

THE WINTER
OF DISCONTENT

By JAMES FRANCIS BARRETT



Class PZ 3

Book B2761

Copyright N^o Wi

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT

copy 2

THE WINTER OF DISCONTENT

BY
JAMES FRANCIS BARRETT

AUTHOR OF
"THE LOYALIST"



P. J. KENEDY & SONS
NEW YORK

Copy 2

PZ3

B 2761

Wv

Copy 2

Copyright, 1923
P. J. KENEDY & SONS
Printed in U. S. A.

JAN 10 '24

R

© CIA 766740

no 2

TO THE MEMORY OF
MY
Father and Mother

PREFACE

THIS is the story of an egoist.

If she were less concerned about herself the story might never have been written.

She is not a heroine, for she has too many faults. Just a simple, ordinary person, imaginative, fretful, visionary, querulous. Circumstances envelop her, and she is incapable of surmounting them. When the crisis comes she learns that she has to be made over. Of course you will lose patience with her, until you remember that you yourself have been culpable of the same silly, nonsensical faults. Don't close the book and console yourself with the thought that she is impossible. She is a type, and her likeness may be found in every community in the country—in Gopher Prairie, Zenith, Shefford, and New York.

We prefer to read only those books that portray our best sides, for the seductive consolation they afford. But some of the people we meet with in books we seldom encounter in real life. It is stimulating to see ourselves as we really are, however unpleasant it may be to have our shortcomings characterized, our conceits exposed, our selfish appetites revealed. It teaches us

the need of disciplining our wills, our affections, our minds.

Edith Colman is only a type.

No one hopes to imitate her.

But Nature sometimes rhymes her children.

THE WINTER OF DISCONTENT

I

WITH a mournful sigh Edith Colman threw herself on the sofa near her dressing-table and closed her eyes in languor. On her face was a look of petulance.

It was only eight o'clock, but already the night seemed terribly long, lonesome, and intolerable. Outside, the cold winter wind blew fierce blasts through the trees, making them strain and crack. Snow was piled up on the sidewalks, while scores of shovels beat nervous staccatos in an effort to clear it off. Snow covered the roads like a blanket, where noisy motor cars droned and sputtered as they endeavored to force a way through it. All day long it had stormed, and the massive firmament of clouds threw down a mantle of gloom. To add to the lack of cheer in the room, a dim light burned on the dresser and cast a dull glow about the place. Patches of shade swelled beyond the bed and out into the hallway, while a solitary strip of doubtful brightness crept up the stairs from the entrance hall where the vestibule light was turned on. The house was shrouded in somber stillness, save for

the melancholy sounds filtering in from the outside, and Edith, pensive and sad, waited for her husband, worrying over his protracted delay.

Ordinarily he was in the habit of informing her of the cause of any unexpected tardiness, but of late he had grown conspicuously careless about this important detail. For some reason she could not rid herself of the notion that all was not well with him. Visions of crowded trolley cars, caught in the jam of traffic, projected themselves in the dim light around her, and she saw his unconscious form taken from the wreckage and removed to a hospital, where he kept calling for her in vain. On the other hand she was sadly aware that he was no longer the boyish lover of old. He had become tepid in his attentions, careless about many things. It was this marked indifference to the ordinary urbanities of domestic life which she had grown to notice more and more of late in his conduct. The thought saddened her, for she deemed it unfair that she should be forced to worry without costing him a thought. She would not mind so much if she were sure he meant it, but it was the carelessness of it that annoyed her. He was so good in many ways that she could not help forgiving him, but there were times when he was shockingly impossible.

From a corner of the room, partly concealed in the shadowy substance, and on the silence of the wintry night, came the sound of merry laughter. It served to dispel, for an instant, the solemn sadness that pervaded the room and the haunting visions that floated through it. Edith roused herself.

“Babs! What are you doing?”

“Nothing!” That was the usual reply. Babs was always doing “nothing” whenever she was called to account. Better to be convicted on evidence than to accuse one’s self needlessly! To-night she was but playing with her doll.

Barbara Colman was five years old, but she looked seven. She was precocious, and wanted it clearly understood by all that she had already passed from infancy to girlhood. She was never anybody’s “little girl.” She was just “girl.” She did not play with everybody in the neighborhood, only with the “nice people.” She was going to visit France when she grew up and meet the relatives of Eudoxia, Miss Wheaton’s maid, and acquire an education just like hers!

“Mother!” she cried now, leaning on the couch.

“Now, Babs! You mustn’t bother mother. Can’t you see she is tired?”

“I am tired, too!” came the artful reply, as she climbed into her mother’s lap.

“Well! Come, then! Lay your head down and go to sleep.”

“But I don’t want to sleep.”

“You don’t? What do you want?”

“Just to rest!”

A few minutes’ silence—and then:

“Mother?”

“Yes, dear?”

“Can I have some candy?”

“Can I?”

“Yes, mother!”

4 THE WINTER OF DISCONTENT

“Didn’t I tell you nice people never say ‘Can I?’ ”

No answer.

“Didn’t I?”

“Yes, ma’am,” falteringly.

“Now what should you say?”

Signs of mental distress, followed by efforts to rise and depart.

“Now, Bab, you must answer mother. What did I tell you to say when you asked for something?”

“I dunno!” shamefully intoned.

“Didn’t I tell you to use ‘May I’ when asking permission?”

Head nods in reserved manner.

“Now—say it correctly.”

“May I have some candy?”

“No, Babs, there is no more candy!”

“Why?”

“Because there isn’t. You ate it.”

More silence, during which time the wind shrieked pitilessly and the windows trembled in fear.

“Mother, where is daddy?”

“I don’t know, dear.”

“When is he coming home?”

“I don’t know that, either.”

“Where is he?”

“At the office, I presume.”

“Will he be home to-night?”

“Yes, indeed.”

Fell a protracted silence broken only by the howling of the wind.

Satisfied that there was no more to be said on the

subject and content with the information that daddy would soon be home (with another fresh box of candy and a new story like the one he told her last night about the Happy Beggar) Babs settled herself comfortably beside her mother and drowsed off. Edith looked at the peaceful child and began to stroke the flaxen head.

“Why is it,” she mused to herself, “that men occupy so large a part in women’s hearts when they themselves continually put their home, their children, their wives, their domestic affairs in the remotest suburb of their own?” No, perhaps she did not mean it just that way but there was such a difference between the sexes in this respect. She could feel it, if she could not describe it. Woman, it seemed, gave her all to the man and to the home. Men never did that. They were too busy to devote themselves to such things. They could manage and direct great corporations, superintend and construct vast structures, shape and define the policies of empires, but they didn’t know the first thing about a home or what it meant to bring up a family. They had reputations to acquire, business to attend to, ambitions to gratify. When they married it was usually for the purpose of setting up a domicile, where they could repair after the day’s toil; but they were unwilling to sacrifice in its behalf any of the big things of life, business, politics, fraternal organizations, stocks and bonds. Women, when they married, gave their all. Men made judicious reservations. How one-sided! It seemed to Edith that women always got the worst of the bargain. Poor Babs! She pitied her

for being a girl. Some day she would grow up and surrender herself to a man, and, the romance over, wonder why she did it.

She herself had done it, and now, after six or seven years, she was wondering why. It was not because she was unhappy; "discontented" would better describe her condition. Little by little she had grown to feel that her married life had lost all flavor of romance, owing, in great measure, to the many incompatibilities which shattered mutual confidence and which neither husband nor wife seemed capable of smoothing over. It was true, he was her inferior in many things. She had not reckoned with that. "Why do you think of marrying a man like Robert Colman?" her mother had begged her. But she was headstrong.

For Robert Colman was not born to wealth, neither did he command position in life. He was an ordinary young man with an extraordinary aptitude for doing things well. He meant to succeed in a world that smiles upon those who make the most of what they have. The first and only employment he ever sought, after completing his high school course, was in the office of an attorney-at-law, where he applied himself with such assiduity that he was enabled to pass the examination for the State Bar at the termination of his apprenticeship. A year later he was taken into partnership by his mentor, Judge Walsh, who from the start had evinced more than a passing interest in the young man. He was honest and courageous, for which reasons he won the respect and esteem of the men of influence in the city of Shefford. He was industrious, and his name

soon became known in the community. It was due to these qualities that Edith had, in the beginning, found herself attracted by him. He was different from most of the young chaps she had known, even though he was poor and of ordinary parentage. There were other traits that presented him to her imagination in refreshing contrast to the men with whom she had spent many hours of useless comradeship all her life.

"I know we are going to be happy," she declared to him just before their marriage, "and I don't care what people say."

"What can they say?" he asked, a little abashed; "have I done anything to make myself unworthy of you?"

"No, of course not; they are only jealous of you. You are different from the rest, you have worked hard for what you have. It means more, doesn't it, to have to work for what you want?"

"If you infer that I cannot measure up to your accomplishments, I agree. You have been blessed with opportunities which were not vouchsafed to me. I could not enter college, much as I should have liked to, and I never had the time to meet people socially. But what I have is yours if you are willing to share it with me. You can help me immeasurably by what you have, and in this way supplement my deficiencies."

The bargain was honest. Their marriage was not going to be any selfish demonstration of individual tastes and preferences; it was to be built on solid soil—the soil of service, sacrifice, and cooperation. There would be no master or mistress in their home. Author-

ity would be fairly divided. Tenderness and forbearance were to be mutually observed. It was to be a union of opposite excellences such as every boy and girl dreams of in the springtime, when hearts are free and reason knows no reasons, a form of partnership governed by the self-same standards, with everything for each other and everything commonly shared.

None of those shocking modern notions respecting feminine freedom, such as Edith had read about in college, would be found in her home. She had never quite approved of the theories concerning the social and economic independence of women. Others might find them novel and charming. She could not. What if her education was superior to her husband's, she was still but complementary to him! That was the law of creation. Woman as man's equal is not and never can be woman. She is nobler in some respects, when measured by her own standards, but she is a complete entity in herself, individually distinct from and dissimilar to man. Her duty was manifest: in her lay the power to make the comforts of the home, to make the most of the finer arts she had studied and mastered, devoting her time and energy to the advising and comforting of her husband.

She began her married life with the finest ideals. In the years that followed she succeeded in outgrowing most of them. True, she accepted the responsibilities of wifedom and motherhood and met them faithfully, but there were bad moments. Rising in the morning to prepare breakfast on the gas-stove in the kitchenette where there was scarcely room to turn around, bathing

and dressing the baby and trying to keep her still while she washed dishes and put them away, setting in order the things of the house, sweeping and dusting rooms, ordering the meats and groceries, mending and caring for the clothes—not much romance here! Nothing but tedious monotony and endless existence for days and weeks and months—and nothing better to hope for; and no choice but to keep on. The house itself annoyed her; it was one of those attached houses, common enough to all cities, small and stuffy. Poor as it was, its maintenance kept them continually on the edge of their means. There was no semblance of privacy in these thin-walled apartments, where conversation could be plainly heard through plaster and boards. Still, it had one attraction—it was fashionable to occupy these places, especially if they happened to be located on the Avenue. Everybody worshiped the Avenue. It was the rendezvous of the upper set, and to dwell there lent one a somewhat exaggerated importance and distinction.

The city of Shefford was noted for the number of its ultra-fashionable families, the real or pretended progeny of the early New England settlers. Their high lineage seemed to guarantee them a sort of god-like existence. There was no community, not even Pilgrim Plymouth, that honored its early traditions more scrupulously than did this same city, whose very atmosphere was charged with that reserve and decorum so typical of early Puritanism. Its people were stately and supercilious, as if the entire burden of Colonial history was placed upon their shoulders. It had its

exclusive sets, some of which could trace back an unbroken lineage to John Alden and Priscilla Allen, the eighth generation now vaunting the proud mixture of that blood. It had its time-honored burial-places (though these were unkempt and forlorn often), where children, halting on their way from school, loved to trace with their tiny fingers the obscure biographies on the soft brownstone slabs. It had its old buildings, some of them designed by the great Bulfinch himself, and lately restored to their original lines by philanthropic citizens; its old churches, with the identical pews in which the patriots were wont to worship; its shrines and landmarks in the midst of commerce and industry, their antique fronts adorned with bronze tablets commemorative of sites and achievements. Small wonder its people affected an air of distinction and segregation. They were woven into Colonial history by their genealogy; in them the present and the past met and kissed.

It was this upper set, with its luxury and pretense, that enticed Edith Colman, and tempted her. She became impatient with her lot and felt acutely envious of the lot of others. She longed to be noticed by these exclusive men and women, and counted it a real favor to be numbered in their company. She tried to imitate them in everything, from smoking cigarettes—though this shocked her—to owning a summer camp. But smoking made her sick, and she had not the means to measure up to her ambitions. Her only claim to exclusiveness lay in the solitary fact of her living on the Avenue. Robert was but an ordinary lawyer, which, in a city like Shefford where office buildings fairly

teemed with students of the courts, meant that he could never earn more than a pittance. What if he was honest and sincere in his dealings with others or more intelligent than the average—such talents were not marketable commodities. The honest lawyer seemed to be always poverty-stricken. She could see no prospect of his ever earning enough money to give her the position in life she desired, unless some beneficent spirit, laden with everything from honors to wealth, winged its way to her door. Social position fired her fancy. But poverty called her back to earth and set her securely within the narrow walls of her home.

As she reached this point in her retrospection, the front door opened and she heard her husband's familiar cough in the vestibule. She leaned back and drew aside the curtain to peer into the night. The storm had passed, and a pale golden moon filled the heavens, lighting up the fragments of clouds hurrying on. Then she bent over her sleeping child. Poor Babs! How peaceful and happy she looked! She had been too tired to wait for "daddy" and greet him as he came upstairs.

"What in the world happened?" was Edith's first impatient question. "Where have you been until this hour—without any supper?"

"What time is it?" he returned, mechanically. "It isn't late."

"You'd think it late if you had to sit here alone all day long. Did you have any supper?"

"Yes; a couple of sandwiches. I don't care for anything."

He passed in front of her indifferently, and began

to remove his coat. The lines on his face, the deep furrows that cleaved his forehead and cheeks, were unusually prominent, and his eyes were swollen. It was evident he had had a trying day and as a consequence was none too cheerful. Bab awoke, and called to him.

"Hello, kidlets!" he cried, catching her and tossing her into the air. "Fell asleep waiting for the old man, didn't you? Hey! You're not mad at me, too, are you?"

Babs giggled enthusiastically.

"Any one would be angry at you," Edith replied, in piqued accents. "Where were you? You haven't told me yet."

"At the office! Good Lord! Where else would you think I'd be in a storm like this?"

"How should I know? You might have called up and told me."

"I had a thousand things to think of. Never gave the 'phone a thought until now. I suppose I might have called, at that," he added.

"I never met any one like you, so downright indifferent and careless. It wouldn't bother you in the least, I suppose, whether this house kept or not, unless you happened to come home and find it gone. Then you would wonder what happened! You think of nothing from morning to night but that office. While you are home you are talking about it, or you have a pile of books under your arm and you shut yourself up in your room like a hermit. There was a time when you would call up occasionally to inquire how things were going, but no more."

"I am sorry, Edith. You are quite right; I should have called you, but I expected to be leaving every minute. It was not the storm that kept me, but two or three men in conference. They didn't get home either, or think of calling up their wives; so I suppose they are hearing about it now."

"I suppose I shouldn't care—but you have grown so careless and apathetic. There was a time when I thought nothing could come between us."

"And nothing has——"

"A thousand things! Business! Politics! Whatever do you want mixing up in politics for? There is something suggestive of cheap advertising, questionable methods, dirty apparel in a politician. I wish you would give it up."

"Give it up!" he echoed. "Why, Edith, you do not understand. I am not getting into this game for the excitement of it, but for what I can get out of it. It means everything to-day to keep in the public eye. It is a matter of business with most of us. Call it cheap advertising, dirty work—I know what it is. But I have to do it. Judge Walsh used to say, 'Get into politics, boy, or join the National Guard. It's another way of getting better acquainted.' "

The blood rose to Edith's temples, for she had to give in to him again. She felt that she knew better, yet she was unable to convince him, so adroit was he in the use of words. Before he came in she was exasperated to the breaking point, but this passed away. He was so frank about everything—the storm, the conference, the forgetfulness—that she could find no rea-

son for not excusing him. For the moment she was not even conscious of the causes of what had happened; there was another matter to engage his attention.

"I hope you have made no plans for to-morrow night," she ventured like one who needed courage to say what was in her mind.

"To-morrow night! Why?"

There it was again; always replying to a question by asking another. How could she ever get on with one who argued this way?

"We have been invited to the theater."

"Indeed!"

"By the Wheatons. Wasn't it nice of them?"

"Nice! For what?"

"To invite us. There are hundreds who would give their souls to be seen with the Wheatons. They really count in this town."

"They did once. The old man was a power. Nat Wheaton owned the city of Shefford once upon a time. He made and unmade more men than you and I know."

"If you mean politics I don't know what you are talking about. To-day the Wheatons are the real leaders of the city. Their name alone is worth much—and to be seen with them is a privilege."

It was kind enough of them, thought Robert Colman, but inconsequential insofar as privilege was concerned. Social leaders made little impression on him, and people with a pedigree reminded him of a horse show, where gallant steeds, groomed and sleek, waited attentively in the various stalls for their accustomed pettings. He had a poor opinion of wealthy parasites.

"There is another reason I am anxious to go," she continued. "Nazimova is playing Ibsen."

"Who is Ibsen?"

"A Norwegian, and one of the greatest dramatists of modern times. And they say Nazimova does him beautifully."

"A problem play, I suppose?"

"A Doll's House—yes, I suppose you would call it a problem play. I read it in college, but I have never seen it presented. I have the book here if you would care to run through it."

"I do not think I can go——"

"Why not?"

"Well, I have an important appointment for to-morrow night."

"I never saw one like you. Don't you want to be seen with the Wheatons? It is very seldom I ask you to take me anywhere——"

"Don't be so foolish! It just happens I can't go, that's all. There is a committee meeting to-morrow night and I can't stay away. I might have postponed it had I known this earlier."

"Why didn't you call up, and I would have told you."

"Good Lord!" he ejaculated and turned away.

"Bert, I am going whether you take me or not. In fact I have already accepted. I don't see why I should be compelled to sit home alone just because you find it impossible to come with me. People are getting away from that idea more and more. It is not at all unusual

nowadays to find wives going out to places of amusement without their husbands.”

“Let’s leave it at that. If you don’t mind I won’t. I suppose when you tell them——”

“Oh, no! You can tell them.”

He left the room.

II

EDITH could not quite forgive her husband that refusal, and spoke to him little the next morning. Breakfast was a dull meal, for neither manifested the remotest interest in the other. Robert Colman seemed to be conscious only of his strenuous program for the day—at least he so impressed her—while she, on the other hand, smarted under a thousand stings of spitefulness as a result of this disturbance of her plans. It meant a great deal to her to be seen with the Wheatons that evening, more than she could possibly impress upon him. To have to decline the honor and thereby lose the advantage she had gained because of the caprice of one who put his own interests before everything else was bad enough; but to have the Wheatons suspect—they who viewed everything with fastidious eyes—that her husband was one of those banal creatures who saw nothing elevating or inspiring in the drama was humiliating in the extreme.

He had seldom met the Wheatons socially—at least not often enough to form any opinion, and consequently he could not claim to know them. On one occasion they met in the Park. It was one day the preceding summer, during the Flower Show. Bert naturally fell in with Kelso, and together they began a tour of the gardens. Edith fancied they were getting on splendidly,

until he told her afterwards of his impressions of the man. He said he did not like his annoying habit of asking so many personal questions; it seemed to him that the fellow was a prig, one who was pleading ignorance to everything for the shrewd purpose of drawing another out. And since then he had avoided Kelso Wheaton whenever possible.

"I think you do not want to meet them at all," she said now, tartly.

"Why, yes, I do," he replied. "They are all right as far as I know. What makes you say that?"

She looked at him with steady eyes. It was almost a menacing look. He did not flinch.

"You don't think I am inventing a pretext for staying away?" he continued.

"I don't know. Some men are capable of anything. You told me you thought Mr. Wheaton was a snob——"

"Did I? I should not have said that. How many times have I met him? Only once or twice! Certainly not often enough to form an opinion of him."

"Nevertheless, you are prejudiced against him."

"If I am, it is because he is not our kind."

"What of that?"

"He doesn't notice us because of our equality. The difference of interest and ambition that exists between us is too great to admit any degree of friendship. He has inherited position and wealth and spends most of his time indulging in the luxuries of the rich—clubs, sports, travels. We are not in the same class."

"Well," she sighed, "I am not so fastidious. We

do not have to be in their class it seems, for they have made important advances to us already. It is no small honor to be asked to share their box with them this evening, and I think them pretty decent.”

It was in college that Edith had first met Evelyn Wheaton, but they did not become friends there. Notwithstanding the fact that both girls were from the same city, neither of them knew the other until introduced on the campus. Edith had often heard of Evelyn, of course, for everybody in Shefford knew her by reputation as the daughter of Nat Wheaton, the sewing-machine man. For over fifty years the Wheaton Manufacturing Company was the leading industry in Shefford, and for the last twenty-five years the name of Wheaton had been one to conjure with. Its proud possessor dictated the policy of the city as mayor for ten years and that of his party until the day of his death seven years before. He had wielded an influence that smacked of absolutism. He made and unmade men in a single day. He drove the Tramway Company into the hands of a receiver when they refused to accept transfers from another line. His friends mourned him for days and lined the curb as his cortège passed, while his enemies, fearful of him even in death, secluded themselves in doorways or hid behind their shutters, and secretly rejoiced.

Shortly before his death he had disposed of his interest in the corporation that bore his name, and retired to West Shefford, where he built a magnificent home. Far back from the highway it loomed, a pretentious

structure of brick and limestone, an object of interest, having little in common with the abodes which stood more modestly on either side of the road. The setting of the Wheaton mansion left nothing to be desired in the way of privacy. It was an artistic creation, notable even for affluent Shefford. Behind lay wide level meadows where the sluggish Pequabuck overflowed in time of freshet, and where the glimmering shadows lay half asleep between the windows of the house and the distant hills. Before the domes and towers, the city glistened and glinted in the afternoon sunshine. Main Street crossed in front, at the terminus of an avenue shaded by giant poplars, and leading from the front door. Forest-clad hills and open fields enveloped the countryside, where herds of cattle grazed peacefully in the midst of veritable gardens of color. In the summer, the windows looked out upon hills and vales aglow with red maple and willow and acres and acres of flowers scattered thickly in graceful disorder over a verdant carpet; in the winter the softly falling snows afforded another panorama of unrivaled beauty, its whiteness broken only by the sturdy hills climbing skyward, the pines and cedar-bushes making great, black spots along their downy sides.

Of the three children who fell heir to the Wheaton estate, Kelso was the best known. The other two, Evelyn and Doris, were plain, unaffected girls of simple tastes and gentle manners, who shunned the public stare. But their brother liked the world's applause. He was popular, and claimed membership in every club worth while in the city. He could relate an anecdote

with pungent humor and his anecdotes were always apposite. He played a good game of golf, was an enthusiastic motorist, loved fishing and hunting, and of late had begun to take an active interest in aviation. His charity, too, was liberal, and the hospital campaigns found him not only a generous contributor, but as an earnest of good faith, a tireless worker. He was looked up to, and admired, his amiable disposition, his kindly smile, combining to make one feel always at ease.

Edith was glad to learn he was to be included in the party, for, her husband's opinion to the contrary, she had always entertained a striking regard for Kelso Wheaton. He was ready to add interest to any occasion with a gayety that was infectious. Besides, he was polite and gallant, knew the worth-while people and their histories. This was something, for it offered to Edith's mind a portrait of luxury which she loved.

"You won't be home for supper, I suppose?" she remarked, as her husband rose from the breakfast-table.

"No," he replied, "I hardly think so. It is unfortunate for this to happen. If you wish I can meet you after the theater——"

"You need not bother. I expect to get home all right. You might wait up for me. I'm going to leave Babs with the Dahills."

When she prepared to dress for the theater her heart beat as if there were some new ferment at work within her. Not in a long while had she been so happy. For the first time since the night of her Commencement

clothes meant something to her. How extremely well she would look—and the sort of impression she intended to create was a vision that seemed very real. As she stood before her dresser putting a last touch to her lovely hair she gazed at herself with satisfaction, and with the knowledge that she had not lost any of her beauty. In her evening gown of black and jet, admirably suited to her brunette type, her arms and shoulders revealed themselves as if cut from Parian marble. Her face, in contrast, was flushed and warm, alive with excitement. She patted her hair and smiled with delight.

“I do hope Evelyn and Doris will not spread themselves,” she murmured, as she fastened her corsage bouquet of sweet peas. “They have such elegant things!”

The bell sounded in the hall and put an end to her reverie. She quickened her movements, seized her cloak, and threw it about her shoulders. She recognized Kelso’s ring. He had come to escort her himself.

“Oh, I say!” he greeted her as she opened the door. “You do look stunning! Too bad about Mr. Colman! What! Too bad!”

“How do you do?” she returned pleasantly and offered him her hand. “Yes, I ’phoned his regrets to Evelyn this morning. The invitation came so suddenly and unexpectedly that he found it impossible to attend. A committee—central committee—or something—I don’t know. Are the girls waiting?”

“Yes; they wouldn’t come in. We have other com-

pany. Mr. and Mrs. Liggett of New York. Splendid folks! Makes a nice little party of six."

She thought as he spoke that it was just as well Bert had found it impossible to postpone his meeting.

"What a glorious night!" she exclaimed, as she stepped out.

Meeting the Liggetts proved easy enough. Mr. Liggett was quite elderly—over fifty, certainly—and she mistook him for Mrs. Liggett's father at first. Betty—as she heard her called—was an attractive woman, young and comely. A strange alliance.

As Betty welcomed her graciously, Edith smiled back without any sign of embarrassment. "Are you a lover of Ibsen, too?" she inquired.

"Crazy about him!" Mrs. Liggett replied. "He is so subtle."

"Will you ever forget 'Ghosts'?" Edith reminded Evelyn. "Wasn't it horrible?"

"And what a time we had putting it on!"

"I wonder how Nazimova does Ibsen?" said Doris. "They say she is splendid."

"Is she a good-looker? That suits me," remarked Mr. Liggett, in a squeaky tone.

At the theater they were soon lost in the crowd that pushed its way confusedly into the foyer. What makes any crowd so boisterous and riotous? They meet, push, and struggle like a swarm of ants assaulting a mole-hill, every one sensible of his own excellences alone, and fully determined never to be outstripped by the other. A selection from "The Bohemian Girl" was being played by the orchestra and Edith, in her

radiant joy, began to hum the air. Never had she seemed happier or more buoyant, and her face clearly showed it. Not even Mrs. Liggett in her lavish attire looked prettier or more attractive, and as she passed on the way to the box many turned to observe her. Pure delight this, a choice moment—to have the world turning to offer her attention and admiration! It served to complete her bliss. Everything was so wonderful! The immense theater (it had never seemed so immense before), the big curtain with the enormous figures painted upon it, the myriads of faces confronting her, row after row as far back as the eye could travel! For a moment she felt a twinge of self-consciousness as she stood against the brass rail, staring down into the audience, and she stepped back, allowing Kelso to relieve her of her wrap. He did it gracefully and she thanked him with a lovely smile.

She sat next to him in front of the others, and soon began to experience what it meant to have a man's undivided attention. He complimented her on her charming appearance, admired her sapphire ring, which he pronounced to be unusually fine. He reminded her of the first time they had met; he had never forgotten, he said, the blue dress she wore, and the reddish brown beads sewn all over it, like constellations in the sky. She was a pert little creature then, during those college days, and she had not permitted him to see much of her. The next thing he knew she had married and disappeared from sight. To-night was a jolly occasion, so like old times.

He agreed with her in everything. The question of

suffrage made the same appeal to him, on the ground that woman's place was no longer beside the kitchen stove but out in the world, shaping its policies with men; the League of Nations, a threat to our domestic isolation; the Foreign Policy of Mr. Wilson and its departure from our traditional usage; the influence of the younger school of fiction on the literature of the day.

"Do you know much about Ibsen?" she inquired.

"Not a great deal," he replied. "He is a Norwegian—dead now these dozen years. His social dramas have carried his fame throughout the world. A genius, I understand, but radical, immoral, and pessimistic. He is credited with giving the drama the impetus that has enabled it to reach its present high state."

"I must have read this 'Doll's House.' But I can't seem to remember the theme——"

"It concerns itself with the problem of marriage as a failure. In the play Ibsen sacrifices the individuality of the woman to that of the man. She is the Doll-Wife, who forges her husband's name to a legal document. The plot concerns her efforts to keep the matter a secret——"

"Oh, yes! I remember! And he discovers it——"

With this the lights grew dim. A hush settled over the house. They sat back to await the curtain and saw it rise on a room, plainly furnished. Nazimova, as Nora, entered from back stage carrying several parcels and humming gayly. They joined in the ovation.

Edith quivered with emotion as she followed Nora's

soul-torture through the varying scenes of the play. Helmar, the selfish husband, blind as a bat to his own shortcomings! For the moment Edith imagined herself to be Nora in the flesh and began to converse with her. "Would you, too, have recoiled from confessing this fact, even to your husband?" the flesh-person demanded of her. She thought, by way of reply, that she might have. "And would not you, too, have left in despair a situation that was so hopeless of settlement? What else could you do? Soon he will discover the letter in the box. What then? He will upbraid you for duplicity!" No, no, she thought, he will understand and forgive. He could not do otherwise.

But the third act came, and with it the climax. Nora's illusions vanish, when it dawns upon her that she has, all these years, been living in a doll's house, a lark, a squirrel, a playmate for her husband, but at no time his equal, his confidante, his mate. When Helmar reads the letter, the miracle she expected failed to occur. He upbraids her for her want of principle, and declares that she is no fit mother to bring up his children. Then she realizes what she has never comprehended before: they are not mated, they have never really understood each other, there never was any real love between them, there was no mutual intercourse, no self-sacrifice. And so in despair, she resolves to run away from him and his children—they were no longer hers—and leave them forever. The curtain descends as she goes out the door, her husband sinking into a nearby chair, his face in his hands, waiting for the miracle to happen. The picture was vivid, so vivid

that Edith half expected to meet the runaway wife as she left the theater.

During the dinner that followed Edith could scarcely bring herself to participate in the pleasantries of the occasion. A conflict of emotions pricked her mind. Nods and smiles showed approval of the evening's entertainment. All seemed to agree that it was very exciting. But Edith had left the theater and come to the dinner-table quivering with the thought that she had seen the artificiality and unreality of her own life vividly portrayed before her. She had never before felt the extent of the illusion that darkened her home. When Nora and Helmar faced each other, one on each side of the table, and set about to unravel the warp and weft of their lives' tapestry, which hitherto they had been viewing on the wrong side, it revealed to her her own life with poignant emphasis. Nora's declaration of independence was striking; it was flying in the face of orthodoxy, but there was no other way out of it unless—unless both of them buried their own characters, forgot their own personal pride and individuality, became subservient to the whims and eccentricities of the other. This was asking too much in this liberal age and, besides—was human nature capable of such complete reformation?

“Wasn't it surprising? It was over before I knew it!” exclaimed Betty Liggett.

“Wonder where Nora went?” chimed in her husband, prosaically. “Bet a million she'll be back before morning!”

“I don't think so. Helmar was impossible.”

"To be candid," said Evelyn, "I don't think that stuff does much good. It doesn't help any to advertise methods of escape from unhappy marriages——"

"Oh, well," Kelso rejoined, "it's only a play. Such dramatic episodes do not happen in every-day life. A play must have a climax to supply the thrill."

"Ibsen is too drastic," Evelyn went on. "The sore spots of our nature ought to be concealed. You cannot expose the truth at all times. Even modesty requires a certain amount of silence. Conduct is never justified by emotion."

"What else could she do?" Doris asked. "She waited for the miracle——"

"To happen; but there was no miracle," was Evelyn's reply.

Edith listened to the discussion, but ventured no opinion. A shudder ran over her. What if she were confronted with a similar situation? She did not know what she would do. Marriage was, after all, a great experiment, and it was only natural to suppose that some experiments turned out disastrously. What, then! Must two lives be spoiled for the sake of form? If Helmar was too blind to perceive his own selfish nature, must Nora be compelled to sacrifice her individuality for his sake? He was just as complacent at the end as in the beginning. He looked for no miracle. He could see only that he was right, and everybody else was wrong, and throughout the play he did not so much as try to understand what his wife was talking about. She was courageous to take the step she did. Few could have done it.

"What do you say if we drive out to the house," Kelso suggested. "There will be time for a little dancing."

"When?" Evelyn inquired.

"Now!"

"I don't dance," Mr. Liggett confided, "but I can sing."

"Oh, let's go!" Betty exclaimed.

"Got any stuff?" Mr. Liggett inquired again.

"Plenty! Will you come, Mrs. Colman?"

"Really, I think I must go home. I am sorry, but I told Bert to wait for me."

"Call him up and tell him you won't be home right away," proposed Kelso.

"I would not want to do that——"

"Oh, come, Edith! Kelso will drive you home. It will be all right," said Evelyn.

Edith hesitated. She knew what she ought to do, but she felt an irresistible impulse to yield to the Wheatons. To her this was the essence of adventure. Perhaps, too, she lacked the courage to refuse.

"You call him——" she suggested timidly.

"And tell him we are stealing his little wife for an hour or two," Doris amended, glancing at Edith to see the effect of her words.

She murmured her assent and Kelso stood up. He was not gone long and when he returned it was with the assurance that everything was satisfactory. Calling the waiter he asked for the check.

"Let's go!" he said then, and followed them out of the room.

III

“**I**F I am to act as head-waiter here, some of you transients have to help me,” Kelso declared as he removed his coat and started for the kitchen.

“What’ll it be? Horse’s neck?”

“Not for me, please,” protested Edith. It was the first independent assertion of the evening, but it proved to be only fluttering protest.

“Oh, go on!” Betty taunted. “One can’t hurt you. It’ll make you sleep better.”

“Little liniment for me,” squeaked Henry Liggett, and the head-waiter disappeared.

In the meantime some one started the phonograph, and Betty and Doris began to dance. The rugs were rolled up and piled in a heap in a corner. Edith moved out of the way of the dancers to the other side of the room, where stood an Empire sofa against the wall, beneath a Raphael Madonna, and sat down to watch the performance. But she soon found herself more interested in the tasteful furnishings and rich appointments about her. It was a large room, extending from the front of the house to the garden in the rear. The furnishings were rich, antique mahogany upholstered in rose corded silk and satin damask, the majority of the pieces being genuine antiques. From overhead the light filtered through decorated panels of

frosted glass built into the ceiling, which shed a soft glow over the white walls and polished floors. An open piano stood at one end and across the way was the main staircase, with mahogany rail and carved white enameled balustrades rising to a landing where a tall, antique clock ticked out its hourly appreciation of so attractive an environment. She looked at the clock. It was midnight. When had she been out of her own home at midnight?

There had been times when she could not have looked on at such a function as this without feeling conscious of being incapable of enjoying it, but to-night she really wanted to enter into these festivities. Heretofore her life had been dull and prosaic, with nothing of the unnatural or unconventional to startle or dazzle her, and the contrast which this moment afforded reminded her that she had been deprived of many recreations in her seclusion. These deprivations arose before her now with the ugliness of failure. These others knew how to enjoy themselves in an innocent way without violating any of the principles of decorum; they extracted enough amusement from the vanities of the world to make up for its miseries! Ordinarily she would have been shocked at her own silliness, but now this did not annoy her in the least. Of course some people would gasp at the thought of a midnight party, but they were the people of her own narrow and biased world. There was another set where people put on less pretense, yet where things moved at a faster pace, where everything was pitched in a higher key, where there was more good-nature, less rivalry, and keener

capacity for enjoyment. She was in the midst of it now; it tempted her with its tinsel draperies, its easy promiscuity, the while it taunted her with her simple and narrow outlook.

She recalled how her mother, hearing of some outrageous house-party in the West End where the guests indulged in dissolute dances until dawn, or played bridge all night and well into the next day, risking hundreds, perhaps thousands of dollars, exclaimed, "That's a set for you! And we are supposed to look up to them!" But this remembrance was not pleasant—it was too sweeping, too untrue. Even she, at one time, had been led to believe that the Country Club was a notorious place, where the wildest revels were frequently indulged in under the pretext of sport, where scandalous balls and hops were held at which young girls disported themselves wantonly, in which no person could claim membership unless he had money enough to cover up indecency. But these notions were all false.

They were not all indecent. Doris and Betty, stepping gracefully and modestly across the floor, were refined ladies. It was true that there were some who lived like profligates, some whose conduct and character clearly justified her mother's repugnance, but they were not peculiar to one class. In her own nondescript and unsophisticated world there were folks just as bad. She knew the Wheatons, she felt proud of their friendship. They did not snub her, or make her feel uncomfortable because of her inferior station. They made her acquainted with all their friends. Now they had invited

her to their house, and she found them the most agreeable of companions.

She paused in the midst of her reverie to watch Kelso, coming with a tray in his outstretched hands. Henry Liggett rose to meet him, and taking a couple of glasses brought one of them to her.

"Really, Mr. Liggett," she pleaded, "I don't care for any; not now, please."

"Don't be foolish! This will never blind you, nor any one else! Everybody is taking one. Don't be conspicuous."

He looked at her so kindly that she was encouraged to take it.

"Do you know," he said, smiling as he sat beside her, "I am glad you came to-night. There is something refreshing about you. Tell me, do you visit here regularly?"

"No, I have not been here often—at least for any length of time," she quickly corrected. "It is so hard for me to go anywhere. When one has a small child one has to stay pretty much at home."

"Ah! You have a child!"

"Yes."

"What greater happiness could you ask? A dear little one to brighten one's days! And to make you want to live for something!"

She pondered over this. "Yes, she is a dear," she said.

"Don't spoil her," he cautioned in his paternal way. Coming from his lips it sounded proper enough. "Don't let some one else bring her up for you, or form

her ideas for her. Make her your own, lest when she comes of age she will be forced to confess that she never knew you. Don't do that. She is yours. Watch her grow."

Edith found herself actively interested in this man. She took to him instantly. His humorously puckered eyes and smile-wrinkled face fascinated her, and made her feel at ease with him, to such an extent that she was curious. He had been married before, she had been told, and she wondered if he had any grown-up sons or daughters.

"Are you fond of children?" she asked, rather timidly venturing the question.

"Very!" he answered. "I never had any of my own but I am fond of them just the same."

Again she would have liked to ask him how long he had known the present Mrs. Liggett, but dared not. Presently, however, he said:

"Do you think it strange that an old man like me should want to marry the second time? I am sixty, although I look older. The reason is not far to seek. No one can understand what it means to get old with no one to comfort him, no children to manifest any interest in him in the evening of life. People ridicule an old codger seeking a young wife, but one would have to live through it to appreciate what loneliness means. I had a big house, all to myself. There were servants who came and went, but there was no one I could depend upon to fetch me a glass of water when I fell ill. That's the time you realize it. As long as you are well and hearty you don't mind, but when sickness

overtakes you! When pneumonia got me I was moved out of the house to the hospital. They said it was the best place for me. There I met Miss Rowe and she nursed me back to health. Later she consented to marry me."

So that was the story of the Liggetts! She had been his nurse after all, and married him for— What? Because she pitied him, took compassion on him, or was it from a more selfish motive? He had not long to live—he possessed considerable money— She stopped again. This was unfair to the girl, it was uncharitable to think such things. Raising the iced liquid to her lips she sipped it slowly.

"You were lucky to find her," she said, "I like your wife very much."

"Do you?" he asked, his eyes brightening. "I am glad to hear you say that. Of course I do not expect her to give her time to me exclusively. Youth must have its fling, of course; it wants the society of its kind."

Edith looked across the room, to where Mrs. Liggett sat exchanging gay banter with Kelso. She could not help observing the striking beauty of the woman. She was like a Grecian goddess, hair raven black, brought low on the cheeks, eyebrows arched and delicate, nose small and straight, chin firm, color like the blush of a peach in bloom. Her eyes seemed deep and soulful, her mouth was large, an almost infallible sign of generosity of mind and feeling. The more Edith studied her, the more she was surprised and delighted. It

was small wonder her admirers were numberless, and followed her as if drawn by an irresistible attraction.

To the remaining members of the party Edith was paying but little heed until her eyes met Kelso's. He waved to her, crying aloud, "What's the matter, Mrs. Colman? You look terribly pensive."

The remark roused her, and she smiled back at him sweetly. Some one put on another record, and Kelso advanced to her side and asked if she cared to dance. She nodded her assent and looked around for a place to set her glass. His gesture restrained her.

"Finish it," he commanded, "and we'll have some more."

She laughed with him, and raising the glass to her lips peered at him above its edge. Coquetry took hold of her; it lifted her above the lazy sense of pleasure, and she felt like swinging from the sofa into his arms and away across the floor. She passed the empty tumbler to him without a word and allowed herself to be assisted from her place. They fell into step at once.

"What do you think," he asked, suddenly; "can a woman be partial to a man without his knowing it?"

"If the woman is wise enough," she replied.

"That's just the point. Is she?"

"Men are not blind. Some can read a woman's thoughts."

"Do you think a man would fall in love with a woman with whom he sympathized?"

"Possibly—other things being equal."

He met her eyes, and she flushed a little.

"I saw you studying Mrs. Liggett. What impression did you form of her?"

"She's adorable. What made her marry him? He's splendid and all that, but too old. What she wants are youth and companionship and romance."

"Think so?"

"That's the way she impresses me."

"Well," he opined, "you're not supposing she hopes to spend all her days leading him about by the hand?"

"She was willing to marry him—or was it just his money? He has money, hasn't he?"

"Oodles of it."

She laughed. He drew back his head with a responsive flash.

"What are you laughing at?" he asked. "Does it seem ridiculous?"

"I was thinking she would have to wait long before inheriting his money."

"She is having a good time," he protested. "They travel extensively and meet many people, and these afford her a great deal of amusement. Then she may leave him some time, with alimony. It may be worth the experiment."

"Who wants marriages of experiment? They're bound not to turn out well."

"She's a mighty clever woman—and a clever woman can usually have what she sets her heart on."

"Are we as bad as that?"

"Often!" he rejoined.

Edith was unusually pleased with the attentions bestowed upon her by Kelso Wheaton—she preferred

him to the genial but venerable Henry Liggett. Kelso had always made much of her, but she had never before seen him so alert, so responsive, so devoted. She was aware that this display of feeling was a form of self-complacency, but even this afforded her consolation, in the knowledge that she still possessed charm enough to content the connoisseur of women that she knew him to be. She essayed no further talk but closed her eyes, and abandoned herself to this deep feeling of pleasure. There was no thought of the hour, she considered only the fact that she was having a good time, a splendid time, with no one to answer to or tremble before as a result of her merriment. What a wonderful sensation is unrestrained liberty of action! The sort of freedom that lets you do what you want, as long as you want to do it, without any fear of being called to account for it! That was the way she felt, carefree, light-hearted, indifferent to criticism, intent only on the fleeting pleasures of the night. Never a thought came to her of what her husband was doing, or what he might say, or how she would return to him, or whether Babs was asleep. It was past two o'clock, but in the whirl of the dance she was not conscious of it. She still had the strength and loveliness of youth, and this compensated in some degree for the delights she had forfeited in the past five years. It was not her fault if she had been a recluse—but she meant to be a recluse no longer.

She liked her companions, their elegance, their ease, their informality. No rules bound their coming or going, no conventionality restricted their delightful free-

dom. And this in spite of the fact that they were dominant figures in the world where such formalities were, as a rule, scrupulously insisted upon, the only world she really cared for—and because they seemed willing, even anxious, to admit her to their ranks! She admired them and their standards, she was almost ready to accept their opinions and beliefs, to approve their methods and interests. They were the kind of people she had always wanted to know, for she hoped, through the influence of association and imitation, to identify herself with their personnel and habit and thus advance from the tedious environment of a manner of living that had held her captive for too long.

The room was growing uncomfortably warm she thought, so warm in fact that she asked to be excused from further dancing. She knew her face and neck were flushed; she could feel the burning of her skin and she wanted to rest a bit. Kelso offered to fetch her a cooling drink, but she refused. It was half past two; the music was still going. Some one suggested a song, and they gathered about the piano. But Edith did not feel like singing; it was too much of an effort, and she plucked Kelso's sleeve and motioned him to the sofa.

"Have you made plans for the summer—the whole of it?" she asked, knowing well that she and her husband spent it at their shore cottage.

"Next summer! Why, we usually go to Southend you know——"

"All the time? No side trips?"

"Oh, well, now and again——"

"Can't you steal a week with us?"

"Where is your place?" he asked.

"It's called Spring Lake, up in the Berkshires, the prettiest in the world."

"What's pretty about it?"

"The air and the white birch, and the water when the sun is shining."

"Oh! Any fish?"

"Lots of them."

"What do you mean by 'lots'? Any salmon?"

"I guess so. And there is bass."

"Anywhere near the Trail?"

"No, no! It's only about fifty miles from here."

"I should be glad to go. Bass? Oh boy! That's the greatest thrill in the world. Get a big one on the end of your line and, believe me, you know you've got something."

He kindled a cigarette and the match lighted up the grin on his face, a grin of enthusiasm and delight.

"You are spirited about everything you do, aren't you?"

"Me? Shucks! I love fishing, if that is what you mean, and golf and all sports——"

"Indoor?"

"Sure! Bridge, pool——"

"Hearts?"

He looked at her, curiously.

"How many, for instance, have you at this moment dangling from the ends of your lines?"

"Really, Mrs. Colman," he answered, playing for time, "you flatter me. Lines! A pretty figure!"

"Ah—ah—ah!" she interjected, holding up a re-

proving finger. "You mustn't tell lies. God does not like a boy who tells lies."

"God doesn't bother about me! He has enough to do——"

"He takes care of everybody—you, too."

"Well, I feel sorry for Him. My father used to say that whenever I did anything. He wanted me to go into the factory to learn the business from the ground up. Imagine working at a machine all day long! I wanted to go to Harvard——"

"And had your way?"

"Of course."

"I should think you would marry and settle down."

"What's the use?"

"Some nice girl would be glad to share this home with you——"

"That's the point; it is not mine to share. Besides I want to be sure that I would be happy. I was made to be happy, you know."

"Let me give you a piece of advice. When you marry don't neglect her. Some young husbands I know love their wives devotedly, but they give to their work more attention and devotion than they are accustomed to give to their helpmates. Naturally, this piques a young wife, and unless she is extraordinarily strong of will she will seek amusement where she should not."

"Yes," he replied, "I know that, but I've heard of young wives who, immediately after the ceremony say to themselves, 'Well, I'm married now. I don't have to attract him any more.' They are slovenly in their attire and unpolished in their manner. They never think of the means they used to employ to fascinate

their lovers. A man wants a presentable wife. He likes to be surprised with something different every day. And when he does not find it, what does he do? Goes elsewhere in disgust. So you see there is much to be said on both sides."

"Yes, but the men are most to blame for the present condition of things. For the man the world is his arena. The poor wife never sets her foot outside of the house. She is semi-imprisoned in a place where she meets the same people day after day, where she goes through the same old routine of baking, cooking, making beds and polishing furniture. Naturally, she wants a little relaxation. But her husband has his business or his club and his interests and ambitions lie there. Then comes the danger point, when the wife meets a young man of nice appearance and manners who manifests more than ordinary interest in her. She seeks his company——"

She ceased quickly. The lights seemed to grow dim; a sickly feeling stole over her. She felt the blood leaving her head, an icy cold settling across her brow. A sensation of nausea took hold of her and she groped for her handkerchief.

"I am afraid—I am ill. Please——"

He caught hold of her, startled. She did look ill. He called his sisters, then, and they brought her upstairs while he stood by, staring, bewildered. Turning to Henry Liggett he said:

"How did that happen? How did she become ill?"

"Poor child! She is not used to this," explained the older man. "And she is not over strong."

IV

THE next day was Sunday. Edith came home to face an ordeal.

“What’s the matter?” Bert exclaimed, as soon as they were alone. “Where have you been?”

“You know well enough where I’ve been,” she replied tartly, knowing him to be in bad humor. “They ’phoned.”

“Yes, to tell me you were going out to their house for a while.”

“Well, that is where I was——”

“All night?”

“Wasn’t it better to stay than to come home at two o’clock in the morning? That would look fine to our neighbors, wouldn’t it? Imagine driving up to the door at that hour!”

He glanced at her, at her lids drooping in lassitude, at the dark pencilings of fatigue under her eyes, the morbid pallor of her face. She evidently had had no sleep.

“You look as if you’ve been up all night,” he said.

“Do I?”

“Have you been to church?”

“No!”

He made no further comment, but he was greatly

troubled. He fumbled awkwardly with the little gold chain that hung across his breast, his brows contracted. Not a muscle in his frame moved save for the fingers, playing idly with the little gold chain.

"You ought to know better," he went on quietly. "It isn't very edifying for a woman to be out all night and then stay in bed all Sunday morning."

"It was unavoidable. I just couldn't run into the house and run out again—but there isn't any use trying to explain. You either can't understand, or you don't want to."

The taunt moved him. "I can understand this much: I don't want it to happen again," he said impulsively.

"Indeed!"

"I'm not the idiot you think me; neither are you so simple that you must be led about by the hand——"

"Nor lectured by you, either, if that is what you think you are doing."

He looked at her. "You are a strong-minded woman, Edith, and you always want your own way. You will have it in this, too. I am not trying to lecture you so much as to point out the futility of your trying to mix with these Wheatons."

"I am not ashamed to admit that I want to mix with them. Why not? A man boasts of his ability to make a team, or join a club——"

"But that is different. He gets something for his money——"

"I expect to be compensated."

"In what way, please——?"

"Well, I shall have entrée into the best houses——"

“Yes?”

“And meet the people who are worth while.”

“But do you think you can afford it—to keep up with them, I mean? Don’t you understand you will have to pay for what you get? You want to go about with the rich—to eat their dinners, smoke their cigarettes, too, I presume (they all do it), ride in their expensive cars, dance and play golf with them—but don’t you suppose this is going to cost you money? You will have to spend, too. You must wear becoming clothes and a whole lot of them, otherwise you will soon be dropped. We can’t afford it, Edith. First thing you know you will be borrowing money to meet your debts.”

She was silent. She needed time to determine her next move, but her brain was in a whirl.

“I’m sick of this, anyhow. You never take me anywhere. You stick around the house all night long, you never think of making life any way pleasant——”

“I haven’t the time; besides, when I come home I am tired. Neither of us will suffer from confinement, it seems to me. The man that is true to his fireside is true to his wife and everything else. I have enough to do to keep me occupied; so have you, with a child to attend to. And you haven’t even asked for her yet——”

“Oh, I know she is all right as long as she is with you.”

He took this in silence; then he said, “You needn’t be so sarcastic!”

“You’re impossible! I can’t talk to you! There

was a time when you were nice—before we were married——”

“Oh, that stuff!” he interrupted her with an impatient laugh. “Things are different now.”

“Yes, I suppose so. I didn’t know you. People never get to know each other until they live together. They told me I would not be happy——”

“Happy! Is that the reason you stay out all night, because you are bored to death, because I am too plain for you, because I don’t dance or give a rap about these society folks? You know what my income is, and you know a man’s luxuries are limited by his income. The Wheatons are rich. They can afford all these things. I can’t. That’s not my fault.”

“It’s not my fault either if I want these things. I can’t stand the house all day. It unnerves me, and I’m not going to bear it any longer.”

The violence of her words amazed him. To hear her talk in this fashion was unusual, and he turned on her with an astonished stare.

“Edith, what are you saying? Please don’t raise your voice like that. People will hear you——”

“I’m as calm as you are,” she flung back at him. Her eyes had turned coal-black and flashed fire as she gazed at him coolly, without a tremor. “We might as well have this thing out now. We’ve had enough of this, or I have. I’ve sacrificed a whole lot for you. I came down to your level and there I have been floundering about for the past six or seven years. Now, I’m going to assert myself. You’ll get me a maid, pay her a decent salary, and let her run the house; cook,

wait on table, wash the dishes, care for the baby. I shall manage the house as before, but let some one else do the work."

He accepted this generously enough, much to her surprise. "Oh! all right, then!" he said. "Let us have a maid if you want one. How much do they get?"

"I don't know."

"See what you can do. You know where to get them. I'll agree to anything reasonable. I only object to such conduct as last night's——"

"Oh, forget that! I've heard enough of it. I'm more interested now in the maid——"

"And I told you you could have her."

"Thank you! You are getting human," and she arose with a half suppressed smile and went up to her room.

She started to put away her things, in that little bedroom with its American walnut furniture and beveled mirrors encased in the doors, and the brightly colored cretonne window draperies. In her heart of hearts she regretted more than anything else the episode of the preceding night, yet she could not bring herself to acknowledge it to her husband. When she came home she had been penitent enough. But at the look on his face, at his grave, superior manner, something within her rose and transformed her contrition into contempt. It made her more determined than ever not to let him see her compunction and she feigned an indifference she was far from feeling. Wouldn't he have been pleased to see her fall at his feet, acknowledge her

fault and plead for forgiveness? The thought amused her.

It was not natural for her to countenance an unbecoming action, she would have recoiled from the merest suggestion of wrong-doing as from a kind of sin, still she did not feel wholly to blame now, inasmuch as she always had been impulsive, doing queer things on the slightest notice. Circumstances played a large part in her life. She believed herself to be a creature of destiny for whom everything was preordained. Often, it seemed to her, she would hear some bland voice whispering honeyed syllables into her ear, bidding her cast aside the conventions that circumscribed her ambitions and interests, and launch forth into the gay billows of freedom and unrestraint. She had never yielded to these truant promptings until last night. Left to her deliberate self she might have refused the invitation to go to Westlawn, but once arrived there, she threw all care to the winds and abandoned herself with enthusiastic delight to the pleasures of the evening. Bert told her she could not be led about by the hand, but she wondered if this were wholly true.

As for becoming ill, it served her right. She knew better than to drink liquor; even during the exhilarating days of her college career she could not touch it. But now everybody seemed to be partial to its use. No party was complete unless intoxicants were served. All seemed to enjoy liquor—as if they were getting the best of the Government. Had she not danced with Kelso she might have escaped disaster, but the room was warm and she was overtired. Things had changed

in the years of her wedded life. They moved faster, the fun was different. One would be terribly old-fashioned nowadays to insist on the standards of the ante-bellum days—those exacting conventions were gone forever.

Kelso was a splendid fellow, kind, sympathetic, sensible. If she had come home to him he would not have blustered and brayed about it, but would have passed it off as a good joke. She did not know any better, he would have told her, for he understood her, had made it apparent that he believed in her. If she had been indiscreet enough to make a mistake he was broad-minded enough to make allowances for it. She stood before the mirror—pleased with herself for what she had done. He was interested in her—and she enjoyed that. It was going to be delightful, this kind of friendship, where neither of them would be obliged to resort to artifice or deceit, or to concealment. For the first time in years something within her was roused to action, some starved sentiment that had lain buried in the recesses of her heart.

Here was romance indeed! To awake in the morning in an expectant mood, to wonder what new experiences the day would bring! The vague longings of youth had not been entirely killed. They were still alive, still potent. Now she would have more time to herself. She would have time to visit in the afternoon, time to meet more people, time to devote her energies to charitable works in company with others of consequence in the city. She had waited long enough for it! But Robert had fumed and fretted so every time she

talked of getting a maid, that she was sick and tired hearing him. Penuriousness! He could not afford to give her a maid, but he could afford to dabble in politics. That was all right, of course. Besides, he argued, there was no need of any help in the home. He was away all day, and dinner in the evening was the only meal that had to be prepared. She had nothing to do but care for the house! Babs was a problem, but she was getting bigger, and would soon be able to help herself. It was the future of which he continually reminded her, for which he was trying to lay a little aside from time to time with faithful regularity. He never stopped to consider how much he spent on himself. Men never do until it is brought home to them. She was glad this thing had happened, for if they had not exchanged words she doubted whether he would have consented to her proposition so readily. What became clearest of all was that the future was going to be different. Life was going to be more real, more attractive, more stimulating. She smiled to herself, as she threw off her gown and sat down before the dresser to arrange her hair.

Think of it! To-day, if the promised maid were here she—Edith—would at this moment be making herself ready for dinner, instead of having to get into a house-dress and go down to cook it! Luckily, they were going to have a broiled dinner. Everything would be late, of course, and there would be another row, but she was determined to hand back just what she received. She meant to let him see who would have the last word in these matters, even at the cost of her serenity of

mind. It was too bad she had to miss church, but even that couldn't be helped!

Bert, however, was very agreeable during dinner and chatted in a jovial way. "There is one thing about you," he said. "It doesn't take you long to do anything once you get started."

"Next week," she reminded him, "we shall sit down to a regular dinner. We should have done it long ago."

"Yes, I suppose we should. But it never entered my mind. It will make a difference, won't it?"

She looked at him across the table in despair. How like him!

"Your worst fault is that you don't know there is such a thing as a house existing. As long as everything runs smoothly, the bills kept down, the meals on time, your clothes cleaned and pressed and laid out for you, the fire going in the cellar and the lights burning throughout the house, you never bother your head how these things are happening or who is taking care of them. It is only when something takes place out of the ordinary, like a cup falling from the shelf and crashing into bits on the floor, that you look up and inquire what has happened."

