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YEARS OF DISCRETION



“It’s going to be wide open or shut,” he continued
(page 164)

YEARS OF DISCRETION

BY
FREDERIC HATTON
AND
FANNY LOCKE HATTON

*Novelized from the Play
By the Authors*

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ALONZO KIMBALL



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YEARS OF DISCRETION

CHAPTER I

AN APRIL AFTERNOON

THE rays of a lingering afternoon sun shone from a clear Hudson river sky into Margaret Brinton's charming sitting-room and filled it with cheer and amber light. The room was a delightful one at any time, full of rare and beautiful things, with harmonious walls and comfortable divans. In many years it had taken from its mistress much of her daintiness and personality. Opening off from it was the hallway of the apartment—the building was one of those smart establishments of the upper Riverside Drive—and from this floor curving stairs ran up under a wide arch to the second landing where the bedrooms were. Halfway up a quaint bend formed a little resting spot with a wide and pillowed seat,—an ideal retreat for a confidence or a quiet chat.

On the opposite side of the living-room rich, dark portières dropped discreetly down, veiling a quaint little music room in which there was just room enough to hold Mrs. Brinton's grand piano and a chair or two. This was a tiny corner, but exquisite

in colouring and appointment and a fitting neighbour to the larger room into which it opened.

The day was one of those wonderful April times when spring and summer seem to have wandered twin-like hand in hand. Mrs. Brinton had felt all day the witchery of the lazy hours and despite insistent voices of duty she had left undone the thousand things she should have done. An indefinite longing filled her usually sane soul with vague disquietude. She was not quite sure whether it was the spring that had so disturbed her usual serenity or the unexpected news that Mrs. Farrell Howard of Brookline was to arrive at last for a visit which had been promised for ten years. Despite the telegrams and an array of new trunks which had already arrived Mrs. Brinton found it difficult to believe that the long-awaited guest was about to appear.

The trunks in themselves had been enough to take Mrs. Brinton's breath away. Ellie Howard, as her old friend knew her, was the quietest and simplest of creatures. Mrs. Brinton remembered her as one of those modest New England women given to inconspicuous pastel colours in gowns and uninteresting bonnets in headgear. Those immense French wardrobe trunks bewildered the hostess. What in the

world did they contain? She could hardly wait for Mrs. Howard to come. Her curiosity grew as each moment passed. Surely something unusual was afoot!

The bond between these two women was no usual one. Their close friendship had lasted without a break from the impressionable and impulsive hours of their school days. Through years of marriage and widowhood they had still kept in touch with each other.

Mrs. Howard lived in Brookline just outside of Boston, and was the conventional and staid New England matron. Mrs. Brinton moved in the smartest set in New York and was mundane to her fingertips. Both women were widows and independently rich. They were also about of equal age.

But Mrs. Brinton certainly did not look her forty-eight years as she stood waiting for her guest. The April sun fell affectionately on her brunette head and revealed her superbly erect figure, her fine poise of throat and chin and her air of grace and breeding. Her hair, which was magnificent, was plaited and twisted simply about her head. Her skin and eyes were youthful and her entire appearance was that of the perfectly gowned and coiffed woman of the world. She fairly radiated an air of feminine sophistry.

An insistent tingle of the bell interrupted her conjectures. But Metz, the butler, did not announce Mrs. Howard as he entered. He came towards his mistress with the faintly apologetic bearing of the well trained servant. Mrs. Brinton came towards him eagerly.

“Is that Mrs. Howard, Metz?” she asked.

Metz hesitated a moment.

“It’s Mr. Thomas, Madame,” he announced dubiously.

Mrs. Brinton was as nearly impatient as her serene temper permitted.

“Metz!” she said with vexation. “How could you let him in. You know I’m —”

Metz coughed discreetly. “Mr. Thomas would not be denied, Madame. He said it was most pressing and Madame had given me no orders to excuse her.”

Mrs. Brinton nodded, somewhat mollified. “That’s quite true, Metz, and of course if he is in the house and knows that I am in, I shall have to see him, I suppose. Ask him to come up, Metz.”

She moved to the window and sat down resignedly. Crossing her small, well-shod feet she awaited the unexpected caller. She felt quite annoyed. It was too provoking to have Thomas and his tiresome theories blunder in now. She felt she could never

explain him to Mrs. Howard should the latter come before she could get rid of him. There was one ray of hope. She knew Mrs. Howard was interested in all sorts of things that went with lectures and of these Thomas was one. She had asked him to come in some time and discuss a programme. She felt hopefully that a talk on some appropriate subject might interest Mrs. Howard. She had been racking her mind to think what would amuse a serious woman from New England. She felt quite sure that the average whirl of society would not divert modest and intellectual Ellie Howard.

Now that Thomas was here she would arrange for a literary afternoon. She rose pleasantly enough to greet him with her captivating smile. He returned it with one of his own that had an air of pleasant insolence about it. Mrs. Brinton sensed that quickly. She always felt that Thomas was more or less rude and there was an aggressive conceit about him. He was a well-set-up man of forty-two or three, a bit odd in his dress. When he spoke it was with vigorous self-assurance, though his voice was smooth and insinuating. Mrs. Brinton sat down and motioned to him to do likewise. She even offered him a cigarette and lighted one herself. She didn't know how long she would have to wait for Mrs. Howard and the

cigarette would help her through Thomas' tedious utterances.

He appraised her from head to foot with undisguised admiration. He was an ardent worshipper of women and Mrs. Brinton was charming.

"Evidently you are not over-joyed to see me," he said. "And yet, you remember, you asked me to call early this week."

"So I did," confessed Mrs. Brinton hastily. "But to-day I am fearfully busy and expecting a guest from out-of-town."

Thomas smiled again. He was always finding footing on uncertain grounds and he was never ill at ease doing it.

Amos Thomas was one of those masculine evils for which women's clubs are more or less responsible. Were it not for study programmes with a radical tendency his kind would be forced to daily labour, a harsh consummation which none of them desires. Thomas appeared before many a club and always for a compensation. Women loved to hear him tear society and property to pieces, always quite secure that nothing ever would come of what he said.

Mrs. Brinton regarded him as something to amuse an occasional gathering and she did have in the back of her mind the idea of another programme. She

would have been glad enough to have seen him at another time.

She had been presented to Thomas first at the house of a friend who had been studying "advanced" literature. This woman took the Socialist quite seriously and chose to regard him as another Marx, a profound and misunderstood thinker. Mrs. Brinton knew much better; she was sure Thomas was a fraud; but to her frauds were diverting and she loved anything which would make lecture programmes amusing.

"You haven't forgotten what you wanted to say to me?" he asked.

Mrs. Brinton laughed merrily. "What an opinion you must have of me," she returned. "I know I'm a trifler, but I do remember some things. Of course I know. Our woman's club means to devote some of its time this spring to social study and wants you to give it three lectures. They were desperate at the last board meeting. Nobody had an idea for the spring course. In a weak moment I consented to be the chairman of the study committee and in a weaker moment I suggested you. You are the only parlour Socialist I know."

Thomas leaned forward. "I believe they think I will say something shocking, and perhaps I might.

I never talked to a woman's club, and I don't know its limitations."

Mrs. Brinton laughed again. "You would find it difficult to shock our woman's club. It's quite advanced and besides, I shouldn't care if you did. Just talk to them about something they can't understand. Most of them know as much about Sociology as they do about balancing their bank books, a hateful knack I never could grasp. While you are here I would like to arrange to have you one afternoon myself. Mrs. Howard, who is coming to visit me, is very intellectual and quite advanced in all club work, and I really believe one of your literary talks would amuse her. On an unusual subject — say Sociology, or some stupid thing like that — you know what is fitting, I'm sure."

Mr. Thomas thought for a moment and then he said slowly, "Now and then I make grave mistakes. Last week I gave a talk to the Rosebud Club, a débutante organisation, and I really did put my foot into it. I gave the pretty dears bombs! And they only wanted bonbons."

Mrs. Brinton held up her hand in mock horror. "I heard about that lecture, you naughty man," she said, "And, of course, you mustn't do anything like that here." She looked at him in mild reproof. "Just be amusing and startling, but not naughty.

I'm sure you know a lot of subjects. 'Anything but race suicide. I am so tired of that.'

Mr. Thomas' expressive face relaxed into a smile of utter simplicity; which meant, in his case, that he was about to say something very sophisticated. "Do you think Mrs. Howard and your friends would care for a talk on 'The Infinite Varieties of Love'?"

Mrs. Brinton laughed outright. "Oh, no, no, you wicked man. Of course, not! I want to have a successful literary afternoon. I thought I would ask about fifty women, have some queer playing, odd singing, and —"

Thomas interrupted her. "Me! Eh? I'm flattered. Well, I'm sorry you won't have that subject, for I have made rather a personal study of it. It has a wide scope, and from my own experiences I have kept notes — from time to time, as I could."

Mrs. Brinton rose suddenly. There were moments when she felt that Amos Thomas presumed on her good nature, and trod so near to an insolent intimacy of dialogue as he dared. She also remembered, all at once, that Mrs. Howard would arrive at any moment and she did not want her to find so undesirable a guest having a tête-à-tête with her. She put out her hand to dismiss him with dignity, which seemed to amuse

him, for he ignored her and stood with his arms folded, waiting.

“We will have to discuss it some other day,” Mrs. Brinton said, coldly. “I haven’t time now and I am expecting my guest any moment.” The words had hardly passed her lips when the bell rang and Metz came into the hallway. She looked at Thomas in despair. “Please go,” she urged, “I shall be much engaged for the rest of the afternoon.”

Thomas shook his head. “You evidently think time is nothing to me. My dear lady, there’s the whole world to convince yet, let alone a few women. Five minutes more will settle it, and I am not sure when I can come again. Can’t you give me a word or two while the lady removes her bonnet and powders her nose? I am quite sure she will want to do both. I’ll go into the little music room and read my *Daily Socialist*, and you can call me when you have a moment.”

Mrs. Brinton motioned him aside breathlessly as she heard Mrs. Howard’s voice in the hall.

“Do, do go,” she murmured, as he strolled toward the music room. Thomas finally disappeared and she gave a sigh of relief. Truly he was almost too persistent, but just then Mrs. Howard appeared and she rushed over to embrace her. Thomas and his

insolence were forgotten in the joy of seeing her old friend. As the two women stood together, they looked as if they were beings from different worlds. Mrs. Howard, although an undeniably handsome woman of clear complexion and expressive, long-lashed, grey eyes, was frumpishly dressed in a badly-fitted tailor suit of an indefinite prune colour, and she not only wore an elderly bonnet on her smoothly-parted hair, but she carried an umbrella and a large hand-bag. Even her shoes were broad and low heeled and her soft greyish hair was pulled so tightly back behind her ears that one felt it must be uncomfortable. Only her enthusiasm and her animated speech would convince one of the fact that she was a contemporary of Mrs. Brinton's. When she spoke or smiled one recognised her fascination, for her voice was exquisitely modulated and she used her small, well-shaped hands with much freedom and grace. She was a sad example of an attractive, good-looking woman whose natural charms were quite concealed by her unfortunate mode of dressing.

Mrs. Brinton's frock, on the other hand, was the very last word in modish gowns. It was a beautifully wrought garment of black and white, which clung closely to her slender figure and showed by its daring drapery every line and curve of her graceful

body, as she had already dressed for dinner. Her slippers were high heeled and finished with jewelled buckles, an ornament of diamonds fastened the aigrette in her dark hair, and her beautifully tinted cheek was as clear and soft as a girl's. Mrs. Brinton's charm was one of art; but it was art at its perfection, and Mrs. Howard, who hadn't seen her for a year, gazed at her in undisguised admiration.

CHAPTER II

MRS. BRINTON'S GUEST

IF Mrs. Brinton, in her joy and pleasure over seeing her old friend from Brookline, had forgotten Amos Thomas and his lectures, the Socialist was not so absorbed. The little book he had picked up to take with him into the music room was a beautifully bound volume of Ruskin's "Sesame and Lilies." Thomas regarded it as a reactionary remnant of a well-lost period and tossed it contemptuously to the top of the piano. He had not the slightest intention of playing the eavesdropper, but he could not escape the crisp, clear, attractive tones of the visitor's voice, and as she went on explaining her visit to Mrs. Brinton he became fascinated and was almost tempted to walk out and insist on an introduction. But for once in his life he did not act on impulse. He listened breathlessly and shamelessly.

The meeting between the two women had been a mutually happy one. They embraced repeatedly and went through those feminine half sentences that are tinged more with emotion than meaning intelligible to another.

“Ellie, you blessed soul, I am glad to see you!” Mrs. Brinton finally exclaimed, releasing her friend. “How splendid of you to come. Aren’t you tired, dear?”

Mrs. Howard laughed delightfully. “Not I, I never felt better in my life nor more delighted to see you. How well you look, Peg.”

Mrs. Brinton tucked an arm about Mrs. Howard and led her over to the sofa. “Sit down and let me have a look at you. You haven’t changed a scrap and it’s a year since I was in Brookline.”

Mrs. Howard untied her bonnet and threw it on the chair near her as she answered, “I can’t see why I do look the same, for I am quite done over inside.” She ruffled her soft hair with a little pat of her hand and smiled at Mrs. Brinton with the air of a child who possesses a secret and longs to tell it.

Mrs. Brinton was filled with curiosity. Her friend seemed quite changed, somehow, and she felt sure she was going to hear the reason. She helped Mrs. Howard off with her coat and gazed in amazement at her black silk blouse. It was something she had forgotten existed.

“What on earth brought you to New York?” she asked. “I am consumed with curiosity. Has any-

thing happened to Farrell? Do tell me!" she begged.

Mrs. Howard shook her head. "Farrell is shooting for two days. And I ran away. I couldn't have flown more rapidly if he had been a brutal, dissolute husband, instead of a model son. Peg, I do wish Farrell would fall by the wayside once in a while. I have never even had an opportunity to sit up for him. He's always in before I am. Farrell is twenty-four, and I do not believe any woman has ever had one passing thought over him. And yet he is young, and quite nice-looking. Of course, he isn't human, he's only rich! I often wonder where my blood, in Farrell, finds a spot warm enough to course through." She took absolute joy in Mrs. Brinton's impatience and purposely delayed telling her.

"Do tell me what it all means. I perish of impatience." Mrs. Brinton grew pathetic. "Don't tease me."

Mrs. Howard leaned over and patted her friend's arm gently. "Prepare to be surprised, Peg. I'm having a kind of revolution, and you are getting a private view."

Mrs. Brinton nodded. "Do you mean suffrage? I've always wondered if you would."

Mrs. Howard shook her head. "No, dear, I am

not going in for women's rights. It is something much more feminine — diversion! Perhaps I might call this a domestic revolution, but even that doesn't half express it. I do not believe I shall ever be quiet and respectable again. I am tired of being a frump, a kind, good, unselfish doormat for Brookline and Farrell to step over coming into the house. It's a dull, uneventful life, and I've run away from it. Of course, this has been gathering in me for years. Finally, even I couldn't stem the tide. Of course, it is funny, but it's also rather tragic. When father was alive I breakfasted by candle light with him, then gas light with Farrell, and now electric light with my son. And I hate to get up. I love to loaf and loll and dawdle. Lying in bed of a morning was never one of the things I blamed the Pompadour for, Peg. I am considered a fine housekeeper, but I do hate detail and I want to be quite idle. Really, I do. I am called an exemplary mother, but I'm not. It's a fearful admission, but Farrell bores me every day of his life, and what is worse, his father did before him. All the Howards bore me. And so does Brookline, and all its inhabitants. When I was young I was very fond of Farrell and I am fond of his son. But it's tiresome living with him, and I ran away. Everything about our house is poky and

New England, and I detest New England, beginning with its mince pies and ending with its Pilgrim Fathers!"

Mrs. Brinton laughed immoderately. "That I should live to hear it! And after all these years! You know how often I have begged you to leave Farrell to amuse himself in his own dull way and try the continent with me."

Mrs. Howard nodded. "You were always my salvation, Peg, because you were so understanding. That's why I've come now. As for Farrell, he's a sort of spinster bachelor. That's a new animal, but I have an excellent specimen, my dear, and a spinster bachelor with means and morals is quite above sex. You know you once told me the name of your dress-maker?" Mrs. Brinton smiled. "Celeste," she said, "I have begged you for years to buy yourself some pretty gowns, but you wouldn't."

Mrs. Howard's smile was baffling. "But I have. Celeste had an exhibit of models in Boston and I bought most of them. From now on I am going to live and dress to please myself and spend quantities of money doing both. I have even engaged a French maid." With this final shot, she leaned back as Metz brought in the tea tray and placed it before Mrs. Brinton.

“Ellie, you are wonderful,” exclaimed Mrs. Brinton, hardly believing it all. “I adore you. Do go on. I pray a kind fate that I may be by when first Farrell hears this. I hope you brought all the gowns with you. That explains the army of trunks. I am sure I shall die of sheer envy. It must have cost you a pretty penny.” She handed Mrs. Howard her tea.

Mrs. Howard sipped in silence for a moment and then said, “It cost an appalling sum. But I don’t care a rap. Do you realise that I’ve never done yet as I liked in my whole life?”

Mrs. Brinton laughed. “Poor you! Do have a muffin, Ellie.”

“You’re a pampered cat, Peg,” returned Mrs. Howard quickly, “and you know nothing about duty. My life has been one long bore! Duty! I hate the very word!”

Mrs. Brinton put down her tea cup in amazement. She hardly knew her old friend of high ideals and New England conscience. She was shocked for a moment. “Ellie,” she expostulated. “And you the president of the Domestic Arts Club!”

Mrs. Howard moved her teaspoon in derision. “My dear, that’s not half. I’m head of a mothers’ bureau, a home science organisation and a dozen other hygienic, philanthropic or reform affairs. And

truly, I despise reform. I wouldn't help reform a white rabbit in my present humour and heaven knows they need reformation. I am done with it, I tell you! I won't be bored one hour more. Farrell is exactly like his father, even to the way he says the 'o' in Boston. And he is just as shriekingly dull. I'm through with it, I tell you! I won't be a good mother any longer, nor a fine housekeeper, either. I won't knit or darn another hour. There you are, Peg!" She waved her hands gaily. "You see, I am quite abandoned."

Mrs. Brinton laughed convulsively. "Ellie, Ellie!" she gasped. "That I should live to hear it and after all these years. I believe you are going to be married —"

"Heavens, no!" exclaimed the rebellious widow. "I am going to be happy. I am a quiet, ordinary-looking, indifferently-dressed woman of forty-eight. I intend to look forty. I have never attracted men, but I know I can. I shall be daring and wicked and fascinating. I shall show my feet, which are irreproachable, and my shoulders, which no one ever sees, but which are well worth looking at. I shall wave my hair and tint my lips, make nice, cunning eyebrows, and be massaged. I mean, Peg, to live just as I like from this moment, no matter what

anyone says or thinks, and to have all sorts and kinds of experiences. I intend to love and be loved, to hate, to lie and cheat and perhaps even play games. I may shock you, Margaret, and that wouldn't be easy, but I am afraid I shouldn't care if I did. And my clothes are really wonderful! Wait till you see them! I have sixteen gowns, hats to match, and slippers and all sorts of grandeur. Look at me hard, Peg, it's my last appearance as a middle-aged dowdy."

Mrs. Brinton was filled with undisguised amazement. She felt grateful to Mrs. Howard for that. Life was often monotonous and here was novelty. "Ellie, there is no one like you," she said. "Who else would dare? And the perfect thing is that you undoubtedly will do it. That's what I adore."

Mrs. Howard laughed merrily, her charming face aglow with excitement. "I am beginning to-day," she continued, "but I hadn't the heart to burst upon you robed and decked like Sheba's queen without a friendly warning. By six o'clock I mean to forget I ever crocheted a baby blanket or wore a bonnet." She took off her glasses.

"My dear," said Mrs. Brinton with much emphasis, "your hour has arrived. When your wire came I telephoned three of the most agreeable men I know to keep the evening for me. And I thought we would

dine at Sherry's and do a play. They are coming in here first for a cocktail. One of them is without doubt the most fascinating male creature alive, Christopher Dallas."

"Philadelphia?" Mrs. Howard inquired.

Mrs. Brinton went on. "With a lot of Virginia stirred in. He has been to every place in this world. One would not be surprised to turn a corner in Paris, Algiers, Peking, London, Bombay, or Cairo, and run across Christopher Dallas. Like the devil in the Book of Job, he is always just back from going up and down in the earth."

Mrs. Howard smiled her anticipation. "And I suppose like the devil, stirring up mischief. Delicacious possibility. And the other two?" she asked.

"You remember John Strong — my John Strong, Ellie," Mrs. Brinton explained, "and Michael Doyle, our great political giant. Once a bar-tender I am told, but always a delight. And *all* unmarried. What do you think of that? I must have been inspired when I asked them."

Mrs. Howard rose hastily and gathered her belongings together. "I am going to freshen up a bit," she announced, "and put on my war paint, for it is getting late. My train got in hours ago, but this new maid, Anna," she pronounced the name with a

faint suspicion of an "r" on the end of it, "insisted upon my laying in a stock of false hair, and it took ages to match it up. I suppose I have the same room." She started toward the stairway, followed by Mrs. Brinton, whose gaze fell on the music room just as Amos Thomas parted the curtain an inch or two.

Mrs. Brinton paused as the curtain was hastily dropped, but she remembered the Socialist suddenly and her heart failed her. He had surely heard every word, for the music room had no door.

She thought hastily and then she said to her retreating guest, "Yes, dear, and do hurry. I'll follow you in a moment, I have to see to something."

Mrs. Howard, engrossed in the novelty of making herself over, hurried up the stairs, displaying a generous glimpse of white clad ankle which made Mrs. Brinton shudder. The latter walked over and threw open the curtain of the music room and faced Mr. Thomas, who was filled with repressed excitement. He came out and walked up and down restlessly. Mrs. Brinton watched him.

Finally he turned and demanded, "Is the owner of that caressing voice Mrs. Farrell Howard? I have been the most willing eavesdropper. What a woman! And what a superb self confidence! She has filled

me with a pulsating ardour. I am on fire to meet her."

"Did you see her?" Mrs. Brinton asked faintly.

"Of course not," returned Thomas, "I am not so ill-mannered. But I couldn't help hearing, because you have no door to that room and your friend's delightful voice pronounced each dear syllable so clearly, that without trying I could drink her words in one by one. Such a nature! And how she must have suffered!"

Mrs. Brinton smiled quietly. "'Suffered' isn't just the word I would use. She has millions."

Thomas paused to regard her gravely. "But I am sure she counts it as mere dross. What ideals she has, what longings! It is wonderful! A mature soul with a craving for love and liberty. I could devote my life to such a woman. Will you not, out of the goodness of your heart, allow me to remain here until she comes back again? After she has, as she so delightfully expresses it, put on her war paint? I promise not to stay a quarter of an hour. Truly, I could not sleep if I did not see her. She has roused me!"

Mrs. Brinton looked at him with a twinkle of amusement in her expressive eyes. Amos Thomas as an admirer was a new role. To present him to

Ellie Howard for a first plunge into the sea of flirtation promised to be a very unusual diversion. So much so that she suddenly made up her mind to accomplish it.

“Mind, now,” she warned, “you can see her only for a few moments and I am not sure she will come, but I will try.”

Thomas looked eagerly at the stairway. “Shall I wait here,” he said, “or go into the little music room again and wait until you call me? I haven’t read my *Daily Socialist*.”

Mrs. Brinton paused before mounting the stairs. “Yes, do wait in there and think over the lecture, unless lectures are beyond you at such a moment. Male atoms are usually weak things when they fall under the spell of the love force.”

But he would not jest. He really seemed to have put aside his artificial and insinuating manner for a very serious humour, which diverted Mrs. Brinton immensely. She went up the steps slowly, while he went back to the music room. She knocked at Mrs. Howard’s door without really knowing what she would tell her. The door was opened by the new maid, a trim, pretty, young person dressed in a grey gown with lace cap and apron. Mrs. Brinton looked at her in open-eyed amazement. Ellie, with a sou-

brette maid in bows and streamers, Ellie, of all women! Mrs. Brinton had always pictured her cared for by a mature Scotch or English woman in alpaca with a black silk apron. Beyond Anna was the widow trying on some pink satin slippers. She already was a new Ellie Howard, indeed, but a wonderful one! Mrs. Brinton sat down abruptly and tried to gain her mental balance. Mrs. Howard, on a low chair in a ravishing lace garment, which might be vaguely described as a negligée, was bending over her slipper, with her hair in a state of frightful disorder. The resourceful Anna had pinned a quantity of false, blonde curls deftly on her head. A soft, but equally false wave, rippled across her brow, and her face, radiant with excitement, looked like a girl's. As she struggled with her slipper, the foamy lace which served as sleeves for the present covering, fell back and showed her round white arms. One pretty shoulder was plainly visible where her negligée had slipped over. It was a singularly intimate and disconcerting picture.

Mrs. Brinton, speechless for the moment, gazed upon her friend, so changed that she barely recognised her. "Ellie!" she murmured faintly, "you are wonderful! Stand up and let me see you."

Mrs. Howard put her foot into her slipper firmly and got up. The deft Anna darted about her like a faithful little bee, pulling a bow here or patting a bit of lace there.

“Celeste certainly has sold you a negligée,” said Mrs. Brinton. It was worthy of its name, for it had about it a charm, a wicked abandon in each fold and pleat that only a French woman could have achieved.

Mischief entered into Mrs. Brinton’s soul. With one more glance at this vision of golden hair and frills, she held out her hand to her friend. “Come, Ellie,” she urged, “there is someone downstairs waiting to meet you, and I am going to take you just as you are. You look quite wonderful.”

Mrs. Howard protested faintly. “I seem rather undressed, Peg.” But Mrs. Brinton was firm.

“Haste is the main thing,” she said, “and he’ll adore it. He doesn’t know it, of course, but he is assisting at a true occasion. You! In your first negligée! Come just as you are, don’t alter a thing.”

She hurried down the steps ahead of Mrs. Howard, who followed carefully and a little chary of her high heeled slippers.

Mrs. Brinton pushed aside the curtain of the

music room. "Mr. Thomas, do come out, I'm bringing Mrs. Howard down to meet you."

He rushed out so quickly that he almost ran over Mrs. Brinton, his eyes on the vision at the bend in the stairway. He walked past Mrs. Brinton, who turned to present him.

Mrs. Howard, full of new-born coquetry, leaned over the stair rail and smiled recklessly into Mr. Thomas' eager face.

Mrs. Brinton introduced him to her. "Mrs. Howard, Mr. Amos Thomas. I am sure Ellie, you will be glad I called you, for he is a most interesting man and quite wild to meet you. But you can only talk to him a moment, Ellie, for it is late, and you have to dress." She went on into the dining-room to give Metz a message, feeling that Mrs. Howard would be less embarrassed without her.

When they were alone Mrs. Howard smiled again at Thomas, so daringly that it sent a curious dizzy sensation through his brain. He leaned against the lower post of the stairs to steady himself. Mrs. Howard made a pretence of gathering her wrapper about her more closely and only succeeded in showing her very attractive satin slippers and her pretty, slim ankles. Not a move escaped Amos Thomas, whose susceptible heart was pounding.

“I’m not fit to be seen,” Mrs. Howard said. “But Mrs. Brinton insisted that I must come. I do wonder why?”

Thomas found his voice. “Because I begged to see you. I was in that little room when you arrived, and your voice was so marvellous that I felt I must see the woman.”

Mrs. Howard was surprised out of her flirtatious mood for a moment. Things were starting in even before she had planned for them. “Do you mean you heard my conversation with Mrs. Brinton?”

Thomas nodded. “Every word, and it fascinated me. What a mind and soul you must have.”

Mrs. Howard was interested. “I have been wondering what man I would meet first in New York. And just what he would think of me. I love to think you liked my voice,” she ventured.

Thomas placed his hand higher on the balustrade, very near her arm. “I want to know you better, to see you often. Would you like that?” he asked softly.

Mrs. Howard looked at him. “Are you married?” she asked.

Thomas stepped back for a moment. The directness of the question was so markedly different from her flirtatious manner of an instant before. He did

not know that the shrewd New England habit of years found it difficult to so quickly drift from its moorings. But he was never long at a loss for a word.

"I — I," he hesitated. "Well, not exactly. That is to say, I am not married. I am afraid, dear lady, that my particular views on marriage might seem a little odd to you until you understand me better. I am a varietist. But I don't suppose you ever — we are not much given to marriage, you see. However, we can surely let that pass for the moment. I couldn't put it all into words in five minutes. But as one free soul to another I shall tell you the beautiful truths in my heart when next we meet. When may I see you? To-morrow? Can I come in the afternoon, just before the beautiful twilight, and take you to a quaint little Russian tea shop in the Ghetto? I won't ride in cabs or automobiles, but if you will have it so, we will take a trolley car. It doesn't matter if only the eyes of my soul can feed on yours." He mounted a step and gazed raptly at her. Mrs. Howard leaned slightly towards him.

"Perhaps," she agreed, "if I can arrange it. You must promise to be very nice to me, for I am a stranger in a strange land. And what will you talk about? I know so little of life or love." She

looked at him appealingly. "Will you teach me?"

In his excitement Thomas stepped on a low chair at the foot of the landing, and put his two hands on the rail. He reached out impulsively to grasp her hand.

"You are such an oasis in my desert, you wonderful woman," he murmured in an emotional whisper.

Just at this moment Mrs. Brinton returned and Mrs. Howard, who saw her first, drew away from him and started hurriedly up the stairs.

"I'm going this instant, Peg," she assured Mrs. Brinton. "Until to-morrow, Mr. Thomas," and before he realised it she had gone.

With as much dignity as he could muster, Mr. Thomas climbed off the chair and came over to Mrs. Brinton.

Mrs. Brinton's mobile mouth was quivering with repressed merriment. There was no question of Mrs. Howard's first conquest. She saw Thomas was still in a dazed condition. Mrs. Howard's coming and her bewildering candour had quite driven everything else out of his head.

Mrs. Brinton held out her hand, "You know you promised."

He moved towards the hall. "I am already starting," he said. "And to-morrow after Mrs. Howard

and I return from the Ghetto, we will settle the fate of the lectures. Once more a woman comes into my shattered life!"

Mrs. Brinton sank into a chair, "Good-bye," she said faintly.

"Good-bye." The door closed behind him.

She leaned back and gave way to uncontrollable laughter. "The Ghetto! What a trysting spot! The Ghetto! Oh, Ellie Howard!"

CHAPTER III

THE TURNING POINT

It was the very serenity of existence that had operated as much as anything to bring about the revolt of Mrs. Farrell Howard. She had lived her life in two houses, the first in Roxbury, where her parents had dwelt in an ingrown New England environment, and later in Brookline, where she and her husband had moved after their marriage.

That serenity of existence was the off-spring of generations of repression. No Howard ever confessed to anything so interesting as excitement. Emotion of every sort had been added to the biblical list of deadly sins in that serene and practical family. For twenty years Farrell Howard, Sr., left the Brookline house at the same hour in the morning and returned as punctually at an unvarying hour in the evening. His father had been one of the successful New Englanders in the East India trade and he had turned his inheritance over many times by judicious investments in city and suburban real estate. Farrell Howard, Jr., literally, was born into this unimaginative business. When his father died, quite as

unemotionally as he lived, the younger inherited with the office and the business the hours of going and coming of the elder, his air of practicality and unexcitement, his preciseness and exactness, his nose glasses and his calm, and almost his age. Farrell Howard, Jr., may be said to have been Brookline's oldest young man. He was the creature of his father's habit, following without a thought of anything else the routine of the inherited office and home.

Farrell was short, sandy of hair, near-sighted and formidable only when thrown off the path of habit. Then he was irritable and complaining until he managed to get his feet back into the fixed ways of established office and household custom. Each Saturday afternoon he spent at home and in spring and summer puttered about the yard and garden with the care-taker, just as his father had done in earlier days. On Sunday morning he arose early with an air of extreme sanctity and frowned down all frivolity of mother, maid, servant and animal. He faced a sermon with severity and walked home from church with an air of great silence, following his father's literal interpretation of the second commandment regarding the animals in the barn.

All of Mrs. Howard's inborn grace and charm, her unreleased spirit, her capacity for emotion and ex-

perience, her hunger for life and living, had been rigorously frowned upon by her husband. One of his infrequent, unbusinesslike remarks was to the effect that "nice" women ought to know nothing of such pagan things as emotion, and that which the urbanites call "life." Of Boston's gayer side the elder Howard knew little save by scandalised contact with an occasional newspaper item, and he was always careful to take the offending journal to the office with him. So as the years went on his wife learned to bury feeling, sentiment and imagination. She forgot an early hunger for pretty things, her unsatisfied desires for romance and lived the quiet, uneventful life of the well-bred New England woman.

She was not really unhappy in these repressed years, for her husband was devoted to her in his rigid, undemonstrative way, and very proud of her. She was his ideal woman, an exemplary wife, a careful housekeeper and a model mother. Like the Emperor of all the Germans, he believed firmly in "Kirche, Kinder und Kuche." In all fairness to him it must be admitted that in many ways he was a very good husband. He was rich and Mrs. Howard was never stinted in anything. She spent what she liked and was accountable to no one. He was a church warden and a prominent man in the community in which he

lived. His small horizon was largely made up of his business and his wife and son, and if he lived narrowly, it was at least consistently so. Mrs. Howard was fond of him and appreciated his many excellent qualities. When he died she was profoundly stirred. He was the husband of her youth and he had been very good to her. She then missed the care and protection with which he had always surrounded her, and felt a vague loneliness during the first few years after his death. Farrell, her son, was a young man just entering college at the time, and she insisted upon his completing his studies. As his father did, Farrell admired and respected his mother more than he did anyone else in the world. She stood for all that was sweet and womanly in his life, for he knew very few girls, and the ones who came to his mother's hospitable roof always faded into insignificance beside her and her great charm; a charm which years of Brookline and a large family of prim in-laws had never driven away.

Mrs. Howard was easily one of the most popular and best loved women of her age in Brookline. Her house was a centre of the staidly conventional society of that aristocratic suburb. She entertained lavishly and often. Farrell's college friends were loud in their praises of her, and he always brought them home

with a conscious thrill of pride in his charming mother. Farrell drove the fine horses his father had before him, and Mrs. Howard had two or three quiet and substantial vehicles to drive about in. She would have loved a motor, but she knew Farrell did not approve of cars, and she repressed that desire as she had done hundreds of others. She was quite aware that her friends considered her a very lucky woman, with her model son and her large and independent fortune. But Mrs. Howard was bored out of all reason. She could not get up in the morning, or go to bed at night without a feeling of wearied mental stagnation.

But her mind had to have occupation, and as thousands of other women in similar situation have done, she went in for "things." She surrendered to the helpful suggestion of pastor and suburban uplifter, joining domestic science clubs, art and travel classes, the directories of homes and benevolent associations and followed in other directions the paths of mild and innocuous "improvement." Here she found many other women quite as repressed and bored as she herself and felt that with them she was tramping the rounds of some great cage. She was doing always everything but that which the depths of her spiritual soul clamoured for.

The years of repression made her revolt all the more violent and certain when it did come. The actual moment of rebellion was her forty-eighth birthday. It was one of those grey, dull mornings in the very early spring when the snow has faded away, leaving the earth a soggy, soppy blank against an equally blank grey sky. Farrell had gone off to the office at his usual exact minute and after Mrs. Howard had given the orders for the day to cook and maid she went to her room. For a time she stood at the window above the garden, looking out over the dead vines. She felt the bitter depths of depression. She felt that there had been no higher tones in her life than in that dead and dreary early March landscape. And she was sure that in her there were possibilities for beauty and life, just as vivid in hue and as sprightly in form as there were stored in the unawakened bulbs and roots beneath the soil of her garden.

She went to her glass and coldly surveyed her attractions in the firm, determined manner that only women can who have generations of relentless Puritan blood coursing beside such other warmer fluid as there might be in her veins.

“For one thing,” she said aloud to herself, “there is no good reason, Ellie Howard, why you should

continue to be a frump. And you don't have to keep on going the endless round here.

"Do something," she said, clinching her fists and fiercely addressing herself, "go somewhere, waken up, brighten up. You haven't got many more years to do it in."

And then she calmly analysed herself.

"You're almost half a century old. You've never really lived in your life. You've never really loved. You've never really been loved. You've got more money than you know what to do with. Use some of it before you are too old to get any good of it."

She looked in the glass at a figure quite shapeless in the practical negligée and the low-heeled slippers. She ran her fingers over her smooth, simply-parted greyish-brown hair and shivered. She got quite close to the mirror and cruelly followed each tiny wrinkle.

Then she turned, and for a few minutes walked rapidly up and down the floor, stopping now and then to check, if possible, the tumult of thought and to select some definite plan out of mental chaos.

"I have it," she announced finally and with decision. "I'll make that long-promised visit to Peg and I'll buy everything in Boston first."

Her plan matured quite as rapidly as it had been conceived. She spent days in Boston hunting a sort



Things were starting in even before she had planned for them

of rebirth trousseau among the modistes. She finally remembered Mrs. Brinton's Celeste, found her and discovered her with a wonderful exhibit of models. She bought practically all of them that fitted or that could be made to fit her. Celeste, no less interested, attended with feverish activity on the plans for the blossoming out into butterflydom of the long dormant chrysalis.

Mrs. Brinton, on whom Mrs. Howard expected to descend, was her oldest friend. Margaret Oliver Brinton and she had gone to boarding school together and visited back and forth as young girls. When Mrs. Howard married, Mrs. Brinton had been one of her bridesmaids. Mrs. Brinton's own marriage, which followed Mrs. Howard's very shortly, had taken her into the gayest set in New York, and she had seen less and less of her old friend. Mrs. Brinton had no children, but, as she had married a man who was entirely given up to the allurements of the world in which he lived, it was not easy to persuade him to go to Brookline even for a visit, and the Howards rarely came to Manhattan. After Farrell was born Mrs. Brinton made a brief flying visit to see Ellie Howard and to admire the new baby. She went again when he was just finishing school, to help celebrate a wedding anniversary, and she felt more thank-

ful than she could say that the stiff, spectacled, red-haired young boy did not belong to her. She really was sorry for Ellie. She seemed to be so engulfed in the Howard atmosphere. When the older Howard died Mrs. Brinton went to his funeral and tried to persuade Mrs. Howard to return with her to New York; but Farrell declined the invitation for her politely. His mother needed great care and devotion at this trying time, and he felt sure he could supply it as no one else could. After Mrs. Brinton's own husband died, she and Mrs. Howard met each year or so for a day or two, and they went on one or two short summer outings together. Mrs. Brinton fumed over Mrs. Howard's settled and middle-aged appearance, and her humdrum existence, and she continually wrote and urged her to change her way of living. She had asked Mrs. Howard so often to visit her in New York that she hardly believed her own eyes, when Mrs. Howard's letter arrived saying she was coming early in April. A few days later a wire confirmed her coming.

The widow was really ready for her coming out. Unknown to Farrell she had found a clever French maid in Boston and had engaged her against the advance on New York. Then there came the problem of telling Farrell, but the day before she was to go he

announced that the ducks were flying and that he was to go on his only dissipation, a shooting trip, which meant three days of solemn peppering at mallards and blue-bills. So she didn't have to tell him. On the morning he was to have returned she started out gaily for Boston, leaving word with the servants that she would write Farrell when she got to New York. In Boston she met Anna, who had supervised the moving of her convention of trunks to the station. They remained over-night at a hotel, caught a morning train and before she knew it Boston was behind her and she felt that the bridges of years were being burned.

But fate had other plans. Farrell found the shooting poor and caught a wretched cold, which the damp marshes and wet boots only made worse. And he came back sneezing and coughing prepared to find a gentle and capable mother who would hover about him, doing a hundred and one things for his creature comfort. With the good nature, which was one of her chiefest charms, Mrs. Howard had always spoiled Farrell. The house, the table, even her own life, were studied and arranged to meet his approval. And he was particularly fond of saying to his few intimates that no girl would ever be so considerate of him as his mother was.

His dismay at finding her gone was pathetic. And when he was told that she had left for New York on a visit, the consternation that filled his mind quite drove the cold out of his head. The house, which was usually as ship-shape and orderly as a yacht, seemed at sixes and sevens. The servants were all vaguely disturbed, and quite out of the rut they had walked in so long, guided by Mrs. Howard's firm, capable hand. Farrell wandered about like a lost soul for a couple of hours. If the house could go to pieces in this way when his mother had only been gone a day, what would it be after a long visit? It was not to be endured. The sight of the canary chirping plaintively to be watered and fed convinced him. He and the servants could not get on without her, and he would go and tell her so. The thought that she would not come back did not enter his well-regulated head. He caught a train an hour or two after her own had gone. Filled with righteous indignation and a feeling that he had been deserted in a cruel world, he set out for New York to find his truant mother.

