."

"I don't, eh? Well, what did you think he got? No sand to him. They make machines now to do figuring."

Denny was inwardly stupefied. This Kane, who had seemed to him a big fellow—a genius—getting a mere pittance after a lifetime of work. Why?

Perhaps Kane had come from college feeling himself a conqueror—perhaps he had dreamed of mastering rivers and mountains.

“Well, what did you think he got?” Bliss repeated. “Takes a real man to make the big hauls—fellows like St. Clare and Bowditch.”

Denny knew these names. There was an epic romance about them. St. Clare, taking his surveyors through the Sierras in the midst of winter, and in this white wilderness, mountains hidden under twenty feet of snow, had made a survey for a railroad—a masterpiece of engineering and courage. Bowditch, directing a small army through an almost impassable forest, blasting century-old trees that rails might be laid.

These were men of vision. These were the fighters with courage.

These phrases were continually before him. Into the smallest task he put a passion of effort.

Yet months passed and he was still doing routine work, still dashing up the lawn in the evenings whistling gayly; sometimes bringing a box of candy, a bunch of violets, to show that he didn't care and to give Katy a cheer. Gee—darn lonesome for her now!

There was a quietness in her life that the college days had not known. Then Stephen or Denny often rushed home for note book, a bit of lunch, an hour of study. Now she was alone from seven-thirty in the morning until six at night.

She missed Denny, missed Stephen; missed the noisy, exuberant crowds on Friday nights.

Stephen wrote innumerable letters, breezy, full of plans. His mother was improving; he was coming back—Lord, wait till he got there!

“Sweet, Lovely Kate: I owe heaven a debt of everlasting gratitude. 'Tis for this—I was raised in a barn. No home like it! Hot as blazes here. I long for my shady room and the scarlet Rambler and a scrap with Den and a smile from you, Kate. I'll be back before long. Keep the grass green and the pies fresh and the wonderful Den from hitting the ceiling. . . . Honest and true, as you say yourself, Katy-kid, I'm orful lonesome.—Steve.”

She treasured these notes. They filled her with gladness like the laugh in Stephen's eyes. He was coming back. . . .

Other letters came from Clay Andrews. These never varied

in tone. He would write long pages telling everything he thought would divert her—new books, new ideas, plays he had seen. And always at the end, as though he had measured restraint to its limit, were paragraphs that brought painfully before her his dark face in its mood of breathless, suppressed excitement, the sharp drawn smile that had pierced her like a sob.

"It's a year now since I left, Katy—a year since that night we sat at the water's edge and watched the light that you called 'moon fairies' come down to dance on the waves. Do you remember, Katy, or did I bother you too much that night?"

"Your letters have been like yourself, sometimes so wistful I've wondered what longing it is that fills your heart. Other times they are like your eyes, your laugh, your singing, radiant as poppy fields.

"You wonder if it is wrong to write me, Katy? You wonder if you are only prolonging a hurt to me?"

"Katy, loving you gives a purpose in life; thinking that some day you may need me sweeps through me like a mad storm of joy. Sometimes I wonder if I am really sane that I should want you so. You and no other. I want to be the one to care for you, to serve you. But then I know I am sane—sane than any other man, for you are more beautiful to me than anything I have ever known and I am glad to be on my knees to you; glad for the pangs your remoteness gives.

"Keep on writing, Katy, won't you? If this is prolonging a hurt, let me have it. . . . Give me this hurt before all other joys. Perhaps, some day, dear Katy, there may be a difference."

All of his letters Katy kept in a little wooden box in her bureau drawer. Tears were in her eyes, a trembling in her throat. Poor, dear Clay, why did he love her so? Would he keep on, as he said he would, always? The hurt she gave him drew her as it had the night of his going like deep, sad chords of music.

She searched her heart, wondering if she might some day give the answer he asked.



## CHAPTER XLVII

### DENNY'S GOAD

TULIPS, crimson and gold, flamed at her feet. Katy stood at the hedge, leaning against it, gripping it with both hands. She laughed softly, fearfully; cheeks and eyes brilliant.

"Now, what am I going to do? However am I going to get back?"

Four feet from her was her chair. In her pocket was a letter. A letter from Stephen.

"Dear Little Kate: Open your arms. Open the barn. Slap the jelly on the doughnuts; stick the fat calf in the oven. I'm coming. One week.

"STEVE."

An hour ago the letter had come. Katy, sitting under the willow, the spring roses and heliotrope mingling their perfume, read it. Dreamed.

He would be coming up the lawn; he would go poking about the kitchen, breezy, curious, telling her how to do this—how to do that. There would be gayety—the three of them going to concerts.

Suddenly she had glanced at the tulip bed a few feet from her and her thought burst like a song: "I could walk to that. Stephen thinks I never can—but I will—I will." Leaning on her canes, swept with her dream, she had started out, saying her child's prayer: "You will help me—help me, Lord, please; right now, Lord dear!" She had lurched, shaking and frightened, against the hedge.

But she kept laughing at herself. "Wasn't I smart, though! If I call Fay, will she hear? Is she home? She'll think I have a gall. Maybe Denny will come—"

It was Saturday, early in the afternoon. Sometimes Denny hurried home, took her for a walk; other times he stayed to work.

"Well, I guess I better sit down," she said whimsically. Then Denny was rushing up the lawn.

"Gee—Katy!" His face was white. "What's the matter? What did you do?"

"Just took a bit of a jaunt, Denny darlin', and I can't get back!"

"You frightened me to death." He lifted her gently, the heart in him bursting. "Why did you try that, Katy?"

She was trembling. "I don't know, Denny. There I was sitting and all of a sudden up comes a shout inside saying, 'Get up! Take a chance. Go on now, Katy-kid. You've been sitting there long enough!' So I thought like you do, 'Well, I guess I can—guess I can, all right.'"

"But now you see I couldn't quite—not quite." He kept his head down as he set her in the chair.

Katy was still hoping—still hearing the angel's voice. A storm of resentment tore through him.

Now that he was working and away all day there hovered about him always, nagging, persistent, the thought of her loneliness. Once in a while he found her quiet; pain shot through him in these moments. Years and years like this before her. Then he would take her to the movies, to plays in the Greek Theater, to lectures and concerts. The happiness in her sweet, beautiful face touched him achingly.

As soon as she had gained her breath she brought out Stephen's note, and laughing, handed it to Denny.

"Gee—coming! Guess he didn't like the job back there."

"Ain't it the goodest thing, Denny!"

Ten months had passed since Stephen left. His mother's illness lingered and he had gone to work in New York. When that word had come Katy had despaired of his return. He would never be one with them again.

Now there was a week of laughing suspense, a day of baking; gathering flowers, filling every corner with scarlet roses. Even Lady Eglantine contributed to the preparations, for Katy made her sit still and have her long hair combed, then a pert blue ribbon on her neck.

"Now, Miss Eglantine, we're ready, and be sure to make a big bow and say 'Meow!' loud as you can when Stephen comes. Oh, cat, isn't this fine!"

A whistle, swift feet padding the grass, the door flung open, suitcases dropped.

"Hello, little Katy." Laughing, kissing her, grabbing Denny's arm. "Lord, this is orful good. This is the place!"

Just the same Stephen, the mirth in his eyes, the breeze about him. Yes—he had a job, surveying party near Walnut Creek, but he could run home on Saturdays, and, Lord, how he'd missed them!

Then the three of them sitting down to dinner as much at home, as free and easy as in the carefree yesterday, and every once in a while Stephen saying: "Lord, our Katy looks fine, doesn't she, Den? You'd be the belle of Fifth avenue, Kate."

He had three days before he would go to the country.

The next morning he was unpacking a suitcase, Katy sitting near.

"Got something for you here, Katy-kid. Orful snappy."

"For me, Stephen, dear? And I never even thought to expect it."

"All the belles are wearing them."

"Many belles in New York, Stephen?"

"Town's full of them, and sometimes they all ring at once. Rather bewildering, Kate. Knocks a fellow off his feet. Now, how do you like this?"

He brought out a silk sweater, green-blue—the color Katy loved, a color that brought out all the lights in her eyes. He tossed it and she caught it in both hands, too flushed to answer.

"The beautifulest thing I ever had, Stephen! Too lovely to wear. Oh, how noble you are!"

"Lord, you're a great Katy-kid!" He began to laugh. "Put it on this minute. We're going for a walk."

He made her do it. Then he wheeled her up the hill to Prospect avenue.

"Our view's still here, Katy."

"And everything else, isn't it, Stephen? Do you remember the first time you took me for a walk?"

"Was I noble then, Kate?"

"I thought you were a knight of chivalry. Did I ever tell you that before?"

"But I guessed as much, Kate. Lord, isn't that black cloud over the Gate a wonder? Well, give me two feet here in the West and they can have the whole of New York."

"And all the belles, too, Stephen?"

"All of them."

"Perhaps that's because you only want one of them, Ste-

phen?" He was standing behind her chair and she looked to his face with a wistful laugh. "You don't want the many of them because you've found the one?"

"Don't wish monogamy on Solomon, Kate. Nope—haven't found the one and not looking for her. But I'm a big man now, Kate. Got to quit playing with dolls. I've come home to you and Den and work."

Katy laughed to herself, wings to her thoughts.

They were glad months that followed with Stephen's comings and goings, making holidays like a Christmas.

One evening Denny found her brimming with excitement, looking at him and laughing to herself.

"What's up? Come on, now, Katy-kid, out with it!"

"I did it, Denny! Got there and back to-day. Got to the tulips and back!"

His chin trembled, young eyes darkening: "Gee—well, gee, now, Katy, suppose you fell trying that and nobody there to help you. Suppose you did?"

"But I didn't fall. You see I didn't! And you see, I don't intend to fall. Don't look so astonished, Denny darlin'! Just think how salubrious it's going to be when I come prancing down to meet you some bright summer's day!"

He kept his face averted—a stone falling on his heart. Katy thought that day would come—she thought she was to be cured.

And was there any chance? He brooded over this. Was there the shadow of a hope? Well—was there?

Then his blood would run like fire in his veins. Was there, was there—perhaps! And Katy-kid—gee, with that glorious face of hers—she'd be walking around like any one else—

The hope became a goad, spurring him. Perhaps—oh, perhaps she could be made to walk!

He'd have to do better—earn more. They'd go to Europe. If there was a chance—

With a resistless devotion he threw himself into his work—a glutton for tasks. Kane, the wiz at figuring, sat back, lips faintly curling: "How's the whirlwind to-day? You'll get over that, boy, in a score of years!"

Denny paid no attention to the aimable taunts. Humph—fellow without any sand. . . .

One afternoon John Merchant, the chief draughtsman—an abrupt, nervous fellow—a demon of energy, returned from a survey of a power site. Maps, figures, dozens of sketches for a

railroad bridge were on the board. It was nearly 5 o'clock. Denny began to study the drawings. He sat at his stool making rough designs, thinking what a lucky fellow Merchant was to be doing this magnificent work.

Finally the thing laid hold of him; he became absorbed in the problem; his imagination flung the bridge across the canyon. He was unaware of the hours passing. Merchant returned.

"What have you there?"

Denny colored: "Just looking over the maps."

Merchant was at his elbow, leaning down with a low:

"Whew, you've got something here, Brooks! By Jove!"

Denny's heart leaped; his neck grew scarlet. Gee—Merchant saying all that!

It was the beginning of Denny's success.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

### PETRA

"GETTING in right with the bosses?" Kane, back and lips, both faintly and indolently curved, passed Denny's bench.

A momentary flare of anger ended in a teasing laugh as Denny looked up with a grin. "Well, how about it, Kane? Now is it all right with you if I get in with the bosses?"

"Sure, if you want a ramrod down your back all your life!"

"Just as fashionable as a curve, Kane."

Merchant had set Denny to work on the railroad bridge, allowing him for the first time in his year and three months of service a share in a big plan. Denny walked on his toes, exuberant, lordly, as though wine sparkled in his brain.

"Merchant's a prince, Katy," he said as they sat a long hour over their dinner and he repeated a hundred details of the routine of the draughting room. "Pushes a fellow right up.

"You know, Katy, this is an awful serious time in a fellow's life and it means a lot to meet a big man. All along I've had the darnedest uncertainty, wondering if I'd taken the wrong road. It's a mighty crucial step—starting out in the world. Now I'm satisfied. If you've got the goods, Merchant's the kind that'll send you right along."

"And Denny, you're the boy that has the goods all right, ain't you?" Katy laughed. "And even if you started wrong, Denny, you'd just be sure to end right. I think that's true. I think you couldn't be wrong except for a little while, maybe. Merchant, perhaps, can see that about you, Denny."

When Merchant took him some time later on a survey of the dam site, made him, in fact, an assistant on this job, Denny was nervous but irrepressible.

"Gee—there's a terrific responsibility about it," he told Katy, and made rough sketches that she might understand what he was doing. She was awed when he talked of the penstocks—immense steel pipes weighing tons—that would be laid through the mountains to carry water from the tunnels and drop it from a great height into the power house, and when he showed her

how whole streams, rivers, would be picked up and turned into new channels by the young Hercules before her. "Makes a fellow breathe kind of deep, Katy."

Merchant encouraged him with an incisive, "Don't be afraid. You're nothing in this game if you can't see the big thing and put it over."

Denny scarcely needed the spur. There came the miracle day—he had been working nearly two years—when there was a change in his pay check. His first raise. Riding home on the boat, he walked back and forth, stood at the rail grinning at the Ferry building. Passing his hand over his mouth to hide the chuckle, "Gee, this shows you! Work. That's the thing!"

He dashed into the barn. Katy caught the excitement in the hurried step.

"'Lo there, Denny! Something good? Something happen?"

He stuck his fingers in his vest, wagged his shoulders, foolish as a youngster. "Hundred-and-fifty-dollar man, Katy-kid. Hundred and fifty."

She dropped the green pepper she was slicing on the salad in thin circles, stared. To Katy, one hundred and fifty dollars seemed fabulous wealth. Then she laughed.

"We must be rich as the Carletons, Denny. Why, you can buy yourself a gold watch and pretty soon an automobile."

But he was thinking. "I can buy a chance for you, Katy-kid. That's what I can do before so very long."

For weeks after the raise he went at his work like a tireless engine. He'd get to the top quickly and then he'd sit back and live. Then they'd have the fine house, a machine, Katy-kid cured and he—why, he'd have and do whatever he wanted!

Several times John Merchant, a man about 38, said to him, "Stay over to-night, Brooks; we'll take in a show and breeze around." Denny had refused.

"I've got to be home. It's this way, John—I don't like to leave my sister alone." To himself he added, "Guess I'll have time enough—guess there'll be some fun left in a couple of years."

One afternoon after the others had left, Denny was talking over a plan with Merchant. The door opened and a light, sauntering voice called: "Hello, John; have you seen anything of the amiable Peter Channing?"

Merchant laughed. "No, Mistress Petra."

Denny had a sudden glimpse of brown eyes, dimples, golden

hair, a lithe, bright figure in trim blue tailor suit coming over to the board. The girl, despite her dimples and her youth, looked at him with a smiling assurance.

"Meet Miss Channing," Merchant introduced. She extended her hand with an easy, "This is the Mr. Brooks we've been talking about, John?"

"The same."

Denny flushed, for the dimples were smiling at him, and she had quite a proud lift to her head. He felt almost as though he were a piece of merchandise and the patron had not yet decided to buy or to leave.

"He's said things you'll find it hard to live up to, Mr. Brooks."

Denny knew that called for a clever response, but his tongue got mixed up with his teeth and he mumbled, "Well, now—is that so?"

"Chump," he thought, inwardly flushing. "Fine booby!"

But the girl laughed as gayly as though he had distinguished himself with wit.

"Yes, it's so. But I'm afraid one of the things he says about you isn't going to be true so very long."

"Which is that, Miss Channing?"

"You'll soon find out."

Denny noticed that her skin was a peculiar gold color and her eyebrows thin and very black. He had never seen such dimples—never heard such an easy, sauntering voice. A nymph—that's what she was—a golden-skinned nymph, and mighty pleasant to stand there and talk so friendly to him! And to laugh at a chump that hadn't sense enough to say more than a dozen words!

"Well, John, tell Friend Peter, if you see him, that I'll be waiting at the Palace for him, will you? Good-by, and glad to meet you, Mr. Brooks."

That was the way Denny met Petra Channing, daughter of Peter Channing, general manager of the Mountain Light and Power Company.

In the next month or two he passed her several times when she came down to meet her father. His heart warmed because of the brightness of her dimples and the friendly smile in her eyes when she bowed. Once he met her on the steps of the building and, feeling in a very jaunty mood, he swept off his hat, saying:



"Good morning, Miss Channing; have you found the amiable Peter Channing?"

He was instantly confused, scarlet to his ears. "Gee, she'll think I'm the fresh guy! What made me say that?"

But the girl tilted back her head, laughed in delight.

"He found me, Mr. Brooks. I never look twice, even for the amiable Peter."

Humph—perhaps it wasn't so fresh.

Then John Merchant invited him to a dinner.

"Better come, Brooks. You'll meet some people there it won't hurt you to know."

So Denny borrowed Stephen's "Lord Arthur" and Katy had his white tie ready and sneaked a powder puff and dabbed it on his forehead and nose. When he dashed it off and said she wanted to make a clown of him, she made him put a little more on the shiny spots.

"Now—will I knock 'em all dead, Katy-kid?"

"There won't be one left living to tell of the victory! You're the brave lad that can do it. Kill 'em with a grin!"

He went out swaggering enough, with his muffler neatly laid over his neck, but he was nervous when he reached the steps of John Merchant's house in Presidio Terrace; more nervous when he passed from the hall to a small cloak room, catching a glimpse of the women in low-cut gowns of black, rose, amber, beads, talking to men; heard their laughter. He was a long time taking off his coat.

They were ready to go in. John Merchant introduced Denny to a tall, good-looking girl in a dress of orange and silver. She made him instantly uncomfortable by flashing her eyes and saying in a cooing voice: "So happy to meet you, Mr. Brooks!" She made several flat remarks, each accompanied by brilliant maneuvers of eyes and lips that served only to irritate him, for he couldn't understand their purpose.

That is the tragedy of some women. The approach of a man is their cue to perform; to make little clowns of their eyes and their mouth. Repeated failures never seem to warn them that their tricks repel the audience they would lure. Oh, if they could but put a stone on their tongues, and be suddenly paralyzed in the face, their mysterious poise might incite what their anxiety is sure to lose.

The dinner was important for one reason. As Denny sat down, Petra Channing, half way down the table, sent him a

friendly nod, saying with her lips: "I want to see you, Mr. Brooks."

He kept looking at her. She had the gold hair piled high on her head, the black eyebrows and dimples giving a witchery to her face. The girl in orange talked, gesticulated, but Denny kept thinking: "She wants to see me. I wonder why. Gee, what a nymph!"

When they were back in the drawing room she came in, a cape of blue velvet with a border and immense collar of white fox, thrown over her shoulders:

"I asked John to have you take me in," she said as though this were a deep favor to Denny; "but the old tyrant had his own plans. Suppose you call next Thursday night, Mr. Brooks?"

Denny was astounded. He went home elated, waiting for next Thursday night.

## CHAPTER XLIX

### MAN AND MAID

“SUPPOSE you call next Thursday night?” These were the words Petra Channing used. Denny pondered them and grew anxious.

What did she mean? Was he to be the only guest? Or was it a reception? Would the “amiable Peter” and perhaps her mother be present?

Gee—what should he wear? A full dress or a business suit? Was he supposed to bring candy or a bunch of flowers?

Grave questions to trouble the heart of youth. All of life before him, ambition and a great purpose driving. Suddenly a beautiful girl steps across his path. He wonders fiercely, “Shall I wear a full dress? Shall I bring her candy?”

No answers for Denny. Stephen not home. Katy wouldn’t be sure. Anyway, he didn’t want to tell her.

He finally decided in favor of a new blue serge. This came out of the barn and went across the bay Thursday morning leaving long but somewhat evasive excuses with Katy.

When Denny ate his dinner that night he was nervous. Becoming aware of his excitement he grew indignant. He—a man going on twenty-six—a fellow trusted by John Merchant to be fluttered over such a trifle as calling on a girl!

Pooh! He could have been Lochinvar to any of them if he’d ever taken the time.

Hadn’t Lou Bendal been captivated by him? And there was Joan who walked so happily at his side.

Where was Joan now? Often Denny thought of her and that moment of farewell when she turned in such a lovely way—dear and ardent—with her face upraised to his. He remembered the tears on her eyelids when he kissed her. Nothing before or since was ever half so tender . . . half so piercing sweet.

Joan had not come back to college. And in his fourth year her letters abruptly ceased. Those he sent to her were returned unclaimed. Strange thing that. . . .

A brief survey of his experiences revealed little to aid him

now in dealing with a golden nymph girl. What would they talk about? Why had she asked him? What wonderful dimples!

As he went up the steps of a roomy, somewhat old-fashioned white house in Clay street he hoped to heaven he'd be the only one there; when he had rung the bell he hoped to heaven there'd be a mob. He was glad he didn't bring candy or flowers.

Queer for him to be standing there. Suddenly he thought of Aunt Josie and Lizzie and Matt Borley. His cheeks stained.

A small room with tapestries of amber and lavender; amber lights; paintings of dryads in pale scarfs dancing through trees. Then the tall figure, the sauntering voice, coming toward him; lavender dress, head of gold like a picture out of a setting.

The brown eyes and dimples smiling: Denny bowing with deep, unconscious grace.

"Sit here, Mr. Brooks, and do let us be comfortable. I've been bored to death for the last two hours. The amiable Peter will have old Chatterbox Reynolds for dinner every Thursday night and I don't like competition. You see, I wanted to talk about the Charity Ball and he insisted on arguing about the single tax, whatever in the world that happens to be. Oh, dear! What a relief to run away. . . ."

She said all that as she came to the small French sofa and very carelessly motioned him to be seated next her. There was ease for you!

Denny had an impression of light, of smiles, of gladness, surrounding him, and he found himself answering:

"Then is it silence you seek, Miss Channing?"

"Yes—that is, on the other fellow's part. I always like silence and appreciation."

"You're sure of that, all right!" Neck growing red—too bold. Crude stuff! What should he say next?

But the dimples were deep. "You're rather sure of your charm, aren't you, Mr. Brooks? That's one of the things John told me, though. He said you had plenty of self-confidence after you got started. He said—well, I don't think I'll tell you yet a while."

From one vagrant topic to another without so much as "good-by" or "good-day," depending on Denny only for an occasional echo, until his pride reared and he undertook a little flippant conversation on his own account. Nothing brilliant or profound—merely random talk of the mountains, hobos

he had met, a spiritualistic seance he had attended. Petra Channing listened with a subtle flattery in her drawing:

"Now, isn't it singular, Mr. Brooks, but I've just about the same ideas on that as you have. You and your sister live together, do you? I suppose your folks are East?"

"I have no folks. You see," Denny grinned, "I'm altogether a self-made man!"

"No, I don't think you are—quite."

"Well, almost, then. I've pretty nearly made my own way since I was about twelve."

Denny felt her eyes on his strong, firm hands; felt them shift coolly to the square fighting chin; then rest on his own that were young and now a little challenging.

"Well?" he asked.

"Peter would relish this," she laughed, reached over to a tabourette and took a small album. "You see, he boasts of fighting his own way from the foundry up. Here he is at the age of twenty-two."

She opened the book to the picture of a brawny young man in overalls, a cap on the matted hair.

"There he is. I'll show you another!"

As she turned the pages she leaned toward him, her soft hair fragrant against his face. Denny, piercingly aware of her nearness and beauty, tried to keep his attention on the photographs, but his senses drifted back to a contemplation of her neck with its warm curve, a single tendril of the gold hair falling behind her ear.

How friendly she was! How lovely in that lavender dress, as though she were just made for this delicate room with its soft colors, its vague perfume.

At the last page she closed the book slowly. Her hand somehow touched and rested on his, yet she appeared unconscious of the contact. Denny was flushed.

What a beautiful white hand, cool—like silk. If she left it there another second he'd crush it. But she began talking with that amazing fluency.

Afterward he tried to remember why it was they had laughed so gayly and so frequently; what delicious things had they said? But he only felt his pulses tingling with a pervasive memory of delicate colors; of fragrance, pretty hair, carefree voice.

Yes—but she was lovely. And at the door she had shaken hands and said breezily: "There's a Thursday next week, Mr.

Brooks, if you want to rescue me again from Chatterbox Reynolds. Do you?"

And Denny, astonishing himself, answered: "Does Chatterbox only come once a week?"

Petra laughed: "That's all, at present."

After his third visit he was as much at ease as though he had known her for months. This third time he had come in considerable excitement. Merchant had set him to work on a railroad the company must build in the construction of a dam. The cables high in the air bridged the canyon.

"It's thrilling," he said to Petra Channing. "The things men are doing to-day."

"Oh," she said wearily, "I'm just worn out with those kind of thrills."

"Are you? Well, you ought to take a trip up to this site!"

She laughed: "Now, are you going to be ruined like old John and see nothing in life but bridges and water and dams?"

"And damsels with golden hair!" As soon as he had said it he thought with a touch of contempt: Stupid!

But Petra turned her face to his with a pleased laugh.

"That's better. Why, I might as well endure Chatterbox as John. And there's so many things more interesting than shop!"

"Such as—? Come on, now, tell us what they are?"

A sparkle from the dimples.

"Don't answer with a dimple."

She was actually enjoying this kind of personality. Denny was a little astonished.

"That's Peter's dimple." She covered it lightly with a slim white finger. "I can't answer with that. Peter always kisses me there." She was sitting next him, eyes flashing at his.

"And who kisses you on the other?" •

Petra's cheeks pink, her eyelids suddenly drooped.

"Oh, I'm saving that one!"

A pause. Denny's heart warmed, pulses quickened.

He might have. But he hesitated. The moment passed. She was standing, passing him a cup of chocolate.

He went over the incident a dozen times. Why had she looked up, then down so sweetly? Had she meant anything? Why did her hand so often rest on his?

The next time! The thought marched blithely, Denny with it, not reckoning where it led.

## CHAPTER L

### BY-PATHS

INTO Denny's experience new ideas, like bits of color in a mosaic, were fitting. They concerned girls—or rather, one girl. A girl who had entered with perfume and brightness upon the loneliness of his life.

She was part of a picture—picture in lavender and gold with sometimes the pale green or rose of her dress blending with the setting. He found his thought dwelling in the small room where they sat; where sometimes the soft hair, done high, would brush his face; where often her cool white hand, like silk, met his, the touch loitering in his senses, a sweetness and a song.

Was she aware of her hand on his? Suppose some day he pressed it hard? Suppose he had leaned down and kissed her the night she told him one dimple was Peter's and she was saving the other?

Now, as he thought of it a warmth crept up to his ears. He should have. Of course he should have. It was the thing to do.

Then he remembered the waiting look in her eyes. Yes—a waiting look, all right. She would think he knew nothing—hadn't sense enough to follow a subtle lead.

But no—it wouldn't have done. A man kisses a girl like Billie. She expected it. Petra Channing was different.

Was she different? Could she be unaware of her glances? Her hands?

Denny knew what some men would say. Frank Bliss was always recounting his exploits. And at college were all types of girls. "And there's no such type as the unkissable," Nick Breeden had once declared. "Those you can't kiss at the first you can always kiss at the last."

It wasn't that Denny was so concerned about kissing Petra—but he wanted to do the proper caper. If kisses were the order—far be it from him to withhold them.

Further than this, he wanted to acquit himself with grace. Now, if he'd gone around a bit more at college, taken a general

course in gallantry, he'd know how to measure the smiles, the challenge of a girl like Petra. Take Stephen, for instance—he'd know just which look meant "Come!" and which "Go!"

Denny happened to be thinking these things as he stood before his chiffonier brushing his hair with such vigor that Katy thought:

"He'll just be bald in another week. Why is he grinning now?" She loved the clean sculpture of his square chin, broad forehead and close-fitting ears. She liked the sparkle in his skin, his eyes.

Lately she often stole a glance when he was occupied and she wondered: "Will he tell me more?"

Denny had mentioned Petra Channing, admitted that he visited the Channing home, but he managed to convey the idea that he was the guest of the family. Or, rather—he hoped that he gave this idea.

"Katy's darn smart. She guesses something," he concluded when he detected some of her scrutines. Now he whisked around with a quick, "Well—now is there a boil on the back of my neck? Or what is so handsome in me that you stare, Katy-kid?"

Katy laughed with a musing tenderness. "Is Denny in love?"

He grew scarlet to the wave of the rich brown hair. "I'll bite now, Katy. Am I? Now, you're always in love—with me or Lady Eglantine or Lizzie—so what would you say? Am I?"

"Is she pretty, Denny? Is Petra Channing lovely?"

"Sure she is. Didn't I tell you she was?"

"And you like her?"

"Of course I do. Like the 'amiable Peter' and the 'amiable Mrs. Peter' also."

"All right for you, Mr. Denny. You just wait—some day I'll have a secret and I'll keep it."

"Come on now, Katy! What are you trying to do? Guy your bashful brother?"

"You're not really and truly in love—not for keeps, are you?"

"Humph!" More grins, then a seriousness. "Say, Katy-kid, when I fall really and truly in love I'll tell you. Now, that's a promise."

Denny meant it. He wasn't in love—wasn't thinking of such



a thing. He had to save first—he had to succeed first. Right then he would have turned from Petra Channing and never step into the beautiful little drawing room again if there had been any choice between Katy and her, or if his going there would interfere ever so slightly in the happy plan for his own and Katy's future.

But he knew he wasn't in love. Neither was Petra. They spent pleasant evenings together. Nothing more.

One night she kept him waiting half an hour. He looked through the little album, then at a book of selections from Emerson, thinking the maid had not announced him. Then Petra, her hair a little disordered, the dimples faint, walked in with:

"You're not going to be irritated with me, Mr. Dendiddle! I'm at outs with the world as it is."

"What put you out, Stormy Petrel?"

She laughed: "Well, not myself!"

"I asked what, not who."

"A vacation. Peter—he's not very amiable just now—wants me to go south with mother because she doesn't like to go alone, and as it happens, I wish to stay here, and what's more, I'm going to stay."

She ran her hand over her neck, gathering up stray tendrils.

"Leave those curls there. I like them."

"You do?" Petra glanced from under the massy gold of her hair, face and voice brightened. She became vividly animated whenever the conversation turned to these trivial and bantering pleasantries, especially if Denny made the allusions. "Why do you like them down? It's not smart."

"But very fetching."

"Oh, is it? Well, I'm glad you think I have a right to spend my time where I wish."

"Who said I thought that?"

"Well, don't you?"

"Maybe I do and maybe I don't."

"Fiddlesticks! I'd like to know why I should remove myself from pleasant scenes because some one else is weary of them."

"Perhaps some one else does a great deal for you."

"Help! He's going to preach!" She drew herself from the sofa, went to the piano and began to play with one hand, and not nearly as well as Katy, passages from "The Barcarole."

"You might turn the pages, Rev. Dendiddle."

Denny burst out laughing. She moved over so that there was room for him on the bench.

"Suppose you play the bass."

"Not much. You're not going to ring me in on this discord of yours."

"Perhaps you'll sing 'Aloha,' since you're so anxious to bid me farewell. There—now, don't quarrel with me any more!"

Denny grinned: "All right! let's kiss and make up."

She sat with her hands folded, her head down so that he could see the soft gold hair on the warm curve of her neck.

"I hate to quarrel." She lifted her shoulder sadly.

"You just like to have your own way, and no argument about it?"

A slow smile crept to her lips, flashed in the dimples. She tried to hide it.

"Well, I suppose that's the truth. But it's so foolish for Peter to tell me I should consider my duty, and I should consider the wishes of others, and I should consider my soul, I suppose, when all I'm aware of is that I have a body and it has wishes."

"Oh, you're aware of that, are you? Now, that's what I'd call bright."

She allowed him to mock her, and finally grew fluent and sauntering again, and had a tray of sandwiches brought in.

Four days later when he called he found her quiet. Just before he was leaving she put her hand on his arm. "Don't go yet—I'm lonesome to-night. Do you know what I've done?"

"No."

"I've decided against myself. I'm going south. You won't see me for quite a while. So to-night is a kind of good-by."

Suddenly she looked up, hair against his face, hand on his arm. Denny felt her eyes, felt the cool, white fingers. He didn't know what brought the warm face so close to his, the taunting dimple. But he was grinning into her eyes, heart flushed, pulses quick. Then he had laughed, swept an arm about her.

With an exultant thrill he found her hand reaching to his neck, her lips meeting his.

## CHAPTER LI

### WILES

"THERE'S no one here but a fat old lady under a black parasol and an impossibility who wears white flannels and a monocle and follows me about from dawn to dark. I need to be rescued. Chatterbox is a life saver compared to this kill joy. So come down early Saturday. There's a train back Sunday night.

"P.S.—The light of these springs never goes out, I'm told. We have the sun all day and at night the moon. He is scheduled to get full for Saturday, and that makes it luminous for others besides himself. If you're good and come early we may take a peek at him through the trees."

Petra Channing had written to him. This was her note. Denny read it over, dallying with the lure. Pretty nice in her to ask him in that sweet, friendly way. At the last line of the postscript he grinned, stuck the letter in his pocket.

During the afternoon his thoughts wandered. Petra, in one of those gay dresses of lavender or blue, the dimples sparkling, would be waiting at the train, extending her hand in that pleasant way of hers.

They would take a walk in the evening. Under the trees. It would be dark. She would take his arm. . . .

But when he was riding home in the train he grew restless, suddenly thinking: "Gee—Katy'll be alone. Nearly two days. Gee, she'd be lonesome. Could take her to Old Lady Traynor's. She might begin to think she was a trouble. Humph—never thought of that."

Katy's face, with the wistful tenderness that always sent something warm like tears into his throat, came before him. So, liking bright things and happiness, he whistled softly, turned to his paper. He'd have to see about it.

And the first thing as he came into the barn was the piercing sweetness of Katy's singing; golden poppies on the table. Without stopping the tune, Katy shifted the words of the song to a gay "Now, is that you, sweet Denny? Come into the kitchen, the kitchen. Come! Oh, come!"

At home with her, years dropped from him. Katy would never really grow up. She was like a flower—nothing at all, unless it is young.

“At it again, Katy-kid? Gee, you’re a riot!” He stood at the door grinning. She shook the bright curls from her forehead.

“Indeed, sir, I’d like to tell you that there’s much to be at! Mighty much! It’s all fixed up.”

“What?”

“Sunday. Well, you haven’t forgotten, have you?” She was cutting the string from a bunch of asparagus, setting them on a small platter. Now, with the string on her finger, she paused, asking quietly, “Oh, you’ve forgotten about it, Denny?”

“Sure not! Well, say—they’re peaches, all right. They’re going to lend it to us!”

The Carletons were going away over the week-end. Fay had told Katy some weeks previous that her father would lend Denny their automobile for this Sunday—the same day that Petra invited him.

“You didn’t really forget about it, Denny? Perhaps—”

“Well, I should say I didn’t! Say, we’ll take a lunch and I know a great ride by Lake Chabot—”

“Oh, and I’ll wear a white skirt like Lizzie’s and hold it up high above the grass, and we’ll have bologna sandwiches and no butter, and all the fun on earth! Here, take in the joyous vittels!”

After Katy was in bed, Denny sat a long while at the table. He wasn’t clever at writing notes, and this was a hard one.

“That’s too stiff”—it was the third to be torn in strips. There was a fourth that was too gay. The one that went was none too brilliant, but he thanked Petra and deeply appreciated her favor and was only sorry that he couldn’t be made happy by accepting it.

“But I’ve already promised the day to my sister,” he wrote, “and it’s not possible to change the plan now.”

There came a short reply with a little gossip of the Springs and this line: “Sorry you missed a good time last Sunday. Mother is bored with this place, so we are returning. Hope to see you as usual on Thursday.”

“Guess she didn’t miss me much,” he thought, his egotism piqued. But when he was again in the small room and Petra came toward him with an easy, “Good to see you, Dendiddle,” and laughed and was prettier than ever with her hair parted

demurely to a coil at the nape of her neck, a happiness possessed him. What a pleasant, make-yourself-to-home manner she had!

She wasn't quite as talkative as usual. Pauses fell between them. In these moments Denny found Petra glancing at him—a vague reproach in her eyes. He began to feel uneasy—as though he had done a wrong; as though he should defend himself. Unthinkingly, he said:

“I was sorry to have missed last Sunday.”

“Yes?” She was leaning forward, her long arms, with their delicate wrists, resting on her knees. “What a dear, devoted brother you must be!”

“Oh, I'm dear all right,” he laughed.

“Your sister is younger than you?”

“More than three years.”

“Is she pretty?”

“Beautiful. At least I think she is.”

“Then she must have admirers, I suppose.”

“Every one admires her.”

She glanced sideways, the dimples sparkling: “Isn't it rather selfish in you to take possession of her on a Sunday? Now I should think she'd have been ready enough to change her plans.”

“Perhaps—but these were plans that couldn't be changed.”

“And I suppose there's no substitute would take the place of our dear brother? I suppose Katy would rather have your company than any one's else?”

Denny felt suddenly hot, indignant. He answered coldly:

“Katy met with an accident some time ago. She doesn't walk very well. So she doesn't go out much with other men!” His face had reddened and he was talking low through half-shut teeth.

“Why, I hope it's not very serious,” Petra began. She saw Denny a little rigid, his jaw set. She sat up, put the cool, white hand on his: “You must know I didn't understand that, Denny.”

Her eyes were smiling into his. The way her hair was parted and brought back from the low, beautiful forehead, marked by the thin, black brows, gave a sweet seriousness to her face.

“Of course you didn't. I should have explained.”

“It doesn't matter, anyway.” She began talking in her rambling, diverting way, looking up at him and laughing—asking if he liked her new coiffure; if it made her look holy as a nun.

She let her hand rest where she had placed it. He closed his

over it. Of course she didn't understand! How could he expect her to?

When he was ready to leave she asked him to come again on Tuesday.

"Merchant is taking me on a survey," he answered. "We leave Saturday and won't return till the following Wednesday—perhaps later."

Petra's eyes widened. "Oh! You can leave your sister this Sunday! You can leave her alone?"

"No—we have an old lady friend. She stays with her."

She pursed her lips. "I suppose the old lady was sick last week?"

Denny stood rather stiff, astonished by her insistence, but she kept on twitting him. "Or perhaps our ambitious Dendiddle is more interested in visiting a dam than in visiting a friend."

"Not much comparison between business and pleasure, Petra."

"I should say there isn't! You can live without business, but not without pleasure. Every one needs recreation. You can't sacrifice your life for any one else. Your sister wouldn't expect it."

If she only knew the file she was drawing over his raw heart. "There's no conflict there, Petra. The very most my sister can ask isn't one-half what I intend to give her!"

The hurt passion in his tone, the clinch of his jaw, warned her.

She laughed nervously: "You're bound to misjudge me, aren't you? I didn't mean it that way at all." She lowered her eyes, glancing ruefully at the palms of her hands. "But I was so disappointed that you didn't come. We would have had such lovely walks—"

The color rose slowly in her cheek. She put out her hand. "Don't be angry."

"I'm not—not at all." He took her hand, held it politely.

"There—that's just the way Peter says after I've crawled on my knees—not at all—not at all. It doesn't sound loving, I'd like to tell you!" She tossed back her head, smiled willfully. "Oh, I suffer such remorse for my sins! You have no idea! And I committed them all on account of you. They're really yours if you weren't such an old Adam!"

He laughed and softened and drew the hand toward him.

"Maybe they are, Petra."

She stood on her toes, looking into his eyes. "Then you take all the blame—all of it?"

"Yes," he said, pressing the word against her lips. She let her head rest on his shoulder. He looked down at the warm, rich tint of her skin, the line of her soft hair. His heart melted.

She didn't mean what she said! Not a bit of it. Just spoiled. Sweet, golden thing.

He went out blaming himself—rejoicing in her.

## CHAPTER LII

### THE RETURN

"BRING me the roses, Stephen—the reddest you can find, crimson to the heart, 'cause that's for love."

Katy, sitting at the table, a heap of tissue paper beside her, folded a luncheon cloth and a dozen doilies, embroidered and inset with the finest of laces. It was the day of Fay Carleton's wedding. This was Katy's gift.

Stephen put the roses near the box with a meddling one: "Here, Kate, you're folding that crooked. Put it in the other way."

Katy, the meek, obeyed: "Isn't it mighty gorgeous, Stephen? Think of it, Stephen. Fay's been engaged ever since she was seventeen—seven long years—and she's just ever so much in love yet! Now—we're all ready, and I've never seen a bride before. I hope the roses won't wither."

Fay was to be married at six o'clock. She had promised Katy that before she went to the church she would send over that Katy might come and see her in bridal gown and veil all edged with the grandmother's lace—the thing Katy thought so touching.

A little boy at the door: "Fay sez you kin come over now. She's ready."

"Stephen, true now, you don't mind taking me? Will you feel funny?"

"Don't you know I'm the beau ideal with the ladies, Kate? A dozen, more or less, only add to the scenery."

He pushed her gayly across the lawn to the porch door. She had the box, banked with roses, in her hands.

"Well, dear child"—Mrs. Carleton, in silver gray, opened the door—"Fay will be right down. Come into the living room."

Katy caught her breath. An arbor like those Stephen used to tell about—arbor of pink and white fruit blossoms and roses distilling perfume everywhere—like a garden—like a fairy's haunt.

Fay—orange blossoms on the light brown hair, lace shading the sweet, half-boyish face—looking over the banister:



"I'm coming, mother!" A low, nervous laugh. "Now watch, Katy, and see my train come trailing after."

"I'll not miss an inch of it, Fay," Katy called back. "Your face looks just entrancing!"

Another laugh: "The girls are coming first."

A hurried, excited chatter; rushing to and fro; laughter—then a fluttering wave of pink as five girls in big, droopy hats and ruffled silks, shaded from the palest pink to the deepest rose, moved down the stairs. Katy watching, lips parted, eyes starting.

Then Fay, laughing more than a bride should, but beautiful in the simple gown of white, the graceful train, following—stopping before Katy. "Do you like me, Katy? Am I good enough for Donald?"

"For a king, Fay. I never saw any one look so like an angel—not even in a dream."

"See, I had some of the lace you gave me for a present put in my dress, and all because you gave it to me, Katy."

Then Fay saw the box with the crimson roses and the gift that Katy had brought. A flush colored her face. She stooped and kissed her, whispering, "That's the best present of all. You're the darlingest thing that ever lived, Katy—the very sweetest."

"Excepting you to-night. Fay. Stephen and I are so glad to have seen you."

Stephen laughed. "That we are, Miss Carleton. A sight worth seeing."

"Now we must go, and thanks, Fay, and ever so much joy to you. Denny and Stephen and I wish you just ever so much happiness."

Before they left some one entered the hall and Fay stepped quickly behind the portière. It was Donald Grace, the man she was to marry.

"Mother, he has no right to come. He should be at the church now."

Mrs. Carleton laughed: "Your father stole in to see me, Fay."

A deep, tremulous voice: "Going to be sure you're at the church, too! Ah! He had stepped behind the portière, stepped back in surprise, holding her hands, saying nothing but an astonished "Oh!"

Katy saw and heard it all . . . crowning flower to the romance.

"Did you notice the way he looked at her?" she asked Stephen when they were at dinner. Denny was on the survey with Merchant. Luckily, Stephen happened to be home.

"Didn't see him at all."

"Why, he had the most shocked look of joy you'd ever imagine. Just as though he woke up suddenly to hear some one say: 'Here's the whole world—it's yours!'"

"Guess he felt like that."

"Why?"

"Well, he loves the girl, doesn't he?"

"Is love that sweet, Steve?"

"Ah, Katy! Near love is sweet. What must the real thing be?"

"You've not tried that yet, Stephen." Katy glanced at him with a laugh: "Not yet, but soon, Steve?"

"Neither yet nor soon, Kate. The trouble with real love is that you have to keep it even if you discover it's a sham. But near love is like the paper plates we take to a picnic. They're only for an hour. They serve their purpose and we toss them away."

"Stephen! You don't think that?"

He laughed.

"Well, you don't. But weddings are sad and beautiful, aren't they, Steve?"

"Why sad, Kate?"

"All beauty has a little of sadness, don't you think? Like hope—that's the saddest thing in the world. You know a wedding is a high and noble moment—like a vision of what life should be. But that moment doesn't last and all the moments that come after may fall short of it. That's why beauty is sad because we know that it will go, and in going it mocks us. We can't always live our best and sweetest, can we? Just the same, Fay looked seraphic, didn't she? It must be terrible for two people each to love the other so much. Do you think so, Steve?"

The quiet Katy often found, like bright wings folded, came into Stephen's eyes. She laughed, but he stirred his coffee, glanced up, smiling at her.

"Kate, are you lonely here?"

"A little—sometimes. I would have been if you hadn't come home, Steve. But then you see I'm always lucky."

"And always brave, Kate. You don't worry about the future, do you?"

"No—but, of course I don't much trouble myself thinking of the day when the three of us will be separated, though, of course, we will—"

"A good long time before that happens, Kate. Who's so fine as the three of us? Let's leave the dishes and off for a walk before all the light is gone."

They went gayly down Piedmont avenue, passing gardens where the fruit trees opened a radiance of pearl and amber petals. Near a low wall they paused. The hills were veiled with lavender; monastic hush falling like a canopy.

"Do you know, Steve, that you brought a lot of joy to the barn?"

"Sure, Kate, I'm the joy bubble."

"No matter what the future brings, Steve, the three of us have a great and glorious past. Now, haven't we?"

He looked down at her, the laughter and sadness both in his eyes: "You made it great and glorious, Kate."

The next afternoon he had to leave.

"Lord, Kate, wish I could stay until Den comes. Hate to leave you."

"He'll be here late to-night or to-morrow, Steve. I'll read, then I'll sleep. Then it will be morning and the sun shouting 'Hello!' And lots to do getting a fine dinner ready. Don't worry for me, Steve. And do you know this was the best visit we've had in quite a while."

"Good-by then, beautiful Kate!"

Laugh echoing—a pause like distant music trembling—steps padding the grass—gone.

A long while Katy sat, thoughts winging like birds to a quiet tree. Why did Stephen ask her that about the future? Why were his happy eyes so somber? What was he thinking? Of her? Of Denny?

"But it would be a long time—yes, that was true. Denny isn't in love. Not much. That's what he said himself. And yet he grins so much to himself. I think he soon will be. Is he happy—very happy?"

Then Katy's lips were praying: "Somebody noble for Denny, dear God. Somebody beautiful. Please—let it be some one who will do as much as I would do for him. Oh, at least that

much. Make her love him with all her soul. Oh, somebody great and beautiful for him."

Then she mused: "He won't need me then? Will he? Will he?"

Growing dark. The old iron knocker clanging softly. Who could it be? Not Denny. He wouldn't be home till midnight. Stephen back? Oh, that couldn't be.

Katy pushed herself to the door—opened it. A dark face, lighted, breathless. Eyes like flame. Katy startled:

"Clay! Why! You didn't say!"

He had taken her hands. Kissed them, pressed his face against them: "Katy. Katy, darling!" Eyes wet, lips hot against her palms. "I had to come. Had to. Funny. I dreamed you called. Dreamed it. You called."

## CHAPTER LIII

### AWAKENING

His kisses left little burns all over her palms. Yet she was glad to see him; glad to hear the low, breathless voice.

"I had to come, Katy. Just for a while. How beautiful you are. Like a thousand flowers. Are you smiling at me? Let me see—"

She laughed. "Of course I'm smiling at you, you dark, funny man, talking so odd and not telling me you were coming. I had your letter only to-day. Of course I'm glad to see you if you'd just turn on the light so that I can."

He stood motionless, holding her hands, his own trembling. She grew a little frightened.

"What are you thinking, Clay?"

"I'm not thinking. I'm living. I've been dead without knowing it. Your hands are life."

He knelt down, buried his face in them, his whole body shaking.

She freed one hand, ran it gently over his dark hair.

"Dear Clay, don't feel so. Why—you're crying—"

"No. I'm just mad, Katy—mad with the joy of seeing you. Oh, God! I didn't know I loved you; didn't know it till now. But I've dreamed. Dreams—you know what they are! Wild hopes our waking hours ignore. I dreamed you were calling . . . dreamed that, Katy. So I came—"

He pressed her hand against his mouth as though it were some sacred chalice and he were drinking from it. The blood fanned hotly from her heart. She kept stroking his hair, stilled by the passion of his tone; the suffering of his bowed form.

"Love makes you suffer so? Clay—dear Clay—" Her voice entered the darkening room like a frightened presence not knowing which way to turn: "Is it because you love that you feel—like this—Clay?"

He didn't answer, but presently he was standing, pushing her chair to the window. Then he stooped down and laughed:

"You're not frightened, are you, Katy—dear little Katy. It's been so long—years—and seeing you now—why, it's like a

tumult. But you're not afraid of me, are you, Katy? Do you want me to go away?"

She tried to speak lightly:

"Well—didn't you just come and what's your hurry—running in and running out again like a breeze. Course I don't want you to go!

"You've been so sweet to me, Clay, and all those books you've sent filled my days with pleasure. And the little watch makes me laugh every time I look at it—it's so pretty.

"So you can easily see I've lots to talk about and be good enough to have a seat, sir!"

But he kept looking at her and smiling: "You're more beautiful than I dreamed, Katy—more beautiful than anything on earth."

"And smarter and sweeter and gooder and just now hungrier, and let's get pushed into the kitchen, Clay, and we'll fix ourselves a dainty bite and you'll tell me more tales than the Arabian Nights. Oh, I'm greatly pleased to see you, sir!"

She opened the cooler, taking out chops, bread.

"Tain't a banquet we'll be having, Clay. For dessert there's nothing but elegant conversation, and for an entree how will you fancy live brains on the tip of a tongue?"

He laughed boyishly, captivated by her happiness, letting the toast burn and the chops sizzle.

"You're happy, aren't you, Katy? There must be spirit somewhere, and most of it that I've ever met is in you."

She laughed. "And then when we've honored our lovely flesh with food, Clay, are you going to take this spirit for a ride?"

"I hoped to, Katy."

When they were riding he reached over several times, touching her hand, smiling at her, whispering, "Katy-kid—darling!"

She lowered her eyes before the prayer in his. And when he had brought her home she looked at him and thought, "Dear Clay—now am I only going to give you more pain?"

He stood holding her hands, opening and closing his own on them. "Are you really glad I came, Katy? I want to take you for more rides and to all the best shows. I won't trouble you, either."

The dark, earnest eyes looked gently into hers; the passion as though storms beat him was gone. "You won't be worried with me, Katy?"

She pressed his hand against her face. "You've always been

so nice, Clay. I'd be so happy with you only that I know it makes you suffer."

"No, it doesn't, Katy. Then I'll come to-morrow."

When he was gone she mused: "Why do I feel so hushed? So vacant? And I was glad to go out with him. . . ."

But there was no winging lightness—no songs bursting. It disturbed her to find how quickly her thoughts turned from Clay Andrews to a hope that Denny would return. She began making little sandwiches, looking eagerly to the door.

He pushed it softly—surprised to find her up. Five days in the sun had tanned him.

"Gee! Hello! You up! A feast! Gee—great!"

"Clay's come back for a while!"

"Gee—no." Then they were rushing talk at each other. Denny had some bursting news: "Say—Katy-kid—now don't breathe this—"

"To the flowers, Denny?"

"Aw, well—I think Merchant's going to put me on this job—under him, of course. But I think I'll get it. Gee—I'm made if he does. Say, we'll have a bear of a time. Told you we'd get up to the mountains some time, didn't I? Well—"

"You mean I'm to go with you, Denny? Going to take me?"

"Sure—I'll be there a couple of months. Say—it's wonderful. You'll get the thrill of a life—"

Katy scarcely slept that night. It was of the vacation with Denny that she dreamed.

In the next week he was feverishly busy. Twice he had come home early, brushing and shaving and sniffy with talcum:

"Do I look good enough to dance with a fairy, Katy-kid?"

"Yes—even if she has twenty dimples!"

He grinned and blushed and tapped his heart.

"Does that mean you're in love, Denny?"

"I'm too young for that, Katy-kid!"

But he laughed—the deep, humming laugh—and the hazel eyes sparkled. Katy wondered and grew curious. Had he met the "somebody great and beautiful" who would come into his life and enrich it with all the gladness he deserved? Was Petra this "one girl"?

Then Denny would love as Clay Andrews loved, only he would love bonnily—with a happy swagger. He would want to marry. She lay still and wide awake thinking of this, a numbness in her heart. She prayed: "Dear Lord—only do this

for me—don't let me be in the way. Never let me be the one to keep joy from him."

Early one evening a singular thing happened. The phone rang. A light sauntering voice asked: "Is Mr. Brooks in?"

"No."

"Is this Miss Brooks?"

"Yes—this is Katy."

"I've heard a great deal of Katy. I wonder if you've heard of Petra Channing?"

"Yes." Katy became excited, nervous. "Why, indeed I've heard of you, Miss Channing. This is a great pleasure to talk to you."

A low, delicious laugh. "Thanks, Katy. I might know you'd say something lovely. Denny says you are that way, and beautiful, too. I called up to ask him to a house party with me. Do you know if he's free over the week-end?"

"I haven't heard him speak of any plans."

"And you haven't any engagement with him, Katy?"

"No, and that wouldn't matter."

"Do you think I should ask him? Would you be lonesome if I took him away over Saturday and Sunday?"

A flash of pain went stinging to Katy's ears.

"Why no, Miss Channing. I wouldn't want to deprive Denny of pleasure for anything. Why, I don't need him at all over the week-end."

"Then I'll ask him. But I did want to know how you felt. Once before I asked him but he couldn't come because he had an engagement to go for a drive with you. So you see you come first."

"Maybe so and maybe not, Miss Channing. But I won't keep him home next Sunday. So you ask him."

"All right, Katy, and you needn't say a word about it to him."

Katy put the receiver quietly on the hook—a terror as though some one had sneaked from behind and stuck a dagger in her throat, freezing her.

She was in Denny's way. This was what Petra Channing told her. Katy understood it as achingly as though Denny had given her chair a rough push; as though he had come up and scowled at her through shut teeth.

She sat with her eyes closed, tears pushing through the lids, saying over and over again: "Save me from this—only this. Oh, what am I to do? What!"



## CHAPTER LIV

### WHICH WAY

THEY were sitting at the breakfast table two days after the telephone call from Petra Channing. Katy poured the coffee, then she leaned back with a magnificent air:

"You know, Denny, I have a lovely idea."

"Another one, Katy-kid?" He looked over and grinned.

"Oh, so you admit I've had lovely ideas before. Thanks. But this concerns me. You see, Denny, Clay wants to take me to the opera on Saturday and on Sunday he wants to drive me all over the grounds where the great fair is to be. I'd like to go, of course. But it's hard from here. So I thought—wouldn't it be pleasant to stroll over to Old Lady Traynor's and spend the week-end? Now, do you consider that a brilliant maneuver?"

"Humph! That's a funny one, Katy-kid. You know the Channings want me to go on a house party with them, but I'm not so sure about it. . . ."

"Don't you want to go, Denny?" Katy covered the nervousness with a laugh. "Why, I should think that would be delightful, and you know every one should have friends."

"Of course, there's a lot of truth in that."

She saw the jaunty sparkle dancing in his eyes. You bet he wanted to go, all right!

"I'd be sure to go if I were you, Denny. Only young once, you know. And you see I'm all booked up like a leading lady!"

"Well—maybe I will—"

Katy knew that his heart was as light as his jubilant step. No wonder Petra Channing wanted him to the house party. Now he could go, and never a care for her. Because her days were filled, too.

At Old Lady Traynor's the little room, with the sun flashing past the hanging brass bowl to the quaint old pictures, was always ready, perfumed with lavender, redolent with peace. They went over on Friday night.

Saturday morning Katy heard a great rushing to and fro in the back parlor, then Denny came out in a pair of white

flannels and the coat of his gray suit . . . a grin from ear to ear.

"Say—pretty sporty, Katy-kid? Now look! Get the combination? Now wait!" He whisked back to his room and reappeared with the coat of the blue suit: "Which goes?"

"The blue—much better."

"Like the trou? Feel it—fine material! Gee—forgot to bring my handkerchiefs."

"I brought them. They're with the collars."

"Think this looks pretty good, do you?"

"You, the Beau Brummel, Denny!"

He came out in fifteen minutes, ready for work, the white flannels and blue coat in his grip. He was excited and rushed:

"Say—didn't it happen lucky, Katy-kid, that we both had dates for the same day? Gee—I'm glad you're going to the opera. You know, Katy, if we lived on this side we'd get out lots more. I've been thinking about it. Say, we're going to drive down in a machine. Makes it spiffy, doesn't it?"

Katy laughed: "You and Petra in the same machine, Denny?"

Red to the forehead despite the grin: "Come on now, Katy-kid—kiss your brother good-by."

He went swinging down the block. Peach of a day! Lilt in the air. Spring in the heart.

"He loves her," Katy thought. "I know he loves her. That's why he's happy. That's what makes him the happiest person in the world."

At three o'clock that Saturday afternoon he got into the Channing automobile and sat next to the brown eyes, the golden hair, the dimples. The amiable Peter was driving. Next him sat Mrs. Peter, plump, apple-cheeked, talkative. Petra greeted him with a smile and a willful:

"Did you bring me candy, Dendiddle?"

"No. I brought myself."

"I can't eat you."

"Yes, you can."

A quick glance at the front seat, then a frown at the exuberant Denny. He laughed, put a box in her hand. She whispered: "We'll get there before the crowd and have a walk on my hill before dinner."

Petra's hill marched quietly behind the house and hid among the trees. Below, drifting, pearl-touched like a sea of pink shells, was the orchard.

"Hurry now!" She took Denny's hand. "We've only a few minutes."

She wore a sweater that matched the gold of her skin, gold of her hair; and a skirt of the same color. It took Denny's breath away.

"Wonderful, isn't it?" he said.

She glanced up with a wicked, "What do you mean, Diddle?"

He laughed, looked down at the lowered eyes, the hair tossed high. Golden nymph—that's what she was—part of the spring-time.

"Do you fall in love very much, Denny?"

"Very much, Petra, but not often."

"Come, we have to go—" She tossed her head. Because her lips were close, he kissed them; because her eyes assented, he kissed them, too.

If Katy had seen him grin as he put on the white flannels for dinner she would have said: "It's love. I know. Indeed I know!"

From the moment the door had closed on him, Katy's thoughts were with him. She tried to put away a fear that fought to enter her mind. But it gained on her.

Katy would have emptied her heart to make Denny happy. Was he going to be happy? Was Petra the girl?

For two days the question nagged her. Why had Petra phoned to her? Didn't she understand how piercingly Katy would feel the terror of becoming a burden? Didn't she know that Katy loved him—oh, longer and more than ever any new person could? Didn't she care if she made Katy suffer?

Then Katy shook the chestnut curls from her forehead and combed them into place . . . laughing the tears out of her eyes.

"She loves him, too, and who wouldn't!" she said half aloud, beginning to sing.

Clay Andrews was waiting to take her on the great ride about the fair grounds. They went over the vast, level tract—then out through the Presidio.

"It's going to be a magnificent sight, Katy. I hope I'm here to take you. Would you like to go with me?"

"Indeed I will, Clay."

He stopped the car and they looked through trees to the water that was now tranquil as a dream bay.

"Let me say something, Katy? Then you can forget it at once. But let me tell you why I came."

She nodded.

"When I went away you were no more than a child and I was older than the other fellows. I had a notion that perhaps if I came back you would be more willing to think of me; you might grow to care."

The deep blue eyes looked into his, then she turned her head:

"Yes—I'm older, Clay. But don't you know that even if I loved you as you wish—for I do love you, but different—even if I loved you with all my heart I wouldn't want to marry unless I were better, because you know some day I'm going to be better."

"I've never considered that, Katy. Maybe you think this is insanity in me and maybe it is. I don't care. I want you just as you are. Why, Katy, men have gone into monasteries because they worshiped a star. You are that to me—a shrine. I'm content to love you in this way and I know exactly what I'm saying."

The hurried speech seemed to light flames in the soft, evening air. He sat forward, his arms folded, speaking in low, rapid tones as though he talked to himself; as though he were powerless to check the fire burning him.

"Why, Katy—haven't I hungered for you all this time? You don't know how I've dreamed of serving you; of talking to you; of hearing you sing, hearing you laugh. Katy, I've only lived in the thought of you. It's been years. Other women mean nothing. They come and go. I want you."

The fire touched her heart, left a red, aching burn. Across the straits were the imperturbable hills garmented in crimson and jade of the sunset.

"I don't know what to say, Clay. I wish that I could do as you ask. But I don't know what to tell you."

"Don't bother about it, Katy. Only believe that I know what I want. I'm not a boy with a fanatical dream. If you ever come to want me you will have no right to refuse—no right to think my love would ask more than you can give. Because it would not!"

He sat so quiet with the smile that was like a living pain across his mouth, Katy put her hand on his. It was hot, but her own was ice.

And a thing within her said: "Perhaps I should let you take me, Clay. Can I? Dear Lord, is this what I must do?"

## CHAPTER LV

### DENNY'S CHOICE

DENNY, his blue shirt open at the throat, swung past the mess hall, where the men were going to dinner, on through a platoon of pines to a cabin on the hillside. Smoke curled gently from the chimney. That meant Katy inside, and perhaps hot biscuits with their steak.

They were in the Sierras—he and Katy—Merchant had put him in charge of the unit.

A sense of power tingled through his veins. On the big road now. He had his chance. Here he was up in the mountains—men working under him.

Not much of a job—the building of this dam as the first unit of a larger project. But the great beginning—the first step into that glorious future where Katy would walk again—where he, Denny, would be that big achiever, that masterful fellow, with his head above the crowds. His stride quickened. All things were possible to him.

Katy sat at a little table near the open door waiting for him. The look of awe and wonder that had come into her face when the vastness, the silence opened to them, rested on it now like a beautiful prayer. She turned to Denny with a whimsical smile.

"I feel poems coming on me, Denny. They've been coming on all day."

"Sure it's not the chills and fever, are you?"

"And you know if I stayed here long I'd write something noble. And if I were the governor of the state do you know what I would do? Instead of having prisons I would bring men up here and make them look at the mountains and the trees and the skies—"

"And they'd turn angels, would they, and perhaps fly away? You forget, Katy, that some people look at mountains and trees and skies without ever seeing them. Hope the poems coming on didn't keep the dinner from arriving."

She nodded to the stone oven.

"Gee—I knew it!" He put a big hunk of butter on the steaming muffin, brought the steak to the table, "Say, working up here gives a fellow an appetite."

"Oh, were you suffering from lack of one, Denny? When?"

"But, say, I'm hungry all the time."

"You like this work better than the office?"

"This is the real stuff. Well, you know I always wanted to get out and do this, and there's more money and more power, and before long we ought to have everything we need."

He was watching her sharply, noticed that her eyes were lowered suddenly, and the paleness he had seen in the last weeks stealing over her cheeks.

"You got a letter from Andy yesterday?" he asked in an indifferent voice.

"Yes."

"Pretty faithful, isn't he?"

Stains of red flooding the pallor. "Yes; you know some people are natural letter writers. That's what Clay is."

"Oh-huh. Katy, did Clay come back here to marry you?"

"No."

"To see you, then?"

"Yes; and to tell me he still wants to marry me."

"But you aren't going to do it?"

Katy pretended to have great difficulty with the green peas on her fork; pretended to laugh because they kept rolling off.

"Well, I haven't yet, have I?"

"And you won't, either! You don't love him. Well, you must think I'm a fine bonehead, Katy-kid, if you suppose I don't know a thing or two. I haven't been asleep for the last few weeks. I know just how you've sized things up. Oh, I know you, all right!"

Teeth shut, eyes dark. Then he laughed. "Great little diplomat, ain't you? Going out in the garden and eat worms, ain't you?"

Katy burst out laughing, a sudden wild joy throbbing in her head. She kept laughing, tears running down her cheeks.

"Did you see any more with your X-ray mind, Mr. Denman?"

"Yes, I did!" The young eyes that were so tender pierced like a knife. She dropped hers.

"Well, I should think you would blush!"

"And now, Denny, what did I do?"

"Well, anyway, Katy, you ought to know that nothing can

ever make any difference between us. I'd like to see the thing or the person that could!"

"I do know that, Denny. But just the same you should have joy. You've earned it and I'll be the happiest person in the world when you get it. And I don't want you to sacrifice for me, but that's what you've always had to do. It seems as though it should be my turn now."

A pang rasped through him, made his eyes sting.

"Gee, Katy, you might just as well shoot a fellow as say a thing like that."

"No, Denny, it's not that at all, but if you let me get in your way that's the cruelest thing that ever could happen to me."

"All right then, I won't. You're not in my way and you know you never have been. And if you think I'm in love, I'm not and I'm not thinking of getting married. I'm going to succeed first. And say, Katy, it'll be a pretty tough day when you and I have to part company. And I don't care who it's for! That's the truth. If you don't feel it, I do!"

She drew a deep breath, covered her face quickly. When she took her hands down she was laughing, but her eyes were wet, her lips trembling so that she couldn't speak.

"I'll never, never think a mean thing about you again, Denny—honest and true."

"Well, you better not! You won't get by the next time!"

He wheeled her to a big tree. In the far distance, black peaks went like cathedral spires into the blue sky. Then clouds assembled, passed over the ridges, drawing veils of silver and rose across the rugged contours, making more limitless and vast the aspect of the mountains.

Katy listened. The breeze, the pines, the looming cliffs seemed moving to majestic notes of unknown music. The rhythm entered with uplifting peace into her senses.

She watched Denny going down to the camp for the mail. He meant what he said. Meant every word of it. There would be time together for them yet!

And as Denny sauntered he thought: "Didn't I know, all right, what she was thinking? Well, I guess I'm not going to take on any more problems for a while. Fellow wants a little fun. She (that meant Petra) doesn't love me. What have I got to offer her?"

But there was a letter that brought the golden head, brown eyes that assented, before him. Just like her, cute, all right.

It rambled on in chatty intimacy. Toward the end this paragraph:

"You'll come down for my birthday, won't you? I'm going to have a big party and I want you. If the old dam breaks, let it! But, John Merchant, the mean tyrant, sending you to a wilderness when I'm having a birthday, says you can come if you like. At least, he says it's all up to you and that he hasn't anything to say about it, so it means you'll come, doesn't it? What excuse could you have as long as it's in your own hands?"