"It doesn't so much matter about the how. The fact is that you are here—that's enough, isn't it?"

"That's just it. If I weren't here—what then?"

"I'm not supposed to know about these things——"

"You're supposed to know that one person can't do everything. I don't mind doing these things, but you

ought to be decent about it and show some appreciation.”

“Is it a set of resolutions you want——?”

“That’s what makes me mad—you’re so downright complacent, so——”

He laughed; they both laughed—for they saw the humor of it at the same time.

That evening when Dr. Dahill came in she hastened to tell him her big piece of news. He congratulated her on her victory, and remarked aloud that it should have happened years ago.

The doctor had the apartment adjoining the Colmans. He was unmarried, and lived with his mother. Surgery was his specialty and skilled he was in the science. Morning after morning he spent in the hospital cutting away disease and decay from human bodies, cleansing, draining, cauterizing infected areas. And every night, returning from his daily toil, he stopped into the Colmans’ on his way home. A friendship had been formed between the two men that was sincere and dignified, never profaned by anything worldly. They met and chatted, thought and planned as thousands of other men do who feel pride in the accomplishments of one another as if they were their own.

“I was at the theater last night,” Edith told him.

“What was the play?”

“A Doll’s House! What do you think of Ibsen?”

“Hits the nail forcibly on the head, doesn’t he?”

“It had to be done. Really, there was no other way out of it——”

"Except diplomacy."

"Helmar did not know what it meant. Don't you admire Ibsen?"

"A great dramatist, but productive of much harm."

"Yet he is wonderful——"

"I can't agree with you. No man is wonderful who is bent on destroying the existing order of things. The great men of the world have built up, not torn down."

"He is a realist. He depicts society boldly, just as it is——"

"It is the office of the dramatist not alone to record life but to interpret it for our edification."

"Oh, I know. But don't you consider it a service to humanity to picture the sore spots of our nature as they are?"

"Life is not a failure. Why make it appear so?"

It was unusual for the doctor to utter more than a few words at a time on any subject. Whatever he had to say was expressed with laconic dispatch, often by analogy. He was fond of one or two pet theories, to which he referred time and again. The one was that imperial Rome was the archetype of America, the other that this country was doomed to an unhappy fate because of her like contempt for the sanctity of the home and the basic principles of the moral law.

"It isn't the stage alone," he declared, "that makes vice attractive. The whole field of literature is oversown with the cockle. The movies thrive on it."

"I sometimes wonder if the picture of modern life is as depressing as the pessimists paint it. We have

been going to the dogs for the past twenty years, but we haven't got there yet."

"It took five hundred years for Rome to decline."

"Oh, well! We have a long time yet."

Dr. Dahill reached for a cigar, bit the end from it, took a match from the silver holder standing on the table beside him and struck it. Meantime he looked curiously at Edith. His eyes rested on her slim white throat, her small, determined chin, on her large hazel-brown eyes full of expression. He thought he discovered a suggestion of ennui. There was a doubt in his mind concerning her peace and serenity. Even in the light of her good sense and judgment he questioned the fixity of her future happiness. She resembled one whose heart held sway over all her faculties. He knew her to be easily led by her whims, and she coveted the blossoms that hung the highest. Behind that beautiful brow there were thoughts which he would have liked to read, for her manner seemed indicative now of unrest and discontent.

"I'm thinking of taking up riding lessons next week," she confided to him.

"So!" he replied. This was part of it.

"Do you play golf?" she asked, then; "I am going to learn this spring."

"It seems to me you will have a busy time of it. What are you going to do?" he asked Bert, seated away from him, under the parchment shade.

"Oh, I'm going to keep house with the new maid."

V

BLESSED was the springtime when it came at the close of that unusually severe winter. The sun climbed higher and higher, to the topmost parts of the immeasurable blue, and beamed ecstatically, kindling the shadows lingering tardily on the hills and valleys into tenuous outlines of mellow light. Heaven smiled on the dainty green of the woodlands, where tints were being laid on with a lavish hand; on the tranquil woods, where impetuous buds were bursting on the branches of the trees, like so many thousands of golden fairy buttons. The moss-grown willows were already arrayed in festal attire. Soon they would be followed by the forsythia, the lilac-shrubs, the magnolias and the maples. Everywhere the fields were strewn with violets and anemones. The crows betook themselves to the remote depths of the woods, and yielded to the smaller songsters whose outbursts of melody were gladdening the hearts of men like a brook let loose over the frozen countryside. The world was glad, and so was man. For the sunshine of youth was revisiting his haunts and bowers in the prettiest season of the year.

Edith stood at her bedroom window one fine morning watching the transformation of nature, and marveling at the beauty of earth and sky. The freshness and happiness of the world were reflected in her smile.

She shared transports of ecstasy with the earth the while she had a vision of herself carried away on its bosom to ramble through its fields and hollows. For she had been invited to play golf that day as a guest of the Wheatons, and to dine with them later at the Country Club. Nowhere was the scenery more wonderful than at the Club, where there was just enough artificial arrangement employed to make the landscape perfect. Colman was unable to accompany her, but did not object to her going. He was too busy to dawdle away his time with sports, and besides he had an important case to argue before the courts that very morning.

Early in the afternoon the Wheatons called for her. In her tweed suit and hat, so discreetly conspicuous, so apparently negligent, yet so studied, she seemed younger, simpler, and prettier than ever before. No one could accuse her of vanity if she took a special pride in her trim figure, for it lent youth to her appearance and buoyancy to her step. She looked the part of an athletic girl, notwithstanding the fact that she had never held a golf club in her hand before. The game was not so popular when she had been younger, but she hoped to be able to master it as she had mastered tennis. They agreed to play a foursome with Kelso as her partner in order that he might teach her the different methods of play as they went around. Evelyn and Doris drove off while she watched them. Then Kelso made her practice addressing the ball several times before driving. She proved to be an apt pupil, and suc-

ceeded in meeting the ball squarely, sending it out a short distance onto the fairway.

"Don't look up," he cautioned her. "Look! This way!" and he took a stance and swung at an imaginary ball in true form.

It was a picturesque course, rolling and wrinkled as a brown velvet carpet, with clusters of trees grouped at certain intervals, and dense woods fringing the borders like a lace hem. The day was perfect, clear and invigorating, and distances were accurately discernible. Immense clouds, like packs of wool, moved lazily across the heavens, their whiteness dazzling the sight, while the surrounding hills stood out sharply against the horizon in uniform relief against the pale blue of the distant sky. Only a few players could be seen on the links, a twosome playing on the ninth green and a foursome marching hurriedly across the fourth fairway.

Evelyn and Doris had gone on ahead to locate their drives. Kelso joined Edith and lent his hand to assist her down the rugged slope.

"It was good of you to come to-day," he remarked.

"That shows you wanted me to," she returned gayly.

"Why don't you get Bert to take up golf?" he suggested.

"He wouldn't bother. You know how odd he is. There is no sporting blood in him. I believe he does not know how to play any game."

"He works hard."

"Yes, but that is all. He thinks of nothing but the office—and politics."

"He plays that game, eh? A rather expensive sport, I should say!"

"That's what I keep telling him, but he pays no attention to me. He thinks he is going to run for Congress this fall."

"Indeed! Can he get the nomination?"

"I don't know. He doesn't say much about himself. But he did say that."

For the next shot he advised her to use an iron, demonstrating the way to address the ball. His interest was conspicuous, as he pointed out her defects. She did not turn her shoulders, but kept them stiff and, naturally enough, he took hold of them and twisted them about until they had been properly placed.

"Don't move your head or feet," he cautioned her, "and keep your eye on the ball."

Kelso was courtly to the extreme—and in polite behavior he was unsurpassed. During the preliminary stages of the game, he gave every indication that he was content and pleased with the turn events had taken in the course of the afternoon. He paired with Mrs. Colman against his two sisters. The professional golfer could not be located at the club house and this gave him the opportunity to play the part of instructor himself. There were no caddies—it was too early in the season and the boys had not yet begun to come out—and this let him caddy for her and walk beside her the whole way round. They were beginning to know each other quite well, but there seemed to be no surfeit of enjoyment in one another's company. He made her feel the ardor of his interest, and this stimu-

lated her vanity. He waited upon her until she completed every play and watched the ball to mark it. He encouraged her constantly whenever she dubbed a shot or drove into the rough, and he congratulated her on every good play. It was impossible for her to feel nervous or self-conscious, so inspiring and assuring was his guidance.

For the moment this attitude of his affected her visibly. She began to hum under her breath indifferently fearing lest he detect the nature of her thoughts. It was not as if she were afraid of what he might do that troubled her so much as the extent to which this show of kindness would go. Had she any right to accept these demonstrations of particular friendship? The spirit of conquest intoxicated her and took away all sense of responsibility. She could not deny that she had been drawn to him by the narrowness of her own life and the advantages of his—but neither of these accounted for his continued evidences of interest and preferment. She could not help but observe them. It did not seem possible that he could be this way with all, it could not be through sympathy alone that he was so gracious. The idea that he was not altogether outside the influence of her charms forced itself upon her. In the short while they had been friendly a remarkable sense of ease, of familiarity had grown up between them, as if some kind fate were exerting a powerful, subtle influence over them. What was this influence, whither would it lead? She could not know. And for the first time she began to experience a feeling of apprehension and uncertainty.

“The best way to learn this game is to devote an hour or so each day to the mastery of each club,” he said, in his masterful voice. She was glad to hear him speak; it served to distract her from her uneasy conjectures. “We should let you do nothing to-day but practice driving. Afterward we could take each iron, learn the stroke, and measure distances.”

“But this is ever so much better,” she said. “Besides it makes sport for all of us. I don’t suppose I’ll ever want to play in a tournament.”

“This is more unconventional.” He paused. “Does it strike you as—dangerous?”

Her eyes questioned him. “Dangerous! In what way?”

“Well—my playing golf with another man’s wife, for instance.” He laughed—and she joined him.

“I have little respect for conventions, if that is what you mean. What harm is there?”

“None, as far as I can see. But—there are people who will—talk.”

“Let them. I did so want to come to-day! And everything has been perfectly lovely, thanks to you——”

“There is nothing to thank me for,” he said. “It means a whole lot to have you with us.”

She laughed, secretly pleased. He knew how to make such pretty speeches!

“Look!” she cried. “Evelyn and Doris are on the green. We had better hurry!”

“Take your time! Take your time!”

At the third hole, the water hole, Edith encountered great difficulty. Her first shot dropped into the mid-

dle of the lake. Kelso supplied another ball and suggested that she try again. This fell in the same place. The third ball she dubbed, made a poor out and played her third shot short so that the ball fell into the pond and sank beneath the surface.

"Isn't that terrible!" she exclaimed.

"You should have played a floater," Doris advised.

"If we had a boy here we might recover those balls," Kelso said. "Here," he added, dropping a ball at her third lie. "Shoot again!"

"I positively won't."

"You mustn't give up like that. Play from here."

"No! I'll let this hole go. You play it out."

"But every hole should be played. These hazards are scattered all through the course. They're just like the hazards of life. Every one gets into trouble on the golf course—the test is getting out of it. That's where nerve and steadfastness and determination tell."

"But I can never put the ball over—from back there."

"Everybody else does. Why not you?"

"Others know how to play."

"Well, come along, then," he concluded, and they headed for the green.

"You know," he said as they walked on together, "golf really calls for those qualities that we associate with manhood: decision, accuracy, perseverance, self-control. If a player lands in the rough he maintains composure in the face of difficulty and applies himself to meeting the unfortunate situation. On the fairway

he is upright and honest. On the green, deliberate and sure. Every shot is played for what it is worth."

"Is that why men love it?"

"To some extent, yes."

Evelyn sunk hers for a three, but Kelso put his ball too hard and it rolled across the green. He failed on the next two and had to content himself with a five.

"You would have a better score," Doris reminded him, "if you were not so careless. You throw away your game."

"What difference does it make?" he rejoined nonchalantly. "We are having a good time."

During the dinner which followed Kelso knew that he was more than interested in Edith Colman. A passion for possession took hold of him, the selfish ambition of a frivolous heart, hungry for fresh conquest with no other object but the desire of proprietorship. He longed to know this woman, longed to dominate her thoughts. Were it not so ridiculously impossible, he would have made love to her for the mere excitement of it, but the more he studied her the more the thought of her fascinated him. The warm afternoon sun had brought the color to her face. She burned like a young maple in early fall. She looked more attractive than she had ever seemed to him, and her smile was very sweet. While she was conscious of his glances she was perfectly innocent of their meaning, interpreting them indeed, in her native simplicity, as indications of admiration and attention.

"Well, Edith," he remarked at last, with a pretense of casual negligence, "how did you enjoy the game?"

"It was wonderful!" she exclaimed. "I'm wild about it."

"It does take hold of you," said Evelyn.

"Would you care to try again—to-morrow?" he asked, raising his eyebrows inquiringly.

"To-morrow?" pondered Edith. "I think I could manage it. You know my time is less taken up now than it used to be. Will you come, Evelyn and Doris?" She continued, "If I improve we may return the compliment of to-day's defeat."

"If they don't care to come, let you and I try it together. We shall be ready for them the next day."

"I'll go!" Doris interposed, and Kelso dropped the subject.

"You ought to join this Club, Edith. It could be managed," Evelyn suggested, with a glance at her brother.

"I would love to—if I thought Bert would care enough about it," Edith agreed.

"It can't make any difference to him," Kelso grumbled.

"Use his name and enjoy the family privileges," said Doris. "There is so much going on here that you ought not to miss any of it."

"But it is so exclusive—" Edith protested.

"What of that? You can be just as patronizing as the best of them. Few here can rival you," Kelso assured her, glancing over his shoulder at his sisters as if he feared being overheard.

"It all depends on who sponsors you," Evelyn said. "But Kelso would take care of that, wouldn't you?"

"Leave it to me," he said, and settled back in his chair.

His heart gave a leap of exultation. He had discovered her weakness. She wanted to feel the sense of her own importance, her capability of being numbered with the best in the town, and she was not artful enough to conceal it. To be admitted to the same circles as the Barneses, who were being asked everywhere because of their fashionable adherences and because everybody knew that nothing really worth while could be held without their patronage, the Lovells, whose family was regarded with especial favor because of Arthur Lovell's marriage with Amy Strachey, who was of Colonial ancestry, a peculiar mark of distinction common to all New Englanders, the Fishers, young Fred Harkness and his wife, who was Governor Pratt's daughter—this was something evidently worth striving for in Edith Colman's estimation. She did not have to be told that the whole catalogue of customs and conventions had, for generations back, been shaped and decided by these very few who had risen to power and prominence by the vagaries of fortune and influence. Rank determined everything to-day, even excellence. It is not what you are, but who your ancestors were, that scored. Suppose it were a pharisaical class for the most part that dominated the upper set, they had the advantage on their side of time-honored respect and reverence, so that their very names became synonymous with all that stood for culture and attainment. He now perceived how earnestly Edith yearned for admittance to this inner circle, and he had an idea that if he

could let her see the work of his hand in enabling her to rise to these guarded heights he would hold an advantage which she could not very well disavow. She was clever enough to take care of herself.

There was her husband to be considered, of course—a narrow-minded chap in so far as social gayeties were concerned. Still there was no reason for him to find fault with her ambitions. No modern woman would think of being tied to the house like the mothers of the other generation. The world had made a great step forward with the emancipation of woman. There would be expenses, of course, and from the little he had learned from her own lips about her husband, he was sure to raise a fuss when the money question was brought to his attention. An odd fellow, thought Kelso, somewhat contemptuously, one who wanted his wife to have a good time, but who was unwilling to pay for it.

This was one of the consequences of early marriage, with its narrow margin of operation and limitation of personal choice and freedom! Here was a girl who wanted to be free to do as she pleased, but who was denied by an onerous yoke the satisfaction of her desires. With the burden of matrimony thrown off he pictured her an altogether different creature. It made him shiver to think what might be in store for him should he come away from the altar mismated with a woman for life. What would he ever do when he learned, to his profound astonishment, that she was impossible? Spend his vacations at home! Or travel extensively in Europe! Edith Colman possessed all the

earmarks of a capital sport, a regular girl, one who might easily adapt herself to the requirements of any occasion, were she not oppressed by the ponderous millstone hanging about her neck. It was the woman who paid the penalty for these things always. Though it was right and proper for her to have immunities and safeguards, the crude custom of society still branded her with suspicion and confined her circle of operations. It was ever the woman who bore watching. Why else did they make her wear that band of gold about her finger? She was not entitled to the privileges which man enjoyed before the law, before the public mind, before God, because she did not share the competence, the nature, the vocation of man.

Later, as they sat on the dark porch in the swing settee, he took the opportunity to allude to the monotonous existence she had elected to live. His sisters had stayed inside to attend to some matters concerning dues, a few extra charges which had to be settled before the first of the month, and they were left together to await them outside.

"For a girl of your ability, you really don't get out enough," he said, turning towards her and throwing one arm negligently over the back of the settee.

"But I don't mind it—not in the least," she tossed back, indifferently.

"Others do," he rejoined. "You have no right to deprive them of the pleasure of your company."

"No one bothers about me. Why should any one care? It may be different, perhaps, when I am a Congressman's wife."

"But the friends you make to-day will stand you in good stead then. And these are the people you ought to meet."

"It's our way, I suppose. You see neither of us think much about other people. We seldom entertain——"

"Isn't that the reason?"

"The reason?"

"Why you do not meet people? Things have moved forward at a fast pace since we were children. Woman's place was once in the home. Now her interests have expanded considerably. To-day she makes her presence felt everywhere."

Edith received this in silence. "I suppose you are right," she said at length.

"You can't drift indefinitely. The strain is aging you. What you need is life, and lots of it. You don't mind my telling you this, I hope? It is because I am interested—very much interested."

He let his hand fall on hers. She did not draw away.

"I discovered this the first time I met you. You wanted to be different in spite of yourself. But you didn't dare. You thought only of your home. It circumscribed your ambitions. Home is good, but it must not become a hermitage."

"I shall get out more," she said.

"You will come to see us—often?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"To-morrow?"

"Perhaps! I should love to play golf again."

“Do you ride?”

“Just a little. I learned to sit on a horse while in college. I suppose I have forgotten how since that time.”

“We have our own horses and you can easily be accommodated. Suppose we make an afternoon of it—you and I?”

“Oh, but Evelyn—Doris——”

“I am not including Evelyn—or Doris!”

She flushed, hesitated, looked away.

“I knew you wouldn’t come. Everything you’ve done so far has been at the request of Evelyn.”

“You never asked me before.”

“I thought you might refuse me, as you did just now.”

“I haven’t refused you—yet. And I won’t. I’ll do anything you ask.”

“You mean it?”

“Absolutely!”

The two sisters appeared in the doorway. Kelso, glancing past her saw them, and lapsed into silence. Shortly afterwards all departed for home.

VI

THE second week in July the Colmans were in the Berkshires. It was their custom to spend July and a part of August in their camp at Spring Lake. It was a beautiful spot. There was the usual fringe of hills, behind which the sun, large and fiery, was wont to rest, his saffron rays blazing a path of color across the garnet and silver waters. There were camps and clearings bounding the shores, where red and brown roofs shone by day and signal lights burned at night. There was never a moment of perfect rest, so careful was Dame Nature to attend to the minutest things of earth and sky with the same degree of effort and the same felicity of success.

“Trailsend” was located on a point of land jutting out a few feet into the limpid water. Here was the Colman camp, of brown-shingled sides and roof, with cobblestone foundation, the whole resembling a bungalow in West Shefford more than a summer camp in the woods. Bert had purchased it at Edith’s solicitation a little more than a year ago, and, although it was far removed from home and consequently reached with great difficulty, still the first few hours spent therein were quite sufficient to justify its isolation and inconvenience. Its aspect was inviting, a comfortable veranda running around two of its sides, a spacious green

lawn leading clear down to a concrete embankment close by the water's edge, winding gravel walks leading away and anywhere, a dense thicket of Norway pine protecting the rear and making a fine background against which the white trimmings of the tiny house stood out with precision and elegance.

They had been here less than a week when the place began to grow monotonous. Edith had had an unusually busy and pleasure-filled spring and summer, and the lake became very dull by way of contrast. Golf and riding had been the order of the day for weeks and weeks, and nearly every Sunday she and Bert had gone touring with the Wheaton sisters to some nearby resort, where they stopped for dinner. This exciting living had fascinated her, and the landscape at Spring Lake no longer awakened the ecstatic emotions of yore. It was isolated. What else was there to do but read to pass away the time, or go canoeing? Unless it happened that a party assembled at McKim's, where, to the accompaniment of an old piano and drum, dances were laboriously performed on the pineboard floor. Bert went fishing nearly every day and Bab lived in her bathing suit, but neither of these diversions interested Edith. She sat and read, and longed for the days to roll away, when she could get back home again to the charm and excitement of the little city.

One evening, just before sunset, Bert coaxed her to go fishing, a sport she heretofore had refused to attempt. She entered into it as a means of breaking the monotony, but manifested impatience when she learned there was a science to it that had to be mastered. She

listened attentively to her husband for a few minutes, then taking the rod from his hands, began to throw the fly.

"But I don't think I really want a fish. I wouldn't touch it even if I were lucky enough to land one."

"Wait until you catch one and see," he said.

They had a good time of it for an hour or more, away up the lake where the beach showed pebbles and rock in abundance. He explained to her that it was one of the favorite haunts of the bass, and he dropped anchor a short distance from the shore and told her to cast in the direction of the land.

"Be sure you keep your thumb lightly on the reel while the fly is in the air," he told her. "Then, when it lights on the water, clamp it on firm. If the bass sees it he will strike at once. That's the time to hook him."

She nodded at the advice, and stood up in the boat like an expert. Her eyes danced with the fervor of an enthusiast, her trim form swayed gracefully from side to side. Several times she threw the fly, far over her head, inaccurately, awkwardly, letting it fall rather than alight on the water.

"Let it rest on the surface. You will scare him. He must think it a live fly, and live flies do not fall into the water with a splash."

She made no reply, but reeled in again for another try. This time she threw the plug with less violence and the reel hummed merrily. No sooner had the fly struck the water than it was seized and carried below. The rod bent under the strain.

"Hook him," Bert shouted. "That's it. . . . Give

him plenty of time. . . . Now you have him. . . . Don't try to pull him out of the water. . . . Play him and keep the line taut. . . ."

Her heart beat wildly as she felt the rod jerk in her hand from the movements of the fish. The more he pulled the more she let him have it, slowly, carefully, following Bert's instructions. Suddenly the bass raced toward her and before she had time to reel it had broken water.

"Tight!" Bert called. "Don't give him any slack. . . . Raise the rod. . . .!"

But the bass had already broken and was standing, literally, on top of the water, jaws distended, his whole body shaking vigorously. The effort was successful and the next moment the hook had been disengaged and he fell back into the depths of the lake, the victor in the struggle.

"Too bad!" was Bert's sole comment. "Never mind."

"I couldn't help it," she cried.

"I know it, but you see what happens when you give him an inch of line. The bass is a gamy fish, and it takes all your wits to land him. Try again!"

She made no reply; she was annoyed at her failure. Slowly she reeled in the line and examined the fly wistfully.

"Wasn't he a beauty?" she said.

"Yes. About three pounds, I should say."

"I'm going to try again."

"Go ahead, but he won't bother you for awhile."

Long after the sun had gone down and well into the

twilight she cast for a strike, but none came. The water was running smoothly, the wind having died down, and the moon was rising over the pines, a dull copper color. They conversed but little, as fisherfolk are wont to do, and centered their thoughts on the movements of the fly. Finally, she grew tired and decided to quit. For the first time in her life she had tasted the thrill of victory only to see it snatched from before her eyes.

But she was none the less happy. The evening seemed to take her out of herself and her lonely thoughts. She fancied that the lake had taken on a new aspect of loveliness with the pale moon half way up the sky and its warm glow glittering in the ripples like a sea of diamonds. The boat cut through the shimmering water like an intruder and she put out one of her hands to seize the sparkling wavelets. She was in a happy mood, and she chatted with her husband all the way home.

"This is what Kelso Wheaton would like," she said.

"Why don't you ask him up?" he replied, quickly, emphatically.

"I have asked them. But they are away so much. They promised to steal a few days. Be good to them, won't you? They have been good to me."

"Does Kelso like fishing?"

"He likes any sport."

"Do you know," he said, musingly, "I've never quite liked him——"

She colored a little. "And why——?"

"I don't know. Doesn't he strike you as a bit of a sycophant?"

"You are unkind. Why do you say that?" Her face betrayed her annoyance.

"Say what? Sycophant?"

"Yes. Is it nice to talk about people that way?"

"There is no harm in it, surely—between ourselves. I only asked your opinion."

"In my opinion you are entirely too critical."

With her wonted impulsiveness she decided that this was but another way of his expressing his supreme contempt for Kelso Wheaton. But Bert often did that, she thought, by insinuation instead of assertion, and he could say the meanest things in the most caustic way. She was well aware that he did not care particularly for the Wheatons, but that was no reason why she should be obliged to suit her friendships to his tastes. These people had proved themselves loyal and benevolent friends, and for this reason she thought he might be decent enough to show them some consideration. He was odd, indeed. She paused and watched him for a moment, pulling at the oars, quickly, emphatically, always emphatic, always quick, just as a few minutes ago, when she said:

"This is what Kelso Wheaton would like," and his answer:

"Why don't you ask him up?" Quick and emphatic.

Another pause; she looked away that he might not detect her studying him. Presently she turned upon him.

"Perhaps you wonder why he interests me," she said.

“If you want to know I’ll tell you. He is companionable, he is interesting, a fellow who makes no pretense at all at being clever—yet he really is clever. I can’t discuss things with you as I do with him. He likes books, plays, knows college life and fun. Sometimes my brain loses its grip on things. Association with him keeps it sharpened. Sometimes I have to brush up again on things to be prepared for him. He reads all the books, and knows what the reviews have to say about everything.”

“Poppycock!”

“That’s where you and I differ. Certain things make no appeal to you; yet to me they mean a great deal. I have been accustomed to dealing with them all my life, and I have had to forego many pleasures on account of you. How much nicer it would be for both of us if we enjoyed the same sort of amusements. We should have so much more in common. As it is you are wrapped up in politics, for which I don’t care a snap of my fingers. I am fond of reading and discussion, and you don’t even know what a novel looks like.”

“Well, I suppose if I had the time I could get interested in such things, too. I like reading well enough, but I like to read for a purpose.”

“Do you suppose people read novels just because they have nothing else to do?”

“Most of them.”

“Then you are wrong. Some of the finest intellects the world has ever known have given us stories that help to influence and guide our lives——”

“And some of the worst trash ever written may be found among the pages of story books.”

She lapsed into silence, the consciousness of defeat overwhelming her. To continue any argument was useless; he would have his way. Whatever his limitations were, and she felt them to be many, not one of them interfered in the least with his argumentative powers. It was impossible for her to get along with him, for it meant complete surrender every time. How different with Kelso! He always let her feel the importance of her own point of view, and whenever their opinions differed it was he who yielded to her. As she sat motionless and silent in the stern of the boat, and gazed on the moonlight bathing the surface of the lake or lighting up the topmost parts of the trees and the more prominent places on the lowlands on the nearby shore, she was conscious of a curious reversion of mood. She always felt happy with Kelso. There was something about his gentleness so distinguished by minute observance and deference that the remembrance of it consoled her. It stole across her like a narcotic, to relieve the bitterness and distress of her existence.

“Pull on that oar,” she remarked now, diffidently. “You’re going into the cove.”

“It’s hard to keep my eyes on you and watch where I am going at the same time,” he said.

“You don’t have to keep your eyes on me,” she returned, soberly.

“I would like to get a small motor for this boat,” he then observed. “We could run around the lake in no time.”

“Why ‘don’t you save some of the money you spend foolishly and put it into a car?”

“I spend no money foolishly——”

“Oh, no!”

“You are not referring to—your maid?”

“I am not,” she flushed angrily. “I mean giving it to those dishonest politicians.”

“I expect to get it back some day,” he reminded her.

“Yes. Graft, I suppose.”

“Never! You ought to know me better than that. They may run me for Congress this fall.”

“How much will that cost you?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean for the privilege of running. You don’t expect somebody else to pay your bills?”

“No. There are contributions, of course. It might cost me a thousand dollars.”

“A thousand dollars! And then you tell me you spend no money foolishly! And I am foolish enough to believe you. You can’t give me anything, but you can throw a thousand dollars away on politics. Suppose you are defeated!”

“I get the advertising, don’t I? It will help my practice.”

The boat neared the shore and he got out first to draw it up on the sand. She stepped out and left him without a word. Babs was waiting for them on the wall, but she passed her by and went into the house to prepare the supper.

Next morning she was astir early and the dishes were finished quickly. The day was fresh, and a lively

breeze came dancing down the lake. Bert was trying to hang a picture in the living-room and was making a fuss looking for picture wire and some hooks. She, wanting to get out of his way, especially during these moments when he set about something which he had not the patience to do slowly, wandered out on the veranda and took up the review to resume her reading of yesterday. One of the very popular novels was running serially, with New York society of the Seventies as the setting for the tale. It was uncanny, the art of this author. It was so very interesting and so painstakingly done. But how extremely formal these folks were! And how tiresome it must have been to have to conform to the standards of those days! Here was the Countess Olenska, fleeing from her Parisian husband and meeting with a cold reception from New York society! They looked upon her as a dreadful person, even refusing to meet her at dinner. What a difference a score or more of years makes! It was plain to be seen that the metropolis was then living in its age of innocence.

Presently Babs came running to her side, heedless of everything, and threw herself into her mother's lap.

"Babs! Don't you see mother is reading?"

Babs did see mother was reading, but not before her attention had been sharply called to it. She withdrew pouting, one fist buried in her eye.

"What is it you want?" Edith inquired.

"Can—can I go out—in the—canoe?"

"No, dear. You cannot."

"Why-y-y?"

"Because I do not want you to."

"Will you come with me?"

"Not now."

Edith resumed her reading while the little one continued to sulk. Presently Bert's voice sounded from the living-room.

"Who's pitching into Babs now?"

No answer, only a deep silence.

The mother interpreted the remark as a mild rebuke and her face colored slightly. Babs, observing the silence, hastened away and went indoors.

"Daddy!" she called, "I want to go out in the canoe and mother won't take me."

"Never mind, I'll take you. We shall go for the mail. How does that strike you?"

"Oh, goody! Let's!" she cried, gleefully, and they came out together.

"What's that you're reading?" asked Bert.

"Just a story," she replied, tartly.

"What's it all about?"

"Do be quiet, please," she said. "How can I read when you ply me with questions? Besides, it's only a story—a trashy story."

He whistled softly as if he understood. She was vexed again. The frown on her forehead showed it, that, and the nervous staccato of her foot.

Leaving her he turned quickly and headed for the lake. Babs raced after him. No sooner had they crossed the wide lawn in front of the house than Edith looked up, saw them chatting cheerfully, and was seized with a strange caprice. With a rush she was off the

veranda and outsped them for the canoe. Grasping Babs by the hand she carried her along with her.

“Come with me, Babs! I’ll take you.”

Bert continued his leisurely pace to the shore and put the canoe into the water for them, helping them in and pushing them out into the lake. For several minutes he stood there watching them glide away. Then he turned, scratched his head, and made for the house.

The warm morning sun stood well up above them in the clear, steel vault of heaven, glowing and sparkling in the eddies driven forward by the wind, in the wavelets cut by the slender prow. The wind blew briskly and catching the canoe on the side, made paddling difficult. The curved shores of the lake revealed calm and lovely vistas, where birch trees stood up straight against the water and seemed twice their height in the glassy foreground. A shy kingfisher took alarm and flew from a branch close by with a shrill cry of anger.

Babs talked incessantly. First it was about Edgar Stock’s new canoe with a motor in it that went “like everything” and “all you had to do was steer it”; then it was about Mrs. Doran’s dog “that jumped off the pier and went in swimming like anybody else, not after a stick or anything, but just jumping right off”; now about Agnes’ old boat (Agnes Smith was her playmate), a “scow” she called it, that leaked “something awful” and had to be baled out all the time when she rowed across the lakes; the new log cabin of Clark’s, built of pine logs cut near by; and the dance hall beside the store. The uninterested mother replied with a

word or two to her persistent questioning, but made no attempt to keep abreast of the little chatterer's thoughts.

For she was too deeply absorbed in another matter. More than ever she had begun to realize that she and Bert did not understand each other, and she was beginning to resent his attitude of seeming to own her. She was sick to death, tired of his narrow spirit. It was just the little incidents—insignificant as they seemed—that showed how unable each was to appreciate the thoughts and feelings of the other. She was becoming increasingly impatient with him, and it was obvious that his offensive bearing would have to be changed. She could easily imagine the peculiar state of mind of the hero of the novel she had been reading. His wife was too genuine, too innocent, for stimulating interest. In the Countess Olenska were combined a number of attributes that lent zest to his more prosaic surroundings. She, like Newland Archer, was losing all interest in her unimaginative spouse.

Only last night, as they went out fishing, she had thought this spot the loveliest place imaginable, with its fir-trees encircling the white marble surface of the lake, the evening air soft and fragrant with the nectar distilled by the needles of the pines. But this morning all was changed. It was too sequestered for human endurance, too solitary. She saw it now as clearly as she saw the light of the sun in the water before her. But it was not the place that was at fault; it was her husband. If their lives were doomed to failure because of an incompatibility that appeared to be growing wider

and more vehement every day, something should be done to make him realize it before the breach grew irreparable. She was satisfied, however, that deliverance would have to come from his side.

The store lay directly ahead of her, and she coaxed the canoe to the side of the float. This was the rendezvous of the lake people. There was the usual assortment of canned goods, candies, ices and tobacco for the comfort and delight of the campers; there was the post office where the mail was brought from town in the old Ford car; there was the dance hall where the young folks congregated and enjoyed themselves twice every week. It was the community center and provision mart combined, and, with its old proprietor, Roger McKim, authorized constable, justice-of-the-peace, and game warden of the township, was the outstanding place of activity of the neighborhood.

Babs climbed up the float, scampered up the ramp, and disappeared within the store. When she reappeared she had a letter in her hand. It was addressed to her mother and bore the post-mark, "West Shefford." Edith recognized the writing immediately.

"Who's it from, mother?" Babs inquired as she handed it to her.

"Miss Wheaton, dear."

"What does she say?"

No answer.

"Miss Evelyn or Miss Doris?"

"Miss Evelyn."

"Is she coming up?"

"Yes. Next week."

“What day?”

“Sunday.”

Satisfied, the child crept carefully back into the tiny craft and Edith paddled home as rapidly as possible. She wanted to tell Bert that the Wheatons were coming. They had decided to take a short motor trip and stop over for a few days, and they intended to bring Kelso for a purpose which would be explained later.

She met Bert on the veranda and smiled happily. It caused him to wonder what good news had come to her.

“Here is a letter from Evelyn,” she said. “They are coming up.”

“Fine! When?”

“Sunday!” she replied with eyes aglow.

“Good!” he exclaimed again. “Write back at once and tell them they will be welcome. I guess we can find room for everybody. Put the car in the barn. Sure!”

She went to the table at once and began to write the reply, giving directions concerning the best route to take. The atmosphere had cleared wonderfully, and the camp was not so solitary, after all.

VII

SUNDAY was dark and showery, the rain streaming continuously from a dull gray sky. Thunder was heard at times in the distance, long, rolling growls like the terrifying roar of angry animals in the jungle. The downpour was terrific while it lasted and marched up the lake with a hissing noise, defining the area of its progress as it moved along. Huge clouds whirled by from the south, making ugly grimaces as they passed, dripping with moisture which the wind caught and drove mercilessly against the trees and the house. It was such a day as Nature loves to use, to display her might and power before a cowering world. But Edith did not cower. She rather enjoyed the spectacle, and marveled at the awful splendor and wealth of Nature's energy. She stood on the veranda, in the shelter of the house, and watched the alternation of showers as they came from the lower portion of the lake and disappeared behind the upper hills.

Suddenly, above the noise of the storm, she heard an automobile horn. She had been expecting it, and, turning quickly, she peered down the path that led through the woods out to the main road, and saw the familiar enclosed car feeling its way nervously and cautiously down the trail. Wrapping her cloak about her she descended to the front lawn to signal a message of

welcome. They saw it, and the dripping and spattered sedan jumped forward joyfully, climbed over the grass and sand as far as the front steps, snorted loudly and stopped. Edith hastened to the door to extend the hospitality of the camp to the weary tourists, but they assured her that they were not in the least uncomfortable, and had enjoyed the trip in spite of the driving rain and heavy roads.

She was aglow with feverish enthusiasm. Calling Bert, who had just appeared on the veranda, to assist with their wraps and bags she waited for the two young women to alight, and then took them upstairs to their room. Everything was clean and neat, there was a fresh supply of water in the pitchers, freshly laundered towels and bed linen, brand new scarf on the dresser. Kelso's room was in front, a large airy room, which she and Bert had surrendered to him. Here were trays for his cigarettes, matches, a rocker brought upstairs for his use, and several Remington prints of which she knew he was fond.

"Hasn't it been dreadful?" Evelyn remarked as they went upstairs. "We came through shower after shower."

"It rained here all 'day," Edith replied.

"We were caught at the Wayside Inn. It's the queerest place!"

"Don't you like it? We are very fond of it."

She relieved them of their hats and laid them on a shelf.

"We have no room here for closets," she apologized. "All space available has been made into rooms."

"Why, you have the cutest place imaginable!" Doris vowed enthusiastically.

"Yes, it is pretty," Edith agreed. "And it is so delightful in the evening when the moon is out over the water. You could sit for hours watching it."

"And the lake! Isn't it fine!" said Evelyn from the window whither she had gone to look outside.

"Oh, you cannot see it to-day," Edith reminded her. "Wait until to-morrow. The storm will be over then. Really, it is quite charming."

They came downstairs to find Bert and Kelso examining some fishing rods and flies. Some words about bass and pickerel escaped their lips. These men! Forever talking about sport!

"I was just complimenting your husband on his camp," Kelso said. "Why, he has everything here. I never dreamed of finding such a place."

"Do you like it?" Edith asked.

"Immensely! I should like to stay here all the time."

"You would soon get tired of it."

They fell to examining the gayly colored flies and silvery spoons, Bert explaining to the girls the purposes and values of each. A trolling spoon greatly interested Evelyn and she spun it round several times with her finger.

"Look! Do you wonder the fish is fascinated?"

Supper was served in true camp style, everybody waiting upon himself and passing the dishes from one to the other with obliging courtesy. An oil lamp, suspended from one of the beams in the ceiling, cast a yel-

low glow over the table, and added to the simplicity of it all. There was certainly enough to eat, judging from the crowded appearance of the table, with its wholesome food. Never before had their board accommodated so many, and Bert, at its head, sat and marveled at the tireless industry of his wife and the real pleasure she was deriving from the deliciously satisfying meal.

“How do you ever do this—all by yourself?” Doris asked Edith. “My, but you are a wonder!”

“Oh! I am ashamed of myself and the dirt of the place. Please, don’t notice it—and the floor! I meant to scrub it yesterday, but it would never dry.”

“Scrub it? You? Mercy!”

“Really. I washed all the woodwork last week. Soon I am going to stain the floors. It’s loads of fun.”

“And what do you do for real excitement, when you want to go off and create a scandal, or do something desperate?” pursued the incorrigible Doris.

“She goes to the movies,” Bert supplied. “And we attend the dances.”

“Dances!” exclaimed Kelso.

“Yes. There’s an old fellow here, a peculiar old chap with quite a history attached to his life. Got in here some way or other and settled down. All those camps the other side of the lake are his. He rents them. The dance hall was built by him alongside of his own camp, and it’s the weirdest place you ever saw. Rough pine trunks holding up the roof and there’s a tree growing through one side of it. A couple of boys come in from town, over here at Shapley about eight

miles away, and one of them plays the piano, and the other a drum. It's good, I want to tell you."

"It must be. How often do they hold these affairs?"

"Three times a week, isn't it, Edith?"

"Yes. There's a dance to-morrow night, by the way. Would you like to go?"

"It would be fun," said Evelyn. "Do you go often?"

"Once in a while. Bert doesn't dance, you know. But we stand at the windows and watch the others."

Early the next morning before the sun had risen, Bert brought Kelso up the lake for a try at bass. The storm of yesterday had cleared entirely and there was scarcely a cloud in the sky, but everything was damp and sticky and the air cool and moist. What luck they would have was conjectural, Bert reminded his anxious guest, for the heavy rains of the two preceding days had washed a quantity of food, flies and bugs and worms, down the slopes into the lake and the bass were liable to be pretty well fed. Still it was worth the attempt. So they were gone for hours before the rest of the party thought of rising for the day.

Evelyn and Doris rose about eight and got their own breakfasts—usually a simple ceremony in a camp. Recreation followed as soon as the few dishes were put away and this morning it was indulged in on the veranda, where there was much gossip to be exchanged. Sadie Jackson had announced her engagement to Chet Baldwin and the papers printed a terrible picture of her. She never took a good picture, anyway. It was whispered that all was not going well with the Pooles. Mrs. Poole and Gladys had left for Europe without

Will and it was rumored that a certain Mrs. Leffington was mixed up in the case. It was said that they had agreed to separate, but she wouldn't give him the satisfaction of getting a divorce.

Edith inquired about Mrs. Liggett. This gave Evelyn the chance she was waiting for, to tell Edith what a 'dangerous woman they had been inviting to their house, who was affording them as much concern as they had ever suffered.

"She is after Kelso, and I know it," Evelyn declared with emphatic determination. "Every pretext in the world she has seized to visit us and we have never returned a call. She wrote us that she was driving through this week, but I wired back that we were leaving for a trip. That was the reason I brought Kelso with us."

The words gave Edith a shock, for she never imagined for a moment that such a state of affairs could be possible. The only time she had met Betty was at Westlawn the night of the play. It had never dawned on her that she was entertaining any secret designs on Kelso Wheaton. She resented the idea bitterly, for some reason or other of which she did not seem conscious.

"What does she want with Kelso?" she asked in scorn. "Isn't she living with her husband? I thought she was happy."

"Oh, that marriage won't last long," Doris declared. "She will shake him off one of these days. Too diabetic for her! He needs a nurse, a real nurse, not a flirt."

"But I thought she was his nurse——"

“She says she was; but no one knows the truth. She told Kelso once she was his private secretary, but Mr. Liggett claims he met her in a hospital. Another report has it that he first met her at Newport during the tennis tournament and was attracted by her wonderful form.”

The last words were accompanied by a long 'drawl.

“Does Mr. Liggett suspect this?”

“He's too simple to suspect anything. They say there's no fool like an old fool, but the fool who misleads the fool is a reprobate. I could never understand why a beautiful young woman would want to tie herself up to a fossil, yet it happens every day, and it occurs only among our best families.”

“Was a time when New York would have gasped in astonishment over such affairs,” said Edith. “But no one seems to mind it now—very much. We are rather surprised at a marriage that turns out perfectly happy——”

“And print our pictures in the papers to tell the world that we've been living together twenty-five or fifty years,” Doris chimed.

“Well,” Evelyn observed, “convention is wonderful. The Beloved Vagabond says it is essential for the smooth conduct of social affairs, but it seems an elastic term, nevertheless. For instance, convention to-day has elevated divorce——”

“And created alimony. Bianca Black got her 'divorce in twenty minutes, 'by default.' Her husband forgot all about the summons. Not so bad!”

“The married woman who philanders with another

man and steals his affections is a thief of some other woman's happiness," Evelyn returned, emphatically.

Edith saw envy and jealousy beneath all this. There was no doubt that the two sisters were very much in love with their handsome brother. For him they lived. She could see the turn of their hands in every factor that had been brought to bear upon the regulation of his career. He was sent to college to give him the advantage of a liberal education, although he was not expected to make any material use of the training he received. He was sent to Europe to develop his æstheticism, and to give his manners that polish that European experience affords. He was initiated into the Governor's Foot Guards, an honorary organization composed of the representative men of the city to act as escort to the Chief Executive of the State whenever he appeared in public ceremony—and she knew that Kelso detested this on account of the fact that he was obliged to march on parade. They entertained at bridge for his sake, made him run the gamut of social life, encouraged him to feats of endeavor, such as taking part in aviation meets and golf tournaments—but they had never succeeded in marrying him to some suitable and respectable girl. Why? Were they simply selfish creatures who wanted him entirely and exclusively for themselves?

Presently her eyes fell upon Bert and Kelso turning the bend where the land shot out peninsula-like into the water. They were heading for home.

"Here they come!" Doris announced, "and they look like a pair of hungry fishermen."

As they stepped ashore it became apparent to the watchers on the veranda that Kelso's hand was swathed in a handkerchief. Further investigation revealed that he had met with a painful accident. A hook had penetrated the fleshy part of his thumb and torn a deep gash. He asked for a little iodine.

Edith jumped to her feet and ran to meet him. She led him inside and examined the wound. It was more ugly than serious and she prepared to dress it. How like a big boy he looked, shirt open at the neck, arms bare and sunburned, hair matted, a smile on his face. As she applied the tincture of iodine he flinched and unconsciously she seemed to feel a similar sensation of pain. But there was harmony even here, and she beamed while she dressed the wound for him, like one unaccustomed to the happiness which the joy of doing something for some one else affords.

She saw that he wanted to speak to her, but her instinct forbade it. She kept talking, and as she clipped the strings from the bandage, she dismissed him with a parting pat on the back. This was an indication of her indifference and he interpreted it accordingly, for, after thanking her in his gracious manner, he wandered out of the kitchen and joined the others on the veranda. She watched him depart and tarried behind long enough to permit them to lapse into naturalness before she herself went out and took her chair.

That night they went across the lake to McKim's. Here was the pavilion, a rude structure fashioned from freshly cut pine timbers, fragrant and coarse-looking. Oil lamps suffused a faint yellow glow throughout the

place, and hid from view the rough pine knots and uneven matchings of the floor. Pine needles, scattered about the hall, made a slippery surface. From lakeside camps and the nearby town came young folks and old ones, too, in canoes, motor boats and Fords. There were, indeed, two distinct classes here, and the one remained in complete ignorance of the other insofar as knowledge or acquaintanceship went. Only those who were entitled to the privilege of friendship were permitted to become partners for the evening. Total strangers were they to everybody else and usually remained so the entire season.

It was to satisfy the curiosity of her guests more than anything else that led Edith to propose a trip across the lake on the evening in question. Never for a moment did it enter her mind that the Wheatons should mingle, even on the dance floor, with the crowd. Here in the dense woods there was that same consciousness of class privilege, as pronounced and as permanent as any definite discriminations of aristocratic Shefford or cosmopolitan New York. Intercourse was precluded by a feeling of mutual contempt. One of these shop girls, who had come over in the jitneys from the mills at Shapley, would as soon snub the idle debutante summing in her cozy camp by the side of the lake as she would look at her. In point of fact she would prefer to snub her rather than look at her. It would afford her a great deal more satisfaction.

Edith was radiant as she approached the hall. Of course people would wonder who her guests were, and she could perceive, as she climbed the few steps, the

glances directed at them by the crowd assembled on the veranda that ran around two of the sides of the pavilion. Even here in the lake country the Wheatons bore themselves with that air of elegance and distinction so characteristic of them at all times, and they became outstanding figures among that plainly attired company. Edith presented them to as many of her friends and neighbors on the lake as she encountered. Then Kelso asked her if she cared to dance. She readily assented. Here the eyes of the dancers were upon them. He wore the conventional suit of light tweed knickers and it became the object of all interest. No one had ever appeared in that pavilion in such attire before. Certain young men disdain to wear knickers, and they usually entertain ideas of their own concerning those who do. These looked over their shoulders at Kelso as he passed, sneered at him and passed remarks about him to their partners. But Edith enjoyed the spectacle. She was glad of the opportunity of showing some of these people what conventional usage amounted to, as well as the kind of company she was accustomed to keep when she was at home.

"I did not think you would come," she said to him. "Was it much of an effort to tear yourself away?"

"You asked us, didn't you?" he responded.

"Yes. But I didn't dream you would care for it."

"It is a pleasure—to me at any rate. Really, I am charmed with the place. I had no idea you were so happy."

Happy! The word smote her, but she let it pass. She was not sure of his meaning.

"How is Betty?" she asked, changing the subject abruptly.

He laughed. "Well, I think. Why?"

"Why. . . . I just wanted to know."

"Evelyn has been talking to you. Let me assure you, however, that Betty means nothing to me."

"Of course not! Why should she?" she replied with artless malice. He saw it instantly.

"It is because she gets lonesome and comes to visit us to drive away the blues. You don't know what it means—to feel lonely."

She looked amused. He watched her. Did he know what thoughts were surging through her brain he might have evinced surprise, she thought.

"You have merely tried to cheer her up then?" she asked.

"Yes, at times."

A stranger brushed close to him, pressing roughly against him. Kelso looked over his shoulder to offer an apology, but discovered a sardonic grin on the fellow's face. He stepped out of the way to avoid him.

"Do you know that chap?" he asked her.

"No," she replied. "He does not belong here."

The incident was forgotten. But Kelso could not help feeling that the fellow's actions were deliberate and malicious. On the other hand the hall was quite crowded, and it was just possible that he himself was partly to blame for the jostling. He had not been looking where he was going, so interested was he in their conversation.

"Do you know," she said now, very gravely, "I have

often wondered why you do not marry and settle down!"

"I suppose it's because I can't have what I want," he replied.

"Betty?" The word escaped her before she knew it. Like a temptation the name had suggested itself and before she was aware of it her lips had given it utterance.

"Betty! Ridiculous! But you would not understand——"

Again they were jostled roughly. Kelso clearly saw the couple racing toward him, and halted to let them pass. They crashed into Edith and unbalanced her. There was no question now about the malice of the attack.

"Don't do that again, please!" he said quietly to the aggressive pair.

"Go on, you big stiff!" came the savage retort. "Back to the woods!"

Kelso's fist shot out and landed squarely on the ruffian's jaw. Several blows were exchanged before they were separated and conducted from the hall. No one seemed to mind; it was as if the affair were an ordinary occurrence, but Edith felt deeply humiliated as she joined the others outside.

"I am sorry I forgot myself," apologized Kelso. "I thought you were hurt."

"I am sorry, too," she murmured. "But you were provoked to it——"

"That's it," he said. "I lost my head, I guess. That's the trouble with me—I'm too impulsive, too

hot-headed. And when he struck you I lost my self-control."

The story of the fracas had to be repeated to his sisters and Bert, Kelso emphasizing the fact that he had acted only in Edith's behalf. It was evident, however, that the crowd favored the bully, and they flocked about him as they would about a hero. The situation was growing tenser, and it would not take much provocation to create a strong disturbance. Bert grasped the situation, and whispered that it would be discreet to escape. Obedient to this suggestion they picked their way cautiously through the crowd and down the planks to the float, where they boarded their boat. In a few minutes they had pushed out into the lake.

That was the evening Edith realized that there was something new and peculiar in her feeling for Kelso. She was unwilling to analyze it, but it had vanquished her completely. She felt it keenly, meeting it with fear first—then with enthusiasm.

VIII

ABOUT a week later Bert awoke and found Edith dressed and ready for the day.

“What’s the hour?” he asked.

“Seven o’clock. Time you were up.”

“Why are you up so early?” he asked, knowing it was her custom never to arise before eight.

“We’re going to town.”

He looked at her, noting the freshness of her color as she stood before the glass. She was lovely, in yellow and brown with short skirted frock of tan, dotted with little white knots, silk stockings to match and tan and white oxfords. Then he remembered that she was going to the store with Kelso in the big sedan to buy some provisions.

“Did you hear me last night?” he asked.

“No! What was the trouble?”

“It was a wild night. I must have been shouting my lungs out.”

“I heard nothing.”

“I thought you were drowning, and I was trying my best to save you. I was frightened to death.”

She adjusted a hairpin.

“Would that frighten you?”

“I don’t know where we were—in some sort of car, I guess, climbing a trestle. It was uphill, and a hard

climb, but all of a sudden we began to move. I could see a pair of towers far ahead and this gave me the idea that we were on the cables of a suspension bridge. I wondered how in the world we were going to get down on the other side. Before I realized it we had made the turn and begun the drop. It was awful. The wind took my breath away and I caught hold of you. The river was below us, black and flecked with foam. The turbid waters were rushing through the rapids. All of a sudden we fell into them. The next thing . . . Oh, yes, I was on a piece of rock and you were being tossed about in the current. I tried to reach you, but you did not come near me, and you were dragged away. There were falls, I remember their roar. I was calling after you when I awoke. It was terrible. What did we eat?"

"Lobster salad. You had a nightmare," she said, prosaically.

"Well, a death like that must be terrible," he yawned, clenching his fists and stretching his arms above his head. "What time did you say it was?"

"Late. You had better dress," she replied, and turning, left the room.

When she came downstairs and threw open the doors and windows it seemed as if the fresh morning air rushed in with pure delight, so welcome was its embrace. It bathed the living-room with a flood of fragrance. It filled her whole being and made her glad and blithesome. The day was indeed brilliant, without so much as a stray cloud to ruffle the bosom of the peaceful sky. A gentle breeze murmured through the

trees with a great many whisperings, and drove the tiniest of wavelets scurrying across the lake like a multitude of phosphorescent fishes leaping out of the sea. She stood on the porch to gaze at the charming scenery and thought of Shelley:

“My soul is an enchanted boat,
Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float
Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing:

.
Whilst all the winds with melody are ringing.”

But it was not the splendor of the scene, lovely and captivating, that alone occupied her thoughts and, touching the deepest powers of her soul, elicited from them tuneful harmonies. The landscape was delicious to the eye and awakened pleasurable sensations, but it was her heart, particularly, that had been stimulated with an absorbing interest in its surroundings, the like of which had never engaged it before. She had been, literally, swept off her feet by this guest who had come into her house and effected a change in her very existence. It was not love now, it was more than love. It was like the taste of a new life, the life of the ardently wooed heroines of fiction, with their alternate moments of insecure certainty and complete ecstasy, and she visualized herself as the counterpart of one of these fanciful creatures, and lived, for the time being, in a world of romance. Never before had she experienced quite the same sensations. Never before had she imagined that life could be so interesting and afford so much enjoyment from sheer frivolity.

Kelso had been allowed to make love to her, not that she feared its seriousness, but as a matter of amusement. The whole affair was couched in terms of the wildest fancy. It was interesting; neither of them ever expected anything to result from it but the memories of a harmless escapade. They were like two love-birds, perched on a tiny bough at a dizzy height, whom accident had brought together and whom accident would soon separate. It was delightful, this fairyland, where no one grew weary, and where everybody played all day long to the sportive melodies of an elfin Puck.

Only one short week! And yet how crowded with enchanting days! He had come, and had changed the aspect of everything and made it unlike anything that had ever been there before. That dead pine, the solitary tenant of Gavin Island, which had heretofore reminded her of a gaunt ghost with weird, outstretched arms, was now a living thing, clothed with beauty and symmetry, standing as a sentinel to challenge the intrepid mariner who dared to venture near. The old plank bridge at the head of the lake, whose heavy timbers were green with a half century's growth of water moss, was a tottering old affair extremely perilous to the traveler; but last night it had seemed as if a phantom host of redskins were swarming over it, pressing on in mad pursuit of a panic-stricken foe. Each bush and rock, however unsightly in reality, assumed ideal beauty. The lake itself was no longer a body of water, but a crystal fluid dropped in among the hills, kissing the tall, green grass and overhanging boughs with precious lips. Strange how the buoyancy of the soul can

communicate its radiance to the material world! Here she was, a girl again, who, during these moments of exuberance, had cast off the deepening shadows of the years that weighed upon her. Everything delighted her.

Last night Kelso had commented upon her exceptional brilliance and charm. They had gone for a ride in the canoe just after supper, at that hour between day and evening when the landscape was bathed in twilight's faintest hues; they did not turn back until they had gone under the old wooden bridge to Square Pond. Darkness chased the soft tints from the groves and hill-tops, and folded the countryside into its restful arms before their return, but they were quite unmindful of it, so wrapped up were they in their own selves. Wonderful things her ears had listened to, stories of himself, stories of his abiding interest in her. He made her feel that she was the only person in the world who mattered. Her ears believed him. When he spoke of the ardor of his affection, of his continued devotion, she did not wonder for a minute whether or no he were insincere. It did not occur to her, even, that she might be but another butterfly whose gaudy wings and delicate texture had fascinated his eye and stimulated his fancy for the pleasures of the hour.

What would Bert say if he knew this was going on? Surely he must have suspected her feeling for Kelso from the start, unless he were blind indeed! But that was the way with Bert: he was so sure of her. It would never enter his brain that he might suffer the loss of her to some more ardent admirer. Never, unless some

sudden casualty, like a bolt of lightning out of a clear sky, occurred to bring the realization of it home to his mind. And there was that gloomy tale spun through his brain last night by some old meddlesome fairy god-mother perched beside him on his pillow! Was she not trying to put him on his guard against his wife? Suppose, on the other hand, the dream were symbolical of the truth! Would he make that supreme effort to save her?

She thought no more about it, for it dawned upon her quite suddenly that she was waiting for Kelso, and he had not appeared. Last night they had agreed to meet early this morning to go shopping in his car. There were many things she needed. They would want the car to bring home the bundles.

"Oh, I say, Mrs. Colman," his voice broke in upon her thoughts, "I am sorry to keep you waiting. My, how perfectly delightful you look this morning!"

