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THE TENTH WOMAN

BOOKS BY  
HARRIET T. COMSTOCK

A LITTLE DUSKY HERO  
A SON OF THE HILLS  
AT THE CROSSROADS  
CAMP BRAVE PINE  
JANET OF THE DUNES  
JOYCE OF THE NORTH WOODS  
MAM'SELLE JO  
PRINCESS RAGS AND TATTERS  
THE MAN THOU GAVEST  
THE PLACE BEYOND THE WINDS  
THE SHIELD OF SILENCE  
THE TENTH WOMAN  
THE VINDICATION  
UNBROKEN LINES







ROSE-ANN, THE TENTH WOMAN

*“Nine women out of ten would have acted differently”*

# The Tenth Woman

By

Harriet T. Comstock



*Frontispiece*

by

*George W. Gage*

Garden City                      New York  
Doubleday, Page & Company  
1923

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With sincere affection I dedicate this work to

THE HOUSE ON THE HILL

It is such a kind and friendly house.

“It gossips with the trees.” Beneath its sheltering roof the old and the new merge into one. Its shadows of the past are tinged gloriously by the sunshine of the present.

For all that it has meant to me and given to me I am grateful.

HARRIET T. COMSTOCK

New York

Jan. 12, 1923



THE TENTH WOMAN





# THE TENTH WOMAN

## CHAPTER I

**T**HE branch road of the Boston & Essex Line ended abruptly at the dun-coloured station of Middle Essex. The main line ended at Essex. So sudden was the branch's termination that it gave one the impression of a jog.

Beyond the station, to the west, lay pleasant pastures and woody hills, rich in rocks and sturdy trees—wild flowers grew everywhere but the ground was uncultivated and was held, by far-visioned owners, for the future; in the meantime the section was known as Far Essex.

In front of the dull-toned station, and running to the east, was the Main, and only, street of the township of Middle Essex. In well-kept and dignified beauty the road took its course between plume-like elms, past green and fragrant lawns. Just as it had a hundred years ago; as it would, so it suggested, a hundred years hence.

The first estate one came to after leaving the station belonged to the Compton family. The stately lawns and house were cared for by a faithful old servant; the garden bloomed early and late, but for over twenty years the owners had lived abroad and left their affairs in the hands of the law firm, Dalton and Dalton, of Boston.

That any one should choose to live abroad who legitimately belonged to Middle Essex was a matter rarely discussed but deeply resented by other Middle Essexians.

The head of the family of Compton had always been a queer, moody man taking no interest in public affairs, feared and obeyed blindly by his meek wife; a man from whom his only son, Barry, shrank and before whom his servants trem-

bled. He was not missed from Middle Essex; he was merely resented; but when he died it was hoped that his widow and son would return to their native land. This had not come to pass and no one but the lawyers and, perhaps, the caretaker, knew their whereabouts.

Between the Compton place and the hilltop there was a stretch of lovely pasture crowned on the right by a wooded knoll in the heart of which lay a tiny lake, like a hidden jewel.

The Trevall homestead dominated, triumphantly, the crest of the hill. A dignified, colonial edifice was the Trevall's and nearly two hundred years old. It still preserved, through all accumulation of modern devices for comfort, the sacred relics of the past. In the brick oven the Christmas turkey was always roasted; open fireplaces played their active part even while the hot-water furnace sputtered its contempt.

The road, after leaving the Trevall acres, seemed to get absent-minded. It sagged a bit and edged, in friendly fashion, to the very doorsteps of lesser homes where, behind discreetly drawn shutters and closed portals, old families hid, even from their kith and kin, the devices made necessary by diminishing incomes and proud refusals to adapt themselves to change.

But the road recovered its dignity farther on and became a respectable highway as it entered Essex.

At Essex were the Primary and Grammar schools; the three churches, Presbyterian, Unitarian, and Catholic; the First National Bank, of which John Trevall was president; the woollen mills of the Conklin and Conklin Company; some very good stores, and the houses of young married people.

Some of these young people were strangers to Essex and, indeed, to New England. They saw no reason for apology for their pretty homes with small, tidy lawns and embowered porches, but those citizens who came of the Middle Essex stock regarded Essex as a sort of purgatory: a temporary test of character and business genius. They existed merely until such time as they could afford to build in Middle Essex and begin to carry on the traditions; be sure of their neigh-

bours and forget the trying ordeal of the purgatorial state through which they had passed.

Of course one could go by the branch road from Essex to Middle Essex—that was what the Branch was constructed for, and many availed themselves of the convenience—but those who could afford to do so motored into town and thus escaped contact with strangers who, while most desirable from a business point of view, were not eligible as social equals.

John Trevall always rode to Essex in his small but expensive car. He naturally resented automobiles as he did all other innovations, but when they became necessities he procured the best.

Often one or the other of his daughters acted as chauffeur for Trevall; when they were not at the wheel, a young man-of-all-work, who had had this detested job thrust upon him, scowlingly took command.

From the moment the door of his house closed upon Trevall, he became another personality. A citizen who saw his duty and did it serenely; a business man, keen and of iron integrity. But when at six o'clock his eyes rested, from afar, upon the door of his house—a doorway mentioned in most books dealing with New England architecture: when the shining knocker on that door caught his eye—a knocker that had been lifted by the hands of Emerson, Longfellow, and several Harvard presidents, Trevall became himself once more. Himself.

Inside, the stately rooms of the quiet house presented an almost painful order and cleanliness. The shining quality of mahogany and brass suggested backache and set mouths, but Trevall never got that suggestion. As things had been, they were, and always would be. They represented a static state; a state he revered.

Trevall always went at once, upon reaching home, to his bedchamber. There he dropped his business garments and reappeared later in clothing more befitting his surroundings. He then descended to the living room and his family. He was always greeted as though he had been away on a long trip.

Faith Trevall, John's wife, sat, according to the temperature, by the open fire or the open west window. She always sat in a low rocker from whose back swung a rather giddy silk workbag. When Trevall entered the room Faith rose and went toward him.

"Tired, dear?" she asked, raising her sweet face.

"No, my dear," Trevall would answer, and bend to kiss her—on the forehead.

Sometimes Prudence, the older daughter, would be in the room; occasionally Rose-Ann the younger; but they never interrupted this rite of arrival.

A newcomer to Middle Essex often contemplated Faith Trevall with puzzled amusement—she did not seem exactly to fit into the general scheme, but the old families had long ago accepted the little woman as something Trevall had acquired and moulded into shape.

When she was Faith Adams, and seventeen, she had been pretty, rather giddy, and exquisitely pliable. She was a daughter of the haphazard state of New York and in her veins ran a mingling of blood that might have caused trouble had she not been, at seventeen and a half, appropriated by Trevall, incorporated into his traditions, and run into form. She had apparently congealed and, thereafter, honoured her station.

There had been seven children born to Trevall and his wife. Five of them died early in life, and the neat little row of graves in the Presbyterian Churchyard still had power to contract the throat of the mother.

The sixth child, Prudence, survived, and was all that might be expected. She gave no trouble from the hour of her birth; she did what was legitimate and proper, and seemed to be the recompense for all that had been denied. For ten years this model child was the only child and lived her serene days in the old house without interruption, and then—Rose-Ann was born! After Rose-Ann anything else in the form of offspring would have been superfluous. From the moment of her birth she dominated the household.

She was so pretty that she startled the family, who re-

garded beauty and happiness as obstacles to virtue. She completely obliterated Prudence by this quality of loveliness. When life smiled upon Rose-Ann she smiled and coquetted with life, but she reacted to discipline with roars of rage—no other word described her tones. She hungered for adventure and counted not the cost, but monotony drove her to actions bordering upon impishness.

She had all childish diseases in terrifying rapidity and intensity. She walked early and talked earlier. Her first word was “why” and that was the keynote of her career.

Rose-Ann, in after life, always said that her first impressions were received from a prostrate position. Lying on her stomach, her small chin resting in her hands, she regarded events at an angle that probably accounted for many of her conclusions.

Out of doors this position was utilized for reading and gathering knowledge of animal and insect life. The uplifted feet indicating the state of mind, as a dog’s tail indicates his.

It was wonderful what sounds were discerned when one laid her ear to the warm earth. The sap running up into the trees, the scurry of little wild feet near, oh! so near to the slim, quiet form, and the bursting of the buds in the spring.

Indoors the prostrate position was regarded as the best possible angle from which to view the mysteries of the open fire.

Prudence, when she was fifteen and Rose-Ann five, became sedately interested in the fire revelations; they stirred her sluggish imagination, but that sterling steed of Prudence’s was always well in control.

“The things are not *in* the fire, Rose-Ann,” Prudence primly stated. “You only think they are, while you play.”

“They are in the fire. I couldn’t put them there. It’s only when I see them there that I can play,” Rose-Ann retorted, and kicked her heels aloft as she spoke.

“Then—you tell *lies*, Rose-Ann.” Prudence knew neither gray nor light blue in virtue. “And little girls who tell *lies*——”

“Shut up!” Rose-Ann suddenly broke in, “When you talk something happens to things in the fire—they get blurry.”

This was reported to headquarters.

“She does lie, Mother, really,” Prudence explained with tears in her cool steady eyes, “and—and I haven’t told you before but she says worse things than ‘shut up’—she once said—‘damn.’ It frightened her after she said it—she cried, and when I asked her where she had heard that word she said—it *was in her*; she only had to take it out, and that there were many she could take out if she wanted to; worse ones!”

This was alarming. Mrs. Trevall, with an insane desire to laugh, controlled the tendency by undue severity.

Rose-Ann was dignifiedly spanked and sent to the “upper chamber” over the living room to think the matter over and perchance find forgiveness.

Things were in the Trevall family as they always had been. Virtues, sins, punishments, and—reactions. Nothing changed.

Now in that upper chamber, sacred to guests of honour and freshly spanked youngsters, there was a hole in the floor. This was covered by a thin sheeting of tin and a beautiful knitted rug. A stovepipe, in long-past days, had made its way to the chimney by this route.

The day that Rose-Ann came into contact with authority as it dealt with blasphemy, she discovered the hole by pure good luck. She was howling and kicking when a well-aimed blow disclosed the medium through which curiosity could leak down and information ooze up.

Rose-Ann ceased her outrageous tantrum so suddenly that people below should have taken warning, but they did not; they just went calmly on—talking.

John Trevall had entered the room. Rose-Ann knew exactly what was occurring. He would stand in the middle of the room until Mother lifted her face and asked if he were tired. He would say “no” and kiss the forehead of Mother and then go to his chair, across the hearth from Mother’s

rocker, and beckon Prudence to him. After being assured of Prudence's virtuous conduct he would kiss her and ask for Rose-Ann.

That was exactly what occurred while Rose-Ann listened. "John, I had to punish the child."

There was a tone in Mother's voice that Rose-Ann later understood.

Then followed a detailed account of the scandalous actions of Rose-Ann while Trevall tapped the arms of his chair with thin white fingers.

"I—I spanked her, John—and she is so little and—soft." Mother was crying.

"She thinks she sees and hears things," Mrs. Trevall pleaded.

"She cannot too early learn to distinguish between what she thinks and what she knows." That was Father, of course, and the words were punctuated by taps.

"But who does know, really, John?"

Rose-Ann waited breathlessly. That was her particular stumbling block—to think that her mother felt that way, too! That was the hour of Rose-Ann's intellectual revolt.

"It is very simple," John Trevall replied. "Truth is simple."

The small rebel above, on her stomach, longed to resort to her time-honoured *roar*, but she conquered the impulse. She solemnly swore, then and there, never again to indulge in that relief—it attracted attention! She would never again tell any one about the pictures in the fire nor the queer sounds that birds made in their nests.

She would keep things to herself—no one should get the best of her in the future. She would never, God hearing her, make her mother cry again if she could help it.

From five to twelve Rose-Ann was a silent, wide-eyed child given to most alarming symptoms.

She took the stern religion of her family hard, as she did measles and whooping cough, and she gloried in it.

"Why, I wouldn't be a Unitarian for anything, Mother," she confided; "it's too easy—I like hell fire"—the religion

of the Trevalls was exactly the same as it had been from the time of Jonathan Edwards. Fierce, hot, and picturesque; it was their one dramatic indulgence.

"Oh! Rose-Ann," Mrs. Trevall was shocked as people often are when their creeds turn about and give a direct blow. "Hell is not a thing to like—it's a fearful warning—a thing we don't talk about——"

"Why not?" Rose-Ann asked. "Someone's got to go there or it—it would dry up—so I think we ought to talk about it and get—acquainted.

"Why"—here Rose-Ann's eyes took on that look that made Mrs. Trevall's lips soften—"I've got it all pictured out as real as can be.

"Hell is like our furnace—and by the door stands someone shovelling folks in——"

"Rose-Ann—stop!" Mrs. Trevall was trembling.

"That's only the way I picture it, Mother. I have to have something familiar. Sometimes it's so funny, Mother—but sometimes I try and see who is on the shovel—but never is it any one I know. Isn't hell for our people, Mother?"

"It's for sinners," Mrs. Trevall replied weakly; "and there are sinners in all classes, Rose-Ann dear, but—but don't you ever picture heaven?"

"I try to, but it seems so—so stupid. Honestly, Mother; and maybe I am a sinner and being prepared for the shovel, but I don't think I'd mind burns, and hoppings around to cool off, half so much as to be bored stiff."

This conversation was repeated to Mr. Trevall in the living room that evening. Indeed, the doings of Rose-Ann were the usual topic of conversation when John and Faith sat alone, and they were often alone now, for at the age of twenty-two Prudence had married the head clerk in her father's bank and was enduring purgatorial tests in a small house in Essex. Her absence from the Trevall house had brought about changes most gratifying to Rose-Ann. Life was less complicated and dispositions were sweeter. With no one bent constantly upon doing others good, good looked



after itself. Then, too, Rose-Ann as daughter of the house had privileges. She had been offered Prudence's bedchamber, but to this she, as might have been expected, objected.

"I'd rather have the upper chamber, Mother," she explained; "please do Prue's room over for guests—they wouldn't mind."

Strange to say, Mr. Trevall agreed to this without comment, and so it was that Rose-Ann, whose dignity and conscience now recoiled from the hole in the floor still, while lying in bed, gathered valuable information.

Wide-eyed and motionless the girl, supposed to be sleeping, learned much of the true inwardness of life as it rose, broken here and there by lowered tones in the conversation carried on by her parents or their friends below.

Rose-Ann at twelve was athirst for truth; athirst for knowledge; but early she had learned that her questions more often closed doors to her than opened them. The simplest course to pursue, consequently, was to keep silent and—listen. Often she drifted into sleep with a cargo of valuable and undigested material some of which melted into dreams—wonderful dreams—but some sank into that vague region of subconsciousness and bided its time.

The evening of the day upon which Rose-Ann had confided her religious views to her mother was destined to make a deep impression upon the girl.

Mr. Trevall was tapping on the arms of his chair; the staccato raps seemed to strike on Rose-Ann's exposed nerves. When one is "all ears," sounds have terrific significance, and those sharp taps had grown, with the years, into a torment to the sensitive child. The raps punctuated the vital conversation below like audible marks; commas, semi-colons, and periods.

"She's a very strange and puzzling child," John Trevall spoke in reply to his wife's confidence; "she's a serious responsibility. It seems peculiarly hard, Faith, that you and I should have such a problem to solve."

"Perhaps we—we ought not try to solve it, John." This was daring. "She's very lovely and affectionate—though

different. She is the merriest soul, too. Her amazing ideas about religion and life do not detract from her sweetness and charm."

"She seems to me," Trevall broke in, "to be very superficial and trifling. Her 'ideas,' as you term them, are simply pert. A constant curb should be kept upon her."

"I'm not so sure about that, John. To clip and train often makes young things stronger at the roots."

This caused the listener in the bed above to raise her bare feet in an ecstasy of delighted kicks. Rose-Ann adored her mother; was beginning already to understand her.

"'As the twig is bent,'" John Trevall quoted solemnly, and then there was a pause while the tapping continued and the clicking of Faith Trevall's knitting needles kept time.

From such pauses dramatic things often evolve.

Suddenly, apropos of nothing, apparently, Faith Trevall remarked calmly:

"Old Mrs. Armstrong was here to-day, John. She toddled up the hill like a naughty, mischievous old baby. She must be ninety, if she is a day——"

"Ninety-two," Trevall corrected.

"She said such a strange thing, John. She chuckled over it—she said that Rose-Ann looks like"—the voice fell to a mere whisper—"like Aunt Theodora!"

The name struck upon Rose-Ann's waiting ears with thudding force. She had never heard it before, but it was heavy with significance.

"How can Mrs. Armstrong remember my great-aunt Theodora?" asked Trevall, and his voice was like something rigid; "she was a mere child at the time."

"The old are visioned both ways, John dear. She may remember clearly, though she were only a little child at the time."

"This is not a pleasant topic of conversation, Faith."

Trevall always snipped off conversation he did not approve as one snips a dead leaf from a bush. But Faith Trevall, just then, took no heed. She went on musingly:

"Old Mrs. Armstrong described clearly the night——" Here

a lowering of her voice caused Rose-Ann to lose a sentence or two. Then: "It was an awful thing, John, to send a young girl adrift, no matter what she had done—and at night, too."

Little, dramatic details always interested Faith Trevall.

"You surprise me, my dear," and John Trevall's voice sounded surprised; "surely you remember that it was Theodora who cut herself adrift."

"But she came back, John."

"A woman never comes back, my dear, after doing what she did!" Trevall's words struck into the quietness like icy pellets; "when one thinks of the blood that ran in her veins; of her training and opportunities—why, it was incomprehensible!" Since Trevall had not choked the subject of conversation at its birth he meant to get the best of it now and for ever. It was as if the long-dead ghost of Aunt Theodora had risen and must be definitely laid.

"She left her home and husband." Trevall's voice trembled with virtue and determination. "She ran away with a common peddler."

"Oh, not quite that, John," Faith breathlessly interjected with one of her dramatic details; "Mrs. Armstrong said he was a kind of artist or something like that."

Trevall paid no attention to the interruption.

"She tramped the countryside with him like an abandoned gypsy, and when she became weary of her evil doings, she did what was most wrong of all. Unwilling to bear the burden she had evolved for herself, she sought to make them she had injured share it with her. She placed them in a position, always the saddest, of either shielding what no right-minded persons should or doing their hard but sacred duty.

"In the name of decency and Christianity there was but one thing to do, and I am proud to say my forbears did it!" Trevall's voice clanked like an iron chain. "Blood should never weigh against justice."

Rose-Ann drew the blankets over her head. She was cold and unhappy. Muffled, however, Faith Trevall's words reached the shivering girl:

"I suppose you are right, John. I dare not question that.

But when I think of that poor child, as Mrs. Armstrong described her—I—I hate—justice!

“She stood right on the crown of the hill in front of this house, John, so Mrs. Armstrong said, and called back.” There was a pause and Trevall broke in:

“I do not wish this evil story to be repeated,” he said sternly and finally; “that you, Faith, should be interested in forgotten scandal brought to your door by a senile old creature——”

Trevall brought a “period tap” into action.

“Does Rose-Ann look like Aunt Theodora, John?” Faith was too deep in the matter to heed the efforts to distract her. This, then, was the crux of the matter.

“Does she, John?”

“How should I know? Everything relating to the unhappy woman was destroyed.”

“But did they, years after, bring her poor body back and bury it here, John?”

“If they did—the place is forgotten, Faith!” There was no relenting in Trevall’s tone.

Again Faith Trevall, as if talking to herself, spoke musingly:

“Poor, desperate child! They say she laughed and warned them that they were not through with her, she would return and have her hour yet.”

“Faith!” The tone of command at last silenced Faith Trevall and it caused Rose-Ann, in the chamber above, to experience that sensation of heat, followed by cold, that more and more her father’s overbearing personality evoked.

Slipping quietly from her bed, she ran across the hall and to the window overlooking the crown of the hill upon which Aunt Theodora had taken her last stand.

The road was like a broad band of white lying between the shadows of the tall elms, for the moon was directly overhead.

Almost it seemed, in the weird, ghostly gleam, as if a small, defiant figure stood there and a sound, perhaps the lowing of a bereft cow, rose like a desolate call from the risen dead who could find no rest; no peace.

*“I’ll have my hour yet!”*

Well, Aunt Theodora was having it now, for Rose-Ann, shivering by the window, stretched out her slim arms as if in welcome while she murmured softly:

“Aunt Theodora—here I am; Rose-Ann! I’m—sorry for you.”

## CHAPTER II

**W**HEN the clock struck ten on the night that Rose-Ann stood by the window and looked out at the crest of the hill, it did not strike just the hours; it struck a deep note that sank into the girl's consciousness and one which was destined to reverberate through all her future years.

*"You're—not—done—with—me—I'll—have—my—hour—yet!"*

Ten! Then such quiet as surely had rarely fallen upon Middle Essex.

The girl by the window trembled, while instincts never recognized before rose and overwhelmed her.

She flamed and paled; she smiled and then broke into tears; she was being absorbed by a force over which she had no control.

Between the ages of twelve and twenty Rose-Ann passed from the lank, trying type into a sweet, fascinating creature of colour and charm.

She was as utterly unlike Prudence as though no common blood ran in their veins. Prudence was stout and capable. She wore trim house gowns of her own making. Rose-Ann designed her own gowns and the village seamstress carried out her plan. They were strange garments, unlike anything female that Middle Essex had ever seen, but they seemed to be part of Rose-Ann.

"You wear no corsets!" Prudence once remarked indignantly.

"No, thank heaven," Rose-Ann flung back, "I haven't anything to hold up that my bones cannot hold." Then, unkindly, "Prudence—you eat too much. You're growing fat."

Prudence's cool eyes blazed but she made no reply.

Life was comfortable for Prudence and Albert Townsend. Investments had turned out well and the new house to be built in the future was becoming a near-by possibility. Purgatory was all but over!

There were no children to disturb and complicate the Townsend affairs. Prudence's life had flowed undisturbedly on and that made for breadth of beam and soft flesh.

Rose-Ann had gone brilliantly through the schools of Essex. She had read everything within a radius of fifteen miles and had bought books in Boston, besides. She had a carefully chosen shelf of books in the chamber above the living room and then instead of going the expected way and marrying, she suddenly announced, on her twentieth birthday, that she wanted to go to college.

This request Trevall flatly refused.

"But you wanted Prudence to go!" pleaded Rose-Ann. "You've always said that you believed women should have all the education possible."

"Would you care to go to Mt. Holyoke?" John Trevall temporized at this crisis.

"No—that is only a half-way measure," the girl retorted.

"Very well, then, Rose-Ann, you cannot leave home for any other college."

After this interview, John Trevall took the family into his confidence. Rose-Ann and her demands had disturbed him considerably and he was beginning to feel the necessity of sharing the responsibility with others.

"Why do you think she has suddenly come to this desire?" he asked.

Prudence, who was present at the time, was ready with an explanation.

"She doesn't really want *college*, Father, she wants to get away; to go to one of those dangerous universities where both men and women go!"

Trevall stared.

"Has she said anything like this to you, Prudence?"

"Yes, Father. She is restless and says that Middle Essex bores her."

John Trevall looked positively alarmed, but Faith smiled over her knitting. At this juncture Rose-Ann came in from one of her long, wind-swept walks. She looked radiant in her youth and beauty.

"Rose-Ann," John Trevall began the terrible tapping on the arms of his chair, "we've been discussing this mad idea of yours—about college."

"I thought that was settled, Father, as far as you were concerned." Rose-Ann went close to her father and smiled down upon him—her smile thrilled even him, and he resented that.

"Do you mind, Daddy," she said, "if I sit on the arm of your chair?" This would limit the tapping, she felt.

"I prefer that you draw up a chair of your own, Rose-Ann."

"Very well, Pater. Now, then, let us hear what the family have to say."

She took the family in with a sweep of her wide, friendly eyes; she removed her turban and let loose a lovely mass of short curly hair.

"Now, Sir—and family!"

Trevall never approached a subject directly when dealing with inferiors. He left ways open for them to incriminate themselves.

"Just for argument, Rose-Ann, if you were to choose a college, which one would it be?" he asked suddenly.

"I haven't quite decided which, Father. I know that I would like to go a long way from home—that would seem part of the experience. I want to live among new people; among new scenes. I want to find myself, Father, to get a good understanding of myself—be independent."

The sweet, hurried voice broke into fervent tones.

Prudence sighed—she was justified!

Mrs. Trevall sent a yearning glance toward the pretty creature pleading before a power that could never comprehend her.

"I see!" John Trevall set his strong teeth together; "you are touched with the spirit of the times."

"Yes, Father. These are *my* times."



"You—want to be free!"

"Yes, Father. What have I done that I should *not* be free? Why is it a subject of discussion?"

"Do you forget that you are a woman?" That was the thought in Trevall's mind, but he said tolerantly:

"My dear child, it is my duty as your father to protect you!"

"From what, Father?"

"From yourself, apparently, Rose-Ann. Had I found in you a sincere desire for learning, I might have reconsidered my decision, reached a few days ago, but anything that tends to draw a woman permanently from her legitimate field should be discouraged."

"But, Daddy," Rose-Ann was smiling, "who is to judge so tremendous a thing for another?"

"In this case I am, Rose-Ann."

There was never a doubt in Trevall's mind as to his eligibility as a judge.

Then Rose-Ann stood up; the others gazed affrightedly at her, for the expression on her face was new.

"You dears!" she said calmly, almost pityingly. "I wasn't going to tell you for a long time, but after all perhaps this is as good a time as any. I will be twenty-one in another year and then—I am going to college. I am thinking seriously about which one, but when the time comes I will have chosen. I will work my way through if necessary, but I am going."

"Is this a threat, Rose-Ann?" Trevall was rigid.

"No, Daddy—and family—just a statement. In a year we will all have become accustomed to the idea and Prudence will be helping me get ready."

"Rose-Ann, leave the room!" Trevall harked back to the days of spanking.

"Of course you do not really mean that, Father!" Rose-Ann held the angry man with her smiling eyes; and she did not leave the room.

The disturbing subject was not referred to again and life went smoothly on. Rose-Ann took long, lonely walks and

did most of her thinking and planning then. She was clear as to her course but she did not wish to hurt those she loved.

“I am going to have my own life,” she promised herself. “No one has a right to deny me that, but I want to take it and keep love, too, if I can.”

It was her mother at that time who caused Rose-Ann the most anxiety. There is a time in a girl's life when a mother may stand revealed as a *woman*, or she may fade into the vague realm of those who, having fulfilled their mission, become uninteresting factors in the younger life, beings to be respected, for heaven alone knows what virtues; a responsibility to be regarded with more or less irritation.

Faith Trevall was standing forth at this juncture as a vivid personality in Rose-Ann's life. She was bewildering and perplexing; she seemed to be, in a way, shining through a thin film that utterly hid her from others but revealed her to Rose-Ann.

In the girl's most trying and restive moods there was an expression on Faith Trevall's face that quivered with sympathy and hope; it seemed to hold fear, too—fear that Rose-Ann might *not* carry things to their legitimate end—a sort of protest against any weakening; an alert suggestion of readiness to spring to her aid at a crisis.

“I wish that I might take Mother with me,” the girl vaguely thought, though where and from what she did not try to explain even to herself. She only knew that while all others were unnecessary to her, her mother was becoming tremendously vital. They never discussed this new tie that was gaining strength between them. In all ways Faith Trevall outwardly appeared as usual—it was that self of hers that gazed out of the tender eyes at Rose-Ann, which interpreted the true woman; the woman who had been subdued but never conquered.

It was during one of Rose-Ann's lonely walks that she entered the old cemetery and wandered in that corner where forgotten graves were all but obliterated by long grasses and sturdy weeds.

Many of the stones had crumbled; some were so moss-

covered as to seem part of the sod, but there was one that had fallen face downward as if in despair and shame and so had, to a certain extent, preserved the record of the sleeper lying below.

Rose-Ann absent-mindedly raised this stone and brushed aside the mould.

THEODORA TREVALL OTIS

Born January 3, 1825

Died February 6, 1851.

That was all! But it brought back sharply the half-forgotten memory of the disgraced dead.

The words sank into Rose-Ann's very soul. She found herself crying desolately and rebelliously. Such a little life to be filled with experiences that had brought it to this neglected port of forgotten ones!

When the strange mood of pity and sympathy had passed, Rose-Ann was conscious of that thrill of excitement that had swept over her the night when she had first heard of Aunt Theodora through the hole in the floor.

She reverently passed her hand over the mossy-faced stone. She drew the cracked slab into the sunlight, and then knelt by the little flattened mound under which Aunt Theodora had been relievedly thrust so long ago.

With the heavy stone removed and the tall weeds and grasses ruthlessly uprooted, it almost seemed as if Aunt Theodora might awaken and come back into the sunshine she had loved and braved.

"There!" whispered Rose-Ann. "Do you feel better, poor dear? After all these years I am here to welcome you—let us be friends, little old Auntie!"

Then Rose-Ann counted off on her stained fingers the length of the brief life.

"1851—1825—five from eleven—six! Two from four—two!

"Twenty-six, you poor dear! And all that crammed in! Home, husband, lover. What was the peddler like, little

Auntie? What had he to offer that could make you leave all else and follow on?

"What had life done to you that made it possible for you to follow on?"

"Did the peddler lead you into the open—or to a blind trail that ended here in this dreary corner?"

"Were you happy for a little time? Did it pay?"

The thoughts pounded upon Rose-Ann's brain; she became absorbed and felt as if she must, in herself, answer the questions for the inarticulate dead.

"I've got to exonerate you, Aunt Theodora, and lay your unhappy ghost."

And then Rose-Ann laughed as one does who, having blundered along, sees a clear mark of a trail.

From that day Rose-Ann paid frequent visits to the grave. It presently became a thing of beauty; an altar upon which the girl spread rarest flowers and at which she offered the secret yearnings of her heart and soul. The dead woman's short story was the only romance that could arouse in Rose-Ann those stirrings of passion and curiosity that were being starved by her daily life.

The summer passed and autumn; then winter hid the small mound under a blanket of snow and the unbroken whiteness lasted until spring.

During that winter two great events marked Rose-Ann's life: An aunt of her mother's died, leaving Faith Trevall fifty thousand dollars, and Barry Compton came back without his mother, for she had died abroad. He was accompanied by an English man-servant and two maids and the beautiful old house was once more opened.

The legacy and Barry Compton became, to Rose-Ann, things that merged into a Force that drove them all into the open. For a time they seemed strangers to each other, much was revealed and much evolved, and life vibrated to it.

"Why have we never known this delightful aunt?" Rose-Ann naturally asked.

"She was a most difficult person," Trevall replied; "an impossible woman."

"She does not seem to have laid anything up against Mother," Rose-Ann twinkled.

"She did, however, a characteristic thing." Trevall, as he spoke, had the will spread before him on the table. He had an air of possession that irritated Rose-Ann. She felt like taking the paper from under his hand and carrying it to her mother who sat smilingly by the fire knitting.

Faith Trevall was remembering that long-past time when the dead woman, who had opposed her marriage, was like a mother to her.

Presently the door opened and Prudence and Albert Townsend entered—they had been summoned to the family conclave.

"It was quite a shock at first," Prudence exclaimed; "all that money dropped, practically dropped, upon us."

"On Mother," Rose-Ann suggested, and moved a bit, making a place for her sister beside her on the settee.

Albert Townsend also edged in—the three young faces on a level were amusingly different in expression.

"Wait until you hear what the old dear tacked on to the will, Prue, then you will get another shock."

"I insist from the start, Rose-Ann, that you control your tongue." Trevall, at times, could not tolerate the tendency of his younger daughter to keep in evidence. Intellectually he regretted the days of the upper chamber.

"Please read the will, Father," Prudence asked. "I tried to tell Albert but I have such a poor head for business, and you only gave the substance of it."

Prudence was one of those women who find it necessary, in order to establish her husband's superiority, to reduce her own accomplishments to nil.

John Trevall put on his spectacles and read slowly the terse, brief testament and then, more emphatically, the last words expressing the dead woman's desire.

"I bequeathe this money to my dear niece Faith Adams Trevall with the earnest hope that she will use it for her own personal needs!"

Into the silence that ensued the words were translated by each listener according to his kind.

"As if Mother *had* any personal needs!" Prudence's remark was balm to her father.

"The old lady was vindictive to the last," he said.

"Everyone has personal needs," Rose-Ann ventured, looking wonderingly at her mother; "sort of queer needs that can only be met when one has—well, a free hand with what is one's very own."

Faith Trevall folded her knitting and smiled. She seemed the least interested member of the group.

"I'll have to find out what mine are," she said quietly; "it will be quite exciting."

"What are you going to do with—with the fortune?" asked Albert Townsend. Then he flushed darkly under Trevall's frown of disapproval.

"She will invest it wisely," Trevall replied, looking at his wife with a new expression on his face. For the first time in their lives she suggested a doubt to him; a doubt of his power over her.

At this point Faith Trevall took a stand that, for a moment, made her a stranger to them all.

Her pale face was flushed as if her sluggish blood were flowing more freely. She walked across the room and stood by her husband, her hand on his shoulder.

"John, dear," she said, and her voice was quiet but firm; "I am going to carry out the spirit as well as the letter of Aunt Judith's will. I shall do nothing with the money until I find out——"

"Whether you have needs that I have not supplied?"

There were wounded pride and resentment in Trevall's question.

"Needs that no one but—myself could supply."

Faith Trevall took her hand from the rigid shoulder as if she understood that it was not wanted there.

"You desire to—to manage this money yourself, Faith?" Trevall asked, and the three faces in a line across the room were tense.

“Yes, John, for the present, at least.”

“Then, Faith, I wash my hands of the unpleasant duty. In the future, should you realize your need of my advice, you must ask for it.”

Almost it seemed as if Trevall said, “beg for it; implore it, penitently.”

“I will, John dear.” Then, turning to the others, Faith said gently, “Such a sum of money is a great test of character. I hope your mother will not fail you, children.”

Rose-Ann felt the hot tears rise to her eyes.

“This whole scene,” she said, her voice trembling, “proves how wise that old aunt was. We ought to be fairly jubilant over Mother’s windfall instead of acting and looking as we do and taking the fun out of it for her.”

But the subject was not referred to again for some time. Legal details were gone through and a subtle change came to Faith Trevall. Those nearest her could not describe it.

“Mother is a person at last!” Rose-Ann exclaimed one day to Prudence.

“And what, pray, was she before?” Prudence was really curious. The remark seemed to cast a possible light upon what all felt to be there.

“I do not know exactly.” Rose-Ann looked confused. “Something the family thought she was—but which she wasn’t.”

“Absurd!” Prudence retorted.

“Well! wait and see, Prue. All I know is this: Father and I have a feeling that something is going to happen. I like the sensation but it’s the ruination of Daddy’s peace of mind. It’s like living in the house with a—with a plant that has never been catalogued.”

“The plain English language does not seem to be sufficient for you, Rose-Ann.” Prudence was ill-natured.

“Oh, it’s sufficient, Prue, if we do not limit it. But I say unto you, watch Mother!”

## CHAPTER III

THE law moves slowly no matter how impatient people may be, and Faith Trevall's legacy passed through the mill in the usual way.

Faith herself was calmly content. It was beautiful to think of the legacy as a proof of the dead woman's faithful memory and love.

"And after all the years of silence, too," Faith thought, "she might so easily have misunderstood."

"If you find you need my advice you know you may depend upon me," Trevall repeatedly said to his wife. It was a constant nudge.

"Thank you, John, dear, but I suppose things are going the usual way. When all the knots are untied and the money quite my own, we will discuss it."

Rose-Ann chuckled at this—her mother had become the most absorbing interest in her life. The money hardly ever entered into her thought except as the vehicle of her mother's self-expression.

With the Townsends this was not so. They counted upon their possible "share" of the fortune with clear and definite purpose, although they never spoke of it except in the sanctity of their own small house in Essex. But the result of their secret sessions was the purchase of a Ford runabout and a half acre of ground in the sacred precincts of Middle Essex.

Counting upon Faith's generosity, without realizing the pathos and humour of the situation, they felt that their purgatorial experience was about over.

And at this time Barry Compton appeared upon the scene.

The shy, shrinking boy had become a tall, refined-looking man. There was a delicacy about Compton that accounted



for his frequent days of retirement which were indulged in from the beginning.

“It’s all so new and exciting,” he explained to the neighbours who called at once. “I’ve lived such an abominably selfish life abroad that this sense of responsibility that is in the air affects me. I’ll soon get used to it and be one of you. I’m hoping to fit in soon; already I seem to feel at home.”

This, as explanation for his frequent withdrawals.

From the hour that Compton met Faith Trevall his heart went out to her in a peculiar way. She reminded him of his mother; she appealed to that quality in him that his mother’s desperate need and proud suffering had evolved.

“She gives one the impression,” he thought, “of a bird escaped from its cage and afraid of its freedom.”

He recalled the night of his father’s death, when from across the bed he and his mother had looked into each other’s eyes with that stricken and stealthy glance of relief that the death of the evil doer often calls forth.

“Too late!” his mother’s soul seemed to say to his.

And so it was that Barry Compton, in the house of his father, reached out to Faith Trevall in mute sympathy and understanding, and because Rose-Ann was her mother’s almost constant companion, Compton included her in his more intimate invitations.

It was so natural for him to ask Mrs. Trevall to preside at his tea table once the old house opened its doors to informal afternoons, and Rose-Ann was the best possible aid to her mother.

She handled the beautiful china with reverent touch, and Compton, quietly regarding her from his corner near the tea table, smiled and nodded whimsically, thinking that the girl was an embodiment of her mother’s spirit, with the limitations removed.

“She will know what to do with her freedom,” he concluded, but as time went on and he knew John Trevall better, and realized the persisting undercurrent of New England ideals, he wondered about Rose-Ann.

At that point he spiritually formed a silent partnership

with Faith Trevall. He and she must make it possible for Rose-Ann to live her life in her own way!

Naturally, with this sudden, unspoken compact holding them, small confidences leaked out. Almost guiltily, at first, then more easily as Compton proved himself a perfect interpreter of a word, a smile, a hurried, nervous laugh followed by a quick and loyal explanation.

It was Compton who suggested, after a few weeks of afternoons by the fireside and short walks to historic spots, that Mrs. Trevall should take Rose-Ann abroad.

So unexpected was this proposition that it never occurred to Faith Trevall that she had, in her quiet walks and talks with Compton, revealed herself.

She shrank spiritually from him for a time as one might who feared a hypnotic influence.

Barry did not press the point. He merely explained the suggestion by adding "to one who has travelled as I have, learned to know and love my neighbours overseas, it seems a natural conclusion that others must share my feelings. To me, a trip abroad is less exhausting and confusing than one to Boston, let alone New York."

For several days the subject was not mentioned again and then Faith Trevall asked simply:

"Did you mean that Rose-Ann and I should go—alone abroad?"

Compton laughed aloud at the panic he had evoked; but after an hour's explanation he saw that his listener had ceased her fluttering and that her imagination was fired.

And then Rose-Ann's craving for college was mentioned—quite incidentally.

"Let her decide after the year abroad," Compton said; "college is not for everyone, and at twenty-three Rose-Ann will have got the bit between her teeth."

It was easy to laugh at this; it all seemed so simple.

During this time of readjustment and new ties, Compton seriously endeavoured to cultivate John Trevall and the Townsends, but his friendship for Faith and Rose-Ann was an obstacle in the way that he could neither understand nor

cope with. Trevall was suspicious and resentful, though both emotions were discreetly hid under a calm appearance of indifference.

The friendly advances of Compton were attributed, not to pure kindness of heart, but to foreign superficiality.

"The man has lost the simple sincerity of his American birthright," Trevall remarked to his wife; "he has bartered it for the cheap and untrustworthy polish of another race. Good taste should prompt his withholding his lavish hospitality until he is better known."

The Townsends were ill at ease with Compton. With the best and most untiring efforts he never was able to win their confidence.

"And I think," Prudence confided to her husband, "that it is improper, under the circumstances, for Mother and Rose-Ann to accept his attentions. It is a direct insult to Father and to us! They are constantly at his house or wandering about the country with him. Have you seen his car?"

Albert nodded to this and added:

"The fellow is laughing on the sly at us. We amuse him. I can see through him."

To call Compton a "fellow," relieved Townsend's feelings.

Compton's man Cleaver also complicated the situation. His appearance, his very presence in the old house, was incongruous and foreign.

"So un-American. Such a reflection upon the good taste of Compton." And so the remarks were handed on.

Not being able to deal intelligently with the situation, Compton ignored it. He apparently assumed that his neighbours were his friends and acted accordingly. His manner toward Trevall was embarrassing to the last degree—to Trevall. What could one do with a man who insisted upon admiring virtues that one did not possess or even desire? Who called upon one in his private office at the Bank and created the damaging impression that he was learning American finance at the fountain head?

The flattery silenced the resentment, but it stiffened Trevall's private estimate of Compton.

And then came the afternoon when Faith Trevall herself took up the subject of the legacy.

It was Sunday and, as usual, Prudence and Albert had come for dinner.

The meal had been perfect in every detail; with each course the spirits of the family had rallied from the depression caused by a dull church service, and with the dessert an air bordering on levity prevailed.

"We are to have coffee in the library," Faith announced, suddenly rising; "the table can then be cleared and we can take our time without delaying the work in the kitchen."

Trevall looked alarmed.

"Is this a—a foreign innovation?" he asked.

"No, but a sensible, humane one," Faith was actually leading, physically as well as spiritually, her family from the room.

The coffee was already awaiting them—this was evidently a well-worked-out plan and one about which the family had not been consulted.

Faith, with the grace acquired at Compton's afternoons, poured the coffee into the exquisite old cups and, quite as naturally, Rose-Ann passed them.

And then, while the cups were poised midway between saucer and lips, Faith remarked:

"About that legacy. Everything is settled now, isn't it, John dear?"

Trevall quickly set his cup in the saucer.

"Judging by the letter you showed me from the lawyers," he said quietly, "I should say that the legacy is quite your own, Faith."

"Mine? Just mine?" Certainly a marked change had come over Faith Trevall. Six months ago she could not possibly have assumed the manner that enveloped her now with poise and smiling charm.

"Isn't it wonderful—the feeling of power?" she said, and then quickly, as if she feared they might misunderstand her, she went on: "and I have really worked out quite an elaborate plan. Barry Compton helped me. The dear fellow came

just in time. Only a person who was not in any way concerned could have helped so wisely."

Trevall drew himself up, but made no remark. Instead he returned to his coffee, but Prudence spoke:

"Mother! how could you permit a stranger——"

"Barry Compton is no stranger!" Rose-Ann interjected, going across the room to her mother; "he is a bosom friend."

It was always possible for Trevall to express himself to his younger daughter when he was annoyed.

"Do you, too, refer to Mr. Compton so informally, Rose-Ann?" he asked.

"No, Daddy, usually I leave off the Compton. He asked me to. One could not keep up formalities with him."

The group took this flippant reply in silence for a moment and then Trevall turned to his wife.

"That you should consult any one before your husband in so delicate a matter, Faith, surprises and—hurts me deeply! It is extremely humiliating."

"I am sorry, John, that you should feel so about it. Barry Compton does not seem a stranger; some people are like that, you know. They seem always to have belonged."

"Ridiculous!" Trevall reached for the cream. Faith did not heed the interruption.

"It was one day when I happened to be down there alone. Barry was showing me his mother's photographs—she was the great thing in Barry's life, I soon discovered: he says he sees all women through her. After awhile, and I really do not recall how it came about, I was telling him—well, about the legacy and then—it almost frightened me the way he cleared things. Every detail was—well, John—it seemed settled."

"I am not interested in Compton's private affairs," Trevall said calmly. "Kindly omit them."

Rose-Ann laughed. She saw her mistake at once, for her father turned upon her. This time angrily.

"I cannot and will not bear with your behaviour, Rose-Ann. You and your mother seem bent upon making the rest of us ridiculous."

"I'm sorry, Father." Then Rose-Ann looked at Prudence's pasty face; it was crimson; at Albert's efforts to appear neutral, as an in-law should, and she laughed again.

"I'm nervous," she apologized. "It is enough to make me nervous the way we are acting about what Mother has a perfect right to do. It shows how necessary something like this legacy was."

There was nothing to say to this impertinence, and after a moment Faith Trevall went calmly on, sipping her coffee between her remarks.

"Of course, John dear, I always meant to consult you as soon as I could see clearly myself; I would take no action without your advice, but this seemed so entirely a thing I was responsible for—this gift of Aunt Judith's. You never understood her; that was natural; but I did, and at the last I realize she meant to prove to me that she did not resent all the years of silence and my—my loyalty to you, John. She was so unselfish that I owe her some consideration. I had to understand about myself, too, John. I wondered if I had any ungratified desires—and if I did I felt as if I should deal with them for Aunt Judith's sake—and yours, too."

"Absurd!" Trevall set the rare china down with a rattling jar. "I suppose Mr. Barry Compton got at the root of the matter? After laying your family affairs open for his approval or disapproval—he discovered ungratified desires. Faith, I do not wonder at your children's amazement."

Certainly Prudence's expression gave cause for this remark, but Rose-Ann's lowered head saved her from betrayal.

"It all seemed quite natural when it occurred," Faith said wistfully; "I am sorry that you all see it differently. A stranger, or one who has been away, often gets a new light on a problem that helps tremendously, and Barry is singularly sympathetic.

"He feels as I do about my responsibility toward the money. He feels that only by literally accepting this legacy as my own can I be faithful to the spirit in which it was given.

"I want to share it with you all, just as I have always

shared things; as you, John, have shared with me. It is the doing of it myself that matters. Barry suggested that I give, as I might give a Christmas present, ten thousand dollars apiece to you, Prudence and Rose-Ann, and that I keep twenty thousand—for myself to—” Faith’s lips trembled—“to play with.”

John Trevall and the Townsends were beyond the relief of words, but Rose-Ann again forgot to control herself.

“Are you making this up, duckie?” she said, her eyes shining with excitement, “or did he go on and root up some hidden desires of yours?”

Faith turned her eyes upon the girl with relief.

“Well, he actually did,” she said. “I confess this sounds absurd here, with you all, but while Barry and I talked it over, it was the simplest thing imaginable.

“He found out how much I want to travel and see things, like Europe and—and other places.

“He says many women travel alone, now, and that it is perfectly safe—but I would like to take you, Rose-Ann.”

Faith seemed to be speaking only to Rose-Ann. The others, for the moment, did not exist; in a way, she had bought them off; won the right to consider herself.

Rose-Ann’s eyes filled with tears; some tremendous thing was happening. She knew that it was carrying her and her mother over a path they could never retrace. She sensed the danger, but saw that her mother did not. That they were together gave her a power to act with some assurance.

She lifted her head and her serious eyes rested on her father.

“Isn’t it queer,” she said, “how the simplest things can get people in snarls if the things are a bit out of the ordinary?”

“Now the idea of Mother having money quite her own has just knocked us about and we cannot get an honest view. I think we ought to buck Mother up, not take any of the fun from her, and as for talking with Mr. Compton—one naturally does talk to him. I wager even Prue and Albert would be opening up their souls to him in a half hour if they would only get acquainted.”

This amazing onslaught had the effect of a dash of cold

water. It brought the family to its senses, but the reaction was anything but pleasant.

"I hope Prudence feels no need of going to a perfect stranger for intimate talks," Townsend remarked: then seeing the flush on Faith Trevall's face, and realizing, as he usually did, that when he ventured in the open he but laid himself open to attack, he hurriedly dodged.

"I mean, of course, that a young woman must be more careful of such things than a woman of assured position and knowledge of the world."

Rose-Ann raised both her hands in a gesture of pushing Albert's volubility aside, then she laughingly said:

"It's all right, Bertie. Mother doesn't mind the suggestion."

During all this side play John Trevall sat silent—tapping energetically the arms of the chair.

He had come to see what Rose-Ann saw; he appreciated the importance of dealing with this family problem in a different spirit, but he resented his younger daughter's keen handling of the situation and that subtle and growing power of hers to take command.

Finally he spoke, addressing his wife:

"I do not suppose, my dear, that by any possibility you are joking? This money idea has rather upset us all." He magnanimously desired to give his wife an open exit from her mad proposition back to the safe shelter of things as they had been. When she realized how she might estrange herself, she surely would not carry this nonsense any further.

But Faith rocked peacefully in her chair, glancing now and then at Rose-Ann to make sure she was spiritually and physically near.

"It's no joke, John," she said, "though I see I have bungled sadly by being so abrupt. We have got, I fear, in a rut. There is no real reason why I should not take a holiday, now is there? And this money makes it quite an easy and practical thing to do.

"I have never realized that I did want this sort of thing, at least not since my marriage, but I suppose the desire



has been lying dormant all the happy years we have had together.

"John, I wish that you could see it as I do!" The dear creature was positively pleading. It hurt Rose-Ann to hear her; she knew that her mother was firm, but that she yearned for the approval of them she loved. That was the way Rose-Ann herself felt about things.

"This Barry Compton must be an ass!" Trevall was aroused and angry—he rarely indulged in epithets.

"I should say so!" Prudence agreed, her face flaming.

"I do not suppose," Trevall went on, "that Compton could comprehend the selfishness of this proposed pampering of your—what shall I say, folly? As a family we have shared everything. I have had no pleasure or recreation but what you have had a part and now you propose to——" He paused, for the expression on his wife's face dismayed him.

"John, dear, if you needed all the money, you know I would gladly give it up. I am proposing to share it now—you have shared everything, dear, but can you not see, *you* have always directed the way of things and now"—there were tears in the sweet eyes—"I just wanted to do that myself."

"We will not discuss that," Trevall said coldly; "if you imply that I have been a hard and masterful husband and father, I have nothing more to say. My life of sustained duty and devotion must speak for itself."

Faith Trevall gave a little sigh.

"I wish I could have said this all better," she began quietly; "and of course the details of arranging the money and my trip will take a long time. We will get used to the idea and be very, very happy about it before the hour comes for separation. And—" she brightened as one does who watches the sun break through a cloud—"here comes Barry Compton!"

The large gray car swept up the drive and Compton stepped slowly from it. In a moment he was among them smiling, more with his eyes than his lips, and reaching out a lean, friendly hand.

There are some people who by sheer force of personality exact the best from others. Compton was such a one.

Even Trevall rose, as he always did, to the subconscious appeal, but because they could not rise, Prudence and Albert became restive, getting what satisfaction they could from an almost sullen silence.

Not for the chance of regaining what Trevall inwardly believed Compton had taken from him by his play upon Faith's imagination would he allow Compton to suspect his state of mind. He did not doubt for an instant his own conclusions—the indignity with which he had been treated—but for that very reason he relegated the matter to a position that Compton could neither suspect nor arraign.

Rose-Ann greeted Compton as she might a deliverer who had rescued them all at a critical juncture.

“Coffee, Barry?” The familiarity made Trevall wince, but he held his poise.

“Thanks, Rose-Ann. Black, please. No sugar. I like the last cup in the pot—it is always stronger.”

Then while he sipped the coffee Compton's eyes roved amusedly over the small group, and there was not a person present who did not realize that he had a keen understanding of the situation.

An ugly thought entered Trevall's mind. Had the visit been planned? Had his wife so far forgotten herself that in her desire to assert her position she had conspired—no other word so fully described it—with this stranger?

If Trevall could sit a bit more rigid, he did so now. The apparently simple affair was assuming preposterous proportions, but that did not occur to him.

Meanwhile Compton was talking delightfully of places across the sea.

“I could never have so fully appreciated the land of my birth,” he was saying, “had I not this knowledge of other lands. It's like never being able to estimate yourself until you have experiences that test you.

“There is something, a kind of spiritual homesickness, I suppose, that clings to one's own land, but the real joy of it all is to find out which *is* your own land. Just being born in a certain corner doesn't prove anything.”

With this Trevall immediately and firmly took issue.

“But how do you know?” Compton retorted cheerfully.

“There are some things fundamental,” said Trevall.

“Undoubtedly, but they have to be proved. Now for instance”—Compton passed his cup toward Rose-Ann, smiling in her eyes as he did so, remarking, “It’s stronger now? Good.” Then:

“Now for instance, England almost got me. I seemed wedged there. It *was* home to me, but in the end I realized that it was the home of my grandparents—a wonderful place to return to for holidays, visits, and refreshment; but the land of my father was really *my* land; an inheritance more direct; more demanding.

“I am realizing this every day.”

“Exactly,” Trevall nodded, “and you’ve wasted long years coming to a—a fundamental fact.”

“Wasted?” Compton’s gaze seemed to widen and travel back over great areas. “Wasted? My dear sir, wait until your wife and daughter return.”

They were cornered—all of them. And then quite as if there had been no possible barrier the conversation became personal, intimate. It gradually took the form of planning details. In order to preserve his dignity, Trevall joined in.

“It sounds like a trip to Boston,” Prudence remarked, a bit breathlessly. She felt as if Compton were dragging her.

“Less exhausting,” Compton turned toward her genially, “no jams nor subways—I find these do weary me beyond words. It’s more easy going over there.”

“Umph!”—this came from Townsend, who desired to make his presence felt but could think of no pertinent remark.

Compton nodded toward him.

“Exactly,” he said. The trouble with us New Englanders is that we are so damnably set in our ways that any break seems epoch-making. This is not so. When Mrs. Trevall and Rose-Ann come home, we will realize that except for some new frocks and a wider vision, nothing has happened.”

Townsend somehow felt flattered by the attention given to his ejaculation.

When Compton departed the family looked rather blankly at each other. At last Trevall spoke.

"It appears that your arrangements, my dear, had been fairly well developed before you took your husband and children into your confidence."

"John, dear, how can I explain—I truly did not comprehend this myself. I suppose that what seems so vital to us, because it has never come into our lives before—is a mere bagatelle to Barry Compton."

"We will not discuss the matter further, Faith. After all the question is yours to settle, I admit that, but there are some sentiments that cannot be put into words; if they are not felt they must be disregarded. However," and there was a cold finality in the words, "I must refuse to accept my share of your generosity. Certainly in your determination to carry out the spirit of your aunt's will, you overlook her disapproval of me! I could not accept anything with which Miss Judith Adams had to do."

A dull silence followed. Then Prudence and Albert rose awkwardly, bade their parents good-bye, and left the room, followed by Rose-Ann.

"Whew!" Rose-Ann emitted the word explosively. "Has any one the least idea what has happened to us all?" she asked.

"What always happens," Prudence replied, "when strangers are permitted to be familiar with what does not concern them. I think it is unpardonable, Rose-Ann."

"What is it, *just*, Prue, that Barry has found out? We, as we *are*; or we, as we wish to seem?" Rose-Ann was serious.

"I quite agree with Prudence." Albert thrust his arms into the sleeves of his overcoat. "A family owes its first duty to itself."

"Well," Rose-Ann sighed and opened her arms as if to get a freer breath; "it almost makes me think that as a family we need airing." Then:

"Prue, I warned you. You see what has happened in this house."

## CHAPTER IV

THE winter settled down early that year in Middle Essex. A white, dry snow came from the North in late October and decided to call its brood after it. Storm upon storm and then days of blue skies and solemn stillness. It was a season that tested even the oldest inhabitants, and poor Barry Compton viewed it with positive awe. He seldom went out, and welcomed, almost passionately, the few friends who came to him.

"Cleaver," he said one morning when the snow lay level with the dining-room windows, "another year and we must have house-parties week in and out. Folks to stay and make merry: folks to keep us company."

"Yes, sir." Cleaver set a tray before Compton. "I dare say we could entice people to come—and stay," he added.

"Cleaver, that doesn't sound complimentary. Muffins, eh? That's right, do not spare the butter. Coffee strong? Thanks. Never mind, Cleaver, if it does keep me awake at night, it also keeps me awake in the day.

"Cleaver, it's strange our nice little Miss Rose-Ann has deserted us. I should think she could clip it over these drifts and not sink in.

"The mother, so the farmer tells me, is ill, sir."

Compton started.

"Ill?" he asked. "What is the matter?"

"I think—the winter is too much for her." Cleaver put more coal on the fire. "The doctor went past an hour ago, sir."

"I wonder!" Compton's face twitched. "She ought to be used to all kinds of winters. I must get to her."

"No, sir." Cleaver was firm. "No, sir, you cannot attempt it. It would be madness, sir."

There was a pause. Then Compton spoke.

“Cleaver, I haven’t had a bad attack in over two years. That is longer than any other interval. If one should come back now your task of hiding me would be comparatively light—the heavy drifts, too, are an excuse for leaving us alone.

“Strange, Cleaver, that I cannot seem to get under my neighbours’ crust. They accept me, but I do not agree with them; they cannot digest me and—I need them so!”

Cleaver, because deeply moved, appeared less responsive than usual.

“There is no accounting for tastes, sir, and the American taste is peculiar, sir.”

Compton laughed wearily. Then:

“Should it become necessary to account for a long absence, Cleaver, have you made arrangements; got an excuse ready?”

Cleaver removed the tray, taking mental note that his master had not touched food but had drained every drop of coffee.

“I have had the small room in the tower, sir, prepared.”

“And what is my rôle—illness?—or——”

“No, sir. You are writing a book, sir. They all do when they come to America. You cannot be disturbed, sir. When the mood for writing seizes you, sir.”

Compton threw back his head and laughed a mirthless laugh as if his soul revolted from the humour of Cleaver’s ruse.

“You’re a master hand as a plotter, Cleaver. I’m no end grateful.

“Send up to the Trevall house and get the last word.

“I wish”—this more to himself than to Cleaver; “I wish they had got away before the spiritual frost blighted them. God! how relentless virtue can be.”

Cleaver had passed from the room; Compton went to the window and looked out at the dazzling, unbroken whiteness. It seemed an empty, hard world where he alone waited for—what?

Almost it seemed as if he saw a shadow approaching over the glistening, unbroken wastes. His shadow; his infirmity.

The haunting horror that had been his since early boyhood, the spectre that had been hidden from all but Cleaver, his parents, and physicians. The shadow that had denied him all that his nature craved, health and the sane and beautiful things that youth expects as its due. There had been a mad time in Compton's first youth when he had almost brought himself to gamble with his shadow. During the spells of comparative well-being he had wondered how it would be if he married, took the blind chance. Cures were possible; the best of physicians granted that; some woman might love him well enough to risk the chance with him; he would not deceive her; he could give her all that wealth could procure. He would demand little outside the bare joy of companionship, the wonderful opportunity of service to another who belonged to him. And there had come into his life, just then, a girl whose high courage and loveliness tempted him sorely, but his spectre overpowered him at the crucial moment of weakness. There had been a worse attack than usual. He came out of the isolation wan and convinced! There must be no chances taken. That much of the man he could be—and Cleaver swore never to desert him.

And so the inevitable was acknowledged and utilized in a masterful way during the periods of health. The pleasures that could be obtained from travel, music, and art were absorbed. When the blows fell, Cleaver took command and was prolific in devices to hide the truth that his master was an epileptic.

That the rich and handsome Barry Compton did not marry was for a time a topic of discussion, but since all men do not marry the subject became less and less interesting. There were excuses, too, for Compton's celibacy: first, his father's ill health and then death; his mother's dependence upon him, and lastly her death. After that Compton was so desperately lonely and broken that a new element entered in—the second curse bequeathed to him by his inheritance.

Intemperance in one form or another had marked the Compton line. Drink, women, and a general lack of moral fibre. During his youth Barry Compton was so keen a

sufferer from his father's hours of degeneracy—hours more or less skilfully hid from the public—that his own character seemed to gain strength and vitality, but the physical weakness that developed into epilepsy threatened to mark the last of the Comptons as the worst of all. The struggles of the boy to hold to the best in him while beating off the worst was the tragedy that all but drove Mrs. Compton to madness. She had borne superbly her husband's degradation; his lapses of loyalty; had lived abroad and made no cry; but when she realized at last that her son, giving promise of a better manhood and future, was a prey to the evil disease that suddenly attacked him, her hold on life gave way.

Then Barry saved her by his appeal—his desperate appeal. She must fight with him—not leave him alone.

To the day of her death, which occurred several years after her husband's, Mrs. Compton was her son's constant companion. She was happier, too, than she had ever been, for there had come periods of hope; doctor after doctor strove to effect a cure; there were years when success seemed at hand and—then Mary Compton died.

With the shock and sense of desolation Compton reacted perilously, and his disease took a stronger hold upon him. As if that were not sufficient, the lurking devil that had but bided his time fell upon him. When the fits of epilepsy gave warning, Barry resorted to drink. Like a condemned man, he drugged his senses to lessen his agony.

Cleaver never wavered in his faithful guardianship. As far as he dared he fought against Compton's weakness. When he was worsted, Cleaver shielded and cared for him, and in the dejected hours that followed the attacks he rose to Compton's needs, sought to give him courage and comfort, and lied to him as to the details of the sodden periods that marked the spells of disease aggravated by liquor.

Strange to say, Compton in his sane moments could still battle. The good in him died hard.

"When I can no longer fight," he often told Cleaver, "I'll end it. The last vestige of decency in me shall be devoted to that. I'll save it—like the last bullet."



Then coming to America had had a remarkable effect upon Compton. The complete change; the subtle demands of place, people, and temperaments seemed to call forth all that was fine and aspiring in him, and once again hope flamed high.

Something of this was passing through Compton's mind as he stood at the window looking out at the white emptiness. There was danger in the mood. Loneliness was gripping him; a depression caused by the news of Mrs. Trevall's illness. He had not realized what her friendship and Rose-Ann's had meant to him—they had been an appeal to that craving of his for service. He had joined forces with them against a vague something that could not be voiced, but which they all understood.

"I must get to the Trevalls'," murmured Compton at last.

Nothing on earth at that moment seemed so urgent. The impulse was like a divine urge for self-preservation, but again Compton was defeated. Word was brought to him that Mrs. Trevall was too ill to see visitors, but that Rose-Ann would come to him when she could be spared.

And in the old Trevall house quiet and order reigned. No small duty of polishing and dusting was omitted below; while in her bedroom above Faith Trevall lay battling for her life—if one could call the calm, cheerful patience a battle.

Prudence came and ordered affairs in kitchen and dining room; a day nurse took charge above; John Trevall went to and from the Bank while Rose-Ann rested during the day in order to be with her mother at night.

Rose-Ann had suddenly developed a positive genius for her task.

"I find Mrs. Trevall in a much better condition when her younger daughter remains alone with her," the nurse had explained to the doctor. So Rose-Ann was permitted to share the dark hours and give the comfort that she alone could give.

Strange comfort it was on both sides. Fully aware of the situation, its dangers and slight chances, neither Mrs.

Trevall nor Rose-Ann referred to it. They accepted it and—ignored it.

“It’s up to this heart of mine,” Faith had whispered the first night of Rose-Ann’s vigil; “typhoid can do tricky things to hearts, dear, but hearts can outwit it at times. Now let us talk, before I go to sleep, about our trip.”

With a hideous agony of fear gripping her, Rose-Ann brought nightly to the sickroom the maps, folders, and time tables that she and her mother, like half-guilty children, had accumulated and had hid for their hours together.

Once Mrs. Trevall’s eyes rested on the carefully arranged papers, she seemed content. Sometimes she would speak vaguely of a special spot that Barry Compton had described.

“I should like the warmth and sun, Rose-Ann, for a time. It is queer, but I do not think I have been really warm any winter in Middle Essex since I was very, very young.”

“We’ll go straight there!” Rose-Ann let her pencil point rest on the spot that Compton had described as “melted gold and fragrant wine.”

“Do you think we could sail in March, Rose-Ann?”