A momentary annoyance passed. Denny laughed. That showed how much she understood—asking him off to a dance just when the work was in its most critical stage.

But he dallied with Petra's image; dallied with the memory of the nymph walking on a hill, hand in his, eyes in his, lips on his.

Life is a niggardly patron. It comes to us as children do with their hands behind their back, saying: "Which do you want, the right or the left?" If we take the one we must leave the other. But we want both—both!

But life smiles. In the one hand is Purpose and in the other Pleasure. None may seize the two.

Denny struggled with a long answer, explained at great detail the importance of the work, all that it meant to him.

No answer came. The day set for the big party found him restless. He kept thinking of Petra, seeing the bright turn of her face, the dimple that was his.

"Gee, I might as well have gone," he thought impatiently, "if I don't stop mooning about it. Wonder why she didn't answer?"

He was waiting for the mail when a man galloped in with a message:

"Suspend all work on dam at once. Letter follows.

"MERCHANT."



## CHAPTER LVI

### THE CLASH

A LIMPNESS passed into his muscles. He kept staring at the message. Suspend the work. At once!

Denny gave the orders, walked up the ridge and leaned against a tree, running his hand over his hair. Flames seemed to be leaping about his neck.

"Gee, what's up? Wonder what this means?"

He felt as though he were in a warm pool, sinking in thick, sickening waves. He kept running his hand over his hair.

Had he failed? Where? What was wrong? Merchant was dissatisfied? Had one of the assistants complained of his work?

But there had been no trouble. Denny had measured up with a fine dash, meeting emergencies like a veteran. He was sure of that.

Katy saw him coming to the cabin, no jubilation in his step. She was frightened.

"I don't know what's up, but I suppose I'll hear soon enough," he said, showing her the order.

"Why, perhaps it's something to do with the whole project, Denny. You see it only says 'suspend,' and if he were disappointed in you they would have sent another engineer up right away so's not to lose any time."

Yet it was a strained, restless day—each of them pretending that—pooh—it was nothing; both fearing it might be everything.

The first big chance—perhaps Denny wasn't equal to it. He had fallen down when the great opportunity was in his hand.

And he had dreamed of doing this work so masterfully that Merchant would put him in charge of a bigger unit. He had seen himself as the towering genius who would one day, and not far distant, superintend the building of a plant that was to cost millions.

Then came the letter from Merchant. He threw back his head, fists swinging, laughing to himself: "Well—gee, work was all right!"

"Farmers in the valley are making trouble," Merchant wrote. "They've taken out a temporary injunction, but it won't stand, as the whole issue has already been settled. Keep your gang intact, and speed up the work as soon as you can. You're making fine progress. Good luck."

A hundred dollars found unexpectedly in his pocket wouldn't have raised his spirit with half such exultance.

At noon came another message, a subpoena from the clerk of the county court. Denny was to appear at once as a witness in the case of the "United Farmers of Stanislaus Valley against the Mountain Light and Power Company."

Why was he to appear? What was the trouble?

Flushed with nervous excitement, he drove to Sonora, the county seat, and phoned to Merchant.

"Nothing to it," Merchant laughed. "It's all been hashed out and definitely settled. They haven't a right in the world. Our lawyer is there."

"What am I to say?"

"Nothing. You won't be called. Don't worry."

But Denny was uneasy—walked restlessly about town waiting for ten o'clock. What kind of a row was there going to be? Did the farmers have any rights? Was all their water shut off?

A little before ten he went into the square two-story courthouse. The oblong room with the kitchen chairs, cuspidors in the aisles, was already crowded. High-pitched, angry talk flashed into the hall.

Men in slouchy hats, their shirts open at the neck; some of them young, others gnarled, yellow as soil, were standing in groups, arguing hotly. One wiry fellow with a sandy beard and a massive protruding forehead shouted with a rasping twang;

"They ain't satisfied getting all that water free! They gotta starve us outer house and home. There ain't been a spoonful of water on my place in a month. Things has got to sech a pass the farmer's no better than a dawg in this here Golden State! By heck, I'll fight them!"

Denny edged into the room. A thin, shapeless woman in a white waist, a wide black ribbon belt and a black alpaca skirt turned as he entered. Denny was surprised at the swiftness of her movements, the vehemence of her dark eyes. Then he saw that she was somewhat young. A faded girl-look lurked in the dry, sallow face, the small, well-modeled chin.

"Do you think we stand any chance?" She addressed Denny.

He wanted to hurry on, but she was directly in front of him.

"I don't know."

"Isn't it just terrible?" The thin lips drew down, twitched. "Our alfalfa's ruined—ruined. What's to become of us? They might just as well steal the land. What good is it without water?"

Denny felt a moist faintness stealing over him.

"Too bad," he said, quickly. "Maybe it can be adjusted. I hope so."

He skimmed along the wall to the rail, spent a miserable ten minutes wondering if he would be called. The lawyer for the farmers presented his plea for a permanent order restraining the Mountain Light and Power Company from building its dam.

A silence tight as the skin of a drum drew over the room, holding within the furious potentiality of sound; of hostile voices bursting with wrongs.

Then the judge speaking, shaking his head:

"I have no authority. The company is established in its rights."

A rip through the skin, chairs knocked aside.

"Rights! What about our rights?"

One man, then another, lunging to the rail. In a moment the room was in an uproar, waving with uplifted fists.

"Rights! What about us?"

A hand on Denny's arm, the lawyer for the company whispering:

"Quick, let's get out!"

Burning with suspense, Denny pushed the hand. "Wait! Let's see what's up."

"Come on! There may be trouble."

The faces were now wide, shouting mouths, teeth showing. The whole room screaming. "Where do we come in? Where are our rights?"

They passed down the steps. The woman who had spoken to him was climbing into an old buckboard, where three children crowded the seat. As she picked up the reins a bundle rolled to the sidewalk. Denny handed it to her.

"Oh, isn't it terrible! To think they can do things like this in a civilized country! Does it make much difference to you?"

"No. I'm not a farmer. You may get the water."

She shut her eyes, pinching her lips between her fingers.

"No, we won't get it! Well—good day."

The lawyer fell into step with him.

"Guess it hits some of them pretty hard, doesn't it?"

"Oh, they're always raising a yell. They haven't a right on earth. They want their cabbages even if all the rest of the world goes without light. Can't reason with them."

Denny laughed. "Well, I guess you can't reason people out of their bread and butter!"

At the crossing he parted with the lawyer, dug his hands in his pockets—oppressed, stifling. He was suddenly aware of some one following him. At the same instant three men crossed the road toward him.

He turned. The wiry fellow with the sandy beard and protruding forehead who had dominated the court room leaped at him:

"You're the engineer for this here company?"

Denny straightened his shoulders. The three men halted a foot from him.

"Yes. I'm the engineer."

A pistol jabbed against his chest: "Get into that machine!"

## CHAPTER LVII

### ACCUSATION

DENNY stood motionless, pulses thumping.

"That's your machine, ain't it? Get in!" The sandy beard was pushed against his face; a fanatical light in the man's eyes sent a chill, clammy terror over him. He was almost powerless to move.

Something of the boastful youngster made him throw back his head:

"What for?"

"You'll find out!"

The pistol pressed. With a lightning thrust Denny knocked it from the fellow's hand. With a wild start he sprang down the deserted street.

One step—a hulking form had him by the collar; another pinioned his arms.

"Get fresh, young feller, and you'll get hurt. Get into that machine. Now drive down this road."

Three lanky, powerful fellows in the back seat. Not a word. The man who had leaped at him, still holding the pistol and sitting next him.

Denny's blood beat a hot clamor at his throat. What were they going to do with him?

"To the right! Pass that gate. Stop."

Wide, level acres, hot arid sun beating everywhere; waves of heat quivering from the parched ground; yellow stalks, millions of them broken, drooping to the earth.

The men in the tonneau got out, opened the door, ordered Denny out. The leader put the gun in his pocket, walked over to the field, twisted a handful of the dead hay, brought it over and shook it at Denny.

"There's what you've done to my alfalfa, you damn thieves! Look at it—forty acres! Look over there!" He stuck his arm out viciously.

Across the road, a wide, disconsolate sweep of a dead, rough yellow:

"There's Keene's and Painter's and Miles'. Ruined—can you see? That's what ye're doing to us, you damn thieves! Stealing the water. Starving us out 'er house and lands!"

He came close, shouting and shaking his fist. The fanatical eyes darted:

"How do you like that, young feller? Look at them dead acres! Starving us off the land. That's your business. Walk over there!"

He caught Denny's arm, keeping up a mutinous uproar, racing him across the fields. The three others followed.

They stopped near a big brown barn. In a pasture, standing close as though exchanging the deepest confidences, were the cows—a sorry looking outfit with scrubby coats, all knobs and angles.

"Them's what's left of my cattle. Sleek, aren't they? Starving to death. How many will I have at the end of the summer?"

His fingers twisted in Denny's flesh:

"How many? Speak up! How many will you leave me? Will you kill them all?"

Denny tried to shake off the angry hand. It tightened.

"How many? Damn you, speak!"

Out of a burning, parched throat, Denny brought an answer.

"What have I to do with your cattle?"

A furious laugh. "By God, what have you to do with our cattle! Starve them! Kill them! That's what you've got to do with them. That's what you're doing with them, taking the water. The water is ours!"

"The company paid for all the rights—paid handsomely for them."

"What did you pay us? Us! We're the ones that got the water and used it for thirty years. What right have you got keeping it from us?"

"The Valley Irrigation Company sold the rights to us. We own them."

"And you got the right to freeze us out, have you? The Valley Irrigation Company stole those rights. Stole them from us. We're the fellows that's got the rights!"

The skin drew so tightly over the bulging forehead it seemed ready to burst. He shook his fist up against Denny's chin.

"By God, we've got the right, but you've got the water."

He pushed back across the fields. Denny followed trembling.

The sun pressed like a hot weight. Perspiration dripped from him. He kept wiping his forehead, rubbing his handkerchief across his neck.

What were they going to do with him? What was this half mad fellow driving at?

Across the road to a gate with "Keene" written in chalk across the top. Here they stopped and the biggest of the three walked at Denny's side.

Without speaking, he motioned to the dead alfalfa fields at his right. On over the burning ground, not a tree, not a shadow anywhere; the sun raining heat. They were at the pastures—more lean cows, Keene pointing, saying nothing.

Half a mile to another field, then another. The air was like a hot, thick fluid. Suddenly Denny halted, and abrupt anger whipped in a flame.

"What am I to do about it!" he shot through clenched teeth. "I'm not taking the water from you!"

The fanatical fellow who had first accosted him and who was called "Red" grabbed his coat:

"You ain't, ain't you! You're driving the horses for the thieves but you ain't doing the stealing, eh? You ain't taking the water? Well, you are! You're a building that there dam and that's what's taking the water."

Two of the others pitched at him, accusing, demanding:

"You can leave us the water. Build your dam without robbing and starving us. That's what we want."

He felt like shouting: "You're a crowd of lunatics! Let me go! I'll swing at you!" He wanted to bolt across the road. They had doubled back, the machine was in sight. Were they going to take him to it? Had they some other plan?

"It's only a temporary inconvenience," he said quietly. "Eventually you'll get the water . . . all you want of it."

Keene, for the first time, opened his mouth:

"We'll get the water when we've lost the land. That's what it 'mounts to. You're starving us to death—to poverty. We'll get no crops this year. We'll be lucky to get food. Now, you know what you're doing!"

"And if you keep on with it," Red's ugly forehead was thrusting at him again, "you're a murderer and a thief. Now, you get off this land, and get quick! You know what men think of you! You see where you're driving us!"

He lunged forward in front of the others. They tramped off, leaving Denny, boiling with rage, swearing through his teeth.

"Crazy fools! Lunatics!"

He felt as though he had taken part in some horrible burlesque. As he drove back to the town, going swiftly to get a breath of free air, he passed without glimpsing the seared, burnt fields. He could feel the pistol pressing against him, the discomfiting light in Red's eyes.

"Did they expect the whole state to lag behind that a few worthless farms might be saved? Where would the country be without water power? Without electricity?"

But he reached the camp, spent and uncomfortable, ordered the men back to work, went about speeding up activity as though some furious fire drove him.

Then he went up to the cabin. As soon as Katy saw the white, suppressed excitement of his face she was alarmed.

"What was it? Something terrible, Denny?"

At first he answered lightly; then, as always, he blurted out the whole affair, growing hot with indignant resentment. The maniacs! Grabbing him off like that! Lot he had to do with it!

Katy was electrified, open-mouthed with astonishment. Was he sure they hadn't hurt him? Was he frightened to death?

So Denny found a belated thrill in the encounter, found himself a hero, went into further details.

It was late that evening when they were finishing supper, that Katy asked:

"Just the same, isn't it a pity about them, Denny?"

"Sure it is."

"Haven't they any rights? Couldn't something be done?"

"Yes—thousands of people could do without lights; thousands of other farmers could do without the power to run their irrigation pumps . . . Well, it's just this way—water power is going to make this state. You can't stop a big project like this because a few are injured."

"I suppose it's just as Clay used to argue. You can't expect the swift of foot to lose the race helping the laggards. But it's sad, anyway, Denny."

Yes, it was. Worse than this, the face of that fanatical fellow, the grim silence of Keene, haunted Denny.

Finally, he wrote a long, vehement letter to Merchant. "It was a shame about those fellows. We have a lot of water be-



hind Dam 1 that is of no use. Can I release it to these farms? Please give this matter your quick attention."

This after a vivid page describing and emphasizing the tragic need.

Merchant's answer was a cold disappointment:

"I've taken this up with our attorney. At this stage he finds it will make serious complications to release the water. Sorry, but the issue is closed."

## CHAPTER LVIII

### OUT OF THE PAST

OPPOSITE him, across the white table, was the golden hair, the flashing petulance of brown eyes and thin black brows.

Denny was just back from the mountain, stirring mirth in his spirit. For that very afternoon, John Merchant had said to him:

"Great piece of work, Brooks. You made fine time."

So Denny rang up Petra Channing and they went to the theater. Now they were at Techau's. Denny felt himself a lord and ready to laugh because Petra wished to quarrel.

Oh, she had written after the birthday dance, but don't let him imagine she had completely forgiven that slight. He could have come if he wished. This was her attitude. It amused him and this gayety of his heightened her pique.

"If there's anything in the world that irritates me," she said in her most sauntering tone, "it's a person that won't even be sorry for his sins."

"Look how we suffer for our virtues, Petra."

A smile lurked in the dimples, but she straightened out her lips:

"Now, once in a while I commit a wrong, but at least I have the grace to repent."

"But you have the sin first; penance comes second. What I lack is the sin."

"Then I suppose you don't consider it wrong to hurt another?" She glanced at him quickly, lowered her eyes, breaking a bit of toast from the club sandwich. Denny surrendered.

"Were you hurt, Petra?"

"How would you have felt this afternoon when I phoned you if I'd said: 'Now I appreciate this favor of yours, but I've some knitting to do and it's quite important to me and must come before pleasure or friendship.'"

"Was I as crude as that, Petra?"

"Yes, you were. You may have thrown a few more words around it, but that's the way it seemed to me."

"Well, I wanted to come. I'd have given a lot to be here. But a man can't walk off on a four days' holiday when he's out on a job."

"But John said you could. And I told Peter you were coming."

"What did Peter say?"

"He said: 'Is that so?' meaning that it was all right. But I went purposely to see John about it and he said it was all up to yourself. You could come if you saw fit."

"Because he knew I'd have sense enough not to see fit!"

Denny's temper quickened. Why was she harping on this? She surely understood! Why couldn't they talk about the play or listen to this beautiful serenade the orchestra was playing?

Petra caught the impatience in his tone. She laughed, tossed her head back: "Oh, then Mr. John was playing me, was he? The old tyrant! I might have known it. And you really wanted to come, Dendiddle? You see I only have a birthday once a year—I'm not very lucky, and this was an extra stunning affair. I kept thinking up to the last minute"—she glanced up slowly, a malicious twinkle on her lips—"that you'd see fit to come!"

Her glance dwelt deliberately on his, held it till he laughed.

"So I was disappointed, Dendiddle. My party was spoiled."

"It wouldn't have been if there'd been a chance in the world."

"All right then, don't quarrel with me any more, Dendiddle, because it was all on account of you that I was disappointed. Now, the first time we see each other, don't let's argue about nothing. But if you had to dance four times with Rudy Grimm you'd understand."

She rested her chin in her hand, eyes down, dimples sleeping. How startling she was to-night in that gown of bronze and gold with the faint touch of orange at her throat.

Denny was more interested in the gleam of her skin than the stroll of her words. His senses delighted in the picture.

Suddenly she glanced to him with a challenging: "Isn't it strange most men are such bores?"

There was a warmth—a lure in the winning suggestion. It said more plainly than words: "You're entirely different!" His pride flushed and he began to laugh and to talk with surprising wit. What a winsome thing this Petra was. Lot of insight.

When they were driving home in the amiable Peter's car she said twittingly:

"Why didn't you tell me of your heroic deed, Dendiddle?"

"Do you mean the meeting with the farmers?"

"Yes. I had to eavesdrop on John and Peter. John said it was quite an ordeal."

"It was an eyeopener, Petra. Those farmers are having a tough time."

"I think they're terrible. They had no right to kidnap you like that. Suppose you had a weak heart?"

Denny roared. "They didn't kidnap me, and they've suffered heavily. It seems an awful shame. . . ."

The question was uppermost in his mind—an obsession. John Merchant's letter had come like a blow. He was not to release the water behind Dam One. It was going to waste. And down there in the valley were men and women driven frantic through the lack of it. Whole lives crushed. Why shouldn't they have it?

Hours he and Katy had argued the rights and wrongs. In his heart Denny was appalled at the order. Wanton cruelty, he said to himself when he read the refusal. On his mind like a hot brand was the picture of the dead, yellow acres, the gaunt cattle, the crazy eyes of the fellow they called "Red." Why couldn't he let them have this water?

Now he began talking vehemently to Petra.

"You know that woman with the three little kids in the buckboard was just desperate. She must have been pretty once."

"Why did she go and poke herself on a farm then? What could she expect?"

"But it seems a pity, doesn't it, that progress always demands such a heavy human toll. We have to have development, but it's the deuce to see tragedies like this and to push them along—"

He was in the heart of it, searching for some answer to a hundred vague yet oppressing questions. Had the minority any rights? Was it inevitable that the few must be trampled? Was he responsible? The thing was every day gripping him more bitterly.

Petra was sitting close to him, her hand in his, listening with a rapt attention. He glanced down suddenly. His jaw dropped. The golden head rested on his shoulder, eyes closed.

"Petra," he whispered softly.

No answer—asleep.

She wasn't interested. Why did they poke themselves on farms? He had bored her.

For a while he sat rather stiff and humiliated. The fingers fluttered against his palm; from her hair came the fragrance of violets. He let his cheek brush against it.

Then the lips parted in a willful smile. Her eyes half opened, closed again. He watched her, grinning.

Again the eyes were half opened. He caught her face, laughed: "You darling! You little golden darling!"

She turned her head quickly, wide-awake against him, let her fingers creep up to his neck.

Gee—she was sweet. His eyes delighted in her; his heart exulted when she came close and twined her arms about him. And what was there to him?

He bought a paper to read on the train, kept it open wide to hide a random chuckle.

The thought of her nestled like a warm, sweet flower in his mind. He would see her again in two or three days . . . a long time.

Then he remembered that she fell asleep when he was talking of this thing that carped incessantly at him so that he must be arguing about it to Merchant, to Katy, to Stephen.

"Well—what can you expect? A girl like Petra's not supposed to worry herself over things like that. But Katy does. Oh, she's different and then she's used to me. I've always pestered Katy-kid with things like this."

There would come a perfume of violets, the taunt of half-opened eyes—her head against his shoulder. Two days more. . . .

One noontime Denny was eating a hurried lunch at a cafeteria. He had an evening paper open before him, but his thoughts loitered deliciously among fresh memories.

Suddenly he glanced up, dropped the paper in a shock of astonishment. A pair of magnificent dark eyes set like great jewels in the pearl-white skin of a thin face held him. A young girl—a form that had passed as a pale, luminous shadow before him. He got up abruptly, walked over to the table, his hand out, lips trembling.

A radiance over the girl's face:

"You remember me!"

"Joan!"

## CHAPTER LIX

### JOAN AND DENNY

JOAN—how well he remembered the lovely eyes, the dark hair parted, and all that eagerness and grace. And just now the dewiness and joy of her smiling. He was remembering a night on the hillside when Joan said good-by—the appeal of her as she turned that sweet pure face for him to kiss.

Joan remembered too. Every day Joan remembered. Times without number in a lonely room at night after the day's work was done, Joan peopled gardens and hills and seaside with a happy pair, strolling along arm in arm. The man was always Denny and the girl was Joan. Never any one else . . . her first man friend. He would also be the last. Joan was like that.

Now she waited with warm, beating heart as he brought his tray to her table . . . It seemed a miracle to Joan that he recognized her—that his eyes lighted up with pleasure . . .

He said: "Gee, Joany—this is great, seeing you again."

They fell at once into the naïve, frank relation of their campus days. She looked up to him as she had then, looked up to one destined to bridge the stars. And he laughed and chuckled in the radiance of her approval.

Where had Joan been? Why had she cut him off without so much as a parting grin?

"I cut you off, Denny? No, 'twas never I! 'Tis never the girl who wearies first. Man of the world, don't you know that?"

"But I got my letters back, Joan. They were returned unclaimed."

The thrill it gave Joan to hear this—the thrill it would have given her on many an anxious day when Joan thought her heart was broken. For they had moved away. Joan left her address, but no letters were ever forwarded. When she wrote to the postoffice she was told no letters had come. So she thought he found the writing a burden and had ceased.

She told him this. Tears came to her eyes telling it. Say,

Joan had missed hearing from him! Had longed to hear from him!

Denny went jauntily back to work that afternoon . . . a fellow destined to bridge the stars. Nice to have a girl like Joany say such things as that—made him feel like reaching up and up.

His spirits soared so that a very gay Denny came strutting into the barn that evening. He found a subdued, listless Katy-kid.

She had been crying. They had to move—had to leave the palatial beloved barn—the Carletons were going to build a home for Fay on the ground where the barn stood.

And Katy thought that Denny's heart would surely break at the news. Instead he was glad—darn glad—better to be in the city—could go to a show now in the evenings and, say, couldn't he come home to lunch?

Suddenly without prelude: "Why, it'll be a knock-out living on the other side, Katy-kid! You'll make friends. You need friends. I'll bring Joany to see you."

Just like that—Joany—as though Joan were Katy's twin.

In a moment he tried to cover up but there was no hiding the flare of red that went boyishly to the roots of his hair. So Katy had it all.

She said, tremulous: "You mean it, Denny? She'll come to see me? Will she like me . . . ?"

"Sure and you'll like her. She's your sort."

"You mean 'noble,' Denny? So Joan is noble. Then she'll come."

Joan came. A Saturday afternoon Denny brought her. She got up early that morning and ironed fresh organdie cuffs and collar for her trim blue suit. She thought: "He never told me his sister was crippled . . . never said it. He made believe everything was so easy. Oh, I knew there was something beautiful about him . . . something glorious . . . I knew it from the start."

She put her hand quickly in his when they met at the Ferry. She said: "Denny, it's wonderful in you to take me—it's just beautiful in you."

But he thought Joan was the lovely one to be so happy to come.

Katy was almost beside herself. She wore the blue silk sweater Stephen sent . . . with a pretty lace collar. The

bright chestnut curls were glossy and all in place. Denny gave her a quick look that said: "You look spiffy!" So she became at once hilarious with joy.

She liked Joan from the first glance. She called her by her first name and told her to look at Stephen's treasured sketches and their flowers and their books.

"This is the most beautiful room I've ever been in, Katy."

"Do you know why, Joan? Well, this is what I think . . . every one who comes here leaves a dear thought or a feeling after them so the place is just rich with so many memories. Then there are the books and they always seem alive to me."

Joan brought over a book—astonished that Katy knew so much. Had Katy gone to college too?

"Why, yes, Joan! Didn't you know that? But I had only one professor and don't you think he made a fine job of my edjication?"

Denny watched . . . warmed to the spirit. Wonderful for Katy to have a friend—a friend like Joan.

That night Katy said with a sigh, "You didn't tell me she was gorgeous-looking as well as noble."

"It takes you to find out all these little secrets."

"And you've known her all these years, Denny? Then she must be your greatest lady friend? Greater than Petra?"

His face reddened. Fancy Petra spending the whole of a Saturday in happy converse with Katy-kid!

He said vaguely: "Well, they're slightly different."

"You mean Joan is a friend but Petra is a girl—a golden fairy?"

But no, Denny didn't mean that. He was too piercingly aware of Joan's lovely eyes—Joan's sweet, appealing mouth. And he liked the quick way Joan touched his hand.

So he went every day to the cafeteria where Joan had lunch. Once he made sketches on the tablecloth of his great dam. In a quick impulse he said: "You ought to see the photographs. Come up to the office when you're finished to-day. I'll show them to you."

Denny was chummy by nature. He and Katy-kid could talk half the night away any old time. There was no discussing with Petra the issues alive and burning in Denny's dream. He turned with spontaneous fervor to Joan.

She came. With a boyish pride he showed her pictures of



the construction he had supervised. She listened with a vivid enthusiasm.

The door opened. A gay voice, "I'm waiting for you, Dendiddle!"

Then Petra saw Joan. She stood perfectly still, color creeping up and fading in her cheeks.

## CHAPTER LX

### THE WEB

FOR a moment Petra stood with her head raised, a vague reproach in her silence, that gave Denny the disquieting sense of being "caught."

"Come in, Petra." He went to meet her. "This is Miss Lewis. We were looking over pictures of the dam."

She acknowledged the introduction coldly. Denny felt a tightening in the air. Joan felt it.

"It's a wonderful piece of work, isn't it, Miss Channing?"

"Oh, very! If you're finished looking over the plans, Diddle, I have a plan." Petra looked up willfully at Denny. All the dimples sparkled. Joan was edged out.

The slight was cleverly, unconsciously given. Denny perceived it. He abhorred hurting any one. Especially he didn't wish Joan to be hurt.

"All right, Petra," he said, rather shortly. "We're not quite finished. See, Joan, this is where the tunnel cuts into the mountain. And, see, down here we'll have the power house."

"I think that's gigantic, Denman. Well, maybe you'll let me come in and look at them again. I have to go now." Joan nodded to Petra, carried herself with swift, eager grace to the door. He followed.

"Katy wonders when you're coming again, Joan."

She kept her face averted. "Does she? I could come next Saturday. Tell her I'll come then."

Petra had taken out her vanity case and was tapping a few grains of powder from her nose. "Well, thank goodness! Now for my plan."

But Denny at the table rustled the photographs together. Petra, with the open vanity case in her hand, drew back.

"Oh, perhaps you didn't wish me to come for you, Diddle?"

He wanted to say, "Miss Lewis is an old friend of mine. You didn't need to snub her!"

But her lips were parted, a surprised hurt in her eyes. "What's the matter, Diddle? You're angry. You didn't wish me to interrupt you?" She was moving to the door.

"Come back here, Petra. Of course, I wanted you to come in. But I have to put these pictures where they belong. I'll be with you in a minute. What's the plan?"

She came up and stood beside him, resting her chin in her hand, pursing her lips in a low whistle.

"Something enormous has happened, Diddle."

"What, Petra?"

"I'll tell you after dinner. That's part of the plan. I'm taking you home. Peter and mother are off to a golden wedding. We're to have a tête-à-tête. Will you hurry?"

"But what's the enormous thing that has happened, Petra?"

She moved the photographs toward him. "There, you'll know in good time. Now come."

The dining room was old fashioned with a massive side-board running half the width of the room, a fireplace with carved pilasters of a dark cherry running from the ceiling to the floor. On the heavy mantel were two exquisite Sèvres vases.

Denny only noticed that the many-branched candelabra threw a yellow glow over the table that harmonized with the amber of Petra's dress—some kind of a sheer, glinting thing like her soft hair.

She had paused after a long, bright chatter and was now lazily watching him. It was the first time he had ever dined here alone in the house with her. He found it alluring—a most fascinating thing to do.

"Pleasant, isn't it? Do you like my plan?"

"So far so good. Is there more to it?"

"We may take a ride and then again we may not. I may sing and play to you."

"Heaven forbid!"

"I like your impudence. Do you talk like this to all the girls you go out with?"

"I don't go out with any 'all' of them."

"Well—with the others, then."

He grinned. "There aren't any others."

"George Washington! And I catch you red-handed. She's dark, isn't she? I thought you liked fair people."

"I do."

"And love the dark ones?"

"No."

She clasped her hands, looking down at them, the thin, striking, black brows raised. "I suppose all men are polygamous, aren't they?"

"We're all accused of it."

"You rather like being guilty, too, don't you?"

"Not at present."

Petra delighted in this intimate personal talk, but now she grew silent. Finally with a pensive shrug, "I thought her very attractive, Dendiddle."

"Who?"

"Well, whom are we talking about?"

"Polygamy."

"Don't be silly, Diddle. You know very well we were talking of Miss Lewis."

"You mean you were talking of her."

"Have you known her long?"

"About six or eight years."

"I suppose she's in love with you?"

"Oh, do you?"

She got up from the table. "Let's go inside. You can smoke there. I'm going to play whether you like it or not. I feel melancholy. You can stuff your fingers in your ears."

She didn't make room for him on the bench, but let the white, beautiful hands wander over the keys, an occasional treble note reaching him. He thought he had never seen her so charming with her hair brought back from the low forehead and pinned carelessly in a shiny coil.

She played "Aloha" and "The Barcarole," the only things she seemed to know, turned the last page with a petulant sigh. "Music doesn't satisfy me to-night!"

"How do you know, Petra?"

She tried to hide the smile lurking on her lips, came over and sat beside him on the sofa, leaning forward, with her hands crossed on her knees.

"When am I to hear the enormous thing, Petra?"

She sat up quietly, facing him, "I'm going to marry Rudy Grimm."

He felt the blood leap into his face, then drop coldly away. After a pause, he said, "Are you?"

"You don't seem very delighted. Rudy's a nice enough fellow. Peter wants it, and I suppose I might just as well. Do you think I shouldn't marry him?"

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

She glanced down at her hands, palms upward, her face half turned, so that he saw the sweet, full curve of her throat. She remained thus silent, a distant smile on her lips. "It's hard to know what to do."

"If you love him, I don't see where the problem comes."

"Of course there wouldn't be any problem then. Who said anything about love? I'm talking about marriage."

"I didn't suppose a girl would figure on marrying a man unless she loved him."

The smile deepened; her eyes rested on his. "We figure on lots of things, Dendiddle. I thought you would help me out on this."

"I don't see how I can. I thought Rudy Grimm bored you to death."

"Most men do. I can always take myself away."

"Yes—or fall conveniently to sleep."

Head down, all dimples. "I did not fall asleep that night."

"Well—you were bored."

"No—but we don't have so much time together. Why should we waste it talking of such fiddlesticks as tiresome old farmers and their troubles. There are so many other delightful things in the world. But I'm glad you've figured this out the same way I did."

"I haven't figured it at all."

"Don't be silly. Didn't you just tell me Rudy Grimm bores me to death? I'm sure I don't want to be bored and what's more I'm not going to be! I'll let the amiable Peter learn that."

"How the deuce is that any solution, Petra, when all men bore you?"

The wicked gleam playing on her lips, her hand, soft and warm, folded in his. "But all men haven't a nice roomy shoulder to fall asleep on!" She looked up at him laughing, her face, the wondrous golden hair, not an inch from his.

His heart thumped. She made a move from him. He caught her in his arms, pressing her head back, kissing her throat, covering her mouth with his lips. Color flamed in the

pale gold of her cheeks. He kissed that, too, and the closed eyes and the hair that smelled of violets.

She smiled. "Then you don't want me to marry Rudy Grimm?"

He laughed. "You little devil! You darling!"

He went out triumphant, the memory of her smooth hand, the lips that had challenged him like a warmth, a melody in his heart.

Long afterwards he began to think; to wonder. Did Petra love him? Did he love her? Did he wish to marry her?

When his thought reached this point, he pushed it from him. He wasn't ready to get married. He didn't have money enough.

But underneath these visible objections was a vague and persistent reluctance. Petra was a darling—ah, she was sweet. His senses exulted in the contact of her hands, her lips. His eyes dwelt on her beauty. And yet—well, did he wish to marry her? The question persisted. He felt sometimes as though the fate of his life was at stake.

While he pondered this insistent but rather delicious problem, regarding it as a great crisis in his career, there came an event that gave him no chance to reckon—an event that lifted him body and soul and swept him in the floodtide like a chip.

## CHAPTER LXI

### COURTING FATE

THEIR talk was haphazard, unsatisfactory, yet Denny was saying, without ever realizing it, the words that shaped his destiny.

Strange that—for it often seemed to him that Fate was dropping strands before him, and these he must catch to weave into the woof of his life. This woof would be fine and strong, just as he wished it to be if only he might seize delicately and at the right moment proper threads for the pattern.

But the thread that was to run vigorously like a red life vein he never saw at all. It was stolen into the web.

It was one evening in late summer. He was riding home with Chisborough, consultant for the Mountain Light and Power Company and the professor who had given Denny his job.

"John Merchant is going to give you charge of the Basin Creek Unit?"

"Yes."

"You did a fine piece of work on the Tuolumne dam. You didn't have any trouble at all?"

"Nothing but a mix-up with the farmers. The thing's got under my skin," Denny swept into the dramatic episode. "You know there ought to be an adjustment. It's not just a few farmers here and there. It's not just half a dozen families thrown out. Up and down the whole state is this conflict of interests. It's appalling! What do you think?"

Chisborough shrugged. "Yes, but we've got to develop our power. These men are spending millions for the interest of the state."

"But they'll make other millions. And this state has got to have food too. It's just as that wild fellow, 'Red,' was saying, if we don't look out we'll freeze the farmer out of Northern California."

"Not in my time or yours."

"You don't think there's any solution? Why, Chisborough, it's up to you and me and every fellow with a brain to find a solution."

"After you find it what will you do with it?" The older man laughed. "You've got a century of education ahead of you before you'll ever hammer it into the consciousness of capital that coöperation and not competition is the soul of progress."

Denny took off his hat, the breeze lifted his hair. This was no answer.

"Well—it takes a lot of joy from the work to know that you're pushing the other fellow into the ditch. That's the way it's got me. Those fellows have a real grievance. I tell you, Chisborough, if you'd seen them—"

And he kept insisting that there must be a solution and all but demanding that Chisborough become excited and find it.

It was about two weeks after this that Chisborough phoned to the barn and asked Denny to come and see him.

"There's a big job, Brooks. It's yours if you want it."

Chisborough was a tall, quick-moving, lean man with brown skin and a very curt manner of speech.

"It'll give you a chance perhaps to find that solution you're after." He laughed. "Here it is."

He brought out maps and placed them on a big table, his finger moving rapidly. "Here are your farmers with some 75,000 acres. They've formed an irrigation district. You're to build a dam across the Merced, install the power house and furnish this district with light and water."

He took paper and pencil, making hurried sketches, figuring. Denny, his breath pumping so noisily he was abashed, followed the swift details. Chisborough outlined the project.

"I've been working with them on and off for the last two years. They're about ready for the actual work. It's a four-million-dollar job. They've voted the bonds.

"There's a big salary, of course. I can't say just yet but don't forget you're giving up a permanent job. Well, think it over and let me know within a few days."

Denny went out, his head so light it felt like a big empty circle spinning giddily above his shoulders. A job like that—a four-million-dollar job. Dropped out of the sky. Gee, what a chance! Think it over a few days. Well, any old time! The job was his.



He went dashing home, bursting with excitement. When he reached the barn he could scarcely speak, and just stood in the middle of the room grinning, his lips trembling.

"Oh, tell me!" Katy begged. "You aren't stricken dumb, Denny? Aren't I ever to hear your beautiful voice again?"

"Well—we're made, Katy-kid." He sat down and with the aid of many little sketches showed her what he was to do.

She raised her head with the long, singing laugh. "I've been praying for it."

"Oh, it was the angel got it for me, was it? Not your brilliant brother's ability or his magnetic personality or anything like that, Katy?"

He moved about in an electric warmth imagining the entire world brighter and happier because of the golden fortune that had come to him. His first awakening came when he told Petra.

In his exuberance he rushed into it, telling it clumsily, going back and picking up the details he had dropped. He expected her to turn, put her hand on his arm, say something great—well, like Katy, for instance.

But she sat with her hands on her knees, her head bent.

"You mean to take it, Dendiddle?"

"For the love of Mike, Petra! Why, it's a chance that comes to one in a thousand. Take it! It's taken!"

"You'll be up there in those mountains for months at a stretch?"

"Yes—in the spring and summer." He laughed. "Come up and visit me, Petra. See me in overalls. I cut a dashing figure."

She ran her hand very deliberately over her neck, pushing up the soft hair. This was a sign of her displeasure. Finally she glanced up at him, and smiled. "Do you think the earth will stay still all those months, while you're gone?"

He didn't catch her meaning nor the question in her eyes that asked plainly, "Do you think I will sit back and wait till you're pleased to return? Do you think you'll find me in the same spot as you left me?"

His answer piqued her. "Let the world spin as fast as it likes. I'll catch up!"

She couldn't enter into the swaggering happiness, so she tried subterfuge. "I think you're making a mistake to give up the place you have. John says it's only a question of a few

years, when you'll be right on top. You know there's opportunity there."

"But look here, Petra, this other job suits me. I believe in the people getting together and helping themselves. That's a fine spirit. The farmers have got to do it."

"Farmers, fiddlesticks! It's not your business to give up your life for them, is it? You have the funniest ideas."

"It's not that at all. You see in this project two interests are harmonized on a small scale. Why," he burst out laughing, "I might find a scheme of development that would give us all the power we want and not interfere with our farming. Don't you see? It's a big problem."

"Yes—well, I don't see, Dendiddle, anything except that you're throwing over great chances here—perhaps greater than you know."

She was very quiet. When he was leaving she stood with her head lowered. Then he put his arm around her. She raised her hands and drew his face down, pressing her cheek on his. "You won't take it, Dendiddle, please. I'd be here all alone. You won't take it?"

## CHAPTER LXII

### VISIONS

PETRA didn't want him to take the job though he told her all his heart was in the work. She said: "Do you think the world will stand still all these months while you're away?"

He understood the veiled warning. If he went away there might be no Petra when he returned.

No Petra. Did he want this? She walked in on his thoughts, black brows arched, gold hair piled high, curve of her throat. There was warmth and quickening in his pulses.

Was this love? Would he give up the great opportunity for this?

"No!" his mind made answer, yet his senses loitered persistently on the image of her beauty that was music to him.

It seemed harsh that he should be forced to choose. Was all his life to be this conflict of pleasure and ambition? Must he be forever denying and stinting? And why? Had he within him such great gift to offer life that it was worth the sacrifice?

At college he had goaded himself to the last jot of energy, all the while watching with a hankering envy those carefree, lazy fellows sprawled in the sun. Gee, they were gathering the fine, delicious fruits as fast as they ripened. He was postponing, struggling. And perhaps when he finally reached out for his share and had the fruit to his lips the high capacity for enjoyment would be gone. How often he had figured this!

Now, it was the same thing over again. He would go into a wilderness. Life with a gaunt hand would snatch away this bright, golden Petra, who had come upon his loneliness and filled it with young color, with a vibrant gayety.

Was he willing to lose this? He didn't wish to face the question of marriage—but most emphatically he wanted to sit in the small room with its drapes of amber and lavender, to sit there on the sofa and twit and laugh with her. And feel her hands reaching to his neck, and feel her lips and feel her eyes. He wanted this, and he was going to have it.

Friday night he called. She wore some new, demure thing in pale green with little sleeves that just puffed over her shoulders. The long, slender arms were bare—rounded, rich gold tint under the skin.

As always, she began very brightly—chatting, flirting. He was there nearly two hours before she said: "Why are you so excited, to-night?"

"I've a good hunch."

"What about?"

"You!" he laughed.

"Oh, you've decided not to take it, have you?"

"No, I couldn't do that. Listen, Petra—"

But she lowered her head, ran her hand gently over her neck and up over the smooth hair. "Well, I suppose you know. It just opens my eyes."

"Listen, Petra—you don't understand."

"Perhaps not—but I understand what months and years are. I see how you figure and what comes first in your opinion."

"Well, you don't see anything of the kind." She began to interrupt, but he turned on her quickly, saying through shut teeth: "You're going to listen!"

A startled flush stained her cheeks. She liked that sharp way in him. As he talked she tried to keep the dimples from deepening.

"Now, do you see, Petra? And I'll come down once a month anyway."

She answered petulantly, "Yes, I see. I see clearly."

"What?"

"That you don't care."

"You don't see anything of the kind. You know you don't."

"I suppose you do care?"

He laughed and kissed her. "Of course I do! Now, can I take the job?"

The triumph was easier than he anticipated. It lifted his spirit sky-high. Pooh—he'd manage a little thing like ambition and joy—

On Saturday at four o'clock he went to see Chisborough about the new job. Chisborough kept him an hour. As the conference ended he said casually, "Your salary will be twelve fifty a month."

Chisborough saw his lips tightening. "Don't forget, Brooks, you may wait a long time for another job."

Denny scarcely heard. He felt that he staggered down the steps, that he zigzagged wildly across the street. He turned once, half expecting to see Chisborough running after him, yelling, "Made a mistake. It's twelve fifty a quarter."

That much money every month! He was swinging along, mad to get home, mad to come bursting out with the news. He kept saying to himself, "Twelve fifty a month—gee!"

His lips trembled. They could do it now. Now! Katy cured now!

As he cut across the campus the clock in the old Bacon library chimed. Just five. Suddenly he remembered Joan was visiting Katy. She would be leaving, going down for the five-twenty train.

He hurried. Catch up with Joan. Tell her about it. See what she'd say about this wondrous chance. She'd know what it meant.

He came behind her as he used to long ago on the campus: "Hello, Joany!"

She stood still, eyes all shiny. "Katy told me."

His heart rapped seeing the color flying to Joan's face, hearing the glad excitement in her voice. "She told me all about it. I knew you'd come to do a thing like this. But already—oh—"

Just what he wanted to hear—just what the chummy kid in him ached to have another say . . . "A bigger job, Joan, than I've ever tackled . . ."

"But not bigger than you can do!" She said it softly and looked away. Then he longed to see her eyes. Not crying . . . not tears in them surely? Tears of gladness for him!

He went on eagerly, "Joan, there's a thrill about it." He told her his dream of harmonizing the two biggest things in California—irrigation and power development.

She said: "Yes—yes—go on, Denny—" hungry to hear it all.

"Gee, Joan, you'll think I'm an egotist. Every time I see you I talk about myself. But you coax me into it."

"How?"

"You say 'Yes and go on.'"

Joan laughed: "Go on and on—"

"Say, Joany, what do you think—twelve fifty a month."

She stopped abruptly, staring at him.

He burst out laughing. "Twelve fifty, Joan."

"What will you do with it all? Why, you can make the world over with that."

"You know, Joan—there's Katy."

"Yes—what about Katy?" She spoke breathlessly.

His hands were suddenly tightening on hers. "I can have Katy cured."

She closed her eyes swiftly, knowing that he had opened his heart letting her see the deepest and the purest things it held.

"Know what that means to me, Joan? Have Katy-kid cured."

"Yes . . . I know."

## CHAPTER LXIII

### THE GREAT HOPE

"NEXT Saturday at 3:30."

Denny came down in the elevator repeating this to himself. His breath drew hard. They'd know then.

He had been to see the doctor, a young brisk man, but as John Merchant told him, "as good a bone specialist as you'll find in the country." Denny had made an appointment for Katy.

No sooner was this done than he found himself on fire, the blood crowding about his neck. He walked swiftly, saying: "Well, it can't hurt to know. No harm in knowing. Won't make her any worse."

Yet there was something in this step he had just taken that crept over him with dread; that knocked in a panic at his heart. Suppose the doctor should say she could never be cured—she could never walk? Suppose nothing, nothing could ever be done for her?

All the thought and hope of his life was massed against such a verdict. Katy, with that happy voice of hers, her face prettier than any he had even seen next to Queenie's—Katy, with all her rich, sweet capacity to enjoy—doomed to sit always a spectator and not a participant in life. He didn't want to hear that. He wouldn't hear it, wouldn't accept it.

Rather might it be that the dream would come true—the dream that had been before her like a beautiful star, that had swept with glory through the brightness of her years.

He remembered the day he had hired the horse and buggy and driven to the hospital to bring Katy home. He remembered the life going out of him when the doctor said then, "Walk, lad? Well, I don't know. Well, I don't know. Well, probably not for a long while—probably never again."

And when they brought Katy out in a wheel chair, he couldn't bear to look at her. But she had pressed her face against his arm, and told him the dream of her angel—the angel who came to cure her.

Eleven years she waited for the angel to redeem the promise.

Her faith was a magnetic thing, for it reached out to Denny and won him.

Saturday he would bring her over. And Saturday they were vacating the barn.

Denny had found an apartment with one big living room that he intended to fix up as near like the one they loved as could be. For Stephen was coming with them.

Katy wrote to tell him of the moving and to ask what they should do with the piano, the sinky chairs, the steel engravings and all the bits of color that had given a richness and a charm to their dwelling. Back came an indignant shot:

"Say, where do you people get this stuff? What do you mean asking what I [underlined with many angry dashes] want done with MY things. I thought they were OUR things. Has the day passed when I'm one of Us? If this is a polite way of kicking the foundling out, kindly remember the foundling is now large enough to kick back.

"Kate, you wouldn't write such a letter to the Lord Den, would you? Wouldn't write and ask him what he wanted done with the crazy quilt? Well, I'm hurt about it. Darn it, I thought where you and Denny were would always be home to me. Don't you love your adopted brother any more, Kate?"

And she wrote back, delighted:

"Lovely, Mad Stephen: Course you're one of us. You ain't thrown out or disowned, Stevie, dear. And I only wrote to apprise your royal highness of the momentous exodus forced upon us in your most deplored absence. And to inquire in most becoming and courteous langwidge your noble wishes. Forsooth to learn if it pleased you to join the march, bag and baggage. And don't be angry with me, dear Stephen, if the words I chose are not the ones I should have chosen. For we love you and as long as there's any glory hallelujah left anywheres we'll keep on loving our beautiful Steve."

So the new place would be as the old. There would be no moving done until after Saturday. They would stay with the dear old friend who was a mother to them. Then Denny was to have the furniture brought over and the apartment in order before Katy should see it.

She'd scarcely notice the change. Just wait and get all the effects he had planned. Besides, there was a view from the window that would take the breath clean out of her mouth. She'd really see the water, the boats and the islands now—see them close.



For two or three days Denny was stirred with an uneasy restfulness. By Friday night he was wishing for Saturday to come and be gone. Anything rather than this carping suspense; gee, face the thing and get done with it!

At 1 o'clock he strode into the barn, banging the door with a great show of devil-may-care. "'Lo! Ready, Katy-kid?"

"Yes—but come here, Denny."

He went into her room. She stood leaning against the bureau, putting on her hat, but her hands shook so that the fingers caught in her hair and mussed it.

"Oh, there! Now I have to fix it all over! That's the third time." Her lashes were wet.

"Say, Katy-kid, crying?"

"Laughing, Denny, laughing!"

The way she said that—the look on her face—the very way Queenie had said the same thing the night before she died. Why did he remember it? Gee—superstitious—gee, fellow's pretty soft when a thing like that takes a twist in him!

"You're all worked up, Katy-kid. Here, I'll fix it for you."

And as the tears ran down her cheeks he whipped out a handkerchief, wiped them off, grabbed the powder puff from the bureau and flopped it on her cheeks. "You're all right now; come on. Say, Katy, not afraid your angel's going back on you, are you? What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Everything. You."

"Why me?"

Her lips twitched, but she tried to laugh. "You're the angel, Denny—nobody else. You're just good enough angel for me."

"Aw, you little stupid! Come on, now. Just got time to kiss every corner and crack in the place good-by."

"Isn't it singular, Denny, that you should be taking me to get all well on the very same day we leave behind us this dear old barn?"

"Is it so hard for you to be leaving, Katy?"

She laughed. "I'm dying to see the new place, so that takes away the pang of leaving. And then I've thought this—every change we've made has been a gayer one since that night He put us out."

The old childish antagonism stuck. Neither ever spoke of Matt Borley except as "Him" or "He."

"Your beloved Uncle Matt, Katy-kid? So it was he started us on the road to happiness?"

"But it's true, isn't it? Let me say this, Denny, please. Let

me say it to the end, and it's this. I think it was the luckiest thing that ever happened to me that I fell off that tree. No—honest and true, I mean it. Because otherwise you would have left me with them. Look how different my life has been all these years. And you know, Denny, you've always made me feel in my insidest heart that you were glad to have me. Now, that's beautiful. So it's been me that's helped to make you so."

He ran his handkerchief over his face. "Darn nice in you doing that, Katy-kid, finishing up God's own job."

They stood at the windows where Katy had fixed the curtains that expectant day nearly seven years ago when they had first come to the barn. She opened her hands with a whimsical little move. "I'll write you a letter and tell the rest, Denny. These dear, glorious old walls know it all. Oh, do you feel that this is a majestic day in our lives? I feel as if I were standing on a semicolon and I don't want to move."

"You're scared, Katy-kid? You half wish you weren't going?" He pulled out his watch. "Got to go. Gee—cast your last, last look, girl!"

He lifted her in his arms. She patted his cheek lightly. "Heigh-ho, Denny darlin'—and won't you be glad when I can sally forth to do the Highland fling at Third and Market?"

At the willow tree, he looked back. "Was a good old place, wasn't it? Gee whiz!"

When they were on the train Katy kept her hand folded under his arm. "I feel all trembly, Denny. I feel like laughing."

"S'all right with me if you laugh." But he didn't look at her.

When they got off the boat he called a taxi. Katy twitched his sleeve indignantly. "Extravagant, Mr. Denny!"

He grinned. "Twelve-fifty, Katy-kid. Thousand-dollar man!"

Never had his arms seemed gentler nor stronger than when he lifted her from the taxi to her chair—wheeled her into the building where the doctor's office was. She reached her hand to him in the elevator. He held it.

"Denny—oh, Denny! . . ." Then the nurse greeted them. He carried her to the small, white room. She looked up and laughed, and kept holding his hand.

Then he went outside and waited.

## CHAPTER LXIV

### THE VERDICT

DENNY sat with his legs crossed, a magazine opened before him. He didn't turn a page. His heart seemed to be swelling, to be crowding the breath out of him.

He got up, walked about the room, stopped before a picture of the Bridal Falls. He stared at this, nodding and saying, "Lots of water there. Lot of power there—"

The door from the little white room opened. It was like a bolt catching him in the middle of the back. The nurse. He turned quietly with a terrible effort, demanding, "Well?"

"The doctor hasn't begun the examination yet."

"What? Oh—not yet—oh, I see—" He sat down and picked up the magazine. Now his whole body thundered with pulses that were almost audible in the intense, unnatural quiet of the room.

Suddenly, he heard Katy's laugh—same joyous laugh as yesterday, last week, last month—an astounding, wondrously human thing that reached out as her hand or a look, and loosened the tightness clutching at his throat.

Why in the world was he shaking like this? They couldn't hurt her. Just coming to a doctor wasn't going to doom her.

It seemed to him that he sat there hours, then days, eternity settling about him in a cold, breathless pall.

The door opened again—and again the nurse smiling:

"The doctor will see you, Mr. Brooks."

Then Denny was leaning with both hands at a desk, staring through gray fogs at a face—the young doctor's face. And suddenly the fogs were parted with a luminous shaft, with a lightning flame, that struck into his spirit with a madness—an emotion, terrific, heart-shaking, too big to endure.

"Yes, she'll walk. I'm sure of it. No reason why she shouldn't. In time, of course. It can be done."

Katy walking! Without facing the doctor, he managed to say, "Well, it means a great deal." Then his chin shook. Hell, let the fool doctor think what he liked! He whipped out a

handkerchief, blew his nose with ferocious gusto. "You're sure? She'll walk? Without crutches? Without a cane?"

"That's what I hope. It won't be done in a month, or in two or three."

Denny laughed, put out his hand. "This means a lot!" To all the details of the delicate operation, to all the warnings against impatience, "But you're sure about the walking—sure about that?" He kept blowing his nose, managing cleverly to spread the handkerchief over his face.

Katy was in the reception room, putting on her gloves, taking them off again. Tears streamed down her cheeks.

He didn't know whether it was a laugh or a sob, but she caught his hand and looked up, the cloudless eyes swimming.

He stooped down and kissed her.

When they were in the taxi she pressed her face against his arm, "It's almost more than I can stand, Denny."

Blocks and they said nothing, but Katy kept her hand folded under his. When he looked at her she wiped her eyes.

"Don't you want to walk?" he teased, his arm about her in a tumult of piercing tenderness.

The red lips—red like Queenie's—trembling. "Denny, we won't tell Stephen. I'll just surprise him and some day, without ever saying a word, I'll come so gayly with little buckles on my shoes—I'll come prancing down to meet him. Do you think he'll be glad? Ever and ever so glad?"

"Listen, Katy, you don't think you'll step off the table and walk five minutes after the operation, do you? It might be a year."

"Oh, what's a year after so many? I don't care about that."

"Then why not tell Steve?"

"It would be so much sweeter not to say anything, but just to surprise him. Only you and I do the waiting, Denny. Just you and I."

It was as though fine, warm threads wove their thought together in a web of tenderness; of gladness poignant and deep as pain.

When Denny looked at Katy there came a rush to his throat as though his heart overflowed or as though it discharged foolish tears instead of blood into his veins.

And so these days he found himself stopping at work with a startled, "She'll walk." Each time it came as something new—like a wondrous, incredible revelation.

He would see her beautiful, tall, graceful as Joan—swinging open a door, running over to the piano, standing with her hands airily fluttering the way she had that day he came home and found her with the old lace curtain draped about her, practicing before the broken mirror for the dance of the Flower Fairies.

What a little, slim thing she was then—swift, why, she could beat him running any day, and he was no poke. She'd be that way again.

And in these days, Katy laughed and cried herself to sleep. "Oh, you dear, beautiful angel, I knew you'd do it," she prayed. "But you're not finished yet. Don't go away. Stay—stay."

In the afternoon she sat in the back garden of the little Traynor cottage. She thought: "Shall I write and tell Stephen? No—No! Surprise him! Might he die from being so shocked with joy? Oh, I guess not." She would imagine herself greeting Stephen, taking walks with him. Oh, they would go to the theater, walk to the beach. What fun! What joy! Dear Stephen, who thought she was never to walk—never!

The glory would not be quite complete, nor all the brilliance lighted in the star till Stephen knew.

## CHAPTER LXV

### THE PROMISE

JOAN came late for lunch that day. She laughed a great deal. But he knew she was excited. Finally she told him. It made him gulp because of the trembling of Joan's lips and the way she pretended not to care.

But Joan had lost her job. And it was a good job. The Globe Printing Company was merged with a larger concern. All the employees of the smaller one dismissed.

The Lewises needed Joan's salary. They always needed it. She couldn't afford to be idle—not even a week.

"Why should you be idle?" Denny asked suddenly, his eyes dark and eager. "Say, Joany, why don't you come and help me bridge those stars? Wouldn't that be great though? I've got to have some one. Might it be you?"

Neither of them guessed the momentous thing they did. Joan thought: "Oh, he cares for her—for that Petra." Yes, perhaps. But it was Joany that he asked to come with him to bridge the stars.

"Not much of a salary yet. Only \$115 a month. Could you take it at that, Joany?"

She nodded and kept her eyes down, unwilling that he should see their all too open joy.

And it was Joany that he asked to help him fix the new apartment for that Katy-kid of theirs. Would Joan please buy gay colored drapes in blue and amber and birds and flowers? And would Joan come up to-night and help him hang the pictures and see that all was hunky-dory?

They ate supper together on the sink-board out of the little delicatessen cartons Denny bought. Joan grabbed the last olive. She laughed merrily: "Who'd ever think, Denny, after all these years that you and I would meet again?"

"I thought it, Joan."

Even a little word like that was music for Joan's waiting heart.

They came the next day to the new apartment.

Lady Eglantine took her tufted way across the piano, treading cautiously between two slender Satsuma vases Clay Andrews had brought to Katy. The round, yellow eyes had a stealthy, profound look, as one bent on diplomatic intrigue. She stepped lightly over the keys, the notes of music blending. This was her performance, but there came no applause.

The quiet figure sitting in the big chair near the window offered no laugh; not even a word of caution. So the lady in tortoise-shell fur sauntered over, rubbed her back against the table, complaining with dignity. Finally she jumped into Katy's lap.

Katy laid her cheek on the silky coat. "Shall I or shall I not, Lady Eglantine? Shall I? Oh, tell me what to do? Shall I go and be cured right away? But if I do that we can't go to the mountains, and maybe we won't see this wonderful exposition that's to come, until it's nearly over.

"And we'll worry Denny to death thinking about us while he's up there alone. Oh, I think I'll wait and make sure of this joyous time together first. Shall I?"

Katy faced the biggest problem of her life. There had been a second examination. Gradually she was beginning to realize that time—oh, a long, long while must pass from the moment she entered the hospital until she came out a new Katy, a tall, free Katy, ready for long strolls, for tramps, for all the joys these eleven years had denied.

How she fancied herself in little suède shoes, a black messaline dress and big hat with a pale facing. She'd wear a white gardenia at her shoulder the way Fay Carleton did when she was very smart . . .

But then—how she wanted to go to the mountains! How she wanted to be with Denny through every moment of this heroic enterprise that was to make him the biggest man in all the world—to her, anyway.

"Would Denny rather have me wait? I wonder—wonder. He is afraid. Afraid it's most too good to be true. I can see it in his eyes, dear eyes. Poor Denny!"

It was Katy's first week in the new apartment near Taylor and Washington. A week of joyous surprise from the little white kitchen where Katy could sit at the cabinet and make a cake without moving an inch, to the colorful drapes Joan had

made, the long wicker basket filled with ferns Denny had bought as the crowning masterpiece for Katy's window.

Perhaps the living room wasn't as poetic as the barn, the fireplace not as bold and plaster walls lacked the dark charm of redwood boards. But there was the window—magic window like a frame for the silver crest of Diablo, the inspired sweep of the Berkeley hills and the ferryboats tracking white lanes across blue waters.

Katy sat hours watching, searching for words to string like pearls about all this beauty that was so piercing it brought tears to her eyes. Now she tweaked the cat's ear.

"Little old kitten-cat, don't tell it to a living thing, but just the same, isn't this window worth the whole palace we left? Can't you feel it reaching to the soul in you and shedding something warm and soft and orful tender all over your heart and your throat? We sit here so long we forget about dinner and a man with a savage's appetite. And nothing's decided yet, so Denny'll have to be the one to say."

With all his heart Denny wanted her to wait. He didn't say it, but he hoped with tormented uneasiness. Sometimes he was half sorry they'd gone to the doctor so soon.

For it was now the end of October. The doctor was going away for six weeks or two months. At the very earliest it would be about the end of January before the operation could be performed. This would be at the very time when he was getting ready to launch the actual work on the dam.

He would be in the mountains, scarcely free even for a week-end. Katy would be lying in a plaster-cast, alone day after day. If anything happened—of course, nothing would—but if it did and he not with her? Not a soul with her except perhaps Joan or Aunt Josie. Suppose she would suffer terrible pain? Suppose the bones didn't knit and there had to be another operation?

"Why are you looking at me so mournsome, Denny?" Katy had turned from the piano, drawn by his eyes that were often dark and questioning now as though a fear crept in them. "I know. You're troubled over me, aren't you? Poor Denny!"

"Do you want the operation right off, Katy?"

"You know, Denny, I've several engagements to keep—a French ball, a dance at the Palace. I can't postpone them too long."



"But I'd be away most of the time, Katy. I'd hardly be with you at all."

"I'll be all better before you're finished. . . ."

"Say—Katy, you'll be there maybe six months."

"Oh, surely not that long, Denny. It couldn't be that long."

"But it will be, Katy. You have to be ready for that."

She laughed: "Yes, I know, and sleep on a board like an old fashioned saint and wear a straitjacket. But I don't think of that. I think of afterwards and we'll walk to the top of the mountains and I'll scribble my name and yours, Denny, on the highest peak."

Every time he brought up the subject she went winging off in these glad dreams. Now she resumed quietly. "I've been thinking hard to-day, Denny, and I want to be with you in the country and I want to go to the exposition and I know it might be more than six months and you'd be worried to death, wouldn't you?"

"Well—sure I want to be here."

"So I decided to wait till you're a little freer and don't have to be down there quite so much. That's what I decided to-day, Denny. And besides, I'll have you for my slave a few months longer. That's something! I have your feet to use—why should I worry getting my own under me!"

Katy had caught the tender, fearful anxiety in Denny's tone; in his look. She spoke with an impulsive rush of affection.

"Oh, I couldn't stand to be there alone, Denny. I'd get so frightened and keep longing for you to come. I'd have to hold on to something. And that something's been you so long—well—let's wait—"

The next morning a letter came from Steve. He was working on irrigation projects in the rice fields of the Sacramento Valley.

"Long time since I've snuggled up to the family hearth, dear Kate, so even if it's a stable the Lord Denny has picked this time, it'll seem like the Mansion at the Golden Shore to me. Have the coals flaming in the grate and popcorn in the pan. We'll eat it red hot and smeary with syrup.

"After that, sweet Kate, off for a promenade to all the old haunts of Nob Hill and I'll show you the sites where the silver kings built their thrones in the vanished but princely sixties.

"Write to me, Kate. No letter yesterday. None to-day. 'Tain't right and it's orful blue being alone and lonesome."

Katy smiled—closed her eyes. Should she tell Stephen? Oh, he'd have to wait so long now. But then he wouldn't want her to be in a hospital all alone. He'd wait all right. He'd have to if ever she was to go to the ball—

Katy was living in the thrill this surprise would bring to Stephen. She pictured the laughter in his eyes—the astonished joy in the fine, breezy face.

Yet almost without emotion she told the news to Clay Andrews. He was still in the city—working with the branch office of his father's bonding house. He had come out for a month. That was in spring. Now it was autumn. Yet he remained.

A day or two after Katy made her decision to wait he returned from a trip to Los Angeles. The middle of the morning—a soft, clear day, he dropped in to see the new place, to bring her a box of chocolates and a pair of sapphire cuff pins.

He stood before her in his excited, earnest way.

"Katy—why, you seem radiant! Is it because I've been away that I notice it?"

She laughed. "Who wouldn't be—Clay—dear old Clay. I'm to walk—I tell you, I'm to walk, to dance," she went on full of gayety.

His eyes seemed to leap with fire—a white, tense light on the sharp face. But he said nothing. Finally he walked over to the window, standing there rigid, motionless.

"Katy—why"—he came back to her, spent, breathless, as though he had been running. "Oh, Katy."

That was all he said, though he kept staring at her, his folded arms clinched against his side.

When he was leaving he held both her hands. "Katy—dearest—oh, well." He pressed his face against her hands. "You know all that I can say. You know I love you. I love you, and if you were helpless, and you aren't—still I would love you. If you were blind, dear little Katy, I would give you my life if it would make you happier."

Suddenly he dropped her hands. "Katy, give me a promise?"

"What, Clay? Oh, I will do anything I can for you—anything."

"Then, if I'm not here, will you write and tell me when this

operation is to be? Will you let me be near you then? If you need anything, will you let me give it to you? Only this, Katy. Give me one chance to serve you. Just one."

Katy dropped her eyes because his face was drawn, ashen.

"I will, Clay—oh, truly I will."

Long after he was gone she felt the burning lips on her hands. "Poor, dear Clay. Will he be so broken hearted? Does he know? He would take me even if never, never could I walk."

## CHAPTER LXVI

### PETRA'S VISIT

"HELLO, there, Diddle!" The gay voice brought an image of the bright, saucy face, the hair that Denny loved to feel, soft, perfumed, against his chin. "Come and sip tea with me, lad, at 4:30 in our salon."

"Can't make it that early."

"Oh, but this is important."

"Will a little later do?" Denny sought a tone midway between business and banter. He didn't wish Joan to guess that he was talking to a girl—to Petra.

And Joan was filing letters at a desk two feet from him, her profile toward him. He could see the black lashes, straight and very long, against her cheek. She appeared deaf and absorbed.

"Will five o'clock do?"

Back came the high, petulant treble distinctly audible two or three feet from the receiver, "What's the matter, Diddle? Have you a cold? Or are you short on words to-day? And haven't I a name?"

Denny laughed in a hurried, self-conscious manner, repeating, "Well, now! How's five o'clock?"

As he hung up he stole a covert glance at Joan, thought he saw a faint trembling on the curved lips. He was impelled to speak to her, to show her some favor.

She was standing at the cabinet. Even in her quiet there was an eagerness; a swift grace in the long, slim lines of her figure. It was pleasant having Joan there. She handled a mass of difficult work—typing contracts, endless specifications, reports to the irrigation district—without apparent effort, all the while giving the impression of being on a holiday, of being so young and dewy-eyed, with her dark hair drawn back austere and a flower in her coat.

"Say, Joan, you like marigolds?"

Without turning she glanced at the gaudy flower. She was smiling. He could see it plainly now. "Apropos of what, sir?"

"Well, you're wearing one. They become you."

"Yes—there's an affinity between us. We're both poor and proud. Like to see something?" She came over with her naïve candor. "Isn't he a love?"

A picture of a youngster of eight or ten—freckles, two big teeth showing in a grin, hands in his pockets—kid like Denny himself was yesterday. Joan's face glowed. "And read this, Denny." She brought out a wrinkled bit of scratch paper with letters sloping backwards and forwards and scrawled all over the sheet.

"Dear Old Jo:

"You're a brick. Can't think how yer guessed I ben wanting an air rifle ever so long. Gosh, this is a beaut and say, what do you think, I beat all the other fellers bustin' windows in Flaherty's house. And I don't know what's gonna happen fer I never got a wish before. They're down to ther grandmuther's ranch and so er course, it don't make no difference to them. But I wouldn't say nuthin' about it to ma cause the fellers might ketch it and yer know ma's still got all them queer idears of hers. She ain't like you, Jo. Gosh, why don't yer come home? Mary thinks she's an orful lot. She gives me a turrible pain. I got poor in deportment and spellin' and grammar, but my pollywogs lived and all the other kids' are dead and I got five frogs now and ten warts and I stole a piece of beefsteak and buried it so I guess I'll get rid of the warts and I beat all the other fellers counting niggers and touching humpbacks, and one of them gimme a crack in the eye but that was after I touched the hump so it didn't hurt me none. Well, I guess I've tole you all the news except that there was a fire on our roof and Mrs. Wilcox dropped down dead. Dead as she could be and stayed there two days before they ketched her in the kitchen with the door locked. And so I thank you again, Jo, and send you my picture and wisht to goodness you'd come home. Your effectshun brother,

"BURKE LEWIS."