She thought she could make the same remark of him, in his loose fitting blue serge coat, white flannels and shoes.

"That's kind," she replied, pleasantly. "I did not mind waiting. I was admiring the view."

"Isn't it a wonderful day? Look at those clouds over the lake. The only ones in sight. What's that Shelley says of the clouds?"

"I am the daughter of earth and water,
And the nursling of the sky.'"

"Now isn't that singular!" she exclaimed. "Do you know I was thinking of him when I came out."

Their eyes met and they both laughed.

"That was strange, what! Sort of coincidence! . . . Sorry I kept you waiting, though. This air, I guess, has a soporiferous effect on me. Ye-uh! Soporiferous! It means the same thing. I guess I am only half awake now."

"So it seems," she said, and they left the porch.

He backed the car from the garage and swung it around to the veranda steps to enable her to get in. Slowly he picked his way along the furrows of the trail, scaring up several partridges from their early feeding and driving them deeper into the woods for fear of the mighty roar. They went through a mile of this, through the pine forest, and at length reached the broad highway where they settled back for a long run.

They talked in the usual way, as most people do, of the beautiful morning, of the mist clinging to the tops of the pines and hemlocks, of the good road moist with the dew. Edith presently volunteered the information that to-morrow was Sunday and that at this same hour they would be journeying along this same road on their way to church. This occasioned a number of inquiries on his part respecting the hour, the place, and the duration of these services, adding that he would consider it a pleasure to escort them and as many of her friends as the car would hold to early Mass. She thanked him.

"Don't you ever go to church, even on Sunday?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. Sometimes!"

"It will be a novel experience for you, then, this rising early on Sunday morning."

"I daresay it will," he laughed.

"Don't you believe in church?"

"Yes of course. It is good. Religion is good for man. It gives him some consolation."

"But you would not want to bind yourself to the obligations of any religious creed?"

He smiled without answering and let her draw her own inference. This she did.

"You would not want to make the sacrifice. Have you ever wished to be other than you are?" she asked.

"In what way?"

"Well, deprived of your sense of security. Could you live and not be a fatalist? You are one, are you not?"

"I suppose so," he answered.

"Suppose it happens that you are heading for a goal you least expect!"

"Maybe I am. Who can tell? But I am ready for whatever the future holds in store for me. Nothing ever happens without being preordained."

"How do you know that?"

"That's it. I don't know. Therefore I accept whatever is to be."

She did not like this necessarian doctrine, but the fact that he embraced it made it look somewhat different. Heretofore she had been accustomed to frown upon it because it was a philosophical heresy of John Stuart Mill. Now she thought she saw something in it, precisely because Kelso Wheaton believed in it.

"What about the future? Are you yourself not directly responsible for it? Your own will, I mean."

"Not much," came the reply. "I have always believed in living for the day. To-morrow never comes. Epicurus spoke a good truth. What have we to do with the future other than to await its coming?"

"But God knows what is in store for us——"

"How do we know? How can we be sure? Of course I believe in God. Most people do, nowadays. But that does not help me to know what He thinks or does."

"It has been revealed," she quickly reminded him.

"Yes, so they say. But again—how can we be sure? They tell us now that Moses never wrote the Bible. Whom are we to believe? What if we were living in the midst of a huge sophistry! We accuse the pagans of having their gods and goddesses—yet they were entirely sincere."

She pursed her lips, unwilling to agree with him, unwilling to contradict him. He seemed to have very definite ideas along these lines . . . yes, he was a free-thinker . . .

"The tendency to-day," he went on, "is to get away from all these so-called dogmas. Men want more freedom of thought. They must have it. The great trouble with religion is that it has not kept pace with man. We are living in an advanced stage of civilization. Science and machinery have made gigantic strides and have contributed much to progress. Religion has not moved forward one inch. Take our moral code. It has outlived its usefulness, for it has failed to measure up to the advance made by society."

“But it isn’t our moral code that is at fault. Society is at fault.”

“Social life is precisely what we make it. Codes of law are beneficial as long as they reside in the heart of the individual. Any law that oppresses is unjust of its nature.”

She felt like crying out against this, but for some reason or other was unable to. A law to her was an objective reality, while conscience was the subjective norm. These two notions he had confused. Every law that regulated the welfare of a community restricted the liberty of the individual. Was a penal law to be considered unjust simply because it restrained the freedom of action of certain persons? There were times when authoritative interference was necessary. All this she revolved in her mind, but she was powerless to give expression to it in the presence of this man. Even his way of thinking completely dominated her, until at length she began to discover herself going against her better judgment and coinciding with his expressed belief.

“Take yourself, for instance,” he exclaimed, putting an end to her cogitation. “You are unhappy with your husband! You know it as well as I. You are compelled to live with one who is incompatible in every way, bound to continue an unholy and unhappy alliance simply because a law of your Church compels you to. Better judgment tells you not to obey that law. It is unjust.”

“But I must not think of doing otherwise.”

“And why? Simply because you fear the conse-

quences of divorce. Still you will admit that you and your husband are not properly mated."

"I suppose so," she faltered.

"You know it. Well, then, why don't you leave him?"

"I couldn't do that. I do not believe in divorce."

"Your Church does not, and you do just what your Church tells you. That is the point I was getting at before. The world to-day has grown away from that mediæval notion about the absolute authority of the Church. Men no longer believe in the indissolubility of marriage. Moses allowed divorce. We are returning to the Old Dispensation."

Edith sighed and let her arm fall along the edge of the seat with a gesture of helplessness. She wished that she might turn the conversation to other subjects—the summer tints, the fields and other impersonal things, but her lips quivered helplessly. It was uncanny, the influence of the speech of this seducer. And the worst of it was that she wanted to agree with him.

"Do you think it right for two people to make each other unhappy? That is what it amounts to, isn't it? You cannot be happy with your husband, while, on the other hand, he is so constituted that he can be perfectly happy with or without you. Family discord is a much more serious evil than divorce. As long as two people have no ambitions, tastes, or ideals in common, there is no law that can render them happy or the home secure. There is only one thing possible for them to do under the circumstances—separate."

He spoke like a sage. Never before had the argu-

ment come home to her with such cogency. He seemed to grasp her situation completely, and his apparent mastery of the problem made his language the more impressive.

"Would you advise my leaving him?" she asked timidly.

The question was so direct that its suddenness caught him off his guard. He did not know what to answer. For he suddenly realized that he had succeeded in persuading her to agree with his way of thinking. His reply must be the death thrust.

"Certainly!" he retorted with deliberate intent. "You are unhappy. You no longer love him. Why prolong the agony?"

"But my child!"

He frowned and with reason. There was no attempt to answer this, for no answer could be made.

A pity, indeed! Was it not a real pity that an attractive but mismated young woman should be obliged to live a life of misery on account of a child of four or five? Was it not misery for him to have to pity her? It was either of the two emotions that confronted him with the thought of the child—pity for her or misery for himself. Why had she mentioned the child? It was an obex that could not be surmounted.

Kelso Wheaton had never been accustomed to endure any thwarting of his desires. What he wanted he took, keeping as far as possible within the limits of propriety. And while he had a genuine desire of being loved by everybody, he did not fear the consequences of being hated. If he were a business man he would

have ridden rough-shod over his competitor. Buy him out or force him out would have been his motto.

But he was not a business man. His only competitors were his opponents in golf, tennis, the races. He did own much real estate, but it was given over to the exclusive management of his representative. He devoted his activities only to the field of society. Here he acquired a peculiar mode of living that was not possible to a man of the business world. He was a good fellow well met, but with no outlet for his talents or abilities. The arrogant optimism that was his was the result of this complete isolation, which forbade him yielding obedience to any person, creature, wealth, force or position. He was indifferent to material sin, and cared little what offense or pain he gave as long as it was unintentional. It was his concept of duty. He loved and feared his Maker only insofar as he knew Him.

If he really desired Edith Colman for his wife, the mere matter of a divorce would not intimidate him. Neither would the future disposal of the child. Nowadays people seldom hesitate over the question of one or two children, while the State wisely provides institutions for the accommodation and relief of such encumbrances. Of course the little girl was a hindrance to the consummation of his desires; she had to be considered—and it was only natural for a mother to express concern over her future welfare. Such problems were not insoluble, however. Children had figured in divorces before, sometimes with strange results. There was the case reported in the press of a mismated couple

freed in the divorce court. Soon after each one contracted a fresh marriage. They had children by their first marriage; they now had a child each by the second marriage. Question: What relation were the children to one another?

Babs! What was the answer he was to give to this embarrassing little creature? He was puzzled for a reply, as many persons had been puzzled before him.

"The matter of the child must be settled between your own selves," was the evasive answer he made to this vexatious problem. And so came the end of the discussion, for neither of them dared refer to the subject again.

And now, when their minds and hearts were strained to the breaking-point, enmeshed in a web of difficulties from which there seemed no immediate escape, the two found fresh tidings of events transpiring in far-off Shefford which were destined to bear directly upon their lives and fortunes. Doris greeted their arrival home with the information that Mr. Colman had been summoned. The intelligence startled Edith, for she conjectured the occurrence of a catastrophe. She abandoned her bundles and the car, and fled into the house to learn from her husband's own lips the nature of the message. But he quietly informed her that it was nothing: just word from Jim Watson, the party-boss of Shefford, offering him the nomination for Congressman. The conference would be held next week, and it was imperative that he get into consultation with Watson before the leaders met.

"Is that all?" remarked Edith. "Mercy! I thought mother was dead."

When Kelso came in he felicitated him warmly, wishing him all the success in the world. He congratulated Edith on her husband's good fortune, and addressed her as the wife of the Congressman-elect from the First District. But she turned away and started for the kitchen. At its threshold she paused.

"That means, I suppose, we shall have to go with you," she said to her husband.

"Not at all," said he. "There is no need of your leaving. I shall be back again in a few days."

"I think it would be well for all of us to leave together," Evelyn suggested. "We have overstayed our visit. . . . It was so enjoyable."

"Now see here," Bert interrupted, "think nothing of it. We have enjoyed your company more than you did ours. You are most welcome. I'll skip off for a day or two and will join you later."

But Evelyn was persistent. She had decided that it was time to return home. They would leave with him and drive him in their car.

Edith turned away without a word. As she passed Kelso, she looked at him with an intent gaze. Then she left the room and went out on the veranda.

IX

A CONGRESSMAN'S wife!

The suggestion at first seemed to her as extraordinary as it was enchanting; it thoroughly altered her attitude. For the while she derived a pleasurable satisfaction from the contemplation of what this new and eminent dignity would mean. People would be glad to welcome her to their houses; she might even participate in the honors which would accrue to her husband by virtue of his position. It was sure to keep them in public view and probably lead to fresh opportunities. The fine armor of her fastidiousness was penetrated, her waning interest and ambition stimulated to adhere to the existing order of things.

Bert could not be the simpleton she imagined him to be and rise to these heights. Among his friends he passed as an authority on economics, and he mingled constantly with the kind of people that dealt in abstract theories and formulas. The mere fact that he had been elected on a progressive ticket seemed the proof of intrinsic superiority. He reveled in his work. She doubted if, after his election, he would be any more attentive to her, for with his admission to Congress he was sure to be plunged into an amount of extraordinary business which would require all his time and thought. To fortify herself against temptation, she resolutely

fixed her mind on the privileges which would compensate her for his inevitable neglect. Would she derive enough from the society of Washington to make up for what she would have to forfeit in her domestic life? Or would she discover this to be another disagreeable episode, putting the death-stroke to her happiness and contentment of mind?

She had no idea of what life in the national capitol was like. Would she meet the Ambassadors' wives, with all the fastidiousness and finesse of their courtly manners, the members of the Diplomatic Corps, their families and their retinue, the fashionable younger set for which the seat of government was noted? If she had been in Washington when the Prince of Wales was there would she have danced with him at the grand ball given by the British Embassy in his honor? Then, there was the President's wife! Would she meet her if Robert was fortunate or clever enough to be delegated to consult with the President on official business? So many Senators and Representatives met and took lunch with the President at the White House during the season! There were many interesting sidelights within the confines of public life where there would be novelty and variety. Life, at any rate, would be gayer, brighter, and more exclusive.

In this way her happiness might be secured and her Congressman, after all, prove a worthy helpmate. She might, even, discover in him some new ideal to engage her attention and she might learn to put up with his idiosyncrasies for the sake of the good things to come. It would be far better than leaving him. She abhorred

the thought of divorce. Perhaps it would prove to be her good fortune to be taken away from here and confined in Washington. It might teach her to forget many of her grievances, even at the cost of a thousand domestic heartaches.

One day she took a train and went to Southend to visit the Wheatons. Here she received knowledge that put an end to these dreams. Kelso was there, more wonderful, it seemed, than ever before. He provided her with a stimulant, a precious compound concocted from sympathy and honeyed words. He took her for long rides in his motor car, frisked and gamboled with her in the water, and sat with her on the ample porch where they viewed together the splash and play of the tide and the steamers moving lazily across the horizon. The uncertainty of the future was vividly portrayed. Everything was problematical. Washington was, at its best, he disclosed to her, unfriendly to the commoner. There were hundreds of Congressmen who could not afford to live in the city. Only the merest handful of them were privileged to enter Washington homes. A senator was more distinguished, perhaps, but it must be remembered that there were nearly five hundred Representatives, only a few of whom rose above political and social mediocrity. Congress met but once a year, the first Monday in December, unless called into extraordinary session by the President, and this was not likely to happen in times of normalcy.

"You cannot hope to go on as you are going," he counseled her. "It is painful for a girl of your ability to have to minister to the wants of another so hope-

lessly beneath you in everything and to be forced to obey him and honor him. You can think a thousand things beyond the power of his mind. How often have you shed bitter tears in secret over the ill-usage and neglect of him who seldom thinks of you during the day? But, wonderful girl that you are, you smile throughout it all, and hold your head high before the world. Your love has been extinguished because you have had no ideal to measure up to. Your whole life has been a disappointment because you have never realized your ambitions. Your respect has been destroyed because you have been living with one you have learned to despise. Not all the marriage vows sworn before all the ministers in the world can hold you to this alliance."

"But what am I to do? . . . What can I do? . . . Don't you see . . . ?"

"I have already told you what to do. Leave him. Come to me. I am able to make you happy."

She flinched a trifle. It was not the first time he had proposed this to her, but she had not yet grown used to it. He saw the indecision on her face and followed up his advantage.

"I have everything to offer you. If you want to live in Washington I shall attend to that. It is not too much for me to say that I am considered a man of means and I can have anything I want. You, too, can have anything that money can buy. There is a splendid home awaiting you. My sisters will welcome you. The entrée to all the best homes in the country is yours. . . ."

"I can't do it . . . I can't . . ."

"Because you fear divorce. I have told you what a simple thing it is to get a divorce to-day. Go out to Nevada and register in a hotel. Return in six months and obtain your decree. Use desertion as the ground. He won't contest the case if you leave him the little girl."

In a terrible conflict, with these honeyed words ringing in her ears, Edith returned home after the weekend to face a fresh crisis. It would not have taken much to swerve her either way, for in her excitement she had reached the point where decision hung in the balance. Unfortunately Bert was in none too genial a mood. He observed the discontent and ill humor on her face, when he expected it to be covered with smiles, and he grew irritable and impatient. This was the first time they had met in four days and neither of them seemed to have a word of friendly greeting.

They sat down to table in silence. She made several overtures to speak, finding the silence oppressive, but he heeded her not. Babs began to tell her about school—she had been attending about a week—and the funny things some of the boys and girls did. She listened absently and stole glances at the expression of her husband's countenance across the table. It held an angry message for her.

"I had a woman to see me to-day," he said.

She paid no attention to the remark.

"She introduced herself as Mrs. Liggett. Do you know her?"

This time she looked up at him in astonishment and met his menacing stare.

"A friend of the Wheatons," he continued.

"What did she want?" she asked defiantly.

"She came for no good purpose, I assure you."

"I suppose she came to tell you about me?" she asked nervously.

"Then it is true?"

"Is what true?"

"What she had to say? I 'didn't listen to her—I asked her to leave the office—but . . . !"

"What did she want, then?"

"I don't know. Yet I suspect. I told you I 'didn't give her a hearing."

"Well," she said, "what 'do you propose to 'do?"

"Nothing at all. What can I do? I tell you the interview was brought to a sudden end."

"I suppose she advised you to watch me?"

He deigned no reply.

"And you believed her, and made up your mind to come home and chide me." She laughed as she added, "Don't you think it a little too late for that?"

He stared at her, one hand drumming on the table. The blood rose in his temples.

"Too late!" he repeated. "What 'do you mean?"

A sudden impatience mastered her. She arose impetuously, threw her napkin on the table, and hurried from the room. He made no effort to restrain her. Bidding the surprised child remain alone and finish her dessert he followed his wife to the front room where

he found her caressing tenderly a pink rosebud that protruded from a slender vase on the piano.

"Don't you think it time we came to some sort of understanding before this goes too far?" he asked, drawing near to where she stood.

"Understanding!" she scoffed.

"Yes," he rejoined. "Let us try to get together. We do not understand each other."

"Isn't it pretty late to begin?" she taunted, with sarcasm.

"Isn't this the proper time to begin?" he asked. "We have our faults, you and I. Suppose we try to rectify them? That's what I mean by coming to an understanding."

She stood motionless.

"What have I done? I tell you I pay no attention to gossip, but I am not foolish enough to be blind to what has been going on. What have I done to bring about this unhappiness?"

Still there came no answer.

"I am ready to go more than half-way if there is anything I can do."

"Impossible!" she said.

"Don't say that, Edith."

"You would have to be made over."

His face clouded.

"Does—does this mean—that you no longer care for me?"

She deigned no reply, but turning her back on him went to the sofa and threw herself upon it.

"Are you not happy?" he asked, following her.

No answer.

“For God’s sake talk to me,” he pleaded. “There is nothing I won’t do for you—nothing.”

He sat beside her, trying to take her hand.

“Don’t touch me!” she cried, drawing away from him.

He sat up without a word, and gazed at her in a turmoil of contradictory feelings. It seemed to him as if he were not speaking to his wife but to another woman to whom he was bound by some spell that he ought to shake off, but could not.

“My God!” he muttered. “Do you detest me that much?”

To his surprise her color rose, reluctant and vivid. Mournfully she looked at him and addressed him.

“Life isn’t what it should be for either of us, Bert. It has been a great mistake. I came to that conclusion some time ago. We were never intended for each other. You have never loved me; you only thought you did. Why continue this farce?”

Speechless, he heard her, stricken with pain at the wounds inflicted by that soft and beloved hand. The words struck the chords of his memory and the whole of his life passed in review before him. He had done the best he could for her, he knew, but it had never dawned on him that she was unhappy.

“It is better, isn’t it?” she went on.

“Better!” he gasped, without comprehending what was meant.

“We shall hurt no one. I am only living in your house. . . .”

He sprang to his feet and stood before her, looking down upon her in a rage.

“What do you mean?” he cried. “Haven’t I done everything to make you happy, to make you proud of me, to make myself worthy of you? Haven’t I been faithful to you? Surely, you entertain no such view of life as to want to dissolve what God hath put together? You don’t mean what you say! Consider your obligations—not the satisfaction of your own desires. It is not true that free love is the principle of marriage any more than that marriage ceases when love ceases. . . . Never was matrimony intended to depend upon the vagaries of human affection. You have told me you no longer love me. For God’s sake, girl, don’t say that. You are unreasonable, you are ungrateful to think it, let alone say it. Haven’t you been happy here?”

“No!” she replied, deliberately. “I only thought so. I never was.”

“Never . . . !” he repeated.

She shook her head, a deep sigh escaped her.

“Not—not happy?”

His voice was breaking under the emotion that surged like a storm within him.

“You have been kind enough, but——”

He walked away, wringing his hands like one in despair. Suddenly he turned and confronted her.

“But—what—what do you propose doing?”

“I don’t know.”

“You think this is—worse? To go on living this way?”

"A thousand times, yes!" There was a pause, then she quickly added:

"The truth is hard, but to go on 'deceiving ourselves is infinitely worse."

"Can't we begin over? Can't we learn from our shortcomings? Our child! Have you thought of her?"

For the moment she hesitated. Her fingers interlocked on her lap and fell apart again. At length she murmured:

"For her I stayed. Otherwise I would have gone long ago."

"Gone?" he reiterated and dropped spiritless on the piano bench. He kept his eyes fastened on her rigid form, her cold countenance, and wondered why she did not return his look or venture any reply.

"What about our home?"

"It is yours—and hers. Keep it for her."

"But your Faith?" he reminded her. "You cannot be true to it and fly in the face of its dogmas. The Church will never countenance this separation."

"Oh, well!" she sighed.

"You can't be thinking of 'divorce?'"

No answer.

"And people! What will they say?"

This had the desired effect.

"What will they say?" she asked in defiance. "Do you suppose I consider what they are going to say? I act to please myself, not people."

"Edith," he cautioned her, "you do not dare to condemn custom. Popular opinion is almost omnipotent.

It governs the world more effectively than laws. No sooner has a man committed a sin against society than a deep remorse pursues him like a Nemesis. He has no peace of mind, but torture of soul and body. He is obliged to suppress his identity. He becomes an out-cast. He flees into oblivion in the hope that oblivion will bury him forever. You know that, don't you? Self-respect, if nothing else, obliges you to take into consideration what people will say."

"I must make up my mind, then, which is right—society or I."

"You read that in some book."

"And I am not convinced but what it is right."

"To leave one's home, husband, children!"

"For love!" she corrected. "What else has a woman but love to live for?"

"The will to love," he replied.

"Then our life has been a failure," she declared almost contemptuously.

"Without love?"

"Without love," was the frigid reply.

He had no consciousness of thought, he had no sense of the lapse of time as he sat there like one in a stupor. It was past eight o'clock, though he scarcely knew it. Amazement first, that seemed to crush down upon his whole soul and crowd out every other emotion, took hold of him, then a jumbled confusion of thoughts, finally despair. Was this Edith, the wife, the mother, the one whom he prided himself on having for a partner? What was this deadly dissension that had arisen in their lives? And where was the serpent that had

poisoned her mind against him? He did not strive to seek the reason; there was no reason, for he questioned whether or not she realized the awful import of her words. She was fighting against herself as surely as fate, and paradoxically, it was her own weakness that was strengthening her. She had said she did not love him. She had said that! It seemed as if she meant it. Nevermore, then, could he hope for happiness. Her heart . . . ! A tomb, containing ashes of a love that once lived. He recoiled from the sinister metaphor, and dark despair descended upon him and bore him down.

A thousand resolutions came to him, as he chided himself for his part in this tragedy. He accused himself of being its sole cause. He was encouraged to rise to better things. A woman is ready to pardon an indiscretion at any time, but an inattention never. He mused over this axiom, and considered the multitude of times he had transgressed it. All because of his diligence and industry! He had prided himself, fool that he was, on being worthy the love of the best of women. He knew now that he was not. He resolved, therefore, to cast all industry, all care to the winds, to partake freely of the rounds of pleasure, the theater, cards, society. Yes, he even resolved to learn the dancing that she loved. After all, perhaps, he was entirely to blame for this catastrophe.

He was cheered as he considered how he was going to win back the love that was lost. His life was going to be a tournament with a maiden for a prize, a maiden he did not know at all, a maiden of strange whims and

fancies, and as strange and as novel as any heroine of fiction. He was going to woo this fair creature; he was going to make her bring her stamp down upon him and fashion him to her liking. He would send her roses, American Beauties, her favorite flower, as he had been wont to do years before. He would get tickets for the theater, give her trips to New York and Atlantic City. Yes, he would even visit the shops with her and help to pick out gowns to her liking! He saw her pleased and happy throughout it all, and his heart began to beat with exultation. Kelso Wheaton was his adversary, and he knew it, and he was ready to run him through with the spear of valor and courtesy.

"Come," he said now, rising, "let bygones be bygones. The future will witness a transformation."

"Too late! Too late!" she exclaimed.

"Do you mean that we——?"

He could not finish, but stood with arms outstretched in an appealing gesture.

"I mean that I have made up my mind to go."

"You—are going away?"

She nodded assent.

"It is for the best. God knows how I have fought against it. You can divorce me. I shall not come back."

"Divorce!"

"It's the only way out."

"Edith!" he said, and stretched out his hands.

But she was imperturbable.

X

SHE left him. Going upstairs to her room she paused to listen if he were coming behind her. Then she locked the door.

The darkness was terrifying, yet she preferred it. She would have preferred anything just now to the misery of this house. She hated it, she hated everything in it, even her own self, and she did not want to start from their slumbers any old memories by flooding the chamber with light. Standing with her back to the door like one pursued by a horrible nightmare even into her waking moments she looked about her, her whole being tense with emotion. A glimmer across the room startled her, but it was nothing—just a beam from the vase on her dresser which caught the errant ray of a street lamp. A small voice, garrulous and hurried, told out the seconds in the dark. It reminded her of an accusing angel taunting her for her misdeeds. Taking two or three steps in the direction of the bed she flung herself into it and buried her head with all its sorrowful thoughts in the depth of the pillows. There were no tears. Deep emotion gripped her, preventing her from giving expression to her grief.

What was uppermost in her mind was the thought of Bab. Try as she would she could not dispel her image. It loomed before her, real, tangible, not the

picture of a little girl who thought and spoke as a child, but a grown-up woman, the *débutante* of the season, with a will of her own. What would the years bring to her without the loving care and counsel of a mother? Into what sort of a character would she develop? Would she grow into womanhood with a fearful apprehension of her mother's sin and hate her for her wanton self-indulgence? It would be appalling to have her wrong-doing visited upon her only child. The future passed before her in a procession of scenes frescoed on the darkness above her as she tried to single out the niche in life that would be occupied by this grown-up girl fifteen years hence. But the dim outline of the light fixture alone stood out against the dark curtain overhead, and took away the figures from the scene. The pendant bulb held her attention and reminded her of the unfortunate victim chained to the cold, stone floor of the pit, enduring a thousand deaths as he anxiously watched the measured strokes of the slowly descending Pendulum narrow the distance between him and eternity. Secretly she wished that she were in his place, waiting, waiting for the approaching stroke to come and make an end of her miserable existence. There were no sufferings of the body comparable with the tortures of the soul.

Hark! There was some one else in the room, some invisible presence, from which she shrank with cowardly fear. Her heart pounded out a message of consternation and dismay as she turned from the spectacle and buried her face in the pillow. It was the ghost of herself, but she did not know it; it was the angel who

had been appointed her guardian years before, come to warn her of her folly. Soon she seemed to hear whispered syllables, soft syllables that fell ever so lightly, and gently crept against her ear.

“Think well of what thou dost before relentless remorse penetrates the marrow of thy soul!”

She heard the voice distinctly, although it no longer frightened her. It was a plaintive voice, yet its expression was like one who spoke with authority. It continued:

“Thy child! What of her! Hast thou given thought to the responsibility from which thou wouldst shrink? Knowest thou not that thou hast given life to this being and hast been appointed guardian of a sacred trust? Thy sin! Shall it be visited upon her in the years to come? It has been written, ‘The inheritance of the children of sinners shall perish, and with their posterity shall be a perpetual reproach.’ ”

“No! No!” Edith whispered, and covered her ears with the fold of the pillow.

“Thinkest thou to barter public esteem for personal liberty,” the voice went on, “or to sacrifice right conduct to individual preferment? Alas! The story of those who have gone before thee, who have contemned society through their own voluptuousness, who have set up cradles of luxury in irregular homes and presented in the midst of disorder a semblance of order is a tale of harrowing deceit. Shalt thou be included in the number of these deluded fools? Hast thou reckoned with the future? The end of the voyage, not the beginning, is the anxiety of the mariner.”

She gasped in horror. The chiding voice ceased; only the garrulous clock with its rhythmic, incessant chatter filled the hollows of the room, and re-echoed through her confused brain.

"Wait-a-bit, wait-a-bit, wait-a-bit," it cautioned her.

Confusion! Never had she experienced such a non-descript jumble of images. There was the present, tangible, intolerable. There was the future, insecure, uncertain and—promising. Here was a dilemma. Life was opening before her as a colossal failure tinged with disgrace and her instinct prompted her to avoid that disgrace which was flavored with death. Even if her intelligence did apprise her of the disappointments that awaited her return to the old manner of living with one she could not possibly love or understand, her instinct was unsparing in regard to the awful uncertainties of the second estate. She was entering into partnership with a man with whom she was scarcely on equal footing. What security did Kelso hold out to her with his class privileges, extravagant tastes, and social superiority? She raised herself from the bed with a struggle as if she had been bound to it body and soul. The Pendulum was there, just above her, approaching nearer and nearer, soon to cut her free from all earthly tribulations. O God! She should have prayed, but could not.

Presently she thought of the door. She had locked it but she had no right to do it. It must be opened, and at once, before her husband's steps began to echo on the stairs. She must not wait until he came to it and beat on its panels or rattled the knob noisily, forc-

ing her to obey. The door must be open when he came, for she was still his wife.

Reluctantly she arose, defeated but unconquered. Pride seized her, and urged her on to bitter things. The realization that she was compelled to obey the impulse of opening that door steeled her heart to cruelty. If she were overcome, her pride was not. And she would turn the key, yes. Excitement, expectancy of better things, the pleasure of imagined victory over an antagonist—her husband was that!—somewhat akin to that emotion which holds the athlete in the stadium when he wrests the wreath of contest and gains the admiration of the multitude—this was the quality of emotion from which she presently derived the greatest relief. She was determined to show her husband who was right—society or she. She had told him of her decision. Now he would learn the value of her word. She began to pray, and it was for courage.

In the adjoining room was her sleeping child. Babs! Precious Babs! Another force, mightier than ever, rose up within her and threatened to stifle her with its vehemence and intensity. It was the force of mother love. It tore her heart-strings with its insatiable desire and brought to her a greater realization of her duty than she had ever before experienced. For the first time in her life she felt the pang of motherhood and the craving of the maternal instinct. For what better purpose do men live, for what nobler purpose do they die than for their own flesh and blood! Here was flesh of her flesh and blood of her blood, her child, not somebody else's child, not her husband's, her

brother's, her sister's. It was hers—hers—hers. She opened the door cautiously and peered out. Stealing into the room, she turned on the soft light and gazed at the face of her sleeping offspring. It was like seeing her own self.

The little breast rose and fell perceptibly. One hand lay outside the clothes, the tiny fist clenched about an imaginary toy. The little lips were slightly parted in the semblance of a smile! How sweet that day when they uttered their first symbol, "Mamma"! The little tooth that came one night and she found it in the morning when she put her finger into the tender mouth! How happy she was in the knowledge that her baby was growing, getting bigger and stronger day by day. And then she walked! Not far, but just from the rocking chair to her lap, and fell into it. She was a darling baby, nurtured by her own hands, kissed thousands of times by her own lips, cuddled and petted. And here she was peacefully asleep, wholly innocent of the tragedy about to be enacted in this very house. Who would suffer most for this vanity, selfishness, inconstancy? Stooping, the mother kissed the ruddy cheek, not once or twice, but many times. She stroked the ringlets that fell away in wavy confusion from the vein-streaked forehead. She took the little hand and patted it. Her Babs! Her child! The little one stirred and the mother drew back, dreading to face the opened eyes. She stole softly away, as softly as she had come, switching off the lights and closing the door.

Outside she paused for strength, her hand on the knob, undecided whether or not to return to the room.

But her temporary indecision soon gave way to marked determination, and the new woman within her gained ascendancy over the old. There were voices downstairs. The doctor! This satisfied her—it was his evening call—a usual occurrence. But what was that? A deep, resonant voice. And it was doing the talking.

“No,” the voice pronounced, like one having authority, “only one marriage is possible in the Church; and if that contract has been validly entered into and the union consummated, no power on earth can dissolve it.”

So they were talking about divorce!

“This has always been the teaching of the Church, and this because of the Scriptures. It so happened, if you chance to recall, that the Pharisees approached Our Saviour one day with a question concerning the dissolubility of marriage, asking Him if it were lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause. ‘For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife,’ He replied, ‘and they two shall be in one flesh. What, therefore, God hath joined together let no man put asunder.’ The Pharisees then reminded Him that Moses permitted the people to give a bill of divorce. To which He replied: ‘Moses, by reason of the hardness of your heart, permitted you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you,’ He solemnly reminded them, ‘that whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and he that shall marry her that is put away, committeth adultery.’ ”

She shut the door, quite unwilling to give her ear to

any further exhibition of such pedantry. Evidently this mysterious guest was a churchman, an exegetist of the Scriptures, a friend of Dr. Dahill, perhaps, summoned here by her husband to pass judgment on the theological aspect of divorce. The trio were engaged in preparing an indictment, intending to summon her in due time before their self-constituted tribunal. But she would circumvent them. Yielding momentarily to a curious desire to learn more she let the door swing open again.

"The Church will never sanction 'divorce?'" she heard her husband ask.

"Absolute divorce—no!" came the measured response. "Separation from bed and board—yes! This secures the happiness of the innocent party and metes out no injustice to the guilty."

"There are exceptions, of course——"

"Persons have been known to marry the second time, owing to the fact that the first marriage might be invalid because of the existence of a diriment impediment which was never dispensed from by lawful authority."

"For instance——" suggested the doctor.

"Blood-relationship, legal adoption, and so forth. These are impediments which must be removed before the contract becomes valid."

"And a valid marriage can never be dissolved?"

"Never! The Church cannot act in a manner contradictory to the teachings of her Founder."

"What about society——?"

"Its interests are safeguarded. If the permanence of the marriage bond is permitted to depend upon the

vagaries of human affection a host of evil consequences were bound to result. It is unavoidable. Divorce obliterates family life, gives no stability to the parentage of children, defiles the sanctity of the home and paralyzes all our nobler aims and activities."

Edith was on the point of again shutting the door, when a question, proposed by her husband, made her pause once more.

"Let us suppose the wife obtains her decree and remarries. Will the Church recognize or ratify that second contract?"

"Not until death intervenes, and removes the first husband from the scene," came the response.

"And she forfeits her membership in the Church?" Bert persisted.

There was no answer to this. She presumed the divine was nodding his head.

"Forever?" her husband repeated.

"Just so long as she persists in sin. Absolution, you know, is never denied the penitent soul, but it presupposes contrition and amendment. This would include, of course, an absolute rejection of the unholy alliance and a return to single life."

"The second spouse?"

"Must be separated from."

"A refusal would mean——"

"No participation in the sacramental system of the Church, forfeiture of membership and deprivation of Christian burial."

Enraged with herself for having given ear to this conversation Edith shut the door almost violently. She

was smarting from the suspicion that lurked in her mind, that she was the subject of the colloquy, and she became indignant and humiliated. She vowed she would never, never forgive Robert Colman for subjecting her to this. To invite guests into her house to discuss the delinquencies of a disobedient wife! She was seized with a sudden impulse—she would face her judges and reply to their accusations. She turned on the light and looked at herself in the glass. Her hair was disheveled and she arranged it. Her nose was shiny and she gave it a dab or two of powder. She changed her dress, and opening the door descended the stairs carelessly and stood at the threshold of the living room. Here she paused.

It pleased her to note the look of surprise that greeted her. They stood up quickly, looking towards the doorway where she stood, surveying them with contemptuous disdain. Never did a Susanna visit more reproachful glances upon her false accusers than did this slip of a girl as she stood motionless with her dark, hazel eyes fixed on those she thought her censors in a sweeping gaze. She was in waist and skirt that fitted close to the gracious lines of her slender figure, her bare throat quivering with her breathing, quickened by the emotion that surged within her. Her lips were set, her rounded cheeks heightened to a deep rose color, her thin brows divided by a furrow of anger that seemed to cleave its way deep into her brain. She did not speak, but stared defiantly with just the merest sneer starting from her bow-shaped lips. Bert it was who broke the silence.

"Why, my dear, I thought you had retired!"

She did not reply to this but lifted her eyes and gazed at him.

"This is the Reverend Dr. Hunt," her husband continued, indicating the presence of the churchman with a slight gesture. "Dr. Hunt, my wife."

Edith acknowledged the clergyman's modest bow.

"He is a friend of Dr. Dahill's. They came in a short time ago. I would have called you but I thought you were in bed."

He offered her his chair, which she took, after exchanging greetings with their friend.

"I am glad you have come, doctor," she said to the divine. "I believe you were discussing the moral aspects of divorce. I heard you upstairs."

"Just so," agreed the clergyman, in the gracious manner which was his. He was tall, inclined to be portly, brimful of mirth and joviality, and dignified, with the air of one accustomed to the treatment of momentous matters. His address was always pleasing; his face smile-wrinkled. No one had any difficulty in feeling at perfect ease in his presence.

"We were discussing the consequences of that pernicious evil," he went on. "It is not a pleasant theme."

"But I am interested," Edith persisted in a tone that indicated her earnestness. "Is it so terribly wrong for one who is supremely unhappy to want to escape from the torture chamber of her own making?"

"There is limited divorce, of course," Dr. Hunt suggested with a twinkle playing about the corner of his eye.

“Yes, I know,” she nodded. “I know that. Something like imprisoning a poor fellow for life instead of sending him to the chair. Which is the more humane punishment?”

Her logic was unanswerable, but she was arguing the wrong side. At what was she driving? He looked to Mr. Colman for relief. But the relief did not come.

“But his misconduct has rendered his right to liberty forfeit; which is not the same as death,” Dr. Dahill observed.

“A man is not compelled to live with another man unless he likes,” she said cautiously. “The man to whom the society of a woman is a menace should have the same right to sweep the nightmare aside.”

“Expect for the law—” counseled the priest.

“Are we bound by unjust laws?”

“You think the marriage contract an unjust law?”

“In its indissolubility, yes! It is unnatural.”

“Unnatural! But it protects the home, it safeguards the State. Doubtless, this does prove irksome to individuals, but laws, generally, are framed not for the individual but for the greater good and for society in general. If the divine law forbids the discontented wife or husband from contracting a fresh alliance it is for the purpose of securing the welfare of the State. Does not this sacrifice of the rights of the individual occur in our everyday experience? An epidemic breaks out and the doctor here issues an order by authority of the Board of Health which restricts the freedom of your coming and going, your eating and drinking. He closes the theaters against you; he forbids you to associate

with your neighbors; he prohibits your leaving your own house—and you obey him. A fire breaks out in your neighborhood and the policeman interferes with your right of way. You never question him. The soldier in battle sacrifices his individual rights hourly for the general good of the army. The sailor has no rights in relation to the welfare of the passengers on the ship. In fact, the whole scheme of our existence is based on the surrender of the individual good to the better interests of the community. And no cry of injustice is ever raised against this stringent legislation.”

“I cannot see the application,” she declared. “There can be only one motive for marriage. Mutual happiness.”

“You know, of course, that such a statement is absurd,” Dr. Hunt replied good-naturedly.

“I was never more serious,” she retorted. “Our grandmothers were forced by economic conditions to do domestic drudgery, bear, and bury children. But the woman of to-day is not economically dependent on man. She is not compelled to become married or to submit to hardship and stay married.”

“You are quoting from the feminist journals. Did you learn to read them at college? Most girls’ colleges, I understand, are amply supplied with them.”

She felt like replying, “Yes, and a good many other things,” but self-respect bade her hold her tongue.

“The saddest thing in the world, next to death, is the destruction of the home,” said the divine.

“Yet to live in unhappiness is living death,” Edith

interjected. "Nothing is worse than living with one you despise."

"That depends. Very often it is the result of pride. One does not want to give in to the other. A married couple must not be foolish enough to expect perfection in their relations. They must establish their domicile on unselfishness and be ready to sacrifice a great many things. But if a woman is insistent upon an independent career I doubt if she can be happy."

"Suppose neither of the two can understand the other!"

"I would have them learn. It is character that counts in the long run."

Edith saw how impossible it was to continue this discussion, with neither willing nor able to surrender the slightest advantage to the other. She knew it to be Dr. Hunt's duty to defend the sanctity of the marriage bond, therefore his arguments were all one-sided. No clergyman could possibly know the true condition of wedlock when viewed from the outside. Marriages are not all made in heaven, for the devil very often has his hand in them—and for unions such as these, divorce is a necessary provision. What he said was true enough—but there were flaws in his reasoning somewhere which she was not capable of detecting. If Kelso were only here he would pick them out and she smiled as she thought of the eminent divine matching his wits with the clever Kelso.

She arose with the suggestion that they forget their differences over a cup of tea which met with general approval. While she busied herself in the kitchen the

conversation began anew on the one topic that mattered insofar as Bert was concerned—the matter of election. Everything, life and death itself, seemed to him to hinge on the result of election day. He thought of it continually, and staked all his hopes, all his ambitions, his purposes and concern on that issue alone.

The following evening, when he returned for dinner, he found his wife gone.

His instinct seemed to whisper to him, as he opened the door that everything was not going to be right. He had meant to have another talk with her, but he had had no time that morning, and besides, he felt that if he entered into any argument it would knock him out for the rest of the day, particularly since he was in the midst of the campaign and was scheduled to address a business men's luncheon at one o'clock. There was another rally on the program for to-night but that did not come until nine o'clock. Two hours would give him all the time he needed, he told himself, to bring her to her senses.

Bab met him as soon as he crossed the threshold, and threw herself sobbing into his arms. This startled him. He picked her up and shut the door behind him.

"Mother went away this afternoon with Mr. Wheaton," the little one sobbed, "and she kissed me a whole lot."

He stood perfectly rigid. Then, closing his eyes, he yielded to the force of the blow. His brain began to whirl and his knees trembled under him, making him

sway backwards and forwards. It was some minutes before he collected himself enough to realize what had taken place.

There stood, just inside the door, a console on which rested a black, slender vase holding a tall lily. A letter rested against the vase, and he perceived it over Bab's shoulder, recognizing the writing at once. It was addressed to him. Seizing it frantically, he tore it open. It read:

DEAR BERT:

I hope I am acting for the best. For that reason I have left. There is no other way out. I waited for the miracle to happen, and it did not. Do not seek me; I shall remain in seclusion until you are elected. After that neither of us need to care.

EDITH.

The letter fell from his hands. He crushed the hapless child to his breast, and his eyes filled with tears.

"She is not coming back, Babs. She is not—coming—back."

XI

THERE are degrees of death. It is not merely the tragic act of the separation of the soul from the body, the supreme penalty which Providence has constituted for every man for sin. Death is present in life. After the heartless perfidy of the wife or the base ingratitude of the child, the crushing stroke of misfortune or the instantaneous collapse of ambition and reputation, there comes a queer taste in the mouth that savors of death. It salts life's sweets, mocks hopes, embitters all smiles. The heart is stifled. In the frame of what was once a man it pulsates with the monotonous action of the hairspring of a watch.

Bert was now situated in this strange estate; the tyranny of this tragedy influenced his peace and security of mind, and days and nights no longer meant anything to him. They were hateful phenomena, endured with the constantly recurring hope that the evenings would soon be mornings and the mornings evenings. Nothing stirred him to enthusiasm; not even the strenuous campaign he was conducting. He wandered from platform to platform in obedience to the program of arrangements furnished him by the Campaign Committee, but wherever he went he saw the hazy outlines of his absconding wife projected before him. He doubled and redoubled on his tracks, glad to mingle with the crowd,

but oblivious of their presence. The noise seemed to intoxicate him, yet he saw little of the sights that confronted his eyes. He dared not be alone. He felt that his sanity depended on his intercourse with the multitude, and he was like a small boy in a large empty lot gazing dumbfounded at a procession of people wending their merry way along a distant road.

Were it not for the spirited campaign in which he was engaged he would have gone mad. In the time of intense sorrow application to duty furnishes the greatest diversion. The election promised to be the most bitterly contested in years. Never before, perhaps, was so much acrimony and ill-feeling injected into a political conflict. It was the League of Nations controversy that created the antipathy, and gave a well-defined platform to the two leading parties. The previous spring the Senate had rejected the Treaty of Peace with Germany precisely because of the League of Nations sponsored by the President, and Mr. Wilson very promptly decided to submit the whole matter to a national referendum. The people were asked to render the final decision. Was it for the best interests of the country to permit itself to be engaged in foreign entanglements and to lend its active support to a world association for the maintenance of peace, or, on the other hand, was it better to reject the League, and preserve thereby the traditional attitude of the United States in its policy of non-involvement in Old World affairs? The question was momentous.

Because of his domestic difficulties it was impossible for Bert to rise to the heights expected of a candidate.

Here was a matter that concerned the future policy of the nation—yet he could not become enthused over it. Each day was torturing and abnormal. He had made a discovery that amazed himself—a discovery that thousands of men had made before him: that his truest and most necessary friend in the whole world was his wife. Scarcely had he appreciated her real value. And now she was gone, gone like a phantom ship, perhaps to appear never again. Was it any wonder the national situation failed to affect him? What mattered most to his mind was: Where is she? What is to become of the little girl? What am I going to do after the excitement of election is over? No word had come from her since he had read the fatal letter but Dr. Dahill had whispered to him that she had left the city. But this was only a surmise. How could he know? Kelso Wheaton was not with her, for he had been seen on Main Street only the other day. She was not at her mother's home, for inquiry there had brought no news. Strange enough! She might have taken her mother, at least, into her confidence.

He was dismayed, but not so much dismayed as desperate. He tried to console himself that time would teach her to repent of her misdeed, but this was empty satisfaction. The true fact of the matter was, he had never been so much in love with his wife before, or if he had been, he had never before quite realized it. These honors that were about to come upon him. . . . How gladly would he thrust them aside for a return of her love! His precious Babs was without a mother! Without a mother . . . ! The concept was crushing.

So his thoughts ran on day by day, depressing, disheartening, his ardor quenched in the midst of so much commotion. He was a nervous wreck from the strain of mind and body—campaigning for election, distracted mentally, suffering from a broken heart. He had not slept in weeks, and wondered presently how much longer he could hold out. Each day brought with it feelings of renewed hope, but night came on and extinguished these sanguine anticipations. Unless he heard from her soon he thought that he would go mad. It was the uncertainty that was killing him. That, and the terrible sense of hopelessness.

Election Day came and went, leaving behind it the verdict of the people. The League of Nations was rejected. Bert was swept into office with the landslide to his great surprise. He had hoped for the best, but his had not been the effort of a successful candidate. He had won honors but he had lost.

In the midst of so much rejoicing on the part of the successful candidates, telegrams and letters by the hundred, messages of congratulation, expressions of goodwill, came the first news concerning her whereabouts. The mail brought a letter from an attorney's office serving on him a summons and complaint. He was ordered to appear before the Superior Court to answer unto Edith Colman and so on. . . . She had kept her word. She was going to divorce him, but not until after election. Election Day yesterday, the summons to-day. She was prompt. It interested him to learn the nature of the complaint. Mental cruelty! He smiled, a forced smile. There was no mention of ali-

mony, or the custody of the child. Desertion! That was all.

That night he sent for Dr. Dahill.

"Congratulations, old man! We're proud of you!"

"Thanks, Doc."

"My, what a vote! I suppose every woman in the country voted. Guess that's the end of the League."

"Yes, I guess so," assented the Congressman-elect.

"Well, now that you're elected," continued the doctor, walking about the room, "what do you propose to do?"

He found the leather easy-chair he liked, and extracting a cigar from his vest-pocket, he bit off the end.

Bert returned no answer to his inquiry, but shrugged his shoulders.

"I know what you ought to do—go away. But will you?" the doctor recommended.

"Where?"

"Oh! Atlantic City!"

Bert gave no sign of being interested.

"What do you say?"

He hesitated a moment, and, reaching into his inner pocket, extracted a letter. He handed it to the physician.

"What do you think of this?"

The doctor read it through without a word.

"When did you receive this?" he asked.

"This afternoon."

They exchanged glances.

"You remember," Bert continued, "she said in the

first note she would remain in seclusion until I had been elected."

The doctor remembered.

"Looks as if she is going to see this through!"

"But is it possible? I mean, can she get a divorce in less than a month?"

"Yes; they do it."

"But . . . a month!"

"I know."

Dr. Dahill shook his head ruefully.

"I do not want her to suffer," Bert murmured. "She does not deserve all the blame. She told me she was running away from her own self; this I believe to be the truth."

"Then you think him responsible——?"

"Sh! Not a word concerning him! Please!"

"But you forgive her . . . ?"

"What have I to forgive? She has injured herself—and Babs! She is welcome to return here at any time—to-night, to-morrow or next year. She is still my wife, understand; and no power on earth can take her from me. She is mine, mine until death. No court, not even the august tribunal of the Supreme Court of the United States of America, can dissolve a tie that God has validly joined together. She may live with this other man, but she is still my wife and the mother of my child."

The doctor pursed his lips, preserving the silence that the occasion warranted. He could not help admiring the fortitude of the man who sat before him, a strained and nerve-wrecked man that leaned back in the

big, upholstered chair as if on the point of exhaustion. His black, curly hair was disarranged, his cheeks were wan, and his eyes wore a haggard look indicative of severe mental strain. He had far from surrendered to himself, however, for his mouth had closed firmly and his jaw was set. It was evident to the doctor that he would face this, firmly and courageously like a man.

"It is the age in which we live," the medical man began, in an effort to offer him a little distraction, "the age of utilitarianism. The men and women of to-day have not the moral strength of their ancestors. Our children are not so clean and innocent as those of an earlier generation. One editor, I noticed, goes so far as to declare that the so-called feministic movement is largely responsible for the alarming increase in suicide. This is due to the fact, I suppose, that human life to-day is put on a purely utilitarian basis. A human being is measured solely by his value as a producing agent."

"Yes," Bert assented. "That is what the schoolmen say. Vocational training, instead of cultural and moral."

"I do not say that your wife is radical, but she does represent a type. I think it spoils a woman to educate her. She is deprived of much happiness that she would ordinarily enjoy."

"Carol Kennicott, for example."

"Exactly. Everything becomes a Gopher Prairie to her. Our young women are told that they are the coming mistresses of civilization; that men are back numbers; that marriage is a relation of convenience; that the

world has been made a mess by the ignoramuses now in control. The harmony and the interdependability of sex-life is consequently ruptured.”

“All women do not believe in this silly stuff.”

“True! But the propaganda has done its work.”

Bert Colman had not summoned his friend for the exclusive purpose of airing his views on present-day radicalism. There were far more important matters to be considered and more far-reaching decisions to be made. In the first place he was of a mind to ignore completely the pending action and permit his stubborn wife to obtain her decree by default; but the doctor sharply criticized this *laissez faire* policy and pointed out the necessity of taking certain steps to safeguard the custody of the child.

“Let us suppose,” he said, “that you do refuse to heed this summons. What will be the result? She will obtain the decree by default and will be awarded the custody of the child.”

This decided him as to the propriety of the first step.

In the second place he was plainly worried about the education and care of Bab. She was already past five and going to school. He considered himself at his best a hopeless substitute for a mother. What should he do with her while he was away? Congress was sure to be convened in extraordinary session in the spring of the year. He could not break up his home and take the girl with him, for he was required to preserve a domicile, at least, in the district he represented. There were no immediate relatives whom he

might summon to his side to help him bring up his child. Relatives are often useless quantities, especially in times of misfortune. Of course, he might engage some woman, but he did not think kindly of leaving the exclusive management of his home and the care of his child in the hands of a stranger.

"Break up and live with me; both of you," suggested the doctor.

Bert shook his head.

"What do you know about this Academy?" he asked.

"Montmercy?"

"Yes."

"An ideal place! The Sisters conduct it. The results speak for themselves."

Bert was almost decided on the propriety of the second step. With the divorce out of the way he thought favorably of placing the child in the Academy under the immediate charge of the Sisters. It was not home, for no institution could replace the home, but under the circumstances, she would be as well off there as anywhere else. In the meantime he made up his mind to get into communication with some one to represent him at the hearing, after which he bided his days pending the result of the trial.

He had not long to wait. The first week in December witnessed the settlement of the proceedings. Edith was granted her divorce on the grounds of cruelty, and was permitted the use of her maiden name. The case was not contested except for the custody of the child. In this matter the attorney for the husband made a strong plea, with the result that the custody

of the child was awarded to the father, with the understanding that the mother could visit the child whenever she so desired. There was no stipulation concerning alimony. But the daily press of Shefford made great capital of the story. Robert Colman's portrait held the front page; black headlines announced the story of the divorce. Everybody talked about the case. Bert hung his head in shame, and left the town and its gossipy inhabitants.

He felt a little better when he found himself away. Atlantic City, like the river of Lethe, is the gateway to the fields of oblivion. Here he tried to lose himself in the excitement of the place. He stopped at an exclusive hotel. He visited the various houses of amusement. He sat and listened to the music in the dining-halls, in the theaters, on the piers, until he had made himself familiar with the refrains of every popular air. He paced the boardwalk from end to end and interested himself in the enthusiastic throng. Overhead a biplane lumbered noisily through the air. He stood and watched it. A sand artist attracted him; and he consumed the better part of an hour watching him mold a heroic-sized bust of Marshal Foch. There were other splendid specimens of his work, wrought nearby in the perishable sand. He studied them, then let his gaze wander to the mighty ocean beyond. As he stood contemplating the restless, majestic, destructive motion of the sea, he thought how soon all the patient and laborious work of the artist would be reduced to mere nothingness. The short meditation held him, and he passed on.

He wandered out to the end of the Steel Pier and sat down. A suitable spot for reminiscences where all was still save for the dashing and the splashing of the waves against the concrete supports! Beyond, the dark sea with its alternate markings of deep green and ultramarine blue heaved and tossed restlessly. It was never quiet, never peaceful. Just as Edith had been, restless, dissatisfied, uneasy! He wondered how long she would be satisfied in her new estate. She would find, now, everything for which she had ever craved—society, luxury, excitement. She ought to be as happy as her nature would permit. “As her nature would permit!” He repeated the words. She was fortunate in some respects, however, more so than the average divorcée. She was young and good-looking. She had nothing to worry about. The tragedy of their marriage was an experience which should afford her many lessons. Would she measure up to those qualities required, yes, demanded by the upper set? Did she know whither she was going? He was willing to wager that she would be labeled “a climber” before her first reception.

It seemed to him that this terrible catastrophe could easily have been avoided. Neither had ever learned the sweet uses of adversity. Mutual forbearance, self-denial had been ignored. He had been narrow, inconsiderate, dull, prosaic. It was a severe arraignment of himself, but it was true and just. Yes, he had prided himself on owning her, when, as a matter of fact, he had but lent her his name. People have outgrown that idea of owning one another. It was part of the

false philosophy of the day—for how much of himself had he really surrendered? What a tragedy, this sudden rupture of existence. He would not admit, even to himself, that it had had to happen. He could have prevented it, and he should have.

Perhaps it was the standard of the times. People thought differently nowadays of the manners and quality of the social order. That old-fashioned reverence for authority was fast disappearing before a bombastic and noisy democracy that shouted meaningless phrases from raucous throats about self-determination, consent of the governed, Bolshevism, and raised the meanest individual to a par with the most deserving. It was the war, he thought, that had leveled all things, opinions as well as everything else. The country had gone mad. Crime was on the increase, suicides and murders occupied the pages of the newspapers, divorce filled the dockets of the courts. Where would it end? Universal chaos was written on the wall, but there was no Daniel come to issue the opportune warning.

Would she have been so anxious to leave him had she not known that divorce was so easy a process? Suppose there had been a uniform law with only one or two grounds for obtaining decrees! The idea seized upon him with emphasis, all the more so on account of his experience. Here was he, a member-elect of Congress. Some one with the courage of his own convictions was required to introduce a bill for the regulation of this national evil. Suppose he himself should volunteer to do it! There was nothing preposterous about the idea, when one considered that twenty odd

years ago National Prohibition was a chimera. And yet more than two-thirds of the States were satisfied to surrender their rights to a Federal Amendment for the discontinuance of the manufacture and use of intoxicating beverages. Of course the liberties of the individual were restricted, but what was this when the general welfare of the country was secured? There was something of an analogy between National Prohibition and National Regulation of Divorce. The only difference lay in this: the one affected the liberties of the poorer classes, the other the liberties of the richer. Well, it was now the turn of the rich, and he pledged himself to be the iconoclast of this, their precious institution.

A little smile twisted his lips. It was not the smile of a vindictive man, but of a defeated one. He was despising himself for his own ardor, after what he had been through. The water swished against the pier, making mockery of his thoughts. The ocean rose and fell with great, angry grimaces, as if it secretly desired to lift up its huge maw and swallow him. That he should still be in love with this woman was inconceivable! She no longer cared for him; she never had cared for him! Before he returned home she would, undoubtedly, have become the wife of another. Imagine meeting her day after day! Could she act as if she had never been his wife? And what would Babs call this strange man? His smile disappeared; a subtle pain convulsed him, crawling up his throat to the corners of his mouth. He hated himself. He hated the sight of the ocean. Getting up, he left the pier once

more to mingle with the great throng bustling along the boardwalk.

He went home in three weeks. The blue walls, the stuffy atmosphere, the closed piano, haunted him. For the first time in his life he realized the crushing force of despondency. The house was tenantless; it was like a tomb. Forms of dead memories flitted past him—but the air was still. He was alone—all alone. His life's candle had gone out and left him groping in the darkness.

He went straight to Dr. Dahill's. Babs was there—Babs, his darling, his only consolation. The doctor greeted him joyfully and complimented him on his excellent appearance. But he returned the handshake without a word. When he did speak it was to ask about his wife.

“It has happened,” the surgeon announced.

“What?”