“Surely, ducky dear. There’s a splendid steamer leaving Boston on the third of March.”

“It is January now.” Then Faith Trevall closed her eyes and murmured “abundant time in which to get well, and get ready.”

It is a terrible thing for the young to undergo the strain through which Rose-Ann was then passing. Her black, clutching fear, hid by a determination to ignore it, almost broke the girl’s strength; the routine that her father and Prudence followed did not give her support or help—it seemed cold, brutal, to her, and the only person in the world she wanted to see was Barry Compton, and she wondered why he did not come. She never knew the purely conventional replies her father had sent to the oft-repeated offers of help from the next house.

Every morning Prudence, crisp and capable, entered her mother’s room.

“All right, Mother?” she asked.

Prudence's idea of sickroom manner was a brusque cheerfulness.

"Quite all right, daughter. How is Albert?"

"As usual, fine and well."

Then Prudence departed and devoted her day to seeing that the machinery of the house ran smoothly.

Perhaps the Marthas of the world *are* underestimated.

Before leaving the house for the Bank, John Trevall spent a half hour with his wife and another half hour before he retired at night.

If apprehension held place in his heart, he gave no sign. He did not ignore the possibilities, but he was never one to anticipate evil.

Holding his wife's thin, hot hand, his stern mouth softened. In his way, in the way of his forbears, he loved and honoured her. He had been faithful to her in word and spirit; had done his entire duty—as he saw it. He had nothing to regret as he looked at the face on the pillow; he could even forgive and overlook the slight, foolish ripple the coming of Compton and the Aunt's legacy had created.

Not even a woman like Faith Trevall was proof against the flattery of a man like Compton, Trevall admitted tolerantly and that was past now. Not a cloud rested between him and his wife.

"There is nothing I can do for you, Faith?" he would ask, tapping her hand as he often tapped the arms of his chair.

"No, John dear"—Faith slowly withdrew her hand—"nothing, dear, nothing."

"Shall I read to you, Faith?"

Faith saw that her husband wanted to read, so she said in a whisper:

"Yes, John. There's a new book on the stand."

But while Trevall read, Faith was not obliged to listen. Indeed, there were times when her mind wandered sadly and her thoughts were beyond her control. At such moments her husband seemed like a stranger to her, she puckered her brow as if the strangeness puzzled her. In a weak way she resented him. Why should he insist upon reading to her?

Why should he be there at all? And then Faith Trevall shivered and came back, mentally, to the fine old room with its ancient furniture and brass and irons—how they glittered!—and to the handsome, upright man beside her, reading on and on in tones that were firm and even.

And there were other hours when Faith Trevall looked back at her life as the drowning are said to do—looked at it as she might upon the life of another. She had made so many mistakes. Things would have been so different had she been wiser in time. And then her life seemed to merge into Rose-Ann's life. Rose-Ann was in danger; she must be warned.

Something was loosed in Faith Trevall. The habit of self-effacement, the sense of dull content, gave place to a new determination that had had its beginning in her decision about Aunt Judith's money. Duty was a terrible thing and many sided. There was duty to others and to one's self; one must decide. There might be a choice of "others"—Rose-Ann, for instance, must be warned. Warned! Poor Faith saw only her own mistakes and they clutched and held her; she would start feverishly and John, if he were there, would pause in his reading.

"You are not interested, Faith?" he asked in that tone that implied a lack of appreciation.

"Oh, yes, I am, John dear."

And so she was, but not in the words that fell from his lips. She was interested in Rose-Ann's danger. That interest soon absorbed Faith Trevall and excluded all others. It obsessed her and became compelling. When the fever rose, the interest rose; when the deadly weakness made her faint, her last conscious thought was of Rose-Ann's "danger."

It became a fixed and tangible thing. It was none the less so because it was shrouded and muffled. It was all the more dangerous because it could not be dealt with openly.

"Delirium!" said the doctor, and the shades in the lower rooms were lowered.

And then, one night when Rose-Ann came on duty, Faith Trevall smiled in quite the old way at her.

"I am better, dear child," she said faintly. And so she was. She had, during the day, got the best of the haunting danger; had torn its disguises from it and with quickened vision understood the true purport. The trouble had all come from confusing big things with little ones. She had grasped at last the truth and could deal with it.

Rose-Ann's eyes rested upon her mother.

"Oh, you are better, ducky!" she said relievedly, and the agony lessened. "I can see that you are. Now nestle down like a dear while I brush your hair and sing to you. I have a new song especially created for good mothers who obey their wise daughters."

Mrs. Trevall smiled contentedly. Rose-Ann could always amuse her with her nonsense and there was magic in the touch of the quick, light fingers.

The brushing of the long, fine hair began and questions and answers in half whispers.

"You have all the folders, dear?"

"Yes, darling, and some new ones. Do I pull?"

"No. You seem to be drawing all the ache and heat from my head."

Then, so quietly that for a moment Rose-Ann thought that she must have misunderstood:

"I heard the doctor tell the nurse to-day that to-morrow would be the crisis!"

Rose-Ann paused; the truth sank in and she stood as if frozen.

"But one passes through crises, dear girl. I only meant that to-night is a bit more important than usual, you see."

One does strange things at a critical moment. Rose-Ann laid the brush on the table, gathered all the folders together, placed them beside it as if they were done with, and then spoke:

"You must have misunderstood them, Mother," she said in short, gasping breaths. "They would not say such a thing in your presence, dear."

"They were in the hall. They thought I was asleep."

A silence fell in the dim room and strange shadows flickered

on the old walls. They were like wraiths touching reverently the sacred furniture, candles, and glistening andirons; sometimes a long, grim shadow would lie across the bed of the strange woman resting there.

The strange woman! She had always been a stranger in her husband's house. Faith Trevall realized it at last; she had never made a place for herself and she held the omission as a sin; a great wrong to Rose-Ann.

"You are not going to fail me now, Rose-Ann."

This was a command, not a question.

"No, Mother."

How entirely they understood each other! Their lips might trifle with words, but their souls realized and accepted truth.

"Does it hurt you to talk, Mother?"

Somehow Rose-Ann felt there was much to say, and only a brief time in which to say it.

"It does not hurt me to talk, dear, and it is so blessed to think that we can talk woman to woman, Rose-Ann."

"Yes, Mother." No longer were they mother and daughter. Their eyes met and held.

"My dear, I have done you a great wrong."

"*You*, Mother? Why, you could not wrong any one except yourself, perhaps."

Rose-Ann knelt beside the bed and held the thin worn hands that were clasped close together.

"Rose-Ann, I have wronged—many; many." The words fell into the silence. Then:

"I thought at the first that it was my duty; a proof of my love to keep silent. At least I tried to force myself to believe it—it was the easiest way."

"You mean," Rose-Ann understood—"when you—sacrificed yourself—utterly?"

"It wasn't sacrifice, Rose-Ann. I tried to call it that but it wasn't.

"I gave up my people—and once a woman does that, she wrongs love. I wronged your father, Rose-Ann. I gave up other things, they were small things; they did not seem to matter, but they were links in a chain that I was forging.

“You must believe this, Rose-Ann, or you will be unjust to your father. He was always dealing with a woman he did not know. You see, I loved music and dancing and joyous things. Had I spoken my true self I could have had them. Everyone would have been happier. Your father needed them, but he did not realize it. That was my duty—to insist! If I had given them up and not cared, it would not have mattered—but I *cared*, Rose-Ann. The caring ate its way in—instead of out.

“When the babies came and died, I thought God was punishing me. Then when Prudence came and—stayed—I was so glad, and I meant to struggle for her sake, but it was too late—she was like the something in your father that I should have helped him conquer. During the years following Prudence’s birth something in me nearly died.

“And then you came and I saw that the *want* in me, the thing that I had hid and called by untrue names, was alive in you. You would have to pay or be killed by it.”

A faintness fell upon Faith Trevall. She almost stopped breathing.

Rose-Ann reached for a glass of medicine on the table and put a few drops of the liquid on the trembling lips.

She did not seem frightened; she did not seem to feel at all. Mechanically she acted and waited.

Waited—for the scroll to be further unrolled. She knew part of the poor tragic tale, but something remained; something her mother must reveal and she learn and remember.

Mrs. Trevall rallied.

“Thanks, darling. It’s queer—the slipping spells. I always seem to fall on that lovely spot that Barry described as ‘melted gold’.”

“But you come back—Mother—you come back.”

“Oh! yes, I come back. Rose-Ann!”

“Yes, dear heart.”

“It is cowardly for a woman to hide her real self—and then blame others. I have let people think your father was overbearing—I have seen it in their eyes. Had I in the

beginning made him understand, all would have been well. There has always been great love between us, but no real knowledge."

The panting voice paused, and Rose-Ann's heart hardened within her.

"My little girl, you must never hide yourself and permit others to see you as you are not! At least give them the opportunity of seeing the true self.

"You may find happiness; it may be your choice to sacrifice much—but it can only be a beautiful and helpful thing when others know the real you. Unless you do this, the thing that you have inherited from me will eat into your soul, and go on hurting others and killing the good you owe to them."

The clock ticked away in the gloom. The fire on the hearth was all but dead, and the long shadows grew still as if they were listening.

"Oh, it has hurt me so, Rose-Ann, to see you resent your father. My child, he has never suspected that I rebelled. It was my part to give to him what he lacked—and I did not! And you, poor child, have *lived* what I should have conquered before your birth."

Rose-Ann rested her face close to her mother's. She sought to comfort, but her mind acted slowly. Presently she said:

"Thank you, Mother. You have done a great thing for me. You have let me see all your hidden life. Mother, I will try and not make the mistake. I understand. Believe me, dear, I understand."

"Oh, Rose-Ann—I knew you would—you are young; it is not too late, dear. I think we can manage that crisis—to-morrow.

"And, Rose-Ann?"

"Yes, dear."

"College or travel or both—if you want them. Barry will explain. He is such a friend. I think he, more than any one else—helped me to see wherein I had failed. I could not have accepted so freely had he not shown me that."

Faith Trevall passed the crisis, if not triumphantly at



least with courage that gave her family hope, and took from Rose-Ann's heart the heavy load of doubt and fear that the night of confession had left.

"I let her use her pitiful strength trying to excuse what others had done to her, when I should have made her rest."

Over and over again Rose-Ann repeated the accusation to herself; "as if anything mattered—but her."

A week passed. The shades in the lower rooms were raised and the daily routine was again taken up.

One evening, Prudence and Rose-Ann were in the sickroom and John Trevall was reading, when suddenly he asked:

"Are you interested and listening, Faith?"

There was no reply. Faith, her eyes resting upon the face of Rose-Ann, had slipped so quietly and unobtrusively out of life, that it almost seemed as if the reading need not be interrupted!

Life went on dully after the first shock.

Trevall was at home for a week receiving callers in the darkened library. All the house was in gloom. Prudence stumbled about in the darkness that she insisted upon as a mark of respect to the quiet dead who had so loved the light and warmth of day.

On the day of the funeral the white crust of the snow was broken for a trail leading from the old house on the hill to the graveyard below.

Then the shades were rolled up and John Trevall planned to go to the Bank and Prudence spent only the afternoons in her father's house.

"I suppose," she said to Rose-Ann, "that you are going to take up your duties sometime. Why should you not assume them now?"

This was two days after the burial, and a light fall of snow had hid the ghastly trail leading from the house to the freshly made mound.

"Why, what is there to do, Prue?" Rose-Ann, sitting by the library fire, looked surprised.

"Do? Why, you must take Mother's place."

Rose-Ann gasped.

"I do not want to appear unsympathetic, Rose-Ann, but at times you seem to pose, and just now it is inexcusable. People talk."

"Do they, Prue? What do they say?"

"The day of the funeral," Prudence seemed to count her words, "you gave the impression of being apart from the rest of us. I do not think you have shed a tear, and still you——"

"One cannot cry when there are no tears, Prue."

Rose-Ann spoke as from a great distance.

"I wish with me, at least, Rose-Ann, that you would not *act* and talk like the foolish books you read. I agree with Father, you have been allowed to lay too great a stress upon yourself. You should forget yourself now, at any rate, and think of Father!"

Rose-Ann gave a deep sigh as if rousing from a stupor; she looked at Prudence sitting across the hearth, her skirts, drawn up, showing her fat legs extended toward the fire.

"Father?" Rose-Ann spoke the word as if it were the key that could open the door which was closed between her and life.

"Father! Why should I think of him? All day long he sits like a king while people tell him—what, Prue, what? Do they tell him of Mother's loveliness and goodness? No. They tell him of his goodness to her. *His* goodness! I do not think him good.

"Why, Prue, I've been looking through this house since Mother died, and I cannot find one trace of her—except the gay little bag hanging over her rocker. She only stayed among the things Father let her have; she only showed what he outwardly had made of her.

"But you are right, Prue, I am going to think of Father. I'm going to get from under the thing that crushed the soul of Mother and I will make Father see!"

Had the dead risen and stood before Prudence she could hardly have been more horrified. Her jaw dropped; she drew her feet close as if to spring.

"Are you mad?" she asked. For a moment she blamed herself for underestimating Rose-Ann's condition. Weak natures often succumb to attacks like this. She thought it was hysteria. But Rose-Ann went on.

"All through this house, Prue, I have tried to trace Mother, but it is Trevall Trevall from cellar to attic. Mother made no impression."

"I'm going to telephone for the doctor." Prudence rose suddenly.

"You need not, Prue. I'm all right now. You set me going. I shall go on—never fear. On and on."

"Where are you going now?" Prudence watched every movement of her sister's with wide, frightened eyes.

"You know, Prue, how it is with me. Once I get started, I go. I am going now to Barry Compton's—I'd almost forgot him."

At this Prudence clutched at something sane and vital.

"You can hardly go there, Rose-Ann, after the disrespect he has shown Father."

"What has *he* done to Father?"

Rose-Ann turned her thin white face to her sister.

"He did not come to the funeral, sent no word—has taken no notice since."

"Then something must be wrong with him." Rose-Ann's face took on a tinge of colour. "And you've thought only of yourselves. You and Father! Haven't you sent to inquire about *him*?"

"Certainly not! But you must see that you cannot go there, Rose-Ann." Prudence's voice was hard.

"I am going to him now, Prue. Tell Father if you must; tell him anything you care to—until I explain later."

And then Prudence was alone. She heard the outer door close after Rose-Ann; she went to the window and saw her sister running over the lawn, making a short cut to the road. With horror she noted that over the black dress Rose-Ann wore her dark red coat, and the red turban crowned the ruddy hair.

For a moment Prudence was more horrified by Rose-Ann's

appearance than she was by her defiance and disrespect. The latter might be explained—but the former, never. Middle Essex at midday was agog; it would never forget the sight of that flaming figure darting over the white snow—within a week after the funeral.

## CHAPTER V

**T**HE day of Mrs. Trevall's death Barry Compton had, according to Cleaver's account, "shut himself in the tower room to write."

In a roundabout way this came to John Trevall, and while he was indifferent to Compton and not interested in the book he was supposed to be writing, the lack of respect shown to himself at such a time irritated him.

"Of course this puts an end to any further intercourse," he said stiffly to Prudence, "and it is a relief to have the matter ended. The man has nothing in common with us; his foreign habits are most objectionable and he will always be associated with—the one cloud that came between your mother and me. It was not her nature to make sudden friendships. Compton's influence is not good."

In the face of this what was Prudence to say to her father, who at that moment was coughing rather miserably in the room above.

But Rose-Ann speeding across the snow gave no thought to her outrageous appearance nor to her father's state of mind when he should hear of her defiance. She was suddenly brought into action by the fear for Barry Compton.

She, into whose life death had held heretofore so small a place, now feared mightily the devastating evil that seemed bent upon wrenching everything from her.

She fancied Compton at death's door or already passed through. She did not go to the stately front entrance of Compton's home but ran to the porch upon which opened the bay window of the library. To her relief she saw Compton sitting before the fire, a book on his knees; and he was talking to Cleaver.

At the sound outside, both men turned, and Cleaver, as if expecting the visit and not at all surprised by the entrance chosen, opened the sash and stood respectfully aside while Rose-Ann ran across the room with outstretched arms.

"Ah!" Compton's face glowed as he drew her toward him. "I knew that you would come. You can take a friend on trust, my dear, that is a divine attribute."

"You have been ill, Barry?"

"Not seriously, Rose-Ann."

"And—you did not let me know!"

"You had enough to bear, dear girl. I knew that as soon as you could rise above it you would come to me.

"Cleaver, bring a good inviting lunch in here. I'm going to keep Miss Rose-Ann; she looks as if she needed attention."

Then after Cleaver had left the room: "My dear, you—must relax or you will break; you look—brittle. Sit down close beside me. There, now!"

Rose-Ann bent her head upon Compton's arm and burst into a flood of tears; the great sobs shook her from head to foot. All the barriers were down.

"I hoped, my dear, that you could cry—it saves so much suffering. But you have waited until now. You will see clearly, Rose-Ann, from now on. Oh, my dear, my dear."

The sobs lessened; the tears stopped, and Rose-Ann looked up.

"Thank you," she murmured; "thank you." She felt that Barry had physically set her free.

"That's all right. Rose-Ann, I am not afraid for you now, dear girl—I was when I first saw you. Are you able to have a little talk?"

"I could talk for ever, Barry. There are ages of things to talk about."

But they ate the lunch before they talked. To her surprise Rose-Ann discovered that she was *tasting* the food.

"It's been like swallowing straw until now, Barry," she whispered, and a faint smile touched her drooping mouth.

Cleaver stood close, watching Rose-Ann's plate with alert glance. When she raised her eyes to look at Compton,

Cleaver added a tidbit of this or that and presently Rose-Ann said:

"But with all my appetite, Barry, I do not seem to be making much impression." And she regarded her plate doubtfully. Then she turned to Cleaver and—laughed. The sound gave Compton a sense of grave danger well past.

"And now, Rose-Ann, let us—talk!" Compton leaned back in his chair. He had eaten little while making a brave attempt. "Draw your own chair close, my dear. We may need to reach out to each other now and then."

"Mother said"—Rose-Ann would, for many a day, gasp as she spoke that name—"Mother knew, Barry—you are a wonderful friend."

"I have a kind of sixth sense," Compton closed his eyes. "I call it my divining rod—it points to them who need friends as much as I do."

"I think, Rose-Ann, that you and I need not retrace what your dear mother accomplished for us. She had time to reveal herself to you, my dear?"

"Yes; Barry!" Remembering, Rose-Ann looked haggard. Compton leaned forward and touched her hand and the touch recalled her.

"She was about the bravest, most splendid woman I ever knew, Rose-Ann, and she was right, right to the core."

"No, Barry! She was wrong. All her life she was crushed—she couldn't rise against——" Rose-Ann wanted to say "Father", but there was no need, between her and Compton, for saying unnecessary things.

"Rose-Ann, you must be just. Your father dealt always with a woman who was *not* your mother. That woman, the yielding, patient woman, was the kind to *be* crushed—she knew that at last. Had she been her sunny, joyous self, had she added that to what your father gave her, she would have been victorious. Your father is a good and just man, but his inheritance has made him hard. When one has such a golden gift as your mother had, Rose-Ann, she owes it to love, to be herself, to share it. Your mother realized this at last and she was right. Rose-Ann, she feared for you!"

“Barry”—the girl close to Compton seemed a stranger—  
“Barry, I hate my father!”

Compton did not combat this. He merely asked, again reaching toward Rose-Ann:

“Why, my dear?”

“Because of what he did to my mother.”

“He never dealt with your mother as you and I knew her. He might well, in a bitter moment, resent this. How would he have dealt with her—had he known?”

“He would have broken her; killed her!” The voice was unrelenting.

“That’s a terrible thing to say of any human being, Rose-Ann, unless you *know* it to be true. During all the years of his life with your mother, Rose-Ann, your father was adjusting himself to a woman who was acting a part——”

“Barry, stop, stop!” Rose-Ann seemed protecting herself against the thing that she knew was truth.

“It is too late for that, Rose-Ann. Women, tender, fond women often deal men cruel blows when most they mean to be loyal. And now if you, Rose-Ann, knowing what you do, go on judging, condemning, you will fail your mother. You must drop this shield behind which you are hiding and come forth. If you have anything superior to what you see in your family, you owe it to them, not others. You must deal openly.”

“But they are so hard, Barry. So cruel.”

“And you, my dear girl, are you not hard and, perhaps, unjust?”

“They would hate the girl I really am, Barry!”

The pitiful surrender touched Compton.

“How do you know, my dear?”

“I *do* know, Barry.”

“I think not. Now see here, my dear girl, you have a right to your life. You must not steal it and leave a black trail behind you. Live in the open; deal frankly, Rose-Ann, and hopefully—when you have done this you will be in a position to act.”

“Barry, I cannot.”



“Yes, you can, Rose-Ann. In the name of your mother, I demand it of you!”

Compton’s words rang out like the tones of a bell.

“Have they told you of your mother’s will, Rose-Ann?”

“No.”

“She has left her share of her aunt’s legacy to you. That, added to your own, makes you free to be yourself. First, Rose-Ann, stand forth; the rest will be clear sailing—even at the worst. Your mother called this gift your open door, Rose-Ann. She was very whimsical with me; quite different from what she was at home.” Compton seemed bent upon making the dual personality clear.

“Barry, it breaks my heart.”

Compton saw the softened face, he heard the sob-shaken voice break into gentler tones. Closing his eyes, he talked on as if unheeding the sanctifying change.

“This problem of your mother’s, Rose-Ann, she has left you free to solve. She did a brave thing when she laid her life open to you; her real self. She has done a wise thing in leaving you economically independent—the lack of that in the past has helped to forge the barrier between men and women—there is no excuse for you. There are many, Rose-Ann—and I was one of them until lately—who believed your father to be a hard, domineering man—he may not be at heart! He may, in his soul, be hungering and thirsting for what life has denied. Rose-Ann, in your mother’s name, give him opportunity to prove himself in dealing with what I know you to be; what your mother hoped for you to be. Unless you do this while you are young you will be as I am now! One who hated until it was too late to love—when love might have counted the most.”

Rose-Ann looked up and she saw, for a moment, the very soul of Barry Compton. A stark, bare soul. It stood as a pine stands upon a desolate hill. It had borne the winds and floods—it was twisted but not bent—it stood erect before her. It was trying to help her by exposing itself.

And then Rose-Ann did the only thing she could do—she went to Compton and pressed her lips to his white forehead.

"I shall always remember," she said, "this talk and—Mother's."

After that the subject was never reopened, except indirectly.

It was late afternoon when Rose-Ann returned home. She went up the hill with a sense of lightness that she had not felt for many a long day; the sun was gone behind the distant hills and the cold air was congealing the trickling brooks by the roadside that had so hopefully been loosened earlier.

The sky was filled with great masses of white clouds that looked like broken and freed snow; these were growing pink in the afterglow. Rose-Ann stood still and watched it all with an overpowering realization of coming happiness—the righting of things; and with this came the glorious acceptance of the fact that her mother had never been really crushed, but had lived vitally—powerfully flowing through and under all that had hidden her, and so she must live on—in her child.

At that moment Rose-Ann opened her soul to life; life and all it held; but she vowed that she would with all, through all, be free to give as well as to accept; to impress as well as to receive impressions. She would be her mother's *Thought* in form.

When she entered the house the family were in the library.

Dinner had not been announced and Albert Townsend had just come up from Essex on the five o'clock train. John Trevall held an open paper in his hand.

"Oh! Rose-Ann," he said, "this is a copy of your mother's will."

"And you," Prudence broke in, "are quite an heiress." Prudence tried to make her voice sisterly and sympathetic, but the acid tinged it.

"You have what your mother terms her share and your own." Trevall frowned at Prudence's interruption.

"Barry Compton and that man Cleaver were the witnesses—before my lawyer. This all seems to me to be regular enough, but in bad taste as far as the witnesses are concerned, and the time and place. However, I shall see the matter properly adjusted." Trevall had himself well in hand.

“It is an added grief to me at this hour to find that your dear mother could act so in defiance of what she must have known were my wishes. And I am grieved and shocked, Rose-Ann, at your going to Compton!”

“I think it is terrible for Father,” Prudence whimpered; “what will people think?”

Rose-Ann sat quietly down and said nothing.

She was holding to that moment on the hill—when she accepted life. She was not to be driven by life or absorbed by it—she would be part of it. And this was part of it—her family; her relation to them—she must look well to that. She merely raised her tired eyes and smiled at her father.

With the coming of spring hard and bitter emotions softened as the soil did that was opening to the flowers.

John Trevall drove as usual to Essex and home again. If his heart ever ached, his self-control never failed him.

Sometimes Rose-Ann felt that he was glad of her presence. He gave no sign of this by word, but often the sternness of his mouth relaxed when she had a merry moment.

But Trevall was cautious.

With Prudence’s share of her mother’s legacy, the house was begun in Middle Essex. Townsend had been recently made teller of the bank and a friend of his, William Braintree from Boston, was selected to take the head clerkship.

Braintree was a handsome fellow of twenty-six or -seven; college bred and of good old New England stock. He had been a classmate of Townsend’s at Harvard and what had drawn them together was difficult to tell. The two men were, to all outward appearances, markedly unlike. There were an alertness and a decisiveness about Braintree that Townsend utterly lacked; he had a small income of his own that made him independent of the salary offered him by Trevall, but this did not lessen his interest in his work nor the zest with which he attacked it.

During their college days both Braintree and Townsend, owing to a certain austerity of code and manner, had been isolated somewhat from their fellows who, while possibly as

honourable as they, assumed a scoffing attitude toward anything personal or serious.

Finding themselves in a small minority they naturally cultivated each other, and as often happens in such cases, they both discovered likable and similar traits upon which to build sincere friendship. Townsend differed from Braintree in that he never suspected his limitations. He had ample freedom for all his mentality, ambitions, and desires. When any crisis loomed on Townsend's horizon it was met by spontaneous preparedness.

With Braintree this was not so. Without affectation he was as rigid in his personal tastes as a mediæval saint, with this difference—he realized the limitations of saints. He knew that something set him aside from the many, but he recoiled from paying in spurious coin—and to him it would have been that—for the care-free enjoyment of life that the many accepted in the pure spirit of give and take.

Braintree then had started out in life with a theory and he was prepared to make all else conform to that—and his theory was, he acknowledged, only secure behind a stockade. From that vantage point he had looked on at life; conscious that he had no real part in it.

All this had contributed to making Braintree an intimate and favourite with few—but he was respected by all. Perhaps it was sheer loneliness that had drawn him to Townsend.

When Rose-Ann first met Braintree, who lived with a Middle Essex family as a "paying guest," she was confused and impressed. Her youth rose joyously to the splendid youth in him. To her beauty-loving nature his big handsome body made an appeal that she had never known before in her intercourse with young people of the town. Where others had bored her, Braintree interested her.

He soon became worthy of her skill at tennis; he loved the open and books; he was alive, as she was—but he puzzled her.

She confided her emotions to Barry Compton as he and she paced his old-fashioned garden in the late spring.

"He is so different, Barry," she mused, her eyes on the rim

of golden crocuses that edged the stepping stones that she and Compton were treading like children—half jumping from stone to stone; “he’s like—at least part of him is—like something encased in crystal. I can see it, but I just cannot touch it.”

“Do you like the young fellow, Rose-Ann?”

Compton looked straight ahead at the splendour of young budding bushes and trees.

“Well, Barry, I like the thing in the crystal. That is what gets me—it’s the best of him.”

“And the rest, Rose-Ann, the part that is—well, outside the crystal?”

“Barry, that’s the trouble. The two parts don’t seem to fit—and I am always trying to look through and get the one out and match it with the other.”

“Ah, Rose-Ann, you’re playing with fire in the usual mad way. Why should you qualify as Smasher and Connector of this stranger in our midst?”

“Oh, Barry, he has ideas. It’s so delightful to play around with someone with ideas of his own. Most of the others have ideas that have been handed down to them like rag dolls with new dresses on. Mr. Braintree has some brand-new notions and *he* tries to put old duds on them.”

“Rose-Ann!” There was a sharp note in Compton’s voice, “do you ever think about going abroad these days?”

Rose-Ann stopped short, and the little gasp that Compton never heard without a twinge greeted him. Then:

“Not just yet, Barry, not just yet. You see—I should always be trying to find—her—in the places to which we planned to go together.”

“I see, my dear! Well, I have been thinking lately of another plan. As I often say to you, middle age has its recompenses and old age its special favours. I’m thinking of going West this summer. With all my globe-trotting I’ve never been there and there is someone I want very much to see in the Far West. Rose-Ann, how would you like to go with me as a—special favour?”

Rose-Ann stood still and looked at Compton while her face changed from blank amazement to amused delight.

"Why, Barry—you shock me!" she said. "You're not old and you know it. Father has lately acted as if he were not sure of me; expected me to spring something on him, and if I should suggest this mad plan of yours he'd feel confirmed in his opinion. But the West, Barry, the West! You tempt me sore, you mad Barry! Why, all my life I've dreamed of the West—somehow it has always seemed the only place big enough to spread out in. The West!" Rose-Ann gave an exaggerated sigh. "Barry!" she added, "don't say things like that to me. There may be instantaneous combustion."

Compton laughed.

"Oh! well, we might get around your conservatism, Rose-Ann," he said, "we could take another woman along or—a policeman."

"Barry!"

"Well, it's worth thinking about, and I would like to have you meet Eric Manville."

"What a name for the West! And who is Eric Manville, Barry? And why do you spring him on me just now, you—you subtle old dear?"

"Because"—Compton's face grew serious—"you ought to see men. And Eric *is* a man. It's a bad thing for a girl to know only certain types. It's a disadvantage."

"You insult my male friends, Barry." Rose-Ann tried to turn the conversation into shallow channels, but Compton was not to be side-tracked.

"I mean what I say, Rose-Ann. Lately you have seemed to me to be drifting—fallen from your high ambitions. Don't flax out, my dear, it is fatal at your age. How about college?"

"I still think of that, Barry, but I want if I go to college to have a definite aim now. I'm old, terribly old, sir."

"You look about seventeen, Rose-Ann." Then: "Has it ever occurred to you, my dear, that you are very beautiful?"

"I'm rather respectable looking, Barry."

"No, that's just what you are not, my dear, according to

certain standards. Your hair has a glint that is not at all respectable or safe. Your eyes, child, should often have blinders on; they are not just eyes. Your smile, Rose-Ann: your smile makes one remember all the things he ever wanted and couldn't have. Some women, who can be trusted, should know such things about themselves."

"Barry, you make me want to cry."

"Instead, I want you to be the happiest woman in the world, Rose-Ann, and no woman is happy if she is ignorant. Have you ever been farther from your moorings than Boston, Rose-Ann?"

"Yes, sir. I've motored several times through the White Mountains and twice I've been to New York. Father insists that once one has seen Boston he has seen all cities; but, of course, that isn't so. Cities are as different as folks. The last time I was in New York I went to Washington. That seems like the spirit of cities. I adored it. Yes, sir, I'm a travelled person."

"I was not thinking so much of cities, Rose-Ann, as spaces between cities; the life that is lived by people who are creating life; people different from—well, New England folk. I've lived always among finished products and so have you—we have this ignorance in common, Rose-Ann—and it is rather interesting to see what effect upon us the unknown would have."

"Barry, my blood is running riot in my veins. I think I would be willing to die if once I could know the thing you mean. It would take our breaths, Barry. We'd cling and shiver maybe, but we'd be a better man and woman for ever after."

There was a pause. Then Rose-Ann, linking her arm in Compton's, said:

"Barry, why don't you write and ask that friend of yours—that Eric Something, to come here? You might go back with him, you know, and he could put life in us. Tell me about him. Is he young?"

"About thirty-two or -three, I should say." Compton was visioning Manville.

“He was in a crystal once, Rose-Ann—your simile made me think of him. He splintered it—and got free. But once free, Manville had to learn to manage the thing he had freed in himself. People often do, you know. I have not seen Manville for years.”

“Barry!” Rose-Ann shook a finger at him, “are you warning me? Am I in danger?”

“My dear child, you are always in danger because——” Compton paused.

“Because what, Barry?”

“You are trying to fly before you learn to walk. There is a legend about the marlit bird, you know, that reminds me of you. Having no feet, the creature always had to fly, could alight nowhere. My dear Rose-Ann, you *have* feet. Learn to manage them on this earth of ours—this little spot of earth, Middle Essex—and then take to wings. I would not limit your flights, but I do not want you to have any more tumbles than are necessary.”

“Barry”—Rose-Ann’s voice trembled—“we are getting very, very serious, and on such a day, too! There are days when I cannot see over the rim of things. Days when I think of Mother’s poor little futile life snapped off just when *she* might have tried her wings; but on such days as this, Barry, I can feel myself rising—rising and leaving the rim behind.”

Compton looked at the young vital creature beside him; felt her charm and appeal that were so intensely feminine yet daringly suggestive of strength.

“Rose-Ann,” he said, and his eyes were now fixed upon the edge of sunny crocuses, “your life, my dear, is to justify your mother’s. There is no other solution. Remember that.”

“Are you clipping my wings, Barry?”

“No, Rose-Ann—just trying to strengthen them.”

The spring afternoon was warm and fragrant and the two walking in the old-fashioned garden talked on until the shadows fell across the sweet young grass.

And later, when Rose-Ann was alone at home, her thoughts



wandered back to all that Compton had said. Detached from him, it sounded grave and apprehensive.

“And what started it all?” Rose-Ann thought. Then she flushed and her pulses throbbed.

“Braintree!”

That was it. Barry was warning her. Barry wanted to take her away; wanted her to meet other men—Eric Manville in particular.

“Why? Why?” murmured the girl to herself; and then her eyes grew dreamy.

Poor Compton, as people often do, had headed Rose-Ann in Braintree’s direction when most desiring to accomplish the opposite. Compton was afraid of Braintree. He saw what Rose-Ann saw, but he saw more. He realized from a knowledge, gleaned from his reading and study, that it was the similarity between Braintree and her own people that was luring Rose-Ann in her hours of reaction from her mother’s death.

The inner man that Rose-Ann perceived was, Compton agreed, possible, but its development was a mere chance unless Braintree was shaken out of the inheritance of which he was so proud.

“And I do not want Rose-Ann,” thought Compton, also sitting alone after the garden talk, “to be hurt by the splintered glass when that crystal that she feels surrounds Braintree is crushed—if it ever is!”

When summer came to Middle Essex life became pleasanter than Rose-Ann had ever known it.

The house was still vibrating to that sense of loneliness that Faith’s going had evolved. It still hurt Rose-Ann to see any one sitting in the little rocker in the living room, and she had had a new flooring put in her room. She could not bear the hole in the floor. She felt no curiosity about the conversations carried on below.

Always it was her mother’s voice that she seemed to miss; the pleas for her; the efforts to be loyal where loyalties so often clashed—oh! how hard it must have been. And the

tappings on the chair had become unendurable. So Rose-Ann had the floor relaid.

“But why this sudden desire?” Trevall had asked. “The rug seems to cover the space perfectly.”

“I can hear voices too plainly,” Rose-Ann carelessly explained, “through the stove hole.”

“Have you not always heard them?”

Trevall was not imaginative, but a curious expression passed across his face.

“Yes,” Rose-Ann replied gently, “and I miss Mother’s.”

So the floor was relaid, and the upper chamber had a modern look that jarred the placid unity of the rest of the house.

There were gay cretonne hangings and coverings—every new detail brought a grim setting to Trevall’s jaw, for they were bought with Rose-Ann’s money and she never asked for approbation.

“Being at the back of the house, Daddy,” she flippantly explained, “the neighbours will not get too great a jog, and I adore the colour. Look at those cocky birds among the flowers and leaves—they simply sing to me.”

“I dislike the whole thing,” said Trevall, and so he did; and Rose-Ann was puzzling him.

It was only in her own brightened and modernized chamber that Rose-Ann could hold her mother’s memory without a pang.

“How the dear would have loved it,” she said. And presently the little old rocker found its place by her own fireside, and the gay little workbag still hung over the top! No one missed the chair from the room below, and that hurt Rose-Ann, but she patted it gently and whispered:

“Never mind, ducky, you’d love best to be here.”

But if the house echoed to footfalls that had gone their distant way, the sunny out of doors was vibrant with joy, promise, and sweetness.

There was Barry Compton to visit with—and some anxiety for his sick spells and hours of detachment while he wrote his mysterious book. There was William Braintree to play

with—and there were the long walks alone, often ending in the churchyard where, in that quiet place, she divided her time between Faith Trevall's revered mound among the elect and Aunt Theodora's in the forgotten corner.

“Somehow, little old Auntie,” Rose-Ann whispered one day as she knelt to plant ivy on the flattened grave, “I believe Mother will look you up and—make you happy. I like to think of you together.”

This seemed, even to Rose-Ann upon reflection, to be rather daring, and having finished her task she sat on the old broken stone, her sweet face resting in her rather soiled hands—and tried to understand the difference between her mother and that long-dead ancestor. “Mother had not lived out her longing and Aunt Theodora had. But——”

And it was the path that Theodora Trevall had chosen that lured Rose-Ann more intensely than the one her mother had trod!

It was by Aunt Theodora's grave that Braintree found Rose-Ann one June afternoon.

He had come up from Essex early, in order, so he believed, to have a game of tennis. Braintree was not fond of sport and he played automatically, but it was the best avenue of reaching Rose-Ann, so Braintree availed himself of it.

He had gone to her house and to Prudence's—the Townsends were living in their pretty finished house now and Prudence had already taken on the air of assurance that Middle Essex alone could bestow upon her.

“I think,” Prudence had told Braintree, “that you'll find Rose-Ann at Mr. Compton's or—perhaps in the graveyard. She often goes to Mother's grave.”

Braintree chose the latter possibility. If Compton had doubts about Braintree, Braintree had none about him. Very definitely, so Braintree thought, danger lurked in Compton's quarter.

It was the influence Compton held over Rose-Ann that disturbed Braintree.

The silence in the Place of the Dead impressed him. He stepped softly and bared his head. The full June sunlight

beat down upon him, and standing at the entrance of the Trevall plot, disappointed and dismayed at not finding Rose-Ann, he had never looked handsomer or more human.

From afar Rose-Ann saw him. Saw him as she had never seen him before—off his guard!

For a moment—one of those unsuspected moments when Fate gambles recklessly—Rose-Ann sat very still, and then the call of her youth and loneliness deafened her. Something stronger than her doubt pleaded for Braintree. He looked so tall and big and protecting. He had sought her and she must meet him!

She stood up, a slight, lovely figure, and Braintree saw her. His face suddenly flushed and his eyes grew grave and deep. He came quickly toward her with outstretched hands. His crystallized self throbbed but did not shatter its prism.

“You look,” he whispered when he reached her, “like a little spirit risen from the earth. Just for a moment I feared that you might disappear before I could—hold you.”

The words were daring, and since Braintree was holding Rose-Ann’s small, stained hands, they were significant. He could not let them fall from his; he pressed them closer.

“I feel,” Rose-Ann did not move away, “rather glad to be—held from disappearing. I do not want to disappear.”

“Rose-Ann?”

The world-old question was in Braintree’s eyes. He asked it without doubt or withholding. He had never wanted anything so much in his life as he wanted Rose-Ann, and there was no earthly reason for waiting, now that he understood.

“Rose-Ann?”

Again Fate gambled for a moment. Rose-Ann stood as still as if indeed she were a risen spirit weighing the chances of disappearance or—a static state.

To go on—with the love offered? That meant but one thing.

To slip back? That meant—what?

“Rose-Ann?”

She must act at once. That, too, Rose-Ann recognized.

Their eyes clung. Young, unafraid eyes with the sudden uprising of passion flooding them.

Without a word from Rose-Ann, Braintree bent and kissed her. In silence and awe she had surrendered. His lips upon hers made her tremble, and so Braintree gathered her in his arms.

She lay there quiet and breathing so lightly that she seemed unconscious. But never before had Rose-Ann been so alive. It was like being aware for the first time in her life of a great power that meant herself! She lifted her eyes to Braintree's and whispered:

"And this is what it meant?"

"Yes, Rose-Ann. It has swept us away, but together."

"Away? Away from what?"

"Everything. It is carrying us to a new heaven and a new earth."

Trevall was deeply moved when Braintree came to him that night in the library. Rose-Ann had gone to Compton.

Braintree had all the essentials dear to Trevall's soul. Family—New England family. A modest fortune, not enough to kill ambition, but enough to be an incentive to greater ambition.

The physical fitness of Braintree, also, appealed to Trevall. He laid great stress upon that.

That anything so perfectly in accord with his own desires should meet with Rose-Ann's approval caused Trevall to curb the impulse to show his relief. He felt as one does in the presence of something so lightly poised as to be in danger of the least jar—Rose-Ann might from sheer perversity topple the sacred thing.

Since his wife's death Rose-Ann had been a subject of much thought to Trevall. There had been a marked change in the girl. There were moments when she did not seem to take Trevall seriously. This was most disturbing, and yet there was less and less necessity for proving to her how serious he was. Except for her determination to visit Compton, she behaved in the most seemly manner. She managed the house serenely and competently. She was adored by the

servants, and even Prudence was obliged to admit that her younger sister had at last "come to her senses."

But with this gratifying state arrived at, no one could look at Rose-Ann and not be impressed with the transitory suggestion of her moods and appearance.

"But once married," thought Trevall, "she will be safe."

Looking at Braintree, this belief grew in power. There was nothing transitory about Braintree. He was of the kind who belonged to the ages—all ages—and Trevall reflected, with a grateful sigh, that Rose-Ann had a sense of honour that might be depended upon once she took a vow. The vow was the vital and objective point.

With that air of being afraid to dislodge something Trevall talked to Braintree that evening. Then, having expressed his entire approval (he did not mention his relief), he turned to the sterner aspects of business. Braintree should, of course, be advanced at the Bank.

Since Rose-Ann had money of her own the future was about as rosy as any future could well be.

Braintree admitted this with the light of the new heaven and earth still in his eyes.

And while the two men went over the details—always edging cautiously, Rose-Ann, unknown to both, was sitting on the top step of Compton's porch catching her breath, for she had run wildly across the lawns.

"Barry!" she gasped, "the most unusual thing has happened to me. I am engaged to marry Braintree!"

The ashes fell from Compton's cigar.

"That is rather unusual, Rose-Ann," he said at last.

"Barry, it is more than that. It is epoch-making."

It was characteristic of Compton that after the first shock he relinquished whatever he had hoped for and reached out to grasp what might be offered.

All his life this had been his lot. Disease, and secret, losing battles, had weakened his mental and physical resistance, but his spirit was unconquered.

"Are you happy, Rose-Ann?" he asked, seeking now that consummation through Braintree, not another.

“Oh! Barry, I am, but I’m not sure of myself. It is myself that makes me doubt—what am I going to do with happiness?”

“It will do great things for you, my dear girl!” Compton tossed his cigar aside and bent over her as she sat at his knee; “it will reveal you, Rose-Ann, to us all.”

“How satisfying you are, Barry. One could not fail you, for you never fail others. I wonder if you will think me a cold-blooded vampire, Barry, if I tell you something?”

“No, Rose-Ann.”

“Well, lately I have seen that this was coming, and one day when I was making up the house accounts—income and expenditures, you know—something queer happened. Instead of writing down dollars and cents on one page and sugar and butter on the other I was doing this.”

She pictured it merrily.

“College.

A home with someone else.

“Travel.

Children.

“Having myself.

Giving up myself to others.

“Having my own life.

“The total was, Barry:

The Big Chance!

“I did that over and over, Barry, and it helped. And the Big Chance was all that mattered, really. The Big Chance alone, or with another. Always, the Big Chance. I was ready when Braintree spoke. He wasn’t. I saw that. He just plunged. I think women usually have the advantage of some kind of a Budget, but men just plunge. It is rather splendid of them, I think. It makes women, at least it made me, sorry and tender as if I were taking advantage.

“And then, Barry, he and I were in the old graveyard, of all places! I felt swept off my feet by the thing that had swept him, and all the cold-blooded Budget faded away. I saw that I dared take the Big Chance with Braintree. I loved the feeling of his arms—I wanted to kiss him; I trusted him, and oh! Barry, you *will* understand, I suddenly felt that I wanted him to be the father of my children. I think that

is the greatest test. I would not have to apologize for him as a father. And, Barry, I adore little children.”

The cool evening was still, and a holy radiance from a full moon fell upon Rose-Ann's uplifted face—she had laid her girl-soul bare to Compton and he felt as if he should kneel before her.

Again there swept over him the emotion that had decided his own temptations long ago when he dreamed of the Big Chance with a woman.

He wondered how men—dared! Men who craved the best in women; men who could only be satisfied with the best. How dared they?

That Braintree *dared* did not lower Compton's estimate of the man; that Rose-Ann trusted, called forth hope and a new sense of life.

Women, such women as Rose-Ann, had a light within them that needed no interpretation; that shamed doubt.

“And so I am happy, Barry.”

The words came swiftly, as if shielding the moment of revelation.

“My dear, my dear, you have made me very happy. You have given back to me something I thought was lost for ever.”

And then Compton bent and kissed the face close to his—waiting for the kiss.

Compton had never touched Rose-Ann's lips before—it marked a new relation between them.



## CHAPTER VI

THE engagement, announced at a small dinner over which Prudence presided in her father's house, caused a mild and gratified ripple. Every such union in Middle Essex strengthened the foundations that were often threatened by innovations. After the congratulations Rose-Ann and Braintree were permitted to indulge any personal idiosyncrasies they might have. They would be proper ones, without doubt.

Rose-Ann blossomed suddenly into an exquisitely lovely girl. Her father, regarding her as he might a plant whose kind he was familiar with but not its bloom, felt like exclaiming: "I had not anticipated this!" Secretly Trevall was thankful that another, not himself, was to deal with the woman Rose-Ann promised to be.

Braintree, in the first flush of happiness and possession, saw no flaw in Rose-Ann and his best and truest nature, while not splintering the crystal that held it, warmed it so radiantly that Rose-Ann felt the heat and expanded in response. It was so exactly to her taste to be appreciated, flattered, and considered. This new phase of existence did not make the girl selfish or self-centred—she became touchingly humble, she reached forth as she had never done before, to anticipate the wishes of others; to be what they believed her to be. So intent was she upon this that she dragged into the light of day her every shortcoming. She did not mean that Braintree should take her under false pretences. She made an effort to be as frank with him as she had always been with Compton.

This aspect, as might be expected, blinded Braintree to any real danger. He saw complete and beautiful surrender to a love that had mastered Rose-Ann. And while he and

she looked from a different angle at some things, they had much in common.

Spurred to ambition by Rose-Ann's prowess, Braintree took anew to outdoor sports, and while he never fully enjoyed them, he gloried in the results. His health was perfect; he welcomed every day as if it were another opportunity to test and prove his mettle. His new work at the Bank called forth unsuspected powers of endurance and concentration.

Rose-Ann, again with her own money, bought that summer a little roadster and soon became a familiar figure on the broad highway.

The innovation naturally appalled Trevall. It was one thing for Rose-Ann to sit beside him at the wheel and quite another to dash through the landscape unaccompanied, or with someone of her own choosing.

"Billy approves!" Rose-Ann smilingly silenced her father—of course with her natural tendency to nicknames, Braintree, a bit jarred, it must be confessed, was known now as Billy.

"And oh! Daddy, the feeling is rapturous. I tell you, when I get to heaven, if I ever do, I hope they'll give me a car instead of wings."

"I have nothing to say, Rose-Ann, if William approves." Trevall ignored the flippancy of nicknames and irreligious joking—"but I hope that you will observe the laws for safety."

"I will, Daddy. My neck was never so precious as now."

It became a habit with Rose-Ann to drive into Essex and meet Braintree each day. Sometimes she would take him to the tennis courts, where he changed to flannels and competed with Rose-Ann, or she took him for long drives in the country which, that summer, was lovely beyond words.

The drives pleased Braintree most of all. He grew inordinately proud of the girl beside him; proud of her skill and daring; proud of her beauty and independence. She was so surely *his* that every attribute was an added asset to his

growing success. In the glow of content, marriage was rarely thought of except as a desirable port to which they were naturally drifting on a golden sea.

And then one day, they were a long distance from home and the little car was flying over the perfect road, Rose-Ann spoke of Aunt Theodora. She had had the subject in mind for several days. Braintree had called it forth by a reference he had made to the startling purity of Rose-Ann's nature. He mistook her quaint knowledge for—ignorance.

“My darling,” he had whispered, “there are times when you make me afraid. You see me through your own untouched idealism and when you find I am—well, just a man madly in love—what is going to happen to us?”

Without realizing it, Braintree had in common with his forbears a belief that marriage gave license and sanctity to all relations.

The remark had caused Rose-Ann a wakeful night; had taken her to the window overlooking the road upon which Aunt Theodora had stood and flung back her challenge.

“I've got to make Billy understand,” Rose-Ann spoke aloud as she viewed the crest of the hill in the moonlight, “that the thing that is going to happen is this—a woman is going to meet her man, not a silly fool. I've read and thought my way out of the jungle. I'll tell him about Aunt Theodora and my likeness to her.”

This instantly seemed to focus the whole situation. Rose-Ann believed she understood, at last, her long-dead ancestor. The fire and blood that held part in that fugitive's character were like to those that raced in Rose-Ann's own. Having a vision of happiness as Aunt Theodora had, she now could count the cost. It was quite plain.

“And I realize, too, the cost!” Rose-Ann confessed to herself. “I'm that kind of a woman, and I do not believe Billy suspects it. He hasn't got to make me—I'm made. Poor dear! he likes to think he's lured an angel from a niche in Paradise, and like all men after he marries what he thinks he's lured, he'd expect her to become—a woman. Well, there'll be no agony of readjustment here, Billy my dear, I'm a

woman now and we'll discount the angel period. I like you mightily, my love, but also—you are an opportunity."

And so sitting close to Braintree in the trim car Rose-Ann began her devastation of Braintree's angelic conception of her.

"Billy," she said, giving him the side smile that her attention to the wheel necessitated, "I'm going to tell you a story. It's about an old, disreputable aunt of mine; we do not often speak of her, but since they say I resemble her, and since it was beside her grave that you told me you loved me, I'm going to share her with you."

If coming events sometimes cast their shadows, they occasionally announce their approach by a warning blast.

Braintree suddenly started and put his hand over Rose-Ann's as it clutched the wheel.

"I wish that you would slacken your speed," he said.

"Nonsense, Billy, I know this road. It was meant to fly over. Now listen to the story of Aunt Theodora."

Braintree listened. He listened to the words and tones; something far back of his organs of hearing listened to echoes and undertones, and took alarm.

Rose-Ann's reading and hours of reflection had given her a knowledge of life; a background that was as frank as it was startling. She called certain things by grim Saxon names and Braintree shrank as he might from blasphemy on the lips of a child.

Indeed, it was by considering Rose-Ann as a child dealing with expressions that she could not possibly comprehend, that he kept his poise.

His eyes never left the glowing, vital face beside him.

"You see, Billy," Aunt Theodora's sketchy history came to an abrupt end, and Rose-Ann appeared to take her own place on Braintree's horizon; "all my life long the trouble has been that I have rebelled, as Aunt Theodora did, against the iron in my family inheritance. I understand it now. I am different. I love life, warm and quick. I love being part of life—all of life. I'm not afraid, and I'll pay the toll. God has been very good to me, Billy dear, in giving me my chance through love and you. That poor little old auntie of

mine had to steal her bit. Had I married what she probably did, I, too, would have followed the call of my blood. Nothing could cheat me of my own.

"You must not think me a white dove, Billy dear. I hate to have you act as if you were bowing down to a prudish little statue on a shelf. I'm just a woman out for life. Thank God! it is *our* life, Billy. Isn't it splendid?"

Braintree's face was set and—tender. He looked at Rose-Ann, not daring to express his true feelings for fear he might startle her into consciousness by suggestion.

Of course, he thought, she is tinged by the thing that is menacing other women, but she does not understand.

"Rose-Ann," he said presently, ignoring all that had just been said, "I want you to marry me—at once!"

The fear in Braintree's voice was hid by the sincere desire he had to save and protect the woman he loved. He, like his forbears, saw safety for her only in marriage. He did not for an instant doubt the safety of that sanctuary. He understood, he believed, more than Rose-Ann's amazing words had expressed. He felt the high tide of emotion and youth that had spurred the girl to her conclusions; he had controlled and subdued them for himself; he would be Rose-Ann's interpreter as well as lover, but he must be her husband. Only in that capacity could he command the situation.

"At once, Billy? How absurd."

"We need not wait, my dear girl. With your little fortune and mine," he smiled, "we can begin our life together. There is no real life for either of us until we are married."

"I don't want to think in terms of income, Billy. That is one thing that disturbs me. I wish that you and I could—" here a whimsical laugh startled Braintree—"do the stunt that Aunt Theodora and her—her artist-man did."

"Rose-Ann!"

"Don't look snippy, Billy. I mean of course being perfectly proper, you and I. Correctly married and all that—but afterward, our faces set to the open, going forth to find our place in life. It's so horribly safe about us. House

and three meals sure and certain. Billy, what am I going to do to fill in the day—when I'm married?"

"Be my wife, darling." The strange fear still held Braintree. "Keep house and love bright and shining."

"It will never fill in the whole day, Billy. I'll have to consult Barry about that."

"Rose-Ann, I do not like Compton. I do not trust him."

Braintree had never gone as far as this before.

Rose-Ann gave him a quick side glance.

"I'm sorry, Billy. I like him a great deal and he is to be trusted. You must—" Rose-Ann leaped ahead in her thought—"you must try to like him, for he is my best friend."

Suddenly Braintree asked:

"Have you got your ideas of life, Rose-Ann, through Compton or—books?"

"Both, Billy. Barry and I talk of everything—especially after we read books."

Braintree shuddered as he reflected upon the conversations.

"Cold, Billy?"

"It is a bit chilly."

They were skimming along the road toward home when Rose-Ann suddenly slowed down. The unbroken hillside known as Far Essex was beside them.

"Why—" she said and stopped the car—"why, we'll build here, Billy—on that hill! No one has thought of it—we'll be pioneers—we'll put our house right there—see?" she pointed to a rocky, elm-crowned rise of ground. "We'll start Far Essex. I can see it like a picture. The dining room will be the link—between kitchen and living rooms. A narrow room facing east and west; sunrises and sunsets. Open fireplaces—many of them—a big room to begin and grow in. Billy, can you see it?"

Rose-Ann was ecstatic.

"They will think us mad, my darling." Braintree was estimating the cost of the land.

"Well, we are, Billy—mad as people are who let go—and do not know where they are going to land. Never mind—if I don't have my house there, I'll have no house."

After all, odd as it seemed, there were advantages in the scheme, and Braintree was counting them. Land would be cheap. It was near the station and happily distant from neighbours.

"I'd build on the edge of—nothing!" Braintree whispered, "rather than wait, my beloved."

Braintree had let go, but he believed he knew perfectly where he was going to land.

It all seemed too, too easy after that.

Trevall was raised to a state bordering upon excitement. What he had feared for his younger daughter he had never dared to express, but she had always filled him with a grave and tangible anxiety. It was to be all right now. He knew Braintree's type—did he not, though!—and Braintree would make Rose-Ann happy for, added to type was modern comprehension that knew how to curb tradition and direct it.

Prudence shared her father's joy and relief.

"William is perfect, Father," she said. "Albert has known him from boyhood up. He's quite wonderful as to—to ideals, you know and all that—and simply unbending in the final analysis." Prudence was inarticulate when it came to details.

"And so practical, Father. Rose-Ann needs just such a balance. The way she handles Mother's legacy proves that. William keeps account of every last item. He knows where he stands, always. I can just see him organizing Rose-Ann."

But it was to Compton that Rose-Ann went with all her doubts and quivers of joy. She could speak to Compton without hesitation—she never had to weigh her words with him—he understood.

Braintree had left early one stormy August evening.

"Now that we have each other," he explained, "we must save ourselves for each other, dear. We must not—exhaust each other."

Rose-Ann laughed.

"Do I exhaust you, Billy?" she asked. "I'm as fresh as a daisy—all the time."

Braintree smiled indulgently and kissed her passionately. He felt like a mariner nearing port after a dangerous passage.

"Nice old Billy," she whispered. "Sometimes I think you are afraid of me."

But when he was gone and Rose-Ann, in her room upstairs, looked out into the heart of the storm, she saw a light in Compton's library window and without a moment's hesitation she donned storm coat and rubbers and set forth.

When she reached Compton's she tiptoed to the side piazza upon which the library opened, and tapped on the glass. That was now considered her private entrance. Compton was reading but looked up instantly and stared at the rain-drenched laughing face outside. He got up, and opened the window.

"Well," he said, "I wonder if there is any limit to the things you may do, Rose-Ann?"

"I think not, Barry. Please let me sit by your fire and dry out."

"Of course. Is anything the matter?"

He was taking her coat and hat.

"Certainly. I wanted to shake all my small doubts out and go over the list with you."

"Have you doubts, Rose-Ann? You, a girl about to marry the man you love? Shame on you!"

"That's just it, Barry." Rose-Ann was crouching before the small welcome fire on the hearth. "What *is* love?"

"I suppose every soul on earth has asked that, child—and found thousands of answers. Shake out your doubts."

"Well, sir, I'll shake out first the things I'm pretty sure of."

"I love to have Billy touch me and say that he—wants me above anything on earth."

"Love scores one!" Barry broke in.

"Barry, I still like to think of Billy as the father of my children. I always shocked Prue by saying that my children had to choose my husband for me."

Compton chuckled.

"Prudence thinks children immoral until they are making bodily nuisances of themselves," he said.



“Exactly! Well, Barry, I really approve of the choice my children have made.”

“Good!”

“I am crazy about the home on the untried hill. It’s such a dare—and we are going to take it and prove what it means to start a boom. I’m going to have all the things in that house that I have never had anywhere else—music for Mother and you and me.

“Books! I want you to choose many for me. Books possible for married women to possess but which young girls have to—lie about.”

“You little desperado, Rose-Ann.”

They nodded at each other happily.

“But, Barry”; and here Rose-Ann grew serious and wistful. “Billy agrees to everything—as if it really did not matter, or——”

“Or what, Rose-Ann?”

“Or as if he meant to have his say—by and by. Goodness! Barry, I don’t mind opposition. I’ve been brought up on that, the fun is to win out—or surrender. Something vital, something to clinch, but Billy just lets me slip along. It isn’t natural or human.”

“You show the lust of battle, Rose-Ann.”

“Yes. To simply go up to that house on the hill, Barry, and end it all, would be——”

“Exactly what, Rose-Ann?”

“Well, the beginning of calamity. I want to go on and on with Billy. I want to go from one experience to another with him. Grow up with him to the very end of life, you know. Never stop. I tire him when I talk like this—he gets up and looks puzzled. He seems, I hardly know what to say, Barry, but he seems to think that marriage in a way is a terminal—and oh! I think of it as a starting point.”

Compton looked at the grave, absorbed face.

“Don’t expect too much, my dear,” he said; “a man goes on in his business and, of course, experiences for you both will come—but when a man marries, his home life does seem a bit stationary to him; it must.”

"I'm afraid I don't take root easily." Rose-Ann shook her head. "I like the wing idea better. Settling on branches—and then off and up."

"Have you talked this out with Braintree, Rose-Ann? You should, you know."

"Yes, I have. He thinks it a joke; and, Barry, it is the deadliest earnest thing in my noddle. That's the trouble. The solemnest things to me seem jokes to Billy. It's when I talk like this that he says we mustn't exhaust each other. He goes home at ten, sharp. I've battled to make him understand."

"It's ten forty-five now, Rose-Ann, and quite disreputably late."

"Isn't it? Well, I'm going now, Barry. I suppose it's either shutting your eyes and leaping or opening them and getting blind with the light. But, Barry, I'm afraid of things that somehow elude me."

"They may not exist, Rose-Ann."

"Exactly. And so—I want to tell you, I am going to marry Billy on September 24th. That was Mother's wedding day. No one will ever know, but I'm going to fancy her standing beside me—my maid of honour; sort of bucking me up."

When Rose-Ann had slipped again through the window and out into the storm, Compton sat on by the ashy hearth and grew grimly serious.

"She'll go on growing," he thought, "but Braintree won't—he's finished, and she senses it. What will he do when she pushes on? He had better not try to—to grip her." Compton looked fierce.

"It will all depend upon whether she holds him sensually, alone, or spiritually as well. In the latter case there may be hope. It's a damned risk no matter which way you look at it."

Then Compton got up and walked the floor while over his face a strange and dangerous change came.

The fine features twitched and then hardened. The sensitive mouth set in firm, coarsened lines, the perspiration stood on his forehead.

Presently, with a determined gesture he touched a bell on the table. Almost at once Cleaver opened the door.

"Yes, sir," he said, his face like stone.

"Whiskey, Cleaver, and vichy."

The men stared at each other. A silent battle waged between them.

"Damn you, Cleaver, why do you stand there? When I say whiskey—you know the game's up—I say—Whiskey, damn you; don't stand there like a graven image."

"Yes, sir."

During the moments that Cleaver was absent there was no struggle in the mind of Compton—that had been waged and lost. He was waiting now as one does for ether that will deaden consciousness of pain! The twitching of his body was the signal of the coming on of an attack of the disease that haunted him like a malevolent demon; the whiskey would at least befog his senses and help to carry him over the black space that divided his times of normality.

"To-morrow," Compton's face leered unpleasantly; "to-morrow, I will be writing my impressions of America."

And then he laughed the heavy mirthless laugh that marked his last sane border line.

## CHAPTER VII

COMPTON was not a man to live in any community as a nonentity, and between the spells of his passionate devotion to the book he was supposed to be writing, he gave himself freely to his neighbours' needs and whatever demands the small township made upon him, for in time people to a certain extent had accepted him.

By training he was a lawyer, but his absence abroad had prevented any application of his profession to practical ends, and his fortune relieved him of any necessity to resort to it; still, now that he had definitely decided to remain in Middle Essex, he resolved to creep out of his seclusion and mingle with what it pleased him to call "his kind"—if his kind would accept him.

His roaming life abroad had fitted rather than unfitted him for keen appreciation of this love of home, but it had been hard to combat the indifference of Middle Essex. Still, reaching out beyond Rose-Ann, he eventually touched others.

He was at last entertained cordially; his generous donations were accepted, and often the appreciative thanks came as near to being fulsome as the New England characteristics permitted.

"A bit overdone!" Compton often thought, and sighed. "I don't want to buy them, God knows!"

Compton could not conscientiously enlist his efforts in the Church. He had small sympathy with that especially as it was conducted in Essex.

"I'd bet a round sum," he often thought to himself, "that they'd cheerfully do to-day what they did a century or so ago—let some condemned wretch come into their

Holy Place in irons the Sunday before his execution and listen to his own funeral sermon.

“God! what a state of mind. No understanding of the victory of defeat; no sympathy with the beaten one who went down fighting as they never have had to fight.”

He recalled a conversation he had recently had with Trevall along this line.

“I trust the man who never knew temptation more than the man—yes, who knew temptation and conquered it,” Trevall had said.

Compton had disagreed rather vehemently.

“In my bank,” Trevall had pursued, lifting his handsome, firm chin, “I want no man who *could* be tempted.

“Why, Compton, I’ve handled millions in my time and never for one moment——”

Compton laughed aloud.

“Of course not! Trevall,” he said at last, “that’s why I wouldn’t be *sure* of your kind in *my* bank. The time might come, you know.”

At this Trevall stiffened. His conversations with Compton always came to sudden and abrupt ends.

