

CELIA'S CHOICE



EDITH VEZOLLES DAVIS



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CELIA'S CHOICE

HOW ONE GIRL SOLVED HER PROBLEMS



HER CURIOSITY EMBOLDENED HER.—Page 42

CELIA'S CHOICE

How One Girl Solved Her Problems

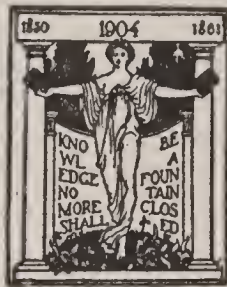
By

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and "One Girl's Way"*

ILLUSTRATED BY

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CELIA'S CHOICE

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TO
MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,
MARTHA OWEN JACKSON

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CELIA'S CHOICE

CHAPTER I

A DECISION

SLOWLY dusk grew into darkness and settled over the figure of a young girl sitting motionless on the doorstep of an unpretentious little house perched atop a knoll overlooking the little town of Newtonville.

Her chin buried firmly in her cupped hands, she stared unseeingly into the descending darkness, apparently unmindful of the beauty of the scene spread out below—the big Duval house with its walled garden a little to the left; the gleam of the new highway curving to the right and on into the little town, whose lights glimmered enchantingly through the old trees that bordered many of the little streets. Nor did she note the myriad fireflies that drifted up from the rough grass of the slope below and twinkled intermittently among the tall pines that seemed to hug the darkness a little hungrily to themselves. Even to the sleepy coo of a pair of turtledoves high in one of the pines, which usually brought a light of interest to her brown eyes, she now made no response.

And when her aged great-aunt, Mrs. Clementine Carson, who sat in a rocker on the porch behind her, slapped irritably at a marauding mosquito and complained, "You've been awful quiet all evening, Celia," she made no move, nor did she give any sign of having heard.

Her aunt drew her knitted shawl a bit closer about her slender, stooped shoulders, closed the open Bible on her lap, then said gently, her eyes fixed a bit anxiously on the rigid figure on the step below her, "I do hate seeing you go to work, Celia, especially so soon after commencement. I was hoping Steve'd be back ——"

Here the old voice quavered a bit and paused, then went on again:

"After all, Celia, I reckon you're lucky to have people like the Duvals interested in you. I must say Mr. Duval was nice to say you could take your choice between a job in his hardware store and one at his bank." Then, with a relieved sigh, "It's so much better than having to go into the pottery. Somehow I just couldn't bear seeing you go to work in the pottery, Celia."

And when Celia made no response, she went on, a note of caution in her voice: "I don't want to do your deciding for you, Celia, but it seems to me you couldn't make a mistake going into the bank. There's something a little more tony about a bank

than a hardware store, though I reckon it was the hardware that put the Duvals where they are to-day."

Celia did not move, but she said with an intensity that made the elderly woman look at her sharply, "I *loathe* hardware, Aunt Clem."

After a moment's pause her aunt sighed with relief and said brightly, "I'm so glad, Celia, that you've decided on the bank. You'll have more time then to be with Angela. She gets back from Worthington Hall to-morrow, they say." A pleased note was now in her voice. "If you go into the bank, you'll have your Saturday afternoons and holidays to be with her, and every day after four. It'll be nice. And then, if Steve comes back, there's no reason why you can't go on to Normal in the fall and be a teacher."

"I don't expect *ever* to be a teacher, Aunt Clem!"

Again the intensity in the girl's voice caused the elderly woman to look at her, but, instead of the soothing quality that was in Mrs. Carson's next words, a note of sharpness could now be distinguished.

"Celia! There's no need of talking like that! It's what I've set my heart on for you all along! In my opinion there's nothing nicer than a nice, smart, independent old-maid school-teacher!"

"But, Aunt Clem, I ——" There was a hopeless

note in the girl's voice, and her words trailed off into a sigh.

"It was what I'd set my heart on for myself, Celia, but Fred Carson just wouldn't listen to reason. He was all for marrying. It seems just like Providence to me that you can go right on ——"

"But, Aunt Clem!" The protest was weaker now, as though it were useless to disagree farther.

Her aunt continued a bit dreamily, "It is kind of nice having men around, in a way, Celia, but—well, I always longed to be independent of them and not have to think about washing their shirts and brushing floury pants with grain all around the bottom cuffs. Fred being in the mill business made such a heap of extra work. And smelling tobacco smoke and old pipes!"

Her voice was wistful now, and low-toned. "I always had sort of planned a nice big room for just myself, with a row of windows where the sun could come in, some geraniums in pots, and verbenas; a shelf of books, with *Jane Eyre*, *Lady Audley's Secret*, the Bible, and Riley's poems, and maybe a book with pictures of Madonnas, and a geography. I always loved to look up places on maps. I guess that's one reason why Steve always hankered after the open spaces and never could settle down to the mill business, me being so fond of geography.

"Well," resignedly, "there's no call to get your-

self all upset about it now. When Steve comes back will be time enough to think of going to Normal. But I'd run along now, if I was you, and tell Mr. Duval how pleased you'll be to take that position in his bank."

Celia did not stir.

Sharp surprise was now in the look the old woman bent on her.

"Celia ——" she began, then stopped, for she knew now that something serious was wrong with her niece. Every line of the stiff, slender little figure sitting so tensely there below her gave ample proof.

Her hand grasped a bit tighter the worn Bible lying in her lap, as one would the hand of a dear friend when craving support. One needed so much wisdom in guiding the young. The wrong word at the wrong time might make a lifetime's difference.

"You'll like it at the bank, Celia," she said soothingly. "All that marble and brass and mahogany! It'll be nice working in a place like that."

"I'm *not* going into Mr. Duval's bank!"

"Not going into the bank? But, Celia ——"

The averted face turned slowly. "I'm not taking any more favors from the Duvals, Aunt Clem!"

"Celia!"

"I mean it, Aunt Clem! I don't need the Duvals to offer me any positions. I'll get my own!" The words were tumbling out in a steady flow. "I'm

never going near the Duvals again as long as I live! They—they ——” The tense, impassioned voice broke suddenly, and, leaning forward, she buried her head in her arms and began to sob passionately—great dry, shaking sobs.

“Celia! Whatever on earth!”

Laying her Bible hastily on the little table beside her, Mrs. Carson with a quick gesture hitched her chair close to Celia and drew the girl's head into her lap.

“There, there, Celia—don't, dearie, don't! You've got no call to talk that way about the Duvals. The Duvals have always been our friends. The Duvals—why, Celia—I just don't know what we'd do without the Duvals.”

“That's just it, Aunt Clem! They've patronized us all our lives and made us like it! But now—now——” Hurt pride had given way to anger. “I won't stand it! They sha'n't say that I ——”

“What do you mean, Celia? Who is it that's been turning you against them?”

“Oh, Aunt Clem! We've been such fools—worshipping them—while they —— If you knew what people say!”

“What is it, Celia? Just a lot of silly schoolgirl talk?”

The faded blue eyes peered over the rumped curly head in her lap toward the big house below,

whose lighted windows now revealed a portion of a wide portico and massed shrubs about it. The Duval house with its walled garden was one of the bulwarks of Clementine Carson's life. As far back as she could remember, she had looked down into the Duvals' garden with something of a sense of ownership. Hadn't she nursed Perry Duval himself, when he was a boy, through all his childhood illnesses? Hadn't she read her Bible to each of his parents when they had slipped so fearfully and reluctantly into the beyond? Hadn't she nursed Angela, his daughter, time and again through minor illnesses, and assisted as best she could the stiff trained nurse brought from the city when Angela had nearly succumbed to pneumonia? Hadn't she always been ready to help when unexpected company arrived, or at one of Angela's parties, or at some of her mother's more sedate entertainments—women's club meetings, hospital board meetings, or what not? Why, the whole town knew how close she had always felt to the Duvals! And hadn't Angela and Celia always played together, from the time Celia came to her until just last year when they sent Angela off to boarding-school?

The wrinkled old hand wandered soothingly over the tumbled brown curls.

“Just you don't pay any attention to them, Celia. Schoolgirls! A lot they know about it!”

“But it's true, Aunt Clem!”

Celia sat erect now. “It's all true, what they say! I've been thinking and thinking. I can see now that it's been true all along. We've been *blind*. We've gone on loving them and worshipping them while they've just been looking down on us and pitying us because we cared for them. Oh, can't you see they don't deserve to have us love them?” She drew in her breath to stifle the sob in her voice. She wanted to cry, “And I *don't* love Angela! I never did! I loved her *beauty*! I loved her pretty blue eyes, her bright golden hair, her soft pretty hands, her exquisite clothes. I loved her pretty playthings. I loved their garden—the tulips and hyacinths, the roses, the clematis. I loved their house because of the lovely things in it, though I never did love them!” But she had no wish to let her aunt discover how passionately she loved beauty. It was too close to her, too sacred a thing to share with any one.

“But, Celia, dear, what makes you think that they look down on us? I'm sure ——”

“Oh, Aunt Clem! I heard Julia Winters telling Sue Berkeley. It was the last day of school. I was alone in the cloak-room and they were in the hall. They didn't know I was there. They talked a lot about how Angela and I used to be so intimate when we were small, but, now that we were growing up, the Duvals didn't mean to let our friendship con-

tinue. It was why they sent Angela to boarding-school, to get her away from me! They wanted her to meet other girls—rich girls—with social backgrounds!”

“Now, now, Celia!” The wrinkled hands trembled, and the troubled blue eyes clouded a moment with tears. Life was so hard for the young. They felt things so keenly. Their hurts were such tragedies. She lifted the bowed head. “Just don’t you pay any attention, Celia, to what people say. If Steve was home, you wouldn’t have to work, but—well, it just wouldn’t seem nice to Mr. Duval, Celia, if you refused to work in his bank or his store when he knows you’ve got nothing else but the pottery in view.”

“But don’t you understand, Aunt Clem, *that’s* the only reason he offered me a position. They don’t want me to be friends with Angela, but they want me to come and help them when they need me, and if I work in the pottery, I’ll be too low in the scheme of things to have around! I’d contaminate their guests!”

“Oh, Celia! It’s wicked to talk so!”

“But it’s true! Besides, I *love* the pottery! It’s lots more interesting—than hardware—and banking!”

“Maybe so, to you, Celia, but it’s just as they know. You’ll be cut off not only from the Duvals,

if you go to work there, but from all the other young people you've gone to school with."

There was silence for some time; then Celia said sadly but firmly, "Going to work in the pottery won't change *me* one bit, Aunt Clem. And I mean to show Julia and the others that I've *some* pride ——"

"Yes, I guess you have some pride, Celia, but I'm afraid it's not the right sort. One can have pride and yet be humble. The Duvals are thinking of your welfare, Celia, and I know it. The pride that cuts one off from opportunities that will improve one and may never come again—that's a foolish sort of pride, Celia."

She sighed and sat silent, her hand reaching to touch the Bible on the table beside her. How could she make this girl-child, this little orphan grandniece who had come to her when little more than a baby, realize how important were the right contacts for a young girl? If only she were not so old and half-crippled with rheumatism! Try as she would, she could not seem to make Celia realize that a girl cannot be too careful in her conduct or in her choice of companions and situations. It had been so hard to keep up with the active child, and it was with real dismay that she learned of Celia's discovery of the pottery on the other side of the railroad tracks and of her constant and growing interest in it. She had done her utmost to keep her away, for a pottery was

in her estimation no place for a small girl. To counteract its increasing interest, she had done everything she could to promote her niece's friendship with Angela Duval. But though Celia seemed to enjoy every moment spent with the Duvals, there was no apparent lessening of her interest in the pottery, though, as she grew older, she became more and more silent about her visits to it.

To ease her own conscience in the matter, Mrs. Carson made it her business to become acquainted with the group of foreigners who worked there, and it was with considerable relief that she found the little colony of Czechs a gentle and peaceful group. Her own goodness of heart in time caused her to become something in the nature of a guardian angel to them, teaching them many American customs and easier ways of living. To old Jared Stornoff, who made the hand-turned pieces on the wheel, and his wife Melby, she became a real friend, for she soon recognized the worth of the rugged old couple.

But it was nevertheless with considerable unhappiness that she regarded the girl at her knees, for she well knew how most others in the little town looked down upon the pottery workers.

“Seems like I just can't bear to have you go into the pottery, Celia,” she said finally, “even though they're such good folks. Being among them all day ——”

“I sha’n’t be among them. I’ll be upstairs in the room with old Jared. Oh, Aunt Clem, *please* don’t scold! If you knew how I love ——” Celia drew in her breath in a long sigh. It was so hard to talk of her love for the clay, to try to make her aunt understand that strange exhilarating thrill when she felt it soft and pliant between her fingers.

“Well, I know Jared’ll look after you, Celia, and they’ll all treat you with the utmost courtesy as long as you do right, but I can’t help thinking you’re making a dreadful mistake, choosing to take a position in a factory instead of a nice clean position in the Duvals’ bank. Well, maybe you’ll tire of the pottery after a bit. You better tell Mr. Duval you’re just trying it temporarily, so if you do change your mind ——”

“I’m not going to change my mind, Aunt Clem!”

“Dear me, Celia, I never knew a girl your age to be so headstrong. Well, Angela’ll be home to-morrow. I’m sure when you see her——”

“I won’t have any time to see Angela, Aunt Clem,” a hint of bitterness in her voice.

“Well, maybe not. But run along and tell Mr. Duval your decision before he goes to bed. I’m sure I’m sorry. They won’t be overly pleased, after being so kind ——”

CHAPTER II

THE PATH DIVIDES

WITH a despairing gesture, Celia arose. She might have known it would be useless to say anything to her aunt against the Duvals. Slowly she walked down the sloping path to the little wooden gate.

“It’s the very last time I mean to go near them,” she said to herself.

There was no use, she knew, in saying anything more to her aunt. Her aunt was old. Her ideas on some subjects were fixed. You just couldn’t make her understand. She would never be able to see the Duvals as they really were.

She lifted with gentle hands a long spray of fragrant lilac that hung over the gate, paused to sniff it, then gently swung it into place as she closed the gate behind her.

No, there wasn’t the least bit of use in saying anything against the Duvals to Aunt Clem, she reflected as she went down the slope. She would never have said what she had if it hadn’t been necessary to ex-

plain why she wouldn't accept one of the positions that Mr. Duval had offered her. She wished ruefully now that she had not let her emotions run away with her as she had. There was no need for her to make old Aunt Clem unhappy over it, too; no need to let her know how bitter she felt.

To tell the truth, she had been vaguely conscious for a long time of the widening gulf between herself and Angela Duval, though it had been a considerable shock to know that others gossiped about it. That had hurt keenly—that and the other things they had said, things that it would not have done to tell Aunt Clem. They had called her and her aunt the Duvals' unpaid servants. The Duvals had simply taken them for fools, getting all they could out of them all these years; and now that Angela was growing up, they intended that she should mix in much higher society than Newtonville afforded. Was it any wonder that Mr. Duval had offered her a position? What would people think of Angela, to have been friends with a girl who now worked in a *pottery*? Besides, they still wanted Celia's help when they entertained, for it saved them the expense of hiring extra maids, and how could they have her if she lowered herself by going to work in the pottery, especially as she had once been on such intimate terms with them? It simply would not look well.

It was true, she said bitterly to herself over and

over as she moved slowly along. The Duvals had used them. Hadn't Aunt Clem gone over there time and again to help? Hadn't she herself assisted Mrs. Duval many times, setting the tables when she entertained, pressing some of her finest linens, polishing the fragile china and glassware?

The praise Mrs. Duval gave her had been reward enough.

"I couldn't trust every one with my treasures, Celia," she would say.

Celia's heart had warmed many times to Mrs. Duval when she said such things, and she would have done anything Mrs. Duval asked of her just for the pleasure of handling the lovely things and of hearing her say, "You have such exquisite taste, Celia." She would never forget the day Mrs. Duval had said, "I think I'll always have you arrange the flowers when I entertain. You do know how to make the rooms look so charming!"

And Celia *had* known. It became one of her greatest pleasures to fill the vases and jars and tall baskets from the fragrant abundance of the Duvals' garden.

One thing had led to another. It was not long before Mrs. Duval was allowing her to mend the delicate lace in some of Angela's fragile undergarments and adding a bit of silken handwork to some of the simpler things.

To Celia, those hours had been nothing but the utmost pleasure, sitting beside Mrs. Duval in a low basket-chair under the great beech at the side of the house, looking up into Mrs. Duval's sweet, placid face, a bit full, as was her short matronly figure, the soft light-brown hair combed into a smooth roll over the top of her head, her flounces of flowered voile falling softly about her, her arm and hand moving in graceful gestures as she plied her needle, while Angela lounged in the hammock, alternately yawning and flicking the pages of an expensive beautifully illustrated book, reading bits aloud, humming a new song, chatting about clothes, or fretting about something that irked her.

It was all so lovely to Celia—those hours, the quiet of the garden broken only by the buzzing of insects among the flowers, the varied scents that drifted from the massed blooms about them, the lacy patterns the sun made over them and the grass as it glinted through the drooping branches of the big beech, and the delicate beauty of Angela—her hair spun gold where the long shafts of sunlight reached to touch it, her skin white as milk, though glowing faintly at cheeks and chin as by some faint rose radiance within, lips red as the ruby in the ring she twisted about her slender finger when she wearied of her book.

It was all so beautiful, so perfect, that sometimes

Celia's chest would swell with emotion. And the satisfying qualities of the cold lemonade and the cookies which dark Selina brought out to them!

But now she thought bitterly of it all. Oh, why had she been so blind, thinking they were fond of her, as fond as she was of them, when all the time they were nice to her only because of the help she gave them so willingly?

Well, it was all over now. No longer would she assist Mrs. Duval with her flowers, her linens, her china, her mending and embroidery in exchange for a cooky, lemonade and cake, a bonbon or two, the privilege of sitting in her garden worshipping Angela, to be shooed home when callers came or when other interests offered.

How often had she heard Mrs. Duval say, "You'll have to run along now, Celia," a slightly impatient note in her voice! "Angela will have to dress. We're expecting callers," or "Yes, you've arranged the flowers beautifully, so there, dear, help yourself to two of the bonbons on the buffet as you go out."

It had been so different when they wanted her. "Could you come over, Celia? Angela's so fretful, and you do play so nicely together. I don't know of any one who gets along quite so well with her as you do. It's such a pleasure to see the two of you together!"

Yes, all that was over now. She understood at

last, fully. They wanted her when she could be useful to them or help them idle away the time until better things beckoned, but they didn't love her as she had loved them.

She swallowed a lump in her throat and blinked her eyelashes rapidly as she opened the little green gate in the red brick wall that surrounded the Duvals' garden. When you loved *things, people*, it was hard to give them up, even when you knew they didn't love you. She knew, too, that though she had declared emphatically to herself only a short time ago that she did not love Angela, she really did love her. She would always love Angela. She just couldn't help it. She just couldn't help loving anything so lovely as Angela was to look upon.

Slowly she went up the flagged path and around to the front of the house. She longed to pause and touch each plant and shrub as had always been her custom, for they were dear, though silent, friends, but she did not stop. There was no need of adding to her pain.

Mrs. Duval arose with a flutter from her chair on the portico as she rounded the corner of the house.

"How you startled me, Celia!" she exclaimed, a mixture of surprise and annoyance in her voice.

"I'm sorry ——"

"Oh, my dear," in warmer tones, "it's quite all right. I was just sitting here dreaming. Mr.

Duval's busy in the library and I —— You know Angela is coming to-morrow. It seems an age. Come up and sit down. I know you came to hear about her. She did so well in her studies and has made some very interesting friendships."

Celia did not move. She had no intention of getting within range of the hall light that made one section of the portico as bright as day.

"I came to tell Mr. Duval," she said in rather flat tones, "that I—thank him—Aunt Clem thinks it so kind of him—but—but I won't be able to accept either of the positions he offered me."

"Why, Celia!" Mrs. Duval arose and moved quickly toward her. "Surely you don't mean—that you're ——"

"Yes, Mrs. Duval, I'm going into the pottery." She tried to keep the elation out of her voice, for she was glad just then, immensely glad, to let them know this once that she did not want their help. "I'm to help in old Jared Stornoff's department."

"Oh, not really, Celia!"

Celia nodded. Then came the sickening realization that this indeed was the end of her connection with the Duvals.

"Surely, Celia, you don't mean that you're going down there to work among those foreigners!"

Celia swallowed a lump in her throat and said, with genuine distress in her voice:

“Yes, Mrs. Duval. They’re kind—those people. And you know I’ve always—loved the pottery.”

Of a sudden she had a wild desire to fling out to Mrs. Duval: “They love me—those people at the pottery! I’m happy when I’m there! I can forget about you and Angela and your lovely home and garden. The pottery makes up for all the little hurts, and the big ones, too, that I’ve suffered here.”

Would she ever forget them? They came rushing back—the memories of those slights. That first day when Mrs. Duval had found her reaching through the iron bars of the front gate to feel the petals of the deep velvety tulips that lined the walk!

“Run away, you naughty, naughty child! How dare you touch my tulips!”

She had softened under Celia’s tearful explanations that she had only wanted to feel them. They were so soft and lovely. Other memories—but she pushed them back resolutely. There was no need to dwell on them. Her work at the pottery would make up for all this.

“But, my dear!” Mrs. Duval still seemed unable to comprehend. “You’ll be beyond the pale. You could never expect the young people you’ve gone to school with —— You couldn’t expect to—to—my dear—you wouldn’t be quite the same to any of us!”

Celia said nothing, as there seemed nothing to say.

Mrs. Duval hurried on. "We were hoping you'd go into the bank, dear, though the pay to begin with wouldn't be as much as in the store, but you'd have more time—if Angela or I needed you. She'll be entertaining quite a bit, now that she's a real young lady and has met such interesting young people. You'd enjoy being —— You'll miss seeing it all, Celia. It would be so difficult, Celia, explaining you to the young folks if you work in the pottery. Now, at the bank —— Really, Celia, I don't see how we'll manage without you. I had counted ——"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Duval. I—quite understand. You won't need to—try—to explain me. I expect to be rather busy. They're working overtime some, you know. If you'll—just—tell Mr. Duval—I—I do thank him."

"He'll be disappointed, Celia. He thinks you're a bright girl, and it wouldn't be long before you'd be promoted, I'm sure. Hadn't you better reconsider your decision? It'll hurt Angela, too, I know, to think of you working in that dirty place."

Celia turned away. She could imagine the little moue of distaste Angela would make when she heard it. More than once she had tried to tell Angela of the fascinations of the pottery, but Angela always hushed her abruptly. There couldn't possibly be anything interesting about those old drab buildings. She didn't want Celia ever to talk about them again.

“Well, I’m certainly sorry, Celia,” Mrs. Duval called after her somewhat impatiently. “You’re certainly making a dreadful mistake.”

Celia made no reply. Sudden tears were blinding her. She stumbled somehow through the darkness, found the little gate in the rear wall, crossed the road, and went slowly up the slope.

Julia Winters *had* been right, she thought bitterly. They *had* counted on her to take the position in the bank so that she would have time to help Mrs. Duval and Angela when they wanted her. No, she thought bitterly, it wouldn’t be hard to explain to Angela’s new friends that the girl who arranged the flowers, helped with the refreshments, ran upstairs for the bathing suits, kept the magazines in order, hung up the wraps, and did all the little things expected of a maid was one of the girls from the bank.

“Just happens to live in the neighborhood, you know,” she could hear Mrs. Duval explaining, “and simply worships Angela!”

It would all have been intolerable to Celia, had it not been for the knowledge that the pottery was waiting. What did she care what they thought of her for working there! They couldn’t possibly know how fascinating to her was the feel of the moist clay in her fingers. They couldn’t understand that strange hunger of hers to make things with the clay. And there she wouldn’t be taking favors from any

one, pushed aside when in the way and beckoned enticingly when they wanted her help.

Aunt Clem was still on the porch. She looked intently at the slim figure of the girl coming slowly up the slope and sighed deeply.

If Celia's parents had only lived, how different life might have been for her! Her mother's music—her father's learning. Not much money, no. Latin professors never get very far along the road to material things. And if Fred hadn't lost the little bit of money they had left for Celia ——— But how could he have anticipated the failure of the bank in which he had placed it?

Her wrinkled hands clutched the Bible she had again taken into her lap.

So mysterious were His ways! "Whom He loveth He chasteneth."

How could some people live without the comfort of such words from the Holy Book? But even so, it was hard—hard to understand—hard to bear. Just why should Celia's mother, her only niece, and Celia's father have to meet an untimely death beneath the wreck of a motor car? It had been hard, too, to have to separate Celia from her only brother, to give him into the hands of strangers, even though there wasn't the least doubt in her mind that the strangers could do far more for him than she could. But it was harder still to see Celia, whom she had

taken to rear, grow up with so few opportunities for development, and to know that she must take up the burden her own son Steve should have shouldered—the care and support of his old mother, becoming each day more frail and unfit to guide the growing girl who would never seem to her more than a dear and somewhat wilful child.

Yes, even with the comfort of the Book, life was hard. Not that it mattered about oneself, but it was hard to see Celia suffer; hard to see the eager, glowing flame in the brown eyes change to somber, bitter hardness; hard to know that the girl had deliberately cut herself off from all contact with the things that had always meant so much to her. For she knew how passionately Celia loved beauty, though the girl betrayed the fact to no one. Hadn't she seen, ever since Celia was a tiny girl, the look of adoration in her eyes when she came to show her the first golden dandelion to be found on the slope, the first purple violet from the clusters along the fence? Hadn't she marveled at the expression on her face when she watched the changing panorama of the sky as the sun sank down beyond the pottery and the group of houses beyond? Didn't she know just exactly the depth of her love for the beauty of the Duvals' garden, the lovely possessions that made the house a realm of delight to the small girl? Long ago she had sensed and learned to respect the reserve that

kept Celia from confiding what lay so near her heart.

And she had chosen that dreary, drab pottery in which to work! When the fascination of its revolving machinery wore off, as it undoubtedly would, once she became a paid worker there, what was to become of her, with her unconscious craving for the lovelier things of life? Those people who worked there—good, of course, but not the sort who could satisfy Celia, once she had probed the shallow depths of their inert minds.

She looked unhappily but hopefully upon her niece as she came up the porch steps. Perhaps Mrs. Duval had been able to make her see her mistake. Then she sighed deeply as Celia's voice came clearly:

“I'm going to bed, Aunt Clem. The pottery begins work at seven-thirty, you know.”

CHAPTER III

CELIA CARSON

WHEN Celia reached her low-ceilinged room at the top of the narrow flight of stairs, she did not go to bed. She sat down on its edge in the darkness and stared unseeingly out of the opened window, through which drifted the scent of honeysuckle from the vine that clung about the window frame. After a time she arose, lighted the little oil lamp on her dresser, and took an old ledger and pencil from a shelf that held a miscellaneous collection of schoolbooks and battered magazines.

Taking the book on her lap, she sat down in the low rocker and idly turned its pages. As far back as she could remember she had written to Ted, her brother, in this book, for it seemed to her that Ted, no matter where he was, must still be caring as much for her as she did for him, and would therefore be as interested in her life as she was in his. And in spite of the fact that her aunt had said that the people who had adopted him had insisted there be no intercourse between Ted and his few relatives, she was

sure that some day he would come to find her, though she never expressed this belief to her aunt. She knew her aunt had wanted to impress upon her the uselessness of still clinging to the memory of him.

She had been told more than once of the people who had discovered the wrecked car in which her parents were killed, and of their delight in the small boy, unconscious but unhurt, beside the road. So like their own son who had died a few months before was he that they had begged to be allowed to adopt him. Unstrung with grief over the loss of her only niece and her niece's husband, and worn with the care and anxiety of her own husband's long illness and consequent business difficulties, Mrs. Carson had succumbed to their pleadings, especially as Ted seemed as eager to belong to them as they were to have him. But, much as she regretted the separation of sister and brother, it seemed to be flying in the face of Providence to refuse, for Ted would be assured of a good home and education, besides inheriting the comfortable, if not great, estate of his foster-parents.

The thing that troubled her most was their insistence that no communication ever be made with Ted. Had Celia been more than four, she might not have yielded, but she knew that the years often bring forgetfulness. And Celia was such a gay, happy little thing, seemingly so content in her new sur-

roundings, that she tried to think it was all for the best.

And though Celia talked of her brother constantly at first, she became more and more silent when she realized her aunt's reluctance to speak of him. It was then that she found the old ledger and began writing to him of all the occurrences in her daily life.

It was strange how real he seemed at times, though it had been years since she had seen him. And though she knew he must by now be nearly a man, he would always remained fixed in her memory as a laughing, rowdy small boy pouring sand down her back, or teasing her kitten, or picking her up when she had fallen down and dusting her knees and frock.

And again she would become frantic at her inability to picture him. She would try to recall the exact color of his hair, the shape of his face, his bodily outline, but always the picture she tried to evoke in her mind was too hazy to grasp. He might have been like any small boy in Newtonville for all she could recall.

Then terror would creep into her thoughts when she thought of his forgetting her. Could he have become indifferent, have forgotten her completely? Boys were so different from girls. But then Ted was her *brother*. He wouldn't forget her.

And so she wrote to him of all that went on in Aunt Clem's little house atop the knoll that overlooked

Newtonville. She told him of the vegetable garden with the fat cabbages, the tall bean vines, the green onion spears, the lacy lettuce, the plump red tomatoes. She told him of the lilacs and rosebushes; the honeysuckle where tiny red long-billed hummingbirds came to suck the honey from the waxen flowers; the clump of pines on the slope that housed a pair of turtledoves. She told him of the big red brick house of the Duvals with its rose garden, its trellises and arbors covered with purple and white wisteria, its marble seats and bird baths, its formal flower beds, and the tulips along the walk. She was determined that he miss nothing of all these delightful experiences that filled her life. She told him of Uncle Fred's dying, of Uncle Steve always going off and coming back unexpectedly, of how the mill had had to be sold, and how Aunt Clem's rheumatism got worse all the time.

Her sentences were stiff at first, but she wrote as best she could, and gradually the words came easier.

She told him in detail of the pottery—that place of magic to her. The day of its discovery had been an exciting one. Angela had been cross that day. She had not wanted Celia even to touch any of her playthings, and so Mrs. Duval had sent Celia away. Puzzled and considerably hurt because she knew that she had not deserved Angela's irritation, and know-

ing that Aunt Clem would be dozing over her darning, she wandered down the dusty road that led to the drab, ramshackle buildings along the railroad tracks. The great piles of coal and cinders had set her to guessing. Then she discovered the heap of broken pottery. It was *wonderland*. She hunted excitedly for the broken bits of colored ware. She loved colors. The pockets of her gingham frock sagged with the weight of the pieces she picked up.

Growing bolder and filled with curiosity about the great dingy buildings that had disgorged these glorious bits of color for her, she strolled along the open sheds where great stacks of crocks awaited shipment, and watched the men at work.

After that, she did not mind so much when Angela was cross and Mrs. Duval sent her away. The pottery was always waiting.

There were days when she would watch for hours the loading of the crocks and tiles into the freight cars. As time passed, her curiosity emboldened her to linger in the doorways and to make friends with the men.

They told her at different times of the processes through which the clay went. She learned of the great pit beyond the lake where the clay was mined and brought to the pottery; how it was allowed to dry and then ground to a powder, after which water was added and all foreign substances removed, and

then how it was finally worked by machinery into a soft plastic mass.

It grew more and more interesting to Celia, and each day she learned something new about this dingy but fascinating place—how the moist clay was fashioned into various receptacles, dipped into the great vats of glaze, and then fired in the great ovens.

At times she would be ordered out, but always she came back. The foreman, seeing her fascinated gaze as she looked at the machinery and the great belts whirring overhead or watched the workmen who shaped the huge crocks, finally permitted her to come and go as she wished.

She grew to love the sheds where the crocks, bowls, and other wares were piled in great pyramids to the ceiling, but best of all she loved the furnace-room, where the great round brick ovens sent out withering blasts of heat. She loved to watch the men before the flickering fires of the open hearths about the ovens and imagine, as they brought out the fired pieces, that they were genii who had worked some sort of magic with the dull gray pieces of clay that had been taken in. It was some time before she learned that it was the firing which brought out the lovely colors of the glaze.

Then she learned about old Jared Stornoff upstairs, who made the finest pieces by hand. Though he was greatly loved by all, she soon learned that he

wasn't one to be bothered with a young one; she'd have to stay on the first floor, they told her. The temptation was more than she could stand, however, so she climbed the shed under his window and watched him from the outside.

She told Ted as best she could how the clay came in time to mean so much to her. She even told him how she had once picked up a lump of moist clay from old Jared's table and had taken it home. That had been a dreadful experience, for never had she seen Aunt Clem so angry before.

"To take something that isn't your own is very wrong!" she had scolded.

"But it just seemed to stick to my fingers, Aunt Clem! It just seemed as if it wanted to be in my hands!" she tried to explain shrilly in self-defense. "It was so soft and nice!"

"Well, then, you could have held it a moment and put it back again!"

"But when I held it, it began to feel *real*, Aunt Clem!"

"Real? Of course it was real!"

"I mean *real*—like a kitty—maybe! *Alive!*"

"Nonsense, Celia! Take that lump of clay and put it right back where you found it!"

And Celia, with reluctant steps, had returned to the pottery, climbed to the top of the shed that stretched below old Jared's window, and returned

the clay to its rightful place, not, however, without a regretful sigh.

It was the beginning of old Jared's interest in her. He had so far only tolerated her, but when he found her returning the clay and listened to her explanations, his tolerance grew into real interest. He gave her the lump of clay, and she carried home triumphantly to Aunt Clem the image of a kitten he had formed for her with it.

She went to sleep that night with the moist clay kitten against her cheek and awoke in the morning to find it a hard formless mass. Her consternation when she found that she had slept on it and ruined it was changed to amazed delight when she discovered that, by moistening it and kneading it smoothly as she had seen Jared do, she was able to work it back into something of its original shape. And she found that she could make other things with it besides kittens. It became in time a whole zoo, all in one.

This was a fascinating pastime, and it made up for much of Angela's neglect and irritation. As she grew older, the clay took on the shape of things other than animals. Sometimes it would be an imitation of some of the pieces she saw at the pottery, sometimes it would be a little figure—a fat man, a slender boy, a chubby child, and sometimes just a laughing head with exaggerated features. It came in time

to mean almost as much to her as Angela and the Duvals' lovely garden, almost as much as Ted. Every few days she would find it necessary to change its shape. Her fingers seemed happiest when handling the soft, plastic stuff. It gave her a new sort of confidence in herself.

"I could do that," she told old Jared once, when he was putting the handle on an exceptionally graceful urn.

He challenged her to come in and try. She did, and though she did not succeed, it was not long before he was showing her just how it was done, and when orders were slack and there was time to spare, he showed her how to shape the clay on the whirler. She loved the feel of the soft mass as it rose and fell under her fingers. Its fascination for her was endless. Many times it grew into funny pudgy shapes, not at all like Jared's, but it gave her a feeling that she was dealing in magic of some sort. The stuff seemed to possess *life* under her hands.

She and Jared became great friends, and when he knew she must do something to help support her aunt and herself, it was through him that she was given an opportunity to work there, trimming the rough edges of the pieces that came from the molds and receiving fairly good pay.

She sat for some time, turning the leaves of the

big book slowly, reading a line or two as she went along.

So childish—this writing to a brother who had no doubt long ago forgotten her! Just one of her childish delusions—his coming back—like her delusions about the Duvals being as fond of her as she was of them!

Her red lips curled scornfully. What a silly little fool she had been all these years! Well, her eyes were open at last. She knew now for a certainty just how little she had ever meant to the Duvals.

And no doubt it was the same with Ted, she thought bitterly. The adored son of wealthy parents would hardly be interested in a sister who worked in a pottery!

She closed the book sharply, pulled open a drawer of the dresser, and flung the book into it. She was a child no longer. Why continue to dwell on childish fancies? Ted was the same as dead to her, just as the Duvals now were. Long ago Aunt Clem had tried to make it all very clear about Ted, but she had stubbornly gone on hoping and caring. What a fool she was!

Well, all that was over now. To-morrow she would start anew, with no more illusions. She would be just one of the pottery workers. But she would do her best. She would learn all she could, and maybe—some day—No, she wouldn't dream any more use-

less dreams. She would work, and love it. It was safe to love work. Besides, it was all there was left to do just now. Angela Duval and her alluring surroundings were definitely out of her life. She meant to cease even to think of them.

CHAPTER IV

A SYMPHONY IN BLUE

As the days and weeks passed, Celia's hurt gradually lessened, and she became more and more absorbed in her work and in everything connected with the pottery.

To her aunt, who watched her anxiously and lovingly, she seemed to grow a little more slender, her chin a little more firm, her eyes a little bit harder; rarely now did they dance with excitement as they used to do when she told of things at the Duvals'—the purchase of some deep green velours portières, the lovely carvings of a new chair, some new gold-etched goblets so fragile one hardly dared touch them. Even her ringleted brown head seemed to have changed. There was a new poise in the way she carried it.