Instead of replying he procured a morning paper and handed it to him in silence. It read:

“Mrs. Edith McClure (Colman) and Kelso Wheaton, both of this city, were married in Stamford, last Saturday by Rev. Wallace Atkins, pastor of the Congregational Church. Mr. Wheaton, who gave his occupation as realtor, is thirty-two years old, and his bride is twenty-five. She was the wife of Congressman-elect Robert Colman, from whom she was recently divorced. . . .”

Bert read no more.

XII

IT was not until the week before Christmas that the Wheatons returned to West Shefford from their wedding trip.

It had not been a honeymoon. A bridal trip, to be sure, but not a honeymoon. Both of them were agreed on that. In the first place the approaching holidays made an extended tour, such as they hoped for, out of the question, and, besides, they both were of a mind to spend this, their first Christmas, at Westlawn. In the second place, Kelso had promised to take his bride to Palm Beach and the season at that fashionable resort did not open until after New Year's. For these reasons it was thought best to postpone the honeymoon and take a short trip down to the Virginia coast and return by way of Washington. Edith had never visited the National Capitol and she might as well go there as anywhere else. In point of fact it mattered little where they went, for at this particular time every part of the world was tinged with romance.

Sunday night they left New York on the Old Dominion Line under the most ideal weather conditions. Although December had set in, the weather was not cold, and the happy pair might have been observed in the sheen of pale moonlight, strolling arm in arm up and down the starboard deck until long after midnight.

The following afternoon they stopped at Old Point Comfort long enough to visit the Fortress and the Soldiers' Barracks, after which they crossed the river to Norfolk and idled away two whole days in that old Southern town. Petersburg was next, then Richmond with its relics of the Confederacy, and finally Washington. Joy, akin to the delights she had already experienced, awaited Edith here. She saw the President and Mrs. Wilson going for a ride in the park, and she stood in silent contemplation of the famous couple long after they had passed and were lost from sight around the corner of the road. She ascended the Washington Monument and gazed with wonder over the city and the surrounding country for miles and miles. She visited Mount Vernon and peeked through the iron gates at the tomb of General Washington. She went through the Government Buildings, and the Capitol, where she sat for a short time in the galleries of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Senate was not in session, but a member of the House was addressing his colleagues on the Income Tax Bill. She listened for a few minutes—until it suddenly dawned on her that this was the very room where Bert would be called upon to perform his services in the interests of the nation. The thought caused her a little shudder. She drew her furs closer about her, looked around the great hall, and asked to leave.

When at last they came home to take possession of his domain, Kelso's patrimony, a feeling of confidence possessed her. Never had she felt so equal to an occasion. She followed her husband into the great living-

room with graceful pride, conscious of her dignity, yet becomingly modest of demeanor. A thousand thoughts, the realization of a thousand hopes and dreams, took substance in her mind. The great Airedale, Nestor, seemed to sense her proprietorship by jumping up to meet her and extending a welcome as cordial as that shown the master. For here she was, in truth, the established mistress of Westlawn. The great home, with its winding walks and spacious lawns setting back far from the main road, the cynosure of every passing traveler, was now hers! The family crest over the door-frames, in the walls of the den, on the china, on the mirrors, on the doors of the sedan—gules, three lions rampant in pale or—was hers! The automobiles were hers, the big sedan for shopping and touring, the "Little Six" roadster for sporting! She could not yet manage it herself, but Kelso had promised to teach her to drive in the spring. She had her own maid to attend her, dress her, and serve her with breakfast in bed on those murky mornings when she did not care to rise. She had her chauffeur to take her to town and wait upon her pleasure. She had her private telephone in her own bedroom. And better than all she had Kelso. Verily, this was the era of romance! No other mortal could be better or more richly endowed.

And she knew it. If her life had been clouded with sorrows and poignant regrets before, it was radiant with ecstasy now, not a mere semblance of contentment, but real, genuine bliss. For the moment she forgot all else save her own state of beatitude. Comfort! Contentment! Love! Kelso! There was no more to be

desired. There could be no more. It was her heart that had led her thither, almost against her better reason and she thanked devoutly the instinct that had prompted her to thrust aside the suggestions of a cold mind in favor of the warm feelings of a fervent soul. All her life she had longed to taste the effects of gushing emotion. The saints had written of this state of complete rapture that seemed to envelop their entire being, causing them to faint dead away from the effects of the great flood of enthusiasm that inundated their souls, and elevated them to realms of love where they communed with the Divine Will. Such transports of intense emotion were not possible to ordinary mortals, she had thought, and she never quite hoped to participate in such animated enthusiasm at any time of her life. Only religiously inclined enjoy this favor, and she was not religious. But she did feel now that she was approaching, for the first time, something great and fine in the physical order, as if her blood was gushing in her veins in a great flooding rush. It was this ecstatic happiness, she decided, that had overwhelmed her and nearly swept her off her feet.

"Wonderful, is it not," she cried, "how happy they can be who really belong to each other! It does seem as if all this had been prepared for me from the beginning, but denied me by the interference of a cruel fate."

"It makes you happy—this?" Kelso said.

"Yes—but not this alone. Everything has contributed to it—you most of all. You have been just splendid—splendid!"

She put into action what she would say. Turning

suddenly, she threw her arms about his neck and hung there.

"And you don't regret—not a little bit?" he asked, disengaging her arms and holding her from him.

"Regret? A thousand times, no!" she answered, her hazel eyes fixed seriously upon him.

"And you love me? You are sure?" he repeated, half smiling, half in earnest.

"Why do you keep asking that of me?" she whispered. "Haven't I told you—so often?"

"Yes, I know," he reassured her. "There! There! I shan't ask you again."

"Aren't you sure—yet?"

"Of course—of course. Absolutely!"

"But . . . But you look at me so strangely sometimes—now, for instance. Are you sure of—yourself?"

He folded her to him, gently patting her to indicate his complete assurance.

Nestor looked up at them and let his jaw drop. Edith was sure he grinned. His shaggy face took on the silliest expression, and he wandered away aimlessly.

"Nestor! Come!" she called, freeing herself. "Look—he says we are nonsensical."

The dog responded with a leap. She stooped to stroke his wiry hair.

"I believe he is actually happy to have you, too!" Kelso observed. "You have won him from me. That breed is famous for being one-man dogs. What charm have you cast over him?"

"Jealous!" she taunted, glancing up at him.

“Ha!” he laughed. “Not I. Whatever is mine is yours.”

“But mine!”

“Belongs to me, now.”

She smiled at him gently.

He wandered to the mantle. The little gold clock clicked at five minutes before the hour, and he looked at it. It was almost four o'clock. Suddenly it occurred to him that his sisters were not around, but on second thought, this did not quite surprise him, for he had deliberately failed to inform them of his homecoming in order that Edith herself might be the one to break the joyful news to them. Of course they knew of the marriage. They had seen the announcement in the papers. But it had been too solemn to write about.

The sun was just setting behind Pinnacle Mountain, his saffron beams touching the purple patches of the western landscape and painting them a dull gold. It was the last, great effort of the day, for twilight was fast approaching. Kelso stood for a moment looking through the French windows at the variety of color. Then he turned abruptly, struck with an idea, and touched the bell.

“I wonder where they are!” he muttered.

He did not expect Edith to know this, but he wished only to convey the purpose he had in mind in summoning the servant. His wife sat down quietly, and presently a faint tap was heard at the door, which was quickly followed by a maid, attired in black with a white apron and cap. She entered and stood waiting, respectfully.

"Yes, Mr. Kelso," she said meekly.

"Oh! Katinka! You! Well, well! How have you been behaving yourself since I went away? I want you to meet Mrs. Wheaton. Edith, this is Catherine Berg. Catherine is her name, but I always call her 'Katinka.' It is much more musical than plain Kate. Names are misleading—what! She looks a deal prettier with the name 'Katinka'—don't you think?"

Katinka blushed and looked at Edith, while Edith stared in astonishment both at her husband and at the girl.

"Where are Miss Evelyn and Miss Doris?" Kelso continued.

"Please, sir, I don't know."

"Where did they go?"

"Please, sir, I don't know."

"Did they leave any word?"

"Please, sir, I don't know."

"What is the matter with you? Talk natural! You need not be afraid of Mrs. Wheaton. Come! Come! Talk to me, not at me, like one scared clear out of her wits. The fact is—ahem—I want to surprise them. No one is supposed to know we have arrived. You see we have been married. You know that, don't you? Do you think you will like my wife? You will be kind to her, won't you?"

Katinka did not know what to respond to this absurd banter. She was used to his way, and could exchange the merriest chaff with him on any occasion. But this was not the occasion. How could she dare to be loqua-

cious with this new mistress? She did not know her—Mrs. Wheaton. But she did know her place.

“Yes, sir,” she finally said, submissively.

“That is all,” Kelso said; and the maid turned to go.

“Oh, by the way, Katinka,” Kelso called. “My mail!”

“Yes, sir.”

This time she did go.

“Do you act in this fashion with all the servants?” Edith asked him, puzzled.

“Certainly! Why not? They like it.”

“What difference does it make whether they like it or not?”

“Only that they want to do more for you.”

“But need you descend to—well, to the point of equality with them?”

“Pshaw! They all understand me here. It is my way. They attach no more meaning to my chatter than you would.”

There was no more to be said, for at this juncture the maid returned with the mail. She was brisk and circumspect in the performance of her duty, and went straight to the center table where she placed the pile of letters carefully. She turned as precisely as she had come in, and left the room. Not a word was spoken, Kelso not even thanking her. It was plain to everybody, even the dog, Nestor, standing there and sniffing the air, that the situation was strained.

No sooner, however, had the door closed upon her than the suppressed feelings of the girl expressed themselves in a fury of resentment. From that moment she

hated the woman who had been brought into this house. If she called her "cat" she could not help it—she looked like a cat in her sleek coat, she said.

"The airs of her!" she went straight to the kitchen and confided to the cook. "Have you seen her? The missus, I mean. She sat there like Queen Victoria, as if she had been accustomed to being waited on all her life, when everybody knows she came from down near the Flats. Her old mother is still alive, but do you think she goes to see her! They say she left her husband and went West with Mr. Wheaton to get her divorce. The likes of her and the style of her to-day! Have nothing to do with her. She's a villain."

"What does she look like?"

"One of those pretty things. She makes me sick with her powdered nose. Mr. Colman was too good for her, but he was not high-toned enough. She was dying to get hold of Mr. Wheaton. Don't you remember the day they went horse-back riding? And she fell off! Pooh!"

"Was that the one?"

"Sure it was! You know Bert Colman—Robert Colman, the Congressman?"

"You don't tell me?"

"That's her husband. A fine man, and they had the loveliest child. They tell me he has put the little girl in the Academy with the Sisters, and broken up his home. Poor man! It must be heartbreaking to lose everything that way. All on account of a wife like that. Nellie, whatever else you do after you are married, don't go running around with other men."

“So that’s what it was,” Nellie exclaimed. “Colman’s wife! Ain’t she a Catholic? The bold thing!”

For Nellie Reynolds a “bold thing” was the very epitome of infamy. Only the most degraded deserved that epithet. She would never apply it to any one who did not deserve it, but from Katie Berg’s description of Mrs. Wheaton, she decided that she richly deserved it. What was more, she began to entertain visions of a precarious existence. It was the way with upstarts, those who are not accustomed to fine things. With the Wheatons there had always been perfect freedom in the house. They were splendid people to work for. No one felt restrained in their service and while everybody kept his place, still he was not made to feel his inequality. Of course there was the work which must be done, but there were no arbitrary or whimsical rules such as obtain in some houses.

“You know how good the boss has been to us. Well, that’s ended! Take it from me, we’ll walk the straight and narrow path. I could see the minute she looked at us that he was in for a call-down. That’s the last of him making much of us. I’ll bet we get a set of orders to-morrow forbidding us to speak until we are spoken to. And it will be Catherine this; and Catherine that. Some one of us will have to carry her breakfast to her bedroom. Her sort never gets up in the morning.”

“Well, all I want to say is this! If she starts any funny business, I, for one, throws up the job,” Nellie declared arrogantly.

“I tell you what ails her. She’s a fish out of water.

She does not belong here, and she'll never know how to conduct herself. Those are usually the sort that try to lord it over everybody else. Well—the sooner she starts——”

A ring at the front door put an end to the threat. Katinka bounded to her feet, straightened her apron and cap and started for the door.

“The young ladies, I suppose,” she said, as she hurried into the hallway.

Her surmise proved to be correct. Kelso rose the instant he heard his sisters' voices and stood with his back to the table. Of all moments this was going to be the most critical, and he awaited the approaching encounter of his wife with the members of his family with the anxiety of a condemned man. As a matter of fact he had never taken his sisters into his confidence in respect to asking this woman, their former friend and bosom companion, to share their house with them, and it had caused him no little concern to conjecture what attitude they would assume upon meeting her. Would they receive her cordially? Everything, it seemed, depended upon that. Evelyn, he was aware, was opposed to divorce. But would she be willing to make an exception in the case of her own brother and her chum? If he detected the least displeasure on her part—and he took this position in the center of the room where he might witness the meeting—he would have to acknowledge defeat. Edith, too, was awaiting the meeting with an anxious air. He saw it in her face as she left her chair and hurried to the door.

But as they flew into one another's arms he watched

the fervor of the embrace. It satisfied him. The meeting was all that he had hoped for, and a slight grunt of satisfaction escaped him. It was not because these people were his victims that Kelso's lips curled in that perceptible sneer. That was a way with him. He rejoiced simply because his own vain misgivings were wholly without foundation, at most fanciful, suspicious and foolish. The greeting of the women, instead of being, as he had feared, feigned and frigid, was genuine and spontaneous. The light of welcome that beamed from his sisters' eyes was soulful and genuine. He was confident that their capitulation was complete. He knew enough about women to assure himself that they were going to be a cordial trio, Evelyn, Doris and Edith; and the thought encouraged him.

"What do you think of this modern version of Pyramus and Thisbe?" Kelso asked characteristically. "We tore down the wall."

"Just splendid!" Evelyn exclaimed with eyes aglow. "I know we shall be very happy—just us four."

"Thanks!" he replied.

"Why, you big, foolish boy! Did you think we would stand in the way of your happiness?"

"No, really! The fact is—well! We were not sure."

He wandered away, his eyes gleaming a little, his fingers thrust into his side pockets, the dog, Nestor, at his heels. It was over—thank God! The girls were pleased and that meant everybody was pleased. But it had been a strain while it lasted and he passed his hand over his forehead in profound relief. Of course it mat-

tered considerably what his sisters thought. He would not for the world have caused them any pain over his hasty venture, and he had hoped—he never prayed, for he trusted too much to pot-luck—that they would condone his offense against society on the ground that he was their own brother. “It was surprising,” he muttered, and then strangely enough, he asked himself in the same breath, “What would people say?” as if the answer gave him any real concern. It was a way with the Wheatons never to consider the opinions of any outside the members of their own family. It was a tradition with them and they simply could not outlive it. For him to ask, even to himself, what the rest of the world thought, made him chuckle again. It would make any Wheaton chuckle.

His mail contained a letter announcing the coming reception to the newly-elected Governor. There on the table it lay and he picked it up and scanned the message. Suddenly he thought that this was Edith’s chance to make her bow to society. He was a member of the Governor’s Foot Guards, an ancient and honorable organization, the bodyguard of the Governor of the State. It was customary to hold a public reception on Inauguration Day, which reception was generally looked upon as the social event of the season. Everybody was there. The citizens of the State came to salute their new Governor, and to receive his salute in return. Prospective office-holders came to show themselves, and to pay homage to their chief. The rank and file came to meet everybody else and to see all there was to be seen. He grunted. What a splendid

opportunity to present his wife to their friends! He would escort her himself, introduce her to his own circle and sit back the while and watch the manner of her reception. He could see them now. Mrs. Billings taking Edith by the arm and parading her around the hall, halting before the several boxes to introduce the wife of Kelso Wheaton to the envious guests. Ted Newell asking for the pleasure of a dance; Charlie French coming to him to congratulate him on his excellent fortune. A rather formal round of ceremonies, to be sure, but he was accustomed to formal ceremonies. His whole life had been regulated, to a certain extent, by them. Arching his brows he looked around at the trio now engaged in earnest conversation. Then he sauntered up to them.

"I say," he interrupted, "here is something."

"An announcement!" Doris guessed.

"The Governor's Ball. New Year's Night. Last time we were there was before the war, don't you remember?"

The girls remembered.

"Now is the time for you to meet the crowd, Edith. Suppose we decide to go, you and I. What do you think?"

Evelyn thought it would be the proper thing. As for Doris she had no desire to attend. She was tired of meeting the same people.

"It will be your chance, Edith," went on Kelso, "to meet the 'crits.' Do you know the 'crits'? No? Everybody knows them. They manage the conduct of the city, pry into men's affairs, upset innocent

women's homes. They never mean any harm—Oh, no!—but they never seem to be out of mischief. They haunt the recesses of brilliantly lighted ballrooms. Super-elongated jawbones are characteristic of them, as well as jack-in-the-box gaits. They travel, usually, in pairs, and never look ahead to see where they are going. They visit jails, hospitals, sanitariums, institutions for the blind, the deaf and so on. They assemble at lectures, receptions, soirées. And no one is spared their pointed shafts; and when they shoot, they shoot to kill."

No one deigned to make reply to this banter. The sisters looked at each other and tittered. It was ridiculous, this spectacle of Kelso Wheaton reciting a monologue on "town gossip," and accompanying his performance with appropriate gestures and facial expressions. When he finished he appeared even more ludicrous, as he stood, right foot forward, with hand and finger extended as if in aim.

"Don't be silly!" Doris exclaimed.

"Ha! You make light of my remarks. Well, you shall see. Look, here is the announcement! Reception to His Excellency, the Governor, Foot Guard Hall. New Year's Night. Yours truly, 'The Crits.'"

There was a pause, followed by more tittering.

"Eh bien! We go to meet them. Edith, buy the smartest dress in town. And then we'll go to knock them cold. What!"

XIII

“**I** NEVER saw Edith look lovelier,” Evelyn whispered to her brother as they stood together for a few moments in conversation near the end of the hall.

“Best-looking woman in the crowd!” Kelso grunted with obvious delight.

“She will make a good impression, don’t you think?”

“Of course!”

Together their eyes sought Edith. In her gown of gold net over peach satin with its opalescent trimmings, she seemed to have caught the form of some fairy princess brought to earth for this ball. She was standing a few feet away laughing and chatting with two of Kelso’s friends, Ted Newell and his fiancée, Miss Rogers.

“But I am going to enjoy it, I know,” they heard her protest. “It is just splendid.”

“The coloring is wonderful,” Miss Rogers observed.

“And the gowns!” exclaimed Edith.

It would be difficult to say, indeed, which was the more resplendent, the hall with its kaleidoscopic effect of color formations, representing every hue and shade of the gleaming rainbow, or the gowns, worn by the women, which for brilliance and beauty transcended anything seen heretofore in the city. The matrons for

the most part wore sequins that scintillated like a clustered nebulae in the heavens, as well as jets, while the younger women were noticeable for their dazzling shades of rich velvets, gowns of gold or silver, and brilliant creations of zephyr lightness.

It was yet early evening. His Excellency had not arrived and the guests were slowly filing into the hall and taking their places in the galleries and around the sides to await his entry. Kelso had been marching all day and was tired to death. He had escorted the Governor in parade through the streets of the city up to the Capitol for the inauguration ceremony and he had marched with the Guards to the hall for the performance of the last solemn service. He felt silly in his uniform and was glad this business of inaugurating Governors occurred only once every two years. For the moment he had stolen away from the ranks to catch a glimpse of his wife. He had not seen her since early morning and was anxious to know how she looked in her new gown.

Presently a party came through the door with some commotion and much chatter and Edith turned her head to see who they were. As she did so she caught sight of her husband in his buff and blue uniform standing with his sister. She excused herself and hurried to his side.

"Hello!" she greeted him. "Are you very tired?"

"Not very," he answered. "How are you?"

"Splendid!"

"Are you enjoying it?"

"Oh, isn't it wonderful!"

“Has everybody been nice to you?”

“Yes, indeed!” she exclaimed. “But I 'don't know very many. We just came.”

“Oh, that's all right. You will before the night is over.”

“Edith, have you met my friend, Mr. Towne?”

“I am pleased,” Edith replied sweetly.

“And Mr. Perry!”

This must be Doris' friend, for the two had just joined the party. Again she acknowledged the introduction.

“We were just saying,” Mr. Towne volunteered, “that the effects of the hard times are hardly apparent here. Have you ever seen anything more brilliant?”

No one ever had, so he continued:

“Don't you think it a mighty good thing to hold these affairs? We would grow so narrow without them. There are people here to-night I have never met before. It gives us an idea of their way of doing things and we are learning all the time——”

“Ye-ah,” said Kelso, “you're right, either way.”

Edith laughed merrily.

“I'll bet the 'Guv' will learn something when he takes a look at this mob,” said Perry.

“Well, I wish my part in it was over,” Kelso exclaimed. He was interrupted by the call to attention. His Excellency had arrived and was ready for the grand entry.

Edith drew back with the others to make space for the triumphal procession. There was no delay, for presently, to the strains of a stirring martial air, the

Foot Guards marched into the hall in their gayly-colored uniforms, and by a clever and precise movement ranged one platoon at the head and the other at the opposite end of the room. Then came the Governor, smiling, emotional, somewhat nervous, surrounded by his staff. It was the signal for cheers and applause. "Present arms!" rang out high above the uproar and every rifle came to salute. Simultaneously with the command came a flood of electric lights, and above all else, prominent and brilliant, a large American flag flashed forth, the Stars and Stripes outlined in colors. The effect was striking. The band broke into the national anthem, and the Governor and his staff stood at attention until the last prolonged note had died away. Then he advanced quickly to a reserved place, fashioned like a bower, with flowers and potted palms in abundance. Here he played host to the vast assemblage.

To Edith all this was inspiring—the sight of the dress uniforms, the military appearance of the men, the martial music, Lieutenant Wheaton (her Kelso), the Governor and his staff, the salute to the colors. Her heart danced with enthusiasm and she was so overcome with emotion that she was thrilled almost to tears. And now His Excellency was about to receive the company, another inspiring spectacle.

The members of the staff came first, each saluting his commander-in-chief and then clasping his hand in a firm, hearty grasp. Then followed the Justices of the Courts, the women in the Governor's box, his mother, wife and children, the committees and finally the guests.

Evelyn whispered to Edith that she had better remain with them until Kelso arrived. Edith thanked her, but never took her eyes away from the line that was forming and moving slowly down one side of the hall in orderly fashion and dispersing at the other in increasingly disorderly confusion. She fell in line with the others and moved along with the slow procession. It seemed to her as she neared the front that His Excellency was tiring of the ordeal. She took his outstretched hand, whispered a word or two of congratulation, and passed on, with Evelyn and Mr. Towne, to the left of the hall.

The ceremony concluded, the Governor left his station and hurried to his box. Then followed the signal to break ranks. This was welcomed by Edith and she smiled a little smile of joyful relief as Kelso approached her. They were preparing for the grand march and he took her away to find a place in the line.

When all was in readiness the leader of the band raised his baton, the players broke into the Governor's March, the head of the column began to move and the march was on. Around and around the hall they went, a line of beautiful women arrayed in dazzling gowns and jewels, olive drab uniforms, red and blue uniforms, black and white costumes of men in evening attire. Edith felt that many eyes were focused upon her. There were very few she knew in the line of march and this consoled her. But the more she advanced and the more people came into her line of vision the more she realized that there were a great many of her old acquaintances in the assembly, and that none of them

had spoken to her during the evening. The whole city was here to-night, Kelso's kind and her own combined.

Presently the music stopped, the march halted, the dance was on. Each escort took his own partner for the first waltz, and Edith swung into the arms of Kelso, the first waltz they had had together since their night in Roger McKim's pavilion at Spring Lake.

It did not take Edith long to discover that she was in a strangely unwholesome and chilling atmosphere. New England traditions savor of social ostracism. The stern and black-browed inhabitants of ancient Salem were no less conspicuous in their martyrdom of the witches or severe in their denunciation of the public sinner, than were these people of modern Shefford in their cruelties towards the unfaithful husband or wife. It is all right to say that a great amount of water had flowed under the bridges since that time and times had changed considerably, but the fact remains that New England tradition to-day is just as jealous of the strict observance of the moral code and adherence to duty as it was two hundred years ago. The adulteress is condemned now by public opinion as she was condemned then by a stern, inquisitorial law to stand in the public pillory. She is religiously avoided by her nearest of kin. There is no extenuation that can serve to lessen her guilt, and the townsfolk stand by as they did then and suffer her to pay the whole of her fine. Edith was aware of this, and she sensed this feeling of repugnance to her in the coolness and contempt manifested in the behavior of the people who surrounded her in the great hall.

"Are you enjoying the evening?" Kelso asked her a little later.

"Not any too much," came back the rather listless reply.

"What is it? The ceremony or the company?"

"Both, I think."

"What do you care? Just walk up to these people and let them see you. That's what counts."

"I couldn't do that," she said.

"Of course you can. You've got to if you want to make any headway with them. It's their method."

It was not that anybody by look, word, or sign manifested the slightest indication of dissatisfaction or displeasure. But they knew well how to conceal their emotions and impulses under the guise of politeness. Edith felt terribly conscious. She felt that the women were staring and whispering horrid things behind their fans and dance programs about her and the sin she had committed against society. Was it because she was young and fashionable that they could not take their eyes from her, or was she really a notorious person bearing the heavy consequences of an infamous disgrace? Why could they not admire instead of condemning the sincerity of her convictions? She had been unhappy with her former husband, she was not ashamed to confess it, and she had left him for that very reason. Must she be subjected to scorn and persecution for doing what the majority of them yearned to do but dared not. Hypocrites! There was more than one of them who knew that their own husbands were scandalously familiar with other women, but who covered

it up as well as they could so as to avoid giving the public something to talk about! On the other hand they did not want her because she was a divorcée. Which was worse?

“Do you know,” she confided to Kelso, “I think they are very cold to me. Do you notice it?”

“Nonsense!” he exclaimed.

“But no one seems to be kind—” she protested.

“They never are. That’s their way.”

“There’s May Welch, a girl I’ve known all my life. She has not come near me all evening. And we used to be such good friends.”

“Perhaps she has not had a chance. The night is young yet. How many engagements have you?”

“You have my program? How many dances have you taken?”

“Oh, I can fill it easily enough. But I thought you might want to reserve some.”

“I don’t know whether I do or not.”

The dance over, they made their way to the side of the hall where stood the Governor’s box. Edith judged this to be the most prominent portion of the hall, and she was determined to let every one see how unmindful she was of criticism. Never would she allow herself to be isolated, not even by the self-appointed arbiters of fashion and society who composed the dominant minority at the head of the hall. Kelso took care to present her to everybody they encountered, and all received her with cordial delight. Apparently they were entirely sincere in their protestations of pleasure—still, Edith did not trust them. She never could be

sure of what others were thinking. Actions were poor indexes of a person's thoughts, especially in the case of these social leaders.

Presently the music started again and Mr. Newell came to her side to claim his dance. The selection was especially cheerful. Round and round they stepped, moving in the midst of other couples, coursing merrily to the lively accompaniment. How they moved, and laughed, and frisked and chatted! She was happy. Beautiful girls of the best families swayed sportively about her, and my lady Evelyn also, to the evident delight of her escort. Edith scanned the hall for Kelso and found him at the opposite end with a frail and vivacious girl for a partner.

"What are all these traditions of which I hear so much?" she ventured to inquire of Mr. Newell. He was supposed to know all about these things, for she had heard it said that he was an authority on "form."

"Traditions!" he repeated. "What do you mean—traditions?"

"Oh, those customs and formulae transmitted from one generation to the other and supposed to govern the behavior of our people and give them a sense of self-confidence."

"Never heard of them," he replied. "What do they look like?"

"That's it. They can't be seen. Have you ever felt them?"

"Never! If they do exist I should describe them more of the spirit than the flesh."

"But it angers me to think that such things do exist,

and that so many are compelled to subscribe to them——”

“It is but natural. Class divisions are indestructible. There is always a certain class at the top of every form of society, and even if one set succeeds in dislodging the class above, they in turn automatically become the top-most class. Should every class be destroyed until two men only are left, one of these would be the leader of the other.”

But it was later in the evening, while she was sitting out one of her dances with Kelso, that her ears caught an unfinished sentence that resolved all her doubts and conjectures of the evening into grim and startling realities. Two women approached the side of the hall and passed immediately behind her. They were talking earnestly, but it was only part of a sentence that succeeded in reaching her anxious ears.

“ . . . and they say her child is in the asylum . . . ”

That was all, but it made the room grow still and cold. She decided that the whole hall must be talking about her. It was her child they meant, and she felt the color leave her face and a chill run down her spine.

Some time later Evelyn found her in the rest-room, whither she had retired. She had been crying, and was sitting in one corner quite alone. It was terrible, this ordeal, and she could not endure it. She could not pass any couple on the floor without feeling ashamed, for she was not bold enough to look them straight in the face without flinching. So she had fled away, from the sight of the gayly decorated hall and its cruel mockery, from herself, to this place of refuge

where she might hide herself in solitude. She remembered with shame her foolish thoughts—even during the grand march when she was deluding herself that they were envying her and admiring her pretty gown. Fool that she had been not to know that they were only eyeing her to whisper secrets about her!

“What is it, dear,” Evelyn asked, running to her side and placing her arms about her, “are you ill?”

“It is nothing,” Edith replied, suppressing a sob and assuming a brave front. “I just came in to rest.”

“Does Kelso know you are here?”

She shook her head.

“Had I better call him?”

“No! No! Please don’t.”

“It is stuffy—that hall. It made your head ache.”

Edith looked up at her and tried to smile.

“Let us go outside. Are you engaged for the next dance? Let me see! Yes, you are—with Fred. Come along.”

Evelyn put her arm through hers and led her out, laughing and jesting merrily all the time, stopping several whom they met and speaking to them. Mr. Towne saw them and advanced, looking straight at Edith as if he would say, “Where have you been?” She put out her hand and welcomed him.

“Do you know I have been looking for you all over this blooming hall?” he said.

“I did not forget you,” she replied.

During their dance together she scarcely spoke a word; and when he took her to the refreshment room she was but little more communicative. As they

passed the gallery stairs some one called out to them as they passed.

"Oh, hello, Tom," Mr. Towne exclaimed. "I didn't see you. How are you? Do you know——"

"Sure I do. Mrs. Colman," the other interrupted. "You remember me—I was at the Armory?"

"Yes, indeed," Edith averred. "How do you 'do, Mr. Wallace?"

"But she is Mrs. Colman no longer," Mr. Towne explained. "Mrs. Wheaton, if you please. Kelso's wife."

"Oh, I see," returned the other. "Well, indeed I am glad to know Mrs. Wheaton. My mistake I am sure."

They passed on.

When the intermission came Edith sought Kelso and asked to be taken home. He protested with his usual grunt, and told her it was altogether impossible because of the number of engagements he had made for the evening. She must wait, he decided, and while he was sorry she was not enjoying herself, he had little doubt but what she would do better as the night grew older. It would never do, he reminded her, for him to leave at this juncture. There was a certain formality to be observed and his presence was required.

"But, Kelso, I am ill. I know I can stand it no longer. You must take me home."

"Let us find Evelyn or Doris," he suggested, thinking he saw a way out of the difficulty.

"No, I want to get away."

"What's the matter?"

"They hate me. I hate them. I can tell when I am not wanted."

He was aroused this time, and forced an affected laugh. He did not grunt, for it suddenly occurred to him as he sat there and studied her that her color was changing, or that it had changed in the course of the evening. It would never do to have her grow ill on his hands, he concluded, in a public hall like this, and so he made up his mind to do as she had suggested. Pulling out his program he looked at it carefully. Most of the names were those of friends. He would not be forced to make humble apologies and he resolved to seek them all immediately and explain the cause of his departure.

"Come," he said. "Let us find Evelyn. I shall be ready to leave with you in a few minutes."

And he busied himself in hurrying through the hall and offering explanations for the forced departure he was obliged to make on account of the sudden indisposition of his wife.

There was little said during the ride home, for he was manifestly displeased with the abrupt termination of the evening's pleasure and the Wheaton blood rose in rebellion against those who had deliberately or otherwise taken a hand in Edith's undoing. Did they really mean it or was it wholly imaginary? He had never suspected Edith to be subject to hallucinations—still one never knew to what extremes the subconscious mind might go. That there had been cynical comments passed upon his marriage alliance, he knew very well. Had not Betty Russell, in a spirit of banter indeed,

asked him what amount of consolation he supposed his many admirers would derive concerning the value of their own charms when the prize of the year had been snatched from under their eyes by a divorcée! Of course she was familiar enough with him to be privileged to make such a remark, but it was presumptuous. A pretty state of affairs when the private concerns of his own house were on the lips of the public! He did not recall the exact words of his reply, but they were to the effect that he was not in the habit of consulting the rest of the world in respect to his own personal duties and predilections, and it was sufficient for him to deem the admirable lady who now bore his name to be worthy of her station. He lived to satisfy himself, not people; and it mattered little to him what they thought or said, provided he was gratified. He caught his mustache between his lips with characteristic determination, as a man clenches his fists, with his back against a wall, while he prepares to whip into insubordination the crowd of unruly insurgents confronting him.

If Edith, he thought, only possessed some of the Wheaton characteristics in fact as well as in name she would have treated the garrulous multitude with the scorn it so richly deserved. But, unfortunately, she could not; it was not in her nature to do so. She took too seriously all that other people thought and said about her, as if it mattered! She liked to be on friendly terms, and was not independent enough to fight for her convictions! When she set out for this solemn function to-night she had been eager enough, gay and happy, but now she was returning crestfallen. It was too late

for her to retrace her steps and she might just as well make the best of it. If he only could make her see his point of view! She was mistress of Westlawn for life, and she could well afford to snub whomsoever she chose.

“Why do you mind this?” he tried to console her. “You have nothing to lose. They are powerless against you and they know it.”

“I hate them,” she cried. “I wish I had never seen them.”

“You will have to cast off your old life and become like everybody else——”

“I don’t want to be like everybody else,” she flared back.

“Well, never mind,” he said resignedly, “we’ll go away and leave them. When you are at Palm Beach they will give you no further thought.”

“I wonder . . . !” she murmured and her rouged cheek grew even redder. She pretended to agree with him, but there were monstrous truths she could not put aside, even though she simulated resignation.

XIV

PALM BEACH was gorgeous; at least Edith thought so. She had heard so many entrancing tales of this most fashionable of resorts, this Floridean playground, where youth and beauty met, that to be present in the shadow of its groves and bowers seemed happiness enough. The ingenuity of man, it seemed, had been taxed to the utmost to make this an ideal winter garden. The wealth of a great railroad system had been prodigally expended to surround with all comforts the vast number of guests who were attracted thither every year. Luxurious appointments distinguished the hotels, and transformed their enclosed areas into modern hanging gardens of Babylon. The surging waters of the mighty Atlantic rolled against one side and ground down the white pebbles into the finest sand, affording a bathing beach which for natural and artificial splendor transcended every other bathing beach along the eastern seaboard. The placid waters of Lake Worth lapped against the western shore and created a panorama of serene and refreshing beauty. The splendors of earth and sky seemed to converge here to make a paradise. Tall and stately cocoa-palms towered aloft, nodding slumberously in the gentle breezes, and fair flowers lifted glad faces to the morning sun and filled the mild air with languorous perfume.

There were hosts of artificial unrealities here, but none of them made an unfavorable impression on Edith at first. What interested her particularly was not the hotels, or the palm avenues, or the variegated flower gardens, or the quaint shops and showplaces, so much as the people. She had always found people absorbing, and she was fond of studying them and their ways. The men and women appealed to her because they were assembled from the most exclusive homes of the country, distinguished for their wealth and culture and typical of the best traditions of American aristocracy. They had made this place an island inviolate. No one, it seemed, ever got too much acquainted. And while the manner of all was not without ostentation and superciliousness, their aristocracy was of the kind that would associate with cliques and castes only, and never with the children of the people. The only claim to good manners some possessed was a plentiful fortune. There was no meeting-ground here between lord and serf. She saw a haughty damsel at one of the dances at the Ponciana leave her settee in contempt because an ordinary girl came to share it with her. And this, thought Edith, was the great American nobility, simulating a title without warrant, the product of an industrial nation, elevated and inspired by European contact and custom, but as thoroughly artificial and as stilted as the fairy playground it had helped create.

She quickly learned that Palm Beach was not so solidly gorgeous as she had imagined it to be. It was interesting, true—but that was all. The hotels were vast wooden structures, spacious and richly appointed, but,

contrasted with modern New York hotels, veritable firetraps. The hotels were Palm Beach, and Palm Beach was the hotels. There were no drives, or walks, or seaboards. Automobiles were prohibited from using the island and one had to ride around in a wheel chair. The bathing beach was small, adjoining an old, wooden pier. And everybody went bathing at eleven o'clock. If one wanted to bathe in the early morning or in the middle of the afternoon he would not think of taking a dip in the ocean. No one else thought of it—hence no one did it. Want of individuality—but ultra-fashionable—of course! It had been decreed that eleven o'clock was the bathing hour and everybody was expected to conform to that rule.

One afternoon she went with Kelso for a ride in a wheel-chair. Everybody went for a ride in the middle of the afternoon and wound up at the Cocoanut Grove at five o'clock for dancing and refreshments. The ride around the island, including the trip through the jungle—so called because of its naturally wild and unkempt appearance—took more than an hour. The return trip was made along the ocean front, past the bathing beach, and through the hotel grounds. Of course the fare was exorbitant, but everything at Palm Beach was expensive. That, it seemed, was the hall-mark of distinction, just as a university education was once considered the hall-mark of a gentleman.

“I think I like it, with all its faults,” she confessed to Kelso. “The people are shallow, I'll admit, and brazenly affected. Still they know how to mind their own business.”

"These folks never ask how the rest of the world lives. They don't have to."

"Environment counts, doesn't it? Look at Shefford! It's only a small town with grown-up buildings."

"The point, precisely!" replied Kelso. "Shefford is neither rational nor irrational, rigorous nor over-indulgent. Heat and cold are, after all, but relative qualities. You breathe on your hands to warm them and blow on your tea to cool it. That's the ridiculous side of making private judgment a form of action. Social prestige is only a huge hypocrisy, and all social distinctions are built on pretense and artificiality. In Shefford, for instance, people look upon divorce as an outrage, while down here it is most acceptable. The former is not used to it, that is all. Environment is the thing. One can be exalted in one place and damned in the next."

"It's a funny old world. And we have to suffer for its peculiarities."

"It isn't the world. If the world is part comedy and part tragedy it is due to the actors. There are good actors and bad actors, heroes and villains. The world's heroes are the tragedians. We are the jesters, bound by no text or form. That is why we jest. But we serve to amuse the tragedians and play with our baubles while they recite their solemn lines. We are supposed to know nothing, and yet we supply the tragedians with their thoughts."

"Before the white man came," she said, indicating a dense portion of the jungle through which they were riding, "I suppose the whole country resembled this.

The red man lived according to no arbitrary code. He took what he wanted and asked no favors. If we lived in that age we would have to answer to no one for our conduct."

"The native had the natural law, hadn't he? And he could not escape from himself very well. To kill his neighbor's deer was wicked. But I can't understand why God puts these unnatural desires into man's heart without giving him the liberty of satisfying them. My flesh and my spirit are continually at war. God made me as I am, gave me my passions and my covetous desires. He wants me to be happy and still He has condemned me to suffer."

"Did He corrupt human nature—was it not the result of sin?"

"That's just it. We sin by obeying our natural impulses."

"On the contrary. We sin by obeying our unnatural impulses. God made man good. He had to. But the first man fell from grace and inherited concupiscences, ignorance and death. It was not God that condemned man to suffer, but man himself."

"I can't see it that way. We all came from the hand of God, religion tells us——"

"Pure and happy."

"But we are not pure and happy——"

"As a result of Adam's sin."

"Do you believe that? It appears to me that we ought to make the most of our existence here. We are not sure of the future. No one has ever come

back to tell us whether there exists a life beyond the grave or not."

"There have been apparitions of the saints."

"Conceived by some hypersensitive person."

"And the Bible assures us of the existence of heaven and hell."

"It tells us that. But who can believe it with absolute certitude?"

"There is no absolute certitude except in the case of death. All our lives are regulated by a certitude that seldom approaches the absolute."

He was silent for a minute as if he wanted to press the argument no further. At length he said:

"Well, life is certainly a puzzle to me, but while I'm here I am going to make the most of it. It is a play, tragic at times, comic, serio-comic. This afternoon we are sophists, to-night we shall be Euripideans."

"Will Mrs. Liggett be here to-night?" she suddenly asked.

"Yes, and Mr. Liggett, too," he replied.

There was nothing to distinguish the dinner dance given that night by Kelso Wheaton at the Beach Club from the other brilliant affairs held there under the patronage of one family or another, with the single exception of the choice delicacies that made up the bill of fare. It was characteristic of Kelso to be distinctly individual in this as in everything else, and there were wines in abundance, with champagne as the chief beverage. Even the tiny cigarettes, scented and gold-tipped, were not forgotten for the ladies, and the men had a special brand of cigars with monogrammed wrappers

brought for the occasion from Havana. Everything was wide open. The Volstead Act, apparently, was not intended to embrace this little island.

"I suppose none of you gentlemen are Federal agents in disguise," the younger Mr. Clark exclaimed facetiously, looking from one to the other as he spoke. "It is not always that we can have what we want when we want it without fear of confiscation."

"Rubbish!" said Kelso, laughing. "What difference would it make? Florida was always dry."

"It's Constitutional now——"

"What of it? Who is going to enforce the Constitution?"

This was supposed to be a joke. Everybody laughed.

"It was Bacchus, was it not, who is credited with discovering the culture of the vine and the mode of extracting its precious juice?" asked Mrs. Malley of Edith.

Edith admitted that it was, rather embarrassed that the question should be put to her.

"And was it not a woman who struck him mad and made the rest of his followers foolish?" echoed Tom Dargan.

More laughter.

"Do you know, I think mythology more interesting than fiction," Mrs. Liggett volunteered. "Isn't the story of Psyche the sweetest thing? A pity one so beautiful should have to be so miserable!"

"You remember the cause of her misery, don't you?" Kelso asked. But he had to answer his own question.

"Curiosity!" he said.

The joke was on Mrs. Liggett, and everybody joined in the laugh at her expense. That proud lady was clearly annoyed at finding the odds against her, but bore herself well and succeeded in carrying off the situation. While the merriment was at its height she led the others, waiting for the opportunity to deliver an answering retort. Finally she said:

“Like the age of chivalry, it is gone, I suppose—the age of curiosity. But it did give us the phonograph.”

A dead silence greeted this. Edith shot an admonitory glance at Kelso who smiled indulgently. He did not press the subject further, and with the consent of everybody it was allowed to drop.

“Were you ever in Pompeii?” the elder of the Malley sisters interposed.

“No,” Edith replied. “We are hoping to visit there this summer.”

“Don’t miss the ruins,” Mrs. Liggett advised her, talking across the table for the benefit of all. “They are perfectly wonderful. Even the houses the people lived in are preserved. Really, they were no different from us—and they drank as well.”

“I never saw the like,” Mrs. Clark declared. “The kitchens, chambers, baths are in perfect condition. And the mosaics!”

“Did you see all of them?” Kelso inquired.

“I did,” exclaimed Mrs. Liggett, as she reached for a cigarette and lighted it.

Edith was a little disturbed. The atmosphere was not at all congenial. It recalled Roman banquets in

the days of the Cæsars, when the elements of decay that ruined the old empire—wealth, vice, corruption—were present and unrecognized except as bizarre amusements. Her sensitive nature rebelled. She felt like an intruder in this closed assembly, where everybody conversed equally well and intelligently, called one another by their first names, and drank and smoked with apparent ease and delight. It did not serve to make her feel any too comfortable to be the object of glances that were anything but kind.

“I say, Edith, don’t you smoke?”

She turned at the inquiry, rousing herself from her reverie, and faced the speaker. It was Jack Southey.

“She has not yet taken up the habit,” Kelso replied.

“Oh, my dear!” exclaimed Mrs. Liggett. “As horribly old-fashioned as that!”

“Tobacco sickens me,” Edith protested.

“But these cigarettes are like perfume. Nothing to them.”

“No, thank you.”

“And you don’t drink—not even champagne? Sweet cider?” Mrs. Liggett was facetious. “Kelso, I thought you said you had married a regular fellow?”

Edith could feel the color rising in her cheeks, but she tried to laugh this off with the others. Of course everybody was looking at her and the situation was embarrassing. This woman was insulting, and for the moment she wanted to tell her so, but on second thought decided not to. She paid no attention to the remark, and it was soon forgotten.

By this time several of the party had left the table

for the dancing which followed. Kelso arose to open a fresh bottle and began to fill the glasses. When he sat down again he was next to Mrs. Liggett and began whispering to her. Edith's eyes were fastened on him, until at length Mrs. Liggett cried out:

"My word, Kelso! I actually believe your pretty little wife is jealous of me. Look! She is getting angry."

No one seemed to overhear the remark, and Edith, engaging Jack Southey in conversation, pretended not to notice it. But she struggled so within herself that she felt herself growing weak, so weak that she feared something would happen. She looked up and saw Evelyn gazing at her. In her sister-in-law's eyes she thought she found encouragement and hope.

Things were no better when they went upstairs; they grew worse, but she put forth her best efforts. She had hoped so ardently to enjoy herself this evening, because this had been the sort of life that seemed to appeal to her. But when she saw it in its nakedness she began to yearn again for the quiet days of old. This society was dull and idle. It was social and un-intellectual. Luncheon, luncheon, luncheon—it was just one array of foodstuffs after another, with dancing all the time. Or it was bridge, or rummy, or roulette. Once she had read that "women in America are an ornament, in England an object, in France a passion," and she believed it to-night for the first time.

The wheel of chance was turning, with everybody mute until it stopped. Suspense held the crowd until

the winning number was announced and then there was an uproar.

"Betty Liggett again," they cried out, "and odds seventeen to one."

"Ten to one," Kelso shouted, "you don't win the next."

"You're on," she replied, hilariously.

The wheel spun, lingered, stopped.

"Number Fourteen," announced the croupier.

Mrs. Liggett had won again.

The reckless playing of the woman caused Edith no little astonishment. She won because she did not want to win. That was the impression she created, with her casual manner, flippant behavior and recklessness. Three or more of the company played against her constantly but coquettish Fortune still smiled on her. This seemed to be Mrs. Liggett's evening; no one else had so much as an even chance with her.

"Mrs. Liggett," Edith cried aloud, seized with desperate desire. "I'll bet you an even hundred on the red."

"You can't play that way," Tom Hogan reminded her.

"Why can't I?" she flared back. "This is a side bet."

The croupier bowed his head. He had no jurisdiction over side bets so long as the rest of the company continued to play the wheel.

"What do you say?" Edith challenged her.

"Taken!" came back the instant response.

Edith played on the red and won.

"Beginner's luck!" Mrs. Liggett exclaimed.

"Play the pile," Tom Hogan advised her.

"Two hundred on the red," Edith cried, and again the red color was called.

"Leave the bundle where it is," she commanded.

"Four hundred on the red."

Mrs. Liggett covered her again.

"Red wins!" everybody called.

"Eight hundred! Red!" Edith challenged, her face ablaze with excitement.

"My heavens!" Mrs. Liggett cried. "Where did you learn to play?"

"Eight hundred!" Edith reminded her.

"It is covered."

And Edith won again.

The company were wildly excited over this duel. In the course of ten minutes Edith Wheaton had won fifteen hundred dollars from one woman. Mrs. Liggett scowled fiercely, and Edith was elated, happy at the triumph she had won over her rival just at the moment when she was bent on receiving the most applause . . . She knew that she would win, she knew Kelso was approving her! That was her stake, as well as her joy and heart's treasure.

Later in the evening, the game room being filled with a number of strange guests anxious to test their luck with the mischievous ball, Kelso withdrew with his party to the main floor, where dancing was in progress. Like noisy, frolicsome children they descended the stairs in twos and threes, their voices suspiciously husky, rising and falling in meaningless banter and gay

repartee. Betty laid a light and artless hand on Kelso's arm and took precedence at the head of the procession, while Edith trailed behind with Jack Southey whom she particularly detested, since he was the one who had brought Kelso and this woman together for the first time on this beach two seasons before.

Far into the morning they danced, a customary procedure at all these functions. Negro boys were assisting spent guests outside to their wheel-chairs, and women giggled shrilly and persistently. Edith grew restive at this hideous spectacle—hot, stuffy quarters, couples half asleep on the lounges and divans, women's painted faces streaked with perspiration. She rose to leave. Passing through the hall she saw a spectacle at the other end that sapped her vitality and left her cold as death. There stood Kelso and Mrs. Liggett in close embrace, the woman's bare arms about his neck, his dark form hardly visible in the obscure light.

"Kelso!" she called.

They came toward her, a sheepish look of guilt on their faces.

"Don't you think we ought to go home?" she asked quietly.

He nodded and passed without a word, leaving her standing a lonely figure in the empty hall.

XV

LATER, after she had dressed for the day, Edith wandered down to the bathing beach. She was alone, Kelso having risen before her and departed early. None too spirited as a result of sleepless hours and a quarrelsome morning she sauntered along the boardwalk, misery darkening her brow. Her determination was anything but irresolute. The experience of the night before had but served to steel her to stubborn insubordination.

Evelyn, seated in a beach chair with her needles and yarn, accosted her.

“Why!” she observed, “how dreadfully preoccupied you appear to be! You would have gone right by me. Where is Kelso?”

“Bathing, I guess. Have you seen him?”

“No—but I have not looked for him,” she added quickly. “He must be here, of course. Tell me—what has happened?”

Edith drew back, startled, and made an involuntary motion of surprise.

“He has told you?” she asked, trembling.

“My dear, no, absolutely nothing! But I know my brother so well that I inferred that he was out of sorts. You are the only one who matters with him, and so

I naturally concluded that you had been having a little tilt."

"It is nothing." But Edith's self-restraint was fast vanishing.

"Of course it concerned Mrs. Liggett," Evelyn said blandly.

This time Edith could not conceal the feeling that swept over her.

"Yes," she unwillingly admitted.

"What has she done?"

"Done! She's done everything possible. I hate her."

"Now, Edith! You shouldn't say that. She isn't worth it."

"I don't care," retorted Edith, indignantly, "she's a vile serpent. And the way he carries on with her is perfectly shocking. I told him this morning he ought to be ashamed of himself. If she hasn't any shame he ought to know better. Since we came here it is Betty, Betty, until I am sick and tired of hearing her name. If we are alone she calls him on the telephone to make a date for dinner. If we go for a walk she is sure to be perched on the front porch or in the parlor. Last night—well, it was scandalous . . ."

Her white teeth flashed and the upper part of her face, the shadows about the eyes, the slight drawing in of the brows suggested furious anger. Evelyn saw it and almost regretted her intensity.

"That's his way, my dear," she assured her with evident honesty. "Kelso means all right, but he hasn't the heart to hurt any one's feelings. He is simply a

woman's man, that is all. He is fond of them all—and shares his heart generally—for which everybody likes him. And he does everything so gallantly! Why, you have only to look at him? Or listen to his talk? And it is not altogether his fault. People make too much of him.”

“He's old enough to know better than to succumb to every woman he meets . . .”

“But all men are not stoics. And you'll have to allow that Betty is unusually attractive——”

“She's a brazen piece. A painted doll!”

“They all are nowadays. You rouge yourself——”

“I don't have to,” she flung back triumphantly.

“But,” Evelyn averred, amused at her sister-in-law's indignation, “take all the women you meet here. You surely do not question their conduct; and yet you must admit that just a touch of color heightens their attractions!”

“A married woman has no right to attract any one but her husband!”

“And the rest of the world generally!”

“Well, it seems to me that a wife should consider only those things which can interest her husband. When she arrays herself like Cleopatra she is but enticing other men.”

Evelyn laughed.

“You are outspoken anyhow, my dear. And you are not up-to-date. It is the customary thing for ladies to do these things now. They drink, flirt, smoke——”

“No lady smokes,” Edith corrected.

“Any number of them; and they say it is very com-

forting, especially when you are alone; and fascinating, as well, to watch the thin, blue smoke curl into the air."

"When a woman drinks and smokes you may as well hang a sign on her."

"Why, Edith! How very shocking you are! Whatever put that terrible notion into your head?"

"I suppose I have been raised that way. Somehow or other I cannot grow accustomed to this manner of life. It sickens me. I told Kelso he would find me anything but an apt pupil."

Evelyn sat in silence a few minutes. During the interval she got a small vanity case out of her purse, opened it and looked with critical interest at her mouth and nose. She wanted to tease Edith, but the latter pretended not to notice her. Finally she closed it, restored it to its proper place, and said:

"Is that why you think so little of Mrs. Liggett?"

"Actions are the best interpreter of character," came back the cold reply.

"Well," Evelyn volunteered, "you must remember that Mrs. Liggett is a modern woman. Not questionable, understand, but simply indifferent to all conventionalities. She is married—but what of that? She won't be bothered with children, for she likes a good time and she means to enjoy herself. If she does smoke now and then, or take a highball, it is more from gayety than habit. She is attractive, and manages to keep herself attractive, for she knows that her popularity depends upon her personal appearance. Ethically she is correct——"

"Look at her now," Edith interrupted.

Evelyn looked, and saw her brother and Mrs. Liggett on the edge of the beach. Kelso had just caught her, and, seizing her hand, was engaged in pulling her into the water. She went under, and a moment later reappeared, dripping, laughing, breathless and climbed back to the sun-baked sand. Evelyn waved a friendly greeting. He responded by coming straight to where they sat, followed presently by Mrs. Liggett herself.

"We were watching you," Evelyn said. "It sent cold shivers down my back."

"I deserved that ducking, I suppose," Mrs. Liggett rejoined. "Really," she added, addressing her remarks to Edith, "your husband is awful."

"You must be more gentle with Mrs. Liggett, Kelso," Edith admonished her husband.

"Come out and I'll duck you, too," Kelso replied in his characteristic jovial way.

"Not I, thank you," she said icily.

"Oh, well, I didn't think you would," he looked at Mrs. Liggett and smiled.

No answer he could have made could have more exasperated his wife. How like him it was to want to show this other woman just how clever he could be! How it would have wounded his pride to be obliged to humble himself before his wife in this lady's presence! It never occurred to him for an instant that his enjoyment was at the expense of another's defeat or that his pleasure meant another's pain and chagrin. He was proud of his aptitude to turn aside a reproof with his ready tongue, and the smile he bestowed upon Mrs.

Liggett was equally indicative of his complete satisfaction with himself.

And as for Edith, the more she looked at him the more she was struck by his easy, magnetic manner and attractive countenance. Even with his wet, matted hair covering his head in confusion, there was something about him that was compelling. He need not be dressed fashionably to be graceful, or to be virile for that matter. A strong, masculine personality was his at all times, whether one regarded the broad back with shoulders high and rigid, or the short neck with the firm and square jaw resting determinedly upon it. He was a man to compel the admiration of any woman.

Mrs. Liggett's face was round and full; a saucer-face, Edith sarcastically called it. It was never still. The large and splendid dark eyes played a conspicuous part in her haunting beauty; the heavy masses of raven hair brought low on the forehead and cheek and caught high in back (she had removed her bathing cap); even the little flare of color in the cheeks intensified her brunette type—all these combined to unite in a spirit extraordinarily mirthful and mischievous, a supremely airy and careless and bold spirit, that would challenge in combat the stoutest heart of the most phlegmatic man. Edith realized at a glance how dangerous was this woman, and she wondered if Kelso realized it. Perhaps he did and was enjoying it for the mischief that might be in it!

Wasn't it like men to allow themselves to be flattered and cajoled by women of this type? Pretty and painted, chic and smart! Genuine assets in the world

of to-day. Whether a girl possessed character or not made little difference, so long as she was gifted with charms of figure and face. Most men, it seemed, did not want a helpmate. Instead of a wife they sought an ornament, fashionable, and expensive, but an ornament none the less, suitable for exhibition purposes only. Classic lines, oh, yes! And pretty to gaze upon! Odd Kelso could not see this. Strange and odd!

She fought to control the impulse to tell him so. She fought against the discretion which importuned her to hold her peace. How she hated this woman! From the moment she had identified her with the obnoxious gossip who had crept so furtively to Bert Colman's office, to put him on his guard against Kelso Wheaton, she had positively disliked her and feared her. It was a score that would soon be outlawed unless prompt settlement were made, and nothing could afford her more pleasure than to pay her back in her own coin. She would be merciless. If only Kelso could see this proud beauty wincing under a deserved blow. Something like this must be done to bring him to his senses—for Evelyn had touched the right note when she described him as a woman's man. His gallantry was bound to be his undoing—and hers, too.

He was talking to Mrs. Liggett now—he was calling her by her first name:

“What do you say, Betty? Another swim?”

They were off.

“Oh, I say, Edith,” he called back. “You don't mind, do you?”

Edith said, “No, of course not. Silly!”

Silly! She wondered what made her say that.