But if Compton could not join the churchly activities, there were social ones that appealed to him.

He, one of the elect surely, resented the barbed-wire fence division between the old stock and the new.

The lately come families in Essex, proper, were permitted, of course, to gaze through the wire entanglement at their superiors, but not one of them ever leaped the hurting obstacle that stood as a barrier between.

A few had bruised and torn themselves, pressing on to a social-equality basis.

“Who do the damned things think they are, anyway?” Andrew Conklin, head of the woollen mill in Essex, queried.

Conklin had two pretty daughters and a rather fine son whom he was eager to see mount the ladder that he held firmly in place. But while Conklin served on all the business boards and was respected financially, he and his were never asked socially to those sacred gatherings in Middle Essex.

“He should confine himself to Essex,” Trevall explained to Compton on one occasion. “Are we, we old Americans, not to keep one acre of our country for our own peculiar tastes?”

“What, in the name of heaven, do Conklin and his kind want to edge in for?” Compton had returned. “Between ourselves, Trevall, we old Americans are stuffs when we segregate ourselves. It’s the leaven that helps every time. We ought to woo them.”

So Compton as time went on drove in his big gray car to Essex almost daily and quietly took in the situation.

He discovered, as he knew that he would, that Conklin was as keen a snob as Trevall. If Conklin did not exist for Trevall, on one side of the barbed wire, Conklin’s employees did not exist for him on the other side of the obstruction. And when one once began to investigate, he found himself in a maze of obstructions that bewildered and cramped everybody.

“All right!” And Compton laughed good-naturedly. “I’ll deal in opportunities.”

And so he started two or three things as a test to the public. This was before Rose-Ann’s engagement.

He organized a club which was open to all who qualified. The qualification was—a desire to learn something.

“I’d like to get my kind in to learn humanity,” he humorously thought, “and Conklin’s in to learn common horse sense.”

In the meantime, however, the long-suppressed school teachers and the vivid, wholesome little librarian rose to his bait and the Club, known as the Torch Light, became popular.

Eventually Compton had a really artistic house erected which was open every day and evening for classes in various crafts and trades; lectures and social gatherings.

Instructors came from Boston and leaders were discovered in Essex.

Naturally Rose-Ann became involved. She had never enjoyed anything more than the Torch Light.

It was really living—this running into Essex, either in her roadster or with Compton. She meant after her marriage definitely to assist Compton regularly.

Often Rose-Ann remained all day at the Club House, either taking a course in one thing or another, or attending a session of some young girls' or boys' club.

"Why, Barry!" she confided enthusiastically, "they're just the livest things—I feel fairly mouldy beside them."

Seeing Miss Trevall enter the ranks, the Misses Conklin ventured in. This might, vicariously, bring about their own redemption socially, they believed.

"If you want to have a real good time," Rose-Ann told Braintree, "come in while the thing's new."

But Braintree was too busy. It pleased him to consider that his time and talent were too valuable for side play.

"All right for Compton," he said to Rose-Ann. "With his money and idle hours, he's got to find something to do."

"It's a big, vital thing that he is doing, Billy," Rose-Ann looked serious; "but he's making it attractive. When a thing is attractive some folks think it is not work."

Rose-Ann nearly always ate her lunch, when in Essex, at the small, sunny cafeteria—an outgrowth of the Torch Light. The best of food was served, and the Conklin girls and Rose-Ann saw to it that it was served daintily and artistically. The men of the town gradually came to it—Braintree, Conklin—but never Trevall. He still went to the commercial hotel where in the dim, sordid dining room he ate blindly what was offered and trusted to its cleanliness and nutrition.

"It's just putting ideas in their heads," Prudence said loftily to Rose-Ann.

"Of course!" Rose-Ann agreed; "what do you suppose? Barry is not wasting his thousands. Of course they are getting ideas."

"Well, it's all wrong," Prudence flushed indignantly, and brought forth her time-honoured ideals: "I guess God knew what He was about when He made differences."

"You make me sneeze, Prue," Rose-Ann broke in, and

proceeded to sneeze in a most insulting manner. "Sometimes when you speak the dust flies."

She and Prudence were sitting in the cretonne bedroom sewing on the wedding clothes just then.

"Well, when you have got through sneezing," Prudence never let go her argument, "I would like you to tell me, who is to do the rough, horrid, but necessary labour, if we are to let a certain class get ideas?"

The sneezing ceased.

"That God of yours must find a way out," Rose-Ann flung back irreverently. "If He gave minds that *can* take in ideas, He must take the consequences, I guess. He can manage if we let Him alone."

"Rose-Ann, I should think you would be ashamed—and afraid. Such dreadful talk! I suppose Mr. Compton teaches you this." Prudence never resorted to familiarity or nicknames.

"He's giving me ideas," Rose-Ann smiled back, "and thank heaven, they fall on rich soil."

There was a silence. Prudence drew her lips close and hard. After a little Rose-Ann said placidly:

"They are going to make all my dresses at the Club, Prue. That little dressmaker from Boston is the most original creature I ever saw. She is going to design them, and those funny girls from the mill are going to do the work—evenings."

"Father will never allow this, Rose-Ann." Prudence was thoroughly roused.

"But Mother will!" Rose-Ann whispered, and her face fell into fine lines. "Mother is very close to me these days, Prue."

And so the little designer, who adored Rose-Ann, began her work of love and so inspired the class from the mill that they strove valiantly to out-do one another after a long, hard day at machine or in the stock room.

And while this was going on on the surface, there was an undercurrent making for the very foundations of Compton's structure.

"Giving them ideas," was the keynote of the opposition



from Prudence up to Trevall and down to Conklin. At this point the Old Order and the New were as brothers under the skin. Ideas were not good working principles when one got down to the lower strata.

"Give them decent treatment, of course," Conklin confided to Trevall, "and their glass or two at the tavern, and they'll stay contented and happy. But I tell you, Trevall, this highfalutin talk of prohibition is dangerous. There is a class that must be kept down—to a certain extent, you know that."

Trevall nodded. He knew it—and he mentally included Conklin, but he dared not say so.

"And a man will have his drink, Trevall. It is for you and me to see that he gets it pure and in moderation. That's our job."

Trevall squirmed.

"As it is now," Conklin proceeded, "those classes and lectures at the Club House are—yes, sir, affecting tradition and"—Conklin had decency to lower his voice—"and the Mill Tavern."

"They'll get tired of the child's play," Trevall comforted. "You won't get working men and women to keep up this sort of thing long. They must have diversion—and as for prohibition, Mr. Conklin"—Trevall kept the titles of people pure—"we need not fear that. American rights can look out for themselves and, as you say, it is for men of ability to look after the common decencies. We *are* our brothers' keepers, Mr. Conklin, as we very well know."

At the Mill Tavern the new Club was also discussed. Whatever effect the "ideas" had upon the few, there was a goodly number who were not affected in the least degree by them. Nightly in the smoky barroom the faithful gathered to sneer, laugh, and drink.

They knew "what was what"; they knew on which side their bread was buttered. They'd see that their women did not get "ideas" and turn on them!

"And what does that dude think he's up to, anyway?" was the general query about Compton.

“Living abroad, damn him, and getting all fussed up and then starting things so as to get himself popular?”

“Do you know—” it was Pat Brady, the spokesman of the “Nightlies,” who held the floor—“do you know what was handed out ter me the other day? His man Cleaver let it spill. That guy Compton is writing a book. Yes, sir. Writing about what strikes him in America—now he’s come home. And by the Lord! if he ain’t using us all for pulling his chestnuts; this is his way—to get his ear to the ground. This Club of his is his spy centre.”

The effect of this speech took form in an ugly growl.

“An’ him riding around in his bloated car!” a sullen voice broke in; “that’s the way with these tops—keeping clear of everything—and being damned generous with what they have too much of.

“I’d like to get my ear to his ground, by God! and tell that bunch up to the Club what kind of a flaming torch they’re following.”

A roar went up at this.

After a spell of digestion a new subject was introduced.

“What’s this talk of shutting down on the drinks?”

“Rot!” said Brady. “Forget it! This ain’t Russia nor yet Kingdom Come.”

And the action and reaction smouldered, flared, died down but never died out.

On the 24th of September, Rose-Ann was married in the little Presbyterian church at Essex.

If Trevall, as he gave his pretty daughter to Braintree, thought of that day thirty-five years before when *he* had stood beside Faith Adams in her home town, he gave no sign. Stern, handsome, inwardly relieved, he passed over to Braintree’s authority the wide-eyed, sweetly serious Rose-Ann.

The wedding gown was lovely, even Prudence had to admit that. It was part of the girl’s personality; it was an expression of herself—not even of the designer’s—though no one knew that.

Barry Compton, seated among the elect, because he was

of the elect, caught, for the first time as he watched Braintree, the significance of Rose-Ann's early impression of him.

"By heaven! the fellow has a crystallized look," he thought, "there's more to him than I've suspected."

Braintree was making his vows at the moment and his face was transfigured. He looked at Rose-Ann as though accepting, with fear and manly doubt, a tremendous responsibility.

"He isn't a conceited ass, anyway," Compton concluded: "and Rose-Ann may smash the hold that has been handed down to him."

Rose-Ann's "I will," stirred Compton strangely. It was not the careless, passionate "I will" of the average girl. It seemed to hold a reservation. It was as though the girl spoke to Braintree *and* her God. "I will, so long as my soul can."

And how unutterably appealing she was; how she had grown. Compton, who was so lonely, so hungry for human ties, so weak, yet so strong, looked yearningly at the young wife.

"And she will come back after a few weeks; come back and help me." His thoughts rambled on. "Things would be more permanent in the future. Another man might have taken her physically afar." At that moment Compton was grateful to Braintree. Then he thought on, his eyes still on the pair at the altar.

"The chap positively looks as if he appreciated her."

Then as the two were passing down the aisle, Rose-Ann looked at Compton with her big, misty eyes and he heard her whisper as she neared his pew:

"Barry, dear—Mother's close—do you see her?"

And almost Compton thought that he did, but the vision melted into the solid, practical face of Prudence Townsend, who almost jubilantly trailed after her sister.

A great load was, at that hour, lifted from John Trevall and Prudence. From now on, no matter what happened, it would be Braintree's affair, not theirs!

Braintree and Rose-Ann went away for three weeks. They

saw cities, briefly, superficially—for Braintree, like Trevall, saw nothing in any city to compare with Boston. They roamed, at Rose-Ann's suggestion, in mountain places where the autumn colouring was at its finest.

"Do you know, Billy," the girl whispered one evening as she stood with Braintree among the Vermont hills, "on one of our trips I want to see what the big, wonderful West is like. Barry has a friend there who sends him the most breath-taking pictures." These pictures were an outcome of a new correspondence.

"My sweet," Braintree said, "after this we must settle down to business, you and I. We cannot afford many trips for some time to come. Besides, I am no lover of travel. Of course we'll run into Boston now and then—and we have our beaches for the summer. I do not mean to become cramped—but——"

"But, Billy, you might as well get used to me. I shall plan always for—things to do and some of them will come true."

"'Stay-at-home hearts are happiest'," quoted Braintree, touching Rose-Ann's shining head with his lips.

"Pooh, Billy—don't get wedged."

"You will let your hair grow, Rose-Ann?"

"Why?"

"Well—a married woman——"

"Pooh! pish! Billy."

"My darling—will you never grow into a woman?"

"Of course I will—until death doth me end."

"Don't speak of death, my wife!"

"Oh! Billy, you are a dear; and if anything could compensate me for being a little girl and having my own way, it would be being married to you and"—impishly—"making you give up your way. Just think, Billy, we're going to make our life just what we want it——"

"*We*, darling?" A lurking shade prompted the emphasis on the pronoun.

"Of course, Billy. I'm not a selfish beast. I'm quite tractable when I'm pulling in team, but I'm not going to have our life like Prue's and Albert's."

“They are happy, Rose-Ann.”

“Well, I’m thankful they are—but I would be desperate. I want——”

“What, my precious?”

“Oh! to add something new to life. Put something in it—not just plod on.”

“I don’t want you to be restless, Rose-Ann.” Braintree was strangely uneasy.

This lovely, sweet thing had given herself to him gravely, beautifully, but he was always conscious of a withholding even in the most ecstatic moments. Already a desire was being born in him, not to conquer her reserve, but to dispel it by his love and devotion. He did not feel safe while it existed.

“She will be at peace when she can trust absolutely,” he reasoned, “and if there was not something in the darling for me to prove my love to—I could not love her so well.”

The honeymoon was devoted to this worthy end.

And in Middle Essex, Compton by bribes and cajolery and general good nature kept the men at work on Rose-Ann’s house on the hill—the first house in Far Essex.

The garden, at the start, was to be one of Compton’s gifts to Rose-Ann, and while carpenter, plumber, and mason worked day in and out and others worked on special jobs, gardeners planned and plotted to utilize rocks and woo the long-sleeping soil to its duty.

“Let there be a little tea house on that rock,” Compton suggested; “sort of work up to that.”

The gardener, who was also an artist, saw the possibilities.

So the seeds were planted in the hope of a glorious resurrection. When the Braintrees came back to Middle Essex, a miracle seemed to have been wrought on the hill.

“Oh! Barry,” Rose-Ann exclaimed, standing with him, not her husband, the day after her return; “you are a wizard. I believe by November we will be in. ‘In’—isn’t that a ducky idea? In our house; our home! Another lovely thing to potter at and make grow into a shape that we see now like a vision.”

“Are you happy, Rose-Ann?” Compton was watching her.

“Very, Barry.” The girl looked at him frankly. “I was afraid, dear. It was quite the most terrible thing I ever did—that going away with Billy. It was such an awful chance. Such a liberty to take with Fate. But it’s all right, Barry, all right. After the first week—it was like letting go and taking hold of his hand without any fear at all.”

“That’s about the biggest thing a man can hope to obtain from such a girl as you, Rose-Ann.”

“Yes; isn’t it—from any girl. He never exacted anything, Barry—and that made me want to love him and make him happy—he asked so little.”

“He’ll ask more, Rose-Ann. That’s very human.”

“Well, now he’s won out, I can trust. I know my man. I want to give—and he will understand my withholding. I am not really a mean, selfish egoist, Barry. Always I have wanted to give—I only resented being forced to give.”

And just before Thanksgiving, Rose-Ann and Braintree were in their lovely little house.

“We’re going to go slow and make no mistakes, dear folks,” Rose-Ann explained, “but there are chairs and dishes enough and two of the mill girls demand that I let them help and so—come to Billy and me on our first heavenly Thanksgiving. Father, Prue, Albert, and Barry. You’ll see what the girls and I can do to a turkey and fixin’s.”

## CHAPTER VIII

**I**T WOULD have been difficult for the most observing to have told just when Braintree took the reins of government into his own hands.

His kindly, genial good nature had from the first blinded Rose-Ann. When she was bent in her old home upon gaining her ends, a determined opposition had made her irritable and ill-natured, but Braintree took another course. It always was a source of wonder to Rose-Ann suddenly to find that Braintree had got his way while she was complimenting herself upon her own handling of the situation. And if, at a moment of defeat, she flared in impatient passion, it was Braintree who tenderly, lovingly soothed and condoned—but he never gave up his point!

“I think William is a saint,” Prudence confided to Albert in their holy of holies. “He keeps his temper always, and Rose-Ann is very trying.”

Albert shook his head ominously as he drew off his practical gray woollen socks.

“A man cannot expect much rest with such a temperamental girl as Rose-Ann,” he said. “That sort of thing is entertaining enough as a side show, but——”

Prudence came across the room to her husband.

“I suit you, don’t I, Albert?”

“You certainly do, Prudence. I know where to find you. To a busy man that is about the greatest thing going in a wife.”

Prudence was comforted. It was always a hurting thing for her to see Rose-Ann considered, applauded, and adored while openly neglecting and often rejecting her plain duties.

Prudence was one of the women who would never be con-

tent with her virtues appreciated. She demanded, silently, often sullenly, that the shortcomings of others should be openly used as a foil for her superiority.

"Do you know, dear," Prudence was now brushing her straight, shining hair, "Rose-Ann has taken one of the mill girls—for a helper."

"Paying her?" asked Albert—his bare feet were stretched to the small fire on the hearth, just fire enough to last until bed time; the furnace was not yet started.

"Of course. Eighteen dollars a month," Prudence snapped.

"And what does Rose-Ann do with her own time?"

"Oh! she spends hours with Mr. Compton. I call it shameful. They study seed catalogues and tree planting as they should their Bibles. And then Rose-Ann is teaching English at the Torch Light Club. She squares herself with her conscience by saying that those low, dirty foreigners cannot *think* in *American* until they can read and talk in *American*. Silly! As if they ever *could* think *American*. And that girl she's taken has had two"—Prudence blushed crimson and dropped her eyes—"babies"; she whispered; "two! A girl might make a slip once—but *never* twice. Rose-Ann says she's going to try to keep her from having a third; she calls that *Christian*—but *I* call it flying in the face of God and man."

"Rose-Ann usually flies in that direction," Albert interjected slowly. "But what is Braintree thinking about?"

"He is a saint!" Prudence went back to her original statement as she always did. "A perfect saint."

Outside, the wildest kind of an early December storm was howling and driving. Before it, snow and sleet came like the vanguard of a great army. The trees caught and held the icy particles; the drifts rose by the hour.

At Rose-Ann's house the furnace and several fireplaces were in action. The rooms were warm and bright.

Braintree wanted to go upstairs to bed, it was nine-thirty—but Rose-Ann never could be induced to accept early hours.

"Why, Billy, when are we to get acquainted except from 6.30 to 11.30? Breakfast is a hustle, and business—ugh! is a



regular slave driver, but when you come home to dinner—and they are bully little dinners, aren't they, Billy?"

William had to admit that they were.

"Well, after dinner with our tummies and our souls at peace, you and I have to live, Billy-Boy, live!"

Braintree looked through drooping lids at the bright thing near him. Rose-Ann sat upon a chair as a bird sits upon a branch.

"What are you doing, Rose-Ann?" he asked.

"Making a giddy dress for Patsy O'Brien."

Patsy was the helper in the kitchen; the girl who had departed from the way of virtue twice.

Braintree opened his eyes wider now, and pulled himself up.

"Rose-Ann, I object to your management of that girl."

"Do you, Billy? Well, lean back and take it easy—this is my responsibility."

"Have you any responsibilities, Rose-Ann, that are not mine?"

"Heaps, Billy."

"That girl fell through her—her weak desires," Braintree spoke calmly, most tolerantly, "and now you cater to them. She will never learn her lesson with such treatment."

"Billy, she'll never learn it without. The first time she sold herself, Billy." Rose-Ann held the small, dainty garment at arm's length. "She wanted to go to a picnic with a boy she loved, but who was ashamed to go with her in her shabby duds. Her people took every cent she earned; the child worked hard and had nothing. Well—she went to the picnic, poor little Hessian, and—well! you know how it ended. The boy gave her up——"

"And quite properly. Surely, Rose-Ann, you don't think he should have kept on? A girl who, you admit, sold herself for finery?"

Braintree was very much awake now.

"Well, I don't think he mattered one way or the other. But why don't you get stirred to your depths, Billy, about the beast that was willing to take poor Patsy's stupid offering of herself?"

“Rose-Ann, you amaze me!” Braintree was indignant. “I am not defending him or any one else,” he added, “but no matter how one may regard this girl’s first offence, there can be nothing said in defence of her second lapse.”

“Oh! yes, there can be.” Rose-Ann flushed brightly.

“When the poor creature was down and out—and a butt for everyone; it must have been almost a delirious triumph to find that she could command attention from another man!

“Oh! I know, Billy, if she had been a high-minded blue-blood she would have died rather—etc., etc. But if she had been a patrician she wouldn’t have been working in those deadly mills day in and out with every natural yearning starved”; there were tears in Rose-Ann’s eyes, and suddenly Braintree recalled with a sinking sensation Rose-Ann’s defence of her long-buried ancestor that day when he had insisted upon marriage at once. After being his wife for several months she had apparently caught no sterner aspect of morality. This was disheartening to say the least.

“I feel—oh! I feel,” Rose-Ann was saying, “that I cannot do enough for such girls as Patsy, because people like you, me—‘our kind’—just let them wallow in mud and then throw the mud on them if they wade up out of it.

“I’m going to give Patsy some of the things she loves without asking her to pay as some men do! She shall have pretty dresses and not be worked so hard that she cannot enjoy them. I’m going to get some of those girls at the Club to help me and Barry is going to bully the boys into decent common sense; we’re going to save Patsy from a third wallow.” There were defiance and passion in Rose-Ann’s eyes.

“Compton is going to get himself into trouble yet, Rose-Ann,” Braintree said, shifting his position. “And that brings me to another point. I wish, dear, that you would not be so intimate with Compton.

“You know, I am sure, that I would not deny you anything that is a pleasure, but you are no longer a young girl regarding Compton—old enough to be your father. You are a married woman, darling——”

Rose-Ann deliberately folded the gaudy but dainty pink

frock, and laid it aside with a little pat. Then she came over to Braintree, leaning an arm against the stone of the chimney, while she looked upon him with a curious blending of love and aversion.

"Marriage is a great test, isn't it, Billy?" she asked. "We've got to take awfully good care of the tie that binds or it may—snap!"

"Rose-Ann!"

"Yes, Billy, I mean it. I want to keep your love and approval. I'm like a cat. I like to be smoothed—but not the wrong way. And, ducky, don't you think it is quite as important that *you* should learn not to brush me the wrong way, as for me not to brush you?"

"But there are some standards, my love," Braintree smiled up at the lovely face. "You admit that?"

"Of course. Yours; mine; everyone has standards—even Patsy. She told me to-day that she'd never tell who harmed her, not if there were hundreds of them!"

Braintree shuddered and Rose-Ann laughed.

"I know, dear," she went on. "I merely wanted to prove that I agreed with you about standards. I will never be disloyal to you, dear old Billy, and you know it; but I will never give up old friends or lay aside such work as I find to do at the Torch Light. Of course"—here Rose-Ann looked impishly mischievous—"I realize that you, my husband, have the right to my services—or their equivalent. And, Billy, do me justice—I pay Patsy's wages!"

Braintree's face grew stern.

"You must not speak in that strain, my dear," he said. "Between husband and wife the sentiment should gloss the crude details. What is mine is yours. Why should we split hairs?"

"To show how sharp and keen the blade is, Billy. I'm rather daffy about sentiment, dear, but I hate sentimentality."

"Darling! Come here." Braintree opened his arms to her. "We must not speak so to each other."

"Forgive me!" whispered Rose-Ann as she sank into his

arms. But Braintree did not echo this—he simply kissed the dear lips and laughed a little.

If only the great meanings of life came *as* great meanings few of us would become involved, but they come in so many guises and are often decked with wreaths of poison ivy instead of laurel. With a man so kindly, sweet-tempered, and tolerant as Braintree it was difficult to hold to a point that after all seemed non-essential.

But every lapse with such a man is but to clinch the things that sooner or later will rise gauntly to confront one, and it calls forth—subterfuge.

When a man tells a woman that she is all the world to him—and means it; when he sets her upon the throne of his heart and pays homage to her—it would seem brutal, crass ingratitude to suggest to him that so narrow a realm cramps rather than glorifies existence.

“I have no great ambition,” Braintree confided to Rose-Ann along about the first of the year when promotions at the bank and increased salaries were under consideration. “I could never enter the ranks of pushing, coarse men, dear heart. I am a hard worker and love my work, but I am content with enough—and you; my home and the beautiful things that have no money price or value.”

This sounded so fine and noble that to attack it made Rose-Ann feel a bit gross. But she did speak out rather more fumblingly than critically.

“But, dearie,” she said, “everyone is ambitious. Everyone wants to stretch his muscles and grow up to the best that is in him.”

“Dear little fool!” murmured Braintree fondly.

In years ahead Braintree was to look back on the moments when he called Rose-Ann a “little fool” as the most satisfactory of his life. Their relations then could tolerate the title as a joke.

He felt so strong and superior; she so sweet and ignorant. Braintree was not a man to enjoy his mental equals, he loved to be looked up to when it did not require too much exertion or a change of base.

But this time Rose-Ann did not reply to his "little fool" with a pout and a flick of a kiss at his nonsense. They were at the breakfast table and the remains of Patsy's good breakfast lay between them.

"And as for the men you despise, Billy, they are the men with whom you must deal. Is it easier to be their slaves than their compeers and—perhaps their masters? You see, if you really have higher ideals, it would seem a duty to rise and project them into business."

"My darling"—Braintree was bored—"when you talk business, you are out of your depths. You must leave that to me. I know my own limitations and my own superiorities. I am no man's slave, but if my talents, such as they are, mean anything, they mean devotion to duty as I see it—and not to unrest, and aspirations to reach what I am in no wise fitted for."

Braintree rose and looked at his watch.

"Come, dear, kiss me. I must be off."

Rose-Ann went close to him; something of pity stirred her loyal affection, and it shamed her while it did not reflect upon him.

"I am ambitious for you, dear," she whispered. "I want to see you succeed—a wife does, you know. I want to feel that by and by—oh! years ahead, Billy—when all our children are married and in homes of their own—that I can still think you the biggest thing on foot.

"You see, darling old boy, a woman *does* love a bit of the master in her husband, but a woman cannot follow unless—her husband *is* a master."

But Braintree closed her lips with a passionate kiss.

"Little fool of mine!" he murmured. "I do not wish to lead you or drive you—I am content with you, my blessed. I ask little more because I have so much now. You're a wonder, Rose-Ann.

"And now I must go to—to my duties. I may not be the biggest thing in port, you child; but I can keep the little nest cosy."

And after he went Rose-Ann sat down and thought the

talk over. A vague unrest possessed her. She knew that she and Braintree were both right and wrong. What was wrong? what was right? That was the trouble.

She went through her day with a haze enfolding her and she did not talk it over with Barry Compton. Subterfuge had taken root.

Recently Compton had been in seclusion. He had come forth from his "writing room" rather more worn than usual.

Rose-Ann met him the day of her talk with Braintree, walking down the hill toward Essex. Rose-Ann was in her runabout. The snow and ice had been smoothed on the road to marble hardness and the chained wheels hardly left an impression.

"Get in, Barry." Rose-Ann stopped. "Why on foot?"

"I needed the exercise, Rose-Ann, but I'll forego it since it's you! How are things going at the Club?"

"Fine, Barry, just fine. Now keep your face straight while I tell you something. Patsy is taking a course in domestic science and that Brady boy—the one you snatched from the burning—is deeply impressed by Patsy and her course."

"That's all right," Compton did not smile; "the girl is just as good as he is—better in many ways. I tell you, Rose-Ann, the older I grow the more I am convinced that people are like some vegetables. Layer upon layer can be peeled off before you strike the real heart of the thing."

"Like an onion?" Rose-Ann suggested.

"Or an artichoke," Compton added. Then went quietly on: "The damnable fuss that has been made about a woman going wrong while men have escaped the lash doing things far more harmful to the race! Drinking and loose living.

"A man is mighty particular as to whom he shall marry. That's all right, but why doesn't he consider whether *he* is fit to marry or not? It gives me a bad turn, Rose-Ann, when I think of it."

The little car sped along under the blue January sky.

"You're edgy, Barry," Rose-Ann said. "You write too hard. After all, who cares what you think of America now that you are with us? Who cares what any one thinks?—it's

the fun of cleaning America up and washing off her smears that counts and, Barry, you are doing such heavenly work in Essex!

"Why, the Tavern writhes under what you are doing; that fat old Conklin is positively scared and talks strikes and violence for propaganda. He acts as if he believed you had a club under your coat. The old, mean slave driver! I know a thing or two about him from Patsy. Barry, it is when you know both sides that you understand."

"Yes. Why in thunder doesn't everyone see that?" Compton sighed.

"Barry, you are tuckered out!" Rose-Ann moved nearer to him.

"You are on my mind, sir. Cleaver is all right for a graven image that has been electrified; the servants are all right, but, Barry, it is creeping into my conscience that you need a real bossy woman in your plan of existence.

"Barry, why haven't you married? I never thought of it before."

This half-laughing question had a strange effect—Compton turned deep, pain-filled eyes on the girl.

"I'm glad you can speak that way, child, in so light a tone. Only a happy woman could," he said.

It was Rose-Ann's turn to be serious now.

"One's own is very sweet, Barry," she whispered. "Something at the day's end that wants you more than all the world besides. Something that, right or wrong, stands by you! You have to pay something for that luxury. You are a lonely man, Barry."

This was dangerous in Compton's mood.

"I am lonely," he said gloomily; "I'm not such an ass as not to know that you are speaking—truth.

"Rose-Ann, do you know anything of my father?"

Rose-Ann coloured. It was only recently that she had heard what was intended as a warning where Compton was concerned; it had but further enlisted her sympathy.

"Yes, I have heard," she said quietly, "but I do not see how that could affect you, Barry."

"When a man breaks the heart of the woman he loves, because of the weakness that is in him—his child had better watch out, Rose-Ann, if he has been able to keep his soul and conscience alive. We New Englanders are proud enough of our stiff virtues and the inheritances they involve—we overlook the fact that our damnable traits run down the line as well."

"Barry, that's man's way; not God's."

"God!" Compton laughed lightly. "God! Well, God exacts toll, Rose-Ann, like every other master. That's all right. But we haven't any right to make others pay."

"Rose-Ann, I don't know why I say this to you—but I want to keep your friendship on honest terms—my father was a big, a real man except for a taint that somehow grew stronger as the better qualities dwindled. He made hell of life for my mother and me—we all clung together and went through the furnace with him. He committed suicide."

"Yes, that is what I heard." Rose-Ann quivered.

"Mother couldn't stand that. She died." Compton spoke reverently. "Died with uplifted head, and as she died she said to me—'now you are free'."

"Please take the wheel, Barry. I am crying." Rose-Ann's voice broke.

Compton took the wheel grimly, not even remarking upon the tears.

"Free!" he said, "free! as if any one can be free who passes through such a furnace—there's bound to be the smell of smoke on him—and a fear of burns."

"Poor, dear Barry! But you were free, dear." Rose-Ann patted his sleeve.

"Free? Yes; in a way. Free to play the rest of the game without damage to others."

"Rose-Ann, I have never been able to see any woman without seeing my mother beside her. When I knew your mother it gave me a positive shock, for she was so like my mother. I believe women who suffer have a family resemblance."



"No; the men of my line ought not to chance it—with women, Rose-Ann."

"Barry, why do you grieve me so? Of course, you are all wrong. You could make a woman so happy; you could be so happy. Why, dear old Barry—even if the thing that held your father was in you, it is not like you to let it beat you. At least you could down it or die with it!"

"For God's sake, Rose-Ann, don't!"

There were a few minutes of silence. Essex with its smoke and bustle loomed near, the white snow was grimy under the wheels.

"The time may come, Rose-Ann"—Compton had relinquished the wheel—"when you will have to decide about me for yourself. Essex is rumbling, as you know. The people are not all with me. They'll try to get back at me—some way. Conklin has intimated this.

"They may come out with some ugly things and some of them, a part of some of them, may be true. But I want you to know this for God's truth. Where I most have failed, I may wish to keep others from failure. Because I know—I am out to help others."

"I am sure of that, Barry."

"And now, Rose-Ann, let us get down to business.

"What do you think of a course of lectures—illustrated ones?"

"They'd love it, Barry. Something that will amuse them; make them happy."

"Exactly. Do it with a laugh."

Compton was quite himself again.

"They are often so tired, Barry; so groggy. I don't wonder they do wrong. Why isn't it made as easy to do right as to do wrong, Barry? There's always the Tavern; why not the show?"

"There's the churches, Rose-Ann, you overlook that.

And then they both laughed.

"They don't want to be told how bad they are," Rose-Ann said at length. "They want to forget it. They are just like children.

"I once heard of a man who sent his little, bad girl to close the front gate, and think what he said, Barry: 'By the time she comes back she will have seen so much she will have forgot her badness'."

"That's ripping." Compton stretched himself.

"Let's send the children to the gate, Rose-Ann, even if others want to send us to hell for doing it."

"We need not go to hell," Rose-Ann put her foot on the brake. "Sending isn't—consigning, Barry. I want to do something for Middle Essex this winter, too. We're getting fearfully prosy.

"I'm going to try to get up dances and card parties and other frivols; will you help?"

"Count on me, Rose-Ann, but you're in for trouble."

It was easy for them both to laugh now.

"I'm not looking for easy jobs!" Rose-Ann said at length. "I've always wanted to do things, Barry, but hadn't anywhere to do them. In my own house, sir, I am mistress. You'll see. They'll come out of curiosity—and remain to enjoy themselves.

"Barry Compton, Mrs. William Braintree is going to set the pace!

"Where do you want to get out?"

"I don't want to get out at all, Rose-Ann, but if I must be dumped, set me down at the Bank.

"Did you ever think, Rose-Ann, what fun it would be to get into a car and go——"

"Until the gas ran out?" Rose-Ann's eyes twinkled.

"Yes. And then get more and go on."

"It would be jolly—a big car full," Rose-Ann came to a jerkless pause.

"I was thinking of a roadster," Compton replied, laughing. At that instant Braintree came out of the Bank.

"Mr. Compton," Rose-Ann was saying, "are you forgetting that I am Mrs. William Braintree?"

Then she turned and saw Braintree.

"Billy," she called, "want me to take you to lunch to-day?"

Braintree merely stopped long enough to say:

“Sorry, dear, but I have no time for lunch—in your understanding of that term. A bite taken when I have a moment is all I can manage.”

And Rose-Ann went her way feeling at odds with herself and life. Braintree had put her distinctly in the wrong.

“Well,” she vowed, “I’ll have to make it up to him in some way.”

## CHAPTER IX

**I**T WAS with this determination to "make it up" to Braintree that Rose-Ann approached the subject of the festivities she had planned for Middle Essex.

"My dear girl!" Braintree said, relaxing in his easy chair before the roaring fire of the living room after dinner. "I don't play cards, nor do I dance."

"But, Billy, you can learn. That would be half the fun."

"I'm not that kind of man, darling. I'm sorry, but life has been too serious a job for me, I'm afraid. Partly working one's way through college and getting into harness at once are not things conducive to frivolity."

"Now, Billy, dearie, do listen to me. It's exactly because of all that that I want you to play—really play. You played tennis, dear, before we were married."

But Braintree shook his head.

He ignored the reference to tennis.

"Are you beginning to tire of your sober old husband?" he asked, and gave the patient, cheerful smile that always had the effect of making Rose-Ann sorry for him and contemptuous of herself. Instantly her quick sympathy and tenderness were enlisted.

She saw the marks of strain and weariness on Braintree's face; those signs that marked the faces of so many men. Compared to their rigid, compelling lives, the ease and leisure of a certain class of women seemed selfish and brutal. No wonder, so Rose-Ann brooded, that men demanded to be paid for such privilege—if that was what women called it—in a coin that she held in contempt.

Rose-Ann's own economic independence had less to do with her state of mind than many would have been willing to grant. She was prepared to deal justly with the marriage

relation, but what she gave, she gave from love and loyalty—not for privilege.

She looked very thoughtfully at Braintree now, then said more seriously than she often spoke:

“No, Billy, I am not tired of you and you’re not old, and I’m keen against your ever becoming stupid. That is what I’m trying to guard against. At times”—her breath came quicker—“we seem to be settling into a groove as Father and Mother did.” She paused and then went on:

“I’d like our home to be a jolly little centre where people would love to come—tired people like you—and play and talk and just forget wearying things for a time. I’d like to contribute something.”

“I am afraid, little wife,” and Braintree was earnest also, “that we have different views of life. We must try to be tolerant with each other. Now I should like nothing better, at the day’s end, than to read with you—serious, good reading. I’d like to see you happy and content—right by the west window in summer, or in the porch, or in that little tea garden; in winter by the fire—sewing, knitting.”

The domestic picture had for some reason a most humorous aspect for Rose-Ann; she leaned back and laughed hysterically.

Braintree watched her with alarm.

“Billy, I simply—cannot be that kind of a—of a—lady!” she burst forth at last. “It would finish me. You don’t know it, old boy, but you’d hate it, too. There’s not enough of me to make over. Still, if you don’t want cards and dancing and frivolling I will not have them here. This is your house as well as mine and you’ve given in a lot to me about furnishing and—Patsy and things like that.”

“Are you unhappy, my darling?” Braintree was all tenderness now.

“No—only squelched.”

“Rose-Ann!”

“Well, I do feel so, Billy. You must not misunderstand, dear, but I feel as if I were dragging an anchor.” She looked out over the lovely hills behind which the sun was setting.

"I like my harbour, but I don't want anchors! All my life, Billy, I've pulled against things. I thought——"

She paused, and Braintree came close to her. He was gaining point after point; he liked anchors, and he was supremely content in the belief that drag as she might, Rose-Ann, his wife, *was* safely anchored.

Braintree could not put this into words, but it gave him poise.

"Dear little wife," he whispered, "can you not see that all this is due to your own restlessness? Your father's home; this home—everything is as near perfect as one could plan—you must get over the desire for change and new experiences, my dear. They will never bring you peace and they threaten our happiness."

This sounded so plausible that Rose-Ann tossed her sunny mane and threw herself into Braintree's arms. He enfolded her rapturously.

"And you'll be good?" he whispered.

"No, sir!" in muffled tones. "I think I'll fly into atoms. You'd better watch out."

"Kiss me, Rose-Ann!"

This was an easy thing to do and Rose-Ann complied eagerly.

It was in the early spring that Rose-Ann ran up to Compton's one evening. Braintree was at the Bank. Frequently, now, he spent evenings there, "plugging away" as he called it. This plugging made Rose-Ann feel guilty.

"You're an expensive little luxury," Braintree had said. He really knew that she was not. But in his scheme of things a helpless, pretty, dependent wife was as natural an adjunct as his daily bath.

Rose-Ann found Compton in his library under the inverted dome of electric lights. He looked thin and worn. He had the evening paper in his hands and his eyes were twinkling.

"Barry, I thank my own little, private God," Rose-Ann exclaimed, dancing up to him, "that there is a man or two left for me to relax with. What are you reading, Barry?"

“Oh, another one of these comical, impudent articles that are running in the *Criticism*.”

“Oh!” said Rose-Ann and sat down rather heavily.

“Have you seen them, Rose-Ann? Clever, devilish clever they are. They are called ‘Chips from Plymouth Rock’.”

“I’ve seen one or two,” Rose-Ann replied. “Are they good, Barry?”

“They are impish. They dress folks up in such thin clothes that you can see the man or woman, the real man or woman, right through them. They’re exaggerated and crude, but they are true. I make a guess that they are written by a bitter rebel against Puritanism; a rebel that knows what he is rebelling against, by heaven!”

“Barry, I want to tell you something.”

“You usually do, Rose-Ann. I’m listening.”

“I was at the Torch Light this afternoon, Barry; the Conklin girls were there—it was my English class, you know. They said their father was in a rage over those articles—especially the one of Thursday, called ‘Jamming into Plymouth Rock.’ They said their father knew that it was meant for him! And oh! Barry, they think you are writing those articles.”

Compton laid the paper down and stared.

“I write them?” he asked confusedly. “I write them? Why, that’s absurd. I wish that I could fling off such smart, acrid bits—it would be fun. And what has Conklin got to kick about? The Jammer was like him, but it was the Rock that came in for the sarcasm.”

“But, Barry, can you not see?—he thinks the Rock ought to come to him.”

“Rot!” Then: “Rose-Ann, you know better than to think I wrote the articles?”

“Well, Barry, you see they *might* be your impressions of America!” Rose-Ann’s eyes twinkled.

“They may voice many of my sentiments, Rose-Ann, but they are not mine.”

A silence fell between Compton and Rose-Ann. Then:

"Barry, I am writing those articles. I get twenty-five dollars apiece for them!"

Compton turned slowly in his chair and eyed Rose-Ann for a full moment and then he leaned his head back and laughed until Rose-Ann begged him to stop.

"Now that I've begun," she said, seeking to hold Compton's attention, "I must go on. The editor wants them. He says—oh! Barry, he says they are ripping. You see, he comes from New York. I dare not be known, Barry, for I have all my friends, yet, to make dance. Prue's a scream. They'd never forgive me if they knew, Barry; but it is too late to stop. I thought they would be refused—I almost prayed that they would after I sent the first—but oh! the editor took them all."

Compton controlled himself finally and gave himself to the serious aspect of the thing.

"You are head-on for trouble, Rose-Ann," he said. "If you cannot draw lightning one way, you'll put lightning rods on. These articles are not exactly ill-natured, my dear, but they are like lashes on exposed backs. You haven't the right to lash, my dear, especially since you know so devilishly well the anatomy of your puppets.

"Rose-Ann, swim out, while the swimming's good, you little daredevil!"

"Barry, I'm not going to! I am not hurting folks. If they are all right—and goodness knows they think they are—why shouldn't I play with them?"

"It isn't the thing to do, Rose-Ann. You shock me."

"Well, the only thing that makes me tremble," Rose-Ann swayed back and forth in her chair, "is that any one could think you would do them. It's an overpowering compliment, Barry, but a facer!"

"Evidence is against me, I admit," Compton nodded with amusement. "My writing spells—good God! And my 'impressions'. They'll have something in for me, one way or another, Rose-Ann, so let them have this. I do not approve of you, my dear child. You ought to be spanked. But I won't tell on you."



"You mean, Barry, that you will keep my secret?"

"Even so, you out-lander."

"Oh! Barry, you certainly are a friend." Rose-Ann gave a sigh of relief.

"I'm not doing you any good, Rose-Ann. But what I cannot comprehend is how can you do these things so well? They are faulty, but they have the blood of life."

"I don't know, Barry, that's just it. I suppose when you get your back against the wall you're apt to fly out with almost anything. I hadn't enough to do, and so I tried my hand at writing."

"Rose-Ann, look at me!"

The girl turned her clear eyes to Compton.

"What is it, Rose-Ann?"

"Barry, I don't know. I suppose the devil has his eye on my idle hands. I am not worthy of Billy. He's the best thing on earth, but I cannot fit into the ideals he has and I want, awfully, his approval. I miss something and it is all my own fault."

"You give up a great deal, Rose-Ann, to Braintree's——" Compton was going to say "whims," but he said instead "wishes."

"Not half as much as he does to mine, Barry."

"For instance?"

"Well, oh, in hundreds of ways that do not bear telling. I'm trying, Barry, very, and he never loses his temper—never!

"He works hard, but always for me; he thinks of nothing but me."

"An awful waste of time and energy," Compton laughed.

"Of course." Rose-Ann admitted seriously. Then:

"Barry, why do not men—a lot of men—like Billy?"

"Everyone respects him, Rose-Ann."

"I said, 'like.'"

"Well, he doesn't hang around with men much; they seem to think he is a reflection upon them."

"I feel that way, too. Billy just naturally makes folks feel that way and yet, Barry, he doesn't mean to—he never thinks of such a thing."

"I wonder!" thought Compton, but aloud he said:

"Rose-Ann, you must chip that crystal about Braintree. You remember?"

Rose-Ann thought, then nodded.

"I had almost forgotten that, Barry."

"Smash it if you can, my girl; crack it, anyway, give him the chance to get out. At least give him air to breathe."

"This is very disloyal, Barry. I'm ashamed. If I could only get into some crystal myself all would be well. I'm so fearfully fluid."

"God forbid, Rose-Ann, that you should crystallize."

All that summer the crisp articles in the *Criticism* attracted attention. People writhed, but to writhe in public was to confess when confession was least advisable.

New England traits were profanely handled and caused much laughter among the ribald. The articles were syndicated. Prominent people, absurdly caricatured, paraded in print their virtues and follies before a growing audience.

Rose-Ann's bank account grew mightily, but like a thief's hoardings, she dared not show it. She opened a new account in Boston. Her bank books she had from the first kept to herself. She managed them perfectly. Her father had wanted to "balance" them for her, and Braintree, in pure kindness, offered also to relieve her of the duty, but she refused them.

"And oh! my Lord!" she confessed to Compton; "if they should see my balance swelling now!—where would my reputation be?"

"Look about for investments, Rose-Ann."

"I don't dare, Barry. I'm snarling myself all up. Help me out, there's a dear. Find something for me to put my money in. My ill-gotten gains. I must tell Billy soon."

And Compton conceded to the investment plea. He did it so cleverly that all traces seemed hid, but he advised Rose-Ann to tell her husband. Her withholding worried him.

And then came the outbreak in Essex over the complica-

tions produced by the Torch Light and the snarls produced by the *Criticism* articles which were attributed to Compton.

There certainly was some ground for Conklin's attitude of mind. To be advertised as jamming into Plymouth Rock was bad enough, but to realize that he was making no impression on the Rock added to his resentment. His toleration toward the liberal Torch Light did not aid him at all. And besides, the mill hands were growing obstreperous.

During the course of lectures, a man had come from New York, and in drawing attention to the laws of the land, he touched upon Child Labour and its evils. The lectures were neutral enough, Compton had made sure of that; the man was simply adding his quota to the subject of Americanism and he said that working little children was un-American and stupid.

But Conklin, who had a discreetly obscure room in his mill to which he relegated suspiciously young workers when the State inspectors made nuisances of themselves, took this lecture as another personal insult.

Added to this, Rose-Ann's classes were contributing fuel to the fire. With better English at their command, the foreign-born girls read better books and certainly got new and more disturbing ideas. And then Compton himself took a prominent part in the Young Men's Club. He held ideals before them that were sentimental bosh, mere bunkum, Conklin thought—until he focussed on the drink question.

Always, hitherto, a retiring man and a poor speaker in public, Compton blossomed out at this juncture. He did not mince matters; he used the Mill Tavern as a blighting example; the fathers of the young men as objects of warning.

He stopped at nothing, apparently, and Conklin made sure of this by sending Brady to the meetings as a possible brand to be saved from the burning. Brady was to report.

"Gosh, almighty!" Brady came to Conklin's house full to the nozzle; "he's handing out stuff to them kids as ain't decent or proper. He's telling them that a harmless drink—a night off—may end about everything for them. He tacks diseases onter drinks—damn him! Not D. T., mind you,

Mr. Conklin, but the damnedest rotten kinds what makes invalids of women and the devil knows what-all of the kids.

"He's got some of the boys scared stiff, and the rest as guilty feeling as hell. That kind of talk ought to be muzzled."

"We'll muzzle it!" Conklin said grimly. "What more, Brady?"

"Oh! a lot of lingo along that line and then he shot questions at them. Did they want to ruin women's lives? Did they want a bunch of sickly kids? Did they want to be the best kind of American citizens, or just howlers?"

Conklin looked serious. Half truths, he knew, were as dangerous as half lies. He never had his feet off the ground and he had no belief in wings as applied to human affairs.

Things were as they were. Make the best of them. Human nature was human nature. You couldn't change it but you might twist it or brace it up.

Conklin was for the bracing-up method. He paid decent wages and saw to it that the Tavern was kept well within the law. Conklin had a great regard for the law—when it could be interpreted by him.

Of course where poverty was—and didn't the Lord Almighty say the poor ye have with you always?—it was better to let children work than starve.

And that damnable rot about birth control! Did the wretches think they could interfere with the holy and divine laws of Nature?

"If you let things alone, Nature takes care of everything," was Conklin's complacent philosophy. His first step, then, was to forbid his daughters going to the Torch Light.

"It gets you nowhere," he urged, "and there's a lot of smut there that has got to be cleared up. I don't want my women mixed up with it.

"After all, who knows anything about this Compton? He stayed out of his own country long enough to lose much of its idealism and gather the Lord knows what from other countries."

The Conklin girls sulkily gave up the clubs. Certainly

they were making very little progress socially, but Rose-Ann was a vivid interest in their lives.

And then Conklin decided to do a big, magnanimous thing—he'd go up to Middle Essex and have a man-to-man talk with Compton. The Lord knew, he did not want trouble. Trouble was costly.

It was a warm October evening that Conklin selected for his neighbourly call.

As he passed the Trevall house, he nodded to Trevall as one gentleman bows to another—with a slight upward movement of his hand to the brim of his hat.

Trevall was on the porch reading the *Transcript*—the warm weather had lured him out.

Prudence sat near him sewing on a little garment that she held, ready to hide, should necessity demand, in a yawning bag at her side. Albert and Prudence had decided that the time had come when they could safely begin a family and the "beginning" was decidedly on the way—a source of constant alarm and modest retreating on Prudence's part, while Albert ignored the situation as any upright man was expected to do.

"Is he going to stop, Father?" Prudence was trembling as Conklin's car went slower.

"No." Trevall looked over his spectacles.

"But why is he up in Middle Essex?" Prudence settled back, relieved.

"I'm sure I do not know." Trevall raised the paper and read on.

Rose-Ann Braintree's roadster met Conklin's flashy car just before Compton's place was reached.

Conklin knew a handsome woman when he saw one and there were two things that he prided himself upon: he never struck a man when he was down, though he had been known to strike a man down; and he never failed to pay homage to beauty—feminine beauty.

The Pierce-Arrow and the roadster halted beside each other.

Rose-Ann was wearing a white skirt, artistically short, thus

leaving free for observation two dainty feet in white stockings and low shoes. A warm, eiderdown sweater of white came close up to her round chin; a little turban of dark red hid the bronze curls, and a red scarf fluttered loose in the warm, brisk breeze.

“Well, Mrs. Braintree—a delight as always. Pardon an old man’s admiration, but you certainly command it.”

“Thanks, Mr. Conklin. How are the girls?”

“In great health, I’m glad to say. But a responsibility to a widowed father. It is hard to know——”

“Oh! let them alone,” Rose-Ann broke in; “they can make their own way. Martha is a dear in the kindergarten, and Joan is a dabster in the millinery class. The hats the workers wear now are inspirations. Hats often decide a girl’s career.” Rose-Ann showed her pretty teeth and dimples.

“They have tired of the classes.” Conklin seized the first pause. “That is the fault with the girls—no stability of character.”

“I’ll get after them, Mr. Conklin. You weren’t going up to our house, were you?”

“No, no, my dear Mrs. Braintree, though I will give myself that pleasure soon. I was going to call on Mr. Compton—Club matter, you know.”

Rose-Ann shook her head.

“No use I fear, to-night, Mr. Conklin. Genius is burning. I’ve just been there. No one can get past Cleaver.”

“Eh?” Conklin’s hard face looked puzzled.

“Genius—his book—impressions of America, you know. Mr. Compton is working in his tower room. No one ever disturbs his writing hours.”

“Oh! I understand. I’ve seen some of his impressions, Mrs. Braintree. Bad form, I say, for an American to make shows of his neighbours for the amusement of outsiders.”

Rose-Ann flushed.

“What makes you think Mr. Compton does those articles?” She touched her horn and it emitted a spasmodic yelp as if she had tickled it.

“Who else could, my dear Mrs. Braintree?”

“There are others, Mr. Conklin. However, when genius is burning in that high tower room—I doubt if anything could lure Mr. Compton from his task. *I* couldn’t! I implored Cleaver to let me pass. I offered to bribe him. Nothing doing!

“But good luck to you! I’m going to meet my husband.”

Rose-Ann waved a white-gloved hand, the red scarf floated behind her; the horn tooted a salute to the Trevalls, and Conklin went on to Compton’s.

The big orderly house was quiet and dim. There were lights in kitchen, hall, and in a room high up near the roof.

To Conklin’s ring, Cleaver appeared.

“Sorry, sir,” he explained, “but Mr. Compton is engaged.”

“I think he will see me, if you give him my name.” Conklin had an inborn objection to Englishmen. He took his stand against Cleaver.

“You may come in, sir. I’ll give your name, sir. Perhaps Mr. Compton will make an appointment.” Anything to gain time. Cleaver was eager to be at his post upstairs.

Conklin passed out a card and followed Cleaver into the beautiful old room—the library.

Sitting alone among the books and the rare prints, Conklin got that impression that he often experienced, a kind of impotency. “There is something, damn it!” he thought, “that you couldn’t buy.” Even if he made this room, this house, his, that something would elude him and escape the bargain.

How still the place was; how peaceful. Servants were moving about; one came presently and turned on the shaded light, saying, “Excuse me, sir,” as she did so.

And then through the stillness a voice broke cruelly sharp and strained. It cut like a knife and made Conklin wince and huddle in his chair. It was the voice of a mad man.

“Stand aside, Cleaver! Take your hands off me, damn you!”

There was a scuffling in the upper hall, a muffled—“Sir, I—implore you. Sir!”

And then a muttered curse—and steps coming down the broad stairs and straight toward the library.

## CHAPTER X

CONKLIN was conscious of actual, personal fear. The approaching steps were unsteady, and out of keeping in the beautiful stateliness of the quiet house. Nearer, nearer they came, a groping hand now and then touching the side walls of the broad hall—first one side, then the other. It was uncanny, hair-raising.

The groper was at the door of the room now, and the bright, rosy light fell upon him. For a full moment Conklin did not know the man on the threshold. His face was drawn and white, his hair in disorder. He was unshaven; his feet were bare and thrust into loose slippers. A rumpled bathrobe hung carelessly over his pyjamas.

“Good God!” Conklin exclaimed. He knew the signs of a man slowly recovering from the depths of bestial drunkenness. Nothing else on earth compared with it for repulsiveness.

“My God! Compton.”

Compton stood and stared. Slowly and with horror he was sensing the situation. He was coming into his own.

As if he were drawing up a mantle to cover his shame, Compton’s better self asserted its control. He gave a miserable laugh; straightened his shoulders and came into the room and seated himself.

Even in his shame Conklin’s horrified eyes and his heavy, hanging jaw struck Compton as curiously comical.

“Excuse my appearance,” he said with an attempt at a smile that had the effect of angering Conklin; “you see when I heard that you had honoured me by a call, I was so eager to welcome you that I did not stop to make a toilet.”

Conklin’s big face flamed. How dared this hypocrite take such an attitude? He drew himself up. He had all the



cards in his hands! That was his next thought. It gave him a thrill of relief; it guided him out of his stupefaction; it gave a kind of heavy dignity to his big red face.

"I came," he gasped a little before he spoke; "I came, Compton"—the "Mr," was dropped unconsciously—"I came to talk business with you—man to man."

"I'm sorry to have upset your plans, Conklin, but now that you are here—perhaps you had better make the most of it; man to man, I mean."

There was a gleam in Compton's eyes. His brain was clearing. Before him he saw ruin of all that he prized; all that he had fought to keep. At the moment when Cleaver was most needed he had been off guard, to Compton's undoing. He was at Conklin's mercy now, absolutely; utterly. And there could be no mercy, he knew, but there might be arbitration.

"I am shocked beyond words!" again Conklin spoke with that indrawing gasp.

"And no wonder, Conklin. Most men would be." Compton pulled his bathrobe together and hid his feet under the enveloping folds. "I suppose we might as well play our hands, Conklin."

"I've won the game, Compton! I'll make my own terms, thank you. I came, as I said, to talk man to man; I've never been so shocked and amazed in my life, but—I hold *all* the cards."

There was a brutal flash in the gray eyes of Conklin; a fierce set of the jaw.

"You do *not* hold all the cards, Conklin"; and now Compton in all his disarrangement took on a pitiful air of refinement which subtly combated Conklin's crude attitude. "I still have a trick or two, I think."

Conklin leaned forward and clasped his big, hairy hands on the table. As far as linen and wool could make him, he was immaculate. Beside Compton's ill-kept appearance he had the advantage and yet—Compton did have a trick or two; Conklin felt the truth of this and it stung him to brutality.

"You're drunk!" he whispered, and fixed his hard eye upon his victim.

"I have been, Conklin, for nearly a week; I've been coming out of it for three days; in another week I'll be quite myself."

There was no bravado in the words, but Conklin was not fine enough to perceive that.

"Yourself!" he almost groaned—"yourself. And I suppose if I—if another hadn't discovered you, you would have come down to that damn club of yours and paraded again your superior virtues?"

The absurdity of this and his own wit caused Conklin to give a guffaw; then he affrightedly controlled himself, for Compton was looking at him quietly; simply waiting for him to cease.

"I would have done something like that, Conklin," he said wearily, sadly. "I never considered that I had superior virtues, but I know what superior virtues are."

This was too cryptic for Conklin.

"See here, Compton," he said suddenly, natural curiosity overpowering him; "is this sort of thing a habit of yours?"

"No, Conklin, I never had the chance of making it that—it is an inheritance."

"Blaming others, eh? That's a damned small thing for you to do, Compton, and it doesn't go with me."

"I did not expect it would, Conklin. You have, I see, adopted the New England attitude of mind."

For some reason this stung Conklin and he flared forth:

"The stern morality of the New England people," he said rather huskily, "should not be flouted—it's what this nation needs. Backbone; the decency to take one's medicine and not slink behind others and expect——" He paused.

"Anything," Compton put in.

"No, sir!" Conklin meant to have his way. "Expect folks who have battled for, and achieved, decency to overlook his lapses on account of money or what he terms his damned blood."

Compton's deep, sad eyes did not move from Conklin's face; he seemed fascinated.

“Our country has a firm upholder in you, Conklin,” he said at last. “I suppose it is to such as you that we must look for our bones and sinews. Well, there is a good deal in what you’ve said.

“I am fully aware, Conklin, that my appearance is against me, but just for the test of an idea, may I speak to you as a—man to a—gentleman?”

Conklin leaned back in his chair and stuffed his hands in his pockets.

“I’m listening,” he said.

“Have you ever, Conklin, fought a hard fight against anything evil in you? Anything, perhaps, that you may have inherited? *May* have, I repeat.”

Compton’s voice was curiously inquiring.

“Compton, I inherited from my people the necessity to work for my daily bread; I had to dig my way out—no one did it for me. Once out—I had to pull myself up or get under the feet of the herd—the blooded herd!” Conklin flung this out bitterly. “But I’m out and up, by God! and I’m beginning at last to see what blood counts for!”

“And, except for this, this scramble you’ve never known—temptation stronger than yourself?” Compton’s tone was still curious.

Conklin flushed a purple hue, but being an honest man, he said after a pause:

“I’ve had my fling—I see what you mean. I’ve lived the life of a red-blooded man—if not”—Conklin had a bit of wit—“if not that of a blue-blooded one. But, by God I never posed for anything I wasn’t. When I set the pace, I kept step with my kind. When I saw my folly I dropped all that. It was then, and then only, that I felt fit to do any preaching. I never aspired”—Conklin caught his breath, “to be a plaster saint while——”

“That’s enough, Conklin, I see your point.” Compton waved a white, trembling hand.

“Now let me ask you something else. Have you imagination enough to put yourself in the place of a man who, not

having inherited the necessity to pull himself from under and climb, fought, inch by inch, a losing game?

“Can you fancy what it must be to have only enough strength to fight to the losing point and yet get up and fight again because the gleam was never utterly killed?”

“I ain’t much on the fancying line, Compton. I keep my feet on the ground. A man that is a man can get the best of the devil in him if he wants to and means business.”

“That’s not always so, Conklin.”

The patient suffering in Compton’s tones did not reach Conklin. He was restive; wanted to end this disgusting scene, but Compton spoke on.

“I acknowledge, Conklin, that I’ve fallen into your power. I haven’t the slightest doubt but what you will use it.”

“If you mean that I’ll give people an opportunity of knowing what kind of a man it is who is the shepherd of that there Torch Light flock—you’re about right.”

“Exactly, Conklin, exactly. I would not have put it quite that way myself, but I see that you have caught my meaning. Certainly, the Torch Light must be enlightened—after this. But, let me, just for argument, ask you if there is not more than one way to enlighten them?”

“I don’t follow you, Compton.”

“Well, I’ll try to make myself clearer. To prove how truly I recognize my position, Conklin, I’m going to speak more plainly to you than I have ever spoken to any other creature in the world.

“My father”—Compton’s lips grew dry and stern—“drank himself to death. My mother took him abroad to hide the shame and her misery. I was conceived in fear and horror. My mother believed, before God! that she was doing her duty by my father. She did, to my father, Conklin—but she did not think of my part in the scheme until later. She stood by my father—stood by him! Good God! Conklin, I’ve seen her stand by him until in his crazy moments—he struck her down. At ten years of age, I protected my mother from my father. We travelled from place to place abroad. When my father had periods of sanity, re-

morse and despair drove him. It was in a remote corner of England that my father saved my man Cleaver's life—we need not go into that—but it made Cleaver our staunch friend for ever and he has never deserted me.

“My father killed himself when I was twenty-two. My wreck of a mother, Cleaver, and I travelled then and tried to forget. I was constantly aware through my boyhood that my mother feared for me—feared what was always a grim spectre but never mentioned. It haunted me, too. Cleaver watched me; I was surrounded with fear, and that aggravated a physical ailment that developed rapidly—epilepsy. And then, like a full, unmanageable tide the inheritance rose. That thing that was in me, Conklin, wasn't just a craving for drink—it was a devilishly disguised determination to deaden the horror of the attacks. When I felt the fits approaching, I turned to drink. I became a prey to my inheritance in my weak moments.

“I”— Compton looked helplessly at the staring man across the table—“I opened the flood gates, Conklin, but you see, I had not the strength to close them! You—your kind could, but before God! I could not.

“Only this strength was left me—I could always face the terrible truth and I made my losing fights. I fought and fought. I fought for my mother—the look in her eyes when the time came that she bowed before me—me!—and begged forgiveness because she had given me life.

“I fought later for a woman that I loved—she wanted to take the chance—I had enough strength to deny her; deny the mad longing in my soul.

“My mother died.” Compton paused; a mad light flamed in his eyes and he gave an ugly laugh.

“No, I'm not going to ask for drink, Conklin,” he said. “I'm safe for a time.

“Well, Cleaver stuck to me. He hides me, lies for me, fights with me; for me. We came back to America; came home. I suppose it was the blood in my veins that drove me hungrily to my people. I wanted to be part of them, to be with them.

“I thought it might be possible to help them, as I saw they needed it. Out of the depths of my weakness and repeated defeat I clung to the hopes of still helping.

“You, Conklin, you who had power to help people—what have you done for them?”

Somewhere, off in another part of the house, a clock ticked slowly, calmly, as if, after all, nothing mattered. The blue-blooded man in his pitiful disorder and defeat sat patiently staring at the red-blooded man whose victory rested uneasily upon him.

Neither spoke until Conklin, with a groan, hitched his chair nearer to the dividing table. His big, deep-lined face was haggard; his thick lips trembling.

“My God, Compton,” he muttered, “you’ve given me a glimpse of—hell!”

“My abiding place!” A pitiful sneer shook the words.

“As long as I could help, not harm,” he went on, “I felt that I might work among you all. But—now——” Compton got up and walked about the room.

In the next five minutes, Conklin, in his chair, fought the most exhausting battle of his life. A battle that threatened to lay low all that he had gripped and gained while he had been pulling himself from under—and up.

To place himself beside the sad, beaten man pacing the room meant to retreat before his people, from a conclusion he had lustily proclaimed. It meant giving power that might undermine his relations with his mill hands—or it might make it necessary for him to assume relations with them that he had fought through many a strike. And yet, above all else, when all other aspects had been considered, here was a man; yes, by God—a man, face to face with a brother man!

What had his boasted victory done for him if he could fling this fellow creature to—what?

Again, Conklin, who knew his kind, and indeed other kinds, clenched his hands, his big brawny hands, and the sweat came on his forehead. He turned back to Compton and fixed his eyes upon him fiercely. Compton smiled his

wan, unbeaten smile, and returned to his chair—awaiting the verdict.

“Well?” he asked.

Everything was at stake between them.

“Compton, I’m going to keep my hands off! Keep my mouth shut.”

The slow-ticking clock struck into the silence that followed. Nine sharp, alarmed strokes. The old, old clock appeared to realize that something did matter.