CHAPTER IV

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

MRS. BRINTON came down the stairs slowly. She was dressed for dinner in her exquisite evening gown, with John Strong's violets pinned close to the laces at her breast, and her famous pearls as her only jewels. She was so engrossed in thought that she did not notice Metz, who came toward her.

"I beg pardon, Madame," he said, "but cook asks is it dinner in or dinner out, as she had heard talk of both."

She glanced at Metz patiently, for she knew quite well that he had a great deal more than that to say to her. She had not wintered and summered this odd old servant for ten years without knowing his peculiarities. She realised that he loved to talk. He talked respectfully, deprecatingly, but always on the slightest provocation his kindly, garrulous tongue would run on about the merest trifle. Metz was a lean, gaunt man of uncertain years. He might have been either forty or sixty. He was very much the gentleman and an invaluable servant, but Mrs. Brin-

ton knew that just so often she had to listen to him.

Resigned to the inevitable, she sat down and made herself quite comfortable. "We dine out, tell cook, and a late breakfast," she directed. "Have the cocktail wagon in here when the gentlemen arrive, and cigarettes."

Metz took a long breath. "Very good, Madame. Cook says, is breakfast light or heavy, not knowing Mrs. Howard's taste. And cook asks, 'Does she hot water early,' and cook also asks, 'Is it plain or with lemon?' Cook having heard Mrs. Howard is from Boston, feels sure she hot waters; but Mrs. Howard's maid being new, doesn't know. Cook also asks, it being her Bible Class evening, if dinner should be dinner out, is there any objection to her taking the young parlour maid, whom she thinks rather a godless girl, to the Class with her. And cook asks will Madame allow me to call her a taxi, as it's damp and she's feeling rheumatic. Cook says,—"

Mrs. Brinton protested faintly, "Metz, I beg of you! I would rather take a bridge lesson than one of cook's messages. No wonder I keep house through my speaking tube. Tell her to do anything she likes, always, Metz. For she can cook!"

"Very good, Madame." He departed to speed cook Bible-classwards.

Mrs. Howard's maid ran down the stairs and came over to Mrs. Brinton. She was full of breathless interest as she spoke. "Madame Brinton, Madame Howard she ask you to let her know when all three messieurs have arrived, for the grand entrée!"

Mrs. Brinton smiled into Anna's earnest young face. "That was your clever idea, wasn't it, Anna? I am sure it was."

Anna shrugged her shoulders. "Ah, well, Mrs. Howard has never had much good time. For me, I want Mrs. Howard to have all messieurs possible. The gentleman, Thomas, he likes the beautiful undress, you think?"

Mrs. Brinton nodded, "He looked at it with hunger," she said. "It was not wasted, Anna."

The maid was much gratified and smiled happily. "Ravissante. Only wait, Madame Brinton. Already Mrs. Howard look like a young lovely lady."

"God speed the play!" laughed Mrs. Brinton. "Hurry her, my good Anna, the débutante must be ready for the grand entrée."

"If Madame Brinton rings twice," Anna assured her, "Madame Howard appear." Then she ran up the stairs as swiftly as she had come down.

Metz, who had answered the bell, announced the first of Mrs. Brinton's guests in John Strong, who

came at once into the room. He was a typical New York club man of forty-eight, well-dressed and perfectly-groomed. His hair was iron grey, and he was a shade too stout, but his complexion was fresh and clear and his step and bearing elastic and graceful. He had a pleasant, quiet manner and an air of agreeable conventionality. He had known Mrs. Brinton for more years than she cared to admit, and she was quite delighted to see him.

John Strong had been Mrs. Brinton's ardent admirer from the day her husband, who was one of his old friends, had presented him to her. He had envied Paul Brinton his happiness from the moment he first saw her charming face and superb black head. The years had only strengthened that admiration. He couldn't remember the day he first realised that he loved her, but he admitted to himself that it was long before Paul Brinton died; and after her first grief, when she began to go out a little again, he had attached himself gently and unobtrusively to her train. There had been few days since then that he had not seen her. At first she paid very little attention to him or his devotion. He had always been an intimate at the Brinton house and she was accustomed to seeing him about. But after a year or so she grew to depend on him and his perfect consideration. He

never failed or disappointed her, he never made jealous scenes or demanded anything, but he was always there and she cared for him more than she allowed herself to believe. He had asked her to marry him off and on almost daily for six years, for fear, as he naively expressed it, "you might feel like saying 'yes' some day and not know it," and she knew that in time she probably would give in. Women usually do.

She rose to greet him with a cordiality that she yielded no other man. "How are you, Jack?" she said. "It seems ages since you were here, and yet it was yesterday."

Strong took her slim fingers in his own and kissed them fervently. "That is ages," he agreed. "I ought to be here always. How wonderful you look to-night." He stood back a little to admire her. "I never saw a nicer frock."

Mrs. Brinton sat down again and he stood in front of her, a handsome, well-preserved figure, with the utter devotion of the faithful, life-long lover in his kindly eyes.

"I adore this frock myself," she confessed, "and your violets are charming with it. Where's Dal? I supposed you'd leave the club together."

Strong laughed and swung his gloves idly as if

he were trying to gain a moment or two to remember why he hadn't brought Dal.

But Mrs. Brinton insisted. "Where is he, Jack? Don't tell me he isn't dressed yet."

"Of course he's dressed," Strong said. "I left him drinking an old-fashioned cocktail with Ned Summers, and I warned him not to start for a quarter of an hour. I came early to have a moment alone with you. I never see you any more. We are always about with enough people to form a convention, and I never want to see anyone but you."

Mrs. Brinton looked up at him. "I expect to lose you to-night, my friend. You and Michael Doyle, and even Dal to Eleanor Howard."

Strong was much amused at the mere idea of it. "Of course, I don't doubt the lady's charm," he said, "but you will admit a Brookline widow doesn't sound like me."

"But," Mrs. Brinton objected, "you haven't seen this widow. She's unique, and she is clever. I hope she'll frighten you. I don't want to lose you."

Strong came closer. "If I thought you meant it!" he said softly.

"But I do, just this moment," Mrs. Brinton answered. She got up slowly and looked at him from under her long lashes daringly. "Even though I

am a stubborn creature, Jack, I like to know that you are always there. And that if I put out my fingers you'll be sure to close your hand on them."

She held out one hand to Strong, who took it in both of his and held it close against his breast, drawing her near to him. "As long as you and I are you and I. I've wanted you ten years," he murmured, "and I care more each year, dear."

"I know, my friend," she returned, with a flush that rewarded him. "I wonder you still bother."

He bent closer. "Some day you'll come."

"Perhaps," she sighed. "I wonder that I don't. I am a wretch, and you are like the Bank of England, and deserve more than I could ever give you. I ought to be scolded and shaken."

"I can't help myself," he said. "You are a habit. You've been one ever since I saw you first in your widow's black. And the day you put a touch of white on your dress I felt immensely cheered. And when you wore lavender, I felt really encouraged. Do you remember you lunched with me the day you blossomed out in all the colours? I surely thought I was the luckiest dog in all the world that day. But here we are still," he sighed a little. "How long I've waited for you!"

Just as she was about to answer the bell rang and

she drew her hand away slowly, but not before Strong had kissed her fingers and her wrist, and finally, with much warmth her round white elbow. Then he smiled at her contentedly.

“Bring on your widows. I’m ready!” he exclaimed. They turned to greet Christopher Dallas.

“I hear, Dal, that John wouldn’t fetch you. I call it very mean of him,” said Mrs. Brinton, as she shook hands with him, her eyes taking in with admiration his superb masculinity. He looked particularly well on this occasion, and appeared so young and dapper in his well-cut evening clothes that even Strong saw his friend anew.

Christopher Dallas did not look a day over forty-five as he entered Mrs. Brinton’s drawing-room, though one who knew could have told you that he was fifty-one. He was irresistibly attractive and his superb natural equipment was given added momentum by perfect manners, courtesy and a sort of courtly, old-school breeding. There was poise behind all his handsome, perfectly-groomed person and ease seemed to have been born in him. One felt instinctively that he had lived life intensely and fully, that he had tried all things everywhere and liked very few. He was evidently a prince of good fellows among men and a great favourite among women. At fifty-one he was

a millionaire many times over, he had ranged the world and yet retained no real, vital, central interest. His innermost desires and hopes still remained unfulfilled. In a professional way he was one of those peculiarly successful men in that he had won name and fortune without surrendering himself and his time to an office.

Dallas laughed at Strong as they stood facing each other. The two lived together at the same club and were inseparable.

"I don't blame him," Dallas said, referring to Strong's remark. "I am sure if I were he I would never come to this house with any man. I would find out first when you would be here alone. And he must sometimes feel the need of a vacation from me. We have lived together for fifteen years."

Strong's eyes twinkled. "I understand, Dal," he said, "that Mrs. Farrell Howard of Brookline, Massachusetts, is just about going to capture your young affections."

Dallas nodded. "Yes, Margaret promised me her over the telephone this morning. And after my outburst to you it's providential."

Strong waved his hand at Mrs. Brinton. "Please tell Margaret, Dal. He has a confession to make, Margaret, that will surprise you awfully."

Metz entered with the cigarettes and cigars, which Mrs. Brinton directed him to put on the small smoking table. She took a cigarette herself and moved over nearer the two men and sat down. Strong lounged on the divan beside her and Dallas sat in a big arm chair near her.

Mrs. Brinton laughed. "This is a wonderful day. I really hear things," she said. "Do smoke and tell me your news, Dal, before Michael comes."

Strong smiled. "Are you afraid Michael might put a damper on Dal?" he asked. "You don't half realise Dal's possibilities. He's not afraid of any man on the earth, or the devil. I haven't lived with him all these years for nothing. There is a wanton twinkle in his eye to-day."

"I won't tell it to Michael Doyle," Dallas said firmly, "for he is neither fish, fowl nor good red herring. He's Irish."

"Don't abuse Michael," begged Mrs. Brinton, "I adore him. And do tell me this interesting thing that will surprise me so."

"Perhaps it won't surprise you at all," Dallas began. "But Jack is right about one thing, I have a wanton fancy, and it's so absurd for a man of my age that I am prepared to be laughed at. If only you will understand me! To begin with, I am finding the

Club dull and life limps. I am getting old, too, and I hate that. It isn't wrinkles or lines or grey hairs that I mind, because they are only on the surface, but it's the astounding fact that I have lived half a century. Some day I shall break up all of a sudden like the Deacon's one-horse shay, and then people will gloat over me. And before that happens, I do want to have a last splendid fling, a wonderful farewell set-to with one of your adorable sex. My swan song, if you will. The only difficulty is that all the women I like are married or annexed, and be it written down of me, I was never one for *débutantes*. Give me an interesting page to read, not a blank on which I must painstakingly inscribe my monogram. Let me rather find so many names written there, that there is barely space left to carve mine. Of course, I can picture no greater joy than to make love to you, Margaret, but I do rather like John, and he has builded a high wall all about you and put signs of his own all over it. And I will not share my affair. I want a heart interest whose only alphabet is spelled with the letters of my name. I must have a love affair. I am just in the humour. Even if spring is a liar with her violets and sweet lilacs, she is the real promiser. A poet said she always promised us the same old lie and we always believed her, the promise

of the perfect woman. And this identical April she has lied so well that I will swear by her. I am ready to jump into a boat and go sailing out on a deep, strange sea, only trusting that a kind providence will tell me when I make my first port. I warn you, Margaret, it's love I want. I have reached that dangerous and criminal age when I would barter away my soul — to a woman who had one."

Mrs. Brinton laughed immoderately. "It is so delicious that it can't be true. From you, too. Only half an hour ago Eleanor Howard informed me that she must have a love affair, and without even asking, I promised that she might play with you, Dal. Isn't Providence almost too complaisant? I haven't been so entertained in years. You were always brave at the game, Dal, but for you to sigh and be poetical is worth while. I wouldn't have anything happen to it for worlds!"

Strong blew smoke rings in front of him. "Look out," he cautioned. "If Christopher Dallas is in that reckless a mood, I wash my hands of him. Never say I didn't warn you. He's not to be trusted, when he is sentimental or retrospective. And he is both now. Upon my soul, I fear for the lady." He gazed in mock terror at her.

But Mrs. Brinton was not to be alarmed. "I only hope they do play games," she said. "It might do them both good, and heaven knows, it would amuse me immensely. Here's Michael, bless him, he never forgets my chocolates."

The two men nodded at Doyle as he entered, carrying a gorgeous bonbon box which he handed Mrs. Brinton.

Michael Doyle smiled his own charming smile, as he gazed on his hostess.

"I'm of poor and common parentage," he said, "but I've an excellent memory for what ladies like, chocolates and other things. How are you two boys? Jack looks quite serious. And Mrs. Brinton is so bewildering to-night that if I said the half I feel, I know what stone Dal there would say I had been kissing." He had a delicious touch of brogue, and it added much to his charm.

Doyle was a handsome, sturdy Irishman, with an excellent disposition, and an extremely sunny smile. He had a quick wit and a rare gift of perception. Underneath a well-clothed, well-put-together exterior, he was a very human, natural soul. His manner was a trifle noisy, but he had a personality that quite overpowered his lowly origin and a gift of blarney that

was his salvation. He was over fifty and a tremendous figure in political New York, where he had risen from bartender to millionaire promoter.

Doyle was one of the few men of his type and origin whose rise in politics had been matched by an equal rise in society. In both places his Celtic adaptability helped. And he had an art for pleasing women which quite matched an ability for handling men. Add to this a shrewd business sense, a brilliant persistency and a good sense of the right things to have, and it was not difficult to understand the Irishman's success.

Though his origin was humble enough, he himself had never had a humble position in any environment. He was a leader of the parochial youth as a boy, and early learned the value of being a man who not only could bring his own vote, but a great many more to his ward chieftain. To be sure, he had served once as a bartender, but that had only widened the circle of his friends and paved the way for further advances.

Not having had much of a chance at school he had made men his books and his lessons were learned thoroughly. When wider opportunities offered themselves he was ready and his progress upward astonished both his friends and enemies. Once financially successful, he found himself readily admitted to any

masculine circle, where high value was placed on his wit and affability. Knowing the men of the better class it was not long until he had met the women. Among them he was even more of a favourite than with the men. Mrs. Brinton regarded him as one of her chiefest discoveries. It was now many years since he had first found his way to her house, and he had ever since been a faithful caller.

Mrs. Brinton moved her skirts aside to make room for him beside her, and he sat down easily, quite as much at home as Strong was, for he and Mrs. Brinton were excellent friends.

Strong leaned over as if he were telling him an important secret. "Do you notice how serious Dal looks, Michael?" he asked. "Well, he's hunting a love affair. He wants a soul mate."

Michael stared. "Hunting is he? Well, the town's full of soul mates, bless them! I might introduce him to a couple myself. What colour is he after?"

Strong laughed. "A grey head, I believe. He wants a well-seasoned soul mate, none of your fickle fillies for Dallas. He must have a lady who knows her book."

Dallas laughed as he lit another cigarette, while Metz came in pushing the cocktail wagon before him.

He left it in the centre of the room, and took the tray of cigars and cigarettes to Doyle.

The Irishman lighted a cigar and turned again to Dallas. Dallas, sentimental, was a new specimen and Doyle looked him over interestedly. "What's started ye?" he demanded. "The spring, I take it."

Strong interrupted, "He's begging for trouble, Michael."

Dallas leaned back, lazily, looking at Mrs. Brinton with half-shut eyes.

"Well, Dal?" she queried. "Don't stop. Shall I provide you the love affair?"

"If the Brookline widow is in a springtime mood, there is no telling what we might do," he confessed.

Strong waved his cigar at Michael triumphantly. "There," he said. "Now you can hear him yourself. Isn't it worth while, eh?"

Michael nodded. "I'll take pains lookin' up that soul-mate for ye, Dal. This is too good to lose, this humour."

Mrs. Brinton rose, and as the men followed her example, she motioned to the stairway where Anna, carrying Mrs. Howard's evening cloak and gloves, was coming down the stairway.

"Speaking of soul mates," she said, moving across

the room to more fully watch them as Mrs. Howard made her appearance, "my widow ought to be coming down."

CHAPTER V

THE NEW MOTHER

IN her dreams at Brookline Mrs. Howard had imagined no more flattering reception for herself than that which awaited her now in Mrs. Brinton's drawing-room. Three handsome, attractive, eligible bachelors of a seasoned middle-age awaited her, all quite breathless with interest. Mrs. Brinton had so cleverly sketched the widow for each man that he was quite wild to meet her, and Anna, with a Gallic theatrical sense, had seen to it that her mistress should really have an "entrance" into her new life.

Anna, having notified Mrs. Brinton of Mrs. Howard's readiness, tripped back up the stairs after leaving an opera cloak over the back of one of the drawing-room chairs. Mrs. Brinton and the men, ranged in semi-circle in the middle of the room, waited, looking eagerly up the stairs. Mrs. Howard appeared and came down slowly, enjoying to the utmost the creation of her first sensation.

Not only were the men quite overcome by her charm, but Mrs. Brinton faced her in amazement. She had

not dreamed Ellie could look so lovely. John Strong hastily pulled down his waistcoat and ran his hand over his hair to smooth it. Michael Doyle stepped forward, throwing away his cigar. Satisfaction and admiration were written in every line of his handsome face. But Dallas, whose heart was beating so fast that he feared the others must hear it, stood quite motionless. To him it was too wonderful to be true, this vision of fairness. Who dared to say that spring could lie! Here was the actual dream woman of his youth walking down the stairs right into his life.

Mrs. Howard's appearance was quite bewildering. The quiet, middle-aged Boston matron had vanished under Anna's skilful hands. In her place was a slender, fair-haired woman, beautifully gowned in a most modish pale pink evening frock with a transparent lace petticoat. The gown was cut daringly low and had a fascinating little slash over each ankle. Her high-heeled slippers and cobwebby stockings matched her frock, and were generously displayed as she walked down the stairway. Her hair, so lately purchased, was skilfully and charmingly arranged, and a superb aigrette waved above it. Her jewels were priceless and her face adorable. Anna was truly a wizard. Mrs. Howard looked scarcely thirty and there was no

question about her beauty. She was ravishing. Michael Doyle stared at her hungrily.

Mrs. Howard turned to Mrs. Brinton with a radiant smile. "You know, Peg, I don't know which is which."

"Suppose you guess," said Mrs. Brinton gaily.

After a careful glance Mrs. Howard took a step toward Michael, who stood between the other two men, and put out her hand. "The Irishman!" she said.

Nothing could have pleased him more. He fairly jumped and then smiled back at her warmly.

"God love ye for knowing the brand," he exclaimed gratefully. "I needn't say I'm delighted to meet ye."

Mrs. Howard glanced over at John Strong, who stood in pleased anticipation. "I do really remember meeting Mr. Strong ages ago," she said, giving him her hand. Strong took it in his and pressed it fervently.

"I am sure I never met you, Mrs. Howard," he beamed, "or I would have seen you again long before this."

Mrs. Brinton laughed, "Ellie, you must admit that my tame bears are well trained. But you have one more." She turned to Dallas.

Mrs. Howard stepped toward Dallas. "And this is your Christopher Dallas," she said.

Dallas stood looking at her and she smiled radiantly at him until her eyes met his. Then she gave a little but scarcely perceptible start. Perhaps she felt at that moment, as he did, that something really vital had happened to them both. He came nearer to her and put his hand over hers. The other men watched him closely. There was no doubt that the widow had scored with all of them.

"Mrs. Brinton doesn't want me. Why not *your* Christopher Dallas?" he answered pointedly.

John Strong pulled up a large arm chair and Mrs. Howard sank into it, her upturned face smiling at the three men as they gathered around her. Dallas took the only other chair near by and sat down as close as he dared, while Strong and Michael leaned over back of her, determined not to be put aside for Dallas. Mrs. Brinton, going to the music room, and pausing to look over the cocktail wagon to make sure Metz had brought everything, quietly enjoyed her old friend's triumph. To see even her faithful John fluttering about was indeed amusing. Strong leaned a trifle nearer to Mrs. Howard's charming head.

"What came over the Brookline men that they ever let you get away?" he asked.

Mrs. Howard crossed her knee, showing her pretty foot and ankle recklessly. Mrs. Brinton remembered the threats of the afternoon and turned her back to conceal her mirth.

“I ran away,” Mrs. Howard explained. “And I am purposely late to make a sensation.”

“Don’t worry, ye made it,” Doyle said dryly, his eyes on Dallas, who seemed hypnotised by Mrs. Howard.

“Who is to make cocktails, Metz?” asked Mrs. Brinton. “It’s getting late, you know.”

Doyle walked over to her. “And ye ask it, Margaret Brinton, while I’m in the house? I hate to get out of practice, for some day I might need to earn an honest living again.”

He pushed back his cuffs and took up the shaker, glancing at Mrs. Howard and Dallas, who were whispering together earnestly, quite forgetting John Strong, who was still leaning over the back of Mrs. Howard’s chair. He rattled the cocktail shaker to attract their attention.

Mrs. Howard finally noticed Doyle and he smiled at her warmly. “Perhaps Mrs. Howard would help me!”

She rose and went over to Doyle, followed by Dallas and Strong.

Doyle took up the jigger measure and Mrs. Howard watched him in admiration. "I would love to make a cocktail," she assured him, "if you would show me how."

Doyle deftly measured and mixed the cocktail with a skill that even Mrs. Howard's unpractised eye recognised as professional. And as he did so he told her the ingredients, suiting his words to the ice and liquor he poured into the shaker.

"A mild little concoction of my old days," he announced. "First the storm, then five little fellows of good gin, and two and a third little sisters of old vermouth, a smile of orange, with a swear of the peel. And last two tears of absinthe. And it's yourself that must shake the mixture." He prepared the drink with great skill, put a napkin around the shaker and handed it to Mrs. Howard.

"Dallas realised that for the time being Mrs. Howard's interest had turned to Michael.

"I call this cocktail a 'Sabbath Calm,'" Doyle explained.

Dallas came up close behind the Irishman and spoke into his ear softly. "Michael, you're a born actor," he said.

Doyle shook his head. "I am a good bartender gone into bad politics," he murmured back.

But Mrs. Howard did not know how to begin. "Somebody show me how," she begged prettily. The men all started at once to help her. Doyle put one hand on top of hers, and the other on the bottom of the shaker over hers again, as they shook the mixture. Strong took out his handkerchief and held it in front of Mrs. Howard's frock. Dallas held a glass for her to fill. Laughing and smiling she shook the cocktail rapidly. Mrs. Brinton lighted a cigarette and stood watching her. The door-bell, which no one noticed, rang and Farrell Howard entered before Metz could announce him. Mrs. Brinton saw him and threw away her cigarette.

Farrell entered the room rapidly, carrying his hat and stick in his usual stiff, conventional way. Mrs. Brinton, who knew him of old, watched him nervously and realised that neither his frivolous mother nor her devoted swains had even noticed his arrival. He stood utterly aghast at seeing his mother taking part in such revelry, if this creature in jewels and satins, whose hair and colour seemed to him to have some faint familiarity, really was his respected parent.

Mrs. Brinton was just about to speak when Farrell, who had been gathering his scattered senses together, brought his cane down firmly on the polished floor and ejaculated in horror, "Mother!"

It was the first intimation she had of his presence. "It's quite a surprise to see you to-night, Farrell, although I did rather expect you to-morrow," she said.

Michael removed his fingers from Mrs. Howard's wrists and John Strong took his arm from about her waist, where he had been holding his handkerchief in front of her dress. Farrell gasped audibly. He choked as he looked at his mother, a radiant vision of youth with an abandoned smile. She didn't even seem glad to see him. She evidently was quite bored.

"You, Farrell!" she said, and she did not even look into his face. "Fancy you're coming."

Farrell took a step nearer to her. Words would not come and he struggled to express his horror. "Mother!" he gasped, "I hardly know you — I — what are you doing?"

His mother gave the shaker an extra fillip or two, "Making a cocktail. Won't you have one?" she said sweetly.

"You know I don't drink cocktails, Mother!" He was shocked.

Mrs. Howard laughed. "Then sit down while we have ours," she said.

She shook the cocktail again, Dallas assisting her. To poor Farrell it was all like an orgy, what with

the lights, the gaiety, the men and this strange, fascinating female whom he dared to call by the good old-fashioned title of "Mother." He put out one hand to stop her. She couldn't realise how awful it all was. He must tell her. Before he could find his voice, Mrs. Brinton took pity on him, and introduced him to the three men, whom he hardly noticed, so intent was he on his parent. Strong and Dallas shrugged their shoulders and returned to their task of helping Mrs. Howard make her first drink. As for Michael, he didn't even look at the boy. His mind was too full of the adorable mother. Mrs. Brinton took Farrell's hat and stick.

"Is mother quite well, Mrs. Brinton?" he asked in an audible whisper.

Mrs. Brinton looked at Mrs. Howard with sincere admiration. "Doesn't she look it? I thought I had never seen her looking better."

"She looks quite wonderful; but not Mother," he announced frostily.

Mrs. Howard's arm was tired, and she paused with a little sigh. "When are these done, Irishman?" she asked Doyle gaily. "This is very much like work!"

Michael took the shaker out of her hands and returned her smile with warm interest. "Just to the

frappé now, I should say, and I'm sure no cocktail I ever drank will taste like this. You must pour them out now."

He arranged the glasses for her and laughing and jesting they finally managed to pour the drink. They were watched jealously by Dallas, who saw already that Michael was as much attracted by the Brookline widow as he was. He moved closer and took the tray.

"I'll be Hebe's cup-bearer," he said, and he handed the cocktails around, ending with a polite smile at Farrell, who indignantly refused one. Farrell watched his frivolous parent in open-eyed terror. Surely madness had descended upon her. She hesitated a second before sipping her cocktail.

"Oh! drink it now," Michael urged, "to please me and to celebrate this wonderful occasion." She laughed and took a taste of it. It evidently pleased her, for she drank it quickly.

Michael raised his glass to her. John Strong touched it with his.

"Here's to—" Strong glanced at Farrell, "Mother!" They all smiled but Michael.

He shook his head. "I'll not believe it," he vowed.

Mrs. Brinton realised that Farrell was almost at the breaking point. So she said, soothingly to him,

“Never mind, Farrell, it’s the first one she ever swallowed.”

Michael laughed. “After this one it’s the deluge, I’m thinkin’.”

Farrell grasped Mrs. Brinton’s arm. “I am sure she is not well. I’ll take her home,” he said.

Mrs. Brinton smiled. “You’d better talk to her about it.”

Farrell gazed at her with such sorrow that she really felt for him. “Please, Mrs. Brinton,” he begged. “Do let me see Mother alone.” She nodded and moved over to Mrs. Howard, who held her fingers up before Dal with an enchanting smile.

“They’re all wet,” she said, waving her hands. Dal took out his handkerchief and dried them affectionately. “I’ll dry them,” he murmured.

Michael watched with amusement. Dallas in this mood was wonderful! “Don’t hurry now, Dal,” he insinuated. The other man laughed as he slowly went over each finger.

“Go away and stop bothering me,” Dallas warned. “I’m doing this.”

Mrs. Brinton interrupted hastily, “This poor boy wants to speak to his mother. Come in the other room for a moment and I’ll play Michael’s favourite waltz.”

Mrs. Howard seated herself near the window a trifle

flushed from the cocktail, and the three men busied themselves making her comfortable. Dallas opened the window and Michael fanned her; but after a moment John Strong moved over to Mrs. Brinton. After all, she always came first in his faithful heart.

“Come!” Mrs. Brinton urged, “you know we are going out. Do let Farrell have his moment or two!” She went into the music room with Strong.

Dallas turned reluctantly. “I won’t stay long,” he declared, with a hasty and amused glance at the scowling Farrell.

Mrs. Howard waved her fan at him. “You needn’t,” she said, “I should miss you too much.”

Farrell gasped with horror while Michael took Dallas by the arm and pulled him away. When they were safely out of earshot by the music room door, Doyle glanced back at Farrell, whose unrelenting back even showed displeasure in every line.

“A curtain lecture,” Doyle whispered in Dallas’ ear. “I know the type! A good young man, but, oh, what a devil he’ll be at sixty!” They disappeared into the music room, leaving Farrell and his mother alone.

CHAPTER VI

UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

MRS. HOWARD had anticipated Farrell's early arrival in New York, but she was surprised to find him following her up so quickly. She had never known him before to act so promptly in a matter without office or household precedent. His presence just at this moment was awkward and embarrassing. But the widow was determined that it should in no way interfere with her evening or the pleasures she saw opening up in a long series of radiant days at Mrs. Brinton's. Left alone with her son for the moment she maintained the gay and abandoned manner which she had put on with her new gowns and her false hair. The artificiality, as it were, had gone below the surface. Somewhat airily she walked to the table where her bag was lying, extracted a vanity box, glanced carefully into a tiny mirror to see if her new beauty remained, and then faced Farrell.

"Mother!" he cried, "have you lost your senses? Where did you get that dress? What has happened to your nice, smooth hair? I hardly know you."

Mrs. Howard turned away to hide her laughter.

An ejaculation of dismay escaped his lips when he saw his mother's white back revealed almost to the line of her waist. Its beauty was lost on him and his outraged feelings almost choked him. "Mother! your back!" he wailed. "You'll — you'll catch cold. You don't look like anybody's mother!"

Mrs. Howard whirled about and embraced him. "I could kiss you for saying that. That girl is a good maid!" she said.

Farrell started. "Maid? When did you get a maid, Mother?" he demanded.

Mrs. Howard patted his shoulder reassuringly. "A French maid, Farrell. And she and I are going to stay here until Mrs. Brinton gets tired of us. That surprises you, I'm sure, dear."

Farrell sat down weakly. "And what am I to do in Brookline all alone?" he asked.

Metz interrupted them. He was carrying a small bunch of flowers wrapped only in unattractive tissue paper.

"For you, Madame," he said, giving the bundle to Mrs. Howard. She took it excitedly. All this was so new and she was loving every second of it. Farrell rose and waited.

"For me?" she queried. Her fingers trembled a

little as she tore away the paper. She found a bunch of cheap, vari-coloured carnations with a card tied to them.

Farrell watched her miserably. She seemed to be gradually slipping away from him. Mrs. Howard looked at the flowers in amazement. They seemed so poor and wretched after the things in her own splendid garden in Brookline. The card read, "From One Free Soul to Another. Amos!" She laughed merrily, realising who had sent the flowers, and then threw them aside carelessly.

"Amos?" Farrell asked. "Who is Amos, Mother?" Mrs. Howard paid no attention to his questions, she was listening to the waltz Mrs. Brinton was playing, and to the murmur of the men's voices.

"What a divine waltz," she said, taking hold of Farrell and trying to dance with him. He pushed her away stiffly, and gazed in horror at her radiant face.

"Mother!" he said. "Mother, I know you are ill. I think you are delirious and I am sure you have fever, your face is so red."

Mrs. Howard shook her head. "That is not fever, it's rouge. Anna thought I looked too pale."

She moved her body in time to the waltz, humming it to herself. Her inattention was even more trying

to Farrell than were her clothes. He looked at her helplessly.

Finally, with tears in his eyes, he said, "Has anything happened, Mother? Are you displeased with me and are you trying to punish me? You've never been like this before and I am frightened. I couldn't bear to lose my mother. You know, Mother, I think there is no one in the world like you. I have the greatest veneration and respect for you." He paused, quite overcome.

Mrs. Howard nodded. "Yes, dear, I know; your father had those sentiments before you. I'm rather tired of them! They are uninteresting!"

He sat down and put his hand to his head. "I believe I'm asleep at home and having an awful nightmare."

Mrs. Howard resigned herself to the inevitable. She saw she would have to explain. So she sat down and motioned to him to take a chair near her.

Realising that time was flying and that Margaret was monopolising the three delightful men, she plunged ahead.

"I suppose I'll have to tell it to you," she said, "although it is a bore. I meant to write it. Now listen attentively and let me preface my tale by assuring you that I'm just as fond of you as I always have

been. You are a most dutiful son and a good creature, but I'm thoroughly tired of Brookline. The people bore me nearly to death and I even want a little relief from you, darling. I've made up my mind to live the remainder of my life differently. I am afraid this is going to be a great blow to you, Farrell, for you hate a change, but you will have to make up your mind to have a changed mother. I've mutinied! And I've wanted to do it for ten years. I'm not even sorry if it makes you unhappy, so you see how unregenerate I am. When I get tired I'll come home again and I'd love to see you whenever you've time to come to New York. But I'm through with Brookline for the time being and I don't know whether I shall ever keep house or crochet again."

Farrell gazed at her in consternation. "You can't mean it, Mother!" he faltered. "Not keep house! It would be too terrible! Oh, I want my mother back!" He leaned on the back of the chair, tears choking his usually precise voice as he finished.

Mrs. Howard smiled affectionately as she rose from her chair. She kissed him airily and he got up in a daze and took his hat and cane mechanically. He was beyond speech. Mrs. Howard gave him a little push. She was impatient to have done with this annoying domestic interlude. But she spoke soothingly.

“Poor Farrell, it must be a blow to you,” she commiserated. “I’ve thought of it so long that I am quite accustomed to it. Trot home, dear. The house runs itself and you’ve been in one rut for so long that you can’t possibly stub your toe. You must go, Farrell, we are dining at Sherry’s and you are not dressed to go with us. Still, you might join us later.”

Farrell shook his head. “I shall go to a hotel and return here in the morning when we will have time to talk this over. I haven’t been so disturbed in years. The world seems upside down.” He turned to go. Then he paused and looked hesitatingly at his mother.

“Come in to luncheon to-morrow,” she suggested. “We can have a chat about it then and thrash it all out. I’ll say ‘good-bye’ to the others for you.”

Farrell was moved almost to tears and his voice was full of woe. “Good-night, Mother. Please be different to-morrow — and Mother —” he turned gravely, “don’t drink anything, you know you are not used to it. I shan’t sleep a wink to-night, but I’m sure you don’t care. Good-bye!”

Mrs. Howard patted him cheerfully on the back. “Good-night, little boy. I’ll keep sober, if I can!” she said teasingly.

Farrell slammed the door behind him with a gesture of utter despair. Mrs. Howard did not even

look after him but went over to the music-room door, the tail of her gown thrown over her arm, and her body swinging to the music.

“Come back all of you,” she called. “My furious offspring left good-bye for you.”

Dallas and Doyle needed no second invitation. They came out in great haste, each ready for the game. Dallas put one arm around her waist and swung her into the waltz.

“I am just getting my foot in,” she said against his shoulder. “I haven’t waltzed for years.”

“Have you any idea how wonderful you are?” Dallas whispered in her ear. “They have no right to make women like you to torment us poor devils of men.”

Mrs. Howard looked into his laughing face with deliberate challenge. “You love to be tormented. All of you.”

Michael stood by uneasily, and John Strong, who had just come out of the music room, eyed him in keen amusement.

Dallas forgot to dance, he was so absorbed in looking at Mrs. Howard. “You are too marvellous,” he said softly, so Michael should not hear him. “I’ve been looking for you always.”

But Doyle was no longer to be denied. He took

Mrs. Howard out of Dallas' arms into his own. "You're so greedy," he said to Dallas over his shoulder. Then he looked warmly into Mrs. Howard's expectant eyes.

"I don't know the steps very well," he explained. "But I'm hell on position!"

Mrs. Howard smiled up into his face. "Don't ye believe a word Dal says, Widow," he admonished as they danced about the room. "He makes love to every pretty woman he sees."

"And of course," Mrs. Howard returned, "you never make love to anybody."

"Don't I though?" Doyle returned, giving her an affectionate shake as they turned in the dance. "Ye know better! If you don't I'll have to prove it to you."

John Strong interrupted him. "Do give someone else a chance," he said.

Mrs. Howard disengaged herself from the Irishman and smiled at Strong. She pulled a rosebud from her corsage and held it out to him just as Mrs. Brinton stopped playing and appeared in the doorway of the music room.

"John doesn't like roses," Mrs. Brinton said with a swift and amused glance at her truant suitor. He turned with mischief in his eye.

“But John likes widows, eh! John?” Doyle put in.

Strong took the rose and pressed it to his lips. “I do like roses,” he declared. “And,” with much warmth, “I *love* widows.”

Mrs. Brinton shrugged her shoulders in mock despair. “If Ellie won’t leave me one man, we had better start. If the dinner is good enough I’m resigned to being a wall flower.” She rang the bell for Metz and turned to speak to him.

Meanwhile Mrs. Howard flirtatiously offered a rosebud to Doyle. “Will you have a flower, Irishman, from one free soul to another?”

Michael grasped the rose and her fingers with it. “God love ye! I’ll press it to mark the day!”

Dallas did not ask for one, but stood looking at her. She went to him and without a word put one of the little roses in his buttonhole. Metz announced the car, and brought Mrs. Brinton’s wrap, which John Strong helped her into tenderly.

Dallas and Doyle with much chatter and laughter picked up Mrs. Howard’s gorgeous evening cloak from the chair where her maid had left it, and together held it up for her.

Mrs. Brinton, a striking picture in her black and white cloak with its soft high collar of white fur, paused to say, “You must all help me make Mrs.

Howard happy. I want her to stay a long time."

Dallas leaned forward. "I'll do my little best," he promised.

Doyle pushed him back an inch or two. "Don't ye trust him, Widow!"

Mrs. Howard's cheeks were crimson with excitement. The three devoted cavaliers and their adulation had gone to her head.

"I'm not afraid of either of you," she said gaily. "But I'm so excited! I'm all of a flutter!"

"God love ye," Doyle interposed. "Flutter my way!" Then they all moved towards the elevator door.

Dallas paused. "We can't all crowd in there," he said to Strong. "Mrs. Howard and I will wait, send it back up for us."

"We won't wait long for you." He pushed the unwilling Doyle into the elevator after Mrs. Brinton and then got in himself.

Left alone with Dallas, Mrs. Howard smiled daringly on him. "And now?" she parried. "I'm sure you didn't come back for nothing. Was it to try some of the Irishman's blarney?"

Dallas came close to her, and looked down at her. "Do you know I'm jealous already. You like Michael?"

“I’d like to make a little dent in Michael,” she returned teasingly, “just big enough to put my little finger in.”

“And,” Dallas asked, “what about me?”

“Oh, you promised to play with me and teach me some new games.”

Dallas was losing his head. “I’m quite mad over you!” he exclaimed intensely. “Quite mad! Are you a witch?”

“I’m a widow!”

“They tell me you are from Brookline,” he continued. “But I don’t believe it. You’re from heaven! And Margaret also told me you wanted a playmate.”

Mrs. Howard raised her eyes slowly and looked into his. “Have I found one so soon?”

Dallas put his hand on her arm. He was quite beyond being conventional. “Listen!” he warned her. “Listen! If you get me started, be it on your own head. When I play I play hard, and you — you —”

Mrs. Howard drew back in mock terror. “Are you warning me?” she asked.

Dallas shook his head. “No, I’m warning myself, but it’s no use. I am wading in deeper every second. By to-morrow I will be in over my head.” He raised his arm high above his head to indicate the depth.

Mrs. Howard stood on her tiptoes and looked up at him. "My, what a tall man you are," she said with utter disregard of danger. "A little woman would have to stand on a chair to — kiss you."

Dallas made a sudden movement towards her but she evaded him. "If I were only sure what you really wanted," he said in a low tone, "you'd get it!"

The elevator came back and stopped with a slight rattle which recalled Dallas to the prosaic fact that there was a dinner to be attended. He smiled at Mrs. Howard as they moved towards the door.

But he could not resist a last word. "What are you going to do with me? Do you like me?"

"Aren't you undiscovered country?" Mrs. Howard asked.

"Perhaps," Dallas said; "but city-broke."

"And bridle-wise, I can see it in your eye," she retorted as they got into the elevator.

CHAPTER VII

THE VARIETIST

METZ, used to surprises, as must be all good butlers who for ten years have let people in and out of the door of a rich and eligible widow, nevertheless was not altogether prepared to find Amos Thomas asking for Mrs. Howard the next afternoon. Metz regarded Thomas as a freak, a curiosity to be dangled before a woman's club of an afternoon. Never before had the socialist called at the house on his own enterprise, as it were.

But the philosophical old butler swallowed his amazement, showed Thomas to a seat and took word of the caller to Anna. Mrs. Howard sent the maid down to say that she would be ready in a few minutes.

"Thank you," said the socialist, taking careful note of the maid's pretty face and the curving lines of her well-developed figure. All femininity was fish to his unconventional net. "What's your name, my girl?" he added with easy familiarity.

"Anna Merkel," she replied.

"Not French, then?"

"No, Swiss. All French maids are Swiss."

"So, so," he returned, amused. The girl's physical charm and her frankly coquettish air interested him. His eyes travelled over her rather hungrily. She stood the scrutiny with composure and even gave him a glance which showed him that she quite understood him. There was no anger in her gaze.