Denny got half way through and mused, remembering frantic, appealing letters he had sent to Sid. "Gee—the poor kid!"

"That's what I think, Denny. Little kid like that and never gets a thing he wants. Mother said I should have sent a sweater or stockings. Would you?"

"I should say not! Suppose a kid does bust a few windows? What made you think of the gun, Joan?"

"Why, in every letter he's talked of one. I knew he wanted it. And I think it's terrible for youngsters to long and long and never get the least thing they ask for. You know once when I was about twelve, I saved up \$3.10 and it was to buy a toy grocery store. The price was \$4. Then, one day my mother came and asked me for the little bank because she had to have the money. Just had to have it."

Joan laughed, a catch in her voice. "I could sit down and cry over that yet. I never got the grocery store and I never got the money back. It's been the same way," she broke off. "Well, I believe in a kid having fun even if he has holes in his stockings."

Denny's chin set. "And I had \$2 once, and a big brute grabbed me by the ear and knocked it out of me." He was talking through his teeth, more furious than the day he had shaken his fists after Matt Borley's hulking form.

Joan dashed her hand across her eyes and laughed, "We're a pair of fools, Denny."

He grinned boyishly, shoved the drawing off his desk toward her. "There's the way the dam will look when it's finished. Joan, remember the day you said an engineer had a chance to be a missionary?"

"Why fling the sins of my youth in my teeth? But what makes you think of missionaries?"

"This job. It's like that. The more I work on it, the deeper it gets me. Look, we eliminate conflict. The same thing can be done all over the state."

Denny went out with a light hearted, "Guess it's a day, Joan. Why don't you quit, now?" The swagger was in his mind. Joyous talking to Joan. How quickly she grasped what he had to say. Nice to hear her answer: "You'll do it, of course," just as though he were a god. She expected him to achieve as greatly as he willed. He would, too. She made him feel like that.

Joan picked up the plans, sorted them as though they were living things. Some one was coming in. Steps toward her, then a startled, "Oh! Miss Lewis?"

The papers fluttered as though a breeze swished them. Joan knew her face was absurdly crimson, but she turned quietly, "How do you do, Miss Channing?"

Petra's dimples vanished. The black brows were arched. "Oh, very well, thank you. Mr. Brooks isn't gone?"

"Just this moment left."

"Why, it's only half past four. Isn't he coming back?"

"I think not."

"I think I'll wait a few moments." She sauntered over to Denny's chair, toyed with the paper cutter. Then she asked sweetly, "Do you like working here, Miss Lewis?"

"Very much. The work is fascinating. Would you like to see this photograph of the canyon where the dam is to be?" Joan took over the picture. "See, they've drawn in the site of the power house."

Petra glanced at it. "I've heard nothing but that dam and power house for the last three months. Denny argued so much before I agreed to have him take it—"

Joan felt as though she were slapped and told to sit quiet and hold her tongue for the rest of the day.

"It's all Greek to me, but I suppose you've been working so long at it that you get something out of it."

"Just a month," Joan offered guilelessly. "I never was in an engineer's office before."

"Oh, so? It's pleasant here, isn't it? You and Mr. Brooks are such old friends, I believe." Petra smiled but her eyes took in every detail of Joan's face. They drew back a little from the steady glance.

Joan picked up the photograph. "Yes, we are friends."

"And he has such brilliant ideas, hasn't he? I suppose you've noticed that?"

Joan laughed, "Oh, yes! Hasn't he?" She wouldn't follow Petra's lead.

"Well, I suppose he's gone for good after I go and think up this lovely surprise. That's the way with a man and they tell us we are illogical." She got up slowly. "It's been awfully pleasant meeting you, Miss Lewis. I don't know why he needed to leave so early."

She kept toying with the paper cutter, talking on and on.

Suddenly, Joan was aware of the door opening, Denny standing flushed, self-conscious, then rushing over with a brisk: "Well, here's luck. Come for me, Petra?"

## CHAPTER LXVII

### THREE GIRLS AND LOVE

PETRA smiled, tapped her wrist watch. "I came down to surprise you"—she glanced up with the wicked gleam on her mouth—"and I guess I succeeded."

Denny took her arm. "You sure did!" A dark flush bounded across the clear skin. "Say, Joan, don't stick around any longer. It's almost five now."

"All right. I'm about finished."

Young and light-hearted, the pair of them. Summer and the sun.

"Good-by, Miss Lewis!" Petra called. "I'll drop in again to see you when Diddle's not around."

A light seemed to pass with their going, left a hush like the chill of twilight. Joan sat very still, the maps and photographs before her. She drew down her lip, bit it, smiled, then, with an intense quietude, laid the papers in a long drawer, moved to the closet, stood motionless before the mirror just above the washstand.

In the finely chiseled features, the passionate purity of eyes and proud, sensitive mouth she saw no charm, no beauty. She closed her eyes against the white, trembling image.

"It's right! I'm glad. I AM glad!" Petra's gay assurance rippled through her memory—the golden hair, the black brows. "No wonder! Like a flower—it's right."

She leaned against the wall, covered her face, fighting against a warm, confused rush of self-pity. This was like the day her mother had come, taken the bank from her and said, "Joan, child, you must be brave."

"Yes, brave!"

But Joan remembered that night on the hillside—that holy sweetness of his hands framing her face—his young, sweet lips on hers—and all her heart claimed him.

But he was—gone out with Petra, who was a flower blooming in the sun and demanding to be noticed. Petra never allowed Denny to forget that she had a cool, white hand like



silk, that her hair was soft against his face and her throat was a warm curve where his mouth might loiter.

Even in a moment of uncertainty and irritation like now, he was intimately conscious of her eyes flirting with his, her lips challenging him. But he thought, "What is she going to say? Why the deuce didn't I tell her about Joan?"

Petra didn't keep him long in suspense.

She glanced mischievously at him as she took the wheel. "I came to give Diddle a surprise and he had a better one there for me."

"You mean Joan? I didn't even think about it."

She pursed her lips, blew lightly as though whistling away a feather. "She's quite an ornament to the office. But do you think it looks good?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, she gives a flirtatious air to the place and wearing flowers. I don't think a young man can afford to have that . . ."

"Bunk! The last thing in the world any one would ever say of Joan is flirtatious. She never thinks of anything outside of the work."

Petra flashed a sidelong glance at him, "And the worker? I think he comes in for a few of the thoughts."

"Oh, I'm the knock'em dead kid, Petra. One look and they fall."

She laughed. He knew the issue was not closed. They were half finished with their tea, when in a subtle way she referred to it. Her cup was empty. She leaned over and sipped from his. "Oh, you like things sweet!"

He kissed her. She grew serious, lowering her head, holding her hands before her, studying them. "Dendiddle, while you're away do you care if I go out with Rudy Grimm and others?"

"Well, of course, I don't expect you to stay home, Petra."

"But do you care? Would you be glad if I didn't?"

He was uncertain what answer to make and felt a nervous warm throbbing at his temples. "Don't flatter me so much, Petra."

"No—but this is the way I figure: if people care they shouldn't be frittering with others. Do you think a man should go a great deal with one girl and then play around with others?"

Denny laughed. "I'm for constancy first and last."

"Well, I'm glad we figure it the same way, because I've decided not to go out except when you come down to take me. Shall we have it that way?"

There came a tightening at his heart—half fear, half exultance. Underneath was an instinctive longing to escape; to postpone. And yet he wanted her head just where it was—against him so that his lips were in her hair. "You'll get lonesome, Petra. Better not make rash promises."

"No. The others bore me. They don't count. Do they with you?"

She raised her head until it was flung back against his shoulder, courting him with its curves, its softness. He pressed his mouth against her throat. "There are no others."

That night Katy heard him whistling in his room, breaking off suddenly. After a pause he took up the tune. Denny felt like that: one moment a surcharge of warm emotion poured like a tide over him; then an ebb, a reluctance, a fear. He thought, "What now? What the deuce!" There would come a hotness like a band about his neck.

"He's in love, truly now," Katy thought when she caught him pausing suddenly over the dishes, grinning, resting his weight on his fists. She whispered, "Golden Petra?"

His face flamed. "You're darn smart. Say, Katy—"

"She's a darling, Denny?"

"Come on, now, dry the dishes."

All the next day and the day after when he was gone to the mountains for a week she thought about it. "It's love. Dear Denny. Oh, let him be happy! Only that. And now he won't need to stop for me. How good—how joyous this is!"

Stephen came home for his promised visit. A tumult of happiness rushed upon her. She'd tell him the wondrous news of the promised cure—oh, she must!

And Stephen was gayer—like a youngster to be home again.

"Lord—why didn't Den wait a day. I'm hungry to see him. Kate—let me look. By the Lord, handsomer than ever. Did you two miss me?" He said that often.

There were the promised walks, Stephen taking round-about turns to avoid the hills, brazenly stopping before club-houses and apartments and entering into delightful histories of the passing of the old splendid mansions.

"Kate—no place like home when you're the lady of the hearth. I've dreamed about this place."

"And me too, Stevie?"

"Waking or sleeping, Kate."

Just one day more—this night he must go. It was late afternoon. Rain falling—quiet November rain . . . a fire at the grate.

"Lord, I hate to go." He was sitting on the floor at her feet as he used to in the barn on Friday nights when all the fellows gathered. Katy with her hands clasped was laughing.

"Kate, you've got something up your sleeve. What is it?"

"A beautiful white arm, Stephen."

"I believe that all right. But what's the big laugh?"

"Something supernatural that's going to happen. Something wondrous."

"Don't I come in on it, Kate?"

"Oh, indeed you do. That's what makes it so fine."

"Well, tell me then."

"Oh, before so very long. But, Stephen, remember when you saved all the dance programs for me and I loved the little crosses opposite the girls you loved? And remember you were to take me to a dance and to the French ball? Now did you mean it, I wonder?"

Stephen lowered his head. "Of course I meant it."

"That's all I wanted to know, because I've changed my mind about the French ball. I think I'll go to the Mardi Gras. Now will that be all right with you?"

She looked down at him. The handsome face and sunny eyes were struck with pain. Katy covered it with her hand. "Oh, you gloomy old Steve! Don't make sad eyes at me. I'm asking a most dear and personal question. Do we or do we not go to the Mardi Gras? Because I wish to think up a costume."

"Dear Kate—think up the costume. You'll have the escort."

"A year from next time, Steve. I'm to walk then."

He kept his face turned from her. She laughed to herself. "He thinks it's never to be. Stephen is sure I'm just to sit here like this forever. Will he be glad? Oh, will he almost die of gladness when I do truly come walking down to meet him?"

The sadness remained with him. When he was leaving he

kept saying, "Dear Kate, good-by," and looking at her with a long, brooding tenderness and holding her hands till she laughed.

Then he kissed her, not in the quick, off-hand way, but as though he wished to say something or as though it were a long, long parting.

## CHAPTER LXVIII

### THE OFFER

"HENRY STODDARD! What in the world can he want?" Denny turned the memorandum Joan had given him. "Did he say?"

"No. But he asked that you would phone if you couldn't make it at two."

"Humph! Know who he is, don't you? Chief engineer of the Consolidated Power Companies. The big bug in hydro-electric. Only draws a cool hundred thousand a year. Humph!"

"You'll go and see him, won't you?"

"Well, yes."

But what could he want? Suspense that was half young pride lit an excitement in Denny's mind. Stoddard sending for him. Stoddard—well—

Stoddard was a big wide-shouldered man with thick sandy hair, sandy skin, a sharp jaw and a deep furrow between his small, piercing eyes. He was sitting at a flat top desk, pulling at his watch fob, when Denny entered.

He nodded, then began very abruptly, "Merchant tells me you left him to take over this Twin Falls Irrigation project. Merchant and I are old friends."

Denny was about to make some pleasant rejoinder when Stoddard swung round, pulled some maps from a drawer, talking as he did. "I understand you're getting ready to launch the construction?"

"Yes—if the weather's right." And Denny wondered where this was leading.

Stoddard tapped his open hand on the maps. "Well, of course, you know we've been fighting over this site for the last five years. We were there first. The courts haven't looked at it in the same way. So we're licked on that score."

"Why is he saying these things to me?" Denny thought.

"What's up?" The question showed in his face. Stoddard answered it.

"We need that site. Here's our proposition in a nutshell."

They needed the site of Denny's magnificent achievement. He felt as though a sheet of flame whipped before him. "I have no authority to take up any proposition, Mr. Stoddard."

Stoddard brushed his hand. "I know that, Mr. Brooks. I don't expect you to take up the proposition. We only want a hearing—a chance to present this offer to the irrigation people. The lawyers can't arrange it. The irrigation board thinks every corporation is out to knife them. But you, as an engineer, can appreciate this."

He opened the maps. "Here our dam No. 1, just to the north of you, is entirely completed; dam No. 2 is half finished. We've spent more than a million dollars on the two projects. Here's our plan: We'll turn over these dams complete in exchange for the site. That's an enormous figure. And these dams of ours are every bit as good for the purpose of your people. They're getting a gift of a million dollars. It amounts to that. You can see the advantages."

Denny's breath came quick and hot. Stoddard pointed out the dams. "That will give them all the water they can possibly use—more than 125,000 acre feet."

"We count on retaining 200,000 behind our dam. We need that amount if there's to be any expansion. The district has grown within the last few months."

"Yes, but there's not going to be any such expansion as the farmers count on. They won't require any such volume of water for years. As an engineer you can, of course, appreciate that."

"Well, all the preliminary work is done. There's been all that cost."

"But you can see the worth of this offer we make, Mr. Brooks. We only want to get this before the farmers. If it's only the reduction of the tax per acre they ought to jump at it. Here are these dams of ours that will serve their purpose completely."

"Now we simply want to get this proposition before the board. You can present it to them on its merits. They're getting a million dollars for a site that is valuable only because it is a connecting link between our two chains. For the farmers it's not one whit better than the ones we exchange."

"Yes, I know your dams." Denny was somewhat unnerved with the surprise of this offer. He felt like a youngster from whom a new, cherished toy is coaxed by an elder.

"Well," Stoddard said quietly, "I drew the plans myself so I can vouch for them. You can see that this is handing them a gold mine. But the farmers are hostile to us. They think there's a nigger in it if it comes from us. That's why I've asked you to take it up with them. They can draw the contract any way they like. What do you think?"

"I don't know, Mr. Stoddard. It's not up to me at all. I'd have to study the question."

"But you can see, of course, that it's worth consideration. We understand that in asking you to put this up to them you'll be out the job. We've taken that into consideration. Well," he paused, "you won't be the loser. Here's the situation." Stoddard pointed to the map of the district. "Your irrigation canals can connect with our dams with very little change in the general plan. See here—" He began emphasizing his points, the tremendous profit to the farmers, the value of the sites offered in exchange.

Denny listened, scarcely offering a word, but his brain raced with objections, questions, a rising, unreasonable anger. He wanted to shout, "You go to the devil! You think you've got a schoolboy here, and you can ram this million-dollar stuff down my throat. Bunk!"

"Well, will you take it up with the board, Mr. Brooks? I'll want to hear from you as soon as possible."

"I'm somewhat bound to submit it to them. Yes. They're the judges. If they want to accept your proposition."

"You don't seem to think so favorably of it?"

"They need more water than your dams will give them."

"Even granting that—there's a lot of the water they can have when we're finished with it. And with a million dollars as a start, they're away ahead. We're convinced that they'll see it that way. This is a wonderful proposition. You realize that no concern would make such an offer except as a final measure? You'll put it up to them?"

"Yes, I'll do that, Mr. Stoddard."

"Let me say this, Mr. Brooks. John Merchant and I have talked about you. We're always needing young blood. We can give you better opportunities than you'll get with a bunch of farmers. They're the most unreasonable set. You'll find that out before you've had many dealings with them . . ." He began talking in a friendly, magnetic way, going back over some of his own early experiences, saying: "If you've got big

stuff in you, you want to get in with the people who are doing the big things."

Denny went out from the interview in a burning uncertainty. Was this a good thing for the farmers? Was it an honest offer: Did Stoddard mean anything by that slow, "You won't be the loser."

He swung with such flushed, suppressed excitement into the office Joan stopped typing, asking with quick eagerness, "What was it? Something big?"

He sat down at her desk, grabbed a piece of paper, made a sketch. "Take a squint, Joan." He hurled Stoddard's proposition at her. "What do you think?"

She sat silent.

"Well?"

"If you can't judge, Denny, how can I? But it seems rather late for them to make the offer, doesn't it?"

"Yes—but you see, they thought they could win by fighting. You know those fellows all think the world belongs to the one who can grab it."

He took the paper and rolled it between his hands. "I'm against it. It sounds good, but it isn't. But the hicks will fall for the million-dollar talk."

Denny sent a detailed report of his interview and the proposition made by Henry Stoddard to Berne Melrose, cattleman and head of the Twin Falls irrigation project.

"Well, there goes my life, Joan," he laughed as he pounded the stamp down with his fist. Yet he was possessed with nervousness, feeling that this thing he did was a solemn and crucial affair.

The next afternoon when he returned from lunch a stocky, shiny-faced man with yellow eyebrows, a forward stomach and a very husked, confidential voice, waited in the office. He hurried over and sought Denny's hand. "Oh, Mr. Brooks, I'm Dunlap, James Dunlap, attorney for the Twin Falls. You know the name?"

Denny nodded, wishing Mr. Dunlap's soft, small hand would cease squeezing and shaking his. The lawyer, with a misgiving look at Joan and an increased hush in his tone, whispered, "You've talked to Stoddard?"

"He talked to me," Denny answered rather brusquely. He was not impressed with Mr. Dunlap's voice or his hand or his portly figure.



Mr. Dunlap pulled out his watch, scanned it as though he had a very important engagement, then went on in his whispering voice: "It's—why, it's amazing. After five years to come through like this!"

"Do you think the farmers will take it?"

"Take it? Why, it's—it's velvet for us. Take it?" He laughed. It jarred unpleasantly on Denny's ears. "Take it? Why, it's taken—it's taken! That is, if you and I say so."

## CHAPTER LXIX

### LAWYER'S STAND

FOR half an hour James Dunlap, lawyer for the Twin Falls irrigation district, sent his whispering, confidential voice against Denny's ears.

Half an hour Denny listened with a growing and irritable impatience. When the hushed conference was over an uneasy sense of conspiracy loitered in his thoughts.

For the rest of the afternoon he could feel the man sitting next him, his hand cupped over his mouth, his eyes now and then turned quickly to Joan, quickly back, and all the while his hissing sentences winding in circles through Denny's head.

"I don't see what you and I have to say about it, Mr. Dunlap," he began.

"Well," he opened and closed the soft, rosy palms, "naturally they'll take our advice. Why, it's—it's such an amazing proposition. You know, I've been trying to compromise this fight for the last five years. We've beaten them. Now they come to these—these amazing terms."

"You're in favor of accepting?"

The shiny face and whispering voice came a trifle nearer to Denny. "It strikes me as an all around victory—why, a triumph for our people. I'm enthusiastic over the amazing thing. Of course, I can see that—well, that it isn't quite so agreeable from your point of view. Naturally your interested in the work you've started."

"That doesn't figure, Mr. Dunlap!"

Mr. Dunlap was bald, but he had plenty of coarse, yellow hair in his eyebrows. He cocked the right one, gave his short, jarring laugh. "You misunderstand. I mean—why, I mean that in your place I'd be heart and soul in the project and would hate to let it go. Just the joy in work, you know. So from that standpoint I can't expect you to share my—my satisfaction at this outcome of the fight. As far as our people go there's—well, there's no question about it. That is, well, in my opinion, we should accept."

Denny's temples throbbed. He answered quietly, "Their

dam won't give us enough water. Little more than half enough."

"That is if we grow up in a week instead of in a score of years. But of course, you're the engineer. You understand more than I do, but—well, it's—it's this way: I know the district. They'll have water enough with these dams for the next ten or fifteen years. By that time—well, there are other sites they can add. Why, a million dollars is an—amazing proposition. It's wonderful. I would certainly recommend it, but I don't like to oppose you. That's—well, that's why I came in here."

"If you want to recommend it, Mr. Dunlap, do so."

"But I'd like to get your point of view, Mr. Brooks. I don't want to make a recommendation that wouldn't be wise. We'll have to pull together. Here's the way I look at it—" Mr. Dunlap suddenly dropped his pauses, let his eyebrow settle into its natural place and a brisk note entered his voice.

"The Consolidated needs this site. It's practically indispensable and between ourselves," he cupped his hand over his mouth, cast a hasty glance at Joan, "between ourselves, they had as good a title to it as we did. They won in two courts, lost in the last. But they need it and are willing to pay a fabulous price. We cash in on their need.

"Now, I've fought this corporation for five years, but I'm not against power development, exactly. I think it's necessary for our industrial growth. So I don't want to block them just for the sake of old scores. That's all turning down their proposition amounts to, Mr. Brooks. It's blocking an immense development scheme for a petty grudge. It's cutting off our own nose to spite our face."

Denny felt a choking hotness. Each time he started to speak the lawyer took up the thread of his thought and twisted it in and out between his own arguments. Clearly the completed dams were the biggest and most amazing—he used the word so often Denny began to wait for it—the most amazing improvement the district could possibly acquire and without any expenditure. Finally he asked: "What is your view, Mr. Brooks? Perhaps you can convince me."

"My views are brief, Mr. Dunlap. First, I believe these dams inadequate. Second, I believe the farmers and Berne Melrose better judges of their needs than either you or I or Mr. Stoddard."

Dunlap, with his chin on his hand, nodded. "Terse—why, that's downright terse." He kept nodding. "But you don't know the farmers in this instance and you don't understand their hostility to this corporation. If the Consolidated handed them a crystal lake they'd swear it was sewage.

"And as for the dams—why, we differ there. You should be the better judge. I'll look into it. Well, we needn't decide yet. I'll drop in again in a day or two. That'll be plenty of time to make any report."

"I've already sent a report."

Dunlap was standing. At Denny's answer his light blue eyes focused sharply. "Well, you've sent it already?"

"Yes."

"And I suppose you advised against it?"

"I merely reported the offer."

"I see," he rubbed his sleeve with a kind of happy caress over the brim of his hat. "Well, maybe you're right about the dams being inadequate. I'll admit I was captivated by Stoddard's offer, but I don't want to recommend acceptance if we'll be sorry about it later. I want to look into it carefully. A million dollars is an amazing concession but money won't grow crops without water. Well—we'll have to pull together on this, Brooks."

Denny went back to his desk, whispers in his ears. He took out plans, put them back, a feeling of uncertainty and confusion in his head. Finally he turned to Joan.

She was at her typewriter, her dark hair drawn clear from her forehead. She looked tired, her face, like a pale flower balancing on the long slender stem of her neck.

"What did you think of him?"

"I didn't like him."

"There may be some truth in what he says, though. I don't want to block the Consolidated just for the sake of blocking them."

"No—but if this site they offer is so fine and so near to ours why won't it serve their purpose? If their site is such a gold mine why do they wish to exchange it for ours?"

"Oh, they don't give a darn about us. They've got their own interests to serve. The power companies have got to have water and the food growers have got to have it. If they came together and built reservoirs, there'd be enough; but instead, the two interests are running a crazy race, grabbing at the least

expense all the rivers they can harness and sending them into their own channels. Whichever wins, the state loses."

"But that's the world's way, Denny. Each man cuts his own trail and it doesn't matter whether he hews through trees or hearts of people as long as he gets there."

She had her hands clasped on her typewriter and was glancing upward at Denny. It struck him that he had never seen eyes so poignant and deep; never a forehead so white. She seemed different to-day—gentle, quiet. He thought her beautiful. Her beauty stirred him. Not as Petra's—a perfume in his senses—but a flame within his thought—white, eager flame touching from Joan's eyes to Denny's heart.

"I don't know what to do on this, Joan. I don't know a great deal about their dams."

"Perhaps the farmers do, Denny. Anyway, isn't this Mr. Dunlap coming in again?"

Mr. Dunlap appeared the next day with elaborate figures and reports on the stream flow behind dam No. 1 and dam No. 2. He was more enthusiastic, more portly, more confidential. Denny could actually feel the swish of his steady whispers about his ears.

"So—there's no question about that, is there, Brooks? By heaven, we're cashing in with a vengeance, turning this trick for the board. I think—well, I think we ought to recommend it. But then—well, where do you stand?"

By the time Dunlap made his fourth visit Denny's own convictions were secure. The exchange would be ruinous to the farmers. He said so to the lawyer. Dunlap's eyes drew sharp.

"Well," he said, nodding slowly, shaking Denny's hand in his soft palm. "Maybe you're right. I'll think it over."

"The devil you will!" Denny's thought flung after him. He dictated an incisive, vehement letter to Berne Melrose, urging emphatically the rejection of the Consolidated Companies' proposition.

Joan typed the fiery message with a secret delight. The letter was never sent—odd thread in the web of circumstance.

## CHAPTER LXX

### AT THE DAM

RESTLESS, impatient days followed Denny's interview with the big engineer. Would the irrigation board accept Stoddard's proposition? Would they doom the great project that had become the consuming interest of Denny's life?

He waited uneasily the answer to his report. It came on the afternoon of the lawyer's fourth visit and just as Joan finished Denny's letter advising against acceptance. The opening paragraph told the story.

"We're looking for water, not for cement walls. The Consolidated Dams are first rate. All they lack is the big stream flow behind them. We're not in the market to dispose of our site or to consider any million-dollar offers. This is the answer of Twin Falls to Mr. Henry Stoddard."

Denny dropped the letter on Joan's desk. His grin broke into a laugh. "Didn't know I cared so much!"

He noticed her fingers that were slim and white, tremble as she took the letter. "You cared, too, Joan?"

Without raising her eyes, she curled her lip in an odd humorous twinkle. "Thanks for letting me in on it! This is a pretty crisp letter from a bunch of farmers, isn't it? Almost as flashing a pen as you swing yourself."

"We won't need to send that letter now."

"Oh, I'd send it! Suppose it had been mailed?"

"But there's no need now. The thing is decided."

Joan took the envelope from the wire basket, handled it regretfully. "It's a shame to waste a fine fury like that. Well—" She tore it in two, dropped it in the waste basket. "There goes our rage against James Dunlap, attorney at law."

Toward the end of the week Mr. Dunlap, his shiny face red with excitement, came into the office. "I've just been talking to Mapp. You know? Engineer for the Central Valley Company. Well—I've come to the conclusion we better squash this project."

"Yes?" Denny said quietly, getting a relish from Dunlap's importance.

"Yes. I've written Melrose, stating the objections—stating them vigorously."

"That's fine. When did you send the letter?"

"This morning." A gust of laughter swept into Denny's throat. He could scarcely check it. "I suppose they'll be glad to have their decision affirmed, Mr. Dunlap. They turned down the proposition five days ago. I told Stoddard."

Dunlap cocked his bushy, yellow eyebrow. "So!" He rubbed his soft palms together. "Why—why, then it's all right. You'll soon begin construction?"

"Yes."

"Well, I guess there won't be much work for me to do then." He glanced about the room, his eyes resting on Joan. "Oh, by the way, Mr. Brooks, there's an amazing mass of documents belonging to our people . . . reports, maps, testimony. We want to keep it. I haven't room in my office. If I send up the cabinet can you give it room?"

"Yes—if it's necessary to keep it."

"Very necessary. Of course, it needs to be indexed. Perhaps later on the young lady will have time to attend to it."

Denny turned brusquely, a flare of anger reddening his face. He didn't wish Joan to be called "the young lady" by James Dunlap.

"Miss Lewis is extremely busy, Mr. Dunlap. She'll have no time. I have more work than she can do."

"Well—very well—just a suggestion. It's all for the interest of our people, you know. I'll have it arranged. No harm done. I merely thought things would slacken up when you're away. If I'm not in again before you leave, good luck, Mr. Brooks."

There came a twinkle of humor to Joan's face.

"Say, Joan," Denny's teeth were shut, "if he comes in here while I'm gone, tell him to get out. You're not supposed to do work for him."

She pinned back the white, pleated cuff. He wished she would raise her eyes so that he could tell whether she was laughing. "I'll do that, Denny."

The long black lashes against the white of her skin gave a piquant touch to the chasteness of her face. The twinkle deepened.

"I'd love to act the duchess and show Dunlap the door."

He thought, "You could do it!" And he kept looking down

at her, wondering if she were never to raise her eyes again. When she did suddenly, they were so deep, such vivid things, they seemed to touch him. He went back to his desk, asking himself, "Why did I do that? Why did I want to look at her?"

Dunlap gave no trouble in the next weeks. And Denny was so rushed before leaving he didn't think again of him. He was in a fever to be started.

It was the end of January, 1915—golden days of a charmed spring coming lightly—going happily. Just the kind of weather he would have conjured.

The work started—gangs of men under him, the ridges echoing in this nippy, spring air with the chugging of steam shovels, the harsh voice of the derricks, gong of ax and pick. Denny in blue shirt and overalls swinging about with the thrill of a creator. This was his work.

When he passed through the lofty trees roofing the construction camp, saw the men in gangs of 350 filing into the mess hall, he was stirred. The power he had dreamed to possess was his.

Once he watched the huge cranes reaching down like titans in some primeval war, lifting earth, rock, gravel from the stream bed where later the dam would rise. And he felt as he had that summer when the young magnificent virility of the mountains had first laid hold upon his spirit. Here in these rugged, upflung peaks was the setting for man to come and hold the play—stupendous drama, mighty as the scene. A sense of responsibility grew in him.

"It's almost as though this state were given to us as a trust," he said one night to Katy; "given us to enjoy and then to hand on richer and more beautiful to those who follow. That's why no one interest or group has the right to develop in a way that is going to cripple the whole."

"It's the same way all through life, isn't it, Denny? No one, even in his own thought, has a right to do a thing that done by every one would bring a blight like the pest of the locusts." She laughed as she always did when pictures came to her vivid imagination.

He sat at her feet outside their cabin, the quiet stealing into his mind, steeping it with a joy in the still music of the ridges. Something of his thought, Katy spoke.

"I'd rather be here, Denny, in this sweet evening hush than



lying in a hospital. But see that mountain over there—the blue one. That’s the one we’ll climb. It’s my very own. Doesn’t it seem alive? Brooding, immense, tender, like some giant mother dreaming peace for her children. All the cliffs are living, glorious presences. That’s the way they seem to me.”

Finally she leaned over, teasing, “Denny, you’re mighty proud?”

He laughed. To no one but Katy would he have admitted the enormous thrill the job gave him. Sometimes the work seemed to go too easily. And then he felt that he could do bigger things—far bigger.

One day Berne Melrose drove up to look over the construction. Melrose was a Viking type—big as the out-of-doors—a millionaire cattleman, vigorous and direct as the letter he had written. Denny told him how smoothly the work went. He was six feet four. He looked down at Denny with a hearty, “That’s good, lad, but you’re not finished yet.”

Berne Melrose had been through five years of fighting.

## CHAPTER LXXI

PEDRO FRANCITA

MELROSE was like the upright pines, rugged, erect, free. But like the pines, he was old.

Or so Denny thought, listening to his cautions. Not finished yet—well, of course, but here was the master plan. No hitch possible. Down from the mountains the water poured in streams of silver. Behind the wall he would fling across this gorge, it would be locked—a pool of wealth that men would tap and turn into food and power.

Besides, what did a cattleman know of engineering?

"Well—the Bear Creek folks had a narrow escape. Their temporary dam wasn't high enough. 'Long came a hot spell that melted tons of snow. Four inches more and the water would have stormed over the dam back to its old channel, ruining a million dollars' worth of excavation and a million dollars' worth of time."

"No danger of that here."

"Can't be too sure of anything."

To himself, Denny laughed.

One evening, a few weeks after Melrose's visit, as he came down the knoll from the cabin, Denny noticed a form slouching against a tree—a man in a brown shirt, holding a black felt hat in his hands. He had dark skin and coarse, black hair so long it half obscured his eyes.

As Denny approached, he walked toward him, bowing with his hat, talking rapidly in a soft, musical voice. "My wife, she seek. I think she die. Vera seek. Nine leetle ones"—he raised his hands, counting on the fingers—"nine. Vera poor. You gimme back job?"

"What's the trouble?"

"No trouble. This foreman tell me go. I tell you nine leetle ones, wife vera seek." He kept repeating this rigmarole.

"Where did you work?"

"Tunnel. You gimme back job?" A sudden flash of white teeth.

Denny was on his way to the camp for his mail and allowed the man to follow him. In front of one of the bunkhouses, Tom Parsons, foreman of the gang working on the tunnel, was smoking.

"Could you give this fellow another chance?" Denny asked.

The foreman took the cigarette from his mouth, his cheeks puffing angrily. After a silence when he looked squarely into Denny's eyes he answered, "That's Pedro Francita. If we want a strike on our hands, he'll make a good ring-leader. He stirred up all that trouble last week and I had to fire ten men."

Pedro Francita, with his black hair in his eyes, slouched indifferently against the wall.

"You go!" Denny ordered.

He hunched his shoulders, "No gimme job? I tell you wife vera seek, nine leetle—"

"Beat it. No chance for you here!"

The fellow stared at Denny, fixing his image in the reddish brown eyes. Ten feet away he turned and stared again.

"Better watch out," Parsons warned. "He's a bad one."

Denny shrugged. "They're cowards—the lot of them."

He walked over to the postoffice and in the pleasure of five or six letters forgot the incident.

There was one for Katy from Clay Andrews. He had returned to the East. Two or three times a week Katy heard from him. She never showed these letters to Denny, but he knew she was often saddened by them. Sometimes he thought, "Katy will marry him out of pity. Andy's all right." He felt a piercing sympathy for him; an admiration for his incredible devotion.

There was a package, too, for Katy. Denny recognized the small, vigorous script. Joan had sent something. It stirred his curiosity. He shook the box—hoped it might be candy and not a fool sewing kit or some such rubbish.

For him there were three letters. And all from Petra. Each letter was in a different color envelope—one a pale amber, one a deep purple, one a blue. He took the purple one first, opened it with a little misgiving. There would be extravagant beginnings, chatty, rambling. Petra always threw a few flowers before she showed the thorns.

He knew the thorns would be there, for he had not kept his promise. In three months he had been to the city half a dozen times, but only twice had they had more than an hour together.

He left the camp on one evening, returning the next. Petra found constancy a sorry trial.

"You don't need to stay home," Denny told her on his last visit.

She was hurt. "That shows how much you care."

He had to spend their hour convincing her.

But the purple letter was like the fragrance from her hair. It dwelt in his senses. Lonesome—she wanted to see him. He felt her walking suddenly beside him as she had that evening on the hill when they looked down at the fruit blossoms rippling like a sea of pink shells. Spring a year ago . . . on the hill, he had kissed her lips. And then her eyes.

"You see, my dearest, darlingest," she wrote, "I'm in a dark flower mood to-day because of you. And don't you break your promise again, because I'm expecting you on Saturday and I've ordered a scarlet moon and a saffron dress. If you don't come I'm going to jilt you. I'm not fooling, either. This hermit life is robbing me of all my youthful beauty. I will no longer be golden as you call me, but yellow as a kite's claw. Then whom will you love?"

"Please come even if the heavens empty 10,000,000 gallons of water and spoil all your work. I'm jealous of that old dam. Come because I want you and I'll be waiting and everything else doesn't count. But I can't be faithful forever. Unless—Now you'll come, Deardiddle, and we'll have a ride all by ourselves with only the moon about . . ."

He would go on Saturday. The heavens weren't going to empty. Anyway—he would go.

He went whistling up the knoll. There'd be a Sunday. They'd ride down the highway—come back just in time for him to catch the train—

"Here—what do you suppose this can be?" He gave Katy the package from Joan.

She shook it just as he had done, trying to guess the contents.

"Panocha! Isn't she the most lovely thing, Denny?"

"Oh, divine! How can you tell what's in it? Open it."

It was panocha—rich brown, studded with nuts. There was a note.

"Dear Katy—To-night I'm writing you a long letter, so this is just 'Hello, and have a piece and give a piece to Denny.' I

came home early, as I was instructed by my employer to do on special occasions. This occasion was the arrival of the whispering James Dunlap. He comes frequently to look over legal files, but to-day he insisted on having my advice, and as this is a priceless treasure which I wish to keep for myself, I took my departure. As a result, please accept the enclosed delicacy, which I have just concocted over the flame of an oil stove. I have saved a share for myself, which I now eat, and trust your pleasure will be as keen. I suppose I should end this properly and say 'love and kisses' from

"JOAN."

Denny read it over Katy's shoulder. Without thinking, he grabbed it from her hand. "The gall of that fellow! When I get down there I'll tell him where to head in!"

She stared at him. "Why?"

He flushed, and was suddenly at a loss for an answer, stumbling, "He has no right interfering with her work. I don't like the fellow."

Most assuredly now he would go to the city Saturday. He would see Joan. Well, he would tell her again what to do.

Saturday morning—flare of sun—song in the breeze, whistle in his thoughts. Off for a holiday.

He was almost ready when a laborer came running to the cabin. "Norman sent me, sir. He wants you at the shed."

"What's wrong?" Denny snapped.

"Something's happened to the cement. Somebody broke into the shed."

Denny ground his teeth. "Never mind about the socks, Katy. I'm not going."

He pulled off his collar, flung down the slope after the laborer.

## CHAPTER LXXII

### UNSEEN HANDS

"SOMETHING wrong with the cement." A sudden trembling seized him. He began to run.

As he neared the shed the foreman hurried over, accosting him excitedly. "Some one broke in. They've turned a hose on the cement. It's ruined."

"Many sacks?"

"All so far. Look at this." He held out a man's coat with the butt of a pistol showing in one of the pockets.

Denny turned the coat in his hands, took out the revolver and examined it—a .32 caliber, no mark of identification anywhere.

"Where did you find it?"

"In the shed. He must have been scared off. Left the hose with the water running."

The shed was built on a gentle slope about fifty feet from one of the bunkhouses. Sacks of cement were piled from the floor half way to the rafters.

A hose had been attached to the trough at the bunkhouse and drawn through a knothole in the side wall. This hose was now lying on the floor. The narrow passage from one wall to the other ran with a thin puddle of water.

It was the middle of the morning, the camp deserted except for five or six laborers standing near the shed, listening avidly.

"How many know of this?" Denny asked the foreman.

"These here. We were just starting to move the cement to the towers, as you ordered."

Denny motioned the men into the shed.

"I have a hunch who did this. He'll creep back for the pistol if he thinks his work isn't discovered. We'll get him if you fellows keep quiet.

"Eight men know of this thing," he glanced from face to face—four Irish, two Swede. "Will you fellows see that no more than eight find out about it?"

One of the Celts, brawny, with a red stubble on his chin

and a long upper lip, pushed himself forward. "That we will, sir!" He shook his head belligerently, domineering the others. "That we will!"

"Then it's up to you. Go back to the job. We won't move the cement to-day. Say nothing about this, even among yourselves."

In the burning excitement of Denny's thought a face with coarse black hair obscuring the eyes, flamed. Pedro Francita—was it he who had done this?

"It was last night, wasn't it?" Denny asked the foreman.

"Yes. I was here late in the afternoon yesterday. The stuff was all right then."

Denny walked down the passage, knocking his foot against the sacks. They gave back a hard, unyielding sound. Five thousand sacks of cement spoiled—the work delayed—the first baffling emergency he had been called upon to meet. He was seething with excitement.

By nine o'clock that night the camp was asleep, the lights in the bunkhouses out. Denny went quietly through the black aisles of trees, through the dark pulsating stillness to the shed. The foreman, Jack Norman, was with him. Their forms blended with the impenetrable shadows pressing down from the ridges.

In exactly the spot where the fugitive had left it, they placed the coat. This was on the top of a low pile of sacks about ten feet from one side wall. The door was at the opposite end.

Denny figured that the man would remember where he had left the coat with the pistol in the pocket; that he would go immediately to the stack and reach for it. He intended to wait at the spot; to permit Pedro Francita to enter the shed, to steal down the long, narrow passage and then as he grabbed for the coat, to pounce upon him. The point was sufficiently far from the door to prevent a swift escape.

Norman stood a few feet nearer the door. Both of them were pressed against the wall. Quiet, so intent it seemed to breathe in vast, long-drawn inhalations, lay about the place.

They waited. Once Denny heard Norman shift his feet. The sound was appalling in its crisp suddenness.

And then the room began to swirl, to move in dark, heaving circles. He dug his nails into his palm, wondering if Norman was having a hard time keeping awake.

Once Denny heard a creak, then a muffled sound like a body against the sacks. His heart leaped, every nerve tightening. He kept his face toward the door, listening with such an intensity the stillness grew to a tumult, his own breathing like thunder in his ears.

Again that muffled sound. The door remained closed. The sound was at this end of the shed. Silence—an age of silence.

Abrupt as though the dark had opened with a red gash of flame something knocked against him, hands, arms. A low, infuriated cry. Denny grabbed wildly, felt a hot breath a moment in his face—the thing was gone.

“That way!” It was Norman calling. Denny ran to the wall, felt, rather than saw, a man scrambling over the sacks. He bounded up them—sprang like a panther. “There, there!”

A heavy thud, bare feet striking the floor, Denny after him. He came flinging up against the end wall, snapping his pocket flash.

An instant glance. The man sliding through a broken board, darting, lost in the impassable darkness.

Denny was not aware how far he followed until Norman had finally caught up with him, shaking his arm. “You can’t, man! He may be five feet from us. He’s gone.”

They walked back limply—without a word. Furious disappointment drilled hotly in Denny’s mind.

“He didn’t get the coat?” Norman whispered at last.

“No. He must have broken that board yesterday.”

“You didn’t see him?”

“I think I saw his hair.” In the quick flash of light Denny had marked only the plank that had been ripped out and placed back. Yet he was convinced that he had seen Pedro Francita’s coarse, black hair.

In the following week, when Parsons reported further trouble with the Mexicans in his gang, Denny was certain that Francita was the culprit.

The trouble grew.

“It’s spreading to the other men. I can’t get the work out of them,” the foreman declared.

The men were well paid. They had good quarters and first rate food.

“Fire the disturbers,” Denny ordered.

“I’ve been doing that. It hasn’t helped.”

One day when the men kept gathering in small, angry groups,



Denny decided on a showdown. Parsons' gang was in the mess hall at noon. He went in and sat at a table at the end of the room. Just before they were finished he stood on a chair.

"You fellows have a kick. What do you want?"

The abrupt speech rang out like a shot. Cups and spoons clattered to the tables. No one answered.

"You've kicked," Denny shouted. "You're all loafing on the job. Now is your chance to say what you want."

"Money—more money!" From a corner of the room came a grumbling. A yellow-faced fellow with lean, red lips stood up, "More money!"

"Thanks! Now I know." Denny swept out his arm till it rested on a browny, truculent laborer with a pug nose, red cheeks and a mass of black hair on his arms. There his finger rested. "Mike Collins, is that what you want? Is this fellow," the hand shot contemptuously back to the Mexican, "is this fellow your leader?"

"You get the best grub and the highest wages you can collect anywhere. You know it. I want to know, Mike Collins, and the rest of you, if you're going to take dictation from him? I want to know if a handful of greasers are going to talk you out of the best job you'll find in a day's run—the best grub and the best bed?"

"Any one that wants more money can get it, but you won't get it here. If you want more money, get out and be damn quick about it. If you stay, you work!"

He jumped down from the chair, walked down the room. The men stared in silence. Then Denny sought out Mike Collins, made a friend of him; used him and his influence to dominate the gang. The move succeeded. For two weeks there was no trouble.

Denny grew buoyant with inner exultation.

It was a night in the middle of May. He awakened suddenly to a confused, terrific roar crashing down the canyons—a thunder as of ridges splitting.

Fear gripped him cold. The coffer dam was blown.

## CHAPTER LXXIII

### THE NIGHT'S HAVOC

THE night became a tumult, the mountains shouting the loud, terrific boom, blasting the darkness as with flame.

Denny ran madly, aware of others pelting through the massy shadows—unreal, frightened, as men pitched suddenly to the end of the world.

Denny ran on, a frenzy lighting up his mind.

All at once the cliff thundered. "The dam!" Lights flashed, men hurled against him, cries split frantically, "The dam! Blown up!"

He reached the gorge, stood paralyzed, staring while the water burst through the dam, leaping like a white fiend into the pit.

Into the pit where for three months the men had been excavating; into the pit that was all but ready for the erection of the permanent dam.

And now this coffer dam, this great fence they had built to keep the water away from the permanent site, was blown apart and the imprisoned water free, tumbled mightily into the gorge.

Thought rushed back with a blow of pain. "Stop it! The water must be stopped!"

Those 5000 sacks of cement that were ruined would do it. Denny was suddenly possessed, snapping out orders, marshaling the men. The futile, agonizing work began.

Hours, the weird procession plowed through the darkness, some of the men running to the shed with wheelbarrows; others in groups of two picking up the sacks, carrying them to the gorge. When the gray, metallic dawn parted the night the sacks of cement, three deep, were piled into the huge gap torn by the dynamite.

But the excavation was filled with water, loose rock, tons of dirt and mud. With a cold sickening at the heart, Denny surveyed the ghastly crime of the night. Figures wheeled with

harsh ache through his thought, "Work of three months ruined! A hundred thousand, anyway—\$100,000."

Mechanically he mapped out work for the men. Set them in relays. . . . Water must be pumped out.

Through the frightful morning, the frantic afternoon, he stayed on the job. With each hour in his calculations the damage proved greater.

Who could have done it? Now he put from him the face of Pedro Francita. Was it likely the man could be such a demon of revenge? And after the scare they had given him? Supposing, of course, it was Pedro who turned the hose on the cement and then had come sneaking back for his pistol, was it likely Pedro would set dynamite against the dam?

But since the shed had been entered and the cement watered, Denny had placed night watchmen all about the camp. Two he had placed at the coffer dam. He sent for them.

One had a gash across his forehead where a rock had struck him and knocked him unconscious. The other was unhurt. They had seen no one. They had not fallen asleep. In fact they had shouted to each other not more than fifteen minutes before the explosion occurred. They went on at 10 o'clock; the dam blew off at 2. In those four hours no one had prowled about the gorge. They had seen no figure moving—none.

Denny went himself over the site, searching for some clew that might fasten the outrage somewhere. He found nothing. But he looked into the pit where the pumps churned mud and boulders; where branches of dead trees bobbed listlessly on the murky water. Never in his life had such a vast, sinking depression claimed him.

It was 9 o'clock that night when he finally gave up. He had drunk gallons of coffee, but eaten almost nothing. Katy had a supper waiting. It had been a day of anguish and prayer and impatience for her.

If ever in Katy's life she had railed wildly against the fate that kept her chained to the cabin it was in those hours, when she knew a storm broke loose on Denny and she couldn't walk at his side.

"Eat just a little, Denny?" He sat with his elbows on the table, his fists pressed against his face, all the young sparkle gone from the bonny eyes. She saw his lips draw tightly. Tears rushed to her throat.

"Won't it be all right, Denny?"

He was afraid to speak; afraid to release for a moment the furious self-control. Katy kept on with her questions. He must talk—must. Then he would feel better.

"Oh, God knows, Katy," he cried impatiently. "Like as not it's all gone to smash. This puts them in the hole about \$150,000." Each time he repeated these figures to himself an appalling heaviness seemed pressing him against the wall. What would Berne Melrose say?

As he crossed from the kitchen to the space partitioned off as his room, he saw his suit case in the corner. It was open, half packed. "What were you doing with this, Katy?"

"Well, you were going to the city to-day, Denny, don't you know. I didn't take the things out because I thought you might go to-morrow."

"Yes—well, I won't go to-morrow."

"Funny," he thought distantly as though he were but a spectator at his own affairs. "I was going to the city."

He had forgotten completely. He had sent no word. Petra would have waited. She must have grown angry when he didn't come. Three weeks ago he had disappointed her, too. That was the night he and Norman had waited in the shed for Pedro Francita. But then he had sent her a telegram. Well—he went over and closed the suit case. It wouldn't matter. He'd explain. After a little she'd understand.

At noon the next day Berne Melrose came into camp. He brought with him James Dunlap, Chisborough and two members of the irrigation board. The farmers were in an excited, belligerent frame of mind.

Chisborough, retained as consultant, went with Denny to the site. "That's good," he commented, noting the sacks of cement. The men were repairing the cofferdam. "What do you make of it, Brooks? Dissatisfied laborers?"

"Pretty big job for a few Mexicans to pull off, isn't it? I don't know. I'm completely baffled."

Dunlap and Melrose joined them. Melrose swung along, fists doubled, saying, "This is bad. This is hell. This is a devil of a fix we're in."

Dunlap, with his shiny face rather white, cocked his eyebrow. "You've had all kinds of trouble with the men, Mr. Brooks?"

"Comparatively little, Mr. Dunlap."

"Carelessness, then, I suppose? You've used some dyna-

mite for blasting? I suppose some one carelessly left the dynamite near the dam."

Denny's nerves were raw. He flung back at the lawyer: "You're mistaken, Dunlap. There was no dynamite left around."

"How do you account for it?"

"I don't account for it. It happened. That's all I know."

"No offense at all, Mr. Brooks—just a suggestion. You understand we have to investigate this. We have to find the criminal, no matter who that criminal happens to be." The whispering voice curled softly. "Naturally our people must sift this to the bottom. Naturally they want to know why they should pay an added burden of two dollars, maybe two and a half, an acre. Quite a sum for the man with 500 acres to water. You don't object to our investigation, Mr. Brooks?"

"Object! Find the fellow who did this, Dunlap, and I'll let you know and him know how much I object." Denny tried to master a rising fury against the attorney. He had a goading desire to twist his neck.

"Well, then, we'll dismiss the carelessness. If there was dynamite left around, you would have known of it?"

"I most certainly would have known of it!"

"I understand, Mr. Brooks, that you suspected a Mexican of breaking into the shed."

"I did, before this happened."

"Now you have some other explanation?"

"Now I have no explanation whatever."

"But after the cement was watered, wasn't there some discontent among the laborers? You gave a speech, I understand, when you referred openly to your Mexican workers as 'greasers.'"

The blood poured to Denny's head. He reached over and gripped Dunlap by the coat, shaking him. "Are you trying to discredit me, sir? Are you? Out with it! What's your game?"

Denny felt Chisborough step between them, felt a hand on his arm. "Don't get excited, Brooks."

Dunlap laughed harshly. "No offense, Mr. Brooks. That's all right, I understand your position. Naturally, it's a little hard on you. Naturally, you hesitate to place responsibility. But, of course, you understand my position, too. Nothing per-

sonal at all; just common fair play to our people to put the blame wherever it may belong."

Chisborough stepped in with a curt, "Insinuations won't help your investigation, Mr. Dunlap!"

Denny felt as though he had been plunged in acid. He was in this frame of mind when he went to the postoffice. There was a night letter from Petra. He read it, his face blanching. Then he took the end and ripped it savagely in two.

## CHAPTER LXXIV

### TWO WOMEN

THE two strips of Petra's message Denny thrust in his pocket. Chisborough came up with him.

"What's Dunlap got against you, Denny?"

"I don't know. I never met him until Stoddard made that offer to exchange their completed dams for our site. Dunlap came half a dozen times to urge acceptance, but he changed his opinion later, so I don't suppose he's holding any grudge against me there."

Dunlap, Melrose and the two members of the board were watching the men at the pumps. Dunlap talked to the laborers.

Denny wanted to walk up and say, "Get out of here! You go, or I go!" He could feel a poison running in his veins, eating him.

"What can he learn talking to those men? I ran down a dozen clews. Does he want to pin the thing on my incompetence?"

"If he does," Chisborough snapped, "I'll block him. Too bad, Brooks, to get a setback like this. No one could foresee or avoid it. The farmers are excited. Can't blame them at that. They'll kick, but the thing is done now. There'll be a meeting to-morrow and the work will go on. It has to go on."

Dunlap spent the best part of the day interviewing the foremen, calling Melrose aside for conferences or to listen to some of the conversations.

And when the big Viking fellow was leaving he shook Denny's hand grimly. "Hell of a fix we're in, Brooks." It seemed to Denny that he scrutinized his face, that he delved into his eyes.

He said nothing, yet Denny felt a tinge of reproach, of censure, as though some stain had been put upon him and he couldn't rub it away. His mind leaped indignantly; the sensation remained, bored into him.

He walked half a mile beyond the cabin, flung himself down under a giant hemlock, sat a long while with his arms wound

about his knees. Finally he took the two yellow strips from his pocket, reread them.

"Since you think it such a trifle to make a date and then not even to wire that you will break it, perhaps I'd better not count on your coming in the future. You knew I would and did wait until 12 o'clock last night for you. But perhaps you didn't know that I might be alarmed at your delay. Are you so busy even till midnight that you can't take one minute from your work to let me know you weren't coming? There are pleasanter ways of spending time than in waiting for a thing that isn't going to happen; pleasanter experiences than continual disappointment."

Denny tore the telegram in little pieces and tossed it down the cliff. His sudden anger against Petra was gone, but he would then have welcomed some soft word from her instead of this. But it was a shabby thing to have so completely forgotten the date; to have left her sitting in that room, the beautiful hair done low on her neck, the pretty new dress—waiting. He could see her.

Yet he let another day pass and sent no word.

The third day she wrote again. And on this day came a report from the irrigation board. One paragraph stung to the quick.

"We trust you will now rush the work with all possible speed, as further delays or expense will most seriously cripple the interests of this organization. The summary of Attorney Dunlap's investigation and conclusions are enclosed. The board makes no comment and passes no judgment, but earnestly advises the utmost caution in dealing with the labor situation, especially that you guard against inciting the men by injudicious speech."

Denny's hands shook. He took up Dunlap's wordy document, glanced hastily through the account of his investigation to the conclusions:

"I am of the opinion, therefore, that an unfortunate handling of the labor situation is responsible for the enormous damage sustained by this irrigation district.

"My interviews show that the men were incensed by a speech made by the engineer of construction wherein he openly characterized the Mexican workers as 'greasers.' Several laborers walked out following this incident. One of these, Juan Hernandez, made threats of revenge.



"Efforts to locate Hernandez and some of his followers with a purpose of bringing them to justice have so far failed.

"Omitting this cause for the disaster I can find no other solution of the mystery dynamiting unless we attribute it to gross carelessness. This the engineer emphatically denies."

When he came to this last clause Denny's blood rose like a sheet of flame. He ground the letter into a ball, swung through the trees gritting his teeth. His fists doubled, ached with a fury to be at James Dunlap. He went back to the postoffice and sent a telegram to the irrigation board:

"Just received your letter enclosing the report of James Dunlap. This is to advise you that your attorney's investigations are grossly malicious. I will not rest under the accusations and am ready at this moment to surrender my contract if you wish to be released from the obligation and if you are not entirely satisfied with my services."

When the message was sent he went back to the dam, stood watching the cranes lifting mud and loose rock. Minutes passed; his thoughts were numbed. Through this dull apathy there came suddenly a twisting pain— Quitting, leaving this work, this great opportunity! His eyes burned.

He flung himself down the gorge, almost at a run. The creaking of the derricks, clang of picks lost their voices in the hot, throbbing silence. He could have swept out his arms and beat the rocks with his bare hands.

He took out Dunlap's report to get the working of it searing on his brain. As he did so Petra's letter came with it.

With the first few lines the furious sense of outrage softened as though she had put her smooth, cool hand on his face, on his stinging eyes, as though she had whispered gently and brought her lips against his cheek.

"What is the matter, dearest dearest? I'm sick with fear, for I know you wouldn't treat me so unless something terrible has happened to you. I'm sorry I sent that telegram, for I should have known you would have come if you could, but then I did wait such a long time and I did want to see you so much and you promised that nothing would make you break the date. But now I feel that something is wrong with you, and won't you have your sister write and tell me? Dendiddle, darling, I'm coming down to see you if I don't hear by to-night. Send me a wire, please. The next time you come down I won't let you go back. I wish I never had let you take that job anyway,

and I wish you were here sitting next me and I'd kiss you to make up for all the broken dates. Dearest, darlingest, you haven't found somebody else to love, have you?"

His heart warmed to the golden charm of the face brought close by the letter. If she were here now—and in this melting of his rage he sat down and scribbled a note to her.

One admission he remembered with a touch of shame, would have recalled the moment the letter was out of his hands. This was the very sentence Petra cherished. For he said:

"I've given my soul to this job, sacrificed every other thought and interest, as you know. It's tough to get a deal like this. They have their chance to break the contract. I don't care if they do. I've got to be in the city Friday. I'll see you then. I'm going down early and will arrive around 5."

Friday at 5 o'clock Petra dropped in at the office. She intended to meet Denny and take him home with her. Her plans were careful and far reaching.

Joan was tying together a contract and several papers Denny wanted. He asked her to leave them on his desk in case he arrived after she left. Joan intended to wait.

Then Petra came sauntering in, self-possessed, bright and careless as a sun ray.

"Hasn't arrived yet, Miss Lewis?"

"No—but he should be here soon."

"Isn't it shameful about that old dam and that horrid lawyer?"

"Yes—but, of course, the irrigation people won't accept his resignation."

"Well, I hope they do! He ought to refuse to do another day's work for them. Poking himself down there in a wilderness. I hope they do accept it."

Joan turned quickly to hide the red stain mounting to her dark hair. Her voice trembled.

"It will crush him, Miss Channing, if they do. His heart is in this project. It would be the cruelest thing in the world if he has to give it up now."

Petra tapped her fingers on Denny's desk. "Fiddlesticks, Miss Lewis. He's sick of it. He's had enough of those hicks. I think it's all been for the best."

Joan stacked the papers carefully, slipped a rubber band over them. She said quietly, "He won't give up the project, Miss Channing. He won't quit a fight in the middle of it."

Petra laughed. "That's one way to look at it."

When she was gone Joan closed the door with a little bang. "You empty thing, you! Rub it in to him now!" Tears pelted into her eyes. She tossed them back. Then she sat down and waited hours.

But Denny didn't come to the office. He went to Petra's. He went into the room of lavender and gold. And there was in his heart not the remotest intention of doing the thing he did do.

## CHAPTER LXXV

### FASCINATION

SHE was bright as the night he had first called on her, and luring in a soft, veiled thing, russet as an autumn leaf flashing veins of gold.

Her hand was smoother, more like silk; the dimples brighter—a mellowness in her voice and in her lips. He had again that feeling of gladness, of sunlight bathing him—a piercing nearness of music and perfume. This was the charm of her. It played on his senses.

In its sweetness the harsh anxieties of the previous days dimmed. He could forget for a moment the grim smile on the face of Berne Melrose; the menace in the antagonism of the lawyer. There was still joy in the world—plenty of it—and a share for him.

Petra twined her fingers in his, chatting gayly. She talked of the amiable Peter and his early struggles. "But everything turned out all right. You only need to know how to make the turn, Diddle. That's what Peter says."

She laughed, pulled his hand, making him sit next her at the piano to listen while she played with one hand; then while she sang in her untrained, easy voice.

Jubilance won him, for he was by nature light of heart; at home with happiness. In this mood, obstacles were thistle-down. He felt a strength growing in him; the old "Gee, I can do it!" of his kid days. A passion to get back to his job—to put it over and to put it over big.

After a long while, when they were sitting on the sofa, she asked lightly: "Do you miss me very much, Dendiddle?"

"Oh, very!"

"Do you miss"—a willful pause—"all your friends?"

He burst out laughing, "Meaning Joan, Petra?"

"No—meaning Old Lady Traynor."

"Why, yes, I miss her every moment."

"She's quite a determined person, isn't she?"

"Oh, is she? I thought she was the dearest old woman on earth."

Petra sniffed, blowing a contemptuous breath. She added seriously, "I missed you, Dendiddle. I didn't dream I could ever miss any one so. It's a great mistake to care about people, isn't it?"

She was sitting forward, her slender hands clasped at her knees; her face half turned toward him, the hair like a golden nimbus above the waiting eyes.

"Do you care a great deal for any one, Petra?" He was laughing, yet a warning sounding dimly in his thought called him back.

She didn't stir, only permitting her eyes to meet him—a hurt reproach in their depths.

He laughed. "Do you, Petra? Come now, tell me."

She brushed her hand over her neck, smoothing up the yellow tendrils. "You don't care."

And still he laughed. "How do you know, Petra? How can you tell that?"

As she dropped her hand, he took it—took the other one, too, drew her a little. She didn't resist. He would have kissed her but she lowered her head quickly. "No. Don't . . . It makes a difference."

This amused him deliciously. "What makes a difference, Petra?"

She laughed, keeping her head down. "Nothing! Nothing matters. Let me go. I wish to play."

"You don't know how. You're not going to move. Look up, Petra."

But she wouldn't. "I thought you felt serious to-night, Diddle?"

"I came in like a funeral, but I'm going out like a song."

"A swan song, Diddle? Is it going to be our swan song?" Her voice trailed, set a chord trembling in his heart.

And suddenly she raised her face, let one arm steal to his neck, pressed her cheek against his. He felt her eyes wet. It startled him.

She whispered softly, "Kiss me, Diddle. Kiss me if you want to."

There was a gentle acquiescence in her long, graceful lines; in her throat curving upward that lit a fire in his veins. He bent down and kissed her, all the tenderness of his youth vi-

brating. Underneath was a ruthless exultance. He laughed into her eyes and laughed against her lips.

"You do care, Dendiddle?"

"Yes, yes."

"Then kiss me a thousand times." She clasped her hands at his neck, drawing his face down to hers.

He closed his arms about her. "Do you love me, Petra?"

She whispered again and again, "Yes, I love you, I love you."

His senses thundered to the thrill of her beauty; put down the dim warning in his thought. This was joy's hour. "You'll marry me, Petra?"

"Yes—to-morrow."

She took his hands, turned them palm upward, pressed her lips lightly in their hollows. "Are you glad, Diddle?"

"Yes." It came with a deep breath.

"It won't have to be so very soon, will it?"

"It can't be, Petra. I may be a year and a half longer on this job."

She sat up stiffly. "A year and a half more!"

"Yes."

"What in the world will you do?"

"Well, we can't pour much more than a thousand yards of concrete in a day. And we'll use something more than 300,000 yards in the dam. That means nearly a year from the time we start pouring it."

"And you intend to stay all that while up there?"

"Rather!"

"But I thought you gave in your resignation?"

"They're not very likely to accept it."

"I should think you'd have too much pride to work for people that accuse you. I thought you would resign anyway. Why should you stay there when they make it so horrid for you?"

He didn't take her seriously. "That's when the fun begins."

"Diddle, do you really mean to stay?"

A sharpness cut from his tongue. "You don't think I'm going to quit, do you?"

"It's not quitting. It's just standing up for your rights. Just as you say you've given your soul to that job and sacrificed every other thought and what do you get for it? Nothing but abuse."

He felt suddenly rigid. "You'd like me to quit, Petra? You know what this job means?"

She glanced up sideways, "Does it mean more than me, Dendiddle? Does it mean more than our happiness? Our whole future?" She came closer and whispered with her lips against his cheek. "Peter knows of a great chance. You can have it, Diddle. Give up that other and take this. You'll be here all the time. Please—for me?"

He answered nothing. But she kept coaxing. Finally she said, "Will you, dearest darlinest Dendiddle?"

He felt his throat drawing tightly. "I can't. No. I'm in this fight to the finish . . . to the end."

She began again. At last he took her hands from his neck. "It's no use, Petra, I'm not going to quit."

She grew suddenly white. But when he was leaving she stood near him, her head down against his shoulder. "Don't be angry with me, Diddle. Two years is a long time to be lonesome." She looked up, radiant. "Maybe they'll take the resignation. Tell me you love me, Diddle."

"Yes. I love you."

He walked down the block, a quick pulsing in his ears. "I asked her to marry me," he thought. And he kept saying to himself, "I asked her to marry me. She wants me to quit."

The touch of her lips loitered like flowers about his face. There came again the tang of wine in his veins. He laughed softly. "She loves me." He heard her voice saying, "Kiss me a thousand times," kindling a flame in his senses.

He felt that he should walk, exultantly should sing; yet there hovered in his spirit a reluctance, a muteness, vague, disquieting, insistent. He said half aloud: "It's done. I've done it. Well—"

## CHAPTER LXXVI

### JOAN'S VIGIL

HE walked with breathless rapidity, repeating—and each time with fresh astonishment—“It’s done. I’ve done it.”

Images, colors, fragrance crowded about him. Snatches of Petra’s warm “I love you, love you! Kiss me as much as you wish.” His mind was a stage. Thoughts jumped up and shook their fists at each other in an odd dialogue.

“I asked her to marry me. It’s all settled now.” This was the first word. Another answered:

“Yes, but you’re not ready to get married.”

“Not now. But in two years I will be.”

“She won’t wait two years.”

“She will.”

“But she asked you to quit. You know she’ll ask it again. That’s her way. She’ll tell her father she is to marry you and he’ll get you another job. She said so. She won’t wait down here two years.”

“She knows I’ll not quit. She knows that!”

“Does she? But she hopes the resignation will be accepted.”

This thought went with a thud over his lulled senses. Petra’s face was radiant when she said, “Maybe they’ll accept the resignation!”

If they did and he had to return to the city? He grew hot. She would want to be married soon and did he want to marry Petra?

The thing that was deepest in his heart opened—Katy—

But it wouldn’t make any difference to Katy. He’d have money enough—plenty for the operation. That would come first—before anything else on earth. He wouldn’t dream of marriage until after that, until after Katy was cured.

The reluctance that had been vague, disquieting, came now and clamped about him. He could have waited. Why hadn’t he? But nothing would change things between him and Katy. Nothing!

He said this through his teeth, squared his shoulders. Well—what a fool he was worrying about this. The resignation



wouldn't be accepted. He was certain of it. And in two years—why, he'd be rich! In two years Katy would be free as a bird. She'd be walking. Everything would be fine. Of course it would—

His feet raced to keep pace with his thoughts. He was at Taylor street and just turning north when he suddenly remembered the contracts and papers he needed. Joan was to leave them on his desk. He had intended reaching the city early because he wished to see Joan; he wanted to talk to her about James Dunlap; he wanted to hear all she had to say about the dam. But it was 7 before he had arrived and he knew she would be gone.

When he reached the office building the elevators were stopped. He had to walk to the fifth floor. He turned down the darkened corridor. A light streamed into the hall. This light came from his own office.