“There’s some right in what you’re giving them fellows down in Essex. Men like me know that, even while we fight it—like hell. I may go fighting it. Business is not—Sunday-school picnics; but I’ll fight it fair; not by trampling on a man who is crawling along out of hell! When we clash—it will not be—because——”

Compton tried to stand up, but sank back weakly.

“Thank you, Conklin,” he muttered huskily. “I begin to see what my country and yours has to be thankful for.”

“And look here,” Conklin added. He came around to Compton with his chair and planted it firmly beside his neighbour’s; he had lost sight of any barrier that had existed between them. Laying his big brawny hand on the thin white one, he spoke with confidence, authority. “Look here, Compton, this talk you’ve talked is the damnedest rot, though you haven’t caught on to that yet. You’ve come back to this old country of yours to learn a big truth—and by the Lord! I’m going to tell it to you.

“If you couldn’t conquer the devil in you, you’d have given up long ago. The power to fight is the power to win, man. Get that inter yer system.

“Inch by inch as you’ve sweated through hell, you’ve come up; up! Can’t you see it for yourself?

“This here desire to keep others from your—hell—why, Compton, with all the bunk, it’s the biggest, the damnedest—big thing I’ve ever had hit me in the face. I can’t go all the way with you, I’ll have to make yer back down if I can—sometimes; but as God hears me, Compton, I’m going to keep as near you as I can—to your winning point.

“Don’t let an idea throttle you, man. Your father paid his debt—you needn’t do more than pay your own.

“Brace up, Compton, ideas ain’t real stuff—always. God and devil handles them. I ain’t what you call religious, but—I know that.”

Compton, sitting in his chair, felt something surging through him. It was not strength—he was as weak as a child; he felt smarting tears in his eyes. A light seemed to be enveloping him, a light that showed him stretches of arid waste—but it showed him Conklin as well! He did not seem to see the rough, coarse exterior of the man; he saw what the man meant. It was Power in the making; not in the completed whole. Conklin was still striving for better things than power.

And now, springing up, Conklin stood in the doorway and called loudly into the silent, orderly dimness as a master might,

“Cleaver; where in hell are you? Come here!”

“Yes, sir, yes, sir!” Cleaver came hurrying down the hall.

“Here,” Conklin commanded, “get Mr. Compton upstairs. I’ll help you. So! Can’t you see—he’s all in?”

As if Cleaver could not!

“Yes, sir. Yes, sir,” he faltered, bending over Compton as he might have over a child.

“There now. This way. Don’t use up your strength, Compton.” Conklin took command: “Lean heavy. That’s what we’re here for, Cleaver and I!”

Through the hall, up the wide stairs, past the old clock that surely had never beheld such a sight before, then into the fine old bedchamber.

“Cleaver”—Conklin, red and panting, released his hold of the thin form that sank helplessly on the bed—“when your master—when Mr. Compton has these—here—spells, I want you to call me up—hear me?”

“Yes, sir.”

“No monkeying and slouching, see? You and I, Cleaver, are going to tackle this job together.”

Again the humorous twinkle came in Conklin’s eyes.



"When it comes to the touchdown, Cleaver, we Americans and English understand each other."

"Yes, sir, yes, sir."

Cleaver's voice shook. After all the years the relief of having someone to share his responsibility filled him with trembling gratitude.

"And now—good-night!" Conklin turned from the room and went out of the house.

He got in his big car and started down the drive to the broad highway lying well-kept and smooth under the light of a new and cloudless moon.

"I'm letting myself in for a damned lot of rot," he mused. "I ain't going to stand too much of that bunk, by the Lord Harry, but——"

Conklin was passing just then the Trevall house—the piazza was empty—Trevall and Prudence had gone inside; "I ain't going to fling him down to—them!"

He meant Trevall and his daughter and all that they typified. Suddenly Conklin felt a kinship with Compton that gave him a thrill.

He, the jammer of Plymouth Rock, had made a niche into which he might put his foot when least he had expected it. He felt that he was going to climb—but not as he had once dreamed of climbing. In that moment he knew no social or personal ambitions; but he understood Compton as perhaps no one in all the world ever had. He had something to give Compton; something that Compton's own kind had not in their power to give. That is what it all meant. The old and the new needed each other.

And just then Rose-Ann's little car came tooting along the highway; Braintree was beside his wife. He looked tall and handsome in the moonlight, rigid and austere. The big car and the small car stopped—on the highway.

"Oh! it's you, Mr. Conklin?"

Rose-Ann leaned across her wheel.

"Well, did you get in?" she asked mischievously.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Really, Mr. Conklin?"

"Yes, ma'am. When he heard I was there he came down—at once! He is keen about getting new impressions of America—he got 'em!"

Conklin and Rose-Ann both laughed. Braintree made a feeble attempt to join in.

"I—I hardly believe you, Mr. Conklin. To refuse me—and then see you——" Rose-Ann tossed her head.

"My dear young lady"—Conklin put his foot on his starter—"you have several things to learn yet in life," he said.

"I'm sure of that," Rose-Ann laughed gaily. "That's why I'm so keen about it all. And you have some things to learn, too, Mr. Conklin. I've seen Martha. She says you misunderstood about her—stability of character."

The two cars parted on the highway. A merry "good-night" floated into space. Then:

"My darling!" Braintree spoke.

"Yes, Billy."

"I wish, my dear, that you would not be so—well, so free with men. I realize how sweet and innocent you are, but men never understand. You must take my advice, sweetheart."

No answer came to this, but the car gathered headway.

"Did you hear me, Rose-Ann?"

"Yes, Billy. You'd better hold your hat on!"

"You are breaking the traffic regulations, my dear girl!"

Braintree was holding his hat on.

"I'm going to break every regulation if you talk like that, Billy Boy."

"A man like Conklin——" Braintree tried to speak quietly, but the flying dust got into his mouth and Rose-Ann spoke into the pause:

"A man who can get past Cleaver when a woman like me fails to"—Rose-Ann disdained the dust—"has my admiration, Billy."

"Rose-Ann, this pace is dangerous. Go slower."

"All right, Billy, as far as the car is concerned I'll meet your views, but please don't talk any such talk as you've just

been talking, to me again. I mean it, Billy, I'm not joking." She stopped suddenly both car and speech and looked at her husband. "I wonder," she faltered, "if you realize that you are trying to do what you once said you thought was a crime?"

"What do you mean?" Braintree flamed.

"Control another's thought and action."

"But, my dear, there are certain accepted standards——"

"Good only for them who accept them! We've been over that ground, Billy." Rose-Ann spoke loftily.

"Be reasonable, Rose-Ann. I suppose you do grant that truth, honesty, morality——"

Rose-Ann made no reply, but she started the car.

"You see, beloved, when you pause and think, you agree with me."

No answer.

"You are not going to sulk, my precious little fool—are you?"

Braintree put his arm around the rigid form beside him.

"No, Billy."

"Then turn your dear head and kiss me—there's a straight stretch of road before us."

But Rose-Ann kept her eyes on the straight stretch. There were shadows lying across it; shadows cast by tall elms that for centuries had stood beside the highway over which young and old passed with their problems.

"My dear little girl, you know I am thinking—working only for you. My life is devoted to you and your happiness."

"Thanks, Billy, but—— Well; I wish you wouldn't concentrate so on me."

"On whom else, then, my own?"

"Yourself, Billy. You need a little attention."

"Very well, Rose-Ann. If it has come to criticizing your husband, I am sorry——"

Rose-Ann turned suddenly toward him, but not to kiss him—she laughed.

It was such a laugh as no man listens to complacently.

## CHAPTER XI

**T**HE winter was a full and busy one for Essex, and Middle Essex had its share of excitement.

Prudence Townsend's baby was born early in January. The little incoming life nearly swept the mother from what had seemed the safest of moorings.

Prudence, always practical, always the mistress of any situation, came so close to the Great Divide that during the days in which her fate hung in the balance it was given her to look backward and forward. White and weak she lay upon her bed, conscious; awe-filled and piteous. Townsend felt strange and awkward in her presence; he did not know how to approach this pale, austere woman with the light of heaven, instead of earth, shining in her eyes.

There were hours when nothing mattered to Prudence—she stood on the edge of things and all that lay behind—even the child that had cost her so much seemed to have no hold upon her; but the tremendous sense of her own weakness, the gulf that lay at her feet—they were the vital facts. She was not afraid—one isn't when he has gone so far—but she was so helplessly tired—she, strong, calm Prudence! She was at last one of the sisterhood; no longer the superior woman who could look askance at less favoured ones.

Into the dim, still room Albert Townsend tiptoed and knelt beside his wife. His lips were thin and bluish; his eyes grave and deep.

Prudence tried to speak to him, to cheer him. She felt as a good friend might who yearned to comfort one who had lost his dearest and best, but no words came to her trembling lips. Prudence looked upon the man beside her, not as she should have looked upon a husband, the father of her child, but as a person fraught with gravest danger to all that she had

supposed secure. Through him had come the shattering of all that she had believed herself to be.

The things that she had striven to achieve through all her life were as nothing now. She could not think of herself as a Townsend. Through her relations with—she looked fixedly at Townsend—her relations with this wide-eyed man kneeling at her side, she had been brought near to her death. And then one day she spoke and, although Townsend, superficially, agreed with her, something in the depths of his being heard a knell—not a death knell, but a long life knell.

“Albert, if I live”—and no one thought she would at that time—“there are to be no other children. I will never run into this danger again.”

“No, my dear. Good God! no.”

Prudence looked at him with stern, unconvinced eyes.

“Some men say that—and forget, Albert; but I mean what I say and you must decide for yourself. I would rather never set eyes on your face again than to suffer what I have suffered. It—it doesn’t pay. I’ve wished since—since the baby came—that I had never married. Albert, I will never live again with you—as your wife!”

There was something awful in the weak, hoarse tones.

Townsend was alarmed. He feared that she was prophesying her death—not her life.

Having thus issued her ultimatum, Prudence slept, and gained a stronger foothold on the perilous edge.

Her father came to her later. Townsend had repeated the foregoing conversation to him.

Gravely Trevall drew a chair to the bedside and took the limp, clammy hand of his elder daughter in his. Prudence had always met with his approval heretofore; had so exactly footed up the correct total that now this thing that Townsend had confided troubled him deeply.

“My child,” he said, “had Rose-Ann uttered such a sentiment I would not have been surprised—but you, my dear girl!”

Prudence opened her eyes and stared at her father. He, too, was a stranger; an enemy. All men were.

“Of course, my dear,” Trevall patted the thin hand as he was wont to tap the chair arm, “you have suffered a great deal; that is woman’s share in the scheme of the Almighty, but when you have seen and loved your daughter——”

“Is it a daughter?” Prudence asked indifferently. She had been told this many times, but somehow the fact did not remain in her weakened mind.

“Yes, Prudence. A fine and beautiful child. When you are quite yourself, my dear Prudence, you will be proud of every pang, every sacrifice—and you will accept as never before the duties you owe as a wife and mother.”

Trevall paused. Prudence’s face twitched and quivered; he thought she was going to cry—sick, weak women always cried. Trevall recalled how his wife had always wept passionately after each child was born. But Prudence did not weep.

“Father,” she gasped brokenly, “I never knew before how—how—funny you could be without trying.”

And then Prudence laughed. Laughed regardless of the insecure grip she held on life; laughed defiantly; laughed as the free laugh who flout danger.

Nurse and doctor were hurriedly called and “all males except the doctor,” as the stern nurse proclaimed, were barred from the room, which again became a battlefield.

Unknowing and detached, Prudence slipped over the brink—but still clung weakly to the dividing line. What she saw, who was ever to know? She muttered almost constantly of strange and wonderful things—strange to Prudence Trevall who had always been so practical.

“Flowers!” she whispered, “flowers!” As if no flowers had ever grown wildly beautiful at her feet—“and—and music—listen!”

They were all listening—but only Prudence heard the calling, luring tones.

“It is wonderful here, wonderful!” she confided; and then, after many days of listening to music and seeing flowers, she opened her tired eyes and saw Rose-Ann sitting by the western window rocking gently with something small and soft in her arms.

It all seemed so natural, just as if nothing tremendous had happened. Rose-Ann's ruddy hair was turned to a crown of gold by the setting sun. Her bent face was beautiful beyond words—Prudence had never before acknowledged her sister's beauty—but it flooded her now with a sense of safety and of promise. She was glad to have her sister close to her.

Rose-Ann was holding to her lips a rose-leaf—no, it was a baby's hand. She kissed it gently and then sang something that sounded like a prayer set to the lilting measures of a bird tune.

Was this heaven, a woman's heaven? Had Rose-Ann died, too?

And then Rose-Ann, still transfigured by the golden glow, turned.

“Are you awake, Prue?” she asked as simply as if they had not all barely escaped the grave.

“Yes.” It was a mere whisper.

“Do you want to see this blessed baby, Prue?”

“No.”

“All right—I'll keep her for myself. She's a precious, Prue. She looks like Mother!”

At that something stirred in Prudence's heavy heart; a great hungry longing. Her mother! Her mother would have understood! Never before had Prudence felt this truth. A sob sounded in the dull silence and Rose-Ann came hurriedly to the bedside, the baby on her breast. She looked like a girlish madonna; the eternal mother.

“Prue, darling,” she whispered, “stop, dear. They will all come in and make a scene and shut you away from us all again. See, dear old thing, baby and I will sit close to you—feel this blessed little hand, Prue, isn't it wonderful?”

The sob ceased, the velvet touch was on the mother's trembling lips.

“Prue, listen to me. They told me what you said—about such things as this—this precious—and I do not blame you a bit! If you don't want to go through hell who has a right to *make* you? But if I were you, dear, I'd make the most of what I'd clutched as I passed through!

“Look at this darling—she came out with you. Prue, I’d just buck up and enjoy her.”

A sweetness was entering in; a saneness. A shaft of light fell across Prudence’s bed and she weakly thought that that was what brought the warmth and comfort; but oh! that delicate touch upon her face—the groping, divine touch. Slow tears rolled down her wan cheeks.

Then Rose-Ann spoke again.

“The blessed baby doesn’t resent your attitude at all, Prue, she’s going to understand you and stand by you always. She’s taken to the bottle as though from preference and she nestles already—want to try her?”

“Yes.” And when the tiny, warm body lay against Prudence’s heart all the hardness, all the firmness, seemed to melt. She felt faint—yet triumphant.

“We’ll have such gorgeous times together, Prue. You, the baby, and I. What shall we call her? Let’s name her here with all the bright sunlight falling upon her like—like a benediction.”

“We had thought——” Prudence faltered.

“Never mind,” Rose-Ann broke in, “what *we* thought. What do *you* want, Prue—just you?”

There was a pause; a faint sob that came shaken by joy.

“I’d like to—to call her Faith. Faith Adams!”

“Oh! I’m so glad, Prue, dear, so glad!” And then Rose-Ann knelt close and threw a young, protecting arm around Prue and her sleeping child.

“Rose-Ann”—after a longer, a more thrilling pause—“I suppose it was fancy—one is so mad at such a time—but while I was struggling, I think they had given me a bit of chloroform—someone came into the room. I could not see, I—I felt her. I—and do not laugh at me, Rose-Ann, but I thought it might be—Mother. I thought I heard her cry and say comforting things. I cannot remember what it was she said. It troubles me, Rose-Ann, for lately I have heard that voice somewhere and they will not let it in! If it wasn’t Mother’s spirit, who was it?”



Rose-Ann tightened her hold.

“Prue, it was Patsy—my Patsy. I never knew anything so strange, so beautiful; but when she heard about you, and what a hard time you were having, she simply walked out of my house and came here. Once she got past Albert and the nurse and came into this room. They were all too busy to notice her. When she came home, her face had a new look on it. I shall never forget it—and, Prue, she wants to come and take care of Faith.”

Wonder of wonders! Prudence did not flinch.

“Prue, I wish you’d let her. Her babies were taken from her, she told me,” Rose-Ann caught her breath. “She told me that often she stands in front of the Catholic Foundling Home and wonders where her babies are! And, Prue, when she sees a baby’s funeral, she gets faint and weak! That is what she told me.

“Prue, it would be the saving of Patsy to let her come, and she’d give her best to Faith.”

All this talk, ought, according to the nurse who was coming heavily up the stairs, to be the most dangerous thing for Prudence Townsend, but strange to say she was gaining strength with every moment. She was not a dead woman, but a live, a vital one with grave questions to answer, big affairs to settle. Never before in Prudence Townsend’s life had she seemed so necessary, so determined to take a stand.

A stand against what? That was the puzzling thing—but she must take a stand. She was drawing strength from the warm mite on her breast—there seemed to be an inexhaustible supply of strength in that small burden.

“Can—can you spare Patsy?” The faint whisper came slow. Prudence dared not reject anything that offered hope for her child.

“I think I’ve trained her for you, Prue.” Rose-Ann laughed. Then: “I’ll take another mill girl. I’m very popular with them.”

“I think it will be safe, Rose-Ann; I can watch Patsy and she may be, as you say, saved.”

The door opened and the starched and immaculate nurse stood transfixed on the threshold.

"Mrs. Braintree," she said in alarm, "I am afraid you have done a dangerous thing—and the baby! What will the doctor say? I left the room to make some broth——" She was bustling about and then she came to the bed and, with watch in hand, counted Prudence's pulse. She looked disappointed when she found it steadier, stronger. This was not regular with that temperamental Mrs. Braintree standing coolly by.

"I'll take the baby away now, Mrs. Townsend. You must rest!"

"I want my baby! I will rest better with her here!" A new, commanding note sounded in Prudence's voice; "and I want Rose-Ann. I am going to get well, I think, but"—and here Prudence drew Rose-Ann close to her with a look—"but I am never going through this again," she whispered fiercely.

"All right!" Rose-Ann whispered back. "I wouldn't if I didn't want to."

It was strange how Rose-Ann removed obstacles. One did not have to fight anything with her; it was like flaying the air when one most expected opposition.

And so Prudence struggled up the incline down which she had slipped, came to the top, and turned her grave eyes to that which she so nearly had foregone.

Patsy came, in apron and cap, and hungrily assumed the care of little Faith.

Trevall and Townsend disapproved of this, of course. Trevall had a talk with Prudence, and Albert made his responses at the proper time, but Prudence set her lips and remarked at the close of the conference that she did not agree with them. It was a good thing all around. So Patsy remained. With the pretty baby cuddled in her arms, poor Patsy did not seem the sinner and outcast that one might suspect from Trevall's description. She looked very young and inoffensive and a radiancy grew upon her dimpled face.

"It sure seems," she confided to Prudence one day, "that

the child was giving me the chance, ma'am. When I hold her and feed her, sure it seems as if I was doing it for me own."

And then tears came in the girl's eyes; tears that she quickly brushed away.

"It's not tears ye'll be seein', little Faith," she faltered; "but just smiles, me pretty—and that will get yer to expectin' sunshine."

Prudence was never to have another child! The matter was not referred to—but it became an understood thing, an accepted fact. She developed slowly into the bleak, sexless type. Her child alone had power to move her to softness and smiles.

Faith early learned to crow and gurgle her content; soon she voiced her sentiments so audibly that they could be heard all over the house. When she was absurdly young she fixed her wide, blue eyes upon Compton, who would not believe Rose-Ann's reports of the child's progress and came to verify them—and twisted her small face ecstatically. It was as if she had found something extremely gratifying about him. When he put his thin finger near her rosy ones, she enfolded it trustingly and Compton felt the thrill, as Rose-Ann did, in his very soul. The child was the first one he had ever intimately regarded.

Townsend could never be brought to believe that it was good form to refer to his daughter. When he was obliged to, he did so guardedly and in private he contemplated her much as Jonathan Edwards might have done. Of course he hoped for her eternal salvation, but he held grave doubts about it. She had that unsettling look that marked Rose-Ann and she had her aunt's vehement manner of protest.

Trevall, as might have been expected, looked upon his granddaughter as an added grace to that which had been vouchsafed to him and his line. It was unfortunate that she was a female, but as she could not have borne his name in any case, it did not so greatly matter. He took for granted that the child would be christened Faith Trevall, but Prudence shook her head.

"Father, I want her named Faith Adams." And then

Prudence's eyes grew misty as she recalled that late afternoon when the glory of the setting sun bathed them all, Rose-Ann, the baby, and her, in its warmth and joy.

And while little Faith waxed strong and lovely the Torch Light had to shine with its own stored power, for Compton did not appear in Essex.

There was considerable going on there, however. A strike was brooding darkly and Conklin at last asked Compton to come to his office to consider the matter.

The red-faced, bustling man bore little resemblance to the fellow creature who had sat in Compton's library and shared, for an hour, that glimpse of a hell. Conklin was all business now, and irritable to the last degree.

"We might as well understand from the start," he began, waving his fat, hairy hand to a chair, "that I don't stand for no funny business. I know what I'm about and this discontent that you've set going, Compton, ain't going to get any one anywhere, and your staying away looks bad."

"What's it all about?" Compton, perfectly groomed and calm, met Conklin's assault with pleasant tolerance; "and I thought it best to stay away."

"The usual things," Conklin lighted a strong black cigar. "What else have they to fight for, damn them! Wages, hours. What do they think is going to be the end, if we give in to them?"

"It looks"—Compton leaned back, waved Conklin's offer of a black cigar aside and lighted one of his own—"it looks to a layman like me, Conklin, as if they were after what most of us are after: better conditions; and that means, of course, more money and leisure."

"That's damn rot, Compton. They waste their money and—get drunk."

"The equivalent of our free-handed indulgences. Cars, gambling, trips abroad, and a general hullabaloo!"

"That talk doesn't go down with me, Compton. Don't try and pull it off. I notice that you like your daily bath and your big car as well as the rest of us."

“Exactly, Conklin, I do. I appreciate them so that I’m a bit keen that others should have the same sense of gratification about something.”

“You believe in this pack getting drunk and wasting their wages and having more time in which to do it?”

Conklin’s face suddenly flushed, for he saw Compton’s pale and wince.

“No.” Compton flicked the ashes from his cigar. “But I cannot for the life of me, Conklin, see what right—what divine right, mind you—we have to limit them, if they can get by fair means, or a free fight, something better for themselves. It’s what every nation and man has done from the beginning of things. We call it progress when *we* make the fight.”

“I pay my men the regulation wages—in some cases more,” Conklin frowned.

“I know you do, Conklin. But see here, you’re making more and more money; growing and reaching out, aren’t you?”

“Suppose I am. Haven’t I a right to a return for what I put in—brains, capital?”

“Of course. And I suppose that your men think they have, also. They put in all they have. Health, strength, and—brains.”

“The hell they do!” snapped Conklin.

“I agree with you, Conklin,” Compton lighted another cigar, “but the fact is—here we are! We can have strikes and—who pays for them? There doesn’t seem much gain in individual cases, but on the whole the labouring man does get an inch ahead now and then.”

“And we lose an inch now and then.” Conklin bit the end of his cigar and chewed it viciously.

“Exactly.” Then Compton looked out of the window at the many chimneys belching smoke and proclaiming prosperity.

“Sometimes I’ve wondered,” he went on slowly, “what would happen if we, such men as you, Conklin—bolted!”

“Bolted? What yer mean, bolted?”

Conklin's interest was enlisted.

"Oh! traditions. That's what seems to me to be the trouble. You business men have visions, and you're better than your daily deeds—I know that, Conklin. Now you've tried the old recipes for generations; same old materials though in different degrees and shapes. Why don't you introduce a new ingredient?"

"What in thunder——" Conklin's jaws set heavily; "that's the kind of rot that turns my belly, Compton. That's the sort of thing I've got against you."

"I'm sorry, Conklin, but I am afraid I cannot help you much."

"Well, sir, by the Lord Harry, you've got ter!"

Conklin got up and strode noisily about the room.

"I guess you'll think different after I get through. I believe you can smooth these scamps down, Compton. The unrest is among the younger men—the older men are with me because of what they think you are trying to do with their rights and privileges. I don't want a strike just now; it would mean more to me than it would a year from now. Compton, I want you to talk sense inter them."

As plain as a glance could carry Compton got Conklin's thought. His glance seemed to say: "I have you in my power. You'll either use your influence for me—or you'll have no influence to use for any one."

"I'm not to be bought, Conklin."

The steady, cool voice sounded definite and final. Both men stared.

"Who said you could be bought?" Conklin coloured a deeper red.

"You suggested it. No, Conklin, I couldn't interfere. If you can better the conditions of your men, I think you should do it before, not after, an ugly strike. If you cannot, they should be made to understand that by you—not by an outsider, like me."

"You mean that I should explain to those fellows; get down to them——"

"Yes. That's the way it seems to me, Conklin. You're

all in it together. Some of them could understand. I could name a dozen who could."

"You think they could be reasonable where their own interests are concerned!"

"Yes, I do, Conklin, as reasonable—as you!"

And still the two men faced each other as they had that night in Compton's library.

That subtle strain of understanding that had held them then held them now. Somewhere in their depths, they were strikingly alike.

"By God!" muttered Conklin, "they'll never get me to break down, damn them!"

"I suppose you'll all have to prove that," Compton rose quietly. "It's senseless loss and brutal folly, these strikes. Either men like you *can* do better or you cannot, but there is one thing sure in my mind, the true state of affairs should be common knowledge between you and your men."

"And a damned lot you know about it, Compton."

"No, I know, *really* know, nothing about it." Compton had reached the door.

"And what would you do about it, Compton?"—a sneer rang in the words—"just for argerment."

"I'm afraid very little, Conklin. I'm going down to the Club and talk to the men as I've talked to you. I'm going to urge them to understand—but if you refuse to help them to understand, why——" Compton spread his hands wide.

"You'll stand back of them if they strike?" Conklin scowled.

"That depends, Conklin."

"Jest fer argerment again, suppose I let them in on another platform? Suppose I told them that the man they trust——"

"Stop, Conklin. You're not that kind. Once I might have doubted—I know better now. Along that line, I'll back you. You couldn't do it!"

And Conklin knew that he could not.

"But," Compton went on, "if you want me to, I'll lay the whole thing before them; everything, and I'll get out."

Conklin walked about restlessly. Suddenly he turned and faced Compton.

"I know men," he said, his words cutting sharply; "that would but make them hold to you fiercer; my telling would be another matter."

"Of course."

"I don't believe you are counting upon that, Compton, but—it's a fact. We both know it."

"Since we do, what shall we do about it? I leave it to you."

Conklin hesitated.

"I'll answer that later, Compton."

"Very well."

And the door closed behind Compton, leaving Conklin to face a grave situation, alone.



## CHAPTER XII

**W**HAT really occurred to calm the situation in Essex that winter and spring no one really knew. Conklin faced a possible explosion, and waited. He was a man that could estimate fairly well the time for action, but he decided that to know a time for no action was quite as important.

Compton was seen now almost daily in Essex—this fact became of vital importance to Conklin. He was watching his man as he was watching the results brought about, so he believed, by his man. He felt sure that Cleaver would call upon him in an emergency, but he felt daily more elated when by Compton's appearance he knew that all was going well with him.

But there was one phase of all this that caused Conklin great uneasiness.

When he had enlisted Brady's assistance as spy on the Torch Light proceedings, he had set in action more than he had realized at the moment. Brady was as keen as he was unscrupulous. There was no half way with Brady. When he was drunk he was out of the game; when he was sober he was as alert as a ferret.

He believed that by espousing the cause of his master he would be furthering his own ends—and Brady had ambitions.

Conklin, on the other hand, had wanted proof of certain things and was willing to pay for it, within limit, but he had no idea of involving himself. He had believed that Brady was a good dog to follow and fetch, so he set Brady on the Torch Light trail; but when he called his dog off he expected his dog to lie down content and gnaw his bone—Conklin to provide the bone.

But Brady was not that kind of dog. He would follow and

fetch, he would accept his bone, but he refused to lie content and gnaw—he buried his bones and nosed about for more. He never forgot where he buried his treasure.

“See here, Brady,” Conklin said to his man while he was, himself, sitting on the lid of things, so to speak, and waiting, “there’s no need of your browsing up at the Torch Light any more and sitting on the penitent bench. I’ve got all I want. There’s nothing doing up there that counts. It’s all right—let the women have their little fling, they haven’t any Mill Tavern, you know.”

Conklin meant to be facetious.

Brady took off his dirty woollen cap and scratched his head.

“All right, boss,” he returned. “I’m ready ter quit. I ain’t had a free spell for nigh onter a month. What between work and settin’ up to the Club actin’ like a hallelujah man, there hasn’t been much time for the Tavern. A man’s got ter have his easy-goes, Mr. Conklin.”

“All right, Brady, take your easy-goes, and forget it!”

But the last command was impossible for Brady to obey.

Imbibing freely at the Tavern or working ably at the mill, Brady could not “forget.” Why had he been set on Compton? Why had he been so suddenly called off? Why were Conklin and Compton so thick all of a sudden?

A dog like Brady must have scents. So he started on one of his own.

“Double-crossing, I’ll be damned!” he concluded; “I smooth the back of *you*; you smooth the back of me; devil take ’em! I do what I blame please—and you tell ’em it’s all hunky dory.” That was Brady’s conclusion.

The smothered strike certainly carried conviction with it—as far as Brady’s conclusions were concerned.

“By the mother of heaven!” When Brady used this form of speech he was in his most dangerous mood. “I’ll get ter the bottom of this on me own! I’ll let the boys in on it when I clear it up and then see who’ll lead the pack, me hearties.”

There are leaders in all spheres and when they clash, systems are bound to go to pieces.

Brady was fairly sure, so he thought, of Conklin. He knew his species. The old conception of a slave as a slave driver held true. Conklin had come up through the ranks fighting with the weapons with which Brady was familiar, but with Compton this was not so.

Sitting, as Conklin called it, on the penitent bench, had widened Brady's horizon. He watched the results of Compton's methods without in the least understanding them. It seemed impossible to get through that smiling, calm exterior of Compton. He appeared always intensely interested in the other man's point of view. He never insisted upon his own.

"So that's the way it strikes you?" was his oft-repeated remark. "Well, if that is your honest opinion, I respect it."

Against such fairness the younger men at first were suspicious, but finding that Compton sincerely meant what he said, they had decency enough to make sure of themselves before judging him. Gradually, he became to them an Ideal; someone to whom they could look for disinterested leadership. Compton had nothing to gain. Once that was established to their satisfaction, they rallied around his standards with the humorous enthusiasm of youth.

Compton assumed that others were as honest as himself—until they proved the contrary. That was his growing power in Essex; but Brady, whose philosophy of life was simple and direct, who had faith in no one and hated any one who cast reflections upon his motives, eyed Compton more and more keenly.

And at this juncture Eric Manville came out of the Far West, unannounced—as might be expected of a man whose affairs were of the nature of his.

He had replied to Compton's many invitations with the information that he was tied hand and foot to his holdings. "Fighting off thieves and spies," he eloquently put it, while he neared the triumph of his life.

Two weeks before his appearance in Middle Essex, he had sent a letter to Compton giving more detail than he had ever done.

It's been a stiff uphill climb, old man, since those days in London when you grabbed me by the scruff of the neck, so to speak, and jammed me down the throats of those men who took me at your valuation. I had to make good or shoot myself—I've about done the former, Compton, but I must stay here on the spot until I have all the material I want.

This may mean years—but I can see success straight ahead and that is all that counts.

It was an April evening, warm as June, and six months after Conklin had come to his understanding of Compton, when Manville arrived.

The months had known their temptations and grim battles. Twice had Cleaver summoned Conklin; twice had the two men stood by Compton while the physical torture, unaided by the stupor of intoxication, shook him. They had helped as they could, had shared the awful moments, and Conklin, at least, had felt the sweat drop from his forehead as he withheld the drink that would have but added to Compton's degradation.

When the conflicts had passed and Cleaver had moved silently from the room, Conklin, gripping the weak hand of the man on the bed, would mutter:

“God! but you've won again.”

That bare, unadorned fact was all that Compton had to show in the way of laurels—he had not lost in the last two encounters with his enemy!

On that April evening Compton in his library was reading a book on psycho-analysis—the subject was one of deep interest to him. Here were new ideas that were combating old beliefs; they were full of hope in that they opened vast areas of unsuspected supply.

Suddenly, just outside the door, he heard voices.

“My good fellow, you need not tell him I'm coming—I'm here!”

And into the warm bright library, with a stride that suggested a life in the broad out of doors, Eric Manville came.

Compton stared at him as he might at a creature from another planet. There was that about Manville that caused people to stare. He was over six feet tall, of the blond type that grows red-brown in the open and under the sun. His light hair, brushed rigidly from his wide, broad forehead, still held the curve that had been combated ever since its owner left school.

“For the Lord’s sake, old man, don’t say that you have forgot me?”

Manville loomed over Compton like an accuser.

It was the comical, heart-warming smile that first penetrated Compton’s confusion.

And then Manville laughed—no one ever forgot that laugh.

Compton rose unsteadily and held out his hands.

“Eric Manville!” he murmured. Then again as if to make sure:

“Eric Manville—of course!”

“Can you put me up, Compton?”

“Put you up? Why, I seem to have been waiting for the chance ever since I came here. Cleaver!”

Cleaver entered at once.

“Yes, sir.”

“Take Mr. Manville’s bags and open all the rooms upstairs—he’ll suit himself later as to what ones he wants.”

“Yes, sir.”

Then Compton turned to his guest.

“Have you dined, Eric?”

“Yes, in Boston. I had a couple of hours to wait for the train here. Gee, old man!”—Manville looked about the room—“some place, but too many books—they shut you in.”

Then he drew a chair close to Compton’s, and leaning forward over his clasped hands, regarded his friend.

“Yes, sir, that’s the matter with you—books have shut you in.” Manville never wasted time in reaching any fixed point. Compton’s appearance worried him.

“I’m afraid my sudden swoop upon you has shaken you a

bit, old man. Out where I live stray cattle and humans are all in the day's job. I've forgot the use of calling cards."

"That's rot, Manville, and you know it. You're as welcome as a gift of God."

"Well, something rather big has unexpectedly come to me, Compton, and the devil of it all is that I cannot explain just now. I've got to meet some men in New York, got to camp around for an indefinite time. When I fixed things up out West, you seemed to be the only thing on the map of the East and so I'm here. My Lord, Compton, but I have wanted to see you."

"Eric, my home is yours and you know that. Use it and me. The longer you stay the better. As to your private affairs, I'm no snoop but a masterhand as a waiter. Lord! how I have wanted to see what time had done to you."

"And how do I size up, Compton?"

Manville asked this seriously, and sat back waiting the answer.

"I could ask no more, Eric."

"That's the best thing you could say, old man. Through all the years since I left you in London, I've rounded myself up, now and then, and counted the losses and gains with a view of handing you the total. There are items that you would disapprove of, Compton, but even they could be somewhat explained; there have been big fights and a few victories, a good many slumps, but on the whole a slow up-grade."

"I can see that, Manville. You've pulled your muscles at the right job."

For a few moments both men were silent, thinking of that time in London when Compton had come across Manville picturesquely throwing himself to the devil because life and love in his own country had dealt him a blow that had shattered his singularly high ideals and fine perceptions.

Such men, cast from their legitimate spheres, swing more madly through space than others, and Manville was speeding dizzily when Compton, who knew his people as old friends of his mother, simply got in his path, stopped him abruptly, and

sobered him by acting as if he saw nothing unusual in one of his countrymen making an ass of himself.

He had seen more than Manville was ever to understand; had seen the suffering of a nature brutally disillusioned; had seen that Manville had still decency enough to carry on his self-destruction apart from them who might share his disgrace.

He had exacted the plain courteous recognition from Manville that he might from any American who would naturally welcome a greeting from another American.

And Manville, taken aback by the encounter, had rallied his abandoned social attributes and accepted the hospitality extended; though he had hated and resented it.

Suddenly, he had become ashamed to have Compton know the extent of his weakness and dissipation. It took on an appearance of cheap coarseness unworthy of any one who had had ideals—no matter how utterly those ideals had been betrayed.

The quiet, restful home life into which Compton had brought Manville—it was before the death of his mother—sobered the younger man, while, for a time, it bored him. Then he met acquaintances of Compton's—they had accepted him at the valuation Compton determinedly set upon him—a man of brains getting wider experiences.

It was almost laughable, the estimate arrived at. Manville had recoiled from it in private but held to it in public because, from the first, he could not bring himself openly to fail Compton. The meeting had been so unexpected and had come at such a critical moment that he was partly superstitious and partly grateful. It had stopped him so sharply on the down-grade that he was a bit breathless. Even then, he recognized it as his last chance.

The two men in the quiet library now faced each other and, presently, smiled. In the past it had been like that—silences, unbroken by question or answer, and then, complete faith.

“Your mother's death, Compton, hurt me cruelly. I tried to write, but letters of condolence—well! I couldn't.”

"I understood, Eric. The flowers you ordered—the ones she loved best because you always brought them to her—were buried with her."

"Thanks, old man. You see, just then I had to forget everything but the hope I was digging out of the works. It was nothing less than inspiration—your sending me back to the West in our country to make good, Compton. I couldn't have done it here in the East, but out there, where once I had gone to play with gun and rod, out there where a fellow has a chance if it is in him to know a chance, I returned with pick and shovel. I had always had an idea about the place where I took up a claim—and a year after I went back the idea became a hope."

"And now, Eric?" Compton was intensely interested, but he knew of old that he must be content with what Manville offered in the way of confidences.

"That's it, old man. The hope is—well, pretty much a certainty, but I've got to be sure for myself and others before I can share it with you, and yet I had to be near you, just now. You seemed the—well! the mascot. I got to believing that if I were near you, I'd go steadier."

"Thank you, Manville. And young Illington, how did he pan out?"

Illington was a young Englishman who, when Manville returned to America, had joined him, hoping to regain his health.

"He was a great kid, Compton. When once he got on his legs, he proved himself the real stuff and, without realizing it, held me to stiff jobs when, alone, I might have eased up.

"When I looked at him, grimy and hard-fisted, and recalled how he had been the pet of tennis tournaments and dances, I braced up. The work and isolation were stimulants to him, and when I saw the look in his eyes at my lapses—there were lapses at first, Compton, along the old lines—I had to make a choice. I couldn't bear the stare of contempt and surprise on that kid's face. I either had to quit or keep his respect.

"He became as hard as nails and he was an all-around



sport. When we got the hopes out of the idea, he went back to England—that was two years ago—to convert to our way of thinking some of his connections who have money. He got on their imaginations and, once they caught on, they took a leap ahead of Illington—so he cabled me and I'm going to meet some men in New York—they are on their way over now.

“But this is where you come in, Compton. My life in the West has messed me up—I cannot seem to get the soil off my hands. Illington is different. His roughness was like a disguise—I bet he was Gentleman Dick the instant he stepped off the steamer; but my roughness got to be my natural hide and I want to be polished up before I meet my men. See?”

“You look fit to meet anything any country has to offer in men, Eric.” Compton said this seriously, and he was taking keen account of every detail of the big fellow near him.

Manville laughed.

“I know what you mean,” he said. “My clothes are all right—though I am conscious of them. It's that, Compton. I want to lose consciousness of them. There was a time when I could, you know, and yet with the unconsciousness of togs, I may become conscious of that—hell slump. Women, business as it is done by whited sepulchres, you understand?”

“Partially, Manville; but after all you've got the proof in yourself of the folly of lumping men and women, business, or anything else.”

“Of course. But I want to hang around in the right setting while I'm getting ready to play my part.”

“Well, Eric, I repeat, mine is yours for as long as you want it.”

“Thanks. Let me get the reaction of my old life on me, Compton. I knew I'd find you—as I *am* finding you.” Then he laughed aloud and added:

“But my God! this life would stifle me if I had to keep at it long, and it's using you up. It is the real aristocracy here in America and—I need that just now; but I'll cut it as soon as I can. I want you to understand.”

Then after another silence Eric broke forth as if straining at a leash.

“Come outside, Compton. Let’s stretch our legs in this garden of yours.”

And so until after midnight they paced the paths; smoked and talked in snatches.

It was just as they parted for the night that Manville made Compton promise to go West in the near future.

It was the second day of Manville’s visit that he met Rose-Ann or, to be more accurate, when Rose-Ann bore down upon him like a materialization of the day dream in which he was, for the moment, indulging.

He was sitting on the south porch, basking in the sunshine, inhaling the fragrance of the freshly mowed lawn and listening more to calls of his old, old past than to the riotous songbirds circling among the stately elms.

Compton was in a distant part of the house telephoning to Boston for some saddle horses.

Manville, who for years had held his old past in subservance, was keenly under its influence now.

The refinement of his surroundings, the companionship of Compton, conspired to blur the experiences and achievements that had so vitally absorbed him in the West.

It surprised, and rather appalled, him to find how easily he slipped back into the luxury of Compton’s home; he felt a zest for the pleasures that once were his daily routine—while the rigorous details of his ranch life faded into a background that did not seem legitimately his.

In this state of mind, as the abandoned past became distinct and familiar, all that it held began to take on form and shape, as Manville had seen mountain peaks do—emerging from an enveloping mist.

Was his recent life, then, but a mist? Was the old life, wherein he had suffered the disillusionment of all that to him had seemed vital, the real and abiding influence, merely lying in wait for him? This, in the face of what he had believed he had accomplished, gave him a bad moment; shook his faith in himself.

Were it possible, he thought, for him, now that worldly success hovered near, to pick and choose, to accept or decline, all might be adjusted without great harm; but he was not free. Never before had this fact caused him dismay; it had been, he believed, the one great factor to which much of his happiness and success was due. The hold of others upon him had, he devoutly believed, been his support—not his drag. It had given back to him his belief in God—a recompensing God; in man as a simple, just creature and in woman as the mate of such a man.

Already Manville in his talks with Compton had been able to agree that much of his past disillusionment had been caused by his own abnormal and over-sensitive temperament. This certainly was true where men and business were concerned. Having achieved success in his own way he could be tolerant with others, concede that they might be as honest as himself. Since he could hold to his own code independently he was now ready to deal with his fellows without bitterness or resentment.

But there had been one blow dealt Manville that he had believed had deadened sensation—but had it? Suddenly this doubt brought a cloud to his face, a tenseness to his muscles.

So sternly and determinedly had he put it under control, so definitely had he replaced it by other ideals and responsibilities, that to find it could disturb him now, even by suggestion, dismayed him. It was like a shadow falling, from an unsuspected cloud, upon a smiling scene. He wondered how women: women like the one——

In that moment, as if to mock and deride him, the woman whom he had once loved, through whom had come the greatest sorrow and disappointments of his life, emerged from the mist. He tried to regard her impartially.

She did not seem now *The Woman* so much as *Woman*. *Woman*, that held part in the life that Compton and his environment signified.

“No! thank God,” Manville pulled himself up sharply; “she did for all her breed when she revealed herself. I have no more faith in her kind!” The very intensity of his declara-

tion should have warned Manville. "And also, thank God! the female does not seem to be included in Compton's scheme," he added with reviving relief. No; the effete and highly specialized woman could no longer have power over him, he concluded.

It was merely her stalking ghost that had frightened him.

Manville's doubts passed; he was conscious of the spring warmth and the song of revelling birds. He was no longer afraid. He squared his great shoulders and plunged his hands deep in his pockets.

"Bring on your spooks," he thought, and grinned. "I'm ready for them."

And at that instant, the breath of his ice-clad hills, the freedom of his ranges, stirred his blood. He felt a spiritual homesickness for them that gave him a great peace.

And into this sanctifying state a clear ringing voice broke: "Barry, where are you?"

Manville braced as one does for an unexpected attack from the dark.

"Oh, I see you sulking out there on the porch. Isn't it a nippy day, Barry?"

The invader, who was close now behind Manville, had discovered her mistake and was rigidly silent.

Manville turned and he and Rose-Ann confronted each other. Neither spoke. What the man saw was a slim, girlish creature with shining hair and eyes. She wore the trappings of *her* kind. Every dainty detail struck Manville with sharp familiarity.

What Rose-Ann saw was a strange man. Strange in every meaning of that word.

She regained her poise first.

"Excuse me. I am sorry. Have I frightened you?"

This was an unfortunate form of expression.

"I confess—you have." Manville looked so comically sincere that Rose-Ann laughed.

"You've rather frightened me," she said, coming out into the full light of day. "I did not know that Barry——"

And at that awkward moment Compton came upon the scene.

He took in the situation at a glance. It amused him. Manville, in his absence, had been left to the mercy of a comic fate.

"Rose-Ann," he said, coming close to her, "this is Eric Manville, just out of the West, you know. Having said that he wouldn't come, he came! He's like that. Manville, this is my good friend Rose-Ann, officially Mrs. Braintree."

The introduction, for some reason, did not reduce the situation to normal. The two acknowledged it, to be sure, but still with that strained manner so unusual with them both. Compton felt the atmospheric depression extending to him, so he broke into quick conversation as they all sat down.

"I've ordered riding horses," he said. "Manville can no more be happy without a horse than he could without his meals."

"Did you order three?" Rose-Ann asked. She seemed bent upon holding her gains now that she had forced an entrance.

"No, ma'am," Compton was smiling, "only two."

"I suppose they have another?" Rose-Ann asked.

Manville was watching the play between the two.

"Because," she went on, "I have always wanted to ride horseback—and this seems my chance. I meant to consult you about a horse, Barry."

"Impudence!" Compton looked severe.

"I beg pardon," the girl grew suddenly grave. Then, almost childishly, "I always talk foolishly, Mr. Manville, when I am nervously excited. You startled me. Just for a moment I thought I had known you, seen you somewhere before. I suppose it was because of Barry's description."

Compton now stared. He had never described Manville to her, he felt confident, and yet Rose-Ann seemed perfectly sincere.

"What I came for"—and now Rose-Ann turned frankly to Compton—"was to tell you that Mr. Conklin wants you to

telephone to him at once. I met him on the road. He'll be in his office at ten—it's nine-thirty now.

"Good morning!" She offered her hand to Manville. "Are you going to let us share you, or is Barry going to hide you—only exercising you on horseback?"

"I hope I may have the pleasure"—Manville looked almost grim—"of meeting Compton's friends. If one may judge from the sample." His eyes held Rose-Ann's. There was daring, challenge in his glance.

Once brought to bay, Manville meant to see the thing through. The ghost had materialized, and still he was—safe!

"Good-bye, then, until—the next time."

"Perhaps you'll give us a cup of tea in your garden this afternoon?" It was Compton who spoke. He felt as if they were sending her away. She had a puzzled look in her eyes—the look of a child who is banished without reason. She brightened at once.

"At four-thirty, then!" she said as she passed through the library and out of the front door.

It was significant that neither Compton nor Manville referred to Rose-Ann again that day.

## CHAPTER XIII

OF COURSE no other woman in Middle Essex would have done what Rose-Ann proceeded to do without realizing her danger.

“She forgets that she is a married woman,” Prudence confided to her father as they discussed Rose-Ann’s amazing behaviour with Eric Manville.

But if Rose-Ann ever considered her relations with Manville at all, she did so from the viewpoint of a safely married woman who loves her husband and can afford to evolve a code of her own. Only from that point of view could she have taken her pleasure.

Marriage had given Rose-Ann more freedom than she had ever known. So happily could she move about that gradually prisons were eliminated from her calculations—but the bars were there and Braintree held the key!

However, during that spring Braintree was so proud and genial a jailer that no one suspected him.

“Prudence,” John Trevall replied to his daughter’s confidence, “this is, I am glad to say, no longer our affair, except, of course, indirectly. If Braintree condones what he must surely observe, why!”—and Trevall spread his arms wide as if in proof that he had liberated Rose-Ann.

The truth was that Braintree felt so sure of his wife and his position that he could afford a bit of mental strutting. It touched his vanity to see his possessions appreciated. It confirmed him in his good taste.

He had never felt quite at ease about Rose-Ann’s intimacy with Compton, and it was with a sense of relief that he watched her growing friendship for Manville.

“After all, it is the child’s love of pleasure that is at the

root of the matter," he reflected. "Personalities do not count with her."

But after the first weeks of his visit in Middle Essex, Manville took account of stock.

Often he was away for several days at a time. Upon his return Compton gauged by Manville's manner the results of his interviews, but they never discussed details. And if Compton observed these restrictions of business confidences, Manville observed certain others with Compton. Gradually he grew to suspect that either secret trouble or disease was at the bottom of Compton's delicate appearance and gravity.

"But he doesn't want any reference made to them," Manville decided, and merely looked forward to that time when he could get his friend out West.

"Out where God can have His chance," he thought, sometimes with a sickening hunger himself for the freedom and glory that he loved. The East was already relaxing its hold upon his imagination.

The order and discipline of Middle Essex amused and irritated him. Having long since freed himself from bondage, as he termed it, he could regard with indifference the emotions, or lack of them, that ruled his relations with others.

"Lord!" he often said to Compton, "how do they manage to preserve their customs and their prejudices! You would think that they would either get so brittle that they would break or—sort of wear away."

Trevall especially set Manville's teeth on edge; to the Townsends he gave little thought except as parents of Faith. Manville adored children in the shy, amusing way that marks the deep feeling, almost maternal, in some men.

"The baby," he confided to Compton, "reminds one of the sweet mayflower pushing its way through the snow and ice."

Little Faith was an excuse for meeting Rose-Ann, too. Such a natural and commonplace one. Rose-Ann caught and held Manville's interest. Unconsciously he was combating what she, to him, represented.

At first—but only for a few days—she suggested not woman, but *The Woman*, to him, and her appearance made



him suffer twitches from that wound that he had hoped was healed. With the pain, the bitterness and resentment were revived. There were moments when Manville wanted to hurt Rose-Ann. The folly of this, however, reached his sense of humour and he met her puzzled expression at some crass remark of his with a laugh that was a forerunner of a saner state of mind.

Then Rose-Ann merged into woman of the type that The Woman had been. As such she became fair game.

Gently reared and educated, married to a man who adored her and who slaved in order that she might be a waster of time and money, Rose-Ann could not expect mercy from one who understood the situation. Rather contemptuously, then, Manville found Rose-Ann excitingly amusing; he began to watch for her at every possible point of contact; she gave him a new belief in himself.

“With her type,” he tried to condone his brutal attitude of mind, “one need not be on guard for himself or—her. She knows the game.”

Manville liked Braintree. Liked him mostly for the characteristics that Braintree really did not possess, but with which he had to be endowed in order to fill Manville’s conception. Braintree’s evident pride in and devotion to Rose-Ann appealed to Manville almost pathetically.

“He’ll get a big shake-up some day if he doesn’t open his eyes,” he thought. And with that thought came another. “If he does wake up, what is he going to do about it?”

As a matter of fact it was Manville’s own imagination, tinged by his really narrow experience, that governed the second stage of intimacy with Rose-Ann. She would have been appalled had she suspected that he doubted any word or action of hers. She would have called him by several salutary and uncomplimentary names.

As it was, he was simply Barry’s friend; one whom Barry loved above all others; one who was making the quiet house a cheery home for Barry and a place of laughter and song. And so she expanded to Manville as the spring flowers were doing to the sun that was to betray them a little later. .

The real situation was this: Manville, supported by the restored belief in himself and the strong ties he had evolved in his private life, was advancing toward a point of serious danger.

And Rose-Ann, ignorant of the wild strain in her blood that had been suppressed or disregarded, secure in herself, as she and others believed herself to be, gaily sped along toward the same point of danger that loomed like the peak of a triangle. Up one side went Rose-Ann; up the other—Manville—separated wide at the base, but blindly coming closer, while the spring—a particularly mad and tricky one, lured them dreamily.

In Manville, presently, another change took place. He could look upon Rose-Ann as once he had looked at all women: with faith and reverence. It would be difficult to describe just how Rose-Ann overcame Manville's distrust of her. Little incidents often create ripples that reach to the uttermost rim of the space that confines us all.

As time went on, quite naturally Rose-Ann met Manville on the road. Compton had interested him in the Torch Light Club and he was often to be found there—an inspiration to the young members and a puzzle to Conklin, who often talked with him.

"Why, you fellows talk," he burst out to Manville one day, "as if you thought the systems were wrong instead of the damnably wrong way weak fools tackle them. Don't you know yer can't change certain things?"

But Manville, always laughing as if he had inside information, gave it as his opinion that certain things, especially, could be changed.

And then he proceeded, flying under Compton's colours, to show how they might be changed. He soon had a brave following in Essex and boomed Compton's popularity.

"By the Lord Thunder!" Conklin vowed, "I ain't going to stand for everything Compton hands out. Let him dig his own grave if he likes the job. This Western element finishes me."

But the Torch Light was another meeting place for Man-

ville and Rose-Ann. Such a natural one, too. Who could possibly object?

And if, in her swift-moving car, Rose-Ann overtook Manville swinging along the highway as if it were illimitable space, she could hardly rush by without offering him a lift.

And then, for the spring weather acted as if it had come to stay, Rose-Ann sought certain secret and isolated sanctuaries where dog-tooth violets, Stars of Bethlehem, and arbutus grew in riotous abundance and, to her shocked surprise, she frequently found Manville there.

“Do you mind?” he asked humbly, and because Rose-Ann had not the slightest suspicion of that strain in her that brought the twinkle to her eyes and the dimple to her right cheek, she answered:

“Why should I mind? It makes me glad to think another likes what I like.”

After that—what was one to say?

The Club and the mad dashes over the highway in the roadster had given small opportunity for Rose-Ann to reveal herself, but those quiet walks in the deep, springy woods, the close contact while searching for flowers, left the way open for the real poetic beauty of Rose-Ann's nature to ripple through.

It seemed like the streams to Manville at first, streams that were breaking the crust of ice as they gathered force. And it was not the man who had hacked and hewed a place for himself with his broken faith and lost illusions that began to comprehend Rose-Ann, but the man Manville *had* been when he entered life with the sensitive ideals that naturally, as might be expected, had gone down before reality.

Quite frankly and with simple ignorance, Rose-Ann began the readjustment of herself in Manville's mind, by convincing him that she was deeply and genuinely in love with her husband. This was disarming and, at the same time, protecting.

How it happened Rose-Ann could never tell, but she one day told Manville about her articles in the *Criticism*. She did this partly to exonerate Compton—Manville had heard of the resentment the articles were causing. Having confided that, it became necessary to get Manville's promise of secrecy.

“But why?” pondered Manville, and presently he got a vision. The horizon widened, and upon it arose dim outlines that called for investigation and classification.

Finally Manville arrived at a very humane and moral conclusion.

Neither Braintree nor Rose-Ann realized the danger that lurked behind the first early glow of passion and possession. The lack of confidence, the fear of misunderstanding would assume ugly proportions if they were put to the test of cold reasoning with such a man as Braintree and such a woman as Rose-Ann. They must not come to the test!

Manville, and quite humbly, too, thought that he might open Rose-Ann’s eyes without alarming her. She was like a heedless child playing among the holy traditions of her people. So long as it was play and nothing toppled over, there was no cause for alarm, but full well, Manville knew, counting his own scars, the effect of dislodging one cheap but sacred idol.

Having, then, this disinterested aim in mind, he gave small heed to intermittent danger signals that would have attracted the attention of a man as worldly wise as he believed himself to be.

It was on a deceiving day, the first of May, that Manville and Rose-Ann, leaving the car by the roadside, went into the woods to seek whatever flowers they could discover. The earth was damp and spongy, and gave forth that peculiar fragrance that only the spring can evoke.

“Remembering the tricks of New England weather,” Manville said, leaping over a small-sized brooklet and offering his hand to Rose-Ann, “I tremble for these foolish blossoms. They should know better after all their experiences.”

“Oh! each little blossom has its own experience, you know. What does it care for the traditions of its grandparents?” Rose-Ann, smilingly putting Manville’s hand aside, sprang lightly across the water.

“See! I want *my* experience—all alone.” This was an inspired opening for Manville’s train of thought.

“Experiences of others should count,” he said, “and they do help one to go alone.”

“They hamper one abominably.” Rose-Ann was quite serious. “You know that very well, Mr. Manville. You cut and ran. Barry told me the other day that you are a New Englander. Somehow I thought you were born in the West. I can account for you better now that I know your beginnings.”

This was a bold attempt to get control of the situation and Manville took a stand.

“Hardly any one over ten is born in the West,” he replied, bending to brush aside a pile of damp leaves that suggested a hiding place for ambitious mayflowers. “They get born and have ideas, then go West and—get rid of their ideas!

“But, quite seriously, Mrs. Braintree, I know from my own life that the experiences and traditions that were my inheritance have helped.”

“That’s the way folks always talk when they’ve demanded and exacted what they are afraid to trust to others. Barry has told me a good deal about you, you see, Mr. Manville.”

This was disconcerting, and for an instant paralyzing to austerity.

Looking up from the ground—for Manville had uncovered some lovely blossoms—he regarded Rose-Ann, leaning against a slim white birch, with amusement.

“I wonder what Barry has told you?” he asked boyishly; boldly.

“Oh! heaps. First you were a petted son of One of Our Finest. You used to go out West for vacations to kill things. The idle rich always want to kill things, but suddenly something happened, Barry skipped over that—and then you went West and *did* things. Quite marvellous things. You blazed your own trail, Barry picturesquely explained, and I’ll wager it wasn’t cluttered with the trash of others.”

Manville flushed and laughed. He was relieved and reassured.

“To a certain extent that is so, Mrs. Braintree. Like the usual young ass—I first went to devastate and called it fun. When I went with shovel and pick-axe I had only construction in mind. I did blaze my own trail, in a way. Of course a clutter of trash would have hobbled me, but I insist that I would have made a poor fist of it if, in my conscious thought, there had not been knowledge of trail blazing and in my blood the—something that my forbears stood for.”

Rose-Ann listened, but her eyes were twinkling.

“Do you know,” she said presently, “you sound exactly as if you had joined the army of my—my suppressors. I have an awful suspicion that you think I need snubbing.”

Manville flushed guiltily and got up a bit awkwardly, his hands were full of moist earth in which were bedded the pale pink arbutus buds.

“Here is my contrite offering,” he said.

In an instant Rose-Ann’s mood changed. She took the flowers reverently and bent her face over them.

“Oh!” she whispered, “I hope when I die God will put me in the class where they make colour. I suppose colour affects me as music does music lovers: sunsets and sunrises, the streak of light on the water when the moon strikes it, or the setting sun. Even the blobs of oil on the roads—have you ever noticed how beautiful they are? Colour does something to my heart. Just look at these shades of pink in the little bunch of flowers! Can’t you imagine the fun the seraphic colour class must have had?”

Manville was strangely moved as he looked at the suddenly raised face and extended blossoms. He heard himself saying something not in the least like a friendly mental nudge relating to tradition and inherited ideals.

“You make me think of Green Fire. I always mess up a quotation, but it goes something like this:

‘You are April Green Fire,  
A flame that flickers, glitters,  
But—never glows’.”

Rose-Ann drew back slowly; the flowers dropped from her relaxed hands and lay at her feet—pitiful, wilted things that had had only strength enough to push their way through the snow. They could not endure the hot human touch.

“You—you must not say things like that to me,” she murmured. “Let us go now.”

“But your flowers——” Manville said.

Rose-Ann looked sadly at them.

“They are spoiled, too!” she said softly, then looked up at Manville and—laughed.

Manville, strange to say, instead of feeling subdued by Rose-Ann’s quick resentment of his pushing against the lines of her reservations, was gravely impressed. First, by a realization of her knowledge of reservations and secondly by her instant defence of them. His responsibility was lightened.

“She begins to chafe,” he thought, but he loved the attitude she had taken. He could be now her friend in very truth. She had not merged into Woman, thank Heaven. She still was what he had once hoped all women were; in a subtle way she had proved *herself*.

It was absurd to put so much importance upon the occurrences! Suddenly this aspect of the affair struck Manville. He regarded himself as crudely egotistical. Rose-Ann had smartly reprimanded him by a delicate revealment of himself and sent him about his business.

Side by side he and she now walked from the sweet, fragrant woods.

“Dear me!” Rose-Ann sighed as if regretting the departure. “Not since I was a little girl have I heard, as I have to-day, the sap running up from the roots of things. I think——”

“What, Mrs. Braintree?”

“I almost think that I shall see pictures in the fire to-night, just as I did ’way back in the days of my youth.”

Manville longed to carry on this whimsical train of thought, but instead he said, sniffing the air like a thing of the wild:

“If I were in my cabin, I should say there was to be a change of weather. Rain in the valley; snow on the peaks.”

Rose-Ann lifted her small nose and sniffed also.

“And I warn you,” she whispered, “not to put your faith in any New England spring. There may be snow on the way.”

“Impossible! With this temperature, and the flowers as advanced as they are! Why, I’m no defender of the New England weather, but you must not exaggerate, Mrs. Braintree. Do not forget that before I was of the West, I was of the East.”

The reiteration of her name irritated Rose-Ann, though she could hardly have told why. It seemed like insistence upon an unnecessary thing, with the hope that she would notice it. It was as if Manville wanted her to understand that he had accepted her rebuke.

“Mr. Manville,” Rose-Ann meant to combat the impression in her own way. “Some day I want you to tell me about the time between your first visits to the West and—your shovel-and-pick-axe campaign. I wonder if we are good enough friends for that?”

Having asked this amazing question, Rose-Ann flushed as Manville had done earlier at her rebuke.

She was trying to condone her brusqueness, to reestablish the old footing; but she realized, with something of a shock, that her attempt at dignity had not shaken Manville’s position, but had apparently strengthened it—he was smiling at her, seeking to—put *her* at *her* ease.

“Yes. We are good enough friends for that, Mrs. Braintree. It is the one thing above all else that I want to do. Somehow I think we will be better friends afterwards. I want us to be—that kind of friends. I’m getting balled up, but you understand?”

“I think I do. Yes.” And Rose-Ann believed she did.

When they reached the car, the smiling day had begun to sulk. A chill was in the air and a high wind was stirring the tree tops. High in the sense that it caught only the lofty branches—the bushes by the roadside barely stirred. It was a warning wind.

“The wind is with us,” Rose-Ann said, starting the car.



"Of course," Manville bent forward to raise the wind shield; "but this quality of wind may change its mind."

Then, as if he were leading up, as a preface does, to the story he was some day to tell, Manville talked of the scene of his home to Rose-Ann as he never had before. Silently she listened, merely asking a question now and then to clarify a point that particularly fired her imagination.

Quite distinctly she saw, like a mirage ahead on the road over which they were flying, the log ranch-house with the huddling cabins close at hand.

"I'm a terribly gregarious fellow," Manville explained; "the people with whom I work, among whom I live, mean a lot to me!"

"The men have their families with them?" Rose-Ann broke in. "It must be like a Swiss hamlet. I suppose in winter with the twinkling lights and all that, it looks like a frosted Christmas card."

"No." Manville, bent upon accuracy, was keen about details. "We're a male bunch—only one woman on the place——" he stopped suddenly.

"Your housekeeper? I remember you spoke of her the other day to Barry." Rose-Ann regretted her interruption—it interfered with the main interest.

"My housekeeper, yes—and a woman who often stays months with us—mending, patching clothes and sick chaps. She raps our knuckles and—in a way makes us human. She and the housekeeper are the only women."

"Of course. All men or all women are deadly." Rose-Ann nodded.

"There was a slight pause. The personal note had jarred the easy flow of the story. In the silence both Manville and Rose-Ann veered away from the personal.

"There's one canyon near my ranch," Manville suddenly plunged in, "that has an Indian legend that I like. It is said that all spirits, departing this life, go out through that. At sunset and sunrise, I have watched the mists drifting below, and I have fancied that I saw pale, groping wraiths on their way. Oddly enough I went for the first time through

that canyon when I was making for my holdings with my shovel and pick-axe. It was the shortest, but the roughest, trail. The idea got sort of rooted in my mind at that time that I was passing out of the old life, you know—and into the new. Thoughts like that often have an influence upon one. They did upon me.”