Some time later they met for refreshments on the Breakers' Porch. This was customary. The bathing hour usually terminated in a rendezvous at the Breakers, where sturdy wire tables and chairs were set out for the accomodation of the guests, where variegated fruit juices were indolently sipped through artificial straws, where a forty-piece orchestra produced syncopated melodies both for the exhilaration of the weary spirits of tired men and women and the excitation of the restless spirits of indefatigable choreomaniacs. Skill, science and art had contributed to produce the most perfect of settings. Great royal palms guarded the entrance; Washington palms and cocoa-palms towered aloft from the grassy inclosure and formed a perfect canopy overhead; immense flower-beds rested at regular intervals along the greensward, proudly displaying the richly tinted flora of the tropics, and delighting the eye and sweetening the air with their freshness of color and delicious fragrance.

Edith was wondering what had become of Henry Liggett. He had not been seen all morning. She was beginning to think him the humblest and the most obscure person she had ever met, when, suddenly she spied him coming down the veranda, making his way between the rows of tables and chairs and heading directly for them. He was smoking a cigarette in a way that was thoroughly nonchalant. Everything about him was nonchalant. The way he carried his cane under his arm, the tops of his gray suede gloves turned down below the wrist, the sweep of the watch chain

from a higher pocket to a lower, the angle of his hat, the ease of his gait—all served to indicate a state of mind which was neither interested nor concerned. He observed the groups of revelers seated around the tables and returned several greetings nonchalantly. He approached the Wheaton table and bade them the time of day. He ordered a whisky-sour, rubbed his bony hands together, and smiled at each member of the party indifferently.

“Well, Henry!” his wife said to him. “What have you to say for yourself?”

“Nothing!” came back the thoroughly non-committal reply.

He never seemed to have anything to say. It looked farcical, this shadowy existence of Henry Liggett. As far as anybody else was concerned he was a nonentity, but no one seemed to pay any attention to it, least of all Henry Liggett himself.

“Where have you been keeping yourself all morning?”

“Just walking around—here and there—nowhere in particular. Wanted a walk, that’s all.”

“What are you folks going to have?” Kelso asked, generally.

“I want lemon and lime,” Edith replied and Evelyn nodded a like request.

“Let me have a cigarette,” said Mrs. Liggett.

“Wonderful place, this!” Liggett observed.

“Wonderful!” agreed Kelso.

Said Liggett again, “Wonderful folks!”

Yes.—All agreed to this—in silence.

"They make this place wonderful," he persisted. "Ever notice their peculiarities?"

"Now please, Henry, don't begin to preach," his wife pleaded. "You know, Henry views everything with a critical eye. He is for ever applying principles and putting them to work."

Henry chuckled.

"Quite right, my dear. Quite right," he said, very much amused. "You know, flattery itself is never straightforward—never. A flatterer who is clever always takes it for granted that every man is extraordinary—when he is quite the contrary. We call these folks the wisest, bravest, most benevolent and most beautiful of all mankind—when we mean they are simply wealthy. You have noticed that, I am sure. The newspapers are to blame for this. They indulge too persistently in the superlative. Were you ever interviewed? No! . . . You would never recognize yourself, so exaggerated would the value and the importance of your natural qualities appear."

"Rather interesting, is it not?" Edith said, "in view of the fact that we have been taught to believe in the existence of two rival worlds, worlds that have nothing in common."

"Ah! That's just the specious distinction. Specious, mind!" he cautioned with a bony finger poised in the air. "No such distinction ever did exist until the society columns of the newspapers appeared. A dark, squalid world that some could never sink to, and a gay but little world which the majority could never climb to. That was it, eh? There were Four Hun-

dred families in the gay, little world until the Hundred Thousand families discovered the secret. Now there is no gay, little world."

"A specious distinction!" Edith thoughtfully repeated and looked away. A butterfly, gayly colored and delicate, attracted her attention by its exquisite beauty and extreme restlessness. Its gauzy, tinsel wings were never still. It never delayed for more than a second at any blossom. But every flower bowed down in admiration as it passed.

She looked up with a little smile that was half sad.

"Of course, there is no one who is not successful," Henry Liggett continued. "That a thing is successful merely means that it is. The wealthy are successful in being wealthy, that is all. So is a donkey successful in being a donkey. We are one half pretense at our best, and only partly earnest. This place is wonderful because it is built entirely on pretense."

"What would you have us do," Kelso inquired, "for I presume you would include all of us in your category? Reform it altogether, with Hamlet, or punish the race with extinction?"

Henry Liggett saw nothing facetious in this remark. To him it was not even witty.

"Aristocracy is only a vision—a deliberate indulgence in a certain picture of pleasure. We dream of a happy race and we paint a mythical isle and give it the name of Utopia. This is Utopia—where pride and scorn are worshiped exclusively. And mankind never really admires pride. Mankind never has anything but scorn for scorn. The men and women of

modern Utopia scorn indissoluble marriages and children. You have observed that, I am sure."

Kelso watched the dancers for a moment, languidly. Finally he turned to Edith.

"Let us dance," he said. "You will find it more interesting."

But she did not care to. She was profoundly absorbed in Henry Liggett's remarks. He was voicing abstract truths in a way she had never heard before.

"Come on, Kelso, I'll dance with you," Mrs. Liggett cried out, laying her unfinished cigarette on the tray. "Let us have done with this sermonizing. Henry, you ought to be an evangelist or something."

They were gone. Edith could not resist following them with her eyes. And there came a thought to her, a thought that had been first expressed by Evelyn Wheaton, long ago.

"Henry Liggett is a splendid fellow, but too old. Her heart yearns for youth's companionship and romance."

Modern Utopia made this possible.

Edith found Henry Liggett a satisfactory companion. He was intelligent, quiet, and spoke the thoughts of a mind matured by judgment and apprehension. He was not a cynic, much as his wife would have others believe it, and he certainly seemed cool and calculating, an expert analyst of men and manners. His clothes, his clear-cut, rounded, sun-tanned face indicated correct personality, and yet there was a suggestion of banality about him in the thoroughly negligent method of his

speech and actions indicative of simplicity of tastes and equality of spirit and method.

Once before, at Westlawn, she felt the same admiration for him and experienced the same irresistible impulse to reveal her mind and give him her confidence. He was ever the same, gentle, genial, inviting and constant. To-day he seemed to sense her distress, for he continued to look at her earnestly, almost with compassion. She spoke to him—they were alone, for Evelyn, too, was dancing—and he replied like one who clearly understood.

“Never let a man know how much you care for him,” he said to her, “and never let your heart supersede your judgment. Be affectionate, but by no means subservient. It is flattery that makes fools of us all. If you are unhappy let him not be the first to know it, but pull yourself together and seek, by artful methods, to sustain his interest in you. Outwit him at every turn. The secret of discipline lies in keeping the subject ignorant of what goes on in the mind of the master.”

“You saw him, didn’t you? You don’t mind . . . ?”

“Her? No I don’t mind her; and if I did I wouldn’t acknowledge it. Did you ever observe a dog teasing a cat? He doesn’t want to hurt the cat; he only wants to have fun with it, to annoy it. If the cat turns on him or sits complacent, uninterested in the disturbance he is creating, he will soon tire of the sport, and wander aimlessly away. I never let Betty think I am displeased with what she does. She is the kind that likes to tease,

but I let her see that it has no effect on me. In time she will tire of her foolishness."

She glanced over her shoulder, as though fearful of being overheard. He saw this but paid no attention.

"You are shocked?" he went on. "Yes, of course; I understand. But you know you can never make a man fond of you. Intimidation never begot love. The King of France could not alter the determination of a princess though he had a whole kingdom to cast at her feet. You want to hold the affections of your husband—but to do so you must never let him be sure of you. If you see him slipping away do not storm and fret over it. Set about very deliberately to learn the causes of his indifference and overcome them. Be attractive, but stoop to conquer."

Her lips tightened, her eyes narrowed. Something within her rebelled against this doctrine. For the first time she was comparing, in her own mind, the new life with the old.

XVI

“**A** GENERATION wasted, perverse, luxurious—
rushing to ruin as rapids rush to the sea——”

Three months since, Bert Colman found himself repeating these words before the House Committee on Judiciary. He was gravely, deeply interested in a particular resolution proposing a twentieth amendment to the Constitution, which would give Congress power to establish and enforce, by appropriate legislation, uniform laws as to marriage and divorce. But the business before Congress was enormous, with a program of legislation requiring action that threatened to carry the session well through July and August. He had introduced the measure at the beginning of the session, and it had been very promptly referred to Committee. For three months he had fought the Committee, urging early consideration of his measure—but to no avail. It was now the middle of June, and he was on the point of despair. The stern resolve that had endured all this while was giving way to serious misgivings.

Two days, and all had changed. The Committee on Judiciary suddenly took up the Colman resolution for consideration, and reported the measure back to the House, with the recommendation for favorable action. But here was more delay. The Farmers’

Bloc was daily growing stronger, and it threatened to hold the whip hand over Congress unless a compromise was effected. It already had forced the Agricultural Bill through both Houses and was now insisting on legislation, providing long term credits for farmers, reduction of railroad rates, adequate tariff protection for agricultural products, and an amendment to the Federal Reserve Law so as to permit an additional member representing the farming interests to sit on the Board. There was the Soldiers' Bonus Bill, and who dared prophesy the length of debate on this measure with the President opposed to it? And there was the Treaty of Peace with Germany, soon to be reported back to the Senate from the Foreign Relations' Committee. No one, it seemed wanted any further delay in the matter of ratification, with the country clamoring for peace and a repeal of war measures, many of which were still in force. Everybody was certain that the debate on this subject alone would continue for several weeks at the very least—so the Colman resolution seemed doomed to expire on the table.

It may have been the sight of so many measures before this important session of Congress, or it may have been the natural desire to inject a personal equation into the problem of reform that prompted Bert in the first place to frame the resolution calling upon Congress to take action in the matter of a national divorce law. The time was indeed opportune. Day by day the press applauded the suggestion. A preliminary report, issued by the Census Bureau and showing that in the ten-year period before 1920 the number

of divorced persons in relation to the total population in the United States had increased .4 per cent, lent local color to the proposition. What with the national pride mortified by the number and the character of the sordid expositions perpetrated in the divorce courts during the past year, and the national weeklies devoting column after column to a persistent discussion of the national malady, it was small wonder that thinking men and women were lifting their voices, clamoring for uniform marriage and divorce laws to relieve these degrading conditions. Clergymen, alarmed at their insidious growth, advocated the complete abolition of absolute divorce, while others, more moderately inclined, sought to remedy the source of the abnormal disease by placing restrictions on the grounds for divorce and making obligatory the publication of banns several weeks before the marriage ceremony was performed.

Bert had given careful consideration to these various solutions of the vexatious question, and came to the conclusion that a federal marriage and divorce law, regulating marriage and dissolving it under certain limited conditions, was the only remedy for the menace. The wrong that he himself had been compelled to endure he ascribed to the glaring inconsistencies and discrepancies in the marriage and divorce laws of the various States. Were it not for the fact that some of the States did not require the personal attendance of both parties, Edith Colman would never have obtained her decree. New York would have nullified the action upon his subsequent application had he been a resident

of that State instead of Connecticut, where the laws of other States in this matter were recognized. There was the further appalling fact that the United States to-day headed the list of divorce-ridden countries with a ratio of one divorce in less than every nine marriages. This was not a pleasant pabulum for the nourishment of the national mind. His fondest hopes lay in the framing of a measure that would make a general appeal, a national uniform marriage and divorce law that would function alike for all those who would have recourse to it, one that would protect marriage against failure, divorce against multiplication, and safeguard impartially all those concerned—the wife, the husband, the children and the nation.

He dedicated himself to this task, throwing himself into the work with a sort of dogged desperation. It served as an avenue of escape for the pent-up humors of his wounded nature. His wife gone, his home broken up, his child separated from him, indeed the world wore a sordid hue. In this resolution of his alone did he find enthusiasm, or interest. He was anxious for its success. But the session sped on and on. The Treaty of Peace with Germany was brought in and ratified; the Income Tax Bill was amended; and the Maternity Bill was before the House for consideration. Never before had the world promised so tremendous an opportunity as it seemed to promise now, and never before had his hopes of living to see it been so problematical.

The following week he was home.

Home! His face curled in a sardonic smile. There

was no home, except a dwelling-place. There was no home, except seeing Babs and taking her into his arms, and measuring the extent of her growth, and knowing that she was his own. Even she was no longer the tiny, helpless thing with pink face and pink toes and pink, sensitive skin that quivered at the touch, but a strangely human thing, growing apart from him and getting bigger and stronger every day. She was a separate entity now, living her own life and spinning about herself a veil of self-interest. She was an individual who moved and talked and took matters into her own hands. It was the natural law, he supposed, but it had never seemed so terrible, so significant to him before—until they had begun to live apart, he with Dr. Dahill and she in this big, red, austere building. It was cold, this boarding-school life, and he began to see the artificial influence it would exercise on her temperament. Whatever development was acquired here it could never compensate for the loss of a mother's love and word and example.

He sat in the parlor now awaiting his little girl, just as he would await the presence of a perfect stranger whom he had come to interview. These occasional meetings produced a tremendous effect upon him. Memories of other days awoke from their slumbers, when life was pleasant and happy, when he and Edith had their home, their cheerful fireside, their child. That was before his wife discovered she no longer loved him, before they lived together from sheer force of habit, and went through the familiar rites of daily communion without interest or devotion. Indifference

had made its way between them, and the mysterious warmth that had touched their world with ardor and intensity was gone. Gone also was the flame of adoration, gone was his home and contentment, gone was everything except this precious child. But she alone was left.

She came running in now and threw herself upon him, hanging on his neck in a strangling fashion more like a little octopus than human being. Soon she was working her fingers over his shoulders and down his back to his pockets, her busy little hands feeling here and there for the noise of crumpling paper. Babs knew that crumpling paper was an auspicious omen. Its noise was gratifying to the ear. But this time she was disappointed—momentarily; and she drew back wondering, her finger in her mouth. Only when he sat her on his lap in the big chair, and drew from behind it some large bundles did her eyes flash and her head bob up and down.

“You don’t know what I have, now, do you?” he asked.

She looked at him wistfully.

“What is it?” she asked. “Candy?”

“Yes, here is candy,” he replied, raising the smaller of the two bundles. “But what have I in the other one?”

“Popcorn!”

“No. It is not good to eat.”

“A new dress!”

“Open and see.”

Both of them attacked the string vigorously, tearing

rather than removing the wrapping paper from the white pasteboard box, removing the lid and casting it aside impatiently, rending some more layers of tissue-paper and revealing a large-sized sleeping doll, clothed fully in a blue embroidered dress, short baby blue socks, and hat and slippers to match.

"Oh-oh!" Babs exclaimed, clasping her hands in admiration. But they more quickly reached out for the prize.

"Look, daddy! It goes right to sleep. See, when you do this!"

The complacent father smiled approvingly.

"And she has real hair. See!"

Yes, he knew it.

"Did you buy me this?"

"Of course. Do you like it?"

"Yes, daddy! What else did you buy me?"

Her father laughed.

"A typical woman!" he said.

"What did you say?"

"I said you were like all girls."

She did not understand this.

"What did you learn in school to-day?" he then inquired. "Do you like the Sisters, and are you very good?"

She nodded, taken up with the doll.

"And you do everything they tell you?"

"Yes, daddy."

"You don't get lonesome—or tired of it here? Or would you rather come with me?"

"Home to mother?"

The words cut him like a lash. He did not answer, for he could not. But the effect was sorrowful.

Finally the door opened and the Sister Superior came in to greet him. He was glad, but he could not conceal the intense anxiety he felt at those few words. Home! Mother! Alas!

That same night he sat in Dr. Dahill's office.

"It is unjust and unnatural to ignore the rights of that innocent child, to separate her from her home, her parents. It tears my heart every time I see her. I cannot help it. To-day she again asked for her mother."

"And you, very naturally, avoided the question," replied the doctor.

"Some day she will know, God help her! I should have allowed her to go with her mother in the first place."

"But Edith did not want the child. Did she?"

There was a pause. The doctor waited for him to break it.

"The child's place is beside her mother's knee. You know that as well as I. What have I to give her? Not even a home, much less maternal instinct. And while the Academy is fine, still it is not home. Already I can perceive the difference."

Dr. Dahill arose to fetch cigars, for he wanted to break off the discussion. Bert could never talk about Babs and be a man.

"How is Washington?" he asked.

"The Committee has reported back my resolution:

I expect it to be called up next week, just as soon as the Maternity Bill is out of the way."

"What is the sentiment?"

"Pretty evenly divided. The resolution I have proposed calls upon Congress to prohibit absolute divorce entirely, though granting separation from bed and board without the subsequent right to marry. There are many who differ with me, but the real fight will hinge on the question of State's Rights."

"What have the States to do with the proper adjustment of a national problem?"

"That's just it. To-day the legislators of each individual State frame their own laws, the result of which is a regular patchwork, running the gamut of matrimonial delinquencies, from that of South Carolina which grants no divorce, to that of Washington which permits absolute divorce for any cause deemed by the court sufficient."

"The confusion arises from the fact that the courts of one State will not enforce the laws of another——"

"They cannot. They are powerless. The Supreme Court has decided that under certain conditions a State may refuse to recognize the extra-territorial effect of a divorce granted in another State. Let us suppose, for instance, you are married in New York, where you reside for years, have a family and own real and personal estate. You desire a divorce and go to Indiana to procure it. There you re-marry, have other children and acquire additional property. You tire of your second wife, go to California, get another divorce, re-marry again, forming a new family and acquiring new

property. Then you return to New York, where you discover that your first wife has obtained a decree on the grounds of your adulterous marriage in Indiana, which sets her free and prevents your marrying again during her lifetime. You die intestate. What is the legal status of your children? The first wife's children are legitimate and heirs to the estate everywhere. The Indiana wife's children are legitimate there, but probably illegitimate everywhere else. The California children are legitimate there, but illegitimate in Indiana and elsewhere. There is real and personal property in each of these States. There are three widows, each entitled to dower, and a number of surely innocent children, whose legitimacy and property are at stake."

"What you say is true—but will the laws of States or the laws of Church, for that matter, put a stop to the mischief? Is it not the sentiment of the people that scores?"

"True enough, but with escape from an unwise marriage rendered extremely difficult, people will be more cautious in entering into it. To-day matrimony means no more than an experiment. We rush into it like fools, never pausing to consider what it means until we get there. The examination takes place after the purchase. We know the contract is not binding. Why scruple over our choice?"

"And you think there will be fewer experiments, midnight marriages, hasty courtships because of your measure——"

"I think this. When two people know that once they are married they are united for life, for better or

worse, they will exercise greater care in selecting the proper sort of person they want to live with the rest of their days. When they know they are allowed to make but one choice, they will make that choice more wisely. One of the chief causes of the failure of marriage is the lack of preparation for marriage. We do not realize what marriage means—its restraints, its reciprocity, its responsibilities.”

“Your remedy for all this is effective legislation——”

Bert looked at him with his searching blue eyes through the cloud of smoke wreathed about his head. He leaned forward as he said:

“Do you want to know the only remedy? I clipped it from a paper this morning: ‘Christ! Christ at the betrothal; Christ at the altar; Christ on the bridal journey; Christ when the new home is set up; Christ when the baby comes; Christ in the pinching times; Christ in the days of plenty; Christ when the wedded pair walk toward the sunset gates; Christ when one is taken and the other left; Christ for time—Christ for eternity.’ ”

Far into the night they sat and talked, like two old sailors on watch, whiling away the hours with stories of common interests and achievements. Bert always found it to his own advantage to share his confidences with his learned friend, who had a peculiar faculty of getting to the heart of every problem. The doctor was not a man of many words, or of wandering glances. There were a few silver hairs in his beard, but he looked as solid as a statue. He was a medical expert,

but he was a logician as well. And logicians are usually fond of analogy.

"Another point you might use," he suggested. "Draw an analogy from ancient Rome."

"Rome!"

"Yes. What a state! The greatest of antiquity! And undermined by her own citizens! Rome owed her primitive solidarity and indomitable strength in great measure to the unity and perpetuity of the Roman family. The family was the integral unit of the state—a state within a state. It is Lecky, I think, who says that for 520 years there was no such thing as divorce known in Rome. And was it not Cato who would rather be a good husband than a great senator?"

"Cicero——"

"No! Cicero repudiated his wife. It was Cato. Well, what happened? The wealth of the world began to pour into Rome. Luxury and sensuality went hand in hand. Conjugal felicity became the scoff of the poet; marriage began to lose its sacred character and became a mere civil contract. The wife no longer existed under the control of the husband and was dismissed at will. The Emperor Augustus forced the husband of Lydia to divorce her that he might have her for himself. Ovid and Pliny the Younger took to themselves three wives. Caesar and Antony had four. Sulla and Pompey, five. One woman had ten husbands. Another had eight husbands in five years. St. Jerome relates that there was a woman in Rome who had married her twenty-third husband, she herself being his twenty-first wife. Roman life became rotten to the

core, a vast slough of iniquity, reeking with the stench of every form of immorality. Childlessness was preferable to parenthood and celibacy to marriage."

His voice was low, but his face was set grimly.

"See my point? Rome was childless. The barbarians began to press round about her and she was compelled to hire other barbarians, the Allemani, to guard her frontiers and repel the enemy. The Allemani were loath to withdraw once they obtained their foothold. Then began the final disintegration and destruction of the Western Empire. Rome had no more Romans left to fight her battles. With the frequency of divorce and the growth of luxury came childlessness and infanticide, and on the heels of these twin evils followed the gradual extinction of the native Roman stock and the depopulation and downfall of the Empire."

Toward the end of the week Bert was back in Washington. Before he left the city, however, he had been pressed by the papers for an interview. Political reasons, he was advised, required that his name be kept before the public eye at this particular time. A statement was accordingly prepared, and the night before he departed from the city the paper came out with an account of the Colman Resolution, and a picture of its sponsor. It was interesting to the people of Shefford to know that their representative was reflecting credit on himself and his district.

XVII

JUNE was always the splendid month of the year at West Shefford. Then the fields are greener, the flowers prettier, the air more fragrant. Like a soft velvet carpet the grassy meadows seemed to slope upwards and away to the fringe of distant hills, their remarkable uniformity broken only by the meanderings of the silvery Pequabuck and the bunches of pea-green sweet grass protruding from its bristling sides. The mornings were more brilliant at this season of the year, but one must rise early to view the sunbeams flinging their bright arms about the rim of hills that loomed, stately and serene and majestic over the landscape, or to see the soft blue sky opposite the rising sun folding the earth in gentle embrace.

A dozen times in the course of the day Edith wandered to the end of the porch, where glass barred out the wintry blasts during the cold months of the year, but where now stood white screen doors with pretty glass knobs, and leaned her slender body against the corner pillar to get the freshness of the summer breeze as it descended from the hillsides, or to hearken to the ceaseless chatter of the birds, or view the silent washing of the ripples against the banks and wish a thousand times that she, too, might drift away in the sleepy arms of the stream and be lost like it in the sea of

oblivion. There was a time when her soul was thrilled with the charms that nature had to offer and passion burned in her veins, but now—she was learning to hate it all. The world was no longer complete or beautiful. She had yielded strength and life and heart, and the wind of ennui had followed her and burned everything.

She saw the splendid panorama of West Shefford opening out before her, the river, the meadows, the pasture lands, the winding road, the graceful hills—but she regarded it listlessly. She was thoroughly aware of the lavish splendor of her surroundings, the series of terraces, one below the other, leading down to the river bank by lengthy flights of concrete steps canopied with rambling roses; the well-kept walks and drives that ran around the house and gardens, and led off into secret recesses and sheltered bowers where you would least expect them—gorgeous gardens; a vast estate—but there was something exotic about it, something aloof. There was a feeling she could not shake off, which told her these things did not belong to her. They were part of that vast structure that had been erected about her, but she was only enclosed by them. She had no dominion over them. If she was a Wheaton it was in name only. It was that that mattered, and blood and descent, not alliance or adoption.

Two robins met on the lawn four feet away and began to quarrel over a worm. Of all things birds were the most fascinating. She regarded them wistfully and envied their cheerful existence. They suffered no remorse, no tantalizing memories, no restraint—these disputatious warblers. They were innocent and could give

vent to their pure delight in joyous songs. They had never done wrong and knew not what sin was. What a privilege!

Slowly she wandered back to the center of the porch, where were set the faded green chairs of Japanese grass, and fell into one of them. The evening paper had come, and she picked it up. The photograph of her first husband was reproduced on the first page, and it impressed her with a strange significance.

She did not resent his success, as she thought she would. On the contrary, she was pleased with it. She sat down to read the account of his legislative measure with uncommon interest, thinking to herself how such a topic would have one time tired her. He was attempting to make divorce impossible! Doubtless he had learned a bitter lesson and hoped to save others from a similar catastrophe. She pictured him at work, poring over documents, reading volumes, smoking pipeful after pipeful of tobacco, and resenting savagely every intrusion and interruption. That was his way. When he set himself to the performance of any duty he was not satisfied until he had conquered all that gave him mastery. "Specific purpose," he would say, "is what should direct all reading, observation, and independent thinking." Then she used to fly out of the room.

He no longer cared for her, she told herself. But he must still think of her! Yes, it was her hateful image that had stood before him while he was engaged in this work, spurring him on to greater efforts. She had committed an unpardonable offense in deserting

him as she did—she admitted that—but she expected no condoning of the crime. Still it was far from pleasant to consider that she was the proximate motive for this sort of legislation. What would people say? She wondered if he would cite his own case on the floor of the House. Terrible thought!

The printed likeness was familiar. It was an old picture, taken just before they were married, when his face seemed very kind. The day she received it had been one of the happiest of her life. She thought so, then, she was not willing to deny it even now. He had not changed greatly. The eyes were the same, large and penetrating. His hair was still wavy. Cheeks a little fuller, perhaps. But there was that same mysterious air about him, so different from the ordinary countenance. It was this that had attracted her the day they met—because he was so unlike any one else with whom she was acquainted. He had never been demonstrative. In point of fact their courtship was very commonplace to her now, much as it had tingled with romance then, and she wondered who really did the courting. During the first two years, the most important years in any wedded life, she had not quite understood him. Neither of them seemed to care to learn the traits of the other. There were certain little quips in his character that courtship had not revealed to her, and how surprised she was when they were first disclosed. But instead of trying to adapt herself to circumstances she was continually on guard and it was then that it occurred to her that they were hopelessly incompatible.

How well she recalled the occasion of their first quarrel! He had telephoned from the office one afternoon between five and six o'clock to the effect that he would be late for dinner. This exasperated her, for she had taken particular pains that day to have something delectable and tempting. Now all was to go for nothing. The dinner would be cold when he arrived. He would be tired and would not care to eat. The dishes would be left standing. And so she complained that he wasted precious time during the day and that the evenings belonged to her.

"Please don't say that to me again," he said. It was the first harsh reply he had ever made and it cut deeply. "I've been hustling all day trying to make ends meet, and you call me about wasting time!"

And then he came home and sulked for the rest of the night. Neither of them were in the mood for dinner. He spoke little, and ate little. That was his way. At that time she did not understand him. She took all these trifles seriously to heart and let them prey on her mind. She should have known then what she knew now—that such moods were but temporary and required a little humoring to dispel them. But she was not the one to humor him—then.

She had never bothered much with other men until she met Kelso, and he seemed to sweep her off her feet with his engaging manner and undivided attention. His temperament was quite the reverse of Bert's, lively where he was dull, amiable where he was sullen, demonstrative where he was reserved. There was this difference, however. Kelso wanted every woman he met to

adore him. When he boasted of what he could do it was only for the purpose of exciting admiration. He was in his glory when he was being praised for his accomplishments—a vanity he could not overcome—and did not try to. Women he courted to make them feel proud of his companionship. He had a passion for attention and he strutted and fretted for a kind word like a vain-glorious peacock.

The object of her rumination appeared very suddenly now in the doorway with Nestor by his side. She looked up at him, but did not smile.

“Been out?” he asked carelessly.

“No. I’ve been alone all day,” she replied, reaching to stroke the Airedale.

“What’s the matter? Sick, or just another grouch?”

“Neither. I’ve been enjoying myself here.”

This was sarcasm, of course, but he let it pass.

“Sitting here all day—alone! Enjoying yourself!” he mused aloud. “I should think you’d get interested in something—golf or tennis—or something!”

She raised her eyebrows, and answered coolly:

“Or solitaire!”

“Oh, well!” he exclaimed with a shrug of the shoulders. He moved over to the rocker. Nestor, leaving Edith’s side, followed him.

“I don’t know what’s come over you, Edith,” he said. “You complained of your old life because it kept you in the house from morning to night. Now when you have nothing to do but run around you seem to prefer the house. I suggested a few days at Atlantic City, thinking the change would help you, but—when

I mentioned to Evelyn that she might arrange a little party with the Liggetts, you flew completely off the handle."

"Why shouldn't I? What do you see in Betty Liggett, I would like to know? You can never content yourself for a month in your own home. Betty Liggett! That was all I heard while we were away. That feather-pate!"

"She's good company, isn't she?"

"She's a married woman. That's all I know—or care."

"Pooh! What difference does that make? You don't suppose I have designs on her, do you?"

"What am I to think?"

"I don't mean to hurt you. I hate hurting people. For the life of me I never thought you'd mind."

"It wasn't that I cared. It was something else——"

"What else?"

"Nothing! Only that—I don't count—I suppose——"

"Nonsense! Of course you count. But you can't expect me to snub everybody else. You see, don't you?"

His voice seemed to carry an accent of compunction as if he were truly sorry. It created in her a wish to laugh. To hide this she picked up the newspaper.

"Have you seen this?" she asked, folding the sheet and passing it to him.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "It does pay to advertise, doesn't it?"

She watched him as he glanced curiously at the story.

He sat back in the chair lazily, one white leg crossed over the other. He was in white—trousers, socks, oxfords, silk shirt—except his coat, which was of blue serge. His face was expressionless—she could not read his thoughts. His eyes, a little swollen, were masked behind their heavy lids. As he sat there he pulled at his short, stubby mustache. Then a faint smile crossed his face and his lips parted in a sneer.

“Another Amendment! The Constitution will soon resemble a crazy quilt. How very outrageous are the sins committed in the sacred name of liberty! I don’t suppose the founders of the Republic ever dreamed of their descendants tampering with the ideals they risked so much to obtain. They shook off a king, but left the people fettered. England is the only country. The Eighteenth Amendment is a direct infringement on personal liberty; the Nineteenth has taken away the freedom of the male, and now this proposed Twentieth hints at limiting our choice in the selection of our mates. What a country!”

She smiled at him. He was interesting when he attempted to become serious.

“People will say he was driven to this,” he continued. “Do you mind?”

“Why should I mind?”

“They will link your name with his. Naturally they will say you drove him to it.”

“Why should they say that?”

“Well, you ran off and left him, didn’t you?”

She looked at him coldly, and the color mounted to her eyes.

"You are a coward."

But he smiled in the indifferent way that was characteristic of him, and flicked the ashes from his cigarette.

"Let me tell you this," she said, "Robert Colman was a man, every inch of him. He had his faults, he was a slave to work, but one always knew where he stood. He didn't share his attentions with forty different women."

"You are just jealous now."

"Of whom? Those creatures that compose your set! So superior to all sensation! They have no blood. They do not know the meaning of sacrifice. They care only for the outside of things, the forms, the flesh-pots. They have no soul, no feelings, nothing. It is wicked to waste one's life so. That is the society I am supposed to be jealous of?"

"Still you were willing to share it with me."

"That was before I knew——"

"Do you want to draw back?"

"Never! I would die rather than admit defeat."

"But you are not happy here?"

"I have never said as much."

A long silence then, with the shadows lengthening outside, the sun dropping to rest behind the fringe of distant hills, the brown hairy dog snoring at his master's feet, and such a strange sense of stillness as to make both of them feel uncomfortable. At length Kelso spoke, in a low voice.

"I have done my best to make you feel at home with us, Edith. There is nothing you are asked to do, and

you are free as the wind to come and go. I placed a car at your disposal in order that you might make use of it any time of the day. You imagine you are not wanted here. The servants, you say, treat you with contempt. Even my dog you dislike because he does not follow you around the house. You will not mix with my people. For the life of me I cannot understand what ails you, with no cares, no responsibilities, no children to bother with——”

“Perhaps if we did have children——”

“Now don’t start that again. You know my sentiments there.”

Nestor’s jaws snapped. A fly wandered too near his nose and perished for its folly. There was silence then that was not broken.

She was glad when he left. She was glad the homely dog went with him. Rising, she went to the end of the porch, opened the screen door, and stepped outside. The sun had dropped behind the hills, and the reddish tints flooding the western horizon were gradually dissolving into purple and violet hues along the far-flung landscape. Slowly she began the descent of the terrace. She kept on until she came to the river. It seemed to her that there was nowhere she could go except among the birds and trees and fields, who did not mind if she was all mixed up and horrible inside. She sat down in the grass on the bank. She could see the tiny trout moving round and round the stones; swallows came, flying low. Two robins, mates no doubt, were filling the air with their thrilling lullabies and she en-

vied their manifest happiness. These things did not interest her; it was as if her spirit were crushed.

For she herself could not understand why she was not contented. What Kelso said was true: she had everything she could wish for, everything she had always wished for. There was her maid to dress her, to serve breakfast in bed to her if she would have it. She was mistress of a great house and a member of the Country Club, where she could play golf, tennis, or bridge whenever she cared to. Kelso was devoted to her, even though he did love the company of his many friends, and her sisters-in-law were kind to her and considerate. Of course she would have given much for a child. This would have furnished her with some one to work for, to live for; but Kelso was opposed to having children. He could not be bothered with them. They cried all the time, or got sick or wanted attention. Besides it would tie both of them down too much, while he wanted them to be free to go and come whenever it pleased them to do so.

There was the big house standing behind her on the brow of a hill like a feudal castle. Time was when she envied the lot of those who dwelt within such stout and splendid walls. To-night she scorned it. A caste system existed here, and she was a pariah whose touch contaminated, whose shadow defiled the members of that other class. Funny thing! Castes! Sets! They moved in circles, these Grundys—and she could never adapt herself to their sphere. They did things, but differently. They assumed superior airs. They thought and schemed and purposed as if the fate of empires

hung on their actions. Sometimes she exerted herself to imitate them, but in the end she reverted to her own type. Their superior airs overwhelmed her.

It was the idle life she was leading that caused her the greatest torment. It was nothing but a round of entertainment and social duties. How often she longed to go into the kitchen to assist in the preparation of the meals! But this was out of the question. There were many changes she would have liked to make in the house, but tradition forbade her interfering with established arrangements. She did not want a maid following her from room to room, or a chauffeur standing by continually in response to her call. She would have preferred to take the car whenever she pleased, and drive away by her self to the stores as she saw so many young girls do. But this was not proper—not for a Wheaton—these were barriers that the conventions of society had reared about her personal freedom.

If she had stayed there, looking for all time, she could not have graven on her heart a vision more indelible. But dark was beginning to fall. The robins had grown quiet, the swallows had disappeared. Slowly she arose and made her way up the stone steps to the house, her heart heavy, her whole being chilled by the gusts of self-reproach that swept through her. It did not seem that this could be right. She was not rightfully married to this man—and yet here she was going into his house. Six months now! She had been happy for the first few days, or at least she thought she was. But she had been growing more and more wretched ever since. It was useless to say that her

divorce was legal, and the second marriage valid as a consequence. She knew better. Her conscience told her so. What was worse, she could not get away from it. It pursued her like a Nemesis. What bitterness! One slight slip from virtue and she had become miserable, more miserable in fact than she could have ever imagined she could be. No, it was not right! There was something about it that was intolerable. It was wicked! And there was no escape from it—save death. Yes, death might release her!

Kelso awaited her on the porch smoking a fresh cigarette, the Airedale at his feet. He did not ask where she had been. She passed him coldly. Then she turned.

“I am sorry, Kelso, but I had no desire for dinner. I spent the hour on the terrace.”

“Oh, well!” he said, and flicked the ashes from the burning cigarette.

XVIII

DR. DAHILL opened the door of the waiting-room to admit the next patient, and to his extreme surprise saw the familiar form of Edith Wheaton seated near the window. She was alone.

“Why . . . Mrs. Wheaton! . . . You!”

She threw back her head as she stood up, but there was no scorn, no defiant flash under the dark-lashed lids. On the contrary her hazel eyes had a mischievous gleam and the turn of her head was friendly. But the sweetness of her face looked pathetic.

“My dear doctor,” she began in the softest possible tone, extending her hand meanwhile. The surgeon bowed slightly over it, just touching the fingers with his own.

“I am glad to see you, very glad,” he said. “If you were my own daughter you would not be more welcome. You are not ill, I hope!”

“Oh, no!” she replied, decisively. A sudden step startled her and she looked around the room with a nervous glance.

“I came to talk to you.”

The doctor smiled.

“But—not here——”

“Won’t you step into the office?” he suggested.

She nodded immediate acquiescence, and passed before him into the adjoining room.

"It was no easy matter for me to make up my mind to do this," she said, taking the chair proffered her, "but really, there seemed no other avenue open to me. You are the only one that can help me."

Her voice floated, mysterious and penetrating, from lips that moved very little. The doctor watched her with sympathetic curiosity as he tried to anticipate her words.

"You have but to ask."

"Thank you!" she said, fastening on him a keen glance. "I rather hoped you would say that. You are dependable, as you ever were, and I always felt I could turn to you when in need. It is so terrible to have to suffer—alone."

The last word was murmured, which made the effect pitiable.

"To suffer is one of the noblest prerogatives of human nature, is it not?" said the surgeon.

"Yes, I know," agreed Edith, absently.

"And has it not been said that the uses of adversity are sweet, that the man who knows nothing of the novitiate of suffering has missed one of the best parts of human existence?"

"I suppose so. It is a consoling doctrine, but wholly impracticable to me just at present. Too long have I feasted on ideals, until I learned to my sorrow that they do not belong to this world."

"The world is mismanaged, it is true. But who causes it? We ourselves are the dispensers of pleasure

and pain. You cannot hope to escape misery so long as you choose to make your own bed. That is an old axiom. When the Roman emperors returned in triumph to receive the plaudits of the nation it was their custom to have a slave stand behind them to whisper in their ears the unwelcome but salutary truth that all men are mortal. You see, they wanted never to forget it."

"I once thought that human happiness was of paramount importance, and that whatever stood in the way of it ought to be removed——"

"And you have learned to think differently?"

"Yes!"

The doctor forgot himself for a moment in watching her. Her face was still pretty, but less merry, as if hardened by grave thoughts. The words seemed to issue from a soul that had experienced bitterness, from one who had been under a sort of spell. Yet there was something significant about them none the less, like the story of the life to which they belonged.

"I sometimes think I have been guilty of a great folly," she confessed sadly.

The surgeon made no reply.

"You don't mind my saying that, do you? I feel relieved to unburden myself to somebody."

"I think I understand," was the answer. "You may depend on me. What really happened was that the ideals you sought turned out to be chimeras."

"Yes! Horrible phantasms!"

"Do you want to undo the past? Is it that you would ask of me?"

“No! That is impossible! There is something else.”

“Your child?”

She made no sign; but the doctor understood now.

It was a pitiful tale she unfolded, of painful days, of acute suffering from a renewed sense of loneliness, of sleepless nights and wrestlings with horrible nightmares, of senseless and terrifying dreams and feelings of powerlessness in all her limbs. It was the maternal instinct striving after its own, but buried in a purgatory of hopeless longing and deprivation. Her soul was in revolt while she was dwelling like a lonely goddess on a charmed isle. Pitiful! But she could not avoid it, being a woman—and a mother.

“Sometimes I seem to see her wanting to come to me, cold and hungry and crying as if her little heart would break. I know she wants me. I know it. And she never meant so much to me before. I would rather have her than all the wealth and tinsel that surround me. But you cannot feel what I mean. No one can—only a mother.”

“I don’t know how Bert will take this,” Dr. Dahill said in his easy, equable way, “but I shall do as you ask. You want to take the child home with you; but do you understand that Barbara is dearer to him than life itself? When you ask him to part with her you ask a great deal.”

“Yes, yes, I know. But I have a home, a beautiful home, where she shall have the best of everything. She shall be brought up well, educated . . .”

"In the religion of her father, of course!" the surgeon interrupted.

Edith's lips compressed. Evidently she was not prepared for that question. Had she not sacrificed her religion with her divorce? It never occurred to her what the Wheatons might do in this matter.

"I shall see to it myself," she answered with emphasis. "She shall not lose her religion."

"Are you sure of that? It is essential, you know." She did not reply to this.

"Then there is the question of custody."

"I do not ask for custody," came back her ready answer. "I do not want to take Bab from him. No! No! He may retain custody of the child. I simply want her to live with me. I want to take care of her, to feel her near me, to see her every day, to dress her with my own hands. It is my heart that cries out for her, don't you see? You do see, don't you? I don't want the law; I only want her."

"Sort of temporary arrangement, you mean! The order of the court will not be impaired."

"Not at all. I am sick and tired of courts. All I want is my poor Babs. He can still be the claimant, and if at any time I do not conduct myself to his satisfaction he is perfectly free to come and take the child from me."

The doctor considered.

"I shall do as you ask," he said after a moment's pause. "But do not expect me to influence his decision, one way or the other. You know he never mentions

your name. For that reason I do not know what he thinks."

"He never speaks of me!" she repeated.

"Never!"

"He loathes me, does he not? He must."

The surgeon shook his head.

"No, I would not say that. That is putting it too strongly. But you know——"

"Woman has no honor," she soliloquized.

Silence. Then:

"He thinks that of me. He must. It was I who wrecked our little vessel just as we were getting under way. It was awful. I feel like a murderess. But the tie that bound us was not a very close one."

"Would you do it again?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I wonder how responsible we really are for what we do. Our paths appear to be marked out for us by some unseen power, and we follow whithersoever we are led."

"You are turning fatalist?"

"What is that? But don't you think life is only a series of betrayals? There are so many kinds of them. One can betray confidences, and hope, and friendship—and the most sacred——"

It was easy for the doctor to see, however much she feigned obedience to and admiration for her second husband, that she was growing weary of her life, and melancholy over the ties which bound her against her better reason to this strange abode. If it were only possible for her to convince herself that she was not alone responsible for this condition of affairs, he could

see that she would enjoy greater peace of mind. It was wrong to fly thus in the face of God, but to deny His share in it was comforting and a means of escape from greater responsibilities.

"You cannot be happy in your present state," he reminded her. It was an impertinent remark, but he felt justified in making it in view of the confidence already disclosed.

"I think I can—with Bab."

"We shall see."

"You will do this for me?" she asked expectantly.

"Yes. To-night!"

"Thank you. It means so much to have you say that."

Long after she had gone he sat there thinking. A great revelation this! For her, Edith Wheaton, erstwhile wife of his friend Bert Colman, to bend her proud spirit and come to him was marvelous. But he could not rejoice over it; on the contrary his great heart ached when he thought of the woman he was wont to esteem, and the look of mournful anguish on her face now. The half hour's interview permitted him to come in contact with her in a new manner, as if they had some common viewpoint. It was better that she should have come to him as she did without fear of humiliation, if he was to be of service to her. He wanted her to feel that way. There were a score of reasons why he should.

To love children was an instinct with him, so much so that he thought almost with a sort of shame of the softness into which it betrayed him. He could not

refuse this mother's request. While the heartbroken woman was unfolding her tale of mental anguish, the image of the lovely little girl with her fair tresses falling in endless confusion over her baby face, was impressed upon him and remained fixed in his memory long after Edith had gone. Institution life of any kind terrorized him. It was a great mechanical process into which children were fitted like so many cogs in some great wheel turning slowly round and round. No one could ever hope to expect individual attention from such an instrument, from the unvarying schedule that shaped the course of life, and stifled every attempt at individual effort or expansion. Bells called them in the morning, bells summoned them to eat, bells sent them to play, bells hurried them off to bed. Bells, bells, bells—all the time! Not much room here for development of personal temperament or culture of those personal qualities which go to make up character.

All this he saw in his own mind during the few moments that intervened between Edith's departure from his office, and his summoning of the next patient to take her place. There she went, to her splendid home with its rich appointments, to the indispensable servants awaiting her—and he thought of Bab, precious Babs, brought up in the midst of this atmosphere of culture and refinement, with her mother to lead her by the hand through it all. The child needed its mother. That was absolute! The natural law required it. Little secrets must be whispered into its ear, advantageous counsels must be given, private confidences exchanged. Heads of vast institutions cannot

do this work. The child's place is beside the mother's knee, if the mother is at all worthy. And Edith, it seemed, was desirous of performing this duty, for she felt she would never realize happiness and contentment until she was actually fulfilling the obligations she knew she owed as mother to her own flesh and blood.

So great indeed was his attachment for Babs that to spare her a grief or to do her a service, and such a service as would probably influence her whole life, he would run barefoot a score of miles. He decided to write that very night to Bert to acquaint him with Edith's proposal. But he would take no sides. When a master and a mistress are at strife in a house it is better for the friend to divide his sympathies. Besides, it was meet that the present condition of the child be given some consideration. She would naturally prefer to be with her mother. Later, when she was a full-grown woman she could exercise her powers of choice.

So he wrote that very night.

The following Thursday Bert Colman came home. It was after ten o'clock. The surgeon was not surprised to see him, for he had inferred that he would. Indeed he was expecting him to descend upon him at any time, breathless and excited, wondering what had happened. The note carried few details; the doctor never wrote lengthy letters.

"You got my note?" he said to him.

"This morning."

"And then you rushed to get the first train?"

"Of course!"

"Just like you! I expected you to-night. You came from the Academy."

"You saw me?"

"No! I know you."

They sat down and lighted cigars. This was customary. It seemed they could not talk, nor even think, without smoking. Soon the room would be foggy but they would not notice it. Men seldom do.

"What did Edith have to say?" Bert asked. "Rather surprising, this change of heart!"

"You would pity her. She is not the Edith of old. More restrained; more sober; more solemn! How long she waited I do not know, but she was the last person in the world I expected to see. Nervous and diffident, too; and the end of our interview found her but little more cheerful. I think she regrets a thousand times."

"She said that, did she?"

"Not Edith! You know her proud spirit is indomitable. She is of the sort that die ere they acknowledge defeat. Still, she is not altogether happy."

"Indeed!"

This interested him. She was not happy! He wondered if she was finding this other man as incompatible as he had been. Or more so!

"She inquired for you."

"In what words?"

"Well, she wanted to know all about your great success in Washington. I told her as much as I could, which greatly interested her. She remarked about the cut that appeared in the newspapers, adding, with a

smile, that she had the unique honor of being the inspiration for the whole project.”

Bert smiled, too.

“She then asked if you despised her. I thought this remarkable, coming from her.”

“And you told her——”

“That you could not despise anybody—adding that she herself ought to be the first to know it.”

Silence! Puffs and smoke!

“She longs for the child, Bert. It was touching to listen to her pleadings. I honestly believe she cannot live without her; not for long. It preys on her. You know there is something in a woman that we cannot understand; a peculiar instinct. A mother has affinity for her own even after death. It is natural and individual. Even the common house cat possesses the maternal instinct. And the hen, even when she hatches ducklings.”

More puffs! More smoke!

“You could not have sat here and listened to her. It was a passion, I tell you, and you would have found it in your heart to feel sorry for her. I know this seems childish to you, but you’ll understand.”

Bert accepted this thoughtfully. It was amazing. A fleeting thing like sentiment seduced his heart. It was not the thought of self—or of her. It was Bab! He wanted to make Bab happy. “How easily might this man be moved to great things,” the doctor thought to himself. “More the pity Edith never understood him!”

"Bab wants her mother," he said now to the surgeon.

"Indeed! She told you?"

"Yes. It has caused her great concern, has filled her with hopes. Her mother was to see her this morning, and I was told the poor child cried her eyes out to be taken home. She told me of the number of pretty things she would have. I don't know what to do. I learned, too, that Edith has already paid several visits to the Academy."

"That is not surprising."

"And the little girl has undergone a great change of heart and spirit. The minute she ran in to me I discovered it and I marveled at it—without anger, you understand, but not without wonder. Something must have passed between them, a whisper, a caress, a spark of mother's love as the poets would say—something. Whatever it was, it has awakened a sincere passion in the soul of my little girl, and I felt it in my heart, just as you said, to be truly sorry for her."

"She will be benefited, you think? Now is the time, you know, to judge this proposition from every angle, not after you have given your consent."

"The child will be benefited, yes! I firmly believe that children should remain with the mother. It is socialistic to commit the offspring to an institution. It robs the child of its individuality. Of course, I would dislike very much to have the child raised a Wheaton, and it may happen that she will grow up to hate me—but no matter. She needs a mother's care, and love."

"You will let her go?"

“If I can make some sort of temporary arrangement. The custody must not be impaired.”

“Shall I communicate with her—or——?”

“I wish you would. I would not care to see her myself. Not just now.”

More puffs! More smoke! . . . Puffs!

XIX

THIS show of friendly interest on the part of Dr. Dahill inspired Edith to hope for gladder days. The eager anticipation made her light-hearted, mirthful, care-free, and her hazel eyes, usually grave and thoughtful, now flashed with restless intensity and merriment. From room to room she fluttered like a joyous song-bird, humming soft melodies and snatches from light operettas. She sat before the piano and built bridges to dreamland from her playing, somewhat after the manner of the musing organist. It was not that she felt like playing; it was pure joy; the sustaining powers of melody to cheer her soul.

Yesterday, literally speaking, she had been living in a dull, uninteresting world, with no stimulus to excite her to action, or to effect a transformation in the stupid monotony of her life. The unsatisfactory character of her employments had created within her a vague, questioning dissatisfaction. She was longing for happiness, but her longings only mocked her. She tried to laugh for joy, but strange, raucous sounds reverberated in her throat. It was a weary, stale, and unprofitable world she had been graduated into, with all the potency, spirit and heat of living extracted from it. But to-day all was changed—the world lay smiling before her. It was as if an act of delicious magic had transformed

her into a new being, who greatly rejoiced in the mere pleasure of living.

The while she played she grew satirical with herself, musing with abstract pleasure on her recent discoveries. Where, for example, were those very wondrous bodies which were supposed to revolve about that great, luminous sun? And where was that equally famous social pyramid, topped off by the more famous social leader, whose mere acquaintanceship promised so much prestige? To learn that that vast company to which she had aspired for membership, was built on poor pretense and sham was a disappointing process even if it were an invaluable experience. She had believed absolutely in the smart magazines, the sections of the Sunday newspapers. They had colored her imagination with the portraits of the most notorious of an exclusive gentry, who dwelt in marble mansions on the finest thoroughfares of the largest cities, where they entertained in the most stupendous manner possible the foreign princes, and military and political leaders who came to this country after the war. Their daughters were being married into the foreign nobility, their young matrons were carrying off coveted prizes at the annual Dog and Horse Shows. Their men-folk were distinguished for the number and kind of ponies they rode at polo games, for the distinctive appearance and quality of their motor cars, for membership in the Century, Union League, University or Metropolitan Clubs. These people usually met at the Ritz at hundred-thousand-dollar balls; imported priceless gems from Europe, and wore them about their necks; sup-

ported magnificent white yachts, and spent their winters cruising about the Caribbean; took active part in amateur theatricals and gayly costumed tableaux for smart charities, or for the benefit of the milk fund or the French orphans. They did all these things in the newspapers. But where were they in real life? She had not met any of them either at Palm Beach, or at the New York Clubs, or on the streets. Insofar as she was concerned they were mere mythical beings, whose social superiority depended upon the amount of sensational advertising they managed to obtain. There was no social leader, there were ten thousand of them right in New York. There was no social structure, it was erected around every club, ball-room, and church in the land. There was no background necessary for social success, unless, perhaps, an imported and dangerously daring evening gown.

She had been chasing glittering rainbows after a pot of gold that never existed. Yet even the attempt to rise to these dizzy heights had brought snatches of clear, invigorating air. This compensated for the loss of her blasted ambitions. Her brain was no longer befogged. Pausing to collect her thoughts her nimble fingers wandered swiftly over the keys. They were playing an air from *Lammermoor*. Poor Lucia! She felt she could pity her—for she was in a position to understand.

Suddenly an expression of acute pain tightened her mouth. Six months ago she had been inimitably gay. The world, laughing, held out its sunny arms and welcomed her to its brilliant bosom. And then! . . . She

met the people of Kelso's set. They snubbed her. Shefford folks were unmistakably cold, distant, self-sufficient as a rule, and she had scarcely ever hoped for more than a passive reception. But she had never expected to be snubbed. The company she met later at Palm Beach were different. An artificial and exotic atmosphere enveloped whatever they did or said. Even the Wheatons failed her when it came to the question of social attainments. They counted few friends in either New York or Florida, and insofar as Shefford was concerned they were an isolated quantity. People knew them, of course; but they lived in a world of their own. She sneered. The little she had she risked to become a Wheaton, and now for the life of her she could not see how she had profited by the exchange.

Even Kelso was—queer. Not bad exactly, or loose, but just—queer. She understood, however, that she could not have him immeasurably fine; she must accept him as he was, the defects as well as virtues that were his. His manner of living was above reproach, she was sure of that; but it was his temperament, quick, superficial, changeable. From some points of view he was charming. He rejoiced in life, was jovial, unselfish, overflowed with wit and humor; but he was too impressionable, too inconsistent. His heart took its tempo from its surroundings. Susceptible to every influence, it was easily excited by the affections it encountered, abandoning itself to them with intense ardor, or becoming passionately attached to them through sympathy or generosity. The oaths of fidelity he swore

to-day, would be sworn away again to-morrow. Queer!
And fickle!

Consequently, life meant nothing to her now without her precious Babs. Not once, but hundreds of times during the past month, had this idea recurred to her, and each time with increasing importance. It was intolerable, this longing! Her own flesh and blood! She had sinned in the eyes of God and against her innocent little girl; there could be no forgiveness for her crime either in this world or the next. Grief, a torturing grief gnawed into the very vitals of her soul, reminding her of the love that had once abided there but long since destroyed by rebellious forces. She had erred in not knowing the correspondence of love with duty. Why, she thought to herself, the world is made up of people doing their duty! What would become of it if there weren't? Strange that that had never occurred to her before. It was her selfishness that began all her misfortunes, and she feared it would be the end of them and her together.

"O sole mio . . ."

Now it was the Neapolitan love song. Idly she let herself drift into the melody, her mind obscured by a vision which made the room swim about her, unconscious of the presence of any other person save herself.

"I was wondering—you haven't been out to-day—if you would care to take a short ride?"

Evelyn's contralto voice broke in upon her. It made Edith rise abruptly.

"I'd love to," she replied; then hesitated. "Just you and I?"

"Yes. We'll take the limousine. It's so much nicer."

Evelyn began the conversation by saying she wanted to get Edith away from the house because she looked so lonesome. Lately she had not been like her old self at all. There was something on her mind, causing her worry, and she demanded to know what it was.

"Nothing, really," replied Edith. "What made you suppose I was bothered? I was just thinking—about things."

"What are they? What were you thinking about?"

"It would take years to tell."

"I wish . . . you might. It concerns both of us, in a way."

Edith did not answer at once, not because she did not want to confide in her sister-in-law, whose kindly interest was at this particular time most welcome, but for want of knowing exactly what she desired to say. It was one thing to be buried in profound meditation; to put that meditation into words was quite another.

"Did not Kelso ask you to go with him?" Evelyn inquired unexpectedly.

"Yes. He wanted me to go."

"And you refused?"

"Yes! He was bound to call on the Liggetts, even though he took the trouble to explain to me that he was going to New York on business. He had a letter from Betty Liggett during the week. Do you think I could go into that house—and act with composure? They ought to be glad; I suppose they are."

In the closed car, faintly scented with the perfume

of freshly cut rose-buds, neither of them looked at each other. They seemed intent on the landscape—yet none of the two saw any of its details.

“Kelso is—odd at times,” his indulgent sister observed. “But what has happened may be necessary, you know. Business reasons! You know he has been playing the market of late in anticipation of a revival in the industrial situation, and he always does his trading in New York. It protects him.”

“I have no objections to his going to New York. But I know he sees that woman whenever he goes there. He tells me they are good sports and he likes to go there simply to pass away the time. They go to the theater and to the Rendezvous, very likely. I suppose I am to be congratulated on keeping out of their way. But, really, it does make me feel the least bit uncomfortable to have to realize that I am not wanted. What is there about these men that makes them so restless? I wish I didn't show that I cared so much. If I only kept him guessing more it would keep him interested to the extent of knowing just how sure he was of me. That seems queer, I know—to have to mask your sentiments to keep your husband interested and happy. It amounts to that, doesn't it?”

“It does seem so,” Evelyn returned peaceably. “Still Betty Liggett manages to keep her husband interested——”

“Other husbands, too,” came the cynical rejoinder.

“You are too hard on Kelso, my dear.” Her manner grew indignant. “Some women are altogether too horrid with their husbands. They treat them like male-

factors. I heard some of them discussing at tea the other day how they held their husband's affections. It was sickening! They are jealous of every good-looking woman they meet and treat her as a dangerous enemy. I told them they did not even trust the men they were married to."

"With reason, perhaps," ejaculated Edith.

"We are all sentimentalists in practice. Emotions don't, as a rule, last long. What harm can come from mixing with one another in a friendly manner? Husbands and wives are faithful to each other for all that."

"Yes, habit holds many of us together, and convenience and the opinion of society."

"And affection."

"That is the ideal, of course. With it sacrifice, self-denial and unsparing effort are possible. Without it there is no really happy marriage."