"You know," Thomas began musingly, "after all, the only vital thing in the world is that mind and body should be sound. Wealth, power and position are nothing in the real scale of things. After three or four centuries the only important question is, 'how good an ancestor were you?'"

"Ah, *messieur* is a thinker," Anna smiled archly and Thomas leaned toward her. Just then Mrs. Howard appeared at the head of the stairs and Anna scampered away.

If only Brookline could have seen the widow at that moment. In her smart street dress with fearfully narrow skirt, high slippers and a rakishly tilted hat she looked much more suitable for an afternoon at the Ritz than in the Ghetto.

"Ah, my oasis!" exclaimed Thomas as Mrs. Howard gingerly manœuvred her way down the steps.

"Don't worry," she said reassuringly, as she clutched at the rail a moment, "I'll be down in a

second if I don't break through this skirt." As she reached the bottom step she held out her hand. Thomas grasped it and pressed it to his lips. She drew it back with an amused little laugh.

"Mr. Thomas, you are so ridiculous. We are not so fervent in Brookline."

"This is not Brookline, this is —" He looked at her with rapture — "Elysium!"

She threw her head back and laughed, tinklingly and merrily, just as she had laughed when she was a girl. She felt that she had really found her youth again. No one ever had made such a fuss over her before.

"Whether it is heaven or not, Mr. Thomas, are you ready to go? And do you know just where you are taking me?"

"I am taking you to a quiet little spot where soul may speak to soul unperturbed by the harsh discords of man-made harmonies, where only a few simple beings like ourselves are to be found in dual evasions of this sprawling monstrosity called a city."

"In the Ghetto?"

"In the Ghetto, my Mrs. Howard."

"Oh! I know I shall love it. It's all so quaint and unusual and you are so interesting."

"I try in my humble way to please, and I should

like particularly to please Mrs. Howard." He waved her gallantly to the door where the puzzled Metz shook his head in a perturbed manner as they passed out.

"Oh, I do wish I had not agreed to go on the street car with you," sighed Mrs. Howard, as they reached the street. "It means walking a square, and skirts these days are not made for walking."

"My dear Mrs. Howard," interrupted Thomas, a bit put out, "how can you think of skirts on so glorious a morning as this? Why, the world is throbbing with the song of life. It's being sung in every shrub, bush and tree. It's a day of divine spring madness. Let's talk of wonderful things, let's be gods, not mere men."

"But the gods, Mr. Thomas, had no garters."

"Now you interest me."

"Mr. Thomas, do be sensible, here we are at the corner. Do we take a red car or a green car?"

"Some day, Mrs. Howard, your common sense will come between us."

She laughed merrily as they walked out to the crossing. Thomas fixed a motorman's eye with an important finger and in a moment they were seated, two items in one of those curious assortments of humanity which make up a street car load in New

York. The Socialist with a characteristic and superb disdain of mere environment insisted on continuing his extravagant speeches and Mrs. Howard as persistently attempted to quiet him. A smartly dressed woman with a rather unconventionally attired man always is conspicuous. She is much more so when he insists on declaiming to her of "life and love."

After a time they took a cross-town car that carried them far to the east side and then they went south, for years, it seemed to Mrs. Howard. The car carried a mixed cargo of Russians, Poles, Austrians, Germans and other north Europeans, all more or less redolent of various native odours. The street was full of push-carts, itinerant merchants, pedlars and lamentable vehicles drawn by decrepit horses. Thomas talked volubly of it all. He was in his element. He knew an anecdote about each corner, an amusing comment for each bit of polyglot that dropped on the fastidious Brookline ear.

"I don't mind the sounds, so much," said Mrs. Howard, gingerly. "It's the smells that bother me."

"But think of what it all means and forget how it smells. Here are the free souls of the town. Here love is not bought and sold. It is given only for love. A fair exchange is no robbery. Here have

arisen many of the great and beautiful truths of which I propose to tell you.”

“But I’m so conspicuous here and the people stare at me so. I’m afraid.”

Thomas frankly was bored with her for a moment, which did not relieve her discomfort.

“I wish I was back in Peg’s nice, clean, fresh, pleasant house,” she said mournfully.

“Oh, pshaw,” broke in Thomas, “don’t be silly and conventional. I couldn’t stand that in you.”

At the next corner he took her off the car. They went down the dark and dirty little side street for three or four doors and then through a quaint European entrance into the coffee house. Mrs. Howard caught a blended odour of *café* and cigarettes that was extremely grateful after the street car. She breathed more easily.

The room was not large and it was dimly lighted. There were a dozen tables about its walls and at several of them were couples deeply engrossed in each other. Everyone was smoking and the waiters seemed like a pale wraith moving through fog.

“Ah!” exclaimed Thomas, beaming, “this is real! This is LIFE!”

“It’s better than the car,” agreed the widow, “but

the room is small and stuffy and those girls all look as if they had consumption."

"Love is their only consumption," added Thomas, as he nodded to two or three people who passed him a careless recognition. But no one stared. Each couple was too much absorbed to pay much attention to others.

They took a table in a somewhat secluded corner and coffee came accompanied by queer-looking dark cake on which Mrs. Howard looked askance. But Thomas seemed to acquire new life. He glowed and beamed upon Mrs. Howard. He sighed profoundly and blew huge clouds of cigarette smoke into the already clouded air, or gurgled blissfully over each sip of black, foreign-tasting coffee.

"Mr. Thomas, who are all of these people?" asked Mrs. Howard. "They really look very intellectual, even if they are badly dressed and unhealthy."

"Call me Amos," he urged, with amorous unction. "Let us not be the only hampered souls here."

"Very well, Amos. But you mustn't call me Ellie — yet."

"I shall call you my soul. What are names at a moment like this?"

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean, but you are very funny when you look at me that way." She

laughed heartily. "And do tell me about these people."

"I did not come here to talk of other people," he objected. "I came here to tell you all the things there are in my heart. But that man in the other corner with the big-eyed, dark-haired girl, is a noted western lawyer. She is a Russian poetess who calls herself Lydia. She is a true varietist and the lawyer is her variety of the moment."

"Amos, what is a varietist?"

"A varietist is the only true philosopher. He goes where he loves and when his love is gone he goes. He is nature's idealist. And from each love he gains new mental power, new intellectual ability and a truer knowledge of poetry, art and all expression."

"Gracious, would you win a woman and then throw her aside?"

"She has the same choice."

"Amos, it's — it's — it's not nice. I don't think this is any place for me to be."

"Don't be stupid and unadvanced. The world in time will accept our creed. It is a wonderful creed, a glorious creed, and it would do away with all ills."

"Or make a lot of new ones."

He talked on, now amorously, now egotistically, now flambuoyantly. Mrs. Howard was greatly

amused. She laughed when he became desperate, she smiled when he glowed over his theories, and she was no less merry when he wielded the rhetorical sabre on the world's helpless institutions. She was having a very good time, the sort of time she had never dreamed of having in Brookline, now a thousand years in the past, somehow. She started up suddenly. She remembered that there were other things to do that day. She had engagements with both Dallas and Doyle and there was still Farrell to be faced.

"Pay your bill like a good soul and we must run along. It took us hours to come, you know."

Thomas began to beat his pockets and then his face fell. He made a careful search of coat and trousers.

"Something," he said, "is going to happen."

"What's the matter? Have you lost something?" she asked.

"My money isn't here."

"Have you been robbed?"

"I think not."

"Oh! you've lost your pocket-book. That is too bad."

"No, Mrs. Howard, I'm afraid I simply forgot. I simply can't keep my mind on my money. I despise it so that I rarely ever carry any with me. But I did think I had enough for this little bill."

“Oh, Amos, how stupid of you. I am bored. Well, thank the Lord, I always have enough with me. How much is it?”

“Fifty cents.”

“Here is a bill, you can give me the change later. But you must take better care of me than that. What will all these people think? They certainly must have seen.”

“Oh, don't worry about that, Mrs. Howard, the women usually pay the bills here. We advanced people can't be expected to keep our minds on anything as trivial as mere money.”

Once on the car the humour of the situation struck her and she laughed quietly from time to time while Thomas ranted along on the glories of the untrammelled and the unconventional. But she didn't tell Mrs. Brinton about it when she had gotten back. Somehow, she felt that her friend wouldn't find it particularly amusing.

CHAPTER VIII

HIGH PRESSURE

IN Mrs. Brinton's scheme of existence there was little exemption from public haunt. She was connaturally of the city and her way of living may be described as super-urban. Like many other smart women of the metropolis she was peculiarly the result of the simultaneous appearance in the world of a new order of great city and multitudinous devices for speeding human transportation. She and her twentieth century sisters of fashion played to a much wider audience than did their Victorian predecessors and with a stage ingeniously appointed to economise and hasten movement. Woman's new day thus enabled one to crowd into eighteen hours that which once would have exacted a fortnight.

Mrs. Howard in her Brookline backwater had not realised this increase in the movement of the human current. And her previous visits to New York had been so cursory that she had been given no opportunity to put her foot in the stream. But now she was about to be swept willy-nilly into the rapids,

though she had no realisation of her precarious condition. She still felt that she was a schoolgirl out on some sort of lark.

Her first two days in New York had been simple enough. The dinner, the theatre-party and supper which followed her arrival laid no tax on her strength. It was all fresh, diverting and unhurried. And in her first series of engagements with Thomas, Dallas and Doyle, Mrs. Brinton had permitted her to follow her own mind.

On the day after her visit to the Ghetto with the Socialist she really got a first appreciation of the new order of things. Early in the morning she was awakened by her maid, who informed her that Mrs. Brinton's Lucy had just brought word that there must be prompt breakfast in order to pave the way for a varied day. A bit later Mrs. Brinton tapped lightly at the door.

"Ellie!" she called. "Can I come in for a moment?"

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Howard replied, and her hostess entered, a fetching picture in a frilly, pale-gold dressing gown which set off her dark hair and brunette beauty effectively.

"You must pardon me for hurrying you so," Mrs. Brinton began, "but we'll have to be off quickly if

we are ever to get through. I want to take you with me and get you started in several things you'll have to learn. You know you told me that you didn't do the new dances and that you couldn't tell one card from another."

"I am absolutely in your hands," returned Mrs. Howard, looking on it all as play.

"Very well, send Anna down at once. Have Metz bring your breakfast here and meet me in half an hour. I've made appointments for both of us at the hair-dresser's at 9:30 — I have the most wonderful man and I want him to get your coiffure just right — then I must do a little shopping. Later there are the club, the Tango lesson, and the meeting with the Oriental Research Committee, and we are lunching at the Ritz with Dal and John. And I must have you see my new portrait at De Jourdain's. This is bridge lesson afternoon, we have tea at the Plaza, the men are taking us to dinner at Martin's, and we are going to the opening of the new revue later. And for supper we will show you one of the cabarets."

"Oh, my, what fun it will be!" Mrs. Howard exclaimed, her eyes bright with anticipation.

"I do want you to divert yourself, dear. You've led such a dull life. But just now the important

thing is to hurry. You will be ready, won't you? It's so necessary to get a good start."

Mrs. Howard promised, and Anna bustled about, getting gown, stockings, hat, slippers and gloves properly matched ready for their putting on by her mistress. She took a hurried breakfast from the tray which Metz brought up, the repast being somewhat the more speedily encompassed than usual because Anna chose to have the morning begin the diet she had established for her mistress. Thus the widow was deprived of the poached egg, swimming in butter, which she had had year in and year out, the rich cream which she was wont to ladle into her coffee and the jam with which she had been accustomed to disguise her toast. She submitted, willingly, realising after two days that her new clothes were going to be a great trial unless she stripped herself of some flesh.

The dressing was not without its trials, but Anna, who had learned by experience to get the mind of a mistress on some other thought just at the moment of pinch or strain, coaxed and cajoled Mrs. Howard's attention away each time she reached wincing impatience.

"Anna, you are wonderful," she said in complimentary mood as she stood before her long mirror and

contemplated her smart appearance with a thrill of satisfaction. "I should never have had the courage to essay this alone."

"*Merci, Madame.*" The maid was much pleased.

Promptly at 9 o'clock Mrs. Howard was waiting in the reception hall for Mrs. Brinton, the latter appearing in a moment, talking all at once to Metz and both the parlour maids in an effort to get rid of all her house orders for the day as speedily as possible.

"Oh, dear!" she wailed, when she had finished with them, "I'm sure that I will think of something before we have gone three squares. I never have gotten out of the house yet without having to telephone back a forgotten order."

As they started off in the car Mrs. Brinton struggled into her gloves, stopping now and then to search through her bag to be sure that her list for the day was complete or that she had forgotten a card or letter she wanted.

"Oh, Ellie, if only one didn't have so many engagements or so much on one's mind. I start out in just this mental turmoil each morning of the year. Mornings are hateful things! One has to get up so early to accomplish anything, and even then the hours flit by so quickly. I wish there were half a dozen of me and that I could assign myself to different tasks. I

should so like a shopping self, an external self to be coiffured, massaged, manicured and treated, a social self to make calls and attend functions, an intellectual self to take in the lectures and committees, and finally my own inside knowing self for the idle, wonderful moments which I can only snatch at now. There are times when I wonder why I ever do anything. Life is so hurried here in New York. We live it on the double quick. Each minute is another whip to make us strain harder and go faster! I used to envy you your peaceful Brookline."

"Peg, you are talking nonsense. You don't mean half you are saying."

"But I do — at this hour of the day. Of course, I won't feel this way in the afternoon or to-night. I shouldn't go on if I did!"

The car drew up at a fashionable Fifth Avenue hair-dressing establishment. Other smartly dressed women, old, middle-aged and young, were entering as they did.

"Peg, are you sure that a man knows how to dress a woman's hair?" Mrs. Howard felt rather uncomfortable now that they were in this fearfully modern place with its pretentious appointments, its palms and rugs, its liveried flunkies and trimly dressed apprentice girls, its heavy air and its oppressive silence.

The little rooms into which the women disappeared after being conducted there by a pert girl in a short black dress, who wore extremely high heels and many more white bows and flounces than she needed, looked most disconcerting to Mrs. Howard. She was greatly relieved when Mrs. Brinton went in with her to her appointment.

“I want you to do your very best for Mrs. Howard, Barsoux,” she said, addressing the pale-faced, black-haired, black-eyed tenant of the compartment. “Now you understand, of course, that it is the effect she wants and don’t spare hair or time.”

“I shall do what I can for Madame Howard,” he answered, rapidly gauging her style and colouring. She removed hat, veil and gloves, sat down in the chair and then was left alone with the little foreign-looking dresser, while Mrs. Brinton went to another room. The widow had an uncomfortable feeling that she was alone with a barber.

“Will Madame loosen her collar?” he asked. She hesitated, and he added, “Or shall I loosen it for her?”

“Oh!” she cried, much perturbed, “I’ll do it.”

He adjusted a cloth about her shoulders and then rapidly circled about her like some sort of curious bird. He would stop for a second and then flit to

another position for a new view of her head. He then attacked Mrs. Howard's coiffure, rapidly wrecking the effect which Anna had built up so carefully. Then he stripped away all of the widow's false hair.

He loosened her own hair and subjected it to severe scrutiny. Mrs. Howard writhed. No man, not even her own husband, had ever done that before! She could have shrieked and run, but she managed to control herself. The dresser, however, did not worry her as much as a stalwart, healthy American would have done. He looked so like a monkey as he circled about her that she did not seriously consider him human.

"Will Madame leave it to me?" he asked, after he had studied her to his satisfaction. She saw no alternative. So she submitted as gracefully as she could, hoping that it would all come out right.

He combed out her hair, took iron after iron from a battery of flames, then rapidly twisted, rolled and pressed, putting on switch, wave and soft curl. His work was marvellously rapid and she became fascinated with the growing impressiveness of her head as she saw it in the mirror opposite her. To her intense relief the manicure girl came in soon to work on her fingers and she breathed easy again.

Hardly had she gathered herself and her belongings together when the hurrying Mrs. Brinton was

at her door to see if she was not ready. In a moment they were flying down town towards the big shops. At home Mrs. Howard had been what one might term a conservative shopper. She had an old-time notion that buying was a deliberate matter, that one must both weigh and wait. She marvelled as she watched Mrs. Brinton go along the counters. Her friend always asked for a certain girl, simply told her what she wanted and was off before Mrs. Howard, in her slower way, would even have fixed the meandering eye of a clerk.

"I don't see how you ever get served so quickly," said Mrs. Howard.

"My dear, I've worked long enough to get that attention. I always make it a point of going back to the same girl and at Christmas time I give her something to make her remember me. They are human beings, you know, and they have a sense of gratitude."

They next rushed off to a shoe store where Mrs. Howard struggled with slippers. She didn't dare buy them half as big as she wanted, remembering the combat she had had with Anna in Boston on this very point. Women were buying all about her with fearful recklessness, many of them imposing youngsters of handsome, but over-dressed figures, accompanied by much older men.

"I wonder who they all are?" asked Mrs. Howard of Mrs. Brinton. "Isn't it extraordinary for men to be about with them here?"

Mrs. Brinton raised her eyebrows and smiled knowingly. "Well, Ellie, you are naïve, aren't you?"

Mrs. Howard noted with further horror the unembarrassed way the women had of going up to the mirrors at the side of the room and drawing up their dresses to get the effects of new boots and slippers with their hosiery.

"Rather exciting, isn't it?" she heard one of the men say to a bored young clerk, who looked up and said languidly, "Ankles are no treat to a shoeman."

Mrs. Brinton was worrying about time again. She was fifteen minutes late for her appointment at her club and she was not used to Mrs. Howard's cautious buying. The slippers, however, were adjusted at last and the pair were off again.

Her first view of a club entirely devoted to women was disappointing to Mrs. Howard. She had heard of similar places in London where the women sat about tables drinking whiskey and soda, smoking cigars and telling stories that men wouldn't dare tell. She thought she had never been in a quieter place than that to which her friend had taken her. They didn't stay long, Mrs. Brinton having a committee

meeting in a nearby studio which required her presence. There they met a middle-aged, remarkably dressed woman whom Mrs. Howard had read of as being equally devoted to theosophy and spiritualism, an East Indian poet dressed in a Prince Albert and wearing a silk turban of many hues, another man who evidently was French and several women who seemed to form background for these notables. It was the committee on Psychical Research arranging for a series of lectures to be delivered on "Indian Philosophy" by the turbaned poet.

"Oh, dear, I'm not going to be able to stay here at all," apologised Mrs. Brinton. "But I did want Mrs. Howard to meet Prince Rajapore." With that she said hurried good-byes and whisked her friend off for the dance lesson at one of the fashionable up-town hotels.

"Now," explained Mrs. Brinton in the motor, "my teacher is Sylvester. You surely must have heard of him. He is all the rage here now. He is one of the chief attractions of the revue we are going to see to-night and the town is mad about him. You've simply got to learn his dances! You are utterly out of it if you can't do the new steps."

"But I haven't danced for years," said Mrs. Howard.

“That doesn’t make a bit of difference. Everyone has to learn all over again, anyway.”

“I suppose he must have a large class,” Mrs. Howard volunteered, with mild interest.

“Class? My dear, he doesn’t give anything but private lessons and at twenty-five dollars an hour!”

“Heavens!” exclaimed Mrs. Howard.

They found the great man in a fair-sized room just speeding another fashionable pair of students. At one end of the room was a piano where sat his accompanist, a blasé young man, and over the floor there had been stretched canvas because the dancer taught all of his steps for performance “in any parlour.” Working with him was his dancing partner, a lithe, graceful, well-built young woman whose relations to him were always a matter of much speculation to his patrons.

He kissed Mrs. Brinton’s hand in the foreign manner when he came over to her and smiled charmingly for Mrs. Howard’s benefit.

“I think it would be a good idea if Mrs. Howard could see you and Miss Morgan do a few of the most popular steps,” Mrs. Brinton suggested. So they gave the Argentine Tango, the simple American turkey-trot and the hesitation waltz.

Somehow Mrs. Howard did not exactly see herself

doing any of the steps. Mrs. Brinton tried the turkey-trot and waltz with the instructor, steps which she already mastered, but she was not so sure of the Tango. She could start off easily enough but she lost the figure before a third of the fifty or sixty steps had been negotiated.

Mrs. Howard had wondered how Mrs. Brinton could possibly dance anything in her narrow walking skirt, which buttoned tightly up the front. To her horror, her friend calmly unbuttoned three or four of the buttons to get ease enough to move.

The widow sat in fear and trembling, knowing that her turn was coming. She wanted to bolt, but that didn't seem altogether feasible, so she glumly stuck to her chair and waited.

"Now Ellie, it's time for you," the breathless Mrs. Brinton announced after exhausting herself in the attempt to unravel the complications of the Tango. "You better try the easy things first."

"Suppose we do the Turkey Trot," suggested the dancer, coming to her.

She got up trembling. She looked helplessly to Mrs. Brinton, who ruthlessly ordered her to action. Sylvester stood gracefully waiting for her to take the first position. He started and she staggered up

the inside of her dress. If he had not held her tightly she must have fallen face down.

He released her and by himself rapidly ran through the first few steps. "See how easy it is," he said. She hadn't seen it at all and she knew it wasn't easy. But she took firm grip of her skirts and resolved to do something or be forever disgraced. They struck out again, but there was some difficulty, for both went different ways. The fact that he was much the stronger was the only reason that they went in the direction he had decided on.

"Now, it is this way," he objected wearily, going through his solo again. "Come here, Miss Morgan," he called to his partner. Taking her he began to dance slowly. "Come, Mrs. Howard, start off beside us as we go along. Try and get your mind on your feet and repeat our motions."

They went about the room once or twice this way. Mrs. Howard was feeling seven different sorts of a fool. Looking across at Mrs. Brinton she saw that usually dignified person waving her hands back and forth in a mirth which seemed to be quite beyond her control. She stopped firmly. "See here, Peg Brinton, if you think you are going to get me up here to make a fool of myself, you are greatly mistaken.

But I'm going to get this thing or die!" She pushed her hat down and went at it with desperation. She felt the newly-acquired wave coming out of her hair, but she didn't care. "Now I'm ready," she announced defiantly to the instructor.

"It's really, just running along, instead of dancing," he explained. "And everyone has his own way of doing it." Seeing that she was getting the spirit of the thing he went along with her, while she, now madly excited over a sudden insight into the idea of the dance, was going through the steps quite oblivious of all else. She worked at it until she was breathless.

"Good," he commented, smiling at her earnestness, "you'll soon have it."

"Now for the Tango!" she exclaimed.

"Well," he warned, "we'd better wait for that until next time." It was his turn to look alarmed.

"And we must be going to lunch," said Mrs. Brinton. "But to-morrow we'll have another lesson. I do want you to learn the 'hesitation waltz.'"

Mrs. Howard smiled a trifle grimly. "I think I shall hesitate a good deal before I do any of it," she said. "Are you sure it's necessary?"

"My dear," Mrs. Brinton assured her, "the entire world has gone mad over the new dances. They do them at all the afternoon things and everywhere one

goes at night. I have even been asked to a morning trot, before a buffet luncheon." They were again in the motor on their way to meet Doyle and Strong at the Ritz.

"It's childish and undignified at our age," Mrs. Howard said. "I wonder you do it."

Mrs. Brinton bent forward impressively. "Don't speak of age," she cautioned. "In these days no one knows how old any woman is, except herself, and she often forgets. Dignified or not, it's awfully smart to do those vulgar dances. And one must be smart, Ellie, or give up at once. You'll get used to it. I was horrified at first. Sylvester can make anyone dance, he's so suggestive."

"Very," Mrs. Howard observed. And then she and Mrs. Brinton laughed in unison.

The Ritz was crowded with well-groomed men and smartly gotten-up women. The lounge was overcrowded as it always is at luncheon, and Mrs. Howard had her first glimpse of the modern, fashionable society woman smoking in public. All about, her sex was blowing cigarette smoke in the air, laughing and chatting in groups or pairs. Mrs. Howard was so surprised that she could hardly believe her eyes. Even in Brookline she had friends who smoked, but always in great secrecy, and she had felt they were

very advanced. Yet here in this beautiful public room dozens of middle-aged, well-bred-looking women were puffing calmly as if it were the most ordinary thing to do. Strong and Doyle joined them. The men were filled with glee over stealing a march on Dallas, who had invited them all for dinner and knew nothing about the luncheon. Mrs. Howard kept her blue eyes fixed upon Mrs. Brinton's gold cigarette case and its small emerald monogram. It swung from her wrist with her gold mesh bag and card case. She felt, in her bones, that it would soon be opened, and she was not wrong. Mrs. Brinton took out one of her own dainty, monogrammed cigarettes and John Strong lighted it for her. Then with her silken ankles crossed, her charming face animated and her graceful body resting easily in one of the large wicker armchairs, Mrs. Brinton proceeded to smoke comfortably, for the first time in this strenuous day enjoying herself. Mrs. Howard stared at her in sincere disapproval. It so amused Mrs. Brinton that she wickedly leaned over and offered her a cigarette.

This was too much for Mrs. Howard. "Never," she said indignantly. Amid much chaffing and amused comment she continued, "I don't see how you can, Peg, it's so masculine, and so fast."

"You're out of the ark, Ellie," retorted Mrs. Brin-

ton. "Wait until you learn." But Mrs. Howard shook her head. She was firmly resolved never to do that. They had a delightful and most expensive luncheon, with a cocktail to precede it, and a dry champagne later. It was most interesting to Mrs. Howard to hear Michael Doyle give the luncheon order, he seemed so full of new suggestions. Mrs. Howard's own idea of a nice luncheon was grape fruit, bouillon, lamb chops with green peas, or broiled chicken, tomato salad and ice cream and cake. She had eaten many of them with perhaps a variation of vegetable or salad; but the edibles that the Irishman so trippingly reeled off his tongue were quite new to her. "A Catawba iced," he said to the deferential head waiter, who came himself to take the order, "mushroom Purée and oyster crabs, Maryland—broiled guinea and asparagus Hollandaise, with an endive and Rochefort salad, baked Alaska and coffee, the champagne very dry,—and an Ideal cocktail to begin with." Mrs. Howard took it all thankfully. The Irishman knew how to eat, that was evident.

After luncheon she hoped that Mrs. Brinton would suggest going home for a rest, but such an idea was far from the mind of that tireless lady. They motored in the park for an hour, Mrs. Brinton, fortified by her excellent luncheon, being in holiday humour.

Doyle and Strong entertained them with a wit and charm Mrs. Howard found delightful.

They left the park to go to De Jourdain's studio to view Mrs. Brinton's portrait. The artist had just finished it and was sending it off somewhere to be hung. This was the most peaceful moment of Mrs. Howard's day, and she sank gladly into a low chair in the warmly lighted studio, with its artistic semi-disorder and its beautiful old belongings.

The portrait was very startling and wonderfully effective. John Strong was so infatuated with it that he whispered to Mrs. Brinton that he must have it copied for himself, for which she chided him firmly, but smiled at him with delight. Michael said he knew very little about it, but insisted the portrait did not do Mrs. Brinton justice. No portrait could, he maintained. De Jourdain, tall, slim and romantic in his velvet coat and loose tie, his wavy hair falling about his eyes, and his tiny, upturned moustache, smiled wearily. What difference did any of it make to him? Mrs. Brinton had paid him three thousand dollars for the picture and he had skilfully contrived to make a smart, middle-aged, attractive woman look like a young siren with vampirish tendencies; and withal preserve an extraordinary likeness. He felt he had done his share. And Mrs. Brinton adored the por-

trait. She looked so young and slim in it. But Mrs. Howard thought it was uncanny. She gazed at it dumbly. It revealed Mrs. Brinton in a daringly low-cut, black-satin evening frock, the skirt wrapped closely about her ankles. She stood with her back to a long mirror in which her white shoulders and the long line of gown and body were reproduced faithfully. In her fingers she held a single, deep-red rose, and about her and over one arm and shoulder was a thin, transparent scarlet drapery. Her hair, black as coal, was low over her brows and her dark eyes shone languorously out of an ivory white face which had no touch of colour but the vivid scarlet of the lips. She looked twenty pounds slighter, twenty years younger and countless degrees more ardent. The artist had painted her as she might have been at twenty-five if she had been born in Italy or Spain. She looked out of his canvas with subtle, unholy charm and Mrs. Howard hated the whole portrait. It was not Peg, this vampire!

They really did manage to get away and then lost Doyle and Strong while they went to look at hats and later to take a bridge lesson, but only after promising that they would meet them again at five for tea at the Plaza.

“Don’t they ever work?” Mrs. Howard asked as

she and Mrs. Brinton motored off alone. Her friend still was dwelling lovingly on her portrait which she was quite mad over, because she looked so seductive and foreign. "Eh?" she asked, absent-mindedly.

Mrs. Howard repeated her question. "I suppose so," Mrs. Brinton said vaguely. "But I'm not sure when. John always spends a part of each day with me, and of course, Michael has let everything else go because he is so wild over you."

"Do you really think he is, Peg?" Mrs. Howard asked in delighted surprise; "already?"

Mrs. Brinton laughed. "I've never seen him so devoted. And Dal, too. They both broke engagements for to-night. Jack told me so. You are wonderful, Ellie! We've always considered them immune!"

Mrs. Howard flushed like a girl. The joy of conquest was in her soul and she could hardly wait for tea time to arrive.

It wasn't so difficult to purchase a hat as to buy shoes. For at least hats did not hurt one. And as the clever Frenchwoman, to whom Mrs. Brinton took her, put each new creation on her beautifully dressed blonde head, Mrs. Howard looked at herself with infinite satisfaction. How different one did look in smart hats. The prices were a bit staggering to her,

but Mrs. Brinton evidently was used to it, for she told Madame that they only wanted some simple little things, nothing elaborate. She herself bought a daring black toque with a huge martyred bird hanging off its narrow brim, and a brown straw smothered in yellow and purple pansies. These two trifles cost only one hundred and fifty dollars. Mrs. Howard meekly invested in a black tulle wisp with one standing plume set riotously at variance with all laws of gravitation; and a mauve walking hat, with some saucy wings tucked over one ear; and she did not murmur at their eating up one hundred and seventy-five dollars, so eager was she to follow Mrs. Brinton's lead.

The bridge lesson, which was given at the house of a smart friend of Mrs. Brinton's, was a very harrowing hour. Mrs. Howard, who had a vague idea of whist, made a fearful muddle of the newer game. Her brain could not seem to grasp its rules and regulations, and she grew so frightened over her continued mistakes that she had a nervous chill. The bridge teacher told her the same thing over and over with honied, irritating patience; her monotonously pleasant voice sounding a continuous stream of instructive admonition in Mrs. Howard's ear. The other women, bored, yawning and annoyed beyond measure at her stupidity, made audible remarks about her dulness

and laughed sarcastically at her mistakes. They puffed smoke into her face, and insulted her by each look and smile. With her cards grasped limply in her trembling fingers; her face white and her brows knit in a vain attempt to remember the words of the bridge teacher, poor Mrs. Howard glanced furtively about like a detected criminal who knows he is being watched. Mrs. Brinton regarded her helplessly when they rose, and with a hasty adieu or two she fairly dragged Mrs. Howard away. Mrs. Howard leaned back in the motor with closed eyes, utterly spent. She felt as if she had been beaten with clubs, spades and all the other implements there were. After a faint effort to look annoyed, Mrs. Brinton's sense of humour came to her rescue. After one look at Mrs. Howard's pale, drawn face and the modish hat tipped over one eye as she rested her weary head against the cushions, Mrs. Brinton burst into a gale of merriment.

"Oh, Ellie!" she gasped. "Where did you ever play cards? I have never seen anything so awful! Those women will never forgive me! They are bridge fiends! I am afraid we'll have to leave cards out of it. The Lord didn't give you card sense, dear, and we'll let it go at that. But you were so funny!" She fairly cried with amusement.

Mrs. Howard opened her eyes wearily. "If you ever take me to that place again," she said faintly, "I'll go home to Brookline —"

Tea was a merciful relief. Doyle and Strong met them at the hotel, this time with Dallas, who had found them at the club and wormed out of them what they were up to.

Sitting between the Irishman and Christopher Dallas, Mrs. Howard forgot that there was such a thing as bridge. They made love to her openly and persistently and with a skill and facility that was delightful to contemplate. The tea room was filled with groups of men and women, the music delighted her and a sense of peace stole over her humiliated spirit. At least men appreciated her. Then the party went to Mrs. Brinton's. The men refused to go until Doyle had made a cocktail. When they finally departed, it was six-thirty, leaving Mrs. Howard and Mrs. Brinton a scant hour to dress and prepare for dinner. Rest was never mentioned. It's a word New York doesn't know very intimately. Dinner at Martin's was to the widow a gorgeous function. In the party they found the three devoted men and Mrs. Jimmy Brent, a charming divorcee, and a great friend of Mrs. Brinton's.

Mrs. Howard, wonderfully dressed in a black and

silver evening gown, in which her fairness seemed even more lovely than on the evening before, a silver wreath in her blonde hair, and with daring, long scintillating earrings moving with each turn of her head, was the life of the party. Dal was infatuated and hung on her words, and Doyle's eyes rested on the widow warmly. He had quite lost his head.

Later Mrs. Howard was as delighted as a child when she beheld Sylvester and his dancing partner do wonderful things at the theatre. And then she was filled with excitement over supper at Reisenwerber's, where she sat in the narrow upstairs restaurant, her food untasted, while she watched with fascinated eyes the dancers doing the steps Sylvester had tried to teach her. Truly they seemed quite simple as she looked at them. Mrs. Brinton would not dance, not being at all sure of her own proficiency, but Mrs. Jimmy Brent and Michael were a great success, and did the Tango with joy and much energy. Mrs. Howard vowed she would never rest until she, too, could dance with him in that enchanting manner. And she felt quite at ease about her feet and ankles, which she realised would be much in view. They were much better than Mrs. Jimmy Brent's.

They went home at 2:30 in the morning, Mrs. Howard with Dallas in his own car, while Doyle and

Strong and Mrs. Brinton took Mrs. Brent to her house.

Dallas told the widow good-night lingeringly and adoringly, after making two engagements for the following day. Mrs. Brinton returned just as he was going and then the two women went up the stairs together. Mrs. Howard collapsed on a couch, while Mrs. Brinton rang for Anna and Lucy.

“Tired, Ellie?” she asked affectionately. “I suppose it has been a strenuous day, but you’ll get used to it.” Mrs. Howard gazed at her limply. She was beyond speech.

CHAPTER IX

THE CUB GROWLS

Mrs. HOWARD quickly fitted into the gay whirl which circled about Mrs. Brinton. She spent eighteen hours a day going or getting ready to go. When she wasn't off with one of her cavaliers or enjoying herself at one of the endless Brinton functions, she was ceaselessly preparing for the fray. It isn't an easy matter for a woman who has lived simply all her life to keep "up," as Mrs. Brinton described the grooming and preparation. The rejuvenated widow paid high price for her youthful face and figure.

But she was so enjoying herself that she was thoroughly willing to undergo any amount of sartorial torture for the time being. She swept merrily along the gay pathway of her new life, revelling in the novel experience of having three interesting men devoted to her. As yet she had not asked herself for which she cared most. Thomas, the Socialist, diverted her extremely, though she had not the slightest real affection for him. His absurd egotism, his con-

centration on the amatory matter in hand, and his affected indifference to society and its ways never failed to amuse her. Doyle was to be taken more seriously. He was always real. There was no affectation about him and he had a direct Celtic way of revealing his affection that appealed keenly to the widow. But he often trespassed, trusting to a ready wit and a quick adaptability to save the situation.

Dallas, on the other hand, had everything the other men lacked,—breeding, born ease, an almost old-world courtesy and chivalry and the greatest personal charm of all. He was big, solid and satisfying and infinitely more to be relied on than Doyle. And always there was his graceful consideration, which meant that her comfort and her happiness were ever his first thought. But she didn't want to lose any of it all by showing a preference now. She simply desired to go on living!

Farrell continued to be troublesome. He had not been satisfied at all in his talk with his mother on the day after his arrival in New York. Now, three or four weeks later, he was back in New York fretting and fussing because she wouldn't return to Brookline with him. For the first time in his mature life he was unable to keep steadily to the ways of habit. And off those paths he was ever irritable

and unhappy. On this bright spring morning he entirely ignored a smiling nature and all of her allurements and hastened from his hotel to Mrs. Brinton's. Metz informed him that his mother was out.

"I will go up to her sitting-room and wait for her," the young man said with sour severity.

"Very well, sir," returned Metz. "I'll tell her you are there when she comes back."

Farrell walked very precisely and primly up the stairs. He didn't altogether approve of his mother's sitting-room in the Brinton apartment. It was much too dainty and attractive to be altogether wholesome, he thought, and besides it opened into her bedroom. And his mother had a way of seeing her friends there which grieved him more deeply still. But even he felt that the room brightened existence. Still, he wasn't sure that existence ought to be bright.

He was particularly depressed to-day because for the first time in her life he had been hearing his mother discussed publicly by men and in a rather unpleasant way. At the college club where he usually put up when in New York, he had heard a party, talking familiarly of various women, finally mention his mother's name. The men evidently were acquaintances of Dallas, Doyle and Strong. They talked over her "conquest" of Dallas and Doyle.

Dallas, he gathered, had been considered immune from feminine influence previously, so his affair with the widow was regarded somewhat as a seven day phenomenon. Doyle, however, was classed as a professional philanderer, but as such the men seemed to think that he might be able to beat his rival.

This had given Farrell a turn from which he was still suffering. He had been of a mind to walk up to the group, make himself known, and then express vigorously and firmly his opinion of individuals who had no better occupation than to discuss helpless women in the utterly worldly precincts of clubdom.

But he had restrained himself, feeling that it would be better to see his mother and to persuade her, if possible, to be more discreet in accepting the attentions of New York men. So he awaited her impatiently.

As he opened the door leading from the hall he stepped in gingerly. He sniffed at the gentle and ladylike atmosphere, he blinked at the bright, immaculate walls with their tiny and colourful miniatures, he deplored the careful harmony of the curtains. Opposite him was the open door of his mother's bedroom, where Anna was stirring about amid some laces and frills. He started at the sight of a won-

derfully attractive bed corner and looked away quickly to the double doors which led to a little balcony on which vines and potted flowers were growing with much confidence in spring and its airs and sunshine. Immediately at his left was a window leading to a fire-escape, which was masked by a big box of red geraniums. In one corner was a huge Victrola which had been tinted a light colour to match walls and curtains, and in the centre of the room was a table holding books and cigarettes. The general effect was one of pastel beauty, but Farrell thought pastel effects rather weak, and beauty of any sort another weakness.

“Anna,” he said, “where is mother?”

“Mr. Farrell, it is you?” she queried, showing a neat and smiling person at the door. “Madame Howard is away from here. She have gone — Dieu! I cannot remember. I bring you the leetle book of engagements.”

She went back into the bedroom. Farrell paced back and forth like a caged animal. He approved of Anna quite so little as he did of the room. He regarded raiment as a mask and not a drapery. There was never any mask about Anna’s gown. She was proud of her well-developed figure and meant the world to approve of it. She was back in a mo-

ment with a small leather book which she handed to Farrell.

“Read it, Mr. Farrell, it open your eye!” she said.

Farrell sat down and read aloud in dull despair: “9, Thursday, hair wave; 9:45, breakfast here, Michael; 10:30, manicure, if time massage; 11:30, fitting Celeste; 12:30, chiropodist; 1:30, luncheon with Michael, Ritz; 2:30, milliner to try coral hat; 3, Colonial Club to meet Lecture Course Committee with Amos; 4:30, Amos at Antoine’s; 6, Michael for little chat; 8, dinner, Peg, John and Dal; the Walmsley’s dance later; 11:30, supper Café Beaux Arts; home in motor with Dal; a little chat.”

He dropped the book, which Anna stooped and picked up.

“My God! Does she never sit down?” he exclaimed hopelessly.

“You see, Mr. Farrell,” explained Anna, “Madame must keep a little book.”

“All of that before bedtime!” he cried.

“What is bedtime? Pouf! Here we do not have bedtime. We have good time. When Madame is very fatigue she go to bed, not because it is time. She say so many nice people die in bed.” Anna was scornful.

“Anna,” Farrell spoke with severity, “tell me, what is to be done about my mother? You know I can’t have her going about like this. It will make her ill. She ought to be at home in Brookline, where she belongs. Of course, I think her brain is affected, but no one else seems to.”

Anna laughed merrily. “Mr. Farrell, you are absurd, Madame Howard is not crazy. *Non*. It is not her head which bother her, it is her heart.”

“You do not think she seriously considers such a frightful calamity as marriage—at her age? Merciful Heavens!” he exclaimed.

Farrell was aghast. This terrible thought had not come to him before. He dropped into a chair and held his head in his hands dejectedly. Anna, much bored by his lack of interest in his mother’s flirtations, went on to make clear the falsity of his attitude.