Rose-Ann caught her breath and her eyes were shining—the mirage on ahead took on a most substantial appearance.

“I’d like to pass out through that canyon,” she whispered more to herself than to Manville, “in the morning.” Then, as if coming out of a dream: “You have made me see it all, Mr. Manville. It will never seem like a picture again—the picture is alive.

“Why, somehow, the lovely things around here—” she lifted one hand from the wheel and gave a wide sweep toward the woods and cloud-filled west—“*these* things seem like pictures. Etchings, you know. Quite well done in every detail; framed and—hung up!”

“I wonder,” Manville was watching the face whose profile was hypnotizing him, “I wonder what effect the big, unfinished canvas would have upon you? One over whose surface the hand of the Artist is still moving?”

“Please!”—and Rose-Ann turned toward him for an instant—“please, I cannot bear any more. It arouses something in me that makes me afraid. Something——” She hesitated as a child might who can hardly hope for understanding.

“I am bungling terribly, Mr. Manville, but once I had the maddest desire to see and—and *do* the whole world. There is a difference, you know, between seeing and *doing*. I may see a good bit of it some day, but I chose something that I cared for more than the *doing* of the world, and I do not like to”—Rose-Ann’s face blazed—“have my feelings tricked.” Then, realizing somewhat the extent of her bungling, she added, flippantly: “And *that* sounds rude. I begged you to tell me a story and you have. Told it so wonderfully that it seems real and makes me want it as a

baby wants the moon. I was always one to want my cake and—and crumble it as well.

“And here we are—at Barry’s gate.”

Manville got out.

“Do you know,” he said, and his words were slow and deliberate, “you have given me a bit of your real self to-day, Mrs. Braintree. I thank you. Good-bye.”

Rose-Ann made no reply, but turned her car skilfully and drove toward her home.

In the distance she heard the whistle of the train from Essex. Braintree would be on that train unless he came in her father’s car.

Manville’s last words rang in her ears, and presently they became her mother’s words. She flinched then and her eyes widened. The day had done great things to her—she realized that. It had revealed her to a stranger; and, somewhat, to herself. She realized that she was hiding her real self from them she loved best—and she was letting her longings and desires eat in!

She felt frightened; guilty. She had a mad desire to reach the station before that oncoming train. She wanted to meet Braintree before something else met him and harmed him. With all her quickened emotions Rose-Ann wanted her husband, but even more she wanted, at that moment, to keep herself as she really was and find peace.

In a vague way she felt that she was hurrying home as she had never hurried before. Escaping from something. Desperately yearning for love, safety, and a happiness that were threatened by she knew not what—she hurried on.

And that evening, as such things often occur, Braintree chose the wrong moment for doing a very innocent thing and, by so doing, created a situation that should not have been created.

After dinner, Rose-Ann and he went to their cosy library. Rose-Ann was in high spirits and regarded her husband as a wife does regard a husband whom she has spiritually betrayed for an instant, and longs, for that reason, to lay a special offering on his altar.

"Billy, let's have a fire. There's a sound in the chimney that means a change of weather."

Braintree touched a match to the carefully laid kindlings. They "caught" at once and licked at the logs with greedy, little red tongues.

"And now, Billy, let's sit, both of us, in one big chair and—see things in the fire!"

Rose-Ann meant to drag her secret fear into the open and do it to death in her husband's arms.

And Braintree, equally bent upon another course, gladly complied.

He had nothing to fear; nothing to drag forth or do to the death, but he felt the time had arrived to draw his wife's attention to the limit of her freedom. Of course there was a limit to the freedom of everybody.

"My precious little goosie!" Braintree pressed his lips to the bright head snuggling against his shoulders. "What do you see in the fire?"

"Oh! things. Things very bewitching. Billy, sometimes I'm just a little afraid that you are trusting me too much—I mean that you do not really fathom me. I am extremely deep, good man, and 'way down in the bottom of my being there are stirrings——"

Braintree for a moment knew a sensation of discomfort such as he had known the day of the Aunt Theodora confession and the conversation concerning Patsy. Marriage, then, had not done all that he had hoped it would do!

"My darling, you must not talk like that. So long as you play around and enjoy yourself I have no inclination to curb you, but if you have doubts of yourself, my sweet—can you not see? To him that thinks a thing is wrong—to him it *is* wrong. Why, I told Prudence to-day——"

He got no further. Rose-Ann stiffened and withdrew from the circle of Braintree's arms. She quietly brought a stool to his side and sat down, gathering her knees in her clasped hands as if to control every muscle of her body.

"Billy," she said quietly, "I did not know that you ever

discussed me with others. Against what were you defending me to Prue?"

This was unfortunate. Braintree disliked the suggestion of disapproval.

"My dear little girl," he said, "I do not discuss you with any one. You must know that. But when your sister made what seemed to her a very natural remark, I was obliged to—not defend you, my darling, but explain."

"Explain, Billy? Explain what?" Then: "Prue should have eleven children and a drunken husband."

Braintree did not laugh. As they had Manville, Rose-Ann's reactions made him alert.

"I thought," he said slowly, keeping his eyes on the sweet, indignant face close to him, "that by your own observation, dear girl, you might realize in due time that others are not as guiltless and innocent as you. I, having no doubt myself, have always thought it better that you should develop along your own lines——"

"What on earth are you talking about, Billy?" Rose-Ann confronted him angrily.

"Why, my dear child, you cannot possibly blame people, some unthinking people, for disapproving of a young married woman being as—as free with men as you are. As for myself, I can only say that I want you to be happy—in your own way, unless your own way is harmful to you, Rose-Ann. You should be the quickest to see that point, my darling, and even at the risk of your getting rather an abrupt awakening, I thought it wiser to leave you alone until something convinced you. I will never willingly, Rose-Ann, interfere with your happiness—I trust you entirely; I know you as no one else does. I intended to tell you all this as a background for the moment when you might be rudely startled—but——"

Rose-Ann turned her back to Braintree. He thought she was crying, her shoulders shook.

"Precious! look at me."

"I cannot, Billy, I am—seeing things in the fire, and they are a bit blurry."

"Rose-Ann, are you crying, my darling?"

“No, Billy, I’m sorry to say I’m laughing. You poor dear! Just think how we have blundered when we have to resort to such scenes as these. Billy, not to-night, but soon, you and I must see things unblurred.”

She rose and went across to the window. With her back still to Braintree she said gently:

“I suppose many young people who love each other, Billy, go hiding behind all sorts of screens, content to talk—around corners. But we are not like that—we must smash our screens. When the time comes that I hesitate before saying anything to you—I must look out!”

“Rose-Ann!”

Braintree’s face was white and stern.

“I’m not going to talk any more to-night, Billy. If I did, I’d make a mess of it.”

She turned then and her eyes were radiant. She smiled bravely.

“I love you, Billy!” she said wistfully. “I love you—let us rest on that for to-night.”

## CHAPTER XIV

THE day following was cold and stormy.

“Winter is set again,” groaned the new maid in the Braintree kitchen. This girl had not Patsy’s radiant good nature and luring charms, but she was moral and faithful and so could afford fits of gloom and sniffles. She adored Rose-Ann and permitted herself the luxury of relying upon her mistress for all that was the equivalent of frivolity and beauty.

Maggie was heavy and unlovely, but she was a practical machine and carried out the rules of the house devoutly.

“Winter is set again,” she groaned, “and I was a-going to whitewash the cellar for a surprise.”

Why winter’s return should interfere with the plan, Maggie did not explain to herself, but it excused a case of low spirits and preserved her self-respect.

Rose-Ann sang about the house. She read Whittier’s “Snowbound” and made buttered popcorn. She telephoned to Prudence and begged her to put small Faith to the receiver. She was desperately seeking to forget the night before.

“How foolish, Rose-Ann!” Prudence called back.

“I know, Prue, that’s why I ask it. The weather’s foolish; the world’s foolish—connect me with your daughter.”

Even Prudence relented. Then from Rose-Ann:

“Baby dear?” Silence.

“Baby, sweet, this is Auntie Rosie-Annie.”

“Goo!”

“Of course. I knew that you would understand. Sweet, here’s a kiss.”

Then from Prudence:

“Rose-Ann, Central will think you are mad.”

"And so I am!" Then after a pause:

"Father all right, Prue?"

"I saw him pass at the usual time."

"I had a queer dream about him, Prue."

"What?" affrightedly.

"I dreamed that he did not pass at the usual time."

"What ails you, Rose-Ann?"

"Nothing. Snow always affects me so."

The receivers were hung up.

An hour later Maggie pounded upstairs and found Rose-Ann in the attic.

"Well, my stars!" the girl exclaimed; "what are you up ter?"

"The eaves, Maggie."

"Ma'am?"

"Up to the eaves, Maggie. Just listen to the snow on the roof. I never would have had an attic except for the glory of hearing the rain and snow on it."

"It sounds messy ter me," Maggie said judicially, "and besides, ma'am, there's a call for yer on the telephone."

Rose-Ann ran down the two flights of stairs.

"Yes," she said in the receiver.

"This is Manville."

Had she been waiting for that call?

"Good morning, Mr. Manville." The face by the receiver was pale.

"Good morning, Mrs. Braintree."

"Is that all?"

"Not on your life. Say, will you let me give you a thrill in your own country?"

"That depends. And besides—you cannot."

"I'll prove the latter."

"Outdoors—or in?"

"Outdoors."

"If there's anything you can teach me out of doors in my own countryside, I'll give you the opportunity," Rose-Ann ended with a laugh.

"A bargain then. At ten?"



“It’s——” Rose-Ann glanced over her shoulder at the clock and was conscious of weighing a big matter that had all the appearance of being a mere bagatelle.

“It’s nine-thirty now.” This from Manville. “I’ll be along at once. I must go to New York to-morrow—and of course there is only to-day for this snow. Good-bye.”

Rose-Ann hung up the receiver and stood for a moment gravely considering. She was sorry and glad! She mentally declared that her world was all right—but she knew that it wasn’t! That doubt of herself, of any one, should shake her, proved that her world was anything but right. But in order, so she argued, to get things back where they belonged, she must not admit that she had been wrong. She must go on—not back. Of course there was nothing to go back to, and after she had that talk with Braintree that she was going to have, there would never again *be* doubt. So Rose-Ann went upstairs to get ready for out of doors.

She did not intend to give herself any leeway. She put on her most attractive tramping garb, knowing full well how becoming it was.

“Why not?” she demanded of herself. “Why not, indeed!”

She decided, too, while she pulled her tam to the most dangerous angle, to pass Prudence’s house no matter in what direction Manville’s “surprise” lay.

“Why shouldn’t I?” again she sternly demanded. “If I had any reason for not doing it, I’d think shame to myself. Shame, Mrs. William Braintree.”

At ten Manville rang the doorbell. That and the clock in the hall struck together on Rose-Ann’s ears.

Maggie admitted Manville and turned to see her mistress close to her.

“Maggie,” Rose-Ann nodded to Manville, “if Mr. Braintree calls up, tell him I have gone for a walk with Mr. Manville, but will drive into Essex for him this afternoon.”

There was a challenge in this and Manville felt it with a subtle resentment.

Once outside, the irritation passed. An imp of the per-

verse rose in him. He would not permit any nonsense to mar his last day. He knew that it was his last day. He must have a talk with Compton that evening, and although he would have to conceal much, he must share what he could. His business had suddenly focussed; his ultimate success was in sight; he had all but won out, and a great sense of exultation swept over him. Rose-Ann's pricks could not hurt him.

"I wager you are going to take me up to the pond to slide," Rose-Ann twinkled, keeping her eyes on ahead.

"No, I am not, Mrs. Braintree. But where are you going?" for Rose-Ann was headed toward the Townsend house.

"I—I want to stop at my sister's," she said.

"Please do it on our way back," Manville pleaded. "The sun is menacing everything. You'll be sorry by and by if you don't humour me, Mrs. Braintree."

"All right!" Rose-Ann tossed her head. Why indeed should she go to her sister's? To insist would be to own herself in the wrong.

And then she and Manville, subconsciously surrendering to fate, trudged on. They soon left the road and struck across the fields of damp, unbroken snow. They entered the woods that rimmed the hills on the right; they pushed through the underbrush and presently found themselves in a small circle that looked as if it had been cleared by human hands. The overreaching boughs of hemlock and pine had caught and held the snow, and they stood, as a wind-break, about the still and lovely spot.

"It is divine!" The words broke from Rose-Ann. She was caught in the meshes of her quick, vital imagination.

"And it *is* a surprise?" Manville stood looking down upon her.

"Yes. Somehow I never thought of—just this."

Manville smiled happily and said:

"It—the snow, you know—made me think of my home. I recall once, years ago it was, I was alone on my ranch—it was Christmas and I suddenly got devilishly homesick. I packed some food in my sack and set out for the Lord knew

what, and ten miles beyond, among some trees like these, I came upon another homesick devil headed for my ranch. We almost wept on each other's necks. We lighted a fire and had our Christmas dinner—on the snow."

Rose-Ann's eyes were shining; her face twitched.

"I—I am afraid I'm going to cry," she faltered. "It was so wonderful and—and pitiful—your Christmas dinner and your loneliness."

"Don't cry, please." Manville tossed a bag he had been carrying to the ground, "I'm going to make a fire and——"

"What have you in that bag?" Rose-Ann asked sternly.

"Luncheon. I bribed Barry's cook."

Rose-Ann sat down upon a log and laughed.

"I have a deep and desperate plan, Mrs. Braintree." Oh! the reiteration of her name! Rose-Ann felt about it as she did her father's tapping on the arm of his chair.

"I am going to take you at your word and tell you about the time that lay between rod and gun, and pick and shovel. It's awfully presumptuous—but I want you to know, and somehow this day and place seemed—just right."

The little fire blazed cheerily; the tiny plume of smoke curled up and the odour of the pine knots that Manville placed upon the embers was delicious.

"Hungry, Mrs. Braintree?"

"Horribly, Mr. Manville."

"Like cold chicken with hot coffee?"

"I am acquainted with Barry's food, Mr. Manville."

"Barry wanted to come—but I firmly refused."

"He knew?" Rose-Ann felt a quick sense of being released from a dark spell.

"Of course. He asked me to bring you back to the house for tea. He'll be home at four. That Torch Light of his will be the end of him if he does not look out.

"Here's some Scotch scones, Mrs. Braintree."

"My pet breadstuff, Mr. Manville. Excuse me for speaking with my mouth full, but it will probably be full for some time."

All barriers were down. Rose-Ann was in the open and—safe.

“I declare,” she said presently, and her face was a thing to remember, “we are like two funny pioneers. It’s like looking at a long-past scene through the big end of an opera glass.”

“Yes,” Manville was kneeling beside the fire, delicately poising a sliver of bacon over the blaze; “looking through that end of the glass gives you the big *in* the little, instead of the other way about.

“Pioneers!” He repeated the word as if the idea pleased him. He deftly toasted the bacon and flipped it on the bread; he laughed a good deal, as if he were so filled with enjoyment that it bubbled up as the coffee, hung over the blaze, was doing. Presently, seeing that Rose-Ann was well provided for, he sat down with his own paper plate, and, with the frank appetite of a hungry man, ate appreciatively.

“And you are really going away soon?” asked Rose-Ann. She had finished her meal and now got up and waited upon Manville in the pretty offhand way that he remembered as being so charming in her own house. Her service, intermittent and irregular, seemed to be her chief pleasure in entertaining.

“Yes—soon.” It was time now to light his pipe and luxuriate. Manville stretched his legs to the red embers and leaned back against a tree. Rose-Ann returned to her log and spread her hands to the fire.

“I shall miss you. We all will. Barry will be disconsolate.”

“Be good to Barry.” Manville let his eyes rest on Rose-Ann’s bent head.

“Yes, for he is so good to us all.”

“He is a lonely man.” Manville seemed musing.

“Yes. I know what you mean. He’s like the man in the dungeon-of-the-little-door. People could get in to him, but he was too big to get out.”

“That’s good.” Manville nodded. “I wonder why a fellow like Compton hasn’t dug himself out?”

There was no answer to that, and a silence such as only the heart of the winter woods knows enveloped them like a magic that was luring them from reality.

“And about that time between your first and second visit to the West?”

Rose-Ann spoke as if conversation had naturally led up to the question.

The smoke from his pipe clouded Manville's face—he gazed at the woman across the fire through narrowed eyes. Yes; it was like looking through the large end of the opera glass!

The big in the little! Concentrated *all*. And when Eric Manville recalled later that hour in the woods, he knew that neither he nor Rose-Ann was what life had made them; but were certain elements, extracted from themselves, and crowded into that one brief moment.

“How wonderful you are with that red glow on your face, and the whiteness all about you. You seem like something being warmed into life and reality—Rose-Ann.”

Rose-Ann did not stir. She heard her name upon Manville's lips with no shock of surprise or resentment. Had the man near her made a move in her direction every sense would have sprung to duty. As it was he seemed a voice, or rather, an echo of a voice far, far distant.

Again followed that vibrant silence. And then:

“Queer, isn't it, how we want some people to know more of us than we permit others to know? I think we only care to give ourselves away to them whom we can trust.”

“Thank you,” the words reached Manville weighted with assurance.

“And when one tries to tell what I want to tell you it would seem useless unless another really understands—without the actual telling.”

“Yes.” Rose-Ann bent forward and added a handful of dead leaves to the fire which was glowing ruddily like a small warm heart in its setting of snow. When she had added the mite to the embers, she folded her hands in a little patient way upon her lap and raised her face bravely with that smile upon

her lips that called forth tenderness from them who loved her.

"Go on!" she said with a friendly nod of her head; "I'm quite ready."

Through the smoke Manville again regarded her and he suddenly felt years younger; felt as one feels who has regained faith in what he believed was lost; as a child might who, waking from a bad dream, sees the familiar scenes.

"You see, I was one of the people who managed to keep my vision while I kept pace with my kind. Some are like that, you know.

"I did the usual stunts: college, travel, and the gun and rod trick. I always was one of my crowd—at least I thought I was, and I suppose I put up a good bluff for I was not resented until I was at last found out.

"Please do not get the idea that I ever thought myself better than my kind, Rose-Ann. I never did, and I soon proved myself less than they. They, at least, had the courage of their convictions and squared themselves all along the line.

"Of course, in due time I was expected to settle down. It was when business and I met face to face that the tug came. I had, before, enjoyed the results of business: had believed that my family traditions had kept business, as far as we were concerned, clean and upright.

"I hadn't done much thinking on any subject, but my education and keenness for knowing things had equipped me with a good working principle, but it and I were *different*. That was the cursed thing—our difference. It had nothing to do with good or bad, if you can understand; the being *different* was the unpardonable sin."

Rose-Ann breathed quick and hard as one does who nears the goal. She did understand—oh! how keenly.

"My family line is wool," Manville continued. "The biggest and best firm in the state, though my particular branch has died out—and I refused to let them use my name—they offered a pretty sum for it, too.

"There's no need of going into details, Rose-Ann; it's

childishly simple when reduced to a common factor. My father was living at the time. He was a man to whom I looked up—next to the orthodox God that had come down to me with my inheritance. The strange thing about it was, I had an honest belief in both my God and my father. I thought they were real.

“When I was taken into the secrets of the firm I asked a few crude questions. In short, I wanted to see, not only the wheels go round, but what made them go round. I got to wondering why the working part of the concern had been suddenly uprooted and taken to the South. I was side-tracked at that point—but I went South before I would accept the flattering offer that had been made to me.

“It was there that my ‘difference’ came to the surface. I admit I was something of a fool, and as ignorant of many things as any young fellow could well have been; but I realized with a sudden horror that unless I could throttle what then I did not want to throttle, I could never make my self-respect gibe with my business career.

“When I looked upon conditions in the South which my father, with his New England integrity, was responsible for, something happened to me.

“I went North and had it out with my father. I tried to make him see my point. I did not, at first, lose my faith in him for I believed he was not in close touch with the lower end of the business. I offered my services as go-between; a new link that would clean up certain things. Like all young fools I believed I had a mission.

“It was then that I realized that my father recognized my difference. He did not attempt to understand my point of view; to weigh it justly—he meant to kill the ‘difference.’ I was handed out the usual response—‘taint’ and ‘dangerous element.’ I was arraigned as a sentimentalist and a dreamer.

“In that I dared doubt the already proved, the hard common sense of men whose integrity could not be questioned, I proclaimed myself an incompetent.

“In short, I had nothing to offer or add to the business. The ‘difference’ I grimly held to was a menace.

“I was all wrong in what I next did. I have seen that many a time. I should have stuck and proved myself. Instead, I flung out an ugly remark or two about fallen gods and fathers and turned to the only other thing left to me. Love. I was in love, of course. My sort would be bound to be in love. I had early erected an altar and bowed down before it, had laid upon it many a sacrifice of temptation, overcome in its name. Oh! I was the usual kind. The lure of the young-rich was ever present—I had fought it through many a black hour; but when I found the girl I loved and enshrined her, I thanked my one-time God for every hard-won battle.

“She was divine. At least I thought so, and to her I went after my business encounter. It was no question of money. She and I belonged to the class that has had money for so many generations that they can afford to regard it as they do their breath—something necessary to keep them going.

“No, she and I were independent so far as money went. I wanted her to prove to me that my ‘difference’ was hers, also. That she and I would take our future in our own hands and prove the thing that was scouted.”

At this Manville tossed his pipe aside and laughed. The sound was not pleasant; it hurt Rose-Ann.

“Don’t!” she pleaded, and there were tears in her eyes. “Don’t! Tell me—why did she not—go with you?”

Rose-Ann knew that that other woman had failed. She would, of course. But—why?

“She was afraid of my ‘difference,’ Rose-Ann. Absolutely terrified by it. She was body and soul of the clan—I saw it then. She looked at me with wide, frightened eyes. I was menacing all that she held sacred. I was asking her to go out into a wilderness. And I called *that* love.”

“And—then?” Rose-Ann rose and walked around the little dead fire and stood near Manville. “And then?”

“Then? Why, I proved myself a fool. Gave the game away. Well, I went to England. Somehow I had enough



decency left to get out of sight while I made an ass of myself. When a fellow like me loses his God and his idols all at one blow he either rises up and bares his head for the next attack or he turns tail and makes for hell.

“I was well on the latter course when—Barry gripped me.”

“Barry—our Barry!” Rose-Ann’s eyes were shining through the mist of tears.

“Our Barry. He didn’t talk much. He acted as if nothing was out of the way. Acted as if seeing a young fool trying to attract attention was a common enough sight. He made me feel cheap; but he also made me understand that he respected my ‘difference.’

“He took me to his home—his mother had known my people once. His mother was wonderful. I imagine she had known life at close quarters and was almost through with it. She seemed to me then as if she were making the most of her little time.

“She and Barry got me. I couldn’t fail them. They expected the decent thing of me because I had honour left! I had forgot that. It was my last possession.

“They crammed me down people’s throats—the right kind of people. And then when I was able to stand alone, Barry urged me to go back home.

“Home! Good Lord—it had crumbled. My father had died and—the girl had married.

“Still Barry pleaded with me to go back to—my country and give what I believed I had to give—to it.

“And so I came back with my pick-axe and shovel; went to that part of my country that is still in the making, and I pitched in. I have hewed a place for myself out of its rocks; and as I hewed, I saved my soul and fixed a place for that. I worked out some of my own ideas, too. Proved them.”

The expression of the conqueror spread over Manville’s face. He sprang to his feet and stood beside Rose-Ann. She trembled as she looked at him.

“Rose-Ann!” And at that moment reality dropped from them both. All that they were was merged in what they

might have been had the hidden strain in both been left to find its way down the years.

“Rose-Ann, suppose you had been that other! What—pioneers we would have been. My God!”

Manville reached toward Rose-Ann and she, reaching toward him, found her hands in his: felt his lips on hers. The touch roused them as the call of the hypnotist might. They came back!

“Oh!—why have you told me this?” Rose-Ann was as white as the snow above her.

For a moment Manville gazed at her, perplexed and bewildered, as he might have at a stranger.

“Because, Rose-Ann, there may come a time when you will be glad I have told you. The knowledge may help you to keep your faith. You have given back to me my faith. I wanted to do something for you. It was all I could give in return—this poor story of mine.” The kiss lay silent between them!

“I—must—go!” Rose-Ann started, for the melting snow fell like teardrops on her face.

“And so must I, Rose-Ann.”

And now Manville held out his hands again toward her with frank simplicity.

“I wish you could tell me that you understand,” he said in a tone that no woman fails to trust. “I believe—you do!”

“I—do, Eric Manville. And—I thank you!”

They were safe. Safe for the future, whatever it might be.

And that night Manville had his good-bye talk with Compton.

Rose-Ann had not returned for tea and the two men had dined alone.

Later they grew confidential; grew closer together than they had ever been; but Manville could not tell Compton the real reasons for his sudden departure.

“Old man, I’ve about won out. There are only two or three points to cover, and then I can have done with what must seem cheap theatricals to you. If it had been my business alone, it would have been different, but when I

next see you—and you are coming out to my ranch, remember—we'll rake the whole thing fore and aft."

"You're all right, Manville. You've given me a new lease of life." Then:

"Have you said your farewells?"

"To Mrs. Braintree. Yes, and when you sift it down, Compton, Mrs. Braintree is about all—isn't she?"

"She is," Compton smiled happily; "she's the tenth woman in the making, Eric. Nine women out of ten, you know, we can estimate and deal with—it's the tenth that we are up against, I fancy. That is why Rose-Ann Braintree interests me.

"Had she married unhappily——" But Compton never finished that sentence.

## CHAPTER XV

**I**T WOULD almost seem that one should take no chances with fate, for it avails itself of every loose end.

Had Manville frankly told Compton the evening of the day when he and Rose-Ann had had the trip back to their beginnings, that he was going abroad instead of to the West, much might have been saved.

To a certain extent Manville's activities were necessarily secret, but he could have vouchsafed that much information.

As a matter of fact he had a report to make to his partner in England; there would be, possibly, months of important business and then, if all went well, a trip to South Africa that would take an uncertain length of time and certainly it gave no opportunity for explanation. There was a man in the south of Africa that Manville and his English backer wanted for the Western mines. But he would have to be angled for and it was most vital to carry on the operations unobserved. Any slip might give an opening for others to wedge in and muddle, if they did not ruin, the whole scheme.

What Manville did say, however, led Compton to think, afterward, that he was bound for the West at once.

With the aversion that most men have for scenes, Compton and Manville bade each other good-night at last, feeling confident that it was good-bye.

At breakfast the following morning Cleaver handed Compton a note. He had expected something of the kind and merely looked across the table at Manville's vacant chair, and a wave of loneliness swept over him.

However, once breakfast was over, Compton set forth to smooth the edges of his guest's abrupt departure.

Prudence Townsend received the explanation with raised

brows. She was giving a dinner party for Manville and she resented the break in her plans.

Trevall, too, was not easily appeased.

“With no offence to you, Compton,” he said, “I feel that Manville should have given me another opportunity to speak to him—on business. I’ve been looking up those mines of his out West—I was prepared to make a proposition to him.”

“I know nothing of his business affairs,” Compton replied, “and I can only say that while Manville’s manners may be questioned, his good heart cannot be. Perhaps you can carry on your negotiations by mail, Trevall. You’ll be able to locate him easily.”

Rose-Ann comforted Compton.

“He said good-bye to me, Barry,” she explained with that reaching-out look in her eyes that always touched Compton’s quick sympathies; “but he did not say where he was going.”

“Home, Rose-Ann,” Compton replied. “Back West, you know.”

“We’ll miss him terribly, Barry. He was something new and stirring. It’s queer, thinking of him he seems like a—*a* passer-by. I don’t know, even, where he lives!”

“His address, Rose-Ann, makes one think it might be a joke. The Far West speaks in parables. His ranch is the Lone Two. Tim’s Corners, Colorado, is his post office.”

Rose-Ann threw her head back and laughed. She was standing on Compton’s east porch and the drippings of the melting snow from the roof was like music.

“I do not wonder he kept that address to himself, Barry. It is too, too trifling.”

Rose-Ann was in high spirits. She felt as if she had escaped from something that might have wrecked her, had it not carried her to safer and surer holdings. That perilous hour in the woods was already a tender, sacred memory. She knew, now, she felt, what that strain in her really was. It had done poor Aunt Theodora to death, but it had opened life to Rose-Ann. When one knows his weakness, knows how it can, if given way to, control all the real things of life, one

can tackle it. It is the not knowing that counts. A lesser man than Manville—— But at this Rose-Ann drew herself up proudly.

Of course, had Manville misunderstood—but he had not. And once back in her own home Rose-Ann had counted her blessings and looked upon her husband with glad eyes. She must, she had vowed, lay herself open to him. So long as he felt that he must explain her to any one there was danger. And now she knew what the danger was. He had been right—and how he had trusted her! How loyal and fine he was. Manville, being what he was, made it easy for her to reveal herself to him, but she must tell Braintree all about it.

“We’ll never look upon his like again, Barry,” she said presently, regarding Compton with shining eyes.

“Oh! I don’t know. I am going out to him, Rose-Ann, next summer perhaps, or the one after. We, you and I, may persuade Braintree to join us—it would be great sport.”

“Yes; and Father and Prue, Albert and little Faith—a family party. Oh! Barry, when one marries it isn’t so easy—to plan.”

After that things slipped back into the old grooves.

Affairs in Essex were bubbling to such an extent that both Compton and Conklin knew that their combined efforts to keep the lid down were growing less effective day by day.

Brady was on a scent of his own.

“Double crossing! damn them,” he reiterated at the Mill Tavern.

“That’s good enough for talk,” one of the younger men flung back at him, “but you’ve got ter have the goods to prove it to me. Conklin is standing pat like all the rest of his breed; he ain’t going ter take his foot off the line. But you’ve got to make us see that Compton ain’t square. What he’s trying ter do—I take it—is to talk the old man over. Silk-stocking dudes like Compton are heavy with the gab and have great faith in it. Compton’s square—I’ll bet my last cent on that.”

“I’ll show you my goods, yet,” Brady replied. “Yer right

about the gab, though. God! ter hear him use words about this here Tavern and the rights of American men. I bet he has his locker stocked—take it from me, his kind always has. Too good for trolley cars, too clean for taverns—but holy smoke! they have motors and cellars, damn 'em! All they want us for—is work! more work! When we're sober, they get more out of us. When we strike, we strike soft—if we're sober. Hell!"

And then—it was six weeks after Manville's abrupt departure—several brain-racking things occurred in Essex and Middle Essex.

The first took place in Rose-Ann's house.

It was a warm June evening and Rose-Ann was in the swing couch on the western porch. The sunset was most beautiful and it made her think of some descriptions Manville had given of sunsets out West where there was nothing to limit the splendour. She had been thinking often of Manville lately; wondering why she could not tell her husband about him; for the intimate talk had never, yet, taken place.

"Billy," she called, "do come here—the day's going down in glory, all right."

"In a few minutes, dear."

Braintree was at his desk in the small room off the living room. He spent hours there almost nightly—figuring; figuring. There were drawers of folded papers all filled with tiny figures—valuable only to himself—and they made Rose-Ann's heart ache.

"Hours wasted," she once said to Braintree.

He had looked at her almost angrily.

"You must leave that to my judgment," he replied loftily. "Why, my dear, I can tell accurately where every dollar of my money has gone since I left High School."

"Dear Lord! forgive him, he knows not what he's done," Rose-Ann flung back flippantly while Braintree's jaw set.

"It's good one of us is practical," he said finally.

"The sunset won't wait, Billy," Rose-Ann called now. "It's that kind of a sunset."

So absorbed was the girl that she did not speak again, nor

take her eyes from the glowing colour. She watched the gold tremble and die; she saw the purple rise up from the marshes and, as though wrapping a pall over the blessed brightness, shut it away. The stars came out brilliantly—near stars, for the atmosphere was exquisitely clear. Then, suddenly, in a voice Rose-Ann hardly recognized, Braintree called:

“Rose-Ann, come here!”

She almost fell from the hammock; she thought he was ill—she ran into the house with her face pale and her eyes wide. Braintree interpreted her panic by his own understanding of the situation.

He sat in his swivel chair in much the same way as he might have sat upon a boulder—nothing swung or twisted under Braintree unless he willed it to do so. He had Rose-Ann’s check books in his hands.

“Sit down, my dear,” he said in a commanding tone.

Rose-Ann recognized her bank books. The one of the Essex Bank and the other—of the Boston Bank.

“I prefer to stand, Billy,” she said calmly.

“Then close the door, I do not care to have the maid——”

“Maggie’s gone to a dance. You can speak out.” Rose-Ann was tense.

“This is your bank book, my dear.” Braintree offered the Boston book for inspection as though it were “Exhibit A.”

“So I see; but I don’t see why it interests you, Billy.” There was a flush of anger in Rose-Ann’s face.

“I will not go into that, my dear, but perhaps you will explain why you have two bank accounts.”

“I will not, Billy. I have always told you that my bank book was my private property; it is—it was Mother’s money, you know. I would have felt different had it been *our* money.”

“We should have a common fund, Rose-Ann. I have always felt this. I am convinced now. As I share everything with you, so you should share everything with me—that is what true marriage means. It would have prevented just what has occurred.”



At that instant something happened that could never be explained, nor properly understood.

As had been the case with Rose-Ann and Manville in the woods, so it now was with Rose-Ann and Braintree.

Emotions and deep-rooted prejudices which had lain dormant were, in a measure, detached from all else. They sprang to life when touched by the spark—the mere spark—of what both recognized as a menace to what each held as a divine right.

It was an instant when only complete sympathy could have controlled the situation and that was precisely what was lacking.

“I am her husband. I am responsible for her!”

Against that Braintree pressed, even while his love pleaded for the white-faced girl opposite.

“I have not been quite true.” The thought of the kiss flashed across Rose-Ann’s hot brain. “But he has no right to take this stand with me. Until he recognizes that, I will not explain. He may think what he chooses. Judge me first, if he wants to.”

Like most sunny-natured people, Rose-Ann’s dashes of passion were blinding and took on the quality that makes persecution easier to bear than surrender.

The woman in her seemed to rise and envelop the girl of her. Braintree noted the change and wrongly interpreted it. They were clinched now, he and she, and so piteous a thing had brought about the inevitable!

“Billy, your money is *not* mine in the sense that you want to control mine, and you know it!”

Braintree’s glance darkened.

“Explain yourself,” was all that he said.

“You are generous, I grant. You give and give where you feel justified in giving. Would you give to me if you thought I would spend it—say, foolishly?”

“Certainly not. I recognize responsibility, Rose-Ann.”

“Exactly. But you would feel quite at liberty to invest the money that you say is equally mine and yours?”

“Certainly. Using my best judgment for us both.”

“But can you not see, Billy, that that something which permits you to feel as you do is what I prize, too? The right to—to, well! spend foolishly—or to spend as you might not approve? I could not think of doing it with your money, and it is more yours than mine, no matter what you say. That *something* makes it so. It is *the something* which I—defend. The money Mother left to me—that is my own!”

It was not anger alone that shook Rose-Ann's voice but the baffled sense of injustice that the weaker feels when the stronger plays upon him. It was what had caught and conquered Faith Trevall. It rose gauntly now.

“It's the feeling about the money that matters, Billy,” Rose-Ann repeated slowly.

Had Braintree spoken just then he would have emitted one word: “Twaddle.”

But he honestly strove to deal justly with the situation. He was seriously concerned. Doubt of his wife had not quite entered in, but it was pressing against the portals. With a nature like his, so free of complications, it was difficult to deal with abstractions.

“I agree, Rose-Ann,” he said presently and gently—“and I do wish that you would sit down, my dear—that your mother's money, accounted for by this book”—Braintree held forth the Essex book—“is your own, since you feel justified in your rather sweeping assertions. But this”—and here Braintree held forth “Exhibit A” again.

Rose-Ann, at this, sat down across the room from her husband.

Every fibre of her being was in revolt, but her primitive honesty, ever at the surging moment, gave credit due Braintree. She had opened the Boston account with the money earned from the writing about which she had not dared confess. Compton had done some investing for her and the total was, considered from Braintree's viewpoint, rather staggering. Innocence may, when beaten to the wall, have all the appearance of guilt until it rights itself, but innocence that has deliberately cloaked itself with a disguise has the bravado of the desperado.

“I am waiting for your explanation, Rose-Ann.”

A ribald imp of the perverse leaped to Rose-Ann's undoing.

“There ain't going to be no explanation, Billy,” she said, and breathed freer. She had, unwittingly, cut herself loose from the tenderness that might have reached forth, had Braintree realized the real emotion that drove her on to the rocks; had seen in her a sense of the gravity of the moment!

Braintree's gaze dropped from the sweet, mocking face of his wife to the damaging figures in the Boston book.

“I want my bank books, Billy. Pass them here,” Rose-Ann reached across the table. “I'm not going to explain anything. I don't grant your right to exact an explanation. You doubt me and I find I cannot speak openly to you. Had you shown a different spirit I would have——”

“You are adopting the tone and excuse of—of guilt, Rose-Ann.”

This was a mad thing for Braintree to say. He saw his mistake. He had, in his first statement, confined himself merely to bald figures, but he realized that Rose-Ann was interpreting it in the widest sense. He hesitated, wanted to justify himself, but Rose-Ann, like a living flame, sprang to her feet.

“Do be reasonable, my dear!” Braintree went as far as that.

“Reasonable? I am going to be reasonable, Billy, so reasonable that you'll regret what you have said and done to the last day of your life.

“I understand now. It is the same old curse. The curse that crushed my mother, that makes women look as if they were hunted—the New England curse, that makes some men assume a power over women and which some women are too weak to resent.

“I felt it in you—but I thought”—the hurried words faltered; a sob shook them—“I thought love might—help us. But I, too, have the curse in me—I do not want to control others but I *will* control myself and what I believe are my rights.”

“Rose-Ann! Do you forget that you are my wife? That

you have obligations and responsibilities? Have you no shame to so fling your ingratitude and loss of self-respect in my face? Were all your wicked accusations true you still have your duty."

And then Rose-Ann laughed. Laughed as Aunt Theodora had done that night when she called back her warning. Braintree was startled by the sound. The wildness of it reached where all else had failed. He sought to soothe the girl whose whole appearance had undergone a change.

"My dear, my dear! I do not claim what you call my rights for myself, but for your protection. While I felt that I had your confidence I permitted what I now see was folly. Your association with Compton, a man whose ideals are radical and dangerous; your association with that Club of his and your—your intimacy with his friend; I have not taken the stand that I should have for your protection. Can you not see this, Rose-Ann?"

There was tragedy in Braintree's voice. He felt that unless Rose-Ann *did* see, he must put on the screws and he was young enough; enough in love to make that a cruel alternative, but the traditions were closing in upon him like an army of supporters.

All that Rose-Ann saw was the last trench and—she fled to it!

"I want my bank books, Billy," she said quietly.

"You leave me, then, only one conclusion, Rose-Ann." But Braintree withdrew the books.

"I am not leaving you any—you can take what you choose in the line of conclusions. Billy, I want those books! Why can *you* not see, Billy Braintree, that if I put myself in your power now, on your terms, I would never be free again as long as I lived?"

Rose-Ann's face was livid, and with a sudden lurch forward she snatched the bank books from Braintree and held them behind her.

She wanted to laugh; to run; the whole scene had degenerated into the cheap-comic. When the madness was over she and Braintree would be ashamed of it. That was an

underlying thought. But in that moment Braintree sprang to his feet and crossed to Rose-Ann. The iron in him became as molten lead, it filled his brain; congealed and left no mercy.

"Give me those books, Rose-Ann. I see things are far, far worse than I suspected."

"I will not give them to you!"

A madness overcame Braintree, but he and his kind always called it by another and loftier name.

He gripped Rose-Ann's arms above the elbows. (The slim, pretty arms bore the marks for several days.) He did not relent even when he felt the delicate flesh under the pressure.

"I must save you from yourself," he whispered. "Will you give me those books before I resort to——"

"I will not, Billy." Rose-Ann stiffened under the cruel hold upon her. "And if you take them by brute force—I will go to—to Barry Compton to-night!"

As if she had physically overpowered him, Braintree released her.

"I see!" he muttered. "I see. You have outraged the freedom given you, you have——"

But Rose-Ann stopped him by a quick cry.

"Oh! don't. Are you crazy?" she said. "And who has a right to *give* me freedom? Who, but God? I understand. Women must barter for it; sell themselves for the counterfeit, or do what I mean to do—take it!"

Braintree, aghast, listened to the fierce, low-spoken words, but heard only the interpretation he put upon them. What he heard became an ugly, misshapen thought that burnt its meaning on his face.

Rose-Ann understood and, in horror, stepped away from him. She was too spent to weigh any emotion now. With her faith and love trampled, she regarded herself merely as a weapon with which to hurt Braintree. Even in that breathless moment she did not forget the weak spot in the armour of her race.

Through, and by herself, as Braintree's wife could she deal her blow, and of herself—little, sorely driven Rose-Ann—she

thought not at all. She was but a dagger in the grip of Fate. Her arms ached and burned. Braintree's hateful, doubting eyes drove her on.

"I am going to leave you!" Something in her heard the words, but that other self of her did not flinch. "I am—going to——"

"Compton?" Braintree breathed the name.

He was thoroughly convinced now, as a more worldly wise man would not have been, of the gravity of the situation; its coarser aspect.

For so austere a man as he—a man who had reached his conclusions of sex through words, rather than experiences; whose passions and weaknesses had always mistaken curiosity for temptation—he saw but one grim fact, and he felt justified in embodying the ugly thing in a dangerous suggestion.

"You—are going to—him? You——"

Rose-Ann, bewildered and desperate, slowly stepped back; she reached the door before she spoke. Then the devil in her drove her to her own cruel end.

"No. I am going to Eric Manville." She breathed the name rather than spoke it.

She realized that she must save Barry even while she dealt Braintree the blow.

He retreated before it and then, as clearly as though physically Braintree had closed a door upon her—Rose-Ann knew herself to be an outcast from him.

Slowly, heavily she went upstairs. The bank books seemed to weigh like lead, but the bruises on her arms gave her sudden strength. She paused in the upper hall and—thought. She realized suddenly that she *was* thinking and that she had not been thinking for some time past. She had been saying things, doing things—but she had not thought. She must think. Something terrible had happened. It was like the little leak in a dam that had, at last, destroyed the dam. That barrier between her and Braintree was gone. A hideous accident had laid it waste, but at least they must find each other in the wreck; they were not dead!

That quick, dangerous humour of Rose-Ann's sprang to

life. Already the affair looked funny; common and cheap. A squabble, only.

"I'll go to the guest room—but leave the door open." Rose-Ann already was on the rebound; ready to forget and readjust; not abdicate—oh! no, but be—reasonable.

The moonlight lay across the prettily decked bed. It would not do to disarrange the silk coverlid and rose pillows, so Rose-Ann went to the window and sank wearily down in a low chair; then she listened and waited!

It took Braintree a full hour to regain his calm and dignity. At the end of that time he was quite himself; himself as he knew himself. The fact was, however, that Braintree had been stunned and was, to a certain extent, reacting as a body does whose brain has not recovered its proper force. He was incapable of functioning sanely.

Of course it could not be true—the hideous thing about Rose-Ann! But something combated that. It *was* true! It could be nothing else but true! If she had deliberately and defiantly gone to such lengths, it must be true. What else could it be? Desperate means must be resorted to in order to safeguard the future.

All that Braintree had heard and had been able to discount, in the past, glared accusingly at him now, as often the figures of long-past accounts had convincingly confronted him.

Prudence, perhaps more than any one else, had undermined Rose-Ann's foundations. And Prudence had made few affirmations, certainly had never meant to be false to Rose-Ann. Her *fears* for her sister; her timid disapproval; her stories of Rose-Ann's peculiarities and childish revolts, had gone deep in Braintree's subconsciousness. The grim ancestor, Theodora, presently stalked. Braintree, after Rose-Ann's quaint recital of her old aunt's story, had gone to Prudence; Prudence had refused to repeat what she knew. The very reticence regarding Aunt Theodora became, now, an accusingly important factor.

Braintree had deep-rooted beliefs in heredity. They amounted almost to ignorant superstitions. He was fright-

ened. But, of course, both he and Rose-Ann, in anger, had said and done regrettable things. Braintree was prepared, when his wife came to her senses, to accept the position of a wronged but noble husband. He did not pose; the tragedy of his life and Rose-Ann's was complete, but it was possible to hide and conquer the ugly fact—there must be no unseemly scandal. Braintree believed the handling of the affair was at last in his own hands. Rose-Ann would, upon reflection, come to terms.

Braintree did not look beyond the critical moment; did not imagine the bleak, haunted future. Nothing mattered but the saving of the broken idols—the patching together of the shattered bits.

Marriage had not solved Rose-Ann's problem. Her inheritance had betrayed her. But marriage meant a mighty and conclusive thing to Braintree. "Until death do you part" were not idle words to him. He was prepared to face the living death.

But Braintree was discounting Rose-Ann's absorbing passion for life; all life. Her life.

By the window in the guest room the huddled figure was as still as if death had separated it from life.

Vaguely, again, Rose-Ann began to realize the significance of what had occurred. With anger and resentment in abeyance she was able to disentangle the real issues from the false and deal with them.

The absurdity and cheapness of the scene through which she and Braintree had passed took on grim dignity when viewed in its true proportions. All the bald difference that lay between them had been illumined by the flash of the sordid conflict of wills.

It was bound to occur and Rose-Ann presently admitted the fact. With the admission her face, piteous and strained, grew graver and older.

Never in her life had she more wanted or needed love, but never was she more determined to secure love on the right terms.

She weighed, with heart-breaking sincerity, her side and



Braintree's of the question. Her eagerness for pleasure and liberty—well! she had been selfish and blind along that line, but the desires within her were but the starved expressions of others that had not been permitted a natural outlet.

She had leaned too heavily upon love; even now she yearned to go downstairs and confess that to Braintree. But love must be served as well as serve. Rose-Ann admitted that, too. She had never forgot, as Prudence had suggested that she had, that she was a married woman; but she *had* overlooked the importance of respecting the ideals of others.

Because of her cowardice in expressing herself freely, Rose-Ann's conscience smote her hard. That was the rock about which her mother had warned her. She should have lived herself openly in the presence of her love; she should have permitted Braintree at least an opportunity of dealing with her true self and then no subterfuge would have been necessary; no blows in the dark would have been dealt.

The hideous truth was that she was afraid of something in Braintree and he was equally afraid of something in her.

They must drag that Something into the open; understand it; throttle it; kill it; or never, never could they be sure.

The moonlight drifted across the pale, tired face of the girl—she was stern now with the iron that ran in her blood as it did in Braintree's. The difference between them was—she yearned with a great and surging desire to understand; and Braintree believed, while he suffered, that he *did* understand and must not, for that very reason, show a moment's weakness.

“Why dared I *not* confide everything to Billy?” Rose-Ann flung this question to the soul of her; “why could I speak openly to Barry and Eric Manville and yet tremble before Billy?”

She saw her mistakes, admitted them, but through them surged the Cause. Braintree would have disapproved of those articles in the *Criticism*. Well, Barry had disapproved, too, and Manville had shaken his head over them. Had she felt free to go to Braintree, and could she have depended upon his understanding, Rose-Ann acknowledged that she

would have done anything to please him; would have given up the writing. In that she had wanted to do the articles, had been afraid to come out into the open with them, proved the wrong and the existence of that Something that lay between her and Braintree; her father; Prudence and them who could make her suffer because she differed.

Suddenly she remembered Manville! She and he were different. That was what set them apart—and together!

She dreaded suffering; but she dreaded more the cause of suffering. It was that which she and Braintree must attack and—in the open! Her *difference* was not evil—she would not admit that.

Then Rose-Ann dragged from the depths of her consciousness Braintree's attitude toward what was really her own. There, she felt, he was in the wrong. Had that Something not lain between them, she might have been glad to consult her husband at every turn as she had consulted Barry Compton.

That was it—always she came back to it—the grim Something that neither she nor Braintree understood and which she alone could not master. It had overcome her mother; had overcome many others—sad, bitter women in Middle Essex. At that torturing moment they rose in the girl's memory. They would not speak—not they! but in her hour of travail they stood silently near, bearing their mute testimony.

“Oh! Billy, let us—understand!” Rose-Ann bent her weary head upon the window sill; “we can; we can—if we only dare.”

And at that instant Braintree came up the stairs. Without pausing he passed to the bedroom across the hall, turned on the light and, after a tragic moment, closed the door!

“Shut out!” Rose-Ann murmured. “Shut out!”

Hope and youthful confidence were baffled. Rose-Ann for another terrible hour waited. Then she got up, aching and cold, and walked to the door of—their bedchamber. She listened. The even breathing of Braintree was like a poison that entered into her softened mood and turned it to one of positive dislike.

Her head lifted—she smiled; not the dear sunny smile but the smile behind which women hide what hurts them most.

“I am not going to have my life ruined,” she promised herself, “not as most women have theirs, anyway. I’m going to get what—what I can.”

A dry sob escaped her. It frightened her into a stern resolve and she went back to the guest room.

She must deny the softness and yearning—they must not betray her into a relation that could only end in worse misery. Rose-Ann had not escaped the inheritance from her father and in that hour it rose supreme over that of her mother.

Again she took her place by the window and looked forth at the familiar scene with a sense of bidding it good-bye.

The road lay under the moonlight, well kept and smooth—over that road Aunt Theodora had escaped!

The memory rose sharp and clear cut. Rose-Ann understood, now, *why* Aunt Theodora went.

And there stood the dun-coloured railroad station like the gateway—out!

How had Aunt Theodora travelled? Rose-Ann wondered about that; it had never occurred to her before. Ways were easier for women now.

And Barry had said that women, often alone, travelled quite safely without comment. Poor Barry! how he would miss her and grieve for her—but his door would never close against her. When the time came for explanation he would understand and believe her. And she would write soon to him. She was about to do a thing most women would shrink from doing and she must keep her own vision sure. Not even Barry must share her responsibility.

There was just one way to make others suffer as they had made her suffer. As for herself—what mattered? She was no longer loved or happy—but she was not going to be crushed. Barry would see her point by and by.

She had money—Rose-Ann again heard that hard, dry sob that escaped from that part of her that still suffered as the drugged suffer. She would travel. It was quite safe. She was a married woman—Prudence need have no fear—she

was never to forget that! If she could not have what she had chosen—love; home; she would—travel.

If she went in her travels to where Eric Manville was—well! had she not a right to go? He would understand after he—saw her! She had hungered for the West ever since Barry, and later Manville, had described it.

Rose-Ann trembled with excitement and presently exhaustion overcame her and she flung herself upon the daintily made bed, her aching head buried in the rose pillow.

It was nine o'clock when she awoke. The room was filled with sunshine and, feeling as if arousing from a bad dream, she sat up and looked about. The disordered bed! What had happened? And she was still dressed—but chilly, for she had had no covering over her. Then she looked at the door. Someone had closed it.

Then Rose-Ann remembered. Braintree had passed the room, had seen her on the bed, and had closed the door and gone on—gone on!

Could Rose-Ann have known the agony with which Braintree had looked upon her ere he closed that door as he might upon the dead, she could have been merciful. Had he drawn a cover over her chilled, unconscious body—she might have thrilled to the human thought; but the stark inhumanity and apparent hardness seemed to kill whatever spark of the old Rose-Ann that had survived.

Quite calmly now the risen Rose-Ann walked across the hall to her bedroom—Braintree's bedroom! She undressed, bathed, and then carefully re-dressed for out of doors. Then she went downstairs. Maggie had kept coffee hot and was making fresh toast. She came in from the kitchen and after wiping her hands on her apron, took a note from the sideboard and handed it to Rose-Ann.

"Himself left it," she explained, and her eyes looked puzzled.

My Dear, when you have come to your senses, I will be ready to talk to you.

Of course we both have things to regret, but in the future there

must be a complete understanding along certain lines that can only be reached after reflection and regained self-control.

I have taken advantage of a business call to go at once to New York. You can reach me there at the Astor.

WILLIAM.

Rose-Ann read and re-read the note and was subconsciously estimating how far she could get before Braintree had terminated his business.

Finally she said to Maggie:

“Mr. Braintree has been called away suddenly on business. I——” Rose-Ann hesitated at the lie she was about to tell—it seemed cowardly, in that Braintree, not she, would have to face its consequences.

“I am going to—to follow him. You will take good care of everything, Maggie?”

“Shure, mum.”

“Perhaps Patsy will come and stay nights with you—or you can go to her.”

How coolly she was planning for the time on ahead!

An hour later she was in her little car and hurriedly set upon her own arrangements.

In passing Compton’s place—she saw him pacing his garden. A cry rose to her lips but she stifled it. He was, she knew, counting with real joy the new bloom of crocuses and lilies—he worshipped in his garden. She must not disturb him.

“Barry, Barry! Always I will see you so, dear—walking in your garden. Good-bye—dear, kind Barry. Good-bye until I come back!”

After that hurting encounter fate seemed to deal more gently with Rose-Ann. She decided to close her account at the Essex Bank and she dreaded a possible meeting with her father; but when she reached the Bank Trevall was not in evidence. The cashier was a man well fitted for his post—he had no curiosity—but he had automatic ability. A depositor spoke and he acted. Acted with an assurance that proved how fully he controlled all the details of his department.

During the few hours that she spent in Essex, Rose-Ann went to the Torch Light Club and half hoped that Compton would come, but he did not, and the memory of him in his garden was the one Rose-Ann carried away with her.

She went back to her house at four o'clock, packed, and made her final arrangements with Maggie.

"Have you spoken of my going away?" she asked, for she had half expected that her father or Prudence might complicate matters.

"I've not seen a soul, mum, since you left—barring the butcher boy—if you call him a soul, mum."

Maggie sniffed and Rose-Ann breathed more freely. Her confiding in Maggie earlier in the day had been a dangerous break.

"I am going to take the last train in," she explained to Maggie.

Middle Essex, as far as its travelling population went, interpreted this as meaning the midnight train from Boston to any mystical point distant from the Hub. No one would go simply to Boston so late.

"Nine-forty, mum?"

"Yes, Maggie. Will you carry my bag for me to the station?"

After that there was the note to write to Braintree. Rose-Ann went to the small room where, the night before, she and Braintree had faced that miserable Something and been so sorely beaten by it. The atmosphere of the empty place struck a chill to her heart. It was like returning to a tangible, brooding foe that but waited another opportunity to strike.

But Rose-Ann was non-resistant. She had accepted what seemed to her the only terms offered. Surrender, absolute and complete, and then—consideration and the inevitable, or the refusal to permit any one, even in the name of Love, to dominate her life! She had chosen the latter.

"Love!" breathed Rose-Ann sitting down in the swivel chair and turning on the electric light.

Almost it seemed as if her position and Braintree's were

reversed. She was in the swivel chair meting out judgment, while he—well, he might be hidden in the shadow by the door through which the old Rose-Ann had retreated with her poor little booty—the bank books and her heavy heart the night before.

“My dear, my dear!” she whispered as if to the shadow. “I cannot call that love—the cold thing you offer. It would kill me in the end—it is safer to go now.”

Rose-Ann had lost the lust for revenge that had had part in her anger. She felt merely the impossibility of conforming to Braintree’s ideals, and unless his love was for her as she was, she could not accept it.

“*It wouldn’t be safe, dear*”; the tears were dropping on the sheet of paper under the small, hot hand.

“No tear stains!” Rose-Ann tore the paper in shreds and took another sheet.

“*It wouldn’t be safe, dear*”; she began again and again rent the sheet.

“*I have come to my senses, Billy. I am going—West!*”

There were no tear stains on the third sheet. The words seemed to rise like a barricade or a line of protecting guards. They symbolized her desperate challenge against the subtle foe that would overpower her did she remain; but once the line of defence was established, Rose-Ann in retreat added: “*had your love for me been greater than your worship of your ideas about right and justice—I would—*” she meant to write “*have died for you*”—instead she concluded—“*have felt very different.*”

She folded the paper, kissed it—and the kiss left no mark as tear stains had—put it in an envelope, and sealed it. Then she carried it upstairs, placed it in the handkerchief drawer of Braintree’s chiffonier and, at nine-forty, Rose-Ann, crumpled in a seat on the last train for Boston, felt as if she were attending her own old dead self to the grave she had dug for it.

Three days later Braintree returned to his home. His heart was like a heavy, dull weight within him, but on his handsome young face there rested the expression that had

marked the men of his line when they had come to grips with duty.

Braintree might show no mercy to a sinner, but he had gained this much—he felt no satisfaction in his victory over love and over the weakening power of love—toward a sinner. He was, for the first time in his life, backed against the wall. No thought of surrender entered into his calculations, but he did not know what to do next. So he simply braced. Rose-Ann had defied him; the conflict was to be more serious than he thought.

“And herself didn’t come back with you?” This was Maggie’s amazed greeting.

Braintree, on the instant, felt as a condemned man might feel who realized that the first bullet had not killed him.

“No,” he said in a hard, clear voice. “Mrs. Braintree was not ready to return.”

After that Braintree started on a search for a note. There would be one, of course. It was when he was in the bedroom at ten o’clock that he discovered the last words of Rose-Ann.

To Braintree they were the last words. He read them three times and then stood, white and haggard, in the middle of the room.

The blow had shattered everything. Pride, assurance; the last hope and gleam of faith. But it had done more—it had battered down the flintlike crystal through which Rose-Ann in her young love and vision had seen the real man that Braintree, at soul, was. Naked and bleeding from the splintered shield that had protected him, he staggered over to the bedside; knelt by it and with his head buried on the pillow upon which Rose-Ann’s dear head had lain in that past, past time, he groaned aloud.



## CHAPTER XVI

COMPTON dragged himself wearily up the slope to Braintree's house. He was not bodily tired, but mentally he was exhausted. He had never had to do so difficult a task as that which he was about to undertake.

The house was dark except for the light in the hall and in the living room. Maggie, looking solid and non-committal, let him in and awkwardly ushered him directly into Braintree's presence.

The evening was warm, but Braintree looked cool and self-possessed. The *Transcript* was in his hands—the *Atlantic Monthly*, freshly taken from its wrapper, near his arm. The insignificant details struck Braintree with humorous sharpness. Braintree had no appearance of a deserted and wronged husband.

"Well, Compton," he said, rising and drawing a chair forward for his guest, "I've been expecting you."

They both sat down. Compton was by far the more stricken-looking one.

"I suppose you bring some news of Rose-Ann."

When Braintree spoke Compton started, for the tone of the voice betrayed him.

"No, Braintree. Mr. Trevall stated the ugly fact to me, that is all I know." Then Compton reached out a thin, trembling hand.

"For God's sake, Braintree," he pleaded, "do not take it this way. Let us deal with the thing humanly."

"Exactly." Braintree broke in. "But not theatrically, Compton. Before we go any further I wish to state my side of the case as clearly as I can, since Mr. Trevall has thought best to take you into our confidence."

"He naturally," Compton said, "thought I might throw

some light on the trouble. Why, Braintree, the child did not come even to—to bid me good-bye. Things must have gone pretty hard with her.”

Braintree winced but quietly continued:

“As I was about to say in explanation, there had been a difference of opinion on certain subjects between Rose-Ann and me, but nothing that could possibly justify the course she has taken. I can only come to one of two conclusions. Either she is insane or, with her strange indifference to the rights of others, she believes she can exact what she wants by intimidating those who are acting for her best good. Rose-Ann is capable of going to dangerous extremes, Mr. Compton.”

When one is thoroughly frightened he is apt to circle in space before taking a definite course, and Compton circled now.

“Suppose the former is the case?” he asked. “Have you started investigation?”

“No, I have the family to consider. I will cause no further scandal.”

Somehow this statement had power to turn Compton to steel. He realized, in a flash, that Braintree had assumed the latter not the former supposition. He felt the hardness; the cool, calculating attitude from which Rose-Ann was fleeing—alone.

“Of course”; Compton merely breathed the word. Then:

“Braintree, as I see it, the slight misunderstanding that you refer to was not in any sense the thing that you, or Rose-Ann for that matter, regarded it. From the little that I know, from the little that she has told me in the past, I gathered the impression that under the trivial appearance of your disagreements you were both struggling for what is vital to you both and which neither of you could relinquish.”

Braintree’s face hardened.

“Go on!” he said quietly.

“To voice Rose-Ann’s state of mind as I see it, I realize, is but to put it and her in the worst possible light. She was born, Braintree, with a horror of—of any one dominating

her. I hate to say what I must; I know you will not agree, but she is expressing what her mother—what many women of her race and place—have suppressed. Anything that threatened what she abnormally feared would drive her to extremes that nine women out of ten would never dream of taking.”

“All that you say, Compton,” and Braintree’s voice breaking in was like flint, “goes to prove how necessary it was that Rose-Ann, until she proved herself worthy, should have a firm and protecting hand over her. There was no ground for her state of mind.”

“Or a guiding hand,” Compton suggested, ignoring the last part of Braintree’s speech; “or, better still—just a hand holding hers.”

“This is rubbish, Compton. The sort of thing that has always fed the smouldering fire in the uncontrolled mind of Rose-Ann. I have long feared it; I hesitated to exert my control from weakness; not wisdom—until it was too late. Her father warned me.”

“On the other hand”—Compton drew his breath in hard—“you’ve driven her!”

“Where?” Braintree’s face was white as marble. In silence the two men confronted each other.

“I do not know,” Compton said at last. He had been speaking figuratively; he realized that Braintree was speaking literally.

“I did not know that you knew,” he added.

“She has—gone West!” Braintree replied.

“West? In heaven’s name, why?” Then, as a lurid light broke over the darkness: “Do you mean she has gone to—to Manville?”

“I fear so!”

“Fear so! In God’s name, can you say a thing like that without knowing?” Compton leaned forward in his chair, his eyes blazing.

“She left a note stating that she was going West.”

“What are you going to do about it, Braintree?” Compton asked wretchedly.

“Do? Why, nothing. What is there for me to do?”

“You are not going after her; you are not going to prove your love for her as well as your authority over her? Save the poor child from her folly?”

“Certainly not! See here, Compton, if you and your kind believe what you are always protesting—why should any one try to thwart Rose-Ann at this stage of the affair? Why not let the, the personal expression—is that what you call it?—go to its legitimate conclusion?” Braintree’s voice again rang sharp with the suffering behind it.

Compton got up wearily.

“I still believe,” he said, “that if Rose-Ann could be convinced of your love, that in your love, not your desire for power over her—you have erred in your methods—things would straighten out, even now!”

Another man might have laughed at this, but not Braintree. He arose also, and his white, handsome face was like a mask.

“I—admit that I erred? Are you joking Compton? That’s poor taste at such a time.

“No. You and I, apparently, have come to the same conclusion, though by different routes. I have not the slightest desire to govern the actions of Rose-Ann.”

When Compton was again on the quiet, dark streets he reacted from the hold that Braintree’s presence and words had had upon him. He had been unimpressed by the hidden agony that he detected under Braintree’s calm; he had felt the cold reasoning, but now he was hot with anger. He stood still and swore a reviving and sustaining oath. He still was capable of admitting the justice of much that Braintree had said, but under, above, and around it there was that unbreakable, unbendable hardness that Rose-Ann, poor child, had beaten against since her marriage.