"Well, you wouldn't expect a man and woman to live together without disagreeing about some things. You know it is said that women must have the last word. I believe, however, a wife is happier under the control of her husband. Women were never meant to rule."

"I don't agree with you," Edith replied.

"Yes, you do. You despise a weak man as much as I; and you admire the strong and athletic, the giants. It makes you happy to have big men talk over with you the schemes that occupy their minds. Not long ago I was at the Knickerbocker. At a near-by table was a party. One of these so-called flappers was seated beside a middle-aged man, a man of consequence evi-

dently. Suddenly I overheard her exclaim, 'Good heavens! They told me you had brains. You must have, I suppose. What do you do with them? Do you park them outside?' You see with all their faults, the flappers are not so silly as they look. They want to talk sense; they are not interested in tea-hounds, those with their clothes as loose as ashes, except their vests and these so tight. The modern girl wants to be treated as if she had some intelligence; she wants to talk sensible stuff like politics, or business, new discoveries. She looks up to men who are superior to her in intelligence and age, and she wants them to share their wisdom with her. That's why no man interests the modern young girl until he has passed thirty-five, and not then, if he hasn't something to show for the time he's spent in the world."

"That's the flapper's side of it," Edith interposed. "It sounds wild enough."

"The wilder the better," Evelyn answered. "If it's not radical it's nothing."

Edith shook her head and sighed. Her face had grown as somber as a mask. Waiting a few moments, she cleared her throat and said:

"Evelyn, you wanted to know what was on my mind. Shall I tell you? I must ask your advice first—and I suppose I might add I want your permission as well. It's about my little girl."

"Bab!" Evelyn exclaimed. "I thought she was at the Academy."

"So she is. You know I have been to see her several

times lately. Every time I leave there I am sick at heart. It seems that I cannot live without her."

"Isn't she getting along well?"

"Splendidly! It isn't that. I want her with me."

"Didn't the court . . . I mean . . . she belongs to Mr. Colman by right . . . ?"

"Yes, I guess so. But she is still my daughter. You don't know what it is to have a child and to live to see her taken from you. There is nothing more terrible."

"But if she is well cared for, as you say she is, I should think you would be happy in the knowledge that everything has been arranged for her best interests."

"That is true. But no institution can replace a mother. Lately I seem to feel that I need her more than she needs me. I want to take her."

"To live with us?"

"You would not object, would you? Or do you think Kelso would mind? I am sure he would not."

"What does Mr. Colman say?"

An expression of unconcealed joy spread across Edith's face. This was a happy announcement she was about to make. But when she turned to her, a flood of speech on her lips, she suddenly suppressed it. Evelyn's face wore a troubled look.

"You don't approve . . . you don't . . . ?"

"I am wondering just what Mr. Colman thinks, that is all," was the cryptic comment.

"Well, he approves. He was big enough to rise to the occasion. Some time ago I conferred with Dr. Dahill, a very dear friend of Mr. Colman's who prom-

ised to take the matter up with him and report back to me. To-day I received word that Mr. Colman has agreed to it, as a temporary arrangement. It was so like him, not to think of himself. Do you know I have often thought how tragic it was for him to be unlovable and at the same time be quite unconscious of it. He was always good and kind to me, but it was not my fault if I felt no attraction for him. It was that which mattered, and no amount of pity, or reason, or duty could ever overcome that repulsion. This giving me back the child is another instance of his magnanimity."

"But have you considered Kelso? He should be the very first to be consulted in a case like this. You have not been very tactful, Edith."

"Surely he will not object——"

"And why not? You know he is not particularly fond of children—and when she is not his own—he has some self-respect left, I am sure."

"Do you mean to say he would sacrifice his self-respect to any extent by permitting my own child to come and live with us?"

"I don't know. You had better ask him yourself."

"It seems very odd, indeed, if I cannot have my own way about this. It is my child. I want her, and am willing to share what I have with her."

"But you seem to forget that you are asking us to share what we have as well. . . . It is not your own house that you are bringing her to. It is we who will be expected to support her. Naturally, you will be tied down some—your activities will be handicapped."

"I am perfectly willing they should be. For the most part they sicken me. I should be happy to have more of my time to myself."

"Again you consider only yourself, my dear. It is you—you—all the time. But don't you see that you are forcing Kelso into this preposterous bargain? Ultimately you are encroaching on his time, too. He can't very well run off and leave his wife alone with her child all the time."

"He does it now, doesn't he?"

"Very seldom; and you resent it vehemently."

"I shan't mind then—when I have her."

"Listen, Edith. Don't underestimate yourself. You will not be contented then, either. When you have what you now want it will amuse you for a time; but you will be subject to the same desperate depression and to the same sharp fits of sadness as you always have. They are natural to you. Every feeling of discomfort you experience seems to you a serious evil; you reckon the remotest consequences; you credit apparent oversights, silly speeches, and proceedings that are quite indifferent with a meaning they do not possess. Now you have set your heart on having that child because you have persuaded yourself we are persecuting you. When she is with you for no great length of time you will be wishing she was back again at the Academy."

"That is not so. I did wrong, I'll admit, in leaving my husband; but I was a criminal to abandon my innocent child. God will never forgive me for that. My folly is sadly apparent now, and if I can repair in any way the injury I have caused her, the rest of my life

will not be lived in vain. It is the mother inside of me that is crying out for its own. She is mine and no one can keep me from her."

"Suppose you consult Kelso first!"

"Why put that above all else?"

Other cars passed them, swift and soundless, which made them realize they were on the main thoroughfare leading home. Silence fell between them. In another minute they would turn into the driveway with homely Nestor coming to greet them.

"I am glad I came out," Edith commented as she made to rise. "It has helped me a lot."

"I am glad, too," Evelyn returned.

The car stood waiting on their pleasure in the *porte-cochère*.

That night Edith did not sleep very well. The severe castigation she had received that afternoon cut into her tender skin like the thongs of a whip-cord. Never before had any one addressed her in that manner. "Fits of sadness! Never contented! Desperate depression!" It was humiliating to have to listen to this incisive portrayal, and the haunting memory of it left her perturbed. She lay flat on her back, staring at the ceiling, listening to the violence of her heart throbs. The bed seemed to jump with every pulsation. She could not sleep, for emotion choked in her throat and suffocated her.

The wave of suffering passed quickly, followed by a state of mental doubt, and this helped drive away the feeling of pessimism into which she had fallen. Each succeeding thought formed a larger area of hope.

After all, she concluded, Evelyn was not incorrect in her analysis—she was a malcontent. But she had never quite apprehended her true weakness before. Instability! That was it. It was her will that was at fault. Her hopes of self-conquest had always been illusory, simply because she had not brought her will under subjection. How many had bridled their evil inclinations and turned their impetuous energies toward good! How many had mastered themselves and protected their souls from passions that would have seduced them! They had regulated their wills. Evelyn had performed a real service in removing the veil of self-delusion that had covered her, but she felt that she could hate her for her impertinence.

But she was wrong about the child—all wrong. She did not know the extent of a mother's love. She had never experienced these vibrating emotions, sudden and piercing, or the maddening desire for her own. A mother's heart is always with her children, the proverb has it. There is nothing in life, no throe of passion or gratification comparable to the cravings of the maternal instinct. Evelyn was wrong. She did not understand.

"A preposterous bargain!" She called it that. Evidently she did not relish the idea of having Robert Colman's child brought into the Wheaton home. And there was something odd in the manner in which she avoided all reference to her own personal opinion. "Consult Kelso," that was all. As if Kelso would venture an opinion. Consult Kelso! Well, she would consult him—in the morning when he got back from New York—and the Liggetts.

Kelso's answer was a direct refusal. She couldn't believe her ears. It was brutal—it was inhuman. But he was indomitably opposed to any such scheme.

"But, Kelso," she pleaded, "she is my child. She needs me."

"Isn't she well taken care of? If you need money——"

"Oh, it isn't that."

"She would be in the way——"

"It isn't necessary to repeat that," she reminded him.

"You won't have to notice her——"

"No!" The monosyllable was granite-like.

The flood of hysterical tears burst so suddenly that he was unprepared, overwhelmed. Turning, he shrugged his shoulders, buried his hands deep in his trousers' pockets, and made a hurried retreat from the room.

XX

THE following week the Liggetts arrived.

"I had to invite them," Kelso explained, knowing that he had to warn her of the impending visit. It would never do for them to come unannounced.

"Yes," Edith agreed listlessly. "They have been good to you."

"Yes. So I suggested that they run up for a couple of days."

"That was thoughtful. They appreciated it, I am sure."

"Old Liggett is a capital sport—when you get to know him. Dry sense of humor, and all that. Likes to get away from New York. 'The melting pot,' he calls it."

"How long has he to live? The last time I saw him I thought he was very ill."

"Oh, he has picked up wonderfully. Got a new lease on life."

"Indeed! Nice, isn't it?"

She yawned, holding the magazine she was perusing over her mouth. From over the top of it she stole a glance at him. He appeared to be nervous.

"What did you do all the time you were in New York?" she asked.

"Had a good deal of business to attend to. You know I do not care to trade in Shefford. Too many garrulous clerks around the offices. First thing you know everybody in town is saying that you're playing the market."

"Did you go to the theater?"

"Oh, yes! Twice."

"The three of you?"

"Henry went the first night. Does not care for musical comedy; we had decided on that for the next."

"You took Mrs. Liggett; and to dinner afterwards?"

"Not to dinner. We dropped around to the Jardin des Plantes. There was a good show there."

"Danced, of course?"

"Yes."

"Until two or three o'clock?"

He grew impatient. "Good heavens!" he cried, "what ails you? You sit there and question me as if I were a school-boy, and all because I happened to spend a couple of days with two nice people who have been very kind to me."

"Do you have to emphasize the fact that they are nice people?" She did not raise her eyes from the magazine, the pages of which she was now idly turning.

"I suppose that is meant for a sneer! If it is I want to tell you that it doesn't make any impression on me. When I cannot receive the attentions I want from those at home I am sensible enough not to worry about it. I go elsewhere."

"That is a weakness of yours. You want to be pampered."

“Let’s not call it a weakness. It’s just my unfortunate disposition.”

It was evident that he meant to be sarcastic. There was a glint, too, in his eye which she caught, but did not understand.

“Perhaps you are different with your friends; with them there is nothing to hide, nothing to——”

“Hide!” he cried. “I have nothing to hide. It makes no difference to me whether you know what I do or not. I do things because they please me, that is all, and I am not asking pardon for anything.”

“Your self-satisfaction amuses me,” she said mockingly. “You are so sure of yourself, so thoroughly content. What if, some day, one of these dear friends of yours falls in love with you?”

“That would hardly be possible—with you around.”

She looked at him, this time curiously. Really, he might be interesting if she were not his wife!

“I suppose it would make no difference if I protested against your going to see this woman?”

“None in the least.”

“How do you know what I will take into my head to do?”

“What can you do? I tell you it is none of your business what I do or whom I see.”

“Indeed!”

“And if I choose to invite guests to this house I don’t want you sitting around like a mummy before them. You will be expected to welcome them and to entertain them.”

She made as if to rise, and by a violent effort sup-

pressed her emotion. It would never do to let him see her upset.

"I wonder if you think I have no mind of my own, or that I am going to put up with this sort of nonsense forever," she said, quietly. "I have stood a good deal from you, but there are some things I cannot stand. I have done my duty. I am content with what you have to offer me. I don't go around seeking the favor of forty different men or their society; in fact I would prefer to stay right here at home, rather than travel from pillar to post about the country. But remember this: if you have any hope of ultimately bringing that woman into this house I shall balk your plans. You're not going to get rid of me as easily as you suppose."

"Pooh!" he retorted. "Who wants to get rid of you? You seem to think that I am anxious to run off with every woman I meet." His self-restraint was fast vanishing. Nervously his fingers beat a sharp staccato on the arm of the chair, the shoe of his crossed leg quivered, the corners of his mouth twitched. Edith saw his passion, and rose before it grew ungovernable.

"I shan't go on with this any longer. You are not yourself."

And she left him to await alone the coming of the Liggetts.

Some time later they arrived.

Edith heard the big machine snorting and pulling into the driveway, but she did not come down to meet them. Only when the dinner chime was sounded did she quit her room. The guests were in the large reception room, with the Wheatons, when she descended the

stairs, and they tarried for another moment to await her coming. Going straight to Mrs. Liggett she took her hand and greeted her, but she did not welcome her to Westlawn. Then she turned to Mr. Liggett. For him she had a welcoming smile.

At table she took her customary place and assisted with the service. The Liggetts were on her left, Evelyn and Doris opposite them. She could not help noticing how dangerously charming this splendidly attired woman was, with her vivid green dress, jeweled fingers and black beads and ear-rings. Color was not wanting, either; her face wore just a suggestion of pink, a little less than rose, but a little more than violet, that was perfectly adapted to her brunette type. No younger woman could compete with her in her seductive attractiveness.

The conversation, which revolved about New York, sounded to Edith like a senseless clatter of words and unendurable laughter. A new statue was being erected in City Hall Park that was causing a spirited controversy. The midnight restaurants had lately adopted a new regulation requiring gentlemen to be attired in evening clothes. Mrs. Liggett approved of this on the ground that it would keep the undesirable element out, but Kelso did not seem to think so well of it. There were times, he thought, when a man might find it very inconvenient to be in correct attire. He would find it unpleasant to try to effect an entrance in a business suit if the regulation was permitted to stand.

"You do not care for New York?"

Mr. Liggett was addressing his remark to Edith.

She laughed, non-committally: "Oh, yes, I do. At times."

"We never see you."

"But you will—some day."

"A beastly place in summer," he commented. "No air on streets. Too far overhead."

"The subway is always cool," Edith replied.

"I don't know when we have ridden in the subway," Mrs. Liggett volunteered.

"Tell me about the Macksons," Kelso said. "They make very good company."

"They are well," Betty informed him. "Don't you think him a splendid fellow?"

"Fine! But she looked good, too."

"Ugh! Impossible. They don't get along, I understand."

"What's the trouble? Jealousy?"

"Envy. What has she to be jealous of? You know when a woman marries an attorney she must expect stenographers and that sort of thing. These are necessary evils. But there is no use getting excited over them."

"So she lost her head, eh?" Kelso commented.

"And he is a splendid chap, one of the best fellows in the world. And there is nothing to it. He does not care a snap of his fingers for the girl. But it isn't one girl; it's every one he has had—I don't know how many. No sooner are they well established in the office than they are told to go."

"Can't his wife interest herself in something or

somebody?" Doris inquired with a facetious turn. "What is wrong with her?"

"Jealousy! Envy! Insanity! I don't know. An impossible wife, I call her. She abhors the thought of an office. Nags all the time he is home. Wonders if he calls the stenographer by her first name, and all that stuff. No woman like that has any business getting married. She does not know what the world is. I think she is suspicious about herself."

"Gracious! Can't some one take her aside and set her right?" This from Evelyn, with a slight show of impatience.

"She's too narrow-minded," Mrs. Liggett promptly assured her, "you know . . . one of these strict disciplinarians. Expects her husband to wear a coat of mail to protect himself from the shafts of wicked women. She's like many another foolish wife. The girls are not all vicious. Most of them mind their own business pretty well—if left to themselves. It isn't the pretty stenographer who wrecks homes quite so much as the persecuted husband seeking rest and amusement. His wife won't talk to him. He wants to sit down and chat and he turns to the girl in the office. Then you have another terrible triangle."

While this discussion lasted Edith spoke not a word, but sat silent through it all, her face troubled, her lips compressed. She was thinking of the subtle ingenuity of this woman. How she hated her! Dinner was over and the dessert was being brought in. Kelso lighted a cigarette, but Mrs. Liggett took it from his hand and transferred it to her own mouth.

"Do you know," Kelso interposed, "there is a dance to-night at the Country Club. What do you say if we all go?"

"Sure, let's all go," Betty chimed in.

"Do you want to go?" Kelso asked, looking directly at Edith.

"Of course," she replied.

This was an informal affair, conducted for the accommodation of members who cared for that kind of entertainment. Not everybody came for the dancing, however, for bridge was constantly in session, and there were bowling and pool tournaments in progress every night. Besides, it was a charming place to spend an evening, with members continually bringing guests and introducing them to the whole house without favor or distinction. It was considered a great honor to be able to boast of membership in the Shefford Country Club, whose roster was made up with deliberate scrutiny and selection. For the ambitious few it was an achievement to be admitted to its coterie. It was also a privilege to obtain entrance as a guest.

The Wheatons arrived during one of the intervals. The orchestra had ceased playing and the company were sitting about the main room in groups of threes and fours, chatting boisterously and giggling persistently. There were few couples to be found inside; these usually retired to the spacious and secluded porch outside to escape the glare and the stuffiness of the ball-room. Kelso took advantage of the momentary intermission to present his guests, who were received everywhere with the utmost courtesy and consideration.

He escorted them through the house. "What adorable chairs!" Betty exclaimed as she surveyed the rich upholstery in the main room. They peered into the ballroom, its floor reflecting the lights and shadows of the brilliantly illuminated fixtures suspended from the ceiling. He showed them the parlor and its art treasures. A large canvas covered a side wall representing a youth with an animal's skin about him and a girl clothed in diaphanous white drapery running down a hill before a coming storm. "A classic!" Betty pronounced.

"Only a reproduction," Kelso informed her. "The original is by Le Cot and hangs in New York. A Shefford man copied it and brought it here."

Another dance began and Betty began to sway to the accompaniment of the music. "You want to dance," Kelso observed. This broke up the party. Evelyn and Doris quickly found partners, while Edith moved away in the direction of the front porch with Mr. Liggett.

"You do not care so much for dancing," he said to her.

"I was crazy about it once upon a time," Edith admitted. "It has not the same attraction for me now."

"Betty is very fond of it. It makes me sad. When she is with me she has to make a sacrifice."

"Do you think she minds?"

"Me, or the sacrifice?"

She wanted to say, "You," but had not the courage. So she replied, "Making the sacrifice for you."

"Youth is impetuous," he answered, "still it must have its fling."

"I suppose so."

"Betty likes you very much. Do you know that?"

"Me?" Edith cried.

"Yes, indeed. And I wish she could see more of you. It does her good to come here."

"It does her no good to see me, I assure you."

What else might have been said was suddenly interrupted by the sound of another voice falling ever so lightly on the night air. It was pronouncing Mrs. Wheaton's name.

"I was told to commit this intrusion," it continued. "Will you dance with me? They said Mr. Liggett would not mind."

"Me! Not I! I shall not mind it in the least. Sure thing! Run along and dance."

"You have met Mr. Southey?" Edith asked, rising.

"Yes, indeed. How are you? Go along and enjoy yourselves."

She did not enjoy it. What with her husband gone with the one person in the world she feared and despised most, there was no relief for her troubled imagination because of the terrible images that crowded upon it in endless confusion. She looked for the errant two, to gaze upon them reproachfully, but they were not to be found. Strange! This was the second dance since their arrival. She was puzzled. Evelyn and Doris were on the floor, but Kelso was not, she was sure. The encore was given and she remained for it, the

music sounding in her ears like so many measured monosyllables of meaningless noise.

Was it that she really cared or was it anger at being made to appear such a fool? It was evident that Kelso was growing indifferent in his manner toward her; but she was not ready to admit that she had lost him. It was just his way. Where was he then? Oh, out on the porch, buried deep in one chair, his feet on another, while his interesting companion amused him with anecdotes of New York and Newport. She might have thought no more about the whole affair, harmless at its worst, were it not for the fact that he was alone with this siren. It was the woman she feared.

She spent the evening mingling with the guests, stopping to congratulate Mina Gorham on her husband's recent appointment to the judiciary, to whisper a word of admiration to the Smiths on their new automobile, to inquire of Mr. Oliver of the progress of Mrs. Oliver's recovery from an operation; but she did not dance again. Jack Southey took her downstairs for refreshments, and they consumed the best part of an hour talking about their mutual friends. When she did return the Wheaton girls were seated on the porch chatting with Henry Liggett. She joined them.

"Where is Kelso?" Evelyn asked immediately.

"I have not seen him all night," Edith replied.

Presently the missing pair appeared around the corner of the veranda. Cries of "Where have you been? Don't you like our company? It's about time you showed up!" greeted them, followed by, "Why! What's the matter? Can't we sit down and have a

chat without everybody getting excited? We just ran into Lewis!" But Edith was only intermittently aware of the remarks they exchanged. Her mind was full of horrible thoughts. She saw her whole future suddenly unrolled before her and passing down its endless chaos she perceived herself miserable and unfortunate, with nothing to hope for but a troubled existence.

The next morning she encountered Mrs. Liggett in the sun-parlor, where she sat becomingly dressed and ready for a ride. In the fresh morning light her color appeared radiant, and she looked up at Edith's approach with a half disappointed smile, that she tried artfully to conceal.

"You are out early this morning," she greeted her with a show of pleasure, but Edith was in no mood to accept these amiable overtures. The morning found her unrefreshed and impatient, and there were evidences about her eyes of a sleepless night.

"I always get out early in the morning—to attend to my work," she replied.

"Work! Who would suppose you had to do such a thing as work?"

"I do it—occasionally! There is enough to be done when one wants to look for it."

Mrs. Liggett sat back in her chair and smiled—a sweet derisive smile.

"I let my servants manage everything," she said. "They are accustomed to doing these things, and must take the responsibility of them. Don't you know, you can get more out of people by letting them feel their own importance!"

"That may be right, but I think a woman has a place, too," Edith replied. "She it is who is responsible for the good order of her house, not the servants, and she cannot successfully shift that."

"My! You are thoroughly practical! But you *like* it."

Edith began to straighten the chairs, and pick up and arrange in neat piles the books and magazines. Passing before Mrs. Liggett her eyes rested on her costume, breeches and coat and puttees.

"Are you going riding?" she asked, and added quickly: "That is a foolish question, I suppose!"

"Yes! Kelso promised to show me the Glenwood dam this morning. I wonder what's keeping him!"

"I should think you saw enough of him last night!"

"Oh, hardly! We were not alone five minutes. You see we met Mr. Lewis, and he asked us to join his party."

"Well! It was not quite the proper thing to do, was it? To go off and leave us as you did!"

"Nobody minded, I am sure!"

"I minded, and I may as well tell you I don't want it to occur again."

Mrs. Liggett looked at her mockingly. Finding her in earnest she, too, assumed an air of defiance.

"What can you do about it?" she asked contemptuously.

"I prefer to wait until the right time comes before making up my mind."

"Never do that! Never act instantly——"

"If my husband hasn't sense enough to know the

difference between right and wrong I am going to teach him——”

“Indeed! He will not like that, I am sure!”

“He is my husband; he has no time for other women——”

Mrs. Liggett sat up.

“I did not come here to quarrel with you, Mrs. Wheaton,” she said mockingly, “or to be dictated to, either.”

“If you don’t know your place I am trying to do you a favor——”

“I am capable, thank you——”

“All I want you to do is to leave Mr. Wheaton alone.”

“And if he chooses not to let me alone?”

“He will choose for himself when you cease running after him.”

“Running after him! Really, Mrs. Wheaton, you are making yourself ridiculous. Kelso likes company. He wants life—not the monotony you prefer. Right now I’ll wager he’s tired of your hackneyed ways.”

“You wicked woman! It is your kind that destroys comfortable homes! But you won’t destroy mine. . . .”

“Little did your other home bother you! Don’t be such a hypocrite! If Kelso wants to ride with me, I cannot refuse him. He says he is not happy here——”

“Stop! Don’t dare talk like that—don’t——”

The presence of the maid behind her hushed her. Mrs. Wheaton was wanted on the telephone—should she take the message?

She was bade to. When she returned it was to bring

information from the Sister Superior that her little girl had been taken seriously ill with typhoid fever, and had been ordered to the isolation hospital immediately. Edith heard no more. She rushed to the 'phone and called the Academy.

Babs dying! The thought nearly drove her mad.

XXI

THE hands of the House clock stood at exactly half-past eleven as Congressman Colman entered the Hall of Representatives with his bundle of notes under his arm and hurriedly made his way across the floor. Of his state of mind there could be no doubt, for it was apparent that he was nervous and inclined to be depressed. It was Calendar Wednesday and the Committee on the Judiciary was ready to call up for consideration Joint Resolution 300, more commonly known as the Colman Resolution, and urge its adoption. There was going to be a battle, one of those protracted debates, with the dividing line between the majority and the minority sides of the House a fluctuating streak, indistinctly drawn. The knowledge of this, the appreciable uncertainty that everybody felt but could not resolve, made him solicitous. Moreover, the Committee had made known the fact that it reported the bill back to the House with great reluctance, preferring to let the responsibility for its rejection rest upon the shoulders of those who had originated the measure, rather than assume this obnoxious liability.

There was going to be opposition of course, but to say that this hostility was directed against the measure would be decidedly unfair to those who directed it.

It was not the consequences of stringent legislation they feared so much as the power of Congress. What with the passage of the recent Prohibition Amendment and the proposed Maternity and Educational Bills up for consideration they viewed with alarm the increasing autocracy of the Federal Government. They were stalwart champions of States' rights, these men, and were zealous protagonists of the doctrine of State sovereignty. The danger for them lay not in the proposed resolution but in the ominous centralization of power. In defense of this principle they were willing to stand or fall.

All this would formerly have increased Colman's enthusiasm, but now he found himself pitched to the keenest anxiety in apprehension of a savage struggle. While he entertained the utmost respect for his opponents' point of view, their sincere faith in the doctrine of States' rights, their genuine horror of Federal domination, still he felt that this was no ordinary measure, interfering with individual rights or liberties, but one that affected in particular the general welfare of the country considered as an indissoluble unity, and not as a mere confederation of individual States. He had set his heart and soul on this work. It was the distraction as well as the endeavor of his later life. Never was he so boundlessly, so confidently happy—never since the time of his marriage. He was happy then, at ease with the world, satisfied with himself, his home, his wife; but that was joy of another kind. To-day, for the first time since that unfortunate decree, he was aware of a sense of fresh responsibility, of some defi-

nite and particular purpose for which he was answerable to himself as well as to others, and the fact that he had something important to do, to occupy his mind, gave added zest and continuity to his scattered impulses and the glow of consecration to his work.

The galleries were filling slowly with sightseers and interested auditors; groups of members were scattering here and there through the seats, like an army in open order; the Clerk lumbered in and climbed to his place behind the rostrum with his bundle of precious papers in his hand, while Colman sat in his seat, his fingers joined before his lips, his eyes nervously glued to the clock. It was approaching the hour of twelve.

Wilbur Crane, majority floor-leader, came up the aisle, solemnly and deliberately. Colman accosted him.

“What do you think?”

“Not a chance. The Farmers are dead against it. Want long term credits and more tariff protection. I promised to compromise.”

“What?” Colman cried. “On higher tariff!”

“Sure! Promise anything—now! Give them the Capitol, if they want it.”

“Can’t you whip them into shape? We ought to have the majority.”

“We ought to; but the agricultural bloc has smashed the parties. Wise birds, those fellows! They know what they want and they are herded together like cattle until they get it.”

“It’s the South and West,” said Bert. “You can’t control them.”

“Well, they stuck pretty close together for the Smith-

Towner Bill! Wanted the rest of the country to pour money into their own States. That's the trouble, you see, with this whole Congress. Too much politics! Wondering what the folks home in the district will say! Last year we ran rough-shod over private interests and the people are beginning to complain. Four million soldiers home from France. Feel sore over the Prohibition affair, which they claim was rushed through during their absence. That's what scares us. The Smith-Towner Bill was killed because it handed too much power over to the Federal Government. They mean to argue along the same lines to-day."

Crane's analysis of the situation convinced Bert of the herculean task required to get his measure passed by a Congress composed for the most part of the extreme conservative wings of the two old parties; and yet there was nothing dearer to him or more consoling than the triumph of this project, his own conception, on which he had expended more concentrated effort than he thought possible at the time of its inception. Besides it was his maiden-effort in the work of legislation and he could not bear to entertain the notion of absolute failure.

"You know," he said, "I have set my heart on this bill and I should not like to meet with disappointment."

"Don't let that worry you," amended the other. "You will get used to these things after a while."

"Did you see Fenton?"

"Nothing doing! Unbendable as a stone wall."

From the door to the right of the rostrum came the Speaker, a large, stout man with a beard, followed by

the Chaplain of the House, a venerable man with white flowing locks. This was the signal for the noise heretofore prevalent throughout the Chamber to subside. Whispers alone were heard as the members and officers of the assembly rose from their places and stood with bowed heads. The hands of the clock now stood at the hour of twelve, and a hush settled upon the room as the Speaker brought the gavel forcibly upon the desk, calling for order. Immediately the solemn tones of the chaplain's voice were heard in fervent prayer.

After the Journal of the proceedings of yesterday had been read and approved, the record corrected in several places, a point of order raised on the absence of a quorum with the resultant closing of doors, notification of the absentees and the calling of the roll, and finally the presentation of a conference report, the Speaker announced:

"To-day is Calendar Wednesday. The Clerk will call the roll of committees."

The Committee on Ways and Means was called and the call proceeded. The Committee on the Judiciary was called and the Chairman rose to address the Chair.

"Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on the Judiciary, I call up House Joint Resolution 300, proposing an amendment to the Constitution."

"The gentleman from Illinois, Chairman of the Committee on the Judiciary," stated the Speaker, "calls up a resolution which the Clerk will report."

With nonchalance the House submitted to the reading of the bill. The Clerk's voice, shrill and blatant, carried the words of the resolution at breathless speed

to every part of the vast chamber, but without arresting the attention of a single person save the few uninformed onlookers who sat in the galleries, amazed at this business of legislation. The Speaker was gone, having surrendered the gavel, temporarily, to the gentleman from Iowa as Speaker *pro-tempore*, and disappeared through the same portal by which he had entered just a few minutes before. Some few members sat at ease in their chairs and pretended to show some interest in the affairs of State; others wandered about the Chamber aimlessly, looking around the room, into the seats or into the balconies in search of one they knew; others met in the rear of the hall and chatted jovially but without disorder, while another few were occupied at the tables with a procrastinated and accumulated correspondence. To look down upon the three hundred odd members composing the session it was a question how many of them represented the neighbors who supposedly had sent them there.

The reading stopped and the Chairman of the Committee which reported the measure to the House arose to obtain recognition.

“Mr. Speaker and gentlemen,” he said, “the resolution presented for your consideration by the House Committee on the Judiciary is short and to the point. It provides for an amendment to the Constitution giving Congress the power to establish and enforce by appropriate legislation uniform laws as to marriage and divorce. You are asked to take action upon this measure to-day, but the amendment shall not be valid to all intents and purposes as part of the Constitution until

passed by both Houses of Congress by a two-thirds vote and duly ratified by the legislatures of three-fourths of the several States.

“We hear it said continually: Why does not Congress propose a remedy to relieve a situation that is becoming more and more each year a menace to the stability of family and national life? There is to-day in the United States one divorce in every eight or ten marriages; the number of divorces granted during the year 1901 in the United States was more than twice as great as in all the rest of Christendom; for the last quarter century the number of marriages has not even doubled, while the number of divorces has increased almost fourfold; there are to-day about thirty-five different causes for absolute divorce enumerated in the statutes of the various States; what is the matter with Congress? This we hear from every side. Now, gentlemen, the purpose of this resolution is to enable Congress to do something. We cannot hope to regulate marriage and divorce, unless we are authorized to pass uniform laws. This is not a local matter. It is not a matter of interest to one State and not to another. Marriage is a vital institution, the civil aspect of it one upon which the life of the nation depends. It is a fundamental national question and Congress is the proper body to treat it.

“It is not too much to ask for legislation in favor of absolute divorce. The Church of Rome forbids it. The State of South Carolina forbids it. It is absolutely prohibited in Italy, Spain, and to two-thirds of the population of Austria-Hungary in the days of the old

monarchy, while the Latin-American countries of the Argentine, Brazil, Peru, Chile and others enjoy the same law. A legal separation is recognized in all of these jurisdictions, but without the right to remarry. In Canada the important provinces of Quebec, Ontario, Newfoundland and the Northwest Territories have no divorce laws, although divorce may be obtained in very exceptional cases and then only through a special act of Parliament.

“The adoption of a national marriage and divorce law would abolish automatically many, if not all, of the alleged contributing causes of the divorce disease. I mean by contributing causes, the present laxity of law and its maladministration, the growing tendency of young folks to wed in haste, the failure on the part of parents to exercise proper oversight in the matter of their children’s associates, the free and easy public mind which seems to hold the marriage vow too lightly, the jazzing wife, the marrying parson, the divorce lawyer. Proper legislation would remedy most of these. Prohibit absolute divorce entirely. Permit separation from bed and board, but without the right to remarry. The rights of neither party are then violated. I reserve the remainder of my time.”

“The gentleman reserves 52 minutes.”

Mr. Fenton rose and addressed the Chair.

“For what purpose does the gentleman from New York rise?”

“I desire recognition.”

“Is the gentleman from New York opposed to the bill?”

“I am.”

“Does any member of the Committee desire recognition in opposition to the bill? If not, the Chair will recognize the gentleman from New York who is opposed to the bill.”

“Mr. Speaker and gentlemen, this is a dangerous piece of legislation that confronts us to-day, which if permitted to pass, will encroach on the rights of every State in the Union. The purpose of this bill is to delegate to Congress, powers which it never should possess, which the authors of the Constitution never intended it should possess. We have already added to that great charter more amendments than are necessary and we ought to act very carefully in the future, about surrendering away rights and privileges that are inherent. This nation was once torn asunder precisely because of difference of opinion on a question such as this, and I would not care to predict what might occur in the future if we persist in robbing the several States of their lawfully constituted rights.

“I am not opposed to the general tenor of this bill, but I am unalterably opposed to the method of enforcing it. The State can do the same work you are asking Congress to do and in perfect harmony. Let them get together, that is all. But for God’s sake don’t force us to subscribe to another amendment. The poor old Constitution is becoming more and more like a kite every time Congress meets. Remember the States enjoy certain inalienable rights, for under our political system the original and ultimate sovereignty was vested in the State, or the people of the States, sev-

erally. We have no desire to witness an increase in Federal power or in centralized government. It smacks of autocracy."

Mr. Crane: "Will the gentleman yield?"

Mr. Fenton: "Yes."

Mr. Crane: "Does the gentleman mean that allegiance is due only to the State and not to the United States except through the legislative bodies of the individual States?"

Mr. Fenton: "I mean this: that it is possible to conceive of State rights without State sovereignty, and the unity of the political people of the United States without making the States mere dependencies on the Federal Government. The political people of the United States have never existed except as mutually independent States."

Mr. Crane: "But these mutually independent States have never existed and acted as free, independent and sovereign States or nations, but as one federated government."

Mr. Fenton replied that it was not his contention that the States were severally sovereign, but that they possessed certain rights which even the national government must respect, the destruction of which States as elementary political bodies would mean the ultimate destruction of the United States.

For more than two hours the debate persisted with much feeling and acrimony. It was a sight to look down upon. Fierce wrangles began in a score of places, isolated remarks were heard between the debates coming from members in their seats, but no one lost his

head. For it was almost universally agreed that uniform legislation in respect to marriage and divorce was a good thing, but whether Congressional action was the way to do it was another matter. So independent was the trend of personal opinion on this question that it was a problem for the leaders to estimate the strength of either side. A test vote was imminent, since the previous question would soon be demanded and Colman obtained the floor to make the motion that the bill be recommended to the Committee on the Judiciary with instructions to report the same back forthwith in an amended form.

A point of order was raised that the instructions were not germane to the bill, but the objection was overruled and the question was put to the House. It was taken and the motion was rejected on a division of 160 to 168. The proponents of the measure lacked a bare majority.

It was evident that the resolution would not pass the House that day, and it was decided by the protagonist group to dispense with Colman's prepared speech and move to adjourn. This would defer consideration until the following Wednesday and, in the ensuing week, additional pressure might be brought to bear upon a sufficient number of intransigent members of the minority so as to bring the voting strength of the House up to the majority required. Accordingly Colman moved that the House do now adjourn.

Mr. Fenton was on his feet in an instant.

"Mr. Speaker, I hope the gentleman from Connecticut will not move to adjourn. There is no use in let-

ting the grass grow around this bill before we finish it. Why not vote on it now and get it out of the way?"

"I should not object were it not for the fact that I want additional time to prepare my remarks," Colman replied.

"Mr. Speaker, I suggest the absence of a quorum," Mr. Fenton cried.

Mr. Crane arose. "I make the point of order that a quorum is not required on a motion to adjourn. It is evident that there is a quorum present, anyway."

The Chair sustained the point of order, and on a division, demanded by Mr. Colman, the question on his motion to adjourn was rejected.

A dozen members were on their feet shouting to the Chair for recognition. Tingling in every nerve and perspiring, Colman stood in the aisle hoping to catch the Speaker's attention, his blue eyes flashing with anger. The Chair rapped loudly for order, and the gentleman from Pennsylvania, one of the opposition, was recognized.

"Mr. Speaker," he cried. "I move the previous question on the resolution to final passage."

There was some subterfuge here, the opponents trying to force a final vote at once. Colman was on his feet instantaneously.

"Mr. Speaker," he called. "I move that the House stand in recess until 8 o'clock."

Mr. Fenton arose. "Mr. Speaker, I demand the regular order and make the point of order that the motion is not in order."

Mr. Morrison: "Mr. Speaker, the question now is upon ordering the previous question, is it not?"

He was informed that that was correct.

Mr. Colman: "Mr. Speaker——"

Mr. Fenton: "I demand the regular order."

The Speaker: "The question before the House is the motion of the gentleman from Pennsylvania. As many as are in favor of ordering the previous question will say 'aye'; those opposed, 'no.' The ayes seem to have it."

Mr. Colman: "I ask for a division."

The Speaker: "Those in favor of the motion will rise."

"Those opposed will rise."

After counting, the Chair announced that the ayes were 161 and the nays 167, so the previous question was ordered. Mr. Colman demanded the yeas and nays, but his demand was not seconded by one-fifth of the members present. The hour of five had arrived, and most of the members were anxious to get away to their offices in order to clear up the day's correspondence before dinner. Thereupon Mr. Colman made a point of no quorum, but the Speaker, after counting the House, announced that 216 members were present, a quorum.

Colman rose again to address the Chair with another motion to recommit the resolution to the Committee on the Judiciary, but when the question was taken this motion also was rejected.

The fact that the day was lost was sadly evident throughout the chamber, for the violent agitation that

had marked the afternoon session was subsiding gradually until it finally had ceased altogether. The whispers in the gallery died down and the spectators relaxed a little. Bert alone remained tense; his hot anger had cooled into a vindictiveness that set the hard lines on his face even harder. He clutched the arms of his chair desperately. He heard the formal steps being taken, preliminary to the vote on the final passage, the ordering of the resolution to be engrossed and read a third time, the hurried third reading by title only, and then the question on the adoption of the resolution being put to the House. It was hopeless, hopeless. Answering his name he left his seat and hurried down the aisle, defeated and heartbroken. As he stepped to the front of the floor a messenger met him with a telegram. Tearing it open he read:

“Barbara seriously ill with typhoid. Better come home. DAHILL.”

He passed his hand over his brow like one struck, and a cold chill ran down his back. Groping for the door he passed out and raced to his office.

XXII

KELSO was just leaving his room when Edith brushed by him, almost heedlessly. Her precipitate haste and anxiously drawn countenance startled him.

“What’s the matter?” he asked, surprised.

“I’ve got to go to the hospital,” she replied. “Babs is very sick.”

“Babs! Who’s Babs? Oh, yes. That’s too bad!”

Her face was charged with tragedy and her mind entertained no desire save that of getting to the bedside of her helpless child as soon as possible.

“Would you mind asking Charles to get the car?” she requested him, from the depths of the clothes closet.

He returned to the room and stood back to watch her.

“I believe he is washing it this morning. I was thinking—well—perhaps, we would go away to-day.”

“Who?” she inquired in amazement.

“Well, you and I. The Liggetts are going with us. Suppose we run off to Newport for a little while!”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t go. Besides, this is hardly the proper time to tell me, is it?”

He stood staring at her, vexed and awkward.

“Yes, I know. But you see I didn’t quite think of it until yesterday—and I had no chance to ask you——”

"You mean last night. Is this a trip for Betty Liggett's benefit? Why are you dragging me along?"

"Well, I couldn't very well go without you, my dear. It would look odd—you'll enjoy the ride, won't you?"

"No! I tell you I can't go. Don't you understand that it's impossible?"

"Because of the kid, you mean! Oh, she'll be all right. Most children get sick now and then. What ails her?"

"Typhoid! They've got to take her to the isolation hospital."

"So that's where you're going! And you'll come back here full of bugs and things! I thought they didn't allow any person to visit that place."

She made no attempt to reply to this, treating it with the contempt it so richly deserved. She was almost dressed, and in another minute would be ready to depart.

"Are you going to get the car?" she asked.

"I told you it was being washed. What time are you coming back?"

"I don't know!"

"Before luncheon?"

"What difference does it make?"

"I was only thinking we ought to be ready to leave right after luncheon."

"You need not count on me. I told you I would not go."

"Why not?" he insisted.

She looked at him with disdain. He caught the ex-

pression and moved nearer, resting his hand on the bow foot of the bed.

"There is something you are trying to slip over me. What is it? I guess I have certain rights around here——"

"What are you doing?" she taunted; "talking for the gallery? She can't hear you—up here."

"It's like you to defend yourself behind an insinuation like that," he said with a sneer, "I will have you know I am no fool——"

"Indeed! I would pity you if I thought you weren't."

"You don't have to waste any sympathy on me——"

"Oh, no! I'm not wasting any—but you are so ridiculous. You come to invite me to an excursion like a sentenced malefactor. If I really thought you wanted me to refuse you I would be tempted to accept."

"So that's your game! Well, you are going whether you want to or not. And you are not going to any pest house, and come back here full of disease and everything else. You are to do as I tell you, see!"

She stood before the mirror, pretending to rearrange her hat. What should she do—obey her husband, or hearken to the pitiful pleadings of her stricken child? She was not long in deciding, for the next minute she turned abruptly and made as if to walk around him. But he continued to block the way.

"Let me by, please," she said to him curtly.

"Not yet!"

"Kelso!"

But he stood there defiant, provoking, rubbing his cheek and chin. His lips were compressed and hard.

She raised her hand to push him aside, but he resisted the effort.

“Don’t you dare to stop me,” she warned him. “Let me pass, I say,” and she pressed against him with all the force at her command. He caught her in his arms and held her.

“Let me alone!” she cried, furious with rage. “You always were a bully, and mean, and contemptible.” She fought savagely, wrestled with him, and tried to free herself. Her arms shot out, her hands were delivering fierce blows on his flabby face and thick neck. Infuriated, he brought his heavy hand down against her, and pushed her back from him. One of her fists came in contact with his eye and blinded him. He caught her by the throat and threw her from him brutally. She fell headlong across the floor, her temple striking the corner of the bed as she fell.

He looked down at her, his tightly clenched fists pressed against his sides, his brain in a whirl. She lay quite motionless, with eyes closed. Stealthily he crept from the room and escaped into the hall. Then he called for one of the maids.

Edith could not remember where she was. A flash of ice, a flash of fire, a whirly feeling of unsteadiness and dizziness, and the room swam with moving objects until it disappeared from view. She felt light, so light that she seemed to be floating, her breath caught at intervals, with great difficulty. The earth was below her, she was sure, but she could not look down. Fear held her like a vise and she fought desperately against it. Still she knew who she was, Edith Wheaton, and

she had nothing to fear, for she was alone, away from her enemies and whirling through empty space as free and airy as a cloud. Because she was alone she tried to hasten, of course; but she could not escape the awful suspicion that she was not alone, and, as a consequence, began to believe that she was in deadly peril. There was a wicked shadow pressing close behind her. She could feel it. She even thought she could hear its faint sighing, its faint sobbing gurgle, its little stealthy motion. A faceless thing, yet with eyes to see and power to move, that hung wavering there close by her—a shadow.

So cold, so dark and dismal was the place where she fell, a place bristling with shades and terrible trees, that she was alarmed. She was in the midst of a forest, and she experienced a strange sense of utter desolation. Terror of the people in the city obsessed her, making her want to shrink from meeting them. There was something obscure and underhand about all this, which she could not understand, and it made her recoil from wanting to be discovered. They were setting traps to ensnare her, fiendish wretches, and were bent on her destruction. It was awful to be pursued, with nothing but this shadow for a companion. Still—what had she to fear? What had she done to want to fear any one? Presently the atmosphere grew intolerably close, followed by moments of delirium, then horror. The trees, it seemed, were wet and soggy to the touch, like cold damp places in a subterranean world. She was in the midst of them, condemned to remain in solitary stillness, with tall, gaunt shadows

leering at her like so many accusing witnesses. These were the spies sent out by the people in the city, her pursuers, and their long skinny fingers pointed at her out of the Cimmerian gloom. In the hollow of one, more friendly than the rest, she concealed herself from the hostile force. But it was the people, the ubiquitous and omnipotent people who swarmed out of the city, that confirmed her worst fears. They made the laws, and they persecuted those that transgressed them with implacable vengeance.

When she attempted to resume her flight again, she discovered to her intense horror that she was sinking up to her knees in the marshy ground. To add to her peril the terrible thing was close beside her, breathing its foul breath upon her exposed shoulders. She succeeded in moving, but with the greatest difficulty, for her feet were heavy and stuck fast to the earth. The terrible thing upbraided her when she tried to run, and taunted her mercilessly for her cowardice. Then she did a heinous thing. She attempted to destroy it, felling it with a club. For some inexplicable reason it yielded to the blow, and she stopped to examine its hurt. It was strangely light, and the limbs, as if they had been empty, moved with the utmost freedom. The face was pale and shockingly smeared with blood about one temple. It repelled her, yet she continued to look intently with curious gaze. It was herself she beheld, with pallid countenance and parted lips. She arose in horror. She had killed her own self.

Presently there were voices around her, soft tones, sharp tones. A strong odor penetrated her nostrils,

burning her nose and making her eyes smart with tears. She opened them to see a clean, habitable room, her own panelled room with its gay cretonne hangings. A man with a pleasant face was bending over her. It was Dr. Dahill.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"You're all right, now," he smilingly assured her. "Don't try to talk. Rest if you can."

"How—how is Babs?"

"She's all right."

"Will she get better?"

"Yes, indeed! She is better already."

"How are you, dear?"

She turned her eyes at the question, and saw Kelso. Then she remembered and suddenly averted them.

"Doctor," she said, "can't I get up?"

"No—you must remain perfectly quiet for to-day. To-morrow, perhaps!"

"Can't I see my little girl?"

"Not to-day!"

"Are you sure she is getting better?"

"Most assuredly, madam. She has had a turn for the better."

"Thank you, doctor. You are very good."

For a whole day and a night she lay there, recuperating from the effects of the syncope, during which time she thought much of the things that had come to pass of late—none of which were wholly pleasant. She was remarkably calm and even coldly self-possessed amid dreams which ordinarily would have been a delirium of agony. The vicissitudes of the past year

were misty substances, that affected her sensitive imagination but slightly, but the painful scene, enacted in this very room only a short hour ago, was a humiliation she could not endure. It was inconceivable that Kelso should have behaved like a brute, and the remembrance of it would prove difficult to efface. A thousand times she re-lived the short, ignominious scene, and thanked God each time for the joy of living to make amends.

A stupendous idea suddenly drove the blood in torrents to her brain and for a brief moment she felt dizzy. It was not a miracle at all. She had been killed, Edith Wheaton, the mistress of Westlawn. She was as truly dead as if she had ceased to breathe, murdered by her own husband, and lost to him forever. He could now go away with Betty to Newport without fear of being reproved. He could marry her, for that matter, as soon as old Liggett was gone. But she was dead. To-morrow she would arise, a new being given to the world, and, out of the ashes of violated faith, blasted hope, sin and disgrace, she would enter into another life, where content came to those who strove for the right, and beatitude to the clean of heart and stalwart of courage.

Yesterday she had been her old self, a creature of moods and fancies, discontented with pleasure, wantonly ambitious, desirous of the best things life had to offer of all that mattered most in this world. She now began to see that she had never looked ahead of her own satisfaction. Whatever she had seen in Kelso she could not imagine, but it had sufficed to wreck her former home and place upon her the brand of an

adulteress. There was no law above the law of God. She was never Kelso Wheaton's wife, but his mistress. She belonged only to one man, joined to him before the altar of God, and what God hath joined together no man could possibly put asunder. It was a huge mistake to trample on convictions which had obtained for long years, and to barter her soul for wealth and rank, qualities without a name, substances shadowy in their existence and temporary at their best.

Was not that precisely what she had done? She had violated the divine law. The doors of her Church were shut against her, she no longer belonged to its communion. She even felt that the intercessory effect of her prayers had lost all influence with God. The thought haunted her. What should she do! Before she could offer any gift must she not herself first repent? And what did repentance mean except leaving this sinful house, this other man whom God knew not? Her purpose of amendment must be entire, otherwise her contrition for the past would be insincere. The future must become her real present.

To pass from yesterday to to-day she needed will-power, and she perceived how sadly wanting she was in this respect. Strength of will was only acquired steadily and laboriously out of a succession of small efforts, out of the mastery of daily difficulties. Melancholy settled upon her as she thought of the arduous struggle, and she burst into tears, stifling her sobs in the corner of the pillow. Night came on, and with it a weariness of mind and spirit. Still she did not sleep. Her want of feeling amazed her; she was not

frightened at the thought of going to Kelso in the morning and telling him of her decision. On the contrary, the thought seemed to fascinate her. For the first time in months she felt at ease with herself because of her utter disgust for what she had done.

Outside the stars scintillated brightly in the darkness—she could see a few of them through the open window—like the eyes of God looking down upon the just and the unjust. Presently a brilliant meteor crossed before her vision, glowed splendidly and burned itself out. Its existence had been brief, like a life spent on earth—for once entering its atmosphere it could not endure the terrific pace, and the heyday of its jolly excursion was short. She watched its fiery course through the inky darkness; then the thread of light disappeared and all was still. The transient visitor had come and gone like a swallow coursing its way through the immeasurable, leaden chaos of the sky, its passage a mere matter of memory, adventuresome, tragic.

Weary from the prolonged wakefulness of the night she made an effort to sleep, lying on one side, then on the other, with her mind as empty of images as she could make it. But it was impossible to unburden her soul altogether of its terrible load, the consciousness of her guilt and its appalling consequences. It was beyond human endurance, this remorse. There was no relief except to go to Kelso in the morning and to tell him all, of her discovery of their very great mistake, and her fresh sense of responsibility and duty. He would understand how she felt about the essential oneness of

matrimony. She would persuade him of her belief that her first husband still had a claim upon her, that she was still his wife, and the mother of his child. It caused her some mental anguish to be forced to this somewhat humiliating interpretation, but she met it bravely. The very foundation of all future happiness seemed fatally shattered, and nothing could be done to save the tottering edifice except flight and atonement. From yesterday to to-day she had lived a lifetime.

Some time later she was awakened by her maid. It was morning, and the room looked pleasant and cheerful in the splendid sunlight streaming through the open windows and doors. Kelso came in to make hurried inquiry concerning her health. She answered him without any show of feeling.

"The trip has been postponed," he announced, "until you are able to travel."

"Are you—very much disappointed?"

"Oh, no! They knew you had been taken ill. They left for home yesterday."

"Yesterday!"

"Yes. We thought it best not disturb you. But you are all right this morning."

"Yes—I am all right!"

"And you will soon be getting up?"

"I think so! Does the doctor say I may go out?"

"I don't know. I think it will be all right—what do you think?"

"That I am going."

After a hurried toilet, she began to feel younger, more hopeful. Her indomitable spirit strengthened her

to meet every difficulty. Within half an hour she was ready to go to the hospital. Inquiry over the telephone gave the prosaic information that the patient had had a good night and was doing as well as could be expected. But this did not satisfy the mother; she wanted to see the child herself, for she would be ill-at-ease until she did.

The small room at the hospital was severe and melancholy, pervaded by a terrifying silence, and a strange smell suggestive of influences hostile to human life. It contained little furniture save a small, white bed, with a white and glass bed-table alongside, a dresser and a chair or two. Edith had been warned to come in contact with nothing inside the building, not even a door knob or a chair. She might visit the patient, but only for a short while, and talk to her if she were awake but not touch her or come close to her.

She crept to the foot of the bed and for a long time narrowly watched the sleeping form, with its pallid face, eyes closed as if in death, mouth open and parched. At regular intervals the little breast rose and fell, by which she knew that life was still present. She noticed that the child appeared very restful, although the head was slightly drawn back, and she concluded that she was not so bad as she had feared. Turning to the nurse she said:

“Is she very sick?”

“Well, she has a little temperature and her pulse is somewhat slow.”

“Are those good signs?”

"It is too early yet to say."

"How long?"

"Oh, typhoid runs, usually, from four to five weeks."

"Then—anything is liable to happen?"

"Well, her general condition is good, but it is an insidious fever. She will need constant care."

Subdued voices sounded, coming, they seemed, from outside in the corridor. She recognized them at once. It was Dr. Dahill and—and— Blushing she took out her handkerchief to wipe the faint moisture from her eyes, but it only made her blush the more, until it became like a smoldering agony. She tried to arise, and wished to run away, to hide some place. Then she heard the doctor close behind her, coming just in time to redeem an awkward situation.

"Why, bless my soul!" he said. "Here is Edith now! Did I not tell you she would be here before you!"

She rose from her chair and tried to smile back without any show of embarrassment, but she made a clumsy effort of it. Bert was standing before her, looking at her dreamily, confusedly, as if making an intense endeavor to assure himself it was really she. There was tragedy written on his face.

"Tell her you're glad to see her, old man," the surgeon counseled, giving him a reassuring slap on the back. "She is as broken up over this as you are."

Bert came forward and took her hand.

"This is terrible, terrible!" he said.

Holding his hand in both of hers she returned the greeting. But she could not speak, not even when he

walked past her to the bed. The encounter was dreadful, for both of them were too amazed, bewildered, terrified for words. For a moment she stood watching the painful scene, and then without a word she disappeared into the corridor.

XXIII

IT was just a week later that she met Bert for the second time.

He seemed surprised as she entered the room where he had been seated and it was some moments before he collected himself enough to rise from his chair. Of all places Dr. Dahill's private office was the last he expected to encounter her. But he divined quickly enough the purpose of her call. The expression of her face, her nervous manner, her speechless attitude upon discovering him seated before her, told better than words of a troubled state of mind, suddenly resolved and as suddenly distracted.

She had come to the doctor's office to inquire about her child, who did not seem to be getting along any too well. She probably felt, as so many mothers imagine to be the case when their own are taken from them and placed in the care of another, that there was something being left undone, and she had decided to do what any other mother would have done under the circumstances. She wanted to find out for herself if there were not some possible detail that was being overlooked in the campaign that was being waged against death. The doctor would gladly advise her. But when she caught sight of Bert she was shocked. It did not occur to her to ask what he was doing here.

She even forgot to wonder whose place she was in, or what purpose had brought her thither. The blood rushed to her forehead and left it again making her unsteady.

As she stood there, Colman had time to look at her before they met, and he was dismayed at the change in her. It was a thoughtful woman who now confronted him, of commanding aspect and grave demeanor. The youthful freshness of her face, still beautiful but blanched with pain, was still there, but the mischievous sparkle that was wont to play curiously about her liquid eyes, the irresistible manner and light-heartedness that had once seemed to dominate her whole being, had given way to artificial loveliness, a concentrated gaze, and sober deportment. Edith was indeed a woman, older and less impulsive than the girl he had known more than a year ago. This was his Edith—his wife, strangely attractive in her modern attire.

"I didn't know you were here," she stammered, as if her heart stopped beating.

"Don't tell me you are sorry," he replied.

"I wanted to see Dr. Dahill. He asked me to await him here and to make myself acquainted with the person in this room."

"You don't have to do that, do you?"

"I did not think it was you. I hope you will not judge me——"

"No, of course not. You see, I was not consulted either. This amuses him, I daresay. He evidently thought he was doing us a favor."

There was a deathly pause; she grew visibly nervous.

"Won't you sit down?" he asked. "Just for a minute!"

"Perhaps I had better be going!"

"On the contrary, I wish you would stay. It has been so long since we have really seen each other that I am very glad this happened. I confess I have wanted to meet you for a long time to find out how we both would feel during the interview. It does not strike me, just at present, that either one of us seems very much dissatisfied."

She slowly turned her vague eyes upon him, as she crept to a chair. But he did not seem as strange to her as she thought he would—different, perhaps more sympathetic.

"It is considerate of you to say that," she slowly said, "wronged as you have been."

"Wronged!" he repeated. "You don't—you don't mean that you have regretted— But no. You were not to blame."

"It was my fault. But I did not think you would mind—not a great deal."

"I didn't. That is, I was happy to know you had what you wanted."

She lifted her eyes to his impenetrable face, and caught the faintest suggestion of a smile.

"You had your career. I might have proved only a hindrance after all."

He smiled, this time perceptibly. "That's a poor alibi. But you can't mean it, not really."

The remark cut her pride and she again raised her eyes. This time she was the one to smile.

"You are not as proud as you used to be," he continued.