He halted, then moved cautiously. The door was locked. Steps hurried over, "Is it you, Denny?"

Then Joan caught his hands. She said, her glad voice melting: "Denny! You're all right— Everything's all right? I waited—I had to know—" A faint color brushed her cheek.

The glow in Joan's eyes went suddenly and warmly to Denny's heart. "Joan—so late—you waited?" He could not have said why this touched him so. "What did you have to know?"

"You've not quit, Denny? You're not going to quit?"

"I may have to— What do you make of that fellow, Dunlap, Joan?" He wanted to keep her here. He wanted to talk and talk to Joan.

"I'm afraid of him. I don't trust him. Why should he have made that report against you?"

"He believes it. He thinks I bungled the labor affair."

"Well—the farmers don't, do they?"

"I'll know soon."

"Oh, they'll never accept that resignation."

"How do you know, Joan? They may."

"They won't. They won't! They wouldn't dare! They know it would have happened no matter who was on the job." She flung her head back, her eyes passionate in the white purity of her face. There were little trembling movements about her lips that drew a gratitude melting through him. He felt like laughing.

"They won't accept it, Denny?"

"I hope not."

"Well, it's your job, Denny. You have a right to finish it. You will finish it." She turned quickly, winking her eyes, thinking achingly— "She didn't make him quit! She couldn't make him quit!"

He was gathering up papers at his desk. In a corner was a handkerchief—lavender with tiny gold flowers embroidered in the corner. "Is this yours, Joan?"

"No, Miss Channing dropped it there."

Denny wished she would talk of Petra. He wanted to hear Joan's opinion—wanted to hear her say, "She's beautiful, isn't she? I never knew any one so charming. Isn't she an angel?" Joan said things like this of Katy.

But she was silent now.

"Was she in to-day before you left? Did she stay long?" He was carefully folding the handkerchief.

Joan noticed the deliberate quiet of his tones. "Something has happened," she thought, chilled. "He's asked her." She picked up the powder puff and dabbed it all over her face, wetting her fingers to wipe the white from her eyes. Then she answered him.

"She stayed about an hour, Denny. She thought you'd come here first."

"I meant to, but it got so late—" The expression of his face had changed. It was flushed, a touch of recklessness about the eyes.

"You love her," Joan thought. "You love her and she'll tear the heart out of you." With a sudden impetuous tenderness she moved toward him as though she would protect him.

He looked up, smiling, saying absently, "Pretty little handkerchief, isn't it?"

Joan bit her lip. "Yes; it should be." She turned suddenly and closed a drawer in the filing cabinet. "She's wonderfully pretty, too."

He laughed. "She is, isn't she?"

Joan knew that she had lost.

## CHAPTER LXXVII

DENNY WINS

KATY sat under the giant hemlock shadowing the cabin. The late sun caught the red sheen in her chestnut hair, gave a vivid, excited look to the beautiful face. She glanced at some snapshots and laughed. Stephen had sent them in one of his short breezy letters.

"Dear old angel Kate—How do you like me and my new girl? She's the one at the end that I've marked with my little 'x' and not the one about whose shoulder you see my arm affectionately reposing. I may not cavort thus with Angela. She's stiff. Ah—but she's sweet, Kate.

"Advancing age and the scarcity of the dear feminines in these wilds are forcing your handsome Steve into the sorry paths of rectitude. So as you know it's been a long, dreary day since I've made use of all my gallant arts. When you answer, sweet Kate, tell me what you think of the one marked 'x.' She's the new school ma'am here and just fresh from Stanford.

"I'm still waiting to hear how this trouble comes out for Den. What a darn shame the whole thing is. But it's good you're there, dear Kate. Don't let him get down in the mouth, and if you need any help send me a line and I'll be there on the jump.

"Yours as ever and always—

"STEVE."

"Just the same glad old Stephen," Katy thought. She looked at Angela, noting with a wistful pang the girl's strong, sweet face, the upward tilt of her chin. Then she remembered the crosses on the hundred old dance programs. Dear Steve—She laughed.

Up the slope came a whistle, the first Katy had heard in many days, Denny swinging buoyantly. Without a word he put a message in her hands. It was from the irrigation board.

"At a special meeting held last evening this board voted

unanimously against accepting your resignation. The district is naturally deeply affected by its great financial loss and for this reason urged you to use all possible diplomacy in dealing with a labor situation we know to be critical. We did not mean by this to attach any blame whatsoever to you. We attach none to you now. In his report, Consultant Engineer Chisborough declares your work above criticism."

Denny leaned over Katy's shoulder though he knew the words by heart. His hand rested on the arm of her chair. She covered it, looking up gayly.

"Well, it helps a little," he said.

"Oh, it helps a lot! It's terrible that it happened, but it's terrible that we have cyclones and blizzards and earthquakes. But you can't be blamed for them."

"No—but they put a fear in one."

This was exactly the terror in Katy's mind. She lay awake at night listening—waiting for some frightful repetition of that mad detonation flung down the canyons. But not for worlds would she mention this to Denny.

Now she laughed. "Of course, they do. But that's an old grandmother habit to get into. We'd all get ourselves framed in glass cases and wouldn't stir or breathe if we once gave way to fear."

"I'll feel better when I lay hands on the fellow who blew the dam. Just wait. Any one devilish enough to do that isn't going loose. I'm going to get him."

"Was it that Pedro?"

"I don't know." Denny folded the letter, put it in his pocket. Here there was another letter in a rose-colored envelope. He wanted to talk about this to Katy.

For now, every time he looked at her he saw Petra's golden head, the dimples gleaming wickedly. And he kept wondering, "What would Katy say if she knew? Will they like each other? Will Katy be glad?"

These thoughts oppressed him. They were like clouds closing out the sun. He brushed them aside with an impatient "Well—two years. I've got two years." The phrase came gradually to ring with an infinite comfort through his mind. Two years—he didn't need to tell Katy. There wouldn't be any change.

Yet he longed to know what she might think. In putting the answer from the irrigation board in his pocket he purposely

pulled out the bright envelope. It dropped to the ground. He picked it up, grinning, flashed it a second under her nose, then took a sniff himself.

"That's good sachet, Denny. I wish you'd find out the name. We'll get some for our handkerchiefs."

"Can't have it common, Katy."

She laughed. "In love, Denny? You grow fonder of her. I can tell. It's a whole year and more that you've had to find out."

She meant nothing by that, yet it turned him like a sudden wrench. A year to find out, and he had plunged into it without a moment's calculation—swept into it in a glowing intoxication of perfume, of color, of soft lips against his face.

His face paled. She reached up and touched his arm. "Denny, you promised once with all your heart you would tell me. Now do it. Is it because of me that you wait? Tell me honestly."

"No! Don't dare to think it! How could that be? If I wanted to get married now, I'm earning enough. You know that."

His thoughts were sweeping headlong. He was earning enough. He could marry at once if he wished. Even to himself he wouldn't admit the hesitance, the insistent reluctance, that halted him. It was the work—so he convinced his thought—the work that needed him. He could make no plans until this big job was finished. The suggestion of an immediate marriage caught like a burning hand at his throat.

"I'd love to see golden Petra, Denny."

"Would you?"

"Yes, I'd know in a minute—"

"Oh, you would, would you. Aren't we the little clairvoyants?"

"I was merely going to say I'd know in a minute—"

"If she was 'noble' enough for your 'noble' brother, eh?"

Katy laughed. "I guess I'd know that, too, Mr. Denny."

"All right, Katy, when we go back to the city I'll bring her to see you."

"Is she as beautiful as Joan?"

"Different. I'll ask her to send you a picture."

"So that you can look at it? Well—I'd like her if she was the homeliest person in the world, Denny, as long as she could make you happy."

He began to describe Petra to Katy, his memory dallying and growing warm with the bright image. Then he remembered the radiant anticipation in her face when she said, "Maybe they'll accept the resignation!" Depression dropped like a stone on him. But he found excuses. Of course, two years of separation was an eternity.

He wrote and told her the resignation was not accepted and that it was the biggest relief and the biggest hunk of joy any one could have handed him.

She wrote back, "And we have to wait two whole years, Dendiddle, darling? Oh, that's an everlasting age. I wouldn't care if you were in the city, but to be away up there in the wilderness. What good will it do you? If you only knew all the wonderful plans I've made, dearest darlingest. I want you here. Then you could come every night and we'd go to all the shows and to the fair and dancing. It's an awful thing to care so much for you and to love you and have you hundreds of miles away. Perhaps I'll have to marry you and go up and live in a tree. Dendiddle, darling, you love me—why don't you come down here and work?"

It rambled on for ten pages—gossip, news of John Merchant and the amiable Peter, then every few lines a vivid outpouring. "I love you—why must you be away? Oh, you needn't. It's all in your silly old head, Dendiddle, darling."

A few days after this Denny received a wire from Petra's father.

"New company forming here. Offer you first rate permanent job. Salary ten thousand a year. Letter follows.

"PETER CHANNING."

## CHAPTER LXXVIII

### PETRA'S INSISTENCE

THAT offer from Peter Channing struck Denny with a cold shock. For a moment his thought reared—savage, obstinate and in an anger against Petra. She had done this. She was bound to have him quit, throw up his honor, break the contract. She was trying to force him into it!

He snapped his teeth, rammed the yellow paper in his pocket. Without waiting for the letter, with scarcely a second thought, he wrote furiously:

“Appreciate your offer but I am under contract on this job and can not accept.”

He felt a hardness to Petra. But his thought, as far as she was concerned, was the dupe of his senses and these vibrated warmly to the memory of her arm curving about his neck, her head pressed against his shoulder.

When her next letter came, a tenderness rushed over him and made amends for the injustice his anger had done her. Why should he expect her to enter so completely into his thought? Why wasn't he willing to see her side? And how was she to feel this ideal he had about the job? She was alone down there night after night. Hard for her, loving gayety and motion as she did.

“Dendiddle, dearest” [she wrote]:

“My eyes are all tears and I wish you were here to kiss them dry, for it's all on account of you that I'm so terribly at outs with all the world. If you heard what that old Peter said! My heart is broken. And the way the unreasonable old tyrant stamped up and down and ranted like a maniac all because I made a mistake and hadn't explained about the contract for I never thought that made any difference and I only told him you had resigned.

“My own darling Dendiddle, don't you be angry with me or I'll pine away and die. You can stay up there if you want to, but how I wish you were here now. Please come as soon as you can and love me more than ever, for I've taken Peter's dim-

ple away and he's never to have it again. They're both yours now. . . ."

In the warm folly aroused by the thought of her, Denny tried to explain why he must stay on the job.

"Petra, I'd give an eye to be down there now, but I can't quit this job. It's out of the question. Further, I don't want to work with a big corporation because they're going ahead with a policy of development that is ruthless in its short-sightedness. I've seen too many cruel examples of the havoc done and I'm not going to take part in it, for it's all unnecessary. They can have all the development they want—as much as they have now without killing the farming industry—but it means the building of more reservoirs and it's cheaper to freeze the other fellow out and let California be the goat. This is treason to the state and I'm not going to have anything to do with it. . . ."

In his isolation, Denny's ideas became sharply focused. Immense and noble presences the mountains were to Katy. With Denny, since his first summer, all the fine tenderness of his nature made answer to their poignant inspiration. Up here he felt himself a young god—one who would march fearless in the front ranks of his fellows, taking a proud part in the pulsing drama of human progress.

He would have nothing to do with greed and brutality. He would not be one of those who pick up a helpless Prince Jerry to squeeze its life out with a rope—not one to send Violet like a hunted thing to the street.

And in his view there was no difference between this ruffianism of Matt Borley and the corporate ruffianism that had starved that woman in the buckboard crowded with children, out of her lands.

There was no shame in this job he was now controlling. The work went swinging along. Denny filled his letters to Petra with buoyant account of its swift progress.

The towers were up on either side of the gorge and from these towers they would soon begin pouring the concrete through great chutes down into the pit, where the workmen waited and would put it in place. Soon the dam would begin to grow.

She wrote back:

"And does it mean, Dendiddle, that you'll be there nearly a year and a half from the time they start dumping that old concrete? You love this job more than you do me. What



good can you do sticking up there? Oh, please come down.

"I've told Peter, as you know, but I haven't told mother yet because she's fussy and would want to have it announced and have teas and all that. Of course, we're not ready for this, but I was looking at betrothal cards to-day and saw some nifty ones.

"I'm sending you a sample. Tell me if you like the engraving. Of course, we won't send out any for a while, but I might as well begin planning."

Denny shrank from that card with a throbbing recoil. Announcing it! Good Lord! The dim voice in his mind warned: "It's done now. You're in it. It's done."

He wouldn't listen, but conjured Petra's face—golden face, golden hair—and soothed his harassed thought with the image.

More often he threw himself with a glad passion into the work. Two years of it before him—long years—demanding years. The harsh creak of the derricks, the mighty hiss of the steam shovels and ring of picks made music in his mind.

Now there was no trouble with the laborers. They were still searching for Pedro Francita and Juan Hernandez. But the gangs drove faithfully through their tasks.

And Denny knew that scores of the men were his devoted friends. There were half a dozen sons of the farmers who had come up to work on the dam. Two of these, Bill Cross and young Martin Loop, admired him openly. They were fine sturdy fellows, accepting it as an honor when he sent them with messages to Katy.

She liked them, especially young Martin Loop. He had boyish, kind blue eyes and curly blond hair. When she offered him a big slice of cake or tied up in wax paper some of the fudge Joan sent every Monday, he blushed like a schoolboy.

Katy laughed at his shyness. "Come again, Martin. I'll have doughnuts here to-morrow."

He would stand at the door and tell her what a prince that brother of hers was, and she oughter be proud of him.

"And shouldn't he be proud of me and I so smart, Martin?"

Then the color would flame to the rim of his yellow hair and Katy would wrinkle up her nose and laugh.

One night he came with a big newspaper filled with wild flowers.

"You've never seen them, I'll betcha, Miss Brooks. Evening primroses. Say, I just wisht I could get you over to that there meadow. They bloom at night and come out with a big

'Whoop-la! Here we are for a blazin' good time!' The meadow's chock full of them. You can smell 'em fifty yards off."

He stood watching Katy as she set the brilliant things in a battered old soup tureen. Then he said: "Say, ain't you tricky with them hands? Guess you love flowers all right. It's mighty beautiful over to the other side of the ridges. Wisht I could get you over there to see that meadow. You'd like it!"

"Next year, Martin, I'll see it. Next year we'll take a walk over there."

He blushed, turned his cap nervously in his hands.

"Oh, it's true, Martin. I'm to walk by next year. You needn't blush for me."

The kind boyish eyes lightened, but he stammered:

"Say, I'm right glad to hear that, Miss Brooks. Say, it's pretty nice in you to tell me."

He started down the slope, came back, repeating: "Say, Miss Brooks, I'm awful glad to hear that. Awful glad."

It touched Katy to the heart. Denny twitted her about young Loop's devotion.

"Hope you won't rob the cradle, Katy-kid. The lad's only twenty-one."

"Can I help my charming ways, Denny darlin'? But it's you he loves—the big, bashful fellow. That Bill Cross, too, is always telling me how fine you are."

This attitude of the men gave him a boundless satisfaction. He wrote to Joan about it, feeling she would understand. They, too, were a part of this job. He liked to feel that they loved the work as he did.

One morning as he passed the towers where the men were now pouring the concrete, a laborer stopped him, saying: "This here cable don't seem strong enough."

The cable was suspended like a tight-rope between the two towers. The heavy steel chutes descending obliquely from the towers into the pit were supported by steel arms hung from this cable.

Denny examined the cable. "It's strong enough to support twice the present weight."

"Guess you're right, but it looks pretty weak to me," the old fellow insisted.

Three days later the frightful thing happened.

## CHAPTER LXXIX

### THE ACCIDENT

DENNY threw his sweater to a chair. As he did, a letter in lavender dropped from the pocket. With a laughing tenderness Katy handed it to him. She noticed his eyes, that she loved, because they were so young and tender, now dark and a little hard.

She wondered, "What troubles him? Is Denny lonesome for Petra? Does he love her with all his soul?"

Katy asked this often, feeling it a treason against him because the question held a prayer, a hope, and these were not for Petra, but for Joan.

"Why couldn't it have been? Oh, why!" She looked at the clean, strong sculpture of his chin, the close-fitting ears and piled the dishes with little whacks. "Why isn't it you, Joan? Oh, you're stupid! That's why! You don't know how to show off. And Denny's blind—just blind. Does Joan love him? Who could help it! She would make him happy. But Petra?"

Katy never thought of Petra without remembering the cruel evening when she had phoned and so lightly permitted Katy to know she was in reality a burden. Not a lovely thing to do. Katy, for all her sweetness, was a sharp judge when Denny's interest was at stake.

If he should not be happy?

The next look she caught at his face brightened her. He was brown as an Indian.

"I'll be home to lunch, Katy-kid. I'll be at the dam most of the morning. Say, the work's going like magic. I'll get you down there in the next couple of days. You'll get a thrill out of it."

Just at noon Katy took a steaming apple pie from the oven. And just at noon she heard a step on the path.

She glanced swiftly from the window, saw a reddened face and curly blond hair. "Oh, it's you, Martin? You've brought me the mail?"

Whenever the mail arrived at noon young Martin Loop came up with it to Katy.

"Yes, I've a letter here for you but your brother's not coming. He asked me to tell you. He's busy."

"Oh, Martin! And just come in and take a look at this lovely apple pie. Now isn't it a shame?"

He stood bashfully at the edge of the threshold, the boyish face flushing. "Say, you did get it nice and brown. That's quite a trick, ain't it?"

"I'm very tricky, Martin. Did you have your lunch?"

He stammered something about the mess hall. Katy rather liked to tease him.

"Come in, Martin, and eat my brother's lunch. Please do, and you can have his share of the pie, too."

"I don't think your brother'd like that, Miss Brooks."

Katy laughed, waved her hands in a capricious gesture. "Why, Martin, didn't you know that I'm perfect? And every one must like what I do. So if I tell you to come in and eat, that's the proper thing to do!"

Scarlet to the yellow hair, "Well, I guess you ain't far from it, Miss Brooks. You beat most of the girls I've ever seen."

"And no doubt you've seen a great number. Well, we've cold lamb and beans and potatoes, and the whole of this pie, Martin. But perhaps you have an enormous appetite, have you?"

"Guess I ain't exactly a bird, Miss Brooks. Sure your brother won't mind if I stay?"

"Why, he'll be charmed, Martin."

When he found that Katy wasn't watching him and that she didn't even notice when in his nervousness the beans dropped to his lap, Martin Loop became talkative.

"You like this here country, Miss Brooks?"

"I love it."

"Well, just wait till you've seen it! Say, I wisht I could get you around a bit."

"You know what I told you, Martin—"

"That's what I'm thinking about, Miss Brooks. I wrote to my mother, and you can come and stay to our place next year if you like. Say, you'd like my mother and she'd like you. Then you could see the waterfalls and the mountains and you'd never guess the queer feeling it gives you in all that stillness and all that there bigness. It's plain upliftin'. It's better than going to

church. Say, I wisht you coulda seen the moon ridin' over the sugar pines last night. Made me think about you. I was wishin' you was up there on the ridge."

"The ridge will still be here next year, Martin, and that's not so long to wait."

"Guess you're right, Miss Brooks. And you ain't the complainin' kind. But we'd be right glad to have you visit us, all right."

Katy laughed. "You've a dear, kind heart, Martin."

The big fellow passed his hand awkwardly over his face. "You've been pretty nice to me, Miss Brooks, and always savin' me a share of that candy. Well, guess I better be movin'."

He looked at the pie that was left. "Want to take it with you?" Katy asked quickly.

"Say—I'd like to take a piece to your brother."

"And to Bill Cross? And to Ned Crowley? Take the pie, Martin, and give them all my love."

He carried it gingerly, looked back with a shy laugh. "This is pretty nice in you, Miss Brooks. Say, the fellows will like this."

She leaned at the window, watching the brawny, young form swinging down the slope. What a boy he was—what a fine, good fellow—good to the marrow. Katy smiled. "You've a soul, Martin, and that's more than lots of people have. And good luck to you!"

Denny roared when Martin thrust the pie sheepishly into his hands. "All for me?"

Martin's fair skin flamed. "Well, your sister said Bill was to have some and Ned Crowley, but that's all right if you want it all."

"Give it to them, Martin. She's baking another one for me now."

Half an hour later when the still noon air grew mighty with the voice of a hundred engines and from all the chutes at once there came belching a great rush of concrete, Denny stood near one of the towers, stood in the midst of the roar.

He watched with a vast fascination the rhythmic swing of arms placing the masonry as it dumped from the chutes.

Far down there he could make out Bill Cross and the blond curls of Martin Loop.

And suddenly as he watched, there came a swaying—a tremor passing through the steel arm supporting the immense chutes.

A tremor—a momentary sagging.

A cry ripped from his heart, froze on his lips. The great cable snapped apart; the immense chutes, with their terrible weight of concrete, went smashing on the men below.

A shriek piercing and agonized, then Denny was down in the pit, in a blackness and din . . . the spilled mass of concrete, snapped iron, the dangling chutes. Feet stuck out under wreckage. Denny flung into it, tore away twisted steel.

He looked into the face of Bill Cross. The fellow opened his eyes. "I'm-m all right. Get Martin. He's under there. . . ."

"Where, Bill? Where?"

Where Bill Cross pointed men were raising a still form, raising it gently. Denny saw the blond curls of Martin Loop.

## CHAPTER LXXX

### THE CLEW

THEY lifted him quietly—giant shoulders and fair head of Martin Loop. The boyish eyes opened and closed.

"Get him to the hospital quick," Denny ordered. "Tell them to rush stretchers for the others."

The blond hair glared against the ashen pallor of Martin's face. Blood streamed at his neck.

They carried him down the gorge—away from the moans, the massed and twisted steel.

Denny turned from that grim procession. "Check up the men," he told the foreman. "Find out if we've got them all."

Four fellows brought out from under the dangling chutes lay doubled and groaning on the ground; a fifth clenched both hands to his sides muttering hoarsely, "God Almighty! God Almighty!"

Then a man was shouting to Denny. "We've got them all. They're all here. He wants to see you. Loop's dying. He wants to see you."

Denny felt that he was running into a gray, frightful waste. He kept saying in a moist breathlessness, "Martin is dying." But he couldn't believe it.

At the hospital shack, the camp doctor said briefly, "No chance. Internal injuries."

Martin Loop's big hand fumbled for his. The shy blue eyes darted wildly. Denny sat quietly and whispered, "Can I do anything, Martin? Do you want something?"

Even Martin's lips were gray. "I'm finished. Tell my mother— Tell her she has Jeff."

"Yes, Martin, I'll tell her that. What else?"

A pause, oppressive, silent, punctured by long, rasping breaths. "Tell your sister—" Suddenly Martin's eyes were wide open, stark— His hand on Denny's loosened.

Denny stooped down to hear. But Martin's curly head sank back on the pillows. The lips parted. They seemed to smile.

The doctor shook his head. "He's gone."

It seemed to Denny that clubs beat him—drummed dully all about him. The air had a hot unnatural stillness. Martin Loop is killed—killed. He said this repeatedly. But each time the phrase brought a new shock.

Suddenly and for the first time he remembered the cable snapping—remembered the frozen moment when he saw it sag—the steel arms trembling. Like a frenzied shout heaving through vast, empty spaces there came to him the warning of the grizzled laborer: "This here cable don't seem strong enough."

He had dismissed the caution. An old crank, what did he know of weights and stresses?

Now it reached in and clamped on his heart. The cable was weak. He had been warned. And Martin Loop dead. . . .

Almost at a run, Denny went back to the dam. That cable was strong enough for double the load it carried. It suddenly struck him as an astounding coincidence that the old fellow should have made this remark and then insisted: "Guess you're right but it looks pretty weak to me."

Two of his assistants, Jim Tucker and Bob Enright, were standing in the pit discussing the accident. Denny's thoughts made a frantic thunder, and in this he moved. But he said coolly enough, "Have you fellows looked at the cable?"

The long end hung limply, the steel arms it had supported doubled and trailing. The men had not yet examined it. They went over together.

Denny pulled the cable free. As he touched the burnt strands a numb fury swept through him. "What do you make of this?"

The men were silent staring at each other with narrowed eyes. "Nitric acid," Tucker said with a burst of anger. "Nitric acid."

Denny touched the burnt strands—Rage consummate and terrible flamed on his thoughts. Nitric acid—murder—Martin Loop. Who could have done the villainous thing? Who? Mingling with his fury came a grim, deadening sense of impotence.

Martin Loop lay dead—kind, happy lad with his boyish eyes and crop of sunny curls. Two hours ago he brought Denny a pie that Katy made. Now he was lying in the hospital, the sheet drawn over his face.

Some one had murdered him. Some one had brought five



other men to agony. That some one was gone as completely as a shadow swallowed by the sun.

"There's a fiend loose somewhere in this camp!" Denny could scarcely breathe. "Have you fellows any hunch? Have you heard any threats?"

Nothing. They could suggest nothing. They had heard nothing.

"Be on the lookout. Keep your ears open. There's something up."

Inwardly every pulse in Denny's body hammered with suppressed violence. His thought concentrated on the laborer who had given him the warning.

Was it just a notion of the man's? Had he done this deliberately? But why?

He went to the foreman and had all the men working at the towers assembled. His eyes searched hurriedly for the old fellow, but he remembered only that he had a squat figure and wore a battered cap. He couldn't identify the image in his memory with any of the men standing before him.

Yet he was certain that this man was in some way the key to the mystery. There was no reason in the world why he should have given this warning. The cable had been thoroughly tested. Three days ago it was perfectly sound. The more he considered it the more positive he became that here was the clew. The man was perhaps the fiend who had poured acid on the cable, having given the warning on purpose to turn suspicion from the real cause of the break.

If he were merely a crank he would brag over the whole camp of the advice he had given—advice the engineer had ignored. Denny put his surmise to the test.

"Did any of you fellows notice any sagging of the cable in the last few days?"

Eyes lighted with curious interest. One waited for another to speak. Most of them shook their heads.

"Have you seen any one prowling about the towers?"

No answer.

"Did any of you notice the cable weak?"

A stir of excitement, then a confused murmur. The men began to talk among themselves.

"Well, who did? Speak out!"

The foreman answered: "Old Baldy started that a week ago. Just got a notion about the cable."

"Where is he?"

"He quit a couple of days ago."

"Do you know where he went?"

No one knew.

Denny turned away, an overpowering heat rising like a wave and sucking the strength from him.

This was it. Old Baldy was the man or he knew the man who had murdered Martin Loop.

He would find him.

He went back to the hospital. Snag Wilson, the man who had clutched his side calling on the Almighty God to relieve him, was sinking.

Denny went from one bed to another, then came back to the dam giving orders for the wreckage to be cleared.

That night a heart-shaking thing happened. Martin Loop's father came. He rushed into the hospital. Denny was the first to meet him. His lips twitched. "My boy—how is he?"

When Denny shook his head, the man's face smoothed out an ashen gray as though a knife were run through his body. After that he stood above the cot, holding his son's hand and saying over and over, "Martin, my boy, my boy! Oh, my God! Martin!"

He dropped on his knees, flinging his arms about the dead form and sobbing. The cries rang in Denny's ears for days, for weeks.

He flung himself from the room, went over to the cabin and was surprised to find Katy up—a white anguish in her face. She took his hand and pressed it between her own. "What can it be? Oh, Denny! Poor Martin!"

He felt as though he were breaking in two, but he answered, "Go to bed, Katy. This is frightful. You might as well go to bed."

He went back to the hospital. Spent the night watching. Spent the night in a dull, baffled torture. In the morning Snag Wilson was dead.

Before noon, Martin Loop's father climbed to the truck and drove away with the body of his son.

The farmers coming up from the valley passed the grim conveyance. Twenty of them came to the camp. With them was James Dunlap. The storm broke.

## CHAPTER LXXXI

### JUDGMENT

THEY came with a white, grim resolution, their entrance cutting like a rude sword across the warm quiet of the summer noon. Berne Melrose stood with his fists doubled, not offering his hand to Denny.

"Any more dead, Brooks? This kills the project. This is hell."

"One more. All the others will recover."

"Loop's boy. My God! Driving him down like that to the mother—my cousin. This is the worst yet. This finishes it. I wish to God we'd never started it." He leaned against the tower, his breath laboring.

Denny felt the hot noon air pressing like an iron hand. Against the hoarse vibrance of the big viking's voice, his own tones rang weakly. "It's ghastly. Martin Loop was one of the best men we had."

"We can't buck this. This is a killing blow. Takes the heart out of it."

Denny felt that he must talk—must save the job and yet, measured by the still violence of Berne Melrose's emotion, the strongest arguments were feeble.

But he struck into it. "Every big project takes several lives. It's a fearful thing. Martin Loop was my friend, but the project isn't doomed. The money loss is comparatively small. Ten thousand dollars will cover the damage. We'll have another cable in a day or two at most. The work was going along fine. It will go on again."

The farmers standing in groups had now formed a circle about Denny and were listening with their hands cupped behind their ears. James Dunlap, twisting his soft palms as though he were washing them, nodded.

"Ten thousand dollars will cover the damage, Mr. Brooks," he said softly, "but suppose we get another cable and it also proves defective?"

"The cable was not defective, Mr. Dunlap."

"No? Then I suppose it must have proved too weak for the load?"

The loose end of the cable was lying at Denny's feet. He picked it up, showed it to Melrose. "I thought you heard the cause of the break. The cable was neither defective nor weak. It snapped because some one stole into the tower yesterday at noon and poured nitric acid on it. You can see the stains."

"Ah, nitric acid!" Dunlap's shiny face with its coarse yellow eyebrows grew pale. He reached over and took the cable from the farmer. "Nitric acid, Mr. Brooks? You're sure acid was used?"

"Very sure."

"Precisely—very sure. Being an engineer, I suppose you know. I see. Some one put nitric acid on the cable. Managed to steal into the tower. More trouble with the workmen, I suppose, and this was done for revenge?"

"We've had no recent trouble with the men. None whatever."

"All contented, I suppose?" The lawyer's whisper curved incisively. "Amazing! Most amazing mystery. The cable isn't weak and it isn't defective and the men are all contented so that none of them could have any reason for pouring acid on the cable. Yet it snaps and this horrible accident overtakes our people."

Denny felt that Dunlap wished to push him to a corner, when he would flash out a cudgel and strike. But he was too oppressed by the terrible vigil of the night to turn with any sudden anger. He answered quietly.

"It is amazing, Mr. Dunlap. As you say, it's most amazing."

The lawyer took this up, pushing his face close to Melrose. "Why, at this rate, gentlemen, we can expect accidents and deaths every fortnight. Next week the dam may be blown again and another loss of \$150,000 handed our people!"

"That's exactly what we face, Mr. Dunlap!" Denny fired. "When the dam was blown you made an investigation that discovered nothing. The fiend is still at large."

Dunlap's pale blue eyes drew bitingly, his lips tightened. "A fiend, Mr. Brooks? This is your explanation? I see. A fiend may have done it. Novel solution—quite novel. I hadn't thought of this. I'll look into it."

He went down into the pit, examining the foundations for the

dam, calling the workmen aside, talking to them. A quiet, intent group of farmers followed. They gathered in little circles. Dunlap brought the laborers to them. This continued for two hours.

Every time Denny looked at the lawyer, a hot, unreasonable anger surged over him. "What can he learn there?" he thought furiously.

Then Dunlap joined him and Melrose. "There seems to have been a general impression in the camp that the cable was weak, Mr. Brooks."

"One old fellow who quit started that. I'd like to find him."

"Oh, you knew of this rumor?"

"I tested the cable after I heard it."

"Oh, you heard of it and you tested the cable? I see." He kept nodding his head. Then he repeated so that many of the farmers gathered near heard. "You tested it and found that it was sound. Three days later it snaps. Some one, for no reason that any one can learn, pours nitric acid on it. Coincidence—amazing, isn't it?"

The purring voice struck suddenly like a fang, roused Denny from his depression. He turned his back on Dunlap, saying with a burning fury to Melrose: "That fellow's a dog. He wants to pin this ghastly thing on me."

Melrose neither looked at him nor answered. Denny's blood rushed with a stinging hurt to his skin. He flung back his head, forcing the great rugged fellow to meet his eyes. "Do you think, Melrose, that I'm responsible? Do you think that cable was weak and I passed it up?"

He would rather have taken a stab than the sentence Berne Melrose gave: "You're the chief engineer, Mr. Brooks."

He answered hotly: "Yes, and I'm on the job! And that cable didn't snap because it was weak any more than the coffer dam broke of its own accord. There's something behind all this and I'm going to find out what it is."

Melrose nodded "Yes."

Denny turned. He walked swiftly. He found it hard to breathe. "Good Lord! They think I've put up something on them. They think I'm to blame!"

He started back, anger concentrating on the lawyer, intending to demand from him: "What's your game? What do you mean? You've stirred this up!" But he could hear Dunlap's curling voice:

"No offense, you understand. Nothing personal in this. You don't object to an investigation, do you?"

He went back to the camp. Dunlap's game was soon clear enough to him.

He was summoned to appear as a witness with several of his workmen and assistants before the coroner's jury. The inquest was held the next morning in the rooms of the town undertaker.

About thirty men were sitting on the chairs in the bare store. Almost the moment he entered Denny's glance was arrested by a grizzled, squatty fellow wearing a battered cap—Old Baldy!

Denny's nerves tightened. He made a quick dash across the room. As he went a murmur rose, "That's him! There's the fellow." He was too much excited to note that the remarks pointed at him.

As he came abreast of the old fellow Dunlap stood up, whispering, "Don't antagonize him, Brooks. We want to be careful, you know. Don't want to involve our people in any damage suits. He'll go easy on his testimony. I've convinced him the cable wasn't weak."

"I've something to say to him." Denny brushed past Dunlap, accosted Old Baldy with a quick "Step outside a moment, will you?"

The old fellow shook a gnarled finger in Denny's face. "I want nothing to do with the likes of you, sir! Nothing."

"But I've got something to do with you."

Baldy folded his arms, squatting like a graven image on his chair. The coroner was already in his place making his statement.

Then Baldy was called to the stand.

"You noticed the suspension cable was weak?"

"Yes. I noticed it sagged when the pouring was heaviest.

"I been noticing it two weeks. I told the foreman. He done nothing."

He kept his short, powerful arms folded tightly against his sides. Not a muscle of the gray stony face moved except the lips.

"Then I told the chief engineer—that fellow over there, and he done nothing. Gave it a look, said it could support double the load. But it kept saggin'. I seen it and showed it to others. Nobody done nothing.

"And then Martin Loop was killed."

Red lightning striking through the room. The men sat forward mumbling. Voices rose—then a sob. With a pang Denny saw the father of Martin Loop in the second row, his head buried in his hands.

The coroner rapped, but some one shouted, "We ought to string them up for this. By Gawd, we ought to get them."

Denny felt a flashing through him; his teeth clenched. As Old Baldy came from the witness chair, he could have sprung at him, rammed the lie down his throat.

He was called. There came a scraping of chairs, hoarse whispers, every eye fixed upon him. He stood up, eager to speak. Before he had said a word, he felt the hostility. He knew judgment was already passed.

## CHAPTER LXXXII

### VEILED CHARGES

"THERE'S the fellow! That's him!" As Denny pushed to the rough table the mumble sharpened. He passed the bowed form of Martin Loop's father and an image of the ruddy, boyish face with the blue eyes and blond curls came to his mind.

He tripped over the sprawled feet of a man in the first row. They were drawn in quickly with a hoarse whispered "Murderer!" He had a furious impulse to turn, fling off his coat, challenge the room.

But the coroner began. He was a dark, leather-skinned man with a strand of black, dry hair drawn across his head. He snapped his words out with a tight harshness.

Denny made his statement, denied with a rising vehemence all that Old Baldy said.

"Did you keep any watchmen at the towers?"

"Yes, at night."

"But not in the day? Then it would be easy for a strange workman to enter the towers in the day?"

"There is no way of telling a strange workman from any other."

"Then a stranger or any malicious person might have entered the towers and poured nitric acid on the cable? And the workmen have no protection whatever?"

Denny felt that he was being led to a trap door. He stretched his neck quickly, stood up. The men in the room sat forward—some of the faces grim, others expectant.

"Men don't go around pouring nitric acid on cables as a business or pastime! This is a thing that happens once in a lifetime and only because of some vicious scheme to cripple the work. We can no more guard against it than we can guard against a thunder clap!"

The faces were not distinct to him now. He heard his own voice shouting, then the coroner's harsh repetition: "Once in a lifetime? And do you know any reason why this uncommon thing should have happened to you?"



"No—some fiend did it."

"Do you suspect any of your workmen?"

"No."

"Was any one seen climbing the tower or pouring the acid or making his escape?"

"No."

"What makes you so certain that acid was poured on the cable to cause the break?"

"The cable was burned through by acid. My assistants, Jim Tucker and Bob Enright, have testified to this."

"How long after the accident was it when you first examined the cable?"

"An hour and a half."

"Where were you in that hour and a half?"

A sharp breath drew through the room—a low humming.

"In the first hour I was in the pit directing the search for the workers. In the last I was in the hospital." Denny saw Loop's father pass a handkerchief over his face, caught the feverish intensity of the listeners with their undercurrent of hostility. He went on with a warm challenge: "I was at the hospital. Martin Loop was my friend. He asked for me. I was with him—till he died."

Feet shuffled. A man stood up in the center of the room, "Your friend, was he? That there cable was weak though and you didn't give a darn about it. Oh?"

"The cable wasn't—"

The coroner whacked a book on the rough table, rasping out: "An hour and a half after the accident, Mr. Brooks, you went to the pit and showed this cable with nitric acid on it to your assistants. You were the first to examine it. Now in that hour and a half would it be possible to have poured nitric acid on the cable—poured it on after the cable had snapped?"

The trap sprung. Denny was rushed to it; so unsuspecting he was at the plunge that he stood shaken and bewildered, uncertain whether to jump or retreat. The coroner repeated the question. Denny answered, "Yes, that would have been possible."

"And there is no way of determining exactly whether it was poured on before or just after the cable snapped?"

"I was the first to pull that cable from the wreckage. I pulled it out in the presence of my assistants. The acid was on it then."

"I understand. This was an hour and a half after the snapping was it not?"

The anger that had kept his nerves taut passed into a hot, throbbing impotence. They wanted to pin it on him, as Dunlap did. They were sick and tired of these causeless accidents. And in the next room with the door half open lay the body of Martin Loop. Every one's thought was in that room or with the quiet, broken figure sitting with his hands pressed against his face—sitting there a dumb accusation.

Twice the coroner had spoken. Denny caught the end of his question, "—warned the cable was weak, did you cause any tests to be made?"

"The cable had been thoroughly tested before it was put up."

"Then you dismissed the warning without investigation?"

"I examined it myself. It was not weak and there was no sagging."

"Before this accident did you ever hear of a cable snapping?"

"Yes"

"Is it a very unusual occurrence? A thing that happens once in a lifetime?"

He brought out one admission—then another. Denny could do nothing but answer though he saw the faces of the men on the jury nodding wisely, nodding in satisfaction. He was convicting himself—openly proving that he disdained the natural explanation of the break, clinging to a fantastic insistence that some fiend was responsible.

"Does such a thing ever happen to a cable that has been tested? Have these accidents ever happened when skilled engineers were in charge? But they couldn't happen to you? In the present case you maintain that some one, that nobody saw, climbed the tower and for no reason that any one can name, poured nitric acid on the cable?"

Denny stood up, fists pressing on the arms of the chair.

"That's what I maintain! That cable snapped because some one climbed the tower and poured nitric acid on it!"

"And it's entirely impossible that there might have been a weak strand in your cable noticed as a sagging by the previous witness? This has happened on other jobs, but it couldn't happen on yours?"

"It could have happened, but it didn't!"

The coroner nodded. Men about the room nodded, lit their pipes—nodded grimly.

"That's all!"

Denny went from the table feeling that he had walked into a loud, withering blast. There came a mad thumping in his ears that echoed "Nitric acid! Nitric acid! NITRIC ACID!" until the whole room thundered with the phrase.

Men pushed their chairs into small groups. Still that grim, satisfied nodding. The breathless intensity was gone. Other witnesses called, testified briefly. Denny's collar felt like a red-hot steel driving into his throat. He kept saying: "They'll pin it on me," and he had to fight a crazy impulse to stand up and shout, "I tell you, nitric acid snapped that cable. I tell you I know."

The jury filing out—filing back—the verdict.

"We find that Martin Loop came to his death as the result of the breaking of the suspension cable. Whether this broke because of defect or weakness or because of treatment by nitric acid has not been sufficiently established. The jury, however, strongly recommends that the engineer of the Twin Falls Irrigation District adopt an adequate system of inspection that will in some measure safeguard the lives of workers."

Again that flashing in his veins. He went to stand up—to shout—but he found himself riveted to the chair, numb, speechless; the thumping in his ears growing vague, distant, faces in a blur. It seemed that he sat thus hours with his head pulsing "They blame you! They've put it on you!"

Suddenly he saw Old Baldy, Dunlap and Berne Melrose going from the room. He lifted himself from the chair and strode after them.

Without looking at him Melrose said: "There's a meeting of the irrigation board to-night. Will you attend, Mr. Brooks, and make your report?"

Denny nodded, but he reached out and caught Old Baldy's arm. "Mr. Melrose," he said, "I know nitric acid was poured on that cable."

"I've heard you make that statement a number of times, Mr. Brooks."

The grizzled old fellow twisted but Denny clamped his hand. "This fellow knows more than he's told, Melrose. Get it out of him. You don't gain anything pinning it on me. There's

more back of this. There's some fiendish attempt to block the work."

"This has been my private opinion for some time, Mr. Brooks. I'll take the matter up with you to-night."

"Take it up now, Melrose."

"There's another thing I want to take up with you, Mr. Brooks. I'll take it up to-night." The rugged old giant's eyes blazed; "I want to know about a million dollar offer you reported to me."

Denny stepped back with the shock.

"From the Consolidated, Mr Melrose."

"From the Consolidated, Mr. Brooks! I want to know why the engineer of our project should traffic with the rival we fought five years. I want to know that!" He swung on his heel and stalked off. Denny's thought stopped. He went walking down the block saying to himself: "God, what's this—what's this?"

He reached the hotel over the grocery store. There was a telegram for him. Six cryptic words: "How you like the greaser now? Pedro Francita and Juan Hernandez."

## CHAPTER LXXXIII

### UNDER FIRE

WHEN Denny read the crude telegram a fury different from anything he had ever felt shook him as though a panther had him in its clasp, blowing a red-hot breath all about him.

"How do you like the greaser now?"

"PEDRO FRANCITA AND JUAN HERNANDEZ."

He could see the coarse black hair of Pedro as he dodged through the broken board of the cement shed; the lean red lips of Hernandez, demanding, "We want more money!"

If the two had stood before him, his hands would have reached out and clawed the life from them. He would have murdered them. It was murder flaming in his mind, flaming with such sweeping intensity he dropped into a chair exhausted.

And he sat thus with the telegram doubled in his hand; sat without moving; with no count of time. Flies darted through the open window, circled in the small, stuffy room, buzzed in insistent circles about his head. He felt nothing.

The sound of his own name jangled harshly on his raw nerves, came blatantly upward through the thin boards from the bar next the grocery. "That there Brooks made a nice donkey of himself. If I'd been on that jury I'd handed it to him. He's a jinx. He's a jinx, that's what he is!"

Denny listened, staring at the red paper, streaked and torn, that covered the board walls. Four or five were talking at once. From the confusion phrases leaped. . . . "Old Marty Loop'll fix him!" And some one else, "Twin Falls is finished."

And again, "He's a jinx, that's what he is!"

With the word echoing, he smoothed out the message and drank in the pain of it. "A jinx." He was responsible—that hot-headed speech he had made calling the men greasers.

He was suddenly conscious of the oppressive room, the flies, the red walls closing together. He got up and flung out of the place.

It was cooler out of the town. He had no notion where he was going. But he stopped before the school with a bench under a tree. No one was about. He went into the yard and sat down.

The grilling of the morning repeated itself. The coroner's jury had actually made him responsible for the death of Martin Loop. They hadn't said it openly but it was in their verdict; in their recommendation.

There swept over him again a boiling resentment; a fighting surge to get up and shout against the rank injustice. Why should he endure this? He wouldn't!

But he had tried to say this to Melrose and Melrose had flung another charge in his face and stalked off.

For the first time Denny recalled this charge that he had trafficked with the Consolidated and had made himself their agent submitting the million-dollar offer to the irrigation board.

Did Melrose suspect the Consolidated was behind these tragic mishaps? Was such a thing conceivable? What could they gain?

He went back to the interview with Stoddard, his uncertainty at the time, Dunlap's eagerness and then his sudden change of opinion. Toss and twist it as he would there was certainly no reason why the Consolidated should snap the cable and murder men. At most they could halt the work a few days. He dismissed it and went back to it.

Melrose accused him—directly. He'd go and have it out with him now . . . NOW. He'd not wait till the meeting.

Melrose had the biggest house in the town—rambling, two story, painted white, pink roses climbing to the roof. A girl about fourteen answered when he rang. Her face was streaked with crying. "Father's over to Aunt Laurie's," she said. "He's over to the funeral."

The anger in him died, and he had suddenly a picture in his mind of Martin Loop's mother. An overwhelming pity softened him. He took a card and wrote:

"Dear Mrs. Loop:

"In the hour before he died your son spoke of you; he kept thinking of you. He asked me to give you this message. These are his words, 'Tell my mother she has Jeff.' I know that you feel bitterly toward me, but Martin was my friend. I would

have given my own life sooner than have done the thing that took his.

“DENMAN BROOKS.”

He asked the girl to give this note directly into her aunt's hands. She said she would.

When he returned to the hotel, he tried to outline the report he would make before the board; tried to get clear in his own mind some explanation for the vicious chain of accidents. He reached no conclusion.

And in spite of the telegram he wasn't convinced that Pedro Francita and Juan Hernandez had snapped the cable. He kept harking back to Old Baldy. Baldy could tell something.

Would he be at the meeting? If he was Denny would challenge him.

Baldy was there. All the men who had attended the inquest in the morning were there. They assembled in the bare room of the town hall.

Melrose, Dunlap and five members of the irrigation board sat around a white pine table. Baldy occupied a chair in the first row directly facing Dunlap.

When Denny entered a silence dropped over the excited argument. Yet the air vibrated with the tense echo. Dunlap smiled and motioned him to a seat at the table.

“Mr. Brooks will make his report,” he said. It struck Denny as ominous that the lawyer should preside.

He stood up and repeated all that he had told at the inquest. He told the thing exactly as it had happened—told it with a growing passionate heat aroused by the grim, blank silence of his listeners.

Before he was quite finished a big-boned fellow with sandy hair and an aggressive chin stood up. He kept wagging his head, chewing a great wad of tobacco as Denny talked. He spat it out with an explosive: “Say, we've heard all that! We know the dam broke and the cable busted and Martin Loop was killed. We want to know why them there things happened. That's what we're after. We want to know who did them! That's what you've got to tell us.”

Denny squared his shoulders. “That's what I can't tell you. That's what I don't know.”

“But that's what we're gonna find out! That's what you'd better tell us!”

Some one else jumped up and shouted: "Yes, that's what you better tell us!"

Immediately the room bellowed, chairs were knocked over, men were rushing up to the table, shouting, "That's what you better tell us!"

A cold rage passed over Denny and fixed him. Suddenly he walked up to Old Baldy and pointed directly in his face, "This man, gentleman, is the key to the mystery. He gave a warning deliberately so that it might afterwards appear the cable snapped through negligence on my part."

Baldy, with his face stony, his short arms clasped about his ribs, sat motionless as an ancient idol. Dunlap's yellow eyebrow cocked; his cheeks were remarkably pale. The farmers stood arrested, open-mouthed at the flaring abruptness.

Denny pitched on: "He knows more than he's told. Don't let him escape. There's some plot—some fiendish scheme behind this. Blame me for the snapping of the cable, but how will you explain the blowing of the dam, the watering of the cement?"

A pounding at the table—Dunlap calling for order; Denny swept out his hand: "I'm here to speak, Dunlap, and I'm going to speak!"

"I tell you that cable snapped because nitric acid was poured on it. Read this!" He flashed out the telegram, shouted it to them, yelled it at Dunlap. The lawyer pressed his hands on the boards. "Let me see that, Mr. Brooks."

"When I'm finished, Dunlap." He turned his back and fired into the breathless, astonished faces. "If the cable was weak and Old Baldy really saw what no other of 500 men saw—if he really saw it sag, then this telegram is a fake and there was no nitric acid poured and I'm responsible.

"But if Francita and Hernandez did the trick—as they claim here—then why did Old Baldy give a warning? Ask him that. I tell you there's something vicious behind it—something fiendish—Martin Loop is killed. You blame me. But answer these questions—find the fiend—"

In his flaming abandon he kept repeating, "Some plot, some fiend—"

Suddenly Melrose thrust the rugged thunder of his voice through the hot excitement of the room.

"Let us look into this matter of the fiend, Mr. Brooks. Will



you answer these questions? Will you hand over that telegram?"

Denny walked up to the table, Dunlap took the message. With his chin cupped in his hand, nodded. "I suppose this word refers to that speech, Mr. Brooks—that speech you made? You believe nitric acid was poured on the cable?"

"I know it."

"I see. You know it. Then suppose we dismiss the theory that the cable was weak—"

"Then why should Baldy have given the warning?"

Dunlap shrugged: "Have old laborers never made such predictions, Mr. Brooks? Especially with a very young—pardon me—a mere boy as the engineer in charge? Well, suppose we accept your idea that acid was poured on the cable—why then, the mystery is solved—clear as day."

Dunlap took the meeting into his hands.

## CHAPTER LXXXIV

### ULTIMATUM

"SOLVED—clear as day. This telegram makes it perfectly plain." Dunlap smoothed out the crumpled paper with his soft, flat palm.

The men pushed about the table, waited in a stillness so tight it drew like a cord. The lawyer nodded slowly, his eyes on the message, saying in a low reluctant whisper: "We have to sift this matter. We must. The good of all our people depends on it. We have to sift it no matter who it hurts. You understand, Mr. Brooks? Nothing personal in this—nothing at all."

Denny felt the cord of silence twisting about his neck, pressing against his mouth. He leaned down to Dunlap, intending to shout, but his voice came in a harsh gasp: "Sift it, Dunlap, and be quick about it! Sift it!"

"You're willing to assist this investigation, Mr. Brooks? Naturally as the engineer in charge you can materially aid." The pale blue eyes opened frankly. Denny ignored them, turned to Melrose.

"That question is an insult to me, Melrose. And it shows prejudice. Why should I for one moment be unwilling to aid? What have I to fear by ten thousand investigations? This work of yours is my work. No one here feels more bitterly than I these mishaps. No one wishes more than I to find the cause.

"But I don't propose to stand here and be gibbeted by James Dunlap! I don't propose to take his insinuations! You made a charge against me to-day, Melrose! You accused me of trafficking with your rivals, the Consolidated. If I'm under suspicion I want to know it. If you're here to try me and not make an investigation, say so!"

Mutters grew to a rumble. Melrose stood up, swept out his great, powerful arm, answered Denny coldly: "This board wants an accounting from you, Mr. Brooks. Our attorney is here to conduct the investigation. If you don't wish to face it you're free to leave."

Denny thrust his hands in his pockets. They were shaking. Every pulse shook hotly. He knew that he was trapped. If he went, it would be cowardice; if he stayed they would do as they had done in the morning. They would push him to the wall, jam the thing on him. They had come to do this.

"If you don't wish to answer the questions, Mr. Brooks, you're free to go."

"I stay."

"A misunderstanding," Dunlap was saying. "I meant no offense by the question, Mr. Brooks. Mere form to ask you if you were willing. Naturally we want to go into the history of these accidents. Naturally that's the first thing to do. You had no trouble at all until the cement was watered, I understand. The work was going fine up to that moment.

"At that time you suspected a Mexican, Pedro Francita, whom you had fired?"

Denny nodded.

"I see. The man was dismissed, made a special plea to be reinstated, and when refused went away in a rage. A day or two later 5000 sacks of cement were ruined. You were certain then you had seen Francita escaping from the shed?"

"I believed Francita was the criminal then, but when the dam was blown—"

"Just a moment; we're coming to that. You believed Francita the criminal. You believed he stirred up discontent with the Mexican laborers. This trouble became acute, I believe, and you took the matter in hand. You challenged the men in the mess hall, did you not?"

A sudden boyish fury against Dunlap and his curling whispers; against the avid stillness of the forms thronged about the table, lashed him. "Yes," he fired hotly, "and on that occasion I called the Mexicans greasers and if you're trying to trace the whole trouble to that—"

Dunlap stood up, threw aside his whisper, the pale eyes focused sharply, "I'm not trying to trace the trouble to any cause, Mr. Brooks. But merely to find the cause, whatever or whoever it may be. You agreed to assist this investigation. This is a grave—a tragic matter—a matter of millions to our people. We've sustained a loss nearing \$200,000. The farmers have lost heart. Two of their sons are killed. They want to know why. I'm trying to find out why."

The men pressed about him, their eyes fired with challenge. The big-boned fellow who had first disturbed the meeting shouted: "Yes—that's the stuff! Why! We want to know why!"

Dunlap waved his short, plump hand. "Up to the present time we have no cause. Why, at the rate these things are happening the dam may be blown every week, cables snapped, men killed, and we have no solution for the horrible mystery. A fiend?"

"Mr. Brooks says a fiend climbed the tower and poured nitric acid on the cable. This is his theory. But why is there a fiend? What produced the fiend for us?"

Dunlap took up the crumpled yellow paper and waved it. "Here's the answer. It confirms the engineer's own solution: There is a fiend, and the fiend poured nitric acid on the cable. The fiend planted dynamite at the dam. Here are your fiends, Pedro Francita and Juan Hernandez."

Denny stood there with his hands pressed on the table, tongues of flame licking his eyes. He wanted to speak, to say quietly, "Can this be true? Is this possible?" He knew the farmers were staring at him; waiting with a hostile expectancy for his answer. He could drag no word from his tongue. Finally he said, "I don't believe it! I don't believe they sent the telegram. There wasn't enough provocation for all this—"

Dunlap smiled, folded the sheet. "Is it just barely possible that you don't wish to believe it, Mr. Brooks? Not willfully, understand me, but you naturally hesitate to believe the trouble started with that speech?"

"You think the provocation insufficient? You think the mere fact of dismissing the men and calling them greasers not enough to bring such results?"

"But the results are here. After that speech Juan Hernandez and ten of his followers left. They left making threats. Hernandez is a cruel and treacherous enemy. He had this reputation. You had heard these men were dangerous. It was generally known. This irrigation district has learned in a tragic experience the truth of their reputation. The coffer dam was blown. Now this! The telegram puts the blame where it belongs."

Denny felt the tongues of fire reaching into his mouth. He wanted a drink. He wanted something to still the heavy thunder in his ears. The men had stepped back a little, but it

seemed to him they had him gagged and bound and were pulling at the ropes.

The air grew thick. Through its oppressive heaviness, Dunlap's voice hissed. "The facts are conclusive. Mr. Brooks made a speech inflaming racial passions and antagonisms. I am forced to the unpleasant necessity of stating as I did when the dam was blown—and when my advice was ignored—I am forced to state that an unfortunate handling of the labor situation has produced a fiend for us. This fiend will operate as long as the personal enemy remains on the job. We may expect more tragedies; more of our sons killed; more hundreds of thousands of dollars thrown away—

"Gentlemen, the choice is clear. Do you want your engineer or do you want your project?"

The oppressive heaviness was suddenly gashed with a shrill, furious "The project! That's it! That's what we want."

Still Denny leaned his weight on his hands. They wanted him! They wanted the job from him! Wanted him to give up. They were demanding it. They were crowding about him, their eyes darting belligerently. His job.

He flung out his arms—pushed them back, tore the collar from his neck. He found himself shouting, "You have a contract with me. I offered once before, when your lawyer tried to discredit me, to surrender it."

Cries, "Surrender it now! We've had enough! Give it up!"

The youth and the fire in him flashed to the goad. "I don't surrender it! I'll not surrender it! This work is my work. It's done as well as any one can do it. I deny from start to finish the lies James Dunlap has told. I'll finish it without my pay—"

Melrose stood up, saying with a sharp violence, "It's you, Mr. Brooks, or the project. You give up the contract or we give up the work."

In that moment the warmth went out of his veins. His voice, as though it were the voice of a cold stranger, answered, "Take your contract. I can do nothing with all of you against me."

The room broke into a ghastly shout, a clapping of hands, chairs kicked aside, men slapping each other on the back, filing from the room.

Denny stood there, shaking, speechless, pressing his open hands on the rough pine table. Suddenly he went up to Mel-

rose and pounded his fist on the board, "What about the Consolidated? If they've done these things, how did my speech do them?"

"Tell me first, Mr. Brooks, why our engineer should have trafficked with our rivals? If any compromise was to be considered it should have come through our attorney."

"They sent for me. I knew nothing until I arrived. I was against it from the start. Ask Dunlap. He came for a week urging me to recommend acceptance. Dunlap!" He looked about the room. The lawyer had filed out with the men.

"Strange," Melrose answered, "he should send this vigorous argument against it. Strange."

With a stab, Denny remembered the fiery letter he had written and then told Joan to destroy. He leaned down close to the big giant's rugged face. He knew his chin was shaking and there was a terrible stinging in his eyes. He spoke almost with a plea—almost with a sob.

"You're the biggest fellow here, Melrose. You've treated me damnably. Dunlap wrote that letter long after you had yourselves rejected the proposal. I was against it. You think I'm the traitor. But I'll find him, Melrose!

"And I'll bring him to you. You've forced me out. But I haven't quit. I'll get your man and let you have him."

Melrose sat grim, silent. Then he nodded, "Yes."

Denny stood there facing him. Presently he said, with lips twitching, "It was my job."

## LXXXV

### FORCED OUT

A LIGHT winked in the cabin, pierced like a small golden eye through the encompassing blackness.

Denny's face was cold; his heart felt cold and heavy. "Katy's up—still up," he thought distantly. He gave up trying to keep his lips from shaking.

It was midnight. He had driven four hours, driven with a mad recklessness, the stinging in his eyes half blinding him. Along the road the black trees stalked, gaunt and desolate like doomed ghosts. They fled as Denny swept past—seemed to flee in terror—for he drove in a hurricane, with a hurricane beating about and through him.

Now he was come out of it—chilled, shaking and suddenly weak—ready to sob at the thought of telling Katy.

He stepped softly to the door, but even that softly she heard.

"Is it you, Denny?"

"Open it, Katy."

Perhaps to hide his face, he put his arm about her and kissed her.

"You're frozen, Denny. Your face is so cold. What kept you so long? Is it all right? Everything's all right?"

He walked over to the corner, hanging his coat carefully on a hook.

"Oh, all right enough. Why did you stay up, Katy? Were you frightened?"

"No—of course not. I wanted to see you. I've waited supper. The coffee is hot. Have a cup—you're shivering."

"It was a long ride," he answered vaguely, spreading his hands over the oil stove. Then he sat down at the table, toyed with a knife, took a piece of bread and broke it. Katy saw that his face, even his lips, were a queer, pearl gray like the snow on the distant ridges.

He feels terrible over this, she thought. Poor Martin—three days ago laughing sheepishly as he carried away the pie. To-day they had buried him. What a brutal, incredible finality!

What could she say to Denny? "It was unbearable, was it? It's made you feel terrible?"

"Yes—yes—a thing like that's awful." Suddenly he flung the bread from him, went over and leaned against the shelf, pressing his fist against his mouth.

"Denny—oh, you didn't feel this way when you left. You can't help it. Drink the coffee—please."

He turned around and looked at her and turning his back said with a flat quiet that entered like a cold breath on her heart: "They blame me, Katy. They've put it on me."

"You! Not you, Denny. Oh, no!"

"I'm out, Katy. Thrown out."

She lifted herself to her feet. "Denny—come here, Denny."

He didn't stir, but stood with his back to her, his face half hidden in his hand. If ever there was cruelty Katy knew it, standing there bound and he in this utter despair. "Denny, please—come here."

She would reach him—she would! With both hands on her chair, she pushed herself.

He came over then and with the utmost gentleness pressed her back.

She took his hands, folded her own under them, looking up with an infinite trust and tenderness. He could not meet the clear, sweet eyes, but turned from her with a sound that tore like a wound from his throat, "God, Katy—they put it on me. They threw me out."

Katy wished then to throw her arms around him, to cry and to cry, to rail against this terrible thing. But she leaned with all her might on her hands until she stood up again, facing him. With the red lips trembling she said softly, "They can't put in on you, Denny—no matter what they say. They can't. Don't take it so, Denny. You know you're not to blame. Every one here knows that. You will make them know it."

"Know it? They don't want to know it!" She had never seen his young eyes grim before.

He was suddenly standing before them again and they were storming the table, gashing the hot, oppressive air with a harsh, "Surrender it now! We've stood enough!"

"It means the job, Katy. It means everything."

He went over to the couch and pulled a suit case from it. Still his eyes kept stinging and he kept saying to himself, "Damnably—damnably—God!"



"I want to get out quick, Katy. I can't stick around here."

Katy, knowing all this job meant to him, remembering every word of the fervid dreams that grew in him with each week in the mountains, shook the tears from her eyes. "You won't let them put it on you, Denny. You'll come back here and show them. . . . How can you give it up?"

This brought the ridges before him and the tunnel and the dam rising higher each day. He had conjured this work. It was like the blood in his veins—a part of him. He loved it, lived in it. And he couldn't leave it.

All night he kept recurring to Melrose and the promise he had given, "I've not quit, and, by God, I won't quit. I'll find your man and let you have him!"

He didn't sleep for the tossing fire in his brain. In the morning he went to see Jim Tucker and Bob Enright.

"I'm leaving," he said. "They think I'm to blame. I'm leaving."

Tucker grasped his hand. "Are they mad? How are you to blame?"

"They've pinned it on me, so I let them have the contract."

"You're crazy."

"I can't put the job over if they're all against me. Have an eye out for the thing, will you? I'd like to see it a success. It's meant a lot to me."

They had resumed work. When Denny heard the engines chugging, the rush of concrete down the chutes, he wanted to run; to fling body and soul away from all remembrance.

He went to the post-office and sent a wire to Joan:

"I'm leaving the job here. Arrive city Friday or Saturday. Hold up the Robinson contract. I'm through.

"DENNY."

Then he went back to the mountain cabin. He brought their grips to the machine. Katy sat watching—she looked through the window to the lofty sugar pines—to the blue, distant ridges. And then to Denny's face. It was so white. Katy thought: "His heart is breaking."

He came and lifted her in his arms. He said quietly: "We're off, Katy-kid," and never let his eyes meet hers. He set her with this mute gentleness in the machine. He kept his head

averted—turned resolutely from the cabin as he started the engine. . . .

Then Katy said: "Look back at our little house, Denny—our little mountain house. We're coming back. You and I are coming back . . . oh, gladly as we came before. . . ."

He put his hand up quickly, hiding his eyes.

And so they left the mountains.

## CHAPTER LXXXVI

### THE STOLEN BOOK

JOAN had Denny's message before her.

Two days ago Katy's letter told of the latest tragedy. Now there came this. Denny was leaving.

Why?

Joan thought of Petra. Had Petra insisted that he quit? He loved her and would do it? All Joan's ardent young emotion rushed to Denny's defense. He wouldn't quit . . . no one could make him.

Yet he was through. Joan sat puzzling and aching over the mystifying statement. She was deep in her thought, so that she looked up with a frightened start to a man with sharp, fanatical eyes, thick, black hair and a pointed chin, who was standing at her desk, staring at her.

"I want see boss," he said in a rough, broken English. "Right now!"

"He's not here," Joan answered, standing and putting the desk between her and the excited stranger.

He laughed mockingly. "Where is he? You say where!"

"He's up in the mountains."

"When he come?"

"The end of the week. Is there something I can do for you?"

The eyes lighted, roved about the room. "I see him!" He shook a long bony finger in her face: "Don't you say I come!"

Early that afternoon James Dunlap came padding into the office, an attitude of immense, bottled excitement in his portly figure and his quick whispers.

"Quite a shakeup, Miss Lewis! Too bad, isn't it? Painful—very painful." He rested his soft hand on Joan's typewriter. "I was forced to it—forced. Case of duty, you know. Millions invested in the project. Our people must be protected."

"What do you mean, Mr. Dunlap?"

"Why," he leaned over, bending his head so that he gave

himself a red, creased double chin, "the board believes Mr. Brooks is in the pay of the Consolidated. I can't accept that. He's merely too young for the job—blundered—blundered tragically. Of course, we'll need a stenographer. You may as well stay."

Leaving Joan white and breathless with the shock he went over to the filing cabinet, began making notes in a small black book. Joan was at an angle from him, but as she sent the carriage of her typewriter back and forth her eyes were in direct line with him. Once she saw him take a paper quickly from the files, slip it in his pocket, glance quickly at her.

She gazed absently from the window.

While he stood at the files, the door was pushed softly. The man who had accosted Joan in the morning leaped toward Dunlap with a soft, mocking, "Ah—here you are!"

Dunlap recoiled with a startled, "Well—well—"

The man raised the long, bony finger, "You the boss?"

"Well—well—I may say so. At present, yes."

"Pay the money! You pay the money! Now. Right now."

"Well—well—money—ah, yes. The boss owes you money? I see . . ." He kept edging from the cabinet to the corner, the man following and talking angrily so that every word rasped.

"Ten hundred dollars—now. He tell me—"

"Yes, certainly, I see." Dunlap curled his hand over his mouth, the whispers sinking so that the other was forced to follow. Joan, listening with every fiber, caught only a word—a phrase. "We'll settle this, certainly. The boss promised it, you say?"

She got up deliberately, went to Denny's desk, saw Dunlap with his hand on the man's arm; saw him whispering; his face chalky. Then he said aloud, "I'll see what I can do, Mr. Wilson. We'll attend to it at once. If the boss gave the word of the company we'll have to make good."

They went out together.

Joan listened with charging pulse as their steps echoed heavily. Then she sped over to the cabinet. It was open where Dunlap had left it. Which paper had he taken? No way of telling. Did it mean anything at all?

They were all affidavits from the farmers of the Twin Falls Irrigation District; that and titles to the use of the water.

The small black book, covered with notes, lay on the top

of the papers. Joan picked it up, stuck it in her blouse and leaving the drawer open, moved with a soft, cat-like swiftness to her desk.