Suddenly Compton hardened himself to Braintree’s rightness and saw only Rose-Ann’s pitiful folly; her great need. At first he felt that he must follow her; follow her to—Manville’s ranch.

Then he reflected upon the uselessness of such a step. It would but add fuel to an already dangerous conflagration.

“If——” But Compton repudiated the thought. He must wait. There were still Manville and Rose-Ann to hear.

He entered his still and dimly lighted library; off somewhere the maids were laughing and singing—nearer by, Cleaver was moving about in his quiet, orderly way. Compton turned on more light and sat heavily down. How lonely, how dismayingly lonely, he felt. And, he reflected, this sense of loss, this state of nothing worth-while, must go on. The two for whom he cared most must face their undoing while he sat dumbly alone and—waited. This thought obsessed Compton, took his reserves, one by one.

At midnight the maids had ceased their singing, Cleaver alone seemed to be in evidence.

Then at twelve-thirty Compton stood up, haggard, worsted. The silent battle had worn him out.

“Cleaver!” he called.

“Yes, sir!” Cleaver was at the door.

“Bring——”

“Now, sir! Let me call Mr. Conklin, sir!”

“Cleaver, bring the—the bottles and keep away from the telephone, damn it! I’ve had enough of this—tomfoolery. Mind now—I’ve given my orders.”

Cleaver disappeared. He returned with the tray: bottles and glasses. Then he went out to prepare the room upstairs in the tower, but on his way there he telephoned for Conklin!

Conklin and his directors were holding a secret session at Conklin’s house. There were also secret sessions being held at the Torch Light and at the Mill Tavern. It was a busy night in Essex with the three conferences behind closed doors. Conklin took up the receiver, listened, and then muttered—“all right” and jammed the receiver in place. He turned a red, perturbed face to his associates.

“We’ll have to take this matter up early to-morrow,” he said abruptly.

“That will be too late, Conklin. We’ve stood them off as long as they will bear it—it’s arbitration or——” the spokesman waited.

“Hell! All right, then, it’s hell!” Conklin got up

angrily. "I'll make no further concessions. The whole damned mess—workers, and Compton's gang—can fight it out. I'm through."

The men filed out into the darkness. A few minutes later Conklin strode after them and, silently entering his garage, started his big car, as noiselessly as possible, and turned it toward Middle Essex.

Just as he put on speed the gentlemen from the Tavern Conference came forth, followed by a fragrance of mixed liquors and the heat and bad air they had been enjoying.

"Who's that breaking the speed laws?" one of the party asked as Conklin's car dashed by.

"Boys, take it from me, we better find out."

It was Brady who spoke and he had recognized the car. He was dangerously sober.

"I'm telling you something. There's been a confab up to the boss's—I was wise ter that, and Compton wasn't there—I made sure of that. The boss is tearing up to Middle Essex to report ter Compton.

"Here, two or three of you come with me! The rest of yer go back and hang around until we find out what this means. Better hold the Torch Light open, too, until we get returns."

Brady with his picked men took to the highway—they were limited as to speed but they had no choice. It was too late to get a car.

Conklin reached Compton's in record time. He did not pause for polite details—the front door was open and he walked in. He broke into Compton's presence like a disturbing and muddled dream.

"Hello, Conklin," Compton said. "How did you get here? Have a drink?"

There was still enough brain power left to confuse Compton; he couldn't connect his ideas.

Conklin sat down and drew the tray toward him. Compton stretched forth his hand; his eyes glared.

"None of that!" he muttered, "don't forget yourself—or that I am—master here."

“A hell of a master you are!” Conklin returned; “here or anywhere else.

“See here, Compton, you’ve had all you’re going to get. Catch on?”

There was a brief, futile struggle. Compton clutched the tray. Conklin gripped it. Then Compton pleaded:

“For God’s sake, Conklin, just another glass. I swear——”

Conklin eyed his man, sized up the situation, and deliberately poured a small glass half full. This he pushed toward Compton.

The room was stifling and, bearing the tray with him, Conklin went to the window opening to the drive and threw up the sash. Then he went back to the table.

“Another, Conklin, be a—sport—another!”

Surely this craven creature with his weak, sagging face could not be Compton. Gazing at him, Conklin saw the folly of reasoning; he felt, as he often did, the contempt of the strong for the weak; the triumph of the self-made over him who had had responsibility taken from him, but through it all and strengthened by these sentiments was a grosser thought—why not toss the poor creature to the dogs? Why not let those fools at the Club see who was their friend?

Let them choose between their idol, shorn of his pitiful disguise; the idol who was misleading them—and him, their boss; their real stand-by? What was the use, anyway? He’d tried to save Compton—to what end? Conklin watched his prey.

Presently he realized that he couldn’t do it! He no more could betray this pitiful creature who had once shared with him the secret places of his harassed soul than he could have betrayed the sacrest thing in life.

The two men continued to stare at each other. Compton was smiling a weak, conciliatory smile; Conklin kept his grip upon the tray.

In a few minutes, he knew, Compton would grow hazy; sleepy—then he and Cleaver would get him upstairs, turn the key on him, and face the following week as they had faced weeks before.

"Let's have one more, Conklin, a good-night one, old man"; the voice was heavy.

Conklin was about to call for Cleaver when a sound outside startled him and stayed Compton's pleading. They turned to the window—there stood Brady and his men!

Conklin came to his senses first.

"Well," he said steadily, "what's up?"

Brady, the cards in his hands, was equal to the situation. He was almost dignified in his triumph.

"Oh! that's all right," he replied. "I guess we all—all but him"—he nodded to Compton contemptuously—"know what's up. The game's up, boss. The damned rotten game. It's one thing to turn a dog loose on a scent, boss, and another to call him off."

"Brady, shut up, confound you. You're on the wrong scent, you fool."

"That's to be proved." Brady turned to his men. "Go down to the Club," he commanded, "and get the crowd to the Torch Light. Tell 'em we're coming." Brady gave a deep laugh.

When his men had departed, he spoke again.

"Yer ain't very hospitable," he said, "but I can talk from here. Mr. Conklin, it's up ter you—will you come down to the Torch Light and have an open explanation with the boys—or won't you?"

Conklin never crossed a bridge in the dark without testing it.

"What yer mean—open explanation?" he asked coolly.

"Tell the boys what you're using"—Brady cast a contemplative glance at Compton, "that—for!"

The wide-spreading area that Brady's words disclosed for the moment staggered Conklin. He was forced to concede something.

"Brady, you're damned wrong. I tell you, you're on the wrong scent. I'm not using Mr. Compton. He and I are at sword's points as to—to this strike business. This—this—that you see, for God's sake, man, try to understand. He's been fighting a losing game for years; it was out of his defeat



he was trying to help those boys at the Torch Light—and before God, I was trying to help him win out. Win himself, Brady.”

Brady sneered openly.

Then Conklin asked:

“You don’t believe me, Brady?”

“Believe you? Hell, no! But if you want to tell this here yarn to the boys, now’s yer chance. That’s what I was a sayin’.”

“Then by heaven, I will!” Conklin was making one of his quick calculations. It was win or lose, anyway. And the hour had struck.

“Come on, Brady.” Then Conklin called to Cleaver.

But somewhere in the clouded recesses of Compton’s brain his reason held control and reached out now to take command. He had been stopped in his drinking before utter demoralization had overcome him. He heard what was going on—dully. He understood but dimly the meaning of what was going on, but what little he understood his mind gripped and held. His eyes cleared and grew steady; he heard, not what was actually being said, but the inner meaning of it.

When Cleaver appeared, Compton was capable of connected thought.

“Yes, sir!” Cleaver did not flinch, but his face grew gray.

“Cleaver!” it was Compton, not Conklin, who spoke, “Cleaver, my hat and coat, please. There’s business to attend to in Essex. You need not wait for me.”

“Come, now, Compton,” Conklin stood in the middle of the room. “Don’t be a damned fool. Leave this to me.”

“That’s impossible!” Compton turned toward Cleaver, who had returned with the coat and hat.

“Now, gentlemen, are we all ready? Come on, then.”

The drive through the still, cool night revived and calmed Compton. All five of the men were in Conklin’s car, but there was no talking, beyond a word, now and then.

No one in Essex was ever to forget that night, for those who

were not at the Torch Light heard of the doings the day after, and in the lurid light of later happenings.

The waiting, perspiring crowd had been hastily got together by Brady's henchmen. It was an ugly crowd, sullen and muttering.

Brady led his captives to the platform—Conklin, cursing under his breath; Compton ghastly wan—but completely at ease.

Brady's confused, illiterate mouthings stirred the mob feverishly, and Conklin's vehement demand for fair play only added to the unrest, but when Compton wearily came forward—the room grew still as it might in the presence of death.

And the men listened. They heard a confession. It was like the confession of a criminal who, realizing that his last hope has vanished, unburdens his suffering soul.

No two ever agreed exactly as to what was said, but there was not a man there that night who did not grasp the essentials.

Compton's failure must be their warning. From what he had been—he had tried to save them. He knew! If they owed him anything—and they must answer that for themselves—they owed him an attempt at least to follow where he had pointed—but could not lead.

Compton spoke for a half hour, slowly, impressively, and then he reeled back to a chair and sank down.

There was a rumbling like distant thunder. A storm was gathering—but when would it break?

Presently the crowd stirred awkwardly.

Brady got to his feet—and was hissed!

Brady knew the symptoms; knew mobs, and he suddenly—retreated.

Conklin took his place and his grim, set jaw had a certain influence over the crowd.

“See here,” he shouted, “before any of us go off the handle—let's get together. Together! Do you catch on? We owe”—he turned his bulging eyes upon Compton and Compton smiled and nodded, feebly—“we owe Mr. Compton

that—you and I! We've all been pulling in the dark—let's get together!"

A snarl, then a conciliating—"that's talking!"

This came from a young Torch Lighter and it was followed by slow, begrudging applause.

Compton smiled wanly, and when the ensuing excitement was over—he left the hall!

He walked home alone under the calm stars. The coolness that comes bearing the day was in the air; the east was troubled—the great miracle of sunrise was near; the darkness was giving way.

The library was empty when Compton entered, and he turned on the light. He knew that Cleaver was near, but he knew that he would not materialize until he was summoned. There was a sense of comfort in Cleaver's unseen presence.

Compton sat before the ash-strewn hearth and thought about Cleaver—and others. He rested for a while in his easy chair. He was very tired. He looked up at the clock. It was five o'clock. Outside the day had broken.

No wonder he was tired. After a while he went to his desk and, taking a fresh pile of paper, he began to write. He wrote to Rose-Ann. He told her that when the time came for her to return, he wanted her to be free; not a craven, beaten thing pleading for forgiveness in order to obtain mercy. He further explained that he was leaving everything to her because he loved her; trusted her. He wanted her to gather up what was left—of his poor attempt at helpfulness—and carry it on. She had had a vision; she would bring to the work, when she returned, substance. That was what life meant—learning from all experience.

Sitting alone in his quiet house, Compton wrote on and on while the rosy light outside, hidden by the drawn curtains, glowed and burned. There was a scent of flowers in the fresh air—Compton was dimly conscious of it as he wrote on and on.

His lawyer, so he told Rose-Ann, would communicate with her—all had been arranged.

Then, at the letter's end were these words—Compton had quoted them often to Rose-Ann:

“Oh, God who made the evil and the good,  
Is it your will a man shall not forget,  
Dark yearnings for the sins he has withstood?”

When all was finished Compton called Cleaver and said something that the faithful fellow never forgot.

“What has occurred in Essex, Cleaver, is all right. Remember what I say—all right!

“It has done a great thing for me; the greatest thing that could have been done; the only thing.

“Good-night, Cleaver. You should not have waited up—but I'm glad you did.”

Cleaver's features twitched as they struggled between tears and laughter.

“No more writing, Cleaver. My impressions of America are complete.” They both laughed at that.

“All that rot is done with, Cleaver. Good-night!”

Compton's eyes seemed to cling to the departing form of the man whose friendship and loyalty made him seem regal. After Cleaver's last duty was finished Compton heard him go upstairs, arrange the bedroom, and then seek his own bedchamber. The house was silent now as the tomb.

Compton returned to his desk. There was a long letter to write to his lawyer regarding the will made a few months before. The lawyer was to carry out a few details that Rose-Ann's absence had made necessary.

When all was carefully completed, Compton switched off the lights, opened the windows to the new day—and reaching for the revolver that always lay in a secret drawer of his desk, considered it thoughtfully. It held no terror for him. He was not afraid of death, but he *was* afraid of life.

So, serenely and deftly, Compton turned his back upon life and went forth upon a new Adventure.

Cleaver found him crumpled across his desk when he

entered the library to start the fire upon the ashy hearth. The old man gathered the stiffened form in his arms as gently as a woman could have done—and pressing his white head to the defeated one that had passed out in glory, he wept like a child.

## CHAPTER XVII

**W**HEN Rose-Ann left Middle Essex she underwent much the same experience that a person does who is lost in the deep forest. Movement was necessary, it would be fatal to stand still; there must be a way out, and it is the duty of the lost to seek it.

Rose-Ann had plunged into the wilderness and she knew that, for the present at least, she could not turn back. Indeed, at that moment, all directions were the same to her.

A bit of wood lore occurred to her—"If you can find water, follow that." Well! there did not seem to be any visible stream, so Rose-Ann listened to the sound in her heart and soul. As all that was familiar to her receded, as she groped in the dark, her own words—"I am going West"—were like the sound of hidden waters. Eric Manville, alone, seemed an objective point; a static identity in a whirling world that was rapidly swinging everything else into space.

Upon reaching Boston, Rose-Ann went to a quiet hotel where she and her mother had always gone for luncheon and where once they had stayed over night, when attending an opera.

In extremities most human beings instinctively protect themselves, and Rose-Ann was deliberate and self-possessed when she faced the night clerk. Her appearance, her respectable bags, and the security that plenty of money in the pocket gives, paved her way.

She did not sleep much that night, but she thought, not in circles but, presently, in a severe and direct line—outward.

The prenatal fear that had haunted her all her life and had become an obsession, still held her. She saw only her own peril, as she termed it; the "Thing" had almost got her.

What they, her nearest and dearest, called love, was but a shield behind which they worked to gain the ultimate end. That was the net which ensnared so many—that disguise of love!

Lying wide-eyed upon the strange bed in the hotel, she visioned herself—as she had left herself back in Middle Essex—growing dun-coloured and indifferent. No thrills; no sudden joyousness—all flattened down into the Woman of her race. The submerged female who, while she was young and pretty, could barter, now and then: coax and cajole—but only just so far! And then would come the age when barter was no longer possible and when she must give and pay on demand. Day after day the same. Night after night a mere interlude of sodden slumber that gave one strength to plod along—along——

Rose-Ann started up. She caught her slim body in her encircling arms; her eyes widened and brightened.

“Why, that is what drove Aunt Theodora away!” she whispered, as if explaining to her rescued self what had not been clearly understood before.

“Of course! And here was the whole world that God had given. The beautiful world of colour and action. Why should people grind and kill each other by slow torture when they could be free to choose?”

The world was big enough for everyone; if people were willing to pay the price. Why should death, instead of life, solve problems?

Once, when she was a child, Rose-Ann had risen from her bed and prayed a desperate prayer. Prudence had angered her and, realizing her own disposition, she knelt and implored the Almighty to help her to remember to get even with Prudence!

And so, now, she got up and knelt beside her strange bed and earnestly implored God to “keep her firm.”

And when morning came Rose-Ann was firm. She counted her gains and losses; she was frightened and, at the same time, thrilled by the sense of adventure and freedom.

She would travel! She reduced her plans to that.

“And afterwards?” the grim question caused Rose-Ann to turn pale.

“Afterwards?” Then slowly—“I’ll have to pay.”

The commonplace demands of breakfast and a visit to the bank had a sobering effect upon Rose-Ann and made her feel that she was part of the running machinery once more.

At the bank it was suggested to her to buy travellers’ checks and she became absorbed in the small business details that, to her ignorant mind, took on severe proportions. Then, since she had to buy tickets for some given point, she went to a tourists’ office where once she had gone to gather data about the trip she and her mother never took and, finding the same clerk, took advice and comfort from him.

She would go to Denver and from there seek Tim’s Corners which, it appeared, did not figure on the agent’s books.

“It’s probably one of those towns reached by autos,” the man explained; “but where autos go you can safely rely upon getting where you want to go.”

It all seemed ridiculously easy in spite of one’s fast-beating heart!

The day after she left Middle Essex Rose-Ann started westward. Mentally—she let go! She was not conscious of remorse or regret. As a starved person might seize upon food without much discrimination, so the craving Rose-Ann had always known for just what was offered now greedily manifested itself.

The one real and vital memory that caught and held her imagination was Aunt Theodora! More real than the strangers who occupied the car with her was the long-dead ancestor. Aunt Theodora seemed to be giving comfort and courage to the fugitive instinct that was driving Rose-Ann on. The fast-flying train sang along its shining rails and then, suddenly, Aunt Theodora materialized!

She was older, naturally, and quite up to date as Aunt Theodora would surely be.

“May I share your seat, my dear?” the gentle, cultivated voice caused Rose-Ann no surprise. “You see, my com-



partment is just across the aisle. We seem to be travelling alone."

"Of course!" Rose-Ann replied vaguely, and her eyes smiled into the amused ones looking into hers.

"It's quite like running away, isn't it?"

"Exactly!" Rose-Ann beamed.

"Is this your first visit to the West, my dear?"

The kindly old eyes clung to the radiant young face that had bewitched them.

"Yes. My first visit, anywhere, really."

"I thought so. One never looks quite the same the second time. It is rather a misfortune that you are travelling alone, it would give another such pleasure—just to watch you."

They smiled genially at each other.

"I'll—I'll meet someone at the other end." Rose-Ann flushed sweetly.

"A husband?"

"Well, hardly that!" Rose-Ann turned her eyes away.

"Oh! I understand," the old lady nodded. "You young girls! What lovers of adventure you are. In my day we were pulled up by the roots and planted somewhere else, by the hand of others, but nowadays, you young things keep your own hands on your affairs. You do not seem to have roots—nothing but wings or sails. You spread them and fly."

"It is all very wonderful to us who will soon have to assume wings whether we want them or not, and I often wonder if you are being better prepared than we who—had roots?"

Rose-Ann edged nearer to the dear, friendly old soul.

"Who can tell," she said wistfully. "If we have wings or sails, we are the same in our hearts. I am sure hearts do not change much."

"And you have no fears, my dear?"

The young eyes and the old smiled.

"Yes; many. Didn't you have?" Rose-Ann whispered.

"Yes, yes. But somehow they were stilled by others. I did not have the responsibility."

“But you are alone now?” Rose-Ann touched the sleeve of black.

“Yes, alone now, to the end, my dear, but it isn’t far, you know.”

“It was—hard?”

“Very. When I look back it is as if a lantern were turned that way; it is only dark ahead; but the fear is gone.”

“I think,” Rose-Ann’s eyes were dim, “that my lantern’s light will always be on ahead.”

“I hope so, my dear. But what a queer turn our talk has taken, and I felt only a curious interest in you, because of your rapt expression.”

“What are you going West for?” Rose-Ann suddenly asked.

“I am only going to Chicago, my dear. When I was your age, Chicago was West. And you?”

“I am going”—the reaching-out look came to Rose-Ann’s eyes—“I’m going to a mining town in Colorado.”

“Dear, dear—what a change. Well, it has warmed my heart to talk with you. It is queer, but somehow you seem to be doing what I might have done had I had wings instead of roots, long ago.

“I will amuse my son and his wife by my description of our meeting—it has been quite romantic. I’d like to remember you by name——”

“Rose-Ann——” Then Rose-Ann stopped. “Just Rose-Ann,” she flushed and smiled.

“And,” she went on, “please let me think of you as Theodora—Aunt Theodora.”

“How charming. A much prettier name than the one that was given to me.

“I hope—you will always be happy, my dear, or if not”—the kind old voice faltered—“I do hope the good Lord will preserve that look in your eyes. It is such a glad look.”

And when the train was speeding over plains and fertile fields beyond Chicago: when it heavily dragged up hills and the far peaks became less cloudlike—Rose-Ann, leaning back in her seat, thought with a little tug of the heartstrings

of Aunt Theodora left behind. No longer did the old haunting vision of Aunt Theodora take on the guise of the defeated dead, hid away in a forgotten corner of the Middle Essex graveyard; it had risen warm and sweet and kind in pretty clothes. It had been friendly and stopped off at the Middle West—as far as Aunt Theodora could go! But the dear words and smile lingered like warm touches to give courage and hope.

And presently courage was needed; courage and faith. While semi-familiar scenes flitted by the window there was little sense of tragedy, but when the desert surrounded the train Rose-Ann was appalled. The vast empty spaces frightened her; she closed her eyes, hoping that when next she opened them the horror would be passed. But it persisted. When the sun went down it seemed to pick out the clumps of sage grass and fill them with colour. It was then that Rose-Ann recalled Manville's description of the massive canvas over which the Artist's hand was still moving. Something of the terror departed with the thought, and looking from the window of her berth at sunrise, she again watched the effect of that moving but unseen hand on the wide stretches. It was, she began to realize, a foreground for the lofty peaks which, at the end of another day, brooded like clouds on the horizon.

"I feel," whispered Rose-Ann to her lonely self, "as if I had died and been floating through—nothing. And now I am nearing Something!" She kept repeating, for comfort, the old line:

"Out of the dark behind us; we entered here!"

But suddenly every sense was struck to life. Off to the west the sun was setting behind what had seemed a bank of clouds.

"Oh! they are mountains!" breathed Rose-Ann. "Mountains!"

The train had come out of a gloomy canyon and was speeding across a level space. The highest clouds—two of them—were rose-coloured and gold; between them lay the mysterious highway leading on and on indefinitely.

“It is the gateway to what?” The tears, wet on Rose-Ann’s lashes, made the glory flicker and shine the brighter. The soul of the girl at that instant seemed nearing a resting place. Of her body she took no heed.

When she alighted from the train in Denver, she consulted her notebook. Yes, everything was quite clear. She was to remain over night at a certain hotel. A porter, like a trained genie, was at hand to guide her there! Everything was magic now.

She needed only her little handbag for the night. The genie explained that she would have to leave the same station in the morning for Tim’s Corners. He knew all about Tim’s Corners, too. The smiling fellow appeared to know all about everything.

So he checked the bags that Rose-Ann did not need, took the one she did need, and placed her, and it, in a taxi. Certainly the way of the transgressor, in travel, is made easy. Any bed that remained stationary all night had power to woo Rose-Ann to deep, unbroken slumber, and she greeted the next morning refreshed and curious.

At eight-thirty she left Denver for Tim’s Corners with all the composure of a seasoned traveller. There would undoubtedly be other genii at her destination.

There was nothing beyond Tim’s Corners, apparently, but eternity. When Rose-Ann stepped from the train—for the last four hours she had been the only passenger—she had a moment of unadulterated panic. No genie materialized.

The trainmen, to all appearances, felt no further responsibility toward her and went their ways. The station, a mere shack, was dark and closed—after eight o’clock P.M. Tim’s Corners had no interest in railroads.

Standing with her luggage at her feet, Rose-Ann looked at the twinkling lights of what indicated the possibility of a village. Dimly she traced a road, only one, leading out into—space. And just when the panic was close upon desperation, Rose-Ann became aware of a tall, gaunt male figure near her. The figure was clad in a black-and-white checked shirt, a broad-brimmed felt hat, and corduroy trousers which were

tucked into high laced boots. Very muddy, ill-shaped boots they were.

The man regarded Rose-Ann, spat, and regarded her again.

"May I ask, ma'am," he spoke at last, "where you're aimin' ter go?"

Whatever Rose-Ann had expected Tim's Corners to be, she forgot now. Her plan to go to a hotel and telephone her arrival to Manville was relegated to limbo—there was only one thing under heaven to do: get to Manville and throw herself upon his mercy. The man near her was the possible connecting link.

She had heretofore used Manville's name as an arrow to wound Braintree; she had conjured with it while she bided in safety, but now it was the only thing left to her that was familiar. Wreck or salvation must be gained through Manville, and the man in the checked shirt was the spar to which she must cling.

"I'm Tony Marshall," the man vouchsafed, eyeing Rose-Ann as he might a scared rabbit.

"I want—very much," Rose-Ann felt her teeth chattering, "to go to Lone Two Ranch. I—I want Mr. Eric Manville." And so she did—desperately.

"Eric, eh? Well, now this *is* luck. I'm headed for the Lone Two. Got a lot of stuff, yonder, on the truck for the Lone Two. If you don't mind, miss, wedging in 'mong taters, turnips, flour, and whatnot. I can haul yer up to the Lone Two by nine, at the latest. Roads are putty treacherous—but we can make it."

"Oh! I am so much obliged." Rose-Ann was panting as she followed Marshall. He helped her to the seat beside his on the motor truck; arranged her bags, and jumped up.

The heavy truck ground its way into the gloom, its lights making secure the way on ahead.

The jolting was agonizing, but Rose-Ann gritted her teeth and made no sign.

Presently Marshall entered into conversation.

"Relation—maybe—to Manville?" he asked.

“No!” The word came explosively as the truck hit a rough spot.

No further information coming, Marshall spat resentfully and fell into silence.

There were frequent stops at houses scattered beyond the small hamlet. Marshall had orders to deliver to each, and often paused for exchange of gossip. From whispers, now and then, Rose-Ann, waiting in the darkness, gathered that she was under discussion.

“Well, ma’am,” Marshall, after the sixth stop, announced, “from here ter the Lone Two me and you has got ter make the most of each other.”

He laughed good-naturedly; his resentment was gone, but his curiosity flamed.

He entertained Rose-Ann with data about his recent customers. “A punk lot!” he admitted. “Living close together takes humanity from folks, ’stead of adding to it.”

Reflecting upon the scattered houses, Rose-Ann felt that humanity had not been greatly tested. She suggested this.

“Lord Almighty!” Marshall roared with laughter, “yer call yonder lonely? Why, ma’am, up where folks has a chance ter *be* folks, yer might’n see a neighbour for a month. When the winter sets there ain’t no afternoon calling till the roads are broken.”

Another eloquent pause. Then:

“We’re goin’ inter the canyon now, ma’am. T’other side, and we’re there!”

It was like going into the gaping jaws of death; the only seeming hold on life was the contact of the huge form of Marshall and, against that, Rose-Ann unconsciously pressed while the high walls of the chasm rose grimly and the lights of the truck, like vivid fingers, went groping along the narrow, rough road ahead. The awful stillness was broken by the sound of running water near at hand and the thudding roar of falls as they tumbled from the heights to the depths below.

Rose-Ann was beyond the sensations of awe or fear—she felt part of a terrific experience and was enduring it with non-resistance.

And then there came to her the memory of the legend Manville had told her of the canyon over whose trail departing spirits went.

And, as consciously as she had ever felt anything in her life, Rose-Ann felt that she was passing out through the dark into an experience toward which all her life had inevitably driven her. At that moment she felt that she had never had choice; that there was neither right nor wrong. A power had held her to one rigid course that terminated—in this darkness.

Presently through her benumbed sense Rose-Ann was conscious of Marshall's voice and at the same time of a glimmer of light—was it a star?—far up on a hilly slope. The walls of the canyon were gone—there were air and life once more.

“I was a-saying ma'am, there's a safe enough trail leading straight up ter the house from here—jest foller that there glimmer of light. If you'd like ter stretch yer legs by the quick cut, I can set yer down here. The road round to the cabin is considerable further.”

“Oh! yes; yes. Thank you—I would like to—to stretch my legs.”

The words did not seem to hold any meaning. Rose-Ann did not care whether she was put down or not—she was relaxed and near to tears. And once she was on the ground, she was surprised to find herself there.

“I must go—alone?” she faltered.

“It ain't but a step”; Marshall comforted. “It's high and steep, but the folks—they're expecting yer, ain't they?—will be waiting, like as not, by the door. They've heard the wheels coming, I reckon.”

Stiff, weak, and terrified, Rose-Ann, keeping the light in view, began her climb. It was not far, but her trembling limbs and the carpet of pine needles over which she slipped retarded her. Occasionally she stopped to take breath and once, blinded by tears, she lost the gleam of light and hit herself against a tree.

This brought her to her senses. She dashed the tears

away and looked up. Overhead the stars were shining; an owl, in the distance, called weirdly.

When Rose-Ann got near enough to the cabin to see its outlines, she paused again to take breath. The house was a long, low, one-storied cabin of logs; an enormous stone chimney rose at either end and there were rows of small-paned windows that glistened and shone. The porch that ran across the front of the cabin was nearly on a level with the ground. Rose-Ann, presently, stepped up and knocked timidly on the door. There was no response and she knocked again—her teeth chattering.

Then, slowly, the door opened and in the warm glow from within a tall, gracefully poised woman in a dull blue gown stood—with a pistol in her hand!

“Jo Lambert,” she said quietly, and her voice had deep intonations like an organ, “I told you to get out. I’m not much given to shooting, as you all know, but I *can* shoot and I don’t intend to be pestered past a certain point. I warned you off earlier.” Then the calm, grave eyes, searching the gloom, fell upon Rose-Ann.

“The Lord save us!” gasped the woman. “Who are you and where in heaven’s name did you come from?”

“I’m—I’m Rose-Ann Braintree from Middle Essex”—how utterly foolish it sounded! It seemed as futile here as it might have at heaven’s gate.

“I’m—I’m a friend of Mr. Manville’s—is he home?” An awful doubt had entered in.

“Home?” the woman asked dazedly. “Home? Why, he’s in South Africa—or on his way there, the last I heard. Come in!”

Rose-Ann was under the impression that she was being carried in; she certainly was led in and put in a chair before the largest fire she had ever seen in her life. Her brain was giddy—a comical thought struck it—the old memory of her idea of hell; perhaps she had been shovelled in!

“Here! I’m going to get some hot coffee for you,” the tall woman was saying; “it’s just ready; the evening meal,



too; we've been delayed on the range; only just got in. As soon as you're steadier, you can eat."

Rose-Ann gradually got control of herself—she let her eyes roam around the strange but beautiful room, while the tall woman prepared the coffee. It was an enormous room and the walls and ceiling were of rough logs. Couches, covered with beautiful skins, were built in, and tables of home make were scattered about with wonderful chairs standing temptingly by.

There were bookcases, too, and at the far end of the room a supper table neatly laid with several steaming dishes upon it. Rose-Ann was conscious of it all but she had no sensation of either pleasure or fear.

The woman in blue moved over to the table and poured a cup of coffee. In the red glow of fire and lamp she seemed like a tall angel. Her skin was very fair; her eyes the colour of her gown, and her straight black hair was wound about her head as seraphs wore theirs, in an old book that Rose-Ann remembered. The woman brought the coffee to the fire and bent over Rose-Ann; she was alarmed.

"Now drink this, child, you look as if you were about all in."

The hot liquid did its sanctifying work. Rose-Ann smiled.

"You are——" she hesitated.

"Whilla Brookes," the deep-toned voice replied. The woman's wonderful eyes clung to Rose-Ann's face.

"Mr. Manville's housekeeper? He never mentioned your name," Rose-Ann faltered. Then: "Thank you—you are very kind."

"He wouldn't be likely to mention my name—why should he?" the woman returned.

Still that searching gaze fixed upon Rose-Ann. After a slight pause Whilla went on—more to herself than to Rose-Ann:

"But he might have mentioned his trip abroad and spared you this journey and shock."

There was a strain in the low, even tones. Then, as an afterthought, and with a keener look:

“But perhaps you’ve just stopped off and are on some trip of your own.”

There was that about Whilla Brookes, and Rose-Ann soon learned it, that exacted simple truth and confidence. The slightest deviation brought a high colour to the pale face and a dangerous glint to the blue eyes.

In her extremity Rose-Ann replied:

“No—I came right here from home.”

The bald statement held again the comical aspect of triviality.

“Massachusetts, you know.”

For some reason this was illuminating.

“I—see!” Whilla Brookes let the words fall slowly as if she were measuring them. “Massachusetts, of course. Manville has been visiting there. . I see!

“Come, let me help you take off your coat and hat. We must eat, you know.”

There was a vague suggestion of fear in Whilla Brookes’s voice. She was groping in the dark for what she could not, in her confused state of mind, determine. She dared not think of herself or of what this stranger menaced. Manville was her first and only concern. She had been called upon, in the past, to protect and defend his property, his interests, and now, she felt, she must, in his absence, protect him.

Everything seemed to be at stake, and yet to move at all was fraught with danger. Dazedly, Whilla helped Rose-Ann with her coat and hat; with tragic pathos she made an effort to reduce the astounding experience to the commonplace.

“There! You look more comfortable,” she said as Rose-Ann sank back in her chair. “You must forgive my surprise—but just at first I thought you were an unearthly visitor. You see, one gets a bit flighty in this altitude, and being alone so much.”

The words ended in a nervous laugh. Then:

“Please come. The food will be quite cold.”

At last the meal was over and both women rose as if by common consent. Their conversation, while they ate, had

not brought them nearer to each other, but it had disclosed each to herself in a startling manner.

To a certain extent both were trapped and were relaxing in order to preserve their strength and avail themselves of any possibility of escape.

"I am very tired," said Rose-Ann, and her pitiful, white face proved it.

"In Eric Manville's house," Whilla Brookes remarked, taking a candle from the table, "there is always a guest room ready."

She moved across the wide room to the far side where three closed doors appeared.

"This room," Whilla opened the middle door, "is the east chamber; the guest room. I will light the fire."

Rose-Ann followed her in and sank wearily into a chair by the hearth, watching the kindlings catch the fire from the candle held close to them.

Gradually from out the gloom the ruddy glow of the flames disclosed the quaint furnishings. The rude bed proclaiming, above its primitiveness, the promise of comfort. The dressing table, home-made and chintz-draped; the gay woven rugs, the pretty curtains at the broad casement window, undoubtedly opening to the east.

"You will not mind the early morning sun? There are no shades, but we can pin something over the window to-morrow!"

"I love the sunrise." Rose-Ann tried to smile up into the calm face regarding her.

"You and I are alone in the house," Whilla further explained; "all the others have accommodations outside. You may leave the door open if you feel lonely. Good-night."

For a moment Rose-Ann had an impulse to cry out; to hold the departing blue-clad figure. Spiritually, she was combating what she fully realized was in Whilla Brookes's mind, and yet she knew that any betrayal of herself would but complicate matters. She was caught in a trap the spring of which she had, herself, set. She must accept the hospitality

of Manville's home on the terms that Whilla Brookes offered.

"Good-night!" again Whilla spoke and paused on the threshold. "Shall I—close the door?"

The words sounded like a challenge, and then Rose-Ann did one of her unexpected and impulsive things. As she spoke, her own words amazed her. They seemed to be carrying something out of her inner consciousness without her consent.

"Oh! please. Just a moment." Whilla came back across the room at once.

"Everything that I am accustomed to," Rose-Ann's words trembled, "is swept aside. I've done the sweeping myself—believe me! I do not know how to—to behave; how to explain myself.

"We are alone, you and I in this—this wilderness, but the whole world seems to lie between us.

"Can you—will you—be kind until I get control of myself? See what it is that I have done, exactly?"

As often occurs at tense moments, the confusion of Rose-Ann's words cleared, instead of obscured, the situation. Whilla Brookes drew a step nearer; she extended her hand as if to soothe Rose-Ann and then withdrew it, but said gently:

"You are very, very tired. Try to sleep. To-morrow we can talk, you know.

"It is never safe," she added, "to explain things when one is tired—or sick. Good-night. Shall I leave the door open?"

"Yes, please—and good-night!"

Rose-Ann stood up and watched Whilla Brookes pass from sight; a moment later, in the room on the right, she heard her moving about and then—silence.

Whilla had left the candle behind her, and by its golden light and the fire's glow Rose-Ann undressed and went to bed.

She slept as only the exhausted young can sleep among conditions that would have put older people on the rack.

It was the early sunrise that awakened her. She sat up in bed and watched it, framed by the wide window. Over the pointed pines the colours trembled and changed; the beauty quickened Rose-Ann's imagination; her eyes filled with tears

and suddenly, as if she had carefully thought the thing out, she whispered.

“I must tell her everything! There is nothing else to do—I cannot bear what she now thinks. I cannot go back at once, and I cannot stay here—unless she knows. I must tell her everything.”

It seemed a simple thing to do in that mystic hour when vitality, at low ebb, was the prey to emotion, but once dressed and ready to meet Whilla Brookes, Rose-Ann shrank from her ordeal. What was there to tell? As she tried to frame her sentences, even to herself, she was conscious of that conflict between the spiritual and the physical expression of it. And yet, hesitating by the door of the bedroom, Rose-Ann had never been more confident than she then was of the rightness of her revolt; the inevitability of it. It was her unwisdom in choosing her way of retreat that humbled and frightened her. She must deal with the future more sanely; securely.

This brought Rose-Ann small comfort, for the present demanded her whole attention. By her unconsidered act she had involved Manville unpardonably unless she could, by frank statement, clear him of any part in her wild adventure. This was her plain duty; unmindful of herself she must exonerate him.

## CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN Rose-Ann went into the living room she felt as though she were treading on air; she, who had spent her days on the sea level, was strangely affected by the altitude. It did not make her dizzy or short of breath, but it seemed to take all weight from her body. It was like a dream that occasionally delighted her. She could, while in the dream, raise her arms and float about—it was only when she lowered her arms that she fell! Fell! With a wan smile she decided that she must now keep her arms raised.

The big room was filled with sunshine. It had been, apparently, freshly swept and a roaring fire blazed on the hearth.

Upon the dining table, at the right side of the room, a single service was spread—the housekeeper had either breakfasted, or was not to eat with her guest. This gave a reprieve and the sense of floating in space was revived.

Rose-Ann stood by the fire not knowing what to do; but grateful for her solitude.

Just then the kitchen door opened and a lean, lanky boy, of perhaps eighteen, stared stolidly at her.

“Oh!” he said presently, “here you are, are yer?”

Rose-Ann nodded.

“Coffee—ham an’ eggs—bacon eggs—sassage—hot cakes and ’lasses?” The words came strung together in a monotonous tone.

“Just coffee, please,” Rose-Ann replied, singling out a few familiar items, “and toast and one egg.”

The boy departed and came back at once with the coffee, a plate of ham and eggs, and cakes. His interpretation of the

order made Rose-Ann laugh. Apparently certain articles of food were classed together in the youth's lexicon.

Having finished her meal and seen the remains cleared away, a growing awkwardness possessed Rose-Ann. What *was* she to do? Now that she was clear-minded, a panic overcame her. Night is not always the time for wild alarms. She was falling now, falling from whatever heights she had scaled. She could not sit idly by in the present state of affairs.

She began to make calculations. Travelling was a costly luxury, she had discovered. The funds she had taken from the bank had seemed a small fortune, before she set forth, but they had melted like the spring snow. While there was considerable money left, Rose-Ann dared not take to the road again, with no definite plans, until she had connected herself with her home supply.

She decided to write at once to her Boston lawyer and to the Boston Bank. This she set about to do. It gave her something to think about and filled a couple of hours. The lank boy, moving about between kitchen and living room, finally took the letters, promising to "get them out" in a day or so.

"Some durned feller will be passing," he assured Rose-Ann; and with that she had to be content.

With the letters dispatched, Rose-Ann was again overcome by her predicament. She tried to imagine how it would have been had Manville been at home. The thought turned her hot and cold.

Rose-Ann was coming to herself more truly than even she, at the moment, comprehended.

As the hours dragged on, from her confused state she detached certain bald conclusions that could be depended upon as real, for the rest, they whirled through her aching brain, taking on new forms as they twirled.

She must have a perfectly frank talk with Whilla Brookes. It might make matters worse, but it must be done!

She must, at whatever cost, clear Manville of any responsibility for her own madness. Whilla Brookes might

draw her own conclusions, but she must have truth to rely upon.

Over and over Rose-Ann thrashed the two poor conclusions threadbare. She went to the window as she might to prison bars, and looked out upon the surroundings. It never occurred to her to leave the house.

There were small log cabins grouped about, homes of the men engaged upon the ranch, undoubtedly. From these cabins emerged now and again Japanese in clean white duck, servants presumably, and their grinning cheerfulness had a strange effect upon Rose-Ann. It made her desolately afraid.

About noon Whilla Brookes appeared on horseback. She rode superbly and in her trim riding breeches and coat she looked handsome, and much younger.

She came into the living room and greeted Rose-Ann as though she were a guest of the most ordinary type.

"I'm sorry to leave you alone so much," she said, removing her hat and gloves and sitting by the fire; "when Mr. Manville is here he attends to outdoor matters, but in his absence no one understands them as I do. The men are all devoted and good, but they depend upon me.

"I suppose you know about the mines?"

Rose-Ann flushed.

"Not much," she replied.

Whilla Brookes was watching the downcast face; her eyes were deep and troubled. While Rose-Ann had slept she had kept a strange vigil; it was like watching all that one possesses, threatened from an unexpected quarter. She was alert now, but guarded.

The noonday meal was served and shared; the lean boy waited upon them, but the Japanese was responsible for the plain but good cooking, Rose-Ann was told.

"After dinner I will explain," Rose-Ann kept thinking and, as she looked at the fine, strong face across the table, the confession seemed to grow easier and easier.

There are women who appeal to other women, as God might—sure, faithful, and understanding. This characteristic



cannot be put into words; it is elusive but pervading. It has nothing to do with virtue or the reverse; it is a quality that makes itself felt in a glance of the eye, a touch of the hand, but mostly, perhaps, in the tones of the voice. One feels toward such women the inclination to touch the hem of a garment.

The afternoon passed, however, without the coveted chance for confidential talk.

“Come out with me,” Whilla Brookes said, “the air is divine—you need it. You’ll be interested in the country; you and I are the only women within several miles—we must keep each other company and get acquainted. Can you ride?”

“I thought I could—until I saw you!” Rose-Ann lifted her eyes to the calm face watching her.

“If you can keep on it’s all right. We have a safe horse.”

The invigorating air, the excitement of feeling herself secure on horseback, exhilarated Rose-Ann, and presently the marvellous beauty and grandeur of the scenery awed and impressed her to such an extent that she became absorbed and thrilled. She and her small affairs sank into insignificance. She was conscious only of an inspiration that dominated her, impersonally.

She was so silent that Whilla Brookes, occasionally riding close to her, watched her face with an interest that knew both sympathy and aversion.

“You love it all?” Whilla spoke slowly; “the strangeness and sublimity do not overpower you? Some people are afraid.”

“I am not afraid.” Rose-Ann did not turn her head and her eyes were rapt. “And it does not seem strange. I feel as if I had been here before. In a way it is like coming back.”

Whilla’s heart throbbed quicker and the fear again gripped her.

The two trotted along for a time in a silence fraught with emotions that were driving them apart.

Rose-Ann was conscious, in a sense, of what her companion was thinking, and Whilla Brookes was trying as she

never had in her life before to be just; to live up to, now that the hour had perhaps come, her rigid, simple code.

"She is trying to push me aside: she will not let me explain," Rose-Ann thought.

"I will not judge," mused Whilla. "Eric must deal with this—I will not complicate it." Again they rode on without speaking. Then:

"These," Whilla said presently, "are the mines. The Lone Two." She drew her horse up sharply and pointed with her riding whip to the marks in the hills where man had cut and dug because of the faith that was in him. "They will be reckoned with some day. Manville knows what he is about. He and some Englishmen have sunk thousands in those holes, but they'll get it all out, threefold—and Manville will have the glory of a twofold victory: his own, and his power to make others believe in him! There are gold and silver there but"—and here Whilla's voice shook—"there's more than that—it is a dream come true. But perhaps you know all about this?"

"No." Rose-Ann was strangely depressed. "Mr. Manville rarely spoke of his business."

The ride home in the gloaming added to Rose-Ann's sense of misunderstanding and defeat.

Instead of *wanting* to confide in Whilla Brookes, she now began to demand, silently, defiantly, an opportunity for explanation.

After the evening meal, which was eaten during awkward silences broken by spasmodic attempts at conversation, Whilla announced that she had asked the men to join them later.

"We're a queer lot here," she explained, "dependent upon each other for what we have, socially. There are plenty of books and magazines and scenery, but when it comes to folks we must take—as is!" She laughed lightly, moving about the big firelighted room restlessly, while from her chair by the hearth Rose-Ann watched her furtively.

"And it's quite wonderful," Whilla talked on, "to discover the social leaders, even here. I've learned that the social

genius is not a trained species, but a natural one. You may judge for yourself later."

It was about eight o'clock when the kitchen door opened and Marshall, with two or three men of the ranch, entered and quite naturally seated themselves around the fire.

"On my way down," Marshall began, fixing his humorous eyes on Rose-Ann, "I figured I better stop in and see if you wanted to go along back. Not having seen yer since I dumped yer—I had no way of telling how yer visit was panning out."

Here was an opportunity—but Rose-Ann dared not take it—she was tied hand and foot.

"I would feel that I had failed terribly if Mrs. Braintree left so soon"; Whilla Brookes was steadying the situation; "she is seeing the West for the first time; doing the real American grand tour. We must show her the best before she travels on."

Marshall shifted the tobacco in his mouth and remarked:

"She don't look as stranded as she did last night."

"I—I felt as if I'd been dropped off a precipice then," Rose-Ann managed a small relieved laugh.

"And landed on a soft spot, eh?" Marshall's eyes twinkled.

"Yes."

"Where did you hail from?" This from a lean, handsome chap whose ideas of friendliness were founded on complete confidence and simplicity, unhampered by restraint.

"Massachusetts." Rose-Ann turned to him.

"That's the one state," the boy said, "that I ain't camped out in by my own fire."

"What was the matter with Massachusetts?" Marshall asked. "Yer can't hand out that style of talk to a lady *from* Massachusetts without explaining."

The boy laughed.

"Oh! I edged inter the state," he admitted, "but I didn't build a fire. I felt like a bum in a city park. Sorter keeping off the grass all the time. I'm blamed if I could find an acre in the whole state that wasn't cleared and a wire fence bounding it."

The explanation seemed to appease Marshall. A man could well be excused for discriminating against a state where such conditions prevailed.

“Well,” he drawled, “ter prove yer ain’t got any feeling against the natives of Massachusetts, Dingley, give us a song.”

Apparently Rose-Ann was to be entertained and, she suspected, by pre-arrangement.

Dingley, nothing loath, broke into song. He had a beautiful voice, untrained and faulty, but deep and sweet. He chose for his performance the old classic of “Frankie Was a Good Woman,” and with head thrown back generously gave the whole divine tragedy—the company clapping at the end of each stanza, and two or three joining in the chorus:

“Frankie was a good woman  
 ’Most everybody knows,  
 She paid a hundred dollars  
 For to buy her man some clothes.  
 He was her man—  
 But he done her wrong.”

Dramatically, Dingley repeated the last line. Then conscientiously following the revelation of Frankie’s man’s true character, to which the group gravely listened, Dingley triumphantly roared out:

“Frankie went up to Miss Angelina’s house  
 And she didn’t go for fun,  
 For underneath her apron  
 She had a six-shooter gun.”

And then everyone joined in on the refrain, lustily:

“He was her man,  
 But he done her wrong.”

The words meant nothing to Rose-Ann, but the clear, young voice thrilled her and the happy smile with which she

greeted Dingley, when he rose to bow, pleased the boy mightily.

During the singing one of the men, older than the others, had been whispering to Whilla Brookes, and in the quiet that followed Dingley's entertainment his tones became audible to all:

"Yes, *ma'am*, I wasn't born yesterday, nor yet hatched to-day. That oily looking cove has been percolating around until he's got me whoozy, and this morning he drifted in ter camp with a chunk of ore in his hand and a hard look on his ugly phiz like he'd been running too fast.

"He said he'd been told I could tell ore like all tarnation and I told him I could. He handed out the chunk, and by gosh! I felt queer way down to my boots. And I says ter him, 'show me where you got that and I'll tell you something that will curl yer hair.'

"He thought he had me all right. He'd got all he wanted ter know, and he took me down Jake's Gully and pointed out a hole in the ground that he'd been picking, he said—and I just got down and smelt around and fed him up. Made him think me a sucker that believed what he was saying."

A silence. Then Whilla Brookes spoke. She had been listening intently.

"You think, Noxon, that the stranger is prowling about the Lone Two mines?"

"That's about the way I study it out. And hiding his tracks by picking in Jake's Gully."

"It's mighty good of you to come here to me, Noxon." Whilla Brookes turned from him with a smile. Then:

"Put two or three of the boys wise. No shooting, mind you, so long as the Sheriff keeps neutral."

Later, coffee and cakes were served to the callers and then, when they had gone, the clock struck ten. Whilla Brookes rose and leaned against the fireplace. Her strong brown hand, fine and delicate in shape, was spread against the stones.

"I wonder if you have noticed these rocks," she said quietly, looking at the chimney. "There's ore in them,

gold, silver. Manville carried each one here himself. He used to look as if he were praying as he knelt, devoutly placing each rough stone in its niche."

"Have you been here long?" Rose-Ann asked as if suddenly the question was of the gravest importance. Some new element was creeping into the relations of the two women. Whilla Brookes seemed bent upon keeping Manville before Rose-Ann.

"Six years. It seems longer. They have been wonderful years. Years are, when they are filled with disappointments, successes, and—and the making good! That is what the years have meant to Manville, and I—have looked on!"

Whilla's words drifted almost to a whisper, and standing as she did with the firelight brightening her drooping face, she looked lovely.

As if but waiting its moment to spring to life, an ugly doubt in Rose-Ann's mind flared up. At that instant both she and Whilla Brookes, each in her own vague, groping way, realized that the ideal of Manville was being threatened. With the bruising, silent knowledge of this, they reacted characteristically. Whilla was alert to protect, to defend, while Rose-Ann, her oft-abhorred ancestry gripping her, intellectually drew her skirts aside.

With the flood of new emotions choking her, Rose-Ann rallied presently and felt the shame, the self-contempt and humiliation that were her salvation.

And Whilla Brookes, mistaking the flush on Rose-Ann's face—the lowered eyes—asked the world-old, pitiful woman-question:

"How dare she judge—she?"

The palpitating silence was as potent as though words had raked the situation to the roots, leaving it bare and quivering. And so the evening came to an end—with a casual good-night.

For several days there was a truce, skillfully managed by Whilla.

Then, when every exit seemed closed to a common meeting ground, Whilla asked quietly one evening, releasing, as she

spoke, her heavy braids of hair, as if their weight was more than her aching head could bear:

“Will you tell me something of your home and people? When I was very young I lived in the East. I would love to know you better.”

Rose-Ann felt her throat contract, the tears rise to her eyes. She longed to kneel at the feet of the standing woman and cry out for pity. The days had worn upon her desperately.

“And,” Whilla went slowly on, feeling her way through conflicting emotions: “I wonder if we could drop the ‘Miss’ and ‘Mrs.’? I do not know how it seems to you, but I believe we would find everything easier if we could—without too much effort.” Now that the artificial barrier was down, emotion had its way.

“I will be glad to, Whilla!”

This much Rose-Ann could do, and was surprised to find how easily the name fell from her lips.

“Thank you, Rose-Ann!” Whilla smiled, and as she bent forward her long, loosened braids fell over her shoulder and gave her a peculiarly youthful look. “I will sit down again,” she said; “that is, if you are not too tired for a little talk.”

She took her old seat and, facing the fire, waited with that serene patience that so often marked her.

And presently Rose-Ann spoke. Her abrupt pauses, the rigid hold that she kept upon herself, were far more eloquent and illuminating than her words. Whilla listened, but caught the under-meaning that gave her a wider area of vision than Rose-Ann suspected.

The brief glimpses of childish reaching out for brightness and adventure which Rose-Ann portrayed were more tragic to Whilla Brookes than they were to Rose-Ann herself. Whilla adored children, as so many childless women do, and any infringement upon their rights and happiness could rouse her as nothing else could. For a moment, she lost sight of Rose-Ann, and saw only a lonely little child.

“It all seems so absurd,” Rose-Ann was saying. “I suppose I was a most trying and aggravating girl, and be-

cause of the misunderstanding I bided my time in quite a horrid way. I think, in the depths of me, I was always determined to have my way and sometimes, I fear, I had an insane desire to get even."

"You seem to have wanted so little," Whilla broke in, "just a place to play in and enough sunshine to grow in."

"I believe that is so, Whilla, but I also know that my people honestly think I had more than my share. I did seem to be happy, and I expanded, but I had to tussle so for everything, and always against that atmosphere of mental disapproval. Sometimes I flared out and said and did things that my people *expected* me to say and do—and really the things surprised me horribly—the best of me. I did not want to do or say them. My mother——"

Rose-Ann looked blankly at Whilla and dropped her eyes, for the hot tears blinded her.

Impulsively Whilla stretched out her hand and touched Rose-Ann's knee.

"I think I understand," she whispered. "There is always at least *one* who does not have to be explained."

"Thank you, Whilla. Mother was like that! There was a short time, while she and I were learning to know each other, that I was really happy—she filled the empty places in my life.

"She died suddenly. Just before she went, she told me things about her own life; such things as women tell other women when there is no longer need to keep up a shield. She blamed herself for not having expressed herself; she felt she had wronged others because she had never let them see her as she really was."

"Most women feel that way when it is too late," Whilla spoke more to herself than to Rose-Ann. Then again she asked an abrupt question:

"And did you come out into the open—after your mother died, Rose-Ann?"

"I thought I did. I married, and then something happened and I realized that no one really knew me—I did not know myself. That is why I came away."



The hand resting upon Rose-Ann's knee gave a slight pressure and then withdrew.

"I wonder how it would have worked out, Rose-Ann, if you had made your fight right there where the trouble was?"

"I could not. You do not understand my people, or me."

"Perhaps! But now, Rose-Ann, tell me something about Barry Compton. God's man, as Manville calls him."

The name had power to dispel Rose-Ann's depression.

"God's man!" she repeated, "that's exactly what Barry is—though he'd be indignant if he knew any one called him that."

Whilla got up, laid more wood on the fire, and then came back. She saw that Rose-Ann had regained her calm.

For some time they talked of Compton and then the reprieve was over.

"And now tell me of your husband, Rose-Ann." The quiet question seemed so natural that its effect was startling. Rose-Ann recoiled.

"I cannot!" she said jerkily. "Anything I might say would be like bearing false witness—unless you knew my husband. He is—well, he is like *two* people."

"Most of us are, Rose-Ann, or like four or five. You love your husband? One of his selves?"

Whilla was gaining control of the situation. She believed, with a growing relief, she could afford to be merciless if by so doing she could help. It was only when she had feared that there was no help that she was afraid to move.

The sharp, compelling question tore through the shield behind which Rose-Ann huddled in her doubts and fears.

"I don't know," she replied, facing that element in Whilla that demanded truth—or nothing.

"That was why I came away. I had never had time to know myself and, when something happened, and I saw that unless I did know myself I could do nothing but wrong and more wrong—I had to come. It was like—saving myself."

"I see." Whilla bent forward and turned her face away from Rose-Ann. This trick of hers of speaking intimately while thus withdrawing was one of her positive characteris-

tics; a seeming protection when she gave herself most freely to others.

"You risked about everything," she said slowly, "for the one thing you seem to prize above everything else. I wonder if it will repay you, Rose-Ann?"

"I do not know. I never counted on that, but if I had, it would have made no difference. Some things have to be!"

"Yes, that is quite true, Rose-Ann. There are times in life when we all know that. Those things neither punish nor reward us—but they teach us awful truths."

And then Whilla Brookes seemed to forget Rose-Ann. Her thoughts wandered back over a hard road; she sank wearily in her chair as if physically spent by the effort.

She had a sudden and vivid realization of what Rose-Ann must have meant to Manville. How appealing she must have been to one who had suffered and fled from the oppression so deadly to sensitive, idealistic natures.

Going back to that environment from which he had believed himself completely divorced, he had been under the old spell of luxury; of Barry Compton; of a girl representing the thing he had once had faith in and been hurt by. He must have felt as if the present were but a dream and that he had awakened! But how had he dealt with the situation?

That was the question that burned into Whilla Brookes's soul. But from it Rose-Ann veered sharply.

If Rose-Ann, ignorant, blind, and indifferent to the conventions that had crushed her, instead of protecting her, had misunderstood the friendly goodness of Manville—and how divinely kind *he could* be!—If in her fierce resentment of something too deeply felt for expression she had come to Manville without considering the cost—— At this juncture Whilla Brookes turned her grave, wide eyes upon Rose-Ann. In that look was all her own brave defence of Manville struggling with her desperate demand for—truth.

She waited. Would Rose-Ann speak now of Manville? Open the secret chamber that held the grim meaning that must direct the future?

But Rose-Ann, white and weary, simply shook her head as if refusing the unspoken appeal.

"I—I cannot talk any more to-night," she said; "I am so tired that I feel—ill." She got up slowly, stepped toward Whilla, then retreated:

"Oh!" she cried piteously, "I cannot see my way out in any direction. But there must be a way; there always is. Please try to—to keep kind to me—until I can prove myself worthy of your kindness."

They seemed, for that instant, spiritually to draw closer; to come to a clearer understanding. Manville was brushed aside, ignored. They were just two women stranded and recognizing the necessity of interdependence.

"Good-night, Rose-Ann!"

"Good-night, Whilla!"

Side by side they crossed the room. The shadows at the far end closed about them. Then they parted—entered their bedchambers and for the first time shut their doors! They did so cautiously, soundlessly, but each sought solitude that only complete detachment could give.

In her dim, cold room, Rose-Ann undressed and was conscious again of that sensation of physical illness; with it reared the ugly, hideous doubt as to Whilla Brookes's relations to Manville. It seemed only to have been biding its time, but, thank Heaven! it now had lost any actual power over her. She could deal with it sanely, intelligently, and detached from the prejudices of her inheritance. She no longer recoiled. A certain wonder grew in her confused thoughts.

Suppose it were so—the thing she doubted? Seen by the flare, that this question spread over the situation, Whilla Brookes took on majestic lines, while Rose-Ann herself shrivelled.

"Thinking what she must of me," Rose-Ann held herself relentlessly in the light, "how can she be—so wonderful?"

And in her dark room Whilla Brookes kept her lonely vigil with little to comfort her.

She had no prejudices to overcome, and few illusions to

blind her—but she still gripped her faith in Manville. She knew women and she knew men; she weighed the pros and cons and then, toward morning she vowed to her all but beaten self one solemn vow:

“I will not take another step until I know just what has occurred.”

The morning found both women exhausted and reserved. They reacted from the intimacy of the night before with painful silences, broken by determined attempts to readjust conditions to the deadly plane upon which, for the past week, they had been living.

Whilla succeeded better than Rose-Ann. After breakfast she suggested that they start on horseback with the men to track some horses that had got away in the night.

“It will keep us in the open,” she said, “and I’m sure if you take the horse you have been riding you can manage easily to keep up with us. If at any time you care to return, or drop behind, we’ll set you on the trail.”

“Oh! I would love to go,” Rose-Ann replied enthusiastically; “and I can find my way about. You must not have me on your mind at all. If I begin to drag I’ll come back.”

This expedition would postpone the half-formed plan Rose-Ann had made at daybreak. In that hour she had vowed to leave the Lone Two as soon as possible. Where she was to go she had not decided—a day out of doors would give her vision, perhaps. It surely would secure solitude of a kind that would strengthen, not weaken, her resolve. Manville’s house stifled her, but the vast spaces offered peace and she felt, now, that she could never confide further in Whilla Brookes.

It meant only injustice to others. Still, to withhold any confidence from one who had done what Whilla had for her, and remain under the same roof with her, was equally impossible. The snarl was too hopeless for words to undo.

“I must go away. Letters will come in a week or so and then——”

At that moment Barry Compton rose supreme. Once he

knew where she was, Rose-Ann felt he would help. She knew suddenly that she had been relying on this all along!

It was a mountain day. The sky seemed near enough to touch; the peaks appeared but a mile away. The snow patches gleamed and glistened, and the air tingled with life. Through the tall pines they galloped; the sweet, crushed needles gave up their delicate scent—then out into the sparsely wooded spaces, on, on to the timber line.

They were following the hoof marks of the straying animals; sometimes Rose-Ann detected them. This excited her greatly and made the others laugh. But the prints often turned upon themselves or were obliterated by the carpet of needles.

Then came the barren open space. Burned timber, standing gaunt and black with crazy ghost-arms stretched pleadingly up to heaven from hell.

At noonday they stopped to eat a nourishing but meagre meal, then on again, for Whilla had at last detected prints in the soil that she felt sure were the right ones.

At four o'clock, with nothing but bare rocks around them and the rough trail winding in and out, Rose-Ann said that she would dismount and wait for them.

"I'm tired," she confessed.

"That's all right," Whilla replied; "it's open and safe here; the sun has warmed the rocks.

"We'll be back in another hour with or without the beasts. There's a moon to-night, anyway; it will be rather fine to make the return late. You'd enjoy the experience, Rose-Ann; but if you do not want to wait, go on—the trail's easy to follow."

The exercise in the open had brought to Whilla Brookes a strange calm that only the soul-lover of the wilds can understand. Nothing seemed great enough to kill the peace in her that was not dependent upon the physical, but which drew, for its strength, upon what only Nature gives her chosen ones. Indeed, for hours she had not thought about the struggle of the previous night; the joy in her had conquered the fear; driven it from the field.

And Rose-Ann, left to herself on the warm sun-bathed rocks, felt, too, the sudden control of a force that seemed to lift her into space where no other soul held part.

She could see for miles in every direction. She was not lonely or afraid; she felt singularly free and, as her hand touched, accidentally, the pistol at her belt, she smiled.

Whilla had insisted upon the weapon and some lessons in its use, from young Dingley, as a necessary equipment for "one of the outfit."

"I wonder," mused Rose-Ann, stretching herself luxuriously upon her back, "what they would think of me—back there?"

As often happens, when mind and body are relaxed, thought flooded the brain. "Back there" broke down the barrier behind which Rose-Ann had been living for weeks, and such a sudden, blighting wave of homesickness overwhelmed her that she rolled over, and with her face upon her folded arms, wept aloud.

She was free—but beaten! For her, there seemed to be no "back there" and the future was as desolate and empty as the silent spaces surrounding her.

And then, like a bit of driftwood borne upon the stream that was engulfing her, Rose-Ann recalled her father's words, spoken long ago in reference to Aunt Theodora:

"A woman never returns after doing what she has done."

Now, though Rose-Ann had been shaken from the insecure harbour whence her rebellion had driven her, she had been surely carried to a safer, saner point of vantage. With the memory of the hard words of her father came sanctifying and saving strength.

She sat up and, gathering her knees in her arms, faced the sunlighted world. She felt alone in a place but just created. A place that had heard only the command: "Let there be light." And to which it had replied "and there was light!"

There was light—light everywhere!

The tears dried on Rose-Ann's cheeks, her eyes widened and darkened. Something tremendous seemed to be hap-

pening to her. She was being born, a new woman into the new world, and she was filled with courage and vision.

“We must go back!” She spoke the words aloud as if to convince her old, desolate self, and her thought was of Aunt Theodora and her defeat. “We must go back and live; not die! They shall not kill us—women can go back!”

And then Rose-Ann, quite subconsciously at first, then more consciously, began to plan.

Full well she knew that she must be judged by appearances; by what she had seemed to do. The unrelenting code did not recognize possibilities of weakness in itself. She thought of Aunt Theodora’s neglected grave; of shuttered and shaded New England houses in which broken lives were lived out drearily, uncomplainingly. Rose-Ann’s heart ached with understanding and pity.