She talked less than ever before and read more. Books had become her sole recreation aside from her daily swim in the lake, which lay about a quarter of a mile to the west of them.

Often her aunt complained of her silence or of her

complete absorption in her books. She longed more than once to say, "Run over and see Angela for a bit, Celia. You need some young company," but she did not. She knew by the set, stern expression on the slender face that Celia and Angela were definitely now of two different worlds. It was hard not to chatter about the Duvals. All her life she had talked of the Duvals to Celia. Yet, though it grieved her inexpressibly, she felt a certain satisfaction in the new Celia, for she recognized in the girl's stubborn desire to stand on her own feet a strength of purpose her aunt had not guessed she owned.

As for Celia, though there was no way in which she could manage to forget the Duvals entirely, since she had only to lift her eyes from Aunt Clem's little porch to look down into the garden of the big house below them, after many long hours of rather bitter thinking she came at last to the decision that it was not fair to blame either Angela or Mrs. Duval for their lost friendship.

"If I hadn't been so blind, I'd have realized long ago that we couldn't go on being friends," she said to herself one evening as she sat on the porch, staring through the darkness down upon the big house below. "Any one else would have thought of it without having to be told. With all the Duvals have, of course they don't want Angela to be friends with a girl who lives in a little house like this, who has about

three dresses to her name at one time, and who has to work for her living. I was the prize fool for not realizing it sooner.”

Her lips came together into a firm straight line; then they quivered a bit as she said again to herself, “They *have* done a lot for me. I was lucky that they let me be Angela’s friend even for a time. I guess I’ll always remember how nice it was, playing in their garden, and all the lovely things they let me touch and see. I’ve had all that, anyway,” she added fiercely, “and I don’t expect *ever* to forget it. I guess I do love them, in a way, and always shall, but I’m just not good enough for Angela now, and I’ve got to face it. But I’m not going to be silly and make Aunt Clem unhappy. I’ve got the pottery. I guess the pottery makes up for losing the Duvals, even though I couldn’t ever make any one understand.”

It did not surprise her that neither Angela nor her mother sent for her. She realized fully now that Mrs. Duval had intended to make it plain to her that, by accepting work in the pottery, she was definitely breaking the tie between them. Several times she saw them in their garden, but they did not look up nor wave as they used to do.

Gradually she ceased to think about them at all. Her work was too absorbing. The feel of the moist clay in her hands held a spell for her that was endless. The window ledge by her worktable always

held some grotesque or amusing figure that she made in idle moments, though she was careful to hide it from sight whenever the manager, Mr. Creel, could be heard coming up the stairs. She had no desire to be rebuked by him.

Old Jared would laugh heartily at times over some of them and nod his head appreciatively, and when he, too, had moments to spare, he let her take his place at the whirler.

The pottery's fascination for her grew daily. Always there was the whirler to look forward to, a chance to feel the soft clay coming to life under her fingers, that grew more and more skilful as time passed. She hung in delight over each new design that Jared originated, and awaited with breathless interest the results that were brought from the ovens.

She talked at great length with him of colors and tints, and, though he was careful to give away no secrets concerning the formulas of the various glazes, her intelligence and breathless absorption in the subject often prompted him to explanations he would have accorded no other employee.

She asked countless questions, and begged to be told just how each of those lovely pieces of china and porcelain and glass she had seen at the Duvals had been made. But Jared could be very glum at times, and sometimes she wondered if he were not just a bit jealous of those who made the lovely things so

different from his own. And since he would not, or could not, tell her all she wanted to know, she began to wonder if there were not books that told in detail about such things. Those bronze busts on the top of Mr. Duval's bookcases, the alabaster figure of a dancing girl on the marble pedestal in Mrs. Duval's drawing-room—how had they been made?

She became consumed with the desire to know. She haunted the library and pored over magazines, but found only a meagre amount of information.

She was just a little ashamed of her interest in such things, since she well knew what people in Newtonville thought of her for going to work in the pottery. It had not taken long for her to understand the meaning of their attitude toward her. Girls she had been friends with at school no longer called to her in passing. When she met them in town, they passed her with an indifferent nod. She was fast coming to realize that, of her own choice, she had cut herself off entirely from all her former world.

“But I don't care!” she would flare out to herself. “The pottery means most to me!”

And it did. Even through the intense heat of the long summer her interest did not wane, though the low roof, on which the sun beat fiercely, and the gray dust from the clay, which seemed to fill the whole building, made the place almost unbearably uncomfortable at times.

She longed fiercely to know more and more about the creating of those lovely objects she had so much admired at the Duvals'. In a sort of reluctant desperation, she finally approached the librarian with her need.

"Pottery? No, I believe not. We've never had any call for books on pottery." There was a somewhat reproachful note in the librarian's voice. "We don't have very much money, you know, and we try to get the books that will be of help or entertainment to the most people."

Disappointedly Celia turned away. She well knew how little the people of Newtonville cared about pottery. To them the pottery was only a group of drab, uninteresting buildings, fortunately on the edge of town, where the soot from its fires could not be too great a nuisance. They thought of the pottery, she knew, in terms of drain-tiles and roofing-tiles, of kraut jars and mixing-bowls. They seemed to know nothing of the lovely hand-turned pieces, a great roomful—vases, jars, jugs, mugs, and bowls, in all shapes and sizes and in beautiful soft colors—that were sent all over the world.

She wished there were some way to create in the minds of the people of Newtonville the respect and admiration for the pottery that she felt for it.

So intent on the subject was she one day on leaving the pottery that she failed to see the hand which

beckoned to her from a blue roadster that came purring to a stop in front of the line of freight cars that blocked the street.

It was not until a lilting girlish voice called, "Would you mind telling me if this is Newtonville?" that Celia turned swiftly, aware now of the luxurious blue roadster so close to her, as well as of the girl in the blue frock and blue felt hat pulled at a jaunty angle down over a pair of matching blue eyes.

A little thrill of admiration shot through Celia. As she nodded assent, she put out an eager hand and with slim brown fingers caressed the highly polished fender of the blue car. As far back as she could remember, she had had to *touch* things—beautiful things. It was just something she could not seem to help.

"Where'll I find the St. Nicholas Hotel?" the girl in the blue car asked.

"It's at Fourteenth and Main. You can't miss it if you stay on this highway till you come to the Duvals' place. Turn east there."

"Duvals'?"

"The big red house with the walled garden on the left of this street."

The blue eyes looked thoughtful. "You don't mean the hardware Duvals?"

Celia nodded. "Hardware and bank Duvals," she explained further.

“Not *Angela Duval*?” the girl in blue insisted.

“Yes, *Angela*. Do you know her?”

“Well, rather. She was at *Worthington Hall* this last term. My school, you know. So this is her town!” with a swift appraising glance at the dingy pottery buildings to the left of her and the lumber yards to the right.

Something in the smiling eyes brought *Celia* to a quick defense.

“It’s not exactly *Angela Duval*’s town,” she said, a civic pride struggling for expression. “It has four churches, a high school, a gym, six factories, lots of stores, greenhouses, a movie house, a library, and—the pottery,” she ended, a little breathless but convincing. “The *Duvals* don’t own quite all of them, though they ——”

“That’s gratifying. I was afraid they might, after what I’ve seen of *Angela*. And you say you have a pottery? That it?” indicating the dingy buildings spread along the railroad tracks. “It looks—rather— Do you work there?” with a casual glance at *Celia*’s dusty blue overalls and the wide straw jimmy that shielded her face from the fierce rays of the late afternoon sun.

“Yes!” *Celia* said quickly, a sudden note of defiance in her voice. Then, as she saw nothing but mild interest in the blue eyes, she added gently, “I *love* to work there.”

The blue eyes stared now. "*Love* to work—in that ——" She did not finish her sentence, only glanced hastily at the jeweled watch on one slender wrist and looked off impatiently to the line of freight cars, which, with a jangling discord of brakes and couplings, now seemed about to be on their way. But, as they again halted noisily, she asked sharply, "Isn't there some way of crossing these tracks up above?" nodding toward the right. "I'm in such a hurry!"

"There's no way unless you go back about half a mile," Celia told her. "The Wakefield Lumber Yards run up to East Second," nodding toward them. "But, if you're in a hurry, you'd better go that way. There's no telling when these cars will let us pass."

"Thanks. I'll do that. Want to come along?"

"You mean—me?" wide-eyed with surprise.

"Who else? The ride'll cool you off," opening the door invitingly. Then, snatching up a wisp of handkerchief from her lap and flicking it at her face, she complained, "My, it's warm!"

Celia looked wistfully at the open door, then down at her overalls, saturated with clay dust.

"I'd spoil your cushions." She slapped at one thigh and created a little cloud of gray dust. "It even gets in your hair," she explained, "but I don't mind much. The lake isn't far."

“And you have a lake, too?” the girl in blue asked, a bit too politely to suit Celia.

“She’s making fun of this town,” she decided swiftly to herself. “I guess it does look like a small place compared to where she came from.”

But the girl in blue disarmed her completely with another of her cordial smiles.

“Come,” she urged. “What’s a little dust, more or less? Cars expect dust inside as well as out.”

Without further protest, Celia succumbed completely to the charm of the blue car and its owner and climbed in, reveling in the deep luxurious hum of the powerful motor as they swung about and out the asphalt road toward the cross street that would lead them to East Second Street. It was so easy to succumb to beauty and luxury.

With a sidewise glance, she appraised the girl behind the wheel.

“Something of Angela’s type,” she mused, “but I can’t imagine Angela picking up a factory girl in blue overalls. And the way she’s dressed! Blue from head to foot, shoes, beads, stockings, purse, hat, frock, and eyes! Not a discordant note!” she exulted.

And, in spite of her devotion to Angela’s beauty, she had to admit that Angela at her loveliest had never possessed a tenth of the assured charm of this girl beside her.

With other sidelong glances, she noted the silver fittings of the car, one hand meanwhile pressing lovingly into the deep velours of the cushioned seat. It had been so long since she had been near anything so lovely—except Jared's vases. With a sudden glow of admiration, she reflected that this girl beside her was like one of them—perfect.

“You know Angela?” the girl beside her inquired.

“I live just back of the Duvals on the knoll.”

“Then of course you're friends.”

“Yes—in a way,” hesitantly.

She had no intention of confiding the extent of her friendship with Angela to a stranger, but she did somewhat want this girl beside her to know that she realized the very obvious gulf between them.

“You see,” she explained, “the Duvals are wealthy. And Aunt Clem and I—well—I played with Angela when she was small, and we went to school together. Then last year she went to Worthington Hall, and now—I—I—work in the pottery.”

She felt that that was explanation enough, but she could not help adding, “Aunt Clem thinks a lot of them. She's always known them. They've been kind ——”

The girl beside her was nodding understandingly. They crossed the railroad at East Second and swung down the dirt road leading to the new highway that wound past the Duvals' place.

Celia nodded toward it eagerly.

"It's the loveliest place in town," she said, "and if you visit Angela, I know you'll have a nice time," unconscious of the sigh in her voice.

"I'm not expecting to visit Angela," the girl beside her said; then added as though the idea had just occurred to her, "it depends on Dad—on the way he reacts to the unexpected sight of his darling daughter. If he's delighted to see me, I'll stay with him. If not, I may test the hospitality of the Duvals, for I have been urged rather often."

Celia smiled and nodded toward the corner. "You may let me out there by their wall."

"Mayn't I take you up to your door?" with a glance toward the little house almost hidden by the clump of pines on the knoll above the big red house.

"No," Celia returned decisively. "It's too steep for a car. I'll just get out here."

"Well, I'll be seeing you," the girl in blue said smilingly as she brought the car to a stop. "That is, if I stay any time. Pottery, you know, is Dad's hobby, and he may want to look the place over. Besides, I'm a little curious to find out what there is about such a place—to *love*. Now, whom do I ask for if I should come calling?" the blue eyes twinkling.

"Celia Carson," with a little laugh.

Of course she was only joking, but it was nice of her to say that.

“Then, if Sally Vandever sends up her card at the pottery one of these days, you’ll know whom to expect!”

Again Celia laughed at the thought of any one’s sending up a calling card to her at the pottery; then with a lift of her hand she responded to the gay salute from the girl in blue.

CHAPTER V

AUNT CLEM SPEAKS HER MIND

SLOWLY Celia moved up the path to the little house, her face glowing with pleasure, her brown eyes dreamily absorbed in speculation about the girl in the blue car. As she opened the wooden gate, she looked up in surprise at her aunt, who was waiting for her on the porch.

Aunt Clem was unaccountably grim-looking.

“My, Celia!” she exclaimed. “Whatever on earth do you mean riding home with strangers! And in such a car! In all my days I’ve never seen such a car here in Newtonville!”

“No, I guess not, Aunt Clem.” Celia’s eyes shone at the memory of the car.

The small figure in black and gray printed calico looked at her sharply. “I want to know, Celia! There I was in the kitchen, my hands all over flour, making biscuit for supper when I saw that car swinging around the Duvals’ corner—and you stepping out! Haven’t I told you time and again ——”

“Oh, Aunt Clem, it was only a girl. A freight

blocked the street. She was in a hurry. I told her about going back and up to East Second Street. She asked me to go along to cool off." She turned and stared off over the housetops of the little town spread out below them. "Maybe we can see her when she gets to the top of Sixth Street!"

"Now, why should I be craning my neck to see *her*, Celia?" Aunt Clem complained, but the interested light in her eyes belied her tones, and the slim, somewhat bent figure strained unconsciously to draw itself up to Celia's height, and she followed the direction of Celia's gaze with her faded blue eyes.

Though she was often forced to frown upon Celia's enthusiasms, they nevertheless helped to make life interesting, in spite of the fact that her worn body was often taxed to its utmost strength to respond to her niece's never-failing energy. She missed them of late. The girl was growing so quiet.

"Her name is Sally Vandever, Aunt Clem," a wistful note in her voice.

"Sally Vandever? What difference does it make what her name is, Celia?" holding her apron out carefully to catch any of the flour that might happen to drop from her hands to the clean porch floor.

"She was all in blue, Aunt Clem! I wish you could have seen her!" staring off dreamily into the distance.

"Celia," the faded blue eyes full of anxiety,

“haven't I told you time and again you mustn't *ever* get in a car with a stranger?”

“But this was a *girl*, Aunt Clem! And she didn't seem at all like a stranger. She had the friendliest ways. She couldn't have been much older than I,” musingly.

“It don't make one bit of difference, Celia! Girls that go tearing around in cars from one town to another are not the kind for you to be associating with,” her aunt said firmly.

“Don't worry, Aunt Clem; there's no chance of my ever associating with *her!*”

“No, I guess not, seeing as she's from away from here, though just let me tell you one thing, Celia. Having money enough to fly around the country in imported cars, which was what that one looked like, don't make her any better in the sight of God than a girl who takes care of her old aunt by working—in a pottery.”

“Probably not, Aunt Clem,” softly. “The trouble is, God's so far away. And nobody seems to bother much about what He thinks. It's what people on the earth think that seems to count the most. But you needn't worry. I'll never see *her* again.”

“Now, Celia! It's not for you to question His ways. Doing the things that's right in His sight is what counts.”

Celia turned swiftly upon her; then slowly the

sudden spark in her eyes died. She had wanted to cry, "Well, then, why does He make such beautiful things—the flowers, the trees, the sunsets—if He doesn't expect us to love beautiful things? And how can He expect us to keep from *wanting* beautiful things?" But all she said was, "You're right, of course, Aunt Clem."

There was no use in making her aunt unhappy by letting her think she longed for the fine things that there was no possible chance of her ever attaining. She knew, too, the impossibility of trying to make Aunt Clem understand that driving, ceaseless craving that was alleviated only by the sight of some form of beauty and yet seemed intensified the more, the more she dwelt on the thought of it. It was like talking of God. Aunt Clem had talked to her of Him all her life, and yet to her He seemed strangely far off and unreal.

But her aunt had understood the sudden flash in her eyes. She understood, too, Celia's evident reluctance to share with her the thing that meant so much to her. Pushing back with one floury hand a wisp of gray hair that lay on her forehead, she said gently, "You know you chose to go into the pottery, Celia. You could have been in the bank, where it's all marble and shining brass and mahogany, and you could have gone on being friends with Ange—that is ——"

"You mean I could have gone on helping them out

when they needed some one. I could have listened when Angela told about the parties I wouldn't be invited to. I could help her entertain—pass the sandwiches, arrange the flowers and favors—but I wouldn't be expected to be one of the guests. Yes, Aunt Clem, and I would have gone on, thankful to be of use to them, if I'd thought they cared the least tiny bit—about me—but—but ——” She swallowed hard and added, “I'll never be anything but *glad* that I chose the pottery!”

“Now, Celia, it's wicked to be so bitter.”

“But I'm not bitter, Aunt Clem! I'm just awake. I'm just being sensible.”

“Yes, I s'pose so, in a way, but it's hard to have you think unkindly about folks that's always meant so much to you. I guess it's just the way of life, Celia. If I could give you the things Angela has—there's no reason ——” She sighed deeply, then brightened as she added, “Well, don't you worry, Celia. You may not have to work long. Steve'll be sure to come back soon, and then you can go on to State Normal. You'll make a lot of friends there.”

Celia made no response. It was so useless to argue with Aunt Clem. She would never go to State Normal! She would never be a teacher, no matter what happened!

“My! It's nearly half past six!” her aunt exclaimed, casting an anxious glance toward the Big

Ben on the black iron mantel-shelf of the little sitting-room as she followed Celia into the house. "Run and take your swim while I slap the biscuits in the oven. We'll be late for the show, and it's John Gilbert in —— And, Celia!" 'in sudden alarm. "You sure you got your pay envelope on you? These women that go flying around the country picking up strange girls —— There's no telling —— You sure you got your pay envelope?"

Celia drew it from a pocket with a wide smile for her aunt's exaggerated concern for her, tossed it with a laugh into the floury hands, and hurried into the tiny passageway, up the stairs, snatched up her bathing suit, a towel, and a bar of soap, tore down again, and was off, whistling gayly, down the path at the back of the house, happy in the thought of the evening ahead of them.

She loved the movies. They gave you details of foreign places that you'd never find in books. You made the acquaintance of people you'd never know otherwise, but, best of all, they gave you beauty—beauty that made you ache with envy of those who had created it, that made you desperate for knowledge of how it was all accomplished.

If she hurried, they might be able to catch a glimpse of Sally Vandever somewhere about the St. Nicholas, for the Palace Moving Picture Theatre was in the block beyond, and even if they didn't see

Sally, they might get another look at her smart blue car. It wasn't often one even had a chance to look at a car like that.

Later, as they neared the hotel and saw the car standing beside the curb, she took a proprietary pride in pointing it out. With a little inward laugh, she noted that her aunt's romantic streak was getting the better of her, though she was fighting it nobly.

"But you can't judge people by their cars, Celia. Any one with money enough ——"

Celia's hand on her arm tightened suddenly. "Look! There by that window!" she whispered in her aunt's ear. "It's Sally! Oh!" disappointedly, "she's gone!" her chest heaving with a sigh as Sally arose from the table beside the window and moved out of their range of vision. "I wish you could have seen her face—her eyes."

"I guess I was too busy looking at that man she was with, Celia."

"Her father. She said she was coming to meet him."

"Maybe so, but just tell me this, Celia. What's a man like that doing a-climbing our hill twice to-day, just to walk past our house? There's not another thing on that hill but our house and that clump of pines."

"Maybe he liked the view. It is pretty, looking over the town."

“It wasn’t the view he was looking at; it was the house, and I’m sure there’s nothing about a little run-down five-room house like that to attract any one’s attention, much less a moneyed-looking man like him.”

Celia shrugged and thought with a smile that now her aunt would have something to keep her imaginative mind busy for some time.

“It just goes to prove, Celia, it’s not safe to take up with strangers.”

They were nearing the theatre now, but, looking back, Celia saw both Sally and her father descending the steps of the hotel, followed by a porter carrying a bag. Another backward glance showed them climbing into the car.

“Maybe not,” she agreed silently, “but it’s rather interesting when they happen to be people like Sally Vandever.”

The car was disappearing down Main Street, much to Celia’s regret.

“Well, they’re gone,” she said to herself resignedly, and, though she knew her aunt was right about not picking up with strangers, she had a feeling that she would never be sorry she had met Sally Vandever. Just to have seen her smile, the trim set of her slender shoulders behind the wheel, the gay laugh, the wisp of fair hair beneath the blue hat, her air of generous camaraderie— she was a new

experience to Celia, who did not mean to forget her, even though she never saw her again.

Automatically she took out Ted's book that night to write to him about her meeting with Sally and the blue car, and then she remembered. She had done with childish things. Besides, Ted was only a boy, and how could a boy ever understand the thrill of her meeting the divinely alluring Sally or appreciate the friendly qualities of Sally's smile? No matter how far you stretched your imagination or exhausted your adjectives, you knew he couldn't possibly understand. He was only a boy, even though he was older than she; and a strange boy, at that, even though he was her brother.

CHAPTER VI

A BREAKFAST AL FRESCO

MRS. CARSON, a worried frown on her usually placid face, met Celia at the kitchen door as she came hurrying in to lunch a few days later.

"Celia, I hate to ask it, but would you please run over to the Duvals and borrow a couple of eggs? Two of that dozen from Stengel's were bad, and Jared's favorite icing is egg, you know. I just couldn't put any but egg icing on his birthday cake."

Then, as Celia came to an abrupt stop, a flash of distaste crossing her face, her aunt hurried on: "Jared hasn't found out anything about the party, has he? It sure would be a shame after his wife's going to all that trouble to surprise him, untacking her carpets and putting wax down. Did you hear whether Dolph got the extra fiddlers from Phoenix?"

Celia nodded a brief response and said, plainly distressed, "Do you *have* to have those eggs, Aunt Clem?"

"Of course I do, or I wouldn't be asking. I put

all ten of those eggs in that cake, I tell you. I got my icing a-bubbling now, and I can't leave it. You haven't time to run all the way to Stengel's, and they don't have any afternoon delivery in the summer, you know. I'm sure it's very little for you to do for Jared's party. And Mrs. Duval won't mind in the least. Besides, I'd like her to know I don't harbor hard feelings 'cause they haven't sent for us."

With a muttered "Oh, well, all right, if you *have* to have them," Celia started around the house.

Her aunt's gaze followed her unhappily and a bit guiltily, for it was not only for eggs that she was sending Celia to the Duvals. That morning, while sweeping the front porch and pausing, as was her custom, to admire the view, she made the interesting discovery that the Duvals had erected a red and yellow striped beach umbrella on their side lawn and under it had placed a table which was being spread with a lace cloth.

With surprise and considerable interest, she had stood and watched as a maid went back and forth from the house, bringing out dainty china, silver, and glassware. She had no thought of being rude in thus staring down upon them, for the Duval house and what went on therein had always been a never-ending source of pleasure to her. Its red tile roof and the brick wall with its clinging ivy that enclosed the garden filled her with a constant sense of pride. To her,

a walled garden was romance of a sort. That the wall had been erected to shut out the gaze of the curious as well as to enclose the possessions of the Duvals in no way marred her pleasure in it. So many years had she reveled in the beauty of their surroundings that she felt a proprietary interest in all that went on within the confines of the red wall.

But, though she watched until her nose told her that her potatoes, intended for lunch, were scorching, she saw no one but the maid.

As she hurried about preparing lunch, she thought sadly of the time when Celia used to run back and forth, bringing her news of what went on there, and when she herself used to help prepare for the guests that came so often to the big house. Many times of late she had racked her brains in an effort to find some way in which to restore that old happy relationship.

It gave her some satisfaction, therefore, when she realized that, if the cake for Jared's birthday party that night were to be finished, there was nothing to be done but send to the Duvals for eggs. She might easily have gone herself, but she wanted Celia to go, more in the hope that the sight of her might soften their feelings toward her than to know for whom the interesting preparations were being made.

"They might be so pleased to see her they'll invite her over," she mused hopefully.

But, knowing just what Celia thought of them, she was just a bit ashamed to have forced such an errand upon her, though she told herself repeatedly that it just wouldn't do to encourage her niece's ill feelings. Maybe she, too, would soften toward them, once she came under the spell of their surroundings.

"Well, anyway," she said to herself as she turned back to the stove, "I've got to have those eggs for that cake," and added brightly, "My, won't old Jared be tickled when we folks come crowding in on him, musicians, cakes, ice cream, and all!"

Celia, having broken a twig from a heavily laden lilac bush by the front fence, tore it into savage bits as she went reluctantly down the slope toward the red gate set in the wall at the back of the Duvals' establishment. She told herself that for no one but old Jared would she have gone to the Duvals', but she knew just how fond he was of Aunt Clem's cake. She knew, too, just how happy and excited her aunt was over the birthday surprise party that had been planned by the pottery workers to celebrate his sixtieth birthday. It wouldn't do to let her personal feelings interfere with the success of the party.

She was also very anxious herself to have everything as it should be, for she knew that the pottery workers had gone to considerable trouble and expense to make it an outstanding occasion. There was to be a jazz ensemble from Phoenix some miles

away, which would alternate with two Czechoslovakians who played the music of their old world. There were to be native Czech dances and folk-songs. It would be too novel an occasion for Celia to want to miss, though she had no expectation of taking part in the merriment. They were all older than she. She and her aunt would be merely onlookers, though of course Aunt Clem would find plenty to keep her nimble fingers busy.

But she knew that the party would please old Jared and his wife greatly, for both were keenly interested in the foreign element that had come but a short time before into their midst. Their timid aloofness, their shy attempts to assimilate the ways of a new land and strange people, had given both Jared and his wife a desire to ease the difficulties of their adjustment as best they could. More than once Jared had brought them together under his roof, where the music, dances, and songs of their far-away land were interspersed with those of their new country.

Both Celia and her aunt looked upon the party as an interesting experience, and both entered eagerly into the plans of those who owed so much to Jared to make his birthday celebration a success.

But Celia did hate to borrow, and especially of the Duvals just then.

She had never been in sympathy with her aunt's

habit of occasionally borrowing from them, though Mrs. Duval always welcomed her pleasantly and often went into the kitchen and found the things herself that Celia asked for. Selina, the colored cook, however, usually met her requests with a silence that Celia read correctly and resented accordingly. Selina, she knew, had her own opinion of white folks who borrowed.

It was with increasing reluctance that she went up the walk, and she was relieved when she discovered no sign of Selina in the kitchen. She knocked several times and, receiving no response and hearing voices around the side of the house, decided that Mrs. Duval and Angela were at their usual morning task of gathering flowers for the vases that it had formerly been her pleasure to fill. But she must not think of that again.

She hurried around the house, eager to have her errand accomplished, but stopped short with surprise as she came full upon a group of gayly clad girls sitting about a table that held a sparkling array of colored glass and delicate china, its center a low bowl of yellow roses, sheltered from the warm lacy sunbeams that filtered through the big beech by a huge red and yellow umbrella.

There was a sudden pause in the bubbling conversation and a moment's uncomfortable silence while she stared at them and they at her; then Angela,

lounging back in a wicker garden chair, inquired in a lazy voice, "Did you want something, Celia?" and, though the voice was very sweet, the eyes that met Celia's looked considerably annoyed.

"As though I knew she were having a party!" Celia said to herself in swift defense.

"It's just—I—why——" she stammered, suddenly furious with herself for being so embarrassed. "It's just ——"

"Yes?" Angela urged, rising indifferently from her chair. "You want something—isn't that it?"

It was not the question as much as the tone that hurt Celia. For a moment she did not see the figures of the little group. They swung in an amazing circle of pale blue, mauve, and pink, the roses making a yellow center for the revolving disk, with the columns of the portico a futuristic background. Then a streak of blue separated itself from the crazy design, and a voice she had thought never to hear again said, "Why, it's Celia Carson, isn't it! Hello!" and Celia's hand was grasped in the hand of Sally Vander, while Sally's eyes smiled into her somewhat startled ones.

"I thought you'd—gone," Celia responded automatically, her eyes focused on Angela's face just behind Sally.

There was no doubt now of Angela's annoyance with this dusty, overall-clad girl who had appeared

in the midst of her breakfast-party and now was attracting the attention of her especial guest.

"I didn't know that you had guests, Angela," she apologized. "You see, Aunt Clem needed ——"

Angela nodded impatiently. "You'll find Selina in the kitchen, Celia. You didn't expect to find her sunning herself on the terrace, did you?"

"I looked in the kitchen ——" apologetically.

"Probably she's in the pantry.

"I looked through the window and ——"

Clearly Angela's patience was exhausted.

"You see," Celia tried to explain, more because of what Sally would think of Angela than for her own feelings, "it's Jared Stornoff's birthday, and the pottery folks are going to surprise him to-night with a party, and Aunt Clem made a cake; but ——"

"And you want sugar for the icing!" Angela prompted hurriedly.

"No, eggs," Celia corrected her briefly. "Two."

"Then, do go to the refrigerator and help yourself! I'm sure no one cares about your taking a few eggs!" She linked her arm in Sally's and drew her back toward the table and her other guests who had been talking in low tones to each other.

Celia turned to go and could not help but hear Angela explaining lazily, "She lives in that little house on the knoll. We've tried to be so nice to her. When her uncle went off and left them without any

support, Dad offered her a place in his bank, but she preferred to go to work in that grimy pottery with a lot of foreigners. Some people just don't seem to see their advantages when they're right under their noses. We used to think a lot of her, but —of course *now* ——”

She thought she heard Sally's voice in response, but she was too angry and hurt to care just then what any of them said or thought. She hurried around the house without pausing to glance toward the kitchen door and almost collided with Mrs. Duval, who was coming toward her with her arms full of roses.

“Goodness, Celia, how you startled me!” she exclaimed in her usual sweet but rather sharp voice. “What do you want, child?” as Celia murmured an apology. “Just a minute until I take these roses in. The girls are taking them out to the hospital after their breakfast. Such a sweet thought, isn't it? The dear things in their pretty frocks with their arms full of flowers will look so lovely!”

Celia had no desire to hear anything more regarding “the dear things.” What they did or did not do was of no interest to her just then. She wanted to get away as fast as she could. If it were not for disappointing her aunt, she would have fled down the path without caring in the least what Mrs. Duval thought.

Mrs. Duval apparently noted her impatience, for she exclaimed sharply, "My dear, can't you wait just a moment? But of course you're in a hurry to get back to the pottery."

She placed the flowers carefully upon a garden seat. "Now, what is it, Celia?"

"Two eggs, please. Aunt Clem ——" But she couldn't go on, and Mrs. Duval did not wait for further explanations but went into the kitchen.

More than once Angela had said things to her that hurt, but no one but she had known. Now—before Sally Vandever and those others— It was just too much to be borne with equanimity.

Her blood was racing in her veins and her heart pounding. She suddenly hated Angela Duval and all her dainty, sweet, correct, faultlessly beautiful world as she had never hated anything before in her life.

And then her natural good sense gradually reasserted itself.

"You're crazy, Celia Carson!" she told herself fiercely, dashing an angry tear from her eyes as she hurried down the path, an egg in each hand. "You're crazy to let yourself get wild over anything Angela Duval says. You'd better get a grip on yourself and simply forget her!"

She looked down at her hands curiously, conscious of the disturbing force that trembled in them.

“You’re just jealous because you haven’t the things Angela Duval has! But you may as well get over it because all your temper won’t change matters one bit! And you’ve got no right to dislike Angela because she said what she did. She was only telling the truth. You could have worked in the bank, but you chose to be independent of them, and now you’ve got to take the consequences.”

“But if Sally Vandever hadn’t heard,” her other self protested mournfully as she hurried along, “it wouldn’t have been so bad!”

“And it’s so senseless to bother about Sally Vandever,” her good sense again protested. “Her world is even farther away than Angela’s. You’re crazy even to think about her at all!”

“At least I won’t tell Aunt Clem,” she said determinedly as she endeavored to compose her features. “She’ll just remind me that a girl named after St. Cecelia ought to be ashamed to have such mean feelings. But I guess St. Cecelia never knew what mean feelings were. All she did was look sweet while cherubim dropped roses down on her piano as she played. I guess anybody could be sweet and good who never had anything more than that to bother her!” She sniffed a bit resentfully, dabbed hastily at her eyes with a somewhat grimy handkerchief, then laughed a funny little laugh and said, “The joke, I reckon, Celia Carson, is after all on

you.” Then with another laugh, “It’s a good thing I have a sense of humor. Or ill humor, rather,” with a broader smile.

Although the smile vanished in a moment, there was no sign of disturbance on her face as she went up the walk. She knew how keen Aunt Clem’s eyes were. You couldn’t hide much from her.

But when she reached the kitchen, there was no sign of her aunt. A note on brown paper on the kitchen table read:

“Jared’s just been taken real sick. They think it’s appendicitis. There can’t be any party. They sent for me. Eat your lunch and tell them over at the pottery. And don’t let them give Jared’s job to anybody.”

Jared—sick! No party! Jared—unable to work! She frowned thoughtfully. He had been unusually glum that morning and his eyes unusually dull looking, but she had been too busy to say anything to him.

“I wonder if he’s very ill,” she mused, and reread with distressed eyes: “Don’t let them give Jared’s job to anybody.”

“As though I could hold his job for him!” an amused smile twisting the corners of her mouth at this additional proof of her aunt’s childlike faith.

She hurried through her lunch, eager to be back at the pottery and learn more about old Jared’s condition.

CHAPTER VII

AT THE POTTERY

CELIA's anger at Angela melted away as a mist before the sun in the face of this trouble that had come to old Jared.

Appendicitis! That meant an operation, perhaps; days, maybe weeks, unable to work. What would they do for a thrower at the pottery? What would old Jared and Melby do without his pay, for lost time meant lost pay. What would his invalid brother and his family do out in Arizona if Jared could no longer send them half his pay as he had been doing for years now?

Would they get a new thrower, one who would not let her use the wheel at odd moments?

The men were standing in groups talking in low tones when she reached the pottery. They talked sadly of Jared's sudden illness and the fact that now the party would have to be called off. Though one suggested that it would be a shame to let all those refreshments be wasted, his remark was received in silence. The older element had no heart for any fes-

tivities. Jared was too well beloved for them to think of any gayety just then. They wondered, too, what Melby would do, now that Jared could not work. They knew where a large part of Jared's money went. It was one reason why they loved him. A man who would do that for his brother's family was rare indeed.

“And Aunt Clem said I was to see that Jared's job was kept for him!” Celia said with a funny little laugh. “As though *I* could keep his job for him!” Then, hesitantly, “Do you suppose Mr. Creel—would let me—try—if ——”

She was suddenly the center of their gaze. They regarded her in silence for a moment; then one said, “You're the only one that can use the wheel, ain't you?”

And another remarked, “Funny—Jared's teaching a kid like that his trade.”

She thought there was just the least bit of resentment in his voice, and she hurried to say, “It was just that I—sort of—forced myself on him. He didn't like being bothered—at first. I was so small then, but when he saw how I loved the clay—to work with it ——”

A heavy silence met this, and she gazed anxiously from one serious face to another.

“We don't want no strange thrower a-comin' in here till we see how bad off Jared really is. He

might be all right in a week or so without an operation. Besides, a good thrower ain't likely to take on the job for only a few days."

"You talk like you're running this pottery, Stance," one man said.

"No, I ain't a-runnin' it, but if the whole works'll back me up, why, I guess we can save Jared's job for him." His eyes dwelt searchingly on Celia. "You see what I mean?"

"You mean, then, that I—that Mr. Creel might let me take Jared's place?" though she knew that was exactly what he did mean.

He nodded impressively. "Yes. It won't be so hard on him, losin' a few weeks' pay, if his job is waitin' for him when he gets well." He looked inquiringly at those about him. "We could maybe—some of us—help him out while he's sick. Each give a little ——"

Celia's blood was racing in her veins. "Oh!" she exclaimed, "if—if I could do his work for him—wouldn't his pay—go on just the same?"

Again they regarded her in silence. "It depends on what the boss says. But you'd be earning it, and o' course it would belong to you."

"But—I'd want Jared to have his part of it! I wouldn't expect more than I'm getting now."

She saw the sudden admiration in the men's eyes, though their stolid faces showed no sign of emotion.

"There's Mr. Creel now. Let's see what we can do."

Mr. Creel, the manager, listened in an enigmatic silence, and even when the man, Stance, had finished speaking, he waited for some moments before he spoke; then he motioned Celia toward his office door.

"We'll have to talk this over a bit. There's the whistle now," he said to the men, and they moved off to their various posts in the pottery.

He was a heavily built man, slow in his movements and given to little conversation, but well liked by those under him. He gave orders in a firm, quiet voice. It was seldom that he had any trouble with the men.

"So you want to take Jared's place?" he said to Celia, when she had seated herself opposite his desk in the chair which he had indicated to her.

She nodded, afraid to speak lest he see how excited she was at the prospect, but when he said nothing and continued to regard her in a thoughtful silence, she said, "Just until he's well again. You see, he takes care of his brother's family—and while he's sick, he can't earn ——"

He nodded. "Yes, I know. And you propose turning over what you earn to him?"