Dunlap returned. He came in, twisting his soft palms together, pushed over to her desk with an excited, "Bad business, Miss Lewis. Bad business! Our young friend is in pretty deep."

"What do you mean, Mr. Dunlap? You said something like this a while ago."

"Worse than I thought. I'm afraid we'll have all kinds of damage suits on our hands. This man, for instance—fanatical fellow—he was in this morning?"

"Yes."

Dunlap cocked the yellow eyebrow, the pale blue eyes fixing Joan avidly. "He told you what Mr. Brooks had done? He mentioned it? Told you about the promise?"

"He didn't mention Mr. Brooks."

"I see. Merely said 'the boss.' But he told you about the money owed him?"

Joan answered quietly: "No."

"I see. Just as well not to mention it, Miss Lewis. Company will have to settle, I presume."

He went over to the filing cabinet, ran his thumb nervously over the cards in the open drawer, stepped back and glanced at the floor. "Did you see a small black notebook, Miss Lewis?"

Joan's back was to him. She felt, as a flame, the sudden rush of color to her face. "Weren't you writing in one, Mr. Dunlap?"

"Yes—just a while ago. Sure I left it in this drawer." He began patting his pockets, pulling out wallets, papers tied with rubber bands. "Sure I had it just before I went out. Did you notice if I had it in my hands?"

The book lay like a bar of iron against Joan's waist. She went quietly over to the cabinet. "If you left it here, it can't have disappeared. Perhaps it fell between the files."

He took out the drawer, pushed all the papers back and then forward. Joan kept saying, "Are you sure it's not in your pocket? Perhaps you dropped it in the hall."

"No—well, it just means a lot of extra work. Had some valuable notes. Nothing important at all."

Joan waited till she was in her room, and had the door

locked, all the shades drawn down, before she took the book from her blouse.

Her hands shook as she turned the pages. They were filled with notes. In a small pocket of the cover were two half-sheets of paper, each signed with a single initial. This Joan couldn't decipher.

The first said merely: "S. Macey. Use caution."

The second: "Settle. No talk."

What she had hoped to find Joan couldn't say. She knew Dunlap was hostile to Denny, so she was ready to suspect him. The black notebook and these laconic messages gave her nothing more definite than her own doubts.

Yet she was obsessed with suspicion. She sat at a small table devising all manner of hiding places for the stolen book. Finally she took her coat and sewed it into the lining of her sleeve.

On Friday, when Denny returned she would give it to him. She would tell him of the strange fellow's visit and Dunlap's agitation.

The next morning there was a telegram for her:

"They're trying to pin it on me. Face trial. I'm keeping in the dark. Don't communicate with me. Give no information whatever, and above all, keep out of D.'s way. The job is over for you. Sorry. I'll write general delivery. Address me there. Explain all later.

"DENNY."

Joan read the words twice before their import sank with a chill into her mind. Face trial—Denny faced trial. He was in hiding. And she was to do nothing. Merely sit and wait.

Could she do this? When all the hot fight surging within her stormed to be free; to shout aloud against this shame.

It was almost an hour later when she reread the wire that she noticed dully and with a numb acceptance, "The job is over for you."

In the middle of the afternoon a note came to Joan from the Twin Falls Irrigation Board:

"Mr. Brooks has severed connection with this board. As you are his appointee, this board takes it for granted you will not wish to remain. Miss Ida Burns has therefore been named to take your place. She will begin work immediately. Will you kindly turn over all papers and contracts to her?"

Miss Ida Burns was a tall, lanky girl with a large nose and a small mouth. She had straight, oily brown hair and very long limp hands. It was almost five when she arrived.

"I was to have come earlier," she said. "Hope I haven't kept you waiting. Will you be around to-morrow? I'd be glad for an hour in the morning—just till I get acquainted with the work."

"I'd like to help you," Joan answered. "I'll probably be here. I have some papers and personal things I want."

"All right. Then I won't wait now."

Joan was scarcely finished with her dinner that evening when she was called into the parlor. A caller waited. It was Dunlap. He walked back and forth, his short, portly figure seeming to quiver.

"Sorry, Miss Lewis. Sorry about this. News to me until just a short while ago that you are dismissed."

"That's all right, Mr. Dunlap."

He shook his head. "Strong—the board is going too strong on this. Trial—did you know that? Very unpleasant for us—for you and me."

"Why, for me?"

The eyebrows soared as Dunlap stopped directly in front of Joan and whispered ominously. "You'll be called to testify. Some of these contracts will figure. Bad business. I'll have to keep in touch with you, Miss Lewis."

"Yes. I don't know as I have any information."

The lawyer smiled. "No? What about our strange friend and the promise of money? You don't know about that? Hard for you, I understand. Hard for me, too. But the good of our people must come first . . . the good of hundreds comes first. Am I right, Miss Lewis?"

Joan answered: "If I am called, Mr. Dunlap, I shall be glad to testify. I know nothing that I fear to say—many things I shall be glad to say. You will find me more than ready to testify if Mr. Brooks is called to trial."

"Then I may call here when I need you, Miss Lewis?"

"Kindly don't call otherwise."

"Very well—no offense, Miss Lewis—a matter of business, you understand."

Joan was still on fire with uncertainty and indignation when another message came. "Get all papers relating to Robinson contract and hold for me. Can you get out of D.'s way? You have damaging information. Explain later.—Denny."

## CHAPTER LXXXVII

### WAITING FOR JOAN

FRIDAY afternoon a little after four, Denny turned into the corridor leading to the offices of the Twin Falls Irrigation District—the offices he had opened with such buoyance of spirits eight months before.

In his mind was an image of Joan, an eagerness to see her; hear what she would say. He wanted piercingly to look into her beautiful eyes; to find there the flame and the trust. Joan would say something like this: "Oh, it's just an outrage. Such things shouldn't be. But you'll meet it, Denny. You're not finished yet."

More than that. He took heart imagining Joan's speech. She always expected the magnificent from him. She would be sitting at her desk waiting. She would look up with a glad start.

He opened the door. For a moment paused with the shock of it, half believing himself in the wrong room. Miss Ida Burns spoke: "Anything I can do for you?"

"Where is Miss Lewis?"

"She's left. I'm in her place."

He said to himself: "Dunlap!" and aloud: "I'm Brooks, former engineer. You're the new secretary? Mr. Dunlap engaged you?"

Miss Burns had heavy skin. It grew a dull red. "Twin Falls Irrigation Board appointed me, Mr. Brooks."

"Of course. Mr. Dunlap acts for them."

"Oh—yes."

"I've come to take away my papers."

"I have no authority to permit it, Mr. Brooks."

"You don't need any. I haven't turned over my keys yet." Denny went over to his desk, intending to send all the contracts and papers directly to Berne Melrose.

Miss Burns' long thin hand worked nervously tucking a loose strand of hair.

"I'm obliged to phone to Mr. Dunlap about this."



"That's all right with me." He gathered the papers. It was as though he gathered his life, his thoughts, his ambitions; as though he were now vacating his own body that another might come and take possession. He thought of the work—his work. It seemed an appalling, incredible thing that some one else was to continue it.

He was almost ready to leave when Dunlap came excitedly into the office. "Will you turn over the papers to me, Mr. Brooks?"

"No."

"Papers belonging to the company, you know. Rather amazing for you to take them . . . amazing. I have to warn you that you are doing a dangerous thing, Mr. Brooks."

Denny put the bundle under his arm. "You can communicate with Berne Melrose, Dunlap, about these papers. If he wishes to entrust them to you, that's his business. I don't!"

Dunlap twisted his hands, a forced smile on his lips. "Very well, Mr. Brooks. Quite amazing in you in view of Melrose's action. Quite amazing!"

"I'm taking the papers." Denny glanced sharply at Dunlap, walked out of the room.

He closed the door. The sound echoed—a solemn thing. Closing a door had never impressed him so disturbingly before.

He felt as though he betrayed a secret pledge in going out of that room and leaving Dunlap in charge—Dunlap and that muddy looking girl sitting in Joan's place.

When had Joan gone? Had Dunlap dismissed her? What had he said to her?

He took a car to her boarding house. An impetuous haste made him ring twice.

"Miss Lewis is gone," a neat, elderly woman told him.

"Gone out for the evening?"

"Oh, no. I mean she's not staying here now."

"When did she leave?"

"Early yesterday morning."

"Do you know where she went?"

"No—she said she was going away for a while. She left without much notice."

"She wasn't ill, was she?"

"Oh, no. She was very well. She just went away on her vacation, I think."

"Didn't she leave any mailing address?"

"No—she said something about sending one later on."

"Did she take all her things?" He was dragging out the interview, hoping desperately to learn something that would tell him where Joan might be.

"Everything."

He went down the steps thinking, "She'll ring up to-night. She knows we're home. She'll want to see Katy."

But the dinner was finished, the dishes done, Joan had not called.

"It's funny." Katy sat at the piano, dusting the keys. Lady Eglantine, having rubbed her back against all the chairs and the walls in an ecstasy to be treading carpet again, sprang into her lap. "I was sure she'd come."

At half-past ten, Denny gave up hoping. Disappointment, so bitter it was almost resentment, rose in him. Joan knew that he would be aching to talk to her. Hadn't he written her when the work was racing along so gallantly? Why hadn't she come? He wanted Joan achingly.

At quarter of eleven the phone rang—Petra. He had deliberately not phoned—for he knew Petra would say, "It's turned out for the best, Dendiddle. I'm glad. Now you can take Peter's job."

And this would be sticking a knife into a fresh wound. He couldn't bear it. He wouldn't have any one say, "I'm glad. Now you can take Peter's job." For he wouldn't have that job. He'd have his own work or none.

Now her voice came mildly accusing: "Oh, you're there! You got in! I've been waiting. How are you?"

"I was just going to call you, Petra. We got in later than we expected. There was some business I had to do."

Then she began to laugh and to wonder what that great business was and would he come in the morning, not earlier than eleven though?

He answered numbly, "I'm not sure about the morning. I'll call you up."

She took this sweetly, saying archly, "I'm all done up in bronze and orange for you, Diddle. I do look so entrancing. Why didn't you come? I had so many lovely things saved up all these weeks for you."

"I'll come to-morrow," he answered absently, no throb in his veins—

Yet when Katy said quietly, "I think it's so strange, Denny, that Joan didn't come," he felt blazingly alive.

"Not like Joan," he thought. "Not like her." He tried to tell himself, "She'll ring up in the morning. She'll come then."

When the morning passed and the afternoon faded to evening, still Joan had not come, panic caught him. He knew something had happened. He was terrified for what that thing might be.

## CHAPTER LXXXVIII

### DENNY'S SUSPICIONS

DARK hair drawn clear from her forehead, the lashes black and very long against the chasteness of her face, a smile on her lips. She wouldn't raise her eyes and he wished exceedingly to look into them.

This image of Joan as she had sat at her typewriter pinning her cuff the day the irrigation board refused the million dollar offer from Stoddard, passed and repassed before Denny's mind.

He would start up, ready to charge like some tormented bull that can only drive its horns impotently along the ground.

But he must do something. Joan was gone. Why should she leave now in this baffling manner? He became certain there was something behind it—some sinister thing.

From the moment the confused roar of the work had passed into silence of the ridges and he and Katy were on the road back to the city, a cold lethargy had settled upon Denny. The fire of his thought dimmed.

He no longer said to himself, "Damnably. They've treated me damnably." Because a voice insisted, "Why couldn't the speech have done it? You don't want to believe that, do you?" And after a long while he had answered, "Good Lord—could it have been that?" Then this heavy, unbearable muteness had come and sat within his heart.

It was shaken now with a feverish agitation and he kept saying: "Well, why is Joan drawn into it, then? Why?"

He went to Joan's boarding house. A different maid answered the door—a meek, pleasant little creature, who looked in a book hung by a string to the hatrack and answered Denny: "No, Miss Lewis hasn't sent any address. Oh, yes, I saw her that morning. She was in a rush to catch the 6:30 train.

"I think she left unexpectedly. She had an appointment with another gentleman, too—and she didn't keep it."

"What!" He checked the quick breath. Why shouldn't Joan have engagements with other gentlemen? He reached

into his pocket, took out a \$5 bill and put it in the maid's hand. "I want you to give this note I'm writing to Miss Lewis if she happens to call? Will you be on the watch for her?"

Then, as though it had just occurred to him, he asked: "Do you remember what the other gentleman looked like?"

"Yes." She closed her hands in a circle before her. "Like that. He was round and fat and spoke very soft. I couldn't hear him at first."

"Do you know his name?"

"No—but they came out here to talk because there were people in the parlor and I guess he didn't want any one to hear, he spoke so soft. He was bald."

He went down the steps, flame running loose through his blood. "That fellow! That fellow! Dunlap standing in the hall whispering to Joan—"

So she was gone.

The first thought that leaped at him was this: Dunlap had tormented Joan. The contemptible fellow was in love with her. From his first visit he had stared maddeningly at her.

At the end of two or three blocks he caught up suddenly with an arresting doubt. Joan wouldn't permit Dunlap or any one to hound her. She wouldn't run away from him. He wouldn't dare annoy Joan.

And if this were all she would surely have phoned to them. She would have been there Friday night.

It was something else. It could be nothing else but the tragedy at the dam.

He didn't stop to analyze how this might be. But to every other explanation he found himself saying, "That wouldn't have kept her from phoning; that wouldn't make her disappear."

Without a moment's reflection he went to Dunlap's home. The door was immediately opened. The lawyer himself in a black velvet smoking jacket, his hand on the knob, started as though he were confronted by a thug. "Well—well—how do you do, Mr. Brooks. Just going down to dinner. Quite a surprise."

"Yes," Denny answered. "Where is Miss Lewis?"

The color blanched out of his face as though it were drawn by some inner force. "Miss Lewis?"

"Miss Lewis!" Denny stepped into the hall, twisted Dunlap's coat in his hand. "Where is she?"

"Well—come into the room here. Amazing, I must say. Ask me where Miss Lewis is!"

Dunlap tried to back; to smile. Denny held him. "I want to know where she is, Dunlap."

"Yes, Mr. Brooks?" He moistened his lips, then he said quite easily. "Rather a crude way you have of making demands, young man. Quite crude, it seems to me. Suppose I should ask that question of you? Where is Miss Lewis? I'd like to know. She had an appointment with me—do you happen to know that? An important appointment. Business, you understand. She stole away in the morning."

"Why? What appointment had she with you?"

"Perhaps if you can tell me why Miss Lewis should take away papers belonging to our people, I can answer you. Why should Miss Lewis have taken away the Robinson contract?"

"Don't hand me any line like that, Dunlap!"

"The contract is gone. Miss Lewis took it. She had an appointment with me. She went away without keeping it. I'd like answers to these questions, Mr. Brooks."

Denny gripped the coat violently. "You're going to get answers, Dunlap. You'll get them. And before long! Remember that! God help you when I get them for you!"

He wasn't conscious of Dunlap flinging sharply against the wall as he released his coat; wasn't aware of the door closing, the steps, the sidewalk. He was hurled along by this mounting and terrible passion.

Dunlap had done it. Yes. Why did his face get so pale? Why did the breath go out of him when he opened the door? Why had his eyes bulged almost out of his head?

He had done this. He had beaten him against the wall—gibbeted him. Denny was at the meeting again, he was hearing the rugged thunder of Melrose as he scorned him.

Then he was in the mountains the morning they left. He was sitting under a pine, his arms locked about his knees, the loud, creaking voice of the engines going with a rumbling anguish through every nerve. He had tried to shut it out, closed his arms with a savage violence. A voice more frightful took its place, "Leaving, I've got to go! They won't have me here. They've ordered me out like a dog!"

That he might drink the full torture there came before him, majestic, uplifting, the dream he had held—the mad, fool dream. He had seen the silver waters of California

pouring in wealthy streams—conflict eliminated. He had seen an immense dam built far in the mountains and this would treasure all the snows—enough for all when they came pouring down over the parched breast of summer.

Other times there had been a figure in his imagination. This figure was of California as a young, elemental mother, and the two main arteries in her body were power and food. One sent the blood to her heart; one the blood to her brain. She must have both or perish. Yet he had seen men snatching this life blood from her, consuming it themselves.

The work he was doing gave her both. He loved it because it had come to him as one of the first ideals of his youth.

It was Dunlap who snatched this dream from him. There marched swiftly before him the whole array of incidents. He tried to lock them step in step. He found no links, nothing but the feeble threads of suspicion.

But these he twined and made strong out of fury and scorn. He went back to the apartment an hour late for dinner, a wildness in his heart. He told it all to Katy.

"We'll be back up there, Katy. We'll be back in the cabin."

She took his hand and pressed it, a sound that was neither song nor cry, but proud and melting as either, laughed against his arm. "We will. I know—why, I know we will."

How that and the look in her face, her brimming eyes, struck into his soul. "Of course we'll be back. You've never failed yet, Denny. You won't now."

## CHAPTER LXXXIX

### NEW OFFER

WHEN Denny stood before Berne Melrose pleading, "I've not quit! I won't quit!" it was the boy in him that spoke.

And when he came down from the ridge, saying to himself, "Damnable—leaving—damnable!" he had thought only of the cruel outrage against himself.

Then he carried Katy's chair down the slope and came back for her. She looked at him, red lips trying hard to smile. He had turned his back, saying, "Gee, Katy—this is hell." But it was his own hurt and the ashen bitterness of failure that ate through him like a poison, that brought that unbearable stinging to his eyes.

Now this thing that had seemed breaking him in two lost its ferocious grip on his spirit. Trembling, he stood before Katy.

"If this is true, Katy—say, if he did it—they weren't after me." He spoke between long, harsh breaths: "Do you know what it means? They'll wreck the job!"

In that moment he could have sat down and written blazingly to Melrose; written with an imploring passion, "For God's sake, wake up, Melrose! You think I'm the traitor. It's Dunlap."

His eyes were black and he kept walking back and forth, a terrible cramp at his heart. "They'll ruin the whole thing, Katy. Ruin it. They'll rip these fellows to pieces before they are done. If the Consolidated is behind this, they won't stop till they get the site."

"Saying it doesn't prove it, Denny."

"I'll prove it."

He sat at a little desk pushed against the big window in the living room. The lights of Oakland and Berkeley flashed their merry yellow eyes all the way from hill to water. The moon, immense and sulphurous, swung on the bosom of a black cloud sweeping like an Egyptian queen through a silent sky.

There was a brightness and a quiet in the lights playing



against the wide stretch of dark waters. Denny sat there repeating, "He did it." When he had finally fastened the monstrous thing on James Dunlap he drew back appalled at his own savagery. Did the lawyer do it? Was the Consolidated responsible? Would they risk murder?

There came creeping up again that cold, heavy wave of despair. Perhaps after all it was he and he alone that had blundered.

Presently Katy was at his side. "Denny darlin', don't look so gray. You like a fight, you know. This is only the first round. It's after nine, Denny. Golden Petra won't like it if you keep her waiting too long."

A month ago he had asked Petra to marry him—only a month. It seemed like forty cold, desolate years. A month—they hadn't seen each other since then. He had no longing to see her now—Petra would be glad—glad of this sore and fiercely bitter defeat.

It was Joan he wanted—Joan who loved and held sacred the dream of his heart.

But he went to Petra's. And all the images he had in his mind were dull before this radiant thing with tears in her eyes, this slim brightness who came like a happy flower, gold on her head, tears in her eyes.

The suddenness of it caught him with a pang. He stood holding her hands, his lips trembling. "Petra—why, Petra."

"Then you do care, Diddle?" The cool, white hands were on his arms and the face with its dimples, its warm amber richness raised to his. He had not known her hair to be so glinting, so tossed about like a soft glory. "Oh, you're never going away from me again—never, Diddle."

"And let me see. Why, you're thin and, oh, a terrible gray hair. But it's all over now, Diddle, isn't it?"

She sat beside him on the sofa and drew his arm about her, letting her head rest with an easy joy on his shoulder. She was smiling, her eyes flirting and holding his.

And he drank with astonished fascination their glistening beauty. He felt her breath, warm and sweet. A glow ran through his veins as though a bright, carefree sun swept goldenly through a dampness—swept all about him, flooding him with joy.

"I've been dead for a month, Dendiddle. Oh, what a fine lover you are!"

"I'll make it up, Petra."

"Will you, Dendiddle?" She turned her face to his. He kissed the thin black brows, saying aloud,

"You darling, I love you."

"Tell me you're going to stay, Dendiddle. Tell me it's for good this time."

"Why—" he said grimly, "I'm kicked out, Petra. I've got to stay."

"Don't say it like that. Those horrid old farmers. You're glad to stay?"

"I'm glad to be here to-night."

"And to-morrow and the next night and every night? Diddle, darling, there won't be any long two years to wait now, will there? We don't need to wait."

He was startled, but he answered teasingly: "Would you want a man without a job, Petra? Then who would deck you out in diamonds and make you entrancing in orange and bronze?"

She sat up rather quietly, ran her hand over her neck: "Are you mocking me, Dendiddle?"

"No, indeed not, Petra. It's the bitter truth."

"Peter wants to see you to-morrow. He has a job. And it's wonderful." A smile came over her lips. She laid the velvet of her cheek against his. "You'll take it, dearest, darlingest, now. Then we won't have to wait so long."

## CHAPTER XC

### THE THREAT

"YES, what job has Peter?"

"A new one—a lovely, lovely one. I heard him talking to Anson about you."

Denny sat up quickly, stared at Petra. "Anson? Isn't he with the Consolidated?"

"No—not now. He's the head of the Independent."

"He's left the Consolidated entirely?"

"Oh, I don't know all his private affairs, do I?" She saw a quick color coming into his face, his eyes snapping. "Oh, you're so foolish, Diddle! Peter says that's idiotic—all that hunch of yours about the Consolidated trying to wreck your work. . . ."

"Does he say that, Petra? He thinks it's idiotic?"

"Yes—of course. Why in the world should they be bothered about a little job like that?"

"Did you tell him about Dunlap?" he asked quietly.

"Oh, he knows all about it, and he says it's just plain silly." She got up leisurely and sauntered over to the piano. "Are you homesick to hear me sing, Diddle?"

She expected him to say: "No!" and pull her back, but he answered hastily: "Yes. Sing." He was thinking: "She told her father. Anson was one of the big ones in the Consolidated when all this happened. Now he knows I suspect them. They'll cover up."

He grew so excited he stood up, his fists doubled. Suddenly he noticed that Petra had swung round on the bench and with her hands clasped in her lap regarded him with a quiet hurt reproach. He came over and took her hands.

"You weren't even listening."

"Of course I was."

She shook her head. "No—you might just as well be up there in those dreadful old mountains. I don't believe you've even seen me to-night. Why don't you stop thinking about it? It's all passed now, isn't it?"

"It's only a little more than a week, Petra. If you'd seen

what I saw; if you'd heard those fellows when we pulled them out . . ."

"Don't— You might as well forget it. . . ."

"I suppose so."

But a force that was stronger than his own will drew him again and again to the dam that first hour of the afternoon when he had listened with an exultance to the mighty voice of a hundred engines; the great rush of concrete. Then suddenly that heart-piercing tremor along the cable, the frightful snapping and the immense chutes smashing into the pit. Afterwards, the men lifting the still form of Martin Loop.

Was it the Consolidated had planned that brutal crushing of this fine, young life? Had made that old man take up the hands of his dead son and say in a white agony: "Oh, Martin, my boy, my boy. Oh, God, Martin!"

Was it they had done this? And now they were offering Denny a job?

His jaw set. Petra got up and pushed him back to the sofa. "Poor, dear Diddle, he feels so tragic and won't look at me and won't tell me he loves me and it's a whole month since he's said it and he just finished promising he'd make it up. Oh, what a gallant wooer I have!"

She reached up and drew his head down till his lips met hers and her hands clasped at his neck. "Now tell me in a dozen different ways you love me. Yes, in a hundred. And you'll go and see Peter to-morrow and we'll live happy ever after?"

And even then, with her lips on his and her eyes half closed and the delicious sweetness of her breath in his face, a grimness passed through him. It was almost a cry that tore softly to his lips, "Oh, Petra, would you want me to take that job? Good Lord—"

"'Want' you to take it? What do you mean?"

"If these fellows did this thing—"

She smoothed up her hair. After a long pause, "Do you know they did it?"

"No."

"Of course, you don't! You've just got a crazy notion. And, anyway, the Independent didn't do it and they're the ones that are offering the job. Peter is interested in that. I suppose you haven't any objection to him?"

"No."

She reached over and let her hand loiter on his and looked up laughing. "I know you feel perfectly terrible, Diddle, but think what it means to us. Isn't that worth something? You'll go and see Peter, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll go and see him."

He walked home that night and he kept saying to himself, "I'll be shot before I take that job! I'll be shot. Dunlap did it. If he didn't, why was he so interested in that offer of the Consolidated? Why did he fight me from the start? But he's put it on me! And now they'll buy me off!"

He was spent as though he had been toiling desperately, when he reached home. For hours he lay awake going through a fervid debate with himself:

"I have nothing on him."

"Yes—I'll get it. I'll find Joan. I'll find out who sent that telegram. I'll get a hold of Pedro Francita. I'll jam Old Baldy up to the wall and squeeze what he knows out of him."

Before he went to sleep he kept seeing Snag Wilson, doubled in agony, moaning, "Oh, God Almighty!" He couldn't get the frightened cry out of his ears. It echoed in his disturbed dreams.

But in the morning when he went to Peter Channing's office in the Mountain Light and Power Company he was calm, hiding all his suspicions under a quiet reserve.

Peter Channing deserved his title of "amiable." He had fine, amiable blue eyes, an ample yellow mustache and a kindly, florid face. He was frankly glad to see Denny, and enthusiastic about his job as assistant engineer.

"You'll go right up," he said. "We'll see to that. I've talked to Anson."

Denny felt himself growing white. Channing noticed and said quietly, shaking his head: "That's really preposterous, that idea of yours."

"Oh, I've dismissed that. The farmers got the hunch. But they were ready to grab at anything. They knew the Consolidated wanted their site. I'd never have thought of it on my own account."

"I thought not." This in a tone to approve Denny's judgment.

"But I'm interested in irrigation. I want to go in for that. It's my line, Mr. Channing—"

Petra's father was astonished at this quiet announcement.

"It will take you out of the city most of the time, do you realize that?"

"That's the unpleasant feature of it—"

Peter loved his only daughter. He began to argue her case. After an hour, Denny said: "Well, then, I'll let you know tomorrow." When he shook the kind, friendly hand he thought, "What a hell of a fix to be in!"

As he passed through those offices where he had first come to work he remembered the bookkeeper, "Miss Blanche Taylor," and her reputation for gathering choice gossip. He stopped at her desk. After quite a talk he said, "Seen Miss Lewis lately?"

"You should ask! Isn't she working for you?"

"No. She left. I wanted to get in touch with her. I've heard of a good job."

"If I run across her I'll tell her."

While Denny stood there, John Merchant passed. "Hello, Brooks!" There was cordiality that warmed Denny in the quick, nervous tone. "Hear you're going over to the Independent."

"Not keen on it, John."

"Channing tells me you have a grudge against the Consolidated and so against Anson."

"Oh, I don't know, John. They might have done it, at that. They've all done enough dirty work. Look at the rotten deal I pulled at the Tuolomne dam to keep the water those farmers were just starving for!"

"Got that in your craw yet? You're soft."

Denny laughed. And he thought, "You'd be soft, too, John Merchant, if you'd lived with a dirty brute and seen him take up a little dog and hang him and heard him slap a poor, cowed face and watched him beat his own daughter into a corner. Well—what's the difference whether you push your own child into the street or starve out a whole community?"

The next morning Denny called on Peter Channing. He had framed a dozen ways of telling him he wouldn't take the job. None of them came to him now. He said abruptly, "I've decided to wait for some work in my own line. You see, Chisborough—" He went into a valiant explanation.

Petra's father listened. Then he asked, with his eyes flashing: "Do you realize all you're doing, young man? I'd like to know that!"

## CHAPTER XCI

### KATY'S CHANCE

THE threat struck a hot spark. Denny met the flashing eyes of Petra's father, answering a little quickly: "I think I know what I'm doing, Mr. Channing. I've considered the matter deeply."

"Very well!" A bronze paper cutter snapped on the desk blotter. "Suit yourself, Mr. Brooks."

"Well—I appreciate your offer. I'm sorry I'm not in a position to accept it."

Denny went out through the main office, forcing himself to walk leisurely. Once outside he stuck his hands in his pockets, Peter Channing's words, "Do you realize all you're doing, young man? I'd like to know that!" coming at him like a pelting of fine hailstones.

Intimidating him—yes—demanding that he take the job. He walked swiftly. They'd get him in there, hand him a fine salary, he'd marry Petra and then—

Yes, even then if he got the proofs—even if he knew positively that the Consolidated had put dynamite to the coffer dam; had sent the cable smashing, why, he'd have to keep still. He'd have to be in with them on the murderous deal.

They kill a man—his friend—Katy's friend. And the old father comes up and takes his son in a white pine box back to the farm. The next day Denny is held to answer; he's brought before all the friends of this boy and branded an incompetent whose negligence brought death and torture on his workers.

Ten days later the people who have done this thing come gallantly and offer him a job; offer him a thousand a month—big chances!

He went hurling along, in a boiling rage.

He tried to reason. "I'm plunging into this. It's running away with me. I've learned nothing. I'm doing the same thing the farmers did—pinning it on them! Don't want it on myself. Pinning it on Dunlap. Contemptible fellow—I'd like to pin it on him, so I'm doing it."

But all the odds were against an impartial hearing for the

lawyer. His blanching face; his vicious, insinuating attacks; Joan's sudden disappearance.

Suddenly Petra came before him, hand on his arm, tears in her eyes in that sweet, impetuous reproach, "Oh, Diddle, how can you treat me so?"

This picture arrested him sharply as though a black wall dropped suddenly in his path. Her father threatened him; asked him if he knew all he was doing. It meant Petra—it meant that he would lose her.

What would she say when her father told her he had refused the job?

He went into a store to phone. She answered dully, "All right, come if you want to."

But her eyes met his with a quiet accusation. "Yes, Diddle, I know what you've done." She bent her head and he saw the soft ringlets behind her ear.

"Listen, Petra—I had to. You see, I've got some work to do right now. In a few months I'll be ready for a job."

As she kept her head lowered, he took her chin in his hand, raised it and laughed at her. "Are you afraid I'm going to be a beggar? I've always had a job, Petra. What do you care whether I take this one or another?"

"But you want a job that will take you away."

"Can't you come with me? Anyway, I'm here now. Isn't that enough?"

"Why can't you take this job? Peter says it's wonderful. You'd earn enough. It's not very fair to me, Diddle. I haven't gone out with any one for nearly six months."

She drew near to him, and with her hands on his arms, whispered, "Sometimes I wonder, Dendiddle—"

He had never heard a sadness in her tones before. It went melting through him. "Don't, Petra—gee—" When she went to move from him he drew her back. "Now listen— You don't wonder at all. Can't you trust me for a while, Petra? I don't like that job. Why do you want me to take it? I have a little money. I can wait a month or so. Is that so long?"

"It's not that at all. It's all this uncertainty—" And she went back again to her original stand. What was the matter with Peter's job? Why couldn't he take it? Then they wouldn't have to wait even a month.

Petra knew she argued in vain.

"Give me just a month or two, won't you, Petra?"

She let him kiss her. "You always have your own way,



Diddle. It's because I love you too much, more than I should."

She stood at the door, the breeze blowing her hair. She waved her hand to him—dear, golden thing.

Denny thought with a twitch of pain, "Suppose she turned me down? Suppose she had insisted?"

Presently he said to himself, "I'd have to stand it."

She hadn't though. She had whispered with a winsome sweetness that opened a little spring in his heart, "I love you too much—more than I should."

She would wait! A little swagger came into his step. Affairs cleared now. He could do a thing he had to do—a thing that lay closest to the heart and spirit of him.

In a week—well, as soon as she had seen the exposition—he would take Katy to the hospital. There was \$8500 in the bank and \$1000 in irrigation bonds. Plenty—

Then, perhaps by Christmas time—well—there came a tightness to his throat—well, they would have a tree and Katy would stand up laughing, handing him the shiny red balls.

Ever since the doctor said, "Walk, yes; I'm sure of it. No reason why she shouldn't," he had been fearful. Never in his life had he watched her so closely. Sometimes he would think, "Katy's getting pale. Katy's sad to-day. Perhaps I shouldn't have waited."

Then she would be laughing, her vivid face flooded with color, and he would think, "I imagined it."

Only last night he said to her, "You don't practice with the canes any more, Katy-kid? You don't stand up so much, do you?"

A flush stained to her temples, but she tossed out her hands with a light, "Canes, indeed! And why should I? Before so very long—"

"We're going next week, Katy. So you just get ready—"

It had made her laugh with funny tears in her throat all the next morning. It brought all the singing dreams back to her heart.

Yet her hands trembled when she got out a big suitcase, thinking, "Well, I'll pack my things quite gradually, like Old Lady Traynor does, and be ready several years ahead of time!"

On the bed was an enormous bundle wrapped in heavy paper. In this were the beautiful things Katy had made while in the mountains. Lacy with ribbon like those in Fay Carleton's trousseau.

Katy began dividing all these lovely things into three piles,

until three mounds of pink, white, lavender lay delicately on the bed. She was in the midst of this when Denny entered.

"What now, Stupid?" A touch of the old jubilation lightened his voice.

Katy, always abashed to be caught in her absurdities, lied joyously, "Oh, I'm just sorting out rubbish."

He poked his nose into the bundle, rummaged with a heathen hand, "Rather fair looking rubbish for people without a job."

"You'd have to know, wouldn't you! Well, I'm sorting delicacies. Now this first is the pile I'll wear when I sleep like a nun on a board. They don't have to be so fine. The second will be worn by the Lady in Plaster. She couldn't grace the beautiful. But these!" She laughed. "Do you imagine I'll be very graceful, Denny?"

"Oh! Pavlowa!"

"I shouldn't be surprised if I am! Would you do me a favor, please? Get me some little buckles to wear on my shoes. I want pumps and little buckles. Get me the buckles to-morrow, Denny?"

He felt a clutch at his throat. "Say, Katy—now you know it's going to be a long time, don't you?"

"It won't be eleven or twelve years will it, Denny, darlin'? What do I care for time? You'll come to see me every once in a while, won't you? And bring me cream puffs and sit on the bed and eat them with me? Remember how you used to a long time ago?"

When he was leaving the next morning she called out with a singing laugh that was so like Queenie's, "Don't forget the buckles, Denny! With little rhinestones!"

So he did buy them and stuck them in his pocket, thinking, "Katy's a nut."

It was Wednesday—five days and there was no word from Joan. Denny had come to town determined to put a detective on Dunlap's trail. He went to the bank to draw out some money.

The clerk looked at his check, looked at him, shook his head, "I'm sorry, Mr. Brooks, I can't honor this."

"Can't honor it? Why?"

"Well, don't you know? Your account is attached."

Denny turned white with the shock. The clerk asked: "Weren't you served with a summons in this suit brought by a man named Loop for the death of his son?"

## CHAPTER XCII

### THE BLOW

"WEREN'T you notified?" the clerk repeated.

"No. When was my account attached?"

"Last Friday."

He nodded. Stood there nodding, unable to speak, an icy and helpless sense of isolation closing about him.

"They should have served the summons," he said simply. And he went out and walked down the block in a forlorn, heaving dreariness that lapped at his feet, that rose and overwhelmed him.

His account was attached. They were bringing suit for damages in the death of Martin Loop.

He was conscious of no anger; of nothing whatever but his own effort to walk carelessly; to keep himself from stopping abruptly with the numb shock of it.

Before a window displaying all manner of sport equipment he stopped, examined carefully fishing tackle, a tennis outfit. Presently he said, "We won't have a cent." There came a warm upward rush, then a faintness. He walked on. "They're holding me for Martin's death."

Another store showing army goods attracted him. "Katy'll have to wait," he said here. It was like a knife turning within him. His eyes burned.

Half an hour later Denny was sitting in the office of Jerome Cummings, a lawyer who had been in his class at college.

"You couldn't possibly get it settled up in a month, Den. First of all, if those fellows are all prejudiced against you, we'll want a change of venue. No chance at all to win down there. We may have to fight for this."

"It ties up everything I've got. I need that money like the devil."

Cummings was a tall, spare fellow with brown curly hair and penetrating gray eyes. He had a deep, rollicky laugh. "Most of us do need it, Den. Can't you get a bond? That'll release it."

"They've attached everything I own—everything. Why can't you push it through in a hurry?"

"Well, at the best, it will be two or three months. I can't make any prediction on the time."

Each time Cummings said, "Two or three months at best," Denny thought: "Gee, I'll have to tell Katy. She'll have to wait longer."

Katy had been singing and dreaming and living on the glory of this hope for nearly twelve years. He had never dared to think what her fate might be if this were taken from her. What would she say now? The damage suit might drag on for a year—for two years—

Then he remembered he was to take Katy to the Exposition in the afternoon. She had not seen it yet. "I'll wait," he thought, "I won't tell her for a day or so—wait awhile." He was young enough to hope vaguely that the world might come to an end or there might be another great fire or some such kind of supernatural calamity visit the earth and relieve him of his tragic individual troubles.

Katy was ready—her hat very smartly pulled over her eye. She wished to appear dashing that Denny might be proud of her. "He'll be like a person freed when he doesn't have to carry me any more," she thought as he lifted her to the taxi.

But she said wistfully, "I've been thinking, Denny."

"As per usual, Socrates, something that's never been thought of before?"

"About love—and it's this. Those who demand most from us are most beloved by us. Now, take me, for instance, when I'm as independent as a centipede and won't need your blessed feet any more, perhaps I'll lose as much as I gain. Think so?"

"Better make up your mind pretty quick, Stupe, before you forfeit my feet and feeling."

No—he'd not tell Katy to-day—nor to-morrow either. Never can tell what may turn up.

When they reached the Fair Grounds Katy would have poked her head from the window, but he leaned quickly in front of her. "Don't look till you get inside—get it all at once."

It was that year that summer came sauntering with a buoyant joy through the Golden Gate and tossed its scarfs woven of sunlight and warmth on the Jeweled Tower, laid its perfumed sandals in tulip beds and daffodils and fluttered through

every sculptured court and fountain, the careless, happy breath of Holiday.

Katy had read the papers and knew the names of every court and frieze and mural, but she forgot all her glib facts now to drink with a shock of delight the stately harmonies of line, the mellow richness of color.

"Noble, Denny—it's noble."

It always made him laugh, for Katy used this word like a prayer, her eyes filled with an awed joy.

When he brought up a double motor chair and the two of them went spinning off gayly past the palms and the flowers, she was beside herself with the thrill of it. She seemed as much a little kid as when she had ridden behind him on the coaster, clinging for dear life and shrieking as they bumped madly down the hills.

He forgot the grimness of the morning. Might all blow over—never can tell—

For Katy wanted to see everything—to know everything—to go through all the buildings—to learn the where and the why—fore of every little mob scene around the counters. She wanted to sample the coffee and the jelly and the hot scones and the new brand of hotcakes Aunt Jemima was making.

And the chair they were riding in was a source of recurrent delight.

"I wish I owned it, Denny."

"But soon you won't need it."

"Isn't it odd that I always keep forgetting how soon it's going to be?"

He didn't answer. They sat in the quiet temple about the lagoon and watched the day drift past in mantle of lavender, leaving a dream on the waters. The wistful sense of incompleteness that is the soul of twilight, that is waiting for the star—

"I'm like this, Denny."

"Like what?"

"The water and the hush and the kneeling figure."

"All beautiful and holy, I suppose?"

She laughed. "No—all waiting for a miracle."

He grew afraid to meet her disappointment.

A few days later he went to Jerome Cummings. Cummings said: "They're going to fight any transfer of the case. They won't agree to it. You're in for a siege."

"It may take months to clear it up?" Denny asked.

"All of that."

Katy had made her plans as though she were going on some wonderful journey. She had set everything in boxes and labeled them, drawing sprigs of flowers on the white cards or funny little girls in pigtails.

Late that afternoon Denny came in. Her packing was finished. But as she heard his step she thrust a packet of letters under the pillow of her bed and glanced up, eyes vivid in the crimson tide of color running to her hair.

"Caught you reading them all over! How is old Andy?"

"Oh!" Relief in Katy's tone. She had not been reading letters from Clay Andrews. Those entreating, passionate things she never reread. They were the gay, careless scratches she received two or three times a week from Stephen—dear Stephen, with his Angela and his devil-may-care. His letters, every one of them, Katy loved and treasured and tucked away in the little dolls' trunk she had once offered Denny to bury Prince Jerry.

"Andy's fine, Denny," Katy volunteered glibly, "and Katy's ready and the grand march may begin."

He went over to the bureau and pretended to scrutinize his face, picked up her comb and ran it through his hair. She laughed. "You're afraid, Mr. Denny. Now that the gong sounds you'd like to run away, wouldn't you?"

"Would you like to wait, Katy? We could see the fair—we could go often."

She glanced up with swift question. "No, Denny, I don't want to wait. I want to go soon—soon. Oh, I'm in the greatest kind of a hurry."

A shadow that was gray and cold passed from his lips to his heart. "What is it, Denny?"

As he spoke he saw her lips draw down, tremble. "Oh, don't feel like this, Katy-kid! It'll be all right soon. Don't feel like this." He stood there shaking.

She reached out her hand. "No—no, I don't." Even as she tried to toss the tears back her head dropped like a white flower against her shoulder.

## CHAPTER XCIII

### THREADS OF HOPE

He was at her side, taking her hands, rubbing them. "Katy! Katy-kid!"

The pearly lids fluttered.

A faint smile. Katy's eyes opened, the smile deepened into a soft, abashed laugh, "Didn't mean it!"

He turned his face quickly. "She never did that before—never fainted before." He came back with water to her.

She put her hands over his as he held the glass and sipped airily, "You're easily frightened, Denny. Why, our dear, husky Lizzie faints like this regularly every Sunday. I feel very delightful now. No, honestly, I've fainted once or twice before, and you see it came so sudden and such a shock. You know I liked Martin, and it's cruel and awful to hold you for that."

"I'll get out of this, Katy. They can't get away with a raw deal like this. His father is bringing the suit. But Melrose is behind it. He thinks I sold out to the Consolidated. He thinks I stood for that murder. So they're going to get it out of me."

"Do they truly think that, Denny?"

"Melrose is sure of it."

"Then you have to clear yourself. You'll have to do it!"

"And you'll have to wait, Katy-kid. It's a damn shame. They have no right to do this. But it won't be so long, Katy. Cummings is going to push it through." Denny watched her with aching eyes, but she made her own meet his bravely, shaking back the red-brown hair.

"What do I care, Denny? You'll take me to the fair, and we'll eat hot scones and raspberry jam and shake hands with 'Little Elizabeth.' And you know I was a bit reluctant, any way, about freeing my good old slave."

"They'll get a run for their money, Katy-kid! This is putting it too strong."

Wild ideas stormed through his head. He'd fight the case

himself. He'd trail Dunlap. Go after him with a gun and scare the coward heart out of him. They'd not strip him to the bone—make a murderer of him.

He went to see Cummings again. "You've got to get this fellow Dunlap for me, Jerr."

"But he doesn't figure in the case. He's not trying it. And save your fight till the thing gets into court. We'll get it down here and you're a cinch to win."

"I suppose I've just got to sit tight and wait?"

Cummings laughed. "Tearing loose won't help any."

After these visits, he thought of going to Marced and challenging Melrose; he thought of waiting at the office building and assaulting Dunlap. He went through the business district peering in offices. Joan might be there!

In the evenings he would watch Katy, almost mad with fear if he noted the slightest quiet even in her tones. He would say to himself, "She's losing heart. She'll begin to think I'll put it off forever."

Once Katy caught his eyes boring at her. He said with grim passion: "They ought to have been satisfied. They did enough without this. Are you getting impatient? If you'd only speak the truth, Katy-kid, and not lie so about things. Please tell me. Are you beginning to think you'll never get the chance to be cured? Are you?"

Her cheeks were as white as paper and a fear walked into her eyes. After a moment she answered: "I've never once—never once in all my life thought that, Denny. That's the truth."

"Well, if you ever let yourself think that, Katy-kid," he broke off abruptly.

She finished it gayly, "All right, Denny, the day before ever I think that I'll just come a-stealing up and stick a dagger in your sweet, lovely heart."

"Do it! But I'll tell you, Katy, I'm going to get another job. I've talked to Chisborough. He's decent. Thinks the greasers may have done the dirty work, but doesn't blame my speech. He has another project under way. I may get it."

"Really! Why didn't you tell me this before, Denny? You know I like to make plans, don't you? Why, that makes me feel as though I had a piece of French pastry in my mouth—delicious, you know."

She seemed to him then like a flower that blooms and grows



rosy all in a moment. "This is the breath to her," he thought. "I'll get the job."

As soon as he found her radiant again his buoyant assurance sank. Chisborough might not swing it—he might not get it—

Then Petra's father heard of the damage suit filed by Martin Loop, senior. One evening when Denny was calling he came in quite amiably and mentioned it.

"Too bad," he offered pleasantly. "You'll probably get out of it all right, but it's going to hurt you in your work. Of course, other districts won't give you any chance after this."

"They're not all prejudiced," Denny answered coldly.

The older man shrugged. "Farmers are a stiff-necked bunch and suspicious. You won't stand any chance. They'll knock you from the start."

"Now, what did I tell you?" Petra coaxed when her father was gone. "You needn't be so obstinate, Dendiddle. You see, Peter will still give you this job. You see that's why he walked in here so unconcerned. He's fond of you, Dendiddle, and of me. But you aren't, are you?"

She took his hand, doubled it into a fist, opened and closed the fingers. "Why don't you take it, dearest darlingest? That would be the best thing to do if you weren't so silly—so silly—"

Her arms about his neck suddenly oppressed him, seemed squeezing the life out of him. He thought grimly: "They've made me out a murderer, and now they offer me a job!"

"Don't, Petra, please, for I can't take it—"

"But aren't you ever going to do any work again, Diddle?"

"I have a job lined up."

"You heard what Peter said."

"I'll get it."

When he went to see Chisborough again he was indefinite. "They've had some delays. We'll see."

Denny thought: "Good Lord! I'm not going to get it."

But he let Katy keep on with her hope, gave the dream more gayly into her thought.

## CHAPTER XCIV

### LIZZIE'S MESSAGE

"I CAN'T stand this waiting around. I'm going to take some job if it's only a hundred a month—"

"No, you won't, Mr. Denny! Not as long as I've got a chair to sit on."

"I'm not getting anywhere. We'll never find out. Two weeks already and I'm deeper in the hole, less chance of getting out—"

A somber anxiety drew swiftly over Katy's face. She asked carelessly: "That bookkeeper girl hasn't run across Joan yet?"

"No."

"We ought to do something, Denny. Something has happened to Joan."

This fear gnawed incessantly at his own thought. Where could she have gone? Why didn't she write?

Often in the evenings after he had sat hours with Petra and she had coaxed with her soft lips against his cheek, "I guess we're going to wait forever, aren't we, Diddle? And all on account of those horrid old farmers. They don't care about you, though—they threw you out. Oh, please, please, Diddle darling, make believe it didn't happen and start all over again—"

When she would murmur like this her arms weighed him. He wanted to say, "Petra, for the love of heaven, don't start that again. I can't stand it. You know what you're doing—asking me to be a party to murder; asking me to sell out. I'll not! I tell you I'll not!"

She would lower her head, running the cool fingers against his neck, whispering, "Now you're angry with me and you know it's all because I love you so—love you so."

Often when she spoke like this Denny saw not the golden hair brushing so fragrantly against his chin, but another head flung proudly back, eager, magnificent eyes searching his with a passion of trust, a voice saying, "Oh, it's your job, Denny! They won't dare to take it from you. They won't, they won't." He remembered the little trembling movements about her lips

that had touched him so; that had made him want to take her hands and laugh, and say, "Gee, you're a peach, Joan."

If he could see her now—if he could hear some one say, "You'll come out all right! I know you will!" If he could hear Joan say that—

And then if Joan would only come in the evenings and have dinner and talk to Katy, this weight, this unbearable strain would break.

"I don't know what we can do, Katy. You wouldn't be so lonesome if Joan were here," he said abruptly.

"I'm not lonesome. Doesn't Mrs. Clinton come in to see me every day, and Jennie Walton is always dropping in, and just look at that wondrous piece of lemon pie she's brought us. And there's our dearly beloved Lizzie and Martha.

"Denny, please come in to-morrow—just for a minute. Lizzie's so hurt that you've never seen her little girl, and she's nearly two years old."

"Oh, bunk! That pouty walrus and her offspring doesn't interest me."

"But the little girl would, Denny. She doesn't take after Lizzie, and her head's not pointed a bit. You don't know all the fun you miss."

Katy delighted in these visits of her cousin. She liked to twit Mrs. Emmet Goss and to hear her say, "Well, I'm sure that's nice in you, and I come all the way over to see you, Katy Brooks!"

"If Lizzie lived with us, Denny, I'd be a regular little vixen. I just love to stick pins in her and see her sit up straight on that injured dignity of hers and deliver an oration about kindness."

"They never hear a word from Violet, Katy?"

"No. But I ask all the time, and that makes Lizzie wild, especially when I say to little Emmet, "Your dear Aunt Violet was the prettiest girl in the world.'"

"That one's got a lot to answer for, hasn't she? Don't give her anything to eat here, Katy. Just remember that she begrudged Violet cold biscuits and tea."

"Oh, shame, Denny! I make the most gorgeous cake whenever she comes, and then I brag about all the money we have, and that's much worse punishment for Lizzie than meanness would be. Will you come?"

Denny thought no more of Lizzie Borley's visit. In the

morning he found a Seattle directory. There was one teacher listed under the name of Edwin Lewis. Denny was not sure of the "Edwin," but it might be Joan's father. He sent a telegram asking immediate information.

In the middle of the afternoon an answer came. "Must have wrong party. Have no daughter named Joan and none living in San Francisco."

He had counted high on that wire—had grown light-hearted banking on the answer. He crushed the slip with a bitter impatience—a resentment against Joan. Why did she need to go and pull a mysterious stunt like this? She wasn't kidnaped—she went off of her own free will. Queer in her, all right.

He was not in an amiable mood when he reached the apartment to find Lizzie and the stolid Martha sitting at the table partaking of Katy's banana cream cake and tea. Lizzie's swinging hips and the slow precise way she had of raising a fork to her mouth always irritated him.

Now she had her streaky yellow hair squatting in a complacent flat roll on her head. She was wearing jet earrings and felt extremely elegant. Her thick skin flushed when Denny entered.

"You came, Denny! Well, I was just going to be hurt to death if you didn't come this time. Martha, go and get Mary Elizabeth. She must be awake now."

"Don't disturb the lady, Liz," Denny said carelessly. "How's the son and heir?"

"Well, you know he's going to school now, Denny, and he's so bright. I think he inherits genius from mamma's family."

"Why not from papa's, Liz?"

"Oh, you think you're smart, Mr. Denny, don't you? I suppose you think you got all the brains from the family. But you know mamma was a Brooks, too, and I guess little Emmet will make an engineer if you could!"

"'Sall right with me, Liz. Send him around in a year or two. I'll be proud of my young nephew if he's to take after me."

Lizzie flushed with pleasure. "I know you'll be proud of him, Denny, and of course Emmet wants to do right by him so we're saving for his education. Did Katy tell you that Emmet is earning \$200 a month now?"

"Good for Emmet!"

Lizzie glanced around the room, her eyes resting on a new

scarf on the small table. "Of course, I don't suppose that seems much to you, Denny, but then the grocery business is more certain than engineering."

"Yes—always sure of bologna for your sandwiches, Lizzie."

She didn't hear, for Martha came in, carrying the little girl. Martha was heavy, big-boned as her mother, but the broad, mute face was now lighted with gladness. Lizzie got up to take the child.

"Oh, please," Martha asked, "let me show it to Denny."

The baby began to show off of her own accord and ducked her head against Martha's shoulder and gurgled, then looked up and put out her hands to her mother.

Lizzie turned a hostile glance to Denny. "Well, I'm sure you're kind, Denny Brooks. You're not even looking and just see how she's laughing!" Lizzie sat down, the child on her ample lap.

"Oh, is the show on, already, Liz?" He came over and stooped down into a pale, willful little face haunted by enormous dark eyes—a face exactly like that of Violet as he remembered her when he first went to his uncle's home.

He turned in astonishment to Katy. Lizzie flared—knowing that he saw the all too obvious resemblance. "Mary Elizabeth is the very living image of Emmet's mother when she was a girl."

Denny laughed in her face. "Emmet's mother must have been the very living image of Violet."

"It's just like you, Denny Brooks, to hurt me—to bring a slur on an innocent child. And you know I don't wish to speak of Violet Borley."

"If you ever had a child as sweet and as kind as Violet Borley, Lizzie Goss, you could thank heaven for a miracle."

Lizzie's coarse cheeks were scarlet; the little pig eyes glistened cruelly. She reminded him of Matt. "I might expect that from you, I'm sure. But if you was to ask me, Mr. Brooks, and you think you're so smart I could tell you a thing or two about Violet Borley."

"Could you, Lizzie? It's about four or five years since you served her biscuits and tea, isn't it? Violet's probably married and happy now."

"Very likely! Very likely! Well, I guess any one can know what Violet Borley is. I guess it's no secret now. I guess I happen to know. I guess any one would know—wearing ai-

grettes and a fur coat—and rushing up to me at the fair and trying to grab my hand and I with my husband and my two small children!”

Denny's heart thumped. He could scarcely master his voice.

“Is that so, Lizzie? Are you quite sure of that?”

“Yes, and perhaps you'd get sore, too, Mr. Denny, if you knew she had gall enough to expect me to tell her where you were and what you were doing. But I guess I know my place. Tell her and her owing Sadie Farley two dollars for four and a half years!”

“Didn't you tell her, Lizzie?”

“Very likely! Very likely! I'm sure Katy'd be proud to associate with the likes of Violet Borley.”

Katy pushed herself into the group. “Where is Violet? When did you see her?”

“Yes—well, it's all very well for you to ask, but I guess I showed her her place. She's not likely to trouble us again.”

## CHAPTER XCV

### THE RETURN

VIOLET was in the city. Lizzie had seen her. But Lizzie sat there before them, obstinate, her little eyes flashing. "Now I hope you're satisfied, Mr. Denny Brooks! Now I guess you'll believe what she is!"

A gust of loathing swept him. Lizzie saw it and recoiled. "But it's just like you to stick up for her!"

When he countered with a suppressed "What did you say to Violet, Lizzie Goss?" she backed from him, dabbing her cheeks and her eyes with an immense powder puff.

"I'm sure it's nice in you to insult me for her; to insult little Mary Elizabeth. I guess I did what was right. I suppose you'd think I should stand there and talk to her, and I with my husband and two small children! I suppose I should have talked to the likes of Violet Borley, should I?"

He stared at her, his eyes blazing; he swung from the room, letting the door bang angrily.

Lizzie began to whimper. "A nice way to treat company, I'm sure. I'm sure I'd be proud of such a brother if I was you, Katy."

"Yes, and I am!" Katy flashed. A thousand pulses throbbed in her throat, sent a wild excitement into her face. Violet back—they'd see her! But what a thing Lizzie had done! "I am proud of him, Lizzie. Didn't you say a word to Violet? Didn't you say anything to her?"

"Yes, I suppose I should stand there and talk to her kind, and her in a big red hat with aigrettes on it, and a fur coat and stockings so thin you could see through them. I should talk to her, and me with two small children to think about!"

Martha stood all this time at the window, holding the baby in her arms. Lizzie stalked over to her, took the child. "You're not to say a word to mamma, Martha."

The girl's broad face quivered. "Mamma'd like to see Violet. She'd like to hear about it."

"And what would papa say, I wonder? We're not to speak of that one, are we?"

Martha gave no answer; the dull eyes filled. But Katy tossed her head quickly. "Don't you cry, Martha, because Aunt Josie's going to hear all about it. I'm going to rush right over there and tell her every word. And Denny's coming with me. And I guess dear papa can say what he likes!"

Lizzie's ample form swung indignantly. "Well, if you was to ask my opinion, Katy Brooks, I'd say you better mind your own business!"

Katy laughed, flicking out her hands with airy dismissal. "Just what I'm going to do, Lizzie, dear."

The dainty, incongruous earrings on Lizzie's red ears trembled as she set her hat vigorously. With the baby in her arms, its great eyes and small, willful mouth laughing, Lizzie stood before Katy's chair. "If you tell one word of this to mamma, Katy Brooks, I'll never darken your door again!"

Katy wished to make some appropriate remonstrance, but she was shaking with excitement, and just then she caught a glimpse of Lizzie's little turquoise engagement ring. It struck her as enormously funny on that large, thick hand. "Why, dear Lizzie," she said sweetly, "you always brighten our door—"

Lizzie flounced from her. "You'll see. Miss Katy-kid! I'm never coming here again. You tell mamma and I'll never speak to you again!"

Katy watched her quietly, then she said tartly, "I pray for strength to endure the calamity, Lizzie!"

She was wiping her eyes when Denny came back. "Did that one make you cry, Katy-kid? Haven't you any spunk?"

"Oh, indeed, Denny Brooks, it's well for you that can turn on your heel and run, but I must stay to fight. And now our dear Lizzie won't ever come back to see us again if we tell Aunt Josie a word. But I told her we were going to dash right over and tell."

They were not finished dinner that night when the bell rang. They sat rigid, staring at each other. "There she is now! I know it!"

It was Aunt Josie. She came chugging into the room, the wide mouth twitching. She said quietly, "Martha told me." Then she sat down, twisting the rough hands.

Aunt Josie's hair was almost white now, the heavy face softened. She rubbed her wrist across her eyes. "She'll come to you, Denny. You were always good to her. Gawd forgive



me, but how could Lizzie do such a thing to her own sister and Violet always so kind to every one."

She reached into the pocket of her old black serge skirt and drew out a long canvas bag, pushed it across the table to Denny, glancing at him with a mute plea. "That's for her. That's for my poor girl, Gawd forgive me! I've saved it for six years, Denny. There's \$250 there."

"What shall I do with it, Aunt Josie?"

"Give it to Violet. Tell her that her mother has prayed Gawd to spare her for the day she'd come home. Ask her to come and see me."

With that drab suffering face before him Denny couldn't say, "Oh, she's not coming, Aunt Josie! After the way she was treated! We're never going to see Violet again. I've known that for years. . . ."

He took the bag and slipped it in his pocket. Katy said gayly, "She knows we love her, Aunt Josie, so she'll come and then you come over here and we'll have the biggest party in the world!"

Denny took her to the car. "Gawd be praised for this, Denny," she kept repeating. "I've only wanted to live for this day."

"What will Matt say if she comes?"

Aunt Josie's lips trembled. "A hard man, Denny. Gawd knows he's a hard man. But you'll see my girl and tell her her mother wants her to come. Beg her to come."

He locked the money in the drawer of his desk saying to Katy, "When did that one see her, did you find out?"

"She wouldn't tell."

"It may have been months ago."

Katy shook her head. "No—if Violet is here and wearing a fur coat she'll come to see us, Denny. You'll see—"

He wouldn't let himself hope, but the old wound in his heart opened and with it all the tragic scenes of his boyhood. The nights and nights he had tied the cord to his wrist, hung it from the window and then crept softly to the old kitchen and opened the door for Violet. He remembered piercingly that morning at 3 o'clock when Clyde Dunstan had brought Violet home and she had sobbed leaning against the porch.

How cold her hand was when he touched it—how cold her voice. Then Matt heaving into the kitchen beating her.

He remembered with a flash the mad exultance flaming

through him when the hulking form took his blow and went pitching against the kitchen floor.

Nine years ago. He had searched for Violet. He had put personals in the paper, pictured her coming back and he'd say manfully, "Don't you give a darn, Vee! Come and stay with us. We'll get along."

But he had for years ceased to hope. He thought of Violet as he did of Queenie—gone.

Yet now here were he and Katy sitting up till midnight waiting with a feverish eagerness for the bell to ring.

When he went to town he searched the faces of the crowd—seeking a white face with magnificent eyes. Suddenly he said to himself: "That's not Violet, that's Joan. I'm looking for Joan—Joan!" A pang went through him. He tried to put away this image of her, but he was tormented with a longing. It was like the day he had stood at her desk staring until she was forced to raise her eyes. He had found it a joy to look in them.

Now the two images became confused. Violet, too, was pale—her eyes large, but the chin was childish; Joan's strong and eager and piquant.

He came home early, saying carelessly to Katy, "Any phones?"

She shook her head, but each time the bell rang she would laugh, "There—she is!"

One night the bell rang three sharp dots, one long quiver. Katy's hands pressed the table, the color vanished from her cheeks. Denny was afraid to move—afraid to speak. Katy caught his hand, tears rushing to her eyes. "You know it! You remember! Quick—oh, push me to the door. That's Vee—that is!"

A violence trembled through him—a deadly fear. Violet—how would she look? What would she say?

He fumbled with the knob, swung it open. A little cry met him—hands covered his—head thrown back, lips shaking, "Denny! Can this be Denny! Is this little Denny?"

Eyes haunting the moon-pallor of her face. He grabbed her in his arms. "Violet! Aw, gee!"

## CHAPTER XCVI

### THE REUNION

SHE stood off, winking back tears, laughing and saying all at the same time, "Little Denny—a man—why, you're handsome. Denny—I'm half afraid—"

He bit his lips, grinning. "Gee, I'm glad, Vee—well, come in. There's Katy—"

"Still with you? You're not married, Denny? Katy-kid—how is she? Just as sweet? Oh, Denny—"

Katy, calling, half crying: "Oh, Violet! Come in, you dear, dear sing! I want to hear—"

They might have parted but yesterday, for it took no kindling of the deep warm affection that burst into flame. They laughed. And even Denny shook back his head, gulping, staring at Violet and doubling in his lips.

How tall, how pretty she was in the simple blue suit, the little black hat. The same Violet who had given herself such airy fancies and tried to be so delicate in Matt Borley's wretched kitchen—the same, scarcely older for those nine cruel years except for a quietness, a depth that gave a penetrating charm to the willful, magnetic face.

"Say, Vee," Denny burst out suddenly, "why didn't you ever write to us? Say, if you only knew how we waited. . . ."

"And, Violet, every night after that time you went to see Lizzie—every night for whole months I had the table all decorated and a place set for you and Denny and I thought surely you'd think of us, knowing—well, you knew we'd want you—didn't you know that, Violet? Vee, why didn't you come?"

At first she didn't answer, but stood there with her head thrown back as he had often seen her defying her father. She laughed, became quiet at once. "Oh, I didn't have much heart to go, Katy. I knew it would have been hard for Denny. What of it? Now, it's all over—" She glanced at Denny, saying with a note of sadness, a note almost of solemnity, "I'm married. Just a little while—a month. This is a kind of honey-

moon trip. Now you know all about me except that I've been in Chicago for the last four and a half years."

She broke off, went walking about the room, glancing at the pictures, running her fingers over the piano, touching the books. She turned round suddenly, tears in her eyes, "I'm so glad you have things like this, Denny. I don't know how you ever did it. Katy, you haven't changed a bit—you're the same dear little thing."

"Do you like me, Violet? Do you like me and Denny? We can hardly talk, we're so glad you're here."

After a long while, when they managed to talk with a swift, full-hearted incoherence, Denny went over to the desk and got out the canvas bag Aunt Josie had given him.

"Pretty tough on her, Vee. She's blamed herself all these years. She's never gotten over it. Why don't you go and see her?"

Violet kept the bag in her hands, her head lowered. She kept running her teeth over her lower lip, shutting her eyes, trying to smile: "Poor ma . . . the poor thing—" But she said she would go. She was no longer afraid of "Him."

She added grimly, "I would have written, Denny, but until a little while ago I hadn't anything to write. I wasn't very lucky or very strong. I was often out of a job—well, there was nothing to write that any one would want to hear.

"Excepting now," she marked the time on a little wrist watch and laughed, her face softening, "Why, I've been here two hours. It didn't seem a minute. Poor Max! I suppose he's cold now. It's windy out."

"You didn't leave him outside, Vee? Outside all this time?"

She nodded, a guilty light darting into her eyes. "I told him I'd not stay more than half an hour at the most."

Denny took up his hat, "I'll go down and bring him in. This is hospitable."

"No—you'd never pick him out for my husband, Denny. I'll go with you. I've got to leave now, anyway."

As they walked down stairs she had her hand on Denny's arm. "I've often longed to see you, Denny—to know how you turned out. I didn't think you'd ever be able to do all you have done. How does Katy keep so glad?"

"She's going to be cured."

Violet stopped abruptly. "She still hopes for that?"

"It's going to be." They talked about it, then he said, "You're happy, aren't you, Vee?"

"And I never expected to be, Denny." She spoke softly, bringing a warm twist to his throat. "Max is good, Denny, and he loves me so."

"Say, Violet—"

"Oh, I know, but just the same—and you know, Denny, he used to come into the store to buy driving gloves. He always waited for me. That's what I was doing last. But for a long time I wouldn't go out with him. One day after he'd been coming in for about a year he made me try on the gloves and he asked me right then to marry him. After that, we went out together."

"You're only here for a month, Vee? But you'll come often to see us? You'll go and see Aunt Josie?"

"Yes—poor ma! I wonder if she's ever been in a machine? Has she been to the fair? We could take her for a drive. But get a move on, Denny. I hope you'll like Max."

Denny liked him from the start—a broad, substantial man about ten years older than Violet. He was sitting in an automobile, chafing his hands. When he saw Violet he got out with a genial "Fine way to treat a husband, isn't it!" Denny liked the strong voice! the kindness in his face; the composure in his manner.

"I didn't mean it, Max. Are you frozen? I won't do it again. I told you about little Denny. He's not very little now, is he?"

It gave Denny a feeling of happiness that was almost pain to note the eager love in Violet's face, the joy when she settled down in the machine and whispered to him, "Remember, Denny, when I used to worry whether I'd have black horses or brown to drive my phaëton? Things are funny, aren't they?"

Katy accosted him with questions as he opened the door. "What is he like, Denny? Is he good enough for Violet? Oh, isn't she prettier even than you thought of her? And she's edjicated too, isn't she? Why, I'd say she was most elegant, wouldn't you?"

"Which shall I answer first?"

"But isn't it very strange that she should have such a sweet, quiet manner. Where did she learn it?"

"Stupe! She got it from the Brooks side of the house. Isn't little Emmet going to get his genius from that fountain?"