It was on the point of her tongue to flash back, "Yes, and more so," but she knew it would be useless to say that. He knew her too well not to detect the transformation that had been effected in her, and she was unwilling to humble herself still farther. Allusion to the past was precisely the one factor she wanted, as much as possible, to keep out of their conversation and their thoughts, and she could not advert to her experiment without leaving herself open to the inevitable question of her disappointments and disillusion— and that way danger lay. There was nothing to be derived from this interview if not mutual relief, but she did not intend to keep his feeling for her at a pleasant temperature at the cost of her own self-respect. To confess that she had greatly erred would have made him pity her, no doubt; but she did not want his pity.

"We made many mistakes—you and I," he went on, "mistakes which were wholly unnecessary. I see it all too clearly now—better than you, perhaps. You had your way of doing things—I had mine. I did not understand, and it was mostly my fault in not trying to understand. Ah, well! It has taught us both a lesson, I suppose."

"We are all born to suffer, and make mistakes. No one is ever satisfied."

"I don't know. It is mostly our own fault if we

are not resigned to our state in life. They taste not the sweets of the day who live only for the morrow."

"That was the way with me. I wanted everything. I knew what other people had, and I grew impatient. I wanted to be prominent, to push up as high as the best, to be able to choose the persons I wanted to associate with, to make the rest of the world bow before me. Ambition was my enemy and I never sensed it. Then the opportunity came, and I took it. But my veins did not run purple, my culture was not of the right kind, my religion—that makes a difference, too. And then I saw through everything; the sham society I had aspired to, the sham world that surrounded me. Anybody could buy a place at the very top of it, but that was not what I wanted. That was not happiness. You cannot buy happiness!"

A look of shrewdness came into his eyes. He looked at her keenly. Then he exclaimed, impulsively:

"Why couldn't we have discussed problems like these before, instead of making mysteries of each other?"

"I don't know. It was not to be, I suppose."

"Do you think that? You are not a fatalist?"

"I sometimes think I am. But let's not allude to it any more. It is rather late for a post mortem. I am more interested in my child, just at present. Do you think she is doing well?"

Bert did not fail to notice the unconscious emphasis placed on the "my"; still he gave no sign of it. On the contrary he became sympathetic at once.

"She has contracted a very severe case of typhoid, I am told. An erratic fever has set in, and her mind

has become delirious. Still the doctor holds out sanguine hopes."

She recoiled slightly.

"Her mind delirious! Does that mean——?"

"I don't know. It may clear up."

"Better a thousand times to have her dead than——"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you think everything is being done for her? Is there not some one who specializes on the brain?"

"I don't know. Dr. Dahill will do as he thinks best, I am sure."

"But two heads are better than one. Suggest to him the advisability of a consultation. Please ask him! I can't."

He looked at her earnestly, penetrated by a sense of their strangeness to each other. She looked lonely, he thought, and pitiful; but then he suddenly remembered that it was perfectly natural for her to feel this way for her child. Her child! Their child! Why had she not said so? This was his wife who sat before him—his own wife!

"Very well, then," he agreed. "You will leave it to me?"

"Yes," she replied. "I won't stay. You will do what is best."

With this he arose and saw her to the door. But he did not close it after her. Instead, he followed her deliberately into the hallway and stood there watching her until she had disappeared from sight around the corner of the stairway. His surprise over her

coming had been forgotten entirely; only the fact of her departure from him, alone and voluntary, remained with him. Closing the door he hurried to the window and peered through the curtains. She was descending the steps in her familiar way, and his eyes found again the curves of her light body, the same thin arms and sloping shoulders. To be able to recall her even for a moment would have been delicious, but this was no longer his privilege. A band of steel tightened about his heart as he watched her enter the shining limousine and heard the heavy door close with a slam. She was gone, but he continued to stand there, leaning against the window and gazing into the empty street like one in dismay.

"Has she gone?"

He turned at the sound of the voice. It roused him from his lethargy.

"Yes," he replied wearily, "she has gone."

"Everything went well?"

"Everything went supremely well."

"Was she surprised to see you?" the surgeon continued.

"No more so than I was to see her. But she was not angry, and I don't think she regrets it. After all we're not sworn enemies."

"No, of course not."

"She was very kind to me," Bert murmured. It was a serious remark and it was evident that he was impressed by her manner. He sat down.

"And you have been nice to her, too! You look as if you were satisfied."

"I am. It did us both good, I think."

"Well, I was glad she came. And strange as it may seem it was of you I first thought, sitting alone in this room, awaiting her, to all appearances. The situation was odd, to say the least; so I acted on the impulse and ushered her in, not knowing which of you would be the first to run out."

"You would, perhaps have enjoyed seeing us come to blows? But we proved to be very cordial to each other, and we separated very good friends."

"She will see you again."

"I hope so."

No one knew better than Dr. Dahill the extent of Bert's feeling for Edith, and no one knew better than he the extent of the despair into which his friend had fallen as a result of the divorce. Although Colman seldom communicated his mental afflictions to any one, preferring to harbor within his own soul any agitations it suffered and to endure them alone, nevertheless the doctor was well enough acquainted with his temperament to analyze every emotion that beset it. Bert had plunged completely into the political game, for the purpose of keeping his mind occupied. He wanted to forget his wife; it was not his fault if he failed to succeed. For a time, indeed, he had seemed carried away with the enthusiasm of the fight, but when the climax came and robbed him of a momentary delight he discovered that he was more miserable than before. She was never away from his thoughts. Her form was continually projected before him, by night as well as day. When he went to Congress it was for her;

when he addressed his colleagues her face was before him in the gallery; when he led the fight on the floor in defense of his measure she was by his side whispering words of encouragement and approbation; and when the vote was decided against him in the House it was her sympathy he craved more than anything else. Another man would have dropped her, but he never abandoned the hope of being reunited to her, for he felt that she was still his wife in spite of the earthly power that had tried to abduct her from him.

For this reason the doctor considered both of them his debtors for the little scheme by which they were artfully brought together. It was meet and just and honorable that they should see each other, particularly at this time of misfortune, but Edith would never in her life acquiesce to such a proposal. She would have died first, he imagined, rather than face so humiliating an ordeal. It was of the essence of adventure for him to act as he did—there was no other way to bring them together—and he felt satisfied that everything had been done for the best by him.

“She is not happy, Bert. Couldn’t you see it? I knew the minute I saw her in this office more than a month ago that her gay spirit had fled. Every breath was labored and her eyes wore a distant look. It is her heart. It aches. She yearns constantly for her child, for her home, and you. Of course she will be the last person in the world to acknowledge it, but mark my words: she regrets a thousand times the step she has taken. I do not say she will repent of her action to the extent of coming back to you. She is not that

kind. But I do say she has learned her lesson and that life looms before her, a huge failure."

"It's very cruel—cruel and dreadful to have to go on like this," cried Colman, like one devoid of all hope.

"There is nothing else you can do—is there? Either of you don't want to forget, it seems."

"Would you have us forget? You don't mean that!"

"Not unless you can devise some means of improving the present impossible situation. Of course you can hope—and pray. But she is no longer free."

They were silent for a while. At length Bert, clearing his throat with a slight cough, began:

"She would not come back if she could. Position in life matters most with her. She always liked grandeur and I was incapable of supplying it——"

"You were unequally mated from the start," the doctor replied. "Did that ever strike you before? I mean this: she was a college girl and was proud of the distinction it conferred upon her. She had entree to fine circles, she boasted of her privileges. You were a self-made man, and were forbidden the rights and privileges of her set. Right away there was an inharmonious note. It penetrated your lives and saddened the melodies that were to issue from your home. A woman must have a man she can look up to, for she does not want to assume the position as head of a house. College women do not make the happiest of wives unless they marry men who are their intellectual peers. They have learned too much for their own personal happiness and for the welfare of their home."

"That may be true to some extent," Bert confessed,

“but therein lies not the whole blame. It is the individual after all, that counts; not the system. We couldn't get along, that was all. Our tastes differed. Our purposes varied. I was too wrapped up in my work to make any sacrifices for her and it was only natural for her to long for the time when she might be free to come and go as she pleased.”

“To be free! That's the point. The modern woman wants to be free. She is unwilling to make the sacrifices of the mothers of the past. To-day, children are a nuisance. They hamper the freedom of the mother. They require the best years of her life to bear them and bring them up. They keep her at home day and night. Young girls are unwilling to marry nowadays. They want to enjoy life first, they will tell you. Then they are willing to take a chance and settle down. Wives do not want children unless they are relieved of the care of them. When they go away, they are unwilling to take the children with them. Isn't this true? Isn't everybody doing it?”

“What is this—an indictment of American family life?”

“God knows I didn't mean to preach, but you led me into it. It is true, and the system of philosophy taught in our colleges is somewhat responsible for these irreligious, illiberal, and irresponsible ideas so prevalent. We are being taught that we are living in a godless world. One of my professors always devoted his opening lecture to the thesis that there was no God.”

“People will call you old-fashioned and narrow-minded. You are a fanatic.”

“Read the text-books. Read the literature that America is devouring. Do you find any mention of God, or of morality, or abstemious conduct? There is your sex-school, and your radical school and the pessimistic school, with the sexual and unclean side of life portrayed to the limit. Read the books! You don't have to argue with me.”

“What about the motion pictures?”

“Yes, go to the movies; they will show you how it's done.”

Colman left Shefford that evening for Washington. He was weary and depressed. It was no ordinary event to be forced to meet one's own wife, who happened also to be the second and legal wife of another man. He was not quite himself for the rest of the day, and try as he would he could not pull himself together. Nothing could convince him that she was wholly happy. She seemed to him to be living in a shattered fool's paradise, sad and wistful, and full of thoughts she wanted to give utterance to but dared not.

He was visibly disturbed, too, over the condition of his child, Babs, who did not seem to be getting along as favorably as she might be expected to. It was feared that a form of meningitis had set in, but the symptoms were as yet only partly pronounced. The typhoid was beginning to clear up, it was true, but the intermittent fever had remained and she grew more and more restless. Worst of all, she had fallen into a stupor.

That night he stopped over in New York and the next morning he made a call on Dr. Lynch, an eminent

psychiatrist, for the purpose of engaging him for a consultation. The specialist took a very sanguine view of the case as described to him, and assured him that such cases were not altogether unusual. The comatose state would prove to be only a temporary derangement which would adjust itself as soon as the inflammation had subsided, while the meningitis was a concomitant condition and would have to be treated separately. He agreed to go to Shefford and hold a consultation with Dr. Dahill Friday morning, which fact Colman wired home before he left the city.

Arriving at his office in the House Building he plunged at once into the mass of correspondence that had accumulated since his departure. It was absorbing, this business of watching out for the interests of his constituents, and gratifying; but somehow or other he could not get interested. He threw down the bundle of letters, and strode about the office humming a tune. The paper caught his eye and he picked it up, but cast it aside again after a few minutes. At length he bade his secretary call Mr. Morrison's office to inquire for him, and, having received the reply that he was there, he left the office and hurried over to him.

"Leo, how do you stand in your State?" he asked.

"I own it," came back the ready reply.

"Good enough! Come, I want to get you interested in a project." And then he unfolded the scheme he had in mind.

It was, in brief, to establish throughout the country an Inter-State Bureau for remedial legislation in the matter of marriage and divorce. Since Congress had

refused to interfere with the rights of the several States in this respect, on the ground that their respective legislatures were supreme within their own borders for enacting proper legislation in this matter, he proposed, with the help of the most influential men he could command, to establish Bureaus in each of the several States for the purpose of bringing before the various State legislatures the desired legislation. In this way the country at large would be subject to a national divorce law operating through the agency of the forty-eight individual States.

“What do you want me to do? Open a matrimonial bureau?”

“Exactly!”

“Fine chance! I’m not a parson.”

“That isn’t the point. The Bureau will suggest to the Legislature the advisability of a law prohibiting absolute divorce in that State. You won’t have to do much work. Let them use your name, that is all. Surround yourself with clever men; enlist the support of every Church Society, Women’s Club, Christian Union and Welfare Organization you can find in defense of the work, play on the sentiment of the people through paid advertisements; talk to the leaders of the two parties.”

“Say! Who is going to pay all the bills?”

“Contributions! Take up a collection every time you talk.”

“That’s a good scheme! Take up a collection! Oy!”

Almost any one in Congress, Colman reflected, knew more about this business than he did; he only wanted

to supply the thought, the responsibility for the movement. Morrison could do more in a day with work of this kind than he could do in months. But he was a man of eccentric humors—you had to get him in the right mood to do anything with him. Bert only wanted to interest him just now; later when he had more time and was less weary and depressed, he hoped to discuss with him at length the outlines of the project.

He returned to his own office and threw himself into a chair thinking of home, of Edith, of Bab, of Dr. Lynch. Finally he picked up his paper again and began to scan the headlines. The following item caught his glance.

“Henry Liggett, a retired broker, suffered a stroke of apoplexy at his home to-day—East 61st St. His condition is considered grave by the attending physicians, due to his advanced years.”

He read no more for the moment. Henry Liggett! The Liggetts! Betty! It suddenly dawned on him who this was.

Henry Liggett!

XXIV

EVELYN WHEATON sat in the seclusion of her room, her own cozy little bedroom, done in mauve and gray, which she had had made over for her own use on the upper floor, and listened to Edith's confession. There could be no concealments between them, for neither had ever preserved any secrets from the other as long as they had lived together. Evelyn understood Edith with a sisterly appreciation, and had a tender compassion for her. As she heard her now, her eyes swam with tears, and in the empty silence of the room she grew pensive and sympathetic. Finally she leaned forward to lay her hand assuringly on Edith's arm and said to her with cordial feeling:

"You are not like the rest of us, so do just as your conscience tells you, my dear. You know I am going to miss you terribly, but I shall never stand in your way."

"I don't know what to do," Edith sobbed. "It frightens me——"

"But you cannot be happy——"

She shook her head, sadly.

"If you cannot feel at home with Kelso as your husband and us as your dearest friends, then all this is a sham, a huge hypocrisy."

"You have been so good to me—that is why this

thought of going away overwhelms me. It isn't that I don't want to stay. The temptation is stronger than the virtue of doing what is right. But I can't, I can't. Kelso is not my husband and never can be as long as Bert Colman lives."

There was another interval of silence. Evelyn was lost for something to say. She was well aware that she had never favored divorce in the first place, but on account of her love for Edith had made generous allowances to cover the crime. She had never reckoned with events taking this turn.

"Of course you must do as you think best," she said now. "Have you thought of the shock it will cause?"

"I have thought of that. It almost deters me."

"The people——"

"I know it. The papers will glory in it."

"It will anger Kelso. He would not have it happen for the world."

"On the other hand, did he stop to think of that when he brought me here? The papers had it then. They printed Bert's picture, and it was just after election. But neither of us seemed to mind it. No one thought of him, and what he had to go through. Of course they put the blame on me. They branded me a deserter, an adulteress, and told of my infidelity and heartless treatment of my child. They will blame me now, I suppose, for her illness."

"Don't say that——"

"It is true. I am not ashamed of it. Society urged me on to a place of eminence and then suddenly flew into a rage with me. It has taught me a lesson, a bitter

lesson. No one can hope to trample on conventions and escape the penalties. The wage of sin is death."

"Kelso will feel it keenly," Evelyn echoed, her blank eyes still fastened on the drooping form. "Have you told him?"

"Not yet. I don't know how I am going to do it."

"He suspects you are unhappy——?"

"Do you think he does? What has he said?"

"Nothing—to me. But I think he is worried. He will never let you go."

"He cannot stop me," said Edith, steadily. "He can divorce me, but he cannot force me to return."

"You say that because it is the easiest thing to say at this moment."

"It would be better, wouldn't it?"

"Better?"

"For both of us. He could marry again."

"And you?"

"Oh, there is nothing for me."

She looked away wistfully, clasping and unclasping her hands on her lap, out through the windows into the garden beyond. Her future was before her with the trees and the flowers, an uncertain and intangible reality, with nothing definite to hope for or cling to. Only the world, the wide, boundless world—and that was all.

"I wonder if you would be able to return to your first husband!" Evelyn murmured.

"He would not take me back. He could not. I've met him. He was wonderfully sympathetic, interest-

ing, attentive, but he could never trust me again. You could not blame him."

"Still, if you were free——!"

"Free! Ah, what meaning is bound up with that term! Free, from what! Not from the tortures of the soul which matter most! If it were only possible to get away from self, from this serpent that gnaws me, that sends his poison throughout my body and soul. For me no surcease is possible except in death—except in death. And I must make adequate amends before I die. Adequate amends."

She repeated the last words. Evelyn's question, "Won't you remain in Shefford?" aroused her.

"Never!" she replied. "I couldn't face those people again. They scorn me now, and I detest them! No, I shall hide myself where no one shall ever find me."

"But how can you live—alone—penniless——?"

"I shall work."

"Is that necessary? Kelso, I am sure, will see that you are amply provided for——"

"No! No! I would not want that. The clothes that I shall wear, but no money—nothing. I could not in conscience. It would be the same as staying."

These words, uttered calmly, rang in Evelyn's ears and added to her discomfort. It seemed to her that her very love for her sister-in-law and her efforts to preserve an unruffled domesticity were to turn to evil. The Wheaton name had already been tarnished by one matrimonial tangle, and it hurt her pride to have to let the public know that the venture had turned out a sorry one. On the other hand she could not fail to

admire Edith's belief in her convictions. If her ideas concerning matrimony were different from theirs it would be unjust to compel her to live the life of a hypocrite the rest of her days. If she were blameworthy at all it was for perpetrating the wrong in the first place.

"Have you thought of your child? What will you do with her?" she asked.

A faint cry escaped Edith's lips, but she suppressed the emotion and wiped the tears from her eyes.

"If God would only take her!" she breathed, and lapsed into meditation again.

"You can't very well go away and leave her. Stay here until she recovers. It is the right thing to do."

"Yes, I know—I have thought of that. But a good end cannot possibly justify a bad means."

"You have others to consider——"

"I have considered everything. I am doing what I hope is for the best."

For the hundredth time that month Edith turned over in her mind this problem. Why did she not feel more keenly the crisis of the tragedy through which she was passing? The change of heart that had overtaken her as a result of the mental struggle was not, as she first surmised, a sudden transformation made by sorrow, but a process of gradual evolution begun over six months before. All unknown to her pleasant, easy-going nature there had lain within her germs of courage, self-sacrifice and honesty that suffering and meditation only now awakened into active life. It was not the metamorphosis that was sudden, but the apprehen-

sion of it. There had been no planning or consideration of the nature or the effect of circumstances. It was only after events had taken place that she recognized the value of them and found herself a new woman. Fresh faults that she never recognized before came to light, fresh powers were perceived, and a fresh change of sentiment occurred to give her a new world to occupy her thoughts and afford her a new and strange pleasure.

A wealth of self-revelation that truly startled her had come through her first husband. It occurred during the interview in the doctor's office, when a blinding light, like a flash of lightning, penetrated the fog of self-deception with sufficient brilliancy to reveal the discontent, bitterness, and lavish selfishness of which she was composed. Silently but eloquently his presence rebuked her. She felt what she should have been. In his dignity she saw only her own smallness, in his success her failure. His life was a prolonged act of suffering, combined with ceaseless work for others. His cross was bitter and his way strewn with thorns, but he never despaired. He bestowed a look of pity on her and gave her a pledge of his pardon and love, a magnanimity that was a judgment. She compared her life with his and it suffered by comparison. She came into his presence a coward and a weakling, but she left it self-revealed and self-condemned.

The conflict that loomed before her threatened to be ceaseless, a herculean struggle for moral greatness, but she prayed for strength to be enabled to rise above her arduous tasks and perilous tribulations and be the

slave of none. Her plan of campaign must be strategic. Certain thoughts which had become habitual must first be driven away. Comforts of life to which she had become accustomed must be renounced. She must leave her splendid home and escape into the unknown and unfriendly world. Here she foresaw difficulties and privations and poverty, but this was the goal for which she was aiming, and to the consummation of which she was ready to dedicate the remaining years of her life. She could not remain in Shefford. She could not return to her former home because of the mandates of the law. New York was the only haven of refuge, the city of opportunities and catastrophes, where she could be successfully swallowed up in the maelstrom of human currents, sucked beneath the waves of oblivion. To New York then she would go and bury her identity.

Westlawn held no further charms for her. It was but a mausoleum, a chamber of pale ghosts and dreams, perfect in taste and culture, complete in its collection of curtains patterned with flowers and forms, tapestry furniture, mahogany chairs, pictures covering the walls—but exceedingly dull of atmosphere and spirit. Not even Evelyn, with her show of comprehension and sympathy could command sufficient interest. Kelso was a hindrance, rather than a help. When she came downstairs, as she did with Evelyn some few minutes later, and found him sorrowing over the death of his pet Airedale she could not feel sorry for him. She regretted the loss of the dog, but she could not bring herself to share his owner's emotion.

Nestor, it appeared, had wandered out into the high-

way and had been struck by a passing automobile. Charles had found the body tossed to one side of the road and, bringing it in, summoned the master. It was pitiable to behold Kelso standing over the remains of his pet, his eyes dim. He passed his hands along the inert, warm bulk, and upbraided the chauffeur for permitting him to escape from the premises. He rebuked him savagely for failing to obtain the number of the car that had killed him. With a pathetic gaze he stared in silence at the poor dead animal. He stood so for several seconds, oblivious of all about him, reflecting on the loss of his friend. Suddenly he turned and walked away, but stopped in his tracks to address a word to his man:

“We’ll have to bury him. Wait! I’ll bury him myself. Take him around to the back! We’ll put him in a box and bury him in the garden.”

They laid him in a corner of the garden in the shade of an umbrella tree. Charles supplied the box which Evelyn hastily lined with a piece of satin torn from an old dress and Kelso dug the hole and laid the remains in place himself, covering them carefully with dirt and replacing the sod in the form of a mound. The whole ceremony was observed with the greatest solemnity, no one breathing a word until its conclusion. Finally Kelso said:

“I suppose that will be the end of us all. Dust to dust, with only a mound of earth for a memorial. Life is a strange riddle. You are here to-day and imprisoned in the bowels of the earth to-morrow. And there’s the end of you.”

"Except for one's soul," Edith reminded him.

"Had this dog a soul?"

"A vital principle, perhaps. No spiritual soul."

"Where is it?"

"It ceased to function when he died. Just as the soul of the tree when it dies, the soul of the animal."

"But our soul lives on? It is different, then."

He shook his head.

That same night Edith broached to him the matter of her going, telling him with much feeling how greatly she regretted this painful duty, impressing upon him with all the force at her command the necessity of separation as the only possible relief for her miserable condition. He listened to her, at first too surprised to reply, but before she had quite finished his mood changed, and he grew agitated. His puffed eyes bulged as if they were being forced from their sockets, his flabby jaw dropped, and his face turned scarlet from the furious emotion that surged within him. Frightened she drew away, and went to the other side of the table.

"Are you mad? Who ever heard of such a thing?"

"I mean it, Kelso. It is the only thing," she pleaded with all her soul.

"Do you suppose the law will permit you to come in and go off whenever you like?"

"Lots of people do it——"

"Lots of people don't do it. What nonsense! My word, you've lost all your self-respect."

"I can't help it. I must do something. I can't stay here any longer," she muttered.

"Somebody has been poisoning your mind, priming you for mischief——"

"No, Kelso; that is untrue."

"What ails you, anyway? Haven't you everything you want? Of course, if it hurts you to look at me—well—take a room upstairs, all by yourself. Pretend you are my wife, at any rate. I'll never bother you——"

"I couldn't do that. That would be dishonest to both of us. The plain fact is this: I can't feel married to you at all. There was no divorce. We have been living in adultery all the while."

"Adultery! Who said that?"

"It is the truth. No power on earth is able to dissolve marriage. It may grant separation, but not divorce. I am Bert Colman's wife."

"Nice time to be telling me so. Why didn't you say that a year ago?"

"I should have known better; the sin is on my shoulders. You are not to blame."

Her hands had dropped to the table, and she stood with lowered eyes, nervously running her forefinger around the edges of a book.

"Well, I'd like to say this to you. I sympathize with you, but I am placed in very considerable embarrassment myself. The question is whether we are married or not. If we are, you are sworn to obey me and I forbid you to leave this house; if we are not—well, it strikes me as pretty queer, your living with me for the past year——"

"It was wrong—wrong. You see I could not marry you because I still am the wife of another."

"Hell! You were divorced from him——"

"There is no divorce, absolutely speaking. Marriage is a sacrament, not a mere civil contract. The State has no jurisdiction over the Sacraments."

Her eyes darkened; she expected an indignant rejoinder. But he turned with a sigh, and sought a chair. She eyed him furtively until he was ready to speak.

"That's your way of looking at it—but where do I come in? If everybody thought as you do there would be a fine mess, wouldn't there! I have a right to my point of view, and I want to tell you that my way of thinking is shared by everybody else in the world, except yourself. If we could not marry legally do you suppose the law would stand aside and let us live together as we have been living? You're out of your mind. You're insanely jealous, if you want to know it."

"No, Kelso; it is not that," she replied dispassionately. "Jealousy does not enter into this at all. I am honest when I say that. Neither do I mind what you do, for you don't mean anything to me. You are not my husband, and never have been."

"What?" he cried, starting from his chair. "Not your husband! What have I been then——"

"Please!" she remonstrated. "Don't say it. But you do understand, don't you? If you only knew how I have suffered, morning and night, in mind and body, with remorse for the past. A thousand times have I wished to undo what was done, so as to escape it all. But there is no escape except in death. If I thought

there was no hereafter I would go on, cheerfully. But I can't! I can't! There is only one thing to do—I must leave.”

“Where will you go?”

“I don't know. There is no place for me to go. No one wants me.”

“Listen, woman, what will everybody think when they hear of this separation——?”

“I have never thought of others——”

“But I have. Every newspaper in the land will print the story. I shall be kept a prisoner in my own house. I simply cannot go out and face people.”

“You can divorce me——”

“Ha! So that is what you are looking for—to go back to him! I might have thought there was a nigger somewhere in the woodpile. But I shall spoil your little game. You won't get the chance to go back to him. You will have to be my wife whether you want to stay here or not and you will have to carry my name with you wherever you go. Understand! You belong to me in the eyes of the law, and the law has a long arm.”

Her eyes clung to him desperately, fearfully. The table stood between them, but neither made any show of moving.

“Please!” she pleaded. “I don't want to go back to him. He wouldn't take me back even if I wanted him to. It is peace I want, and contentment. I was only thinking of you when I suggested divorce.”

“You are kind and thoughtful, aren't you! But you are not nearly so clever as you think. What made you sore was my refusing to let you bring that kid here.

I know you have been running up to that place every chance you got. Your interest was centered there more than here. I saw this coming for a long time. That rumpus you raised with Mrs. Liggett was part of the game and I saw through it at once. Well, I want to tell you that you have fooled nobody but your own self. Take a sleep and get over this grouch. You will feel better in the morning; and make up your mind then that you are going to stay right here. I really cannot afford to let you go. Later we may get together and agree upon some sort of separation. You can bring suit against me in the proper way. But this idea of running out in the street like a thief is ridiculous. And furthermore, you mind your own damned business around here and let my guests alone. If I choose to go out with any of them that is entirely my affair. If I want you to come I'll tell you. I'm capable of managing my own affairs."

She did not wait to hear more, but turned and left him. He made no attempt to follow her and she went straight upstairs to Evelyn's room where she told her all. It grew increasingly clear to both of them that his interference must be thwarted. Evelyn promised to discourage him from further intervention, and gave her word to do all in her power to assist her in her departure. Edith was not prepared to accept so generous an overture of sympathy from her sister-in-law, but Evelyn hurried her into her own room and bade her make her final adjustments that night before retiring. Edith turned away with a heavy heart, and spent the next two hours destroying old letters, writing out

checks in payment of her accounts, fixing her affairs, clothes, books, and personal property in order. It was late when she put out the light and went to bed, but the last night of her career in Westlawn passed painfully slow. She lay awake and worried about the morrow and its mysterious contingencies.

--

XXV

THE following morning Edith took advantage of Kelso's early departure for Shefford to effect her escape from the portals of Westlawn. It was his custom to drive into town every Wednesday morning to confer with his agents on matters that pertained to his real and personal holdings. Not that she feared him in the least, for she knew that he would never stand in the way of her going once he was convinced of her determination, but she thought it best to follow the line of least resistance and depart quietly while he was absent.

It was a solemn parting that took place in the tiny, marble vestibule, with Evelyn and Doris shedding most of the tears. Edith, too, was sad at heart, but she resisted obdurately every show of distress. She was pained with the thought that it was her own hand which was stabbing them so cruelly, but she derived strength from the consciousness that she was doing what was right, and no amount of poignant regret for present discomfort could alter or deter her from performing it. Sovereign atonement for the past, love for her child steeled her to abide by her decision, and she took her leave as though she were setting off on a pleasant journey.

What would Kelso do when he returned and found

her gone? This thought crept into her mind and occupied it. Was this her return for his generous devotion—this the end of days of affectionate intercourse and gay amusement? He was impetuous enough to be surprised into revenge, but Evelyn had told her not to fear. His was a whimsical nature and in a few weeks she would be allowed to slip from his memory as readily as he had permitted her to suffer in the past from his lack of attention. With Henry Liggett out of the way it might prove very convenient for both of them to find cause for divorce. But Henry Liggett was not dead and there was no telling: he might repent of his hasty show of temper and succeed in persuading her to return to him. As she hurried down the winding path it was with the hope that she would never have to retrace her steps. She wanted to leave the splendid home and all that it signified as completely as if it never had been.

She boarded a trolley-car. It was the first time she had ever left West Shefford in a trolley-car. She went straight to the hospital and found that Babs was resting comfortably. She was seemingly brighter, as if the malignant forces of disease had yielded to scientific treatment. A fervor glowed in the whole aspect of the mother as she stood at the bedside and beamed upon her convalescing child. Her rapture was visible. She looked into the beautiful eyes of her beloved with a glance that was at once fond and sad. There seemed to exude from the bedside a fragrance, rich and delightful, for it was evident the fever had run its course. Edith felt no more doubt or fear. She wanted to take her child and crush it in her arms, but dared not.

"Babs, dear," she said, "you are better?"

"Yes, mother."

"Thank God! You don't feel sick—at all?"

"No, mother."

"Did the doctor say you would soon go home?"

"I don't know, mother."

The tinge of despair that had colored Edith's manner upon her entrance, vanished; she became gay, and appeared to derive sweet refreshment from her visit. She talked about things as simple as the daylight, of the summer clouds, and asked Babs repeated questions about her pains and aches, how good the doctor was to her, how she liked her nurse, her room, the hospital. Within a week, she conjectured, the patient would be discharged and returned to the Academy and it was with this consoled feeling that she eventually took her departure. Then she did a rash thing. Bending over she took Babs in her arms and kissed her fervently, passionately on cheeks and lips, unmindful of the fact that she herself was courting danger by that very heedless act. When she did take her leave it was with indefinable reluctance, like one who had caught a first glimpse of sunlight, and wondered at the reflections of earth and sky which were suddenly flung upon her vision.

At first she thought of going direct to Dr. Dahill's to learn something definite of Babs' case, but to a person circumstanced as she was now, any indiscreet action would render her situation extremely perilous. He would be sure to extract from her information she was loath to part with, and she could not very well misrep-

resent facts with a free and easy conscience. For the success of her plan secrecy was essential. It would never do to encounter anybody just at present, when her powers of decision were likely to be formed one way or the other.

She, therefore, decided to leave Shefford as soon as possible. She feared the city, and because she feared it she despised it. It was an apathetic town, neither ancient nor modern, but curiously situated midway between the provincial and the metropolitan stage. It had its skyscrapers and its one-way streets, its aviation fields and its district school system. But outsiders admired it and this made its people arrogant. They continually maintained its dignity, resisted the invasion of extremists and ultra-liberals, combated territorial expansion, and affected an air of intellectual self-sufficiency.

A six hours' ride brought her to New York. It was late afternoon and a mist of brightness floated over the city like a back stage curtain done in silver and lace. Tall buildings loomed ahead, tracing regular outlines against this scintillating background, their vast façades glimmering with squares of light as if their hearts had caught fire and were blazing out of the windows. This was the city of her dreams, elusive in its charms, tenacious in its grandeur, the true and only heaven for those who, chained down by the weight of circumstances, never hope to leave it, the cavern of moral turpitude for others who have bargained their souls with Prince Beelzebub for the innumerable messes of pottage served within its borders. The train plunged be-

neath the surface into the very bowels of this city of stone and Edith experienced a foolish palpitation of the heart at the thought of the earth and rocks above her head. She longed for the surging traffic, the crowded streets, the grinding noises. She wanted to be free and to be alone, as if loneliness would prove to be the nepenthe for her sorrows.

Job hunting was a fresh experience for Edith, but she was sure there would be no great difficulty in obtaining a place commensurate with her capabilities and ideals. After all, she was better equipped than thousands of other women who had made similar journeys to the city in search of careers. She had her college degree to warrant her ability to perform the duties of a book-keeper or private secretary in one of the downtown offices. Such a position would afford her the income she needed to enable her to live decently and with comfort.

The next morning her way led down the broad street famous for its midnight revels and notorious places of amusement, to that more famed square where relaxation from trade and traffic is never known. Tall buildings raised their gray heads aloft and stared at her offensively. Merchandise, attractively displayed in innumerable shop windows along the avenue, caught her eye, but not her fancy. At certain intervals narrow doorways interrupted the procession of windows with brilliant brass signs calling her attention to the location of countless business offices sequestered on the upper floors, but she passed them by. On a far corner a pretentious banking establishment with extensive windows

sheltering the front and side attracted her and she hurried her steps. Passing courageously through the revolving doors she entered and went straight to the office.

"May I speak with the treasurer?" she inquired crisply.

"Yes," a thick set man with heavy black hair and a square protruding jaw replied as he turned on his swivel-chair to face her. "What can I do for you?"

"I am Mrs. Colman," she said, faltering for the first time. "I am seeking employment——"

"Sorry, madam, but there is nothing I can do for you."

That was all. Dejected, she turned and retraced her steps. It dawned upon her that it might not be the easy matter she supposed to procure just what she wanted in a city where there were thousands of applicants like herself for every job, and where personal associations entered mostly into the transaction. Therein lay the difference between getting a trial and a refusal. But she was not disheartened. All she hoped for was the start; she was confident of the future.

She turned aside at the next corner and came to a doorway where hung a sign "Help Wanted." She paused to consider, and going inside took the elevator to the twelfth floor where was a large waist house. A sleek young man stood before her as she entered and greeted her pleasantly.

"I have come to seek employment," she said.

"Yes! Your name, please?"

"Mrs. Colman."

"What have you done in this line, Mrs. Colman?" he inquired in a matter-of-fact tone.

"You mean—where have I worked before?"

"Exactly! Have you any references?"

"None! You see I have just come to New York to find work. I am a widow."

"We can put you to work on the machines. You would have to learn, of course, for two weeks without pay——"

"Is there no office work——"

He shook his head."

"Is that all?"

"It is machine hands we want to-day."

She thanked him and departed.

Already the fresh elasticity of her spirits began to weary, and the future looked perplexing. It was evident that it was not a question of "What can you do?" but "What have you done?" that mattered. Influence and personal connection were superior to personality and ability in obtaining positions. Of what significance was intellectual power and capacity for achievement to minds that knew nothing but the artificial system of which business was built? It was implied in every doorway and each brick of the houses. Scores of pale-cheeked, slender girls passed her, disturbing her thoughts with the multiplicity of their short, dry laughs. Shopgirls, no doubt, or seamstresses lately emerged from such lofts as she had just left! Their very expressionless faces indicated their abject servitude and want of personality, as if they had been drawn, all their lives, away from human contacts and normal associa-

tions. She watched them as they crowded into one of the restaurants on the avenue for their midday lunch, which reminded her that she had better imitate their example. Instinctively she followed them.

She crept into a corner and selected a table where sat a pretty, whitehaired woman. She came face to face with her as she pulled back the chair and caught the sparkle of her eye. She saw her own self twenty years hence in the form of this neighbor, staring fixedly into the past, a forced calm written on her face, a valiant sparkle in her eye. She smiled at her and bowed. It would be wonderful to be enabled to talk to one that looked so equally lonely.

"Pardon me!" Edith politely inquired, "but are you familiar with New York?"

An amiable smile stole over that calm face which made Edith's heart beat wildly for joy. "I guess I am," came the response. "I have been living here for over thirty years."

"Is it hard to get used to—at first? I 'don't seem to know just what to do——"

"How long have you been here?"

"Since last night. I came looking for work."

"Did you find any?"

"No. I guess it is not so easy to land the kind of a job I want. I should prefer office work."

"There should be plenty of that kind available if you knew just where to go. Where are you living?"

"At a hotel at present, but I intend to select a nice furnished room as soon as I get work. I have searched

all morning without success, and have come to the conclusion that influence counts a great deal."

"That is true. Then you have to preserve the fiction that you are fairly independent. You may not obtain what you want at first, and may have to take what you can get until your turn comes. It may mean but a few dollars a week and living in close quarters, but after a while you will get accustomed to it and you won't live anywhere else. The city will have swallowed you whole and entire."

"I don't think I should mind where I went to live, providing it was respectable, nor should I care how hard I had to work. But I must begin, and once I have begun I shall rise above the ordinary."

The frail, white-haired woman looked at her with a steady, fixed gaze for several seconds that seemed to Edith like hours. Twice she dropped her eyes to look at the knife she was idly turning over and over beside her plate. Then she said slowly:

"I don't know who you are, but you look all right. I have a room that I usually share with some one else. My room-mate has left the city. Would you care to come and live with me?"

Edith, too, felt apprehensive about entrusting herself to an absolute stranger, but this woman looked so lonely and her eyes were so frank and honest that her heart went out to her.

"But—I don't know you," she faltered.

"You can trust me. My name is LaField. My husband has been dead for more than eleven years. I live

on Thirty-seventh Street. You can try it, and if you don't like it you can leave whenever you wish."

"That would please me, I am sure. And I think we will have much in common. But I must first procure employment."

"Jobs are not difficult to get in New York if you know how to get them. But they are suspicious of you when you are alone and friendless. Let some one speak for you and the rest is easy. If you like I shall ask for you in my department. The pay is not much, but it will be something until you succeed in bettering yourself. Besides, it will furnish you with a reference, and that is the first requisite. You haven't any references, have you?"

Edith acknowledged that she had none.

"Well, I shall do my best for you. In the meantime you might continue to look around for yourself. Meet me here to-night at six o'clock. What is your name?"

"Colman. Mrs. Colman."

"You are a widow, too!"

Edith dropped her head, by which she understood that the other would inevitably draw her own conclusion. When they parted later it was with a feeling of intimate familiarity such as comes to those who, for want of living in human households with genuine human beings, have never truly appreciated the fragrance of true friendship until the perfume of its breath had floated into their lives.

Edith experienced no pronounced reaction against the program of life outlined for her by her practical confidante—department store employment, penurious

habits of economy, poky rooming quarters. On the contrary she welcomed the comfortless prospect with an enthusiasm seldom displayed. She would prove to herself and the world that she could do things worth while. Out in the sunny street she strolled along musingly, totally oblivious of the warmth of the afternoon, regardless of the bustle of the busy thoroughfare, the crowds of pushing pedestrians walking about her, over her in their mad endeavor to get on their hurried way. New York was still her fairy land, with its romances of big jobs and prosperous situations waiting just around the corners. She thrilled with a sensation of profound emotion, full of joy and exultation, as she glanced up at the burnished domes and purple pinnacles of the beautiful buildings, and wondered what success and fortune awaited her behind those stout walls.

From the chimes nearby there came the melody of an hour which caused her to turn her head in response to the sweet call. A pretentious structure of rough granite confronted her. It was the home of a great insurance company, and housed thousands of workers beneath its spacious roof. She decided to make application.

“What have you done?” followed her question.

“I have never worked before,” she confided to the little brisk man, who scarcely raised his eyes to her.

“Hm!” he commented, poring over the many papers that lay in disorder on the desk. “And what do you expect us to do for you?”

“Well,” she said, summoning all her courage, “I

have had a good education. I have earned an A.B. and I can write a good hand."

"Know anything about bookkeeping?"

"No; but I am sure I could pick it up easily——"

"Stenography?"

She shook her head.

"Have you any references?"

"I can get them if you think it necessary——"

"Sorry. There is nothing here for you——"

"Could you not give me a trial——?"

He shook his head negatively. She withdrew.

A violent shower came up and caught her unprepared. It so happened that she was passing a church at the time and it invited her inside to escape the inevitable wetting. No sooner, however, had she crossed the threshold, than she realized that she was at home. Everything looked so familiar, the altars, the statues, the windows. Kneeling, she tried to pray, but the words would not come. The depressing thought forced itself upon her that she was unworthy, that her sin still hung heavy upon her, that her soul was shrouded in a garment of the darkest hue, and she would not be heard. An inspiration came to her. Her duty was quite clear. She must unburden her mind, confess her past, obtain divine sanction for her purpose of amendment. Now, of all times, she needed God's mercy—but how could she expect God to be merciful to her unless she made a direct appeal to Him! Seek and you shall find. Rising from the pew she braved the fury of the storm and sought the rectory. In ten minutes

she was back again in the church, kneeling in the confessional.

Prayer was no longer difficult; it never is when the soul is in harmony with its Maker. Heretofore she had been viewing the tapestry of life from the wrong side, because her contrition wanted earnestness to make it wholesome and salutary, and she saw only the grotesque and distorted images of her own abnormal creation. But now the process was reversed. She no longer shrank from sorrow and calamity. She distrusted herself, and did not hope for success through her own powers. She committed everything to Divine Providence. A world of content opened before her; she was satisfied. Prosperity could not elevate nor adversity depress her. Her very weakness became her greatest source of strength, enabling her to rise above her irresolute nature and prepare for better things.

When she took up her abode that night with her friendless companion, she was surprised to learn how cheerfully she entered into it. The severe, white beds, the chair or two resting against the sides of the room, the plain marble-topped table with the gas-lamp upon it, the old fashioned dressers, were like phantoms, colorless, indeed, but of more enduring reality and substantial solidity than the objects of latest fashion and design she had turned her back upon. Mrs. LaField proved to be a delightful room-mate. At the sight of her pretty smile and looks Edith's apathy was melted. She removed her hat and laid it on the bed, not sorry she had no books to turn to, or no piano with which to relax her mind and drive away dull care. It was going

to be splendid, this living together, and the two seemed so congenial that their very laughter had a note of kindness.

"I hope you will soon get accustomed to this," said Mrs. LaField. "It does seem strange at first——"

"But I am going to like it," Edith protested. "And I know we are going to be perfectly happy!"

"Did you find work?"

"No. But I am not discouraged——"

"Would you care to begin to-morrow?"

"To-morrow! Where?"

"With me. I found out to-day there was a place on our floor——"

"Do you know," Edith reminded her, "you haven't yet told me where you work."

"Mitchell's!"

"The Big Store?"

"Yes. I am on the sixth floor with the lamps. You will be on the hardware."

"Selling hardware!"

"It isn't hard. In the meantime you can look around."

Selling hardware! Was it for this she had given up home and comfort, all her happiness?

XXVI

THAT it should come to this—a clerk in Mitchell's Store! It was to her wonted habitude as a dainty flower to the Sahara! If this were a triumph over her earlier self she did not underrate it, but saw truly in the fancy-dispelling morn, the commencement of melancholy days that were to try her sorely with their long hours and constant service. Where were her vanity now, her vaulting ambitions, her arrogance, her conceit? Looking back on these months that had passed she saw how she had let foolish fancy and still more foolish hope mislead her. She was about to pay dearly for her misadventure. This was the reversal of that unnatural life, this the result of that inevitable dualism that bisects nature, where every excess has its defect, every sweet its sour, every evil its good.

She fancied that she appeared most self-conscious as she took her place behind the hardware counter to begin her duties. Everything assumed a strange appearance, the shelves, the fixtures, the extensive floor, but they failed to arouse her. She listened mechanically to the explanation of the process of salesmanship and yielded only part of her attention to the interpretation of the mystic symbols indicated on the sale check. Everything must be carefully dusted the first thing in

the morning, she was told; the various articles arranged in an orderly manner in their respective places, the stock replenished from the storeroom and early customers cared for. Little by little she became interested in these details, and she quickly mastered the methods of sale without being obliged to spend several tedious hours in apprenticeship. But her thoughts were far away, lingering over distant scenes, dwelling in comfort and with unmatched forms, sharing ten thousand purer joys that knew no equivalent, praising what was lost, and making the remembrances dear.

"You want to keep your shelves filled," one of her associates counseled her. "If you don't the 'head gink' will come around and call you."

"Yes, I will," Edith cheerfully acquiesced.

"And whatever you do, don't let a customer get away from you. Sell 'em something. Can you shoot a bunch of talk?"

Edith smiled and assured her she would do her best.

"And don't let any of them give you back talk. Some of these dames come in here and make you sick. They think you don't know nothing. But just spring a few wise things on them about the extra quality of the goods, and they won't even get you. They don't know what they are buying except the price. Show the best you have first. That makes 'em think it is the goods. And listen, cheery, don't charge nothing without calling the 'head gink.' He has to sign the check before it goes to the office. A lot of these birds come in here and try to open accounts. First thing you know you are called upstairs."

Edith thanked her for the friendly words, and set about to arrange her stock, piling screws into even portions in the several compartments; running her fingers over hinges, door knobs, padlocks, and arranging them neatly; replacing hammers, awls, screw-drivers, can-openers that had been thrown about during the previous day. For the time being she was absorbed in her work and busied herself in it. The amount of her weekly wage bothered her. She had been told to go to work without any stipulation as to wages.

“And say, you’d better pull the curtain on that fancy wrist-watch. They don’t allow no jewelry here.”

“Is that the rule?”

“Yes. They put it through last year. Some of these clerks used to come in mornings with more diamonds on them than the whole Vanderbilt family. It doesn’t look good to have a girl waiting on a customer richer-looking than the customer herself. That’s why they made us put on these uniforms. It helps the trade.”

Edith laid her slender hand on her wrist, looking down wistfully. Then she started to unclasp the strap that held the watch secure.

“Leave it alone now, cheery, but lose it before you come in to-morrow. They are pretty strict here on the help. You want to keep busy when ‘Humpy’ comes around. You don’t know ‘Humpy’ yet; he’s one of the firm. When you see him coming down the line start something. Fix the shelves—they always need fixing—or arrange the things on the counters. He likes to see you busy. If he catches you idle he will ask you if you have anything to do. They’re always scouting

around to cut down expenses somewhere, and usually start off by firing fifty or sixty girls."

Edith knew no reason why there should be any appeal from these restrictions, except that they interfered with one's personal liberty. To be compelled to make so complete a sacrifice of her individuality did not comfort her to any extent, but she consoled herself with the hope that time would alleviate the discomfort and render all things tolerable. How fast she was being swallowed up in the life of this great city! First she lost her identity when she came here and now she had lost her name. To her employer she was not Mrs. Colman, but Number H 142. Her own ideas and abilities counted for nothing. It was a gigantic wheel, that revolved slowly, in which she was a mere spoke. No one considered a spoke until it yielded and was sprung; they then pulled it out and replaced it with a sound one. Still she was obliged to endure this situation, for want of something more in keeping with her worth, and it was necessary for her to succeed in this lowly capacity before she could aspire to a greater.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" she addressed a customer who had approached her counter.

She was a crotchety old woman with a sour face and a piping voice. "Yes, I want some picture wire," she said.

Picture wire! Edith was sure she had picture wire. She had replaced some an hour ago, small, white paper boxes with a hole in the center to pull the wire out. Picture wire!

"Haven't you any?" the woman piped again.

"Yes, madam," Edith replied sweetly. "Just a minute, please!"

She found some, after a diligent search, down at the farther end of the counter, specimens of the latest manufacture in clearly stamped cartons.

"Down this way, please!" she said, inviting the lady to the other end of the department. She showed her several samples, much to the customer's dissatisfaction.

"I don't want that kind. Haven't you got the other kind? I want some thin wire, very thin, gold wire."

"Gold wire!"

"No, not gold wire! But of that color. What would I be doing with gold wire?"

Edith did not know what she would be doing with gold wire, nor was it her business to inquire, although she had half a mind to do so. She would have liked, also, to have asked her if she really knew what it was she did want. But there was no thin, gold wire on the counter, and she politely told her that they were all out of it at present.

"I guess you don't know much about this place yourself," the old lady cast back at her in her shrill voice. "There was some here the other day. It's a wonder they wouldn't put clerks here who knew how to wait on people!"

Presently the floorwalker approached, and inquired what it was the customer desired. Edith told him she was looking for gold picture wire.

"Not gold wire. I want that little, thin wire that you can't see. I got some here the other day."

"She means that fine, brass wire, back on the shelf. You want it for some light pictures, madam," he said.

"Yes, that's it. I knew you had some."

Edith filled the order and the customer withdrew. No sooner was she by herself than the floorwalker advanced to the counter, and said in a loud tone:

"You want to ask about these things before you give any decided answer. Look around and see what's here before you make any more sales. You came near losing her."

Ignominy added to indignity, still she did not murmur. Could not she who had been guilty of a thousand offenses bear this with patience and resignation? To be esteemed ignorant was no abasement, estranged as she was from all who knew her or cared about her. She was glad, in a way, to be taught the meaning of self-effacement. It was not without effort that she schooled herself to accept these humiliations, but they made her a prey to the deadlier fangs of remorse for the past. She fought for contentment, but it would not come. Her hands, soft and tender, drew back in disgust from the rough, heavy articles of her counter. Her ears, attuned to the purest of speech and accents, shuddered at the careless, coarse talk of her associates. Her spirit rebelled from contact with the strangers who now peopled her world. She consoled herself with the thought that she was marked out from the ordinary experience of mankind by the possession of a double nature, of a life within a life, and determined to make herself better acquainted with the objects and circum-

stances that surrounded her. This was the only enjoyment possible.

Twice during the day Mrs. LaField came, and imparted a cheerful word of encouragement to stimulate her waning enthusiasm. This helped considerably to make the time pass, still she thought the hour of six would never strike. When she reached home that night she was tired and wretched, for it had been a severe strain on her pampered body to be obliged to remain on her feet all day. If her flesh was weak, however, her spirit was indomitable, and she was resolute in her determination to conquer this inherent weakness and control her will. She bought a combination ticket upon the advice of her comrade, for it meant getting things a little cheaper at the restaurant where she had decided to take her meals.

She found Mrs. LaField interesting that night, and consoling, and she listened to the quiet, unobtrusive woman with her fine head of white hair, so maternal-looking. From her she tried to learn the lesson of heroic achievement, from the sad experiences that seemed wrapped up in that wasted life, and draw a moral for her future guidance, but the image was indefinitely vague. Each wanted to preserve the secrets of their imprisoned souls, and by no look or sign divulge their thoughts. Edith did not want this woman to know the terrible tragedy of her life, the tragedy of shattered schemes of domestic bliss, willfully brought to pass by herself. The despondent note that she struck had to do with the present situation; she was not aware that her sharp companion had already pene-

trated the veil of simulation she tried to wrap about her, and surmised a romance of failures and lost ideals.

"You little expected to find the world so severe a task-master," the mysterious gray angel declared. "It is not all romance."

"I don't mind the hardship," commented Edith, "if only I was doing something that I liked."

"There is no satisfaction that is constant and durable. There is a true and a false content. Do not think that peace and tranquillity consist in doing what we like. We are often deceived to our own misery."

"I suppose we can adapt ourselves to anything," Edith sighed as she dropped on the bed, and opened the newspaper.

"We cannot all hope to sit on the thrones of kings."

She sat, quiet and rather pale, not looking up at her gray angel at all, but gazing fixedly at the illustrations in the paper. Another deep sigh escaped her.

"I wonder if it pays!" she said.

"What?" questioned the other. The thought suddenly forced itself upon her that her young and dainty friend was despondent. It was farthest from her mind to disclose the secrets that had lain buried there for years, but it seemed good to her to share her story with this girl who seemed to imagine herself the most abandoned person in the world.

"Trying to do the right thing!" Edith responded.

"It does in the long run, you may be sure. I once thought as you do, but I prayed for perseverance. I thank God for it to-day."

There was a solemn vibration in her tone, accompa-

nied by an animated sparkle of the eyes. It made Edith long for her to continue, for she felt sure there was a mystery concealed in this life, a staunch spirit that refused to be crushed.

"I thought to-day would never end," Edith confessed sadly. "If I could have sat down for a few minutes I wouldn't have minded it so much. Doesn't it get monotonous, this same thing day after day?"

"Of course it does, but like everything else, you get used to it. I told you that you would soon get sucked into the current and lose consciousness of the fact that you were ever alive."

"I don't think I shall ever get used to it——"

"That's because you have had very little to contend with. You have had an easy time of it."

Edith sighed again and thought to herself, "If she only knew!" But she held her peace and pretended to be interested in an item in the paper.

"You don't suppose I found it easy when I began thirty years ago," her benevolent counselor went on.

"I suppose not!"

"I hadn't a friend in the world I could turn to, except my invalid mother whom I had to take care of as well as myself. Work wasn't plentiful in those days and you had to earn every dollar you got."

"But you were married——"

"Yes, I was married. That's the pitiful side of it. They say women are the source of all evil, but I have my doubts about that. Still, I am not ashamed of what I have done and I can truthfully say that I have

kept my head above reproach all my life. I have suffered, but never injured anybody."

"You know what hardship is, then——"

"Know? My dear, you may have borne crosses, everybody has, but you have not staggered under their burden. No one can know what misery is until they have drunk the cup to the bitter dregs, themselves, meanwhile, innocent and blameless. That's what makes it bitter, the knowledge that it is undeserved. You almost wonder why God has abandoned you, were it not for the consoling thought that He chastises those He loves."

She paused as if expecting an answer, but Edith made no sound and she continued with a remark:

"It was all over my mother. You see I couldn't part with her—there were only the two of us—and it was agreed that she should live with us. She was opposed to him from the start and knew, as soon as we had begun housekeeping, that she was on thin ice. Besides, she was crippled by a shock which made her helpless and matters worse. She was the occasion of all my troubles."

"Your husband didn't want her——"

"He despised her, it seemed, before a year had passed."

"The worst time of married life! The most perilous!"

"Yes, the most perilous! It takes a year to know each other. After that one thing or the other occurs."

"But what happened to your mother?" Edith asked, interested in the story.

"She stayed with me until she died."

"Then you won him over——"

Mrs. LaField compressed her lips.

"Not he! God forgive me for saying it, but he was the meanest man ever made. Positively! I actually think he was out of his head half the time. I couldn't tell you what he was like, but it seemed the devil himself obsessed him."

She paused for a long, quiet breath, and sat down beside Edith on the bed. The sweetness and mildness of her face was made pathetic by her downcast eyes.

"I'll admit I was crazy about him. There was something about him that appealed to me, I don't know what it was. Despite my mother's protest I married him, and we were not married quite a year when he began to find fault with her. He remonstrated against her presence in the house. He didn't marry me to support my whole family, he would say. Finally he demanded that she pay her board. Imagine, a poor cripple paying her board! We were using some of her furniture, but that made no appeal to him. Then he started to hold back his money on the claim that he was not obliged to pay her bills as well as his own. We fought over this. Oh, how we fought! Many a night he blackened my two eyes and I could not go out to work in the morning. I lost one job over it."

"Did you have to work, too?"

"You bet I did. He didn't earn enough. The panic came on that year, and work was very slack. We were months behind in the rent and threatened with eviction unless we paid something. We had to borrow

money on the furniture and, foolishly enough, I put my name with his on the back of the note. We never overcame that obligation, and it finally led to our separation."

"How long were you married?"

"Five years. He left home two or three times, but always came back when he got hungry. Finally, the break came. What did he do but contract for the sale of the furniture. He locked the door and put the keys in his pocket, and when I came home from work that day I could not get in. I called a policeman. That staggered him, but increased his rage. He was a proud fellow and liked to present a big front to the people. But the people knew him; they heard us fighting. But the policeman made him angry and he threatened to kill me."

"Did you have him arrested?"

"No! What good would it do? All I wanted was to get into my house. We had to break open the door. That night he brought the men for the furniture, my mother's furniture, everything——"

"What made you part with it——?"

"I had to. The note was due, and the furniture had been put up for security. We paid the bills and divided what was left. I remember getting thirty dollars. We parted then——"

"And you have not seen him since?"

"Once! At his mother's, where I had gone to find out what he intended doing. He came in while I was there, and ran after me and hit me."

"Hit you?"

"I'll never forget it. Two of my teeth were loosened in front. See, where the pivots are! After that I found it difficult to be generous. The tie between us was broken. I don't know that it was ever very close. It was an external thing. For a time I didn't care what happened to me, but I had my mother and couldn't abandon her. I got a nice room for the two of us and managed to earn enough to keep us alive. Poor thing! She hadn't much comfort in her old age and God was merciful when He took her."

"And you never married again?"

"Ha! Never again!"

Her eyes were fastened on Edith without any expression but that of mysterious immobility. Her face, however, appeared more sad and thoughtful than ever.

"But for all that," she continued, "I have never felt guilty. It is the only consolation I have. I have respected lawful conventions, and nobody can say that I have ever done him an injury. I have worked hard, and my conscience is clear. And I have enough faith in the hereafter, to know that I can face my Judge with perfect equanimity. There must be justice somewhere."

"Life seems to be a series of betrayals," Edith said wearily, as she had said once before. "There are so many kinds of them."