"Except what I've been earning at trimming. You know Aunt Clem needs that since Uncle Steve went away and left her."

He cleared his throat harshly. "Are you related to Jared?"

She shook her head. "He's just been so kind to me—showing me how to handle the wheel ——"

"You like to do it?"

Her hands were clasped tightly together in her effort at self-control. She did not want him to know how very eager she was to have her hands in the clay from morning till night, to feel it alive beneath her fingers, and to know that she was helping Jared, earning money to repay him for his kindness and interest in her.

"I—I love to work with the clay," she said simply. "I think I can do it if you will let me try."

Again silence met her while he puffed thoughtfully at a long cigar he had just lighted.

"I wonder," he said finally, "just how far you can keep your own counsel?"

"You mean you wouldn't want it known?"

"Not that. It's like this," he said. "The pottery is about to change hands, but the new owner doesn't want his name mixed up in the deal. It's still to be the Newtonville Pottery, with me as manager. There'll be changes, of course; not in the help, but in the output and other things. As you know, it isn't easy to pick up a good thrower, especially for a short time, and until we see how Jared gets along, and until this deal is completed, we might let you

take over Jared's work. We've a good stock on hand, and production will of necessity be cut down until this change I've spoken of takes place."

She nodded her understanding.

"We don't want it talked about," he continued emphatically. "In fact, we'd rather not have the men even know there is a new owner. The changes that are to be made will be gradual. I'm only telling you this so that you will understand just why we're letting you take Jared's place. He is a valued employee, as you know, and we want to retain him if his condition permits."

"Then—then I *am* to ——"

"Yes," he said. "Get busy and let me see how well you can do."

Her eyes bright with excitement, she started toward the door, then turned swiftly.

"Thank you, Mr. Creel. I'll not tell any one what you have told me, and I'll do my best." Then she turned, ashamed to let him see the film of moisture that suddenly dimmed her bright brown eyes. And, hurrying through the doorway, she almost collided with Sally Vandever, who stood there.

"Hello!" exclaimed Sally. "Where do I find the reception committee?" Then, catching sight of the superintendent, who was eying her from his desk, she said hastily, "But I mustn't interfere with your duties. I'll see the big boss first."

Celia, eager to get to work, yet surprised and pleased that Sally had kept her promise to look her up, hesitated uncertainly.

“Mr. Creel,” she said, “is in his office. Do you want me to ——?”

“So that’s his name? No, I’m not afraid of him. He looks rather gentle.” Then, with a gesture of a slender hand, she indicated that Celia was to wait and moved toward the office door.

In considerable surprise Celia heard her say with mock dignity, “I’m representing the Wednesday Afternoon Literary Society of Breezeport-on-the-Hudson, Mr. Creel. Our club is studying American industries this year, and, as I must give a paper on the manufacture and sale of pottery and porcelain, I thought I could obtain the necessary data through you. My paper will be entitled ‘An Old Art in a New World’. Rather intriguing title, don’t you think? And I thought it up all by myself!”

Still puzzled and not a little amused, Celia heard Sally’s delighted laugh mingled with the deep bass of Mr. Creel. Certainly Sally Vandever was something of a diplomat, she thought, but she stirred restlessly. She wanted to get to work, and yet she felt she must await the outcome of Sally’s visit. Though she was considerably thrilled that Sally had kept her promise, she was also considerably embarrassed to know just what to do with her. Then she heard,

with relief, Sally say, "No, really, Mr. Creel, I'm merely Sally Vandever, and I'm just dying of curiosity. I've never seen the workin's of a pottery. Couldn't I wander around a bit if I promise not to distract the workmen?"

"Sally Vandever! So you're Sally Vandever! Well, well!"

"Yes. And I'll be awfully good and won't put my fingers in any of the machinery or steal your formulas for glaze or anything like that if you'll ——"

Celia heard the superintendent say quickly, "We'll be only too glad to accommodate you, Miss Vandever. Come this way. I'll show you through myself." And with a relieved sigh she hurried off.

She wondered just why Sally should be shown so much attention, for she knew that visitors were not encouraged at the pottery. But she had no time then to ponder the matter. She must prove to Mr. Creel that she could turn out as beautifully modeled pieces as old Jared could. She might never again have another such opportunity, for Jared's illness might be only a slight one after all.

The machinery, the stacks of earthenware, and the great red brick furnaces all seemed to be dancing crazily in a gray haze. Her feet scarcely touched the gray worn boards of the old floor as she moved quickly through and up the stairs to the long room

which held the whirler. At last she had the chance she'd hardly dared hope for, and, added to that, Sally Vandever had *not* forgotten her! To have two such delightful things happen at one and the same time!

With a little thrill of exultation she threw the switch that set the machinery going. The whirring belt that turned the wheel was now whirring for her—her hands—aiding her hands to create.

She slapped a lump of clay upon the whirler and plunged her fingers into it. Never before in her life had she been so happy. She gave her entire mind and energy to the living mass of clay as she shaped it lovingly while it rose and fell beneath her moving fingers.

So absorbed was she in her work that she did not notice the presence of Sally and Mr. Creel as they entered the long room and paused beside the shelves laden with Jared's work awaiting its turn in the great ovens below stairs.

It was only when Mr. Creel said, "I'll leave you now with Miss Carson. She'll show you how the hand-made pieces are turned," that Celia saw she was not alone.

"Well, I'm here," Sally said complacently, perching herself on the long dusty table and eying Celia with a triumphant smile. "I told you I'd be around to see you if I stayed," watching intently the revolving vase which Celia's fingers were busily perfecting.

"My, isn't that fascinating!" she exclaimed after a moment.

Celia nodded with a pleased smile. "I've always thought so."

"You're rather marvelous, aren't you?" Sally commented after a moment's interested contemplation of Celia's busy fingers.

"It isn't hard—once you learn, though it does take a certain skill, I believe," trying not to let Sally guess how pleased she was. "Jared Stornoff says you have to be born with the *touch*."

"Oh! Like being an artist—or a musician. I was thinking I'd like to try it, but I guess there isn't any use."

"Why not, if Mr. Creel doesn't object?" Celia asked.

Sally shrugged. "I don't really believe I could; besides, what's the use? When you've more money than you know what to do with, nothing seems worth bothering about—except sports, and even they get rather tiresome."

Celia nodded silently. She was glad that Sally was reminding her of the great difference between them. It was just as well to keep the matter in mind constantly, for it would be so easy to let herself care a great deal for Sally Vandever, as much as or more than she had ever cared for Angela.

"You didn't think I meant it when I said I'd look

you up at the pottery, did you?" Sally asked after a moment's silence.

"I thought you'd left town until I saw you—at the Duvals' a while ago," flushing at the remembrance of her anger, which had vanished entirely.

But, even though her anger was gone, the memory of its occasion was still with her. It was another reminder that she must not let herself become too interested in Sally Vandever. Besides, she was fairly certain that it was the pottery which interested Sally, far more than did the girl in dusty overalls who hung over the whirler.

"Seeing you there reminded me of my promise," Sally remarked, watching intently the skill with which Celia slipped a wire beneath the finished vase, lifted it carefully, and set it gently on a shelf laden with others of a similar shape. "Angela told us — You didn't mind, did you, if we talked about you—a little? She told us about your refusing a position in her father's bank and coming here instead. I've been a little curious. Seems to me any one—would rather—especially as you and she had been friends —"

"I've always loved the pottery," Celia said a little sharply.

She just could not discuss the matter again, even with Sally Vandever. She wanted to forget, if possible.

"I can understand why, now that I've seen you work," Sally remarked a little admiringly. "I almost believe I'd prefer it myself to juggling figures all day in a bank, in spite of its social drawbacks."

There was a funny little twinkle in her eyes that set Celia to wondering, and, though she did not mean to take seriously anything Sally Vandever said, she could not help the sudden happiness that swelled her heart.

They were silent for a time; then Sally said with a hesitant laugh, "Do you mind if I'm perfectly frank with you?"

"Why not?" Celia asked, looking at her in quick surprise and wondering what was coming.

"It's just that I rather envy you."

"Envy *me*?" in astonishment.

"Yes. It must be rather nice to be poor and to know that people like you for yourself alone and not for what you can do for them!"

Celia smiled a little bitterly. It was what she had always thought of Angela—that Angela had liked her for herself alone. But she knew how wrong she had been. Still, there was no use in arguing the matter with Sally.

"And it must be nice to have the courage to do what you'd rather do, regardless of what any one thinks or says."

Still Celia did not respond, though she felt she



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deserved no especial credit for the choice she had made. She would have taken the position in Mr. Duval's bank and gone on kowtowing to Angela and her mother, no doubt, had her eyes not been opened to the fact that neither of them really cared for her except for the slight services she had always been so willing to render them.

Sally seemed wholly interested in her own train of thought. "You see, when you have everything—money, position, and all that goes with them—you begin to distrust everybody who is fairly decent to you. You're always wondering what their motive is."

"I hadn't thought of that," Celia said.

"Well, it's true," Sally returned tersely. Then, sliding off the table reluctantly, she said, "But I mustn't bother you too long, or that nice Mr. Creel will be taking me out by the ear. And Angela's mother will throw a fit if I'm not there when they get back from the hospital. I was supposed to have a wretched headache, but I slipped out the back way. It was the only thing I could think of to avoid going to the hospital with them."

She gazed about her interestedly at the shelves laden with the unfinished pieces of gray pottery in all shapes and sizes, at the low table filled with mugs just brought from the molds, at the girl bending over the whirling wheel, whose tawny brown curls

were tinged with copper by the rays of the sun that shown through the many-paned window.

“It *is* interesting, Celia, and I’m glad I came. It makes me understand a little better Dad’s craze for ceramics, though his stuff is all very old.”

She stopped with a little cry of dismay, and Celia saw her eyes widen in quick distress as she breathed in a panicky whisper, “This *would* be my luck!”

Celia turned swiftly to see the cause of her disturbance. Mr. Creel was ushering into the long workroom the man with whom Sally had dined at the St. Nicholas the night of her arrival. He was staring straight at Sally, looking about to burst with apoplexy.

CHAPTER VIII

A CONFESSION

JUST why Sally should be so disturbed at the sight of her father puzzled Celia, but it was not long before she knew.

Once the shock of recognition was over, Sally's chin lifted, her eyes took on a hard little glint, and her lips narrowed to a firm, tight line. Though it was plain to Celia that she was considerably dismayed at the encounter, she seemed to have no intention of betraying the fact.

"Hello, Dad!" she exclaimed with a forced smile. "I might have known I'd find you here if I'd used my reasoning powers."

Ignoring her attempted pleasantry, he strode forward and came to a stop directly in front of her, his eyes stern with surprise and displeasure.

"Will you tell me, Sally Vandever," he exclaimed in a low, tense voice, with the muscles of his jaws twitching with anger, "just what you mean by being here when I took the trouble to put you on the train for home last night?"

Some of the color went out of her face, and her eyes drooped before the stern expression in his.

“I don't mean anything, Dad, except that I wanted to stay in Newtonville, as I told you. I got off the train at Phoenix and came back by bus. I'm staying with Angela Duval.”

“Oh, you are!” He turned to Mr. Creel, who was studying intently the vase which Celia had just completed, and said sharply, “Would you mind leaving us alone a moment, Creel? I ——” Celia, he ignored entirely, though she would have been glad to have effaced herself just then.

She went on with her work, trying as best she could to appear unconscious of their presence so near her.

“Now, will you tell me just why you're so determined to defy me?” turning again to his daughter.

“Oh, Dad! I'm not defying you. I—I ——”

He glared. “Don't argue with me, Sally! There's nothing here to attract you in the least. You merely wanted to see how much you could annoy me by coming down here when you should be at Ingle-nook with your mother's guests. You wanted to show me that you would have your own way, as you've had it practically all your life. But when you come intruding into my business affairs, you've reached the limit! I won't stand it! I sent you home, and I expected you to go ——”

“But, Dad ——” There was a hurt look coming into the blue eyes under the mop of golden hair, though the lips and chin were very firm.

“I tell you I won’t have it. And I intend to see that your mother realizes fully her folly in allowing you so much liberty!”

“Why bring Mother into it? She’s not to blame —except that—that she doesn’t understand. And she’s so busy with other people—all the time. Besides, it’s rather late in the day to be blaming her, isn’t it? I think she’s always tried to make me do her way. She’s certainly made me be sweet to this one and sweet to that one. I’ve certainly never been permitted to have my choice in the matter of schools or friends. I’ve had to accept the invitations she wanted me to accept, whether I liked them or not. Why, I wouldn’t dare let myself even *like* any one until I had Mother’s approval, because she’d find some flaw ——” Here her eyes wandered to Celia. “And sometimes I wonder—what’s the use of living. I don’t get a chance to be myself at all!”

“That’ll do, now, Sally!” he interrupted quickly. “It’s just your excuse to get around an unpleasant situation. You simply made up your mind to ——”

“No, Dad,” she pleaded, “but if you insist on believing it —— The real trouble is, you don’t either of you understand me. You don’t either of you care —what I think about—or feel ——”

"Now, see here, Sally, it's because of you —— There are reasons I can't have you here—especially with the Duvals."

"Then, tell me one. Give me just one reason why I shouldn't stay here in Newtonville and visit Angela for a few days!"

His anger arose anew. "I don't have to give reasons! It's your place to obey! When I sent you back to your mother, I intended that you should go!"

"Oh, Dad, why continue to make such a scene?" conscious now of Celia and the flush of embarrassment on her face. "Other people are not interested in our family scraps."

"Then, come along," he grunted.

She snatched up her soft hat from the dusty table, pulled it on, and watched him as he moved down the long room toward the door.

"Sorry, Celia, to have you get such an unfortunate impression of my male parent. He's usually rather nice. It's just when he's crossed that he's like that. Parents are such a trial at times," she sighed, pushing back some of the soft tendrils of hair that strayed from under her hat. "I guess I did treat him rather badly, coming back after he'd sent me home, but ——" Her voice dropped to a confidential whisper. "Well, I'll see you again soon," with a little laugh, "unless he puts me in a crate and returns me by express!"

Celia's brown eyes met the mocking blue ones seriously. "Why don't you do what he wants, Sally?" she asked. "You certainly don't care enough about Angela or anything in this town. If I had such a father ——"

"Just what would you do?"

"I'd—do anything on earth to please him! Or else I'd make him understand—why I couldn't."

"Well, that's where we differ. He's one of the kind who's run things so long he thinks he's a czar or something!"

"But even czars are human!"

"Not to Soviets!"

She gave her an airy salute with one hand and, with an impish smile, hurried after her father.

Celia was much too busy the remainder of the day to dwell on Sally Vandever and her troubles, and though, during her swim and her lonely supper, her aunt having gone again to assist with the stricken Jared, she determined fiercely that she would not, simply would not, think about Sally, when evening came and she sat alone on the little porch in her fresh pink gingham dress, a book in her lap, the book was not opened. Without realizing it, she was reviewing over and over each detail of Sally's visit, each word she had uttered, each expressive look and intonation of her voice. Over and over the little drama with Mr. Vandever was enacted before her eyes. She

wished desperately that there were some way in which she could help Sally out of her dilemma, but she had no way of even guessing at the motives which had prompted either Sally or her father to take such determined stands against one another. It saddened her to think that the girl she had admired so intensely, had really almost envied, should be unhappy, for unhappy she undoubtedly was or she would never have gone so determinedly against her father's wishes by returning to Newtonville when he had sent her home.

Finally, realizing that she was doing the very thing she had determined not to do, she picked up her book, flicked at a mosquito that buzzed about one ear, then opened her book. But the words held no meaning. Sally's face arose between her and the printed page. Sally's voice spoke over and over in her ear the things she had said that day.

The book finally slid to the floor unheeded, and dusk gradually descended, bringing with it myriad fireflies that twinkled and flashed up and down the slope like restless searchers hunting something, they knew not what.

Then suddenly she sat erect and arose with a little cry as a figure in misty white came swiftly up the slope and through the little gate.

"Sally!" she breathed as she hurried to meet her, for, though the darkness blurred her features, some inner knowledge told her it was none other.

“Oh, Celia! I *had* to see you! But I’ve only a moment! Is there somewhere we can talk where we won’t be overheard?”

“Over here.”

Celia led the way to a wicker settee beneath a tall pine that grew by a far fence, hidden from the house by a huge hydrangea loaded with vague clusters of whiteness.

“I *had* to see you, Celia!” Sally repeated, a little breathless from her climb. “I couldn’t go away—and have you think—that Dad—or Mother——”

“You’re leaving, then,” Celia commented, her heart sinking, though she had felt all along that Sally would not stay very long. The Sally Vandever of this world didn’t linger in obscure little places like Newtonville.

“Yes, of course. I’ll have to go back in the morning. Angela is giving a dance in my honor to-night, so Dad couldn’t very well insist on my going any sooner.

“But I *had* to see you, Celia. I didn’t want you to think Dad was such a bear. He had a right to be angry with me. And I didn’t talk very nicely about Mother, Celia. I was just provoked, I suppose. I’ve been thinking since that you must imagine they’re unkind to me. They’re not. Dad is—well, Dad’s about the best man in the world. I guess he does too much for me. I’ve always had more money

than I know what to do with. And Mother—well, Mother's lovely. Every one adores her. I wish you could know her. It's just that every one —— They never let her have time for me!" She threw out her hands in a little gesture of distress. "I guess it's just me, Celia. I guess I'm spoiled. I guess I want too much. Oh, I don't know just what *is* the matter with me, but I—do hate *people!* The kind of people who hang around Mother. They simply *absorb* her. And—and I don't want to go back to Inglenook!" she added in a final burst of eloquence.

Celia put out a sympathetic hand and touched the soft chiffon-clad shoulders.

"I—I wish that I could help you, Sally."

"No one can help me. It's just myself!" She started to rise, then turned swiftly. "Celia—haven't you ever felt—as though you'd give everything in the world—just to have—*one* friend—who understood you? One friend you could care for without having to wonder why she was being nice to you!"

"Oh, Sally!" Celia breathed. It was all she could say, for her own hurt was so recent that she could guess fairly accurately the state of Sally's feelings.

"But I didn't come to talk about myself," with a harsh little laugh. "I just wanted you to know that Dad had a right to raise a scene when he found me at the pottery. You see, he came here on business, and I guess he really didn't want to be bothered with

me. He wouldn't agree to my going to the Duvals', for you see I'd run off from some young people Mother'd invited to Inglenook, and he said it was my duty to go back. He put me on the train, gave me some money, bought me magazines, and was just so sweet. I got off at the first station and 'phoned to Angela. I told them the truth after I got here, and Mrs. Duval was so kind, though I know she's rather distressed. I never dreamed of running into Dad at that pottery. You can imagine how I felt and how he, too, felt when he thought me at home."

"Don't you suppose your mother must be dreadfully worried?" Celia asked.

"I told Dad's secretary to tell her I'd gone to be with Dad, so you see I figured I could stay on here without either one knowing ——"

"But ——" Celia started to protest.

"Then Mrs. Duval saw Dad with me when he let me out of the car at their house this afternoon, and then she insisted that he come over to-night for bridge, and he's more furious at me than ever. He hates to play bridge with women unless he has Mother for a partner. He thinks she's the only woman who can play a decent game. Oh, Celia!" with new distress, "can't you think of some *reason*, some way I can make him let me stay? I—I ——" Her voice faltered. "I—just—can't go back to Inglenook—*now!*"

“Why not?” Celia asked, considerably puzzled at the intensity of her distress over such a simple matter.

“Why—why ——” Sally began, “because—it’s because ——”

“Because *what?*” Celia urged, her curiosity increasing as Sally’s distress deepened.

“Oh, Celia, I’ve been *dying* to tell some one, but—but—if I do tell you—you’ll think me so ridiculously—*silly!*”

“Silly? I’d never think that,” a touch of conscious admiration in her voice.

“Well, it’s like this, Celia. All my life I’ve wanted a friend—a real friend; one I could tell my thoughts to without being laughed at; one who would like me for myself alone, who would like me as well as I liked her. But I never had *one*, Celia. We’ve gone about so much. We’ve never stayed in any place long enough to find —— At school, the girls—I was always the richest girl. When you’re the richest girl, Celia, every one thinks you’re wonderful. It doesn’t mean a thing. Then, last summer when we were in Europe—we go over every year, for Mother loves Europe—we were at Nice, you know, on the Mediterranean, and we met ——” She drew in a long breath, then finished softly, “Julian Strassman.”

Then she went on slowly and hesitantly: “He was so nice, the very nicest person I’d ever met. Not

much older than I. I knew he liked me. I could see it in his eyes, though he didn't tell me so. It's strange, isn't it, how people's eyes tell you things they don't say with their lips? He was an Austrian. Oh, Celia! I wish you could have known him. He was the friend I'd always wanted! We talked of everything—our schools, the places we'd been to, the things and people we'd seen. We motored, swam, and aquaplaned together. He was wonderful. I don't know when I was happier. Then he went away without a word—and we learned after he'd gone that he was a noted concert pianist, though hardly more than a boy."

Celia stirred, a little puzzled at why Sally should be confiding so much. What could her meeting with a noted pianist have to do with her wanting to stay in Newtonville?

"It simply spoiled everything," Sally went on.

"But why?" Celia wanted to know.

"Why? Don't you understand? He'd only been having a little fun with me. He considered me as just another of those who worshipped at his shrine."

"But why should you think that?" Celia asked, becoming more and more interested. "If he hadn't told you he was a noted pianist ——"

"He didn't, but don't you understand, Celia, the amazing conceit that these celebrities possess? He thought, of course, that I knew and didn't mean to

let him know that I did. That was why he went away without saying good-bye. He was piqued because I hadn't said something about it. I know that now. For when we met him in New York not long ago, he proved it."

"But how?"

"Why, by being too wrapped up in himself and his wonderful performance even to notice the little idiot who'd thrown herself at his head that time in Nice and who was babbling her appreciation of his music, along with a lot of others."

"But didn't he say anything?"

"Not a word. Just stood with a frozen smile on his face. I might have been a stick of wood for all the attention he gave me. And then Mother had to cap the climax by sending him an invitation to Inglenook! You can image how I felt when he accepted and why I left just before he came."

"But I don't see why you should!" Celia protested.

"Well, *I* do!" she returned somewhat sharply. "Do you think I could forget those days and evenings at Nice? Oh, Celia—I—just can't make you understand. I know I was young—only sixteen—but don't you think you're capable of feeling things as deeply when you're young as when you're older?" Her eyes searching Celia's face in the darkness.

"I'm sure you do," Celia assented emphatically. No one could ever convince her to the contrary. No

one would ever be able to guess how deeply she had been hurt by the Duvals.

“You see, Mother wouldn’t allow me to dance in the evenings, so Julian and I used to watch and listen to the orchestra, and one evening we sat on a little balcony of the hotel. We could look in at the dancers in the ballroom, and we could look out upon the curve of the sea. Oh, Celia, I can’t possibly make you see it as it was—the stars, the lights below, the water reflecting the glowing yachts in the distance, the breeze, and the music! It was wonderful! I shall never forget it! They played the ‘Barcarolle’, from *The Tales of Hoffmann*, and he sang the words softly under his breath. It was so lovely ——”

She paused and turned her head away from Celia; then she said gently, “I was happier—that night—than I’ve ever been in my whole life before or since. I wished it would last forever. I thought then that Julian and I would always be friends.”

Celia’s hands were locked tightly about one knee. She scarcely dared breathe for fear the spell would be broken. Sally’s voice was like music itself, soft and vibrant with the emotions which she was trying so vainly to master.

“And—and—he—didn’t—even think enough of me to remember me—a few months.”

“But, if he accepted your mother’s invitation, doesn’t that prove that he did remember you and

wanted to see you again?" Celia suggested hopefully.

"His accepting doesn't mean a thing. Celebrities accept invitations from people they've never heard of and never expect to see again. There's no use in saying anything, Celia. I couldn't stay while he was there. I know now that to him I was just a little girl he'd been nice to when the impulse struck him, but whom he didn't even bother to say good-bye to when he left and whom he forgot immediately. But, at any rate, you do understand now why I wanted to stay here—why I had to double-cross Dad."

Celia nodded thoughtfully, wishing gloomily for the wit to solve Sally's problem. It seemed hopeless.

"And now in the morning Dad will send me back, and Julian will guess the truth and be amused!" between set teeth.

"But couldn't you tell your father, Sally? If he knew ——"

"Tell Dad what I've just told you?" in amazement.

"I know it would be hard. Men are so strange, but ——"

Sally shook her head. "I couldn't," she said weakly. "I simply couldn't. Men—like Dad—are nothing but *business*. He'd think me a sentimental fool." Then she arose swiftly with a cry of dismay.

“What *will* the Duvals think of me? I’ve been here an age, and I only meant to stay a moment! I must go! Good-bye, Celia. It was sweet of you to let me ——” Then, to Celia’s amazement, she was suddenly encircled in two soft warm arms, and a fervent kiss was planted on her cheek.

Before she could recover from the shock, Sally was through the gate and halfway down the slope.

For a moment Celia stood there, immobile, her hand against the cheek Sally had kissed; then, dashing away a tiny tear that trickled down one cheek, she turned to her aunt, who was calling from the porch, “Wherever on earth are you, Celia? And why haven’t you got a light in the house?”

Whether the tear was for herself for losing Sally or for Sally for losing Julian Strassman, she did not know. But she did know that, even though she would never see Sally again, Sally had given her something she would never lose—the memory of that confidential chat and that impulsive kiss.

CHAPTER IX

ANOTHER CONFESSION

ALL the next day Celia's mind was filled with thoughts of Sally Vandever and her confession of the night before. Her heart went out to her in a great wave of sympathy, for, though she considered Sally the most fortunate person she had ever known, she nevertheless recognized the fact that Sally's woes were as real and serious to Sally as her own were to her. Her coming to explain why her father should not be blamed for the unfortunate scene at the pottery made Celia admire her more than before for her loyalty to him.

But why, she pondered, should Sally have been moved to confide her disappointment over her lost friendship with Julian Strassman? Surely Sally must have been subconsciously aware of her sympathy and liking, or she would never have revealed her intimate thoughts to a girl who was practically a stranger and who would in all probability continue to be one.

And why had Sally kissed her? Had it been

merely a blind gesture on her part, born of impulse—a sort of reward for her attention and sympathy—or had it been inspired by sincere liking on Sally's part?

While reason told her it was probably the former, her heart insisted that it was the latter.

She dwelt pleasurably on the thought until some little demon of her mind whispered, "It's too bad you're not in Angela Duval's place. If you were, you might be Sally Vandever's friend—her dear friend."

"But I'm not in Angela's place," she returned sadly. "I've got to work here in the pottery."

"But if you hadn't refused the Duvals' offer ——— Perhaps even now it isn't too late. Perhaps Mr. Duval will still take you on. If you were in the bank, you might still have a chance. At least you'd be allowed to help with the parties, and maybe Sally will come again sometime, and if she should, you could hear her voice, you could watch her come and go, and you might have a chance to make her like you far more than she does Angela. You ought at least to give yourself a chance. Here in this grimy pottery you'll never have a ghost of a chance."

But, though she argued the matter pro and con, she got nowhere. She had made her choice. She had chosen to work in the pottery, and now, with old Jared ill, she could not leave if she wanted to. She

had committed herself to the task of holding his job for him, and hold it she meant to do.

Though she was no longer bitter at the Duvals, she was still too hurt to be anything but glad that she need accept no more favors from them. She told herself fiercely that she would not even think of them at all if it were not for Sally's being there. As for thinking of Sally as a real friend, that was ridiculous. No doubt Sally was already on her way home.

But when she reached Aunt Clem's little house that evening, she knew that Sally had not gone. She saw her blue car come to a stop at the Duvals' gate and Sally, Angela, and two other girls climb out. Celia's heart skipped a beat. Perhaps she'd have another chance to be with Sally. The thought gave new impetus to everything, her work at the pottery as well as her work at home, for Aunt Clem was getting old and slow in spite of her brisk talk, and Celia helped all she could at the household tasks.

The days gradually passed, one by one, more slowly now as she came to realize that, though Sally was staying on at the Duvals', she had apparently forgotten her. But she constantly made excuses for her. There was really no reason why Sally should come near her again, she argued; no reason at all why a girl whose parents were as wealthy as Sally's, who summered each year in Europe, and who chose noted pianists for their especial friends, should go

out of her way to seek a girl who worked in a pottery.

But, though she continued to make excuses for her, as the days passed and she saw her only at a distance, her heart was nevertheless considerably sore. She had been reasonably sure that the something which had attracted her and Sally to one another was a something that took no cognizance of wealth or position. But now her doubts were gaining the upper hand.

Night after night she would sit on the little porch long after her aunt had gone to bed and listen to the sounds that drifted up from the Duvals' garden—girlish laughter, the buzz of animated conversation, the tinkle of ice in tall glasses, the plink, plink of ukuleles with their accompaniment of popular songs. Again she would watch with straining eyes the arrival and departure of numerous cars filled with gay young people off for a dance at the country club in the next county or a moonlight picnic at the lake.

She listened for the sound of Sally's voice raised in song or laughter and watched with eager eyes to see if she could distinguish Sally among the vague forms that drifted in the moonlight about the portico and walled garden of the Duvals. She tried to tell herself that she did not care because she did not belong, could never belong, to that laughing, carelessly happy crowd of young people, but she did.

More than once she swallowed an annoying lump that arose insistently in her throat, and battled angrily with the tears that insisted on filling her eyes and overflowing down her cheeks.

Her one consolation was that no one but herself knew—not even her aunt. She did her best to remain her formerly happy self, and if at times she was unconsciously serious, her aunt laid it to her concern for old Jared, about whom she was always asking, and the new responsibility which his position had given her. Several times she went with Aunt Clem to the plain frame house beyond the pottery and did her best to make him understand that he need not worry. His job would be waiting for him when he was well. And, although he said little, she had the satisfaction of seeing a relieved, peaceful look in his eyes that made her immeasurably glad that she had had the courage to make the choice she had.

Each time she went, she came away a little stronger, with renewed courage to face the struggle that was still going on within her, for she knew she wanted desperately to see Sally Vandever again, to hear her voice, to see her blue eyes laughing between the heavy fringe of dark lashes, to know that Sally still thought of her.

Then one day she came back from lunch to find Sally perched upon her long worktable, holding in her hand one of the little figures Celia had hidden be-

hind some defective mugs on the shelf under her table.

“I’ve been snooping around. You didn’t mind, did you? Did you make this, Celia?” holding the little figure aloft.

Celia nodded, not a little abashed. “Just—in my spare time.”

“It looks like one of those little Chinese gods Dad brought back from the Orient the last time he was over.”

Celia’s dark eyes suddenly glowed. “Does it really?” she asked, surveying with new interest the little figure held up by the girl in cool yellow who was settled, so obviously at home, on her worktable. “It was what I had in mind—only—I’ve never really seen one.” Then she added quickly, “Does Mr. Creel know you’re here?”

She had a swift vision of Sally slipping unceremoniously, and with a certain delight in her own cunning, into the pottery while the men were away at lunch, in somewhat the same manner as she herself used to do.

Sally smiled complacently. “Don’t bother about me,” she said. “I wouldn’t be here if I hadn’t a perfect right.” Then her blue eyes lighted with animation. “Can you keep a secret, Celia?”

“I think so,” Celia assured her, wondering at the expression of keen anticipation on Sally’s face.

"Well, you'll be surprised! *Dad's bought this pottery!*"

"*Bought this pottery?*" in swift amazement.

"Yes. But he doesn't want it known. You're to tell no one. Not even the Duvals know, and he doesn't want them to."

"Then ought you to tell me?" Celia asked, a little aghast at what Sally had done.

"He won't know, because I know you'll never tell. I just thought it would please you to know. Besides, if it hadn't been for your advice about confiding my difficulties to him, I'd never have been allowed to stay on at Angela's."

"Then he did —— You did tell him?" Celia asked, pleased that Sally had seen fit to take her advice.

"Yes. We had a mutual confessional orgy. I told him why I didn't want to go home, and he told me why he didn't want me here. He was afraid I'd find out that he was here to buy this pottery. And he was afraid that the Duvals, if they learned he wanted to buy the pottery, would realize that he was the boy who had lived on the poor little farm where the clay for this pottery is dug."

Celia was staring wide-eyed at the other girl, whose blue eyes were dreamily fixed on the view beyond the opened window.

"I never guessed that Dad had the brains and en-

ergy to build a fortune from nothing. Well, not exactly—just a bit of poor farming land.”

“You mean your father owned the land on which the clay pits are located? That he ——?”

“Yes. It belonged to an uncle who had reared him and who left it to him when he died because he had no children of his own. And, Celia, the little house they lived in is the house on the knoll where you and your aunt live now! All this land about here was their farm.”

She seemed to find Celia’s amazement very satisfying, for she leaned closer and laid a hand on Celia’s sun-browned arm. “But remember, Celia, you’re to tell no one, not even your aunt!”

Celia nodded understandingly, happy in the thought of sharing such a secret with Sally Vander.

“You see, Celia, Dad’s just a little ashamed of his humble beginning because of Mother. He’s never told her how hard he had to struggle at first, and now he’s sort of lost his nerve. Mother’s people had always been so very wealthy, I suppose he hates to have them know of his poverty. But *I* think he ought to be proud that he had the determination and the brains to get where he is to-day, and I told him so. It rather pleased him, Celia.” Again her eyes became dreamy. “I s’pose Dad and I will understand one another better now.”

Celia absently kneaded a lump of moist clay. So Mr. Vandever had lived in Aunt Clem's little house when he was a boy! Perhaps that was why he had walked by it several times that day Sally had come to Newtonville. No doubt he had been reviving his boyhood memories of the old place. How thrilled Aunt Clem would be to know!

"I almost wish the Duvals could know, Celia, but, if he doesn't want them to, we've got to keep his secret. He says he doesn't think they would ever suspect that he is the boy who lived on that little farm, because every one called him by his uncle's name instead of his own, but he can't be sure, and that's why he didn't want me here. They might make it their business to find out all there is to be known about him. Not that he cares, for himself, you understand, Celia. It is only because of Mother. He hates to have her know the truth after being silent about it for so many years. He was really wealthy, you know, when he met and married her. But when I told him about Julian Strassman and he realized how impossible it was for me to go back to Inglenook with Julian there, and he *did* realize it, Celia. He said we'd just have to trust to luck about Mother's learning of his past. Besides, he says poverty is no real disgrace unless you just give up to it. As long as you keep trying —— He did. He made it his business to find out what was the matter with that

land, why you could raise hardly anything on it. It was mostly clay—the kind of clay used for pottery. He sold it, and that money gave him his start in life. And now, Celia, that he's getting old, he's turning sentimental. He wants that land back, or the part where the clay pits are. He wants this pottery. He's always been interested in pottery and porcelains. He's got things from all over the world—old stuff—some of it priceless. He's crazy about figurines especially.

She held up the little figure Celia had fashioned and eyed it speculatively. "I wish you could see them. And books—he's got everything, I believe, that's ever been written on the subject."

Celia's eyes were growing wider and wider.

"Has he really?" she exclaimed. "Books—about pottery?"

"Yes. Why not?" Sally asked, a bit puzzled at her intensity.

"I—I thought there must be—books about pottery. I tried at the library, but they didn't have anything."

"Well, he has lots of them, volumes and volumes, some of them rather interesting—if you care for that sort of thing."

"Oh, but I do!" Celia exclaimed breathlessly. "There's so much I've wanted to know—about how some of the lovely vases and things at the Duvals

were made—the china and ornaments. Who made them, and how ——”

Sally smiled a superior little smile. “Nothing romantic about any of the stuff the Duvals have, Celia. Just the best of modern ware. But those things of Dad’s—some of them are centuries old. If you could hear him tell about them! There’s nothing he doesn’t seem to know.”

“Maybe you could tell me,” Celia suggested quickly, but Sally shook her head positively.

“I couldn’t possibly. You’d have to see them. I couldn’t begin to describe the various colors, the shapes, the designs, the lustres, the periods in which they were made, the countries to which they belong. It just wouldn’t mean anything to you, Celia, unless you could see them.”

“But I’d like to know —— Couldn’t you tell me just a few things?” Celia pleaded.

“Well, there are vases, platters, great jars, tea sets from China as far back as the reign of K’ang Hsi. It was in his time, you know, that china was first brought to Europe by Portuguese and Dutch traders. The Chinese were the very first people to make those lovely porcelains. The European designs, decorations as well as the colors—those of Dresden, Sèvres, Derby, Spode, and all the others—were inspired by the exquisite work of the Chinese.”

“Oh, please don’t stop!” Celia begged as Sally

paused for breath. "I *knew* there must be a lot to know!"

Sally shook her head. "I really know so little about it," she insisted, and again studied the little figure Celia had made. "I do wish I could tell you more, especially about the figurines. There's a little Chinese Goddess of Mercy Dad has. It's exquisite, especially the hands. I wish you could see it. And you'd love the little Chinese Fo-dog. He looks so ferocious, but he is supposed to be very gentle. There's a Taoist queen and a Japanese Goddess of Love and Beauty ——"

She broke off sharply and glanced hastily at her wrist watch. "I've simply got to go, Celia. I promised Angela I wouldn't be long. They didn't much like my coming. They seem to have something planned for every minute. But I had to see you. I wanted you to know that Dad's buying the pottery. But remember, you're to say nothing. I'm hoping, though, that he'll tell Mother. It's not fair to him to have to be secretive about the place where he was born and reared, and I told him so. Especially when he loves it so."