Say, Katy-kid," he began strutting about the room, picked up Lady Eglantine, scratched her head, a jubilation in his heart. "say, I wouldn't take a million dollars for this. Say—"

Violet came often to see them. They spent long hours talking over the dreary past, but they remembered all the happier, all the ludicrous incidents.

Violet went to see Aunt Josie. The poor, mute soul was almost speechless. The tears kept running down her cheeks when Max Fulton helped her into his automobile, and took her for the first ride she had ever known.

Violet told Denny about it. "What do you think? HE was standing at the steps when we got back." She laughed—laughed till her eyes were wet. "He came up and shook my hand and stepped into the car and went for a ride with us!"

"And you let him! Say—"

"Ma—well—your heart would ache for her, Denny. The poor thing! She whispered to me, 'Your father is changing. He's gentler'—"

Her coming brought a gladness to them. In the mornings Katy would say, "I guess Violet will run in to-day. I may go to the fair with them. Isn't this fine, Denny, having them?"

Violet was as airy, as full of caprice as she had been in her girlhood. She had a hundred notions—a hundred follies that delighted Katy's soul.

One afternoon she insisted on giving Katy a facial treatment, and then having discovered a wrinkle, proceeded to remove it by applying a pack. This pack consisted of the white of an egg beaten very stiff and spread all over the protesting but helpless Katy's face.

"Now, you'll just leave that on for half an hour." Violet swung a towel over her shoulder in the grand manner of a face specialist. "And don't move a muscle. Katy-kid, if you laugh now and spoil it—"

But Katy laughed—Violet spread on more egg. As there was plenty left, she gave herself a treat. They were reclining thus, perfectly motionless, with the white gooey paste all over their faces when Denny stood in the room. As soon as Katy heard the door open, she burst out laughing, but nothing could induce Violet to smile. Without moving her lips, she protested indignantly. "Spoiled it all! Go out, Denny."

He rubbed his hands together, then went up and smeared

Violet's face. She got up and glared at him, and the sight of her enormous eyes, flashing in the awful white of the beaten egg, threw him into an uproar. "Great, having you here, Vee!" he said exuberantly. He felt a joy coming back to his days.

Then there came a telegram from Stephen:

"Just got back to camp. Have Katie's letter. Is your money all tied up? There's \$1500 of mine loose. It's yours. Fight to the last ditch. I'll be up soon.

"STEVE."

There was a letter for Katy—short—full of heart:

"Kate, Sweet Old Dear—Tough what they've done to our Lord Den, isn't it! But he'll come out on top. It's in the stars for him. He's never said die yet and he won't now. But keep the glad heart in him, Kate, as you've always done for the two of us. I'll be up to give you a cheer. Remember, Kate, that you tried to disown me once and it didn't get by. I'm here to tell you it never will get by. Remember, also, that if the mule kicks one man of the family you've got the founding to call on and he's ready to answer now and always.

"STEPHEN."

"Hasn't he always been a comfort to us, Denny?"

"Oh, yes—such a prop to our old age!"

"I'd take anything from Stephen, Denny. If we want the money we can use it."

"We have some left yet."

"If you had this money you could find out about Joan?"

They almost dreaded speaking of Joan, so devastating was their concern. Every moment of the day, Denny was on the watch for a small graceful figure, the small head balanced like a flower. One day he went to the irrigation office, intending to ask very calmly that Dunlap give him Joan's address. As he opened the door he heard the lawyer at the phone. A name struck him with panic, "Give me Mr. Anson, please."

Dunlap swung around as Denny entered, clapped the receiver on the hook, his face white as paper.

## CHAPTER XCVII

### STEVE'S CONFESSION

DUNLAP had asked to speak to Anson, head of the Consolidated, now head of the Independent. But he saw Denny in time, and clapped the receiver on its hook.

He was getting up, pushing to the door, rubbing his hands, the florid color returning to the shiny face. "What can I do for you, Mr. Brooks?"

Denny's mind stirred with a deadly caution. He had caught Dunlap. He had something on him now!

"I've been expecting some letters," he said, as though he had noticed nothing. "Were they sent here?"

"Just a moment—Miss Burns, any mail for Mr. Brooks? No? Well—we'll send them, make a note of that." He followed Denny to the door. "Glad to accommodate you, Mr. Brooks. Sorry for this whole unfortunate affair."

Once outside Denny felt a quivering tightness through his muscles; a thumping in his ears. "The fellow turned white as paper! He's guilty as hell!"

He went at once to Jerome Cummings. The young attorney leaned back in his chair. "What's to that, Den? I saw Anson and Dunlap eating lunch together. Not exactly a crime, is it? Dunlap's a corporation lawyer, a friend of Anson's."

"Say, Jerome, it's as clear as water! Anson wanted the Twin Falls site. Dunlap did the dirty work. He turned yellow when he saw me in the room. Anson got Dunlap to ruin the project."

"There's this fact, Den, to consider. They haven't ruined the project. The work is going ahead. You're making out a case against yourself."

"But why should he call for Anson and then slam up the phone at the sight of me. Why should he do that?"

"Might be a hundred reasons. You may be right, but we've got to have facts, not suspicions. Takes time to get them. Your cue is to wait."



Hardest thing in the world for Denny. He must stand by and let that contemptible Dunlap pile one villainy on another; stand by and torment himself over Joan's absence; more terrible than all, stand by and perhaps see the radiant star of Katy's hope grow dim.

Not that—no, he'd never wait for that. Got to end somehow—can't go on like this forever. All the deep, instinctive buoyance of his nature, the swagger and upwardness of spirit that was Queenie's fought against the gloom of suspense. Denny thought of the end, but it was an end of vindication and triumph.

"This can't last much longer," he said to Katy.

She had her hands all flour and a smudge of it across her face and in her hair, for she was making cakes and little pastries to stock the pantry for Stephen's coming.

"Of course it can't, Denny, and we might just as well say, 'To grass and the devil with worrying about it.' Things always come out in the end, and no matter how, we just have to live through it. Most likely it will come out fine." She took a fancy twist in the dough. "Look at Vee. Isn't that inspiring?"

"Which—Vee or the doughnut?"

"Both. Aren't I the wonderful cook, Denny? Stephen will much appreciate these delicacies won't he—being down there in that valley so long?"

Denny laughed. "Have to be an awful desert when Steve lacks for sweets, Katy-kid."

Katy sighed. "Not sweets like these, Denny. You'll see."

Her heart was full of dreams. Seven months since they had seen Stephen. He would be dark from the sun as a bronzed statue or a fine tall Indian. He would come in like a breeze, for he was that way, and go poking his nose into every corner; see if she had cookies and jelly doughnuts, grab a bite out of each, talking all the time. He would fill their thoughts and the room with gayety.

It was just like that—only better.

The door pushed open, suitcase dropped, a shout, a kiss, Katy's hands caught and Stephen, tanned and laughing, stepping back to survey her. "Same old angel, Kate. God love you! Let me see. Miss me? Where's the lord?"

"Your dear, dear Stephen, aren't I enough all at once? The lord is not at home just yet."

"Dinner ready, Kate? Um—what savory odors! Time for a wash?"

And she heard him stamping around with great splashing of water and the apartment filled with the prolonged "EEEEEE," the way he used to shout every morning in the barn. It brought tears and a warm laughter trembling to her lips.

She thought, "How glad—how glad," and forgot that she and Denny were weighted with trouble. If only Stephen could stay longer instead of just these two—two days.

He made Denny feel like that, too. It was a darn shame, of course, all this that had happened. But it was a big fight and not over yet. Why hang the crepe? Aren't we alive and eating lemon pie and, pooh, didn't we get along and fly high on two bits a month not so very long ago? Sure—that's the way to look at it. Too bad and all that, but plenty of fight left—time enough to deliver the blows.

So they went to the fair that night, all three of them crowding into a motor chair, whizzing in bonny gayety from the live-stock yards to the Zone, watching the fireworks and scintillators flinging a thousand rainbows from the sky into the waters.

"Isn't that just ecstatic, Stephen?" Katy whispered. "The first night I saw those moving lights I thought the heavens opened with a shaking burst of music and a hundred thousand spirits came running down those beams of color, singing and waving scarfs backwards and forwards."

Denny cast a pitying look, wrinkled up his nose. "So that's what you thought, Stupe? Well, well—mystery's out at last."

Stephen laughed, "Great place old heaven must be, Kate?"

"Us three are having it right now. Aren't we? Oh, you do have to go so soon, Stephen? Must go then?"

"But I'll wash the dishes each morning, Kate. And we'll gab, gab, gab."

It took them hours to do those dishes. Stephen wanted to know how Katy liked the mountains; wanted to tell her of all the queer nuts he met in the valley. Especially he wanted to talk of Denny and this case and it was bound to come out right.

And then was Katy happy in the city or did she miss the garden and that little girl, Fay? Was she lonely?

"Not lonely, Stephen, with the boats to watch and the fogs drifting so palely and the lights twinkling on the water. I'm

not lonely, Stephen, but waiting for something and now it's going to happen."

"What, Kate?"

"Oh, some day to wake up and jump out of bed, dress myself all gay with little buckles on my shoes and rush out of the house giving the door a glad slam and off for a promenade to town or to the beach or over the hills and far away if I see fit!"

Stephen turned on the faucet letting the water dance in the cups. Why did Katy talk like this? Lord, what a clutch at a fellow's throat. Darn shame anyhow.

"You know, Kate," he said soberly, but not looking at the flushed beautiful face, "you once told me you weren't sorry for yourself. Something or other you said about it being made up to you in other ways. But you don't feel that way, any more? You think it's a darn cheat?"

Katy laughed, "Oh, you gloomy old Steve! Didn't I tell you it was worth while since I had the two best men on the earth for my slaves? Now I have you still for a minute now and then—and Denny, too, for a little while," she watched the fine, handsome face, "but, of course, my tenure isn't very sure."

"What do you mean by that, Kate? As long as there's a pulse in the Lord Den, you know where it beats. Nothing and no one else will change the way he feels toward you. And I want to tell you, Kate, that if anything happens to him you've got some one else that feels the same way."

"Is his name Stephen?"

"Well, isn't it?"

"Dear, dear Stephen."

So the two days passed. In the afternoon of the last they made a fire for old time's sake. And anyway, summer tossed a high, cold wind across the city, so it was piercing enough.

Stephen sat at her feet, idly raking the coals. "You're sad, aren't you, Kate? What's up? Is it on account of Den and his golden fairy?"

Denny was keeping an engagement with Petra and wouldn't be home for dinner. Katy laughed. "You think beautiful Kate is jealous, Stevie dear? Why, I'm as glad as kingdom come right now, and I want Denny to be happy more than anything else in the world."

"Ah, Kate, but you don't think Petra will make him happy, do you? You wish it was that Joan, don't you?"

"Oh, she's so noble, Steve, and beautiful, too. But men are blind, all blind. We shouldn't let them pick their wives."

A crimson flush crept under the tan of his neck. "Despot! You don't let us pick our own. They pick us. But once in a while we're lucky, and a sweet, noble one decides to have us—"

She leaned down, looking at him with a gentle mockery. "Is Stephen one of the lucky ones?"

The strong, breezy face with the lilt in the eyes flamed. Katy's lips trembled—trembled to the soul—but she went on with her raillery. "Angela, Stephen? Is Angela sweet and noble?"

She could almost feel his breath tighten—or perhaps it was her own—but she laughed softly and her voice went on, "Now, tell me, Stephen, is Angela the one—the one of all? Why, you know I thought it when I saw her picture, for it was strong and sweet and different from the others. Tell me, Stephen, aren't you ever to speak again?"

He looked up then, tears and laughter and a young eagerness in his eyes. When Katy saw that look—just as Denny looked to her when he first told of Petra—when she saw that, her heart opened with a terror, a sob; an agony entered and closed the wound over it. She felt bursting within her a prayer—"Now, dear Lord, oh, help me now. Now—oh, now—"

Stephen saw the tears. "You're glad, dear angel Kate? You'll love her. You know, I've thought you two would be like sisters—"

Katy ran her hand over the fine, shapely head. "I'll love her, Stephen—dear, dear Stephen. If she's good enough for you I'll love her with all my heart. I know I will."

But where her heart had been was now a thing that fluttered and throbbed and sent a wild, protesting pain laughing and screaming to her throat. But her hand went over Stephen's hair and her lips kept saying, "Dear Stephen, of course I'm glad, dear Stephen; and you'll bring her to see us, and won't we have the joyfullest times?"

## CHAPTER XCVIII

### SHADOWS

SHE sat, leaning forward, hands clasped. And even from the curve of her lowered head, the arch of the thin, black brows there came to him a soft, hurt reproach.

"It's five weeks now, Dendiddle."

He ran his lips over her neck and laughed. "Aren't you willing to starve with me, Petra?"

She let her eyes touch his, pleading. "There's not only myself to think of, Diddle. And Peter says horrible things to me now. It's rather hard."

"It won't be so much longer, Petra."

"How do you know? Didn't you say you'd been everywhere looking for the kind of job you want? You haven't found one yet."

"Yes—I have one about cinched."

"That one! Peter says you'll never get it. He told you that himself."

"Peter's mistaken."

"Then even if you do get it, Diddle, you'll have to go away again, won't you?"

"I won't be away all the time until the construction begins."

"That's the way it will be always—as long as we live—running away and I'll be left down here alone. Oh, you're a funny lover, Diddle—"

She had taken his hand in hers, raised it swiftly, pressing her lips against the palm. "You're taking both our lives and not thinking of your own wishes and your own happiness and not of mine at all. Is this love?"

"Oh," a chill ran over him. "Does it seem that way to you, Petra?"

He was saying to himself with a little shock of realization, "Yes, that's true. I haven't considered her wish at all. I've thought of my own work, my own ambitions. I haven't thought of her."

She leaned back against the sofa, closing her eyes, the lids

waxy and amber, lips parted. He wished to stoop down and kiss her; but even with this impulse uppermost, a grimness in his thought smiled and mocked.

"You think I should give up the work, Petra?"

She half opened her eyes. "Kiss me, Diddle. The old work makes me tired. I'm so sick of Peter's lamentations and of hearing every one say you're turning down the chance of a lifetime, I don't know what to do. Please do something quick. If you could only make up your mind to take that old Peter's job. . . ."

"I'll never take that job, Petra—never."

She came close to him and whispered sadly against his cheek: "You'd give me up first, Diddle darling, wouldn't you? Don't answer! But please get another job quick, dearest dearest, and save me from terrible old Peter's growls, won't you? Do you love me, Diddle?"

She stood on her toes, reaching up to him. "Quick, just one. They're coming now. Say it—you love me?"

He held her, sank his face in the soft hair, laughing. "Love you—you darling!"

"There—let me go—"

She went swiftly from the small room. His senses throbbed—put from him with a laugh the lurking unrest; the vague, unsatisfied something dwelling in the back of his mind. He remembered only her head resting on the cushion—the parted lips—the easy voice whispering, "Kiss me."

They had taken a short drive and returned early for dinner at Petra's home. John Merchant was present.

It seemed to Denny that Peter Channing talked at him—not to him. They got into an argument on state control of forests. It went from that to state control of shipping, insurance, food products, water. Denny felt Channing's satire pointed directly at him.

Afterwards John Merchant and he were smoking together a while. Merchant began in his quick, nervous way:

"Sorry about the Sierra project, Den."

"What about it, John?"

"Isn't that the job you were after?"

"It's the job I am after."

"Why, I heard it was given to Piney."

Denny's heart quickened. "Can't be, John. I was talking

to Chisborough yesterday. He thought it was going through for me then."

"I heard to-day that Piney got it. It may not be true. It's a job without any future anyway. I don't know what you are thinking about, Den, turning down this Independent offer."

Denny liked and admired John Merchant. He had boosted him from the beginning. In his quick, abrupt way he had opened opportunity to him.

"You're going around with some fantastic notion of changing the world over night. It can't be done. If the men who want power are bigger than the fellows who want irrigation, they're going to get the water, and that's all there is to it. Because you stand around and yell 'Unfair' isn't going to save a single drop."

"If we all yelled it would save it, John."

"But we won't all yell. Only the fellow whose throat happens to be parched and a few nuts like yourself are going to raise any yell like that."

"But in the end, John, even the fellows who do the grabbing are going to suffer. You can't cripple a country and then expect to prosper in it."

"We all start out with those ideas, Den. Where do we get? Just where you are now. The world is too big to buck. Take a tip and look out for yourself."

Denny made no answer. Merchant said quietly, "We all have to close our eyes to a few things now and then."

"I suppose we do, John."

He thought, "Yes, close our eyes to murder—let a fellow like Dunlap beat us to the wall. Close our eyes to that because a few big fellows tell us to."

He walked home in a restless fever. Had Piney got the job? No—Chisborough would surely have told him. Merchant said that because he wanted to give this advice.

"Close your eyes. Yes. Well—my eyes are open. They'll stay open. Cowards—the world is full of cowards and pigs. John is old. No fight in him."

A phrase Stephen had used a dozen times cropped up, "Fight, Den! To the last ditch. I'm with you. These fellows are getting away with hell. We don't have to stand it."

With the old resilience of spirit he squared his shoulders. Fight—he and Stephen and hundreds like them would not close

their eyes. They would up with their fists and strike. What if they did sacrifice a thing or two. They'd get along.

He thought of Katy and the way she had twisted the dough with an airy "Most likely it will come out fine. Look at Vee. Isn't that inspiring?"

What a Spartan Katy was for all her gentle ways. Never murmurs. Gee, what a peach! Just like Queenie. Suddenly he remembered the day Prince Jerry had come bounding in from the rain, shaking mud all over the new carpet. Queenie laughed, drying him with a clean towel, setting him by the stove to get all nice and warm. A thousand times he had heard Katy laugh in the very same gayety of heart.

He hurried. Stephen would be gone—Katy alone. It was a little after 10. He opened the door. Light filled the living room, streamed from Katy's room.

"Hello!" he called.

She didn't answer, "Well, miss, where's the big cheer?"

Lady Eglantine rubbed against his leg, her back arched. "Where is she?" he asked, stooping and scratching the long hair.

He went to Katy's door, knocked loudly. "Why the mystery?" Expected to hear her laugh. But she didn't. He turned it quickly, stood motionless, a deathless agony freezing through him. Katy, a gay blue silk kimono wrapped about her, the chestnut curls loosened, was lying on the floor.



## CHAPTER XCIX

### THE CRISIS

HER hands were cold, the red lips parted like crimson petals against the whiteness of her cheeks.

Kneeling, he clasped the sweet face in his hands, calling a little wildly, "Katy—Katy-kid, what's the matter? Don't you hear?"

He folded his arms about her, laid her on the bed, chafing her hands, begging her to speak, waiting in a blind, half-sobbing frenzy for her eyes to open.

When he saw a faint color creeping upward in her cheek; felt her hands warming and stirring on his, he bit his lips and stooping down whispered, "Katy-kid, you're awake? You hear me now?"

She looked up startled. After a troubled moment, touched his sleeve, "When did you come in, Denny?"

He couldn't answer. But she was awake now and with a flush of shame, remembering.

She opened her hands, saying gayly, "You ketched me again, Denny? That's nothing. I ain't dead. See!"

He ran his hand over his face, "Say, Katy-kid, what happened?" She let her hair fall quickly so that he didn't see the twitching of her mouth nor the cords tightening in her throat.

He went on saying a thing that drew a blade over the new wound in her heart.

"When did Steve go? When did you come in here? When, Katy-kid?"

"A little while ago. What time is it now?"

"Early, I came home early. You're cold. What time did you come in here, Katy-kid?"

His life might have hinged on her answer, with such poignant anguish he waited it.

She lay quietly, her eyes closed, repeating, "A few minutes ago, Denny darlin'—just a few minutes ago."

He saw that she kept her attention with an effort; that her breath came slowly.

"Oh, you're not fainting again, Katy? Look at me. Does it bother you to talk?"

She forced her eyes open, "Never fainted at all—just fell asleep—taking off my stockings—honest—"

But he could only see her lying on the floor, wrapped in the thin kimono—lying there as though she were dead.

Even now her hands were cold. A mad tormenting fear kept stabbing him, "Why did I wait? What have I done? Good God—why did I wait?"

He went to the phone and called the doctor—the young doctor who was to cure Katy.

The doctor's wife answered, "He won't return till the morning. He'll come then."

Then he called a doctor who lived at the apartment. When Katy saw him standing at the bed she looked with indignant reproach to Denny.

"I'm all right—nothing the matter now. The idea, Mr. Denny!" She began to laugh—to talk easily. "The very idea! Can't even faint a bit without making a fuss!"

This bravery of hers smote him. "Bluffing—she'd bluff if she were dying."

When the doctor was gone and a vividness lighted her face she took his hand. "Denny—don't be afraid of me. It's nothing.

"No—honest and true, now, it's nothing at all except that you ketched me!"

"How long were you there, Katy? Tell me the truth. When did you come into this room?"

"Why, I don't just know, Denny. You see I was getting undressed—combing out my hair.

"And I just happened to pick up those little old dance programs—remember. Then I thought how much fun we've always had and I began dreaming.

"I guess I stood up too long. That made me weak, I guess, but I tell you it's nothing."

"Oh, Katy—you never tell the truth."

She laughed. "That's a large time—Denny—is never. You sure that in all my sweet, pure life I never told it once? Huh?"

He turned his face from her. For under the laugh he saw her mouth draw with pain.

But she pulled him back, "Ah, I'm sorry, Denny. Didn't the doctor say I'm all right? He did, didn't he?"

"Now, I'll tell you something. I've often fainted . . . for a long, long time.

"Remember a little while ago you asked me about practicing with the canes? That's why I gave it up because—well because sometimes things happened like now.

"But what of it? See how fine I got along. Just because you didn't come in and find me."

"Oh, Katy, you should have told me—you should have told me."

She shook her head and laughed, "No—no—because you'd begrudge me the pleasure.

"And I feel salubrious now. So will you kindly 'scuse me? I wish to sleep."

He went into the living room, sat at his desk. Lady Eglantine jumped to his lap; he shoved her off; sat there in a gray, aching void, a question searing through his brain, searing on his heart, "What am I to do? Good God, what am I to do? Nothing—without a cent—"

In a little while he went back to Katy's room. She was asleep. He leaned down listening, feeling her breath on his cheek. A dozen times during the night he went in like that.

Once he came so quietly he was at the bed and saw her eyes close swiftly. "You're awake, Katy-kid? What's the matter?"

"You woke me up, Denny. What you doing coming into a lady's boudoir?"

"Katy—you've been awake all night and pretended you were asleep."

"No—indeed not!"

"Oh, come on, Katy—tell me how you feel."

"Well—listen, Denny—I did have a little pain—maybe gout in my back from eating strawberry shortcake smothered in cream, but it's gone now—the pain, you know. That's the truth."

"Do you want anything? You're not cold?"

She reached up and took his hand, "Poor Denny! I was frightened more than anything else—frightened when I saw you home and standing at the bed. But I do feel fine now, Won't you go, please, and get some rest?"

When he did finally try to sleep he kept starting up, seeing the young doctor's face—seeing it through fogs that parted

with a luminous shaft, with a lightning flame that struck into his spirit with an overpowering joy.

He kept hearing him say, "Yes—she'll walk. In time, of course. It can be done."

The memory tossed him heavily. "Would he say that now? What would he say?"

He tried to push these weighted fears from him. As though a mere fainting could hurt her. . . . She looked all right. . . .

The doctor came early. Katy laughed and said she felt fine.

After a short while he came out to Denny, "I wouldn't wait, if I were you, Mr. Brooks. I wouldn't postpone this any longer."

"It's not—" Denny pressed his hands against the chair. But he couldn't force the terrible question from his lips.

The doctor answered, "Well, it's dangerous to wait. Your sister has failed in these months.

"That fall she had some time ago didn't help any. No—not last night—the time she was practicing with the canes.

"Didn't she tell you? Take her to the hospital, Mr. Brooks. You haven't any time to lose."

"I'll take her to-day." He closed the door softly. A voice in his mind mocked, "Oh, yes, take her to-day. You haven't a cent!"

Denny swung around as though he would strike at some visible foe, "I'll get it! By God, I'll get it!"

He went in to Katy, grinning, "Great day is here, Stupe! Come on!"

"No—no, Denny."

"What do you mean 'no'? I said 'yes.'"

Her eyes filled with tears. "I can't, Denny. Oh, you won't do this to me, please. Why, what do I care about a pair of old feet? You know that. And it doesn't matter a bit anyway.

"You don't care whether I walk or not, Denny? I'm not a trouble to you, am I? Nobody else counts. Why, there's lots and lots of time now."

"You were in a terrible hurry a little while ago, Katy-kid."

"But I've changed my mind. Listen, Denny, don't make it so hard for me. Don't I know you can't do this? Don't I know how it is with us now?"

"Oh, I can't, can't I? Well, that's why I came home early last night.

"But, you little Stupe, you had to go and faint. I came home to tell you I've got the job. Chisborough gave me the job."

"Denny! He did? Glorious—but I knew it. But, Denny, let me stay here now.

"Honestly, I don't care. I'm tired. Let me stay here today."

"You go! Come on now. Get your rubbish—the three piles."

"Listen, Denny—"

"Katy, are you afraid? You don't want to get well? Think what it means to me? I've waited a darn long time for it. Don't be a cheat now."

But her eyes filled and the tears ran to her lips. She couldn't sort all the beautiful silks and laces because her hands shook.

"Denny, please—you have to sort them. Why, isn't it funny how sudden so many things all come at once? Oh, Denny—you're the good old angel slave—"

He kept his back to her, lifted the folded garments carefully. "There now—give you an hour to get ready."

His mind lashed, "What am I going to do? Good God!"

He watched Katy combing out her hair, saw her hands trembling, the clear, deep blue eyes brimming.

She called out, half crying—"Denny, aren't I a little fool? But you don't care, do you?"

Ideals—principle, against Katy? God, never! Fling them to the winds—the whole world to the dogs. Not her—not her!

She was pale and covered her face when he came in to see if she were ready. "I'm orful ashamed, Denny. I can't seem to help it."

He was glad she wasn't looking. "You seemed so happy before, Katy-kid—so eager to go—"

"And I am now, too, Denny—only leaving you like this and nobody to get your dinner—and, oh, I'd like to be well—but I want to stay here with you, too—"

"You'll be back again soon, Katy-kid. I'll move to the hospital. How's that?"

When he lifted her in his arms he kept his face down against her shoulder. "Am I hurting you, Katy-kid? I know you're in pain."

She laughed, pressed her lips against his cheek. "You crying, Denny?"

"There, I'm not going to kick any more and don't you either.

"But just keep thinking how mighty magnificent it's going to be when I walk out all by myself—huh?"

And she kept talking like that all the way to the hospital. He would allow none of them to touch her, but took her in his arms to her room.

"Katy, I'm coming back in an hour—I made the date with Chisborough yesterday—you won't mind that little while alone?"

"But you'll come back, then, Denny?"

"Will I? And you know they won't slice you up, Stupe, for a week or so. You're safe."

She held to his hand. "I feel queer, Denny—ever so queer."

"That's you, Katy-kid. Ought to be used to it, by now."

At the Mountain Light and Power Company he saw Chisborough.

"You've heard?" Chisborough asked. "Did you get my letter? They went over my head. Gave it to Piney."

Denny's brain emptied of thought. Katy—can't lose a minute—take her to the hospital now—

He went into Peter Channing's office, sat down quietly. Channing reached over a warm, friendly hand. "Come to your senses, have you, lad?"

Denny answered, "No. I've come to take the job."

## CHAPTER C

### EACH MAN HIS PRICE

PETER CHANNING, bland, florid, hospitable, smoothed his yellow mustache.

"The job is yours, lad, and congratulations. You're on the right road now."

Blood flamed to Denny's head. He felt that his heart was laid open; shame walked on it; filled him with a sickening repugnance.

He wanted to turn from it; to cry out, "For God's sake, Channing! Right road? I know where I am!"

He answered bluntly. "I'm forced to take this job, Mr. Channing. Forced to it."

Petra's father had large blue eyes. They narrowed kindly. "Well, we'll have to see that you don't regret it, lad. We'll see to that."

Denny thrust his hands in his pockets. They were shaking. He had a sudden, crazy impulse to leap at Peter Channing, to snarl, "Oh, no, you won't!"

"You've driven me to this—you and the rest of you dirty murderers! You thieves! Now I'm one of you! I'm in with you and Dunlap.

"But I know what I am. Somebody's going to pay! Somebody's going to regret it! Wait!"

Channing was talking. "When do you want to start? I've held this job a long time. We can use you as soon as you're ready."

"I'm ready now."

"Good—you'll find out this is your opportunity. Biggest field in the world to-day.

"A man has to look to his own future first. By the way, were you able to get your money released in that damage suit?"

"No."

He took a check book from the drawer of the desk. "You can have your first month's salary in advance. Begin to-morrow. Anson will see you."

He pushed the check for \$1,000 toward Denny. For a mo-

ment Denny left it on the table. Then he picked it up quickly, in a mad hurry to end the interview.

The bookkeeper nodded to him: two or three clerks spoke. He was aware that he answered coolly, jokingly.

Outside, he paused, looking up and down the street, saying grimly, "Well, it's done now. I've done it. It's done."

He bit his lips, adding, "Sold out! God—for \$1,000!"

And there came suddenly confronting him the portly figure of James Dunlap, the shiny face white as paper when Denny caught him phoning to Anson.

He tried to put this image from him, but his mind said quietly, "You're with him now. You're in on the deal. You can't get away from this."

Denny answered, "I had to do it. It's done."

As he went flinging along voices followed: Martin Loop's last heavy whisper, "Tell my mother she has Jeff!" And Joan, "It's your job, Denny. You'll finish it."

And Stephen, "Fight, Den! To the last ditch. I'm with you. These fellows are getting away with hell. We don't have to stand for it!"

Then all his own valiant convictions ran after and accosted him. "Guilty as hell! They're guilty as hell. You're with them now!"

He stopped with an abrupt shock—a moment of incredulous revolt.

And as he paused thus, he visioned Katy lying on the floor.

He squared his shoulders, thinking suddenly, "I don't give a damn! Not a damn!"

He was in a panic to reach the hospital again—to look at her—to hear her say some bright, crazy thing. Then he would know she was all right.

She was sitting up in bed, a lavender silk jacket on her shoulders, her hair tied back like a little girl's.

The fear and reluctance of a few hours ago gone. She clasped her hands demurely, "How do you like Katy in lavender and old lace?"

"Little did she dream on yesterday to be reclining in glory to-day. That shows how much we know."

He thought she was prettier than he had ever seen her, but her hair drawn back like that gave a delicacy to her face that frightened him.



"Feeling better, Stupe? Not afraid now?" He sat at the bed, and Katy looked so vivid with the gay rubbish on her shoulders and talked so easily he thought, "She's all right. Well, of course, she is!"

She laughed. "Isn't this idiotic, Denny darling? I feel so ashamed to be sent to bed at 5 o'clock in the evening.

"But never you mind, a tray is coming for the two most elegant people in the world.

"Now, quick—tell me just everything. You got the job all right? What did Chisborough say? When will you begin? Will you like it? It's just as good as the other one? It'll be OUR job, Denny, will it? You're happy?"

He bit his lips. "Well—say, now, which first?"

"And how much a month? What kind of a man are you now, Mr. Denny? Get up and twitch your thumbs in your vest and tell me!"

He could have covered his face and sobbed.

"Oh, it's an all right job, Katy-kid. I'll like it. Begin to-morrow."

"And will you have to go away soon?"

"Not for a long time."

She moved her hand along the bed till it reached his and folded softly under it. "Denny, it's my fault.

"I've taken the joy out of this job, haven't I? Oh, I didn't mean it. And if you'd only come a little later last night you never would have found me there. So it's all on account of me you have no joy in it, isn't it, Denny?"

"Say, Katy, why do you say that? What's an old job, anyhow?"

"A lot, Denny—when the best heart in the world is in it—and that's you.

"But you aren't going to worry over me, because I'm all right. Look at me and you'll know it.

"And to-morrow you'll see the X-rays and be sure, so to-night when you go home and Lady Eglantine rubs against you and asks, 'Where's that Katy-kid and no milk out for me?' just tell her I'll be along in a month or two to grab her by the paws and dance the Highland fling.

"Now you know it's true. It's all settled, and written down up in heaven."

When finally the nurse told him he must go, Katy held to

his hand mocking him, "You're the wonderful fellow, aren't you, Denny? Isn't it a miracle that I have you?"

He laughed, thinking savagely, "I'd do it again! I'd do ten thousand times worse!"

But as he came down the steps of the hospital and was just about to turn, some one came toward him; came with a light, sauntering step.

His heart shrank, then a cool hand clasped his. The voice and the strength left him. "I can't stand this—good God!"

But Petra said softly, "Dendiddle darling! I've been waiting here. We'll have a little drive. How is Katy?"

He followed her into Peter Channing's limousine. She kept her hand on his arm, raised her face to his, the dimples sparkling.

"It's all turned out for the best—now hasn't it, Diddle dearest?"

He wanted to push her from him to shout, "Leave me alone! Good God, leave me alone!"

Even with the golden, fragrant head against his shoulder, her hands reaching to his neck and the wicked taunt, "Silly old Diddle!

"He's not silly now. Here's a kiss for his lips, another for his eyes"—even then he couldn't bend to her.

The vague warning in his mind screamed now, "She wanted this! A dog! But she wanted it!"

Scarcely conscious of her presence he said aloud, "I had to do it. Katy needed it. No time to lose. I had to do it."

## CHAPTER CI

### THE OPERATION

WHEN Denny was gone, Katy leaned against the pillows, her hands pressed together.

She took deep breaths, forced her lips to smile, drawing back the swift, aching tears.

Suddenly she hid her face, murmuring, "Let me get well. Poor Denny! Oh, I must.

"Dear Lord, he doesn't need me, but he wants me for a little while more. Let me stay for him. Just for him. Oh, all these years—"

The tears crept into her palms and there came touching all over her, warm, soft, living, like the fingers of little children, a thousand piercing memories.

Oh, only a few hours ago he had lifted her in arms that might have been wings, they were so strong and yet so gentle. He had been carrying her like that ever since he was 15.

And how he had ridiculed her and served her and taught her. All his life had been that. He knew nothing else.

Why, he was only 9 when he had to look out for her; when he took her to buy the boat; when he took her every Saturday, perched like a little queen on the seat of the delivery wagon.

And only 12 when he counted the redhots and won the bride doll for her.

Hadn't he been doing things like that ever since? That happy morning at Old Lady Traynor's when he came, wearing the white flannel trousers, his young, jubilant face all sparkling and saying, "Now look, Stupe, which coat with them, the blue or the check?" He was the strutting, glad Denny then.

But underneath that buoyant swagger had been always a tenderness, a hope and these for her.

Twelve years he held them. When Katy-kid could walk—all their dreams centered on the glorious chance.

The day the doctor said, "Yes" and they drove home with the dream singing between them—how he had blown his nose, sniffing the tears out of sight.

To disappoint him now—to leave him now? Oh, that would be terrible. That would be cruel.

But there was Petra—golden Petra that he loved. Then he wouldn't need her. Why, what would they do with a crazy little Katy-kid?

She couldn't stop the tears now, though she tried to drink them down with laughter—with a prayer "Let me be strong, dear God. Don't let me want too much."

But there was sitting now at her feet, the fine, handsome head against her knee, Stephen.

And the dear, laughing eyes were turned suddenly to her with their eager question, "You'll love her, Angel Kate, won't you?"

Love Stephen's Angela? Of course she would. Dear Stephen. The night at the concert when she first met him and he had seemed coming toward her out of the music and the dream, a lilt in his eyes.

Afterwards she said to Denny, "Isn't he noble?" He was—dashing up there under the willow tree with a book, a magazine, bringing her all the breezy chatter; hurrying from his classes just to wheel her up the hill for the view and to see the sun go down.

The hundred thousand times he had stolen hours to take her for a joyous walk. Oh, he had been like Denny to her. And he loved her, too. Could anything be finer or sweeter than that?

How was Stephen to guess that Katy had little buckles for the shoes she was to wear on the uplifting day when she came out a tall, free Katy, graceful as Joan, to walk at his side?

Stephen only saw her sitting in a chair—sitting there always. How was he to know of an angel's promise or believe in it?

"But let it come true, anyhow, oh, let it come true, please, dear, kind God," Katy prayed, thinking of Denny—Denny going into the empty apartment, sitting at his desk, missing her, holding his heart in his hand for her.

Not only the heart of him, but the tortured spirit. Katy didn't know this—didn't dream that Chisborough had failed him and to-morrow Denny would walk into Murray Anson's office, saying as he had to Peter Channing, "I'll take the job."

Katy would have died gladly rather than have him do this—Denny to quit. To go over to the men he suspected.

Anson would know he was yellow—a man who threw over his convictions—a dog.

He couldn't say to him, "I have a sister, Anson. I found her lying on the floor as though she were dead. That's why I'm here."

So Denny sat there at his desk with his head hunched between his fists—sat there half the night. In the morning he went to Anson.

If the head of the Independent thought Denman Brooks was a dog, he didn't act it.

He was a smooth, ready man, well dressed, well mannered, with a long, thin mouth, plenty of light-brown hair and a large, slightly crooked nose.

He combined the geniality of a salesman with the suavity of a deacon.

"Yes, Channing told me you'd be here, Mr. Brooks. Glad of it. It's a good move for both of us, I believe."

Denny said simply, "Yes." He was conscious of a confused, nervous feeling of apprehension; of doubt.

This was Anson, former head of the Consolidated; the man he suspected of blowing the coffer dam; of snapping the suspension cable—the man who had brought Martin Loop to his death.

An agreeable, polished fellow inspiring none of the personal repugnance of James Dunlap.

"Can you begin the first of the week? Lambert will be back then. We want to get going on the Indian river project. Is that convenient for you?"

"Yes."

This was all. It was done—finished—whipping suspense ended. The hot agony of shame settling into a subdued, eating depression.

Denny had a secret feeling that he bore outwardly some brand for what he had done; some shrinking, hateful apology in his manner; his look.

He no longer swaggered, the jubilation in his heart; no longer felt the young fists doubling ready to up and strike here, there, anywhere.

Two days ago he had grinned at life; thrown back, with a snap of his fingers, the challenge life gave.

Now he belonged to the conquered—one of the millions and millions life takes in her hand and breaks.

Yet when he went to the hospital he swung his chin upward. Katy'd not know. You bet she'd not know!

He was to see Dr. Lake. To learn if the golden promise still held; if Katy was still to walk.

As he went into the small office he felt as though some one were peeling the flesh from him; peeling it in long, quivering strips, each one tearing from his heart.

He kept saying to himself, "She looks all right, looks great."

But when he saw the doctor's grave face, a steely quiet entered and half numbed his brain.

Long words came to him—"exploratory incision—X-ray findings—necrosis of the bone."

He asked faintly, forcing out the words, "But she'll be able to walk? It hasn't altered that?"

"I don't know. We'll have to have this operation first. We can't do any grafting till all the bones are in a perfectly healthy condition."

Something chill and accusing—a reproachful terror that had Katy's red lips and tear-filled eyes whispered, "You waited—why did you wait? See what you've done to me."

Like a fearful presence hanging about his neck, crying in his ears.

He mumbled a word or so of it. The doctor shook his head. "Condition may have been present then, Mr. Brooks—probably was, though not apparent. The waiting of six months after 11 years shouldn't worry you."

"You'll be able to cure it?"

"I hope so."

"There's no danger in this operation? No serious danger?"

"Well—"

Denny broke into that with a sharp, "Why, you don't mean there's the slightest fear—"

"Mr. Brooks, there is danger—there is always danger. But it is more grave for you to postpone this operation than to meet it—far more grave."

Denny couldn't meet Katy after that. He went out and walked, saying over and over again, "What a hell of a note."

And clenching his fists at heaven or God, or whatever it was that had brought this frightful thing upon him.

After a long while he told Katy—there must be two operations, one of them at once.

She sank her face in a bowl of baby roses Violet had brought.

"'Tain't nothing, Denny! 'Tain't nothing if there's twenty. Me and the angel has decided this.

"You'll see!" She laughed and took his hand. "You the big baby, Denny—you the dear coward!"

The next morning early he was there. He didn't even try to keep the tears from his eyes or his lips from shaking. Katy's hair was all tied back, face vivid.

"Come here, Denny. Now haven't we waited and waited for this? Don't have tears in your eyes.

"You think I'd let anything happen to me and you out here waiting? Now, do you think I'd be that mean? Not much!"

He stooped down and kissed her. When the nurse wheeled her to the operating room, she waved her hand, threw a laugh after him.

He ran back quickly, stood with his hands on her shoulders. At last he said: "Katy-kid, you'll be all right."

A trembling answered him. "Course, Denny—well, of course I will."

The door closed. He was left outside to wait.

## CHAPTER CII

### WAITING

HIS heart was behind the white door. He stood outside and it was in there drawing him with a thousand warm, beseeching tendons.

Katy spoke, then her gay, half hysterical laugh. It brought a wild pelting of all the blood in his body; a shock as though he realized for the first time and with a deadly fear the thing he had done. Katy in there—on the table—in danger.

The animal in him roused with a mad desire to spring. This was cowed by the baffled anguish of thought.

There is nothing to strike . . . nothing but Life. What Life gives must be taken. He must bear this. He must wait.

He assured himself. "She's all right. She'll come out of it."

The doctor's caution answered, "There is danger, Mr. Brooks—grave danger."

Each of the million times this sentence lashed him he was swept by the same hot, insensate longing to do something; to rush in, to cry out, to grab her in his arms.

And each time he turned from the door in a limp, impotent despair. Wait—wait.

A nurse came out. Perspiration beaded his forehead. He saw her smiling.

It was an affront. He asked almost with anger, "She's all right?"

"Why, yes—don't be alarmed. Come back in an hour."

Leave the spot? He was riveted there. He grew used to walking back and forth; to standing before the door and fighting down the desire to rush in; used to the shock of stopping abruptly, accosting himself with an astonished, "Katy-kid—Good Lord!"

At last and when he was half way down the corridor, the door of the operating room opened. He folded his arms, unable to move.



They were wheeling a still form on a white stretcher—Katy. Wild sounds strained at his lips.

He saw her face, colorless, eyes closed heavily, hair drawn back and covered.

It didn't seem like her—no laugh, no gayety, no movement. It wasn't Katy-kid.

Some one touched his arm. Dr. Lake. "Better than I expected."

A rough cry ripped from him, "She looks terrible—terrible!" "Naturally. Wait till she's out of the anesthetic."

"There's no danger now? You're sure she's coming out of this?"

"I don't look for any trouble. None at all."

Something rushed up to his throat, shouted there, set his face twitching.

He wanted to follow them into the room; to go up and touch Katy's hand.

But the nurse closed the door softly against him. "Not now, Mr. Brooks. Come back later. She'll be all right."

All right—she'll be all right. A giddiness throbbled in every nerve. He whipped out a handkerchief, spread it again and again over his face, laughed with a savage trembling. Well—she was all right—gee—

It was evening when he sat at her bed, looking down into the white face, chiseled in beauty as Queenie's was.

Now they had unfied her hair and it fell in bright curls about her forehead and at her shoulders.

The stillness of the room, the shaded light, the quiet loveliness of Katy's face, smote him with pain, with fear.

He saw that her mouth was drawn—pale. And the lips had always been scarlet. He thought, "Good Lord, she's in terrible torment."

She opened her eyes, saw him, and all the winsome sweetness came there above her chin, in a soft murmur, "Denny!"

He leaned down. "You're all right, Katy-kid—all right?"

She smiled, but it seemed to him that she was far off; that she didn't feel his nearness. This hurt him. "Are you in pain, Katy-kid?"

"No—no, Denny—it's—stiffness—just that—see, I can't move much. All wrapped up in a sidewalk. Know that?"

"Suffering, Katy?"

"Not much. Not now."

The talk was an effort for her. Her eyes closed, but she said with a note of gayety, "I liked it, Denny—the anesthetic—drifting off on silver clouds, up and up, lighter and lighter."

He wanted to say, "Oh, don't talk like that, Katy-kid. You look too much like it now. Good Lord!"

He whispered close to her face, "Katy-kid, is there anything you want? Anything at all?"

She nodded. And he was stabbed with gladness. He could do something for her.

"What—tell me what?"

There was a pleading in her tone—the way she had talked last night—early this morning. "Laugh, Denny. Don't worry for me. That's all."

His eyes stung beyond bearing, "Stupe, poor Stupe, who's worrying for you? You're all right."

"The doctor says you'll be fit as a fiddle in a week or two."

But with her face so quiet there, so pearly in its whiteness, the lips drawn even now when she was trying so desperately to keep them smiling—with this Katy before him, his own thought cowered.

"How long will she be like this?" he asked the nurse.

"She'll begin to improve. She's wonderful considering what she underwent. You'll see a big improvement in a few days."

Denny waited for it, half thinking to find Katy sitting up—but almost crazy with relief when he did come one day and found her a little gay, laughing, making fun of herself and the plaster cast.

"Denny, darlin', which would you rather, get into heaven by going through hell, or have your own little heaven and hilarity here on earth first and then go down and be damned for it?"

"I've been thinking of this, for it's no fun being an old-fashioned saint. All they did was to turn things around—made a little hell for themselves to buy their way to Paradise."

"I hope they got it—I do hope that. What a time they and me do have!"

He went away after this visit with the old boyish swagger in his thought: "What a brick she was! Gee whiz—looking great again."

Only a few days after this he stole into the room, found her with her hands pressed together, biting her lips, a madness in her eyes.

He stood at the bed, unable to speak. But the moment she

saw him, she brushed a hand over her face, "Gone now, Denny—see, I just have a pain now and then to make me glad for all the hours I languish here in lazy joy without the slightest twitch.

"And don't I look pretty to-day? See—Violet brought me perfume. Oh, I love it."

He thanked heaven in those days for Violet and the deep affection of her nature.

She kept Katy's room filled with flowers. She came every day and sat with her, reading to her and poking all manner of fun at Lizzie and Lizzie's progeny.

"And isn't it a punishment, Katy-kid, that she should have a daughter like me?

"Poor, sloppy Liz! I suppose she sees her angel child going straight to the dogs.

"And, Katy, now listen to this—your dear Uncle Matt permitted the black sheep to enter the fold again.

"We went there to dinner. Poor ma set the table—oh, dear, think of it, Katy—she set the table in our boudoir and he put on a collar and kept his coat on and talked like a human being.

"Max—well, you see, Katy, I told Max a good deal—everything—funny thing love, isn't it?

"Max said afterwards: 'What of it, Vee—all these things kept you for me.'

"So what does he do but up and ask ma and your uncle to dinner. And the old boy dolls himself up in a red necktie and Dent gloves like a tout, and we went to the Inside inn and he all but ate like a gentleman."

After these visits, Katy was exhilarated, full of plans. "I'll be sitting up soon—in a few weeks.

"Oh, Denny darlin', won't you be the glad fellow, though? Why, I'll be ready to go to the mountains with you.

"Sit down now while I'm feeling so chipper and tell me more and more about the most beautiful new job. I'm praying about it, Denny, and about Joan. So tell me."

These were the moments he dreaded. If Katy should ever learn of his job, how would he meet the look in her clear, beautiful eyes?

In the first week he was launched feverishly in the job—the Indian river project, a monumental undertaking involving millions.

He threw himself into it with a grim fury, fighting against thought, against the carping of his own mind.

Yet there drummed incessantly in his ears the rugged voice of Berne Melrose demanding, "Answer this—why is the engineer of our company trafficking with the Consolidated?"

And Denny never looked at Murray Anson without remembering Dunlap and the yellow pallor overspreading his face.

One noon just after he had come from Katy and found her white, listless, pretending valiantly and failing, as he went in to lunch he saw Dunlap with a group of men.

They were leaving as Denny took his place. Dunlap stopped at his table. "Congratulations, Mr. Brooks."

Denny stood up, intense antagonism flaming. "For what, Mr. Dunlap?"

"Well—well—glad to see you settled. Sorry for our misunderstanding."

"Not exactly a misunderstanding, Dunlap."

"Well, now," the shiny face red to the eyebrows, "I'd call it that. And that little matter of your coming to my house and accusing me about Miss Lewis . . ."

"What has Miss Lewis to do with this?"

"Only the little misunderstanding between us—"

Denny spoke from the madness and the anxiety tormenting him. He caught Dunlap's coat. Dunlap was suddenly ashen.

"I'm not sure about that, Dunlap. If you know where Miss Lewis is, I don't. God pity you when I find out!"

## CHAPTER CIII

### SURFEIT

No gall could be more bitter than Dunlap's congratulations. It distilled the dregs of Denny's surrender, forcing the corroding drink over again to his lips. And the emptiness of his boast to Dunlap: "God pity you when I find out!"

What could he do—he that had so ignominiously surrendered? Yet the meeting with Dunlap heightened his suspicions. "Why did Dunlap bring Joan into it? What made him think of her? Guilt—the fellow's mad with guilt—that's it."

All the afternoon, Joan's image hovered before him. What would Joan say if she knew? If she could see him in this job?

He shuddered against the answer. Joan, with that passionate purity in her magnificent eyes—what would she say?

He longed, with a fierce half scorn, to know; wished achingly that some one would blame him. Then he would justify himself.

For he was goaded beyond endurance with Petra's confident "Diddle darling, we don't have to fret our lives away now for the tiresome old farmers, do we?"

"We don't have to wait forever now, do we? Aren't you glad, dearest, dearest?"

When she said this there was no music to him in the sauntering voice, nor any thrill in the contact with her lips, her hands, like silk, creeping to his neck.

He wanted to put them from him—to fling, maddened, through shut teeth, "Petra, can't you see this is killing me? Let it be, will you? Let it be!"

He had sometimes the unreasonable feeling that if he were once to thrust her from him—to shout "Petra, leave me alone!"—he would be free again; he would be separated from the ignominy of this job. Her love put a seal on his treason and it shamed him to his soul.

But on this very night, after he had gone through his work in a frightful depression of spirit, imagining alternately the

smirk on Dunlap's face, the reproach in Joan's eyes, but, more tearing than either, Katy, lying pale and listless for all that she tried so mightily to smile—this night Petra had a surprise for him.

She came in radiant—ripe gold as summer itself—hair tossed high, long jade earrings.

She sat beside him on the sofa, wooing him with eyes and mouth. "See now what it means to be my own darling, sensible Dendiddle!" She drew a card from her belt, held it before him. His pulses stopped.

Petra had spoken several times of this. He had laughed and evaded. Now it was done.

She had in her hand the little engraved betrothal cards and their two names linked.

He sat speechless.

"Like them, Dendiddle? Aren't they adorable?"

"It's rather sudden, isn't it, Petra?"

She stared at him, mystified, and the radiance dropped from her face. She got up quickly, walked over to a table, stood there motionless, her back to him.

He saw her hand at her throat, her body trembling. He went over and put his hand on hers, pressing it down against the table.

She didn't resist him, but kept her eyes lowered. The lashes were wet.

"I didn't mean it that way, Petra." He spoke gently, but his voice was rough with a desperate fear and anguish.

It couldn't be now—not now, when Katy needed him so piercingly. Not now—couldn't Petra see that?

After a long while and he had drawn her to him, she said, quietly: "All right, Diddle, we'll wait a little longer."

That night the fragrance of her hair loitered in his senses. It stifled him. He wanted no congratulations—no one to tell him he had done well. But rather one who would say—"Oh, shame! Shame—I pity the need that forced you." Some one with dear, ardent eyes—one who had watched and loved the white fire of his young ideals and would now weep because they were ashes.

The next afternoon he went to John Merchant's office, stopping with apparent unconcern before Miss Blanch Taylor's desk.

"Oh, say, Mr. Brooks," she began glibly, "I was going to

ring you up to-night. Found out about your stenog. She's working with Tully's in California Street."

Almost choking, Denny stood at the door of the great office building— Five o'clock— He would see Joan.

Girl after girl came rushing out— Five-fifteen, five-thirty, —no Joan— Then suddenly he gave a little run. He caught her arm—"Joany! At last! Joany!"

There were tears and astonishment, but chiefest of all unreckoning joy in her eyes.

"Where have you been— Oh, Joan, here in town and never a word?—And you knew how I'd need it—want it—!"

There were those little trembling movements all about her lips—and she looked, marveling, at his brown hand touching her arm, his dark eyes dwelling so longingly on hers—

She said: "You wanted me, Denny? How would I know that?"

But she felt like tossing back her head—like laughing madly—He was here and had wanted her.

They said to each other, "Oh, Denny—" "Oh, Joany," and went along, holding each other's hand—mute but understanding.

She told of the telegrams she had received—the telegrams telling her to keep mum—and above all things not to see Denny—

"Not to see me, Joan? And you thought I sent those messages?"

He was bewildered with his emotions—the joy of finding Joan and the fury against Dunlap—now he looked down at her to say—"Oh, this is good, Joany—seeing you again—" And now he scowled—listening to Joan's revelations—

She told him of the fanatical fellow who demanded \$1000—of Dunlap's agitated visits to the boarding house—of the little black book she had stolen.

He raced Joan along, her words feeding like live coals on his mind.

"A fellow came in there demanding \$1000, Joan? What was he like? Dunlap said the company would pay him? What else? This proves it. He's guilty as hell— Joan, did you think I sent you away? Did you think I was guilty and afraid?"

She looked up at him, starry-eyed with faith— She tucked her hand so eagerly in his.

They walked and walked. Now they were in the quiet Greek quarter. They found a bench in a little park.

Denny caught her hand—looked at it a long time— Suddenly he said: "Joany, you understood?"

He noticed the pale features, so eager, so young—waited for her eyes to raise. They did, so quick, so sweet, so brimming.

A sound that was more music than cry broke from her. "Then you haven't gone over to them, Denny? That about the Independent is a lie, too?"

He added dully: "Katy's in the hospital. I had to take their job."

"Katy's in the hospital. Oh, why didn't I know! Little Katy!"

He could have dropped to his knees and thanked her for the pain that came into her face, and the understanding.

He turned with an impetuous gratitude, poured out the anguish of the days, the terror of that morning outside the operating room; the incessant goad of fear.

For the first time in two weeks he felt a freedom, a relief, a something glad within him.

And her face turned upward as it did that night on the Berkeley hill when he framed it in his hands—when he kissed her— He remembered this now and flushed. He leaned down to say: "Joany, having you here!"

His feeling filled him with joy and panic.



## CHAPTER CIV

### CLEWS

THAT night Denny sat at his desk in the big living room, the telegrams and the little black book Joan had stolen, before him. The image of her sweet, brimming eyes raised with impetuous faith to his glowed in his thought—the look he had longed for—the look that wiped away the bitterness of defeat.

In his feeling now for Dunlap was a savage exultance. Dunlap had delivered himself into Denny's hands. He could wait now—wait for the proofs. He would be vindicated. After that he would leave this hateful job.

The cryptic messages with their fantastic signature puzzled him: "S. Macey. Use caution," and the other: "Settle. No talk."

Did these notes refer to the Twin Falls project? Who was Macey? Who was the foreigner Joan had described—the man who had shaken a bony finger in her face demanding the \$1000 due him?

Was it Anson had employed Dunlap?

Denny scrutinized the signature that looked more like a pollywog sitting on its tail than like any letter.

He traced it, became quite expert in making it. Saw the odd scrawl in his sleep.

For the first time since taking the job with the Independent he went into the office without an inner fury. He thought, "Well—they'll pay for this, too!"

At noon he went to Jerome Cummings. He was not bringing mere suspicions now—mere personal hostility. Cummings was away and would return on Friday.

Before Friday, in a manner so matter of fact it seemed a miracle, the proofs were given to Denny.

He returned from lunch on Wednesday and went up to his desk.

Before him was a note in pencil. At the end of it was the initial that looked like a pollywog sitting on its tail.

"Dear Brooks—Solman is bringing you the bridge specifications. Will you make the changes at once?"

The peculiar character in the corner. Anson's writing—Anson's note. So it WAS Anson! The messages in Dunlap's little black book were sent by the head of the Consolidated!

The simple incident left Denny violent with excitement—He was in a passion of impatience for the return of Jerome Cummings. He had an appointment with Cummings for one o'clock Friday.

Just at noon he ran out for a visit to Katy— She was glad because of Joan's coming—so glad because Denny had said, unaware of the joy vibrant in his tone—"Joany! I've found Joany." Calling her that little endearing name.

As Denny was leaving, Dr. Lake met him in the corridor, saying casually: "I'd like to call some specialists, Mr. Brooks."

"Call them! Good God, you're not stopping at this, are you? Call every specialist in the city!" He asked then almost imploring, "There's no danger?"

"Not any more so than before but this is going to be very slow, Mr. Brooks. She'll be here months. I'd like to have Dr. Rollins with me on this case if you authorize it."

"Dr. Lake, you've got to cure her. She's got to be cured. I don't care what it costs. If you need fifty specialists."

Half way down the corridor he turned and caught up again with the doctor. He was spent. "You can cure her? You're not doubting that?"

"I can only hope. At best it will be slow."

Jerome Cummings was waiting for him. Denny put the telegrams, the black book with its messages and the scrawl from Anson before him.

"You still believe Anson and Dunlap did the things, Den?" He leaned back in his chair, eyeing Denny with slow, puzzled intensity.

Denny met the glance, hot with shame. "You heard I've taken the job with them, Jerr? I had to. I had to have a job with money. I had to have it quick. They gave it to me."

"Didn't they know you suspected them, Den?"

"Dunlap knew it."

"Then you may be sure Anson knows it. He knew it when he gave you the job."

"You mean it looks as though I'm bought? I'm not!"

"You're prepared to quit, are you?"

"Of course! I won't need their damn job when I've got the proofs. It'll release my own money, won't it?"

"Eventually—yes. But it may be months before we settle this."

"Months, Jerr? I'd have to wait months? Even with complete proofs?"

"Yes."

Months without money—Katy—specialists. . . .

Cummings said flatly: "You can't bring charges of murder and outrage against these fellows and then turn round and take a job from them. No jury in the country would give you a verdict. Melrose believes you were with them in the beginning. What will he think now? You've got to quit the fight or quit the job."

Denny stood up, his teeth bared. He walked to the door. He fumbled with the knob. Without looking at Jerome Cummings, he said quietly, "I can't quit the job."

## CHAPTER CV

### BETROTHAL CARDS

HE came as youth always does—this is its pity, this its tragedy—he came single handed against the massed ranks of the Old, the Entrenched. The world does not want Youth: does not want white fire set to its dust and shrouds. When Youth comes following the star, he finds the path blocked, a thousand centuries crying out, "Thou shalt not pass!"

Denny had seen his star—had gone after it with a grin and a high heart. He had lain foolishly under a tree on the mountain top and visioned a future of magnificent effort, a drama worthy of the ridges, worthy of the jeweled lakes. His, of course, would be a leading part—a young king come to claim his throne—come to hurry along the new order.

The dream had been with him from his boyhood—from the Sunday when he brought a tray to Violet, saying manfully, "Gee, doncher care, Vee! Say, some day, I'm gonna give him an awful punch. You wait!"

Denny remembered gloating when he heard his uncle moan with the pain in his crushed feet: remembered the satisfaction when he stole into the kitchen and opened the door for Violet. It proved he was against Matt, against him good and hard!

When he followed the hostile farmers over parched and dying acres, he had exactly the same feeling. He was against this.

But when he went to give the awful punch it proved but thistledown against the massed bulk of Dunlap, Anson, millions. They turned as Matt Borley had when Denny tried to save Violet from the whip and let the lash fall on him.

He stood there and yelled like a youngster, "I've not quit! And, by God, I won't quit!"

But he had quit now. He wasn't against them now. He couldn't stand out. Price too high. Anything but Katy—not her.

Denny went away from Jerome Cummings, an utter quiet stealing in and through him. . . .

As he neared the office of the Independent he swung himself together. He had made his bargain. He had to keep it.

This bargain, his spirit had not ratified. In his hope had been always the moment of escape; the thrilling moment of vindication. But he was conquered now. He had to quit his fight or let Katy die—

He worked all afternoon with the thought of Katy resting like her slim, white hand on his mind. He left early that afternoon— He went to the doctor's office, overborne with anxiety. They wanted more specialists. Then was Katy in danger? Oh, not in danger for her life?

He accosted the doctor with an impetuous, "I want to know how my sister is. You're alarmed?"

"Hers is a serious condition. She won't be well for a long time." He went into details.

Denny spoke the hope uppermost in his mind, "She'll be able to walk? There's still this chance?"

But no amount of cross-questioning could get a positive assurance from the doctor. He couldn't say. And it would be months before Katy could undergo another operation.

"It may be six months or longer, Diddle?" Petra asked when he told her. It was the first time he saw Petra since Joan's return.

"And then it may be a year more after the second operation, before she can walk?"

"A long time—"

Petra grew white. She leaned a little forward, her hands clasped, "Are we to wait this long, Dendiddle?"

"What! What did you say, Petra?"

"I asked if you meant to wait a year and a half more."

"I wasn't thinking about that at all, Petra."

"No, you don't think about it, Diddle. But I do. It's not exactly fair to me."

"Listen, Petra—I've tried to tell you. How can I think of marriage now when Katy needs me more than ever?"

"But if it's going to be a year and a half or maybe two or three you may still say that. It doesn't seem sensible to me. You can't wait forever. Katy wouldn't expect it."

His arm and his face and his thought stiffened against her. She wasn't watching him.

"I've given up every one for you, Diddle—every one and now you don't even want to admit we're engaged."

"It costs money to stay at a hospital and have specialists, Petra. I can't stand any more obligations than I've got."

She leaned closer to him, looking up with an arch smile, "Poor, darling Dendiddle—you used to be so full of fun. There's going to be money enough. Peter will see to that. So we don't have to wait for the money. If that's all I might just as well send out the cards. Then after Katy's out of the hospital we can get married. Why, I don't see how it will make any difference to her, Diddle."

"It makes this difference that while she's in any danger, I'm not going to get married. You might as well know that, Petra!"

Color flew into her face—an anger in her eyes:

"When you asked me to marry you, you knew there was Katy. Katy knows surely that you're going to be married some day. She doesn't expect you to give up your life for her, does she? She knows she'll be alone some time—"

His hands reached over and gripped her wrists. She raised her head indignantly. The blaze in his eyes put out the heat of hers.

She said very low, half crying, "You're hurting me, Diddle."

He slumped back, ashamed of his intensity.

She came to him as always: "Diddle—what did I say that made you so angry? I have more right to be angry."

"Well, Petra—Katy's never going to be alone. I thought you understood that. You might as well understand it now. I'd rather be shot than sit here and have Katy talked about like this. I feel as if I were murdering her."

He added gently, "You don't know Katy-kid, Petra. If you did—"

Twice he had asked Petra to visit Katy. She had promised and failed. Now he didn't want her. Katy didn't need visitors now. There was Joan.

But Petra said, "I want to know her— Take me to see Katy, Diddle."

He put her off.

Two days later Petra went alone— She called on Katy. A knife plunged in Denny's heart were better than the thing Petra did.

## CHAPTER CVI

### PETRA ENLIGHTENS KATY

KATY was decked in the gayest thing—blue of her eyes—lace at her throat— Oh, wear the bonny rubbish—make Denny glad with her pretty looks. Wear it while yet there was time—

The nurse brought in a letter. Katy closed her eyes, pressing her fingers against the temples. It was from Stephen.

“Good Lord, Kate—dear, beautiful, old angel Kate—what’s this mean, contemptible trick you’ve pulled, rushing off to a hospital to have your heart cut up and me not there to help with the patching?”

“Lord, Kate, it takes an awful twist out of me. I’m shaking like an old-fashioned leaf. Been way off in the mountains surveying. Just got Den’s letters.

“Thank God and all his cousins, you’re coming out of it like a prince and a lady, and if you didn’t, you mean little thing, I’d be up there to jump like blazes on your grave.

“I wouldn’t slip a trick like this over on you, not much! If they were to take a nick out of a rib of mine I’d want beautiful Kate around to see they did it right and to feed me jelly doughnuts.

“I’ll be up pretty soon, Kate—as soon as ever I can. What a funny old kitchen without pies and cookies in the tins, but I’ll hold up a delicatessen and we’ll have the feast same as ever, Kate.

“Get well, quick—and all the pains you can’t bear, give to me. I’ll take them in a jiff, angel Kate, and the Lord Den will take the rest.

“You’ve got the two old slaves yet—and you know it—got them bound head and heart.

“Don’t take the light out of our eyes, Kate, by suffering too much. . . .”

Longest letter Steve had ever written. He loved her—just

the way he always did—just as much as ever—wasn't that enough?

Katy wouldn't have tears in her eyes. She drew them swiftly back.

None too soon—the door opening and a tall bright thing like a long, gay rose entered—

"I'm Petra. Can I come?"

"Golden Petra— Oh, yes, indeed!"

Katy was a little astonished. Pretty? Oh, wonderfully! Not as fine as Joan—Joan a little taller, walking with a prouder grace—nobler, like Denny was.

"Glad to see me, Katy? Why, I'm pleased with that. Denny has told me all about you and the rubbish you made. I'm glad you're getting better."

Why, it was alluring to have her rambling along, talking like that, not stopping for anything, even a comma.

"I suppose you get very tired in the hospital all alone, Katy?" Petra asked. "I'd just be bored to death. You don't really have to stay, now that you can sit up a little, do you?"

"Oh, it's not so bad, Petra. Violet comes and Joan and old Lady Traynor, and to-day there's you. I think you're most lovely, Golden Petra." The sweetness shone like a light on Katy's face.

"Do you? Denny told me about Mrs. Traynor. You lived with her, didn't you? You're fond of her?"

"Why, we love her. She has a beautiful old garden, and Mr. Traynor has birds. It's just most happy there."

"Why doesn't Diddle have you go out there instead of being poked here alone all day? You could have the nurse with you."

"I thought about going home, later on. We have a view that's a poem from our window. I get lonesome for the hills and the bay and the tall, white campanile.

"We see all that. And then with me there Denny wouldn't be so lonesome. This is hard for him."

"Oh, it's just killing him, isn't it, Katy, he's so fond of you. But he doesn't need to go into that empty house every night.

"I want him to come and stay with us. I should think that would be better, because you'd be alone there the same as here. It's a much better plan to go to Old Lady Traynor, I should think."

Petra took out her vanity case and with little caressing touches smoothed powder on her nose.



"I should think that would be ideal, Katy, with a lovely garden and as long as you love her so and are going to live there later on, anyway—"

Katy felt a knocking in her throat. "What do you mean when you say 'later on'?"