“Mr. Farrell,” she said, “you must not think Madame Howard have age and bedtime. She is *charmante, interestante, coquette*. She have one, two, three *messieurs* mad over her. For you, Mr. Farrell, I see *un beau père* in the cards. For me, I adore a—what you call it—love affair. I have always wanted a lady like Madame, who flirt with all *messieurs* and believe none. I help Madame. I prepare Madame for the war. I make all the little

crease and wrinkle go. I undulate the hair, I make Madame wear the French slipper if it hurt or not. I say always, Madame can never be comfortable and easy and look young. It is too much. If she look young with corset and show and coiffure, she suffer. *Bien*, it is nothing. She has a few easy hours when she sleep. And look at Madame, she have lost ten years. She is beloved of three *messieurs*. She is worried, tormented, scolded, adored by all of them. They are very jealous of Madame. See the figure of Madame, her shoulders, her elbow. She have the complexion of a *débutante*. She have the little ways *messieurs* adore. *Bien!* And you talk of age and bedtime."

"Mother! My mother going on like that, after all these peaceful, comfortable years. I wonder if she really cares for any of those men. It's almost indecent — at her age!" Farrell rocked back and forth quite sick at heart.

"*Mon Dieu!* There it is again. Her age. It is not *chic* to say that so much. What is age? Madame look far too young to be a mother of you." Anna looked at him with disapproval.

"That's just what I think," he returned fiercely. "I wish I knew some way to make her settle down. Upon my soul, I have a great mind to get married

and have a baby and then she'll be a grandmother!"

He rushed out, furiously angry.

"*Mon Dieu*, the threat," laughed Anna, raising her shoulders in that European dismissal of all things which may not be otherwise explained.

CHAPTER X

THE SHOE PINCHES

WHILE Farrell was so irritably seeking out his mother at Mrs. Brinton's, she was lunching with Michael Doyle at the Ritz. Much of her pleasure on this occasion was that which a woman finds in that she is singularly well-dressed and much observed. New York's sympathies are often more European than American.

Mrs. Howard always enjoyed the Ritz. It was the most un-Boston place in New York and she liked its remoteness from her past. It steadied her in her efforts to maintain a difficult sense of youth and an often-ebbing enthusiasm for the gay whirl of the Brinton ménage and she felt that the wonderfully-dressed women about here were paying in just as large denominations of comfort for their appearance as she was. The difficulty of a thing is lessened when one feels that there are so many fellow-sufferers.

Michael was, as ever, buoyant and impetuous. His tongue was an anarch. It defied all the rules of polite conversation, throwing compliment, appeal,

flattery and requests swiftly down before the often bewildered widow, the Irishman always concentrated. His eye never wandered from her; there never was a break in his optical and vocal flattery of her. His eyes said that which even his lawless tongue did not dare.

But on the whole she was not enjoying herself a bit. Her clothes galled her unusually to-day; Michael was crowding her hard and becoming very insistent; Amos was insanely jealous and vowed himself capable of any wild action, and Dallas, she knew, was distinctly bored by the time she had been giving to both the other men. Her dress, a brown velvet tailored costume, with a broad, weighted sash, hampered her every action and Anna had put it on her so relentlessly that even to swallow was torture. As she had an early afternoon fitting she forced the reluctant Michael to take her away and drop her at the modiste's where she met Mrs. Brinton at her favourite pastime of putting together new outfits. Then after they were sure Farrell was safely out of the way they returned to the house.

Once within the Brinton walls, Mrs. Howard surrendered to discomfort. She was thoroughly miserable and she tottered into her sitting-room exclaiming, "Boots, Anna, boots; I am in torture."

Mrs. Brinton, always amused by her friend's struggles, sat down opposite her while Anna came in from the bedroom. The maid kneeled down before Mrs. Howard and removed the offenders. The widow gave a great sigh and wiggled her newly-released toes gratefully.

"They are hand-sewed, beautiful boots," reproached Anna.

"They are instruments of the Inquisition," corrected Mrs. Howard. "Was Mr. Farrell here?"

"A second ago. You could not miss him."

"Mrs. Howard did not want to see him," explained Mrs. Brinton.

"I am not equal to my daily upbraiding, perhaps I may be later on. I do so wish that Farrell would go home. He is very much in the way here." Mrs. Howard expressed her weariness of her struggles with her son. She removed her gloves and tossed them away.

"Are the gloves too small, also?" asked Mrs. Brinton, who had lighted a cigarette.

"Everything I have on is too small and too tight," cried the widow pathetically. "My waist band, my collar, my shoes and my corset. I wear so much false hair that my neck aches, and my eyes are strained reading without my glasses. The bones in

my collar stick into me cruelly and there isn't nearly room enough to sit down in my skirt. With five pairs of garters I can't stand or sit. When I am out I pose on the edge of a chair, my back like a ramrod, and my waist in a vise. All my teeth ache and I feel absolutely wretched. Moreover, that massage pugilist pounded me into a jelly. Peg! I feel like a boneless sardine!"

Anna was much taken back by this tirade but Mrs. Brinton smiled with initiated sympathy.

"I weep, Madame, when you speak so," said the maid. "You are so modish, so *chic*. What does it matter that there is not room enough? Madame Brinton, she does not complain."

"She is used to it, poor soul, but I am not." Mrs. Howard struggled at her collar. "For heaven's sake, Anna, undo my collar."

"Ah!" she exclaimed with wonderful relief, as the offending item of her sartorial scheme came off.

Mrs. Brinton flicked away the ashes of her cigarette and laughed gaily. "Ellie, I am ashamed of you," she said. "You ought to be the happiest of creatures. How many women of your age have three men madly in love with them, all the excitement and delirium of youth and not in homeopathic doses. I

feel for Anna, who has made of you this wonderful and alluring creature.”

“Of course, Peg,” replied Mrs. Howard, a little nettled, “it’s wonderful to have three men in love with you, but it doesn’t make one’s clothes more comfortable. Do let me be miserable in peace!”

“What is Madame’s next engagement?” asked Anna, picking up the engagement book. “Bien, 6:30, Mr. Dallas for chat. Tea gown?”

“Thank God for a small mercy!” exclaimed Mrs. Howard. “A tea gown means at least an inch or two of breathing room.” She rose wearily and added, “Anna, unhook me.”

Anna threw Mrs. Howard’s coat over her arm and loosened a few hooks. The widow glared. “All of me!” she commanded, whereupon the perturbed maid went rapidly down the back of the dress. “I never realised, Peg, how much pluck you had. Think of the years you’ve worn all these things and yet you’re always smiling.”

“Ellie, this is nothing,” was Mrs. Brinton’s comment. “Think of some of the things women endure. They sleep in chin straps and wrinkle plasters. When they go to bed they look as if they had been in a railway accident.”

"Oh, dear!" sighed Mrs. Howard, "I wish I hadn't tried to look quite so young."

"If Madame will come into her chamber," said the maid, "I will let out the corset for one hour. There is a ravisante new tea gown."

"I never want to see any more clothes," petulantly interrupted the mistress.

"With elbow sleeves," Anna resorted to guile. "Mr. Dallas he adore the elbow of Madame."

Mrs. Howard surrendered with a smile. "Yes, yes, he did say that, didn't he? I'll put on the tea gown, Anna. Peg, can I have a bite to eat?"

Mrs. Brinton and Anna both held up their hands in horror. "But you have just lunched!" objected the hostess.

"But that was hours ago," objected the hungry widow. "Besides, I never lunch in this dress. There isn't room."

Anna continued to struggle with the back of Mrs. Howard's gown and the latter gave her all the aid she could by drawing in her breath to the last possible degree. When the tortured widow could speak again she explained, "I have to pretend eating when I wear this costume. I crumble bread, sip at a grape-fruit and play with a lean chop. That isn't a lunch.

Now," she grasped her loosened skirt in front and relievedly pulled it up and down. "I am quite loose and comfortable. I feel that I could really do justice to something."

Mrs. Brinton laughed and rang for Metz. Anna surveyed her hungry charge disapprovingly.

"Madame Howard look far too healthy. She do not starve enough," commented the maid.

"I have to eat now and then, it's a necessity." Mrs. Howard was becoming belligerent. For the moment she was the enemy of all clothing.

She was hungry and tired. Her body clamoured both for food and rest. She was being goaded by nature into an almost primitive desire for these essentials of living. The cruelty of her lacing came poignantly to her mind.

"I must take off my corsets and lie down a few minutes," she wailed.

She snatched at the front of her corsets, failed to make any impression and tried the back. Anna caught Mrs. Howard's hands and held them tightly behind her back. "If Madame does," the maid admonished, "it will be impossible to get her dressed again. She will spread like yesterday."

That threatened calamity sobered Mrs. Howard.

Mrs. Brinton, seeing her pause, advised: "Oh, Ellie, I wouldn't do it. Never lie down in the day time! I never do."

Mrs. Howard yawned piteously. "I would give a fortune for a nap," she almost wept.

"Never, a nap is at least two pounds. Then the frocks are more tight than ever." Anna was bristling.

"You see, Peg, I have made a Frankenstein out of myself." The widow was repenting her revolution. She dropped back on the sofa disconsolate and disorganised, her finery limply about her shoulders and waist.

"Ellie, I beg of you!" Mrs. Brinton saw her friend's courage oozing rapidly.

"Don't give up, Madame, fight!" Anna assumed an exhortatory attitude before her mistress. By a great effort Mrs. Howard, weary and hungry, struggled to her feet.

"All right, I'll be a good soldier. But, Anna," she was pleading again, "do give me an extra inch when I get into that tea gown." Yawning, the worn widow limped to the bedroom. At the door she turned.

"Where do we dine to-night?" she asked, with her hand concealing another yawn.

“At the Ritz. Shall you wear low neck?”

“I certainly shall!” Mrs. Howard’s voice finally found some enthusiasm. “I adore stripping for dinner. At least, part of me is comfortable when my dear old neck and shoulders are bare!”

Mrs. Brinton seated herself at the writing desk near Mrs. Howard’s door and talked through it to the widow over whom Anna again was struggling. “Ellie, I wonder if you realise what you’ve done to Dal?”

“Not half what I mean to do,” came through the door in a voice again courageous, “I’m not through yet!”

“Aren’t you afraid?”

“Of Dal? Bless you, no! He’s too big to be afraid of.”

“You are so reckless, Ellie. Dal, you know, has made love to women all around the world and back again.”

“All the more reason why he might find his Waterloo right here in New York. I wonder what Farrell wanted of me to-day.”

Anna came to the door somewhat mysteriously and whispered, “Madame Brinton, what you think? Mr. Farrell, he threaten to marry and make Madame Howard grandmère!”

“Oh, I say, Ellie, did you hear that? Farrell threatens to marry, have a baby and make you a grandmother.”

Mrs. Howard, wrapping the portière about her, leaned out and said with a twinkle, “Isn’t he sure of himself? If he only would!”

Mrs. Howard soon returned, now handsomely clothed in a ravishing tea gown. Anna hurried behind, catching up an erring hook here and there. Metz was at the opposite door to announce that Mr. Thomas was calling.

“I’m out,” snapped Mrs. Howard. Thomas had become an insistent bore. The widow’s mind now was on food. As Metz was leaving she called after him, “Metz, some cold meat and rolls, a cup of cocoa or a bit of salad and pickles and cake. I am so hungry! Bring anything!”

Mrs. Brinton and Anna protested simultaneously.

“Cake,” exclaimed Anna reproachfully. “Oh, Madame, cake!” Mrs. Howard looked at each and saw that she might expect sympathy from neither in her rebellion against her diet.

“Very well,” she said, turning with resignation to Metz. “Hot water with lemon and quantities of stale bread.”

Metz went out. Mrs. Howard yawned and

stretched her arms in utter weariness. "Oh, if I could only sleep for ten minutes." She threw herself on the sofa, her head drooping under the weight of her hair dress.

"My head's so heavy. Couldn't I have just a little more hair off? This wave, perhaps, it makes my forehead so warm."

"But, Madame, the wave cover up the little grey hairs." Anna was relentless.

"Anna, I'll have spinal meningitis, my back aches so."

Mrs. Brinton suggested removing some of the false hair from the back.

The tyrannical Anna compromised by taking off a puff or two and substituting a soft curl.

There were still slippers to be faced.

"Anna," slyly suggested Mrs. Howard, "bring me some slippers, the soft black velvets."

"With that gown? Nevaire! The high-heeled empire with the buckle." Anna's eyes blazed. "Madame knows her feet will swell and then I cannot get them small again for to-night."

As Anna went out Mrs. Howard gazed at her somewhat resentfully. "Merciful heavens!" she said feelingly, "it's hard work being a beauty."

"My dear, we all work over it," commented Mrs.

Brinton. "I never am easy from morning until night, and since I have taken to cigarettes my appetite's all gone. Of course, I hate cigarettes, but it's so old-fashioned not to and so eccentric, and whether they make me sick or not, I will smoke. You'll have to learn, Ellie."

Anna was back and there was another ordeal with the slippers. The maid got one on, but Mrs. Howard could not stand the other. She snatched it from Anna's hand and ladled it full of talcum powder, finally struggling into it.

"Pretty slippers always hurt," said Mrs. Brinton, meaning to be helpful.

"That's on a par with your remarks about the clothes," fumed the widow. "It's not comforting. Gracious, I shall never be able to keep this up."

Metz then came in with the food which Mrs. Howard welcomed joyously. He placed the tray with its slender luncheon of hot water, pickles, biscuits, and sliced lemon on the table, announcing as he did that Mr. Strong was calling. Mrs. Brinton rose to go.

"I'll be down at once to see Mr. Strong."

"Very good, Madame," said Metz. He removed a napkin dramatically under which the biscuits had been concealed on the tray. "Cook sent up hot biscuits and fresh butter, Madame!"

Mrs. Howard reached with delight for one of the biscuits. Anna, seeing what she was doing, rushed to prevent her, while Mrs. Brinton held to the pitcher of raspberry shrub to prevent its being broken.

"Oh, Ellie!" protested Mrs. Brinton.

Metz regarded the biscuits affectionately. "Cook couldn't resist 'em, Madame." He went out.

Mrs. Howard cast about for an excuse to get rid of the maid.

"Anna," she said, "go into my bedroom and get me a hand-glass."

She then reached for another biscuit, but Mrs. Brinton forestalled her by taking the plate away.

"Don't touch them, Ellie, dear. Hot dough is so fattening."

Thus did Mrs. Howard begin to find her freedom from the cares of home and domesticity harassed by the twin devils, conjured up by the modiste and the beauty specialist. Beauty, if only skin deep, at least hurt to the bone. Artifice was wearing her down, the importance of her musketeers was equally difficult and altogether she was discovering the life of the butterfly far from an easy one. There were days when she would have given it all up in a second for the quiet, the comfort and the groove-like regularity of the old-fashioned Brookline house. Mrs.

Brinton, by some mysterious process, seemed to wind herself up like a clock late every night so that she was able to go through the next day at the same killing speed as the one before. Mrs. Howard was not used to this social strenuousness. And to-day was one of the days when she would have retreated on the double quick if there were not others to face. She thrived under opposition, however, and whenever Farrell came in to upbraid her her spirits rose rapidly, and in a few moments she would be quite back in fettle again with zest for the enterprise and nervous energy enough to carry her through another week's siege of corsets, tight slippers, diet, masseurs, modistes and strenuous admirers.

CHAPTER XI

SHARE AND SHARE ALIKE

MRS. HOWARD'S growing irritation with things animate and inanimate was not lessened any by Farrell's continued presence in New York. She had repeatedly "sent" him back to Brookline, but he would return after a few unsatisfactory days in the office, and renew his insistence on his mother's return to Brookline.

To-day when he called at Mrs. Brinton's he found his parent alone in her sitting-room quietly eating the frugal meal of those who diet. His manner was apologetic.

"I am afraid, Mother," he began, "that I spoke very indiscreetly to Anna a little while ago."

Mrs. Howard laughed merrily and poured herself a glass of shrub. "Do you mean your dire threat about the baby?" she asked. "It didn't frighten me at all. I'd adore it. Do have a baby, Farrell, there's a dear child."

Farrell was horribly shocked.

"Mother, mother! It's hardly modest!" he cried.

The spirit of the banter grew on the once more gay mother. Farrell's manner was so aged that she felt an ingenue in its presence.

"I knew you didn't mean it," she said flippantly. "Evidently I needn't crochet the blanket yet. We're dining out, and you?"

Farrell felt the moment had come for a final assault upon folly as exemplified in the conduct of his parent.

"Mother," he was fearfully reproving, "the whole town is talking about you. You and your admirers form almost the sole topic of conversation wherever I go. I am asked if I am the son of the famous Mrs. Howard who succeeded in landing Mr. Doyle and Mr. Dallas the very night she arrived. Oh, I can't tell you how grieved and shamed I am over it all!"

Mrs. Howard continued to smile blithely. "Poor Farrell!" she cooed with soothing mischievousness.

Farrell was fairly off on his disciplinary sortie and not to be headed. "They have even put bets up on it at the club as to which of the men will get you — Mr. Dallas or Mr. Doyle, with the odds on Mr. Doyle. Always your name is linked with those of these men."

Young Brookline paced righteously to and fro as he talked, but finally came up squarely before the elder with horror in his face.

“Mother,” his tone denoted immeasurable grief, “I hate even to think of it, but I actually believe —,” he hesitated and then plumped it out, “excuse me, Mother, I believe those men are in love with you.”

Love, even under ordinary circumstances, was an indecent feature of life to Farrell. He regarded the inevitable wooing among young people as something of a scandal, but out of season, as it were, it became very dreadful.

“I’ll tell you one thing about Mr. Dallas,” said Mrs. Howard, into whom seven devils had entered. “He has looked into the crater and I question if it was half warm enough to suit him.”

“Mother Howard,” Farrell was aghast, “how can you say such awful things? And both these men are fifty. It’s shocking.”

Mrs. Howard saw a need of justifying her course. “Don’t be conventional and smug, Farrell,” she said. “I have come to the conclusion that blood runs at much the same tempo in the veins of a socialist or a banker. And youth is milk and water compared to middle-age, when middle-age lets go. I wouldn’t be twenty for the world. Imagine the dull young men I’d have to spend my time with. But these men of mine are live dynamos. They haven’t felt for years, and now they are making up for lost time. Give

me the man of fifty, who has learned his book, whose dinner has to be good, and whose motor car is always at the door. He is seasoned, Farrell, and I like that. I won't be a training school for husbands. I want men who know how, men who can kiss one without scrambling and whose kisses are events."

Farrell slumped into a chair quite overcome. "Mother, mother, where did you learn it all?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, I don't know," laughed the gay mother with a dismissing fillip of her manicured fingers. "Perhaps it was born in me. You and Brookline have been holding it in all of these years."

Farrell arose, looking shattered. He wandered off to the table where his mother was nibbling at her rigorous luncheon. He absently picked up a cracker and began to munch it in desperation.

"Mother, couldn't you be satisfied with one admirer?" he asked pathetically.

"Indeed, I could not, my dear. It's an absolute joy to me to feel that three good-looking, healthy, attractive men want me."

"Three!" Farrell bit despairingly into the cracker.

"Farrell," she said reproachfully, "that's a good deal of my very slender luncheon."

He dropped the food apologetically. "I'm so upset!" he explained.

He had had scant satisfaction so far, however, and continued to press his mother. "What do you propose doing with your musketeers?" he asked.

"How do I know?" she countered. "As yet all this is only the beginning. I must have it all — real passion, real love, and emotion that will sweep me off my feet. I want to be frightened, to lose my breath. I want sensation. I never had it. I want to be moved to the depths of my being. I used to rock alone on the porch in summer and knit in the library in winter, and no man ever glanced at me. Now I ride beside one in a motor car, or flirt with one on a sofa."

Anna had brought in a toilet tray and the widow began polishing her nails as an item of preparation for further fray in her flirtatious campaign. Farrell had taken his mother's last declaration as another body blow. He swayed dizzily.

"Mother, please!" he begged.

Mrs. Howard, seeing his condition, followed her advantage breathlessly. "I want to thrill some man to the utmost," she continued. "My heart is full of throbs. Every beat of my pulse says, 'live, live!' Forty-eight? I feel eighteen. I am a girl again.

It's a wonder I didn't break out long ago. I love life and I mean to have every crumb of it."

"Where will it all end?" cried Farrell in agony.

"Don't worry over me," advised Mrs. Howard. "I hope I shall get into a scandal. I've always wanted to. Now be a good boy. Kiss me and run along."

Farrell was almost frantic. "You can't mean half you say, Mother. It's shocking. It's — it's — well, it's not nice at all. Good-bye, Mother."

"Farrell," Mrs. Howard called to him as he reached the door, with the naïvely malicious spirit of a bad little boy. "Farrell, have twins, that might settle me!"

He made no reply save to bang the door angrily after him. Words had failed him. Anna now brought in curls which she pinned deftly to Mrs. Howard's head. The latter pushed aside the luncheon tray and from the dressing table set retouched her ears and lips with rouge, carefully made up her mouth and then surveyed the result critically in her hand-glass.

Metz, appearing to remove the luncheon tray, announced that Mr. Thomas was calling. "It's his fifth call to-day. Madame," he explained, "Mr. Thomas will not be denied."

“Anna,” ordered Mrs. Howard. “Go down and send Mr. Thomas away. Tell him I am dead or ill or out or eating or bathing—anything you like. But get rid of him!”

“I will make sure this time, Madame,” Anna promised, as she hurried out

Metz, who had been mysteriously holding something behind his back all this time, brought it before him with a flourish. “Cook has sent some fresh chocolate layer cake, Ma’am,” he announced dramatically, as he drew a napkin revealing the delicacy in all its tempting completeness. “If Madame cares for it Anna will be none the wiser.”

“Put the table in front of me, Metz,” she ordered.

The butler did so. Mrs. Howard moved over and cut a huge slice of the cake. Metz reached into an inside pocket and drew out a bottle which he handed to the widow.

“Cook,” he said, “also has sent some liquid pepsin for Madame to take after she has finished. Cook once lived where a family always ate recklessly and then pepsin was passed about with the finger bowls.”

“Cook always puts temptation in one’s way,” Mrs. Howard said gratefully. “I love her for it. She is psychic.”

"She says," explained the butler, "that one may eat quite freely and then trust to the pepsin."

Mrs. Howard, throwing all dietary cares to the wind, devoured the cake eagerly, washing it down with generous swallows of shrub.

As Metz went out Anna returned. Mrs. Howard heard her in time to whisk the cake away and hide it on her lap under the table.

"Oh, Madame!" wailed Anna, "Mr. Thomas, he will not go. He say he will wait until you come in —"

Just at this moment Thomas sauntered insolently in, saw Mrs. Howard and paused as her astonished face caught sight of him.

"Well," he announced with irritating deliberation. "You see I'm here."

Anna was quite as much overwhelmed as her mistress. "*Dieu,*" she exclaimed, while Mrs. Howard glanced hopelessly, first at Anna and then at Thomas for an explanation. The Socialist, gratified over carrying his point, was perfectly willing now to let the situation work itself out. He was, for Thomas, painstakingly attired in a neat grey suit and flowing Windsor tie and he flaunted a thin little cane.

"I thought I was out to you," said Mrs. Howard sharply when she finally was able to speak.

"I knew you were in and I made up my mind to



“Experience all, love everybody!”

see you." Thomas still was standing and he spoke slowly and with even emphasis on each word.

"Mr. Thomas," Mrs. Howard was displeased when she forgot the Amos, "it really was very impertinent of you. Since you would push your way in you must not mind if I finish my luncheon. I'm quite famished."

She returned eagerly to the surreptitious chocolate cake.

Thomas fixed his eye on the cherry-hued shrub and the cake. "It looks very good," he commented longingly. His weakness for food had a youthful quality about it. No little boy could have turned more quickly from an imagined wrong at sight of tempting edible.

"I haven't had my lunch either," he continued. "Why don't you ask me to have some?"

Mrs. Howard wasn't at all pleased by the suggestion, but she had to work out the situation some way. She knew Thomas could be very ugly. The food, if anything, would mollify him. He might even forget what he had come for. So with an air of resentment she asked him to sit down.

"It's not much of a luncheon," she explained. "I'm dieting. Anna, get a chair for Mr. Thomas."

Anna did so with a curiously mixed indignation

and approval. For various reasons she felt Thomas much in the way. But she admired with a Gallic abandon the masculine aggressiveness which Thomas had displayed in forcing his way to Mrs. Howard. The intruder put hat, cane and gloves down on a chair at the side of the room and then drew up to the table.

"It all looks very good," said Thomas, looking hungrily on the slender feast. "What is that curious red drink?"

"Raspberry shrub. Will you have some?"

"Thanks."

"I knew you hadn't lunched!" said Mrs. Howard. "High-minded people like you never lunch. They either forget to or they are too poor. Will you have some cake?"

"Cake, Madame!" Anna rushed to the table.

"Yes, cake." Mrs. Howard defended the dish against the swooping maid. "I will have it, even if it makes me fat. I can't get any sustenance out of a pickle. I'm starving — and angry!"

Thomas was growing impatient. "Send that girl away," he ordered.

Anna gave him an angry look.

"I want to see you alone," he continued to Mrs. Howard.

“Anna!” Mrs. Howard said firmly, and the maid retired to the bedroom. “What unexpected things you do, Amos. Who else, I ask you, would have walked upstairs like that?”

“I really came to upbraid you for your coldness,” he said, “and now I am eating chocolate layer cake instead.” The Socialist’s mouth and hands were full.

“But I hope you will still upbraid me. I always revel in one of your scoldings.” Mrs. Howard was forgetting her vexation. The more earnest Thomas became, the fuller he filled his mouth with cake.

“Do you think,” he said thickly between thicker bites, “that you can go about with me as you have done and then cast me aside? You knew all along that I was in earnest. You said your soul was in tune with mine—” He bit furiously into another piece of cake. “Have you forgotten that? And I have kept all those dear little notes that you wrote me. I have also kept the picture postal we had taken together. And have you forgotten that wonderful afternoon at the Anarchists’ Club?”

“Amos,” interrupted Mrs. Howard with a shocked memory of smitten couples unhampered by any regard for convention or mere laws, “I don’t think that was at all a nice club!”

Thomas plunged afresh into the cake and shrub. "Nice," he exclaimed as vehemently as the food would permit him. "What a silly, obsolete word. Nice —" he bit off more chocolate. "You wanted to be free, to have experience, to learn the big, untrammelled truths of love. And I thought I could teach them to you. You haven't the courage of a sparrow! Why, a woman should taste all! Love when and where she will! It's a glorious creed! But she must be able to partake of this love and return it, not throw away the passion of an honest toiler that she may play more easily with a millionaire. Especially that millionaire Dallas. Each should have his share."

Thomas punctuated his tirade with more cake. Mrs. Howard becoming alarmed, drew her chair farther from the table. She had never seen fury, language and food so mixed before.

"Each should have his share!" she exclaimed. "That makes woman into a sort of love trust. It's illegal!"

Thomas snorted. "Don't talk to me of laws. I break them! If only your pretty soul could grasp the great doctrine of the varietist in all its perfection! Know all, feel all —" He halted, seeing Mrs. Howard pick up a small bottle, pull the cork with

her teeth and pour some of a clear liquid into a spoon.

“What is that?” he demanded with never-failing curiosity.

“Pepsin.”

“I’ll have some, too.” He looked dubiously at the cake.

He took a spoon off the tray, poured off a dose, swallowed it hopefully and resumed his speech. “Experience all, love everybody! Do you hear me? Love everybody!”

“Amos, what is the matter with you? You were never like this.” The widow really was alarmed.

“You never were excused to me before,” he exclaimed. “It infuriated me and I could have beaten you.” He glowered at her fiercely.

“My dear Amos! What doctrine is that?” she asked.

“Man’s,” he blustered. “Can’t you see I am mad with love for you? I wouldn’t let anything stand in my way in order to get the woman I love. Why, for one kiss from you, I’d—” He glanced about the room for a desperate proof of some sort. His eye fell on the window and fire-escape. “Why, I’d jump out of that window down four stories to the street.”

“Nonsense.” Mrs. Howard’s practical New Englandism came to the surface.

He rushed to the window and struggled with the sash. “You don’t believe me? Well, here I go!”

“Amos, the whole house will hear you!”

“I’d as soon jump as breathe.”

Mrs. Howard retreated nervously. “You’re insane. Go away, go away!”

“You said you wanted a desperate love affair. Well, you have one!” He fairly bristled.

“Amos Thomas!” exclaimed the worried widow. “I am ashamed of you. You’re a bully.”

“Perhaps,” he softened, “but I could be a great lover. And I want to be yours. Is it yes?” he came towards her.

“How can I say yes before I think, Amos? And you really must go now.” She parried for time.

“You are evading it.” He grew threatening again. “Will you give up this rich idler for me, for your Amos, who adores you — whose one happiness you are?”

“I’ll think it over carefully,” she promised. “You really must excuse me.”

As Amos was about to go Anna came in from the bedroom. “Pardon, Madame,” she said, “it is time for the engagement with Monsieur Dallas.”

Mrs. Howard turned quickly to silence Anna, but Thomas had heard.

“Madame will be late,” Anna continued disastrously.

Thomas stopped. He was very angry and his face revealed brutal possibilities that gave Mrs. Howard even further alarm. She felt the occasion was so serious that fate would forgive her the fib.

“No, Mr. Dallas is not coming here now,” she broke in hastily. “Anna is mistaken. I’ve broken that engagement. I’m going to lie down. I’m exhausted. It was because I am so tired that I was excused to you.”

Thomas, still furious, turned slowly to go.

“If I thought you were turning me out for another man —” he began, when Mrs. Howard interrupted. “How suspicious you are, Amos. I’m not going to see a soul. Do go!”

Thomas determined to get a definite declaration. He faced the widow aggressively. “Will you give up this millionaire for me?” The sharp insistence of his manner startled her and she backed away from him. He followed her, his head out, his lips drawn in a dangerous line and his eyes blazing. “Will you?” he repeated.

Mrs. Howard, losing time each second and knowing

that Dallas was below in all probability, now was solely intent on getting rid of Thomas.

“Yes, yes, please go!” she answered, hardly knowing what she said. Thomas picked up his hat and cane. “I’ll write you,” she added, waving him on.

“See that you do!” His manner was most emphatic.

Just as Thomas reached for the door there was a knock and Mrs. Brinton entered in her brisk manner, not noticing the Socialist.

“Ellie, have you forgotten your appointment with Dallas. He’s here,” she announced.

Thomas turned with a villainous “So-you-have-lied-to-me” expression, but went out muttering furiously to himself.

Mrs. Brinton was bored. She didn’t approve at all of her friend’s intimacy with Thomas.

“Why, Ellie, how did he —” she began.

“Oh, Peg,” laughed the widow, much relieved. “I told him Dallas wasn’t coming. Amos is so jealous of him. I’ve had an awful scene. Peg, that man will shoot me if I’m not careful.”

“Oh, nonsense!” Mrs. Brinton placed no such high valuation on the Socialist’s courage.

CHAPTER XII

PLAYING GAMES

WHETHER or not Mrs. Howard was openly conscious of the fact, Christopher Dallas by this time had come to be a very important item of her new life. His attentions were so unobtrusively but skilfully manœuvred that she had come to rely on him for a variety of things. She would have been very much lost without his ever-ready suggestions for an idle hour or a vacant afternoon. He turned up intuitively whenever he was wanted. She never relied on him that he failed. He was shockingly forgetful of business appointments, but he had never kept a woman waiting with whom he had a social engagement, thus reversing the tradition of the American man. He made his office unimportant and the pad there got the attention of a changeling child. On the other hand his book of social engagements was consulted as religiously as a breviary.

The study of Mrs. Howard's wants and comforts was made his major occupation. And no inconsiderable part of that study was devoted to the care

that she should not be bored, that she should never have too much of him. Christopher Dallas, if the first to come, was no less the first to leave.

Perhaps his devotion was because he had found in the Brookline widow his first thoroughly unspoiled woman. She came to him as fresh and interested as a *débutante*, but with a quaint humour, a fragrant wholesome mentality and a durable, common-sense back of all her apparent frivolity that held him steadily after his first vivid and unforgettable contact with her mind and spirit. She had touched him in a moment of boredom with the extreme sophistication of the women of his metropolitan set. He had tired of cynicism, artificiality of thought and expression, and extremities of sophistication. An experimental turn of mind hitherto had led him largely to women who were making experiments of their own. He somehow felt for the first time out of the amatory laboratory.

And so the man of the world and the woman of Brookline came closer and closer to a mental and spiritual comradeship which once gained, might lead them on to a completer and more durable intimacy. With Dallas, Mrs. Howard felt a comfortable serenity which was never hers when she was in the company of one of the other men. The novelty of Thomas

had worn off and there was left after his pseudo radicalism and engaging audacity were stripped away an unpleasant and often brutal egotism. Doyle, with his world of compliments, his quick gallantries, his mellow humour and his instinctive sense of the road to a woman's approval, delighted her when she was in merry mood, but he was never willing to take her as he found her. He always compelled her to rise to his blithe and bantering level. And it wasn't always easy for her to do this. Besides, way underneath all that pleasant exterior, she sensed there things she knew she would not like at the surface. Then, too, she retained enough of her inborn New Englandism to demand in a man a certain amount of distinction of birth. Dallas was the only one of the three men of whose background she wholly approved.

So she lunched with Dallas, rode about with him in his imposing motor, did the plays and the opera, accepted his flowers and his chocolates and the other items in his multitude of well-chosen attentions. His friendship for John Strong and Strong's regular presence at the Brinton home made it very easy for all manner of little informal affairs in which the four participated. Each couple was always ready to pair off and leave the other safe from interruption.

One late afternoon the four had returned to Mrs. Brinton's from a rather long luncheon. Dallas had brought back a pleasingly sentimental record of a favourite opera singer which he wished to try on Mrs. Howard as an experiment. After it was over and Strong and Mrs. Brinton had gone out on the little balcony for a little chat, Dallas stood up in all his six feet of imposing and polished self and looked down on the enigmatical widow. The afternoon light was gradually turning to dusk and the shadows were growing deeper through the attractive sitting-room.

Mrs. Howard was in merry mood. "Well," she laughed, "you experimented with the music. Did it have any effect on you?"

Dallas, not to be caught in any college-boy sentimentalism, crossed before her, turned and faced her from the other side of the room. "No, it didn't," he commented. "And I notice it left you unscathed." He turned the probe back to her.

"As if I didn't know better?" Mrs. Howard was growing venturesome.

"Exactly as if you didn't know better."

Mrs. Howard smiled archly at him. "I believe you'd stop at nothing."

The bachelor came quickly to his most familiar

encounter, a battle of wits with a woman. "Nothing," he affirmed interestedly.

Mrs. Howard looked at him hard through eyes that were wide in the twilight. "Aren't you afraid you may go too far?" She felt daring.

"I told you I played hard," answered Dallas. He was putting the possible blame, manlike, on the woman. "You know you dared me to."

He was quite wonderful to her in the dimming light. He seemed taller, more Olympian than she had ever seen him. And was there a new softness in his tone under all the banter?

"But suppose," her voice trembled a little, "suppose that I believed in it, this game, some of it?"

Dallas came closer to her. "Do you want to believe?" There was an appealing tone in his voice. "Tell me, shall we stop playing? And if we do, do you know what it would mean? It would mean the door thrown wide open, so you could see everything. And I would be on the threshold pulling you, drawing you, making you enter into my holy of holies." He put his hand on his heart. "And then when I had you safely inside I'd shut the door and keep you there. Would you come in?"

She was kneeling on the couch now, facing him as

he stood behind it. "I'd like to look in," she said mischievously. "Open the door a little crack to me, Dal." She touched his breast with a little finger. He caught her hand, which she pulled away. Feeling unsafe in the bewitching twilight she ran to the wall and flashed on the electrics. He blinked and then smiled at her. Her way of avoiding actualities amused him.

"It's going to be wide open or shut," he continued, as she settled back on the sofa. He studied her fondly.

"Do you know," he resumed softly after a long look at her, "I've never seen your eyes look as they do to-night, they're so soft and tender. And your mouth." He stopped again and drew in a great breath. "Ellie, your mouth is positively criminal! The thoughts it has put into my head! I used to keep track of the time each day that I longed to kiss it." He leaned over the couch quite fascinated. "But I had to stop because I couldn't count so far."

Mrs. Howard was enjoying every second of the encounter with a characteristic combination of sentiment and humour. "It's like a man to count kisses when he hasn't had any." The feminine joy of drawing the masculine out was in her soul. "I wonder

how you look when you are wanting a kiss. Next time you do —” she placed her face close to his and puckered her lips and then withdrew swiftly as he leaned down — “tell me.”

Dallas was bewitched. “The things you say to me and the things you do and still you expect me to keep my senses.” He made fervent love to a defenseless sofa pillow. “I’m a big man, little you,” he continued, dropping the pillow and looking down over the back of the couch, “and I can feel a lot to the square inch. Play fair!”

“Play fair!” she echoed as he reached out and took her left hand in both his. She released herself and continued, “A moment ago you asked if we should stop playing. Do you really know what you do want of me?” She threw her heart and soul into her eyes, and Dallas swallowed the look greedily. He breathed hard.

“When you look at me that way, Ellie, there doesn’t seem to be air enough to breathe. I’m stifling. Please stop playing, be real!” He touched her with reverent affection.

“This afternoon life seems almost too real,” she said, gently disengaging herself and backing away from the sofa, “and you are almost too near.”

Dallas was hurt by her evasion of him. He came

around the sofa out to the centre of the room and stood before her.

“How you delight to thrust and parry,” he commented, “to lunge and recover. I’m no match for you. Wherever you aim,” he touched his breast, “*touche.*” He studied her for a moment. “Be a little kind,” he continued imploringly, “stop devil-ing me for one day. Haven’t I earned that? And isn’t yours the exquisite satisfaction of knowing that I come a little earlier each day and stay a little later each evening?” He took her hand and held it firmly. “And at this particular moment!” He paused tenderly. “This is one of the moments, Ellie —” She interrupted him, quite radiant and quite happy.

Strong and Mrs. Brinton were stirring out on the balcony. She saw them and checked Dallas from further avowals.

“Please, please, don’t say it all to me now. There is the whole evening left. And besides,” Strong was tapping on the glass, “John and Peg are coming back.”

“Oh, I say, why do they have to come back now?” He wasn’t a bit pleased to have the chat broken into, but before he could offer further objection Strong and Mrs. Brinton were in the room.

“Time!” exclaimed Strong maliciously.

“You must have had very little to say to Margaret,” Dallas commented sarcastically.

“Indeed,” said Mrs. Brinton, raising her eyebrows, “I think we have given you two plenty of time. You know Peg and I must dress for dinner and you might as well let us do it now. Go down into the library and order yourselves some fizzy little drinks.”

The men did not show the slightest signs of moving. Dallas looked for Strong to go and Strong waited for Dallas. Both had been well started on man’s well-known proclivity to declare himself, and neither of them was at all in the mood now to be thrust into the uncheering masculine society of the other.

“Do run along,” urged Mrs. Brinton almost tearfully, “and come back for us — oh, well, not too soon. And don’t you dare appear before Ellie is half ready.” She turned to Strong, seeing that Dallas was listening to her. “John, like a dear, do go.”

“Oh, no,” he objected. “It’s hours before dinner time. We refuse to be left all alone. One of you dress at a time, eh, Dal?”

“Please, Margaret,” Dallas seconded. “John and I are tired of each other. We might quarrel.”

Mrs. Howard rose and started for her room. "Take them down, Peg, I'll hurry."

"Can you?" questioned the doubting Dallas.

"Truly I will." She looked at him tenderly.

"Do," he returned. "I'll time you." He took out his watch and studied it. Then, seeing Strong and Mrs. Brinton turning to the door he grasped the widow's hand quickly and kissed it fervently. As he was about to go Metz knocked at the door and said, "Mrs. Howard, Mr. Doyle wishes to see you, Madame."

"Heavens!" broke in Dallas, "that man never knows when he is in the way. Say you can't see him. You know you are sending me away."

Strong, scenting trouble, thrust his head in at the door. "That will never do for Michael," he commented. "You ought to know him better than that."

"I don't like it," frankly protested Dallas. He stood his ground formidably.

"I promise you he will not stay more than a second," urged the widow. The bachelor seemed satisfied with that. He took Mrs. Howard's hands.

"You haven't forgotten our appointment after the dance, have you, my dear friend?"

"No, no," she said quickly.

“Come on, Dal, you’ll be late,” insisted Strong, coming into the room and dragging the reluctant Dallas off with him.

CHAPTER XIII

A CAVE MAN

MRS. HOWARD had her own reasons for wanting to see Doyle. She knew he soon would have to be headed off from his impetuous wooing. There was no such thing as arresting Michael once he had a formidable start. He had a masculine velocity and impact which were appalling. At the luncheon which he had given her at the Ritz on this day he had so importuned her that she felt gravely the need of checking him. Just how to do this she did not know. She planned to await an opportune moment in conversation and hoped some such time would come quickly.