Her old spirit rose triumphantly over the spell of depression. She had her mother’s money and her own; not as a suppliant would she return. No! she would simply take her place; live her life and wait.

There would be Barry; and by and by—who could tell? Only there is no other way. “We must go back!”

And because the repetition of the words seemed to hypnotize her, Rose-Ann stretched her tired body on the rocks and fell asleep.

She slept an hour or more, then suddenly started up. At first she thought that she still dreamed. Great billows of fog—or cloud—were rolling up, wiping out her world, all worlds, as they came. They looked, presently, more like smoke, for the setting sun filled them with a dull flame colour.

Overhead a great eagle swooped and circled—he had been investigating the strange thing on the rocks!

The patient horse stood near, his eyes upon Rose-Ann. While he could see her, he knew no fear.

Rose-Ann, frightened and bewildered, got upon her feet; then she mounted the horse, patting and reassuring him. “Let us try!” she whispered through chattering teeth, “we must try to make the return before—we’re blotted out.”

Slowly they descended, and were at once enveloped in the cold, damp billows. The horse put his feet down gingerly, delicately; he was feeling his way, guided by that sense that God gives as a compensation to His lesser creatures.

Rose-Ann had wisdom enough to let the lines lie loose upon the horse's neck while her trembling, cold hands patted the faithful beast. It seemed hours that they silently moved through the mists, and then Rose-Ann smelled burning wood; heard movements in the near distance.

She called and waited. The mists were clearing; the odour and sound were at hand and then—oh! blessed sight, she saw a small fire in the opening between two boulders, and a man crouching near it. His head was lifted—he had heard Rose-Ann's call.

When she saw him she urged her tired horse on and the man rose to meet her.

"I thought," he said, helping her to dismount, "that the call could not be human; it did not seem earthly. The fog is passing, we can go on in a few minutes—the fire is all I have to offer, but it is at your disposal."

"It is a gift of God!" Rose-Ann replied, and sank beside it.

The man was watching her closely.

"Unless," he said, "we want to pose as—as Adam and Eve brought up to date, we may as well introduce ourselves. I'm John Donaldson, a prospector from Denver. Just nosing about and, as you see, not keen on trails. I'm a good deal of a duffer, too, as to weather signs."

The name meant nothing to Rose-Ann, she simply nodded in a friendly way to her fellow creature in distress.

"I'm—I'm Mrs. Braintree," she confided frankly; "I'm—I'm staying at the Lone Two Ranch. I'm—a duffer, too!"

For some reason this statement had a peculiar effect upon the man by the fire. What was running through his mind was a conversation he had heard the night before where some men, drinking and hilarious, had set scandal free by a campfire.

Donaldson had fallen in with the men after an encounter with Whilla Brookes's representatives. They had come upon



him lurking about the Lone Two mines; had used rather rough language while ordering him off the property, and had suggested that a second meeting might be bad for his health.

Defeated and revengeful, he had listened, later, to the gossip with relish. It gratified him to realize that Manville was not backed by the entire community.

“Say, what’s Manville starting up to his ranch, anyway?” one fellow, drunker than the others, had asked. “A harem, by God?”

“Great guy, Manville! Keeping in the dark about his affairs—mines, women, and all the rest. Gone off now, hasn’t he? Letting the women settle inter shape, eh? Fighting it out between ’em?” This from a second.

“I tell yer, fellows, this here Wild West is the place to live the life.

“Now number one, up to Manville’s cabin, isn’t going to be bounced, I bet. She looks as if she could hold the fort; and number two don’t know the way back home apparently, or she may have Manville on a leash, being younger and fitter. Queer mess, I say.”

Donaldson recalled the conversation clearly now. Someone had asked next:

“Who was number one back in civilization?”

“Oh! a dame whose man flung her off and wouldn’t listen to reason. Wouldn’t divorce her, I heard.”

“And number two—where’s her home town?”

“The Lord knows. Somewhere back East. She’s kicked the traces, too, like as not. She’s a Mrs., all right. Guess she just broke loose and took her chances by hounding Manville to his lair, with whatever she’s got on him.”

It was an ugly, dirty conversation. Donaldson had known that at the time, but in a subtle way the meaning of it affected his attitude toward Rose-Ann now. A certain restraint was loosened.

The talk that followed was freer; a new tone marked it that presently irritated Rose-Ann.

“Let us push on,” she said, and rose abruptly; “the fog—why, it is gone!”

“There’s to be a moon—I’ve ordered it,” Donaldson added familiarly; “it would be something for us to remember—the ride down in the moonlight.”

“Well, let us begin to make the memory.” Rose-Ann felt a vague unrest; but, once on her horse, she regained her poise, and oddly enough her hand, touching her revolver at her belt, grew steadier.

The sun had set, but in the open stretches the gold light lingered. The hungry horses, with heads set toward home, galloped on without urging. Rose-Ann was never able after to remember distinctly what happened in detail, but Donaldson said something that caused her face to flame and her nerves to tingle. She responded with fierce anger added to by a fear she had never known before in her sheltered life.

She turned upon the man at her side and flung some hurting, bruising truths in his face.

She heard herself defending Whilla Brookes hotly, vehemently. Then she rose in defence of Manville.

But at this juncture Donaldson, smarting with resentment and anger, silenced her by a rude jest.

“What in hell do you take me for?” he said. “What you trying to—get over?”

A man spurned and taunted is subject to the same recoils as a woman, and Rose-Ann was, now, prey for all the evil in Donaldson’s nature. He realized that she was not what he had, in his brutal thought, first imagined; her part in Manville’s scheme was different from Whilla Brookes’s—that was clear enough, but for that very reason she could be hurt more.

Apparently she was in the dark as to the true state of affairs; had come to the ranch ignorant and trusting—well, he’d enlighten her and set her wise!

In the moments that followed Rose-Ann was conscious of the hoof beats of the tired horses—she lashed her own horse to greater effort and Donaldson kept apace; she was conscious, too, of hideous words, heavy with a meaning that gave to her own weak doubts shape and colour. She was knowing truth in its baldest, nakedest form.

And then the man beside her, breathing quick and hard, took a new position. He seemed to be *with* her; not against her. While Whilla Brookes was outcast—a creature for any man's fancy, *she* was—of the select even while she was attacked by ugly brutality.

“Does Manville know that you are here?” Donaldson was abreast of Rose-Ann; his insolent face smiling.

“No!” The word was accompanied by a look of contempt. Donaldson laughed aloud.

“I thought so. You just came a-visiting without warning; with all your nice, clean little ideas of Manville packed up in your kit. Men like Manville have an Eastern and a Western code. See here, Mrs. Braintree, this is none of my business, I know, but ask this—this Mrs. Brookes—a few questions to-night. If I'm wrong I'm ready to beg her pardon and *your* mercy.

“God! a man can't see a thing like this pulled off without trying to save a woman like—you. I'm a stranger in these parts, but I've heard enough. Manville's whole outfit is common talk, and to think you were let in for this while he is—away!”

Rose-Ann plunged ahead. Her jaded horse had got his second wind and home was in sight!

Then, when safety was at hand, Rose-Ann drew up sharply and turned a white, haggard face on Donaldson.

“I did not know such vile men as you lived,” she said. “There is some reason for your doing what you have done and—and when I tell Mrs. Brookes about you, I hope she will let her people loose on you as she would upon a dangerous beast.”

Donaldson jerked his horse's head around and muttered an ugly word—then Rose-Ann was alone! Trembling and faint, she reached the cabin and dismounted.

As she staggered toward the house the door opened and Whilla Brookes, attended by young Dingley, came forth.

“Oh, but I am glad to see you,” Whilla cried, rushing to her, “we were about to start out to ride the ranges. You've

given us a big scare and yourself, too, I fear"; her arms were around Rose-Ann.

"Come, come, child! You're all right now"; for Rose-Ann was struggling with a desire to sob aloud; "there's a letter for you—good news, I hope, but you shall not read a word until you've eaten.

"Hurry in, Dingley, and see that things are ready."

Rose-Ann followed instructions weakly. She let Whilla make her comfortable; she glanced at the letter—it was from the Boston lawyer!—and she ate the hot, stimulating food, but she was in a strange state of mind. It was like being in the fog that had earlier swallowed her—she was dreaming still; she could not rid herself of that impression.

## CHAPTER XIX

**B**Y THE time the meal was eaten and cleared away Rose-Ann began to feel more like herself. She laughed at her collapse and then told of meeting the man—Donaldson. At the sound of that name, Whilla Brookes, who was bending over the fire with a log in her hand, turned sharply.

“Donaldson?” she repeated. Then: “Did he frighten you, Rose-Ann?”

“No.” Slowly, cautiously Rose-Ann measured her words. “He shared his fire, and guided me to within sight of the cabin. I think my fright was due to my own bugaboos—the fog was terrible; it was like being part of the ocean.”

“Donaldson”—Whilla Brookes turned back to the fire—“has been hanging about the Lone Two mines. The boys had an encounter with him the other day; drove him off, in fact. He might have done some harm in revenge—but hardly to you. I’m a bit shaken myself.”

She let the log fall on the red embers and returned to her chair beside Rose-Ann.

“I’m glad he’s decenter than he might have been,” she said. “Did he know who you were, Rose-Ann, before he saw where you were coming?”

“Yes. I told him. We had to talk a little as—we rode down.”

A tone of relief was in Rose-Ann’s voice. As in a broad flash of light—her fears melted away. She recalled the night when Dingley sang, and Whilla was warned of the prowler near the Lone Two mines. She connected that with the recent encounter with Whilla’s men.

“Of course!” she thought; “but how dared he! How

could he be so—vile? Still it accounts for him. I knew there was something!”

With the relief came a rallying of all her forces. Nothing seemed really to matter, after all—she was going home; going back to her place with a memory of Whilla’s goodness—nothing could take that from her. Except for Whilla’s goodness things might have been terrible. Whilla had accepted her—without question. She could accept Whilla on the same terms. A great danger had been passed—they were safe; she and Whilla! Presently things would be in Manville’s house as they had been before her madness had brought her to his doors. Whilla’s goodness; goodness!

That was supreme. Barry had once said that one could be peeled like—what was it? oh! an artichoke—before reaching the real person. And even—Rose-Ann was looking dreamily at Whilla as she sat drooping in her chair, the firelight playing over her—even if—— Well! the goodness remained. The *goodness* was Whilla!

She could always hold to that. She knew and understood as she knew and understood about those other women in Middle Essex—women hiding behind shuttered windows; women whose souls were penned by a cruel law that worked only evil and suffering. Her experience had given her a deep understanding.

Whilla’s soul was free. Whilla was good. Manville had not killed the goodness in Whilla no matter—— A quick, indrawn breath startled Whilla.

“I thought you were asleep,” she said, looking keenly into the wide, dark-rimmed eyes.

“I must have been, and I dreamed.”

“A frightening dream?”

“No. A good one. I am quite all right now, Whilla. But I’m tired—I must go to bed.”

“You have not read your letter.” Whilla glanced at the envelope lying under Rose-Ann’s clasped hands. She was curious about it; was counting on the effect of its contents.

“It is only business. It is from my lawyer.”

Rose-Ann looked at it wearily. It had disappointed her

cruelly—she had felt that Barry, once he knew of her whereabouts, would have written.

“Still,” Rose-Ann went on, “I must see what he has to say.”

As she opened the envelope an enclosure dropped from it which Whilla picked up, holding it until it was wanted.

The room was so quiet that the crackling of the logs, the ticking of the clock, sounded explosive.

It is said that when a surgeon thrusts his knife into an unconscious patient there is an involuntary shrinking of the muscles—as if the spirit were recoiling from the hurt done to the body.

And so Rose-Ann, now, shuddered and lifted her terrified eyes to Whilla Brookes. She did not feel pain and her mind had never been clearer, more alert.

“Barry Compton is dead!” she said in a voice that brought Whilla to her feet.

“Dead! He—he killed himself because—he could not stand life any longer. His will—is in that envelope you have, Whilla—and his letter to me. I—I cannot read them now.”

Rose-Ann tried to reach for the package in Whilla’s hands, but her own dropped nervelessly.

“Barry,” she repeated as if Whilla must be made to understand. “Barry, you know—Barry Compton.”

Pressing her hands on the arms of her chair, Rose-Ann struggled to her feet. As she stood so, twisted and unsteady, her eyes dark and vague, she made a tragic appeal to Whilla Brookes. She looked terribly ill, too, and this added fear to all other emotions.

The little that she really knew of Rose-Ann’s trouble, the reticence that had shielded the intimate facts combined, now, to bewilder and alarm Whilla. She realized, too, that almost unconsciously she had relied upon Barry Compton—the friend of Manville and Rose-Ann.

His death shattered a very definite hold she had had upon the intangible situation that had so disordered her life. Still the one absorbing thought at the moment was, that Rose-Ann looked desperately ill and that something must be done.

“Oh! I wish I could help you, Rose-Ann,” she said, and came nearer. “What can I do?”

“Nothing, Whilla. I must be alone and try to think. Isn’t it queer how one can know things and not be able to think them?”

Rose-Ann began to move unsteadily toward her bedroom door.

“Let me sleep in your room, Rose-Ann!” Whilla pleaded, but started back at Rose-Ann’s laugh and words.

“Sleep? Sleep, Whilla? Why—I am not going to sleep—I must think.” Then more calmly: “I will call you—if I need anything.”

“You promise, Rose-Ann?”

“Yes.” The door was reached and opened; almost apologetically it was closed, and Whilla stood alone in the centre of the room which suddenly seemed strange and fearfully empty.

Mechanically she walked back to the fire, and sitting down drew from her pocket a letter about which she had said nothing. It was from Africa; from Manville.

Almost as if it were the possession of another with which she had no right, she tore it open and read.

Manville had secured his man! The written words seemed to convey Manville’s exaltation and then he ran on boyishly, confidently, in quite the simple, frank way that made his letters so like himself:

I’m going to investigate the work here—it will take the best part of this year, but it will make a second trip unnecessary and that’s the big thing.

I’ve tasted the fruit of victory, my dear; I see my dreams materializing, but above all else I have learned that nothing can ever equal the joy of the vision. The “whisper” Kipling called it. The things I heard and saw before they—were.

There was more. Details of business; confidence in the management of his affairs and he was—“always the same old Eric.”



Whilla folded the sheets and returned them to her pocket. Then carefully, noiselessly she banked the fire, bolted the door, and walked, as a sleep walker might, to her bedroom.

Whilla did not go to bed, though she did take off her gown and replace it by a warm house robe. There was a little fire on her hearth and she fed it gradually with pine knots until the room was in a red glow, and very warm. But Whilla was cold; not even when the temperature rose could she feel the warmth; nothing seemed to penetrate the clammy surface of her flesh.

The hours passed unheeded; Whilla only moved to lay more wood on the hearth—but she was reviewing her life with Manville and, in a numb, senseless way trying to make herself believe that it was—going on; that nothing was changed; while, combating it like another's reasoning, was the knowledge that it was over and ended.

And in the room beyond Rose-Ann kept her lonely vigil, trying hard, hard to think.

“If I only could feel,” she moaned, “I could bear it better. I *am* suffering, but I cannot feel.”

It was nearly midnight when, dizzy and faint, she lay down upon the bed.

She had been sitting by the window watching, with unseeing eyes, the moon ride radiantly across the open space between the pointed pines. The fire on the hearth died down—there were only smouldering ashes at last, and a dreary chill crept into the room.

The bed was warm and soft and because Rose-Ann was young, her brain refused to receive any further impressions. Youth protects itself when life presses too close.

Sleep, deep dreamless sleep, fell upon her and she did not move or, seemingly, breathe.

Then suddenly she opened her eyes. She was fully conscious, but she could not move. The blackness of the night was horrible. No “velvet” blackness this, but ebony and hard. It bound her; she felt as she might in her coffin.

“Oh! it is like being buried alive,” she faltered, and her whisper only frightened her the more. “It’s like being buried alive. Oh!”

Suddenly the blackness outside was slashed by a vivid dart of lightning and rumbling thunder shook the hills.

Rose-Ann sat up in bed—she had broken her bonds; but a queer and overpowering horror set her trembling.

She was remembering something Prudence had once said to her—Prudence, of all people!

“I cannot explain, Rose-Ann, you know I’m not fanciful—but it is like God speaking. It’s—awful and wonderful; the hidden life—demanding recognition!”

As Rose-Ann sat shivering upon her bed in the hard darkness, broken now and again by those knife-like, lurid flashes, all that had gone before was swept from her hold. Helpless, dismayed, she simply repeated:

“God! God!” as a child calls for help in the dark. And then she remembered Whilla Brookes! There was no one in all the world but Whilla, and her, and God! Softly she got up, put on her robe and slippers, and went to Whilla’s door and tapped.

“Come in!” The prompt, calm command steadied Rose-Ann. It was like finding another living creature in a space where all else had been blasted.

“You are ill, Rose-Ann?” Whilla in her long, loose gown rose from the hearth and stood, more like a tall angel than ever, in the middle of the room.

“I have a little fire,” she said, piling on more wood. “I thought, perhaps—you might come. Sit here. There, now, don’t look like that! I’ll put this blanket around you, Rose-Ann. Listen to me—there’s nothing in the world worth—such agony—nothing!”

Rose-Ann looked up at the woman bending over her; she saw the great, enveloping pity and misery in the wide eyes. Again she experienced that sense of absolute trust in the woman near her that she had felt before. Trust that was not founded on what she hoped of her, but trust that had its birth in what Whilla *was*.

“Poor girl!” Whilla did not move nearer, but she seemed to be taking Rose-Ann in her arms.

“Whilla, I am going to have a child!”

What Rose-Ann expected she herself did not know, but to see Whilla remain standing with that divine light still in her eyes was more of a shock than anything that might have happened had she recoiled from her.

“Yes; I know, Rose-Ann.”

“You know?”

“Yes. I had suspected. To-night I knew. I know now that I always knew.”

“Whilla, I want to die; I think I shall die!”

“No, you must not die. You and I must fight this out together, Rose-Ann. You and I.”

“What for?” The absolute defeat in the shaking voice reached Whilla’s highest and lowest nature.

“What for?” she repeated, and gave a hard, cold laugh.—“What for? Why, to show what two wronged women can do—when they unite forces. We—we trusted him, you and I. You, in your fashion; I in mine. With me—he was playing a fair enough game. I had no right to—to morals or—to respect, at least he—his kind think that. But I had—we all do, we women, we have shreds and patches at least of ideals. But you!—how—dared he?”

Through the flow of this bitter denunciation Rose-Ann sat petrified. She tried to speak; to stop the cruel tone and words, but her dry tongue and lips seemed to burn the words before they were uttered.

Presently, however, she struggled to her feet—she staggered to Whilla and clutched her arms:

“Stop!” The word came explosively.

“Stop! You—you are wrong. My child is not—his. Not Eric Manville’s.”

At this Whilla laughed.

“You are going to shield him,” she asked, “against me? You are not going to be with me? Me?”

“Whilla, you must listen to me. Look in my eyes! I—I believe God is here—here with you and me. I may die—and

soon. As I hope for God's pity, I am telling you the truth. My husband is the father of my child! Don't you see?" Here Rose-Ann clung wildly to Whilla.

"It is so terribly simple and true that it seems impossible, but you must believe me—you must! You must let me tell you everything—you must listen to me. Sit down. While you stand there I am afraid of you."

Whilla's eyes were searching the wide, fear-filled ones raised pleadingly to her; without lowering her intense gaze she dropped upon the rug before the fire.

All the false, the unsubstantial foundations upon which they two had been living crumbled now, but there was still something left; some primitive verities that could either be turned to helpfulness—or utter demoralization. What each had thought of the other, but had not dared express, flared forth now, and between them stood the one man who must be vindicated at whatever cost.

"Your husband is the father of your child?" Whilla's words came monotonously. "And you left your husband for another man?"

The code of Whilla Brookes, battered and soiled as it was, rose protectingly before her, and from it Rose-Ann shrank back, covering her face with both hands.

Whilla Brookes talked on. She seemed to have forgotten Rose-Ann and her misery, her physical need. Sitting upon the floor, her knees gathered in her arms, she looked a veritable Nemesis bent upon disclosing everything that shrouded the truth that must, in some way, make them all free.

"This—this child," she asked—"was it—forced upon you? Did you hate your husband?"

"No! I loved him. Above anything I wanted a child—back there."

"Do you, Rose-Ann, hate your husband now?"

It sounded like a perverted marriage service.

"I hate—what he tried to do—to me."

The sudden fierceness startled Whilla.

"He tried to break me—he tried to make me fear what he might do to me. He would not let me be myself. His

silent disapproval was enough, but when he tried his brute strength—that ended it!”

Almost, Whilla believed that it had, so tense and unflinching were Rose-Ann’s face and tone.

“Very well!” she murmured, “but did you think you could gain anything by running away? Why did you come here? Rose-Ann, what have you done to us all?”

The last question bowed Rose-Ann’s head.

“I want to die!” she moaned piteously.

“No!” Whilla flung back at her. “No! you do not want to die. You must see this thing through.” Then, more gently, for the haggard face made its human appeal: “And, Rose-Ann, I mean to help you, if you can trust me absolutely.”

“I do trust you, Whilla. I will do what I can. Oh! can you not see how things, not evil in themselves, may look black as sin? Can you not believe that sometimes one has to learn, through being driven by the weakness in him—not the strength?”

“Yes, I can see and believe all that, Rose-Ann, but we must not learn at another’s expense, we cannot make another pay.”

“Oh! I see that now—I see that.”

Rose-Ann shivered and instantly Whilla turned and replenished the fire.

“I would insist upon your going to bed, Rose-Ann,” she said, and her white, drawn face was grave and sympathetic—“but I know neither you nor I could go on living even for an hour until—we have swept the doubts aside and can begin right—for the sake of your child!”

Rose-Ann sobbed.

“I am going to tell you something, Rose-Ann, about myself, for, when all is said and done, we stand, side by side, where Eric Manville is concerned. It’s up to us.”

Rose-Ann’s sobbing ceased, but she did not recoil.

“We women can tangle a man’s life until it is—hell,” Whilla went on, “but the test comes when we show what we are willing to do for him.”

Rose-Ann longed above all else to repudiate violently the part she had played in Eric Manville's life; it all seemed so trivial in the face of present realities, so trivial, and so mad. But Whilla Brookes sternly held to her determination.

"We cannot undo the past, Rose-Ann. We must deal with it if we are to have any peace from now on. I know the world better than you do—I've had to know it at close quarters. A woman does not, even when driven, as you say you were, come to a man without some reason for doing so. No woman feels as I do, as I have felt since you came to this house—without a reason! You must see that. We must understand, you and I, for the time has come, as it always does in the lives of men and women, when sacrifice counts.

"I am going to tell you about myself."

Rose-Ann put her hands out as if warding off a blow, but Whilla disregarded them.

"I'm going to tell you this, because it must weigh with you, perhaps more than with me."

Whilla's dark head bent, not as a penitent before its confessor, but as a woman whose crown rested too heavily.

"I was like you once, Rose-Ann. I had a home, a husband, a child. She was so lovely—my little girl—her name was—Helen!"

This seemed to matter immensely.—"Helen!" Whilla repeated it tenderly.

"I married for love, Rose-Ann; love as a girl of seventeen knows it. He was older; a man of the world with the false glamour that so often appeals to the ignorance of a girl. I married with a fearful sense of duty—duty such as men, some men, teach to women. Duty to *them*; to their sins even; their desires. He had his life apart from mine. I later found that out—I forgave; believed again and again. I thought, yes, God hearing me—the God you say is here—Rose-Ann, I thought I was doing my duty! When my heart almost broke, I still had a kind of glory in doing my duty.

"Then, my sudden awakening came. My little girl was stricken with disease; she was paying the awful price of *my* duty!

"You do not understand?" For Rose-Ann's horrified eyes searched Whilla's as, for an instant, she turned.

"You do not understand? What does our Puritan upbringing mean by not telling us *all* the truth? It hands down its iron virtues—and it forgets that it hands down its secret crimes as well.

"Unto the third and fourth generation, Rose-Ann—what does that mean? Oh! we'll learn some day; some day. My—little girl died—my Helen.

"There was a look in her eyes that I shall never forget—an old, old look. At first it seemed to ask why I let *her* pay? And then"—Whilla choked, but struggled on—"just at the last—it was the look that the Bible says Christ had on the cross—it made me know that she, that little girl, was forgiving me—because I had not known what I did!

"But I knew then. My God, *how* I knew! But something of my sense of duty held. When she was dead—my Helen—I said I'd stay on and do my duty—as I saw it! There should be no other little children with that look in their dying eyes. They shouldn't pay! I refused to be my husband's wife!

"And then"—Whilla got up suddenly and flung her arms above her head—"and then that man who had defied every code grew virtuous. Good God! virtuous. And the law stood by him—I had deserted him—deserted him. The law made him free of *me*. I had no money to fight him—he had seen to that. He held it over me. He would not divorce me—that was his revenge——"

Outside a storm beat against the log house, but neither woman noticed it. The low-hanging clouds were full of thunder and the lightning cut and darted like some mad thing seeking to destroy. Rose-Ann's physical suffering had passed. She was spiritually dominated. Life was being revealed.

Then Whilla came back to the fire. She leaned one arm on the shelf above the fireboard and looked down at Rose-Ann, whose lifted face was transfigured. In the girlish eyes there was an expression of wonder, acceptance. They had

looked into the depths; the body was paralyzed by what the soul had seen! Rose-Ann did not move—but she smiled at Whilla.

“And then,” Whilla went on evenly, “I let go. I was desperate, lonely—I knew how men felt when they justified themselves by smashing their own damnable laws. I vowed to steal for myself—and let it go at that.

“I came out here—with a man; a good sort, too. We had a cabin up by Black Swan Mine—it’s a good fifty miles from here. Manville drifted there—seven years ago. He’d been broken on the wheel, too—we all had, and we clung together. Then my man died—fell, he and Manville into a shaft—Manville was not much hurt and I nursed him.

“And then we kept on together—we made a good working team, we prospered. Someone in England was backing him; is backing him now—and I—filled in. What we touched panned out well and I knew he was happier.

“He didn’t trust me at first—men don’t, you know, even when they say they do—to hold you! I did not try to make him trust by talk. I was necessary to him; I saw that and I got to—to placing him where better women place God—for he was so kind; so kind, and he never dragged me down.

“Rose-Ann, he’s God’s man, though you may not think it. I didn’t, when I thought he’d harmed you. That was what crazed me to-night. You’ve given him back to me—that’s what you’ve done. And now we can play fair.

“He doesn’t know, but I’ve fended men off, the men, wolves, with a pistol. I thought it was one of them the night you came. Such as I was, I’ve kept myself, for Manville. After a time, he wanted to marry me—make me respectable!” Whilla gave a laugh that hurt, as a child’s sob does. “As if he could! As if any man could *make* a woman respectable!

“I’d have been base enough had I let him. That was my code—always the open door for us; the open door and the free road. And then—you came.

“It’s all right, Rose-Ann, here we are, you and I. We’ll keep together—Manville will not be back for months—I



had a letter to-day. When he comes, he must choose; and you, Rose-Ann, you and I must stand as women do—when a big love gets them. I've had my day—he's cleaned up my soul where another man fouled it. He's made it possible for me to believe in men—and for me that meant redemption.

“That's all, Rose-Ann, except your little child. We've got to make it safe or there'll be no peace for either of us, Rose-Ann!”

Never was Whilla to forget the face of Rose-Ann at that moment. There was no need of words; there never is when souls are bare.

“Whilla, Whilla! Oh, my God! to think that I, from my silly desire for—for my freedom—should have brought about this terrible thing.

“Why, I used myself to hurt my husband. I hardly thought of Eric Manville in the way you think—I was mad, and like a child I took the sacredest things at hand to—to hurt with. I did not count the cost—I only dealt the blow. And this, this has come of it—this!”

And then, as a flower wilts when a blighting frost strikes it, Rose-Ann sank in her chair—her closed eyes and her blank face struck fear to the heart of Whilla Brookes.

## CHAPTER XX

THE weeks and months that followed the night of confessions and storm Rose-Ann was always to believe were the ones that gave her, for ever, possession of herself. In them she suffered, but to grow in strength and purpose. Her old self was torn to shreds and left helpless, but her new self rose supreme.

With all her innate prejudices of right and wrong, good and bad, shattered, she at last saw Whilla and Manville as big souls who had escaped the furnace, bearing no odour of fire upon them.

And yet, calm and at last ready to accept and plan her life, she knew that she was not as they were; that which had gone into her making could not be discounted and cast aside. As one may regard the native of another, perhaps a fairer, country, equal and greatly to be admired, but still a stranger to him, so Rose-Ann felt toward Whilla and Manville. They were not of her country—that was all. Life's experience had carried them to a haven apart from hers.

“My dear,” Whilla had said to her two days after the night of confession, “I cannot advise you to go back to your people now.”

Rose-Ann had, between her intervals of physical weakness, laid all that remained of her own pitiful past bare to the woman who watched and tended her; “and I do not agree with you—now that I see the whole thing—that it is so small a trouble that drove you forth. It is a very real and bitter thing that would kill love sooner or later. Had your husband shown one inclination to meet you by acknowledging his wrong, I would feel different.”

“He could not, thinking what he does of me,” Rose-Ann broke in.

“But he must have time to think it out—if it is in him to think back to himself,” Whilla insisted. “Were you to go now, he never could, never!”

“It is that spectre—oh! I know it—that shields him from himself, but lays you bare, that would do again what it has done now.

“No, Rose-Ann—leave things to that God of yours for a time. You have a big job on hand—live here in peace; patience—and when you have your child *and* yourself, go back.”

And to this reasoning Rose-Ann listened. She was weak and spent; the courage of her day on the sun-warmed rocks was gone. To go home and make her place now, to go back with no Barry Compton to sustain her while she made her fight for reinstatement on safer, juster terms, was impossible.

There was bitter truth, too, in what Whilla said. Her people knew now where she was—and their silence sealed the present. She must make her struggle for her child—that was the only thing that she could do to retrieve the folly of the past. She was comforted, too, by the knowledge that her condition had been responsible for much of her madness, and she must guard against further mistakes which would certainly occur were she to seek, in her present state, to reach an understanding.

No, she must rest, wait, and the only thing that roused fear in her was Manville's possible return.

“He never would come without warning,” Whilla reassured her—“and each mail brings letters.”

And so, as one meets the inevitable with a calm born of resignation, Rose-Ann ceased to struggle and gave her thought to the little life that had had its beginning in love and faith and must look to her for its safe return to them.

There were hours, however, when the dull reprieve from suffering left Rose-Ann incapable of rising above the fears that haunted her.

“If I should die, Whilla,” she said one evening as they sat before the fire, “and some women do, you know—I want

you to take my baby home and tell my husband. Sometimes I think that is the one way out."

"Good Lord!" Whilla exclaimed; "how we women do look to death to solve our problems for us. It's your heredity, my dear, that makes such a coward of you. It's been the curse of women. They fight up to a certain point and then fly the white flag.

"You are not going to die and you're going to see this through!" Then, after a moment of reflection:

"See here, there's a woman at Bear Creek who I was going to send for later—but I'm going to get her here now to pump some common sense into you, my dear. She has never lost a mother or child, and she has a slogan that has made her famous: 'God, who made burdens, made backs.' She will bring you to terms, Rose-Ann."

The truth was that Whilla Brookes was feeling the strain she had submitted herself to. Do what she would—and she brought to bear all the facts as she now knew them—there were hours when she faced the day of Manville's return, and his knowing of what had occurred, with positive terror.

Rose-Ann might sincerely believe what she had said—and Whilla did not doubt that; but the vital truth remained that in her hour of revolt it was to Manville that she had turned. What had occurred to make her use that weapon for her threat?

And Manville—how would it affect him, this strange, unthinkable thing with its piteous, tragic setting?

If the hardness of the Puritan mind refused to accept Rose-Ann; if it left her and her child stranded—how would that affect Manville?

And so, torn and driven from her course by her own doubts, Whilla sent for Aunty Day.

The blessed soul came within a week. She came riding astride a husky mule. Her clothing was rough but picturesque; her face bore the marks of contact with a life that had never been made gentle for her, but God had kept her eyes for His own purposes. Through them He seemed to look with deep and abiding love and faith. Into those eyes little

children smiled, and in them sinners found that expression that was—absolution.

“Let me have a corner to myself,” she had demanded of Whilla when she arrived; “there are times when I’m best alone.”

And so Whilla gave her a cabin close to Rose-Ann’s bedroom window.

“Good!” she had exclaimed; “and when she wants me she’ll set a candle on the casement and I can trot over and no one be the wiser.”

With that she went into her cabin and, an hour later, came up to Whilla’s in clean brown linen and an air of capable cheerfulness that purified the dulness at once.

“Well,” she said, “what is it, my dear? Just get on your feet and come here.”

Whilla, who was alone, sprang up and stretched out her hands.

“This case is too big for me!” she cried, and her eyes were full of terror.

“All right—the two of us can tackle it—God bucking us up. Where is she?”

Whilla nodded toward Rose-Ann’s door.

“She’s sleeping now,” she whispered.

The fierce, quick words struck the older woman as a cry from a hurt child might have done. She knew a good deal about Rose-Ann—the telepathy of the hills had included her—but she knew more about Whilla Brookes.

“There, there,” she murmured, patting Whilla’s arm; “don’t forget. God and burdens and backs!”

When Rose-Ann awakened it was midnight and a high, dry wind was beating against the cabin from the northwest. A candle flickered as if it heard the wind it could not feel and before the cheerful hearth a woman sat.

“Whilla!” Rose-Ann raised herself slowly and turned her tear-stained face to the firelight.

Aunty Day came across the room and—looked at Rose-Ann.

Presently the girl's arms reached out and the older woman bent close.

"I am *so* frightened," whispered Rose-Ann. "I know who you are—and why you have come. Oh! I am so afraid."

Aunty Day crooned her slogan and soothed the girl in her arms.

"Besides," she said, "nothing's going to happen now. I just chanced getting here before a storm. My cabin is right off there"—she nodded toward the window; "and I'm going over there now to get a good night's sleep—if you want me—put your candle in the casement—there's something in me that doesn't sleep; that keeps watch!"

Rose-Ann rallied from the hour of Aunty Day's coming.

The autumn faded and winter brooded on the peaks. A white, still winter that shut them away close from all the world. Occasionally the stage rumbled up and later the stage became a sled—it was their only link with the outside.

The three women and the men of the ranch were a small, loyal group, and though no one spoke of it, the coming of a little child made them tender and kind. Rose-Ann was the centre of the isolated family. Around the fire they waxed jolly—for her sake. When she smiled their hearts rose in triumph—and she smiled sturdily. For her entertainment the merriest tales were told and the rough fellows, coming in from their tasks outside, danced and sang.

She grew to understand it all, at length, and valiantly did her share.

"That's the girl!" Aunty Day exclaimed, "and it's all telling, you may be sure. God and burdens and backs! And the baby being educated, as you might say, before it comes."

At Christmas, from out the depths of the snow, the boys brought a tree. Whilla had done the rest, and the day before Christmas the sled-stage came breaking through the drifts. No one ever forgot that Christmas eve. The little tree flashed; there were songs and dances and a jolly supper. Gifts and jokes—and Rose-Ann felt exalted by the meaning of it all.

But that night—she gropingly set her candle in her case-ment! And that which did not sleep in Aunty Day gave the alarm.

“Too soon by two months,” Aunty Day whispered to Whilla, “but the Lord ain’t losing sight of that fact.”

The winter night was still and white and a great blazing star stood over the log house as if to mark the place.

Through the hours of torture Rose-Ann clung to the firm hand that was always close. Hour after hour the quiet, elderly woman and Whilla Brookes shared the strange vigil.

When there was a space of peace, Rose-Ann seemed dreaming of Prudence, but it was Aunty Day that she saw.

And then she drifted, far, far—and when she looked back from her great distance, it was Braintree who seemed to stand close by the bed, where once Rose-Ann had rested, but where now a strange woman lay! Braintree was asking her—that strange, still woman, for *his child!*

And she was trying to lift it up to him—such a small, light burden, but her arms were weak.

And then, up to the place where Rose-Ann was, came a call. A pitiful, whining call. Somewhere she had heard that call before. It was when she had stood outside Prudence’s door, waiting, and baby Faith had made her plea.

Down, down from the great height came Rose-Ann. She felt her way through the darkness; often she seemed to be battling with something that was trying to hold her back. Then:

“Rose-Ann! dear heart!”

It was Whilla who spoke, and her tear-wet face was close; close and beseeching.

“Yes!” Rose-Ann whispered; “I’m here, Whilla.”

“And so is your little girl, my child, your baby!”

That was Aunty Day’s voice, of course, but what could she mean?

“I think”—Whilla was speaking—“I think if you put the baby where she can touch it, it would hold her. Quick, Aunty Day, quick!”

And then, just as Rose-Ann was floating back again to

her far high place, her hand, guided by Whilla's, touched a soft, warm body. A thrill spread over Rose-Ann—it was life; the tide had turned. That contact held—it was the world's way of holding women.

“My baby.”

Rose-Ann had accepted her child.

It was slow but safe sailing after that. The winter passed quickly, and the spring edged in wherever it could. The snow melted and the winds were soft; the birds began to sing and the bravest of the flowers took matters in their own hands—and pushed up to the glad, open sky.

Rose-Ann's baby was a beautiful baby and made up for its hurried appearance by a sweet goodness that seemed to say:

“I will make as little trouble as possible for any inconvenience I may have caused.”

She was “Baby” indoors and out. The youngest creature of stable or shed—was “Baby's”; the newest kitten and puppy were hers—all of their best was “Baby's.”

“But she'll have to have a name,” Whilla said one day. “I hate to have anything nameless.”

“I am thinking of that,” Rose-Ann said, and she looked like a snowflower with the sunrise on it.

And then, a week later, she looked at Whilla sitting with the baby on her breast. The grave face above the little sleeping one was majestic in its expression of maternity that had been called to renounce so much.

Near, and moving about like a benign spirit, was Auntie Day. These two women, at that moment, stood alone, and like protecting angels, to Rose-Ann.

“Helen Braintree!” she murmured. She did not realize that she spoke aloud, she was trying to familiarize herself with the new name.

“Helen Braintree!”

Whilla looked up and her face flamed as if a fire were behind it. Auntie Day stood still and—looked!

“That is my baby's name,” Rose-Ann said steadily; “and the strength of the hills is in it. It sounds big and kind and brave and sunny. It is wonderful.”



Without a word Whilla got up and came, bearing the baby, to Rose-Ann. She laid the child in the mother's uplifted arms and, bending, pressed her lips to Rose-Ann's ruddy hair. That was all. But in the act were consecration and gratitude.

It was in May that Rose-Ann and Whilla had the talk that shaped the next stretch of the road on ahead.

"Whilla, you had a letter to-day?"

"Yes, Rose-Ann; two. One was from that lawyer in Boston in reply to the letter you asked me to write.

"The Compton place will be kept—as its late owner and its present owner—desire."

"Thanks, Whilla, dear." Rose-Ann looked down upon the face of her sleeping baby. The child was stretched across her knees, relaxed and lovely.

"And the other letter, Whilla?"

"It was from Manville. He may be back in August."

Neither woman flinched.

"Whilla, I am going home!"

Whilla's eyes showed all that she dared not voice.

"Oh! I know. I suppose no other woman would do as I am about to do, Whilla, but I have decided. I realize that I closed all doors behind me. I have no feeling of being wronged. They do not know——"

"And they have never tried to find out!" Whilla broke in fiercely.

"I know—they would be like that, Whilla. I can see their point of view—I am of their breed, dear, but with a wider vision, thanks to you. You once said, before Baby came, that some day I must return. Well, the time has come.

"They do not understand, but *I* do, Whilla, and I am going—not as a penitent. I am going to the house Barry gave me; it will be as if he were there to welcome me; advise me."

Whilla Brookes's lips twitched. Her sense of humour rose.

"My dear, my dear," she said laughingly, "it is quite monstrous, you know, and one of those impossible New

England comic-tragedies that could only flourish on rocks and sea weed. They will never condone such a step. Forgive me, dear, but just consider. There are very serious things to adjust; don't complicate them. You ran away from home—to another man. You have stayed in the tents of the outlaws for nearly a year; you go back with a child and live in the town of your father and—of your deserted husband.

“Rose-Ann, you cannot do this. It is brutal to them and—impossible for you.”

Rose-Ann raised her fine eyes with the new strength and power in them.

“I see the truth of all you say, Whilla, but I am going back to Barry's house! I shall ask nothing and I know that little will be given me.

“There are hard, terrible things in those New England towns, Whilla. Families divided and unforgiving; gloomy houses—where love and friendliness never come. Oh! I know, I know; but I am going back and try——”

“What, Rose-Ann?”

“Try and see—what my baby can do.”

“She will be the cruellest part of it, Rose-Ann; the one unforgivable thing!”

“I do not think so.”

Whilla made no reply. In the firm face and voice of Rose-Ann she saw and felt the iron strain that marked her breed. If any woman could carry on the impossible thing, Rose-Ann could.

But Whilla saw more. Like one who had toiled to the highest peak of the range she saw far; far.

When Manville knew the marvellous, the tragically beautiful thing that had happened, there would be but one thing for him to do. Go, and do his part!

And when he saw Rose-Ann, in her lonely home with her child, when he realized the daring she had displayed, the suffering she had endured; then he would rise in wrath at the hardness that he could not break for her, but which would, in the end, break her, what else could he do—what else could any man do?

There might still be, for Whilla, the one supreme sacrifice; the supreme proving of herself. She must make it possible for Manville to follow his will and desire; that must be her task, no matter what the outcome might be. Life had borne them all far and wide—she must do her part!

The sunlight lay warm on the two women, but Whilla shivered.

“You are cold, Whilla?”

And Rose-Ann drew the soft blanket closer about her baby.

“Yes, thinking of you on your rockbound coast. Rose-Ann, it cannot be done. Go where you will, dear, but do not attempt slow suicide.”

But Rose-Ann merely smiled and bent to kiss the little awakening child.

Then after a long, adoring look:

“Whilla,” she said slowly, “I was not sure before, but it has come to me like a revelation to-day.

“My darling is wonderfully like her father! It is as if she came with proof. I am not afraid any more. Oh! Baby, Baby-sweet. You are not to be denied—are you? You—you chose your father, my baby-dear—and you will not let me defraud you.”

Rose-Ann was crying—the tears fell on the smiling baby face; the child crooned and lifted her rose-leaf hands as if to catch the drops.

Whilla came close and gazed upon the two.

“It’s all too big for me,” she said, as she had the night when Aunty Day appeared; then she flung her head back; her firm white throat pulsed.

“Good Lord, Rose-Ann,” she cried out, “this world is a comic show when you think about it, but if it gets you, makes you *feel*, then it is high tragedy.

“My dear, my dear, don’t let it get you!”

## CHAPTER XXI

**A**ND Rose-Ann, serious-eyed and frail, decided, late in May, to return to Middle Essex.

She insisted that she must go as she came, alone, though Whilla was eager to go with her—"part way, at least," she had pleaded, her heart heavy as she contemplated Rose-Ann's reception and, later, her own sense of loss.

But no; Rose-Ann once acknowledging that she had, in her revolt, sowed the whirlwind, demanded that she reap the harvest.

"Only so," she whimsically confided to Whilla, the night before her departure, "can women really go back! And it is the going back from the start, as fully as one can, that counts.

"The Canyon of Passing Spirits," she smiled wanly, "has life at both ends. I feel as if I were entering mine now."

Rose-Ann had not written to announce her arrival to any one but her lawyer. She had been in constant touch with him all winter while Barry's bequests were being faithfully carried out. Through him she had learned that the English maids had returned home, but that Cleaver had been requested to remain in Compton's house, "subject to her commands."

Rose-Ann had been greatly moved by this: had eagerly agreed to the request, but had put off writing direct to Cleaver for reasons that gradually closed in upon her, making it impossible for her to explain herself until such time as she was ready to go back to Middle Essex.

There were hours when Rose-Ann, recalling Whilla Brookes's doubt as to the paternity of her child, grew grave and apprehensive.

Her foolish hour of forgetfulness with Eric Manville had cost her much: much. But—and here Rose-Ann took courage—that hour had given more than it had taken. It had been the

beginning of her real revelation to herself: had, as such hours do, brought weakness and strength to the surface, with which to confront life. Rose-Ann had always said that she would be willing to pay for her experiences. Well! payday had come.

The triumph lay in the fact that the subtle fear that had heretofore stood between Braintree and her was gone. Not a vestige of it was left and, moreover, in her clearer vision of herself she was gradually able to set herself aside and see only the situation from the viewpoint of her people. *Her people.* In that lay the secret of the force that was sustaining her. They were peculiarly her people. That appearances weighed more with them than actual facts—caused her to be tolerant. It made her task a bit harder; her people would not abandon their position as readily as Whilla Brookes had—but she was prepared to pay in the coin of her people. There had been no real wrong, but to minds turned to a rigid code, her offence must be judged by the spirit, not the letter.

Where Whilla had doubted, her people had passed judgment! At this conclusion Rose-Ann set her lips grimly, even while her eyes grew tender.

And so it was that she decided to say nothing of her child until she had seen Braintree. Baldly she must give him all the facts. That was his due. After that a way would be opened. Rose-Ann felt very sure about that.

When the journey East was begun Rose-Ann's spirits rose. She did not hurry. When her baby grew restless or her own strength flagged, she waited over for a day or so and then went on refreshed.

The constant care of her child engrossed and fascinated her, and presently the likeness to Braintree obsessed her.

If ever God had placed His mark of vindication on any human being, He had put it upon Braintree's child. The resemblance to him was startling; even the little irregularities and defects were in evidence.

“Marks of identification,” Rose-Ann had once called them to Braintree while she counted the blemishes as things greatly to be admired.

“It’s like the fairy tale,” she had said: “‘What a funny twist to the right ear, my dear!’ ‘All the better to know you by!’”

“‘What a queer droop to the right eyelid, my dear!’”

“‘All the better to wink with, my dear!’”

“‘What a comical curve of your little finger, my dear!’”

“‘All the better to cling to!’”

How wonderful and happy and foolish it had been! The memory brought tears to Rose-Ann’s eyes and blotted out the precious baby-thing upon her lap with all the heart-breaking “defects” that must plead for her now.

Then, comparing that happy heedless time with the black hour when Braintree had tried his strength against hers, the tears dried suddenly and a sanctifying sense of justice came to her aid.

With the revulsion of feeling again came the knowledge that she had lost all fear of that Something that had stood between her and Braintree and which had driven them apart.

She knew that she could tell Braintree anything; everything. If he could not, or would not listen—well—then her task would be the harder, longer; but she was not dismayed. And as the train rattled merrily over the shining rails her thoughts swung into a tune that was like a lullaby.

From Chicago Rose-Ann wrote to Cleaver. She was to remain there a week and rest. She went to a quiet hotel and gave herself up to long nights of sleep and days of wandering in parks and by the lake side.

“I wish I could find you, dear Aunt Theodora,” she often thought—harking back to the kindly old woman she had met in the train on her way West; “what a comfort you would be.”

Always she scanned the faces of elderly women with a hungry, pitiful longing. Often women, age-touched women, would smile back into her seeking eyes; occasionally a friendly soul would sit with her in the warm spring sunshine and make her glad by her sympathy and companionship.

But Aunt Theodora did not materialize, and at the week-

end, when the train rolled out of Chicago, Rose-Ann thought, and her eyes were grave and deep:

“Oh! my dear, my dear, you only went half way—I went to the jumping-off place. I’ve paid your score and mine, dear—we can both rest now. I’ve seen what lies the other side of the top—you did not have that chance. I’ll tuck you up, safe and quiet, when we get home. God bless you, dear! We’re going back; back; back!”

And if

“thoughts are things and their gauzy wings,  
Are swifter than carrier doves”

—somewhere in the Middle West city an old lady stirred in her bed; smiled, perhaps, and knew a strange feeling of peace and happiness.

Little Helen was a marvellous traveller. She accepted the fortunes of the road with gurgling delight. Strangers, seeing that she was not to be a nuisance, greeted her with joy. She was passed about during her waking hours, and when she slept, which she did often and long, Rose-Ann, watching the blessed little face, felt safe.

As Whilla Brookes wisely had said, such a situation as Rose-Ann had evolved could never have flourished anywhere but in a New England community where the rockbound conventions and prejudices still held.

When Rose-Ann fled, certain grim facts had been accepted. She had abandoned her husband; her home; her family. She had outraged the plain decencies of life. That closed the doors and silenced the tongues—as far as those most affected were concerned. They never talked of Rose-Ann.

Of course Essex, more frank and untrammelled, had revelled in the scandal—but Middle Essex simply lifted its chin a little higher and ignored Essex.

If any one sought to find out where Rose-Ann was and with whom, he kept his investigation to himself. After all, what did it matter? The stern, appalling facts were enough to damn her; why add fuel to the blaze she had started?

Aunt Theodora had been no more surely consigned to outer darkness than was Rose-Ann.

When Essex showed signs of speaking of the affair, above whispers, it was Conklin who stamped the inclination to earth.

“By the Lord above!” he said to his daughters, “if I hear of your listening to, or spilling, any of this slime that is oozing around I’ll turn you out into it and let yer wade as best as yer can.”

And gradually, even in Essex, the mantle of silence had been dropped over Rose-Ann’s name.

Trevall, sterner, looking older, went regularly to the Bank and as regularly returned to his home, gazing from afar at its beautiful door and shining knocker. If he ever cringed in the emptiness and loneliness of his home, none knew. Prudence and Albert shared many of his evenings and always his Sundays—but they never mentioned Rose-Ann. Little Faith, alone, could bring a smile to the stern old face—she was a radiant child.

“Gramp,” she often said, kneeling on his lap and patting his mask-like features, “Baby wants to make-um buful!” With this she would turn the corners of his stern mouth up and kiss the tip of his thin, aristocratic nose.

“Now keep dat way!” she commanded.

On Braintree, the passing of Rose-Ann and the shock of Compton’s death had worked a strange change.

As silent as the others concerning the blow that had been dealt him, he expanded toward, rather than shrank from, his neighbours. He did several amazing and incomprehensible things.

After Compton’s death he had gone to Conklin and staggered that red-faced gentleman by suggesting that Compton’s work at the Torch Light should be carried on.

“I do not know how you feel,” he had said, “but it seems to me that we owe this to him.”

They did not try to enlighten each other further—perhaps they fully understood—but the Torch Light began to flare again ruddily.



Braintree ordered a bas-relief of Compton made, and had it placed back of the platform from which Compton had made his last appeal.

The getting-together that Conklin had suggested on that last night had brought about remarkable results that had the effect of humiliating Conklin.

“By God!” he often ejaculated, “Compton was nearer right than I. They do catch on—to a certain extent.” Gradually, he was working out a coöperative plan that the younger men eagerly accepted, and after Brady had been dismissed, for that was found necessary, the older men agreed to.

And the “principle” set in motion worked—the Conklin and Conklin Mills flourished, and while the Mill Tavern had its hissers, the Torch Light had its rooters.

Braintree could not easily adapt himself to personal service, nor could he feel a kinship for the youth of Essex which Compton had felt, but he was their friend and stood, financially, behind them who were gifted with the divine understanding which he lacked.

Then, not being able to endure the awful emptiness of his house, night after night, Braintree reached out for something to still the gnawing pain in his heart. He went often to Boston; heard the best music; saw the best plays and, when he did spend an evening at home, read books of which Trevall gravely disapproved.

“This is all wrong,” he had once said to Braintree as he fingered gingerly a volume of suspiciously new ideas.

“Oh! I don’t know,” Braintree replied; “that’s why I’m reading it.”

If life settled back into its groove as far as the Trevalls were concerned, it ran in a new groove for Braintree. Maggie, gaping a little now, stayed on and asked, about once a month, if “Missus was soon coming back.” With marvellous lack of tact she ignored the blank silence regarding Rose-Ann.

Braintree always replied that when Mrs. Braintree had finished her visit she would let them know.

Maggie was of the class that takes answers to her questions

as a hungry bird takes worms—unless they were too large and tough, she swallowed them.

Then Braintree began making additions and alterations on his house and grounds. He probably did not realize it himself, but these activities were largely controlled by the taste of Rose-Ann.

No one but Braintree's God—and that God was undergoing a change—knew how he suffered. Rose-Ann had been the one bright and shining thing in Braintree's austere life. Her song and laughter had warmed the silent places of his soul, and though he would have died rather than confess such weakness, he mourned, as few men ever mourn, her absence.

He worked harder at the Bank, too. Where ambition had never stirred before, it reared now. No one must think him beaten.

And so he moved among his fellow-men, and because he could not express his suffering, he suffered the more.

And then, like a stunning blow came the news that Rose-Ann was returning! Just that simple statement. Cleaver had announced it, via the servants, and the rumour spread like fire under the dry leaves of the forest.

"Returning—where?" Trevall looked at Prudence, who had brought the word to him fresh from the tongue of Patsy O'Brien, who had got it from the Compton house.

"Why, to the place Mr. Compton left, Father. I never heard of anything so shameless."

Trevall's face looked gray.

"What are you going to do, Father? What line of action will you take?"

"I shall not deviate from my course. Why should I?"

"But will you speak to her, Father?"

"Certainly. As I would to a stranger who had come among us."

This relieved Prudence. Of course she must do as her father did, but she could not hope to carry it on with his awful calm. Prudence could not forget, at times, the vision of Rose-Ann with little Faith on her breast. Rose-Ann had

that fatal appeal to the weakness in one, and during her absence the sweetness of her had lived on.

“What do you think William will do, Father?”

Trevall gazed surprisedly at his elder daughter.

“My dear, you amaze me. What should he do? He is a gentleman; he has lived uprightly and as a Christian should. If his wife has so little sense of decency as to put him to this test, he must meet it, as he has met all else, unflinchingly. Right cannot be conquered by evil, Prudence. Just reflect upon that.”

When Maggie heard the news from the Compton place she had a bad day.

Braintree came home tired from Boston. He had been away three days. He had telephoned to Maggie, earlier, and ordered his evening meal.

Maggie served the fragrant meal much as a sleepwalker might. She had managed to assemble the food and prepare it—but when it came to placing it before her master, she became fuddled.

The soup course passed triumphantly; then, instead of the steak, Maggie placed strawberries before him—red, luscious fruit from his own beds.

“What’s this?” Braintree asked, regarding the dish of berries as if they were poison.

“Them’s strawberries, sir.”

“Where’s the steak, Maggie, and vegetables?”

“My God!” muttered the girl, and withdrew the dessert and fled to the kitchen.

When she returned with the meat course on her tray, she was shedding tears. Braintree looked at her in real alarm.

“What’s the matter?” he asked.

“It’s that quare!” blubbered the girl. “I ain’t been decently treated like one as has served proper and faithful should have been.”

“What do you mean?” Braintree took up the carver and steel, and while he sharpened the knife he held Maggie with his stern young eyes.

“About the missus! She’s coming back!”

Braintree's heart gave an uncomfortable leap, but he began, calmly, cutting the steak.

"I do not care for gossip," he said coldly. "Pass the peas, Maggie."

"An' her living up ter Mr. Compton's place—all by herself"—Maggie was lost to the warnings filling the air. "'Tain't human and decent, that it ain't! An' her that was allas so comfortable to get on with." Then Maggie went to desperate lengths—she drew her ideals from Middle Essex but her tastes were formed at the moving picture theatre.

"There's them as do cover up blacker crimes than what the likes of her ever dreamed. If all was knowed——"

But Maggie got no further. Braintree paused with a luscious bit of meat half way to his mouth and said with terrifying calm:

"Place the potatoes and salad nearer me, Maggie, then leave the room."

The tone brought the girl to her senses.

"Oh! please, sir," she pleaded, "I'm axin' yer pardon. The heart of me has been aching the day—me tongue is me curse."

Braintree had never liked the girl so well.

"I'll excuse you, Maggie," he said quietly, "but remember, I will not have gossip brought here."

Maggie finished her day's task in silence and then went, as was the custom, to Prudence's for the night.

When Braintree was alone, he went to the telephone and called up Trevall. His face grew white and tense as he spoke and listened.

"Of course there is but one thing to do," he said at last. "Nothing; absolutely nothing. The house is her own, Trevall, she has a perfect right to occupy it."

Braintree slept little that night—but a cold morning bath always removed any marks of strain from his face. He whistled desperately, dramatically, as he performed his toilet and Maggie, below, reënforced by confidences she had shared with Patsy O'Brien, hissed between her teeth:

"The hard-heartedness of him! It's a crime, that it is.

Him an icicle—and her that sunny and free-like. I hope—God hearing me—I hope she brings *him* with her ter fling in their faces!” Maggie was referring to Manville.

Rose-Ann came into Middle Essex from Boston by automobile and she came by night.

Cleaver alone knew of her coming and he had tremblingly made ready for her. The old house was beautiful and flowers were in every vase; the windows opened to the sweet June air, while a welcoming fire glowed on the hearth of the library.

Cleaver had engaged a couple of maids from Boston a week earlier, and by the subtle magic that works such miracles, already these girls were agog with excitement and bent upon devoted loyalty to the coming mistress.

Cleaver was bending over the library table, as, unknown to him, Rose-Ann was rolling toward the house. He was polishing the rosewood table upon which Compton's defeated head had fallen. The mere doing of homely tasks gave Cleaver comfort—he seemed, now, to be smoothing the bowed head. And then—there came a tap on the window opening on the porch.

The old man started back—his face white and haggard. He knew not what to expect; anything; everything!

“I've come back, Cleaver!”

There stood Rose-Ann with that lovely light upon her pale face that Cleaver knew so well.

He went eagerly forward; he stretched out his arms and cried:

“My lady, my lady——” Then he paused, seeing what Rose-Ann carried.

“I'm very tired, Cleaver, and this—is my baby.”

“Yes, my lady.” Cleaver had accepted the staggering fact.

“And, Cleaver, I do not wish anything said about my baby until I have seen its father, to-morrow—or soon.”

“Yes, my lady.” And just how it happened neither of them ever knew, but Rose-Ann was seated by the fire; a tray of food was beside her and Cleaver was tiptoeing near the

door with every suggestion of shielding, with his life, the secret that the old library held.

The second evening of her homecoming Rose-Ann went to see Braintree but before that she had had a strangely beautiful night's rest and a day of calm. The baby's gentle gurgles and complaints had not reached beyond the discreetly closed doors of the rooms Cleaver had prepared against Rose-Ann's coming.

The maids had met their new mistress and had instantly become her champions. She represented a living example to them of suffering innocence triumphing over cruelty.

Facts, with them, did not count against the dramatic aspect of the case as they knew it.

Rose-Ann was Romance to them.

And Cleaver had told Rose-Ann of that last night when Compton had bidden him farewell. She had wept away all the bitterness; had come at the day's end to feel, as if more than ever before, that Barry was near her.

At two o'clock that wonderful day Andrew Conklin had called. Very simply Rose-Ann greeted him. Conklin looked red and uncomfortable, but Rose-Ann took his big hands in hers and said:

"You were Barry Compton's friend, I hope you can be mine."

"That's what I'm here to tell you, Mrs. Braintree." Conklin sat down heavily. They were in the library; he looked about the room with saddened eyes.

"I'm thinking you're going to be up against it," he said gravely; "but you can count on two or three things. I'm standing for you, down to Essex, and by God! I'm going to see fair play."

Rose-Ann smiled wanly.

"It goes against the grain of me," Conklin swept along—"all this starched stiff, God-to-goodness make-up that can't bend. It'll get smashed some day, that's what'll happen.

"Now, Mrs. Braintree, you're a rich woman and money can carry you some length on the road, believe me! Keep a

stiff lip—that's what I'm advising. Money and a stiff lip will pull you out.

"And the Torch Light, Mrs. Braintree, just you get your oar in there. They think of Compton—well, I guess they think of him as if they'd struck him down."

Rose-Ann's "stiff lip" was trembling, her eyes were full of tears.

"I am going to do my best," she faltered. "And I thank you, Mr. Conklin."

It was a fragrant starry night when Rose-Ann went to her old home. Maggie had departed. Braintree sat in the library under the electric light. The windows were open to sweet, warm darkness. Rose-Ann stood like a little ghost, and took in every detail. Like a spirit, too, she saw what many earth-held eyes might not have seen: the marks of care, everywhere, including Braintree himself. By a God-given sense, Rose-Ann understood!

She hardly knew how to make her presence known. She did not want to shock Braintree or take an undue advantage. She moved a bit closer to the French window and Braintree raised his head.

"Who is there?" he asked.

"It is I"—Rose-Ann almost added, "Billy"; the old familiar things had all but caught her, blotting out the present.

"Rose-Ann! You have come—here—to me?"

"Yes."

"I had anticipated an interview," Braintree rose and pointed to a chair—it happened to be Faith Trevall's little rocker. "I thought you might, in time, send for me."

Rose-Ann sat down, and the memory of her mother comforted her like clinging arms. She looked at Braintree and saw the struggle that he vainly sought to hide.

"I thought it best to come to you," she said.

Braintree was watching her. This was no penitent about to grovel at his feet.

"Why have you come?" he said coldly. "Surely, there must be some explanation."

"There is—but it isn't easy to explain," whispered Rose-Ann. "It all sounds so—so—unbelievable!" And then to her own undoing Rose-Ann smiled.

Had she not smiled, she would have wept aloud.

Braintree's face grew crimson and every line of his body stiffened.

"Oh! forgive me," Rose-Ann pleaded. "You see, it is like having lived through a fearful dream; seeing everything as if it were *so*; suffering—then waking and finding that it *isn't true*."

This was almost more than Braintree could stand. Every nerve tingled—his whole being was in revolt; but in the revolt was a flooding sense of joy that almost overpowered him.

"You have taken me by surprise; you have shocked me beyond expression," he began slowly, coldly. "Your coming here to Middle Essex at all is appalling. Your presence here, at this time of night, unannounced"—Braintree was gaining control of himself—"is, to put it plainly, outrageous, Rose-Ann. I must ask you to bring the interview to an end. If you desire it, I will call at—at your home in the presence of your father and your lawyer. What remains to be said—can be said then."

The smile was gone from Rose-Ann's face now—she was pale as if death touched her. She looked up at Braintree with pity and yearning in her lovely eyes. The hardness and cruelty of his voice did not reach her—she was looking at him, seeing the suffering he was enduring in that grim prison of his that his forbears had built around him. In every tone that repudiated her she heard the appeal that could not be killed. He wanted her—while he drove her from him! If she could crawl to his feet, sob out her contrition, he might raise her up—he might deal in that way with his conscience. But Rose-Ann made no move toward him—she was herself at last and as such he must recognize her.

"Billy," she whispered, and her eyes were full of tears that did not fall, "I wonder, if you found out that you had wronged someone—wronged her terribly—how would you feel?"



This was the most unfortunate thing Rose-Ann could have said at that strained moment.

It put Braintree on the defensive; it was an insult to his intelligence and honour.

“I cannot possibly comprehend you or your actions,” he began deliberately, “and I do not intend to carry this absurd situation any further.

“I do not form groundless opinions, Rose-Ann, you must do me that credit. When a woman leaves her home and husband for—for another man, certainly the husband has sufficient ground for forming rather a definite opinion. That you now care to return and are financially able to choose your course; that you care to defy public opinion and cause intense suffering to those whom you have wronged, is beyond reason—belief. Do you wish a divorce? If so, I will tell you decidedly, I will not give it. I do not believe in divorce. As you have made your bed, so lie upon it.”

Braintree rose. He was white and haggard.