Petra looked gently at Katy and blushed. "Oh, don't you know, Katy dear? Of course we aren't making any plans just now.

"Diddle wouldn't dream of getting married till you're better. We had intended announcing our engagement; we have the cards ready, but Denny wanted to make sure you'll be happy first."

Katy clasped her hands, then quietly, tearing the words from a proud, mighty hurt, "You don't need to wait for me, Petra. Not at all. I'm as well now as I'm ever going to be.

"The worst thing Denny can do to me is to sacrifice his own happiness. And Denny knows that.

"And why, Old Lady Traynor would be most glad to have me and I would be most glad to go."

"I know you feel that way, Katy. Naturally. And I think you're right. Diddle has had a hard fight.

"And I suppose we are rather senseless postponing it so indefinitely. But then, are you sure you'd be happy with Old Lady Traynor?"

Katy was having a bitter time with her lips and her teary old eyes. She made them flash. Then she laughed.

"Oh, Petra, it's not where you are that makes you happy. It's what you think.

"And, you see, I think most anything I please. So nobody ever need to worry for me."

Oh, it was good when Petra stood up—when she said in her easy, sauntering way: "You're just a darling, Katy.

"I'll run in again, if you like." And never was a sound happier than the closing of the door.

Katy tapped her fingers against her lips—then she tried to hum, but all her heart was melting and it wouldn't let the song come.

She lay back on the pillows. At least she could shut her eyes—she could make them stay dry.

Stephen's letter was under her pillow. On a little table near the bed was a packet of telegrams and letters. These were from Clay Andrews.

After an hour or so, Katy reached for them, drew out one—the first. It began: “Oh, Katy, you promised to let me know when this was to happen.

“If only you would write and say you want me. Do you? If only there would come a moment when you might need me—even for a moment. I live in the wild hope that this may be.”

Katy ground the letter between her palms. “Oh, it wouldn’t be right, dear Clay—for there isn’t anything left of me now.”

Before the day was over she wrote: “You think you want a star, Clay, and you say that star is me.

“Do you want it when all its lights are out? I wonder, because I think that’s me now.

“Oh, I’m so sorry for you, dear Clay, and so glad just now for all you’ve said and all the mighty things you’ve written.

“And come, Clay—now—if you want. But it’s true what I say, and this is a star that’s mostly out.”

## CHAPTER CVII

### PETRA OR KATY

THAT afternoon Petra called for Denny. They drove through the park. She talked of Katy—how lovely Katy was. As she spoke her eyes met his gently with a deep sympathy.

"But, Denny, isn't it a little cruel to keep her there in the hospital, now that she's able to sit up? She's alone all day."

He looked at her startled, "Cruel? What else can I do? If I took her home, she'd be alone."

"Oh, that would be worse. But she talked so much about that Old Lady Traynor and the beautiful garden and the birds. I have an idea she'd love to go out there. She could take the nurse with her, of course. She could sit in the garden. It would be so much brighter for her."

The notion took hold of him. Katy loved the old people. All the friends and neighbors of the Traynors worshiped Katy. Say, it would be fine!

If Petra had only stopped there. But she added with a quick upward glance and her hand pressed against his, "It would be wonderful all around, Diddle. So much better. Then I won't have to love my darling Dendiddle forever and ever in vain." Her head half rested against his shoulder so that the summer breeze brought her hair to his lips.

"Oh, what do you mean, Petra?"

"Mean, Diddle? Why, now there's no problem at all! Why need we wait a year and a half or two years or any time at all if we're just sure Katy'll be happy?"

He shifted slightly from her, annoyed as he always was, at her habit of opening an issue he thought closed.

"I don't know how a little visit to the Traynors settles things, Petra. There's still the second operation. The doctors may not wish Katy moved."

"She can have the operation just the same if we're married, can't she? But of course, Diddle, if you don't care about me; if you think it honorable to keep me waiting and waiting, and

I've hardly gone a place since last January, and now you plan without even a second thought to dangle me along for six months or even two years longer and then—it may be just the same. . . .”

She lowered her head—the fine black brows frowning to keep back tears. He slipped his hand on her arm, “You know that's not so, Petra. And I know it isn't very fair to you, but can't you see that I've loved Katy all my life and waited on her?” A rising passion shook through him, “And she'll need me more than ever. She'll have to be lifted and carried.”

“If you look at it that way, Diddle, she'll need you all her life. So I don't see why you asked me to marry you, and made me love you the way you have.

“You knew the break would have to come some time. Besides, Katy knows it and she has it all planned to live at the Traynors'. She told me so herself.”

For a long, blazing moment he sat motionless. The hard quiet of his tones when he finally spoke frightened her.

“Katy said that to you, Petra? She doesn't even know we're to be married!”

“Doesn't she? She seems to know all about it. And she said it was lovely at the Traynors' and she was longing to live with them. So it seems to settle everything and you don't seem to have much reason for postponing things. . . .” She brushed up the hair at her neck.

Denny no longer listened. Did Katy suggest that? Why, she would surely have said it to him first.

Would she even think it after all these years—after all the desperate sacrifice?

And now, when she knew she couldn't possibly get along without him; when she knew there were coming months and months when he would allow no one but himself to carry her—to serve her. . . .

He said suddenly to Petra, “Will you have him drive me back? I have to see the doctor.”

“You're coming to dinner, aren't you?”

“No, I have to see him.”

“Oh, the way you treat me, Diddle!”

He doubted her so and underneath was so savagely tormented, he scarcely looked at her but got out of the car. He went direct to Katy.

She lay with her eyes closed, the curls flung back and the

lips, as he had often seen them, like crimson petals against the whiteness of her face.

He went over and sat at her bed, for a moment unable to speak because of the hurt.

Her eyes opened quickly. "Why, you here again, Denny? Oh, you making mad eyes at me?" She reached out her hand, but he didn't take it. "Why, what's the matter?"

"Gee—Katy—do you think it was decent to do that?"

"What do you mean, Denny? What did I do?"

"Good Lord, Katy—about the Traynors and planning to live there, and telling that to Petra, as though I—well—gee whiz!" He took her hand then. "Why did you say that, Katy? Why did you say it to her?"

When Katy kept her eyes closed and didn't answer, he begged, "Oh, tell me. Why did you talk about it, Katy? Was it right to me?"

She smiled. "Oh, you're making a big fuss over a few words, Denny."

"Katy, I want to know. Now you tell me—tell me exactly."

Her lips trembled, thinking of the letter she had sent Clay Andrews, thinking of her heart, melting the song out of her throat.

He pulled her hand, his voice breaking. "Katy, you didn't say it? Won't you tell me?"

"Oh, what of it, Denny? And it's a real fine idea."

"Good God, Katy! That's pretty good! But you're going to tell me, Katy. I'm going to know."

"Don't look so tragic, Denny. Of course, I'll tell you, for it's nothing anyway and we just were talking about all the old friends and about how we loved the Traynors and were happy when we lived with them.

"That's the way it happened. Petra thought it would be lovely for me to go there now. She said this, 'It would be ideal, Katy, as long as you love Old Lady Traynor and are going to live there later on, anyway.'"

"What else, Katy—quick—"

"Oh—just that later on was when you and she would be married, but, of course, you couldn't think of that now—on account of me—"

His hands were clenched and a gray fury swept all the young tenderness from his face.

"She said that, Katy? She came in here and said that to

you? She dared to say that to you? Did you think I made such a plan, Katy? Do you think I ever spoke of you to her like that?"

The tears ran into her voice and she drew Denny's hand. Oh—just to hear him snap at her like that through his teeth—just to know that he never had—not for a moment—wished her away.

She turned her head quickly, switching the bright hair over her face.

Denny got up, walked back and forth, came over again and said to Katy, "What did you think, Katy? Don't lie about it!"

She laughed and said a little hysterically, "The king can do no wrong, neither can the queen—that's me and you, Denny. We don't care."

"I'll be damned if I care for a living soul but you, Katy! I never want to see her again. I never want to look at her!"

## CHAPTER CVIII

### DISILLUSION

HE turned roughly from her, stood with his hands pressed on the table.

Katy with her eyes shut, thought, stricken, "Now I've done it to him—stolen all his joy—robbed him of Golden Petra." She said aloud, "Denny, don't say a thing like that. You don't mean it."

But he was seeing Petra on the hilltop—golden nymph, part of the springtime, standing on her toes, reaching her lips to his.

How he had laughed against them, thinking her the loveliest, the gentlest, the sweetest. But she had come here and done this brutal thing.

She had done this, knowing that he had flung dearer things than life away that Katy might be spared.

A cry broke from his heart, "I never want to see her again—never—"

"It means that I've taken all this sweetness from you, Denny."

"Sweetness! Oh, Lord— If you give a darn about me, Katy, you ought to be glad—damn glad. I see now. . . . It was never me she wanted.

"Good Lord, Katy, when the dam up there broke she wanted me to throw the job and she was on her knees begging me to go over to Dunlap. She wanted that—wanted that!"

To Katy's wide-eyed horror, he repeated, "She wanted it! Never mind, Katy—it's a good thing. She knew what she was doing when she came in here."

He felt that his whole life was mocked; that Petra in one hour had undone all the love and sacrifice of the grinding years. . . .

Katy pleaded, "But you love her?"

He felt like shouting, "I never loved her!"

"And your heart will break?"

"Oh, Katy, there's only one thing can break my heart, and that's if you don't hurry up and get well."

The door opened, breaking suddenly the tension. Joan poked her face through a crack, so that only one of the green pools that were her eyes, and the sharp, beautiful line from her forehead to her throat appeared.

She didn't see Denny, but called merrily: "I'm the manicurist, come to do up Lady Katy's nails!"

She stood at the bed, laughing and talking and looking with so much eager love at Katy that it struck every chord of pain his mind had ever known.

She brought a leather case with a fine tortoise-shell manicure set. Katy had always kept her hands pretty.

The long nails bothered her. She had said so once or twice to Joan.

So Joan sat now on a low chair at the bed, her long legs doubled under her, the dark head, with the hair drawn clear from her forehead, lowered.

Hearing her laugh so merrily and then look down with anxious tenderness at Katy, Denny had a wish to take her hand quickly; to say—"Why, Joan—why, you love her, don't you? Why, you like sitting here with her and all this—"

He wanted to turn her face upward, look into it—especially to look into the pure, deep eyes . . . to keep looking into them.

When she had to go he said abruptly, "I'll walk a way with you, Joan."

When they were outside she turned to him with an impetuous fear, all the banter gone, "Oh, what is the matter with you, Denny? You didn't say a word all the time. Katy's much better. She is, isn't she?"

"Oh, I don't know. Joan, if anything happens to Katy—Oh, God—"

And in the street there she caught his arm. . . .

"Denny—you don't think it? Oh—that's not so. No! You're worried. Is it because everything is too hard?"

He bit his lips. And Joan, swinging along at his side, holding his arm, whispered, "Oh, I wish I could help you, Denny. If you knew how I wish that."

He saw her eyes then, for they turned on him with an eager passion of sympathy; they poured a balm on him. He said hoarsely, "You do, Joan. Oh, Lord, Joan—"



## CHAPTER CIX

### PETRA'S HOLD

DENNY sat at his desk in the living room. A thick layer of dust covered the wood and the whole place had a forlorn, neglected air.

He kept thinking, "What am I to do? I might have known!"

Petra's face, with the fine black brows frowning to hide the tears, came before him.

He felt no pity now, but a contempt that swept into a fury. She knew what she was doing! She did it deliberately.

Dared to go there and beat the heart out of Katy. He said aloud: "I'll never see her again. I won't look at her."

But he knew with a grim certainty that Petra would see him. She would come to meet him, and in the golden radiance of her face would be no hint of the shameful thing she had done.

He dreaded this meeting. He went through his work the next day trembling inwardly.

As it drew near to 5 o'clock a voice warned him, "She's waiting now. She's come to take you home to dinner."

He answered, "I'm not going out. I won't see her."

"But she'll wait. Then she'll come in here. This is a coward's part. Go out and face it."

Petra was out there.

She put out her hand, smiling—a gentle, hurt reproach in her eyes. "I waited till midnight, Diddle. You didn't even phone."

"Did you expect me, Petra?" he asked coldly.

"Expect you, Diddle? Is this all you have to say? And you ran away without even saying good-by. I didn't know what might have happened."

"Oh, it doesn't matter, Petra. What of it?"

He was standing with his hat in his hand, a furious impatience rising.

He felt that he was going to say: "Leave me alone. Let me

pass." He kept restraining himself with a breathless: "No—face it! Out with it."

Petra took his arm, whispering: "People are looking at us, standing here like this, Diddle. What's the matter with you?"

"You haven't looked at me once. I've come to take you home to dinner. We have time for a ride."

"All right, but I can't go for dinner." He helped her into the car.

She put her hand on his, looking into his eyes with a grieved, beseeching reproach: "Diddle, why are you treating me so?"

"Don't!" He drew his hand sharply from hers. "I can't stand it!"

Her face stained suddenly. "Oh, Diddle, do you like to hurt me so? Is this it? Oh, it seems so lately."

The trembling of her lips touched him cruelly. He wanted to jump out of the machine, to rush away from this. "No," he said grimly, "I don't wish to hurt you, Petra."

"But you are, Diddle."

"Oh, what's the use, Petra? You know what you did, and I know. It's done now. You didn't even tell me the truth!"

She drew back, staring at him. "What do you mean, Diddle? What have I done?"

He turned from her with contempt. She saw that. Her hand clung to his arm. "Diddle, don't treat me so. Oh, you're cruel!"

"No—you were cruel, Petra. You went there yesterday and you didn't care if you killed Katy!"

"You went there the very day after I told you how I felt! Good God, Petra, don't pretend about it!"

"You know why I took your father's job! You know why I've made a dog of myself! You know what Katy means to me!"

Petra's hands shook, but she looked quietly at him. "And what did I do to Katy, Diddle? I don't deserve this. I thought she was beautiful. Didn't I tell you so? Just because I thought she would be happier with old Lady Traynor than in a hospital. Was that so wrong, Diddle?"

He kept saying to himself, "It's no use." He wanted to fling at Petra, "Never mind. Don't speak of Katy. Don't think of her!"

But Petra talked on, her voice growing gentle. "Oh, I only thought of her happiness, Diddle."

"Why else should I suggest it? And Katy seemed to like the idea. Why, I didn't dream you'd take it so."

She kept this up and repeated it till he was so goaded he turned with a violent, "Don't lie about it, Petra! You wanted to be rid of Katy!"

She moved from him, her cheeks blanching. Though she lowered her head quickly, drawing the black brows together, tears fell on her white gloves.

She moved to the corner of the car, sat there rather huddled.

And he felt like saying, "I'm sorry. Don't look like that! Lord, this is frightful!"

After a while she said: "You think that's what I wanted, Diddle? Well, you've paid me back. You've taken all I had to give. I love you. You know that well enough.

"But you've wanted to put it off and to put it off. Now for a little misunderstanding, oh, Diddle, you're breaking my heart!"

He thought: "Lord, how terrible. She doesn't even understand."

She had taken his hand in both of hers, holding hard on it.

"Don't be angry with me, Dendiddle darling. I'll do anything you say.

"And as long as you want it so—I'll wait forever. Oh, Diddle—put your arm around me—please. Kiss me, Diddle—just once—quick—no one will see—"

He thought: "I'd rather be shot than this."

He said to Petra finally: "I can't think of marriage, Petra, until Katy is better—until she's completely better. I don't think of anything but her."

She turned his hand quickly upward, pressing her lips against it, murmuring through tears: "Diddle is worth waiting for."

## CHAPTER CX

### HOME AGAIN

"AND will you take me home, Denny? I want to be there and look out at the water and the ships marching so bravely and not knowing where the winds may take them—"

She was sitting up and laughing, blue ribbon on her hair, but in her eyes a look that pierced him to the soul. All spirit, all flower, all beauty—so much glad music that would sing and sing. It sang now with a wild pain in his heart.

He turned his face swiftly, saying in a light voice: "You'd like it better at home, Katy-kid?"

"I just had a notion that you might be wishing me back, Mr. Denny. Lady Eglantine hasn't forgotten me? Do you ask her every night if she misses me, like I told you to? And if I'm home, Denny, and can play you a chune now and then and air my beautiful voice you won't be looking so glum, will you?"

She took his hand and snapped her fingers against it. "You're not worrying for me? Denny, 'tain't for me, because I'm all right. So is it because of Golden Petra you seem so not like yourself? Are you sad for that?"

"I see now, Katy, and I never saw before. It hurts to be awakened, but I'm glad of it."

"Then are you worried because it was hard for her?"

He evaded. "I never would make her happy, Katy. She doesn't like the things I like. When I talked of anything that interested me she was bored. If it's hard for her now—that's better than having her whole life unhappy. That's all I'd do to her."

"Then your heart isn't broken? Denny," the vivid eyes filled and laughed a little and pleaded, "that's half my heart inside of you. Know that? Don't ever let it break. Never—never—no matter what happens—because my half would feel the pain—oh, something orful."

And he couldn't bear to hear her say these things because her

eyes were too blue and clear and that flush on her cheeks made the whiteness delicate, transparent.

Why, she was as well as any one could ask—a little slow getting back her strength—why, he was a fool to be always looking for signs to trouble him.

But he felt those thousand threads of tenderness, of gladness, of little kid-delights that had bound them from their childhood drawing him now.

He would have told any lie rather than let her know the wearing, unbearable strain of Petra's insistence, Petra's tears.

Not for the world would he confess the cold, numb despair that dropped into his heart when Petra said, kissing the palm of his hand, "Diddle is worth waiting for."

Sometimes now he deliberately avoided Petra, but other times she came right into the office and waited—came in with a half timid uncertainty that touched him poignantly; that made him feel brutal.

Then she would be so pleased and gay because he showed a little interest. Other times she would reproach him for his coldness.

He would answer, "Oh, I can't help it, Petra."

"But after a while you'll be happy again, Dendiddle, darling. And when that bad old forever gets here at last and you'll see the beautiful home we'll have and every night I'll be at the door to meet you—doesn't that make you glad, Diddle?"

He sat next her in an aching misery thinking, "Lord, this is frightful. What am I to do?"

He felt her hands on his, her hair against his face and mocked the senses that had once exulted in their thrill. It was only hair and skin to him now.

One afternoon she insisted so, with her gentle, hurt reproach going all over him like an immense bruise, that he went with her to tea.

She was full of gay chatter, sat at the piano and played for him; sat next to him, twining his fingers in hers.

When he was leaving she stood on her toes, reaching up, wicked gleam in her eyes. She kissed him. He turned quickly, overcome with a sense of shame.

She drew back, tears spurting to her lashes. "Diddle! Oh, I don't know you at all. Why do you do these things?"

He said nothing.

"Don't you love me, Diddle?"

"I don't know, Petra."

"Oh, you do, Diddle! Don't say that! It's because you're worried. Oh, you break my heart."

And she clung to him and stifled him with her lips. There had been other scenes like this.

He went away so ashamed, so weakened, that he wanted not to think at all.

He went up to the apartment to get some books for Katy. As he opened the door the big living room put on a friendly brightness like a kind hand extended.

The shades were raised, the dust gone, big bowls of flowers on the table.

A queer melting that was half gladness, half a rending pain, drove through him.

Then from the kitchen came a tall, graceful figure, a basket of sweet peas in her hands. It was Joan.

He stood staring at her until color swept to the pale, finely chiseled face and color stained the long, white throat like blood on a petal.

He had a desire for her then that was anguish—a wish to go up and cover her with his arms, to press the flowers against her; turn her face upward until its white purity flamed, until his eyes were lost in hers.

She seemed to him a proud, beckoning spirit and if he could once go up to her and speak the thing he now felt so maddeningly; if he could once wind his arms about her, he would be free; he would be relieved of all this chaining depression.

There would come a jubilation once more; a lift in the heart. How he wanted this.

How, most of all, he wanted her—the dream in her eyes; flame in her thought.

His mind cried out to her and his heart cried with it, "Joan! Oh, God—Joan!"

She set the flowers on the table and stole over to him. "Did I frighten you, sir? I'm the lady what cleans your house."

He looked down at her, kept looking till her eyes lighted, then closed sharply. She said: "What is the matter, Denny?"

"Nothing, Joan, nothing."

He wished to see scarlet on the pale face and he saw it.

Joan turned with a nervous laugh, "It's Katy and myself thought we'd be having a treat for you, sir, with a clean house and all, but I wasn't quite swift enough."

She added eagerly, "Denny, are you going to bring her home?"

"Yes—in a little while. The doctor says I can."

"She's getting along all right, isn't she?"

"What do you think, Joan? She's not improving as quickly as she should. Lord, I don't know--"

"Oh, she is, Denny. And when you bring her, might I be the one to get things ready? Might I have it all lovely here for her?"

He said only, "Oh, Joany, who else?"

So they moved Katy's bed into the great living room and put the royal crazy quilt over it, in the east window facing the bay, the hills and Diablo that she loved.

Joan had every corner filled with flowers and a big pink ribbon on Lady Eglantine's neck.

When they reached the apartment Katy touched Denny's hand. "You'll carry me up yourself, Denny? In your own dear arms, and not in the stretcher, now that we're home again?"

He raised her as he had a thousand times, only now it seemed his heart went under and bore her upward. He said:

"Am I hurting you, Katy-kid?"

"Denny! Nothing in me but joy. You can't hurt that."

"Oh, this is like old times, isn't it. This is like heaven again. Everything!"

## CHAPTER CXI

### KATY'S PRAYER

KATY, propped with pillows and all lovely in a blue kimono, watched a great white bird riding buoyantly on the waters.

It spread out its wings, sailed upward—higher, higher, wings growing luminous, wings spreading wider—gone.

She closed her eyes, smiled; lips always smiling now. Never could tell when a door might open and that old Denny, with his young, tender eyes all anxious, there looking down at her.

Miss Ogden, the nurse, was in the kitchen. Katy heard her whisking up an egg.

That would take a minute or two.

She reached under the pillow and drew forth an envelope.

The slim, white hands trembled desperately, and now, for all that she snapped her lids down sharp, tears rushed out, got tangled up in the soft curls that lay against her cheek.

Clay Andrews had answered. Every word was a wound in Katy's heart.

Katy, little Katy-kid, coming! Have I read your letter right? You mean it? You won't take it back? Star with its lights all out? Oh, there's light enough for me!

Ten days, Katy, darling—ten days and I'll be there. Your letter has just come, for I'm here in the mountains. You want me? I'm starting. My heart and soul are with you now. Oh, Katy, you won't take it back, will you? It seems a miracle. Are you glad?

CLAY.

Katy made the corners of her lips perk upward and she kept looking at her palms.

Poor Clay! Poor, dear Clay—he wanted her still—

She hid her face in the pillows. Why, it would be cruel—too cruel—to have him come all the way out here—

Katy was praying her foolish prayers. "Let me stay. That's



not so much to ask, is it, dear Lord? Oh, don't be hard on us, dear God!

"And there's Denny—there's Denny! Stay on, sweet, good angel. Don't I need you now? Right now!"

A hand on her shoulder, "Sleeping the view away, Katy-kid?"

"Oh, you, Mr. Denny! Already!"

"What's up, Katy-kid? Crying?"

"Yes, I was! And what's it to you? Can't a body cry as suits their deep emotions? And you see I've an artist's soul, Denny. That's my failing.

"And I saw a bird flying so high and saw a cloud all lighted up like a spirit.

"I tried to make a song about it and couldn't, so I wept. And what do you think of that?"

He sat down and turned her hands in his and bit his lips. "Say, why, I thought you were feeling great this noon."

"Well—and, Denny, didja ever know Katy to weep except when she felt most beautifully gay? Now, honest and true, didja?"

"And it's so nice to be home again, and isn't Miss Ogden good fixing the dinner and moving the table right up here so we can all eat sociable like together?"

"I'm so happy you brought me home, Denny—"

"And look, isn't this good? From Stephen."

She handed him a letter. Every one of these days came a bright, short note from Steve, but this the best of them all.

Home again, are ye, dear, glorious Kate, and a welcome, and I'll be there to give it.

And if you're 40 times a plaster saint, and a right old one at that, don't ever worry but your handsome Steve will get his arms about you. You'll have a hug that's old-fashioned, too.

Kate, old dear, Lord love you as I do, and there'll be few aches or pains in that back of yours.

Next week-end, Kate, I'll be there, and grant we may have lemon pie and a song, and a cold day with logs crackling in the grate.

"Just like Stephen, isn't it, Denny? Now we were lucky to have such a friend, weren't we?"

"And you know, Denny, I lie here and think back over all those blessed days—"

A pause—how vivid her eyes were and her lips. "What, Katy-kid, what?"

"Well, what yourself? But weren't they most perfect? Now all of it together?"

He would have liked to lower his face quickly in his hands, for his eyes burned most terribly, and there came that awful melting at his throat.

Oh, why need she look so startling with her red lips parted and laughing and pleading and hand tucked so like a little flower in his?

He thought, "She's losing hope. Oh, Lord! Losing hope."

That night when the doctor came he tormented him with questions, following him to the door, wouldn't let him go.

"She's getting better? She's improved? How is she now?"

The doctor answered, "She's not improving. She hasn't much strength."

"But there's no danger? Nothing to fear?"

"Why, Mr. Brooks, I can't make you any promises. There's been danger from the start.

"I told you that. If this condition of her spine should prove general . . ."

Denny leaned against the door, fighting for self-control. "It's not general . . . ?"

"I don't know. There's no positive symptom. She should be better than she is."

"Get more doctors."

"If you're not satisfied, Mr. Brooks—"

Denny had seized the doctor's hands and was shaking them.

"Look here, look here—why—"

He bit his lips furiously. It was no use—his voice broke.

The doctor gripped his hand. "Too bad, Mr. Brooks. She's no worse. In fact, a little better since you brought her home. There's no immediate danger."

"But a chance? Good God—you're going to cure her? You've got to cure her!"

"There's a chance—yes. We're doing everything we can. You can't do any more, Mr. Brooks. She's a little better than she was."

Denny followed him to the street, his teeth chattering—all the heat sinking from his veins.

He kept saying, "Look here, doctor—cure her! She's got to be cured."

"Don't be alarmed, Mr. Brooks. Your sister has a wonderful spirit. I have hopes."

Without answering, Denny turned away—half flung himself down the block.

Couldn't meet Katy now. She'd see—she'd know they talked about her—

He was only aware of a blinding desolation hurrying along with him echoing, "Oh, Lord—losing hope!"

## CHAPTER CXII

### THE LITTLE SHOES

"THAT'S a very long letter you're writing, Miss Brooks."

Katy kept her eyes staring hard at the many sheets she had covered before she looked up laughing and took the egg-nog from the nurse.

"Yes, isn't it, Miss Ogden? But then this is a letter that has to last a long, long while—oh, mostly forever. And I've reached the end two or three times already and I keep thinking of more, and more. It's just as if my heart were turning itself into these words. Did you ever feel like that? And just wanted to pour your whole self out like a song or something mighty glad? Why, I guess I'll never reach to the post-scripts—"

She wrote on and on with a little gold pen Clay Andrews had sent her. Sometimes she lay back against the pillows, letting her hair fall over her face, or she looked down to the green waters and the silver fogs just then stealing over the far Berkeley hills. And for all that she pressed her fingers against her temples, she had again and again to shut her eyes sharply; to drink back tears.

As she wrote they rushed out warm and melting as the words and they mingled with these. But Katy wouldn't have this at all. No blurs. No sadness. This was a brave, glorious letter. She wrote the quivering pages over again.

The door opened. Perhaps Denny? He was not to see. She slipped the papers under the quilt. But it was only Joan. She caught the guilty look on Katy's face.

"I saw it! Hiding something—maybe a cream puff—under the spread."

Katy laughed. "No, Joany! A letter. And after a while, will you be kind enough to send it for me?"

"When is 'after a while' Katy?"

"Oh, Joan, are you stupid like me? Now I should think you could put two and twice together and decide for yourself when 'after a while' may be. 'Taint now, is it? After a while means later on in some sweet auspicious moment when the inspiration

may strike you. Then you're to come sneaking right up here and, oh, Joan—"

Katy's hands were over her face, the vivid eyes closed, burnished hair soft against the pillows. Joan, sitting next her and hearing the gay voice trail till it was but a little frightened moan, felt a dread pierce coldly on her thought. But she said lightly enough, "Was it such a sad letter to write, Katy?"

Katy took her hands down, opened her brimming eyes into Joan's, "Maybe not sad to read, Joan, for I turned myself into the letter. Know how things are sometimes? Just sit here a while, Joan, and don't bother to read. Let me have your nice, sweet hand. Aren't I the goose, Joan, always needing something to cling to? You're such a peace to me. Know that?"

Joan answered, with warm huskiness, "I'd rather have you like me, Katy, than any one in the world."

"Oh, not than any one, Joan? Not quite that much?"

"Yes—Katy—that much."

But Katy was searching Joan's face, an eager prayer lighting over it. "Oh, such a pretension, Joan! And you know right well there's somebody fine and blessed in your heart this very moment."

"No, Katy, this heart's as empty as the widow's purse."

"Then it's only waiting to be filled, Joan. That's the way with hearts."

"Not mine, Katy."

"But suppose, Joan, some one you can't help loving, oh, say some one that's been glorious and strutting all through life—well, like Stephen or Denny—should come? Would your heart still be shut?"

Joan felt the blood pelt to her face. Katy saw the stain, saw little movements on Joan's lips before they laughed, "Oh, what makes you such a funny little thing, Katy? Why do you ask?"

"Oh, just to have something to think about, Joan dear. And to know if you'd be near if some one needed you. Very near? And you would? Oh, Joan—yes, you would!"

Katy's hands flew to her face. When she took them down, she was laughing. "That's only half the reason why I asked, Joan. Would you mind reaching under the bed and fetching for the other half. That most delicious-looking pink box—"

The treasure chest with all Katy's wonderful rubbish—pink, lavender, blue and white. She had Joan lift them out on the bed. Then she fluttered them through her fingers.

"Ain't they gorgeous, Joan? Here, let me see. Oh, you look an ecstasy in pink. See—I made them all and half for you and half for me. Now, you wouldn't want such to go to waste, would you, Joan?"

"But, Katy—why, with all that wonderful lace—why, I wouldn't dream."

"Oh, Joan! Now isn't this sweet and gracious in you. 'Stead of up and saying, 'I thank you, Katy-kid, and esteem you for being thus far-sighted,' or some such nice appropriate speech! Here, let me see the lavender against you that are so white. Oh, delightful! First thing I know you'll be getting them all. Joan, you have such lovely eyes. Know what I think of them? Deep, green pools where two angels live—two bright, beautiful angels. . . ."

As she sat thus, with all that piercing gayety playing over the sweet mouth and in the flushed, excited eyes, Denny came in. Seeing her like this and with Joan and laughing so happily was like an uplifted song, a gladness of summer flung in his face. Getting better! Lord—like her old self again! This was the Katy-kid of all his years!

His hand and his glance sought Joan's for a look that would say, "Yes—didn't I tell you she was better!" Joan's lips trembled. He took that for the warm accord with his own mood. A jauntiness struck up in his mind.

He sat down in the low chair that was his at Katy's bed. "What now, Stupe! Showing off the rubbish?"

"Don't mind if we have a little feminine delicatessen, do you, you dear, beloved Denny—huh? And you see Joan is to fix them all up like new with the ribbons. See! And what's in the package? A present? Something for beautiful Katy?"

He opened it slowly, watching her and making her guess as he had long ago when he brought Lady Eglantine—such a little fluffy ball then that he could cover her completely with his two hands.

The paper was off, but when the cardboard box opened a cry that broke a little sprang from Katy's lips. "Oh, Denny!"

The little black shoes with buckles on them . . . little black shoes to wear when Joan taught her to dance.

Denny set them on the bed. "Spiffy? Like them, Stupe?"

But Katy took his hand, pressed it against her cheeks, kept her eyes down. He felt them wet. When he would have looked, she drew his hand over her eyes and then whispered into it.

He questioned her with that mad, pleading tenderness, "What's the matter, Katy-kid? Why don't you like them? Why, that's all right."

"Oh, like them, Denny! Now can't you let me cry a little, seeing that I have so much more joy than will go up in a laugh. Hasn't any one a right to cry now and then, huh, Joan? And wouldn't you, Joan, if you had such a dear old magnificence as this Denny beside you?"

When Joan was gone, Katy made Denny put the slippers on the table near the bed.

"They're like an inspiration, Denny, and know what it says—'Git up now, lazy bones, and hop to it. You been loafin' much too long!'"

She was lying back on the pillows— He saw her eyes shining— "What is it, Katy? You're bluffing."

"Oh—did you just see that sparkling and beautiful tear, Denny?" She ran her hand over his hair—from the fine, clean forehead back. "That was because of your dear brown head, Denny—your dear brown head that I love. Oh, it's been such a sweetness to me, Denny. And to-day was a holy time—know that. Joan is so noble. . . ."

"Another of the nobility, Katy-kid? First it was me—then Steve—now Joan."

"Yes—all of us—and isn't she? And beautiful too—don't you think so?"

"I guess so."

"But tell me what you do think of her, Denny?"

"Where may this lead, Stupe?"

She pressed his hand . . . "You're seeing through me? Oh—but how much it would mean to know—"

"Know what, Katy? Say it then—nobody cares what a little Stupe says. . . . Katy, ask what you want."

"I think it's so and you don't know it and you won't find it out until maybe it's too late—and, oh—how sad that would be—Denny, you love Joan and you don't know it."

"Why do you want this, Katy? I love you—that's enough."

"Oh, I want to know it so much, Denny—to know that I didn't spoil things for you."

“Katy-kid,” she could scarcely hear his voice—“I love Joan—and I know it. I’ve always loved Joan— Always—

She pulled him down, her arms about him. . . . “Denny, how glad I am for this—”

Her lips parted, smiled—look all spirit, all flower, all beauty. He caught her to him, sobbing, “Katy—don’t look like this.”



## CHAPTER CXIII

### THE SUMMONS

KATY, with that light, that unearthly beauty, touching her face, the blue eyes and red lips a radiance, a thing all spirit, yet spirit so gentle it reached out like her hand touching him—that image of Katy was before him as he worked.

And it seemed now pleading, now smiling and weeping against his heart.

Why did Katy look like that?

A few nights ago he told her of Joan and found her eyes with this piercing glory, this tender peace in them.

He had caught her to him, sobbing, "Oh, Katy, don't look like that!"

She fluttered out her hand with a capricious, "Now, Denny darlin', can't ye let Katy go up like a skyrocket now and then?"

"She always comes down right side up, doesn't she?"

Why, she'd always been like that—face all lights and gayety. He remembered the night they were turned out of Matt Borley's home.

He had shoved her up the Hayes street hills and against the tents in the park they watched the dawn come up.

What a bright little fairy she was then, with her hair all curls and whispering to him; the wide, cloudless eyes shining, "Oh, Denny, you're so brave! You're not afraid—oh, not of anything!"

Why, he had looked at her then, and because of that face of hers, felt himself a giant, an infinite tenderness flowing through him.

He had vowed to do something great for Katy-kid, something kind that would forever mark him apart from all Matt Borley was.

Just the same face now—what a fool he was! As if anything was going to happen to Katy because she was so beautiful.

But he went home that noon. As soon as he saw her he felt glad.

A hundred times better—sure she was, sitting there with dreams in her eyes and watching the sun playing on the waters, making great trains of silver to ripple splendidly after the ferry boats.

She was all laughter. "You here, Denny darling! Dear old miracle Denny! You caught the thought I sent to fetch you?"

"Wasn't it a prayer, Stupe? Not changing vehicles, are you?"

"But aren't I the most clever tyrant, Denny, making you do just as I wish with the flip of a thought?"

"It's been that way all these years, hasn't it, Denny?"

"If Nero were only like you, Katy! But did you want me for anything special?"

"Oh, just to have a little conversation and to see this most fawncy letter Violet has written.

"And isn't it a pity that she had to go back so sudden like, and we didn't see half enough of her, and she so sweet, Denny.

"Remember when she tried to make the dress for the flower festival and it went and fell to pieces in the tub?"

"Gee, Katy, what gives you such an infernal memory? It's like a hook in a fellow's heart."

"Oh, Denny, you, the old softy—dear old softy—went and bought me the new dress—little white organdie, remember, and you wanting the sweater so much."

"Say, Katy-kid, is this another attack you're having?"

She burst out laughing. "Going from one right into another! But, Denny, did you know I have that dress yet? Kept it all these years.

"It's to be saved for posterity—know that? And Katy will write a poem about the noble boy who gave up his sweater for his sister. And he only 14!"

Nothing unearthly about the mocking eyes now—good to see that! "Take it you're feeling rather chipper, Katy-kid?"

She laughed, reaching out for his hand. "And Stephen coming to-night, too, Denny.

"Poor Stephen to poke his nose in all the tins and find no jelly doughnuts and no leming pie!

"Now would you mind bringing several gross of French pastry to make up for Katy's deficiency, Denny, darlin'?"

"And you know what I fink? Maybe next Chuesday before Stephen goes back we'll all go out to the fair again and see those most entrancing lights. What do you say, Denny?"

He listened with his heart trembling. Presently he laughed. "Gee whiz, Katy-kid, this is something like it!

"Say, I wouldn't take a million dollars for this—not a million!"

When she saw that bit of a sparkle in his eyes again and on the mouth that was too often grim now, Katy gave a little silent thanks. "Oh, let him stay like this!

"Let me not be the one to take the laugh from him—don't let me do that—"

Denny put his arm around her, kissing her. He went away, his eyes stinging but because of gladness now. Say—enough to make a fellow shout! Like her old crazy little self again!

And he came with such a springy step into the office Lambert looked up in surprise.

He whistled a little, then he called up Joan and told her.

At 3 o'clock that afternoon, Miss Ogden phoned. Denny stood there hanging to the receiver, saying, "What, what—good God!"

All his senses, all his thoughts flying from him, leaving this hot, half-fainting madness drumming over him. Hemorrhage—Katy—sinking—

He dashed out of the building into the first taxi, yelling at the driver: "Quicker! Quicker!"

Then, boring his fist into his knees and saying: "God—God—" and yelling at the driver again.

He reached the apartment limp, almost out of his mind, a frightful dryness raging in his throat.

The doctor was just coming from the hall.

Denny leaned against the door, biting furiously at his lips. He was aware that he was saying half aloud: "I can't go in! Can't go in!"

The doctor's voice came in a dense, throbbing quiet: "She's resting easily now. She wants you. Too bad, Mr. Brooks. I feared this. It's affected the lungs."

Denny had his hands, shaking them crazily, trying to say: "She'll be all right? All right?"

He couldn't form the words. He made out a feeble "Don't go! Don't leave her!"

"I'll be back. She's all right now. I'll be here again in an hour.

"She wants you. Go in." He opened the door. Denny was in the living room.

Katy heard the first step—saw him. Her hand, white as that luminous wing of the bird she had watched, reached out to him.

The curls were bright against the pillow. Oh, it was terrible to see the red lips parted with that smile that was like Queenie's—a moving light on the dear vivid face.

"Denny—you coming to me? Oh, come here! Coming to your poor little Stupe!"

He reached the chair at her bed, not knowing how he stumbled.

He had her hands in his, his face buried in them and saying: "Oh, Katy-kid! Katy-kid!" Sobbing that with all his heart breaking.

She loosened one hand and ran it over his head and tried to raise his face.

"Ah, Denny—you crying? Don't cry for me. Now, doncher do it!"

That tone—that unbearable tenderness just the way the little Katy had said it an eternity ago when she knelt beside him with her soft lips against his cheek—knelt at Prince Jerry's grave and stuck the daisies all about the edge.

"Denny—oh, look up, Denny darlin'—see—I'm all right now—oh, don't be crying—poor Denny—why, a little thing—oh, I feel fine now—!"

But her skin was white as pearl and the black lashes sparkled all over with tears.

"Come nearer, Denny—oh, Denny, put your dear arms around me.

"It's hard, Denny—hard for you—don't cry—let me go—gladly—if I must—"

"Katy—stop!" He had her in his arms now, holding her with a gentleness—with a fierceness.

"Don't talk like this! Don't dare give up! Katy—you're a coward—you've got a hundred chances. You're fine now! Oh, Katy-kid—"

Her hands fluttered to his face—the shadow of her laughter. "Yes—yes—Denny—I'm fine now—see! Is Stephen here? Dear Stephen—and no jelly doughnuts—oh, I do feel better."

Then Denny was whispering to her and saying a thousand wild things. "Why—Katy—giving up like this. Oh, Katy—take my heart like this—you're all right—you feel better?"

And then she did lie back and rest, holding fast to his hands.  
And then she slept. Denny sat there.

It might have been Katy herself for all the mad prayer that stormed the heavens.

He saw a little flush creep in her cheeks. He said desperately to the nurse: "She's better."

"Yes."

That was too much. He pressed his face against his arms and cried.

## CHAPTER CXIV

### THE ANGEL'S WING

HOURS he watched the lashes lying so black against the pearl white of her skin; hours he poured out his heart and his soul in wild, imploring prayers, holding gently her hands, fanning her, seeing a faint color creeping to her cheeks, thinking then with a desperate frenzy, "Better—oh, she's better."

Memories swept over him like waves of some relentless, aching sea.

Oh, that day the vivid, little kid of a Katy stole the plum and he made her run like mad up the Fell street hills to hide in the church.

And he had scowled at her, "You'll go to hell for this, Katy-kid; right straight down to hell!"

How she had clung to him, beginning to cry, making such funny faces he burst out laughing before God and all.

And that time when he was so downcast at college and came home to find a mound of silver dollars on his plate—dollars the angel brought to Katy through the laces she sold to Fay.

He could see yet the glad shiny light in her blue eyes; could feel still the queer, melting tremble that had gone through him—Katy—gee, Katy helping him like this—

But like her hand in his now or like her hand pulling on his heart came the day he had carried her to the doctor's office, his head down against her shoulder.

Then the doctor's voice coming like a luminous shaft through fogs—"Walk, yes! No reason why she shouldn't."

Yes—Katy might have walked. Yet here she lay. He pressed his fist against his mouth and he would like then to have folded the quiet form in his arms; folded Katy to him, run with her, keep her from this silent, unseen thing that stole upon them as the night grew.

Keep her—oh, keep her—no matter what. He would! Why, he'd thrown his life away for her; emptied his heart of its youth; his mind of honor.

And he would do it again and again. He would drink agony for her.

Her fingers fluttered under his. With a passion of tenderness, of love that tore with awful pain, he leaned down, waited.

Her eyes opened, wandered a little, saw him. After a moment, "Denny—oh, Denny . . . poor Denny—"

"Katy-kid, you're better—don't! Why, you're all right . . ."

Her eyes went to his, pleading, trying to smile, filled with tears. "Don't be crying, Denny. I dreamed—"

Then the smile did hover over her lips. "I dreamed of the angel— Oh, Denny, I touched her wing—remember—touched the angel's wing."

He bowed his head in her hands, sobbing, "Don't, Katy, you're better—oh, you're better."

Her hand at his face, a little broken sound, echo of the singing laughter. "Ah, Denny—don't—see—I am better.

"I guess I are an awful coward. Stay near me, Denny—you will—oh, it was a lovely angel—"

And she kept murmuring and pleading, "Now don't cry—ah, doncher do it, Denny—see—I touched it—"

But in the morning a little flush had crept into her cheeks and there was such a sweetness, such a light of peace on the face that was half angel; half fairy—faith surged.

Katy was better—why, look at her with the morning sun streaming across the bed, turning to a halo the red and gold of her hair.

It was like this he left her—and left her thinking with a half mad gratitude that brought a furious stinging to his eyes:

"Better—she's better—oh, God—"

Less than half an hour later he returned. Katy lay flat against the pillows, white, gasping, all the scarlet, all the smile gone from the vivid lips.

Miss Ogden fanned her, put pieces of ice in her mouth. For the first time he noticed that the bed was tilted.

He stood there with the room spinning.

He kept saying, "Why—why—what—good God—"

Then he saw the slim hand reaching along the bed—reaching for him.

He went stumbling over, closed both of his about it and shut his eyes against the piercing smile that touched faintly on her lips.

"Denny—don't go—stay here—stay to-day—just a little while—"

"Katy—I'm here—I'm holding you—I won't leave you a minute. You're better—yes, better."

"Stephen not here—oh, Denny—I prayed for Stephen—Stephen and the sun . . . the sun high . . ."

"He's coming, Katy—don't you feel the sun? It's all over the water—see. Stephen is coming. I wired.

"But he was gone—left yesterday afternoon. In a moment, Katy, he'll be here. You feel that, don't you?"

A breeze, all warmth and amber, came drifting like a golden presence, lifting with gentle, happy fingers the chestnut curls.

"A poem, Denny—coming from the bay—ah, Denny—the lovely hills—the mountains—but don't cry—no—"

But he kept holding her hands, pressing his face against them, whispering wild, tender, pleading things, turning his eyes from the faint smile because that was like her lips weeping on his heart.

There came a ring at the bell. Katy's hands tightened. "Stephen—I knew—"

But it was a telegram and for Katy. From Clay Andrews.

The cruel pain of that and now. Denny held it down for her to read.

"Katy, darling, leaving Chicago to-day. Three days more. I'll make you glad—the gladdest thing on earth—dear star with your lights all out!"

She hid her face.

But in a moment a light quick step—happy step, laugh at the door—Stephen.

Before Denny could reach him he was in the room—saw Katy—saw that white face and pale, drawn lips.

The breezy, handsome face grew ashen; the laughter went out of his eyes.

He stood there with that crude shock of pain turning him gray.

Then he lurched to the bed; to Denny's chair with a low: "Kate—Angel Kate—why, what's this?"

"Our Kate and your bed going down the hill."



Katy's hand fluttered, faint shadow of her laugh: "Stephen, dear; dear Stephen! You came—I prayed."

But for all that, she seemed far away, wrapped from him in a mist.

He took her hands, saying: "Kate—taking a little rest. I thought we'd be going to the fair."

"Next Chuesday—ah—you came. The hug, Steve?"

He put his arms gently, fearfully about her, stooped down, and kissed her; his eyes wet on hers.

"Stephen, you crying—don't cry—no jelly doughnuts—"

At that he covered his face, went stumbling to the kitchen where Denny was, reached his arms to Denny's shoulders.

But his lips worked so that he couldn't speak. "Kate—our Kate; our Kate! Why in the name of God didn't you send for me?"

Denny leaned against the wall, fighting for the hope, gripping it and holding it mightily.

"Steve—why, you don't think— God, no! Steve—yesterday noon—she was better than ever— God, no! Steve—why, Katy's—"

But Stephen dropped into a chair, his hands dug into his face, his whole body shaking.

Denny felt his pulses freezing—going out faintly. Miss Ogden was at the door. "Come—she's sinking."

He went rushing over to the bed. When he saw Katy's nostrils straining like that, the vivid mouth pale, but the dear, beautiful eyes all lighted with that tenderness that smiled and wept, his heart opened—all the joy went out and a blind agony of death entered.

Stephen took the hand she reached to him, pressed his lips again and again over it, saying, "Kate—angel Kate—you won't—oh, you're not—"

But Denny sank on his knees, one arm about her, his face pressed against her hand, all the boy in him crying out, "Katy-kid, no! I can't stand this—oh, my Katy-kid!"

Her hand fumbled over his head, "Denny—don't—help me—the sun—your arms—you so good—the dear angel—your face near me—ah—ah."

Even as he put his face to hers—even as he sobbed his heart out against her, the dear, bright head dropped back against the pillows—a moment of struggle—a moment the white hand twisting on his—

And she that was all beauty, all spirit, all flower, so much glad music reached out and touched her angel's wing.

The smile fell upon her. She lay, unstirring, in the beloved arms—unhearing the broken voice of anguish still calling, "Katy—my Katy-kid."

## CHAPTER CXV

### KATY'S LETTER

His heart and all its fibers were drawn out. In its place a desolation, a cold emptiness. No laughter in the world—no sun.

Gone—the dear, winsome thing whose song met him at the door; whose blue, vivid eyes lighted the place with love. She that had brought him the strongest and the tenderest things he knew, the gayest and the saddest, was nowhere that his straining hand could reach her.

No Katy-kid—bald, incredible finality—never again the bright music of her voice; never again the gay hand fluttering to her shoulder and turning around from the piano with a flushed, “Oh, you ketched me, huh! But now, aren't I quite a singer?” Never that again.

Mysterious, invisible breath spreading over and drawing her silently away—taking her from him. The room empty—Lady Eglantine humping against him. Chair in the corner—Katy's chair where the hundreds of times he had placed her so gently, listened to her bright, “Good old slave!”

And the black pumps with the merry buckles stowed away—down in the drawer of his desk. A quietness—a vast, forlorn destitution in his mind and in his heart.

They had been emptied for her. Katy was the altar and here he had brought all his magnificent aspirations—all his stalwart young ideals and thrown them down as a burnt offering that she be spared. Spirit or angel—whatever it was that guided Katy's life—refused the sacrifice.

“Finished—nothing left now—” He felt this—felt it would be so always. Cleaned to the bone—and for nothing. Katy taken—

Out of the drab encompassing numbness he said this to Joan. She turned on him, her eyes like flaming swords. He looked at her and kept looking till her pale face stained.

That evening she came with an infinite gentleness, her hands on his. “Denny—is this what she would want? Oh, no!”

She gave him the letter that was Katy—Katy's thought and all her heart. So Katy sat now before him, reaching out with a laugh and touching him. From the pages came her voice, then her face and all the poignant beauty looking up, lighting again a little warmth within him.

"Denny, you're thinking of me. Your dear, dear heart is calling. I hear. Oh, believe that. There is no place that God could make far, far enough away to keep the sound from me.

"But, oh, Denny—you call to me with tears—such tears and I don't want that. Why should you weep for me? And all my life was glad. Now, wasn't it? Glad and beautiful as a poem and you made it so, Denny. But now we've come to the close. And, oh, Denny, I know it's hard for you, but isn't it much better to reach a full, sweet end like this without one sad line, than to stay? Think a little, Denny. You want me and I would stay and stay, but there would be bitter, bitter lines for me to say. Don't you know that?

"Sometimes it would be hard to sit so long—oh, so long, knowing it was to be always so. Never to climb the mountains—never to run along the sea. And I wanted all this. I wanted all the gay and flowery things and to jump up in the morning and saunter here and there. But this was not to be. Oh, look down through the years, Denny darlin'— Now would you hold me for all they have to bring?

"Would you keep me for sorrows that would come like harsh postscripts to mar the beauty of our years? Oh, much better to go when the sun is high and laughing on the waters and all the memory sweet.

"And no one, dear, dear Denny, had happier days than I. Because of you. Why, don't I know that in all these glad, beautiful years you never once—not even once—wished me away? wished me better so that you could go? Right this minute I feel great, shiny white wings swooping under and bearing me out of the present, out of pain. These wings are made of the joy your dear and ever so dear goodness gives to me.

"And I can float on them for years and a day and as long as the heavens last. But never far from you—not far at all, Denny. Why, here I am and near to you and watching you and loving you.

"So won't you please look up and laugh and give me a cheer like other days? Make fun of me still and then I will know that you love me.

"But don't be sitting there and thinking, Denny, of the things that might have been—the hopes we held together. And never say the angel wouldn't hear, because we cannot read her answer. Oh, I do believe that every glad and every sorrowful thing has a deep, great purpose behind it. And never feel that I was mocked, Denny, and all my prayers were lost. Why, no—for didn't I do my part? Now—didn't I? Don't laugh, Denny, but guess what that part was—

"Why, just to make it harder for you to win and so, struggling so much more than others, you came out of it bigger and taller and nobler—oh, much more so than any one else in the world.

"And that's what your little Stupe did for you, dearest, dearest Denny. I grew strong through being weak—I made you free by burdening you. Why, that's quite a fine sentence, isn't it?"

Almost like her laughter in his ears—almost an echo of her voice in the room— He had half turned the mockery back to her—half a teasing banter in his eyes—

"And you did need me, Denny. Maybe you wouldn't have been so glorious with that clean, happy look about you if you didn't always have to be thinking, 'Well—there's that Katy-kid and, gee, got to look out for her. Gee—guess I do all right!'

"Remember the night you brought me back from the hospital to Aunt Josie's and Violet had marigolds on the table? Remember how Aunt Josie kept looking to the door and finally HE came in and stuck his terrible face down to mine and swore, 'You brought her back, did you? Couldn't rest till you got here, could you?' All the frightful things he said and wanting to know who was to look after the miserable little cripple.

"Oh, and then you jumped up, Denny. I can just see your chin shaking and you only 15. You said with your lips all puckered, 'I'm to look after her! And don't you dare call my sister a cripple! Don't you dare!'

"Could I ever be sad, Denny darlin', remembering that—knowing there was always you to look after me—always you?

"Could I help believing in angels when you were that very thing yourself, dearest, dearest Denny.

"And now my part is finished, for what could be nobler

than you? And I must leave, for what great actress would loiter about bowing and bowing when all her lines were said—

“Ah—you’re crying now, Denny—don’t do that—doncher do it, for what’s a year, or ten, or twenty? I never wanted to grow old and have wrinkles. Why, didn’t I have to endure the white of egg to take away the lines where I’d laughed too much? And isn’t it quite a graceful thing to dash in and say to folks, ‘Hello, there—isn’t this life just gorgeous, and ain’t we all having the beautifullest time?’ and then before the music is quite stopped and while the golden sun is high to just jump up quick and call ‘Dear, dear Everybody, I must go now, and wasn’t this a joyous hour? And if you’re glad I came—don’t be sorry that I leave. I’m only starting a little sooner and perhaps I’ll have the fountains playing and all roses round to greet you when you come.’

“Can’t you feel that way about it, Denny? Oh, please do—don’t let me take the sparkle from you—the dear sparkle that I loved. Cry a little now, if you must, because of your fine, tender eyes; but laugh, too, Denny, or else it will mean that I was born to rob you, to take the glad heart from you. And, oh—never let me do that—Denny. Be your own dear, joyous self, like the day you counted all the red hots and won the doll for me.

“Be that, dearest Denny, and that will make me glad. Be fine and strong and fearless, with your fists all doubled up, like the day you were going to give HIM the punch in the nose and you only nine!

“There’s much for you to do yet, Denny. And isn’t there our job to win back and all the mountains to be made proud because of you? There is that, Denny. And there is Joan—oh, she is sweet and noble, and how glad I am there is dear Joan for you. Keep the laugh and the jaunty heart for her that is so beautiful.

“And let me creep in, Denny, to sit sometimes at your feet near the fire and know that I am there and talk about me and laugh at me. Why, I will hear—ah—crying again—oh, shame, Denny, and you so brave! Indeed I will be there, for I am not gone—dead—oh, not I, Denny. For I don’t believe and never could—for all that you did at last edjicate me—that we come to any final end. Oh, no—we only pass through a strange, mysterious gate, opening for me on wider, gladder fields, and here I shall be free.

"But not if you are sad, Denny. You will anchor my heart and soul to earth, and if all of heaven opens I can never take a joy, knowing that you here weep for me.

"Let me be free and let my memory make you glad for all the happiness we had together. Didn't we have a great deal?

"And never, never sadden your dear, dear eyes for me. Oh, Denny, you don't think I've left you? How could I, and needing your dear arms so much?

"Why, Denny, as long as there's a blue cloud in the sky and it comes floating near all lighted up—that cloud is I—and that's how long and how long I'll love you. Oh, you that are so fine and all your tender care and all the love and all the lilting joy—all of that for me—

"Oh, Denny—just one last gift—one last greatness from you. This—keep the laugh in your strong, brave heart for me—"

## CHAPTER CXVI

### THE FIGHT

KATY'S heart was in the letter, all its tender gayety throbbing gently in his hands. He felt the dear face close to his; her voice like a song in his ears.

And, for all that Katy wanted the sparkle and the laugh from him, tears rushed up, half blinding him. They had reached the end—nothing but this letter. If there could be but one moment more—if he could but turn around now and see her sitting in that chair there in the corner; see her shake back the curls and laugh at him—see that—just for an instant—

But these tears were warm, living things to fill the mute vacancy of his mind. For they brought Katy to him, not in the wild, cruel moment of parting when her hand had twisted so on his and she had called in a little frightened gasp, "Oh, Denny, quick, your arms—your face near to me—ah—" It was not this Katy the letter brought to him.

But the Katy-kid who had written "pomes" about flowers and showers and the Katy-kid who had stuck out her tongue as far as it would go when Matt Borley tweaked his ear and shook the two dollars out of him. More than this, it was the Katy whose pure spirit expected always and received always the finest and the best he had to give; the Katy who said in the hardest times, "Oh, you'll do it, Denny. You've never failed yet—you won't now."

He could sit there with his head bowed in his arms, blurring all the neat pages she had written with such warm, eager love. And even thus, with his face hidden, he could see Katy in every corner of the room—at the kitchen door, sleeves rolled back, hands white with flour; at the window, Lady Eglantine posed like a satisfied idol in her lap; then at the table holding up a sock she had mended, with an astonished "E-e-e-e! Would you ever think a darn would turn out such a gorgeous pattern as that! Now, aren't I creative though?"

He got up and began walking restlessly about the room, pulsing with echoes; moving with phantoms. He stopped at



the piano, feeling so achingly her presence; seeing so acutely the blue eyes mocking, "Ah, Denny darlin', and you so brave!" he could almost have answered, "Gee—well, say—"

He could almost have reached his arms into the vacancy, hoping to clasp her; shocked with an ever new bewilderment that she was gone. He had clasped her so wildly, but she was vanished, leaving this whispering silence to flout his impotence.

Katy's going had taken not only the sweetness of her presence; it threw him back, stranded and purposeless, on the wreck of his life. No reason now why he should keep Peter Channing's job; no reason now why he should pass quickly with head averted when he chanced to see James Dunlap.

Denny realized dumbly that he must take up the shattered fabric, build it anew. There was this shameful job; there was Petra that he had neglected, and Joan that he loved. Yet he had no wish—no slightest impulse to break through the apathy that hummed with low, monotonous pain incessantly at his ears.

Now he had this letter that Katy had written with her fingers pressed against her temples, tears rushing out warm and melting to mingle with the words. And he could sit at his desk, reading it again and again, not stirring out of the pause that closed about him.

Some one knocked softly at the door. The sound came with a shock. He listened to its repetition. Then it grew loud, a little imperious. And he opened it, stepping back with a startled recoil.

It was Petra, brown eyes and radiant face, turning with a gentle "Don't be angry, Diddle. Don't you want to see me now? Oh, my heart is breaking for you."

He took the hands she reached to him and would have spoken, but his lips failed.

Her eyes filled: "Diddle—it's been almost a week and you didn't let me come and you never called."

"I couldn't, Petra."

"Oh, but Diddle darling, you have to." Her hand crept up to his shoulder. She smiled: "Come out now for a little ride—oh, don't say you won't! You can't sit here always, Diddle. And haven't we each other?"

He turned his face, a shame and a pity and a horror burning like a stain through him. He felt that he should say, "No, Petra—that's passed. Go, won't you? Leave me alone." But

he knew that she would only cling to him, stopping his mouth with kisses, as she had so many times before. He couldn't endure that.

He said with a drab quiet: "Oh, not to-night, Petra! It's kind in you to come. I can't go to-night."

She lowered her head; he saw the straight, black brows meeting; tears on her lashes. "You make it very hard for me, Diddle. Oh, I'm sorry for you. But, Diddle darling, it's only foolish for you to want to be alone. You have to keep on living. Oh, do come!" She pulled his hands a little, "Why, it's gloomy here. You'll come?"

"Not now—I can't now, Petra—"

"Oh, you make me feel so, Diddle! Don't I count at all?"

She moved to the door, dimples trembling. He didn't want to see that, yet he wished her to go. He felt Katy in the room and he didn't want Petra there, not looking at the old crazy quilt and the ferns Katy had watered and the chair where she had sat.

Petra's hands were folded on his and she drew near to him, raising her face, repeating, "Don't I count, Diddle? And you haven't kissed me or scarcely looked at me. When will you be the old darling Dendiddle again?"

He let his arm be about her shoulder, but he kept his face turned. Then he said, "I'm sorry, Petra. Nothing seems to count now."

He felt the room growing warm—he felt her face drawing and stifling him. He wanted to get out—wanted to hurry away. But she was even drawing his head down and kissing him. This was unbearable. And she said softly, "Oh, you'll feel better when you go back to work, Diddle—much better—then you'll come? Oh, it's so lonesome for me—don't you know that, Dendiddle?"

But she went. An uneasy restlessness heaved about him. Added to the phantoms in the room now was another—the hurt, quivering look on Petra's face. That was cruel—yes. But he regarded it remotely as though this were another's problem and no concern of his.

This detachment was a part of the bleak dissatisfaction of his days. In this room, he wished to be out—once out, he wished to return. In the same way he was drawn irresistibly to visit the cemetery and no sooner had he boarded the car than he wished to get off—to rush away. He sat in a corner,

his hat pulled over his eyes—seeing the houses, then the trees drift past. They were all part of the dreary futility. One evening he rode like this down to San Mateo.

He passed the lake and then to the grassy slope. As he neared the spot—a storm of angry grief shook through him. How ghastly this was—coming down here. And she here—Katy lying here—oh, the raw brutality.

And then he saw some one kneeling—putting great masses of crimson poppies in metal vases stuck in the ground. That figure with the proud, lovely head bowed, the dark hair and pale face intent with a kind of rapt, peaceful beauty, broke with a soft melting on the harsh tension. He wanted to go up and kneel beside Joan—to take her hands and hide his face in them.

But he stood motionless, regarding her. She came over, put her hand on his arm, saying, “They’re gay, aren’t they, and beautiful as she was.”

They sat a long while in silence on the bench under a small acacia tree. Then Joan said, “What are you going to do, Denny?”

“I don’t know.”

She answered quietly, “You gave up the fight for Katy, Denny. Now you must win it for her. She would want that.”

But he wished then to rush away—not to face this or anything.

Toward the end of the week Jerome Cummings sent for him, shoved a paper toward him. “They’ve denied the motion, Den. Your case is tied up there. It’s as good as lost. They’re red hot. Lucky if they don’t nail you with a charge of murder.”

## CHAPTER CXVII

### THE BRIBE

THE last time Denny sat in Jerome Cummings' office, an agony of shame had walked upon him. He laid his proofs before the lawyer and Cummings said, "Hell—I suppose you'll quit the job, then?"

But Denny had come from Katy's bed—Katy's white hand reaching for his; Katy's red lips laughing. Quit—and she needing him—needing all that he could earn?

He had walked from the room, not looking at Cummings. He couldn't quit!

Now he could. Katy didn't need him now. The irony ate coldly on him, bitter as though Katy herself had learned of his surrender, refusing to get well at such a cost. As though the dear, cloudless eyes searched his with startled unbelief; as though her hand opened achingly and she said, "Oh, Denny, this was the cruelest thing you could have done to me. Let me take the proudness from you? I couldn't do that—oh, no!"

There was no exultance in his freedom—no rage against Dunlap lighted in his heart. He said quietly to Cummings, "Charge me with murder, Jerr? You mean Melrose believes there was a plot and I put it over?"

"They're all wild-eyed against you up there. If Melrose ever learns that the Independent and the Consolidated are the same and that you're working for them, he'll stop at nothing."

"Let him go to it! I'll help him along."

"You will! You're in a fine position to do that."

"Well—that job's over for me, Jerr—I don't need it now."

"Quitting just as the case opens won't save your face any before a jury. You can't vindicate yourself from the charge of negligence by proving a plot, when you're working for the men that put over the plot. We can't use that defense now. Taking the job with them cooked that."

"You mean there's no chance to square myself?"

"Well—they have no right to make you responsible for acci-

dents—the whole company is responsible. I'll throw a scare into them. Have the officers and the whole Irrigation Board made co-defendants. When they realize they're only fighting themselves and the whole project may be tied up for years—"

"No!" Denny stood up. "I don't want to tie up the work. Why, they need the water up there. They can't get the dam finished too soon—"

Cummings, making little notes on the blotter, regarded Denny with his puzzled intensity. "So you'll be the goat, will you? Why, if they prove that you're an incompetent you might as well get out of the game."

All the old arguments came filing back and flashing in his mind. "Look here, Jerr, I'm not going to beat around the bush like this. I don't care how it looks. I'm going to show them up. I'm not going to stand by now and let a raw deal like this go through."

But he went away thinking, "I don't give a damn how it ends! What of it?" No escape from the gloom that stretched before and about him like some vast, forlorn waste where he must wander always.

Stephen remained in the city, suggesting a fishing trip; suggesting that they pack the furniture and store it, then Denny could go down to the valley with him. Denny accepted each of these proposals avidly, only to reject them the next moment. When Stephen was with him he wished he would leave him alone; as soon as Steve's back was turned he wondered why the devil he couldn't stick around.

Whenever he came near the apartment he halted, a dreary reluctance pulling him back—can't go in there—place full of echoes, dim forms, vivid eyes laughing—smell of cookies from the kitchen—flowers on the table—bright head lowered, chestnut curls half falling at her neck.

He went in now. Some one was in Katy's room—moving about with a swift quietness. It stilled him.

With a queer, misgiving pain, he went over to the door. Joan was stacking things on the bed. But he saw the trunk where Katy kept all her letters. This trunk he remembered all his life—doll's trunk that she had brought down the day Prince Jerry died and, kneeling next to him, whispered, "Here, Denny, you can bury him in this."

When Joan saw him, color flamed even to her dark hair. He saw her hands tremble. She said with a little broken im-

patience, "Oh, Denny—I'm sorry! Why, I thought I'd be finished before you came. I have to do this. Katy asked me to be sure. She made me promise to be very sure."

He didn't care if Joan saw his eyes filled. He merely stood there and watched her and wished her to keep on talking.

She motioned her hand with a little pleading gesture, "Does it hurt you, Denny, to find me here; to see me touching all her things?"

He went over and stood beside Joan, looking into her deep, appealing eyes so that he told her what was in his heart. But he only said, "No, Joan—not to find you here."

She turned her head quickly, hiding the stains on her cheek. When she spoke again it was with a passionate ardor, "Denny, you have to do something for her. You have to win this case. You know how she would have felt—and she was fond of that young Martin Loop and she didn't want you blamed for it—"

And Joan recalled warmly a dozen things Katy had told her—and she recalled to him the night he had returned to the cabin from the meeting—and the light had winked out like a golden eye. Midnight and Katy still waiting.

He remembered how Katy had called him, struggling to her feet, trying to reach him. And how then when he had come over from the shelf she had leaned with all her might on his hands, drawing herself up till her eyes met his. Though they filled with tears and her lips trembled, she said proudly, "They'll never put it on you, Denny! Don't take it so! No—you will make the whole world know that you aren't to blame."