Before Doyle had had time to come up from the door, the maid busied herself with a few final touches on the room and her mistress was startled to hear Mrs. Howard exclaim:

“Anna, a man on the fire-escape!”

Both looked nervously to the window opening on the court at the right of the room. The intruder was struggling with the geranium box, the flowers

hiding his face. As the window came up there was revealed the insolent leer of Amos Thomas.

"Amos Thomas!" Mrs. Howard exclaimed. She was furious and very bored. She had no thought that the Socialist's jealousy of Dallas would lead him into so doubtful a position. Thomas, meanwhile, leaned angrily on the flower-box, looking into the room, for the plants effectually barred his entrance.

"So you lied to me about Dallas," he muttered. "Well, it didn't do you any good. I knew he was here. I heard his voice. And I saw him go out there"—pointing to the door—"just a minute ago."

"Amos Thomas! How dared you?" Mrs. Howard and Anna rushed simultaneously to the window, slammed it down and locked the catch.

Scarcely was the curtain down when Doyle was knocking at the door. Mrs. Howard rushed to the sofa, extricated her beloved chocolate cake from beneath the pillow where it had been since Thomas' visit and returned to the table for another bit of her much-interrupted refection.

"Come in," she said when she was finally disposed at the table to her satisfaction. Anna retreated to the bedroom and Doyle, always quick, neat and attractive, stepped in alertly. He carefully closed the door behind him.

“Dallas says you are in a hurry to dress,” he explained, “but I promise to keep you only a moment.” He seemed surprised to find her nibbling at cake. “And what are you doing there?” he added.

“Eating,” she answered naïvely.

“Will ye listen to her.” The Irishman was puzzled. “And only a little while ago I had you for lunch at no less a place than the Ritz.”

Taking a page out of her visitor’s own book of blarney she commented gallantly, “I only eat when I’m hungry, Irishman, and I wasn’t when I was with you.”

He came a little closer to the table. “Do you mean it?” He was very pleased, “Lord love ye. Is it a bit of flattery, now, or is it for fear you’ll be hearing the thump of my heart.”

“My, Irishman, but you’ve a soft tongue.”

Doyle never allowed a woman to get the better of him in this sort of contest.

“And a softer heart,” he supplemented, “you’ve pounded it so.”

He looked at her with extravagant approval. “I’ll forgive you all if you’ll only tell me what the passionate rose-coloured drink is in the glass.” A professional interest, as it were, had been touched.

“Why that’s —” began Mrs. Howard, when there

was a crash of falling flower-pots in the court. Doyle started and she arose somewhat fearfully.

“What was that?” Doyle turned quickly to the curtained window. Mrs. Howard ran so rapidly that she reached it first. She turned a corner of the curtain and looked out. Finding Amos still on the fire-escape she turned her back and said reassuringly, “It’s nothing but the cat.” Then she again looked out discreetly, and, as if addressing one of the pets, said imperatively, “Pst! Pst! Go down!”

She diverted Michael’s attention by extolling the virtues of the old-fashioned shrub. He accepted a glass and tried a little of the liquid on his expert tongue, while the widow stood nervously against the window.

“It’s not bad,” he reported after his trial. “It’s near-soda. I can drink anything once. I suppose that fuzzy taste is the fuzz off the raspberries.” He put down the glass and faced Mrs. Howard, who had returned to the table.

“Widow! I’m going to lecture you. You’re very careless about the naughty world.”

Mrs. Howard affected to be terrified. “Oh, my! If it’s about the naughty world, I am worried.” She forgot her resolutions and said softly, “What is it, Irishman?”

"Lord love ye!" he expostulated. "Don't look at me that way or smile at me so. I'll not be able to say it at all. And it needs sayin', Widow. It's serious, very serious."

"Really serious," she mocked. "Are you actually going to terrify me?" Somehow she didn't feel a bit in the mood to reprove Michael now that he had come to scold her.

"Don't you think you need to be terrified?" continued Doyle.

"Oh, dear me, I'm left alone with a cave man. I may learn a new trick." Mrs. Howard was unregenerate.

"And it's you have the daring tongue," he said warningly. "Remember, I'm only half civilised and the other half of me has noticed you."

"I wonder if it was safe for Peg to leave me here with a man who is only half civilised?" She pretended to be alarmed.

"I'll give the widow this much," commented the delighted Doyle. "You're not afraid of me."

"Nor twenty such." She snapped her fingers at him.

"But I'll not stand for people talkin' about ye." He returned to his lecture.

“And who did?” Mrs. Howard was only mildly curious.

“Men, and they’ll not do it soon again,” he said fiercely. “But if the women commence it, God help you. I can’t shut their mouths so easily.”

Mrs. Howard’s eyes twinkled. She leaned towards her earnest visitor. “There’s really only one sure way of shutting a woman’s mouth — with kisses.”

Doyle followed her head fascinatedly. He attempted to realise her advice only to find her slyly blocking his way with a good sized piece of the chocolate cake.

He backed away. “Every time I look at ye, Ellie, I wonder some man hasn’t strangled you! You are so damned unafraid.”

“That is probably why!” she returned saucily. “And now what crime am I charged with?” she asked.

“It’s the truth, and I’ll not stand for it!” he affirmed. “It’s Dal — and I am jealous. You are seen too much together.”

“And he complains that I’m seen too much with you,” she returned. “Truly there is no pleasing men.”

“Now understand me, there is talk, far too much talk about Dal and you,” continued Doyle. “And

I'm mad to the skin. I know it's just your pretty, careless way. Ye love to play with bonfires, provided you light them and Lord love ye, but you've started one burning under me you'll have to watch." His voice softened and he came closer to her.

Mrs. Howard was enjoying herself. "Don't come too near me," she said daringly, "I might catch fire myself."

Doyle put hands on the table and leaned down opposite her. "No woman has heated my blood up for ten years," he said vehemently. "Then you came along, with your devilish foolin' ways, and the smile of ye, that catches hold of me and bites like a strong drink. I'm sittin' at the tip top of the toboggan, Widow, and it only needs a push to start me down, and then hell's fire will be loose, mind that. When I'm at the bottom of the slide, it's the bartender you'll have to handle, and he's common earth — are ye afraid now, Widow?"

She had moved back a little, but stood her mental ground. "Not I," she answered with a smile. She rose and came round the table until she was close to him. She looked up archly. "I'd love meeting a bartender," she added.

"I'm mad over ye!" exclaimed Doyle, marvellously taken with her.

She had forgotten her resolution to disillusion him. He made love so blithely, was so amusing under all his surface of earnestness that she hadn't the strength to stop him now.

"Truly, you're wonderful to-day!" she cried. "I like you in this new mood."

"It's not a new mood," he interposed. "It's just the Irish in me. Are you going to mind what I say, Widow?"

"Probably not." She was incorrigible for the moment. "I'll do just what I like."

"Mind ye," warned Doyle, "I won't let you go without a fight. There might be a scandal."

"I'll do just what I please."

"Well, then, please decide between the two of us. It hurts me to hear people discussing ye."

"I'm afraid I can't promise." She went over to the window and listened for a moment. Hearing nothing she came back to the table.

"Do you perhaps love Dal, now?" pursued the Irishman meanwhile.

"And if I do?" She grew coquettish. "Dal is very fascinating, you know, and you never can —" She gave him a wonderful look and smile.

"I'd kill ye first." Jealousy was eating into him. He paused a moment contemplatively. He hesitated

and then blurted out, "Has he kissed ye, perhaps?"

"Not yet," she answered gaily.

"Then I'll be before him for once." Mrs. Howard was startled. She knew she had gone too far. Doyle reached for her, but she eluded him by running back of the sofa. He, thinking she was trying to get to her room and Anna, stood between her and the door. She crossed to the other side of the room, picking up a pillow as she passed the sofa. She was not able long to keep away from him. As he came up she hit at him with the pillow. He caught it and she seized another which he took just as quickly. Then, seeing the perfume atomiser which Anna had left on the table, she grasped that and spurted the liquid in his face as he advanced again.

"You little devil, you are blinding me," he cried, but he kept right on. She could no longer avoid him. He seized her, taking the atomiser from her. She struggled hard, then seeing that she was not to escape him, put her hand against her mouth. He quickly pinned her arms and then kissed her on the cheek, then more roughly on brow and hair as she twisted and turned in an agony of opposition. Finally she leaned back in despair.

"Ellie!" he breathed, "kiss me, just once of your own choosin'—kiss me, kiss me!"

"You are so rough," she said weakly.

"Don't ye like that, darlin'? It's a new trick I'm teachin' ye." He put his face against hers and talked passionately to her. "I long for ye so, woman, that it's a big ache in me. I want ye, want ye, do ye mind — and I'm fifty and more. That's time to be over such feelin' and I'm just startin' in. I'll love ye from mornin' till night, Ellie, and I'll try not to be rough with it. Only kiss me, just once darlin', and say, 'Michael, I love ye.' Am I hurtin' ye? I've always wanted to. You're so damned sure of yourself." He held her hard and she struggled again.

"Please — I'm tired," she cried.

"Kiss me, then!"

"I want to get away from you."

"Do ye, now? Well, who is stronger, eh?" he twisted her around.

"You really hurt me. Please."

"I'd like to turn your wrists till you cried and kiss ye until I bruised your mouth, and hold you so close in my arms you'd hardly breathe. And even then I wouldn't have ye. It's the soul of ye, that stands over there and mocks me!"

"I'm frightened," she urged. Her fear of him instantly sobered Doyle. He let her go, quite over-

come by his outbreak. She backed away and sank on the sofa exhausted.

“I’m a brute,” he apologised, realising his offence. “God, how it comes out at such a time! Don’t ye be frightened of me, Ellie. I’ll not do it again. I couldn’t bear to have ye afraid. It’s the sauciness and courage of ye that warm me heart. Will ye forgive me?”

“Good gracious, was that love, Michael?” she asked. “I’m not quite sure what it was.”

“It’s the way I know how to love,” he explained contritely. “Real feeling is just the primitive in a man getting out. You are the sort of woman who has herself to blame for the way she is treated. You know I am on fire inside, that I am sufferin’ hell’s torments over ye, and ye tease and devil me until I am nearly crazy. If it isn’t a slipper, it’s an elbow, and if it isn’t a smile, it’s a whiff of heliotrope; ye hunt out the dark corners where the beast is restin’ and rout him out into the light. When he snarls and snaps ye laugh at him. All of the worst of me wants ye, Ellie, and all of the best, too.” He was tender again.

“I feel as if I had been through a cyclone,” she said as she arose weakly, “and I do not know whether I am angry or not. I said that I wanted to stir some

man to his depths, so I shouldn't complain. But after all, if that is passion, it's fearfully uncomfortable."

"I'd make a better husband than lover." He came close again and she started back in alarm. "But there's no doubt I love ye, Ellie, and I love ye damned hard."

"Please excuse me," she waved him off. "I am honestly quite exhausted. If anyone ever doubts your temperament, Michael, send her to me. If you will join Peg and John Strong, I will come a little later."

Doyle took her hands. "Are ye angry with me?" She pulled away, slapping his fingers.

She retreated to her door. "I don't know," she answered. "I really don't think I am. But I am breathless and I ought to be furious." He came towards her. "Go away!" she exclaimed. "You wicked man. You, you, you're terrible." She took hurried refuge in the room and slammed the door after her.

"God love her!" said Doyle to himself. "She'd devil St. Anthony." He hesitated a moment and then knocked on her door.

"Widow—" he whispered, and then knocked again. She opened it just a crack.

“It’s good-night to you, Irishman,” she said securely from the refuge of her room.

“Do you mean it?” he asked sadly.

“Good-night!” she said, attempting to close the door.

“You may shut your door, Ellie,” he returned once more, flowery of speech, “but you can’t shut out my love, that’s with ye always.”

“Good-night, Irishman,” she said softly, much mollified.

“Good-night, Widow.” He turned to go as she shut her door.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WIDOW YIELDS

MRS. HOWARD'S scene with the Irishman had been so strenuous that for the moment she had forgotten the extraordinary appearance of Amos on the fire-escape. He was still there, however. A stalwart, masculine sneeze came from without the window just as Doyle was on the way to the door after his dismissal by the widow. Michael listened carefully a moment as he stood in the centre of the room. The sneeze was repeated, a little off the key of its predecessor, perhaps, but still undoubtedly from the same source. Doyle was about to investigate when he heard foot-steps stealthily approaching in the hall. Rather foolishly he retreated, going through the glass doors to the balcony outside Mrs. Howard's sitting-room. He felt that he would be in better position to act from there providing an intruder of some sort had got into the house. So he closed himself out carefully and awaited developments. The door opened very slowly and a head looked in furtively. It was that of Farrell Howard.

The young man glanced about excitedly, then turned his head and whispered to someone behind him. He came in on tiptoe, followed by Strong, Dallas and Mrs. Brinton.

"Are you sure there's someone on the fire-escape?" asked Strong in a guarded tone.

"Positive," affirmed Farrell, whose eyes were bulging excitedly behind his prim glasses.

"Margaret," advised Dallas, addressing Mrs. Brinton, "go into Ellie's room and keep her there."

"But do call me if there's any excitement," she requested as she went. She rapped at the bedroom door and entered immediately with the remark, "It's Peg, Ellie."

Farrell bristled with excitement. "I asked the policeman to watch at the foot of the stairs, so the burglar can't escape that way," he said.

At that moment there was another formidable sneeze without. Farrell rushed forward pugnaciously. Dallas restrained the youth and signalled to Strong to help raise the window.

"One, two, three, ready!" exclaimed Dallas. The curtain shot up, then the window. The men looked out to see the blinking, yawning, sneezing Thomas.

"It's the Socialist!" Dallas could not conceal his astonishment.

“What are you doing on the fire-escape outside this window?” demanded the furious Farrell.

“Will you kindly climb in, Mr. Thomas?” requested Dallas.

“How do I get in?” Thomas blinked at the rampart of geraniums.

“How did you get out?” Farrell was gasping.

“If someone will put a chair here and remove this box of flowers I’ll come in gladly,” said Thomas. “I mounted this damnable affair from the street and it was no easy task. I am quite dizzy and very bored and I have caught—” he sneezed—“a horrible cold.”

Thomas, after Dallas and Strong had removed the flowers and placed the chair, came over the sill stiffly and sheepishly. Once in the room, however, he recovered his wonted poise and with airy composure studied the window and fire-escape.

“Imagine how useful that would be in case of fire,” he said. “It’s a surgical operation to get in or out.”

“What were you doing out there?” Farrell was bursting with impatience and petty authority.

“What matter?” asked Dallas. “He isn’t a burglar at all events. Perhaps Mr. Thomas will tell us of his own accord.”

"Are you going to answer me?" insisted Farrell in the throes of indignation.

Thomas looked Farrell over contemptuously. "That's my business," he said.

Young Howard rushed forward but Dallas restrained him.

"Easy, Farrell," advised Strong. "Mr. Thomas is a friend of your mother's."

"I don't believe it." Farrell almost wept. "Mr. Dallas, you know it isn't true, don't you?"

"My boy, your mother certainly knows him more or less," replied Dallas. "Whether she knew he was on the fire-escape I am not prepared to say. I did not know, however, that Mr. Thomas was in the least venturesome. Perhaps he will tell us about it. Let us all sit down, and remember, Farrell, your mother is in the next room."

Dallas motioned Thomas to a seat at the centre of the room. He and Strong then sat at either side of the Socialist and the excited Farrell fidgeted to a seat near his mother's door.

"I really am rather old to play young Verona," volunteered Thomas lightly. "And a trinity of angry male friends is a sad substitute for Juliet."

"Mr. Howard is waiting for your explanation," advised Dallas quietly.

"There are a good many things going on in this house I don't like," returned Thomas insolently. "Mrs. Howard told me she didn't expect to see anyone, especially you. I don't like to be lied to. That's why I climbed the fire-escape."

Farrell rose furiously. "You impertinent cur, what right have you to discuss my mother?"

"Steady, Farrell," advised Dallas.

Thomas rose angrily. "If it's of much interest to you," he said to the boy, "you might care to know that another friend of Mrs. Howard's is hiding out on the porch."

Farrell rushed to the porch door and tore it open. The others rose in time to see Michael Doyle enter calmly.

"Michael!" exclaimed Dallas and Strong together.

"I am going crazy," cried Farrell, sinking back on the couch. "There are men everywhere."

"What the devil is all this row about?" asked Doyle calmly. "Can't a man take a breath of fresh air?"

Dallas faced the Irishman. "When you came in a while ago you said your business with Mrs. Howard would only take you a few moments."

"Sure I did," returned the ready Doyle. "You might have known it was only an excuse."

“Farrell,” continued Dallas evenly, “found Mr. Thomas on the fire-escape and you on the porch, directly out of his mother’s apartments. He doesn’t care for it. For that matter, neither do I. You and I can discuss that later, but this man —” he waved at Thomas.

“When I tell Howard that I am expectin’ to marry his mother, I’m sure he’ll cool down.” Michael was going a little farther than he had intended.

“What?” Dallas was astounded.

“Marry her — you pompous fool!” Thomas bristled, jumping up. “She’s engaged to me. She said yes to me not half an hour ago.”

“Engaged?” Dallas gave Thomas a look which clearly said “impossible.”

“Yes,” affirmed Thomas staunchly.

“To you?” Dallas continued.

“To me.”

“I wonder!”

Strong doubled up with an amused, “Oh, Lord!”

To Strong it was all absurdly ridiculous.

Doyle advanced on Thomas. “You are a damned liar and a lot more I won’t say!” The Irishman was beside himself.

“Don’t let us discuss this any further without

Mrs. Howard," advised Dallas. "Farrell, won't you call your mother?"

Farrell rushed violently to the door of his mother's room and rapped frantically. "Mother," he cried, "please come out as soon as you can!"

"I am coming," she answered. A moment later she appeared, exquisitely dressed for the evening in a clinging, silverish gown cut daringly fore and aft, and given ardent colour only by a crimson rose effect at her waist and a large fan of the same hue. She had never appeared to better advantage in all her life.

"For heaven's sake! What's the matter?" she asked as she saw the assemblage before her. She caught sight of Strong and Dallas still in their afternoon clothes.

"Why haven't you two started yet?" She looked puzzled. Dallas turned to one side without a word, revealing Thomas, who stepped forward. "Oh! How did you get in?"

Everyone was having a most uncomfortable half minute. Mrs. Brinton went to John Strong and the two turned their backs and gazed hopelessly out of the window. Mrs. Brinton hated scenes and the present situation frankly bored her. Farrell was

blowing from fury to humiliation, Dallas looked grave and injured, Michael was belligerent and Thomas seemed capable of any insolence. Mrs. Howard gazed from one to another waiting for someone to speak.

“Mr. Thomas tells us you are engaged to him,” Dallas said finally in a voice that was icy cold.

“And I tell them it’s to me you’re engaged,” spoke up Michael promptly. “Or meaning to be when you’ve played with me long enough.”

Farrell shook his head as if the end of all things had come. “Mother! Mother! What a disgrace!” He sank into a chair, quite beyond consolation.

“Eleanor, won’t you tell us yourself?” continued Dallas severely. “Surely this is not true!”

Mrs. Howard affected to take it all slightly. She spoke up coquettishly, “I don’t think it’s true. I am sure I never really said ‘yes’ to anyone.”

Dallas was deeply hurt. He looked at her with a peculiar expression, saying, “You’re — not — quite — sure,” and then went to the balcony.

“So you mean to cast me off?” snarled Thomas, advancing again.

“My dear Amos,” she answered, “call it what you like, it doesn’t interest me.”

She dismissed him abruptly, feeling quite sure that he was dangerous only when alone.

Thomas glared and then, sweeping all with his cane, said, "I'll not talk about it now before these idlers; but you haven't finished with me. I'll come back." He turned and strutted pompously out of the room. No one said a word to him.

"Now the Irishman!" Mrs. Howard turned to Doyle. He came close to her with an appealing look.

"You'll forgive me for speakin' up," he begged softly, "but Farrell here seemed so undone by seein' me on the balcony, and I thought ye'd not mind if I said it."

"I am sorry, Michael," she did not want to hurt him, "but I wish you had not said what you did." She felt angry for the first time. She saw the position in which she had been placed. "I wonder what these gentlemen, Mr. Dallas and Mr. Strong, must think of me?" She was almost tearful. "I can understand the Socialist's saying it—but you! Now I am angry with you, Irishman, furiously angry!"

"I'm sorry for that, I'll come to-morrow," he returned sincerely.

"I said good-night to you once, Irishman," she said frankly. "Now it's good-bye."

“Do you mean it?” he asked, really perturbed.
“Do ye want me to go?”

“Good-bye, Irishman,” she said finally.

“It was just the bartender that made me lose ye!” He was quite angry with himself. Then he turned to her with his most winning smile. “I’ll be around bright and early in the morning, Widow, to really say good-bye.” He hurried out so quickly that he effectually prevented further reproof.

“No one could be angry with you long,” she called after him.

He thrust his head in at the door long enough to say, “God love ye, don’t try.”

“I hope, Ellie, that you are satisfied now,” reproved Mrs. Brinton. “For my part I think you deserved it. I only hope people don’t hear of it. Come, John.” She went to the door, really quite vexed.

“If that man Thomas is troublesome I would suggest that Farrell have him arrested,” suggested Strong. “He’s quite crazy enough to do anything. What a pity Michael made such a fool of himself.” He turned to Dallas. “Well, you were looking for trouble with the Brookline widow, I think you have it.”

“Now, Mother, you see what this sort of thing

leads to." Farrell thought it was all over. "Come back to Brookline with me to-night."

Mrs. Howard turned on him with unexpected violence. "This is too much. Farrell Howard, if you don't leave this room in one minute, I will box your ears, or spank you. Do you hear me? Go home." She bristled up to him formidably and he retreated towards the door, gazing on her in amazement. He had never seen her so roused.

"Mind me, go home!" She stamped her foot as he hesitated. It was too much for Farrell. He ran out hastily and she threw herself against the door with a pathetic cry of exhaustion.

"Everyone is picking, picking!" she wailed. "My nerves are on edge —"

She then turned breathlessly to see what Dallas was doing. He had not moved, but still stood in the doorway of the little balcony, his arms behind his back and his head bent a little. A thousand emotions seemed to be surging through him. She waited for him to speak, but he did not, so she took a long breath and crossed over to him.

"Oh, Dal, wasn't that awful!" she confessed. "I feel so dragged about and discussed. How could they? Before everyone. I am so upset. Even Peg is angry. And the worst of it all is, I don't

care. I am tired of them all. I believe I'll go home to-morrow."

As Dallas did not answer her, she continued nervously, "Dal."

He closed the balcony doors and turned. For the first time since she had met him, she felt him watch her a trifle coldly before he answered. "Yes, Mrs. Howard."

The "Mrs. Howard" made her wince. She took a step nearer to him.

"Do you think I am to blame?" she asked. "Well, I suppose I am. I flirted and flirted horribly. But it wasn't half so — so — You're different, you know. Do forgive me." She put her hand on his arm, but he did not even seem pleased. "How could they!" She said a little hysterically. "Before everyone! Before you. Dal, you haven't spoken a word. Don't say you are angry or I shall cry. I am so tired and so nervous."

She sank on the sofa, almost in tears. This was too much for him. He went over to her and looked at her tenderly. He hadn't realised until the other men seemed so sure of her how much she meant to him.

"Are you going to marry Amos Thomas?" he asked quietly.

Mrs. Howard writhed. "You know I am not. His face is quite crooked."

"His face was always crooked, but you never noticed it till now — and Michael?" Dallas continued.

She shook her head. "Michael is a cave man. No, never Michael. I've found him out."

Dallas smiled. "And Michael has always been a cave man. Will you marry me?" He could hear his own heart beat, as he waited.

"Would you be very good to me, Dal?" She rose and stood looking at him.

"Try me," he said softly.

Her voice was full of emotion. "Dallas, I want you to believe me. No one has ever cared, really cared, and I am very lonely and longing to be looked after. Oh, I can love," she said. "I can give it back to you beat for beat, and I will if only you will always understand. It's like some mad thing inside of me struggling to get out. It tears and pulls me, and I laugh at it. But I know it will make me weep some day, or break my heart perhaps —"

Dallas, quite as moved as she, returned, "I am fifty-two years old, and I have cared for a great many women. Some have laughed, and some have

cried, and after a little while it didn't matter. The heart thing that gets at men never came. Then I met you, and I realised it had finally come. I can't even tell you why. I have known so many beautiful women, but there has never really been anyone; the others were all shadows. Since you came I have learned to feel, and it has almost done for me. I am plunged all of a sudden into a heaven or hell, in which I burn and freeze with your change of mood. You say there is something in you which struggles to be left free. I tell you there is a passion eating my heart out. No boy was ever so insanely jealous, no lover of twenty more eager to be loved. When those two men stood discussing you I could have choked them both with my naked hands. It hurt me that much. I cannot bear it much longer. Will you trust your wonderful self to me? I will be very tender of you. I could not be anything else."

Her mouth quivered. This great thing seemed too wonderful to take now that it was offered to her. Womanlike she played with it. "I wonder if it could last, because I do care so much! Would it, Dal?"

He took hold of her and held her close to him but he did not answer. There was a long moment, and then he said, "When shall it be, dear? I am so

eager, so impatient. I want you. I must have you all for myself, away from everyone, Ellie. Shall we go round the world and spend a splendid year in all the beautiful places? Will you go with me and have the honeymoon I've always longed to take? When I was young I dreamed it, and it seemed as if it would never come true. We shall go wherever you will, and I will forget business and men and things, and think only of you."

She put her face against his. "Oh, Dal, I have always longed to go round the world. I'm afraid to be so happy. It may not be true. I'm so happy I fear it will slip away," she murmured.

But he held her closer. "No, dearest," he said, "this is the real truth, that we are together and that we care for each other—"

Mrs. Howard put her arms impulsively about his neck, and her eyes full of the love and longing he had dreamed of, looked deeply into his. "Dal," she said, and her voice trembled. "Why couldn't I have had you when I was twenty, I am not young now, and life is no longer new."

He bent very near to her upturned face. "Hush, dear, what's old or young to us?" he said. "It's love we have. And love is a big thing. Life was never so new. I have you at last, close and safe.

The touch of you is so wonderful! The nearness of you — God, what it means!” His voice faltered. “We are going to have thousands of kisses, but never forget this one, Ellie, for it is the first — I love you.” Then he kissed her on her mouth, lingeringly and passionately but with great tenderness. She stood held in his arms, happy and at peace.

CHAPTER XV

HALCYON DAYS

THE days which followed Mrs. Howard's engagement were at once the most wonderful and the most harrowing of her life. Dallas was lover to satisfy the most exacting woman. He brought into the weeks of wooing all of the mature thoughtfulness and consideration of his varied career and engirdled her with a tenderness and love that seemed too perfect to be real. He knew so well the thousand and one things that women adore, and he remembered them all for her. Day by day he found new ways to please and serve her. To Ellie Howard, whose life had been grey duty and only coloured in pastel, this rose-hued blaze of devotion was the culmination of every desire hidden away in her hungry heart.

Her soul rose triumphantly and sustained her somewhat weary body. The first few weeks after the announcement of the engagement were spent at Mrs. Brinton's in New York, and the days flew away from her. All of the turmoil, discomfort, worry and uncertainty passed. She was left to enjoy the fascinating moments undisturbed. Farrell had

protested, of course, vehemently, firmly, and at the last with real pathos, but even he understood finally that his mother was transformed into another being by this new found happiness. After a few days of struggling and incoherent argument he went back to Brookline sadder and infinitely wiser. He had given up, resigning himself stiffly to the inevitable. At all events, he felt, Dallas was a man of wealth and position, of a most suitable age, and highly respected by all the men who knew him. He tried to content himself with that, and listened in chill silence to the surprised congratulations of his mother's many old friends.

Thomas disposed of definitely, Mrs. Howard still had waves of conscience over Michael Doyle. For she knew well, even if Dallas did not, that she was largely to blame for the Irishman's outburst on the memorable afternoon when all of her musketeers had met and fought one by one the battle of his life and hers. It wasn't a pleasing recollection and she blamed herself severely. About Thomas she was comfortable, for she knew that he had deserved to be punished for his impertinence. In fact, now that she had dismissed him, it was difficult for her to understand why she ever had tolerated him at all. She could not recall even the fact that he had

amused her. The remembrance of the long hours spent alone with him, listening to his extraordinary doctrines and unconventional theories, seemed a wild sort of indiscretion in which she could hardly believe she was ever mad enough to indulge. She knew Thomas returned from time to time to see her, but she sent Anna as regularly to dismiss him. His quaint bouquets and his violent notes were put aside unnoticed. She refused to think of him seriously, but Doyle was quite another matter. Deep down in her soul she had been very fond of the Irishman, and she realised that his tempestuous wooing had opened her eyes as nothing else had, to hidden traits of her own that even she had not known existed. There was something splendidly primitive about Doyle. Despite the years of careful repression and his outward veneer he was absolutely unspoiled and natural in real moments of feeling. And his love for her had been a warm, sincere one. She realised that, even while she played with it. All this caused her more real regret than anything that had come to pass since she broke away from her blameless Brookline environment. The remorse about Michael even went deep enough to re-awaken her dormant New England conscience, which she had supposed was asleep for all time.

The Irishman had not kept his word about coming round in the morning to say good-bye. He had not come at all, and this silence had touched her as no words could have done. She knew Doyle had been hurt and disappointed. The consciousness of that continually marred her otherwise joyous days. Of course, she saw him. He was too much a part of the circle in which Margaret Brinton moved to be left out of the round of gaiety that followed Mrs. Howard's engagement. And when they did meet at the theatre, dinner, dance or reception, he was always charming and merry and full of the good nature which she so loved in him. He never spoke to her of that fearful afternoon, nor of his dismissal, but he congratulated her pleasantly and seemed to be on as excellent terms with Dallas as he had been before she came to disturb the even tenor of their friendship. Doyle had not lived in the fashionable world all those years for nothing. His earlier life had been a continuous struggle and the lucky chance that gave him his first opportunity was still fresh in his memory. He had never before really wanted to marry any woman; although he had had countless love affairs. But Mrs. Howard had entered into his life as no one else had ever done. He really loved her with all the warmth and feeling of his kindly

heart, and she had roused in him, as he had told her, all of the bad as well as all of the good.

He had been most confident of success, finding the widow at first so sweet, so alluring, so generous in her fashion of playing with him that he had never doubted her sincerity. He had been jealous of Dallas but he did not really think the other would be able to take Mrs. Howard away from him. Dallas seemed to him to be cold and lacking in the ardour he felt Mrs. Howard demanded. And he was not sure how much Dallas cared, for he was always the well-bred man of the world. The end was a great shock to the Irishman's vanity as well as a blow at his heart. He had been filled with the sincerest emotion of his fifty years. He felt sore, defeated and hurt to the quick. His pride served as the cover for all his humiliation and he was determined his world should never know the extent of his wound. He never blamed Dallas, for the latter had been quite fair with him during it all. But towards Mrs. Howard he cherished a deep hurt. She had made a fool of him, and that was hard to bear.

Meantime Dallas, more in love than he had known he could ever be, revelled in the days. He felt anew the sweetness and the charm of the Brookline widow. She had never seemed so beautiful nor so desirable.

The happiness which had come to her so late in life seemed to make her fairly radiant.

As no season is more wonderful than that of Indian summer when a mature year yields to a bland atmosphere, divine golden lights and autumnal tranquillity, so were those early days of Mrs. Howard's happiness filled with colour and shade of a sort that a younger and less experienced mind never knows. She basked in the warmth of the time and the experience, not caring to think back and not daring to look into a future which must mark the passing of life's autumn into winter. But an intuitive sense of time warned her to make the most of the days.

Always she yearned for Dallas the moment he was away. Not that he was long absent from her side. He probed the resources of the city for her diversion and entertainment. They lunched, dined, supped, went to the theatre and opera, took long drives in his cars and spent beautiful late May and early June hours in dreamy happiness as the motor ran smoothly over favoured roads with views of sea or river.

Dallas, however, was not so willing to ignore the future. His masculinity continually asserted itself in the desire for plans and programme. He wanted the day set for the marriage, he insisted on outlining

the wonderful journey of a year or more that was to be the honey-moon. Into the plans for a wedding late in life he threw much of the energy and the rosy optimism of a far younger man. And, really, under the spur of awakened emotion and the concentration of all his time and interests on the attractive widow he felt that he had renewed his youth. He threw aside his middle-aged cynicism as to men and women, he came as promptly and eagerly for his many appointments as a smitten youth of nineteen, and all of his movements were accomplished with a decisive vigour which had not marked his goings and comings for many years.

One late May day he came in mid-afternoon to take her out in the motor. Piloted up the steps he knew so well by the faithful and thoroughly pleased Metz he walked into Mrs. Howard's sitting-room with the blithe and athletic spirit of one-and-twenty. Since the engagement he had fallen into the habit of bringing each day a nose-gay of old-fashioned flowers. They pleased his widow, who frequently saw in them many of the inanimate friends of her mid-Victorian Brookline garden.

"Put these in some water before they fade in this warm afternoon air, Metz," he directed.

The loquacity of Metz had not been lessened at

all by the culmination of the romance underneath Mrs. Brinton's roof. He took the flowers from Dallas sentimentally. He went through a similar performance each day.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Dallas, but these are old-fashioned flowers, are they not?" the lean and dry old servant asked in a tone quite out of keeping with his perfunctory occupation.

"So they are, Metz."

"Mrs. Howard has sent some of these quaint bouquets down to us in the kitchen as they had begun to wilt and Cook has accomplished much with them, sir. Can you imagine what she does with them, sir, if I may be pardoned for asking you?"

"Certainly, Metz, what does she do with them? I had always thought wilted flowers were hopeless."

"I am sure Mr. Dallas will excuse me if I tell him that Cook has at least a dozen of his nose-gays still."

"It sounds to me, Metz, as if she were conducting a floral morgue."

Metz chuckled apologetically, stifling a laugh which he knew was out of his role as a servant. "Would you believe, sir, she dries them, sir, and with extraordinary success, sir. They retain their form, sir, and a hint of their fragrance. I wouldn't

go so far as to say that they keep their colour, but it pleases Cook and she places them at the sides of her pictures and in fancy bottles goods sometimes come in. She takes no end of satisfaction in them."

Dallas laughed as Metz bowed out, apologising as usual for having let his tongue wag so long.

Mrs. Howard came from her dressing-room a moment later beautifully dressed in a bluish suit and adroitly matched hat and slippers, all of which emphasised skilfully her pastel charm. Under the tutelage of Anna and Mrs. Brinton she had learned to underscore her physical "points" through her clothing, instead of disguising them as she always had done in Brookline.

Dallas rushed to her and kissed her tenderly on lip and hand. "Oh! I am glad to see you," he cried exultantly. "I haven't seen you for ten years."

"Is it that long since 2 o'clock?" she asked with eyes aglow.

"I beg your pardon," he returned with youthful extravagance. "It was twelve years ago."

"And where are we going now? Some quiet place, I hope, where there aren't too many people. I want long views of river and sky, for I'm sentimental to-day and I must dream."

"All right, I know the very spot. And you have never been there."

"Oh, I would love a new place to go. I am so tired of Claremont and Sleepy Hollow. No one in New York seems able to think of anywhere else."

He helped her down the stairs tenderly and they were soon rolling smoothly in his big French car.

"Not too fast, now, Pemberton," she said, speaking to Dallas' chauffeur.

Pemberton touched his hat deferentially and looked hopelessly to Dallas, who nodded confirmation of Mrs. Howard's order.

"You know, Pemberton is complaining bitterly of your pace, Ellie," explained Dallas. "It is the pride of his life that he can pass anything on the road with this new French machine. If he can't get round any other way he insists that the machine will fly at its highest speed."

"Now, Dal, don't ever let it happen when I'm along," she objected. "I was brought up behind the staidest family team that ever meandered through the streets of Brookline. Motors make me nervous enough, anyway, without having them go fast."

"Ellie, dear, I'll have him crawl if it would make you any happier. I don't know how or where we are going so long as you are sitting here." She

slipped her hand into his and sighed contentedly. The afternoon light seemed of a sudden to pour gold out over the green and blooming landscape. They were getting far into the northerly outskirts of the city now and to their left there were from time to time lovely views of the sheety Hudson flowing like a vast stained-glass plane under a sky of even deeper blue. The beauty of it all and the wonder of her happiness poured in on her soul in a vast surge.

“Oh, Dal!” she cried. “It’s perfect, isn’t it? And you are more perfect, still!”

“Oh, no, I’m not,” he objected, smiling happily on her, “it’s just the wonder of life at its best. What a world this would be if everyone felt this way always!”

“Oh, Dal! I hope and pray continually that this may last always!”

“If it only would!” he echoed fervently.

After running for an hour or more along a road that grew increasingly attractive and diversified, they turned toward the river and quite high above the water stopped at a quaint and old-fashioned inn, with a screened porch, on which there were half a dozen tables.

They had the place quite to themselves and while Dallas was conferring with the waiter as to food and

drink, Mrs. Howard had time to feast herself on the beauty of the river. South it slipped far away to the dim and hazy towers of the great city, while to the north it wandered through its stark palisades to open reaches which invited the imagination to all sorts of enrapturing speculations.

She was brought back from her land of dreams by Dallas, who took from his pocket innumerable folders and tables.

“What are all of those things?” she asked.

“Here we have the trip!” he exclaimed, waving the bundle back and forth. “The great and wonderful trip, the trip that Ellie and Dal are to make!”

“Oh, Dal,” Mrs. Howard’s face fell, “do we have to go to all the places in all those folders?”

He was running through steamer schedules and foreign railway guides eagerly. The globe-trotter’s hunger for a journey was again on him. Her despairing glance had escaped him.

“I am going to show you all the wonderful places I know,” he said, “just made for lovers — ideal scenery, splendid hotels, places where the comfort of both soul and body is studied.”

“My, how many places there seem to be in Europe!” She glanced at a map.

“Don’t joke, Ellie, dear, you know we both have

set our hearts on going round the world together in a marvellous, year-long honeymoon."

"Yes," she agreed, noting his eagerness and earnestness. No young collegian setting face to the old world for the first time could have been more absorbed in his plans.

"How long is it since you've been abroad?" he asked after several minutes of his beloved maps and folders.

"I never went but once and then with father," she returned. "It was when I was fourteen or fifteen, long before Americans went abroad very much. I recall Germany as a huge statuary gallery surrounded entirely by trees under which peasants sat drinking beer. Italy was the driest and dustiest country I ever had seen. Father and I amused each other in a contest to see who could see the most St. Sebastians in the art galleries. I saw so many I lost count."

"I can take you to plenty of other countries," he returned cheerfully. "Leave the trip to me. I know what you like. I'll find out all the bright, gay, in-Puritan places and take you to them. Ellie, dear, I don't want to be insistent — but we must decide on a day for the wedding. We aren't foolish young lovers who can go on living forever on hope.

We both are mature and know our own minds. Please say when!" He looked at her imploringly.

"Oh, Dal, can't we go on just as we are? I'm so happy and it has been so wonderful."

"But, dear, I want you — all of you, all of your hours. Now I barely get half your time. Half a loaf is nothing to a man who has been starving all his life."

She saw clearly that his impatience was growing. He had been growing more and more insistent. She knew she could not hold out much longer and then — there was the future which she had so resolutely turned from all these happy days.

"Dal, dear, would it make you any happier if we didn't wait?" she asked.

"Oh!" he exclaimed happily. "If you only would! Really, I can't be patient much longer. I am so hungry for you, so eager to make you absolutely mine."

"Very well, if it will make you happier, it shall be as soon as I can get my trousseau ready. But I have one request."

"Anything in the world in my power is yours for the asking."

"It must be in the old house at Brookline," she said, with her eyes filling. "I have a sentiment

about my own roof. I want to bring my real happiness under it."

"I would love that!"

"You always understand, Dal."

As they went back to the city Dallas was unusually talkative. But she was strangely silent. The sombreness of the lengthening shadows of the late day crept into her heart. She was afraid of something. She hardly knew what it was. It surely wasn't a fear of the hand that pressed hers. She did not dare look ahead clearly to see what was coming. And she dreaded above all really revealing herself.