Celia nodded. "I sha'n't breathe what you've told me to a soul!" she promised, and added with a smile, "You don't know how glad I am, Sally. It'll be so much nicer, knowing I'm working for your father." Her face was alight with real pleasure.

“Well, I may see you again, though I’m not sure. I expect to go home in a couple of days.”

She was on her way to the door; then she turned and came back part of the way.

“If you’re ever up our way, Celia, near Inglenook, you might stop in. Dad would be delighted to show you his collection and tell you all about it. If he’s not there, I could tell you a little. At any rate, you could see them!”

CHAPTER X

AN AFFAIR AT THE LAKE

How Celia managed to get through the afternoon's work she never knew, for when her mind was not far away, groping through the fog of her memories of early school days for some substantial facts of the land that had been the first to create those lovely things Sally had told her of, she was thinking of Sally and the invitation to stop at Inglenook and view Mr. Vandever's collection, should she happen to be in the neighborhood at any time.

Back and forth her thoughts zigzagged from far-off China to Inglenook. She could see in imagination a long train of little yellow men, staggering under the weight of the huge boxes adorned with queer Chinese characters that they carried on board the ships of the "foreign devils" waiting in the harbor. She wondered what they would have thought, had they known where their lovely porcelains and figurines finally would come to rest and of how much pleasure they would give to those who gloried in the perfection of their glaze, colors, and designs.

Would she, she wondered, ever have the chance to see those Sally had spoken of—to learn about their creation? And, if she had the chance, would she find the courage to take Sally at her word? Though she thought over the matter happily and speculatively she came to no decision. It was enough just then to know that Sally had said she might see them.

Never had an afternoon flown so swiftly. The closing whistle startled her, for it seemed to her that she had hardly more than begun her afternoon's work, though she knew that the drying-shelf held quite a few more pieces than it had when she came in and found Sally perched on her worktable.

Her aunt was not at the house when Celia reached home, but she found a note propped up before the sugar bowl on the table:

“Melby's all tuckered out, so I'm going to sit with Jared while she gets some sleep. I may be a little late with supper, but I know you won't mind.”

Celia smiled. Aunt Clem was always so fearful of not doing enough for her! As though she couldn't prepare supper herself, if necessary!

Securing her bathing things, she was off down the path toward the lake. She would hurry, and maybe she could surprise Aunt Clem by having everything ready when she returned. She rather liked messing around in the kitchen alone. She would get out that new pink-bordered cloth and the best dishes and the

few old pieces of silver, for she felt in a festive mood. It wasn't every day in the week that one was asked to view precious displays of porcelains and figurines from the Orient. She knew, too, that Aunt Clem would join in her festive mood, for anything in the nature of a celebration pleased Mrs. Carson. Celia found herself smiling in anticipation of Aunt Clem's surprise and pleasure when she learned of Sally's invitation.

When she reached the lake, her plans for supper were forgotten entirely, for she found Sally disporting herself from the diving-board which Aunt Clem's Steve had put there for her some time before.

"You don't mind my intruding on your property, do you?" Sally asked, after a gay salute with one dripping arm. "A youngster over yonder said this was your private diving-board."

She climbed out of the water and up the ladder to the top of the platform to which the board was fastened.

"I'm glad to have you, really!" Celia returned, too pleased to think of trying to hide the fact. "I've been wishing I could see you swim."

"Swimming is my one accomplishment," Sally laughed with a certain pride in her voice.

She found almost an equal in Celia and did not hesitate to show her satisfaction. They spent a gay, happy hour together, challenging one another to try

this and that difficult feat, and, for the first time since she had known Sally, Celia forgot the difference that separated them.

Then, as they sat for a moment to rest, dangling their legs high above the water, Sally said, "I've been wondering, Celia, if you couldn't go back home with me for a little visit when I go?"

Celia turned swiftly in surprise. "Home with you—for a visit?" she jerked out unsteadily.

"Yes," Sally returned. "Dad's closing the plant Saturday, for a week, probably, while some changes are made. It will give you a chance to see his collection and look over his books, since you're so keen on the subject of ceramics."

Celia shook her head, trying her best to hide her real emotions, for she was torn between dismay at the thought of the pottery being closed, even for a week, and delight at the thought that Sally should specifically invite her to Inglenook.

"Angela's coming up, too. Mother said I could bring back whomever I chose. I think Dad must have suggested to her that it might be wise to let me have a little say about whom I want for friends. She's always chosen them for me, you know. Of course I've rather imposed on the Duvals, staying so long. But I wasn't going to take any chance of returning until I was sure, Julian Strassman was gone."

A bitter note had crept into her voice, but it was gone entirely when she said, "I've got it all arranged. You and I will go together in the car on Monday. This is Friday, isn't it? Angela has to have some frocks fitted, so she'll come up later. And Dad says the workers' pay is to go on just the same, so there's nothing to keep you from enjoying yourself."

Celia breathed a little sigh of relief, for not only Aunt Clem was depending on her pay, but old Jared, too. Then the brightness vanished.

"I'm afraid it would hardly do for me to be there —while Angela ——"

Sally gave her a sharp look. "I don't see why not!" she exclaimed.

"Maybe—some—other—time," Celia suggested weakly, suddenly sick with disappointment at the thought that Angela was to keep her from seeing that wonderful collection she had been thinking so much about.

"No, I want you now, for I don't know what Mother's plans are for the rest of the summer, and since she's given me permission to bring whom I wish, you'll have to come now. I ——" she paused hesitantly, then went on without looking at the girl beside her. "I—guess perhaps you *would* rather not be there with Angela, but—there's just no other way. I want you, Celia. You'll come, won't you?"

"I'd—love—to—but ——"

Sally's fair slender hand dropped beside Celia's tanned one and touched the brown fingers questioningly. "I've a special reason ——"

She did not finish her sentence, for just then appeared around a bend in the lake a fleet of canoes filled with boys and girls, who began calling shrilly to Sally, scolding her for slipping away from them.

The bright colors of bathing-suits and filmy summer dresses, mingled with the white of masculine flannels, made a pretty picture against the blue of the lake and sky and the deep green of the shore.

Celia was at a loss to know just what to do. She had no desire to be surrounded by Angela's friends, and yet she did not want it to appear that she was running away because of them.

But there was no other way out. "I think," she said as nonchalantly as she could, "that I'll swim over to the big rock once more," nodding to where it lifted itself out of the water. "Then I'm off for home," and, without a backward glance, she dived.

She heard Sally's vehement protest, but she did not pause to respond. She wanted to give Angela and her friends an opportunity to get Sally and depart without embarrassment to any of them, if possible.

But, contrary to her expectations, they did not move off. She heard Sally's voice intermingle with Angela's, and the pleased shouts and laughter of the others, and, glancing back, she saw that those in

bathing-suits had taken possession of her diving-board. She was wondering how long they would stay and how she could manage to get back to shore and recover her clothing from the little shack she used for a bath-house. It looked as though they meant to stay for some time, and she did want to get back and prepare supper before Aunt Clem came.

She swam about the big rock three times, then perched herself on a ledge to rest. Then she saw a canoe headed toward her and recognized Angela in the frothy pink figure that wielded the paddle.

Indifferently, she watched the canoe draw near. Her mind was too full of speculations as to whether or not she should accept Sally's invitation to Ingle-nook to be much concerned about Angela, until she saw that Angela was headed directly toward the big rock.

Now would be a good time to go back, she thought, for she had no wish to attract Angela's attention to herself. The memory of the day she had appeared at Angela's little breakfast party in her dusty blue overalls was still fresh in her mind. She felt there was nothing further to be said between them.

She was just about to plunge into the water when Angela exclaimed, "I'd like to talk to you, Celia!"

Celia, poised to dive, relaxed and let her hands drop to her sides.

"Certainly, if you wish, Angela," she responded.

The canoe was closer now, and Celia saw with misgiving the tense, petulant countenance and the snapping brown eyes.

"I just want to tell you—I—I—don't think you ought to be always enticing Sally Vandever ——"

Celia stared in amazement. "Enticing Sally?" she said at length, as Angela regarded her poutingly.

"Yes! Sally Vandever! It's—it's just spoiling everything! Her whole visit!"

"But, Angela ——!" Celia protested, too astonished to speak coherently. "I—haven't—enticed—her! I wouldn't think of ——"

"But you have!" Angela insisted. "Even Mother's noticed it. There was the day she came. She told us about your riding home in her car. Then you persuaded her to come over to that dirty old pottery instead of going to the hospital with us, and she was there ever so long. Then the night Mother gave a big dance for her you had her up at your house, and we didn't know where she was for ever so long. Mother was frantic. And then again to-day she ran off to that old pottery to be with you, and now ——" her lips quivering—"she ran off again to meet you here at the lake. It's—it's just humiliating!"

"But, Angela ——" Celia protested somewhat weakly. "I didn't—ask her. She came of her own accord each time."

“Of course you’d say that, and I really don’t blame you, but I just want to tell you, Celia, what a mistake you are making. She may think you’re interesting now, because she’s never known a girl who worked in a pottery, but you ought to know better. You thought you were being so independent, refusing to work for Father, but if you had, you’d have been much better off than you are now. You made your choice, and now you’ve got to stick to it. You just can’t expect people to want you about when they know you work in such a dirty old place with a lot of foreigners. It’s ridiculous that you should think you could hobnob with people like Sally Vandever. Even if she is a little nice to you, it’s just impulse on her part. Why, at school there wasn’t a girl who didn’t worship her, and do you think she cared anything about any of them? She did not! And when she leaves here, she’ll forget you *that* quick!” She snapped her fingers impressively at Celia.

But the impressive gesture was succeeded by a shrill, wild scream, for, in her impassioned denunciation of Celia’s conduct, she had forgotten the fact that a canoe is a perilous place in which to lose one’s temper.

It would have been funny to Celia, and indeed her first impulse was to laugh, for the sight of a faultlessly attired person suddenly precipitated into water is usually mirth-provoking. She felt, too, a

moment's swift dismay over the ruin of that beautiful pink organdy frock before she remembered Angela's fear of the water. She knew that Angela could not swim and that she hid her fear and dislike of the water only when in the presence of those who loved it. She knew that Angela would very much dislike to have any one suspect just how much she did dread the water, and that paddling a canoe was the extent of her nautical knowledge.

She was thankful for Angela's wild scream, for she knew that she would struggle wildly when she came up, and she wasn't sure that she could handle her alone.

As she plunged in after her, she saw with relief that the attention of the crowd was directed their way.

The lake was deep here. It would be several moments before Angela came to the surface. What had become of her?

And then she saw the wildly struggling mass of sodden pink, a white face, and the flash of the paddle, to which Angela still clung. She shot toward it.



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A WHITE FACE, AND THE FLASH OF THE PADDLE.—Page 136

CHAPTER XI

AN EMBARRASSING SITUATION

CELIA felt that she had been swimming for miles. She heard vaguely the frightened call of many voices, and saw as in a dream the arms extended to lift her burden into one of the canoes. She knew that somehow she climbed into one. She heard as from far off the murmur of sympathetic assurances. She remembered putting her hand to her head and the strange feel of that sticky stream that trickled down her forehead. Then she remembered nothing more.

When she opened her eyes, it was upon unfamiliar surroundings. She was in a strange room, a strange bed. She blinked dazedly, then put her hand to her head. It hurt. There was a bandage on it. She tried to raise herself on an elbow to look about her, but her head swam dizzily and she sank back on the pillow with a sigh of relief.

She wondered where she was and what had happened, but her brain refused to consider the problem. She was dreadfully tired. She could feel herself drifting off into delicious forgetfulness, when

she saw something moving at one of the windows. A figure came nearer and stopped beside her bed.

"Hello, Celia," the voice said gently.

She tried to remember to whom that voice belonged. She had heard it somewhere a long time ago.

"Rather knocked out, aren't you?" the voice inquired again.

She dragged her eyelids open by sheer will power and saw Sally Vandever looking down upon her.

"Now, don't bother about anything," Sally said. "You'll be all right in a day or so, the doctor said. Rather nasty blow Angela gave you with that paddle. Nice reward for saving her—though of course she didn't mean to. She put up one awful fight."

As Celia stirred uneasily, Sally added, "She's all right, or will be in a little bit. Just scared, mostly. Now, don't try to move ——"

But Celia had managed to struggle up on one elbow, for the awful conviction that she was in one of the Duvals' guest-rooms had forced itself upon her bewildered brain.

Sally pushed her gently back. "You're not to move, Celia. You're here in my room at the Duvals'. That's my bed, there," pointing to the twin of the one Celia occupied. "I made them bring you here so I could look out for you. Your aunt's busy at the Stornoffs'. The old fellow is worse, it seems."

"But—but—I can't stay," Celia protested, strug-

gling against the overpowering inertia that enveloped her. "I've got to go."

"No, you haven't. You've got to lie still, the doctor said. That was a hard blow. It may prove serious yet, though he thought not. Don't you realize that you saved Angela's life? Can't you realize how grateful the Duvals feel to you? Here, drink this, and then go to sleep. Now, don't worry about anything. I'm going over to the Stornoffs' and let your aunt know you're coming out of it O.K., so she won't be worrying about you."

Celia gave in because there was nothing else to do. Sally's figure in its white frock had suddenly turned black. All the world seemed swirling into a deep dark pit. She heard a faint cry of distress from Sally, and oblivion again engulfed her.

She must have fallen asleep after that, for when she opened her eyes again, it was morning and Aunt Clem was beside her.

Her aunt looked unusually old and tired, but she brightened visibly as she met Celia's gaze.

"My, Celia!" she exclaimed, "you did give me a shock. Who would of thought the Lord would ever have let you save Angela like you did? Things surely are a-coming your way these days—getting to keep Jared's job for him and now rescuing Angela. It's almost like a moving-picture story, Celia. I just knew things would come right be-

tween you and the Duvals if I kept on praying. But, dear—your head! Here I am a-rambling on about things!”

She stood over her, gentle withered hands stroking the soft brown hair that tumbled about the wide bandage. “I do hope, dear, it don’t hurt very much.”

“Not much, Aunt Clem.” Celia made an effort to rise, but her aunt pushed her gently back against the pillows.

“Now, don’t you go exerting yourself, Celia. There’s no reason why you shouldn’t enjoy yourself considerably, convalescing here at the Duvals’. They’re mighty grateful, I can tell you. And you don’t need to worry about your work. It’s closing down to-morrow, they say, for about a week, though why, nobody seems to know.”

The faded blue eyes lighted with sudden pleasure. “And I just want to say, Celia, that I guess I was wrong, cautioning you against that Sally Vandever like I did. But how could I guess she wasn’t just like ordinary strangers? My! When she came over to Jared’s to tell me about the accident at the lake, she came right in and made herself to home just like kinfolks. She even put her arm right around my shoulders! She sure did seem to think you’d been brave, rescuing Angela ——”

Celia flung out a hand with a deprecating gesture.

"I don't deserve all the credit, Aunt Clem. I couldn't have got her to shore alone. If they hadn't been there with the boat ——"

"Now, don't go belittling what you did, Celia. It was brave."

The blue eyes were bright with tears, but she smiled through them as she looked about her. "You're mighty lucky, Celia. It's not everybody that gets a chance to convalesce in such surroundings." She lowered her voice impressively. "Do you s'pose, Celia, that the tops on all those things on the dressing-table are *pure* gold or just gilded?"

The corners of Celia's mouth twitched with amusement. "You might ask Mrs. Duval, Aunt Clem, or Sally. I suppose they belong to her."

"Well, they sure look pretty against the blue silk of that dressing-table. And look at those curtains, Celia. Gold net underneath the blue hangings. It sure is tasty."

Her eyes were sweeping over the big cool room. "It's been so long since I've been here. They've done all these rooms over. You do have to be careful, though, on such slick floors. It must feel awful nice, Celia, stretched out in that crêpe de Chine and lace nightgown, a-lying between those yellow silk sheets. If I was your age, I'd take more than one knock in the head just to get the experience."

Celia made no response, only lay still, staring with half-closed eyes at the vase of yellow roses on a table at the foot of the bed. Her fingers longed to touch them. Perhaps she could model them in clay if she could just get the feel of them. But they were Duval roses. She was through with the Duvals.

“Well, I’ll be going, Celia. I guess I’ve tired you out with all my talk. Mrs. Duval said I oughtn’t to stay more than a few minutes. And she said, too, you’re to take your time about getting well. Poor thing, she just wouldn’t listen to me when I wanted to have you brought home. But I guess it’s just as well, with Jared worse and poor Melby all tuckered out. It leaves me free to stay with them. They’re hoping they won’t have to operate, but it sure looks serious,” as Celia murmured a query as to his condition.

Then she arose decisively. “Well, I’ve got to go, Celia. Now, just take your time getting well. I’ll be over at the Stornoffs’ if you want me at any time.”

The door closed gently on her aunt, and when Celia felt sure that she was out of the house, she flung back the coverlet and put her feet to the floor. She meant to get home at once, even though her aunt would be at the Stornoffs’. Once in her own bed in her room under the eaves, she’d be all right. She could not stay here.

But her feet refused to hold her. Her head, too,

was spinning. With a moan of disgust at her weakness, she lay back again, feeling gingerly of the bandage about her head.

“I’ve got to get out of here!” she said over and over, but without conviction.

Her unhappy thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Duval, preceded by a maid bearing a breakfast tray.

When the tray was placed to her satisfaction on the bedside table, Mrs. Duval dismissed the maid.

“My dear child, I’ve been wanting to thank you ——” The trembling voice caught pathetically and broke on a high note.

Celia put out a hand, but Mrs. Duval did not see it. She had found her handkerchief and was dabbing at her delicate pink nostrils. “You’ll never know ——” she tried again, “how much Mr. Duval and I —— If Angela—if anything had happened to our dear darling —— Oh, Celia, it was just too fortunate—your being so near! But then, of course, Angela’s guardian angel must have been—but you ——were given the privilege ——”

She dropped into the low chair that had held Celia’s aunt a few moments before, and sobbed softly into the tiny lace-edged square. “It might—have—ended—so terribly!”

Celia moved uncomfortably, then reached to pat with timid hand the linen-clad knee.

“It’s over now, Mrs. Duval. At least—I hope—Angela’s all right. She isn’t ——?”

“Just the shock, dear. I’m afraid it will be some time—before she’s her own dear self again. She was badly frightened. Now eat your breakfast, dear. I know you’ll find it appetizing. Sally herself insisted on arranging it.”

If it had not been for that, Celia would have barely tasted the tempting food, but she was not proof against Sally’s solicitude. As it was, she ate with a certain enjoyment of the tempting viands in the delicate china banded in blue and gold, and when she had finished, she searched the room with anxious eyes for something that might be used for wearing apparel. She must make another attempt to leave.

She wondered where they had put her bathing-suit. In the bathroom most likely. Which door was it? she wondered. Everything had been changed since last she had been here.

As her eyes roved about the big room, they came to rest suddenly upon a photograph of a young man propped among the gold-topped toilet articles on the blue and gold dressing-table. She considered it thoughtfully.

“He looks,” she said softly, “like the picture of that Russian prince with the unpronounceable name in the rotogravure section of last Sunday’s paper. I wonder if it could be that Julian Strassman.”

She had an urgent impulse to get up and scrutinize at closer range the signature sprawling across a lower corner, then she turned away her head deliberately. She didn't like Julian Strassman at all. He had been horrid to Sally. He had hurt Sally. But, without realizing it, she was again scrutinizing the photograph.

She could make out a *J* and an *S*. Yes, it must be he! So this was Julian Strassman—this handsome youth with the dark serious eyes, high sloping forehead, crisp dark hair brushed so immaculately into place, slender nose, and just a hint of petulance in the curve of mouth and chin. No wonder Sally had been drawn toward him!

She lay for a moment, pondering the matter of Sally's feeling for him whom she disliked so much that she did not want to see him again, and yet whom she liked so well that she kept his picture on her dressing-table.

Sally, tiptoeing into the room, put an end to her cogitations.

"I thought you'd want to know, Celia, that your brother is calling over long distance to ask about you. Mrs. Duval sent for your aunt to talk to him, since you're not able to be up."

CHAPTER XII

TED CARSON

“MY brother?” exclaimed Celia shrilly, sitting bolt upright and staring wide-eyed at Sally.

“Yes. Your brother. I didn’t know you had a brother, Celia.”

“My *brother?*” Ceila shrilled again, her face such a study in glad surprise and puzzled disbelief that Sally, in some alarm, hastened to say:

“Yes, of course. Don’t you understand, Celia? Your *brother* is calling over long distance. I suppose he read in the paper this morning about your getting hurt when you rescued Angela from the lake, and he wants to know how you’re getting along. It was on the front page, Celia, in big headlines. I don’t think the Duvals were especially pleased, but when a reporter came last night, I happened to be on the portico and so I told him all about it without thinking that perhaps I should have consulted them first. But I thought people all over the State should know how brave you are!”

“But you said my *brother!*” a little piteously.

“You can’t mean—my brother, Sally! Maybe it’s—Uncle Steve.”

“No. He said very plainly it was Ted Carson, calling from Clayton Springs. The operator’s waiting now for your aunt so she can make the connection again.”

“But, Sally!” laughter and tears battling for supremacy as she flung back the bed clothes and swung her feet to the floor. “If it’s Ted—my brother—I’ve got to talk—to him—myself! Why, I haven’t seen Ted—since—since ——”

“But you can’t, Celia! The doctor said positively you weren’t to move, and you mustn’t get so excited!” considerably alarmed at the hysterical condition of the girl, who staggered toward the door, clutching the silken coverlet which she had snatched from the bed about her quivering shoulders.

“I—I’ve—got—to ——” her lips trembling pathetically; then she slumped limply into the arms Sally flung quickly about her.

When Celia came to herself again, her head was throbbing painfully, and it was some minutes before she saw the silent figure by her bedside in the darkened room, and remembered.

Again she threw back the bed clothes and attempted to sit up. “Is it—really—Ted, Aunt Clem?”

“Now, Celia!” the gentle voice soothed, as Aunt

Clem leaned forward and pressed the girl firmly and resolutely back among the pillows and spread the coverlet over her. "You've just got to take this more calmly. That was a bad blow you got, and you can't let yourself get all excited. Now, just calm yourself, and I'll tell you everything he said."

"Then he's gone?" mournful disappointment in her voice.

"Yes, of course. It was half an hour ago."

Celia moaned her disgust for herself then exclaimed, "Is he coming to see me? Did he remember ——?"

She leaned forward again, tense, straining for what was to come.

"Now, Celia," rubbing a withered hand gently over the soft brown arm. "There's things we've just got to bear—things we can't seem to help ——"

"Bear?" staring bewilderedly. "You mean—he's not coming? That he ——?"

"He wanted to, Celia. He was all for coming right away. He wanted to make sure that you were his sister. That's why he called."

"Then, when *is* he coming?"

"He isn't coming at all, Celia." The old voice quavered uncertainly, and she continued to stroke soothingly the arm that was now clinging to hers. "I—I just couldn't let him, Celia."

"You—couldn't—let—him, Aunt Clem? You

mean you wouldn't let my very own brother, whom I haven't seen for years and years, come to see me—when he wanted to?" her voice shrill with indignation and unbelief.

"But you don't understand, Celia," Aunt Clem went on, desperately unhappy. "I made a promise—years ago. I *gave* Ted to those people who adopted him. I promised I'd never have any communication with him again, that I'd do my best to make you forget him."

"But, Aunt Clem, it was he—who ——"

"I know, Celia, but the spirit of the thing is just the same. I told him what I'm telling you. Those people have been real parents to him. They've done more for him than I ever could. He owes them—at least he ought to respect the agreement we made until he's twenty-one, anyway. He's nineteen now, Celia. In two more years, if he still wants to get in touch with you, it'll be his privilege, I guess, but, until then, I just can't be a party to ——"

"And—and he—agreed to wait?" her voice sick with disappointment.

"He wouldn't agree to anything, Celia. It strikes me he's considerably spoiled."

"Oh, Aunt Clem!" sitting up straight now and laughing excitedly. "I always knew that Ted would—that Ted wouldn't let anything keep him away—once he had a chance ——"

“Now, Celia, it’s not right for you to talk so. You young people don’t stop to consider —— There’s things I can’t tell you, Celia. Reasons ——” She shook her head stubbornly. “I’ve given my promise, Celia. Besides, he’s not coming, so you may as well try to put him out of your mind. I told him ——” She paused a moment, then went on; “I hope God forgives me, but I told him you were feeling fine and that you were leaving almost at once to visit a friend, so you wouldn’t be here, even if he were determined to come. You see, Sally told me about wanting to take you home with her. It’s just too fortunate. It’ll give you a chance to get real well again, to have a good time, and to put this brother of yours out of your mind.”

“I’ll never put him out of my mind, Aunt Clem!” passionately. “I’ve thought of him all my life—and I’ve written ——”

“Yes, I know, Celia. It’s what makes me feel so bad. I thought I was doing what was best for him, but now I’m not so sure, knowing how you’ve always felt about him. But I made that promise, and I’ve got to stick to it.”

Celia slumped back among her pillows. So Ted had found her, as she had always thought he would, only to be denied seeing her. It wasn’t fair, either to her or to him, even though Aunt Clem had made a promise. She should never have been allowed to

make such a promise, for it was not right to separate brothers and sisters, especially when they loved one another; and surely Ted must love her, though he couldn't as much as she loved him. She thought over those days of her childhood when she had clung to the belief that Ted would write to her sometime, and had hung over the gate day after day, waiting for the postman to bring Ted's letter that never came.

And now—now when he was so near—to be denied seeing him! It wasn't fair. Clayton Springs. Sally had said he was calling from Clayton Springs. Wasn't Clayton Springs up in the northern part of the State? And wasn't Inglenook also?

A little thrill of excitement went through her at her daring thought. If she went to Sally's, what was to prevent her from going on to Clayton Springs and finding Ted or getting in touch with him by phone? Even though Aunt Clem had made a promise, *she* hadn't. Aunt Clem wouldn't be responsible if she, of her own accord, communicated with Ted.

Her aunt evidently divined what was responsible for the pleased expression in her niece's eyes, for she said quickly, "You'll promise me, won't you, Celia, that you won't try to see him or talk to him when you go to Sally's? I just won't have any peace of mind at all while you're away, if you don't promise me."

"Oh, Aunt Clem," disappointedly, "you *would* think of that!"

“There’s reasons, serious reasons, Celia, why you mustn’t be together, why no one must know you’re related—anyway, till he’s old enough to decide ——”

“But can’t you tell me the reasons?” somewhat petulantly.

“No, I just can’t, Celia. I promised. Though it don’t seem right you shouldn’t know. It couldn’t really do any harm for you to know, for I’m sure you’d do the right thing and keep silent, but I can’t go against my promise, Celia. Besides, if it’s God’s will, he’ll manage to bring you two together.”

“But don’t you think, Aunt Clem, that He expects us to help make things happen? It seems to me He must have wanted Ted to find me, or all this wouldn’t have happened—Angela’s accident, and Sally’s telling a reporter, and Ted’s being at the Springs, and his reading about it, and his ’phoning here. It just seems to me ——”

“Now, Celia,” sinking a little wearily into her chair. “Don’t begin that all over again. You’ve just got to believe me. That promise I made concerns other people too deeply to be broken for any reason. You just hurry up and get well and go up to Inglenook with Sally, and have a real good time with Angela and all of them while you have the chance, and maybe in a couple of years Ted will come to see you, that is ——”

A tear rolled out from each of Celia's eyes. "I guess I'll have to—'cause you know I wouldn't do anything—to—hurt you, Aunt Clem. But I can't help—feeling—pretty bad. It just doesn't seem fair, with Ted so near ——"

She swallowed determinedly, and a faint smile flitted across her face. "Maybe, after all, it's best to wait. In two years I ——"

She did not go on, but she was thinking that in two years maybe she might be something more than just a worker in the pottery. If she could see Mr. Vandever's collection at Inglenook—those figurines—read his books, learn all she could, she might learn enough—she might get some ideas ——

She looked down at her slim brown hands lying inert on the coverlet and was conscious of that old tingling sensation that had so often puzzled her—a feeling of power, stored somewhere within the slender fingers. If only she knew what to do with them, how to guide them toward something, some achievement that would make Ted approve of her.

She was suddenly determined that nothing should keep her from going to Inglenook. She must see those things, read those books, and when Ted came again in two years— Two years! They seemed like a lifetime, but they wouldn't be any too long in which to accomplish the well-nigh impossible, for, though one section of her mind said, "You can do

anything if you try hard enough," another said, "Jared'll probably be able to work soon, and you'll go back to just trimming the molded pieces."

"But I'm going to Inglenook!" she said fiercely to herself. "It's my one chance!"

Her determination and the vista it opened up to her aided surprisingly in her recovery, and by the next day she was able to walk about the room without having everything swirling in drunken circles. And when Angela came lounging in during one of Sally's momentary absences, Celia was so much her old self that she greeted her with a smile as ingenuous as those she used to bestow upon her in the old days when they played "lady-come-to-see" in the garden.

But Angela's response was faint. She drew her blue chiffon boudoir-robe a bit tighter about her slim figure and slid onto the low seat in front of the vanity, where she considered her image in the mirror for a moment; then she turned with mild gaze to Celia.

"I'm extremely sorry about your head, Celia. You know, of course, I wasn't responsible. I hope it hasn't been too painful."

"Not very. And I'm sorry to have put you all to so much trouble."

"It's as little as we could do; though, if it hadn't been for you, I don't suppose it would have happened."

Celia flushed, but said nothing. She was leaving just as soon as Aunt Clem came with her clothing.

“But I do want to thank you, Celia. You certainly saved ——”

“If I hadn’t, some of the others would,” Celia remarked as coolly as she could.

Angela nodded. “It’s what I told Mother, but she insists on being all upset and wants to do something for you in return.”

Celia shook her head. “I don’t want any reward. It’s as you said. It was partly my fault it happened.”

“Not your *fault*,” Angela conceded graciously, “though if it hadn’t been for the way you’ve made over Sally Vandever —— But we won’t go into that. Mother thought by now you might be sorry you chose to work in the pottery instead of Dad’s bank, and if you are, you’ve only to say so.”

Celia shook her head. “No, I’m not sorry.”

“But now that it’s closed, how can you afford to be idle?” clasping her white hands about one blue-covered knee. “You could start in the bank to-morrow if you’re well enough.”

“I’m afraid I can’t, Angela. You see, Sally—— Sally has asked me up to Inglenook for a little visit while the pottery’s closed.”

“Yes, she told us,” Angela said quickly. “It’s just one of those wild notions that people with money

sometimes take. You wouldn't for a moment consider accepting?"

"Why not?" Celia asked, a hint of ire in her voice as she gazed straight into Angela's eyes. "Our pay is to go on until the pottery reopens."

"Oh, is it? Well, there are a dozen other reasons, Celia, why you shouldn't."

"There's *one* why I should," Celia responded, "and I'm afraid it's more important to me than the dozen why I shouldn't," and regretted instantly the remark, for Angela's head lifted with a quick gesture of displeasure.

"It's nothing to me whether you go or stay, but I—I—like you too well, Celia, to see you —— I'd like to save you, if possible, the embarrassment—the humiliation ——"

"Thanks, Angela." It was Celia's turn to stammer. "I—I—know—how—you feel, but ——"

Her eyes wandered to the photograph of Julian Strassman still in its place on Sally's dresser. She stared at it, absently at first, then more intently, for she was wondering suddenly whether Ted, her brother, could possibly be so handsome and attractive as this youth whom Sally had found so difficult.

So intent was she upon her thoughts that she did not notice the interested light in Angela's brown eyes, nor the amused smile of satisfaction that curled the corners of her small red mouth.

“Well,” she said at length, rising and stretching her white arms languidly above her head, then strolling to the doorway where she paused impressively. “I think I know just what your reason is. I do wish you luck, though I’m afraid you’ll be badly disappointed,” and she stepped aside to make way for Celia’s aunt, who carried on her arm the apparel for which Celia was waiting.

“As though she could guess!” Celia smiled to herself. Then her eyes became thoughtful as she realized just how much was involved in her prospective visit to Inglenook.

CHAPTER XIII

INGLENOOK

THOUGH Celia was firm in her determination to make the most of her opportunity to visit Inglenook, she was really just a little frightened at the ordeal that was before her, for the more she thought about it, the more she realized that Angela had probably been right in attempting to persuade her to abandon her proposed visit. Sober thought convinced her that she couldn't possibly fit into the lives and activities of those who dwelt there, even for a brief time.

But she set her teeth firmly. "I'm going to bluff it through, anyway, so that I can find out what I want to know," she declared, "and I mean to enjoy all I can of it, too."

With this thought in mind, her fears gradually receded, for she knew without doubt that there would be much to enjoy.

The long drive in the blue car beside Sally, through an undulating country of lovely homes, sleepy villages, across shimmering streams and through dim

cool woods, had seemed more like a dream than reality, but she knew that she must not lose herself as one did in dreams. She must keep her wits about her constantly. She must not do the least thing to embarrass Sally or to make her sorry that she had invited her.

She had expected to find Inglenook somewhat more impressive than the Duvals' home and had schooled herself not to be overawed by anything. But, in spite of her resolution, her first glimpse of the big sprawling stone house through its screen of huge old trees did not in any way add to her assurance. She knew in a vague way that they left behind a tall iron gateway, that a curving drive wound through a park almost as large as the whole of Newtonville. As they approached the house, she saw a gently sloping lawn dotted here and there with giant oaks. Off toward the rear was a tennis court, and beyond, past the kitchen garden, she caught a glimpse of the glass roofs of hothouses gleaming in the sun. They rounded a curve and stopped under the porte-cochère.

Sally nodded ahead with a little smile of contentment.

“The prettiest view is on the east side. You can't see the garden from here. Wait till you see it by moonlight!” Then she caught her lower lip between her white teeth, as though to hide the emotion she

had displayed, honked loudly, threw open the door of the car, and slid from under the wheel.

“Well, here we are, Celia!” with a mock bow.

Celia felt that she should have responded, but words refused to come. It was all a little too unreal, a little too overawing. She hadn't expected anything quite like this. She climbed out, smoothing as best she could the wrinkles from her pongee skirt.

What happened next was a bit bewildering. She had a vague impression of hovering servants, a dim passageway, and a long, wide hall up which a staircase curled, its wrought-iron railing threaded with growing ivy. From the hall she caught a vista of a huge living-room with high beamed ceiling, a balcony at one end, and at the other an enormous fireplace of field stones, over which hung a pair of deer antlers. There were soft divans filled with many-hued cushions, tables, ornate and plain, a great carved chest, gleaming floors over which thick silky rugs splashed the varied colors of their intricate designs. Tall heavily carved chairs stood in dignified solemnity at intervals along the walls.

Sally was demanding imperiously, “Where's Mother?”

One of the maids responded apologetically, “She's at the Springs, Miss Sally. There was a luncheon ——”

“And Dad?”

“He’s away just now.”

“For long?”

“Just a few days.”

“Well, that’s a relief,” she said, turning to Celia. “It would have been too bad if we’d missed him entirely, wouldn’t it? Come along,” nodding toward the stairs. “We’ll freshen up while we’re waiting for Mother.”

Celia followed Sally and the maid up the stairs, through a wide hall, and into a cool, low-ceilinged room, its leaden windows hung with ruffled Swiss. The narrow bed and the dressing table were also hung with the same dainty material. Hand-woven rugs of pink and white lay on the polished floor.

“It’s just the kind of a room Aunt Clem would love,” Celia thought wistfully, wishing she could see it.

Sally motioned the maid from the room, then threw open the mirrored door of a deep closet.

“I’ve always wanted to play fairy godmother to some one, Celia,” she said with an embarrassed little laugh. “I guess you’re *it*. I hope they fit. I had to order them by wire. If they don’t, Mother’s seamstress will make any alterations necessary.”

Celia stood for one stunned moment and gazed on the array of frocks hanging from the long rod. She had not expected anything of this sort; in fact, she had in the last few minutes thought with considerable

misgiving of her own wearing apparel. It would look wretchedly out of place in such an establishment as this. Why hadn't she had the sense to realize it sooner?

She and her aunt had spent a hectic day and night, getting her things in shape and rushing to the store to purchase a few additional things which seemed necessary for a visit of such importance.

"If you mean to stay only a few days, Celia," her aunt had reflected, "there's no use worrying. Your white graduation dress is pretty enough for evenings. There's nothing prettier on young girls than white. Your little pongee skirt and green sweater will do to wear in the car and for mornings, and there'll be your blue and your pink flowered voiles for afternoons. You can wear your tennis shoes mornings and your black pumps the rest of the time. Black is always good with anything."

Now Celia stood speechless, torn for a moment between pleasure and humiliation.