“Through this all, Rose-Ann,” he said, as if pushing her finally out of his life, “I have thanked God there was no child. I can bear my part—but that would have been, I fear, beyond my endurance.”

Rose-Ann got upon her feet and stepped back toward the window through which she had entered; at the casement she stopped, held the drapery as if to steady her frail body and said gently:

“Billy, there is—a child. Yours! I came to tell you that!”

Braintree staggered under the blow.

“My God!” he breathed. “And you expect me to—to believe this? Rose-Ann, are you mad? What is it that you are trying to do?”

“No, I am not mad, now. I was when I went away. I have been—oh! I have been through hell, Billy—but I’ve seen heaven, too. I ran from a fear that was born in me—you did not understand, nor did I. I went to—to Eric Manville’s home, because in all the world he seemed the only one I could go to.

"I—I wanted to—to hurt you, Billy, because *I* was so terribly hurt—and I took the way that could hurt you most. I was mad; mad! But Manville was not there; he was, he still is, in South Africa." The dull details fell from Rose-Ann's lips as though she were defending herself upon a witness stand.

She saw, with a kind of desperation, that Braintree was disbelieving her; she was losing ground. What she had expected she hardly knew, but she realized that she was facing defeat. Still she must go on to the end; Braintree must have the bald facts.

She had come back in order to give them to him—she was not afraid, but she was hopeless.

"Whilla Brookes"—she hesitated and then went steadily on, covering a point that she knew would be vital to Braintree—"Whilla is—is Manville's housekeeper. They are not—married, but she is the most wonderful woman—so good. She made me stay; she was heavenly to me. Your child and mine was born there and now I have come back!

"You—you do not believe this?" Rose-Ann stretched out her hands. Her confused words sounded piteous.

"Certainly not." Braintree's eyes blazed. "Rose-Ann, I gave you credit for more common sense."

The situation was at last reduced to normal. The ugliness of it made Rose-Ann wince.

"Good-night," she said drearily.

"Good-night."

"Do you"—what was it that compelled Braintree to ask it?—"do you wish me to see you safely to your home?"

"No. I am quite, quite safe. I had to tell you the truth. Good-night."

And she was gone. For a moment Braintree stood rigidly looking at the window through which she had passed. The fragrance of the night came into the room; the curtains swayed.

Braintree was visualizing the future in the light of the amazing thing he had heard. Never had so brazen and monstrous a position been forced upon innocent people.

There was no pity or mercy, for the moment, in Braintree's mind. He was horrified beyond endurance. He saw only the desperate attempt of a defiant woman to reinstate herself in a community where she had no right to be.

"And Compton had made this possible!"

All this Braintree was conscious of, but a greater thing, for the moment, eluded him. Somewhere in the soul of him that had been borne through suffering, a voice pleaded for Rose-Ann. It declared that the amazing thing she had told was truth! It bade Braintree, with a note of warning, to withhold judgment as he valued the peace of his soul.

Warring against the inheritance of ages this newer element in Braintree tore and shook him. But he stood still in his quiet room, looking at the window through which the woman had passed with her mighty Truth or Falsehood.

"Which? Which?" At last Braintree sank in his chair and covered his eyes. He recovered slowly from the double shock he had endured—the physical presence of Rose-Ann and the knowledge of the child.

And from that night there was established in Middle Essex another New England tragedy that took on, at times, a guise of comedy.

Rose-Ann quite simply accepted her life conditions. She neither hid nor paraded her activities. She passed most of her time in Barry's home or his garden; but if on the street she met her father, Prudence, or a neighbour, she smiled her old bright smile and went her way.

"Good day, Father!"

"Good day, Rose-Ann!" (A stiff inclination of the head.)

"How do you do, Prue?"

"Rose-Ann!" (Gaspingly, and with a change of colour on Prudence's face.)

Occasionally Rose-Ann met Patsy O'Brien with little Faith. That was harder, but Patsy, as time went on, took a stand.

Conklin called and brought his daughters and, to his everlasting credit be it said, he had no personal feeling in the matter, he was seeing fair play according to his lights and his daughters were genuinely fond of Rose-Ann.

Of course the community was divided. Some thought in terms of tar and feathers, whipping post, and ducking stool; others, more modern, but none the less rigid, held Braintree in contempt for not freeing himself, and all others, from so trying a situation.

"There's the law!" these said. But it was left to poor little Patsy O'Brien to show the compassion that drove her onto the rocks.

It was two weeks after Rose-Ann's dramatic return that she bearded Prudence and Albert in their lair—the living room of their home. She had put little Faith to bed; wept copiously over her; packed her bag—it was standing on the back porch, and arrayed herself in her outdoor trappings, then took her stand.

"Where are you going, Patsy?" Prudence looked up from her book and Albert, who was dozing, opened his eyes; "this is not your night out."

"Yes'm, it is that!" Patsy said grimly.

"What do you mean?" It was Albert who spoke. As master of his house, he was alert at once.

Patsy began to sob.

"If it wasn't for the baby," she said, "I might stick it out and hurl rocks like the rest of yer—only I wouldn't, remembering as how she stood by me!" The girl's eyes flashed through her tears. "I mean," she qualified, "that I mightn't leave yer—but I've seen the baby of—of her yer all trying to kill—but you won't! 'Tis the lie that baby is giving yer all. 'Tis the spinking, spanking image of himself—Mr. Braintree."

"Girl!" Albert's voice shook with anger. "How dare you!"

Patsy, at bay, was equal to any emergency.

"I dare tell the truth, God hearing me!" she flung back, sniffing miserably. "God's writ clear and plain on that blessed's face. He'll down yer all with it some day. I can't see the loikes of that lamb left to the mercy of a stiff-starched maid as has never had a child of her own—and couldn't, heaven help her! I'm going to see that the child has a good

chance to—to—” Patsy faltered—“to get the best of ye all,” she ended weakly.

“Patsy, go pack your clothes.” Prudence was white and trembling, the end of her nose was red.

“They’re packed, ma’am, and on the back porch.”

“If you go to Mr. Compton’s house,” Albert broke in, “you will never return here.”

“I’ve counted on that, sir.”

“And”—this with a severity that surprised even Prudence Townsend flung out—“never, under any circumstances, permit that child to come in contact with Faith.”

There was a silence, then Patsy struck a telling blow.

“I’ll not put myself out, sir, to force one lamb on the other. But far be it from me, sir, to fly in the face of Providence, if He takes things in His own hands on the public highway.”

With that Patsy, shaking with emotion, strode out into the night and made her way to Rose-Ann.

## CHAPTER XXII

**T**HE autumn came early to Lone Two Ranch that year.

Whilla Brookes, living in a state of strange emotions, was alone with the men. After Rose-Ann's departure she experienced such a sense of detachment as she had never known. She was, essentially, a woman's woman; a mother of the world. Her natural bent had been distorted, but deep in her heart she had not changed. She had strayed into the camp of men; had shared with them danger and hardship; primitive passion and—yes, loyal affection. She, who might have brooded dreamily over many children, had learned to protect her shreds of honour at the pistol's point in a wilderness where the codes were simple and crude and the morals matched them.

The last beautiful and tender thing in Whilla's life seemed to fade with the going of Rose-Ann and her baby. In the night she would often rouse suddenly, sit up breathing hard, and think she heard the child's soft call.

Often, bending over her lonely fire, her grave, fine face resting in her hands, she would listen to the rain or hail outside and fancy that she heard Rose-Ann, again, tapping on the door.

That she had done a big and noble thing herself did not occur to Whilla—she had but followed the code of the ranges and the dictates of her own true soul, that had not been scorched or burnt, as she had passed through the trials that had battered her lesser self.

She had kept busy, exhaustingly busy, through July and early August. Desperately, with the only hope that was left her, she looked to Manville's interests; she ate carefully; regularly. She took keen interest in her appearance.

She meant, while giving Rose-Ann every chance and Manville all the freedom she believed he deserved in spite of his relations with her, to be just to herself. She meant to stand before the final bar of judgment at her best. He should not pity her.

There was no one to tell Whilla Brookes how her beauty was gaining with the days. The physical care she gave to herself counted, but her beauty was growing from within. Wonderful thoughts came to her that had lain dormant for long years; her vision seemed to be quickened. As one with restored sight beholds the shades and tints that the more casual eye overlooks, so now she saw the trees, the tall pines with strong, broad, outstretched arms. They seemed generously blessing the world; they cast wide shadows that were like benedictions. Never had the skies been more blue to Whilla Brookes, nor the stars nearer, more friendly, than they were that summer. The little streams sang, where once they had gurgled along. The woman was living intimately with Nature and Nature was taking her into its safe and enduring care.

It was on the twenty-fifth of August that Whilla, coming down from the burnt timber, struck into the tall-pine trail, wearily. She had gone on foot—silently, cautiously, to discover what a curl of smoke, near one of Manville's waiting mines, might mean. She had come suddenly upon the group of men and caused them much trepidation. She stood tall and commanding and regarded them individually. Then she said quietly:

“You're to clear off by ten to-morrow morning. This is no place for honest men, so late in the season, and a dangerous place for any of the other kind.”

The leader of the group returned Whilla's glance uneasily and insolently.

“I suppose you're Manville's woman?” he said. “But suppose I refuse to move on until I get orders from headquarters?”

“You'll get your orders from Manville's men to-morrow at ten,” Whilla replied quietly, and her eyes did not flinch

nor her colour change. "Manville's people," she added, "have their orders."

Then she turned and went majestically down the trail. She was confident that the camp would be broken before morning.

As she came out of the forest upon the home trail she stood still. The day was going fast; and it was not yet five.

"And that means," the woman on the lonely trail said, "that summer is gone."

The chill was intense as darkness fell, and Whilla hurried in. Supper and a blazing fire awaited her, but she went to her room and changed her rough clothing for the blue gown in which Rose-Ann had first seen her.

Almost religiously she arranged her hair so that it fell in softened folds about her face which glowed from the excitement of the day and the damp coldness of the fog.

"His woman!" she suddenly murmured, regarding herself in the glass. "My God! if I only were!" she added, and her eyes shone.

"There should be mail to-night," she said to the boy who brought her food to her.

"There's been a washout down by Lazy Four Ranch," the boy informed her; "mighty bad, too. The stage may have to take a big detour."

"Where did you hear that?" Whilla asked.

"Lambert. He's back. Had to hoof it ten miles."

"Where is Lambert?" Whilla was alert.

"Said he was going on to Dexter."

"Did he go?"

"He was headed that way."

When the room was cleared of the meal and the fire replenished, Whilla went to a cupboard in the corner and took out her pistol, made sure it was in good working order, then laid it on the table by her side and began reading a magazine—one of many Rose-Ann had recently sent her.

The evening wore on. Somewhere in the distance a banjo tinkled and a man's roaring voice sang a rollicking song.

At ten she walked over to the fire and piled on the logs.



She stretched her long arms over her head—she was weary; a sense of the uselessness of everything overcame her.

Then, suddenly, her eyes widened; her arms fell at her sides—she turned toward the table—there were steps outside!

The steps did not pause; they came hurrying on; the door was pushed open—Manville stood before her with the night behind him; the glow of his home-fire on his face!

He came in, flung his pack on the floor, and stretched out his arms.

“My girl!” he said, “I’ve hurried across the world—for this.”

There was a queer, broken sound in the room, a sob, and then Whilla ran into Manville’s embrace!

“Lord!” he whispered, bending his face to her bowed head, “this is home.”

The moment of ecstasy passed; presently they looked into each other’s eyes. Whilla’s were dim like stars shining through a mist. Manville’s were clear and full of laughter.

Presently Whilla brought food and made hot coffee, for Manville told her that he not waited for food when he reached the washout.

“My horse was used up,” he explained. “I left it with the ranger and came on.”

“That was like you.” Whilla, moving about the room, looked at the man near the fire as one does who estimates the years on ahead when she might see him no more.

After the meal, they sat by the fire; Manville in his own deep chair; Whilla near him.

“What have you been doing to yourself, girl?” Manville was struck with a change in the familiar face. He had not considered it before.

“Looking out for your interests, Eric. That means more than it used to. Lone Two mines are being remembered.”

“Any ugly work?” Manville was alert at once.

“Nothing that the men and I couldn’t manage. A scamp from Denver was caught with a bit of ore that he had no right to. The fellow disappeared after one encounter with the boys.”

Manville laughed. "Is that all?" he asked.

"All but a skirmish or two—and to-day I went up to burnt timber and gave the order for breaking camp to some rustlers. It rather surprised me to find any one nosing about the Sleeping Giant. Oh! we've kept busy and—missed you. I'm glad you are back, Eric."

Manville reached out a broad, strong hand and found hers.

"I'm glad, too," he said, watching that new, strange expression on her face; "and I have my African man, too, old girl! A wizard with the ore. Scents it like a ferret and never lets up on it. He's got a system that will teach these hills a lesson. No holding back when he says the word. But best of all"—and here Manville glowed—"I found confidence and trust in the men in England. I got all the money I wanted. They're coming over a year or two from now, and by the Lord Harry! they're going to see all they're hoping to see!"

"Of course," Whilla breathed softly, "they will come—here?"

The question stirred Manville strangely. He withdrew his hand and looked into the heart of the coals. He forgot to answer.

"It's very late, Eric!" Whilla stood up, and there was a piteous, frightened look in her eyes.

"Whilla, there is something I've got to say to you. Sit down. What's a night to us—after all that has passed—and all that is to come? Sit down."

Whilla sat down wearily. Her face was white and still.

"I'm going once again, my girl, to ask you to marry me. I think you will do it this time." Manville's voice shook. "I've given myself all the opportunity that was needed to make me sure of myself for your sake and mine. You know that, don't you, girl? For yours, as well as mine?"

"Yes, I am sure of that, Eric."

"I know why you've held to your line, Whilla, after your husband's death. I've always thought it about the biggest thing in our—experience, as you call it. When you and I drifted together, the life back there had battered us both;

made us suspicious—I own to that. We didn't mean to get caught again—well! that was well enough, only we didn't count upon two things. You either get caught, or you shy off in time.

“I made good here—and so did you, Whilla. Then I had to go overseas, and then the very devil tempted me to stop off and get a breath of the old life and see the effect of it on a fellow who had got used to the heights. I put myself to the final test. That was the real reason I stayed in the East.

“It certainly was a queer experience. At first I couldn't get air enough. The folks were like petrified creatures to me with some kind of inside machinery that made them move about like real folks. They were funny; nightmarish—all but good old Compton. Compton—I wrote about him?”

“Yes,” Whilla whispered. “He wasn't petrified, was he?”

“No, poor devil, he was running to seed in used-up soil. Trying to help others! Gee, Whilla, there were times when I looked at Compton and didn't know whether to laugh or cry—he was so in damned earnest to get the under-dog from the clutches of the pile drivers, and the pile drivers were just naturally sucking him in!”

“Yes—naturally”; the words caught in Whilla's throat. Manville did not notice—he was coming to the crux of his story.

“Some women couldn't understand what I'm going to tell you now, girl.” Eric lifted his eyes to the downcast face beside him. “But you will understand. That's the big thing about you—your understanding.

“Once in Africa, when I got to wanting something—like hell, my dear—I had my vision—it was you I wanted, you! Just hold to that for the next half hour. I'm speaking God's truth to you. When you face death—or a kind of new life—it's the big thing in your soul that clutches you—you clutched me out there! Just you! All the mixed-up deals of my life got spread out—and you were on top!

“Now listen. There are some men, I reckon they flourish best where Compton lives, who cannot imagine equality between men and women—they want to pull the strings, would punish, or scare their women into their ideas of what’s what. It’s ugly business, Whilla, damned ugly business no matter how it’s done, and it always gets me!

“While I was with Compton there was a little woman—I wrote about her, too, her name is Braintree.”

“Yes, I remember.” Whilla felt cold and stiff, though the glow of the fire fell full upon her.

“At first my fighting blood was up. She was being twisted out of shape under cover of what was called love. Oh! such men as hers have all sorts of devices—now that thumbscrews are out of style.

“The very devil tempted me, Whilla. At first I went in for the fun of the thing. It passed the time while I played about like a chained bull in their nice pleasant pastures. I saw the chance of opening that little woman’s eyes to what was actually being done to her—and what she sensed, too, poor girl, even while she was muzzled and held on a leash by what they know as love. Love! Good Lord, Whilla. Well—of course I was a damned, muddling fool—and I got all that was coming to me.

“She *saw* all right; it won’t hurt her, either—after she gets her bearings. She will be splendid when she is herself—and she will be some day. I got to knowing that. Why, there are possibilities in her”—here Manville indulged in a chuckle—“that would blow their constitutional rights to kingdom come—if her fuse was touched.

“But”—and Manville became grave—“I lost hold of myself one day, Whilla—just one day! I fled like a whipped cur after that one breakdown. There was nothing to do but run. I wonder if even you can understand that damned streak in men?

“Something got me—the day; the place. It was the woods—they were like our pines, but I did not think of that then. The little Braintree woman was with me—she has a something about her that knocks the common sense out of

you unless you watch out. It's the surprises she gives you—they bewilder you. You look for one thing and she flares forth in quite a different way. I suddenly saw her back in the time when I belonged to her breed—and Whilla, God hearing me, it was as if I was back there with her. I'm giving the whole thing to you square—if I had met her, before I cut loose, the Lord knows what might have happened, and at that mad moment I didn't remember anything but the past. The present came later.

"That's about all. You can imagine the rest—she was in my arms—I kissed her—and then we both woke up—we'd been dreaming. I guess we both felt like the wretched fools we were—she got her bearings first.

"We were staring suddenly at each other in the *Present*, the present. She recovered herself, as the real sort does—but she left me feeling like the cur a man is when he betrays the trust of his friends, his own self-respect, and mistakes a blaze of passion for a real sentiment.

"I got away without saying any good-byes, Whilla, but I've had my hours when I realized that a let-go like that might mean going the whole down grade. And then it was as if you came to pull me together. You and I—out here in the place we've made; you and I who have no need of dressing up our ideals; they're plain, but can stand the wear and tear of living.

"This is my life; cities would stifle me, and I've got to have a woman that is part of this life. Whilla, you are my woman! There was a time, when I offered you marriage as a kind of sop to my conscience; a—sort of Christmas gift to you, when your husband died.

"Whilla, as God hears me, I ask you to marry me now—because I want you for my wife; I need you."

The stillness of the room was oppressive. The great logs had settled to steady duty, and outside, Whilla almost felt the damp chill—the fog was closing in on the log house as if it were bent upon absorbing it—there was a *drip, drip* from the eaves.

"Whilla, will you be my wife—after all these years?"

And then Whilla Brookes turned her clear, demanding eyes upon him.

“I believe all you say, Eric, and I understand. A man’s a man, we women must reckon with that—and you are a good man. You’ve struggled out of many a bad hole. I’m not thinking of you—but of that girl. There’s never a man been born yet who can understand a woman when she’s swept from her bearings. He has his code and another for her—but before God there is only *one* for them both when it comes to passion.”

“You’re wrong there, Whilla, dead wrong.” Manville spoke sternly.

“Oh! Eric, you think that: you try to make yourself believe it, but women *know*.”

“All right—but that girl, Whilla, after her one flash of passion, was as cold and calm as before. She flared and faded. When she is lighted again, it will be a slow, steady glow—lighting up the corners where she is fixed.”

“You are sure of that, Eric?”

“As sure as I am of anything in God’s world.”

Then Whilla stood up. She went near Manville but did not touch him. She wanted to watch his face; her reading of it would determine the long—or short—stretch on ahead.

“You are both right and wrong, Eric,” she said; “you’ve done the big thing in telling me all that you have told me—but there is a bit more for *you* to know—before we can think of ourselves.

“After you left Middle Essex something happened to that girl and her husband. The fuse, as you call it, was touched. She came here!”

“Here!” Manville put his hands on his knees to steady himself, but he could not rise.

“Here?” He repeated. “Good God!” Then:

“What, in heaven’s name, did you do with her?”

“Kept her, Eric. What else was there to do? I had to think of you. At first it was like going in the dark—I knew so little, and she was terribly frightened. She had spent nearly all her money. While she waited for more and—to—

to gain her strength, she got to trusting me. She was wonderful. I think she sensed your relation to me—but she did not flinch.”

Whilla paused; her throat ached.

“Go on; go on!” The words as Manville breathed them were a mere groan.

“Her baby was born here. She named it—for—my dead—Helen!”

In all the bewildering sense of being carried away on a mad flood, Eric Manville gripped two or three big things that stopped him on his rushing course. They did not seem strange, even, they were something to which he must cling if he were to reach safety. He got upon his feet—he held Whilla firmly by the shoulders.

“Answer me, speak the truth as God hears you, do you think her child is mine?”

A radiant glow lit Whilla’s face, her eyes were full of tears. Raising her arms, she clung to Eric’s extended ones.

“No; no, dear man. At first I did—and I hated you—not for the wrong you did me, but the evil you did her—and then she made me believe the truth. I had you back again!”

Manville, the perspiration standing in beads on his forehead, sat down heavily in his chair. It was a moment when he and Whilla were least able to estimate the next move.

“And she did that! She, that pale, little”—a smile twisted the relaxed lips of the man—“April fire.” He was thinking back; back.

The simple words, the smile, the relief, were maddeningly misunderstood by the woman searching every look and tone with senses worn to the breaking point. She believed that the woman she had shown to Manville made an appeal that his former understanding of her could never have made.

“Where is she now?” Manville asked—“she and her child?”

“She has gone back.”

“To her husband? Would he take her?” Amaze held Eric. “Have you heard?”

“He has not taken her.”

"Where then? Whilla, don't torture me—where then is she? Did she go to Compton?"

"She went—to Barry Compton's house—he left everything to her!" In the closer danger Whilla had overlooked poor Barry.

"Left—is he dead?"

"Yes, he died a few days after Rose-Ann fled from her home."

Once, Eric Manville had seen a forest fire spread around his lonely camp on the ranges. He had seen it eat its crimson way into the deep woods, leaving them black and scarred. The sight had so paralyzed him that when it was almost too late he had recognized his own danger.

So he felt now. A blackened expanse spread about him; he looked at Whilla in bewilderment.

"I'm about all in!" he said, and closed his eyes.

Whilla still stood watching him.

"I'm going to bed," she presently said, and then, more quietly: "Eric, there's a little of the night left. Try to rest, my dear—and there's to-morrow, you know. Remember what old Auntie Day says—burdens, shoulders, and God!"

She smiled wanly, went across the room, and passed through the door to the chamber where Rose-Ann had slept!

Lying, wide-eyed upon her bed, she saw the red dawn creep up over the top of the black pines. She heard Manville moving about in the next room—and then because she was desperate and at the end of her endurance, she fell a prey to the black evil that stalks after the fallen.

"If he goes to her I shall understand. And if he goes, he shall go free of me. I'll hold no man against his will—I have that much left to me.

"If he goes, he goes free; and must decide for the future—alone."



## CHAPTER XXIII

**I**F THERE is one true thing in life above all others it is that Man's way and Woman's way are not, nor ever will be, the same. This is difficult of acceptance.

The Church and the State have sought, by reiteration, to make us believe them so—but to no avail. Blessed is it—if God's way lies between, touching both as the sweet, running river does, which separates the opposite banks but refreshes and feeds them both from its divine store.

Whilla Brookes met the day with but one thought—as Manville regarded the situation so would she plan her course. She had given him a simple, honest statement; she had acted her part well during the trying experience through which she had passed. She had, in her struggles, never lost sight of his interests, but Rose-Ann had gone back to her people; to the life for which she was best fitted—Rose-Ann had the world; the riches of the world.

And she, Whilla Brookes, what had she? Nothing but him! Out of the wreck of life they two had come together, struggling up and out, alone, until the deserted past, in the form of Rose-Ann, entered their wilderness.

What had he to do with Rose-Ann, if what he said of the revelation in South Africa were true? She, Whilla, should be his only concern after the vigil of the night. If he came to her and said: "You have done the best, the big thing. You have acted for me—as I could not have acted for myself. Let me prove to you that there is no other woman in God's world for me but you," she would withhold nothing; nothing.

Standing with the morning sunlight on her face and thinking the thoughts that are possible only at such moments, Whilla felt the pressure of a little hand on her heart. It was

not the hand of Rose-Ann's baby, nor another's—it was *her* child. She was still young. Manville could not make her, as the world absurdly thought, “respectable,” but he could make it possible for her, with her stern code of honour, to bear another child!

As Whilla's sense of right had, before, forbade her permitting Manville to pay the price, so it had forbade her bearing children who would have to pay what she could not. But now, surely now, Manville could trust the woman of her; she had proven herself. She had endured, for months, the sight and comradeship of another who felt she had a claim upon him—she had done it for his sake.

Oh! surely he would understand.

But Manville, also meeting the day, looked at it haggardly. There is never one woman for the average man. He may niche one and kneel before her lonely pedestal at times, but—and women must learn this—he loves and adores the woman who treads the paths of men with him. He wants her beside him—even in the dark; wants to clutch her hand while his eyes are fixed on other things. He expects of her—understanding.

Deep in Manville's heart lay the knowledge and the splendid significance of what Whilla had done. Some time, perhaps soon, that knowledge would rise supreme and flood them both with its radiance—but now and surely, Whilla, of all women, would agree that he must go to Middle Essex and make sure that all was well for Rose-Ann. No man of any decency could shirk, for the second time, such a responsibility.

Whilla had acted for him during his absence, but it was for him now to act. To force, if need be, the truth upon Braintree. He knew the Middle Essex state of mind!

The death of Compton, too, had cast a gloom over Manville; he had not estimated the hold that the quiet, lonely man had had upon him. For the moment the transfigured Whilla was hid from his sight while lesser things appeared.

And so Manville came out of his room and met Whilla.

She was moving about setting the breakfast things upon

the table. The pleasant smell of food was in the air—the special batter cakes that he liked; the fragrance of coffee.

Whilla wore a white linen dress—the neck of which lay open. Her face had a delicate flush—a hint of fever—that gave beauty to the clear skin. Her eyes were shining and full of welcome.

“Ah! but it is good to have you back,” she said, but she did not go to him; nor did he go to her. He stood looking at her and her beauty disturbed him. He did not try to understand the sensation, but it was causing him to hesitate about his duty, and that dismayed him.

He wanted, and oh! if Whilla could only have known, he wanted to stay with her; rest, here in his home. He was tired with his world tramping and late roughing; worn with the burden of confidences that had undone him.

They sat opposite each other at the small round table drawn close to the roaring fire.

“I want to hear about your trip,” Whilla said, and her hand, holding the coffee pot, trembled. She desperately sought to keep things normal. The question suggested the reason why the trip had not more fully been mentioned the night before, and their eyes fell.

“Oh! it was some trip”; Manville rushed gladly into the opening; “the London success went to my head. It’s great, after losing your grip, and making a fight for it, to find that you’ve got it again.

“It makes you want to clean house and stand up straight—honest-to-God-and-man! To know that you can look the world in the face—the world that you’ve managed to get the best of.” Manville laughed his big, free laugh. Then went on:

“Then I shipped into Darkest Africa and rooted out my man. You’ll be crazy about him, Whilla. Such a surprising chap. Out there, managing a lot of semi-savages. Why, they lap his hand and look like little Saint Johns running around loose and naked. What he doesn’t know about mining might just as well be left alone. I swear, it almost makes you feel that he puts the ore *in* where there isn’t any.

“I had expected to find a big, burly brute of a fellow—and I found—” again Manville laughed, a bit uneasily—“well,” he added lamely—“one of those jokes God plays on us, now and then!”

“Why, that fellow, Whilla, is like a woman in his notions. I suspect he says ‘Now I lay me’ at night, and yet he gets there! And he has all his men with him. He don’t talk much, but he sees that everyone has a square deal, and you feel it.

“When he comes here—and it took all there was in me to get him to promise to come—I want to give him the best, as he gave the best to me. He’s like that. Makes you feel like pulling yourself up by your leggings. He reminded me of Compton.”

“I see.” Whilla spoke quietly. “Want some more coffee, Eric?”

“Yes—there never was such coffee as yours—I used to tell Grainger that when we were drinking his *tea*.”

“You told him about me, Eric?”

“Yes—he thinks you are my wife; and you will be when he sees you.”

The red flooded Whilla’s face.

“I couldn’t buy Grainger,” Manville spoke casually, not noting the colour his words had brought to the face across the table; “but I got under the skin and touched the homesick spot. He’s an American, though he’s got the English manner—his father was a miner, curiously enough, in Colorado; Grainger was born here. I laid it on strong about the chance here; the scenery and climate—and he fell for it. He’s rounding things up out there and then, as he says, he’s coming home.”

Manville got up. He looked rested, satisfied. Several contacts had been made during the meal and one tragic break that he was to discover later.

“And now, my girl, let’s do the ranch!”

Manville was always keen about the duty nearest at hand.

All day they rode, and covered many miles. They dismounted, investigated, and shared the company of de-

tached groups of men. They remounted and galloped on. They built a fire on the rocks and ate the noonday meal. Manville was in great spirits, but through her joy in the fleeting moment Whilla was bidding it all good-bye.

At the day's end they were tired but full of the exaltation that a well-finished task gives. Manville had the reins again well in hand. Whilla listened to his surprised delight of her handling of his business and all bitterness was gone from her heart. It had come—as it always comes to such women as she—that is, if they are decent and refuse to take the price that was never agreed upon.

It was not, now, so much, the possibility of Rose-Ann's future relations with Manville, as the thought that had been forced upon her by the breakfast talk.

All Manville's success in the years ahead lay coupled with the man Grainger's. There must be no weak spot in the chain that was to hold them. She must help along the appearance of respectability; she must not shock this man whose ideals were far removed from what Manville's, secretly, were!

Whilla had been hurt where her sensibilities were keenest. After dinner they sat where the night before they had sat. "After all," the woman thought, "how little, really, there is in common between us; now that the time has come."

And Manville, hardly *thinking*, but feeling deeply, was experiencing that comfortable state of being when one can relax body and soul. It was good to find Whilla there as he glanced through his half-closed lids. It was like coming safely to the trail's end with everything intact and no need to worry.

"Whilla!"

"Yes, Eric."

"The way you've managed my job—*our* job—while I've been away is simply magnificent. On my soul, I wouldn't have believed it possible, even knowing what I do."

"I'm mighty glad, Eric. I enjoyed it." Whilla smiled bravely.

"And the rest—the handling of little Rose-Ann Braintree!"

My God, Whilla, I don't believe another woman in the world could have done what you've done there. It was like steering a damaged ship to a safe port.

"But—you'll understand—I must make sure it is safe."

"You are going to Middle Essex?"

"I must, Whilla. I'll be back in three weeks at the latest."

Then Manville looked keenly at the woman near him. Something disturbed him; troubled him.

"Whilla, shall we be married before I go? You could come part way with me."

For a moment Whilla made no reply. The heart of her was aching dully, but in her refusal to heed it she seemed hard and cold.

"After you come back, Eric, we will talk of this," she said presently.

"Whilla, what ails you?"

Manville was utterly dumbfounded. For the time the river flowing between his way and the way of woman was not touching the understanding of the spirit.

"Are you thinking of me—or yourself, Whilla?"

"Of us both, Eric."

"Then, in heaven's name, think only of yourself. I can take care of my end. I told you last night how I felt—I want you because you belong to me—to the life we've made together. Things are going to be different—but I want you to go on *with* me as you have been going on from the first—changing the colour of things can't change the *thing*."

The truth of what Manville was saying rang in his words, in his perplexed, hurt face.

"Oh! my dear, my dear!" the yearning in Whilla's soul made its cry; "this seems the only thing left for me to do for you!"

"I will not take your offering, your sacrifice." Manville stood up. "Come here!" he said; but Whilla did not move except to raise her eyes to his face.

"But I will promise to give you my answer—when you come back," she said, as if arguing.

"You'll marry me then, Whilla, you understand? No woman has a right, for any fool reason, to smash the best things in life to pieces."

Manville never forgot the look he saw in Whilla's eyes; it puzzled him then—he understood by and by.

He bent and kissed her.

"This is a queer stretch for you and me to come to," he said, and an amused smile touched his lips; "after all our years together—to hold each other at arm's length until some glib words are muttered over us. Well! I can do even that for you, my girl. Good-night."

"Good-night, Eric. I'm thanking you for this, this last bit you're doing for me—only I cannot put it in words. When are you going?"

"To-morrow." Manville looked grim. "The sooner I end this farce, the better and safer for us both!"

"Again, Eric, thank you. And please—let this be good-bye—until the—the farce—is ended!"

Whilla got up, clung to him; smiled at him.

"I was thinking," she whispered, "of something I said to Rose-Ann once. Life is funny—until you *feel* it—then it hurts. We've been feeling it, my dear, and that never will do, never."

And, while Manville wearily travelled down to do his duty, impatient at the necessity, dreading the outcome, Whilla took up the reins of government, temporarily again, but her thoughts were of different things.

Gradually she seemed to forget Manville. He merely represented the Inevitable that she was beating her wings against—for poor Whilla was developing wings. No matter how the Inevitable and she fixed it up to meet the ideals of others, *she* would know, *he* would know, and always there would be the Whisper which a few would hear and listen to.

Eric would grimly stand by her—full well she knew that; but the necessity for standing by her was the thing that hurt.

Life had opened and widened for Manville. Success!

success! He had been triumphant and wanted to drag her with him. Drag her!

Women—Rose-Ann's kind would make excuses for her; other sorts would pity Manville. And then the growing old! Having nothing to offer that Manville could not obtain for himself; the lagging behind; the dragging on—and on—with their memory between them.

Whilla knew; she had seen enough of that. But if, alone in her bed, she smiled at the open door as if welcoming something that only her straining eyes could see; "if I slipped out—now while he wants me, needs me, while I have something to give, I could keep him—he would think of me as I want to be thought of. I am afraid to grow old!"

There were days, cold, stormy days when Whilla lived closely with the things that she and Manville had built up together; there were black nights when she toyed with the pistol.

Manville was never to know how she had used that as a threat when men—beasts of men—came lurking during his absence. Always she had been alert for him. Well—it was for him—now!

But at the test she quailed. She was not so old but that life clutched her. There were still more doors than one for her.

If she went away, was not waiting when Manville came back!

Suppose he made the final choice alone when he returned, without her disturbing claim—what then?

And so Whilla set the house in order; left a letter in the tall clock where Manville would be sure to find it—and set forth, two days before his arrival, presumably to meet him.

She had always had her own money—it had been a fair partnership—and Whilla went protected by that—into another open space.



## CHAPTER XXIV

**A**S MANVILLE travelled down from the mountains, a feeling of oppression grew upon him. His former visit had held curiosity; mystery; that was utterly lacking now.

When he began to knock up against people, he lost his temper, and the necessity for the doing of what he was about to do irritated him.

He hoped that he would find, upon reaching Middle Essex, that things were not as bad as Whilla had led him to think. He would, in that case, make the death of Compton the reason for his appearance and return as soon as possible.

That things should have lasted from June to September as Whilla had described seemed incredible. A husband and wife living apart, but in sight of each other for months with a hideous misunderstanding about a baby holding them apart, was unbelievable. Surely, by now, one or the other had become convinced of the absurdity.

“It would be like a Gilbert and Sullivan farce,” Manville reflected; and a smile, suggestive of a sneer, touched his face.

And then as the train was hustling along, between Chicago and New York, Whilla Brookes came so sharply in Manville’s mind that it seemed as if she had physically boarded the train.

“She played a big part—in the farce.” Manville closed his eyes in order to hold Whilla’s vision. “It might all have been a damned hideous tragedy but for Whilla.”

Man is a curious animal. He marks and sets his own traps and then deliberately walks into them. Manville snapped one now. Reflecting upon the rôle Whilla had filled, now that the distance was widening between him and her, she took on a new significance and force. Had she been Man-

ville's wife her deed would have been none the less noble, but it would have been upheld by an authority that poor Whilla, not being a wife, utterly lacked, and so it added to the appeal.

Viewed from this point the recent past was flooded by light that touched everything, Whilla included.

"Could she have done it"—Manville breathed quicker and opened his eyes—"had she really cared as much as I've taken for granted?"

The little serpent was rearing its head. Rose-Ann sank into the shadow while Whilla loomed large.

"I should have insisted upon her marrying me before I came on this fool errand."

Whilla was assuming the proportions of the desired—but unpossessed.

Manville, however, comforted himself with the thought: "no tie could hold Whilla—a mere tie." This gave cold support, but it meant something.

That was the power that had carried her where she was in his life. Other women would have come out sullied—but not she!

Still the grim fact that Whilla would not marry him until his return disturbed him.

"She's cut my anchor," thought Manville. "She's set the highest price upon herself, by God!"

And at that moment, had she but known it, Whilla Brookes had won her victory.

In his present mood Manville contemplated his interview, if one proved necessary, in anything but a complacent state of mind.

He'd give Braintree fair play—he was prepared to lay all his cards on the table. He had been an ass, Manville admitted; "a progressive one!" he added, "but by the Lord Harry, I'll get the truth through that cast-iron shield of his or I'll smash everything in sight."

Manville contemplated with positive relish the devastation that might possibly occur.

"And then I'll go to Rose-Ann," he ended lamely.

It was one thing to roll up his sleeves and hammer his man, but what was he to do with a woman who had fled from everything for his sake; had returned, for his sake, to her blackened ruins and faced what Braintree and his ilk might have forced her to face?

Old memories of Puritan interpretation of justice caused Manville to grit his teeth.

“All right!” he grimly thought as his train drew into the South Station, “we’ve all got to stand up and take the truth, the whole truth, by the Lord, and then let it have its way with us.”

This brought a kind of stern courage. It was a working basis at least.

Manville stayed one night and day in Boston; then he took an early evening train for Middle Essex.

He planned to bring Braintree to terms, if what Whilla had told him still held true—or leave him battered to the ground by ten o’clock at the latest; then he would go down to Essex. In either case, he argued, he would need the bracing walk in the night air. He would put up at the Mills’ Arms and see Rose-Ann in the morning. After that? Well, after that, Manville acknowledged there was an open waste of undiscovered country—after that!

It was eight o’clock when Manville rang the bell of Braintree’s house.

Maggie, about to leave, opened the door, recognized Manville, and felt her sluggish blood race through her veins.

“Tell Mr. Braintree I wish to see him.” The tone had all the ring of command. Maggie departed and announced simply:

“There’s a gentleman, sir, wanting to speak with you.”

“Show him in here.”

This Maggie did, and fled.

Braintree looked up, recognized his caller, turned a shade whiter, rose, pointed to a chair, and remarked as they both sat down:

“So you have come!”

Manville saw, as Rose-Ann had seen, the change in Brain-

tree. He had suffered and—lived! There was no doubt about that. He was more alive than he had ever been; he was going on along inherited lines—but he was moving; not holding an entrenched position without struggle.

“Braintree,” Manville was suddenly overcome by the gravity of the situation, “this isn’t easy for either of us. We might as well get it over as best we can, even if we bungle.

“Is your wife here?”

“She is not.” Braintree did not flinch. He recognized the impossibility of ordering Manville from the house, and if he stayed, the ugly interview must be gone through without danger of further scandal—there had been enough of that.

“She is in her own house; the late Mr. Compton’s,” he added.

“I had heard that, I had hoped it was not true, or at least, was not, now,” Manville broke in. Then: “See here, Braintree, let us begin at the roots of this misunderstanding.

“I’ve been away from America nearly a year; when I left here I went directly abroad on business which was more or less confidential. I have not seen your wife since I—left Middle Essex. I returned to my home in the West—less than a fortnight ago—there I learned of this—mess. Good God! looked at one way it is a howling farce, but I came as soon as I could—to straighten it out.”

Braintree nodded but did not speak. Unable to see any humour in the situation, he regarded Manville stonily.

“The child”—here Manville’s voice broke and it shook when he went on—“I suppose that is the crux of the matter: that, and what it signifies, Braintree, but I swear—the child is—yours!”

The words sounded crass and weak. Manville brought to bay by his bungling attempt to right things stared blankly at Braintree and added:

“Good God! You do not believe that! You are dealing with the situation from your ignorance, you won’t hear—the truth!”

The sudden collapse of his plan for the moment left Man-

ville hopeless. Then Braintree did the unexpected thing—he swept the rubbish from both their paths and took the situation in his own hands.

“Manville, you need not explain or protest. When my wife returned, she came to me, and I did not, then, believe what she said! It seemed to me, at that time, to be a weak but natural attempt to right conditions for her—her child’s sake in order to live among her people and enjoy the inheritance that had come to her from Compton. I had ground, I thought, for my belief.

“Since then”—Braintree moistened his lips—“I have made some investigation—and I have seen—the child; seen it several times.” He paused, and Manville, watching him as one watches returning hope, saw the shadow of a deep sorrow grow in the clear eyes.

“I *know* now that the child is mine! I have proof that you have not seen my wife—since you left here. I know that my wife lived in your house with——” He got no further.

Manville raised his hand—there was command in the gesture and Braintree, after a moment, went on:

“It was a most amazing situation; I am not blind to its significance, but—and now I cannot expect a man like you, Manville, to sympathize with me, nor understand me, for we are as far apart in our views as two men could well be, but I am going to—speak the plain truth to you.

“I loved and trusted my wife—absolutely. To me, love and trust are inseparable. I could not love without confidence and respect.

“When my wife dealt me the blow she did, it shattered all that, to me, was sacred and pure. That she was saved from the worst effect of her folly does not in the least do away with the fact that only circumstances prevented her. To all intents——”

Manville, at this, leaned forward. He clasped his hands until the nails cut into the flesh; only the black trouble in Braintree’s eyes withheld him from dealing a bitter blow.

“See here, Braintree,” he said, “so far, you seem to have

thought only of yourself, and you've taken your own damned time for your investigations. Good God, man, can you not get out of sight for a moment while you consider someone else? Your wife? Me? In a moment I'm going to say something about the difference between us, but right here I want to put a question to you.

"Suppose I had been in my home when your wife, fleeing from God only knows what kind of a ghost, arrived—what do you think I would have done?"

The bald question, set into the conditions that suddenly Braintree visualized, staggered him; broke his calm. He began to realize that his self-created world now was swinging in space.

"I—do not know," he said frankly.

"And you've never given me—or your wife—the benefit of that doubt. You're a devilish hard man, Braintree, but I'm going to do you the credit of believing that you are a just one. You have your ideals; your code—well, so have I; so have we all, when the test comes. Your wife is as innocent of wrong as your child—she fled from the hardness in you that amounts to nothing less than crime. Braintree, that woman who stood by your wife when you and I were shoved off the scene you would call anything but a *good* woman, but she did the big, splendid thing; did it better than either you or I could have done it. She gave time and opportunity for your wife to learn to live—live as her life with you had never permitted. That woman was acting for me; looking out for my interest, never thinking of herself; never counting the cost—to herself. It was superb and—she means everything in life to me!

"Had I been there when your wife came, I know—I would have done my best; done it badly, no doubt; but done it! You and your kind haven't all the virtue in the world by a damned sight!"

This was flung out like a blow to the flickering shadow on Braintree's face.

"And now I come to the difference between us, Braintree. Were you ever tempted by the devil in you?" The sudden,

detached question came like a missile following a challenge. "The devil that can twist a meaningless thing into a bruising cause for remorse?"

"No!" Braintree took up arms in his own defence. "I am not aware that I—I have a devil!" He ignored the latter part of Manville's question.

"Then how, in the name of God," Manville asked, "can you, dare you, judge them who have?"

A heavy silence fell between the men. To ease the strain he was under, Braintree got up, drew the heavy curtains over the window, and closed the door into the hall. It was like barricading against another unlooked-for attack. Then he came back and sat down.

Manville had not moved; but the veins were swollen on his forehead.

"You—no living man—has the right to judge," Manville held Braintree with his fierce eyes.

"I've worked my way up, Braintree, by fighting inch by inch. I know the value of every tussle and I've come to a point where I dare hand out a few facts to men like you—who have never had to tackle life at first hand and throttle it: to feel the glory of a little gain, even while slipping back: to know the value of a human hand stretched out to you at a moment when you think you're going under. That's been my life; the life of millions like me—and what has yours been? Where has your hand been during the tussle that we are all in?"

Into Braintree's mind, his clean, guarded mind, there seemed to be a blinding light. Shrinking, feeling his way, he spoke to the man before him.

"I think, as I see you now, Manville," he said, "that you would *not* have acted the scoundrel, had you been at home when my wife went to you—but you must see that this does not exonerate my wife!

"Your position would have been desperate—a man facing what you would have faced then hasn't much choice."

Manville lifted his head—and glared at Braintree defiantly.

"My God!" he cried. "Can't you think of her; what she

has learned; what suffered? You drove her to the learning—and at your door lies the wrong.

“What is the thing you call *love* made of? What is it for? What good is it? Is it something to which others can cling; or is it something for them to beat their poor lives out against?”

“It is what your wife is *now* that matters, Braintree, not what she was. I haven’t seen her, but I’d wager my last hope of happiness that she is finer, bigger than she would ever have been had you had your way with her.

“Go to her now and ask her why she came back! That’s all that will count. She need *not* have come, you know. Some poor devils of women have to come, or think they have to, on any terms men offer them—but your wife did not.

“Good God, Braintree, who are we—we men, that we dare deal so with women?”

“Stop!” Braintree’s face was livid. He was facing temptation at last and he realized it. All his stern inheritance seemed crumbling under him; his austere justice that could flay its own, when its ideals were spurned, trembled in the scales. His weakness: quivering, human weakness, was tempting him.

The hungry, devouring longing for Rose-Ann overpowered his reason—he saw her as she had a few weeks before stood before him, asking him how he would feel if he found that he had wronged another? And he had wronged her! With appearances against her—he knew her to be innocent then, but he had turned her away: had pushed her from him. He saw only that she had wronged him—that had been enough. Himself; himself!

She had gone from him—pitying him. She had gone proudly; she had lost her fear of him—something had set her free. He had known that, then, and had recoiled bitterly from the knowledge that his dominion was at an end.

But now—he knew that if he went to her, as Manville was suggesting, he would find a woman worthy—worthy of the *best* that was in him, not the weakest. He had fought against that truth—he bowed before it now.



“Go and ask her why she came?” Manville was thundering the question into the still room. “I’m not going to tell you—anything; she may tell what she feels is best to tell you, what—she feels you can understand.

“For God’s sake, Braintree, don’t try to play the part of the Almighty—no man is big enough, but you *are* bigger, or I miss my guess, than the thing that has been handed down to you. You’ve split your shell; outgrown it——”

“Stop!” Again Braintree spoke the word and held up a warning hand.

“I will tell you this, Manville, I promise to see my wife to-morrow. I will ask her why she came back. Is—this enough—for to-night? I can stand no more.”

Both men stood up—they reached out trembling hands.

“It’s good-bye—Braintree. I start back to-morrow—for my place. There is work for *me* to do there.

“Good-bye.”

“Good-bye, Manville—good-bye.”

The day following Manville’s devastating visit was as warm as midsummer.

Rose-Ann, with her sleeping baby stretched across her knees, sat in the little rustic arbour in Barry Compton’s garden. Behind her was the high brick wall against which stood stately hollyhocks bowing their regal heads as if in recognition of someone walking slowly, happily, on the paths below.

And Rose-Ann, closing her eyes, could almost fancy that she heard footsteps—dear, familiar footsteps—near her. It was wonderfully comforting—that sense of feeling that Barry was among the flowers he had loved so well.

From the closed eyes teardrops fell—not unhappy tears, but lonely ones. Rose-Ann was often lonely in spite of her brave resolves to expect nothing that could not be granted freely, lovingly, and with faith.

And then, just as the tears dried on the sweet face, Patsy appeared, a basket of bulbs in one hand, a trowel in the other. One glance at her mistress’s face and poor Patsy’s

cheerful countenance quivered even while an angry gleam darkened her blue eyes.

“Shall I take the blessed to the house?” she asked.

“No, Patsy. I love to have her sleep here in the garden. I think she has wonderful dreams—see! she is smiling.”

Patsy knelt as before a shrine and bent her head over small Helen.

“She’s growing the beautifullest ever,” she murmured. Then: “And the spittin’ image, if I do say it—who hates to, ma’am.”

“Yes; she is very like her father, Patsy, and he saw her again yesterday?”

“He did that, ma’am. I left the carriage and the blessed in it by the side door of his house, ma’am, and himself came out and stopped, while Maggie and I peeped from the kitchen window. He looked around—a man does shure hate to be seen doing the grandest things of his life, ma’am, and then, with me and Maggie hid, but seeing straight enough, he lifted the hand of the blessed and—kissed it, ma’am!”

“You are sure, Patsy—he kissed it?”

Rose-Ann’s voice trembled.

“That’s God’s truth, ma’am, and the face of him had that effect upon Maggie, ma’am, that she went straight and made that apple pie, ma’am, as he always had a liking for.”

Rose-Ann again closed her eyes while the shadows from the tall trees above her cast little, flickering shades as the leaves rustled and danced.

When next she dared to look at Patsy, that tactful girl was burying the wrinkled bulbs in the rich earth by the stepping stones—her rigid back to the two in the arbour.

“I do say, ma’am,” she confided, “as it takes a mighty lot of faith to *see* flowers when you bury these.”

“Yes; doesn’t it, Patsy? There is a great deal of faith needed at times—to see flowers.”

Patsy finished her task of faith and stood up.

“Clever, ma’am, told me to ask you would you like your luncheon served out of doors, ma’am? It being warm and

cheerful like, Cleaver thought you'd be fancying a bit of a picnic."

"Oh! I'd love that, Patsy. And when Cleaver brings the lunch, you may come and take the baby."

Patsy smiled and went away and then Rose-Ann relaxed. With her eyes closed once more, she crooned to the sleeping child and let her thoughts wander as they would. Back and forth on the shuttle of love, they touched Whilla Brookes among the white-capped hills.

"I wonder if Eric is with her now?" Rose-Ann's lips twitched.

"Oh! how strange and jumbled life is," she sighed and shook her head. Life was never to be an easy thing to Rose-Ann.

Then back came the shuttle and touched Braintree—kissing his baby's hand!

"Oh! if being so good makes folks so unhappy, and if being just happy makes others so good, what does it all mean?"

Again Rose-Ann sighed, and small Helen opened her lovely blue eyes, saw the dear face near, and went again to sleep.

Rose-Ann presently ceased to wonder or sing to her baby—for a moment she drifted to the magic border-line of conscious and unconscious thought where miracles are the most commonplace happenings.

There were steps, hurried but cautious steps, on the grassy path—Barry would come that way, so glad; so glad to find her waiting for him!

"Oh! my dear, my dear." That would be Barry's way of calling to her, and in her dream Rose-Ann tried to go and meet him, but the baby held her back.

"My dear, my dear!"

That was not Barry's voice! Rose-Ann started and looked up.

Braintree stood in the door of the arbour and his *look* reached out to Rose-Ann and seemed physically to touch her.

"Billy!" she faltered.

"Oh! Rose-Ann why *did* you come back? That is all

that matters; all that ever will matter. Can you tell me that, dear child? I want to understand!"

Rose-Ann tried to speak, tried to smile, but she could only hold her hand out to him over their child, and motion him beside her.

Then they were silent—looking at the baby face with God's marks of identification so clearly upon it.

"I—I wronged you terribly, Rose-Ann."

"And I—you, Billy. We did not know each other—but it was love that drove us apart—love can do that, you know."

"Yes, it can, but if it doesn't die, it can work miracles." Braintree leaned forward and took the baby's rose-leaf hand in his.

Rose-Ann watched him. She saw the change in him; she knew that the thing that had held him from her, the thing that had made it impossible for her to reach in him what her love craved, what it always had believed was there—was gone; gone!

They were together; she could speak and he could understand!

Oh! the glory of the realization. He could understand!

"I came back"—Rose-Ann heard herself speaking hurriedly, eagerly, as if she could not too quickly offer her best to him—"I came because I was—free to choose. I wanted our baby to have its own. I did not matter, nor you, either, Billy, half so much as our baby mattered.

"I wanted her to have these dear and blessed places of—home. They were hers, and I had taken her from them. I wanted her to have her father—I had no right to deprive her of him.

"I think, my dear, that our child needs us—both! We can—oh! I know it now—we can find each other through her—the baby brought me home!"

Braintree gathered Rose-Ann and his child into his arms.

"I only know that I have found you, Rose-Ann," he whispered. "I think I never saw you before!"

"Billy, you can trust me?"

"With my soul, Rose-Ann."

“And your love?”

“With our love, my wife.”

“Billy, do you want us to come?”

Rose-Ann's eyes were shining, and then from the depth of the perfect understanding, Braintree spoke:

“We began wrong, my dear, in our first home. I fear we are not the pioneers we believed ourselves. Others may make a better showing.

“I should like, Rose-Ann, to carry on, all of us right here, the things that Barry Compton loved.”

“Oh! my Billy.” Rose-Ann lifted her happy eyes to his—  
“My own, my own.” Then:

“I know—Barry is here, in his garden.”

And Braintree, too, felt the presence.

## CHAPTER XXV

**E**RIC MANVILLE'S course was marked always by storm and stress. What he gained was gained through conflict.

When he reached Tim's Corners, where the lopsided, breathless little train left him, he stood for a moment on the platform of the station, waiting while the station master locked up the building.

The smell of the pines was in Manville's nostrils; the wind, icy-touched by its flight over snowy ranges, beat against his face with rude welcome—he had come home!

“Well!” said the station master, joining Manville, “you look like you'd got something, down back there, to chew on.”

“That's about it,” Manville replied, pulling himself upright so that he might better inhale the blessed air; “but I tell you, Dowley, I had to bring my bone up here to maul. I can't digest anything back there.”

“I never seed any one who could—properly”; Dowley nodded understandingly—“they make a bluff at it, but it ain't the real thing. Anything new about the mines, Eric?”

“Yes!” Manville's eyes glittered. “We're going to make things hum in another year, Dowley. Get a gang of men together; pick them up as fast as you can, and you needn't count them.

“The thing that ails us Yankees is that we have such a wealth of everything that we skim the cream, and then try another rich streak, leaving the old, thinking we've emptied it. Dowley, the best is yet to be brought to light and I'm going to help bring it!”

“That sounds good, Eric. It isn't pipe talk, eh?”

“I don't talk gaff, old man. And these roads”—they were

bouncing over the hummocks at the moment—"are going to be roads, not bombardments; and we're going to clean up the low dives, too. I'm no reformer, but when it comes to some men having their rights and leaving hell for the rest, I'm against them. If I had my way I'd block off a ranch, wall it up, and label it 'Hell'; and all who like that altitude and environment could stake out a claim and—stay there!"

Dowley laughed, bounced up on his seat, and came down hard.

"I reckon," he sputtered, "that there'd be a bunch who'd like passes to go in and look on."

"All right, and I'd have passes for them to come out, too, but by heaven, they'd have to qualify to get out."

"Well"—Dowley urged his horses on—the roads were too bad for his heavy motor truck—"I'll stand by yer, Eric. I've had my day and seen the results of it—'tain't pleasant to look back on—when the nights are long."

On they jogged—Manville with the future bright before him; Dowley with his memories, dark and haunting.

The moon came up over the pines, serene and bright; the cold grew more intense.

"Drop me at the side trail, Dowley, I'm chilled to the marrow." Eric rose up and through the trees saw the lights of his home shining and the smell of wood smoke greeted him like perfume. The Canyon of the Spirits had depressed him.

"Can you drive up to the back, have a meal, and stop for the night?"

"No, thank you. I must move on—there's a box of fodder for the men up ter Big Giant, and there's sickness up there, too. I must rustle on."

Manville, with his bag on his back, struck eagerly up his home trail. As he neared the house he fell into a slower gait—the anticipation of all that he longed for was so sweet that he revelled in it. A man may love to roam, but his soul knows its home!

He stepped noiselessly on to the porch and pushed the door gently, his hand upon the latch.

Then he was in the warm, empty room. The fire burned

ruddily—everything was in its place, a terrifying orderliness that struck a chill to his heart. The room looked strange, as a room does that is set to rights after a funeral.

Never before had Manville returned home and not found Whilla awaiting him. His first sensation was of alarm—but that always made him cautious.

He strode to the kitchen. There, too, the fire, freshly replenished, snapped in the range; and the same grim order greeted him.

Then Manville opened the door overlooking the men's cabins. In one, lights were blazing, the scraping of a fiddle sounded and the shuffling feet of dancing men.

Manville shouted, and on the instant the scene changed. As an Oriental's handclap brings human beings to his bidding, so now the men and boys came rushing forward, pleasure and welcome on their rough faces.

"Where's——" For the first time in all the years Manville hesitated. The title carelessly used before—"Mrs. Manville"—stuck in his throat.

"She went three days ago," it was the house boy who spoke, "to meet you, we thought. A kind of surprise. She took her luggage along—yer see, we didn't expect you so soon or we'd have been on the job."

A gray shadow crossed Manville's face.

"We must have missed each other," he said quietly; "she probably took the high pass—the low road is devilish bad.

"Give me something to eat. To-morrow I'll locate her."

Manville ate and then, when the house was again clear of the men, he took his pipe and stretched his legs to the fire.

Never in his broken and patched career had he experienced such depression. At first it was anger that held him; then resentment followed. He felt beaten and trapped.

Then—and this shook him—he realized that he was not surprised. He had expected something: not the bald desertion certainly, but a readjustment. He had simply overtaken what had been inevitably awaiting him. This was no blow in the dark.



He sat staring into the fire, then turned and noted the details of the quiet, orderly room. There was a finality about everything that unnerved him. His anger and resentment passed—one cannot hold such thoughts against the—dead!

The dead! And with that Manville was stung to life.

At that moment, too, the clock struck nine. The metallic tones seemed to be words, not strokes. They called Manville's attention to something.

Of course there was a note. Of course it would be in the old clock. That was where he and Whilla always hid private papers or left instructions when one or the other was called away.

Manville got up heavily and walked to the shelf.

Yes! There it was. The square white envelope addressed in Whilla's firm, large handwriting.

It did not seem to matter much to Manville what the contents were—Whilla was gone! However, he went back to his seat and opened the letter.

I could not wait to talk it over with you, Eric. You might have said something to make me stay—women are like that. They flinch and have to pay later.

I want you to believe that little Rose-Ann Braintree has nothing to do with my decision—except that in helping her to see her way out, I saw my own. She did not belong here—it frightened her. The place; we, everything. She had to get hold of herself and go back. We all have to do that, in one way or another. Eric, I am going because I am afraid of what lies before. Your new life; your ambitions fulfilled—but most of all I am afraid of old age and what it would mean to women like me!

I am not sacrificing myself for you, Eric, I am saving myself—the self that has grown up beside you—for myself and the time on ahead. It will be good company then.

Do not fear for me. I have money. I'll make a place for myself somewhere, and when I have made it, I will let you know.

If you will think over what I have just written, you will see my side.

Manville read and re-read the grim words. And then,

because he was so truly the man that Whilla Brookes knew full well, he stretched his legs before the fire and—thought it out! Oddly enough, something that Compton had once said to him at a bad hour came to him now:

“We talk glibly of what we must do with life. We will largely do with it what life has already done with us!”

Well, what had life actually done with Manville?

With stern honesty he acknowledged that he had, while in England and Africa, contemplated his relations with Whilla anxiously. What he had taken for granted before rose accusingly then. But his anxiety, he relievedly thought, was grounded upon the fact that he respected Whilla. Yes, thank God. Life had done *that* with him.

Those men over there could condone a certain relationship if it bore the usual earmarks—but his relationship with Whilla lacked those symbols. The test had proved that. He had felt that marriage would place Whilla beyond the criticism that the future might evolve; he had not considered himself.

But would it? A woman, such a woman as he now knew Whilla to be, saw deeper, truer.

Manville's lips grew close and hard as he thought of his own heedlessness. He had not considered that, while he struggled to his goal, the woman beside him had struggled also, had developed into something so large and fine that he was humiliated as he reflected now upon her sensations when he offered marriage in the light of the significance she well might have put upon it.

It would seem to her, the woman he now understood—little less than an insult; an effort brutally to make safe his own position.

And then, because he was tired to the verge of exhaustion; because, do what he might, he could not see straight, Manville drifted into a semi-conscious state bordering upon that unreality that often holds solution.

He saw, as in a dream, himself and Whilla on horseback and the night was around them. They were going from the grave of the man who had cared for Whilla—loved her in his

way—but who had left her unprovided for. She had come to the wilderness with him escaping, thereby, the brutal husband who jeeringly flouted her but would not set her free.

Everyone knew that; ignored it—were friends in spite of it.

With the night around them, the grave behind them, Manville had asked:

“Where now?”

Whilla had laughed desolately.

“I don’t know. Back to the cabin, I suppose—until I can—think.”

Then, because they had been friends in the sense that isolation and the wilderness evolves, Manville had asked:

“Will—you come up to the Lone Two?”

Although they could not see each other, they turned their faces toward each other. The woman knew what her fate threatened. There must be someone to help her out; some man. Always some man. Why not Manville? She could not be particular.

“All right!” she had spoken desperately, flinging, as it were, her last coin in barter for safety.

They had turned about in the blackness.

“Shall we trust the bridge?” Manville had asked.

“No—let’s forge the stream,” Whilla had replied, and the alternative seemed to offer what life did not.

Manville had laughed.

“It’s hell to pay,” he had said, “either way.”

“All—right. If we get to the other side,” Whilla had called back to him as she galloped recklessly on, “we’ll take it as a sign that we must go on—together.”

They had reached the other side but only after a fearful struggle. Their horses were swept from under them. Manville had dragged Whilla from the flood and even at the moment he did so, he saw, by a flash of lightning, that the bridge was still standing!

Weak and all but done for, Manville, holding Whilla with one arm and gripping a tree with the other, had felt that she

represented all that was worth while in life—all that he had brought out of death.

She had clung to him; smiled wanly at him—they had come through death together!

The thought was to colour all their future relations.

Whilla had said a strange thing when, as they huddled under a rock and realized safety, she looked in his eyes—Manville recalled that the day was just breaking and she was shivering miserably.

“All right. To the end. You’ve paid the price,” and she had laughed.

The clock struck again. Ten! For an hour Manville had drifted—where?

He stood up and shook himself as he had on that gray morning when he heard Whilla’s words and her poor, surrendering laugh.

“No, by God, I haven’t paid!” he groaned. “I’ve taken and taken, but I haven’t killed her soul and she shall not kill mine.”

At that instant Manville had his vision as Whilla had had hers. He, too, faced the coming experience and beyond that—he also saw the years on ahead—years! And then—old age with its gleanings.

“If a man loses his own soul!”

That is it—what else could count against that?

He and Whilla Brookes—he *and* she had wrought together; had made life worth while, but they had done more—they *had* grown souls.

If a man may wander and yet cling to his true home, so he may have many calls, but knows the one of his soul best.

Manville went to the window and looked out at the splendour of the night. He grew strangely calm and happy.

There lay the little home-trail among the pines—the moon revealed it here and there. Beyond stretched the Canyon of the Spirits with its upper and lower trails. Over one Whilla had gone, after making her supreme sacrifice.

“I will have you back,” Manville spoke the words aloud, “before the week is out, my dear. We have not yet paid the price! We’ll take the Bridge this time, my girl. It’s a rickety thing at best—but it’s safer than the other course for us; we must reach whatever is beyond, by the Bridge.”

THE END



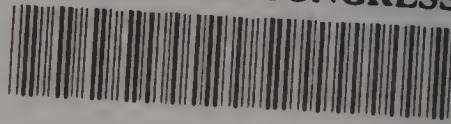








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