After he left her Dallas went back to his club, elated and full of contentment. He had made up his mind when he and Mrs. Howard started out that afternoon that he would try very hard to persuade her to set the day for their union, and he felt a just pride in his success. He was remarkably intelligent about women, and much more skilful in dealing with them than the average man was, and he had realised for some time that Ellie was not very keen on being married. She had put him off cleverly again and again, and he knew it would take very little to make her do it indefinitely. Like most men of strong personality once he gave himself up to a conviction he let it take possession of him, and having made up

his mind to marry Ellie Howard, and live the remainder of his life out with her, he was as eager as a boy to bring the engagement to an end and make her his wife. As he had told her the day she promised to marry him, he had cared for a great many other women, but she was the only one he had ever asked to be his wife. He did not wonder that she hesitated about marrying anyone. It was not easy to change one's entire scheme of existence to fit in with someone else. He had his own qualms at various times; when he looked about his comfortable quarters and saw the luxury that only a bachelor club man can ever hope to secure, surrounding him on every side. He also often felt the discomforts of tight shoes and waistcoats, and the desire for a nap during the day was getting to be a persistent weakness. Twinges of gout had made themselves felt more often lately, and he found it much more difficult to read without his glasses. But Dallas, like Mrs. Brinton, had been putting up a fight over creature comfort for years. And he had learned by grim stoicism to rise above the little comfortable, lazy things that tended towards fat and an increased waist line. It had ceased to be a struggle and became second nature to him. His cold plunge and brisk

walk; his daily rubdown and rigorous régime of diet and hygiene were followed now without a break. And he little dreamed that what it had taken him years of persistent personal sacrifice to attain, in figure and bearing, Mrs. Howard had managed to acquire overnight. To him she was the most desirable and exquisite woman he had ever seen, and her charm was so elusive and peculiarly her own, that he never dreamed it could be artifice. To-day she had been so sweet and womanly that a new feeling of adoration stole into his heart. He felt, anew, her vibrant femininity, her wonderfully youthful enthusiasm. She was always alive and responsive to his slightest touch or caress, and each kiss he gave her seemed more wonderful than the last. He felt a little nervous fear that he might not be young enough for her; and that his more mature passion might pall on her after the glamour of the honeymoon had worn away. But he was too much in love to let that deter him, he thought earnestly that perhaps he was letting down a little, and that would never do. He would sleep less and walk more, he had been eating too many luncheons and drinking too much champagne, that was all. He squared his handsome shoulders and registered an inward deter-

mination to be less easy with himself. Ellie should find him on his mettle. He would not disappoint her in anything. And meanwhile he must order a lot of new clothes and take off at least ten pounds.

CHAPTER XVI

WOOING BY THEORY

AMOS THOMAS, though no longer able to air his theories to the mingled alarm and amusement of the Widow Howard, was not without solace. He had tried frequently enough to see her, but each time he called she sent Anna down to dispose of him. The maid was definitely instructed to stay below until Thomas had unmistakably taken his leave. Mrs. Howard wanted to be sure he did not force his way in again as he had on that memorable afternoon which led to his dismissal.

But, to go back to that important day, something else had happened then which concerned only Anna and the Socialist. As Thomas reached the foot of the stairway, after leaving Mrs. Howard's sitting-room, he heard a light footstep behind him and turned to find the sympathetic face of Anna looking into his. He regarded her with sudden hope.

"Mrs. Howard has sent for me to come back?" he asked quickly.

"No, Monsieur Thomas," she returned, the colour flaming a little in her cheeks.

“What is it, then?” He surveyed her plentiful charms hungrily and forgot for the moment his anger and chagrin.

“I am so, so sorry for Monsieur,” she said sympathetically. “Perhaps he would come and sit a moment in the dining-room while I get him something to warm him up. I fear he has caught a cold from the long time on the fire-escape.”

“Really, that’s awfully kind of you. I do need a drop.” He followed her as she showed him the way and then sat with a new curiosity while she hurried off to the butler’s pantry.

She was back in a moment with a tray on which she had placed a bit of wine and cake. She handled it with a Gallic deftness which pleased him immensely. He noted her youth, her grace, her foreign charm of manner. True, she was a servant, but class to Thomas was one of the abominations of a civilisation he affected to despise highly and he was quite as ready to have an affair with maid as with mistress.

He continued to regard her between sips and bites. “Anna,” he began with the wine glass in one hand and the cake in the other, “do you know that you have great possibilities?”

“*Merci, Monsieur,*” she replied, dropping a pretty

courtesy. "You mean I will have the success with the ladies I make ready?"

"Not at all." He looked her over boldly. She stood his scrutiny calmly.

"I fear Monsieur flatters me," she said. "He is very kind to notice a poor, young girl who has no friends. For me I am very sorry for Monsieur. Madame is not at all nice to him. She has been most unkind and I feel, oh, so badly, Monsieur Thomas! I weep that you have been treated so and Monsieur was so impetuous a lover. *Ciel*, he has, what you call it, the grand manner in the *affaire de coeur*. My countrywomen, they would all love him."

"Anna, you interest me singularly. Tell me about yourself."

"Non, non, Monsieur, there is nothing to tell. I am just a poor, young girl who has the misfortune to have to earn her own living. And to be honest with Monsieur I am not French at all, I am Swiss. My father and my mother had a little hotel in the Engadine, but they die when I am young and I must make my way as I can. It is not easy. I have done many things, but always I try to improve myself."

"That's right, Anna, you are a wise girl. But how did you get to America?"

"I went with a French lady as her maid to Italy.

We do not understand each other. I leave her in Rome and I engage with an English lady. She is worse than the French lady and then I find an American lady who bring me to Boston and there Mrs. Howard take me. But I am growing tired of her. She do not appreciate what I do for her. Already she complain of her clothes and she must eat and she must sleep and she must have comfort."

"Ah," interrupted Thomas, "the butterfly is finding her wings a burden."

"Bah!" cried Anna, "I could tear her hair out when she is so silly and stupid. She has so much money and she does so little with it. Oh, these Americans! They are not glad to suffer for beauty, they are not willing to pay."

"Some day, Anna, all their money will be taken from them and they will have no more chance than you or I. The world has treated me little better than it has you. Both my father and my mother were wage slaves who wore their lives away in a New England shoe factory. Between the two of them they made hardly enough money to exist and they even begrudged my mother the time away from her work that it took to bring me into the world. Both of them died years before they should from confining

work and over-hours. Do you wonder that I am an enemy of society as I find it?"

"Oh, Monsieur!" cried the emotional Anna, "again I am so sorry for you."

He rose and stood opposite her. "Your sympathy is wonderful," he said. "You are not tutored in the deceits and sophistries of the polite world. You are real. And you are also sound, mentally and physically. Why, it's from such as you that a new civilisation must have its beginnings. We must lop off at the top and bottom, slash away the unfit from both ends of a deteriorating humanity."

"I do not understand," she returned, looking at him admiringly. "Monsieur is so clever. It is wonderful for a man to both think and love in this country. It is more like France."

"Have you ever heard of the science of eugenics?" he asked impressively.

"Non, Monsieur." She shook her head.

"I haven't time to explain it to you to-day, but sometime I shall tell it all to you." He reflected a moment. "Sometime soon," he added. "You have given me a new interest in life. At the bitterest moment of my existence you step in, the rainbow across my cloud." He came toward her impulsively.

“Monsieur!” she cried warningly, “someone will hear us. Metz is not far away and the maids may be in at any moment.”

“I must see you soon and tell you all of these wonderful things,” he continued, ignoring her warning. “Who knows what possibility may be hidden away in you?” He grasped her wrist, but she wriggled away and darted to the stairs. Thomas heard the voices of Dallas and Mrs. Howard. He scowled, then smiled, and found his own way out. Once more a woman had come into his “shattered life.”

And so Thomas came often to Mrs. Brinton’s and Anna was just as often sent to dismiss him. If it occasionally took her long, the delay was laid to the Socialist’s well-known obduracy. None of the others dreamed of the nature and direction of his new affair.

Through Anna, Thomas kept himself fully posted as to the progress of the Dallas-Howard courtship. He snarled the day the engagement was announced and spent many a half-hour trying to make Anna see what a monster any man was who had as much money as Dallas.

“But Monsieur Dallas is charming and handsome and so thoughtful of Madame,” Anna objected. For herself she regarded a bank account as one of the great essentials of life. She quite approved of Dallas,

but thought he was "throwing himself away on Madame."

"Think," she said to Thomas, "if he had seen her before she was made over!"

"Made over?" asked Thomas. "What do you mean?"

"Why, Madame look twenty years older when first I see her. She is now the triumph of myself and the modiste, the hair-dresser and the corset-maker, the shoeman and the milliner."

"How barbaric," commented the Socialist. "You see in a capitalistic society the women are no more civilised than they were two thousand years ago."

"Monsieur Thomas, you are absurd when you talk so. What does it matter how the lady gets beauty so long as she has it? Beauty is all. Without beauty the woman is nothing."

"Anna, how can you talk so, especially after all I have told you. Come with me to-morrow, which I believe is your day off, to my pet coffee house and we'll have a long talk for the good of your mind."

Anna was getting rather tired of having her mind improved, but she agreed to go. She admired the Socialist's love-making, not his thinking. That bored her. It made her head ache to try to follow Thomas through the mental mazes of one of his long exhorta-

tions. She was yearning to have scenes made over her, to have him forget his theories and all things except the fact that he was a man and that she was an attractive woman.

But at the appointed hour she met him at a safe distance from Mrs. Brinton's and he carried her off triumphantly (by trolley, of course) to the smoky, stuffy, coffee house which had been the scene of a previous visit with Mrs. Howard. Anna, however, fitted into the atmosphere much more appropriately than her mistress had. She liked the continental quality of the place, the interesting and ardent men she saw there and the Bohemianism of the service.

If not like Paris it was at least like many places she knew well in Berlin or Vienna and once there she felt miles away from New York and the thoroughly exacting duties of keeping Mrs. Howard up to the mark in dress and diet. And since her engagement the widow had shown an inclination to get back to simpler and more comfortable things, a tendency which Anna combatted fiercely. It was a great relief to get away from that now continual conflict of the boudoir.

In the beginning the relations of Thomas and the maid were those of teacher and pupil. He not only had for her the interest of a man in a woman, but also that of a political zealot looking for a convert.

Thomas was a sympathiser in the feminist movement and believed quite sincerely that the hope of society lay in an upheaval which should place woman in a place of greater economic and marital freedom.

Anna's mind, however, had never even been ploughed by ideas, and seeds of political thought, therefore, fell on rather unsympathetic soil. She was neither rebel nor reactionary. She had, however, a conventional morality which was proof against all of the Socialist's advanced ideas as to the untrammelled relationships of the sexes.

She always admitted that his tirades must be just, for did they not come from him and was he not an extremely clever man, but she always parried his advances with a defence which was the more difficult to overcome because of its very instinctiveness. She did not reason against indiscretion. She simply did not consider it. Nevertheless he continued stubbornly to convert her to the doctrines of the "varietist," to win her away from her conventionalism, to inoculate her in some degree with the spirit of revolt which burned so within himself.

"Oh, my head is so weary!" she exclaimed as Thomas began to explain some great victory which had just been won by radicalism. "Why must you always talk so far away from ourselves?" she added.

“I was about to get to that,” he apologised. “But I think it wise always to see that you are well informed. The women who are to be the mothers of the new race should not only have good bodies, but good minds as well. Now, you would make a splendid parent if you would only think more.”

“Monsieur Thomas!” she cried, pretending to be much shocked.

“But perhaps it would come out all right,” he added musingly. “I have mind enough for both of us. By Jove, it’s a great idea.”

“What is?” she asked.

“Why, that you and I should form a union based on sound eugenical principles.”

“You mean that you want to marry me?”

“Now, what has that got to do with it?” he snorted vehemently. “Are you going to be foolish and reactionary like these stupid Dallases and Howards? I thought better of you than that.”

“I may be foolish, but I am no fool,” she returned spiritedly. “If you want to marry, very well. We will have a priest or nothing.”

“And I thought you were a kindred soul,” he returned sadly, “that your mind would go with my mind and that we were to glory in the strength of

our own individualities. But you are just another little puppet out of the conventional mould."

"I will leave you here, if you talk to me so. You haven't said once that you love me, and that is to me the important matter. I adore you when you make love, but I hate you when you talk."

"Anna!"

She blinked tearfully and he melted.

"Forgive me, dear girl," he began apologetically, "but you know I am carried away always by my thoughts. You know I am mad to have you. Otherwise I never should have proposed this wonderful scheme for the improvement of the world. It would be too bad to spoil it all by a foolish little quibble over a few mumbled words. Bring on your priest if you want. He will comfort you, and as for me, I will coolly ignore the fact that he is there. So both of us will be satisfied." He reached across the table in the dim light quite sure that no one in that gathering of absorbed souls had any time to be watching others. He took her hand and thrilled at the velvety touch of it. He forgot theories and was fired to even greater desire for her.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DAY OF DAYS

TRUE to her promise to her impatient lover, Mrs. Howard was ready for the wedding two weeks after their visit to the riverside inn. Dallas realised what inroads all of these preparations were making on her time, for he was allotted so little of it that he complained bitterly and continually that he never saw her at all any more.

The widow submitted herself absolutely to modiste, bootmaker, coiffeur, masseur, jeweller and merchant. She swept along in a fury of preparation; finding in the activities of the fleeting days relief from introspection. She was doing her best to prevent herself from thinking things out to inevitable conclusions. She knew only that she had given her word to Dallas and that she was going to live up to the woman she had superimposed on the Mrs. Howard that Brookline knew.

Even Mrs. Brinton, who was a very dynamo of energy, was surprised by her friend's feverish whirl of buying and fitting. The hostess, of course, was con-

sulted continually as to the plans for the wedding and her advice was always wanted in the matter of clothing, for if Mrs. Howard had trusted her own instinctive tastes she would not always have purchased the smart and torturing gowns and garments which were literally thrust upon her. But she was so busy that she hardly felt the punishment continually inflicted on her by her clothes. For the time she bore her fashionable martyrdom uncomplainingly.

Mrs. Brinton, too, was worried about the wedding. She feared that the excitement of the ceremony and the inevitable reaction after it would bring her friend to a collapse which her present burning energy promised. Mrs. Howard had never been hardened to the strenuous daily existence of the urban woman. All of the entertainment and frivolity of the early weeks had told on her strength, her struggle with her clothes also had worn her and the complication into which her fervent admirers pitched her had made further levy on her stamina. In short, she was in no condition to go through another ordeal. Mrs. Brinton thought that the wedding would prove one.

But the widow did not want to lose an item in the list of affairs which naturally were arranged in advance of the wedding. So after hard, difficult days in the shops and parlours devoted to the adornment

and beautification of women she spent nights in varied entertainment. There were affairs which Mrs. Brinton gave, Doyle felt it incumbent on him to alternately dine and sup his friend and the woman who might have been his, John Strong struggled for open dates, and Dallas literally had hundreds of friends all anxious to entertain him and the fiancée in some way. So it was not surprising the widow grew thinner and more tired-looking each day. She struggled desperately to keep up her appearance and scoured on masseur and specialist to work their hardest on her.

She postponed going to Brookline for the mid-June wedding until the last moment. She had decided to limit the attendance at the ceremony to just the intimates of the Brinton household and a very few of the Boston relatives who could not possibly be left out. Somehow she did not relish the idea of confronting her Brookline friends in all her recreated beauty and her youthful clothes. For that sort of thing one needed the glare and artificiality of the metropolis.

But the inevitable time crept closer and closer. John Strong had gone on ahead, taking Metz and some of Mrs. Brinton's servants with him to assist the old-fashioned Howard retinue in the house ar-

rangements for the wedding. To Farrell had been intrusted what other few charges there were.

Mrs. Howard and Mrs. Brinton and their maids were to have gone to Brookline the day before the ceremony, but the widow balked at the last moment.

"Oh, Peg, I can't do it!" she wailed.

"Can't do what, Ellie?" Mrs. Brinton asked. "And for heaven's sake, do hold yourself together."

"I can't spend the night at Brookline in that house. This Ellie Howard never lived here."

"Oh, nonsense, you are tired and nervous."

"I tell you I won't, I can't. I should have the creeps."

"I thought you loved your old place. You've done nothing but talk about it for two weeks."

"That's the trouble!" Mrs. Howard sank into a chair. Mrs. Brinton was much perturbed.

"Ellie, Ellie, this will never do. You've got to go."

"But not until to-night," Mrs. Howard begged pitiously. "Can't we take the night train and get there in the morning?"

"But you are to be married at noon!"

"What of that? Is it going to make any difference in the ceremony where I sleep, or rather where I don't sleep, for I know I'm not going to have a

wink to-night. That's why I can't bear to be alone in that big house. Don't you understand, Peg?"

Mrs. Brinton, seeing that her friend was desperate, agreed. Their trunks had already gone, but Anna and Mrs. Brinton's maid had held enough hand baggage to make the Pullman journey possible. Anna rushed out to change the tickets and the widow retired to spend the afternoon in a nervous chill. Mrs. Brinton exhausted every resource in her command to cheer the other, but it was a hopeless task.

In the evening they motored down to the station. Mrs. Howard stared at every familiar light with a sort of "I-shall-never-look-on-you-again" expression.

"Don't be so silly," finally Mrs. Brinton could stand it no longer. "Everyone feels this way when they are about to be married. Perhaps that's the reason I've never said 'yes' to John," she added.

"You're a great comfort," Mrs. Howard interrupted fiercely. "Say something else soothing like that and I'll never leave."

"It's a good thing you are with me, Peg," said Mrs. Howard as they finally went down to the train gate. "I should never have the courage to go through here alone."

"Now, Ellie, do be calm," urged Mrs. Brinton. "Don't make a scene in the station."

“Why, Peg! I believe you are just as upset as I am.”

“Well, who wouldn’t be?” Mrs. Brinton returned somewhat querulously, “I’ve done nothing for the past two weeks but repress my nerves to save yours. It’s about time for me to have an outbreak.”

Both women, however, became calmer as they settled down in their adjoining drawing-rooms. Mrs. Howard rushed in to her friend, however, as the wheels began to roll and the lights of the long platform to glide by. She gazed into Mrs. Brinton’s face and then held onto her.

“There, there,” the other said soothingly, “you are all right. Now do quiet down.”

Mrs. Howard yielded herself for a few moments to the helpful ministrations of Anna, who mercifully permitted her mistress to be comfortable in the privacy of the compartment. Perhaps it was not without design, for the maid remarked, “Mrs. Howard, after you are all quiet and comfortable may I talk to you a moment?”

“Certainly, Anna,” she answered, “only I must write out a message to Farrell, telling him when we are coming and you will have to take it out to the porter and have him drop it off at some convenient station.”

The maid brought her a blank and she wrote out the brief wire. When Anna returned she hesitated for a moment.

“Now what is it, Anna?” Mrs. Brinton said.

“I am sorry to bother Madame now,” the maid began, “but as she sails so soon after the wedding I must say it when I can. Madame, I cannot go abroad.”

“Anna,” Mrs. Howard was much taken back. “What a time to tell me anything like that! I won’t hear of your leaving.”

“But I must leave.” There was absolute urgency in the maid’s tone.

“I tell you you can’t go! That’s flat. I wouldn’t let you off unless you were to be married or buried. There!”

“That’s just it. I am to be married!”

“Anna!” Mrs. Howard stared at the maid. “Why this isn’t possible. You haven’t seen a soul here.”

“But it is true.” Anna didn’t know what more to say.

“Who is it?” asked her mistress. “Some foreigner here in Boston?”

“No, I marry a New York man.”

“Someone you met there since we left Boston?”

“ Yes.”

“ Anna, you are the most secretive person I’ve ever known. Tell me who it is? Do I know him? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Not Metz, Anna? ”

“ *Non, non, non.* I could not marry the good Metz. He is too old, too stiff, too unromantic. I want the young, ardent man, the fiery lover.”

“ Then it’s the chauffeur. He’s a rakish looking young devil.”

Anna shook her head. She hesitated, then, feeling that the truth would have to come out sooner or later, she made her confession.

“ It is the Socialist gentleman, Amos Thomas.” Anna hung her head to hide her confusion.

“ What, Anna? Say it again! ”

“ I marry Amos Thomas.”

Mrs. Howard was overcome. She laughed until the tears came and then Mrs. Brinton came rushing in from the other compartment, fearing that her friend had fallen into hysterics.

“ Madame, Madame, you are not to tell! ” Anna cautioned.

“ What in the world is the matter, Ellie? ” asked Mrs. Brinton.

“ Oh, Anna has nearly killed me. She has just

told me something extraordinary which has amused me almost to death. But I'm furiously angry, too, because she is going to leave me."

"But, Ellie, you wouldn't want her with you on a honeymoon, anyway."

"Think, Peg, dear, how long this honeymoon journey is to last. Dal says we'll be gone a year and a half. I'll need Anna in two weeks."

"You can get another maid when you land."

"But it will be awkward. Oh, dear, nothing seems to go right. I suppose I'll have to let you off, Anna."

"*Merci, Madame*, you are so kind."

"Well, Ellie, I'm dying for sleep," interrupted Mrs. Brinton. "I'll drop off where I stand if I don't get to bed. Try to sleep, dear, and don't worry." The two women embraced. Mrs. Howard wept silently a minute on her friend's shoulder.

"I'm just nervous, that's all, Peg. Forgive me for acting like a fool." Mrs. Brinton went back, closing her door, and Mrs. Howard turned again to Anna. "What are you and Thomas going to live on?" she asked. "You know he has no money."

"I have my savings account."

"Don't ever let him get hold of it."

“Indeed I won’t, Madame, I know enough not to do that.”

“And here is a present for you.” Mrs. Howard took her cheque-book out of her bag and wrote out an order for five hundred dollars. “Put that in your savings account and don’t let Thomas ever touch it.”

The widow tossed fitfully through the night, but she did get snatches of sleep now and then mingled with strange dreams in which Farrell, Dallas, Doyle, Mrs. Brinton, Thomas and Anna were weirdly inter-mixed. The train reached Boston early and they were in Brookline soon after 8 o’clock. Farrell, much dressed up, and John Strong were at the station to greet them. She saw no one else she knew, for which she was grateful, and they were soon bowling along in the car through verdant and picturesque Brookline.

Farrell was chirping and pleasant. He seemed to be half reconciled to the marriage and this morning spared his mother the usual protests. Strong, having been separated from his Margaret Brinton for a whole day, was extravagantly glad to see her again. Mrs. Howard was quite silent. The weeks since that March day when she had stood at her garden window and planned to really “taste” life

seemed years. Never before had existence been so crowded and never before in her life had problems so forced her into quick decisions.

Brookline looked unutterably serene and peaceful after all the turmoil of New York.

“Oh,” she said to herself, “if we could only stay here for a few quiet weeks!”

There was a tearful scene after the car had wound down the long elm sheltered drive to the carriage door. Mrs. Hopkins, who had been cooking for the Howards since the gas-lit days, the two maids, Hannah and Abigail, and Simpson, the gardener, were gathered in the background and all wept as Farrell and Strong helped the returning widow from the car. Even the Howard maids were middle-aged, having grown up in the service there, so they were entitled to their display of emotion.

There were many expressions of surprise in good New England tones as to how young and well Mrs. Howard was looking. Much curiosity, also, was voiced as to Dallas, who had not yet made his appearance.

Mrs. Howard quickly retired to her rooms after seeing that Mrs. Brinton had been made comfortable. And then she turned herself to Anna for the final time. The maid was much affected, and interspersed

the dressing of the bride with frequent sniffles and sobs.

“Now see here, Anna,” finally expostulated the mistress. “How do you expect me to keep up with you going on so?”

“I’ll try to control myself, Madame,” Anna returned, “but I weep for myself, too.”

“That’s so, I’d forgotten in my self-absorption that you were getting into the same boat.”

Never had the Howard place, as the Brookline cab drivers insisted on calling it, looked better than it did on that mid-June day. A fresh breeze had literally brought down the flawless skies of highland New Hampshire, the elms stood in green grandeur under the blue of the heavens and the white New England house with its ample verandahs and its multitude of green blinds seemed a refuge from all the world. Behind the house the old-fashioned garden was a riot of bloom. The catalpas were thrusting out their bright cup-shaped blossoms and beneath the beds revealed all manner of blues, reds, yellows and fainter pastel shades.

The garden had been half a century in the making and Simpson had grown from a lad to a stooping veteran over it. He had taken its traditions from the older gardener brought out from Roxbury by

Farrell's father and no upstart flower, no new-fangled blossom, no freak plant ever found its way there. In their season came forth lilacs, forsythia, primroses, varied flags, holly-hocks, corn-flowers, four-o'clocks, marigolds, pansies, stock, bachelor's buttons, and just now the sunken rose garden was showing forth its mosaic of red, magenta, scarlet, pink, white and yellow.

Mrs. Howard had written on that she wanted the house left as simple as possible. Therefore the decorations for the wedding were not pretentious, consisting mostly of great vases of gloriously fresh flowers from the overflowing garden just without.

Dallas and his man arrived soon after Mrs. Howard did and were sent up immediately to their suite as the wedding was to be promptly at noon.

Half an hour before that time Mrs. Howard, radiant but trembling, was ready. Somehow the old house had given her a new strength and purpose. She sent Anna in to Mrs. Brinton to tell her friend to come in to see the bride as soon as she was dressed.

When Mrs. Brinton saw Mrs. Howard in her wedding gown, all her fears took flight and she took renewed courage. After all, she felt, Ellie's nervousness was only natural and was not a matter of age or faltering. Mrs. Brinton remembered vividly

that far off day when she had married Paul Brinton, both of them young and thoughtless and full of the carefree happiness that only youth knows. She had a distinct recollection of the wave of nervous agitation that swept over her young soul that day. Cold chills crept all over her when she heard the wedding march. And Mrs. Howard in her bridal finery was so lovely that Mrs. Brinton knew even Farrell would feel a thrill of pride over her.

Celeste had outdone herself in creating Mrs. Howard's wedding gown. It was of palest dove grey charmeuse, soft and clinging. It draped and fitted Mrs. Howard's slender figure lovingly. Its embroideries were exquisite and a bit or two of rare lace added to its glories. All about it in some elusive way there floated or hung clouds of cobwebby chiffon of the same colour. Mrs. Howard's feet were in satin slippers with sparkling rhinestone buckles and her slim ankles in grey lace stockings. She had an indescribable but adorable hat with the better part of some rare bird drooping over its brim. Her beautiful pearls were about her neck and in her ears. One of Dallas' many gifts, a priceless emerald pendant, lay on her breast. Her lovely face, a trifle grave, was flushed and tinted to perfection by Anna's skilful hand.

When the bride finally appeared below her eyes were downcast. Her hair like live gold, rippled softly about her ears and her mouth never looked more alluring. She radiated charm and beauty. The Boston relatives gazed at her in fearful admiration. And Dallas, awaiting her, felt sweep over him a wave of emotion that fairly choked him. She came to meet him on Farrell's arm. She looked like a girl, and he felt old and grey beside her. Farrell, his face white and awe stricken, gave his wonderful mother to Dallas, and stepped into the background. Then as in a dream Mrs. Howard heard the quavering voice of her old Pastor, and realised that the moment had come. She was being married to Christopher Dallas!

CHAPTER XVIII

SINGLE BLESSEDNESS

TOWARDS the end of the afternoon Mrs. Brinton and John Strong, finding the house intolerable with gloomy evidences of the impending journey everywhere, retreated to the garden. They found two comfortable wicker chairs under a bloom-covered tree near the garden wall and seated themselves with every evidence of deep depression. Yet one could not have found anywhere a more peaceful, restful or reassuring spot. Everywhere were trees, shrubs and flowers, all growing in old-fashioned profusion. To their right the brick garden wall led to a street gate and at their left was the quaint rear entrance to the house. Just off the porch were several trunks and on the steps were hat boxes, steamer rugs and bags of various sizes.

Strong watched wearily the men carrying the trunks and bags to the gate and sighed profoundly. Mrs. Brinton, gowned in her usual good taste, was a most pleasing picture in a mauve dress with parasol and hat that matched, but she, too, stared gloomily

ahead. An oriole dropped a cheery call to no avail and a wren tried its happy lay, but nothing would lift the weight that pressed down on these two good friends. They were practically the only guests left. The town folk had long ago gone. Doyle was wandering through a far-off corner of the grounds and Farrell was bustling about somewhere within the house, which also held, indefinitely, the bride and groom.

Mrs. Brinton was the first to speak. "Well, thank God, the wedding's over!" she exclaimed. "Who was it told that lie about something being as merry as a marriage bell? I'm sure I've been on the verge of tears all day. I have rarely felt so overcome." She seemed about to give in at once but Strong leaned over and patted her reassuringly.

"I couldn't feel worse if I had been to a hanging," he returned. "Being best man at this wedding was very much like being pall-bearer, which post I have filled much more frequently."

She wiped her eyes and slowly shook her head. "I never go to weddings or funerals," she commented. "One is of so little importance at either."

Strong tried to puzzle it out. He looked at Mrs. Brinton, then studied the leaves above him and finally said, "For the life of me, I don't see what was the

matter with this particular wedding. Even Michael's champagne cup wouldn't lift it."

Just as she was about to answer, two girlish heads appeared above the garden, there were giggles and then the rice came rattling down. Strong bobbed up indignantly.

"More of that rice!" he exclaimed.

Mrs. Brinton raised her handsome parasol. "I wonder if Ellie's neighbours think I am the bride," she said. Evidently they did for rice again rattled down on her parasol and a moment later an old shoe hurtled into the garden.

"Another slipper," commented Strong. A second followed. He picked both up and stuffed them in his trousers pocket. "Those Newton girls won't have any left, soon."

"How stupid girls are!" was Mrs. Brinton's comment. Her mind went back to the wedding. "Poor Ellie!" she cried. "Poor Dallas, poor things." She sniffled. "I assure you, John, matrimony is *not* popular with me this afternoon. A vigorous feeling of spinsterhood has taken possession of me. I wouldn't be married for the world." She brought her parasol down decisively.

Strong saw his only hope, his own long-sought widow, evading him. He tried to take her hand.

“Oh! I say, Margaret,” he objected. He looked at her with tremendous devotion. She refused to see the look and she brushed away his hand.

“No, no, John, don’t. Single blessedness appeals to me as it hasn’t for months.” She felt she had hurt him. He turned on her mournfully. She relented a little and said comfortingly, “To be honest with you, John, I’ve been leaning more and more in your direction for some weeks past.”

His expression turned to one of extreme delight.

“What?” he asked to make sure.

She looked at him with affection. “I almost felt that I—”

He interrupted her. “And I’ve felt it, too,” he said.

She suddenly fell back to her earlier mood. The wedding clearly had depressed her. “Well, that feeling is over. Perhaps this is just reaction. How long have you been making love to me?”

He sighed volumes. “Only ten years!”

“Well, when I recover from the effects of this wedding you will have to begin all over again.”

“Oh, Lord!” he cried completely crushed.

Mrs. Brinton was going through one of those periods of depression which follow a long sustained course of excitement. She was feeling the effects

not only of the strenuous weeks which had marked the visit to New York of Mrs. Howard, now Mrs. Dallas, but of months and months and even years of fast driving on the social track. Being a merry soul she had always had the desire for company, much company. And being quite as rich as she was merry she had not failed to gratify the pleasure which people gave her. But she always gave out quite as much as she took. Naturally, since there were so many people to give to, she exhausted great quantities of vital energy. It is not surprising then that the inevitable let-down following the wedding has found her particularly unable to bear up against it. Consequently her treatment of her faithful cavalier, John Strong. But he had weathered similar storms with her.

She stared about nervously. Her brows twitched a little and he noted a drawn expression. "What's happened to us all to-day?" she cried. "Why does everyone feel so horribly gloomy?"

Strong was a firm believer in the doctrine of comfortableness. He never crossed Mrs. Brinton. He made a point of agreeing with her, especially when she was nervous. "The Lord only knows," he answered. "I'm sure I don't! There's something in the air — it's probably Brookline. I can't abide

the suburbs. And an old garden fills me with a pent-up sort of sentiment that's very uncomfortable." He looked down on her fondly. He would have given much to have been one of the day's bridegrooms. But he knew Mrs. Brinton was in no mood for sentimental conversation.

She looked to him for some sort of diversion or consolation, nevertheless. "Do cheer me up, John," she urged. "Tell me a funny story, you know, nearly naughty. I'm sure you must know dozens. I shan't mind if it's very naughty if only it's very funny. That's a good soul."

He held his cigarette case out to gain time. "Have a cigarette," he said, "and I'll try to remember a story. Stories never will come when you really need them. Aren't you going to smoke?" He was surprised to find her ignoring the proffered case.

Thinking she had not heard him he repeated the remark. She shook her head. "Since we are calling things by their real names," she explained, "I'll confess to you that I particularly dislike cigarettes. They always disagree with me, I can't bear the taste or smell of them, and I only smoke them to be smart. I couldn't endure one to-day."

"Margaret, I thought you loved them." Strong was surprised.

She stirred uneasily. She was in one of those exaggerated nervous conditions when a woman is unkind to those whom she loves the best. He was quite unprepared, well as he knew her, for her next remark. "Well, I don't," she snapped, referring to the smoking. "You don't know a great deal about me, and now you never will. Oh, I am so grateful that I am still single, that no words will express it!"

Strong looked very unhappy. He felt it was quite hopeless to say anything further. He got up and stood dejectedly wondering what he should do when from across the garden wall came the sounds of the wedding march played on a piano.

"There they are again, the little cats." Strong almost swore. He was quite sure that the young women of the rice and the old shoes were plaguing them again. "It's all for Ellie's benefit, but we are the ones who suffer."

Mrs. Brinton began to weep. "Oh, dear," she cried, "Oh, John!" Strong was getting a bit bored.

"My word, Margaret," he exclaimed, "this is fearful! *You* aren't the bride, you know! Do be sensible! You are looking beautiful and we are all going back to New York and we will have a jolly time. Cheer up!"

Voices, full of gay mischief, joined the music.

Mrs. Brinton, no longer able to stand it, rose up, putting her fingers in her ears. "Oh! I wish they'd stop. I shall scream in a moment! How can they think it is funny?" The last was delivered over the wall so violently that it had its effect. The playing and singing ceased.

"Thank heaven," said the tortured wedding guest, sinking back into her chair. She wiped her eyes, sniffed a bit and then looked at the trunks piled up at the gate. "John, aren't you glad, honestly glad, we are still unshackled, and that that fearful array of trunks doesn't belong to us?"

"Oh, I can't say that," he answered truthfully. "I want to marry you more than I want to do anything."

"Put it out of your mind, John, forever. A wedding and a wedding trip are beyond me. I simply couldn't — I simply wouldn't! Just picture lifting the trays out of those trunks day by day, and finding the key of each one on your key ring, and rounding up the whole lot on those beastly little station platforms abroad. Fancy going about with an umbrella and a porter and pointing them out with a weary, if accustomed eye! And always losing the one that one really wanted."

"I hate Europe myself. And I really am sorry

for Ellie. "It's a bore, her maid leaving just now."

"It's more than that," she added. "Ellie can never keep herself up alone."

"How — up?" He looked at her curiously.

"Oh, nothing — just up. Dressed — fixed — groomed. You ought to know, you have a valet."

The picture did not look quite so hopeless to him. He thought it all over. It rather fascinated him. "I should think Dal could hook and unhook — or even help her keep up — whatever that means! How I should love to hook and unhook —" He caught himself. "Nothing personal, you know," he added quickly.

"You don't understand," she resumed. "Ellie has my deepest sympathy, but, poor soul, that won't help her. She has got to go around the world, and be handsome and young and amusing, whether she feels like it or not, every inch of the way." She rose tearfully and went over to him. "Oh, John, I'm so glad we're not going on a wedding trip. And after to-day, I know I never, never will find courage." She gave him an affectionate touch.

"John, dear," she began softly, "I don't want ever to hurt you, but I feel I must tell you how all of this to-day has alarmed me. It isn't because I don't care for you that I hesitate, but it is because I love

you so much. I am so afraid that if I married I should lose the John I know and admire. Your faithfulness, your devotion and your consideration are absolutely necessary to me. I must always have them, but would I have them if we were married? Many of the happiest women I know are not married. Wedlock instead of resulting in a division of care and responsibility seems simply to double them. Not that these women have any prejudice against marriage. They realise it is a necessary and valuable institution. They respect its traditions and realise what it means for the human race at large but they have found useful places in the world without it. John, dear, don't you think it better for us to go on as we are? I am always happy with you. Would I be if a greater intimacy brought you to a realisation that I am far from perfect, that I have as many faults as I have virtue? Tell me, John, if I'm mistaken. I am sure I am not."

He demurred gently and pulled her close to him.

She yielded to him. "Kiss me, John," she said. "I love you but I will not marry you."

"You haven't said you loved me for ages, that's encouraging," he said, stooping down to grant her sentimental request. "That is most propitious," he added. "I'll wait for the rest."

“Don’t,” she sighed. “This is final. I’m kissing you good-bye.” She gently freed herself.

“Was that a good-bye kiss?” he asked amusedly.

“So far as marriage is concerned.”

“It seemed like a stay kiss to me. Perhaps you forgot what kind you started to give. I don’t feel a bit as if I had been kissed farewell.”

“Oh, John,” she exclaimed. “How can you jest at a time like this?” The tearful mood was on her again.

But he was much more hopeful than he had been. She had shown that she really was dependent on him when most sorely tried. He was more than a fair-weather anchor for her.

CHAPTER XIX

CONCERNING A JOURNEY

FARRELL had not gotten through the day without coming into a share of the general gloom which had settled on bride and groom and their intimate friends. His was a nature that indicated the appearance of depression as quickly and surely as litmus paper does the presence of acid. He may have been reconciled in part to the marriage, now that it had actually taken place, but he regarded the world-wide honeymoon journey as a piece of extravagance which no sane man would countenance.

The absurdity of the thing had been impressed particularly upon him for in his capacity of general home functionary at the wedding he had completed the final arrangements for the tickets at the steamship office in Boston. He supervised the checking of the baggage and sighed over each piece. Deep down in his heart he felt that he would be saying good-bye to his mother forever, once she started out on any such difficult and unending trip as that which Dallas had outlined.

Late in the afternoon, quite mournful and alone, he walked out into the garden for a final look at the trunks. There he found Strong and Mrs. Brinton, the former somewhat abjectly staring into space, while the latter was dabbing her eyes with one of those futile lace bits which women carry instead of handkerchiefs. He sat down near them.

"Tired out, Farrell?" Strong asked sympathetically. "Warm, isn't it?"

Farrell looked about cautiously and then began, "Mrs. Brinton, have either of you ever thought about this trip mother is going to take? It's appalling. I've seen the tickets for part of the way. Green wavering things like serpents and fully as long. Yards of them!"

He dove down into an inside pocket and fished out a little red atlas. "I have figured out the journey by this little map of the world," he began, "and I want you to listen to it, and remember that mother is supposed to do it in one year. Boston to Hull; from Hull by that fearful North Sea to Stockholm, then by boat across the Baltic to St. Petersburg. A little side trip to Moscow, Berlin and Vienna and in October to Paris. Then down with the season to the South of France, Naples, Athens and old isles of the Grecian seas, to Macedonia, Persia, Ormus

and India. Later all the queer ratty spots on the obscure coasts of India and Siam. Then up for Chinese pirates and Japanese cherry blossoms in the spring."

"Great Scott!" interrupted Strong. "That's work, that isn't honeymooning!"

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Brinton, much overcome again.

"Lord, it's awful!" added Strong, who regarded Boston as remote enough from New York.

"When they are not being tossed about on a boat," continued the sober Farrell, "they'll be shaken up on a train, and when they can't reach a place any other way, they will be jolted around in a motor car. And God knows what that globe trotter will want to do then. He mentions casually, South Africa, the Tyrol, Simla, Sydney, the tombs of the Pharaohs, Buenos-Ayres and the Pampas, Alaska and Alexandria. He wants to sail on the Bosphorus and climb the Himalayas. He has a passion for folding his tent with the Arabs, and he wants to kyak with an Eskimo. Then London, Rome or some other place for the winter—or Egypt. Mother is to ride a camel and she can't even sail on the bay. She must be carried in rickshaws and palanquins. He even talked about a Boer bullock cart."

“Oh, Farrell!” Mrs. Brinton was suffering all the discomforts of the journey in advance.

“One would think she had married a motion picture man,” he resumed. “Do you realise that up to four months ago, mother considered it tiresome to go into Boston, and New York a trip to be made after making one’s will? Mrs. Brinton, I know that mother’s last stop on this trip will be a graveyard!”

“Merciful God! Poor Ellie!” she exclaimed, weeping.

“My dear Farrell,” Strong said, “they’ll never do it all; they couldn’t. Don’t worry.”

“It would have been better if she had married Michael,” said Mrs. Brinton, recovering possession of herself.

“Yes, New York’s good enough for him,” commented Strong.

“It would be much better if she had married nobody,” was Farrell’s view. “But she wouldn’t listen. Mr. Dallas is nice enough, and I feel quite sure he loves mother. Much too ardently, for my ideas of good taste.”

Strong showed dissent by a disgusted smile. He hated a prig.

“Mother is far from young, Mrs. Brinton,”

Farrell continued, "and such things seem out of place. You know mother is at least —"

"Dear Farrell, please," she interrupted. "Your mother's age is not an item of news to me; I know it perfectly. In fact, my own is shockingly similar. But I flatter myself, we neither of us look it."

"Indeed, you don't!" emphatically seconded Strong.