"You're not to mind at all, Celia," Sally hurried on. "You know I have my own income from Grandmother's estate, besides the allowance Dad gives me. He likes me to spend money. It's his excuse for making more. And it was fun planning it. I had hoped you'd be pleased. You see, I do want you to feel ——" She didn't finish her sentence, but Celia understood.

Sally wanted her to feel that she *belonged* in these luxurious surroundings.

She couldn't have been offended, had she wanted to be, not with Sally's arm about her while she nodded at the row of slippers and the hat-boxes on the shelf.

"You see, Celia," with a little hug, "I mean to keep you for more than just a few days. I want you until the pottery reopens, anyway, so you may as well make up your mind to enjoy this visit. Now, have a bath and rest for an hour or so after lunch. I'll have a tray sent up. Suppose you put on the yellow chiffon. Mother's bound to have a lot of people in for tea. She always does. She can't seem to breathe unless the atmosphere is all cluttered up with people. You'll find underthings to match in the dresser," she added, moving toward the hall. "The bath is there," nodding to a door partly ajar, through which Celia caught the gleam of onyx and green tile, shining fixtures, and great thick towels.

Left alone, she moved automatically from bath to closet, from closet to drawers, laden with delicate, fragrant garments.

"I can't!" she kept saying over and over. "I can't use these things," and paused once to stare down at her hands.

"If—if there—were some way—something I could—do for her—in return ——"

All those vague, half-defined longings of hers were again focused, but with new insistence, in her finger-tips. They clamored for attention. Unhappily she tried to concentrate on the problem before her, but they wirelessly to her brain that it was of no use. "You've got to make the most of this opportunity. You may never have another. And you can't let her be ashamed of you. You can't let her be sorry she asked you. You've got to manage to act as though you belong, as though all your life you've worn such things as these. You've got to make her glad that she asked you."

She lifted her head and stared thoughtfully at herself between the flowered draperies of the mirror over the dressing-table; then she took another look at the row of frocks hanging in the closet. How could Sally have thought she'd need so many things? She couldn't possibly stay long enough to use them. She had intended staying only a few days, just long enough to see Mr. Vandever's collection and investigate the contents of his books. She couldn't even take time to read them. If she found out what they were and where to get them, she meant to have some for herself sometime, no matter how long it took to save the money for them.

Stretched among the cool cretonne cushions of the wicker chaise longue, she tried to doze, but the excitement of her arrival and Sally's unexpected sur-

prise had set her blood to racing. Never in her life could she remember feeling so happy. Those lovely frocks, slippers, and underthings, this room, the gorgeous views of rolling country from each window, the books, the porcelains and figurines awaiting her attention! Days of this! It was unbelievable that such good fortune could have come to her.

If only she could have seen Ted! It was the one thing that saddened her. But she must not let such thoughts spoil this wonderful visit. He would come again, of that she was sure, and in the meantime she would bend every energy she possessed toward improving herself so that, when he came, he need not feel ashamed of her.

A little later she surveyed her reflection in the long mirror of the closet door in pleased surprise. It was really incredible that clothes could make such a difference in one's appearance. She had never even hoped to look like this girl. It surely couldn't be she, Celia Carson of the dusty overalls and simple little prints—this girl in the pale yellow chiffon frock, its wide berth of heavy lace rippling over her arms, its snug waist flaring out into flounces that danced tantalizingly above hose and slippers of a matching shade.

Carefully she adjusted a curling lock of shining brown hair over the red scar high up on her forehead, the result of the blow she had received from

Angela's canoe paddle. She was thankful it had been close to her hair; not that it mattered much, but it would have spoiled this lovely ensemble.

She wondered if Sally meant to come for her or if she expected her to go down alone. She rather dreaded descending that imposing staircase, crossing that huge living-room to the terrace.

She heard low voices drifting up from below. Sally must be down there awaiting her. She opened her door, certain now of the murmuring voices. Then, bracing her shoulders and with head erect, she started toward the stairs. She strolled with studied ease downward, a careless hand trailing the railing after the manner of one of her favorite screen stars.

On the landing she paused in dismay. She could see, down the stairs through the grilled doors that led from living-room to terrace, two maids and a stately butler busy with silver and glass about a tea-table. There was no sign of guests.

She must get back to her room, but, as she turned to ascend, she heard a door open and Sally's voice mingling with a deeper, richer one that she knew at once belonged to Sally's mother, for her words came quite distinctly.

"I thought that when you finished at Worthington Hall, you would have acquired the proper perspective. If you knew how humiliated I was! Your tearing off that way when you had guests here! I

can't imagine what your father was thinking of to encourage you to stay there! And then your wanting to entertain those girls here—girls I've never even heard of. And the one you brought with you—just who is she?"

"Oh, Mother—wait until you see her! I never knew any one so nice! She's ——"

The rest of the speech was lost to Celia, for she turned quickly to find some place of concealment. She couldn't pass that open door where mother and daughter were so obviously discussing her, and she couldn't stand here and listen. She couldn't go down and stand around among the servants.

To her relief, she found that the stained-glass window behind her was really a door that opened on a tiny balcony. She stepped out upon it, hurriedly moving to one side so that she could not be seen by any one descending the stairs.

But she did not escape the sound of the voices. They were even more distinct than before. With mounting embarrassment, she heard:

"Well, at least she's a lady, Mother!" Sally was defending her in a level voice.

"A lady? Just what *is* your definition of a lady, Sally?" her mother wanted to know.

"A lady? Why, it seems to me a lady is one who never—consciously hurts the feelings—of—of *any one!*"

There was a moment's silence.

"I'm glad you know that, Sally, but really, a lady —— Well, there are a few more requirements, my dear. One's scrubwoman might be a perfect lady if that were the only consideration, and yet one would hardly feel like admitting her to one's social world."

"But if she had the right clothes, Mother, and education, and had a chance ——"

"Now, there you have it, Sally. It takes all those things, you see, to make people congenial. And even among those who have had all the advantages of money, position, and breeding, one must know how to choose those who respond to some quality in oneself. It's the only way to be really happy in one's friendships."

"But that's just it, Mother!" Sally's voice rose animatedly. "Celia does respond to something in me. She's the first girl I ever knew whom I could really love. And don't you see, Mother—why, I want her to have a chance ——"

"I'm afraid you're making a big mistake, Sally. There isn't a girl anywhere who wouldn't flatter you and pretend to be fond of you for the chance of being invited here and having you provide proper apparel ——"

"Celia has neither flattered me nor pretended to be fond of me, though I'm sure she does like me a lot. She's too reserved to discuss her feelings. I'm de-

pending on the look I've seen in her eyes. You can depend more on what people's eyes say, sometimes, I think, than on what their lips say."

"I didn't know you were so wise, Sally. Well, I wish you luck in your little experiment. It may really be a good lesson, and I hope a harmless one. At least, you'll learn to choose your friends from among your parents' acquaintances. What I'm wondering is how you're going to explain her to Julian."

"Explain her to Julian?"

"Yes. He went away so hurt at the way you had treated him that I invited him down again when I saw him at the Springs this morning."

"And he's coming?" a little shrilly.

"Yes. I rather think he'll get here about sundown. Now, do hurry, Sally, dear. I'm expecting something of a crowd this afternoon."

CHAPTER XIV

A GARDEN IN THE MOONLIGHT

“MY, but you look lovely!” Sally exclaimed as she eyed Celia approvingly.

She did not guess that Celia’s flushed cheeks and bright eyes were due to the conversation she had just overheard and her breathless haste to reach her own room the moment she heard Mrs. Vandever’s door close. But, swallowing her pride as best she could, she returned Sally’s smile.

“You have yourself to thank, you know.”

“Not entirely. Clothes help, of course, Celia, but—well, there’s no need of my telling you what a beauty you are. Mirrors don’t lie. You have only to look.” She waved a gay hand toward it.

“I did,” Celia told her, her lashes drooping shyly. “I feel like the little old woman in the Mother Goose rhyme: ‘This can be none of I.’ ”

Sally laughed and tucked her arm in Celia’s. “Come! Let’s go down. Mother’ll be wondering. She rather depends on me to help things go. Now, remember, you’re a school friend of mine, if any one

asks questions. It isn't necessary to go into details. You don't need to drag out the truth—that you work in a pottery. You and I don't care, and what the others don't know won't hurt them. There, now!" as she flung open the door, and the murmur of gay voices and tinkling laughter floated up to them. "Sounds like a flock of magpies, doesn't it?" she asked, as she hurried Celia through the hall.

"You and I don't care!" It was the warmth as well as the words that sent flying all Celia's bitter thoughts resulting from that overheard conversation.

Her heart fluttering uncertainly, she moved down the stairs, arm in arm with Sally, through the living-room and out upon the terrace.

She had not imagined anything quite like this. She had not guessed how necessary it would be to pose as one belonging to Sally's world, and, though she had felt there would be some difficulties in adjusting herself to the mode of living of the Vandevers, she had not had experience enough to anticipate the form it might assume.

Sally's mother greeted her with the apparent warmth she would have bestowed on any of Sally's schoolmates, but, remembering her recent conversation with Sally, Celia was able to gauge correctly the sweet smile and friendliness in the hazel eyes.

"So pleased to have you with us," Mrs. Vandever murmured, the fluttering ends of her flowered-

chiffon sleeves sending out a faint intoxicating perfume as she patted Celia's tense little hand.

But, to Celia's surprise, she caught Mrs. Vandever's puzzled gaze upon her more than once in the next few minutes, and, each time before turning away her head, Mrs. Vandever smiled upon her in such a fashion that Celia forgave her at once, wholly and completely, for that overheard conversation.

Her heart considerably lighter, Celia acknowledged introductions, smiled upon one, accepted a seat beside another, shared the breeze from another's fan, strolled down the terrace steps and about the garden with others, sipped iced tea from a tall slender glass and munched tea cakes and sandwiches with still others as though she were perfectly at ease. But she had a deep-seated conviction that she was just a cheap little cheat, crowding in among those who would not have accorded her even a withering glance, had they known just who and what she was. And she felt that soon, very soon, some one would point a finger at her and cry, "She doesn't belong! She doesn't belong!"

It surprised her that they were so cordial in their acceptance of her, but she knew it was only because they thought of her as Sally's friend. Their friendliness only accentuated her feeling of disgust for herself.

"Ah, the Southhampton Carsons!" one had mur-

mured, and lifted a jeweled lorgnette to study Celia more closely.

Celia smiled disengagingly and drifted on.

“Don’t let them press you for details,” Sally had said, but she felt more than a little guilty when she heard the woman confide to an eager listener, “And I understood they had sent her to a convent in France. So wise—for these days, when the young are so determined to be themselves! Isn’t she a dear! Those guileless eyes ——”

She watched Sally furtively and strove to be as near like her as possible. It amazed her—the ease with which Sally maneuvered the guests to the tea-tables, kept them laughing, circulating about the terrace and through the gardens. It was a new Sally, a witty, sparkling Sally, one Celia had never seen before. It awed her just a bit, and when Sally sank limply beside her on a marble seat under the colonnade alongside the pool, fanned herself with the end of the green chiffon cape that fell over her shoulder, and gasped, “I feel like a rag! For two cents I’d jump right into the pool,” Celia had a feeling that Sally had tricked her in some way. She knew that she would never have dared to thrust herself upon the Sally so skilled in the art of social intercourse.

“Thank heaven it’s nearly over, and we’ll get a plunge before dinner.” Sally’s voice softened to a

confidential note. "Mother's invited another crowd for to-night—younger. You dance, don't you?"

Celia nodded. Dancing, she imagined, would be less of a strain than conversation. And that sunken garden beyond the pool would be waiting. She could slip away. It would be heavenly just to sit there and listen to the music and breathe the scented air of those massed blooms.

"Julian—Strassman is coming," Sally said with a queer little jerk to her words. "You remember my telling you about him? Mother asked him down again. I do have the rottenest luck."

Celia nodded. "Perhaps," she said, "he's sorry. If he's coming again, doesn't that prove that he does like you, that he does want to see you?"

She felt suddenly just a little jealous of the handsome youth that she knew held such an important place in Sally's thoughts. She was almost sorry that he was coming; yet it might give her more chance to be alone with Mr. Vandever's books. She was just a little impatient to get at them.

The last of the motor-cars purring around the drive, Sally insisted they must have their plunge.

They stayed in the pool until Mrs. Vandever sent an imperious demand that Sally go at once to her room and rest. Did she want to look like a piece of crinkled crêpe paper that evening?

Dinner was something of an ordeal for Celia.

Dressed in pale green, with floating bits of ostrich about her skirt and iridescent straps holding up her scant bodice, she was a perfect complement to the frail mass of pink tulle which enveloped Sally. They might have been stray, sun-tinged clouds that had been caught unawares this side of the horizon before the fall of night.

She sat directly opposite Sally and managed to observe each of Sally's movements so that, though she was conscious of a sense of strain, she was able to avoid making any of the mistakes she had feared.

"One only needs good common sense," she said to herself encouragingly, as she lifted her glass to her lips by its frail stem.

Sally seemed entirely unaware of Celia's careful attention to the details of dining. She chattered to first one and then another of her mother's friends who were staying on for the evening, occasionally sending a glowing smile in Celia's direction.

It was not until coffee was served and Celia had regained a measure of confidence in herself that she had a chance to observe the rich tapestry paneling of the walls, the huge heavily carved buffets on each side of the long room, the tall wrought-iron urns beside the black-walnut mantel, that spilled Wandering Jew to the floor.

How she would have loved to have Aunt Clem see all this—the chandeliers of brass and many colored

bits of crystal, the tall chairs, the exquisite silver, glass, and china!

Night brought a pronounced sense of unreality to Celia, with the soft-tinted glow of many lamps falling on corners of rich rugs, the polished surfaces of tables, and the luxuriant thickness of rich draperies; old prints and portraits of dignified men and women in oil, the overhead lights accentuating their patrician features.

She strolled about from one room to another, then paused in delight before a lacquer cabinet far back in a corner of a little room at the end of a passage. Her fingers longed to trace the beautifully carved base, but the impulse died when she discovered its contents. These must be Mr. Vandever's treasures—these lovely plates, bowls, trays, figures!

But before she had more than realized the truth of her discovery, Sally's voice came to her from the doorway.

"How did you get in here, Celia? I've been looking for you everywhere."

"The door was open. Tell me, please," she pleaded, pointing to a tiny figure that might have graced the court of Louis the Fourteenth.

But Sally shook her head and urged her toward the door.

"Mother must have been showing them to some one. Dad always keeps this room locked. He'll be

here in a day or two, and he'll tell you all you want to know."

"Oh, but, Sally, please just tell me about that little jug!"

"It's Lowestoft, if that means anything to you. It'll really be best, Celia, for you to read up a little before Dad comes; then you'll be able to understand and appreciate them more."

"This one with the Chinese scene ——"

"A Spode willow plate. The willow pattern, you know, has been used a great deal by different potters. It tells the story of the lovers Chang and Koong-see, who were finally turned into those two doves at the top. You can read about it. Come! I'd better tell Mother she left this door unlocked. Dad wouldn't like its being left open."

Reluctantly Celia followed her. She would much rather spend the evening looking and listening to stories of these treasures than she would taking part in the activities expected of her. Now that she had caught a glimpse of those lovely porcelains and figurines, she was avid for information concerning them.

"This lovely blue and white jar!" she exclaimed, pausing beside another cabinet.

"Ming," Sally responded briefly.

"But—what does Ming mean? I know it's Chinese, but ——"

“It’s called Ming because it was made during the Ming dynasty, ’way back in thirteen-something, I think. The emperor gave the name, Ming, to his entire reign and that of his descendants. It means ‘bright.’ ” Dad can tell you more about him than I. But I know Ming porcelain is characteristically white, decorated in blue, though they also used turquoise blue, violet, green, and yellow.”

“And these little figures?” Celia begged, hovering eagerly over a cabinet which held a shelf laden with them.

“Some are Derby, I believe, and Bow. Really, I can’t tell you, Celia, which is which. Those, I believe, are Dresden. The Derby ware, I know, is noted for its lovely tints. *We must go!* I hear cars in the drive. Dad’ll tell you everything you want to know. You’ve lots of time to see them all.”

She snatched Celia’s hand and drew her through the door toward the voices of young people calling from the terrace, where they were spreading from the newly arrived cars.

Celia managed somehow to stay in the background. Her mind was too full of thoughts of the lovely treasures in the room they had just left and the overwhelming beauty of the big house to take much interest in the young people, who she knew could never mean anything to her. She would have much preferred to be allowed to wander about alone, to touch

this bit of carving, that silken drapery, and stare for long minutes at old woodcuts and paintings.

But, now that night had descended, the outdoors was demanding, too, its share of her attention. She would have liked to send away the laughing, chattering young people, who were spilling themselves in and out of this fascinating place, breaking the spell of its silent appeal.

Celia soon found out that Sally's friends were not like her mother's. One was either a "knock-out" or a "dim bulb." It did not take her long to realize that the part of "dim bulb" suited her best. She could not afford any spot lights turned on her. Although Sally pushed her forward and dragged her time and again into the midst of the chattering, humming cliques, she managed each time to slip away to some unobserved corner until routed out again by Sally or some one she had sent.

But after a time they let her alone, and she began to feel just a little lonely and sorry for herself, even though she knew it was no one's fault but her own that she was not having as gay a time as the others.

A jazz orchestra on the radio finally drew them indoors, and she was just a little glad. It gave her the outdoors for herself alone. Leaving her chair, where she had taken refuge behind a tubbed oleander, she crossed the star-roofed terrace and strolled along the colonnade by the pool, where curious Chi-

nese lanterns glowed through the tangled drapery of heavy vines and were mirrored in the pool's dark surface.

She lingered there for a time, then went slowly along a white path that curved away from the pool. The path led to a flight of rough stone steps, down which she went slowly and carefully by the light of the moon.

“What right have I to be here?” she kept whispering over and over. “What right have I to be here?”

But she made no attempt to answer, for the overpowering beauty of the garden spread out below her was beating upward into her brain, clamoring for recognition, for appreciation.

Once she paused and drew in her breath sharply, while she gazed at the moon-drenched garden enclosed in high green shrubbery. Two tall poplars stood like sentinels before a little green gate at the far end. Her nostrils twitched with the tantalizing odors of the many flowers.

She tried to analyze the riotous perfumes that drifted up to her. She could smell nasturtiums, spicy sweet; pungent geraniums; the sickly scent of tuberose and August lilies. She moved about slowly, leaning here and then there, sniffing thoughtfully. Then, as a sleep-walker does, she put forth a questing hand, scarcely conscious at first of the desire that slowly set her fingers to tingling. She

must touch, feel, the beauty that lay about her. Only in this way could she make it her own. Only in this way could she carry it away with her back to Aunt Clem's when this venture into fairyland was ended. This soft silkiness just under her hands must be Oriental poppies.

Forgetting the filmy edge of her ostrich-trimmed frock, she knelt beside a pool and leaned perilously over to touch a huge white lily, its petals cup-shaped above the dull dark island of its floating leaves.

A whiff of another tantalizing odor sent her exploring toward the farther end of the garden. She could see a faint glowing mass beside one of the slender poplars that guarded the green gate. What could it be? She had never smelled anything just like it.

She started toward it, then paused. Some one was coming through the little green gate between the poplars.

CHAPTER XV

JULIAN STRASSMAN

CELIA stood, a little shyly, a little resentfully, staring at the tall youth in white flannels who had intruded into her paradise.

“Hello!” he exclaimed. “I hope I haven’t strayed into the wrong garden! This is Inglenook, isn’t it—the Vandevers’ place?”

“Yes,” she said, and made a guess that this late, rather unceremonious visitor was none other than Sally’s Julian Strassman.

He confirmed her suspicions at once by saying, “I’m Julian Strassman. I’m a bit late, I’m afraid. I hope I didn’t startle you, coming in on you like this.”

“No, oh, no!” she said hastily. “I—I—was just ——”

“I thought I knew the way,” he explained further. “Got a flat tire several miles back. Decided to walk. Thought I was headed for the front entrance, but I seem to have made a mistake.” He talked in quick, breathless fashion as though eager

to dispose of explanations. Then he drew in a long breath and said, "I thought at first you were Sally." When she made no response, he said, "You're one of her friends ——"

"I'm Celia Carson," she said. "She invited me here to ——"

She had a sudden longing to tell the truth, to say, "She invited me here to see her father's collection of ceramics and his books on the subject, because I work in his pottery and she knows I'm especially interested in them. I'm not really a friend like those others dancing inside."

But she didn't. There was no sense in dragging in the truth. It would not interest him in the least. Besides, she was suddenly concerned at the change that had come over him. He was staring at her in the strangest way and saying, "Ce-lia Car-son? Ce-lia Car-son?"

"Why—why ——" she stammered, wondering at the expression on his slender handsome face. "I'm just Celia Carson—from down at Newtonville."

"Newtonville?" sharply.

"Yes. It's just a little place."

"And you have an aunt, a Mrs. Clementine Carson?"

It was her turn now to be amazed. How could Julian Strassman know anything about Aunt Clem—or herself, for that matter?

He had come closer now and was peering eagerly into her puzzled eyes, lifted to his.

"Did—did you ever have a brother named Ted?"

She nodded wonderingly. What could this youth, this European musician, know of Ted, her brother? And then she remembered that, when Ted had called over long distance, he had called from Clayton Springs, and that Sally's mother had spoken of seeing Julian Strassman at the Springs that day. Perhaps Julian and Ted had met there.

She reached out an impulsive hand and laid it on his dark sleeve.

"You've—met—my brother? You know Ted?" her voice eager, yet wistful with tenderness.

"Do I know him?" He stared for a moment, then said more dramatically than grammatically, "I'm *him!*"

"*Him?*"

"Yes, *him*, or rather, *he*, I should say."

"You mean—you're *Ted*—Ted Carson—my *brother?*" her voice rising in excitement.

"Yes!" he exclaimed, laughing at her amazement. "Isn't it great—that we've found each other? I had a hunch I'd better run down here again!"

The eager dark eyes were close to her own now, as well as the firm mouth with its gleaming white teeth. She drew back instinctively, but her hands were grasped and held tightly in his.



"YOU'VE MET MY BROTHER?"—Page 186

“But you said a moment ago—that you were Julian Strassman!”

“But I am, Celia! I’m both! I’m your brother, Ted Carson, and I’m Julian Strassman, too. The Strassmans, you know, adopted me. I’m theirs, but nevertheless I’m your brother!”

Celia was too dazed for a moment to do anything but stare, and his sudden impetuous embrace added nothing to her peace of mind.

Ted Carson, her brother, and Julian Strassman, the same! Julian Strassman, whom Sally Vandever had wanted for her especial friend—Julian Strassman the noted pianist—her brother, Ted!

It was incredible, but it was evidently true, for he was holding her off now, staring at her approvingly.

“It’s great, Celia, to find you here, a friend of Sally Vandever’s; to know you’re such a beauty, and that this old aunt of ours has been so good to you! When I talked to her over the ’phone the other day, I got the impression she was something of a Tartar. At least, she’s plenty generous, isn’t she?” with an approving nod at Celia’s frock. “I’ve been afraid at times that maybe things weren’t so easy for you, Celia. I guess we can’t really blame her for being so determined to stick to her word. I did my best to get her to tell me the name of the friend you were to visit, but she wouldn’t. To think it was Sally Vandever, of all people!”

He leaned over her again and touched the soft brown locks that curled about her forehead.

“How’s your head? Will that blow leave a scar? I read in the paper about your rescuing the Duval girl. It’s what put me on your trail, though of course I couldn’t be sure it was you until I ’phoned this aunt of ours. I certainly owe a lot of thanks to whoever wrote that article. It gave me just the information I needed.”

He laughed now, delightedly. “Won’t our conscientious Aunt Clementine be disturbed when she learns I managed to find you in spite of her?” Then his voice took on a note of anxiety as he nodded to a rustic settee beside the lily pool and said, “Let’s sit down here. There’s a lot of explaining to do.” Then he drew out a handkerchief and mopped his brow.

Celia, seated beside him, occupied herself for a moment in adjusting the ostrich-tipped flounces of her skirt, conscious, through it all, of his sudden embarrassment.

One white-trousered leg rested across the knee of the other for a moment; then both were stretched full length before him. Then, as she watched him, he arose hurriedly and stood before her, his hands plunged deep into the pockets of his dark coat.

She fixed her eyes on the silver buckle of his white belt. It was safer than his eyes.

“I’m just wondering, Celia, if you’ll understand. You haven’t forgotten—when we were children together—how fond I was of you?”

She lifted her eyes then to the serious face of the tall youth who looked down upon her so anxiously.

“No, Ted,” she said softly.

“Better call me ‘Julian’.”

“No, Julian.”

“You must have thought that I cared very little, to go off with the Strassmans.”

“We were both too young, Julian, to know —— I guess I didn’t think about it at all—at least, not that way. I *knew* you’d never really forget me.”

“I should say not. But it’s been a long time—and—and I’m just a little afraid—it’s too late to ——”

“Too late?” What did he mean? Too late for what?

“It’s like this, Celia. You know how, even as a little chap, I was always whistling and singing? I loved music. I guess that was one reason I was so content to go to the Strassmans. They offered me a saxophone, Celia. It was great. But they wouldn’t let me learn to play it until years later. They had set their heart on my being a pianist—taking the place of their son, who had died, and whom they had destined for a musical career. They looked upon me as a gift from God, for I was so

like him that I was able literally to take his place. It was here in America that he died. They were Europeans, you know, visiting here. When they returned to Europe, I went with them as *their son*. No one ever knew the difference."

She nodded dully. She was beginning to understand, and with the knowledge her heart grew heavier and heavier.

"They've built up such a background for me, Celia, they and my press-agents, that—that it would ruin everything if it were to become known that I am an American by birth and only their adopted son. The Strassmans, you know, have been musicians as far back as they can remember, though not really famous. Father was showing wonderful talent as a boy when he had an accident to his hand. He lost his thumb entirely. It nearly killed him, for it was the end of his career. You can understand now, perhaps, how dreadful it would be for anything—to —— All their hopes are centered on me."

"I think—I understand, Julian," she said resolutely, facing him with a brave smile. "You've got to go on being their son, being a famous musician. It would spoil everything—if any one guessed—about me."

"I'm afraid—that's the truth of the matter, Celia. I just can't let any one know that you're my sister or that I have a sister. The public would feel that

we've been cheating them all these years. It would resent it. And if these people in New York who brought me over from Europe learned that I am an American instead of an Austrian, it would be just too bad for me and my career, as you in America love to say."

She nodded, her throat too full for speech. She knew now why Aunt Clem had not wanted to tell her. Aunt Clem knew that Ted could never enter her life in any way. She was only trying to save her the heartache that unfulfilled hopes would bring.

She smiled up at him through tear-filled eyes. "It's something, Ted—Julian—to know about you, to know that you've thought of me, that you wanted to see me."

"Yes, of course, Celia. I've wanted for years to square myself with you. I was afraid maybe you didn't have—that Aunt Clem might not have enough money to —— But I might have saved myself all that worry, mightn't I?" his eyes traveling again over the ostrich-trimmed frock. "If I thought for one moment, Celia, that you needed me ——"

"No, no, Julian. You can't leave them. Aunt Clem and I, we have —— It's enough to know you're happy—with them. And famous. It makes me feel so proud. You *are* happy, aren't you, Julian?" she insisted, as she remembered suddenly that confidential talk with Sally about him.

“Happy? Oh, I suppose so. Only they sort of smother me at times. I get rather fed up, to use some more American slang. It’s the constant adulation of the public that I find hard. I can’t seem to get used to it. It takes away all my pleasure in the music. It just freezes something in me, Celia. It’s all I can do sometimes to keep from being positively rude. If they’d just listen and let me alone —— But the gushing, the flattery, the dribble ——”

“I guess it’s just part of the price one must pay, Julian,” she said thoughtfully. “You could hardly be a success, could you, without the public’s approval?”

“Hardly. I guess I’ll stick it out, anyway, as long as Father and Mother live. It would kill them if I quit.”

So there was really nothing to hope for! He meant to go on, even after he had reached man’s estate. Those two years she had been counting on, looking forward to their passing— She would have to go on alone now. Ted’s life could never touch hers again, not even in two years. He was, by his own statement, definitely separated from her for all time.

Still, she would have the memory of him to solace her when she was back at the pottery again. She would remember her meeting with him here in the

Vandever's lovely garden. And it would be wonderful to think of him as flooding the auditoriums of America and Europe with his music, adored by the parents who had helped to make him what he was. She knew she ought to be glad—glad that his life would not be along the narrow, constricted lines of her own, and yet she could not help but feel dreadfully depressed at the knowledge that her dreams of him could never be realized.

He sat for a time, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands, apparently lost in thought; then he turned with an apologetic little laugh.

“What a conceited being you must think me, Celia! I've done nothing but talk about myself. Tell me about yourself. What have you been doing all these years?”

“There's little to tell, Julian.”

She thought of the book in which she had been writing to him the intimate details of her daily life, and wondered what he would say if he knew. But he never would. She intended to make no plea for his affections. His duty was to his foster-parents, for he loved them devotedly. He had said so.

“Just school, you know; friends, books, a little fun, clothes, and such things as interest most girls.”

The wide, white petals of a night-blooming *Cereus* which hung over an arbor near by were ghostly little faces mocking her for her deliberate deceit.

But she defended herself fiercely. "You can't tell him you work in a pottery. You can't shame him like that, even though you don't mind for yourself. He wouldn't understand, any more than the Duvals and the people in Newtonville understand."

"And *you've* been happy, Celia?" a wistful note in his voice.

"Yes," she exclaimed quickly, eager to reassure him as well as herself. "Yes, I've been happy."

She *had* been happy, even though she had missed him and longed for him, though she wondered dully if it would be possible for her ever to be happy again. Happiness seemed such a childish thing now, something one shed on growing up, like one's dolls.

She saw him glance for a moment at the glowing dial of his wrist-watch.

"Whew!" he exclaimed in dismay. "I'd no idea it was so late. Sally will think ——"

The speech was not finished, for Sally was coming toward them—a Sally that Celia had never met before.

CHAPTER XVI

A RESOLUTION

SALLY'S face looked white in the moonlight, as white as the round blossoms of the flower on the arbor behind her, though not as placid. A stiff little smile was on her lips, but there was no hint of a smile in the chill blue eyes.

"I didn't know that you knew Julian," she said to Celia. Then, before Celia could respond, she said hurriedly, "Of course one naturally expects the temperamental thing from artists, but—isn't this rather ——"

Julian broke in quickly: "Yes, of course it is, Sally. I—I *do* owe you an apology, and your mother, too but ——"

"Then I'd advise you to see her rather soon. It's nearly midnight, you know, and Mother ——"

Again she left her sentence unfinished, caught Celia's hand, and drew it into the crook of her arm. "I've been hunting everywhere for you," and without another glance at Julian she turned toward the house.

"But, Sally! Let me explain, please!"

"Save it for Mother," tersely.

"Now, see here, Sally!" began Julian, striding up. "You're not being fair! Why do you suppose I came down here again, anyway, after the way you ran off before?"

"I'm sure I don't know!" letting him have a glimpse of a severe little profile, "unless it's to loaf a few days before another recital or—or—to enjoy yourself with girls you've never met before in other people's gardens! I can see how that might appeal—to one of your temperament!"

"Thanks!" curtly.

During the brief pause that followed, Celia tried to withdraw her hand from Sally's arm, but Sally held it fast. She had not dreamed Sally could be so unfair to any one, and, though Celia knew that she herself was partly to blame, she could think of no excuses to offer.

Julian had no intention of swallowing Sally's scolding without protest. He grasped her arm and swung her about.

"Is this any way to treat me when I've made two trips down here just to see you? I *do* owe you an apology for arriving so late and then lingering here, but I had a flat tire and—Celia and I got talking ——"

"Celia? You seem to be on rather familiar terms."

“Miss Carson, I mean,” he corrected himself. “We—I—it was my fault entirely.”

“I feel fairly sure it was,” Sally observed coolly. “I seem to remember some specific instances of your remarkable conversational powers, myself.”

“Don’t talk like a Bryn Mawr graduate to me, Sally. It’s not your style, and it doesn’t become you.”

“I’m not fishing for compliments, Julian Strassman, nor am I requesting any constructive criticisms. But I do advise you to make your peace with Mother. She’s rather perturbed, I’m afraid, thinking you may have had an accident.”

“I will at once, Sally, and do try to feel a little more generous toward me, won’t you, please?” in a voice that Celia thought irresistibly appealing. “Well, I’ll be seeing you later, anyway,” as Sally made no response.

The two girls stood silently as he rounded the flower beds and swung lightly up the stone steps to the path around the pool. His white trousers below the dark coat flashed intermittingly through the vines of the colonnade; then the house received him.

Sally turned to Celia with a motherly gesture.

“I know you think me terribly rude, Celia, to talk so, but—I just can’t bear—the way he —— He’s so insufferably ——”

She did not finish her sentence, and Celia, con-

siderably troubled moved along beside her in silence. Finally she said softly, "He was telling me ——"

"You needn't feel that you must tell me anything he said, Celia," Sally exclaimed somewhat sharply. "My experience with him those days at Nice and his going away without a word, and then freezing me stiff in New York —— I don't even want to think of him! But since mother asked him here again, I've got to be fairly decent to him, I suppose. Sometimes I think, Celia, that there's just no one in the whole world you can really depend upon!"

"But really, Sally, he could hardly help being late." Celia continued to defend him before she realized that silence would have been the best course to pursue with Sally just then.

"Now, don't take up for him, Celia!" with some heat. "You don't know him as I do!"

"No, of course not." But Celia was thinking just then of the little brother who had poured sand down her back.

For a moment the colonnade with its lighted lanterns and the glowing house beyond was a dim blur in the moonlight, and her throat hurt. Sally wasn't fair. Sally had no right to treat him so. She couldn't know how Julian hated the public's adoration—that it really was not his fault he had been stiff to her in New York. Celia felt she could bear to hear no more against him just then.

But Sally's hard little voice kept on: "I think I ought to warn you, Celia. It's not because I think you can't take care of yourself, but because you can't possibly understand a person like Julian Strassman. You've no idea the sort of people he's mixed with all his life. You've no idea how a self-centered person like him enjoys hurting people. You've never met any one like him before."

"Oh, but, Sally, I'm sure he can explain all that if you'll let him. He was telling me about ——"

"I don't want to know anything he was telling you, Celia," in a tone that told quite plainly how very much she did want to know. "He can make his own explanations if he has any to make! Come!" she exclaimed, hastening her steps, "the crowd's leaving."

"I—wonder if you won't excuse me, Sally? Your friends won't miss my good-night, I'm sure. My head feels just a little queer."

"Why, of course! Run along if you wish. You've had a rather hard day. I'm afraid we haven't been very considerate. I'll apologize for you."

At a side door where a flight of stairs led to the second floor they said good-night, and Celia turned to ascend, then paused and said hesitantly, "Sally, I wonder—I mean—will you please not tell Julian Strassman that I—that I work in the pottery at Newtonville?"

Sally did not respond at once, and Celia looked at her sharply, but the shadow of the vine-covered arch over the doorway hid Sally's face completely.

"Of course I sha'n't, Celia," she said finally, in a voice that made Celia wonder if she had not made a big mistake in asking for Sally's silence. She felt sure that Sally would never hint at it to any one, and yet she felt as though she must do all in her power to keep Julian from knowing. He had seemed so pleased and relieved that she was being so well cared for. There was no use in making him feel unhappy by letting him know the truth. It was better to let him think that she lived the same gay, care-free life of Sally Vandever and her friends, for he could do nothing about it, anyway, without causing unhappiness to his foster-parents, and he had made it quite clear to her that he loved them too much to do that. Besides, wouldn't he feel terribly ashamed and humiliated if he knew that Sally had invited her here only because of her interest in Mr. Vandever's collection of ceramics, and had supplied the proper apparel for her stay, as much to save her own pride as to please Celia and make her feel at ease with the people she would encounter here? She knew for a certainty how impossible she would have appeared among Sally's friends in the modest garments she had brought with her.

Though she had complained of being tired and

went straight to her room, she did not sleep. She sat in the dark for a long time beside the open window, drinking in the beauty of the moon-flooded landscape, thinking of her brother and what he had said to her, of Sally and her resentment at the way he had treated her.

It made her vaguely unhappy that Sally should feel as she did toward him. But by and by she heard the low murmur of voices from below and, leaning out, recognized the figure of Sally perched on the stone parapet along the tiled terrace beside another who could have been no one but Ted. She sighed relievedly and gave herself up once more to enjoying the beauty of the night.

After a time the voices ceased, but she continued to sit there, thinking of the strangeness of her being where she was, listening to the noises of the night that drifted up to her—low-toned good-nights; the clang of the grilled doors being closed for the night; Sally's voice gurgling with laughter in the hall below; her mother's raised slightly in remonstrance; light steps on the stairs and, a little later, heavier ones; the tinkle of glasses when a door to the rear was opened somewhere; the rush of water as a tap was opened; a shade lowered; a window raised; and finally silence, except for the sleepy chirp of a cricket under her window.