The case was set for Tuesday. Denny went up with Jerome Cummings.

It was a warm, arid day in September. They drove past the school house; past the bench where Denny had sat that tortured morning after the coroner's inquest. And he was suddenly living again through the goading injustice; was suddenly sitting in that sordid room over the bar with its torn red paper, the flies buzzing; hearing the men down stairs guffawing: "That Brooks made a nice donkey of himself! A jinx—that's what he is! A donkey!"

As they came into the main street and were going to the court house Denny saw Berne Melrose. Melrose glanced at him and ignored him.

The first anger that he had felt in weeks flashed. He was

ready to clutch Melrose by the arm, to hurl at him, "Wait, Melrose! You've made a dog of me! I'm not finished!"

They went into the court house. Here the astonishing met them. No lawyer for Martin Loop was present—no witnesses. Instead, Martin Loop had asked for a dismissal of the case. It was on the docket—dismissed.

"Why?" Denny asked it hoarsely of Cummings.

"Humph! Frightened perhaps—saw they were involving themselves. Queer hicks!"

Denny felt a tightening in his muscles, a fang in his mind, "Too damn queer!"

They asked men lounging about the court but learned nothing.

"Let it rest," Cummings said. "Can't gain anything stirring things up. Your money is safe."

But as they came down the steps, Melrose was standing at the curb talking to three other men. Denny went over abruptly, "Why is this case dismissed, Melrose? What right have they to dismiss it?"

Contempt hardened the straight, fearless eyes. Melrose turned on his heel, stalked off as he had once before. One of the other men, a tight, sandy little fellow, chuckled, "Guess you don't know why it's dismissed, do you! Innocent, ain't you? Don't happen to know about a sack of money sent up to old Marty Loop, do you?"

## CHAPTER CXVIII

### STONE WALLS

MARTIN LOOP stood at the door of his barn, his foot on a stack of hay. A calf, three or four days old in a stall in the corner, rubbed its nose against his arm.

"Why did I dismiss the case? Well, guess that was the agreement, wasn't it? You pay the money, I drop the case.

"Wasn't that the agreement, all right?" He took off his hat, mopping his forehead, regarding Denny with a puzzled uncertainty.

"Who made the agreement with you, Mr. Loop?"

The man stood a long while searching Denny's face, then he spat out a great wad of tobacco, asking with a touch of hostility: "What are you up to, sir? Case is settled, ain't it?"

"No! It's not settled. I made no agreement with you, Mr. Loop, and if you received any money I never sent it."

"You didn't, eh? Guess that there \$3000 fell out of the sky, then? Guess I dreamed that a man came up and handed it to me?"

"Guess I dreamed I signed the paper to dismiss this here case."

"Do you know the man who handed you the money?"

"I got the money. I know that. And it don't make no difference whether you gave it in court or out of it so long as you paid. That's all I got to say about it, sir!" He picked up a rake and tossed fresh hay into the stall.

Denny stepped out of the sun into the barn. Loop went on raking the hay, his lips set as though nothing was now to force them apart.

The mulish, impassive silence aroused in Denny an unreasonable violence.

The longer he watched the hotter he became until he flung suddenly, "Well, if you think you got the money out of me, Martin Loop, you're mistaken. If some one can murder your



son and then drop \$3000 in your hands and get away with it, I guess that's your business!

"But you're not going to put the thing on me! I'm telling you that!"

Loop put the rake in the corner, his lips moving. He came over, shaking a finger at Denny. "You didn't send a man named Emmons up here to compromise the case? You didn't send a fellow up on Saturday night with \$3000 in currency?"

"If I did that, Loop, would I be here now trying to undo it? Haven't you got enough sense to see that?"

"The money was paid. Who else should pay it but you? I sued for damages and I got them. And I guess you got a few things to clear up besides a busted cable.

"Guess you better walk out of this barn and damn quick about it!"

When Denny didn't move, he repeated, "You heard me, did you?"

"What have I got to clear up, Loop? Now, you can't glare me out of this place! I'm not moving! You fellows are such damn fools you ought to be stung! You can't see any farther than your nose! Who came up here and tried to get you to drop the case?"

Martin Loop's father doubled his fists and walked off, swinging them belligerently.

Denny flung himself into the machine where Jerome Cummings waited. "Who paid the money?" he fired, as though Cummings was the culprit. "They didn't want the case aired!"

Cummings whistled softly, "Some one wants to cover up."

To Denny there was but one answer—Dunlap.

Dunlap knew that Berne Melrose suspected the Consolidated. And Melrose was so hostile he was ready to bring a charge of murder.

Whether or not Denny was named as the agent, Murray Anson couldn't escape. This would bring the Consolidated and the plot into court. Three thousand dollars was a small sum to hush this matter up.

"It proves the plot!"

"Something rotten's been done. It proves nothing."

"Well, you get the proofs then! And I don't care how it makes me out or what kind of a face it puts on me. You get the goods on them! My money's free now. So there's \$9000 to do it with."

They drove back to town. Near the grocery store Denny saw Bill Cross, the young fellow he himself had dragged from the wreckage after the snapping of the cable. He got out and went up to him.

"Say, Bill, what do you know about this money Martin's father received?"

Cross was slouched on a bench. He drew himself up, measuring Denny angrily. "Don't you 'Bill' me! Low-down skunk! Quicker you get out of this town the better for you."

"Yes, Bill Cross! I'll stay in this town till I'm damn good and ready to get out! And I'll stay till I've found out what I want to know. And you'll eat what you've said!"

"I will, will I? You can't bluff us! We know where you're working. Make me eat that, will you?"

"Yes—you pig-headed set, you! I'll make you eat that!"

Denny walked off in a white heat. No one spoke to him, though he passed many that he knew.

"Let's get out of here—damn place—lunatics."

The heat was oppressive, a heavy blanket weighing down as it had the day Denny followed the furious Red and the silent Keene over their parched, dead acres.

"Can't learn anything here—anything more—"

"You've quit the job, have you?" Cummings asked when they reached the city that evening.

"Of course!"

"Keep quiet about it. Say you're going on a vacation."

"Well you move quickly, Jerr! I want to clear out. I want to get finished with this mess!"

His mind had already disposed of the past. It was appalling and intolerable to find on every side these grim, imperturbable consequences waiting with relentless patience.

One of these was at the apartment—rose stationery, scented, elusive fragrance that had once been an exotic flower in his senses. He opened it with a rough impatience.

And he sat a long while at his desk. Finally he got up and dressed himself with great care—a reluctance—a touch of cowardice delaying all his movements.

When he was ready he read the letter again, tearing it slowly into little pieces, but the words echoed in his mind:

"Dindiddle Darling: What am I to think? What do you want me to think? In three weeks you've seen me only twice.

"I know that you are not yourself, but can't you think of me a little? Can I stand this always? I have called you four times this evening and no answer. Now I shall wait for you to come. Are you coming or will you break my heart completely?"

## CHAPTER CXIX

### JOAN'S DISCOVERY

A YEAR and a half ago the hair tossed high against his cheek, the cool, white hand like silk on his, had loitered in his senses, a perfume and a song. Golden nymph—Denny had gone away from Petra Channing, a jubilation in his heart.

He was a boy then, all of life before him; a boy, wondering if he should wear a full dress or a serge when calling; if he should take candy or flowers.

The Denny who went to Petra now was not a boy and he was no longer the dupe of his senses. He knew that he didn't love Petra; above all things, that he didn't wish to marry her.

He had been swept into it in a glow of color and fragrance that night in May when he found her so radiant, smile on her lips, tears in her eyes.

He was bound to her. And she wanted him.

"Oh, you did come! At last!" Moving toward him with that easy grace that had so charmed him, taking his hands, drawing him to the sofa beside her. He knew the resentment in him was unjust—yet it remained.

She raised her head slowly, the dimples twitching: "Diddle—oh, darling, if you hadn't come!"

"I was away yesterday, Petra. I only got your letter to-night."

"Never mind—you're here and there won't be any long three weeks again, will there? You'll make it up?" The sidelong flash of her eyes. "You'll tell me in a hundred different ways?"

A flush staining to his mind. But he'd have to sit here and listen. He said, hoarsely, "Oh, Petra!" Then, "I'm going away for a while."

"Away! Going away, Diddle?"

"Yes—I have to get away. I can't stand things."

She drew close to him, running her fingers across his palm. "Poor darling! Yes—I've thought of that, Diddle. You need a change. You'll come with us. With Peter and mother and

me—a drive through Lake County or anywhere you like. We've spoken of it."

He got up suddenly and walked over to the piano, leaning there with his back half turned. Her eyes stared after him, a hurt astonishment making her face pale.

It shamed him. He came back quietly, taking the place next to her. She didn't glance up, the sad acquiescence in her manner touching him like a reproach.

"Petra—don't you see how it is? I want to be alone. I didn't mean to do that. I'm going down to the valley with Steve—I want to get off some place far."

Without looking at him, she asked: "Do you mean that you're going away to work? You're going back to the mountains?"

"I don't know. I haven't thought about that."

Her hand moved quietly, shoving up the soft hair at her neck. "Have you given up your job, Diddle? Peter says you haven't been there."

"I've asked for a leave for a while."

"And now you tell me perhaps you'll go back to the mountains to work and that means I'll be left alone. Have you thought of that? Have you thought what I might have to say?"

The discomfort and the irritation in him grew. He had given her the right to say these things, but his heart withdrew the privilege and he blamed her because she didn't see it.

She raised her face slowly so that he saw all the warm, amber beauty of the throat he had so often kissed, pressing his mouth, laughing against it. "Diddle, dearest, darlingest, you won't do that?" Then softly, "Peter is going to give us the most adorable home here. And you'll be my own sensible Dendiddle, won't you?"

He wanted to get up and rush out of the room, push her from him, but the soft murmur went on, "Of course you will. And I'll be at the door every night to meet you. Now tell me that you won't go back there—never, never, and leave me to pine away and die. Kiss me and tell me that, Diddle."

He took her hands from his neck and held them, his pulses racing with the shame of his thoughts.

"Petra, I can't promise that. You've known all along that my work would take me to the mountains. That's the work I want to do."

She drew back, a sudden streak of color running into her

face. "Then you are thinking of working in the mountains? You mean to leave this job?"

"I haven't thought about that."

"Oh, what are you saying, Diddle? Oh, do you like to hurt me so? And you sit here, just unbending! What am I to think?"

And because it seemed so sordid to be arguing when the thing was so completely settled in his own thought he said abruptly, "Oh, don't you see, Petra? I don't want to hurt you. But I guess I have." She leaned forward, lowering her head, the black brows drawn sharply together. It was a few moments before she spoke.

"Hurt me, Dendiddle? And don't you really mean to? Sometimes I wonder if you think I have any rights at all."

"Yes—you have rights. I know that."

"But you want to leave this wonderful job where we can have everything and a beautiful home and go on with all our friends and you want to go and poke yourself in old mountains, and you know I hate them."

He said nothing, for he felt it was dishonest to quarrel over the job when this was not an issue. She took his hand, measuring her fingers with his. "Now, you're angry with me. But, Diddle, you asked me to marry you, and you knew then I couldn't go off and poke myself in the mountains."

"You knew then, Petra, my work would surely take me to the wilderness. But don't let us quarrel over this—because I haven't any job staked out yet."

"Oh, Diddle—well, what is the matter with you to-night? Poor Diddle—he has no heart for anything. His hands are cold." She stooped down quickly, pressing her lips over them. "Then you aren't going to quit? Well, why are we having all this tiresome old argument, then? And so many better things to do."

She had come closer to him, her face raised a little, hands creeping upward to his neck. He flung his arm quickly about her, drew her to her feet, stood facing her, his hands trembling on her elbows. "Oh, I have to go, Petra. Let me go now. I'll come again—soon."

She turned her face a little—the whiteness of it smote him. He was suddenly aware that she, too, suffered. The pity that was so large a part of his nature melted. He was responsible. He had half caused this.

And she seemed so slight—so white and cold and her lips quivering. He put his arm about her. She yielded with a quietness that pierced him. "Petra, I'm sorry—I'm sorry—"

She lowered her head against him, her hands toying with his coat. "Yes, Diddle? Oh—I don't know. I don't know at all. You're sorry, yet you talk of going away. Leaving me alone. And you won't even promise to keep this job, and you know I want this."

"I can't promise this, Petra. You know why I took that job."

"You really want to go back to the mountains. You put your work ahead of me. And now you've scarcely seen me in three weeks—"

He covered her hands because they looked little and helpless and he didn't wish to see them—

"And you're rushing away. . . ."

"I have to, Petra. I want to get out."

She looked up, a quickening of pride in her eyes. "Yes? And you think you have a right to do this, too? You think you have a right to do just as you like, and I—" Her hand brushed nervously at the fringe at her neck, but her head pressed against his shoulder. "Oh, Diddle—and you haven't even kissed me! Don't go—kiss me."

When he stooped down, she whispered against his lips: "You'll feel better. You'll be my own darling Dendiddle soon again? And you won't quit this job because I don't want you to."

He went out stifled, oppressed with shame and a furious restlessness. No use—no escape—coward—evade like that. But with her face so white, fingers twitching.

There came suddenly before him another image—kneeling figure, poppies in the vases, an uplifted peace in her pale beauty. And he had wished to kneel beside Joan, hide his face in her hands.

He put the thought from him because it ached heavily. He felt changed.

The next day he met Peter Channing. He asked soberly, "Are you quitting the job, lad?"

"I've taken a leave."

Denny would like to have shouted, "Yes, and everything that went with it! I'm finished with it all!"

"I see your case up there is dismissed."

"Yes."

"Glad to see you out of that. Farmers are a bad lot to deal with. Glad you're finished with them, lad."

"I guess it's just as well," Denny lied easily.

"You were lucky to get out of that—lucky to be rid of it."

It was noon three days after the dismissal of his case. Denny was at home. Joan phoned—"Did you see the Merced paper? No? I have it. I'll bring it to you. Now."

The proofs were in Denny's hands.



## CHAPTER CXX

### AFTER DUNLAP

ON the front page of the town paper, set off with a deep black border and printed in large type, was a three column editorial. It bore the title, "Traitors and Farmers."

Denny read the opening paragraphs, came to the third, went through it, his face growing white.

"Twin Falls has suffered murder from these traitors. One of them was ordered out of town yesterday. He was told what he was and told to 'get out!'"

"He went—quicker than the proverbial Jack Robinson. But Twin Falls is to eat the insult; Twin Falls is to be forced to its knees and beg pardon of the injured gentleman.

"This is good news. Twin Falls would like exceedingly to masticate the choice tidbit offered by Mr. Denman Brooks, erstwhile engineer of the Irrigation Project. Twin Falls has been waiting nearly four months for the promised food.

"But there is no danger of growing fat on any such fare. Nearly four months ago Martin Loop and Snag Wilson were brought home to this town; they were brought in white pine boxes. The coroner's jury placed responsibility for these deaths on the engineer in charge of the work. Here the responsibility undoubtedly belonged.

"But in the presence of the assembled farmers of this district Denman Brooks shouted his innocence. In words since become memorable, he yelled: 'I haven't quit! And, by God, I won't quit! I'll find your man and let you have him!'"

"No doubt Mr. Brooks knows the traitor. And no danger that he will ever deliver him.

"If there are any who still believe in the honor of our former engineer, the blackguardly dodging of the damage suit ought to be sufficient proof of guilt in this quarter. Mr. Brooks had his chance of vindication. Instead of seizing it as a man of honor he sends a secret agent to stop with blood-money the fight for justice.

"But if there are yet some who believe that Mr. Brooks has been wronged, how does this fact ring—the gentleman in question is now and perhaps always was, an employee of the corporation suspected of ruining the Twin Falls irrigation project—the corporation that for five years fought hammer and tongs against the rights of this district to its dam site. Mr. Brooks is now engineer for the Independent Power Company and the Independent is but another name for the Consolidated.

"Perhaps Mr. Brooks was an employee of the Consolidated at the time Twin Falls suffered a \$200,000 loss through the dynamiting of the coffer dam. Perhaps Mr. Brooks was an employee of the Consolidated when two sons of this town were brought home dead to their parents."

As Denny read, his breath strained so that it came whitehot like a flame through his mouth. He remembered this editor at the meeting—thin, clean shaven fellow about thirty, sitting with his legs crossed, yellow pad before him, a sneer on his mouth. Remembered that he stood up and pressed about the table when James Dunlap suddenly waved the telegram and throwing aside the curling whispers, shouted, "This puts the blame where it belongs. If we have a fiend to pour nitric acid on the cable and murder our sons this tells what produced our fiend!"

And this editor was standing at the door when Denny went up to Melrose, almost pleading, "You've treated me damnably—damnably. It was my job!"

His mind swept him back to the smoke-filled room. He could feel the fury licking through him as it had when the chairs were kicked over, the farmers stamping to the table, a thunder bawling, "Surrender! Surrender now!"

And he had. He'd hurled their contract at them—let them kick him out like a dog—let them brand him—let them get away with it—

And he'd come back to the city and let Dunlap mop up the streets with him. Dunlap had turned white as paper when he caught him telephoning to Anson; Dunlap's eyes had shivered in his head when Denny caught his coat, threatening, "If you know where Miss Lewis is, I don't. God help you when I do, Dunlap!"

He had found Joan. She had given him the little black book. She had told him of the foreigner who demanded "ten

hundred dollars" from Dunlap. Dunlap must know this—must clasp his soft hands over his portly stomach and grin at the yellow dog who was now holding down a thousand-dollar job from the men who had made him out a murderer and a fool.

The blood crowded hotly, lit a white rage in his mind. Ordered out of town. Bill Cross, slouching on the bench, stood up, measuring him with an infuriated, "Don't you 'Bill' me! We know what you are. Quicker you get out of this town the better for you . . . low down skunk!"

But he would eat that—

Through the wildness storming at him Denny was abruptly aware of some one shaking his arm, of Joan speaking in a tense excitement, "Denny—read it all—read to the end. Did you see that name?"

Striking out in letters of fire were two words, "S. Macey." S. Macey—the name on that cryptic letter sent by Anson to Dunlap . . . the letter in the little black book Joan had stolen, the letter that said only "S. Macey. Use caution."

Who was S. Macey? Had he anything to do with the Twin Falls project? Why should Anson be writing to Dunlap about S. Macey?

It was answered in the final paragraphs of the editorial.

"Now Twin Falls must pay for the work of these traitors. And Twin Falls permits the perpetrators to sneak here in the night, drop a bag containing \$3000 in currency at our door and escape.

"Three thousand dollars atonement for damages that will run into the millions! The project is hopelessly crippled. The banks have refused to put the second block of bonds on the market. Now add to this the report of our newly appointed engineer, S. Macey.

"Mr. Macey says: 'I find the concrete poured in the early stages of construction to be of very inferior quality—the rains of last month undermining the dam in several places. It is impossible to estimate yet the cost of this repair work, but it will probably reach the neighborhood of \$100,000.'

"Twin Falls, shall Denman Brooks wreck your project, murder your sons and escape through a payment of \$3000?"

Inferior concrete—Denny had deliberately poured inferior concrete into the dam—had done this to wreck the work! And this work had been his life.

But Anson and Dunlap had planted a new engineer, S. Macey,

on the job, and S. Macey found that Denny's work must be undone—was criminally inferior—so the project was crippled—the banks refused the second block of bonds—

In the feeling that swelled over him now, that rose like a choking sea, sweeping him in a fury so terrible he was aware only of a mad bursting in his veins, a thumping suffocation beating at his head—in this feeling was no thought at all, but an image—a red, shiny face growing white, soft hands twisting—

He was pushing Joan from him, shaking his head against her pleas, rushing into his room, locking the door, echoes in his ears; a face marching through his mind.

Red, shiny face growing white—hands twisting. Dunlap, get him! By God!

Denny took his pistol from a drawer—saw that it was loaded.

“Joan, wait here. Tell Stephen to wait. Ring up Jerome Cummings, tell him to wait. All of you wait here!”

Joan followed him to the door, “Denny—don't spoil it now! You've got them.”

“Wait here, Joan!”

Never had his brain raced with more intent and deadly precision. Go to Dunlap's office. Wait in the corridor—force him back to his private office—get the place cleared—then—

Nearly noon—girls and men coming from the rooms. At the turn, Denny stood. Dunlap's door opened. Dunlap, hat on the back of his head, coming toward him. Denny stepped out.

“I want to see you, Dunlap. Now!”

Dunlap veered with a quick, side movement, raising the whispering voice loudly, “Excuse me, Mr. Brooks. I'm in a hurry. Come again.”

“Now, Dunlap! I said now! Take your choice!” Denny jammed the pistol against Dunlap's stomach.

## CHAPTER CXXI

### THE PROOF

DUNLAP'S mouth opened—no sound came.

Denny pushed him with the pistol. "Walk back to your office, Dunlap. One outcry—it's your last."

Dunlap's face grew yellow—a ghastly yellow. The flesh of his double chin quivered. He could scarcely force himself along the corridor.

Denny walked next him, a step behind. "Go into your private office, Dunlap. Tell your stenographer to leave. Tell her not to return. Quick."

The soft hands, hanging limp, were shaking. In his efforts to turn the knob it rattled so that the girl opened the door. She had her hat on. Dunlap stared at her, saying in a gasp, "Oh, Miss Rudolph! Going to lunch?"

"Yes. Do you want me to wait?"

He hurried past her to the door of his private office, went in and slouched a moment at his desk. Denny said in a harsh, scarcely audible tone, "Tell her to leave and not to return!"

Dunlap picked himself up and went to the door. "Go now, Miss Rudolph. You needn't return this afternoon."

"Why—oh—thank you!"

When the door closed on her Denny walked Dunlap to it. "Lock it. Now lock this one. If the phone rings, don't answer it. Sit down there."

The yellow eyebrows cocked; perspiration oozed from the bald head, ran down the temples. But Dunlap managed to say, "Amazing, Mr. Brooks! Amazing! I don't understand. Rather crude method—"

"Then understand, Dunlap! I've got the goods on you. One lie and it's your last. You're dealing with a man ready to shoot you if he has to hang a thousand times. There's not a power on earth can stop me. You might as well understand that.

"Now write down the communications that passed between you and Murray Anson about S. Macey."

Dunlap stared, fighting desperately to draw his breath without loud, chugging sounds. "Communications—amazing—what communications? Illegal methods, Mr. Brooks. I must warn you—"

Denny whipped out the pistol. "Is this legal, Dunlap? Maybe not! But it kills. Want to try it? Now be careful. Legal be damned, and you too, at the first lie. I mean it!"

The little color that had swept back to Dunlap's cheeks dropped away; he slumped in the chair as though his bones were crumpling. Denny pushed pen and paper before him. "Write, Dunlap. Pull yourself up. You can't save Anson now! I've got him. You've got one chance. Spill it all and be quick about it."

Dunlap took up the pen. "Well—well—amazing—" The point spattered over the page—

"Quick, Dunlap—I'll give you just ten seconds to get started on that. How many communications—what were their contents—where are they now?"

But the hand knocked with such violence the letters were illegible.

"How many, Dunlap?"

"I don't remember."

"About how many?"

"Five."

"Are they in this office?"

Dunlap's head wobbled.

"Where are they?"

"Home."

"All of them?"

"Lost one."

"S. Macey was sent up there by you and Anson to wreck the project? Answer!"

A throttled "Yes."

"You sent the \$3000 to Martin Loop. Who carried the money? Give me the real name, Dunlap, and the real address."

"Jake Bradford—Whitney building."

"Where are the papers about that?"

"No papers."

"Who poured nitric acid on the cable?"

"Not that, Mr. Brooks—I didn't do that! Not murder!"  
The pale blue eyes were bulging, Dunlap's jaw sagged.

"Who did it, Dunlap? Careful! I've got the goods here. The name—quick—"

"Nikoli Blumens—he did it—against orders—not then—"

"Against orders! When was he to pour the acid? Quick, Dunlap." Looking at the slumped, ashen face, the darting eyes, hearing that ghastly admission, a savagery burst in Denny's mind. He came nearer to Dunlap, shoved down to him, ready to kill. They had poured the acid! They had murdered! "When? Who gave the orders?"

"Mistake—unfortunate, Mr. Brooks. Frightful mistake. Against orders."

"Whose orders?"

"Mine."

"What were your orders?"

"When no one was around—no one. Mistake—horrible mistake. Can't explain—unfortunate!"

"But you paid Blumens the money, didn't you?"

Dunlap gulped, twisting his hands like a maniac. His collar wilted with the heat of his neck.

"You paid the money, Dunlap. How—with check?" Where is Blumens now?"

"Currency. Lives on Folsom street."

"And the papers about this—letters from Anson."

"Only one. Lost it, too."

"Where?"

"Had them in a black notebook."

"How much did you pay?"

"A thousand dollars."

"Don't move, Dunlap." Denny leveled the pistol. With his free hand, reached for the phone, calling Joan, telling her to bring Stephen and Jerome Cummings with her, to knock twice and then slip a white card under the door that he might be sure it was she.

There was some one at the outer door now—knocking, twisting the knob. Dunlap made a move, gripped the chair. "Important—very important, Mr. Brooks."

"And Old Baldy—you gave him orders to warn me, Dunlap? You did this deliberately to make it appear I had blundered?"

Another nod.

"Look here, Dunlap. You've got more papers from Anson. Now I'll have a man here in a moment. He's going

out for those papers. I'll give him half an hour to get them."

Dunlap raised himself in the chair, dropped back.

"You write out an order telling your wife to deliver those papers to the messenger—to deliver every one of them."

"Away—my wife is away. No one home. I'll go. I'll get them. I give you my word—my word—Mr. Brooks."

"Give me your keys, Dunlap. Where are those papers? Exactly where in your home—"

Dunlap ran his hands over his neck—made no answer.

"The man I send is going to get those papers in half an hour, Dunlap. He's going to open them and make sure he has them all. I'm holding you here. If he doesn't return in that time with them—with all of them—you're finished!"

Dunlap worked at his neck as though he were trying to strangle himself. Finally he gasped out: "In the safe deposit vault. There's the key." He leaned toward Denny, his mouth sagging horribly, the yellow eyebrows cocking.

"A mistake! I tell you it was a mistake! Against orders. Horrible—no one more shocked—unfortunate—awful—" He kept rubbing his hands, pulling at his collar, repeating and slumping down on his spine, "Horrible—unfortunate . . . Not murder—against orders."

A knocking at the door. The white card pushed under. Dunlap bounded up as though a spring were suddenly released, grabbed Denny's arm: "What! Who is it?"

Denny pushed him before him—opened it. Jerome Cummings, his shrewd eyes puzzled, came in, Joan followed and Stephen.

Denny gave Stephen the keys to the vault.

"Get back in half an hour, Steve. Be sure you have every paper on that list. Make it half an hour at the longest. Bring a big automobile with you."

Dunlap turned to Cummings, a little reassured. "You understand, Mr. Cummings. Illegal. Forced confession has no value in the eyes of the law. Pistol jammed against a man—"

Denny stepped up to him and jammed it viciously. "Start that, Dunlap—start it now or later and see where you end! And if you've lied about the papers— Have you?"

"No—no—"

"Begin at your first dicking with Anson. Miss Lewis will take it down. Cummings will see that it's legal. Mind that! Who started the labor troubles? How much did Pedro



Francita get for watering the cement and Hernandez for blowing the dam? How much did Old Baldy get? Why did you do it? Every word—”

The pale blue eyes, sticking out, ugly, terror-shot, were the one patch of color in the ghastly yellow face. When Dunlap reached the snapping of the cable, he kept tossing his head back and taking frantic breaths, his hands knocking.

“Mistake, Miss Lewis—Blumens insane—you know—came into the office. . . .”

Steve returned with the papers—the automobile. Dunlap hung, clinging to the chair, “What—what are you going to do?”

Denny answered: “You’re going to Merced, Dunlap. You’re going to tell this to Berne Melrose and the rest of them—”

“No—my God—they’ll kill me. . . .”

“You’re going—”

## CHAPTER CXXII

### DUNLAP EXPOSED

DENNY sent a telegram to Berne Melrose :

"Call a meeting of the irrigation board for to-night at 8 o'clock. I'm bringing your traitor and proofs.

"DENMAN BROOKS."

Dunlap listened as he phoned. He reached and clung to Denny's arm. "Mr. Brooks—my God—they'll kill me. You understand? Mr. Cummings, you're a lawyer, you understand. Frightful, unfortunate affair—not my fault—Blumens insane. You saw him, Miss Lewis—insane—a madman—"

"Look here, Dunlap, you're going to keep your mouth shut!"

But Dunlap's feet shuffled under him. He put his hands in his pockets to hide their frantic shaking, took them out again, twisting them wildly. Before they could get him from the room Stephen had to take one arm, Denny the other. He slouched in a corner of the machine, burying his face in his hands.

Cummings whispered to Denny: "Will you get this Blumens and the fellow who paid the money to Loop?"

"No, not my affair. Let the irrigation board get them. Dunlap and the letters are enough for me. Anything can happen if we stall around."

Then no one spoke. Dunlap huddled in abject fear. After half an hour he stared from the window, flinging suddenly back against the cushions, the whispering voice laden with terror. "They'll lynch me! A mob—lynch me. My God, Mr. Brooks, are you going to throw me to them? What did I do to you? Nothing personal. My God—lynched!"

Denny said nothing.

The rope might have been already wound about Dunlap's neck the way his pale eyes bulged and the shiny face splotted with purple. Every dozen miles he sat up with that frantic wobbling of the bald head, imploring now Cummings, now Joan to hear him.

Joan kept her eyes averted, but Denny saw that mingled with her contempt and abhorrence was a deep touch of pity. He turned from it, irritated.

Trees, hills, clouds, like a silver filigree against the sky, flashed a moment—were gone. The light grew amber, the breeze hushed and the tranquil quiet of evening came down upon the valley.

But there was that huddled, half-whimpering form in the corner, the whole body growing limp as they sped into the valley. Dunlap's forehead pressed against the window, staring into the darkness and the trees moving like specters in shadowy converse.

Suddenly he slipped from the seat, the soft hands twisting at Denny's knees, "Here! Hide me! My God, lynched!"

Denny pushed him in a fury of disgust, "Get up, Dunlap. Damn coward you!"

"Mr. Brooks—for God's sake listen—you don't understand. Blumens did it. Insane. You saw him, Miss Lewis. Murder—no one more horrified than I. What good will it do you? Throw me to them! They'll kill me! You've got the confessions. Mr. Brooks, what good will it do you to have me hanged?"

"Get up, Dunlap! It's nothing to me to have you hanged. It's not up to me!"

"Mr. Cummings; Miss Lewis—speak to him. Mr. Cummings, you understand. Farmers incensed—outraged—"

His hands were now dripping, his collar crumpled out of sight. He mopped his face, but it was so moist, so heavy and colorless he seemed about to collapse.

As they drove into the town, he sank, a groaning, inert lump in the corner. But when the lights of the main street flashed he was grabbing wildly at Denny's sleeve, making a last plea, "Think! My God, Brooks, you know these men! In another hour I'll be lynched. My God—save me!"

"Dunlap, you're going to walk in there and tell them what you did and tell them what Anson did and what Macey's doing. It's not up to me to save you, but don't ask me to be your accomplice."

"But, Brooks—I'm their lawyer—my God—"

Denny was half choked with repugnance, the fight in him blunted by the cringing helplessness of this fellow who had a dozen times stuck the hot brand into him, but who now cowered on his knees begging for mercy.

"Think, Brooks—Anson will settle. He'll pay! A million, Mr. Cummings, you understand—"

They drew up at the town hall. A crowd of men and women packed about the entrance. As the big closed car stopped they pressed to the curb. Some one called out, "Him! It's Brooks! He's here!"

Dunlap dug his nails into the leather, "They'll kill me! Brooks, don't throw me to them!"

"Pull yourself together, Dunlap. You were cool enough when you made me out the murderer."

Stephen and Jerome Cummings had almost to lift him from the car. Denny pushed into the crowd. It closed and pressed about him, voices rising, "He's back! He's back!" He was shoved up the steps into the big, barren room where four months previous Dunlap had shouted, "There's what produced your fiend! There!"

Berne Melrose was sitting at the rough pine table. Denny made out the tall, rugged form looming through a low-hanging cloud of tobacco smoke. A hush dropped over the room—a tense, breathless excitement. He swung to the table, faced them, unaware until that moment that a wild turbulence shook and gripped him.

Then he saw Martin Loop sitting next to Melrose, and the editor, with his sneer and his yellow pad, leaning forward, his eyes glinting with expectance.

Denny turned from the straining avid eyes of the hundred men and women, turned sharply and flung at Melrose:

"You kicked me out, Melrose . . . you and this irrigation board. You called me a murderer, an incompetent and every damnable name you could find. You broke your contract. Your lawyer, James Dunlap, stood here four months ago and charged me with criminal negligence. You and every man in this room blamed me for the death of my friend—yes, my friend! Martin Loop. The editor of this town's paper went further and called me a traitor and a blackguard afraid to face the courts. Berne Melrose, four months ago you called me a murderer and a traitor. You accused me of trafficking with the Consolidated.

"Now, Berne Melrose, your new engineer, S. Macey, reports that I poured rotten concrete; that I tried to wreck this job that was my job—that was my life. He's the liar—he's the traitor. That dam is all right. But I've brought you the man

who planted S. Macey on the dam and planted him there to wreck it—to cripple the project and then to turn it over to the Consolidated.

"I've brought your traitor!

"You think I went over to the Consolidated? I took a job with the Independent because you fellows up here made me penniless—you drove me to it. It's none of your damn business what need of mine forced me to take this job. And no one paid the piper but I.

"I've got papers and a signed confession to prove every word I've said. There's your man, Melrose!"

The faces pressed forward in such gaping, silent astonishment, the entire room seemed but one white, open-mouthed circle. Melrose stood up, the viking form trembling, following Denny's outflung hand as it pointed to the rear of the room where Stephen and Jerome Cummings tried vainly to get Dunlap to his feet.

Denny shouted: "Dunlap, you come up here!"

A terrible, palsied moment, then the hush splitting with a shocked cry, "Dunlap!" Men on their feet, others wheeling in their chairs, Melrose thundering, "Order! Order! Hear it out! Shall we hear? Order!"

Shoving and lifting the half prostrate form, the two of them got Dunlap to the table. There he leaned, a man without bones, the shiny face appalling in its dead whiteness, the mouth sagging. Denny was white with disgust, with a half contemptuous pity.

"Speak, Dunlap. Tell them."

But Dunlap hung there, his pale blue eyes bulging, no word coming from the twisting lips.

"Is what I've said the truth, Dunlap? You and Murray Anson, chief of the Consolidated, conspired to wreck this Twin Falls project?"

His head wobbled.

"Is it?"

"Yes—my God—listen—"

But the room was in an uproar—yells—the table knocked over, some one thundering, "Him! Dunlap! Get him!"

Dunlap crumpled at Denny's feet, his arms wound and clinging to Denny's legs.

## CHAPTER CXXIII

### VINDICATION

THE room became a tumult. With a crazy rush the men began yelling, "Get him! Get him!"

Dunlap wound his arms frantically about Denny's knees, shrieking, "My God! Brooks, save me!"

Denny swept out his fists, "Get back! Lunatics! I've got proofs! Do you fellows want them? Or crab the deal like maniacs! Do you want proofs? Want to hear what I've got to say or don't you?"

Melrose, superhuman in his gigantic composure, pushed into the struggling forms, shoving them with massive arms before him. "Take your seats! Keep them! Proceed, Mr. Brooks."

A scraping of chairs, a restless quiet deepening as Denny threatened, "If you fellows want to hear me out, all right! And if you don't, all right! Rush up again like that and you can all go to pot, the same as you sent me. It's nothing to me now to save your project. But that's why I'm here! If you're going to turn around now and ruin what I've got, acting like madmen, say so—say it now!"

"Hell of a lot of good to jump on a wretch like this and let the big fellows escape. They're the ones that did the dirty work; that sent up \$3000 to keep my damage case out of court. Go after them! You can get them. You can make them pay every cent and double it for the havoc they've done. I've got papers enough to send them all to the noose.

"They'll come through. But I'm telling you that I'll not be a party to any violence! I'll not have a hand in any crazy attack on a wretch like Dunlap. I've got his signed confession. You can have it but you'll not get a line if you're going to run mad and take the law in your own hands.

"Do you want this confession?— And on these terms?"

Before any one could speak Melrose banged a hammer on the table. "I speak for the board, Mr. Brooks. There'll be no violence here and no one will make another move!"

Eyes watched intently as Denny pushed Dunlap to a chair.

"Jerome Cummings, my lawyer, will read it. It was given in his presence and in the presence of Miss Lewis, the former secretary of Twin Falls."

Dunlap's head was sunk between his shoulders; he kept his face covered as Cummings read. Every man in the room sat forward, lips pressed tightly, hands clenched.

But not a sound as Cummings went through the admissions that the labor troubles had been deliberately incited; that Francita was paid for watering the cement and Hernandez for blowing the dam. When he reached Nikoli Blumens and the thousand dollars given for pouring nitric acid on the cable—when he reached that blood-flaming item, chairs scraped—a low, threatening grumble—

Cummings stopped abruptly, "Shall I read the rest? Do you want the confession?"

Even the breathing paused, but Dunlap leaned forward, his hands flat on the table, gasping, "Tell them—tell them—tell them—Mr. Cummings—" And after the sound ceased his mouth went on forming, "Tell them—"

Cummings said tartly, "I presume Mr. Dunlap wants to repeat what he said to-day, namely, that he intended the acid should be poured when none of the men were working. He merely intended to snap your cable and smash up your machinery. He didn't plan murder. Is that it, Mr. Dunlap?"

"Yes—my God—horrified—"

A man stood up, sat down at once. Cummings went on, "And, I, James Dunlap, attorney for the Twin Falls Irrigation Project, confess that all this was done with a view to discouraging the farmers, eating up their funds and eventually causing the project to be abandoned so that a sale of the dam site might be effected and the Consolidated come into possession."

The face of Melrose hardened. He folded his arms, "Is this all, Mr. Brooks?"

Denny stood before Dunlap. "Let him tell you whether it's the truth—whether it's his confession or not. Let Dunlap speak—"

At the challenge the pale blue eyes rolled almost out of sight. Dunlap, practically hanging to the table by his elbows, made frantic efforts with his mouth, tried to keep his jaw from dropping. Perspiration ran in streams from his forehead. The sight of him there with his knees slowly doubling under him threw a chafing impatience into the taut figures of the men

sitting so grimly forward. Some one yelled: "Speak! Out with it, traitor!"

Melrose on his feet, "Out of this room, Bellows! Quick!"

A boy got up and left. No one turned; not a stir lifted the silence that strained, breathless, clamorous, expectant.

Dunlap kept sinking till his head was on a level with the table as though it were severed from his body. Struggling, animal sounds came from his lips, and, finally, "True—all he says—I did it—the Consolidated—they're the ones—they started—"

His head jerked back and then flung forward. Dunlap doubled in a heap on the floor.

A gasp—the room on its feet. Melrose flinging out his arms. "Silence! Sit down, every one of you! I'm the president of this board. Martin Loop, and you, Bill Cross and John Farrel, take Dunlap into the room there and hold him. The rest of you—silence!"

The three men went up to Dunlap and lifted him. Every other man and woman in the room craned forward, breaths bursting in the furious, suppressed excitement.

Melrose said abruptly to Denny, "Will Mr. Cummings handle the case for us? Is that agreeable to you?"

"Just as you like. Ask him."

Cummings answered, "Certainly."

"You wish to swear to the murder charge, Mr. Brooks?"

"Absolutely not! I'm through, Melrose. You and the men here can do what you like. I'm not interested in hanging Dunlap. He did more devilry to me than to any ten men in this room. More devilry to me than to Martin Loop! Murder is easy to what all of you and Dunlap did to me.

"But when I take revenge it will be from men and not from a cowering heap like that! He's yours now! If it's worth your while to have him swing, it's not worth mine. There are big fellows for you to get—the men behind Dunlap.

"And there's the project to save. You can make them pay for that. That ought to be worth a few hundred Dunlaps. You've got the weapons now. Use them to save yourselves or not—I've done all I have to do."

Denny, glancing hastily at Joan and Stephen, went to the door. An uneasy sigh, a shuffling of feet, Melrose cried out, "Wait, Mr. Brooks!— This board—all of us—yes, we did devilry—worse than that. I speak personally and for this board. We did you a great wrong. We put our trust in Dun-



lap. He was our attorney for five years. We never dreamed he would betray us. Mr. Brooks, I personally can expect no pardon from you, nor ask it."

Big rough hands were passed suddenly over faces, heads were lowered, eyes on the floor.

"Oh, well—it's past, Melrose. It's all right—"

Long after midnight, Denny stood with Joan at her door. She took off her hat, running her hand through the thick, dark hair.

He thought he had never seen anything so sweet, so virginal as her white face, sharply drawn. He wished as he had a hundred times, and now, terribly, because of his overpowering loneliness—he wished to go up and cover Joan with his arms, look in her ardent eyes and have her shy, eager arms enfold him.

Her hand reached out with gentle regret, "You don't feel elated, Denny?"

"Why should I? It means nothing to me."

"Oh, yes!" She laughed so tenderly. "It means a good deal to you, Denny, because it means so much to others."

He was about to scorn that; to mock its folly; to say, "It means nothing, Joan. Life is worthless and mine has no meaning left."

But he couldn't look at Joan and say this and he couldn't feel it, but only her hand drawing him and the wish to follow and the wish to open his heart and cry out for her. He said suddenly, "Joan, I'm going away. I'm glad you said that, because it's the way I want to think of you. You've always meant things like that to me from the very beginning and right now you mean them more than ever."

Joan's lips were parted and her eyes turned away though he longed to look in them. She said only, "Oh, so you're going away." After a long while, softly so that it sounded like a sob, "And we won't see each other again?"

"Yes, we will!"

In the morning a thing happened that changed all his plans.

## CHAPTER CXXIV

### PETRA'S DEMAND

THE fight was won, but no joy vibrated in the memory. An empty victory. He had saved the project—saved his work where once his heart and all his soul had been. Yet he felt robbed—cheated of his dream.

Mere chance had given him the triumph over the Consolidated. In nine other cases they would win. They were the Entrenched. They would go on grabbing up all the water in the state, not caring who might starve for the lack of it. His excited imagination saw them lifting whole streams, dumping them into vast pits, holding them. They would continue doing this—continue thinking of their own interest, fighting for their own ends. Nothing else counts.

But he had done the same thing. The comparison loitered accusingly in the shadow of his mind. When she, who was dearer to him than life, lay dying; when Katy's hand, folding under his, had touched with such poignant anguish on his love, there had been no contest; no moment of hesitance. His heart struck boldly for itself; for her that was its pulse. He did as Anson did, as Dunlap did—chose for himself. Katy needed it—the whole world could be damned. He defended himself angrily: "Life forced me to it! Life bullied me—"

His thought mocked, "Life! Bunk! Hell of a lot life cares about you—you or an ant—what's the odds? Step on one—millions to fill the vacancy.

"Life doesn't need you. If you can't stand the gaff you're privileged to go. No compulsion about staying. You don't count except to yourself. Suppose you are robbed—what of it? Who cares?"

This notion dropped with an appalling depression upon him. It was the morning after the frenzied meeting of the farmers. The blazing excitement left him exhausted, harried. He went about the big living room gathering up books, his papers, packing them haphazard in boxes.

“Get out of here—quick—stayed too long—” But even now with this bleakness of leaving; this torturing compulsion to walk about the room touching familiar things—even now he was aware of his own furious hunger for happiness; his insistent longing for joy, imperious as the need of a tree for air and the sun.

He had always wanted this—always counted on that mighty day when he, Mister Denny, would have a purse full of money; mind strong with power; heart jaunty with gladness. Gee, the fun they'd have—the places they'd see! Glorious old world!

Queenie had been like that—cherry hat, black curls, and her lips all red, calling gayly, “Oh, leave the dishes, Sid.”

Whenever Denny thought of his mother he was a youngster again, filled with his childish adoration for the happy, sweet creature who had made chocolate after school and put big, sugary snails before him. He remembered her that last night, her cheek and her fragrant hair next to his, kissing him and then floating away on that beam of golden light. After that, Queenie in her coffin, the arrested smile on her beautiful face.

He could feel an unbearable pity in that now. This was the nearest he ever came to judging Queenie—to think of her with a resentment that Life had mocked her so.

Queenie was 28 then, about a year older than himself. And what a thing of joy she was and of gayety! How carelessly Life had ignored her; brought to nothing all her bright charm—dismissed her.

He thought bitterly, “Life is a blunderer—a waster—”

Yes, and Life had no right to take away his dream; Life was stupid not to accept the gift he brought; to turn it back on him leaving this immense, aching destitution closing drearily like gray walls about him.

He would go away with Steve—leave everything behind. This was his thought, but whenever he said, “I'll get away—down in the valley—” he was confronted with Petra's image.

She was present in all his dreary summing up of the hectic year just over—she was present but he had not admitted her across the threshold. She could wait—no—cowardly to do that—go and see her—explain things.

And suddenly it occurred to him that Petra and her father would very soon learn what he had done. They would be indignant—feel that he had injured them. Peter Channing had given him this job: Peter Channing was interested in the Inde-

pendent. Would he be vitally affected by this revelation of the enormous crime of Murray Anson?

Denny went to the phone. He'd tell Petra, himself—tell her before she heard it from an outsider. It was but 9 o'clock but "Miss Channing was out. She didn't say when she would return."

A few moments later, Denny opened the door to her . . . not to the radiant, golden Petra, whose lure dwelt an exotic flower in his senses—but to a Petra with pale face and brimming eyes that turned to him with a shocked, terrible hurt.

This coming was so unexpected he stared at her, wondering why she leaned on the chair trembling and frowning to keep back tears.

"Sit down, Petra," he said gently. "Why, what is the matter?"

"Matter! Oh, Diddle! Have you gone mad?" She turned quickly, hiding her face against her shoulder, her voice breaking, "You saw this? Oh, Diddle, tell me it's not true! You didn't do this? You wouldn't do this to me—"

She held out a morning paper. On the front page were pictures of Murray Anson and James Dunlap. Across the top in big, heavy type, "Murder Charges Pending Against Consolidated Head."

It gripped him cold. Blazing through three columns—red hot—the gigantic conspiracy—killing of Martin Loop and Snag Wilson. Then—"papers and letters discovered and now held by Denman Brooks confirm the guilt. Dunlap confronted with this evidence broke down and volunteered a complete confession. The lawyer then collapsed and is now in a Merced hospital under guard."

Further down the column was a list of the men controlling the Consolidated and the Independent. Peter Channing's name appeared.

Denny raced through it, the account taking him back to the violence of the night. He was unaware of Petra watching him with frightened, pleading eyes until she had come over and caught his arm, voice sobbing, "Diddle—you did do it? You did it?"

"Yes—"

"Oh, Diddle! And the papers?"

"Yes—"

Her hands pulled at him, "Diddle—oh—oh, if you knew what

I've been through. Oh, this is terrible, Diddle. And those papers—you won't bring this charge of murder, will you?"

"I haven't anything to do with that, Petra."

"But you have the proofs. And they'll bring Peter into it, perhaps. Diddle, darling, you don't want that. What good will it do now? Diddle—those papers—give them to me—"

He drew back with the shock but she clung to both his arms and was looking up at him, the brown eyes frantic, the gold hair fallen across her forehead.

"The papers, Petra? Do you know what you're asking?"

"Diddle—you know what I mean. You must! You must! You can't do this. Peter's life will be ruined and mine and yours. Diddle, darling—give them to me— Oh, you will—"

## CHAPTER CXXV

### PLEADING

As Petra spoke, the fine black brows met but still the tears wet her lashes.

She lowered her head quickly against him, whispering, "Diddle, dearest—how could you do this thing—didn't you know what it meant to Peter and to both of us?"

"The home we were to have? Everything— But you didn't think of this? You'll give me the papers? Oh, quick, Diddle, darling!"

He stepped away from her, saying hoarsely, "Petra, don't! Why, I can't give you those papers.

"Why, they don't belong to me.

"Why, you don't know what you're asking. . . ."

"Yes—oh, Diddle, I'm only asking—only asking you to do this little thing—just the papers.

"And it means everything to us. Oh, Diddle—if you saw Peter when he read that paper! And the things he said. And you took the job to betray him.

"And you could have gone to him first. He would have fixed everything right, Diddle—but you didn't!

"You did this terrible thing to us. But he'll fix it right even now. Just give me the papers and it will be all right."

"Petra—did your father send you to say these things to me? Did he?"

She dropped her eyes quickly, a flush running to her forehead.

"Diddle—oh, can't you see it's just to make us happy? Peter wants it fixed. He can arrange it.

"Everything will be wonderful again and Peter will get you another job somewhere right in the city."

Even through his shock, there stirred a breathless amazement. She thought he would take another job from Peter!

But she was looking up to him, smile on the lips and in the dimples. "So you see, Diddle, that's why I want them. Because I love you. And you'll give them to me?"

She put out her hands to his. He gripped them.

"Petra, do you know what you're asking? You're asking me to stand in with a murderer."

"Oh, no. Don't say that, Diddle."

"But you know what Murray Anson and Dunlap did. You know all about Martin Loop and the blowing of the dam."

The words were now pelting with an angry passion through his teeth. "Murray Anson made me out a murderer and a fool, Petra! You know that!"

"And you're asking me to destroy evidence belonging to the state. You want me to make a criminal of myself—to turn around and be a dog for Anson! Petra, is this what you want of me?"

It was tragic to him that she should come like this—that she should add more shame to the feeling that had once so swept him—that she should flaunt in his tormented eyes all this incredible shallowness, this utter poverty of spirit.

His fingers drove against the slender wrists. She flung her head back, her cheeks stained and her eyes darting.

"Petra, that's what you ask!"

"No—no—no—oh, Diddle, don't look at me so! No, I only want the papers so that Peter can fix it all up.

"You don't want to bring this murder charge. Didn't you say that? Then why won't you give up the papers? Why are you holding them?"

She worked her hands free, tried to reach them to his neck. "Oh, Diddle, think what it means to me. Don't you care about that?"

"Think of the position I'm in. Oh, you're just breaking my heart. Give them to me—please."

He walked to the window, stood leaning against its frame.

And he knew that as he went from her thus sharply, an anger flashed and stiffened through her.

Her lips parted. The silence between them was a wire charged with a suppressed, incredulous fury.

He heard her step, then her voice low, astonished, "Diddle, you don't mean this?"

"Yes—I mean it, Petra."

"Diddle, you can't mean it! You're ruining both our lives."

"I have to do this, Petra."

He wasn't looking at her now. She stood at his desk, crumpling a piece of paper in her hands.

Suddenly she went up and touched his arm, her voice shaking.

"Diddle, doing what you have to do! You have to crush me, do you? You have to put everything before me?"

"Why, we were to be married soon and I come here asking a little thing like this and you won't even do this for me!"

"If you cared for me, Petra, you wouldn't ask me for those papers! You'd despise me if I gave them to you."

"Despise you! Oh, Diddle, despise you if you were a little kind? If you thought of me first just once? Why, do you realize what you've done to my father? And to our family?"

"You came to our home and then do a thing like this! And now, you're turning from me?"

Tears trembled in her eyes. Her slim hands worked with the button of his coat.

He wanted to push her hands from his; to shout, "Yes! Yes! Understand it! Turning from you! Oh, Lord!"

Her voice came now like a searing breath near his face—a torment that stifled him.

"But you won't do that, Diddle? Oh, you can't. Not after this year, Diddle. And I gave up every one for you.

"You know how I care—you made me care so much. You won't take my life and ruin it—

"Why, the home we were to have and you right here in the city and everything just as I want it to be.

"Peter would give all that to both of us. Diddle, you're throwing all that away.

"You don't mean to, do you, Diddle? You won't refuse me this little thing?"

"You won't belittle me before every one. Diddle, you love me—oh, you love me enough to do this?"

Her face raised—her hand crept upward. "Give them to me—"

He looked at her coldly and put her hand down. "I'm not going to give you the papers, Petra. I haven't them to give.

"They aren't mine now! And Murray Anson is not going to get them!"

She drew back sharply, shook her hand with a violence from him, stood there quivering and staring.

"You do this to me, Diddle! You dare to speak like this?"

"I told you, Petra. You wouldn't understand."

"No—but do you understand what you're doing? Do you realize that my father's fortune and mine is at stake?"



"The fortune of a hundred men—even their lives—have been ruined by Murray Anson. Do you realize that, Petra? I think you do."

"You put them ahead of me? You put them before my father?"

"You mean to say you choose those wretched farmers before me and after all they did to you?"

When he only stared in amazement she came up, her head tossed back, eyes quickened and an angry streak of color across her face.

"Diddle, do you mean this? You think you have a right to do this? You think you can choose always what you want and I will come up and say it's all right? Do you think that?"

She was tall now—not clinging and no quiver across her lips. "Diddle, answer—do you mean to choose them before me?"

"To go and poke yourself off with those wretched people and betray my father like this?"

He could have turned from her in an utter revulsion— He said only, "I've said all I have to say."

"Oh, you have! And you think I shall say now that it's all right! Come into our home and do this and it's all right!"

"Put your job before me and it's all right! Poke yourself in the mountains and leave me months alone. That's all right."

"You think you can put everything before me—do you think that? Oh, you thought you could put your sister before me in the shameful way you did! And that was all right."

"You thought you would bring a helpless cripple to me in our new home and that would be lovely—just lovely for me! But I mustn't say a word!"

"Now you think you can put these farmers and this disgraceful business before my happiness? You think I will stand this, too?"

But Denny's mind closed over the mortal hurt—the outrage to the beauty of his life.

"A cripple—lovely for me—" She had gone to Katy when Katy lay dying and perhaps she had even said things like this to Katy!

And he had kissed her—this radiant thing—thought her the sweetest and the loveliest—buried his face a thousand times in the soft golden hair—

He heard her voice rising—going back again, now pleading,

now shaming and taunting him—and then her lips parting, her head flung back.

She was moving to the door. And suddenly she pressed her face against it, sobbing, her hand reaching out to him.

“Oh, Diddle, you won’t do this to me? Oh, after all this year—oh, you’re going to give them to me?”

He stood motionless, waiting an eternity—hearing her voice trailing in a cry, then the door opening and a frantic, “You’ll let me go, Diddle. No—come.”

He made no move.

## CHAPTER CXXVI

### DREAMS

HE waited for her to go, but there turned suddenly to him her pale, accusing face, eyes narrowed with fury.

"You'll let me go? Oh—you are going to let me go! And you think I'll come again and plead with you to kiss me? You think that? Oh—that's what you think? Indeed! Oh, indeed!"

The low, shrilling moan quivered along his nerves. A moment she stood beating her hands together, her taut figure beseeching and accusing him.

Her head tossed with a violence. Swift, agitated steps running down the hall, echoing brutally in his ears, long after their sound was vanished.

He went over and closed the door. And he stood with his hands on the knob—stood there a long while.

Finished—thing of summer and the sun ended in this rude, sordid gust that left his pulses shaking, but in his heart only a bleak absence of emotion.

And in his mind a shamed wonder that he had been so charmed—so held through all these months.

A strained quiet settled about him—a remoteness—a silence gashed open roughly—

"A cripple! You thought you could bring a cripple to our new home and that would be lovely!"

Oh, the astounding, shabby insolence reaching out and striking at this dear holiness.

A fierceness shot through him; a wild, blazing shame. In the ashes, a savage relief.

Gone! Swift, agitated steps running down the hall—running from him. Free—released now—

He went on packing, a sense of futility, of defeat, pressing about his mind. Life was all drab, all disillusion.

And then an awakening thing happened. It brought a terrible melting into Denny's throat, a strange, half-glad softening, though it was a softening of anguish to his heart.

Clay Andrews on the eve of his return to New York dropped in for a farewell.

The sight of him went rushing through Denny with an uncontrollable loosening of the harsh tension of these weeks.

He lived again in that frightful moment when Clay phoned asking for Katy.

"And could he come right out? Telegrams? No—he hadn't received any—"

Then the wild joy in his voice breaking into an awful, "What! Oh—my God!"

No other word. But late—very late when only Denny and Steve and Joan were there, he had come.

All night he knelt there, his hand on hers that was so cold, so white, his face hidden in his arms.

And he had kissed that hand, and kissed it.

But he only looked at the beautiful face—Katy's face with the lips so red, the bright chestnut curls, blue eyes closed. A radiant, uplifted peace touched all over its still gladness.

He had looked at that and looked until the sweet wonder of it went into his heart and dwelt there a living sadness and a living beauty.

Now—they said little but stood gripping each other's hand, the pause between them laden—

After a while, "I wanted to ask you something, Den. I'd like to give a couple of beds at the Children's hospital.

"I think she'd like that. I'd like to name them for her. Would that be all right?"

Denny got up and walked over to the window. Finally he said: "Gee, Clay, you're a prince!"

A trembling swept him; mad, aching tears at his eyes.

He looked at Andy's drawn, eager face—dark, almost gaunt, but the eyes lighted.

"Funny, Den, isn't it? Funny, I should have such a notion—but I feel that she knows—that she cares.

"Glad I feel like that—don't know what I'd do without that feeling—"

It gripped Denny mightily—even to the soul. He had a wish to reach out; to lay hold of this enduring beauty.

And this was like the wish that moved him to Joan; that made him long for her.

Long after Clay Andrews left, the melting, half glad anguish

ran through all his thoughts and raised them. No paltry disillusion here—no drab futility.

Queer fellow, Andy! Always was. Now his cynicism giving way before a faith that brooked death; a love that reached beyond it.

Katy gone, yet Andy holding to his dream; glorifying the beauty of it; wishing to keep the dear thought of her alive.

Dream unconquered by the starkest of all finalities.

Denny's mind stirred as though a white flame mocked the gloom of all his previous thoughts.

A while ago he had listened to Petra's steps running down the hall—a while ago he had summed up the year's fight and felt that he was cheated; his highest efforts mocked.

He said bitterly, "Life doesn't want us or our dreams. Life is a blunderer; a failure."

But now—well, perhaps, life only needs a few more fellows like Clay—keep the torch lighted even though the wind of all mortality let loose against it.

A year ago he had felt himself one of these dauntless ones. Why, that day in August when Chisborough said, "It's the kind of work you're looking for. There's \$1250 a month in it," Denny had dashed down those steps half crazy with jubilation.

"Twelve fifty a month! Gee—tell that to Katy-kid—wouldn't she just go out of her head though!"

And he had hurried across the campus. The clock in the old Bacon library chimed.

Oh—Joan was at the barn—she'd just be leaving—tell it to her, too!

They had walked to the water. Joan had suddenly taken his hand, eyes luminous with trust.

"Oh!" she said merrily when he had poured out with a high young confidence the dreams he held—

Katy cured; big project put over—"Why—oh, you'll do more than that, Denny—much more!"

And he thought so himself. A year ago. The young, serene arrogance gone now. Or so he felt.

Then came a telegram from Jerome Cummings and a letter from Berne Melrose.

There went vibrating through him, tingling to every nerve a breath of the old exultance.

He heard again the harsh voice of the cranes, ring of pick

and shovel mingling with the vast, eternal song of the mountains.

Cummings wired:

They've kidnaped Dunlap from the hospital. Anson skipped and Nikoli Blumens can't be found.

Trying to make murder charges impossible for us to prove, but ready to settle damages.

Channing acting for them. He's in the clear. Offers million and a half. We'll get two and a half.

But it was the letter from Berne Melrose that brought the exuberant, sparkling, "Gee!" to Denny's lips; opened again a spring of gladness in his veins.

Letter short, to the point, like the rugged old viking who sent it.

"Dear Mr. Brooks:

"Four months ago this board demanded the surrender of your contract.

"And this board now realizes the crime and injustice of its action. It is herewith sending you the salary due for the complete term of the contract.

"We do not ask you to return and finish the work of construction which now, because of your disclosures, we are able to resume.

"But I recall with humiliation and regret the night when you said to me that this work was your work and this job your job.

"This board most earnestly hopes that you are still of this opinion and that you will be inclined to complete your undertaking. Will you answer?

"BERNE MELROSE."

If he could only have turned with that to some one! If he could only have laughed and twitched the paper with a truculent glad, "Well, what did I tell you? Guess we get by!"

That evening he went to Joan—just to show it—just to ask what she thought—just to see her eyes brimming with gladness . . . tears of gladness for him.

They walked to the park. Quiet path tufted and pungent with leaves. The moon dropped pale shafts of silver light

through the branches. Joan strained her eyes over the letter. Then Denny struck a match, saw her lips part with an eager trembling, heard her low, half-sobbing, all-radiant: "Denny!"

Then Joan looked up. Such a light on her face of tenderness and beauty. She dropped her eyes quickly. She said . . . "Oh, how good this is! How glad I am for you, Denny." Much more she said. Like a melting song between them.

Then he asked quietly: "Is it such a victory, Joan, when you lose all you loved in waging the fight?"

"Don't say that, Denny." Her hands closed on his: "It would break her heart to think you conquered. It would mock that dear, brave life of hers. You've only just begun. . . . All those hopes of yours! You can't step out because the way is hard. Not you, Denny!"

Unconsciously she came close—she reached her hands along his arm. And now the lovely eyes turned up to his. They were alight with love—all Joan's love.

He saw with a wild, startled joy. He said: "Joany!"—and framed her face in his hands as he had that night so long ago on the hillside. He held it gently, dwelling on its beauty—drinking of its tears. How he had longed for this!

Joan closed her eyes. Then his heart cried out to her: "Oh, Joan—let me see!"

And the longing for her and the overpowering loneliness melted in a low sob, "Joan—Joan!"

His arms reached out and covered her. "Joany, let me see!"

Her eyes opened tremulous—alight—wondering—then gave him all their peace—and all their flame.

THE END

## *There's More to Follow!*

More stories of the sort you like; more, probably, by the author of this one; more than 500 titles all told by writers of world-wide reputation, in the Authors' Alphabetical List which you will find on the *reverse side* of the wrapper of this book. Look it over before you lay it aside. There are books here you are sure to want—some, possibly, that you have *always* wanted.

It is a *selected* list; every book in it has achieved a certain measure of *success*.

The Grosset & Dunlap list is not only the greatest Index of Good Fiction available, it represents in addition a generally accepted Standard of Value. It will pay you to

### *Look on the Other Side of the Wrapper!*

*In case the wrapper is lost write to the publishers for a complete catalog*



---

---

# RUBY M. AYRES' NOVELS

---

---

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list

---

---

THE LITTL'ST LOVER

CANDLE LIGHT

THE MAN WITHOUT A HEART

THE ROMANCE OF A ROGUE

THE MATHERSON MARRIAGE

RICHARD CHATTERTON

A BACHELOR HUSBAND

THE SCAR

THE MARRIAGE OF BARRY WICKLOW

THE UPHILL ROAD

WINDS OF THE WORLD

THE SECOND HONEYMOON

THE PHANTOM LOVER

---

---

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

---

---

---

---

# ZANE GREY'S NOVELS

---

---

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset and Dunlap's list.

---

---

THE CALL OF THE CANYON

WANDERER OF THE WASTELAND

TO THE LAST MAN

THE MYSTERIOUS RIDER

THE MAN OF THE FOREST

THE DESERT OF WHEAT

THE U. P. TRAIL

WILDFIRE

THE BORDER LEGION

THE RAINBOW TRAIL

THE HERITAGE OF THE DESERT

RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE

THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS

THE LAST OF THE PLAINSMEN

THE LONE STAR RANGER

DESERT GOLD

BETTY ZANE

THE DAY OF THE BEAST

\* \* \* \* \*

LAST OF THE GREAT SCOUTS

The life story of "Buffalo Bill" by his sister Helen Cody Wetmore, with Foreword and conclusion by Zane Grey.

## ZANE GREY'S BOOKS FOR BOYS

KEN WARD IN THE JUNGLE

THE YOUNG LION HUNTER

THE YOUNG FORESTER

THE YOUNG PITCHER

THE SHORT STOP

THE RED-HEADED OUTFIELD AND OTHER  
BASEBALL STORIES

---

---

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

---

---

---

---

# ETHEL M. DELL'S NOVELS

---

---

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list.

---

---

## CHARLES REX

The struggle against a hidden secret and the love of a strong man and a courageous woman.

## THE TOP OF THE WORLD

Tells of the path which leads at last to the "top of the world," which it is given to few seekers to find.

## THE LAMP IN THE DESERT

Tells of the lamp of love that continues to shine through all sorts of tribulations to final happiness.

## GREATHEART

The story of a cripple whose deformed body conceals a noble soul.

## THE HUNDREDTH CHANCE

A hero who worked to win even when there was only "a hundredth chance."

## THE SWINDLER

The story of a "bad man's" soul revealed by a woman's faith.

## THE TIDAL WAVE

Tales of love and of women who learned to know the true from the false.

## THE SAFETY CURTAIN

A very vivid love story of India. The volume also contains four other long stories of equal interest.

---

---

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

---

---

---

---

# THE NOVELS OF TEMPLE BAILEY

---

---

May be had wherever books are sold. Ask for Grosset & Dunlap's list.

---

---

"Although my ancestry is all of New England, I was born in the old town of Petersburg, Virginia. I went later to Richmond and finally at the age of five to Washington, D. C., returning to Richmond for a few years in a girl's school, which was picturesquely quartered in General Lee's mansion.

## PEACOCK FEATHERS

The eternal conflict between wealth and love. Jerry, the idealist who is poor, loves Mimi, a beautiful, spoiled society girl.

## THE DIM LANTERN

The romance of little Jane Barnes who is loved by two men.

## THE GAY COCKADE

Unusual short stories where Miss Bailey shows her keen knowledge of character and environment, and how romance comes to different people.

## THE TRUMPETER SWAN

Randy Paine comes back from France to the monotony of every-day affairs. But the girl he loves shows him the beauty in the common-place.

## THE TIN SOLDIER

A man who wishes to serve his country, but is bound by a tie he cannot in honor break—that's Derry. A girl who loves him, shares his humiliation and helps him to win—that's Jean. Their love is the story.

## MISTRESS ANNE

A girl in Maryland teaches school, and believes that work is worthy service. Two men come to the little community; one is weak, the other strong, and both need Anne.

## CONTRARY MARY

An old-fashioned love story that is nevertheless modern.

## GLORY OF YOUTH

A novel that deals with a question, old and yet ever new—how far should an engagement of marriage bind two persons who discover they no longer love.

---

---

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

---

---