"That's what disturbs me so," Farrell said sadly. "I want a mother, not a creation. My, dear, comfortable, pleasant mother has turned into a dressed-up, perfumed fashion plate. She looks twenty years too young. I tell you, it's out of nature."

Strong could hardly restrain himself from talking to Farrell with fervent cynicism. Farrell's stiff and punctilious bearing, his smug self-satisfaction and his absolute hatred of the joyous things of life irritated the older man inexpressibly. But he strove to remain calm. He even said mildly, "Once you know Dallas you will love him, Farrell. Everyone does!"

"I don't know!" returned Farrell dubiously. "If he would only settle down and be a father to me, I'd be contented enough."

Strong answered with dry humour. "Perhaps, he

doesn't fancy being a father to anybody. It makes one feel so ancient. I shouldn't care, myself, about being your father."

"It would be very nice to have a father to play golf with," continued Farrell, paying no notice to Strong's joke, "and to talk to of one's business affairs; but Mr. Dallas is just another statuette. He isn't any more real than mother."

"The brat!" exclaimed Mrs. Brinton under her breath to Strong.

Farrell rose sadly and held his hat before him. "I'm going fishing with George Foote," he said, "and I may not see you again before you go. Good-bye, Mrs. Brinton, I am glad you haven't a son, for he would be sure to be wretched over your looking so young and pretty — at your age." He held out his hand.

"That's not nice of you, Farrell," she returned, quite nettled.

Strong was much annoyed. "My dear Farrell, if Mrs. Brinton did have a son, I'm sure he would adore her as we all do."

"Never mind, Jack," she said to Strong, and then turned again to Farrell. "Good-bye, dear child, you never were young, so you can't understand why anyone else wants to be." Both shook hands

with the young man and he started for the garden gate.

“Please tell mother I’ll be back to bid her good-bye,” he called back. “And I forgot, Mrs. Brinton,” he added, “to thank you for bringing your butler over. He is an excellent servant. Our parlour maid left because she said I was too particular, and perhaps I was. I have grown so suspicious of all females.” Hearing the girls across the way at their mock wedding march he climbed up to the wall and shouted, “I say, Lily — Lily. Mother’s dressing where she can’t hear you. These are simply guests you’re entertaining in our garden. Do stop it!” There was a sound of laughter but the music ceased. Even Farrell’s back looked outraged. He turned and with a curt “Good-bye!” was off through the gate.

“Oh, I do envy Dal the pleasure of that young man as an adjunct of his family circle,” commented Strong. “What a pleasant young person to confront several hundred meals a year. No wonder his mother ran away from him.”

“Farrell isn’t altogether to blame,” returned Mrs. Brinton, “though I shall not forget soon how he put me in my place. But he is the product of environment. The suburbs of Boston are full of

Farrells. There is something in the air and the traditions of this part of the country which leads either to extreme and impossible virtue or to utter depravity. No one knows how to strike a golden mean. I have been more frozen and more shocked in Boston than in any other city in the country. And, oh, John, the things some of the *débutantes* talk about. The sophisticated Boston young woman would shock a Broadway soubrette! Not in what she does, of course, but in what she says. Heavens!" Mrs. Brinton's expressive hands were held up in despair.

"Really," sighed Strong, "Boston is extraordinary. What you tell me doesn't make me feel any more comfortable about it. I wish I was back in New York." He relapsed into gloomy silence. The beauty of the day, the charm of the wonderful garden and the quiet peace of the hour were wasted upon them. They were beyond the comfort which Nature extends to all who listen to her. Their ears and eyes were turned inward.

Doyle, quietly entering the gate, caught sight of them, stopped for a moment and enjoyed the mirthless picture with a smile. Then he stepped briskly forward and they started a little shame-facedly, as people do when they are caught off guard.

"Well, what are you two up to, anyway?" he asked mischievously. "Planning an elopement?"

"No, Michael," returned Mrs. Brinton sadly, "nor any other form of matrimony."

"But it's grand marrying weather," Doyle returned sincerely. "I've had a walk and a think and I'm the better for it. I've got to get the widow out of my system. A wedding's a weird ceremony when you watch the other fellow get the *one* woman!" He sat down and pulled himself together. "And now won't you and John, here, oblige me?"

"No, no, Michael," she broke in firmly.

"Ain't that a pity, now — just when I have my hand in," he returned in a blithe second, "I was countin' on standin' up with ye, and perhaps kissin' the bride."

"No such luck!" croaked Strong. "What the devil's the matter here to-day, Michael? We all look like tombstones! Margaret seems to think that Ellie and Dal aren't happy!"

"What's that you say? Not happy?" Doyle displayed great interest.

"They both look so damnably wretched. Do you think the marriage was a mistake?"

The Irishman thought hard a moment as he

lighted a cigar. He puffed solemnly. "I wonder if that's true now! Well! Well!"

Mrs. Brinton's nerves began to jump again and she rose and walked back and forth uneasily. "I tell you we never ought to have let them do it," she said. "They're too—" she paused. "I know they're not a bit happy! At all events, Ellie isn't. I'm a woman and I feel that. As for Dal, I know nothing about men, and—"

Doyle quickly interrupted her. "Mrs. Brinton, may the Lord forgive ye. So you know nothing about men? Why, ye were born knowing all about 'em! Every woman is! It's the cunning of nature! And Jack here, ye know, ye're only devilin' him. You wouldn't be such a fool as to give some other woman the chance at him. Ah, well, it's Irish I am and single, and it's warm and I'm lonesome, and I feel sentimental and full of desires and other discomforts. Lucky Dal! Ye couldn't make me believe he hasn't the finest luck in the world, with that witch, Ellie, belonging to him this day. I'd get her yet if somebody would kill Dal off for me."

Mrs. Brinton, in tears again, shook her head gravely at the Irishman.

“Michael, we’re on the verge of some awful calamity and you won’t be serious,” she cried. “Do go away!”

“Go and cheer Dal up a bit,” urged the pacificatory Strong. “The last time I saw him, he was watching his man pack his bag and he looked as if he were watching him dig his grave.”

“I’d go and offer to take the bride off his hands if I thought there was a chance for me,” said Michael rising. “Perhaps it’s only a drink he needs. Well, I’m off to do whatever I can for him. And you two reckless, riotin’ devil-may-cares, don’t run off and do anything foolish while I am gone.”

CHAPTER XX

AN ADVANCED EXPERIMENT

MEANWHILE the efforts of Amos Thomas to reach Brookline to claim his bride were not unattended by adventure. Thomas, being always of the opinion that society owed him a living, indulged in little individual providence. He was Pickwickian in a confidence that something would turn up at the moment of need. Thus he bid Anna an airy good-bye a few hours before she left for Brookline, sure that he would be on hand in time to meet her late in the afternoon at the home of the new Mrs. Dallas. The details of his own wedding he was perfectly willing to leave to his bride. He knew she had written on ten days earlier to Boston to her manicure friend and her priest. The latter, she said, had filed the needed notice for the license. All he would have to do would be to call for it when he reached Boston, and pay the fee.

Not until late in the day did it occur to him that he might need any wedding finery. The related matter of money presented itself to his mind. He

ran through his pockets and found he had only a few dollars less than the fare to Boston. It was therefore necessary for him to look up some of the comrades to whom he had given money in moments of comparative affluence.

Thomas steered his way to Fifth Avenue and the public library quite certain that he would find some of his compatriots reading over the newspapers and magazines. He, himself, had a favoured chair there at one of the reading desks, which he considered his "office." Fate seemed to be propitious. No sooner had he gained his favoured quarter of the building than he saw three of his friends close together. He indistinctly remembered turning over indefinite amounts to each.

But there was hardly enough of that capitalistic contraband money on any one of them to convict him of subscription to an iniquitous system of government.

Thomas left in disgust. He stood on the broad steps of the library and watched the rich flood of traffic flowing up and down the avenue. He did not see one person in motor, carriage, bus or on foot who did not look what he would describe as "rotten with money." Growing desperate he meditated various enterprises. He even wondered how a hold-up was

achieved. But, however sure he was of the capitalist's lack of right to the money he carried, Thomas was no man for strenuous measures.

The easiest way was always his. He had a brother in New York, a small shop keeper far uptown. Under all ordinary circumstances he despised his relative as a hopeless and acquiescent reactionary. The Socialist turned to Sixth Avenue, paid a nickel out of his small financial store and fared far North on an elevated car. Leaving the train he turned into a narrow side street which on this fine June evening was swarming with children, hurdy-gurdies and dogs. He found the shop without difficulty. It was a combination of news-stand, candy store and small grocery. His brother, a small, pale, baldish man with near-sighted eyes peering through untidy steel-rimmed spectacles, looked up from a little package he was handing to a child.

"Oh, it's you, Amos!" he exclaimed. "Have you come back to give me that twenty? I'd said good-bye to that."

"What a nice greeting to a brother who hasn't seen you for a year," returned Amos with some asperity. "I'd forgotten about that." He hesitated a moment. "I tell you what I'll do, Will. Give me twenty more and I'll pay you the whole amount in

two weeks. I'm going to be married. In fact —" he looked at his brother impressively — "I'm engaged to a very rich woman."

The other looked at him dubiously. "This probably means throwing good money after bad. And you used to go on about marriage being all foolishness. What's changed your mind?"

"A woman," returned Amos. "Now don't be an ass." He assumed an attitude of superiority which seemed to impress his cringing relative. "Either give me the money or don't. You can have my note if that will make you feel any better about the matter."

"I think I'll take it, if you don't mind, and for the whole amount." He wrote out the necessary statement. Thomas signed, and immediately, the moment the money was in hand, he rushed off fearful that his brother might undergo a change of mind.

He hurried off for his room farther downtown and on the way bought as the principal item of his wedding outfit a black Windsor tie. He changed to his best summer suit of clothes, a rather neat grey, shaved and primped a bit and then hunted for a New York and New Haven time table. It was important to find a night train which carried a day car for he knew he couldn't afford a Pullman fare.

Late in the night he began his journey to Boston stiffly propped up in the seat of a coach. The car was crowded. A young man who evidently had been experimenting with life along the Gay White Way exhaled unmistakable fumes by his side; an Italian family, running in all sizes from "padre" to "bambino" occupied a pair of double seats ahead and varied other items in the great army of those who travel cheaply noisily marked the way. Thomas slept very little; for the most part he watched the shapeless landscape of the night slip away beside the car. The train stopped everywhere; the engine had a weakness for backing, buckling and jerking and every time there was a halt, the dissonance of snores in the car was terrifying. The Socialist welcomed with great relief the coming of the early dawn and the growing morning. He opened his window wide and revelled in the freshness of the young June day. It was mid-morning when the belated train ran haltingly into the Boston terminal.

By the time he had gotten into communication with Anna's friend and the priest and accomplished the important errand for the license it was afternoon. He then hurried out to Brookline and called Anna on the telephone. She warned him not to appear before 5 o'clock. But he wandered out to

be sure he would know the house when the time came and then loitered near in a convenient bit of woodland. Promptly on the stroke of the hour he was at the house. He rang the bell at an innocent-looking side door and was quite astonished to be confronted by Metz.

“Tell, tell—” he hesitated. “Inform Mrs. Brinton that I am here and would like to see her.”

Metz looked him over coolly but nodded and went off.

He caught sight of Anna just as Metz left. She rushed to him. “Go back of the house,” she said hastily. “I’ll be out in a moment or two.”

Metz returned to say that Mrs. Brinton was in the garden and would see him. He followed the butler uncomfortably, but as he reached the garden his step became brisk, he rearranged the red flower in his buttonhole and the ingratiating Thomas manner appeared again. As he saw Mrs. Brinton he raised his straw hat with much manner.

“What on earth do you want of *me*?” Mrs. Brinton asked rising.

Seeing Strong and Doyle he first said: “How are you, gentlemen? I suppose this felicitous occasion has brought you all to Brookline. How is the bride?” He turned to Mrs. Brinton. “Radiant,

I am sure, and the happy man—I quite envy him.”

“I am certain you did not come all this distance to offer congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Dallas,” commented Strong. “If *I* am in the way here—”

“Not at all,” airily interrupted Thomas. “I don’t believe in reticence. It’s a foolish, old-time conventionality. I always speak out in beautiful, frank freedom. One’s soul should rise above the petty ideas and customs of men.”

“That being so,” urged Mrs. Brinton, “sit down and tell me your news. I know you well enough to think it worth while. I will say for you, you are never commonplace, Mr. Thomas.”

He took a chair with much ceremony. “I’m going to be married,” he said with a smile. “Does that surprise you? Do you ask me to whom?”

“Why should we?” said Strong, who was much bored. “It doesn’t interest us.”

“It interests me!” Mrs. Brinton insisted. “I’m dying to know.”

“Well,” he began, “I do not expect to be understood. Natures like mine rarely are. After my unfortunate set-to with the fire-escape, that memorable afternoon, not one of you even said ‘good-bye’ to me. Full of your own selfish desires, you let me

go out uncheered into what seemed then a heartless world. But just as I reached the foot of the stairway — that same stairway on which our mutual friend had first leaned towards me in all her womanly charm — a little dove fluttered to my bruised heart. She comforted me, she bewailed my misfortunes, and she took me into the dining-room, your dining-room when I come to think of it, and poured me a glass of sherry to stay my fainting spirit.”

“My sherry, too,” commented Mrs. Brinton, amused for the first time in the day. “But what’s sherry at a moment like this. And the fluttering dove?”

“She let me out into the twilight, saddened but comforted.”

“It couldn’t have been Cook — now, that fluttering dove?” asked Strong, growing interested. “I hope it isn’t Mrs. Brinton’s cook.”

“It was the handmaiden of our mutual friend, Mrs. Dallas — Anna Merkel,” announced Thomas with a smirk.

“Anna? So that’s why she’s leaving! She told me she had a situation,” added Mrs. Brinton, laughing. “So you are the situation.”

“Situation is a mild word for him!” commented Strong under his breath.

“Since then,” continued Thomas, now much satisfied with himself, “we have communed often and written many letters. I find in her fresh, young mind much that interests me.”

“And she is a remarkably good-looking girl,” added Strong.

“Yes, she is pretty,” granted Mrs. Brinton.

“She is indeed!” Thomas emphasised it, “and who am I to ignore nature’s allurements?”

“Well, well!” chortled Strong. “We’re all human.”

“I have it in my mind to make experiments of theories never fully understood by this scoffing world.” Thomas was once more in his own world, the world of discussion. “Anna and I may yet be heard from.”

“Amos Thomas!” exclaimed Mrs. Brinton, shocked. “You are surely out of your mind. To turn from Eleanor Howard to Anna Merkel. I believe you are only doing this to humiliate her.”

“I suppose it will serve as a petty annoyance,” he responded, “but what matter? She has made her choice. I would have guided her into rose-coloured paths unknown to her, but she would not! So I have found this modest violet and plucked it for my own.”

“Hurrah for the violet!” exclaimed Strong.

Thomas looked at him, very annoyed. “Anna leaves Mrs. Dallas to-day, and I have come to fetch her. From now on I will protect her.”

“But you don’t believe in marriage,” said Mrs. Brinton.

“Really! Don’t you?” asked Strong, much interested.

“No, I don’t, but I waive my views!” Thomas returned.

“I actually believe, Margaret, he’s going to make a scientific experiment of poor Anna,” said Strong. “Excuse me, but I must go and tell Dal. It will really make him smile. Nothing else has to-day.” He went towards the house.

“And send Anna out here,” Mrs. Brinton called after him. “I want to speak to her.”

Strong turned. “Very well, and Mr. Thomas, my best wishes to you in your — experiment!”

“How hateful of you to try and spoil Ellie’s wedding day,” said Mrs. Brinton when Strong had gone. “I wondered why Anna was so ready to leave. She refused to go with Mrs. Howard on her honeymoon.”

Thomas ignored her reproof. “She adores me, and we shall be quite happy.”

“Well, one might as well give up trying to find out why people marry people. It’s quite beyond human understanding.” Mrs. Brinton’s soul was sinking again.

Anna came down the steps from the house at this moment, with her hat on and a jacket thrown over her arm. She had a small bag which she dropped as she saw Thomas. He rushed to her delightedly.

“My own little Anna!” he cried. “Are you ready?”

She turned to Mrs. Brinton. “Madame will pardon Monsieur Thomas? He is so *romantique*. He always speak the word right out.”

“Anna, I sent for you to tell you I think you are making a great mistake to marry Mr. Thomas. He’ll never understand you or make you happy. And you are such a good maid. It’s a calamity for Mrs. Dallas to have to give you up now.”

“Ah, Madame,” Anna returned. “I know what people will say. But for me, I have the aspiration, and Mr. Thomas, he find the way for me. I have always the desire for romance, the excitement. I could not live with the good Metz or someone like him. I want the uncertain, the fairy tale.”

“Do you think Mr. Thomas will always play Romeo? My poor child! Men aren’t like that.”

“Did you tell Mrs. Dallas?” Thomas turned to Anna.

“I did, Monsieur Thomas, and I do not know if she laugh or cry. She have a little *hysterique!* But she is *so* kind, the Madame Dallas. She have given me so wonderful a present — I have lose my breath.”

“Some trinket, eh?” he asked. “Or perhaps a gold piece?”

“If you would *only* let Anna talk. Do wait. You’ll have years to step on her.” Thomas galled Mrs. Brinton unusually on this occasion.

“She has given me five hundred dollar,” Anna finally explained.

“Very generous, upon my word,” commented Thomas, trying to be easy. “Most kind, indeed!”

“She have said it was cheap at that,” Anna continued with a curious little smile, “that she might have paid much more. But I do not know what she mean by that.”

“I do, she’s right,” said Mrs. Brinton. “A thousand would be cheap.”

“We — er — shall accept it in the generous spirit it was given,” Thomas put in his word in his usual airy manner. “It takes a fine nature to receive properly. Are we ready my — nesting bird?”

“Anna, when are you to be married — to-day?” demanded Mrs. Brinton. “See that he does marry you. Look out for that.” She did not trust Thomas.

“Do not fear, Madame. I go now to my friend’s house, a manicure. She prepare a feast and the Priest marry us in the chapel at eight. I may be fond of Monsieur Thomas, but I have my senses still. Monsieur Thomas, he know that. And I promise Madame to put my money in the Savings Bank in my name, except for a little I put in the manicure shop with my friend, for I stay here. Monsieur Thomas he believe weddings are happier if the woman work as well as the man. And I think so, too. If he is not good to me, then I am not helpless.”

“And what, I pray, is Mr. Thomas going to do?” Mrs. Brinton lifted her eyebrows.

“Well,” he explained pompously, “I will stay here, too. New York no longer appeals to me as a field for my propaganda. It is too big, too wedded to Mammon, too formidable for one poor pawn to move. Here in Boston I hope to find more receptive soil. Don’t worry, Mrs. Brinton, you’ll hear of me yet!”

“Adieu, Madame Brinton,” said Anna tearfully,

“I sorrow to leave Madame Dallas. I fear she grow careless alone.”

“Good-bye, little Anna. I really believe you may make something of your reformer if you are not swallowed up in Eugenics or some other equally dismal form of progress. Good-bye, Mr. Thomas. You don't deserve her.”

“Who knows when our paths will cross again?” He kissed Mrs. Brinton's hand with an extravagant gesture.

Thomas turned to the gate and stalked majestically ahead of Anna. She looked back at her bag, which he had ignored calmly. About to speak to him she changed her mind and got it herself, tagging along after him with her burden.

“My!” sighed Mrs. Brinton, quite overcome. “He is making her do all the work already.”

CHAPTER XXI

THE BRIDE CONFESSES

MICHAEL DOYLE had joined John Strong in an effort to cheer Dallas, who seemed overcome with a gloom that no amount of drinks or amusing stories could lift. Michael, who still coveted the bride with great desire, could not for the life of him understand Dallas' condition. A little nervousness, even blue funk at the last moment, was natural enough, and he had secretly expected the self-possessed Dallas to make his marriage vows in a trembling, stuttering undertone, or to see him meet his bride with a face as white as the traditional sheet. But to his surprise, Dallas had never seemed more at ease nor more graceful than during the little wedding ceremony in which, after all the long, gay years of free lancing, he was made a benedict. That awkward moment passed and the tedium of the family greetings and congratulations over, the wedding breakfast eaten, and the few guests cheered on their various ways, Michael expected to see his friend eager for the departure of the faithful three, Margaret Brinton, John and himself, so that he might finally have his beauti-

ful bride to himself. But Dallas was particularly loathe to have his old friends leave him. He insisted upon their waiting until the very late train just before dinner, and they both felt so moved by his depression and the fashion in which he entreated them that they remained without protest, both vaguely realising that something far deeper than ordinary nervousness was troubling the bridegroom.

Dallas sat wrapped in oppressive silence in a big guest room of Mrs. Howard's old-fashioned house, his trunks and bags about him, his valet busily engaged in sorting and arranging his things. Johnson, the man, was to accompany Mr. and Mrs. Dallas abroad, and he was to take the trunks and large bags into Boston, where they were to join him early the next morning to take the boat, for at the last moment Mrs. Dallas had insisted upon spending the night in Brookline. She seemed so upset when Dallas urged their going into Boston that he consented, willing, as he always was, to sacrifice his own pleasure for hers. She had gone to her room to dress and now that he had changed his black coat and other wedding garments for a blue serge suit, in which he looked handsomer than usual, he smoked while Michael and John begged him to have a little courage and take heart.

“My word,” Michael stormed at him. “Ye ain’t the first man to get married to a woman. Ye know, Dal, it’s been done often before.” The Irishman sat on a trunk smoking like a furnace, a whiskey sour in his hand, and much earnestness in his soul. He was really growing angry at Dal. It seemed almost a slight to Ellie, this melancholy, and he resented it. She still was the one woman in the world worth winning as far as he was concerned, and he thought as he sat there that Dallas certainly did not half appreciate her. She had looked so exquisite, so girlish and shy in her wedding finery, and there was so wistful a timidity about her, so unlike her usually saucy self, that she had quite touched his warm heart. He longed for her fiercely, so that he felt choked by it, and he scowled over his cigar to keep back tears which had been perilously near the surface all day.

John Strong paced up and down like a caged animal. Between Margaret’s change of heart and Dal’s depression he was almost beside himself. While Johnson was consulting Dallas about the relative merits of a pile of gay hued neckscarfs, John drew Michael over to the doorway.

“Go off and let me see what I can do with him, Michael,” he said in a low tone. “I am sure he’ll

tell me if we're alone. See if you can't see Ellie and tell her Dal is really unhappy. Perhaps she's been teasing him. She often does."

Michael nodded. "I'll go," he said, "and I'll see Ellie too, God love her. It's a shame she should be wasted on that gloom cloud! I'm going now, Dal," he added in a louder tone.

Dallas turned as Michael went to the door. "I'll see you before you go," he said indifferently.

Doyle made his way along the hall to Mrs. Dallas' room. Anna had gone, but Mrs. Brinton's Lucy was helping the bride with the last few things. He knocked on the door discreetly.

"Ellie," he said, "it's Michael, and I'm dyin' for a word with ye. Can't ye come down in the garden a moment alone with me?"

Mrs. Howard's voice was full of sweetness. "Dear Irishman," she said from the other side of the door, "where is Dal?"

"Working at his neckties. He's safe enough. Do come," he begged.

It seemed to her that the old Michael had come back again, and she opened her door a crack as she had on the afternoon she dismissed him. She smiled as she had not done all day.

“I’m dying to talk to you too,” she said. “And I’ll go down in the garden with you this second.”

She had changed her wedding dress for a delicate white lace, with a touch of pale green at the belt, and she looked to Doyle like an exquisite lily, she was so fair and white. He tucked his arm in hers, and they went in silence down the stairway, and out into the sweet-smelling garden, without meeting anyone. Margaret Brinton sitting in the high-backed bath chair was almost hidden from view and the two did not notice her.

Mrs. Dallas was a bit tearful, and dabbed her eyes with her tiny lace handkerchief. Even at this juncture Michael detected the fragrance of heliotrope and loved it better than all the flowers growing in the garden. He guided Mrs. Dallas to a seat and stood in front of her, gazing down at her with fervent admiration in his eyes.

“What are ye cryin’ about, Ellie darling? It was a beautiful weddin’, and ye were lovely enough to charm St. Peter out of heaven.”

Mrs. Dallas dabbed her eyes again and sniffled a little. Then she smiled, a slow, tearful smile. “I’m so glad you liked the wedding. It’s more than good of you to be here at all — after — well, I wasn’t nice

to you, Irishman, and I am ashamed of it. I didn't expect you to forgive me and to be so charming. And what a perfect punch,"—she wiped her eyes again,—“you brewed! You dear Michael—”

He leaned down and patted her hands. “If it was all as easy as brewin' a punch!” he said. “Now, don't ye worry your pretty head over it, Widow. Once I'd cooled my blood I knew I couldn't have put it over. You're too fine for me. I'd have broken ye body and soul tryin' to understand ye. And Dal is the King pin. He's worthy of ye. Ye'll make a wonderful pair. I envy ye both, Ellie.”

Mrs. Dallas patted his kindly hand warmly. “You're such a comfort,” she said. “You'd cheer anybody. I often regret—” She paused, for she suddenly realised what she was saying. He smiled at her, she often seemed a big child to him, and he loved that in her. It was so unworldly.

“Don't ye do it!” he said. “If Dallas can't make ye happy, I'm glad I didn't get the chance; for I'm a child with your sex compared to him. When they were givin' out the grey matter, Dallas sat on the front bench. It's himself knows the sex! Dal always could understand a misunderstood woman. And together ye ought to break a law or two. I wouldn't put anything beyond ye.”

She smiled again. "I always did love your flattering tongue, Irishman. It's got a great big lure in it somewhere." She looked up at him with genuine affection. How understanding he was, and what a friend in need. Mrs. Brinton rose slowly and came over to them.

"I suppose I seem to be eavesdropping," she said. "But I really wasn't. I was so lost in my own thoughts that I have just realised you two were here. And I won't interrupt you, only, Ellie, what is the matter, dearest? You do seem so, so unhappy."

Sympathy was too much for Mrs. Dallas at the moment and she rose and threw herself into Mrs. Brinton's arms, tearfully hugging her and trying incoherently to explain, "Don't go, Peg — I — it's — it's —"

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Brinton nervously, the tears starting in her own eyes. "Ellie dearest, don't cry!"

She soothed the tearful bride with her face full of frightened entreaty. Then she turned to Michael who nodded understandingly.

"Bless your hearts," he said briskly. "What's come over ye both? The bride's unhappy before she's even started on her honeymoon, and the brides-

maid's cryin' with her. Tell it to Michael Doyle, girls, perhaps he can help ye."

Mrs. Dallas shook her head, as she drew away from Mrs. Brinton's tender embrace. "No one can help me," she said miserably, "I feel — I —"

Mrs. Brinton grew really alarmed. "Ellie, my dear, please, what is it? You know we both love you. Tell us what bothers you."

Michael put his arm around Mrs. Dallas who was weeping softly. "Come, come," he said to her. "Nothing is so bad as that," Mrs. Brinton looked at Mrs. Dallas, her own eyes overflowing. "Oh, oh, Ellie," she wailed. "What has happened? I'm frightened." Michael put his other arm around Mrs. Brinton and the two women leaned on his shoulders, sobbing, while he patted them gently. Mrs. Dallas found her voice first, and in broken sentences unburdened her soul.

"The honeymoon — the — the — trip — and all of it!" she cried between sobs and sniffs. "I don't want to go junketing off on a honeymoon. I can't bear my new clothes. I hate being a bride. I want to stay here in Brookline and be comfortable. I was just looking at my old clothes — so nice and homey, and my knitting needles! There's a little one with a sealing-wax knob that I've had for twenty years. I

said I never would knit again, but I'm dying to." She looked about the garden. "When I think of the years I've sat here knitting baby blankets in stripes of blue and white! It's so restful. I wonder why I got married."

Mrs. Brinton interrupted her, lifting her head from Michael's friendly shoulder. "Ellie, don't — I can't bear it. I thought you adored Dal."

Mrs. Dallas raised her face, tear stained but lovely, to Mrs. Brinton. "I *do* adore him. That's just the trouble. I wouldn't mind if I didn't adore him. Oh, Peg! I want to stay at home."

Mrs. Brinton dried her eyes briskly. Tears were a luxury she did not often indulge in. They were so ruinous to one's eyes. "My dear, if that's all — Dallas would never want you to go away if you didn't wish to. Shall I tell him?"

Mrs. Dallas shook her head gloomily. "I am going to tell him myself."

Mrs. Brinton looked at her friend helplessly. She felt as nearly amazed as she could be. "Then what else is the matter? You are the most depressing bride I've ever seen."

Mrs. Dallas returned her gaze sadly. She realised that even Margaret did not understand her, and she longed to be alone with Michael and say the whole

truth to him. She would be quite honest with him, and it would be a blessed relief. And she felt Margaret would never let her say what she wanted to. Indeed, she was sure she would not dare to tell half she felt while Mrs. Brinton stood there, a picture of graceful womanhood in her lovely mauve chiffon gown, with its modish parasol and smart rose trimmed hat. Margaret was far too worldly to hear a confession of the sort she longed to pour into Michael's ears.

"Please, Peg," she said. "Do go away, and let me talk to Michael. Women never understand women when they are depressed. My hand-bag isn't packed—you do that, Peg." Michael gave Mrs. Brinton a knowing wink. She gathered up her draperies and parasol gladly. Ellie was not pleasant company.

"I'm sure I don't want to stay," she said. "I'll go with pleasure, and see to the hand-bag." And without further urging she went into the house and left them together. Mrs. Dallas sat down and looked at Doyle, who drew a chair close to her and sat beside her.

"Are ye frightened, Ellie?" he asked.

She hesitated. "I— Oh, I'm not sure I did want to be married, Irishman."

“Aren’t ye now?” he said. “That’s the way with us all, once we’re caught, we don’t like it. It’s a bit hard on the bridegroom, though. Ye ought to have said it yesterday. It’s past due.”

Mrs. Dallas nodded sadly. “I know that very well, but I lost courage. Now that it’s too late, I’ve found it. Somehow I don’t so much mind telling you. You’re so human.” She smiled through her tears.

Doyle laughed. “It’s plain clay I am, and I guess I’m easy to talk to because I’ve done so many things I shouldn’t. Sinners are always understandin’, that’s why they don’t reform oftener.”

Mrs. Dallas twisted her handkerchief. “I don’t want to go away with Dal,” she explained. “What’s your advice? Shall I tell him so—or shall I lie and go? Come, Irishman, advise me.”

He thought a moment. “I’d lie fast enough if it helped matters. But what’s the man done? Has he offended ye,—or are ye just changeable or what?—Come, my girl, the reason. Right now, since we’re talkin’ to some purpose—what’s the real truth?”

Mrs. Dallas looked at him sorrowfully. “The real truth—the unvarnished bitter truth is, I don’t dare. I’m not twenty-one.”

“Well,” he said, “I don’t see what that’s got to do with it.”

“It’s got a great deal to do with it,” she said mournfully.

“What, then? Ye promised the truth — mind,” he urged.

“I tell you I don’t dare — I’m too old!” she faltered.

Doyle threw back his head and laughed heartily. “Ellie, my dear! You with your lovely face and pretty smiles, sittin’ there and sayin’ you’re too old. Do you mean it, Ellie? I never thought of ye as old, girl. How old are ye now?” He waited to hear smilingly.

Mrs. Dallas set her jaw and faced him. She would not lie any more. He should hear the whole truth, and she spoke it grimly. “I’m forty-eight. An awful confession for a woman to make. But I’m beyond caring — and I’ve seen the day, not long ago, when torture wouldn’t have dragged it from me. I’m forty-eight! And it’s got to be faced. To-day in all my beautiful clothes and with my hair dressed in the latest mode, and my Louis Quinze heels, I am still forty-eight, and that’s almost fifty. If that doesn’t sound old enough, just remember that it’s half

a century. I tell you, Michael, I don't dare —" She leaned back in her chair overcome.

Doyle stared at her aghast. Her confession staggered him for a moment, and before he realised it he gave a little shudder,—and then grew very serious. "Ellie, I wish ye hadn't said it. It makes me shiver a bit. For it's Michael Doyle that's getting along fast himself, and he's all alone and no woman cares much. I'd forgotten it the while. But we're all older than we once were." He too leaned back, a trifle heavily. He felt all of a sudden the weight of centuries steal over him.

Mrs. Dallas looked at him in sincere sympathy. She realised his dismay; but her own fear quite overbalanced her pride. "All of us. There you see, you don't dispute it. We're all old; but I, fool that I am, have convinced poor Dal that he and I are young lovers and that the years have never been. And he believes it. It's awful. What shall I do?"

Michael Doyle got up suddenly and looked at her as she sat there, her sweet face drawn and haggard, her clear blue eyes misty with unshed tears. And all at once he felt the tragedy of it. "God love ye!" he said solemnly. "It's the truth, but I forgot it when I looked at ye. My blood ran as fast as a lad's,

and my old oxheart pounded it all out to ye. I'm sorry for ye, Ellie. It's damned hard on a woman like you."

He felt sweeping over him a wave of gratitude to her that she had refused him. "Thank God," he said fervently. "I'm a single man this day."

Mrs. Dallas acquiesced miserably. She was beyond humour. "So that's the reason, and you can be sorry for me and for Dal. We're two miserable souls, and all I want in the world is a little peace and my comfort and my knitting here in the garden. I'll go and tell Peg now, she's waiting for me." She got up slowly and put out her hand to Michael.

"I wish I could help ye," he murmured, "but God love ye, it's a big shock to me. Why don't ye take a bit of brandy, Ellie? It might put heart in ye." Mrs. Dallas smiled faintly. It was so like Michael to suggest a drink for any sorrow or ailment. It was his one panacea for all earthly woes.

"Bless your soul," she said. "I'm beyond saving, give it to poor Dal! He'll need it."

Then she went into the house and Doyle walked up and down, his hands behind his back, his mind occupied by a thousand disturbing thoughts.

CHAPTER XXII

DEPARTING GUESTS

DALLAS and John Strong came out of the house together to join Doyle, Dallas still woefully depressed, but struggling bravely to overcome it. The Irishman turned and looked at him sympathetically. Since he had heard Ellie's confession, he felt sure he understood why Dallas was so disturbed; but with his heart fairly sick within him, he was determined if possible to help Dal to forget it for the moment, and offered his never varying cure for everything.

"Come here the two of ye, Madame Dallas, the bride, has just bidden me give Dal a nip of the creature."

John Strong shook his head. "You'd better not," he advised. "He doesn't need it. I'm sure he's had fifty. Dal is nervous." Dallas stood between them, a superb picture of health and vigour. His gaze fell on Michael's kindly face, and he smiled at him faintly. "What man isn't on his wedding day? But I'm worse than nervous — I'm afraid," he admitted.

Strong looked at Doyle. What was one to do with

Dallas? He gave it up. And he said a trifle irritably, "You know there is nothing about your present demeanour, Dal, that would coax the average perfectly single male into double harness. What does ail you? You were keen enough on getting married."

As Dallas stared moodily at Strong and did not answer him, Doyle ventured a further query. "What are ye afraid of, Dal? Ye damned fool!"

Dallas turned and sat down at the table. "A woman," he said shortly.

Doyle waved his hands. "That I should live to hear ye admit it."

But Dallas was not in a mood to be teased. "Don't joke, Michael. I'm very jumpy to-day, and I wish we had decided to honeymoon in Cape May or Old Point Comfort, or even Chicago — anywhere but on a boat out on the water. It depresses me." He turned over the leaves of a magazine. An ocean liner stared up at him out of an enticing advertisement of ocean travel. He closed the book abruptly. The thought of the trip came to him with relentless prod. What a prospect! And how soon! John Strong chuckled. "Water always saddens you, Dal," he said. "When you drink it."

Just then Metz appeared carrying a large tray of different drinks, ice, shaker, limes, lemons and the

various paraphernalia Michael delighted in. Mrs. Dallas had remembered, even if her heart was ill at ease, so strong within her was the instinct of hospitality.

Michael greeted this timely interruption with much enthusiasm. "Will ye look now! There's a hostess for ye! What's there, Metz?"

"About everything, Mr. Doyle, sir," Metz said, "if you'll permit me to mention it, Cook always says I was never a stingy hand at a tray. More than you need, I tell Cook,—it's easy to carry it back again, and then all tastes can be studied. Cook says it's a fine rule and praises me for it, and praise from Cook is rare, sir. Whiskey, sir?"

But Michael moved him to one side, and went over to the tray himself. Holding the shaker in one hand, he asked: "What would the two of ye say to a new one, eh? A young buck from St. Louis taught it to me, and mark ye, it's a real drink!"

Dallas was always interested in Michael's new drinks. And even at this moment he felt a faint thrill of anticipation. "I would like a new one. I'm just in the mood," he said. "Has it a name?"

"Sure it has a name," Michael said, as he busied himself squeezing a lime neatly and deftly. "A most amusin' name. A Gin-daisy he calls it. And

this is how you make it." He filled the shaker with ice and put in the gin. "Ye snow it first, then half one big lemon and half one baby lime, twisted till they weep, three little triplets of Gordon, and a beautiful, passionate, feminine, pink jigger of grenadine. Then a wicked taste of that old monk, yellow chartreuse, fizzy water up to the shaker top, and a bit of bar twirl. There's your Gin-daisy!"

He poured the drink out gaily into three glasses and Metz handed it reverently to them. Michael had always been one of Metz's admirations.

Michael held his glass up to Dal. "Here's a last toast, Dal," he said. "Come, Jack! Here's to the one woman whether she's yours or mine." They all drank it. John Strong gave his expert opinion. "It's a wonder, Michael. A life saver."

Dallas laughed. "A poem, you mean. Michael's drinks are all poems. He's missed his vocation." He drained his glass.

Doyle tasted the new drink critically; new drinks were always an experiment. "Ain't it funny now, but I can't keep my hands off the makin's of a drink. Metz here knows that. I've taught him dozens," he said in explanation.

Metz coughed discreetly. "If you'll pardon the liberty, sir," he ventured. "I made a mental note

of the Gin-daisy. Cook always asks me if Mr. Doyle has taught me any new beverages. Cook will be pleased to hear of this one. Anything else Mr. Dallas, sir?"

Dallas took out his watch. "I ordered the motor at six, and it's just that now. You'll see to the bags, Metz."

"Very good, sir," and Metz went on into the house. Mrs. Dallas and Mrs. Brinton passed him in the doorway coming out to the garden. Mrs. Brinton had on her automobile wrap and was ready to start.

"The motor is here," she said. "I'm afraid it's good-bye."

Strong went over to her. "I always hate saying good-bye," he said.

Mrs. Dallas, her voice tremulous, embraced him nervously. Then she kissed Mrs. Brinton with desperation. "Don't say it," she begged. "Dear, good friends that you are. Just run away without it. I can't see you off. I should disgrace myself weeping. Dal and I will stay out here until you're gone. Then it won't be quite so dreadful."

Dallas took Michael by one hand, while John Strong shook his free arm vigorously. "Write us," Strong urged for want of a better remark.

"We will, we will," Dallas assured him.

But even at this moment Doyle's ruling passion found vent. "For the love of heaven, Dal, when you're in South America learn how to make the national drink. They call it a green swizzle; it's a beautiful colour, and I'm dyin' to make one." They all laughed. Dallas turned to Mrs. Brinton, who embraced him sadly.

Doyle shook his head, his eyes blinking to keep back the tears. "Here's three miserable devils," he murmured. "I'm cryin' for what I've lost, and Dal for what he's won."

"Go, before I cry," Mrs. Dallas begged, throwing kisses at them. "Oh, Peg, dear, good-bye!"

Mrs. Brinton embraced her with emotion. "Wire me," she faltered. "I'll be so nervous."

Then she and John Strong went out to the waiting motor but Doyle lingered a moment longer, sick at heart. He knew they were both wretchedly unhappy and nervous. He went back and stood between them.

"God bless ye both," he said. "And I say it from the bottom of my heart, for I cared more for her than you'll ever know."

"Michael, Michael!" she cried miserably. Dallas

grasped his hand. Then John Strong called, and Doyle left them.

The setting sun sent long rays over the garden and little shadows crept in among the flowers. In the houses back of the garden wall the lights were beginning to appear, one by one. The wind caught the breath of the roses, which grew all about the doorway, and sent it faintly towards them. It was very still and peaceful. The evening was perfect and the spot a wonderful one for two married lovers to find themselves. But they stood dumbly looking at each other — afraid.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE REAL WOMAN

BROOKLINE at that quiet vesper hour might have been another Eden, but even a child could have seen that in the Howard garden two of the inhabitants of the apparent paradise had bitten deeply into some apple of bitter experience.