She had a feeling that she was living in a dream

and that presently she would awaken and find herself back in her room under the eaves of Aunt Clem's little house.

That she should find Ted only to lose him again was something on which she had never counted. That Ted should be Julian Strassman, a pianist of note, seemed a little too fantastic, even for one who loved to dream as she did. Like disconnected flashes of some movie story, her thoughts came and went. She couldn't seem to find any consistent link in the events that had taken place. Sally Vandever of Inglenook, and Julian Strassman of European fame, and she who worked with old Jared Stornoff in the grime and dust of the old pottery at Newtonville! What right had she to be here, sharing these two? There could never be any link between them and herself when this visit was over. It was as Angela had said. Sally's invitation had been a mere whim on Sally's part. When it was over, Sally would no doubt forget her entirely, but she felt no bitterness now in the knowledge.

She climbed into bed at last, to sleep only fitfully. She knew that, since it was impossible to tell Sally that Julian was her brother, she must make her visit as short as possible to save any possible complications that might arise. She suspected rightly that, though she might succeed in treating him as one would a casual acquaintance, it would not be possible

to keep her eyes from betraying her unusual interest in him. And so she must make every moment count. It seemed a shame to waste any of them in sleep.

She felt more sure of his ability to keep secret their relationship than her own, for she knew that his career and his devotion to his foster-parents overbalanced his interest in her. He had made it very plain. And, though it did hurt in a way, she was glad and proud that it was so. It proved that he was worthy of the love and attention they bestowed on him.

With set teeth, she resolved that *nothing* would ever cause her to betray the fact of their relationship to any one. It simply would not do for the public to know the truth, that he was not what he claimed to be—the last of a long line of talented Austrians—but merely a boy of obscure American parentage, whose sister worked for her living in a grimy pottery.

She saw clearly now that Aunt Clem was right in the attitude she had taken in the matter, and that nothing could be done about it. The two Carsons were quite evidently fated to follow divergent paths.

CHAPTER XVII

A RUDE AWAKENING

WHEN Celia did finally sleep, it was to indulge in restless, unhappy dreams, and she was glad when Sally, clad in bizarre pajamas, awakened her by calling from the door:

“Are you going to sleep all day, Celia? There’s a tennis tournament at the club this morning. We’re planning to lunch there and then golf a bit.”

Celia stretched languorously, then arose to a sitting position and asked in a somewhat tired voice, “Couldn’t I stay here, Sally? I—I’d like to look over those books, you know.”

“You mean you’d rather stay here alone all day and read than to go with Julian and me and Mother to the club?”

Her voice held a disappointed note, but the sudden gleam in her blue eyes told Celia the real state of her feelings. She wouldn’t mind in the least having Julian to herself.

“I believe I would, Sally, if you don’t object. You know it’s why I wanted to come so badly. Besides,

I don't golf, you know. I'm sure you understand," wistfully.

"Of course I do, Celia, and since you're so eager about those books, I'll tell you just where to find them. They're in that arched bookcase on the left of the library mantel. You can sit there and read and read, or you can bring them up here if you'd rather. Here's your breakfast," stepping aside to make room for the maid with a tray, "and if you don't mind, I'll just run along and dress. Julian and Mother have been up for some time. You'll find luncheon in the breakfast-room about one. Now, are you sure you don't mind our deserting you like this?"

"I'll love it, Sally," Celia returned, with a bright smile at the fair-haired girl obviously so eager to be gone.

She was wholly sincere. A day to herself in this lovely house, to wander about and exult in the beautiful things that filled it, to choose at will of the books that filled the tall bookcase, and to read from them leisurely with no thought of being interrupted, would be heavenly.

"Then everybody's happy!" Sally exclaimed, and Celia felt sure that she and Julian must have adjusted the difficulty that had come between them, for Sally's eyes were as serene and unclouded as the blue sky that showed between the ruffled curtains of the window.

“But don't read too much, Celia. I want you to be fresh for the dance to-night. It's the club's annual frolic for the members and their guests,” she cautioned as she closed the door behind her.

As Celia lingered over the tempting dishes on the tray before her, she saw the car containing Sally, Julian, and Mrs. Vandever curving through the driveway of the park and then swinging into the road that led to the country club. She followed them with her eyes wistfully for a moment, then resolutely gave her attention to finishing her breakfast. She must make the most of this opportunity, for she might never have such another.

But she felt just a little lonely as she went hesitantly down the tall flight of stairs, through the hall, and into the big library filled from floor to ceiling with books.

Then Sally, Julian, everything, went out of her mind, and she was lost in the fascinating realm of ceramics—that land of enchantment, of lustrous surfaces, exquisitely blended colorings, and intricate designs; a land in which fantastically garbed birds and clawing dragons spouting fire vied with delicate landscapes in which ladies and gentlemen in the dress of the Old World promenaded or curtsied to each other in formal gardens; or where lovely shepherds and shepherdesses kept serene watch over their flocks, or frail-looking Japanese ladies ges-

tured with opened fans in doll-like gardens; a land of endless and fascinating varieties of beauty.

She read avidly for a time of those voyagers of the sixteenth century who had brought from the Orient the first of those delicate porcelains that were to start the mania that engulfed Europe and later spread to America, resulting in one of the most profitable industries of the times, for the Dutch then began to make excellent imitations of the Oriental wares, and were soon followed by England and France and other near-by countries.

In amazement, she read of the craze which possessed people to buy in such unheard-of quantities that their drawing-rooms soon came to overflow with porcelains; of the London china shops where the Beau Brummels of the day, statesmen, artists, and all the fashionable world that could afford to make a cult of the beautiful, met to exclaim and rhapsodize over platters and tea sets.

Having only had experience in the making of earthenware, it was with growing interest that she read of true and artificial porcelain, of the various kinds of hard and soft paste, of the methods of different potters in their applications of the various glazes and decorations, and of the different shades of coloring for which one or another was distinguished. She read of the artists who decorated the porcelains, and who frequently went from one pot-

tery to another, making it difficult for those unskilled in the matter of distinguishing one paste from another to know to which potter to attribute certain pieces.

She read more slowly after a time, and sometimes she would close her book to stare off into space, only to resume again, more intent than ever.

Once she went to the bookcase and took down several volumes. They were all somewhat similar in appearance, large, beautifully bound, printed on heavy glazed paper, many of the illustrations done in just the same beautiful colors as the pieces they depicted. After considerable searching, she found a price mark in one of them. She gasped when she read, "Eight-fifty." Eight dollars and fifty cents for one book! How could she ever hope to own any, then? She would certainly have to make the most of this visit!

Again she stirred restlessly, got up and moved about the room, found a pad of paper and a pencil, and was back again in her chair, now reading a while, now taking notes.

She could not possibly remember all the fascinating details of this interesting subject.

So diligently did she apply herself to her note-taking that the maid who came to call her to lunch had to call twice, and then inquired a bit testily if she had not heard the luncheon-bell.

No, Celia hadn't. She hadn't heard anything. She would hardly have heard a tornado if it had passed over her, for she had skipped over and found a chapter on figurines.

She would have refused luncheon entirely if she hadn't felt that the maid might be just a little more provoked with her than she was already.

As it was, she ate what was put before her, but absently, for her mind was intent on the fascinating subject awaiting her in the library, and every once in a while she would forget to eat, and sit staring before her. She was thinking of Jared, wondering what he would think if he could but see and know of those famous porcelains, and their makers. Wouldn't he be inspired to attempt something similar? True, Jared's work was perfect as to form and perfection of glaze, but there was little delicacy of treatment in shapes or colors. Why, she wondered, couldn't they go in for designs, for more delicate shapes? Why couldn't they perfect a paste that would equal those old porcelains? Why couldn't they make some of those adorable little figurines—those gallant cavaliers, those lovely ladies in low-cut, bouffant frocks, shepherds, and sailor-boys. If only she could make Jared vision the exquisite delicacy of the tinting! Might he not be able to persuade Mr. Creel to attempt their manufacture?

She sat up abruptly, for she remembered that Mr. Vandever now owned the pottery. It would be Mr. Vandever who would have to be consulted. And Mr. Vandever would no doubt be here in a day or so! If only she had the courage! Then her heart sank, for she remembered that she wasn't supposed to know that Mr. Vandever was the new owner of the pottery! Sally had confided the matter to her as a secret. But if she won old Jared, if she could get him interested and he would persuade Mr. Creel to put the matter to Mr. Vandever, it would mean that others, those artists and sculptors who fashioned these delicate things, would be added to the personnel of the pottery, and if they were, it was the chance she wanted—to learn of them!

Her heart was racing as she pushed away her plate and arose. There was no time to be lost. She must find out all she could. She must have convincing proof for Jared before she could hope for success.

All afternoon she wrote steadily, until her arm and back ached and her fingers grew so cramped that she could hardly hold the pencil. But she did not mind. It might be the only chance she would ever have. And it could do no harm. Even though Jared refused to be interested, and even though Mr. Vandever refused to be attracted to the suggestion, she would have the satisfaction of knowing she had

tried, had done all in her power to bring to herself the knowledge and skill she coveted so fiercely.

She not only wrote, but she sketched some of the little figures—a Dresden, Bacchus; a Bow, Tambourine Player; a Chelsea, Shakespeare.

Then suddenly she remembered the lump of clay in the tin box she had put in her suitcase when she packed. Just why she had put it in, she didn't know, except that the feel of the clay between her fingers had become such a habit that it seemed a little strange to leave it behind.

She snatched up the book, gathered together her scattered notes, and hurried to her room, where from the closet she took the suitcase that held the box of clay.

She cleared the low glass shelf in the bathroom of its collection of bath salts and lotion bottles; then, in a little frenzy of delight, she moistened the clay, worked it into a smooth plastic mass, and slapped it upon the shelf. Carefully propping open her book on the window-ledge, she went to work eagerly, her eyes somber with purpose, her lips curled into the little satisfied smile that had become a habit whenever she handled the clay. But the smile grew fainter and fainter, for thoughts of her brother began intruding and distracting her. His dark, slender face came between her and the little figure depicted in the open book. Several times she sighed

and paused to stare discontentedly at what she had done, but even then her thoughts failed to focus on the little clay figure before her.

She kept thinking of Ted, wondering if he looked the same by daylight as he had by moonlight; she was just a little sorry she had not gone with them. It would have been so nice to sit beside him in the Vandevers' big limousine, so nice to listen to the sound of his voice, to meet his eyes, and to know he belonged to her, even though no one else could ever know. She thought wistfully of the brown and orange sport suit hanging in her closet. She would have looked so nice in it. He might even have found a chance to tell her so. It would be so nice to have his approval again.

She sat dreamily thinking of him, trying to remember his face as it appeared in the moonlight. Then, without realizing what she did, her fingers were busy again with the clay, digging, smoothing, and prodding the pudgy mass before her into the form of a man's head.

"I believe I *can* make it look like Ted!" she gasped happily, after some time of concentrated work; then she went at it again determinedly. It would be something to take home with her—a tangible proof of Ted.

She worked on and on, wholly absorbed, unconscious of the fleeting hours until a steady knocking

at the door brought her back to the present. She arose hastily, a little dismayed at the thought of any one's finding her thus. She plunged her hands quickly into a soapy bath and hurried to the door, but before she could reach it, Angela Duval put her head in and called,

“Celia? Mind if I come in? The maid told me you were here.”

With a queer tightening of her lips and a sinking sensation about her heart, Celia closed the door to the bathroom quickly.

So much had happened to fill her mind since her arrival that she had forgotten Angela entirely. The sight of her was like a dash of cold water.

CHAPTER XVIII

ANGELA SHOWS HER HAND

“I GOT here a little sooner than I expected,” Angela announced, seating herself in a large chintz-covered chair near the window and complacently retying the blue and white silk scarf knotted on one shoulder. “Dad drove me up. The maid said they’d be here any moment, so I thought, while she was unpacking my things, I’d run in and see you.”

The brown eyes traveled thoughtfully over the tan knitted frock trimmed in green that Celia wore.

“That’s rather a good-looking outfit,” she observed after a moment. “You surely didn’t get it in Newtonville!”

Celia shook her head and, picking up her nail-file from the dressing-table, proceeded to undo the ravages the clay had made on her pink nails. But she raised startled eyes when Angela arose swiftly and moved toward the partly open closet door.

“Celia Carson! Where did you get all these lovely frocks?”

Celia’s hands trembled, but she met Angela’s eyes

bravely. "They're things—that Sally bought for me—to wear—while I'm here. She ——"

It was impossible to go on while Angela regarded her with that queer light in her eyes.

"I might have known!" Angela remarked, drawing out a shell-pink morning dress of simple but distinctive lines and regarding it appraisingly. Then, with a shrug, "Well, it's her own affair. But what does she expect to get in return?"

"Maybe—she doesn't expect anything, Angela," Celia returned, softly. "She said—she'd always wanted to—play fairy godmother ——"

"Perhaps so," wonderingly, as though such an idea would never have occurred to her. "But she must have some reason ——"

"She—wanted me to—feel at home here," Celia explained further. "She knew that I—didn't have—the right things ——"

"But why did she invite you here in the first place when she knew that you didn't? Neither Mother nor I could understand it," a little petulantly.

For a moment Celia was tempted to explain about Mr. Vandever's books and his collection of ceramics, but she had more than once been hushed abruptly when she tried to tell Angela anything about the pottery and things connected with it.

"Perhaps she—just liked me, Angela, and thought I'd enjoy ——"

“Well, you always did have a knack of making people like you, Celia,” Angela conceded with a reluctant half-smile, “but I can’t for the life of me see what good it’s going to do you to be here. You can’t keep up with people like the Vandevors and their friends, and when they find out Sally’s been introducing a girl whose people haven’t a cent and who works in a pottery ——”

A little shiver suddenly rippled down Celia’s spine. She laid down her nail-file on the dressing-table and seated herself on the chaise longue, looking up pleadingly into Angela’s now resentful eyes.

“Please, Angela,” she begged softly, “don’t tell any one that, will you? It’s not as if I mean to keep up the pretense. I don’t expect to ever see any of these people again, and I’m sure they won’t remember me. I—I’m not ashamed of working in the pottery, or I’d never have chosen to go there. But there’s a reason why I don’t want any one to know. I just can’t explain.”

But Angela was apparently little concerned about what Celia was saying. She was staring with new interest through the open window, the pink frock abandoned on a near-by chair.

“Here’s Sally now!” she exclaimed. “And her mother! And, oh, who *is* that handsome person with them? I do believe it’s that Julian Strassman whose photograph she had!”

She turned slowly, two wide understanding eyes resting full on the embarrassed Celia, while an amused smile twitched the corners of her lips.

"I thought so!" she exclaimed. "I could tell by the way you looked at his picture that day down home that you were keen to know him! And to think that Sally didn't suspect why you were so sweet to her!"

"Oh, Angela!" Celia exclaimed, torn between humiliation and amusement at the thought of such an absurdity. "How could I expect to meet him through Sally, when she herself didn't know he was coming here?"

For a moment she was on the point of telling all she knew about the matter; then she reflected that Sally might not have confided to Angela what she had to her about her feelings regarding Julian Strassman. And she knew she had no right to share Sally's confidences, even to protect herself.

"But how do I know that she didn't know he was *coming* and didn't tell you? You two were so very intimate," a jealous spark flashing in her brown eyes.

Without waiting for a response, she turned toward the door, but Celia was before her.

"Please, Angela," she begged desperately, "let me explain! You've never cared about anything connected with the pottery, and that's why I hated

to talk of it to you. But you know I've always loved it. Sally told me about her father's collection of porcelains and figurines and about his books on the subject. She thought I might like to see them. That's why she asked me here." She was panting a little now, for it was easy to see that Angela cared nothing for her explanation and was eager to get away. "I—I—stayed here to-day, instead of going to the club with them, on purpose to read. I can prove ——" She caught Angela's hand to lead her to the bathroom; then she remembered. It would hardly do to let her see the head on which she had been working, though she felt it would be impossible for Angela to find any resemblance between it and Julian at its present stage of development. Still, there was a possibility.

But Angela drew her hand away swiftly. "You would think up something like that. You've such a smooth tongue, Celia," with a faint smile.

"But you know, Angela, that I am interested in those things!"

"And maybe some others, too," smiling again.

"But, Angela," in new desperation, "it can't matter to you whether people here—know I work in a pottery or not. They'd hardly suspect such a thing. Will you *please* not mention it, Angela? I'll—I'll do anything in the world I can for you if you'll please not let any one know."

“I can’t think, Celia, there’s anything you could possibly do for me, but thanks just the same. I really don’t see why you need be so distressed about it. It’s no one’s fault but your own that you went there to work. Dad offered you ——”

“I know he did, Angela, but—but—” she was twisting a bit of handkerchief pathetically. “If you’ll just do this one thing ——”

“Why, of course I will, Celia, as long as it means so much to you. But you’re not to make any attempt to get the interest of this Julian Strassman. He’s simply not your kind, Celia, and I won’t stand by and watch you make a fool of him, especially when Sally —— You’ve overstepped yourself far enough by coming here, as it is, but that’s Sally’s affair, not mine.”

“Oh, thanks, Angela, thanks! I knew you’d understand. I’ll prove to you that I’m honest in what I’ve told you,” a relieved smile on her lips as Angela slipped through the door, her lifted hand raised in assent.

But when the door was closed, the smile vanished completely, and she threw herself wretchedly upon the bed and gave way to a moment’s despair, completely unmindful of the fact that the chaise longue had been purposely provided for just such emergencies, not the dainty coverlet of the bed, which she was crushing hopelessly.

Oh, why, she thought wretchedly, did she have to endure such humiliation from Angela Duval? But she knew it was no one's fault but her own. She should never have let herself in for such a situation as this! If she had had any sense at all, she would have known how impossible it would be to be a guest here with her. She had felt so sure of her ability to carry off the situation in a nonchalant manner, and now here she was, pleading with Angela in desperate fear that the truth about her should become known.

"But how could I guess that I would meet Ted here and that he would be Sally's especial friend?" she demanded of herself somewhat tearfully.

She couldn't, simply couldn't, have him ashamed of her, even though no one else would ever know of their relationship. She couldn't bear to think of his possible contempt when he learned that the clothes he had admired had been provided by Sally Vander. He had been so pleased because he believed her to be Sally's friend, so ready to praise her appearance, and so relieved because he believed Aunt Clem had the means to provide everything she needed and wanted. She just couldn't have him know the truth! But it was so humiliating to humble herself to Angela, to have to plead for her silence as though she were ashamed of working in the pottery, when she wasn't at all. It was only because

of the way these others looked down upon such humble occupations.

Moreover, how was she to endure knowing he was here and yet be unable to talk with him? How conduct herself so that no one would suspect for a moment her unusual interest in him? There was so much she longed to know of those years he had spent in Europe, his experiences there, the places and things he had seen, the people he had met and known, his thoughts on various subjects. It seemed to her just then that he was the one thing she wanted most, had always wanted—his companionship and the satisfaction of sharing his life, his interests. He alone could make up for all the loneliness she had suffered all her life, the loneliness that had driven her first to the Duvals and caused her to lavish on them the love that should have been his, and later drove her to the pottery to find consolation there for the Duvals' slights.

She tried to dismiss her unhappy thoughts, but they only grew worse as she reflected on the fact that the Duvals had not wanted the devotion she had so eagerly given them, and that Ted, even now that he had come back, seemed utterly content to go his way and let her go hers.

Then her pride came to the rescue. She sat up, dabbed at her moist eyes, jumped to her feet, and did her best to straighten the crushed coverlet.

“You’re just a fool, Celia Carson,” she said fiercely to herself, “letting yourself care for people who don’t care for you. The thing for you to do is to get all the information about ceramics you can while you’ve got the chance, then get home and make old Jared see reason.”

Her thoughts were interrupted by Sally’s bursting in unannounced, her face radiant with happiness.

“Oh, Celia! We’ve had the most gorgeous day! But I’ve felt so mean, thinking of you all alone here with only books for company.”

“You didn’t need to. They’re wonderful, and I’ve enjoyed being alone. Do you know Angela’s here?”

“Yes. I’ve just seen her. I thought we’d get back before she arrived, but we got roped into a bridge game. Well, I must get along and rest a bit before it’s time to dress. Mother always insists on it, you know. I just want to suggest, Celia, that you wear the egg-shell taffeta with the cerise bow on the hip and the cerise slippers for the club party.”

“I’m—afraid I can’t very well go, Sally,” Celia responded. “My head feels a bit queer. I guess perhaps I’ve been reading a little more than I should.”

It was the truth. Her head did feel queer, but she knew it was not from reading, nor was it from the injury to her head.

“Oh, Celia!” solicitously, “I should have thought of that. And after that blow you had —— You’d have been much better off out in the sunshine with us. Maybe, if you take something and lie down, it will get better. I just can’t go away and leave you again, and I was counting on showing you off to-night. You’ll be stunning in that frock—that hem-line dipping in the back exposing the cerise facing, and just that simple bow on the hip. Besides, Julian will think it strange. He couldn’t understand why you stayed behind to-day. I think he likes you a lot, Celia. He kept asking about you. And Celia I’ve been wanting to tell you!” perching herself on the wide window-ledge and staring off across the sun-dappled lawn. “I’d have told you this morning, but there wasn’t time. Oh, Celia, I’m so ashamed because of the horrid way I talked about him to you. Last night, after every one had gone, he told me about why he left Nice that time without even saying good-bye. He’d had a wire that his mother was suddenly taken ill, and he had only a few minutes to get a train. We left the day after he did, and for some reason his letter failed to follow us. You know how those things happen, especially in Europe. I know he was telling the truth, Celia, for he went on to explain about why he was so frigid in New York when we met him there. It was because he can’t bear to be praised. He thinks he doesn’t deserve any

credit for his performances. He says God gave him his talent. It's nothing that he acquired, though I think he's wrong there. He deserves credit for developing it, don't you think? But he hates to be applauded. He says it just makes him horrid. It must be a complex of some sort, Celia. At any rate, he just can't even be polite to people who gush over him, and that's what Mother and I were doing, along with some others. It's why he came down here the first time, Celia, to try to make me understand, and I—well, you know how I ran off to Newtonville and persisted in staying there!"

She laughed, a little embarrassed at the confession. "Well, anyway, we're great friends again, and this time it's going to last, I'm sure."

"I'm so glad, Sally!" Celia murmured, and she was. It meant a lot to know that Sally, whom she loved more than any one she had ever known, should share her brother's thoughts and companionship. That they would continue to be friends, even when she knew she would be forgotten by both, would, in a way, make her lot easier to bear.

"Please say you'll go, Celia," Sally begged. "I know you'll enjoy this party, and it won't be a late one. Family parties never are."

"Perhaps—after dinner," Celia evaded. She must not be the cause of Sally's missing the Club party, though she did not mean to go, herself.

“Of course you’ll feel better by that time!” Sally assured her. “Oh, and I forgot! I’ve got a fan that’s just the thing to go with that dress! I’ll run in with it after I’ve dressed.”

Celia had no intention of even dining downstairs, much less of going to the party, though she longed most unbearably to do both and even took out the frock Sally had mentioned and gazed at it wistfully, holding it up against herself and staring for a long time in the mirror. But resolutely she put it away. She had no right to preen herself in finery that did not belong to her. She would not go on being the cheat she had started out to be.

The conversation with Angela, distasteful as it had been, had cleared her perspective considerably. She could not run any chance of causing her brother the humiliation of learning how humbly his sister stood in the estimation of these friends of his. With Angela to watch and note each move she made, she felt that the ordeal would be more than she could bear. It would be impossible to keep her eyes from following him, to keep from meeting his glances. She couldn’t give Angela the opportunity to misconstrue them. No, she must remain here. She would go on with her reading and her note-taking, even though her head did feel queer, and in the morning she’d make the excuse that she was feeling too bad to stay longer. There was nothing to be gained

by staying on, except for the information she wanted, and there was much to lose.

But it added none to her happiness to have Sally find her stretched on the chaise longue, the shades lowered, and a cold towel on her head when she came in with the fan. She felt as guilty as though her head were not really aching.

“Oh, Celia, you poor thing! I thought you were just stalling. I’ll ring for an ice bag at once, and some of Mother’s powders.”

She was gone in a flash and returned almost immediately followed by her mother and a maid.

“You poor darling,” Mrs. Vandever exclaimed solicitously. “I knew we shouldn’t have left you with all those books, but Sally insisted that it was what you wanted. You’ve hardly had time to recover from that accident, either. It’s too bad that your visit should be spoiled.”

She moved about as she talked, straightening a window shade, throwing back the coverlet of the bed, and shaking up a pillow.

“Now, just let Marie rub your head and fix your bath and put you to bed, and you’ll be all right by morning. If you should need any one, you can ring for Marie, and she can call us at the club, if necessary. It happens I’m on the committee, so I feel obliged to go. There’s no sense in Sally’s staying here with you. You’ll be better off asleep.”

Celia agreed with considerable warmth, relieved that she would not be interfering with Sally's pleasure, yet considerably dismayed at the disturbance she had caused, and feeling more guilty than ever when forced to submit to the maid's ministrations.

She was left alone at last, and, cool and relaxed, she lay straining to catch the sounds that drifted faintly up from the dining-room. A light supper was on a little table beside her, but she felt curiously undesirous of food. She wanted to creep out and down the stairs so that she might get a glimpse of her brother, to listen for the sound of his voice, yet she was eager, too, for them to finish and depart.

It seemed an eternity before the house was quiet and the swish of gravel under her window told her that their car had gone.

Slipping quickly from her bed, she dressed hastily in the little frock she had worn that day, and, taking the book she had brought up from the library, she went slowly down the stairs, hoping, if possible, to avoid being seen by any of the servants. She could hear the faint clatter of dishes from the rear and guessed that they were having their own rather late supper.

She was about to pass the door of the room where Mr. Vandever's collection was kept when she saw with surprise that it stood partly open and that lights burned within.

It was impossible to pass without looking in, for, since reading what she had that day, his cabinets of treasure were, if anything, more interesting than ever to her. If she could only get another glimpse of them! For she knew now that this was her last opportunity, since she meant to go home in the morning.

CHAPTER XIX

THE OPEN DOOR

SLOWLY and hesitantly she pushed the door wider and saw that the room was empty. She paused reluctantly on the threshold, her eyes traveling eagerly about from one cabinet to another; then unconsciously she moved toward the nearest, the large rose-bound volume she was returning to the library clasped tightly in her arms.

She stood entranced, gazing upon its fascinating contents, striving to place the various articles it contained. That lovely teapot with the beautiful green glaze leaves forming the base must be a Whieldon "cauliflower." Whieldon was the English potter who had trained Spode and Wedgwood, wasn't he? She must make sure, and, drawing up a low chair, she opened the book and searched rapidly for the information she sought.

With a little laugh of satisfaction, she saw that she was right. If she could only fix in her mind the names of the famous potters and their various products! That Willow plate Sally had told her about the day

she came was by Spode. Wedgewood was the potter who was responsible for that lovely jasper ware, wasn't he? She went from one cabinet to another, searching for one of those exquisite pieces with its lovely white cameo decorations in classical designs and accompanying decorations of festoons and arabesques on delicately tinted backgrounds of blue, green, buff or lilac. Then she gave a little cry of delight as she discovered just the thing she was seeking.

It became a game, almost, hunting for this piece and that, recognizing the work of this potter and that, and hunting through the book to corroborate her guesses.

Those platters with the elaborate borders and scenes of old New York in the center were from the Staffordshire potteries in England, weren't they? And wasn't it at the Staffordshire potteries, lying between London and Liverpool, that Wedgewood and Whieldon, the three famous Spodes, and many other famous potters lived and worked—men whose great-great-grandfathers had been potters before them? Again she must prove her belief.

Oh, it was all so fascinating, but just a bit difficult to remember! If old Jared could only see these things! She knew she'd never be able to explain to him their beauty of line, their exquisite colors, their fascinating decorations. If he could only see that

lovely plate with its ocean scenes, its delicate tracery border! What potter had made that? she wondered. She could find nothing like it in her book, though she searched carefully. She leaned forward, staring intently, wholly absorbed in speculation.

"It's Dresden," a deep masculine voice sounded just behind her, and she jumped guiltily to her feet, snatching hastily at the book, which was about to slide to the floor.

Sally's father! What would he think to find her here alone with his treasures?

"Oh!" she exclaimed in confusion. "I—you—rather startled me!"

"I'm very sorry. I've been standing in the doorway several minutes. You were so absorbed I hated to interrupt."

"Oh, yes, I—— The door was open and I—came in," she explained rather lamely.

"I see that you have one of my books," he observed. "You are interested in ceramics?"

"Yes. Oh, yes. Well, rather. A little." She held out the book to him, furious with herself for being so abashed at his presence.

He was certainly not formidable in appearance—a compactly built, though not heavily set, man of medium height, with rather irregular features and with no suggestion of unusual force about him except in a certain flash of his hazel eyes and a spas-

modic twitch at one corner of his mouth. He was not the sort of man one would suspect of having built a fortune from a piece of worthless farm land.

But Celia had not forgotten how wroth he had been the day he found Sally at the Newtonville pottery. She felt an instinctive desire to soothe him, or at least to do nothing to incur his displeasure.

"I—was alone—and I went to the library for something to read. It seemed so interesting I took it to my room."

"No apologies necessary," he assured her briefly. "Just wanted to look up something, but there's no hurry," as she held the book toward him.

"But I was returning it when I saw the door here was open."

When he took it from her, she added, "I hope you didn't mind my coming in."

"Not at all, not at all. It was just a little surprising to find a girl of your years interested in ceramics. One doesn't usually appreciate such things until one is much older."

"Oh, but I—" and then she caught herself up sharply. She could not tell him the truth about herself without a lot of explanations, though she wondered if he did not already know all there was to be known about her. With a sinking sensation, she realized anew what a mistake her coming had been, for might he not—by chance, anyway—let Julian

know about her? She felt suddenly a little sick, and realized with new conviction the truth of that little verse she had memorized a long time ago:

“Oh, what a tangled web we weave
When first we practise to deceive.”

But his next words gave her new courage.

“Sally’s friends are mostly a rather flighty lot. All young people seem to care about these days is tearing about, burning up gas and energy.”

She nodded, a little afraid to speak for fear she’d involve herself inextricably.

“How does it happen you’re not at the club party with them?” his rather heavy brows drawn together thoughtfully.

“I—haven’t been feeling very well. My head ——”

He nodded understandingly, then asked sympathetically, “Feeling some better now?”

“Some,” with a shy smile, hardly knowing what to say.

“That plate you were so intent upon when I came in—” he said abruptly, selecting a key from a ring he took from his pocket and unlocking the cabinet. “Would you like to examine it? Though it’s Dresden, it really should be called Meissen, for it was at Meissen, several miles from Dresden, that the King of Saxony constructed Bottger’s laboratory. Bott-

ger, you know, was the first to introduce true porcelain into Europe. I suppose you've read about how the King of Prussia, learning of Bottger's success, sent for him to demonstrate his boasted accomplishments, but Bottger fled to Saxony, where the King of Saxony, also hearing of his success, refused to allow him to return to Prussia and sent him to Meissen, not far from Dresden, under guard. There he erected a laboratory for him. It's in that book you were reading. No, I'm mistaken. Not in that one."

Celia was staring with incredulous eyes.

"You mean that the King of Prussia and the King of Saxony were so interested in his work that they both wanted him?"

"Why not? Kings have always been the ones to sponsor the arts, and the making of pottery is about the oldest art in existence. Take the French porcelains, now. Had it not been for Louis Henri de Bourbon, we should not have had the Chantilly ware, and had it not been for Chantilly, France's exquisite Sèvres would never have come into being, perhaps. Sèvres, you know, is considered, in the popular mind, practically superior to all, principally, I suppose, because it is the aristocrat among ceramics. It was the porcelain of French kings and the nobility of many lands, and its cost was prohibitive to all but the wealthiest. Yes, it was royalty in most cases who were responsible for the continued development

of the art, though in later years the business drifted into private ownerships."

"It was the kings who originated those lovely decorations?" Celia asked, eyeing a particularly lovely plate decorated with figures in sixteenth-century costumes.

"Hardly, though they may have made some suggestions. It is rather well known that Madame de Pompadour of the court of Louis the Fifteenth contributed a great deal to the art. They tell a story of how she once surprised him with an indoor garden made entirely of porcelain flowers, each scented with its own particular perfume, and so realistic that he reached to pluck one before he discovered his mistake. So keenly was she interested that she often visited the works and gave the artists and sculptors many inspirations for the beautiful results they attained. All the aristocracy of France, as well as of other countries, were deeply interested. Both Madame du Barry, another favorite of Louis the Fifteenth, and Marie Antoinette were great lovers of the art, and their influence was felt almost as keenly as was Madame de Pompadour's."

He talked on and on of other French porcelains—Sceaux, Rouen, and St. Cloud—but her attention had begun to wander. She was visioning those favorites of the French kings, strolling through the pottery at Newtonville, directing this workman and

that, leaning entranced over old Jared's table as a tall urn rose and fell under his skilful fingers on the whirler. Oh, for some one with the artistic insight of a Pompadour, a du Barry, or a Marie Antoinette, that she would have a chance to learn to model such a cluster of roses, such exquisite figurines!

With hands trembling with eagerness, she took the little nymph he was holding out to her.

“It was Kandler, the sculptor, who was responsible for the Dresden figures. That and this little street vendor are all I have. It was the Dresden figures that were later imitated by the English potteries of Bow, Derby, and Chelsea. Now, the shepherd and shepherdess in this little bower is by Bow and is called a bocage.”

One piece after another he took up, handed to her, and replaced, while he talked on and on, calling her attention to the richness of this glaze or the thinness of that, to the bluish cast of this paste or the greenish cast of that, to the creaminess of one and the pure white of another.

So interested was she that she scarcely dared breathe for fear she would break the spell. She could have listened to him for hours and hours.

“Now, take this Capo di Monte vase. Prince Charles of Bourbon, who became King of Naples and Sicily, was another of those royal personages who loved beautiful things. So much was he in love

with porcelain that he frequently worked at the pottery near the royal palace at Naples, himself."

"You mean he worked with his own hands—in the pottery?"

"Yes. But of course the place was run on rather princely lines. The products were not sold in the ordinary way, but at a fair attended principally by the aristocracy. When this King of Naples was made King of Spain, as Charles the Third, he took his best workmen with him to Madrid and established his factory there. The Capo di Monte ware is similar to the Sèvres except in decoration. The most interesting pieces made in Naples were the little grotesque figures."

Again her mind was back at the Newtonville pottery, but this time she was seeing a king in satin knee-breeches, lace ruffles, and powdered hair leaning over her own worktable, modeling those little clay figures that she used to make and hide so carefully behind the broken, faulty mugs on the low shelf under her table.

If a king could work with clay, why should she need to feel humble and self-conscious whenever she thought of her love for it? Her head went up unconsciously, and that old tingling sensation in her fingers caused her to clasp her hands tightly together, for she had a sudden swift desire to feel the plastic softness between her fingers. Never again would

she feel ashamed. She had a sudden impulse to blurt out the truth about herself, her love for it, and why she was here in his house where she so obviously had no right to be. She wished, too, that Julian could know. If he knew all the things about it that she was learning, he wouldn't feel ashamed. He would feel proud of her interest in it. She visioned his earnest, alert face before her as she explained to him and, in imagination, showed him through the pottery and brought out her own crude little figures for his inspection. If he knew, perhaps he wouldn't want to give her up. He might find a way to come to Newtonville and see the pottery.

Then she came back to reality abruptly, for she remembered having passed his opened door on the way down. Though the room was unoccupied, a light was burning which disclosed to her such an array of silken lounging-ropes, slippers, elaborate toilet accessories, and sporting equipment as only the most fastidious of men acquire. No, Julian Strassman couldn't ever, by the greatest straining of the imagination, fit into Newtonville, its pottery, Aunt Clem's little house, or her own rather drab and decidedly uneventful life. It would only make him unhappy to know the truth about her; of that she felt sure. Besides, though a king could work at making pottery, that added no distinction to her. She was only a trimmer and would no doubt con-

tinue to be one indefinitely, once old Jared was well again, unless ——

Again she gave her attention to Mr. Vandever. She must listen and learn. She must take old Jared convincing evidence of these artistic creations if she meant to arouse his interest in her plan.

So she strove to fix firmly in her mind each word that Mr. Vandever uttered as he traced back to their sources certain designs and glazes. He told her of Persian pottery, so different in material and decoration from that of the Chinese, which had influenced the European potters.

A simple little luster jug became a thing of romance when he took her back through the centuries to when Mohammedan skill first gave birth to those glowing purple and golden browns, iridescent with ruby fires, that were to be found in later years in the Hispano-Moresque and Italian majolica.

She could have listened forever to his fascinating lore, and it was with a little frown of disappointment that she looked up when a maid interrupted from the doorway.

“Mrs. Vandever is wanting you on the ’phone, sir.”