"I have learned that, but at my own expense. There is nothing like having a clean soul. I never knew myself until I had this chance to test my worthiness. I have known caprice, and it left me unharmed because I was steadfast enough not to be captured by it. I have known affliction, but it failed to crush me. There was

something in me that would not be worsted. I think I found it by finding myself."

That hour with Mrs. LaField altered Edith's whole perspective. A while ago her wrath and despair had been so fierce and overwhelming that she almost desired death to put an end to her misery. With the unfolding of that tale, however, there came influences too real to be lightly shaken off. How patiently this woman bore her burden! What religious calm pervaded that life and made her conform to the Will of God! How conscious she was of her innocence! Edith perceived a gulf yawning between them, which absolutely precluded her from even approaching within admiring distance of her. This woman was a veritable martyr; she a miserable coward.

As she reviewed her past she recognized with a guilty feeling the self-deception which had characterized it. She was pleased to term it unconscious, because it exonerated her from culpability. Before this penetrating light of introspection everything turned to dust. There was the tyrannizing influence her stubborn spirit had acquired over her. Unlike this woman of sorrow, whose soul had long been captive to anguish, her own life had never a purpose or an ambition outside of the gratification of its own personal desires. It was her arrogant opinions that had destroyed her home and shattered her hopes of domestic bliss. It was her refusal to honor the divisions between right and wrong, the honorable and the dishonorable, convention and license, that led to her ultimate undoing and complete disaster.

Now all was changed. If her life had heretofore been a ridiculous failure there was still time for reparation. She began to feel calm and comforted. Her bent form grew erect with conscious power. New standards were set up, which honesty to herself and loyalty to her convictions encouraged her to abide by. The hours would not be so long to-morrow nor the place behind the counter so undignified. That night she prayed. When she arose she felt as if she had drawn a magic circle around herself through which no indecision, impotence, or irresolution could possibly intrude.

XXVII

MORE than three months did Edith devote to the strict performance of duty, and they aged her considerably. Not that her actual distress up to the present time was afflictive, or even oppressive, but grief lay heavy within her and would not be assuaged. There was an immense gulf between Edith, the victim of poverty and straitened circumstances, and Edith, the cultured girl and pampered wife, sighing intently for them. It was no easy task to discipline a spoiled body to the rigorous requirements of a resolute will, and her petulant spirit naturally chafed under the compulsory restraint imposed upon it. But she never capitulated. Her weekly wage was no more than a mere pittance; she adapted herself to the limitation of pleasures and privileges which her voluntary servitude enjoined; she grew disgusted with the unpalatable fare which the restaurant offered, and the perfunctory performance of ordering the same menu week after week; nevertheless she bore herself wonderfully well and manifested no palpable signs of displeasure or irritation.

For she had made the sacrifice cheerfully; it was the greater and the more tolerable because no one knew the extent of it but herself. The precise details of her doleful tragedy she never divulged, not even in

exchange for that soulful confession of her sympathetic comrade. Necessity required her to give some reasonable pretext for being alone in a strange city, and she related the story of the Colman catastrophe, her marriage to Bert, the birth of their child, his manifest indifference to them because of his too sordid absorption in politics and the affairs of business, their persistent quarreling and subsequent divorce. The harrowing details of the Wheaton episode she kept to herself. She was ashamed of it, and wanted no one to know about it except herself and God.

She steadily refused one recreation after the other; the fervor of her self-denial was admirable. But the worst side of doing one's duty heroically and exclusively was that it unfitted one quite for doing anything else. Edith spent the hours evenly between her room and the store and seldom wandered far from the beaten path which joined these two abodes. Any other phase of life no longer attracted her. She avoided the theater, the fashionable dining-halls, the cabarets and even the society of her associates. She walked to work with Mrs. LaField in the morning and returned with her at night. She was content to live simply and in solitude. Her dress was strikingly plain and without elegance. It was remarkable the complete isolation that had gripped her and made her, in a few months, a mere monotonous atom in a great city teeming with millions of human beings.

If the mention of the Wheaton tragedy was disagreeable to her soul the very contemplation of it was abhorrent. Westlawn meant no more to her now than

a gloomy and chilly catacomb. She hated him, whom she held equally to blame with her for the heinousness of her sin, and deprecated with all her heart and tears the iniquitous career into which she had allowed herself to be led. He was the traitor who had stolen into her home and destroyed it. What fantastic pictures of connubial bliss she had permitted her imagination to conjure with this man seated by her side, smiling and sneering at her folly and simplicity! She thanked God devoutly for the revelation that had brought her to a sense of duty. Many a lonely day and wakeful night she spent in a kind of powerless despair and rage against her iniquitous indulgence. It was the consciousness of the heinous sin she had committed, more than the consideration of her crime and cruelty that made her present misery the more bitter and intensified the pains of ruthless remorse a thousand fold.

A hundred soft recollections of love and confidence, in contrast, flooded her soul from day to day as she revisited the haunts of longing, and looked back over the great gulf of days that had elapsed since then. In terms the most affectionate she praised the noble man who had thought her worthy to share his honored life with him, and she forgave and blessed the honest hand that would have wounded her to bring her to a realization of her imperfections. There was her cozy little home, comfortable and happy, with everything of her own selection and precious because of its hard-earned acquisition. She lived over and over again those anxious hours while she waited for her baby to come. She fondled it anew to her bosom, saw its first smile

of recognition, measured it day by day as she watched it grow. Its little life was hers, its blood, its tiny heart, its pink skin, its liquid eyes. Half frantic with grief at the rank injustice she had done Bab, and thinking of her deliberate abandonment, her coldness and indifference, when she should have been the happiest mother in the wide, wide world, she suffered tortures of anguish and self-reproach, alone, because she could take no comrade into her confidence. She would as lief have pleaded guilty to Bab's murder and have suffered for it as to endure the agony of soul to which she was subjected.

"You ought to get out more," her monitor advised her when both of them had come in one evening without much show of affability. "I can understand how you feel, but you must learn to make the best of things. Your conflict now is with your own self, and you must not yield."

"It is not myself—so much——"

"Yes, it is. You fret a good deal. Can't you bring yourself to like it here?"

"I am beginning to like it better each day. It was no easy task for me to get accustomed to this kind of life."

"I suppose not. But everything that is valuable is difficult to procure. You make it still harder, however, by continually longing for something different. Even the beggar is happy when his lot contents him. And there is a vast difference between him who performs his work cheerfully and another who performs it from habit and with regret."

“Have I ever murmured——?”

“No, I have not heard you utter a word of complaint these three months. But you have nursed your griefs terribly both night and day. You take no pleasure in anything. You avoid all company. That shows that whereas you have restrained the freedom of your senses, yet you have not mortified your passions. Everywhere you go you bear with you the burden of your bereavement.”

This admonition, while it proceeded from the kindest of hearts, did not please Edith. However reprehensible her sin was, and she did not deny that she was wholly deserving of the severest castigations for her culpable delinquency, nevertheless her moods and her silences were her own purely personal affairs, and subject to no exterior criticism or censure. They were the inevitable effects of her heroic discipline, for she was well aware that she could not remain her former irresponsible self and triumph over her passions and desires. To abandon herself to gayety and wanton indulgence, would be a most effective means of dispelling this melancholic demeanor, but this in turn would only make for dissatisfaction with her humble position and tempt her to find means of escaping from it. It was her dangerously capricious spirit she wanted to keep under restraint, for which reason she regarded not so much the consequences of this self-repression as the security she seemed to derive from it.

“Come with me to the theater this evening,” Mrs. LaField urged her. “It will distract you for a while.”

"No, I guess I will stay at home," Edith replied, "unless you particularly want to go."

"I don't mind. I was thinking of you——"

"You have been very kind to me. I never can express how much I appreciate what you have done."

"Gracious! Don't think of thanking me. I only asked you to go out because I thought you looked quite pale."

"Yes, I have a headache. I am tired, I suppose."

It was a cold, bitter night, and both were content to remain within doors. Frigid blasts had swept through the avenues all day long, making everybody shiver with the intense cold. Dark night descended over the city and brought with it snow and solitude and desolation. Everywhere was the invariable memorial of death and decay.

Edith was really ill that night and took to her bed earlier than usual. It appeared to be no more than a severe cold at first, and she coughed persistently, but the infection spread rapidly to the bronchial tubes. There was a sharp rise in her temperature and she slept but little. In the morning a physician was summoned and pleurisy was diagnosed. She was ordered to keep to her bed and remain absolutely quiet.

Never had she been so near death before, but being so near it began to wish less ardently for it. At times she would have been glad to die were she certain that death would have proved her fidelity. Injuries would then be forgiven. But she feared this now. She was not quite prepared to meet her Eternal Judge with so many accounts unatoned for. Better to live and make

reparation for her iniquities than to escape the penalties of this life and take chances with that to come. Besides, the concept of dying in obscurity, homeless and friendless, was abhorrent, and sent a cold shudder through her fever-tortured frame.

The days passed in loneliness, interminable, with never a sound to rend the ghastly silence save the mocking melody of the clock on the mantel shelf. Pursued with horrible misgivings of a dismal future, her mind distracted with a febrile delirium which caused her to feel the presence of illusory and errant faces that leered at her from the walls and ceiling, but did not speak, she languished on her bed of pain in dreadful fear and unavailing expectancy. Exhaustion sat on her drawn features. From her languid eyes despairing glances traveled through the dimness of the destitute chamber, and grimly reminded her that she had nothing to live for. Even the frosted windows chilled whatever ardor she had into dreary indifference. Somehow or other the time wore away, as she lay there miserable and distressed, waiting for some kind hand to raise a glass of refreshing water to her parched lips, waiting for the return of her gracious patron to console her in her affliction.

“Where is my poor child?” she moaned. “Dear God, give me back my baby! Oh, why did I ever forsake her! Why did I break up my happy home and run off with that wicked man? I wanted riches, prominence, luxuries—for which I brought misery into other lives and disgrace to my own house. I defied God, society, conventions. My sin is always before

me. Must I die in this wretched place, homeless and friendless, in punishment for my misdeeds, outcast, and disgraced, and hurried away to a potter's field as a derelict of humanity? God have mercy on me!"

These words, uttered in the wildness of her delirium, sounded on Mrs. LaField's ears as she entered the darksome room that night after work. Gently she soothed the throbbing brow, and cooled the parching throat with a glass of water. Lighting the little stove she started to prepare some tea and toast but Edith restrained her. Her appetite had failed her, and she had taken no nourishment for days. It appeared as if her strength were rapidly failing, and her lungs filling up, but there was never a word of complaint or appeal. Through the night the sympathetic matron sat beside the bed and watched, as it were, this life slowly ebbing away, stricken with sorrow at her own inability to alleviate the discomfort of the sufferer, and thinking of the shadows of despair which seemed to torture her mind.

"Won't you let me send for Mr. Colman?" she whispered. "I am sure he will be a comfort to you."

"No, no, no!" Edith moaned.

"But listen, my dear, this is not asking too much. Whatever differences you might have had, he is still your husband and nearer to you than any person in the world. He might even be glad to avail himself of this opportunity to show his continued love for you. This illness may prove to be a blessing from heaven in disguise."

“I have done him too great an injustice. I don’t want to live——”

“Of course you want to live. Don’t lose heart now. There are those alive to whom, in return for their love for me, I would fondly have given my life. But I have made them better and happier by living. I have no regrets for what I did. I have purged my soul by mortification and am better prepared to die now than ever before.”

“That is consoling,” Edith replied, “but I can hope for no such satisfaction——”

“My dear, you have lived admirably. Not once in all the weeks we have been together have I heard you utter one word of complaint. I perceived the hardship you were suffering, and I was well aware how unaccustomed you were to this kind of life. Don’t lose courage now. If you want to die to escape the miseries of this mortal life, or to sin no more, or to be united with God, it is a pious wish. But to escape merely the responsibilities of life, the heartaches, the ills that flesh is heir to, and the means of expiating your sins—then it is a cowardly thought. Make up your mind you want to get better.”

These words, the grief and despair which they caused, must have brought on a coma, for Edith had scarce any recollection of what followed save that of her little girl standing beside her with her arms outstretched imploringly. She tried to talk with her and put out her own arms to bring her within reach, but there was no sign of recognition or motion. When she awoke, the dull light of early morning was diffused throughout

the room and she knew she felt better, brighter for the first time in days. Later the doctor came and found her much improved. The crisis had passed and all she needed now was good food and care. A secret pleasure greeted this announcement as she thought how much better it was not to have to die now with no one in the wide world to grieve for her.

The Christmas holidays came and found her still recuperating from her long confinement. But what a Christmas! She was thoroughly miserable, for loneliness and ennui for want of something to do. Not having the energy to struggle against the heavy despondency to which her temperament was subject she spent the day in quietude and recollection, the theater of her brain busy with innumerable scenes, some of them vivid and pleasant, others dull and sad. From its very association the day is suggestive of joy and gladness but to Edith, dissatisfied with her adventures, it meant desolation. She saw the empty chairs of that former comfortable home now tenanted by strangers, smiling, laughing, bantering about a table laden with tempting viands. She saw her precious Babs as she was wont to creep down the stairs on this happy morning in gleeful expectancy. She crept to the edge of the balustrade and peered down to behold her clapping her hands in admiration of the gayly-tinseled tree and the host of pretty things surrounding it, dolls, carriages, beds, toys, horns generously left by good St. Nicholas the night before. But there were no stairs for her to run down this morning in her muslin bathrobe. She wondered if she would derive any pleasure from the big, walking

doll she had sent her—or spurn it with bitterness because of the signature it bore! The gloom of these fancied occurrences clouded the day and left a great blot on her memory. When evening came and she had shaken off to some extent the fatal shadow, it was time to lie down and renew them.

One day, at the close of the holiday season, Mrs. LaField returned with the announcement that Edith had lost her place at the store. It was customary, she explained, to trim the expense account at the beginning of the new year when business was usually dull, by discharging some of the employees. Edith took the news equably, thinking of the hardships she had endured. Virtue, evidently, was not its own recompense, and she thought it unjust that this burden should be imposed upon her shoulders, now so physically frail and impotent.

“What shall I do now?” she said aloud.

“Do!” her comforter echoed. “Why, you will put yourself entirely in the divine hands and do as He wants you to do.”

“Yes,” came the response, “I suppose I shall.”

“It may be God’s will that you lose that place. You had determined, you know, to hold it as a temporary makeshift, but you have made no apparent effort to better yourself since obtaining it. That is not your life-work, evidently.”

“How shall I find it——?”

“All my life I have prayed that God’s will be done through me. I have never sought anything of myself but have been content with whatever He has been

pleased to grant me. I have found happiness, for I accepted good fortune and misfortune alike with perfect equanimity."

"That is the more perfect way, of course—but who can find it?"

"Have you tried? Rather, have you not followed your own will in the performance of everything? You always thought that love could work wonders. Love of what?"

"Perhaps I thought that everything was preordained, like the order and procession of players on a stage. You must be fitted by nature for your part."

"True enough, but one may still interfere with the economy of things while playing his rôle. What you suppose concerning Fortune is unreasonable. Fortune is nothing. It is not she who bestows those goods on us which are commonly called the goods of fortune. Nothing happens by chance. God alone has regulated all things and appointed everything from all eternity."

It was impressive how much the simple piety of this modest woman intensified her simple address. So vivid was her profound sincerity that she impressed Edith with an acute perception of her own unworthiness. Her face indicated a peculiar sort of sweetness and sublimity, a quality which Edith felt was descriptive of her whole personality. She admired her, admired the perfect grace, the amazing poise of that venerable head, the assured and even flow of her voice. Hope and despair kept up continual warfare in her heart as she considered what the message meant which this woman was attempting to impart. Out of the con-

fusion of shapeless images that were crowding her brain the thought surged uppermost that her path of duty lay straight to Bab's door. Bab needed her. That was what she seemed to say.

"I was thinking," she said meditatively, drawing a deep breath, "perhaps I ought to go home to see my little girl."

"To stay?" came the inquiry.

"Oh, no! That is impossible."

"She was in the hospital when you last saw her?"

"Yes, but was expected to leave shortly."

"Will you see—him?"

"No! I would rather not—just now."

"You want to see him, don't you? There! There! I did not mean to make you feel bad. It is a struggle, isn't it! To know what you want to do, but cannot. It is pride that holds you back, isn't it? False pride!"

Edith shook her head. No, it was not pride, for she had overcome that long ago. It was something else. She could not talk about it now.

"I shall see her. She must be at the Academy. But I shall be back. Yes, I shall come back."

It was dark when Edith arrived in Shefford, though not late, and she went straight to a hotel and passed unobserved into the lobby and mingled with the guests at the desk. A severe snow-storm had set in, covering everything with a heavy blanket, piling up angular drifts around the corners and against the houses and scaring people off the streets into havens of shelter. Edith decided to go out for a walk under cover of the storm, for she was fearful of being discovered in

the city. Up the avenue she stepped in the direction of her former home. How strangely familiar everything seemed! The old school was still there, its towers and gables dimly visible through the blinding snow. Centre Street was the same, down which shambled the invariable safety trolley-car which stopped directly in front of her. It was intensely real. Every home wore a haunting presence. The trees, thickets and shrubs, now covered with woolen foliage and flowers, occupied their wonted places. Across the street a new gasoline filling station appeared like an interloper into the sacred scene. But it truly afforded a metropolitan touch to the old-fashioned neighborhood with its colorful façade and brilliantly illuminated environment.

At last the big apartment blocks and attached houses began to show on her right, and she knew well where she was. Out of the opaque whiteness came the pervading illumination of a set of windows which brought back the golden light of her life. It was Dr. Dahill's house and she knew that her husband was there, living with him, sharing his hours between here and Washington. Next door, in the three-story attached house with the sandstone steps and brass railings, was where she had lived. There was her front room, now dark and forbidding, where she had had her array of parchment lamps and commodious chairs. She wondered how the new family had arranged it! And was there another Babs to enliven the subdued silence with her merry laughter? Beautiful pictures passed in painful review across her mind until she began to experience

a sort of pleasure in the reflection; the love of a wife and mother animated her wounded heart.

The wind shook the trees over her head and made the branches toss shiveringly in the driving snow. Her pulse beat fast, with agreeable excitement; her mind reveled in the ecstatic scenes of other years. More than once she pictured Bert crossing the doctor's room with a quick, assured step, and falling into an easy chair with his customary cigar. Everything passed in perfect panorama before her and gripped her intently. There were persons in the room whose shadows moved at intervals across the lighted space, but none of them approached close enough to be distinctly visible. For a long time she stood there in the blinding snow with her eyes glued to the window. At length some one approached and pulled down the shade, clothing the whole house in darkness. She turned away with a heavy heart. Chill flakes of snow drove against her face and there were tears on her cheeks.

A pedestrian crossed directly in front of her. By his gait she knew him and drew back to avoid him as he passed. It was Dr. Dahill.

"Mrs. Wheaton!" he exclaimed, like one surprised. "As I live——!"

"Yes, doctor——" she stammered.

"What in the world are you doing here——of all places? Where have you been?"

"I just got in. I am going to see Babs."

"Not to-night surely——"

"Oh, no, to-morrow."

"Come with me——"

"No, thank you. I would rather not."

"Come upstairs with me. We are alone, mother and I. Bert is out of town. Come along."

Reluctantly she obeyed him, leaden-footed, with a sinking heart and excited brain, hot and trembling. He did not call his mother, for which she was glad. The interview was to be held in his private office.

XXVIII

“WELL,” said the doctor, excitedly and rushing about the room, first to close the door and then to remove her cloak, “this is indeed a surprise. Whatever in the world were you doing out in a night like this? No one would venture into this storm unless he had to. You hadn’t expected to encounter me!”

She acknowledged confusedly that she had not, and looked about the room to make sure that they would not be overheard. It was a small room, partitioned off from the living apartment and fitted up as an office. Here the doctor saw those few emergency patients who found it impossible to visit him down town.

“Imagine finding you outside my window—when I would have given anything to know where you were during the last three months. Do you know you disappeared very mysteriously and left no trace behind you?”

“That was the idea,” she said softly. “I might have been unsuccessful had I made my destination known.”

“And you ran away! There’s nothing more miserable than discontent, is there? Trying to cut one’s self off from the remembrance of man is only a new way

to beget more sorrows. Your face tells me you have not been happy."

"I am better off than I hoped to be, but I am far from happiness. You know my life as well as anybody could ever know it, so it is all right to tell you this much."

He brought a chair opposite her and sat down.

"If ever you are in need of help I want to assure you that no one holds your interests closer to his heart than I. Am I not as fully allied to you by the bonds of friendship as anybody can hope to be? You may say what you choose. I am still wondering how I chanced to find you out in the street at this hour of night and alone."

"I have only arrived in town, and I walked out here from the hotel."

"You are stopping at a hotel?"

"Yes. It was better, wasn't it, to keep my visit secret?"

"Then no one knows you are here!"

"No one but you."

"You are not going back——"

"Where?"

"To them?"

"The Wheatons? Never! I left them for good. You would not expect me to play the part of a prodigal, and beg for readmission?"

The stoicism of her manner, the pathetic flavor of her words, would have convinced the dullest mind. He looked at her in silence for a moment, and then exclaimed:

"You haven't lost any of your indomitable will."

"I don't know," she murmured. "It is not the same. I have learned much during the past three months."

"In what way? What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Working!"

"Indeed! May I ask where?"

"Certainly. I am not ashamed of it. In a store! I got a job at the hardware counter as a saleslady."

"I cannot fancy you standing behind a counter disposing of wares——"

"You can do anything when you are put to it. Of course, I didn't like it, but I soon grew used to it. I rather enjoyed meeting so many people, but it was tiring. I could not get accustomed to standing all day."

"It made you sick. Your face tells me that you are not well."

"I am better now, but I nearly died. Pneumonia! Do you know I really wanted to die, and yet when the time came I fought against it. That's natural, isn't it?"

There was something uneasy in the quick beating of her eyelids and in the subtle quivering of her lips. A while ago she had been defiant—now she was plainly nervous. The doctor felt conscious of a curious interest in her. It was a different woman who confronted him, not the whimsical, negligent, heedless girl he used to know, but a subdued and worried mother. She was here to inquire about her child. That was certain. But did she mean to see her husband?

"Nothing else happened?" he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, for instance, did the Wheatons locate you? Or the Liggetts? They are friendly, I believe. And it is very easy to encounter people in a big store."

"No, I have not seen anybody since I went away."

"But you are not yet freed from him!"

She dropped her dark eyelids over those eyes that ought to have been lustrous but were not, and murmured:

"No!"

"Do you think he will let you go? You can't very well do anything until you are divorced from him."

"Do? What is there for me to do? I am nothing. I only want my child. Do you think I could have her?"

"I don't know."

He didn't stir hand or foot, and not even the modulation of his voice denoted that he was taken by surprise.

"Is she well?" she pressed him.

"I believe so! Have you heard otherwise?"

"No. When I last saw her in the hospital she was ready to be discharged. And so I presumed that everything went well, and that she is now back at school."

"You didn't know of the complication, then——"

"No. What was it?"

"Cerebro spinal-meningitis set in shortly after you were there."

She waited for him to go on.

"She recovered from that, but her mind was impaired——"

"Merciful heavens!"

"She had to be taken away, of course, and is now

doing fairly well. It often happens that way with children. They usually grow out of it."

"Where is she now?"

"At Riverton."

"The insane asylum!"

"There was no other place. The hospital could not accommodate a case like that, and it was deemed advisable to place her with those who were skilled in the treatment of such diseases. If she will improve at all it will be under their immediate supervision."

For a long time Edith preserved a silence which the doctor thought best not to interrupt. Babs an imbecile! Her face lost its mask-like stillness, and assumed a mournful expression. She lost her self-control, and, leaning her head on the desk, began to sob bitterly. Slight, convulsive movements shook her frail body, and the surgeon was moved to pity. Going to her side he laid his hand affectionately on her shoulder and comforted her.

"Now, now, my good girl, you must not take it so hard. Just brace up and look at it sensibly. It is what might happen to anybody. And she is getting well. I saw her last week and have noticed a change already. Meningitis is always dangerous. She got an infection, that was all, and it ran through her system. It so happened with her that the cerebrum was the most affected portion. There! There! Don't let your feelings overcome you."

"If she only—had a home—this—would never—have happened——" she sobbed.

"Now, don't be foolish! That could happen whether she had a home or not."

"But she would not have to be put away in an asylum."

"Even then I would advise it. It is the best place. She has the services of the best psychiatrists in the State. If she can be cured it will be under their care."

She made no reply to this, but kept her head buried in the crook of her elbow and continued to give way to her tears.

"The brain is a strange thing," he went on. "It has its disorders and ailments, but we cannot penetrate into its territory. It has its sentinels that go off duty and leave it exposed to sudden attacks and we cannot guard against them. It is God's domain, where the mirror of the soul is held up to catch the illuminations of the Divine Mind and it admits of no mortal interference. In her particular case everything was done that human skill was capable of doing."

"It is all my fault——"

"Don't be foolish. What makes you talk like that? You had no more control over it than I had. You have known what it is to be sick, to be tormented with a fever, but did it make you any more comfortable to reproach yourself that you were laid low through your own negligence? No one of us courts disease. It comes whether we will or no. Babs fell sick with typhoid, that was all. And the complication was an unfortunate consequence."

She had thrown her head back a little. But her eyes were swollen and moist.

"Oh, why was I not here!" she sighed.

"We made every attempt to locate you without success. No one knew whither you had gone."

"I knew it—I felt it! Something in here kept telling me all the time that all was not well. I could see her appealing to me. God! When I think of it! Did she ask for me?"

"Yes, she did! But to tell the truth she didn't seem much interested in anything. They generally don't, cases of that kind."

"Did she suffer much? I'm not fit to go near her again. She no longer cares for me, I know. She hates me! She must! I would have had her all to myself if I had only known. Poor dear! And I could not even be found."

The implication of guilt in her tranquil manner was pathetic. It seemed to override every other emotion, grief, distress and despair, the overwhelming sensation that everything was over, that a part of herself was lost beyond recall, taking with it the savor of life. It did not appear as if she could be consoled, so bitter was her contemptuous disdain, and she was ready to abandon herself to any penalty in payment of her immense mistake. She pulled at the hem of her handkerchief and a tear struck the back of her hand, big and heavy as if it had fallen from a great height.

"You didn't tell even Miss Wheaton where you might be found," he reminded her.

"No. I thought it better to keep them ignorant of my whereabouts, fearing lest they might interfere with me. He would not let me go, you know."

"Did he attempt to hinder you?"

"Yes! I had to steal away from him. He doesn't care a snap of his finger for me, I know, but he imagined that I wanted to go back to the old life. So he swore he would never permit it. He will never give me my freedom."

"Did you ask for it?"

"No. I wanted to go away, off by myself where I would never see him again. He can't make me go back, can he? I don't want to. I hate him. He was the cause of all my trouble."

"Was he?"

The peculiar flavor of the question struck her as if some one had poured a bucket of cold water over her head. She compressed her lips with an angry glance—then her mind dwelt on that significant retort. Was it true that she was the culprit in this man's estimation? If it were, then she had been deluding herself all the time that she was an innocent victim and had taken consolation from a fabrication that was entirely fictitious. Was it Kelso Wheaton who had victimized her or was it she, the exquisite woman she thought she was, who had deliberately sacrificed her honor and her place for a luxurious existence? The doctor was adroit enough to penetrate beneath the veneer which she had employed to conceal her true self, and she looked up at him guiltily, wistfully, like an accused malefactor hoping for pity from his accusers.

"Yes," she acknowledged at last, with a surrender of self-respect, "I was the one who did wrong, but I have been to confession since I saw you, and am making

reparation for my fault. It is hardly worth mentioning, still I believe I did what was expected of me. For that reason I can never hope to go back to him again, not even if I wanted to."

"They want you to return. Miss Wheaton seems to miss you very much."

"Poor Evelyn! She was very human. I feared her at first, not knowing how she would receive me into her home, but she proved to be a true friend notwithstanding her opposition to my proposal to bring my child there. You see I have been longing for her from the start. When I told Evelyn of my desires she frowned upon them. I suppose she is not really to blame. She is a Wheaton through and through, and would sacrifice anything for the glory of their name. That was one characteristic I observed with them—they simply worship their family name. Whatever else they do they will not tarnish their pedigree."

"Yes," he said, "she told me that, but she regrets her action and feels now that if you had been permitted to take the child everything would have turned out better. They did not want to lose you, that is to say in the way in which they did, for which reason I suspect you would be welcomed back with open arms. You know Henry Liggett died——"

"Mr. Liggett dead!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, yes! These two months!"

She said nothing.

"He never recovered from his shock, I was told. His wife has disposed of the New York home, and has taken up her residence in a suburban district, Pel-

ham or Larchmont—somewhere around there. She came in for the entire estate, and is living by herself.”

Edith smiled cynically. “Do you suppose that will be for long?” she asked.

“How can I tell?” he replied. “You see, I don’t even know the woman.”

“I was jealous of her once upon a time, but I almost wish her well now. To be perfectly honest with you I think I owe her a debt of gratitude.”

“Gratitude!”

“Yes, for making me realize what I never knew before. Through her I found myself.”

“By dint of association, you mean!”

“Yes, and pointing out to me the inconsistency of the whole performance. I learned to know him better through her. It was like taking the lid off a box and seeing an ugly toad staring at you. I suppose I shouldn’t have said that, for he was never ugly. But he grew repulsive! I perceived for the first time the senseless vanity that regulated his whole life. He thrived on adulation. It nourished him. He made much of those who came to him with extravagant compliments and rewarded the one that groveled before him. Never could he play a mean part. Never could he occupy a second place.”

“For that reason you left——”

“No—but that had much to do with it. When I started to compare situations, the old life seemed wonderfully perfect.”

“And you regretted having made the exchange——”

“Yes, I suppose I did.”

“And you decided to act according to your convictions.”

“I began to realize the purchase price of illegitimate pleasure. To have your aspirations appeased is not contentment.”

“But it is something to say that you have climbed to the pinnacle of ambition.”

“It is nothing. It is misery when you weigh the cost. We never miss the sunshine until the day is through. They are not the happiest whose head is crowned with gold. Poor Evelyn! I believe she really pitied me towards the end. She seemed to understand. I wonder if she'll ever marry!”

“The other girl will.”

“Doris?”

“Is that her name? I saw an item about her in the paper the other night.”

“I never could learn much from her. She was very reserved. We got along admirably because we had so little to do with each other. I do hope she will be happy!”

She uttered these last words as if she meant them from the bottom of her heart. He could not help thinking how lonely she looked, her face pale, lips a little parted and her glance darkened by fatigue. Presently he said:

“This makes you melancholy—thinking of the happiness of others.”

“No,” she replied. “I am not envious, if that is what you mean. Until they were brought into the conversation I hardly ever thought of them. I fancy now

that I could tell beforehand what each of them is going to say. They never get serious, even about serious things."

"Would you return to him?"

The question was direct, and he observed her intently to discover what was in her mind. But she did not falter.

"To whom?" she said, dispassionately.

"Bert."

"Impossible! Besides he would have something to say about that. He is the injured party——"

"Do you know that he is still quite attached to you? Often have we sat and talked over the present situation, and I am of the opinion that he would entertain suitable overtures. He realizes how imperfect he was, but he was truly ignorant of his shortcomings. It has taught him a bitter lesson. How unfortunate it was the break should come when it did! A little forbearance, together with a generous portion of mutual allowance, would have worked wonders. The trouble lay in this: that neither of you tried honestly to fathom the motives of the other. The judgments of man are cruel and cold unless softened by the knowledge of motives. This neither of you seemed to want to learn."

"I didn't treat him generously," she said with a show of compunction, "nor even impartially. I was not fair. But what avails it to deplore the irreparable past! I feel like one who has betrayed herself for nothing. It is horrible."

"I am sure he bears you no ill-will——"

"Don't say that. He would not be human if he did

not despise me. I didn't spare him. I told him plainly I wanted to be mistress of myself, free of choice, independent of action. I got what I wanted. How he must have pitied my folly! How disgusted and appalled he must have been!"

"He has not abandoned you——"

She shrugged her shoulders hopelessly.

"I only wish he were here in order that he might speak for himself," went on Dr. Dahill, regardless of her despairing gesture.

"It is best we should not meet," she replied. "Don't you see I am not free to see him?"

"But you may be given your freedom any time."

"You do not know Kelso Wheaton else you would not say that. He has sworn I shall have to bear his name as long as I live."

"Is that possible?"

"I don't know. But you see how determined he is. Where is Mr. Colman? In Washington?"

"Yes. You know Congress rejected his measure, on the ground that the rights of the individual States were placed in jeopardy. Since Prohibition was enacted the States are extremely cautious about giving their approval to federal laws. They recognize, indeed, that Congressional action is the proper course to be pursued in the enactment of uniform marriage and divorce laws, but are afraid of the further extension of federal jurisdiction at the expense of State authority."

"He is still very much interested in the work?"

"Indeed! He began to form immediately inter-state bureaus to bring about remedial legislation in the sev-

eral State assemblies. I think he has succeeded in forming a dozen commissions in as many States. These bureaus coöperate with one another and contrive to have uniform laws enacted in every State. In this way the same effect will be produced."

"Is he trying to abolish divorce——?"

"He would like to make absolute divorce impossible, but sentiment is hardly in favor of such a measure."

"They will never do it. You cannot compel people to live together who are naturally unmated."

"That is not the intention. Legal separation is provided for. The object of the law is to prevent attempted marriages by divorcées."

She shook her head.

"People must want to do what is right," she said. "The law can't make them."

"The welfare of the State is the highest law," he retorted promptly.

Her hands lay in her lap, folded and motionless, and she sat as if absorbed in his words. There was something exquisitely delicate in the slender mold of those features, despite the languid droop of the eyelids, the dark, heavy circles beneath the eyes, the pinched and colorless skin. Her very soul seemed to breathe out the words, "What is more miserable than discontent!" Suddenly her head dropped in a gesture of despair as she said:

"There is nothing left for me to 'do, I suppose, but to go to my child."

"You are going to see her?"

“To-morrow. There is an early train. I shall come back to-morrow night.”

The door closed behind her. She vanished as mysteriously as she had come, a dim figure moving in the biting wind and driving snow along the lonesome street.

XXIX

THE charm of Riverton lies in its splendid isolation. When the weather is fine and the sun high in the heavens it is a lovely spot, the river, the sloping hills, and rich verdant valleys concurring in happy harmony. A railway runs beside the river, in and out among the birches, and above and around the channeled slopes. The whole panorama is one of unrivaled color and unmatched loveliness. But in winter all is reversed. The river is a frozen plain, the fields and hills are cold and forbidding mounds and patches, perspective is wanting, for earth and sky seem to be one.

On a strong-based promontory, where the river bends toward the east, stands an immense quadrangular building known as the Riverton Retreat. Edith had rarely approached anything with more unaffected terror than she did this institution. The storm had abated when she alighted at the railroad station, and boarded a car that rocked and pounded its way to the asylum-grounds with all the ease of a caterpillar tractor. It was the only conveyance the town afforded. There were no automobiles for hire, not even a horse and sleigh. The trolley took you to the grounds and left you standing there, and you could look up at the imposing array of buildings, and wonder how they ever

managed to construct so massive an edifice on so precipitous a slope.

There was not a sign of man's hand in all the prospect and, indeed, not even a trace of his passage in the freshly-fallen snow. The whole aspect was one of solitude, the bare, shivering trees, the woody hillsides clothed with fleecy 'down, the long lines of the buildings and their aspect of piercing sadness. Edith's heart grew cold for want of companionship. Everything was lifeless, not even a hungry sparrow chirped to disturb the silent monotony. She drew a long breath and made her ascent as best she could up the snow-covered path that began just beyond the open gate.

She felt unwelcome and apprehensive as she entered this terrible abode. Great, high ceilings showed immense areas of empty space, glassed partitions dominated either side of a bare corridor, enclosing private offices like so many compartments of a fortress from where 'dozens of unfriendly eyes, it seemed, peered at her to challenge her presence and her purpose. Uniformed attendants, precise and industrious, swept past her, oblivious of her person or her mission—all these frightened her greatly and made her want to hide in some corner for safety. A nurse approached, more pleasant-looking than the rest, to whom she stammered a word or two, and she was bidden to take a seat in the waiting-room until the superintendent arrived. It was not the custom to receive visitors during the morning hours, and she would have to explain to him the nature of her business and its urgency.

Upon his arrival she felt somewhat more at ease,

but he informed her that visiting hours were set for the afternoon because of the fact that the doctors were engaged with the patients in the morning, and it would greatly interfere with their work if strangers were allowed access at all hours of the day. She understood this, she replied, and was perfectly willing to stay in the waiting-room, if she might, until the visiting hour had arrived, for she had come from afar and was without friends in the town.

“The patient is a relative of yours?” he asked.

“I am her mother,” Edith replied. “Mrs. Colman.”

“You are Barbara Colman’s mother!”

“Yes, doctor,” she acknowledged.

“Well, of course, Mrs. Colman,” he explained, “you understand we have to be very strict about the hours for visiting. A good part of the time the patient is under observation and cannot be distracted by any outside circumstance. You see it would greatly interfere——”

“I understand,” Edith interrupted, “and I do not want you to do anything extraordinary. I was ignorant of the rules, otherwise I would have delayed until afternoon. But—I have not seen my child since she fell sick. I was away—and knew nothing about it.”

“Really! Now, now, let us see what we can do. I believe it would make no great difference were you to see her. This is your first visit?”

She bowed her head.

“Excuse me for a moment, please. We shall see what can be done.”

This ghastly formality helped to revive her terrors.

It seemed as if she had been years in this chamber, with every breath a pang of anguish and every thought a nightmare. She twisted and cracked her knuckles like one overcome with nervousness. What were they doing to her child? Horrible suggestions, arising from the sense of insufferable terror that pervaded her spirit, led to a train of thought of the endless pains and tortures perpetrated in these gruesome rooms. Was her child at this very moment writhing in pain, while some heartless surgeon was operating on her tender head and experimenting with her impaired faculties? Perhaps she was strapped to a bed, not able to move arm or leg and was crying her eyes out in unavailing misery! She had heard how attendants were obliged to resort at sundry times to inhuman treatment to coerce irresponsible patients. But they would not have to do that with Babs. A mere child! So loving and mild! Yet who was there to sympathize with her? What did these unemotional attendants care, or how could they be affected by any grief or pain, they who had become so used to such dreadful misery. A deep sigh escaped her, a disconsolate sigh from a mother's sorely afflicted heart, and she looked around the hollow enclosure for consolation. But the bare walls mocked her, and told her there was none to be had.

In a few minutes the door swung open to admit the diminutive, portly form of the superintendent, who announced to her, in his quick, capable manner, that she might follow him. It made her head reel. It must be true, then. Babs was confined in a padded cell from which she was not permitted to escape. A curious sen-

sation overpowered her. She went on, hesitatingly. The Latin epigram came to her mind about the facile descent to the depths. Her very step was mechanical. She did not want to go, yet she followed because there was nothing else for her to do.

Up the long corridor they went without a word to disturb the solemn march, through doors that had to be unlocked and locked again in the course of their passage, down a flight of stairs with hushed footsteps, and out into a large open hall from which a series of doors opened on either side. These resembled bedrooms, small and plainly furnished, and all were occupied with miserable creatures. Edith strained her eyes, peering into each of them as best she could from her place on the threshold where they had halted, but no sight of that dear form rewarded her. Three or four solitary women, clad in bathrobes and loose fitting gray gowns, appeared in the doorways, standing there like curious-eyed children, gaping at a spectacle.

Edith pitied the poor wretches, looking from one to the other with compassionate glances, until her gaze traveled to the farther end of the room. It rested on Babs! Her heart gave a vehement thump, and it was with difficulty she restrained herself from rushing over to her and seizing her in her arms. The child was roving about the hall in an uninterested manner, a sober, expressionless look on her countenance, a dull, vacant stare in her eyes. Her finger rested in her mouth, and she seemed to lack any definite purpose. Object after object attracted her curiosity, but not her attention. She went from place to place in a casual, distracted

way, and stared with increasing wonder at each new article. An electric light switch caught her fancy with its shining brass plate, and she hurried over to feel it, twisting the tiny end of her finger into the keyhole to see what it was for. Turning away she rubbed her hands on the sides of her gray dress, and began a leisurely march across the hall.

"God help us!" Edith breathed, her eyes swimming with tears.

Straight across the floor came the little girl, oblivious of everything in the room until her eyes rested on the two figures standing motionless in the open passageway. She stopped and looked at them with the same unconcern with which she had previously surveyed the other objects that had confronted her. Edith stepped forward a little to give the child a better view, but failed to make any impression. A strange sound issued from one of the nearby rooms, and the child turned her head and kept staring in that direction.

"Does she know anybody?" Edith whispered to the superintendent.

"Yes. She knows her nurse."

"Has she a special nurse?"

"Mr. Colman made provision for that, I believe."

"And she knows her?"

"I think she does. She is much improved, you know."

Edith called, and the little girl turned at the sound. Dubiously she stood and watched. She was motionless except for her hands, which were never still. She picked at her fingers, brought them together or rubbed

them on her dress. All the while her eyes wore that vacant, meaningless stare. Edith bent down and opened her arms to invite her to come, but the invitation fell on heedless senses, for the little one remained unmoved and impassive with the same inscrutable expression across her face.

"Babs!" Edith called.

There was no response. The intensity of her emotion sealed Edith's lips and she could say no more. Finally, in a sort of abject despair she rushed to where her child stood and took her forcibly into her arms. She hugged her, squeezed her and kissed her passionately. The child did not remonstrate, but yielded to the demonstration like one taken by surprise and lost for something to say or do.

"Babs! Don't you know me?" pleaded the mother. "Speak to me! I am your mother. Don't you remember mother? Babs!"

The plaintive appeal made her draw back her head and raise her eyes with a hard, concentrated expression which stimulated Edith's waning hopes. But the look was still puzzled, and the brow remained puckered by the same pronounced frown.

"Who are you looking at? Babs! It is mother. Won't you say it? Say 'mother.'"

Edith looked back at the superintendent in despair and said:

"Does she recognize Mr. Colman?"

"I don't know, madam. You will have to ask the nurse. She sees her more than I."

“Would you mind calling her? Perhaps she might be able to help!”

After a long pause, during which time Edith resorted to every form of coaxing and appeal to impress a familiar image on the blank mind, the nurse appeared, correct and smiling. No sooner had the child laid eyes upon her than she signified her desire to be taken, and rested content in her arms. The nurse spoke to her and the illusions seemed to vanish. She asked her how she was and whose little girl she was to-day and the words came back and the tiny arms were fastened about her neck in a loving embrace.

“Has she always known you?” Edith inquired.

“At first she didn’t. But she is able to remember faces now.”

“Does she know her father?”

“Lately.”

“She does not know me at all,” Edith complained despairingly.

The nurse asked her. “Barbara! Do you know this lady?”

Barbara looked, but gave no sign of recognition.

“Did you ever see her before?”

She shook her head doubtfully.

“That is your mother. Don’t you remember your mother?”

No, she did not.

Finally Edith said, “Do you think she is improving?”

“Oh, yes! She is doing nicely. Every day I can see a big improvement. You see her body is perfectly

healthy. It is only the mind now, and that will clear up in time."

"How long will that be, do you think?"

"Oh, we never can tell! But usually a small child grows out of it. Of course it is a doubtful matter. It may take years for her to be completely cured, and then again she may have a slight affliction all her life. You can't tell. There are no two cases alike."

It was pitiful to behold the mother realize grimly the loss of her child. She looked with eyes that conveyed the holy secret of love from the depths of her soul, since it was impossible to whisper it by way of mouth. But still there was no sign, no seal of lips in return, no clasp of hands, nor the slightest caress such as love claims. The child did not touch her. Her very person was a barrier between them. It was impossible to penetrate this frozen heart, and the mother's heart grew sad and melancholy as the horrible suspicion rose monster-like before her and stared her in the face. Her child was lost to her forever, and her love was of as little avail as morning mist.

She made as if to take the child once more in her arms but the little creature clung to her nurse. The mother's face grew white as marble, and she stood like one transfixed, staring as at the sight of some frightful thing. A pang of despair rent her broken heart, and made her shudder. To be scorned by her own! It was the climax. She stood in solitude, ignorant of what to say or do, until her anguish exhausted itself. In this frame of mind she turned to go, stricken with the consciousness of a gulf of blackness between them which

neither could pass. Suddenly she thought she perceived a smile of recognition steal softly across the puzzled face. Babs knew her! She was asking to be taken by her! She seized her frantically, in a delirium of joy, and crushed her to her bosom. Fervor glowed in her aspect, her eyes beamed like Hemian's bright lamps, and her face shone like the light of truth itself.

"Thanks be to God!" she ejaculated.

"Do you know who it is?" the nurse asked.

Babs nodded her head and smiled.

"Tell me, who am I?" Edith questioned.

"Mother!" came the soft response.

It was a sign of recognition that altered Edith's whole future.

That night she returned to Shefford and called again on Dr. Dahill. She looked the picture of cheer and gladness, and burst into his office with feverish enthusiasm. There was no disputing the change that had come over her, and the doctor flushed with pleasure as he greeted her with cordial courtesy.

"She knew me, doctor—and came to me," she began abruptly.

"At first?" he asked.

"Not at first. But before I left. Don't you think her memory is returning?"

"Of course it responds very slowly. I think, though, each day will witness a more decided improvement. Did she look well?"

"Splendid! Only," mother-like, "she was 'dressed so miserably."

"Let's make the most of it anyhow," he consoled her, "and leave the rest to God."

She received this with resignation but said presently:

"Do you think she would get along better with me?"

"No! No!" he replied emphatically. "To interfere with her now is the worst thing you could do. She must be left where she is until such a time as they see fit to discharge her. It may be only a lucid interval you saw. The progress of that disease is very uncertain and mysterious."

"Such a terrible place, doctor, and so lonely! Why did Bert put her there?" she complained. "There are better places, surely, in the State—more private, more comfortable——"

"That may be true," came the retort. "But there are none so well equipped. We considered all that at the time, and thought it best to place her where she would receive the best medical attention. The big men of the State are at Riverton."

She lowered her head and her face assumed a mournful aspect; she looked like one who had lost the courage to hope further. Nervously she picked at the hem of her cloak as she tried to make the words come in explanation of her thought. At length she said:

"I want to enter that training-school!"

"You!"

"Yes; at Riverton. They have a training-school, haven't they? You see I could be with her. I can't stay away from her, doctor. She is all I have left. All I have."

"What a life for you!" he said.

“Oh—as long as it’s a part of hers.”

“Of hers!”

She nodded.

“And that’s to be all—for both of you?”

“Well, it is all, isn’t it?”

XXX

THE long winter filled with gloom and depression rolled away. So deeply had Edith sunk into despair that she scarce did more than sit alone and brood, heedless of the bleak and bitter days that passed in silence and sameness, soothed only by the melancholy which seemed to cover her like a mourning shroud and shut out all semblance of joy. She never expected to join hands with gladness again, and in her profound wretchedness she felt that all happiness was a mockery. Her child she saw but occasionally, often but once a day, so stringent were the rules that bound her. This privation, however, she bore heroically, for if life could no longer be cheerful it must not on that account be ignoble. Every symptom of frailty and rebelliousness she subdued, after the manner of those condemned to carry smiling faces over sick hearts. But she grew less communicative and companionable, preferring to sit and listen by the hour to other people's misfortunes in sympathetic silence.

She was not daunted by the practical difficulties that beset her pathway. The springs of hope were dried up within her; she could find no other waters, of solace or assurance wherein to find comfort, and she realized that she must purchase her freedom at the full price she had received for her degradation. Since the shock

of the revelation of what she had done, which had seemed to divide her life in two, there was nothing bitter or acrid in the world that had power to sting or smart. She understood now how men could rush away from all earthly delight to dwell forever with sorrow and sadness. There was no more delight on earth for her: the one purpose of her life was to be able to alleviate the misfortune she had brought upon her helpless child.

Springtime came, with the whole world filled with beauty and exhilaration. But she shared none of it. For a fresh terror had descended upon her and made her misery the less endurable. Babs was making no appreciable progress, and the doctors were shaking their heads with serious misgivings. Her imagination, long in a state of morbid activity, conjured up every dismal consequence. She walked the grounds bewildered and sometimes ran; sometimes she screamed out loud in the night, and sometimes threw herself in a corner of the grassy sward and wept. Prayer seemed impossible. All that she had heard of death came back to her; she saw the pallid little face, she touched the cold body and her flesh withered. She almost rejoiced in the relief that death would bring, putting a merciful end to affliction and torture.

Bert came at regular intervals to see his stricken child and Edith often greeted him. But there was never a word of love or reconciliation between them. He constantly avoided exchanging glances with her, and affected to believe she was not in the room in order to avoid any open speech. He appeared to care for no

explanation, as if he felt an explanation impossible. He was kind and gentle, but repressed every sign of interest, if there were any. This only served to make her conscious of the appalling truth that her husband was indeed alienated from her.

Once he gave expression to his dissatisfaction with the unfavorable turn Bab's illness had taken, but her voice was sunk to a whisper and was lost in her throat before she could make reply.

"If we move her now," she heard him say, "it might only make matters worse."

Move her! The very words smote her like a blow, making her conscious of something deeper and more vital to her than the fact of their estrangement, and lending a new interpretation to her present condition. Move her! Was it not for Bab's sake that she had volunteered to come to Riverton—so that she could be beside her? Her work here was a solitary opening in the rocky wall which shut in her narrow valley of grief, through which she might steal a glimpse at the vista of a distant happiness. Out there beyond, out through that narrow chink lay all her hopes, all her aspirations and pleasures. And now this solitary source of escape from present miseries was to be denied her. She shrank from the terrifying thought, and stood for a minute or two with her hands hanging clasped before her like a statue. At last she spoke, as if the words were wrung from her.

"Are you going to take her—from me?" she asked, tremulously.

"From you?" he said.

She nodded. The tears overflowed and ran slowly down her cheeks.

"I don't want her to stay here," he expostulated. "It doesn't seem right. I could provide suitable accommodations for her; but Dr. Dahill would have his way. He thought at the time she would do better here, would benefit by constant, expert care. I yielded, naturally, but—I must confess—I do not see any great improvement."

"Would you take her if you knew how much I wanted her?" she pleaded.

"I'm sure I don't know. She has a home and that is the place for her. Somehow or other I don't quite like this——"

"Oh, you can't understand!" she cried. "I might have known you would not."

He was, indeed, perplexed and uncomfortable. He stared at her helplessly, and she, partly guessing his thought, said:

"You will let her stay?"

"Do you really want her so?"

She nodded.

"Well, if you want her . . . I suppose she needs you the more."

She gazed at him with increasing astonishment, but never for a moment mistook the sincerity of his word. She smiled brightly, and with that turned and left the room.

Ineffable moment! She was silly with delight, so completely content was her spirit. Bert did not despise her; his stifled, ardent emotion disclosed that! Even

to the man who presents the most strenuous resistance to whatever is desirable there will come moments when the pressure from without is too strong for him, and he must yield in spite of himself. Bert was struggling against his own nature, she knew, and sooner or later must surrender to the inevitable. She was not certain he would yield to the extent of taking her back, but he would make friendly overtures which would permit her to see him more often. Time would be found for serious talk, and a basis of mutual agreement might be established. She found herself now in a strange predicament, more ardently attached to her estranged husband than she had been at any time of their wedded life.

For she had come to realize how poor that sort of happiness is that comes by caring very much about our own narrow pleasures, to the exclusion of the pleasures of those who surround us. She had been accustomed to gauge life merely by the sense appeal, and she had ruefully learned the lesson that all is not good that appears to be good. How often had the whimsical notion occurred to her that she was a favored creature, whom the Fates loved to toy with! Her whole moral world was the world of creatures. But with human nature her knowledge had ended. Never had she stopped to consider that human nature was capable of evil as well as good, or that the difference between goodness and badness in people consisted solely in the right or wrong use they made of the powers which God had given them. That she should have known

better did not make her know better at the time when she needed the knowledge most.

The Wheatons had ignored her as if she had never existed. And yet her precipitate flight from that 'detested place afforded her no remorse; on the contrary, she was glad, for it was the truth which compelled her and she felt she must obey, else she would be bound with chains which she would be forced to wear forever. Kelso gave no thought to her now. He had already plighted his troth for the second time, to Mrs. Liggett, as she suspected he would do upon obtaining his divorce. The action she did not contest. She did not even heed the summons which was served on her in the usual way, inviting her to appear before the Court to show cause why Kelso Wheaton should not be given his freedom on the grounds of 'desertion. The announcement of its granting she hailed with perfect indifference, and she greeted with equal indifference the intelligence that another had immediately succeeded to her name and station in the mansion at Westlawn.

She was never more aware of how ignorant she was of herself, how completely she misunderstood herself and how 'different she really was from what she had thought herself to be. How stupid she had been! How foolish! How insensate! Were it not for the catastrophe that had occurred in her life these 'defects and habits, of which she had been wholly unconscious, would never have stood revealed. She had never come face to face with her inner self before. Other people's lives had only exhibited her own brilliant perfections. It was experiment, breaking through the surface and

exposing the throbbing pulsations of the mysterious, fundamental self, that finally convinced her of the truth.

Her chief concern now was that her husband would relent and take her back, and the hope would not have been well-founded had she not observed his confusion. Clearly he was the one to forgive and she trusted his magnanimous, generous soul to rise to the occasion and prompt him to do what was noble. If it had been in his nature to desire revenge he would never have yielded to her wish to keep the child. Unquestionably, home was the place for Bab now, with all prospect of immediate cure fast disappearing. She wanted to have Babs taken home, but she also wanted to be taken with her, where she hoped to atone for her impetuosity and selfishness by living the life of a dutiful wife and a devoted mother.

Day after day she awaited him, and still he did not come. Was it possible he feared to trust himself in her presence? His face betrayed him as much as if it had been his whole person with the soul behind it. He had seemed, for the moment, to yield in her presence. And her mind was again assailed, not by any doubt of him, but by doubt of herself. Had she betrayed overanxiety? Embarrassment fell upon her as she considered this evident weakness—these momentary impulses which discipline had not yet modified. It was the first time they had met and exposed their hearts to each other since her flight and return, and the exhilaration of the moment had asserted itself and

destroyed whatever power she had of holding herself in restraint.

And then, suddenly, came a day when a message was brought to her that Mr. Colman wanted to see her in the Children's Ward. She sprang up, forgetting everything but the welcome summons. A slight shiver passed through her as she came to Bab's private room and knocked. And some impulse, strong as the grasp of a giant, urged her on with a brightness of anticipation that put to flight every other doubt and fear.

"You asked to see me?" she said, pausing a little.

Instead of answering her he asked: "You know Bab is not going to get well, don't you?"

"Yes," Edith replied. "Not for a long time."

"She needs constant care."

She bowed her head. "That is the reason I asked to have her stay," she said.

"Don't you think she would do better at home?" he continued, with a new firmness.

"With you?"

"Yes!"

"But you can't devote all your time to her, and she needs personal attention."

"I shall try to get somebody who can give it to her."

It flashed across her at that instant that he meant to tell her that he could no longer accede to her request; that he had decided to take Babs back with him; and that he had sent for her in the hope that she would suggest the name of a trustworthy nurse to take proper care of her. The mere suspicion that this thought was in his mind made her feel harsh and impatient. She

had come down prepared for any attitude but this, and she was not surprised to find now that she had nothing to say.

"Oh, well," she muttered, "she is yours, I suppose! I have nothing to say about it."

"But I want you to say something," he cried sharply. "She is as much yours as mine. She needs you more than she does me."

"Then why don't you leave her with me? In due time I shall have completed my training, and can devote all my time to her."

To disguise his annoyance he took out his watch and looked at it savagely. With a great show of exertion he put it back again in his pocket. There were heavy furrows on his forehead, his hair showed signs of early gray. Raising his eyes he looked at her, leaning forward, her eyes fixed upon him, her hands clasped between her knees.

"Do you really want to know why I've come here to-day?" he asked.

"To take Babs!"

"Do you honestly believe that?"

"What could be more natural? I knew you would not let her stay. You were always mad about her."

He was silent, but continued looking straight at her. Then he said:

"What is the use of going on like this forever? You are not happy here; it will be infinitely worse when Babs leaves. I am not happy, and Babs needs you. Both of us are deluding ourselves that we are doing the proper thing when, down in our hearts, we know

that we are doing wrong, but are too cowardly to admit it. I came here to see you to-day; I came here because I want you to come back with me, because I need you, and because your place is with me and your little girl."

For an instant she stared at him. Then tears overflowed her lashes and dropped on her lap. She buried her face in her hands.

"And you think this—worse—!" she muttered.

"A thousand times, yes! Both of us made mistakes. Let us forget them. Let us begin life all over again."

"How can you trust me?" she cried. "I know I have done you a great wrong. But I have learned my lesson. I did not understand—I did not want to understand——"

He sprang to her side, caught her by the wrists raising her to her feet and stopping her words. His eyes clung to her desperately.

"Won't you say you will come? I want you. Babs wants you. You will, won't you?"

She turned with one of those sudden, bewildering movements and put her hands on his shoulders. Her eyes shone with tears.

"Of course I shall come."

He drew her to him and she did not resist. Her face looked up at his and he kissed away the tears. They stood that way for a long time, long enough for her silence to communicate all she had to say, and for him to feel that only one thing mattered.

She had found the haven of true happiness at last.

THE END

JAN 30 1924

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00022327963