“Bless me!” he exclaimed, and pulled out his watch with a guilty look. “I promised to run over to the party if I got home in time, and now —— I’d almost forgotten it entirely.” He smiled sheepishly.

“But she knows my weakness. Whenever I can get any one to listen—” Then he turned back from the doorway to say, “If your head is better, wouldn't you like to go along?”

“I believe not,” she responded, and followed him out reluctantly, disappointed that there was to be no more talk of ceramics.

“It's for you to say.” He lifted a hand to her in farewell as she mounted the stairs to her room; then he opened the little booth which held the phone. “Can't say that I blame you, though it seems a bit odd to find a girl more interested in ceramics than in dancing.”

She made no response, but some of the light went out of her eyes as she went on up the stairs to her room.

“As though I wouldn't love to be dancing, too!” she muttered a little fiercely as she undressed and slid into bed. “And I *will* some day, too,” she promised herself still more fiercely, “but not in borrowed party dresses, and not until I've earned the right!”

CHAPTER XX

AN UNEXPECTED MOVE

SLEEP was not long in overtaking Celia, for her eyes were tired and heavy from her close application to Mr. Vandever's books and her mind weary from the strain of trying to assimilate all that she had read that day.

It was not a restful sleep. One moment she was dancing with a curious lot of tiny beings who were nothing more nor less than plates, platters, teapots, and mugs with grotesque heads, legs, and arms. Again she was the center of a circle of them, being jeered and pointed at because she was unable to tell the name of each. They gave her no peace, and though she racked her brains frantically, her mind seemed a perfect blank. She began to feel very unhappy and ill-used and to almost dislike them.

Then they seemed to have faded away, for she found herself beside Mr. Vandever while they dug desperately with their bare hands in the sandy soil of some old Persian ruins for a platter that Mr. Vandever explained had been buried centuries before

when Tamerlane laid waste the city. Occasionally she had to pause to sketch the tree of life in the sand, for it seemed that only by being familiar with each detail of its pattern would she find what they were seeking.

It was a queer, distorted dream. One moment she was a Moorish Princess surrounded by her handmaidens, bargaining for a lovely majolica vase with a funny little man whom she was certain was Omar Khayyám, though he denied the charge over and over. Again she was a veiled Turkish maiden, searching through a confusing and seemingly endless bazaar of lustrous silks, brilliant deep-piled rugs, intoxicatingly sweet perfumes, enticing sweets, gleaming brasses, carved ivory figures—an endless and mystifying array of the treasures of the East—for a great jar with a snarling dragon on its sides in which she knew her brother was hidden.

It grew to be a most maddening dream, for she was conscious through it all that it was only a dream; but it seemed that she could not awaken until she had lived for countless years in those old, old countries that had created the things she so dearly loved. It was as though she had no right to love them until she had lived and learned of the intangible influences of those ancient cities that had gone into their making.

When she did finally awaken, it was to hear the

strains of an organ drifting up to her from the music-room just under her window. She had been surprised to learn of the organ in the music-room, its pipes cleverly concealed behind beautifully carved paneling. She had thought of organs as belonging only to churches. She lay in a sort of sentient calm, listening dreamily to the high sweet notes with their undercurrent of sadness. They seemed, somehow, a part of the fantastic dream she had just experienced.

Then, dragging herself determinedly from the sleep that still clutched at her, she recognized with a glow of pleasure Drdla's "Souvenir." It brought to her mind at once a vision of the pottery and one of the Czechs who whistled it constantly. Once at Jared's, he had played it over and over on his violin. Celia would never forget it. It had been so funny. Jared had said with a laugh, "'Souvenir' seems to be to Czechoslovakia what 'Yes, We Have No Bananas' was to America a few years ago," and had won a quick contemptuous snort and a torrent of Czech expletives from the musician, who, not content, had finished up in English, perhaps for the benefit of those who might not understand him as well as he wished.

"Comparing Drdla's 'Souvenir' with the music of America's gutters!" he had raved. "Bah! America! And Drdla—Franz Drdla—student of the

Vienna Conservatory, leader of the Theatre Orchestra de Wien, and conductor of the Carl Theatre Orchestra! Such a comparison! As though America has any musicians of her own! Even her jazz! Stolen from Russia! Bah!" and, lovingly shouldering his violin, he poured from it again his rendition of the composition he so dearly loved.

Celia, too, had loved it, and always would. It was interwoven so indelibly in her mind with the atmosphere of the old pottery. She felt she could lie and listen to it forever.

Music was so mysterious. You couldn't understand it, and yet it had the power to stir you in the most unexpected fashion. Just a few notes, the combination of a few sounds, and immediately into your mind came memories of places, people, and things you might never have thought of otherwise.

She stirred uneasily after a time and sat up. Could it be Ted, her brother, playing like that? Could it really be he?

A little awed, her heart swelling with an unaccountable emotion, she slipped from her bed and into her clothes. Of course it was Ted! But she must be sure.

Softly she left the room and went down the stairs, listening in a sort of painful ecstasy to this music that had separated her from her brother and would continue to do so.

Moving cautiously, she crossed the hall and entered the room.

His back was toward her, and, tiptoeing cautiously, she moved toward an alcove at the far side of the room. There she could listen and, through the curtain that draped the arched doorway, see him without being seen.

And there Sally, coming in through an outside door, found her some time later, sitting on a low stool, staring through a tiny aperture in the parted curtains, and listening with rapt attention to Schubert's "Serenade."

She looked up a bit dazed at being found so by Sally; then she arose quickly with a little flush of embarrassment. But before she could speak, Sally exclaimed,

"Now I know you're feeling better to be down so early, Celia. Head all right this morning?"

Celia nodded, forgetting for the moment that her head was to be the excuse for returning home at once.

"I'm so glad! We're having a pool party this morning. Swimming feats, you know, and late this afternoon we're going to the cliff above the river for a picnic supper."

"But, Sally," Celia began, "I can't stay! I *must* go home. I—I ——" She paused, angry at herself for her stupid confusion.

"Home?" exclaimed Sally. "Why, you've only just come and you've had no fun at all!"

"Oh, but I have! It's been wonderful! I shall always remember how kind you've been!"

"I haven't done anything yet! You can't go, Celia," decisively, "I simply won't let you. I invited you here—well, for several reasons, the principal one being to make you enjoy yourself!"

"I have, Sally! It's what I've been telling you. It's been wonderful. But I can't stay on. I—I—just don't fit in—with—all this." With a wave of her hand about them. "I've—got—to—work—I can't play—like you ——"

Sally was gazing thoughtfully at her. "I see what you mean, Celia, but the pottery's closed, you know. I just can't let you go yet. Besides, you haven't seen Dad's treasures. I want him to find out—" and then she broke off as Celia looked up quickly, a light of sudden consternation in her eyes.

"I forgot, Celia. Of course I sha'n't let him or any one here know about your working in the pottery, since you don't want me to. But I had been thinking, if he could know how keen you were about ceramics, he might make a point of doing—something—for you. I mean—give you a better position or something like that." She paused, plainly embarrassed, then said quickly, "But of course I sha'n't mention it while you're here, and I know

Mother won't. She likes you so much, Celia. She felt so bad about leaving you last night. But I do want Dad to tell you about his things before you go."

"He has told me. I went last night after you had gone, to return his book to the library, and the room his things are in was lighted and open. I *had* to stop. Then he came. He told me about them."

"He couldn't have had time to tell you much, for he was at the club." She put an impulsive arm about Celia. "Now, I sha'n't listen to any more protests, Celia. It'll ruin all my plans if you leave before I say you can. I've been telling Julian how you can dive, and he's rather keen to see you. He'll think it strange if you rush off after you've just come."

Reluctantly Celia allowed herself to be persuaded, though she determined that nothing should keep her from going the following day. She must get back with her sketches and her information and plans to Jared. She must have time in which to make him see her point of view. But she did long unbearably for a chance to talk to her brother, if only for a few moments—to be near him, to study his face so that she might carry home with her his likeness in clay as nearly as it was possible for her to obtain it.

But she knew she would have to be very careful.

She must do nothing to cause Angela to think that she had any special interest in him.

Though she made one of the active party that disported themselves in the pool, and won enthusiastic praise from him as well as others, there was no opportunity for intimate talk between them, nor did she dare let her eyes rest on his dark, alert countenance for more than a few seconds at a time, for always she was conscious that Angela's eyes were upon her, watching for the least sign that she was overstepping herself.

But more than once she looked up to find him gazing at her with a certain admiration in his eyes, and she would look hurriedly away for fear Angela, too, might see.

She found time after lunch to add a few touches to the clay bust on the bathroom shelf, though there was a certain expression of chin and mouth that persisted in eluding her. If only she could be with him alone for a few moments, away from Angela's watchful eyes, just long enough to fix in her memory the curve of his lips and chin! But she gave up the thought with a sigh. There wasn't the least possible chance. Julian Strassman was far too interesting and important to be allowed any time to be with her.

But when nightfall came, the picnic lunch on the rocky cliff eaten and the crowd gathered about a big camp fire that had been lighted to toast marshmal-

lows, Celia found her chance to stare without danger of being observed by any one.

A cool wind had sprung up, and the young people were grouped into threes and fours about the fire, drawing about their shoulders the light sweaters and blazers they had brought for just such a contingency. Their laughing chatter finally became more and more subdued when those who had brought ukeleles began picking fitfully at the strings. Celia, unnoticed, seated herself well out of the circle of light from the fire, under a huge sycamore whose roots were like great claws. She had a feeling of being apart, which she undoubtedly was, but she wondered whether, if she really belonged in this circle of Sally's, she could be as aimlessly happy, as gayly irresponsible, as these young people encircling the fire. But, though she told herself sensibly that she never could be, she swallowed a lump in her throat as she thought she would give *anything* to be really one of them.

She blinked rapidly to keep back the tears that welled up in her eyes, and told herself firmly that some day, if she could gain old Jared's coöperation, she would have her chance. There was no sense in being maudlin with self-pity. It was energy wasted.

Leaning back against the trunk of the great tree, she rested her hands flat upon the earth. She loved the feel of it. It brought a comforting sensation to her fingers, something of a sense of power—that

same indefinable feeling that she knew only when her fingers were busy with the clay.

She eyed her brother determinedly, but rather wistfully, as he sat between Sally and Angela on the other side of the fire. If she could only fix in her mind the shape of his mouth and chin!

He, too, strummed a ukelele and joined in singing the light gay songs of the day, that all young people love. And when they paused for a moment, he began alone in a gentle baritone:

“I want to meander in the meadow
Where the birds ——”

But Sally broke abruptly into his song: “You’d better be meandering on down to the station, since you promised Mother to meet the eight-thirty. Come on, all of you! It’s time we’re getting back to the house!”

“Aw, there’s plenty of time, Sally!” several protested, but Sally would not listen. She marched ahead toward the waiting motors, and in twos and threes they followed reluctantly after.

To Celia’s surprise, she found Julian beside her as she brought up the rear.

“I’ve been trying to get a chance to talk to you, Celia,” he said as he helped her down a gully and up the bank, “but it seems impossible. Why so exclusive?”

As she murmured an excuse, she wondered a little at the serious note in his voice. He had been so gay all evening. It had made her just a little sad that he should seem unaffected by the circumstances that separated them.

“I want to tell you that Mother and Dad—the Strassmans—my—my foster-parents, you know—” stumbling rather awkwardly on the words, “are coming down.”

“Coming down—*here?*” in sudden consternation.

“Yes. I wrote them that they must come down at once. Mrs. Vandever said I might. She’s wonderful, don’t you think? You see, I want them to know about you.”

“About *me?*” stopping to stare at him in astonishment.

“Why not? They’ve got to know. They’ve got to do something about you! You’re my sister. I want ——”

“Oh, but, *Julian!*” She breathed. “You can’t! You mustn’t!”

And she had thought he didn’t care—except in a superficial way!

“Rather crusty of me, asking the Vandevers to invite them down, but when they, too, know about you ——”

His hand slid under her arm, and he squeezed it to him in a quick affectionate gesture.

It was then that Angela, a little ahead of them, turned in the path and saw them.

Celia's thoughts were in a whirl. What could she do? The Strassmans must not know about her! Julian was mad to think that they would care anything about her. She did not want them to. They had wanted only him, not her. And Aunt Clem! What would Aunt Clem think?

Angela had turned again to stare.

"They must not come, Julian!" she exclaimed quickly, distressed at Angela's notice almost as much as by what he had said.

"But they're on their way here now. It's their train I'm going to meet. Don't look so disturbed, Celia. When you know them—when they know you ——"

They had reached the cars, also the keen ears of those who had gone ahead, and who were always only too eager to listen to each word that Julian Strassman chose to utter.

"Stop in the alcove of the music-room before you go up to change," he whispered, leaning down with a pretense of retying his shoe. "It's a good half-hour before train time. I'll explain ——"

What a mistake she had made, she thought swiftly, in not going home that morning! It might have saved this dreadful situation. Now Julian, as well as his parents, would have to know the truth—that

she was not really a dear friend of Sally's as he believed, but only a girl who worked in a pottery, whom Sally felt sorry for and wanted to befriend—a girl who had not sense enough to realize that she should have stayed where she belonged instead of pretending to a world that could never be hers. As for allowing him to thrust her on his foster-parents—she wouldn't! It was unthinkable that they would even consider recognizing her as a part of Julian's life, now that he had attained the success they had sought for him.

And they would blame Aunt Clem, and Aunt Clem would suffer!

What could she do? She *must* spare him the humiliation of knowing the truth about her and having his parents know. Her brain seethed all the way to the house with the effort she made to find some ready solution to the problem.

There was no solution, she finally decided. His career would be ruined, once the world knew the truth about them both. She must make him see, in some way, how impossible it was for him to acknowledge her as his sister. But how was she to do it?

CHAPTER XXI

RETREAT

CELIA had no trouble in slipping unobserved into the music-room, for the others hurried immediately to the upper regions of the house to change to more suitable clothing for the evening.

As she went in through the curtains, Julian was coming in through the door that opened upon the drive.

She hurried up to him.

“You simply must not tell your parents about me, Julian,” she exclaimed in a low tense voice. “You told me when I met you in the garden the night you came how important it was to your career that nothing be known about your having been born in this country of American parents—and having a sister ——”

“Oh, that was at first, Celia! That was before I’d a chance to realize how interesting a sister like you might make a fellow’s life.”

She shook her head, too deeply disturbed at the thought of his wanting her to be able to think.

“It would be such fun, Celia, showing you Europe, having you meet the people we know ——”

“It can’t be, Julian!” she insisted quickly, afraid to hear more for fear her resolution might weaken. “I understand now why Aunt Clem was so firm in refusing to allow us to meet. Your parents *must* be considered above everything! It was part of their bargain. She gave them a promise, and it is your duty and mine to respect it. It would ruin everything they have worked so hard to attain to have the truth known. I know they would never consent, and it would only make them terribly unhappy. Please, Julian, don’t humiliate me by ——”

“Humiliate you?” sharply. “There would be no reason for you to be—humiliated! Why, Celia!” clasping her hands in his. “When I tell them—when they see you —— You’ve no idea how proud I am of you! A fellow who’d let anything separate him from a sister like you ——”

“But you told me yourself, Julian, that all of Europe believes you are their own son—that your press-agents ——”

He frowned. “We needn’t bother about that, Celia. Press-agents have plenty of initiative. It’s their business to have. Once they glimpse you and know the truth, they’ll get you in the picture somehow. I’ve lots of faith in my press-agents. Think of the sensation the tale will cause. Can’t you im-

agine the headlines and perhaps a full-page spread of the story? 'Noted pianist discovers long-lost sister! While a guest at the country home of the beautiful and exclusive Sally Vandever, Julian Strassman finds that Sally's dear friend, Celia Carson, is the little sister from whom he has been separated since childhood!' The world simply dotes on seeing loved ones reunited, Celia. 'They'll eat it up!'

She shook her head. "I—don't agree with you, Julian, and I don't think your parents will, either, when they've led every one to believe you to be their own son!"

Again he frowned. "I'm coming to that part, Celia. We might even pretend that they didn't know I wasn't their son! We could drag in the old World War and pretend their boy had been separated from them, and when they found me later in an orphanage in France, they thought I was he. But why have me rack my brains to think up a plausible tale, Celia? That's how press-agents earn their money."

She tried to withdraw her hands, but he held them firmly. She must think—think. There was only one thing left to say now. She could not have them angry at Aunt Clem.

"You *can't*, Julian!" she said through stiff lips. "You can't force me on them without—my consent. I've got a right to have some say in the matter. I've a right to my own life."

He stared down at her a moment, then released her hands and said jerkily, "Oh, I hadn't thought—you'd object! Of course you have a right to your own life. I didn't mean to force you. I thought you'd be glad—if we could be together. I thought you felt toward me—as I do toward you."

She stood, her eyes lowered, every nerve quivering. To have him want her so badly that he was willing to risk his whole future, and then to have to refuse! But she couldn't humiliate him by having him know the truth, and she couldn't let him force her upon the Strassmans, who had been so insistent on his having no connection whatever with his former relatives. She had to respect her aunt's promise. It was almost unbearable to lose him—but it would have to be. The most she could hope for was that he would never know how humble was her place in life.

"I'm sorry, Celia," he said after a moment. "I didn't mean to upset you. I guess I've always been a little too sentimental about my early childhood and you. But it's been so deuced lonely at times."

When he saw that she remained completely unmoved and made no attempt to respond, he turned with a hurt gesture toward the door and said, "Well, I must go. You can depend on me not to mention the matter to them, since it makes you so unhappy. But perhaps after you meet them and see how fine

they are, you'll change your mind. And when they see you, Celia —— But we'll say no more about it now."

He started again toward the door, his eyes dark with disappointment, his lips twitching a little with hurt pride.

"Julian!" she exclaimed, moving quickly toward him. Then, scarcely knowing what she did, her hands reached for his face, where her fingers gently but greedily felt of his broad brow, his slender nose, firm chin, and twitching mouth—each tiny muscle and indenture.

Then she drew in her breath with a sob of disgust for her own weakness. Her hands—why couldn't she have prevented them from betraying her? She turned swiftly away, but he caught them and held them fast.

"Celia!" he exclaimed. "You do care! You're just too proud to let them think —— But wait! When they see you ——! I'll lead them up to it gently. Will you trust me, Celia? You sha'n't be embarrassed—in the least! Oh, but I *must* go, or I shall miss them!"

He smiled down upon her happily, satisfied, and proud of his ability to banish her fears—a smile she resolved never to forget. Then he was gone.

She sat for a moment limply on the settee, her head against the wall. She heard the start of his

motor, the deep powerful hum and the crunch of gravel as he shot around the drive.

She must pretend to be ill again and then leave in the morning on the seven o'clock bus, for she *could* not meet the Strassmans. She would slip a note under Julian's door—a note that would give him implicitly to understand that she could not and would not be forced on the Strassmans, that she meant to abide to the letter by the promise her Aunt Clem had made his parents when they adopted him. After all, she told herself sadly, it was the right thing to do. She was relieved at the thought. It helped, in a way, to do what she had to do.

She got up slowly. She must find Sally and let her know that she was going home in the morning; then she drew back, surprised at the sight of Angela standing between the parted portières. Beyond Angela, she saw others of the picnic party clustered about the radio.

Her eyes came back to Angela apprehensively and dropped beneath the chill brown stare.

“So this is how you keep your promise?”

“What do you mean, Angela?”

“Mean? As though you don't know!” her red lips curling. “That day I came —— Didn't you beg me not to let Julian Strassman know you weren't really one of Sally's friends, but only a girl who worked in a pottery, whom she felt sorry for? And

didn't I promise not to let him know on condition that you kept away from him?"

Celia bowed her head in assent.

"Then, since you haven't kept your word, you can hardly expect me to keep mine."

"But, Angela ——"

"Don't try to pretend that you haven't had him in here alone with you ever since we got back to the house! You haven't even changed your frock, and as we came into the music-room just now, we heard his voice distinctly, and heard his car as he left for the station. Do you claim that he wasn't here with you?"

"No," Celia returned weakly, "but—but ——"

Angela surveyed her with a sort of puzzled contempt for a moment, then continued, "I honestly can't imagine what you're up to, Celia. I can't think for a moment you'd be trying to impress *Julian Strassman*, with *your* background!"

Celia was too sick at heart to make any attempt to defend herself, for she knew there was nothing she could say. She could not explain her interest in Julian Strassman to Angela or to any one.

"Just how do you think Sally will feel when she hears that you're bidding for his attention, slipping off this way ——"

"Oh, Angela," Celia begged in quick distress, "please don't say anything to Sally! We were only

talking about—about—Sally wouldn't care in the least! Why should Sally care if we talked a little?"

If she could only think up some way of defending herself! But it was so hard to lie, and the truth was impossible.

She could not bear to have Sally turn against her. She loved Sally and always would, even though their worlds were so far apart and their paths would probably never cross again. She had no illusions about her friendship with Sally. She did not expect it to continue, and yet she did want to keep Sally's regard. There might be times in her life when Sally might remember her kindly. But if Angela told ——

"For all we know, you've been having these tête-à-têtes with him whenever you could find the chance."

"Oh, but I haven't, Angela! I—he ——"

"Your very confusion is against you," Angela remarked, surveying her coolly, "and since I'm Sally's friend, I think it's my place to let her know ——"

Celia's face grew white, but she said nothing.

"It would be different, Celia," Angela went on, her tone softening somewhat, "if you were really one of us. But since Sally furnished you with the clothes to wear here, and every one knows how much she thinks of Julian ——"

"But, Angela, I—I'm going home in the morning! It surely isn't necessary—I don't—really expect—to ever see Sally again. I—I—realize that—that

she's been unnecessarily kind to me. But—but—I *do* love her, Angela, and I wouldn't do a thing to make her unhappy. Please don't ——”

“Every one loves Sally,” Angela returned. “It isn't hard to have people love you when you're as rich and good-looking and generous as she is. I can easily understand why you want to keep her friendship.”

“But I—don't expect to keep it, Angela. I know I can't be—like her friends. I've got to work. Really, Angela, I don't ever expect to see her again.”

“But what about Julian?” Angela asked. “You haven't said a thing about not expecting to see *him* again? You're so adept at posing, you'll probably find some way to keep up your bluff of belonging in Sally's crowd until you ——” Again her brown eyes flashed. “I tell you, Celia, I won't stand by and see you make a fool of him. I've always liked you, Celia, and you know it. Mother and I have always been nice to you. We've tried to make things as pleasant for you as we could, because we knew you hadn't a chance to have many advantages. But you've no one to blame but yourself. You chose to go to work in that dirty pottery when you could have had a nice, respectable position with Dad. You can't expect us to feel the same toward you. Just because Sally took a wild notion to invite you here, it doesn't change that fact in the least. How many

glances do you think Julian Strassman will cast your way when he learns the truth about you?"

Celia shed the last shreds of her tattered pride. She forgot all the little slights she had suffered from Angela as far back as she could remember. She knew only that Angela spoke the truth, that Angela was in the right, but she must make an effort to obtain her silence.

"Please, Angela," she begged, "don't let him know. Really, I'm going home in the morning. It's as you say. I should never have come. I sha'n't ever again pretend to something I'm not. Please," she implored again, catching up Angela's hand, "don't say anything to him about me, will you? I'm going home in the morning. I'm not going to see him again. I don't expect ever to see him again. Please, please believe me, Angela."

The portières were parted suddenly, and a tall youth put his head in and exclaimed, "Lay off the chatter in here, will you? We're trying to get Cuba."

Celia turned a little sick. Had those others in there heard? Angela's voice had been low and so had her own, but could they have heard?

Angela quite evidently cared nothing as to whether they had or not, for she remarked coolly and loudly, "I'm just doing Sally Vandever a favor."

To Celia's further dismay, Sally's voice came dis-

tinctly from the far end of the music-room: "Doing me a favor? *Who* is? I want to know!"

Too sick at heart to face Sally and the others, for she felt sure that Angela meant to carry out her threat, she slipped out the door to the drive, found the side stairway that led to the second floor, and hurried up. There was only one thing to do, and that was to go away at once, to get back home to Aunt Clem, away from unjust accusations that could not be explained and from the embarrassment of meeting Julian's parents, whom she knew could not and would not like her. Yes, she must go. She must save him the humiliation that her presence here would mean, once he knew the truth about her. Flight was the only thing that offered a way out of the impossible situation. She was a fool to have come. She knew that now. But she would go at once. There was an evening bus, she knew, though she was uncertain about the time of its going. But she must make it!

She took time only to scrawl a hasty and unsatisfactory note to Sally. She would have liked to make it a little more fervent with the warm feelings she had for Sally and her gratitude for this visit, for the knowledge she had gained of those lovely treasures of her father; but she had no time to search her mind for appreciative phrases. It was too important that she leave at once.

CHAPTER XXII

A RIDE IN THE NIGHT

SHE left her note to Sally open upon the little desk by the window, dragged from the closet her suitcase containing the whole of her wardrobe—the pongee skirt, green sweater, blue and pink voiles, and the white graduation dress. She opened it hastily and took out the little purse that held her return fare home, then she snapped it shut, grasped it with a firm hand, and hurriedly left the room.

There was a back staircase, she knew. She would slip out that way, cross the tennis-court, skirt the greenhouse, and come out on the road. She was thankful that it was dark. There would be less chance of being seen by any one.

She did manage to get out of the house unseen, but, in hurrying around the rear corner, she collided squarely with a man pacing there. To her dismay, she saw that it was Sally's father.

The red end of his burning cigar looked to her just then like the headlight of an engine turned directly on her.

"Oh!" she panted in mortified accents, stooping hastily to retrieve her fallen suitcase. "I'm terribly sorry! Did I hurt you? I'm sure I didn't mean to!"

"Well!" testily, "I did think I could enjoy the quiet of my own back yard and a good cigar without having a suitcase catapulted into me."

He did not finish his sentence, and she knew from his tone that he took her to be one of the servants. So much the better. He would not think it so odd, her leaving this way.

He evidently did think it odd, as soon as he had a chance to think at all, for he said peevishly, "Can't Jenkins manage to look after the luggage?" Then, as a new thought struck him, "Look here, are you leaving with all this company and more coming? Does the Madame know?"

He was quite close to her now, turning the lighter he had been holding to a fresh cigar full on her face.

"I'm not—one of the maids," she told him hurriedly.

"So I see. My mistake. Sorry. But isn't this a bit unusual? Where do you think you're going with that suitcase?"

"Home," she told him quickly and a bit defiantly.

"But isn't the back way a rather odd way to be leaving, and no one bidding you farewell?"

She just couldn't stop to explain. There was not time. The others might come out and find her. Be-



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sides, she might miss the bus. She must get away at once. And yet, Sally's father could not be ignored. He had been so nice to her that night he had shown her his treasures. She hoped desperately that in the dark he had not recognized her as the girl who had been interested in them.

She tried as best she could to keep down the excitement that was making her heart pound unevenly.

"I've got to go at once. I don't want Sally to know. I can't stay here. I can't explain now, but I left a note. She'll understand."

"I see," he said, removing his cigar, and she could feel his eyes searching her face in the darkness. Then, after a moment's pause, "Well, since you're determined to leave, I'll drive you down. I suppose you're taking the bus. It's quite a little piece to be carrying that suitcase and a girl of your age has no business on a public road after dark."

"Oh!" she protested, "I couldn't let you, when you're expecting guests!" remembering the Strassmans who were due at any moment, yet considerably relieved that he had no intention of trying to detain her. "It's early. I'm not afraid."

"It'll take only a few minutes."

He took her firmly by the arm, her suitcase in his other hand, and led her past the kitchen-garden to the garage.

She hardly knew whether to feel grateful or dis-

tressed. She had hoped that no one would know of her departure for some time. Still, she rather dreaded that long walk to town along the country road. There was danger, too, of missing the evening bus. She was not at all sure just what time it went through.

“So you’re taking French leave, eh?” he remarked as he climbed into the roadster beside her and slammed the door.

“I—suppose you would call it that,” as they swung about the drive, past the open windows of the music-room whence drifted the sound of subdued but intense voices.

Were they discussing her? she wondered dejectedly. Had Angela told Sally about Julian and her talking together in the alcove? Did Julian know about her? But he could not have returned yet from the station.

If only he didn’t have to know! Maybe, when Angela found out she had gone home, she would think it unnecessary to inform him. It was a comforting thought, and she tried to make herself believe it. She hated to have him think of her as a cheat—a social climber, who had succeeded only in making herself ridiculous.

Busy with her thoughts, she forgot that Mr. Vandever might still be considerably puzzled at her unconventional departure.

And when he asked, "Is Sally to blame?" she exclaimed quickly, "Sally? Oh, no! Sally's been wonderful! Sally wouldn't ——!"

"Then ——?" he prompted.

She sensed the sympathy he felt toward her, even though his words betrayed no hint of it. She felt suddenly a wild desire to weep, to blurt out the whole miserable story, but she knew she had no right to. Julian's secret belonged to him and the Strassmans. She had no right to reveal the relationship that existed between them.

But she had to tell the truth as far as was possible. It would be such a relief to tell some one, and even though he felt the contempt for her which she expected, she felt that she must tell him. It was useless, anyway, to try to keep him from knowing, for she was sure Angela had told the others, and even though she might not tell Julian, herself, some one else probably would. To those of Sally's world, her little pretense would seem as amusing as it was cheap.

"I'm just a cheap little cheat," she told him finally, "and I realize just how ridiculous I must appear to them all. I—I don't blame any one. If I'd had any sense, I'd never have come to Inglenook in the first place."

He drove on in silence for a time, apparently intent on his own thoughts. They plunged into a dim aisle of pungent pines. She sniffed unconsciously.

It reminded her of home—the peace and security of Aunt Clem's little house on its pine-dotted slope.

“‘A cheap little cheat,’ ” he repeated musingly.

“Yes. Posing as one of Sally's friends.”

“But I don't understand. If you're not one of her friends, how came you to be here?”

“It's just because —— Oh, don't you see ——!” a little desperate for the words that were so hard to utter. “I'm the girl who was so interested in your porcelains!”

He nodded. “It's what I thought. And though I've been putting two and two together, it doesn't seem to make four.”

She laughed shakily, then said hurriedly, “I'm not really one of Sally's friends. I—I work in the pottery at Newtonville. That is, I did until it was closed.”

“Work—in the—pottery—at Newtonville?” he asked, turning in surprise and staring at Celia's tense little figure. “Then how came you to be ——?”

For a moment Celia could not speak. Suppose when he knew the truth about her, he would not want her to work for him, now that he owned the pottery? Then her plans, the hopes she had been cuddling to her of some day learning to model, everything, would be wrecked.

She sat suddenly erect with a little cry of dismay.

“My *notes!*” she exclaimed. “I’ve got to go back! “I’ve forgotten my notes!”

He looked at her curiously. “Your notes? What notes? Love-notes?”

“Love-notes?” a little contemptuously; then with mounting distress, indifferent to what he thought, “Can’t we go back? I can slip in—some way. I’ve got to have those notes!”

He had slowed the car down. “It’s for you to say. But you’ll probably miss the bus.”

“Oh! Oh!” She wrung her hands in real distress.

“If you’ll tell me where to find them, I’ll be glad to forward them to you.”

“Oh, will you?” she exclaimed, immensely relieved. “They’re in the desk drawer in my room.”

“And you’ll trust me not to peep into them?” sly amusement in his voice.

“Peep into them? Oh!” she laughed relievedly. “They’re not that kind! Just notes I took on what I read in some of your books—about pottery, you know.”

He had increased their speed, and, though he kept a watchful eye on the turns in the road, he took occasion every now and then to look at her with new interest.

“It’s why I came,” she hurried on to explain. “I mean, why Sally asked me. She found out how interested I was in ceramics, especially figurines, and

she wanted me to see your collection. I guess, too, she felt a little sorry for me and wanted me—to have a good time. I just can't say whether I went wholly on account of the ceramics or—whether—it was partly because—I knew I'd enjoy being in Sally's lovely home, though I tried to make myself believe it was just the ceramics. I just can't seem to help loving—beautiful things, wanting to be near them," she added honestly.

"You *are* candid," he commented.

"I—I'm trying to be truthful. You see, we've always been poor. Not that I minded. When you're young, you don't mind so much, I guess. And there was always the Duvals' house full of lovely things until—— And then there was the pottery. It—wasn't lovely, but they made lovely things there."

"Yes?" encouragingly.

"Yes. It—it—I can hardly explain about how much it meant. I was so little when I first began to love it. It—used to seem a little like magic—the way they'd work the clay into shapes and dip it in the glaze, that didn't seem to have any color, and then, after they put the things in the ovens and fired them, they'd come out such lovely colors. The way old Jared would shape the vases on the wheel that spun round and round seemed so marvelous. And the clay—the way it felt in one's fingers—as though—almost as though—it breathed!"

She paused dreamily, and neither spoke for a time, only the deep contented hum of the motor and the scrunch of gravel under the wheels breaking the stillness of the night about them.

"I can't seem to remember seeing you when I was there," he said finally. "What did you do?"

"I trimmed the things that came from the molds until old Jared Stornoff got sick. Then they let me use the wheel. He'd taught me how, you know. But I didn't work at it long. The pottery closed."

She paused abruptly, a little uncertain as to whether or not she should speak of the pottery's being sold.

He made no comment then, but said a moment later, "You haven't told me why you decided to leave Inglenook without the formality of farewells."

She slumped a little in her seat. She had been hoping he would not insist on knowing. When she saw that he was waiting for her response, she began reluctantly, "It was just that—something happened—to—to make me realize how—how ridiculous I had made myself by coming here and pretending—wearing the clothes Sally bought for me."

"She did that?" in a surprised voice.

"Yes. She was so sweet about it. She said she'd always wanted to play fairy godmother to some one. I didn't mind at first. It seemed the thing for me to do—to wear them! but later—I realized. And

when I knew the others were to find out that I was just a girl that Sally was befriending—that I was just a girl who worked in a pottery, not like them, you know, I—I ——” pausing to swallow hard.

“You couldn’t face it, is that it?”

“That’s it,” she managed, searching suddenly in her purse for a handkerchief. She knew he must feel nothing but contempt for her for getting herself into such a situation and then being so cowardly as to run away.

“Well, here we are,” he announced as they reached the little town, and a few moments later he drew up before the lighted bus station. “Here, I’ll take that suitcase. There’s your bus now. Got here just in time, didn’t we? Now, miss, I’ve got your fare all ready,” waving away the money she had taken from her purse.

“Oh, no!” she protested in such distress that he returned the money to his pocket.

She just couldn’t take anything more from the Vandervers, and not from him, now, for she was certain that he was trying his best to hide from her his disapproval.

She held out a hesitant hand. “It was so kind of you to bring me down. I’ll always remember.”

He nodded understandingly, took her hand, gave it a little squeeze, and asked, “You won’t be afraid after you get to Newtonville?”

“Oh, no. I get off the bus at the Duvals’ corner, and then it’s only a few steps to our house.”

He helped her up the steps of the bus, lifted his hat in farewell, then returned to his car.

Once in her seat she turned and followed him apprehensively with her eyes as he returned to his car. If only he had given her some intimation of how he regarded her! He had been so non-committal. Did he disapprove of her entirely? Would he get some one else to fill the position she had had at the pottery?

Oh, why hadn’t she told him, or at least let him suspect, how very necessary that position was to her and to Aunt Clem? What would she do if she were forced to leave the pottery?

CHAPTER XXIII

HOME AGAIN

THE ride home was a most unhappy one. Never in Celia's whole life had she felt of so little importance. She was thankful that the lights in the bus were off. She could better straighten out her chaotic thoughts. Oh, why, she thought miserably, hadn't she listened to Angela that day at the Duvals' when she advised her against accepting Sally's invitation? Why hadn't she realized more fully the great gulf between Sally and herself? Ruefully she thought to herself that even Sally must have thought it strange that she had the courage to pose as belonging to a world that wouldn't give her a passing glance, did it know how far down in the scheme of things she really belonged.

A worker in a pottery attempting to mix socially with those who would perhaps never know what it meant to work with one's hands for gain!

Yet, she told herself wonderingly, Sally had most certainly liked her, even in her dusty gray overalls, and Sally had known from the beginning just how

humble was her place in life. There had been no pretense between them. Besides, she hadn't really tried to gain the liking or notice of any she had met at the Vandevers'. She hadn't in any way forced herself on any of them. She told herself determinedly that it was only because of Sally and her own interest in the little figures that she had let herself believe she had the right to take advantage of the invitation, though, as when she talked to Mr. Vandever, she was not quite sure that way down inside her somewhere there was not also a keen desire to see Inglenook, to experience that taste of luxury which would probably never again be extended to her.

But, looking at the matter from every angle, she could not honestly see that she was so grievously at fault. Certainly she was not responsible for her brother's visit to the Vandevers' and his discovery of her there. No one could in the least blame her for that.

No, she assured herself firmly over and over, no one who loved ceramics as she did would have missed such a chance to see Mr. Vandever's prized collection. Why, she wondered, should one love such things if one wasn't to be permitted to indulge that love? Should one crush such desires instead of fostering them?

Was that why she was in her present predicament? Had she really been wrong in the first place in going

to the pottery to work? She remembered her aunt's distress when she told her of her decision. She remembered Mrs. Duval's plain-spoken disapproval. Shouldn't she have been guided by them—older people who knew better than she the blind alleys at the end of so many of one's dreams? Hadn't it really been hurt pride, or rather, plain temper, that had made her spurn Mr. Duval's offer of a more conventional, if not more respectable, position in his bank? Was this her punishment?

If she had gone into his bank, she would probably be sitting now on Aunt Clem's little porch at peace with herself and the world.

But had she done so, she would probably never have known Sally Vandever, for it was only because she worked in the pottery and had not been ashamed to say she loved it that Sally had been drawn to her. But what must Sally think of her now for running off as though she were guilty of some dreadful crime?

O dear! she thought miserably, staring out into the darkness of the passing landscape, how was one to know always what was the right and what the wrong thing to do? Life was such a dreadful puzzle.

Well, anyway, she decided, it was a comfort to know she had seen and talked to Ted, her brother. Even though she did not see him again, and she was sure she wouldn't, she had the satisfaction of being able to picture him in her mind, of being able to re-

call the strains of his music, of knowing that others, too, would listen and exult in it as she had. She had, too, the satisfaction of knowing that he liked and approved of her and really wanted her in his life—though when he learned the truth about her from Angela or some of the others, all that would be changed.

She sighed deeply, admitting at the same time that she was glad, glad, glad that she *had* gone to the pottery to work, even though it might have been a mistake. She would never have known Sally; she would never have known those fascinating facts about ceramics that Mr. Vandever's books had revealed to her, never have seen those marvelous treasures of his, nor Ted.

Sally had opened up to her a world whose existence she had only half suspected. Even though she knew she could never be of it, some part of her exulted in the new knowledge that was hers, even though it had been bought at the price of her self-respect.

She couldn't save her self-respect now. She had lost that, she knew, in the eyes of Angela, her brother, Mr. Vandever, and, of course, Sally; but she could advance herself a little, perhaps, by what she had learned. No, she told herself again, she didn't believe she had made a mistake in going to the pottery. Why should God put such an intense love of a thing

in one's heart if He didn't want one to develop it? Why should her fingers long so to manipulate the clay if He preferred her to pore over numbers in a bank instead? She didn't believe He did prefer it.

She set her teeth together determinedly. She *would* know more about ceramics. She *would* find a way of adding to her knowledge and skill.

"O God!" she breathed unconsciously, "help me to find the way!"

Then her head went down on the window-sill as she realized how long it had been since she had asked His help in anything. Her aunt's unfailing belief in His constant guidance and help had at times rather irked her. If every one were like Aunt Clem, she had thought, He would get very tired of listening to their complaints.

To her, He had manifested Himself more in the beauty of the earth and sky than in any other way, and she had been content with that. Now she felt a need of Him that she had never expected to feel. He alone seemed able just then to help her to the thing she craved so much.

"Don't let Mr. Vandever dismiss me," she begged. "Give me one more chance." And then she added briefly, "Thanks."

It seemed so needless to take up His time with a long petition and exaggerated gratitude. He must be so busy. Besides, He knew what was in her heart.

But she did want Him to know how utterly dependent she now was upon Him for help and how grateful she felt for His intervention in her affairs.

Was He listening? she wondered. Would He give her another chance? She wished suddenly that she were a little girl again, that she might run and bury her head in Aunt Clem's lap as she used to do, and shut out the humiliating thoughts that persisted in making her feel so humble and ashamed. Though she was not one to weep easily, that comforting lap had had a big place in her life.

The jolting of the bus as it came to a stop at Newtonville aroused her. She wondered just how late it was as she climbed out and took her suitcase from the driver, thinking a bit ruefully of the lecture she would receive from Aunt Clem for coming on the evening bus.

She hurried along the Duvals' wall, went up the slope, and opened the gate with a swift gesture. The little house looked more humble than ever, but she did not dwell on that. It was home, and she was glad to be there where once again she could be her own self and not have to worry about pretenses.

There was no light burning, but the door was unlocked, as usual. She opened it now, eager for the embrace that she knew awaited her.

She stood puzzled for some moments when there was no answer to her repeated calls; then, searching

in the dark for matches on the iron mantelshelf, she lighted the lamp and carried it upstairs.

Aunt Clem's bed was untouched. She looked around thoughtfully. Her cameo pin was missing off the fat pink pincushion on the dresser; so was the string of crystal beads that usually hung from the frame of the old mirror. A swift glance in the closet showed that the black and white voile that was Aunt Clem's best was also missing.

"Where can she be?" she asked aloud, and then remembered old Jared's illness. Her heart sank lower and lower. Why should Aunt Clem put on her best dress just to go over to the Stornoffs'? Then her eyes grew wide with dismay.

Could anything have happened to old Jared? Could old Jared have died?

She must know at once. She couldn't bear the suspense any longer. Down the stairs she hurried, flung out the back door and down the path at the back of the house to the settlement beyond the pottery.

"Please, God," she begged over and over, without realizing that she spoke aloud, "don't let me find that anything has happened to old Jared!"

Past the dark pottery she went, and on to the cluster of houses where most of the foreign workers in the pottery lived.

The Stornoffs' house was glowing with lights, and,

as she drew nearer, she heard strains of wild, passionate music—the music of Bohemia—and the heavy beat of enthusiastic feet.

She paused for breath and drew a long, deep sigh of relief.

They must be having Jared's delayed birthday party! Then he was no longer ill, and he would be able to listen to her plans!

Flinging open the wooden gate, she hurried around to the back of the house, skirting the group of elderly men crowded about the doorway. She knew that the parlor and dining-room would have been cleared of their furniture to make room for the musicians and the dancers, and that those who did not dance would have gravitated to the kitchen to watch with satisfied smiles and nods the exertions of those still full of life and vigor.

The back door was free of obstruction. She flew up the steps, flung open the screen door, and stood on the threshold, her eyes traveling eagerly in search of old Jared.

CHAPTER XXIV

CELIA FINDS HERSELF

“WHY, Celia Carson, wherever on earth did you come from at this time of night? And wherever on earth did you get that dress?”

Mrs. Clementine Carson arose from the group of elderly folk crowded about the doorway that led to the dining-room, her five feet, two inches, fairly radiating indignant disapproval.

“Dress?” Celia looked down at herself. “I—Oh—this!” realizing with dismay that she had forgotten to change into one of her own things. “It’s one—of—Sally’s,” she stammered, then, looking about her hastily, asked, “Where’s Jared?”

“Sally’s?” her aunt exclaimed, ignoring her question. “You don’t mean to say you and Sally Vanderaver have got on such intimate terms that you’re wearing each other’s clothes?”

“Well, hardly, Aunt Clem,” with a wry smile, trying to picture Sally in her blue voile or the white graduation dress.

It could not be done, so she dismissed the idea

with another wry smile, then turned with a cordial one to the cluster of familiar welcoming faces.

“Hello, Melby! Hello, Stance! Hi, there, Dolph!” moving into the group who were holding out eager hands to grip her extended one.

“Where’s Jared?” she asked again, as she gripped first one rugged hand and then another.

“Just went outside,” one told her, with a thumb indicating the front doorway.

But there was no getting away from them just then. They pressed about her, each eager to express himself about her bravery in saving Angela from the lake; solicitously sympathetic about the blow she had received from the canoe paddle; and asking eagerly of the Vandevers and Inglenook. Was it really the swell place it was rumored to be? Had they five cars and fourteen servants?

It was good to be back, to feel again the generous camaraderie of these workers. So much had happened in the short time since she had last seen them that it seemed like years instead of merely days that she had been away from them.

She answered them as best she could, careful to hide her own feelings from the curious eager eyes of these friendly folk. Then, when she had satisfied their curiosity, they wanted to know if she had heard about the changes at the pottery.

Didn’t she know that Mr. Vandever had bought

it? Hadn't she seen the papers? Oh, my! To have missed all that! It was like a story in a book! Once he had been so very poor, living on the poor little barren farm where now the pottery was located, and much of the land about. But he had had brains. The daily papers had told everything. They had put in his picture. Such a nice kindly man, and so pleasant to all! He told them how fond he was of the old town and how some day he meant to put it on the map. It was he who was responsible for that new State road's being run through the town. And no one had guessed. A mighty fine thing it would be to work for a man like Mr. Vandever. The pottery opened again Monday.

Through all the disjointed explanations and excited babble, Celia was conscious of her aunt's unbending disapproval of her, and when at last the workers sidled away, back to the dance floor and the yard outside, her aunt beckoned with insistent eyes from the kitchen stoop. There was nothing to do but follow.

"Now, see here, Celia, I don't like the looks of this—your coming home at this time of night, alone, and wearing Sally Vandever's dress. It don't seem just right, the Vandevers letting their guests go off that way—a young girl like you that ought to be so carefully protected—I must say!"

"Oh, Aunt Clem! Protected from what? It's

only a two hour's ride, and the bus is perfectly safe. And you know, yourself, *nothing* ever happens in Newtonville!"

"There's no telling, Celia. There's no telling what kind of characters might happen to get on the bus."

"But I'm here, quite safe, am I not?" a little impatiently. She was eager to see old Jared, and she said so.

"Jared can wait," her aunt returned tersely. "Now, just you sit right down there on the top of that wash-tub, Celia Carson. It's not going to hurt Sally Vandever's dress. Melby's tubs are as clean outside as in. And tell me all about this visit from beginning to end. I haven't had a minute's peace of mind since you left, worrying about how you might go hunting up your brother after promising me you wouldn't, and making trouble for his folks. You didn't, did you, Celia?"

"No, Aunt Clem, I didn't hunt him," wishing unhappily that she could unburden herself at once of all that had taken place at Inglenook.

But there was too much to tell, and it was of too intimate a nature to talk of in such a place.

"Well, I'm thankful for that, Celia," her aunt hurried on. "I've just been so worried about it all, and what with selling the house, and Steve ——"

"Selling the house?" in swift surprise.

"Yes."

Her aunt sank down upon the lowest step and stared off past the little kitchen-garden to the row of tall hollyhocks along the back fence.

“Mr. Vandever’s bought our house. You see, it’s where he lived when he was a little boy. That’s why he kept walking past it that day Sally Vandever brought you home in her car. It’s the first time he’d seen it in years. Well, it’s like the men told you. He’s bought the pottery and the house. He aims to tear it down and build a sort of museum to house some fine china and pottery he’s got. He’s going to turn it over to the town. And he’s going to beautify our knoll. It’ll be like a park. He says it’s an ideal location, with that new State road alongside it and that stretch running down to the lake. It ought to attract people from other States and mean considerable for the town. I reckon he’s a big-hearted man, Celia, to do all that for a town that hardly remembers him.”

Celia listened in amazement. A museum, here, on the site of Aunt Clem’s little house! Mr. Vandever’s collection where she could look and look her fill at it!

“But, Aunt Clem, where ——”

“If you’ll just wait till I finish, Celia,” her aunt broke in a little petulantly. “Five thousand dollars, Celia, is what he paid me, and now there’s no reason why you shouldn’t go on to Normal, for I’m going out to be with Steve. He needs me.”

“Out *where*, Aunt Clem?”

“In Kansas. He wrote he’s working some land on shares out there and wants me to come and keep house for him.” She heaved a deep contented sigh. “I always knew things would come out right, Celia. I always knew Steve’d do the right thing. And now that you can go to normal school instead of back into that pottery, there’s just nothing more to wish for, I guess.”

But Celia’s face did not wear the peaceful smile that had descended over her aunt’s. She arose slowly. “I’m so glad for you, Aunt Clem, and for Uncle Steve, but I—I—can’t take your money, even to go to State Normal.”

“But, Celia! Half of it is yours, and you know it! I always meant that the house was to be yours to pay up for that twenty-five hundred dollars of yours that Fred lost when he put it in that bank that failed. I never dreamed it would bring more than I owed you.”

“Owed me? You don’t owe me anything, Aunt Clem! It is I who owe you for taking care of me all these years! Besides, it wasn’t Uncle Fred’s fault the bank failed. He did what he thought was right when he put it there.”

“Yes, I know, Celia, but it’s only fair ——”

“You’ll need it, yourself, Aunt Clem, you and Uncle Steve ——”

"No, part of it is yours, Celia."

Celia did not reply. She was seeing a vision of her future as Aunt Clem had planned it—State Normal; girls like those she had gone to school with here; friends; the world of thinking, well-educated folks; a little gayety at times; dancing occasionally—perhaps one step nearer the world of Sally Vander. It did hold attractions, and yet ——

Into her mind suddenly flashed those lines from *Hamlet* which she had memorized in one of her English lessons—Polonius' advice to his son, Laertes:

"To thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

"To thine own self be true." It was her right to choose her work—especially so, now that Aunt Clem no longer needed her help. Had her uncle Steve remained silent as to his whereabouts and the opportunity for a teaching course presented itself, she would have felt it her duty to have gone on as her aunt wished, for she knew the limited opportunities for good pay which the pottery afforded. But now ——

"To thine own self be true" kept repeating itself over and over in her mind.

To be true to one's self meant making the most of

what God had given you, and if you were true to yourself, then you need never worry about being untrue to others. Being true to oneself was just being satisfied to be yourself, regardless of what others thought or did.

Her gaze wandered past the men in the yard, off toward the dull squatting hulks of the old pottery buildings. It was there in those buildings that she had discovered that power within her which so puzzled and delighted her—that power as yet only a sentient something, but whose urgings for expression were becoming more and more insistent. And she knew now that it was only by sticking to the pottery and by learning more and more about those things she loved that she could manage to appease that puzzling something.

And who knew? Some day, perhaps when she had done her best to develop that dormant power, maybe Sally's world—maybe Sally herself—might be her friend.

The muscles of her face twitched with emotion. "I *will*, I *will*," she said fiercely, "find a way!"

She arose with decisive haste. "I've got to talk to Jared, Aunt Clem," and turned quickly to the doorway, biting her lower lip to keep it from trembling.

"I'll find a way to learn—and to reach Sally yet!" she murmured to herself.

CHAPTER XXV

DISAPPOINTMENT

THE musicians had plunged into the thrilling strains of a Spanish tango as Celia edged into the living-room.

“Celia! Celia!” several called. “Come on, Celia, and dance! Be my partner!”

She stood hesitant a moment, a little intoxicated by the promise she had just made to herself and by the seductive music. She remembered the night at Sally’s when she had promised herself that some day she, too, would dance as irresponsibly, as joyously as they. It would be so nice to give oneself up to mere pleasure—just to drift.

If she could forget Sally and the beauty of Ingle-nook, with its glowing, softly-tinted lights, gleaming floors, dull graceful curves of wrought iron and trailing ivy, and its pool reflecting the stars, it might be possible to find pleasure here. If she could forget the delicate tints of rare old porcelains, of exquisite figurines, if she could forget Ted’s eyes, the slender sensitive face, his music drifting up to

her window; if she could forget that puzzling, insistent something within her that demanded all her thoughts and energy, she might dance.

But she could not forget. She avoided the outstretched hands that reached toward her, and shook her head at them. She had no time now even to think of dancing. Nothing mattered just now but that she keep the memory of the beauty of Inglenook, the memory of Sally's and Ted's regard, so that she could go on with the plans she had made for herself.

She looked for old Jared among those who had just entered the far door, but he was not with them. Then she looked around upon the smiling, unaffected gaze of the pottery workers, their wives, and friends, whose eyes dwelt so kindly upon her. She was suddenly a little ashamed. These humble folks were her friends, would always be—of that she felt convinced. The pottery had made them kin.

As she continued to gaze upon them, a little puzzled at her interest in them, she realized with surprise the beauty that she suddenly found in them. That woman with the baby against her cheek—oh, to fix in clay that dreamy sweet expression of a matron caught between the insistent call of the music and her stern devotion to the helpless infant cuddled against her! And that old man, reliving his youth as his rheumatic foot kept time to the music! That small boy, adoring his father with round wide eyes

as he sought safety from the dancers between the rough blue-clad knees!

From one to the other her gaze traveled, a little awed at the discovery she was making. She had thought that Inglenook held the sum total of the world's beauty, and now here in this humble gathering she was finding beauty she had never suspected. It was a revelation, indeed, to know that Sally's world did not hold all the earth's beauty.

She felt suddenly an immense relief, free of all those old aches and longings—as free and happy as she had been when, as a child, she had discovered the pottery with its piles of many-colored scraps of broken pottery; when she made her tremulous explorations about the dingy buildings and gazed in wonder at the whirring machinery; and later when she learned to fashion the clay on the whirling wheel. There was no feeling comparable to it.

She must find old Jared. She must make him realize her tremendous need of more knowledge.

And then she found him beside her.

“Kinda thought you didn't mean to congratulate me, Celia,” he said as he held out a worn and horny hand.

“Oh, Jared!” she breathed, grasping it eagerly. “Of course I do! And I'm so glad you're well again and able to work. But let's find a corner somewhere. There's so much I want to tell you!”

They found a settee in a corner where the music would drown their voices from the ears of those about them. Then swiftly, but somewhat disjointedly, she told him of the beautiful and fascinating collection of ceramics she had seen at Inglenook; of Mr. Vandever's books that gave in delightful details the history of the art; and of those artists and sculptors who had used their talents to further the art.

She watched him as she talked, and was a little disheartened to see that old sulky mood of his descend upon him. With new enthusiasm, she described the dainty figurines, doing her best to make him see the perfection of each piece as she had seen it.

But when she paused at last for breath, he said, "Yeah, I know all about those things. Old stuff."

"Yes, of course they're old. But, Jared!" she exclaimed, sitting tense now, her eyes fastened pleadingly on his passive countenance. "Wouldn't it be possible—for us to make such things—here in Newtonville?" and, seeing no response in his face, hurried on: "I thought if *you* talked to Mr. Vandever, perhaps you could persuade him to bring a sculptor or an artist here and let us learn to make something after the manner of those Bow and Derby figures."

He turned slowly, his gray eyes resting on her with gentle scorn. "There ain't no demand for that sort of stuff now, Celia. It's because those things are *old* that they're considered so precious. They ain't

nobody wantin' little china figures settin' on their mantelpieces these days. And since whatnots have gone out of style, they ain't room enough in a ordinary parlor to put stuff like that. You couldn't sell the stuff if we made it!"

Celia's exalted mood vanished completely, and her heart felt suddenly like lead. And, to her added dismay, a lump was forming in her throat. She tried to swallow it, but it would not down, for she had a feeling that Jared was right and that further hope was useless.

"Besides," he went on, "it'd take a lot of time and money to experiment with stuff like that, and Mr. Vandever ain't one to spend money recklessly. He's got a good business here, and he's wise to be expanding it along its old lines and leave the 'arty' stuff to those whose got more money than sense."

"But, Jared!" She made a final protest. "Your stuff is *art*, or it wouldn't bring such good prices."

"Sure it is. But it's a natural art that will always last. It's been handed down from one generation to another. It's like eatin' and sleepin' with me. I don't need any high-priced sculptors or artists showin' me anything."

She smiled at him now, understandingly but without enthusiasm. Jared's work was sufficient unto him. He didn't *want* to develop any further.

She felt suddenly very tired and discouraged, now

that she knew there was no chance of enlisting his interest in her plans. If only she could find the courage to make her suggestions to Mr. Vandever, and weren't quite so young and inexperienced! If only that dreadful mess at Inglenook could have been avoided, or she had been able at least to give him a satisfactory explanation of why she had left so unceremoniously! He could not possibly feel anything toward her but disapproval. Oh, why was everything so disappointing?

Jared, who had been casting anxious, sidelong glances at her, now spoke: "There's nothing, Celia, that I wouldn't do for you after your takin' on my work and helpin' us like you did."

"That wasn't anything, Jared. Besides, it didn't last long."

"But you meant to help me, Celia, and that's what counts. It's against reason, though, to expect me to go beggin' Mr. Vandever to hire a lot of sculptors and artists who'll come in here and maybe end by puttin' me and you out altogether. I'm gettin' old, and I got my home here, and when I get too old to work, I'd like to see you take my place at the wheel if you've a mind to. I ain't never felt called on to teach my trade to anybody yet but you, Celia, 'cause I never found nobody quite with the knack you have of handlin' the clay."

She knew there was nothing more to be said, and,

though she felt that she should make some show of appreciation for what he had done for her, she could find no words. She wanted suddenly to get away—away from the kind and friendly faces, from the music, from the disheartening fact that her hopes were vain. She wanted to be alone with her disappointment, alone with the tears that she knew could not be held in check for very long. She must get away to the safety and quiet of her little room at Aunt Clem's without Aunt Clem or any one's seeing her go.

She arose, with a faint smile to Jared, and managed: "I'm going out for a bit of air."

Then she started toward the door, but came to a dead stop halfway across the room, for coming through it were her brother Ted, Sally Vandever, and Sally's father.

CHAPTER XXVI

A QUESTION

FOR a moment Celia stood tense, staring unseeingly; then her face flushed a dull red, and her head went down while she quickly blinked back the tears that made her eyes now unusually bright.

Their coming meant only one thing. They knew the truth. Her hasty departure had gained her nothing, nor had it spared Ted and Sally the knowledge she had hoped to keep from them. She wondered wildly if she couldn't think of some way in which to prove them wrong, prove that she wasn't Julian Strassman's sister. Then Sally's arms were about her, and Sally was crying softly, "Celia! Celia! You good old sport, you!"

And then her hands were imprisoned in her brother's, and he was saying, a little tremor of emotion in his deep voice, "Why didn't you tell me the truth, Celia? What a fatuous fool you must have thought me, bragging about my career, when you deserved far more consideration."

She tried in vain to shake them off, but they clung

closer. Their words seemed to come to her from far off, like voices in a dream, voices that gave no meaning to the words uttered. Oh, she must think of something! She must make them understand how ridiculous it was for them to care ——

“Mother was just so distressed, Celia, at your rushing off! And now we’ve come to take you back at once! Oh, Celia, isn’t it wonderful, that you’re Julian’s sister! He’s told us everything! I never dreamed that the two people I’d rather have for friends than any others I know could be so near to one another!”

Celia’s distressed eyes were turned upon her brother. “Oh, Ted,” she exclaimed, “why did you tell—when you knew ——”

“Why! Because I wanted them to know!” his eyes alight with satisfaction as they dwelt on her. “You don’t suppose for one moment that when I knew the truth—what a fine little sport you were, working here in this pottery to help this old aunt of ours —— Why, Celia, I’m *proud* of you! You can’t think how much! And so are Mother and Father. When Father saw that clay bust you’d made of me, that Sally discovered when she went upstairs to find you ——”

“Oh, Ted,” in genuine distress, “I—I—was just making that for myself. It wasn’t finished. I came away in such a hurry—I forgot it entirely.”

“I’m glad you did! It proved to them that you were a rather exceptional person.”

His smile was pleased, confident, and his hand on her arm assertive. “Now let’s be getting back to Inglenook. They’re waiting. They’re eager ——”

She hung back. “I can’t, Ted. I—I—you don’t understand.”

“Now, Celia,” delightful mastery in his voice, “just why do you think we rushed down here after you to-night and woke up half the town trying to locate you?”

His eyes wandered about the circle of interested faces as though seeking their approval. “Mother and Father want to do for you, Celia, what they did for me, now that they know that you’re ——”

She drew back and stared at him, her brown eyes wide with wonder.

“You mean——?” she breathed.

“Yes,” he said. “Father has a friend in Europe, a famous sculptor, who he knows will be glad to take you on as a pupil.”

Again she stared at him. To study under a famous sculptor! To learn to model figures—life-size! To really create the semblance of life! Her brain was dizzy with the intoxicating thoughts; then she said, shaking her head determinedly as though to disperse Ted’s words which hung so temptingly in the air!

"No, no, Ted! I couldn't let them! I should always think it was just—because they loved you so—that they were helping me."

"Love? Fiddlesticks!" he exclaimed. "Don't you realize, Celia, that any one with brains and enough money feels privileged to be of help to those who possess such a rare talent as yours? They *want* to, Celia!"

"But your career, Ted! I'd conflict ——"

"Can't you leave that to the press-agents, as I suggested once before? You'll probably aid my career rather than detract from it."

Again she shook her head, while her eyes met those of Mr. Vandever who watched her from the doorway. Something in his gaze gave her courage to stick to her determination, though she felt considerably sick at the thought of what she was refusing.

"It's impossible, Ted. I'm going back into the pottery Monday if Mr. Vandever still wants me."

She paused while Mr. Vandever nodded assent; then, with a little smile because his eyes bespoke silent approval, she went on: "I've got to stand on my own feet, Ted. Your parents are strangers to me. I couldn't accept their help, even though I respect and admire them for all they've done for you."

"Then, Celia, let *me!*" he insisted. "I've money enough, I'm sure. I've got the right. I've earned it."

“I’m sorry, Ted, but I can’t complicate your life with my struggles. You’re not of age yet, and it would in reality be they who were helping me, not you. Besides, I—I *feel* that my place is here until ——” Her eyes were bright with a suspicious moisture. “The pottery has meant so much to me, Ted! I couldn’t ever make any one understand. I’ve a feeling that if I stick to it, it’ll be the means of helping me find—the way—to what I want.”

Silence descended for a moment. She saw Sally’s eyes meet her brother’s a little wonderingly; then a queer light of triumph kindled in them as she exclaimed:

“I told him on the way down I’d be willing to bet you’d turn their offer down flat! And I think you’re right, Celia! Fond as I am of Julian, and much as I admire his parents, I can’t help but think it’s just too bad they waited all these years to find out the stuff his sister was made of! Why, the very first day I talked to you I knew you were—well, it’s hard to find the word—unusual, different, superior; none of them fits. It’s a blend of all three, I guess. And when I saw you working at the pottery and saw those funny little figures you’d made —— Well, I knew you had *something*! It was why I insisted on your coming to Inglenook. I wanted to prove to Mother and Dad that you’d fit in *any* surroundings; then I meant to prove to them you were worthy of their

help. But I hadn't figured on Julian Strassman's being your brother. *He* was the monkey-wrench that stopped the machinery and flung you back here!"

She paused for breath, laughing delightedly as she turned to her father. "Well, anyway, I think Dad's convinced that you ——"

She paused impressively while Mr. Vandever detached himself from the door-post against which he leaned and came forward, his mouth pursed a bit severely, no doubt in order to try to counteract the gleam of interest that shone in his eyes.

"It's merely a business proposition with me," he stated bluntly, pulling out an immaculate handkerchief and dabbing at his forehead. "You know I mean to make a few experiments with this clay we have here as soon as we get back to work again. It's my opinion it's fit for more exalted purposes than that for which it's been used. I aim to branch out in more artistic lines—bas-reliefs, ornamental tiles, art panels, busts, figures ——"

Celia's eyes lighted with quick interest, and her breath came unevenly, her hands clasping one another tightly.

"Now, I've been thinking that, since this place here," with a wave of his hand toward the pottery, "seems to have meant about the same to you as it does to me,—it's only fair that I keep you on."

He paused, and Celia drew a deep sigh of relief.

“But it’s hardly right to keep you at what you were doing when you’ve got all that artistic ability. My proposition is this. I’ll lend you the money to run over to the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, where I’m pretty sure you can get the right sort of training. Then you can come back here and work out the loan. Or, if you get a chance at something bigger than this, I won’t keep you here. That’ll be up to you, just so you repay the loan.”

Celia’s eyes were fixed on his, fascinated.

“You may sign some notes,” Mr. Vandever’s cool voice went on, “with interest at the regular rate.”

His eyes met hers squarely. “A business man expects interest for money loaned,” he said, and added, “And he’s usually pretty sure of the investment before he sinks his money in it.”

“And you think,” Celia said slowly, “that I’ve the ability—to learn ——”

“Yes. The ability to learn, and the character to take up those notes when they’re due. You’ll notice I’m not asking for any surety.” He felt in one pocket and pulled out a bunch of papers. “This is surety enough for me,” holding them up. “I did peep into those notes of yours that you asked me to send you, as you said they weren’t love-notes. They convinced me that the girl who made them has the intelligence and the determination that’s needed for

success. And now, if it's all right with Stornoff and the folks here, we'll leave the party and go over to the old house and fix up the papers; that is, if you're willing to accept my offer."

"Now, see here, Mr. Vandever," Mrs. Clementine Carson exclaimed, pushing through the circle that had formed about them, "If Celia's got to go traipsing off to Europe to learn to make funny faces and people out of mud, I guess it's my place to supply the money and not yours, especially as you've paid me more now for that house than it was worth. Though why she can't settle down to being a nice, independent old-maid school-teacher is beyond me. Seems to me it's a lot more elevating and refined to learn to teach the little live beings that's already on this earth, than it is to make dumb faces and people out of mud. It's my opinion there's no higher calling than the teaching profession, unless it's the ministry. But I reckon if that's what she's set to do, it's no use to go on pining about what can't be helped. But while I got that money, there's no reason for strangers ——"

"I *won't* take your money, Aunt Clem, and there's no need of discussing it!" Celia said with vim. "You've more than repaid me for what Uncle Fred lost, and you and Uncle Steve will need all of it!"

Her eyes traveled from one to another of the little circle, and she saw that each was waiting anxiously

for her decision. She wondered if any of them could guess how momentous that decision was to her. Ted was scowling. She knew he resented the fact that she had refused his parents' offer and was about to accept one from a person little more than a stranger. Sally was expectant; and Celia, with an inward smile, guessed how certain Sally was of her decision. Mr. Vandever appeared coolly waiting, but she imagined that he would deeply resent a refusal. Rich men love to be philanthropic, and his offer could be interpreted as nothing else than philanthropy, even though she repaid with interest every penny of his loan. Her aunt was indignant, she knew, that she should consider, even for a moment, allowing others to do for her what should by right be her aunt's privilege. Old Jared seemed uneasy at what the decision might be. He coughed into a blue handkerchief, fidgeted uneasily, then said:

"I never figured, Celia, when I said what I did a while back, that Mr. Vandever had any intentions of going in for that fancy 'arty' stuff, though I don't know as he'd find better clay anywhere for it than right here in his pits. But since that's his intentions, I reckon you'd be right smart foolish not to make the most of his offer. It's what I'd do if I was in your shoes."

She thanked him with a smile, then turned to Mr. Vandever, an anxious light in her eyes.

"If I could be *certain* that I have the ability—" her face alight with earnestness and speculation.

"We can't be certain about anything in this life," he returned. "I wasn't certain that this land held potter's clay, either, but I had faith in my belief and I spent my last dollar to find out. You're like this bit of land, girl, and if I've got faith in your ability and in you, that ought to be sufficient proof ——"

"Oh, thank you—for that!" she broke in hurriedly, her eyes shining.

But when she saw the disapproval on her brother's face and he exclaimed, "It's my place, Celia, to help you, not his! Mine or your aunt's." She said quickly, "No, it isn't Ted. Mr. Vandever believes in my ability. He knows to a certain extent what I can do. You and Aunt Clem —— I'd be trading on your love. I can't do that."

"Perhaps you're right, Celia," with new admiration in his eyes, "but it will make Mother and Father rather sad to know what they've lost, to say nothing of my own disappointment. You know I've been counting a lot on our being together again. But I suppose our consolation will lie in letting the world know you're my sister."

"Oh, but that's just what you can't do!" she exclaimed in such quick distress that he eyed her strangely. "There's no need for any one to know.

It's enough to have found you—to be able to see you—to know that you're somewhere, thinking of me—caring a little. You've your work, Julian, and I've mine. We could be friends, perhaps, if they're willing ——”

“Friends? I guess we will be friends! And how are we to prevent the truth's being known? The folks at Inglenook are quite excited about the matter, especially the little Duval girl.”

“Oh, but I'm sure they'll abide by our wishes in the matter.”

Sally, who had been silent with apparent effort, now burst forth as she hung on Julian's arm. “I meant to tell you, Celia! Angela begged me to say how sorry she was for being unkind to you. She was almost in tears. She said she'd always loved you, and she was so glad to know you're Julian's sister.”

Celia's eyes took on a far-seeing look. “I—I always loved Angela,” she said, “until —— And I guess I always shall—in a way—for I owe a lot to the Duvals. I don't suppose I'll ever stop being grateful to them.”

She meant it, for she knew it was true. The Duvals *had* meant a lot to her. She could never forget how devotedly she had loved them. Though she could not define the exact state of her feelings towards them just then, she knew that, where love is once given, the memory remains. She would al-

ways be a little richer for having loved Angela, though she knew she could never again resurrect that blind worship she had once given her. And she was honest enough to know that Angela could not be blamed for the gulf of circumstances that lay between them.

Mr. Vandever broke into her musings.

“Do I understand, then, that my offer is accepted?”

CHAPTER XXVII

AN ANSWER

BEFORE Celia could respond her aunt broke in hurriedly:

“It’s just not fair, Mr. Vandever, to rush her so fast. Celia’s had a hard day, I know, and from what I gathered from this talk, she’s been considerably upset, or she wouldn’t have run off from you folks like she did. And now this party, and you all bursting in on her and demanding the privilege of sending her off to Europe and expecting a sensible answer! I just say it’s too much. To my way of thinking, you’d best forget the matter now, and sit down and have some ice cream and cake and some good cold lemonade, and maybe a dance or two later, and then go home with me for the rest of the night, or morning, rather, and maybe after you all have had some sleep, your heads will be some clearer and more apt to make sensible decisions, ’cause it seems to me there’ll be a lot of planning to do if Celia’s going clear to Europe to stay nobody knows how long!”

And to Celia's look of wonder she responded saucily, "I 'spect it won't hurt Mr. Vandever to sleep in our spare room, seein' as he's slept many a night in that house before. And as for Sally," her eyes twinkling at the girl so obviously delighted at her suggestion, "it'll do her good to know how poor folks live, though I reckon she'll find sleeping in your bed with you just about as comfortable as her own, if you try to keep on your own side. That's one thing I always favored above everything—good mattresses. There's nothing like a good night's rest to start a person on his day's work. And as for this Julian Strassman person, who don't seem to realize I'm his own great-aunt as well as Celia's, well, I guess the front-room floor will just about be good enough for him! Though there *is* a couch."

The shout of laughter that arose at this brought Julian in some shame to her side.

"Have I had a chance, Aunt Clem?" he demanded laughingly, leaning over her and looking reproachfully into her eyes. "But just to show you how agreeable I can be ——" He planted a resounding kiss on her flushed and wrinkled cheek, and then stood back and smiled upon her. "I've liked you ever since I talked to you on the 'phone and you ordered me to mind my own business and leave Celia's alone! And now lead me to the ice cream. I never have had my fill yet!"

At which there was another hearty laugh.

Although Celia's aunt insisted that she postpone her decision till morning, there was no doubt in Celia's mind about what that decision would be, and she found a chance before long to tell Mr. Vandever so.

He nodded his approval and said, "I admire people who can make decisions promptly."

After that, she moved about as in a dream, scarcely daring to think that it was all true—Sally dancing with old Jared Stornoff; Ted taking a violin from one of the men and playing, as only he could play it, their dearly beloved "Souvenir," that wonderfully sweet, half-sad tune so inextricably woven through her dearest memories; Mr. Vandever dancing an old-fashioned schottische with Aunt Clem. Later all of them were in Aunt Clem's little house, talking of all that had happened to Celia and to Ted since that day when life separated them; laughing over the book in which Celia had set down her childhood experiences for Ted; then again sober at some quaint revelation of the love the small girl held for the brother whose whereabouts she did not know.

Finally, yawning unembarrassed, they scattered to settle down for the night.

But strangest of all to Celia, after the endless confidences and whispered plans for the future, was to find Sally beside her in her own bed.

It was unbelievable, she told herself, as she sniffed unconsciously the scent of the honeysuckle drifting in to them on the night air, that Sally should be there. She aroused herself once, to make sure, and leaned over on her elbow, staring at the still figure, which turned with a tired little sigh and whispered:

“I—forgot—to tell you, Celia —— The thing I love—most about you is—not your talent, but your having—the courage—to—be—yourself.”

Celia made no response, but her heart sang. And long after Sally was asleep she lay there musing. “The courage to be yourself.” Then after a time she said to herself depreciatingly, “As though I were wholly responsible!”

As she stared through the vine-wreathed window at the stars glimmering faintly overhead, she wondered if God, wherever He was, were not rejoicing with her in her happiness.

Somehow He seemed closer now than He had ever been before, even when she had been so discouraged and needed Him so badly. Surely, she thought, it pleased Him when the work of His hands came safely through the fires of circumstance, not hardened and embittered by the ordeal, but a little more generous, a little more grateful to those responsible for the process; just as old Jared was pleased when his work came perfect from the ovens.

As she lay thinking of Him, she seemed to vision

Him faintly as the Great Potter He had so often been called, bending lovingly over His wheel, in His eyes something of old Jared, something of Aunt Clem, something of Sally, something of Ted, something of Mr. Vandever, and—yes—something, too, of Angela; for was not some part of Him in each of them, just as some part of any creator appears in his work?

Then sleep descended unexpectedly, catching and preserving the contented, dreamy smile which her new conception of Him had brought to her countenance.

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