Some minutes already had passed since Doyle's light foot had bounded over the boards of the porch and hall as he hurried out to the motor. Dallas and his bride had listened fearfully as the engine was cranked; they heard a few words of direction in Doyle's crisp tongue, then the noisy clutch took hold and the engine groaned into its work, the sound dropping into a rapidly lessening drone as the car moved along the drive and into the street. And when the last sound had been lost in the twittering of the evening choir of Brookline birds the pair in the garden had turned fearfully to each other quite as if they had just been marooned far at sea on a desert island. Yet they were still silent.

Neither seemed ready to face a situation which

had been coming closer and closer all of the day. Dallas looked about him almost as if he felt the necessity of escape from something nameless and formless, something which he could not see, but nevertheless impending fearfully.

Mrs. Dallas stood tensely, her fingers clasped tightly in front of her and her eyes fixed on her husband. There was in her face such a look of fear that he quite forgot his own disquietude, and went over to her and put his arm around her tenderly. At his touch her body relaxed, and she leaned against him silently. The mere physical nearness of him somehow always brought her heart a peaceful comfort.

He looked down into her white face inquiringly. "What's the trouble, Ellie?" he asked. "What is it, dear? I know you so well that I have felt intuitively all day — your unhappiness. Are you sorry you said yes to me, Ellie?"

She shook her head and tried to answer cheerfully. "Why, Dal, of course not. But," she hesitated, "I'm awfully tired, aren't you? I suppose I've let down now that it's all over. And besides that I am bothered. Anna's leaving has upset me."

Dallas put a gentle hand under her chin and turned her face up to meet his. Her eyes dropped, she felt

cold and sick in anticipation. He had never seemed dearer. How could she tell him?

“My dear, that’s not it. You can get a maid any time,” he told her.

Mrs. Dallas evaded it nervously. “Yes, but Anna understood me,” she said. “And it’s such a long journey, and one must be comfortable on such a long, long trip. One’s clothes and hair, and, er — oh — I hate having a strange person — and, oh, dear —”

Dallas put his cheek against hers lovingly. “Dearest,” he begged, “tell me. Come, Ellie, what is really the matter? What is it, darling? Why, you’re trembling! Ellie!”

Mrs. Dallas put her agitated hands on his broad shoulders and pushed him away gently. “I must think — I —” She was pitifully unnerved and he grew more gentle with her.

“Are you afraid to tell me, darling? Surely you are not. I always understood, you know that. Don’t be afraid.”

Mrs. Dallas smiled a weak little smile, as her eyes met his, so full of the tenderness and sincerity she loved. “Perhaps,” she said, “I am just afraid of myself.”

“Perhaps it’s only a little imaginary trouble that I can kiss away,” he said. “But if it’s a real one —

don't deny me of my share of it, for now I'm the other half of you."

He realised that whatever troubled her was no slight matter. He had never seen her so overcome and it moved him strangely.

"You know, sweetheart," he began with great sympathy in his voice, "we mustn't begin our life together like this, Ellie — something between us. Why do you hang your head? Why don't you look at me? What is it? Come, come, dearie," he added tenderly, after a pause, "tell me. And then we'll laugh." His voice was full of feeling. He drew her towards him again — "and be happier — happier than ever, my wife."

She endured his embrace passively. She stood looking at him, not knowing how to begin or what to say. The moment was tense. He waited patiently and she finally plunged into her confession.

"Dal, since you first met me I've hardly drawn one natural breath," she began. He started to interrupt her but she put out her hand.

"Wait!" she commanded. "Be patient and I'll tell you, for it's got to come out. I never could keep this up."

Dallas looked at her bewilderedly. "My God, Ellie!" he said. "Keep what up?" He stood

dumbly sensing her distress, but not knowing how to help her.

She drew a long breath and began anew. "I hardly know where to start or how to say what I feel you must know. I've done everything we women know how to do to make you care for me. I have lied and cheated. And all because I wanted you. Because I could not be sure it was just me, the woman soul in me that held you, or the pretty husk outside. I didn't dare be honest, Dal. There you have it! That's it! I didn't dare be honest with you, for fear I might lose you — and that would have broken my heart."

He held his arms out to her entreatingly, for the look in her eyes was crushing him. He almost felt that he could not listen to her, she was so merciless in this baring of her soul.

"Ellie," he murmured incoherently, but she went on. Now that she had found courage she poured out the hundred thoughts that she had kept hidden in her heart so long, and words poured in torrents from her, words that were ominous with meaning.

"After it was all over," she continued, "and you said you loved me, I felt I had the strength to lift mountains. If I were only sure of you! And so I have gone on madly, blindly and always refusing to

hear the ominous knocking at my heart. To-day, after we were married, the whole frail, pretty, false structure fell about me, and I stood crushed in its ruins. It was the end! I am a wicked, wretched woman, Dal. It can't be, dear. It must all stop here. Before we have really started, and I have tried all day to find strength to tell you so." She paused, her voice choking with sobs.

Dallas took a step nearer to her. "But still, you haven't told me," he said. "What's the matter? Your soul is beating and fluttering to come to me, and you hold it back. What have I done, or you or anyone to so change the world? I know you love me — and God knows I love you. Then what is there to fear? We shall only know each other better, Ellie, and I shall see your real self always instead of sometimes. Why do you call yourself dishonest and a coward? You are only nervous, dear. When we are alone together, and we can throw aside all the shams and make-believe, we —"

Mrs. Dallas came over to him and threw her arms outstretched in utter despair. "There you have said it," she answered vehemently. "When we can throw aside all the shams! Don't you see that I can't bear to have you know all of a sudden what a weak creature I am? I thank you for giving me

a word to tell it in. Sham! That's it. I'm a cheat! You don't even know my real self! You didn't marry it!"

He took her in his arms suddenly. He was terribly moved. He could not believe his ears as he listened. But, manlike, he felt she needed him closer to her if her soul was so troubled. He held her tightly as he answered her. "Nonsense, Ellie! I married you, and you are a hundred women rolled into one. Perhaps that was why my rather weary heart learned a new beat for you. I didn't expect you to know it in an instant. We're going on a new road, and the mere finding it with you, seemed so fascinating that I love to think it may take a long, long time. We aren't children to learn by simple alphabets. There are but two letters in our primer: I and you. And that you doubt or fear or shrink from it all, is not strange to me; for you have lived alone so long that even with all my love, I come as a stranger, whom you must make welcome and trust before you half know him. But I am only a beggar, Ellie, at your threshold with outstretched hands waiting for what you may give — and patient even if I must wait longer than most beggars, for I bring so little and I have dared to ask so much. Don't be afraid of me, Ellie. I am more humble than I

have ever been before, and my heart has its own misgivings when I realise that you have been given into my keeping. God bless you!"

They stood clasped in each other's arms vainly striving to find in that very closeness some comfort for themselves.

Finally she spoke again. "It's not so much your knowing all of a sudden that I am not beautiful or fresh or ardent that I mind so much — it's — it's —" She drew away from him and faced him, trembling with emotion. He listened, his heart aching for her, but now that she had made it clear to him what worried her he knew she must finish it, and he did not interrupt her.

"It's not my looking different even," she said, "because you must have realised that was bound to come, but it is that awful inside knowing that I can't give what I promised, that — you want what I haven't got. You think that I am full of warmth and life, and that I shall pulsate to each touch and kiss. That's one of the lies I've acted so well. At first it was true, and I was on fire if your hand met mine. But I couldn't make it last, Dal. It went away from me. That's the ghastly, awful part of it. It wouldn't stay, and all this journey and honeymoon seem so unreal to me — and such an awful

undertaking. My heart won't throb over things any longer, and I'm awfully tired." She made a pathetic little gesture of despair. "I'm tired to death, Dal, and afraid. I want so to be quiet — to be alone, not to feel that something is demanded of me that I can't give. I've got to have comfortable clothes and easy shoes — and just my own hair. There's no use, I know it now! I want to wash my face clean with soap and slap plain eau de cologne on it, and put my clothes away in old-fashioned lavender. There isn't one inch of my corseted, painted, false self that isn't clamouring to be free. My body has revolted and my soul has sickened. I can't keep it up, Dal. I've got to stop, stop and be absolutely myself, and you've never seen me like that — a quiet, gentle, pretty-faced woman over middle age, with no style and no charm. I lived with her for years and I know her well. She was at least a gentlewoman. I am a cheat!"

Mrs. Dallas brought out this last statement with a violence which gave it a fearful strength of bitter truth. It was one of those cataclysmic utterances which rend a personality, leaving it something else than it was before.

She was quite overcome by the violence of this personal reaction. She wavered for a second, as if

she had reached the limit of expression. Quite startled he reached for her and held her a second. But she worried out of his arms, feeling an instinctive need for air and freedom. She lacked the power to get through with what was still to come. She fought desperately to regain control of her fluttering consciousness. Her mind for the moment would no longer concentrate. Each familiar sound drove it farther away. She had become for the moment a rudderless bark on an emotional sea, each new breeze sweeping her in another direction.

A bell she had known nearly all her life sonorously struck the hour of 7 o'clock in a nearby church tower, the voices of oriole and robin, speeding the wonderful June day, came to her with over-powering reminiscences of happy and peaceful evenings in this same spot. Suddenly it all fell away from her; the agony for a moment ceased. She found Dal again and steadied herself. "The fearful part of it is," she resumed when she had controlled herself, "you are real." She went over to him and laid her hand on his chest as if to show him how live and well he looked to her. She ran her fingers down his arm lovingly and nodded vehemently at him.

"Men are like that," she continued. "If they look young, they feel so. They don't know the little

deceptions, the tricks, the illusions, we women stoop to. Perhaps you may feel a twinge now and then just to remind you that muscles don't stay hard forever, or you may have more grey hairs, or lines, or an extra pound or two, but your skin and hair and splendid body are real. There isn't one lie about them."

The pain in her face tore his heart. He felt he must stop her. He protested desperately. "Ellie, I beg of you! Please don't, dear!"

But she would not be silenced. She had come to the breaking point, and she could not keep back anything. "A man of fifty and a woman of fifty are a hundred miles apart. I'm old, Dal — old, I tell you, and why should I think I could hide it from you or anyone else?"

"Ellie! I can't bear it!" he cried.

"I am!" she cried relentlessly. "There isn't a muscle in my body that doesn't sag, there isn't a curve that isn't going. I don't see as well as I used to. I hate to say it, but it's true. I am short-breathed. And I am always tired and stiff when the day is over. And hear it all, Dal. Let us be merciless. I'm not what I made you believe I was." She faltered. "The passion left in me is only a poor little fire now. It's not my fault. It's —"

she hesitated. "Oh, Dal, you know what I mean. I can't pretend any longer. My skin is still smooth and my teeth are my own, I can boast enough greyish hair, uncurled and unwaved, to twist about my head, but when I wash off all this fine, sweet-smelling, French powder, and delicate bloom, the little shadows around my eyes, the touch of red on ears and chin, the little dark pencil marks on my brows, the colour on my lips, the brilliantine from my false hair, put off these long hard corsets and these torturing slippers — then I won't be any longer the woman you care for, whom you say allures and maddens you. For I shall wash away all the little allurements you love. They must all go with the paint and powders, dear, for I can't keep them up. They wear me out. I fear each hour that I will forget one; that I'll fail to attract you, that I may dare to be myself. It was just an insane desire to be thought young again. And now —" She sobbed in a choked way and leaned against him, utterly spent with emotion.

He comforted her gently. "Don't — sh — sh — don't cry, my sweetheart. Don't you know it hurts me even more than it does you, for I have tried so hard to believe it would all last forever. Why need you say it to-day of all days? Could

we not have gone on a little while longer?" he murmured.

She sat down weakly, looking up at him. "That's the bitterest part of it," she continued. "It has to hurt you, too. And you have been such a wonderful lover, a lover to satisfy even the woman I seemed to be. Youth seems to dwell with you. You are wonderful, Dal, wonderful! And I'm afraid — I'm afraid — for I am cold, and grey and it's twilight. It breaks my heart, Dal. I wanted so to be young a little longer, to live a little, to love, to dream. I shut my eyes and ears to the truth, but all of a sudden I knew. I *had* to see. I'm old! old! old! Oh, the tragedy of it all. No more passion, dear, no more heart beats, no more tightening arms and eager kisses, it's over, it's done. Good-bye to it! There's just memory now. And I won't be the first woman whose heart has only memories to feed on. I'm old and it's over. But oh, Dal, I wanted so to be young and be loved — by you!" She sank exhausted on the reclining chair, the tears flooding her eyes.

Dallas went over and knelt beside her. He stroked her hair away from her tear stained face, and patted her shoulder soothingly. And when he could trust himself to speak he said: "You are the bravest

woman I have ever known. Why didn't you tell me? Do you think you are the only one who has feared and struggled? I have tried not to think of it, but I have known many weeks that we were going too fast and that we would have to stop and go back. Do you think you are growing old alone, and that we all stand still?"

She looked down at him wistfully. He had never seemed younger or more virile. In the soft twilight even the tiny lines on his face were hidden. The grey in his hair was in the shadow, and his eyes, clear and eager burned into hers. She put her hands each side of his face and looked at him hungrily. He should never know what this hour had cost her. She had crucified her pride to be fair to him, and it had left scars that she knew would never heal. But the thought of his facing the inevitable truth that she had met and battled for so long, filled her with a grief that again overcame her. She felt she would gladly go through it all again, if only she might spare him the anguish of it.

"Don't, Dal!" she cried. "I can't bear seeing you wake up to it. I can't. I want to be away off by myself when you first realise that you too are old —"

He put his arms about her as he said, "Time

deals with us alike, dearie, and I am afraid before many weeks I should have had to say what you are brave enough to confess first. I too am old."

"No, no," she protested. "Don't, dear!"

He rose and helped her, for she seemed suddenly to need infinite care and protection. They stood together, he with his hands on her shoulders.

He smiled at her happily. The invisible barrier that had kept them apart all day had faded away with the setting sun. His heart was lighter than it had been in weeks, and instead of despair, a deep thankfulness filled his mind. They had seemed an hour before to be at the parting of the ways; but he felt solid ground again beneath his feet. He need pretend no longer.

"Yes, Ellie, I too," he said peacefully. "I too cannot pretend any longer. Do I seem a young, passionate lover? I cannot keep it up, dear. I haven't paints and powders, Ellie, but I have rheumatism and a great inclination to doze after dinner. I puff when I go upstairs, and I pant when I come down. And I am very fussy. I hate to admit it, for it's a damnable fact. I am very fussy. If anybody moves a brush or comb of mine it disturbs me greatly, and my shoes must all stand at the same line on the shelf. You old—why, Ellie, I've

crossed the half hundred mark, two-thirds through this game of life, and I was afraid I couldn't keep up with you. Frightened to death, dearie, and wondering how I could tell you. It's funny, if it wasn't so tragic, both of us eating our hearts out apart, and both of us with the same fear."

She stroked his hair, her mouth quivering. "Not you, Dal. I can't bear it to have you old. Aren't you afraid you will want a younger wife? A wife who isn't a past, Dal? Good-bye, dear, I am going into the house now and take off all the sham and be comfortable. When I come back perhaps you won't even know me."

"You dear Ellie," he said, as he put his cheek on hers. "I am going to be comfortable, too. And it will be such a relief. I have sat out here many an evening and sneezed silently, because the night air made me chilly; and I couldn't bear to put on my little cap for fear you would laugh at me."

Her eyes filled up again. "Oh, Dal," she wailed, "if only you'd still love me un-made up. It would be so wonderful. But I don't deserve it. I've been too wicked. God wouldn't let you."

With great tenderness he bent over her. "Kiss me, Ellie. Just a quiet kiss, dear. And remember, we must be brave."

They clung to each other and kissed sadly and lingeringly. Then Mrs. Dallas drew away from him. "I'm going, Dal — forever. I'll never come back again, this Ellie. It's been beautiful, but it came twenty years too late. Good-bye, dear."

And she went slowly past him up the steps into the house, leaving behind her in the dim old garden the bitterest hour of her life.

CHAPTER XXIV

OLD LACE AND LAVENDER

It seemed to Mrs. Dallas that she had gone through miles of space in the few moments after leaving her husband in the June twilight. He was looking after her as she turned at the top of the stairs. Another eternity was occupied in walking through her hallway and up the old-fashioned flight of stairs.

She opened the door of her bedroom with numb and nerveless fingers, and entered. Lucy, Mrs. Brinton's maid, had put it in order before she left for New York. There was laid across the couch at the foot of Mrs. Dallas' bed a marvellous and flimsy garment which Celeste had dignified by the name of dressing gown. Near it was a tiny pair of blue satin mules with saucy rosebuds on their pointed toes, and close by a bewildering bit of lace and ribbon which was supposed to be a boudoir cap.

Mrs. Dallas sat down heavily in a low rocking chair, one of her favourites of old, and gazed vacantly about her. The world in which she had danced and played and laughed for so many weeks

had crumbled beneath her feet, leaving her dull and drab again. She felt dumbly that the catastrophe she had dreaded so long had come and gone before she even realised it. The horror and fear with which she had anticipated it seemed far away and shadowy. Her eyes travelled about the familiar outline of her room, and came back to the absurdly fragile piece of covering that Lucy had put out for her. She rose and took it in her hands and regarded it stolidly. It was as unreal to her as if she had never ordered it or tried it on, and she did not even stop to remember that she had worn many others quite as youthful and gossamer-like.

She moved to her mirror, lighted the two old-fashioned gas globes on each side of her dressing table and looked earnestly at the reflected face. It was tear-stained and weary but otherwise quite attractive and her false, blonde hair rippled softly across her brow with an alluring naturalness. With a ruthless hand she unpinned the wave that covered her forehead and dropped it on the tray that held her hair pins. Again her own soft, greyish hair looked out at her like an old friend whom she had not seen for many a long day. The puffs and curls and the heavy coil of blonde hair were pulled off and thrown down with the wave. Then she brushed and combed

her own pretty hair, parted it in the centre and twisted it on her neck as she had worn it for many years before she converted herself into a fashion plate. She took her little pot of cold cream and rubbed it over her face. As she wiped it off quickly the blush tint on cheeks and ears went and with it the crimson lip salve which had turned her lips into scarlet wonders. The colour made two defiant streaks upon her handkerchief. She lifted her powder puff and dusted it lightly over her face. Then she leaned forward and studied the result relentlessly. She was ten years older; but had lost not a bit of her sweet and womanly charm. She looked longingly at her rouge box and then picked it up between her forefinger and thumb and dropped it into her waste-paper basket. It would not be a temptation again! She regarded her beautiful lace gown ruefully. It had countless little hooks and eyes, and it was a difficult dress to get in or out of alone, for the slightest pull would tear it. But a smile of rather grim humour flitted across her face. Why not tear it? She never expected to wear it or its like again. So with rapid, nervous fingers she ripped it open and stepped out of it. Then she kicked off the slippers that had hurt her feet all day and looked at them with a malice in her eye.

Aiming her foot carefully she sent each dainty slipper flying under her bed swiftly. Shoeless, and dressed in her lacy, beribboned underwear, she opened her closet door and gazed into it. Her trousseau gowns were in trunks and boxes, packed for the journey, and only her smart, mauve, travelling gown was left out, for her to put on in the morning. It dangled innocently from a padded clothes hanger as if it were the meekest garment in the closet, but Mrs. Dallas knew better. She remembered vividly the torturing narrowness of its skirt and weighted hem; its perky, jaunty jacket with the long, tight sleeves and its V shaped neck. And before her mind flitted the scandalous thinness of the lace blouse with its waist band inches too small and a bustline out of all reason. She knew also just where she could find a pair of high heeled, narrow, buckled, patent leather torments called "pumps" to wear with the costume. Her eye lighted upon a hat box wherein rested a high, heavy, cocky hat, with a beautiful spray of purple wistaria which was to have aroused Dallas' admiration on the journey. She stepped past them all into the depths of her roomy closet. Gown after gown of quiet pastel colour hung in rows, and from them came the faint fragrance of delicate old-fashioned lavender, the

only perfume beside plain eau de cologne that she had permitted herself before she was led astray by Mrs. Brinton's heliotrope.

How long it was since she had seen one of her dresses! She had almost forgotten them or where they hung; but she was faintly amused at their orderliness, for Anna had believed in artistic confusion. She remembered her favourite and newest dress of the period preceding her rebellion and she reached up and took it down from its hook. It was a soft, greyish-blue, chiffon taffeta, made comfortably and well by one of the best dressmakers in Brookline. It had been designed and cut with a view to suiting the age and quiet personality of the mother of Farrell Howard. Mrs. Dallas regarded it with positive affection. She had always liked it. She took off her lacy petticoat and dainty net underwaist, and with firm fingers unclasped her fashionable brocade stays with their five pairs of pink, satin garters. She flung them furiously into the darkest depths of her closet. Then she got into some comfortable corsets, dainty embroidered corset cover and a neat blue satin petticoat with a ruffled flounce. She had always had handsome, well-made clothes and fine underwear, and there was little to be ashamed of in the piles of neatly-folded snowy articles that

filled the lower drawer of her big bureau. Her dress hooked in front and was easily adjusted.

She now looked at herself without a pang. She felt at peace and ease again. A bit of rare lace was fastened about her neck with a pin Dallas had given her; and blue slippers with low heels, with good, firm silk stockings to match them, took the place of the flimsy lace hose she had worn earlier. As a last touch she put some tea roses in her belt, a bunch of them filling a vase on her table. She took her glasses from their case and pinned them on her breast. She hadn't dared wear them there for many months, and her weary eyes had missed them sorely. With the curious perversity that inanimate objects obtrude themselves upon our most sacred moments, her knitting suddenly flashed over her confused mind. It took possession of her, and she hunted almost feverishly for her basket and her favourite needles. Finding the basket she hung it over her arm. Then she went back to her mirror and looked at herself again. She saw a sweet, pretty woman, suitably and becomingly dressed, with a delicate high-bred face and soft, greyish hair, a woman whom she felt was still attractive and desirable despite her somewhat old-fashioned gowning, and whose slender figure lent itself easily to the flowing lines of the immodish

skirt. Her hands and wrists were round, white and beautiful, her ankles slim and girlish, and her skin, without its artificial colour, looked clear and white. Mercilessly as she scanned her face in the mirror she did not find herself plain nor lacking in charm. She even thought, but she dared not believe it, that she looked quite beautiful as she stood there. That venturesome thought, however, was a great solace to her and a faint flush of pleasure rose in her cheeks. Perhaps Dal would not be so dismayed as she feared. She picked up the evening papers which Metz had laid on her table and took them for Dallas, conjuring up in her mind a restful scene in the garden in which Dallas smoked and read while she moved her knitting needles to and fro over the striped blanket so long laid aside.

Just before she went out of her room, she opened her top drawer and took out of it the soft Chudda shawl which had belonged to her mother and for which she had longed on many a cool evening. Then she went bravely down the stairs, rapidly, because she no longer had high heels and tight skirt to impede her. She moved easily and gracefully. The tearful, haggard, trembling woman who had gone up the stairs twenty minutes earlier had been transformed into a singularly attractive picture of charmingly

middle-aged femininity. A beauty which had been driven away by strain, hectic effort and inevitable worry had returned.

Meanwhile Dallas down in the garden had not been without his moments of readjustment. The discreet and watchful Metz, who had been left to assist the home servants after the wedding, came quietly down the steps shortly after Mrs. Dallas left. He found the bridegroom sitting peacefully under the trees, gazing out into the growing shadows of the oncoming twilight. The western sky was still flushed with the rays of the setting sun but the shadows were thickening rapidly through the trees.

Metz coughed apologetically, Dallas being too wrapped in his thoughts to notice the butler's light step. "I beg pardon, sir, but shall you and Mrs. Dallas be alone for dinner, sir?"

Dallas started to answer but was checked by an irresistible desire to sneeze. He stopped a moment in the clutch of the impulse and then ridded himself of it heartily. The night air was invading a head none too well protected. "Quite alone, Metz," he finally was able to answer. "I am glad of an opportunity to thank you for your excellent management and service to-day. When Mrs. Brinton told me she had loaned you to us, I knew everything would be

well done. It's easy to make you more material recompense, but I wanted to express my appreciation personally." He sneezed again.

"Shall I fetch you a hat, sir?" asked Metz deferentially.

"Oh, no, thanks!"

"If it's not too delicate a question, Metz," Dallas asked, "why don't you marry Cook?"

The old servant halted a moment, shuffled his feet a little, hemmed and hawed and then answered: "Well, sir, as the Frenchman said, when asked why he didn't marry the lady he was courting, where should I spend my evenings, sir?"

"That would be a problem to a Frenchman," laughed Dallas. "Is she young, Metz?"

"Well, Mr. Dallas, sir—she's youngish. But wise, sir, uncommon wise. Cook and I have been in Mrs. Brinton's service for ten years, sir. We met there, sir, and never a harsh word has passed between us. Of course, Cook has had husbands, sir. I won't deny that, and for that matter, I've tasted life myself, sir, in my day. But Cook and I we feel sure we are kin souls, sir, and it would seem a pity to spoil it all by getting married. Marriage is for our betters, sir. It's a great luxury, not a necessity as most people think, sir. And Cook and I—we're

quite snug and friendly about the kitchen, sir. I'm really running on, sir. Cook always reminds me that too much speech is one of my faults."

"Cook seems to have a remarkable insight, Metz."

"She has indeed, sir. She first found out the Socialist gentleman, sir. Pardon my repeating her words, sir, but Cook always said Mr. Thomas was too persistent. Not knowing when you're not wanted is a great lack of brains, Cook insisted, and whenever Cook heard of Mr. Thomas' presence in the house, she would let out a word of caution: 'He's a fad, Metz,' Cook would say to me. 'And fads melt like butter in the sun. Mark me,'—Cook always ended with 'mark me, he'll come once too often.' And he did, sir. I fear for Anna."

But Dallas was too intimately involved in his own matrimonial conjectures to worry about Thomas and Anna.

Metz, seeing his preoccupation, inquired, "You leave on the early train, sir?"

"I believe so," said Dallas. "Have my man look up the exact time. It's somewhere about nine. And Metz, I'll drink port to-night, not champagne. Have Johnson give you my cap. It's in the jacket of my travelling coat." He sneezed again. "I

think I'm catching cold here. And will you look in the writing desk in my room for my steamer tickets? Please bring them with the cap."

"Very good, sir," answered Metz. "Cook says —" He caught himself and went off remarking, "It's a beautiful evening, sir."

Dallas sat quietly for a moment after Metz had gone out. The lamps in the back of the house had been lighted and a yellow shaft cut through the twilight to where he was sitting. Across the way the illuminated yellow panes of another old-fashioned New England house twinkled through the gently swaying branches of the trees. He drank heavily of the peace and quiet and stretched his arms. The natural expansion revealed to him the fact that he was wearing his belt too tight.

He rose from his chair a little stiffly, realising that there was a suspicious twinge or two. He was glad he had countermanded the order for champagne at dinner. Loosening the belt he let it slip comfortably by three holes after a tug which showed how hard it had been pressing. He then discovered that his waist coat was bothering him and he loosened a few buttons of that. Feeling great relief he sighed blissfully.

Metz came down the steps with the cap and tickets and bowed himself off quickly.

Putting the little grey travelling cap on his head he looked about him to see that no one was about and then seated himself again. He held the wallet of tickets in the shaft of light coming from the house and attempted to go over the routings and the express company letters of credit. But his right shoe began to bother him. Quite abandoned now to the idea of being comfortable he undid the top buttons of his smart patent leather shoes. He lifted his foot to the little table in front of him and then leaned back easily in his chair, quite satisfied that all merely physical matters were to his liking.

But he found that the print on the tickets was a little indistinct in the none-too-strong light from the window. He took out his fashionably-made pince-nez, put them on, and turned again to his scrutiny. They were useless for reading and he put them back in his coat. There was still in his pocket a pair of old-fashioned, gold-framed spectacles which he had bought to use in his room. He looked to the stairs carefully for he did not want his wife to find him in them, feeling that they made him look old. Hearing nothing he fitted them to his eyes, put the ear hooks in place and looked again at his tickets. He



“Mother!” he cried. “My own sweet mother has
come back!”

shook his head gloomily over them. The trip, all of a sudden, loomed up as a fearful enterprise. He put the wallet solemnly back into his pocket and gazed for a moment into the trees. Then he slid comfortably into his chair, leaned his head back and — began to nod. He started up two or three times ineffectually, but finally, with a contented sigh, succumbed to drowsiness and dropped into a little nap.

CHAPTER XXV

PEACE AT LAST

MRS. DALLAS came out on the porch in her comfortable clothes. She feared her husband's first glance, not knowing what he would think of the change. Pausing at the top step she hardly dared look at him. What would be his expression? With an effort she turned her face to his chair. For an instant she was sure that he had gone and that someone else had taken his place. Surely this oldish looking man with the spectacles and little cap napping away in her garden was not her dapper Dal! His head rested against the back of his chair, his hands lay loosely on his knees, in one the case of his glasses and in the other the steamship tickets. She heard him breathe a little heavily. She tip-toed forward and looked him over carefully. His spectacles still rested on his nose, his little cap was firmly pulled on his head. Even the unbuttoned shoe did not escape her.

He awoke with a start and for a moment was not sure where he was. Then he caught sight of her and his eyes lighted.

“Oh, Dal, you darling!” she cried. “You actually look older than I.” She advanced towards him.

He stood up to look at her more closely. He smiled happily. “What were you worrying about?” he asked. “You don’t look old at all, Ellie. Why, you look perfectly beautiful.”

She put down her basket and went to him. He placed his arms about her and held her close. She clung to him tightly. “Are you really willing to have me — just me, and let me grow old in peace — you blessed Dal?”

He beamed on her. “Do you know I like you much better this way. It’s *so* comfy.”

She drew away suddenly with another chill. She remembered the trip. “But, oh, Dal, I forgot. I can’t — I can’t take this long, long journey. I would rather die.”

“You mean the trip? Our honeymoon?” he counterfeited surprise.

She nodded, tearful again.

“The wonderful world journey? You don’t want to go, Ellie?”

Turning away from him she shook her head.

“You want to back out?” he continued.

She raised and lowered her head affirmatively.

“You can’t mean it — you said it was a life dream. Come here, Ellie — I adore you. I wouldn’t go for the world. I’ve hated that trip for weeks. Let’s stay here in the garden instead.”

Mrs. Dallas, hardly believing her ears, flew back to him in a rapture of joy. “In Brookline? You mean it? You didn’t want to go either? You didn’t feel up to it? Honestly? Dal, kiss me — kiss me again! There was never anyone like you.”

For a long moment they held tenderly each to the other. Then Dallas drew the chairs together and put a pillow in each. He smilingly placed his wife in one and he took the other. She put her basket beside her and picked up her knitting, slipping the evening paper into his lap. Lighting his cigar, he leaned back in great content.

“Dal!” she said.

“Ellie!”

“I love you.”

“And I adore you. I am *so* comfortable here.”

“I’m so glad to get my knitting back,” she confessed. “It’s like a lost child.”

As they sat there serene and at peace with themselves and the world, Farrell came wearily in at the garden gate. He started as he saw them, rubbed his eyes to make sure that he was seeing aright and then

dashed forward, falling on his knees before his mother and grasping her hands. She had never seen him so moved or so affectionate. Her heart went out to him.

“Mother!” he cried. “My own sweet mother has come back. How lovely you look, Mother. And your dear hair is just like it used to be. And you won’t go away again, will you, Mother?”

“No, dear,” she promised patting him gently. “I’m through junketing about. I’m home.”

“It’s too good to be true!” he exclaimed rising and going to Dallas who stood to greet him.

“Father!” Farrell exploded, thrusting out his hand.

“My son!” Dallas exclaimed sincerely, offering his hand to seal the bargain. “We are not going away, Farrell, we’ve reached years of discretion.”

“Oh, how I shall enjoy my fishing now,” the younger man went on. “I’ll be gone three days. And I’m so glad that awful trip is given up. I am going to have them carry those trunks right back again into the house. They make me shiver.”

He kissed his mother fondly, shook hands again with Dallas and then announced; “I’m going in to Boston to spend the night, Mother, to leave you and

Mr.—er—father to spend your honeymoon in peace.”

Mrs. Dallas put down her knitting and looked about her with unutterable happiness in her eyes and he smoked with a new relish. Life was right again. From across the way there came the music of some old ballad sung by a clear girl's voice to the accompaniment of a piano.

“Listen, dear,” Dallas said. “Isn't that a beautiful air?”

Through the still evening air came the words:

“When we are old and grey, love,
 When we are old and grey,
 When at last 'tis all, all over
 The turmoil of the day. . . .
 The turmoil of the day,
 In the still soft hours of even,
 In our life's fair twilight time. . . .
 We'll look upon the morn, love,
 Upon our early prime:
 'Thank God for all the sweet days'
 We'll whisper while we may,
 When we are old and grey, love.
 When we are old and grey,
 When we were young and gay, love,
 When we were young and gay. . . .
 When distant seemed December
 And all was Golden May . . .
 Amid our life's hard turmoil,
 Our true love made us brave . . .
 We thought not of to-morrow,

We reck'd not of the grave;
So far seemed life's dim twilight,
So far the close of day. . . .
When we were young and gay, love,
When we were young and gay.

Now we are old and grey, love,
Now we are old and grey,
The nighttide shadows gather,
We have not time to stay;
The last sere leaves have fallen,
The bare, bleak branches bend.
Set your dear hands in mind, love,
Thus, thus we'll wait the end. . . .
'Thank God for all the gladness,'
In peaceful hope we'll say. . . .
When we are old and grey, love,
When we are old and grey."

The singing died away leaving an aftermath of subtle harmony which held like the odour of a fragrant flower. The two, who had not moved during the singing, now leaned closer to each other. She looked up from her work.

"Dal, dear," she said, gently, and as if she was trespassing on a spell.

"Yes, sweetheart?" he turned to her.

"Dal, I love you!"

"Ellie, I adore you!"

"All the joys are not left for youth alone," he said looking happily at her.

“God bless them!” she returned.

“Some are left over.” He laughed quizzically and then touched her with devout affection. “And we are not too old,” he added.

“No,” she said with quaint quickness, “we are just a little old, Dal! And we don’t care.”

“I did not know such happiness was in the world,” he breathed finally. He reached for her hand.

“Nor I,” she answered, returning his pressure. She leaned over and placed her head against his shoulder. His arm crept around and held her closer to him.

They sat there for a long while in marvellous peace and content, scarcely moving for fear they would frighten away the great new joy which had come into their lives. The last bit of pale sky yielded to night and her stars, and the wind died away.

“It’s wonderful to be old,” he said with a new insight into life.

“Wonderful!” she echoed.

CHAPTER XXVI

FOUR LETTERS

FROM MARGARET BRINTON TO ELEANOR DALLAS

BAR HARBOR, July 1.

Dearest Ellie:

Your last letter was such a relief to me. I had felt so nervous and troubled about you, and I never hated to do anything so much in my life as I did to go away and leave you alone with Dal. I knew you hated it, but what else could I do? I had hysterics after I got home that night. Jack and Lucy had such a time getting me quiet that they sent for Dr. Barton. I wonder if you met him while you were here? He is so attractive and so *personal*. I love a personal doctor, who treats you as if you were his most interesting patient. Dr. Barton was a perfect dear to me. He sat and stroked my hands, and talked to me, and gave me a bromide, holding my head on his shoulder and soothing me, for I was so weak I couldn't sit up. John was rather cross about my letting him hold my hands, but of course it's quite

another matter with a doctor. But to go back to you. I knew some awful thing had happened to you, and I was awake for hours that night. I even asked Lucy what she thought it was, and she said perhaps you didn't like Dal to know you wore false hair, but I was sure it wasn't that. So when you wrote me that it was all right and that you and Dal understood each other as you never had before, I was so relieved. Dal is a dear, Ellie, and so considerate. Very few men would have forgiven you that Amos episode, as he did. John is much more jealous. That's one reason I'm afraid to marry him; perhaps I might smile at someone else and he wouldn't understand it. And when I saw your face on your wedding day — I was sure you knew you were making a mistake, and I don't intend to put myself in any such position. John is delightful as a sweetheart, but I wonder if I'd like any man, now, as a husband. It means no more cold cream or crimps, no more kid gloves at night to soften one's hands, and worst of all, no more nerves! One must be well dressed, perfumed, powdered, smiling and serene in these advanced days. And I wonder if I could. Still I wouldn't let any other woman get John. I'm afraid of that, too. And Nettie Brent has her eye on him or Michael. Not that I think either of them would, but she's per-

sistent and very pretty, and ten years younger than I. Do you think he'll get tired of being put off, Ellie? Dal's getting married has made John very insistent. Shall I marry him? For heaven's sake, advise me, and tell me, dear, what *was* the matter with you on your wedding day? And what was the matter with Dal? Don't fail to tell me, I'm dying to know. I'm so glad you're happy again, for it would make me feel as if I were partly to blame if you weren't, for of course I introduced you two. But, Ellie, don't keep Dal in Brookline too long or he'll hate it. Remember his heart is here in the city, and you must not try to make him over. Forgive me for that, darling, but I just had to say it. Shall I marry John, Ellie? And are you really glad you have Dal? Do, do tell me! I'm so upset and uncertain. Of course I know Jack pretty well, still who knows any man until one marries him, though ten years is a long time. I wish I could make up my mind. Why don't you and Dal come up here for a week; John arrives in a day or two, and I know he'll want an answer. Sometimes I wish I had married him five years ago. Give Dal my love and keep a lot for your dear self. How is Farrell? Poor boy, I finally understood him, and I almost like him. Michael is going to the Adirondacks. Dear creature, I never could have refused Michael.

Didn't you ever waver between them? Oh, Ellie, I'm dying to see you, and I do wish you were here to advise me. I really suppose I shall end by marrying John for fear someone else will. Write me, dear, and do miss me a little even if you have Dal —

Your devoted

PEG.

P. S. If I do decide to say yes to John what would you wear if you were me? What about apricot charmeuse, or do you think white cloth would be smarter? It would be early fall, you see. I think about September fifteenth, so don't make any engagements for that week.

PEG.

CHRISTOPHER DALLAS TO JOHN STRONG

BROOKLINE, Mass., July 2.

Good old Jack:

I *am* a wretch. I promised to write you immediately to let you know how we were, but one beautiful day after another has gone so quickly that I've lost all sense of time. Hours mean nothing to us. For the first time in my life I am not the slave of a clock. And when I think of that awful trip we might have taken, I am so thankful! "Ah, ha," I hear you

chuckling, "Dal is getting old!" It isn't that, Jack. For the first time I've found real true comfort and content. Always I've flown from boredom, not knowing that it was something attached to my way of living like a shadow. Jack, get married! You will never know what happiness is until you do. I've tried the other thing and I don't need to tell you, as a man, that it doesn't work. But here we are without a secret or a heartache between us. Ellie understands me, Jack. I think she is the only woman who ever did. She doesn't exact high pressure of me; she knows all the old dog's ingrown ways.

She is perfectly willing that I should be fifty-two years of age and she very gracefully makes me feel that she is just as old as I am, though I know well enough she isn't. Now don't say that old bromide: "A man is as old as he feels." I know better, he is just as old as he is.

I feel really rested and comfortable. Ellie lures me into all sorts of little after-dinner naps and easy hours. I should grow fat if it wasn't for Farrell, who has been introducing me to the golf links of Boston and vicinity. He has tried me out now on half a dozen different courses. And would you believe it? The beggar had the audacity to beat me out yesterday after we had carried the match three

extra holes. Once you know the boy he is very likable. To make me feel more comfortable he takes a cocktail and high ball quite regularly at dinner and now he proposes to whisk me off for a two days' cruise.

I don't think we shall stay here much longer. I've had my motor sent up and we have become so fascinated with our little, impromptu tours on these wonderful Massachusetts roads that Ellie is quite in the mood now for a longer journey. I think we shall try the loop out through the Berkshires, then up to the White and Green Mountains and on to Maine, where Margaret is staying. In the fall we are going back to New York either to take an apartment or house. Ellie says she doesn't want me to see too much of her and that she fears I will if we remain too long in this blissful Eden. God! John! You should see the garden now! I'm fascinated by it and I must have one like it near New York.

Now, Jack, don't let Margaret put you off too long. You are both making a mistake by waiting. And, Jack, don't go too strong on the emotional side of the thing. Try a new tack, tell her you want to settle down and have a little real peace. Perhaps that's what she wants. The harder you woo a middle-aged woman the more firmly she becomes con-

vinced that all men should have young wives. If you can make her feel that she will be as care-free after marriage as she is before it, all will be much easier for you.

Jack, did you ever see a woman knit or crochet? I haven't since I was a boy, until now. It's a wonderfully restful sight. Are you going to be at Bar Harbor about the fifteenth? Can't we all get together then? It will be good to see you again. Ellie tells me to send "dear John Strong" her love. Good luck to you, dear Jack, and have a wise heart if not a brave one and the widow will be yours!

DAL.

JOHN STRONG TO CHRISTOPHER DALLAS

NEW YORK, July 6.

Dear Dal:

Benedict the married man, eh? Bless you both! No one is more pleased than I am. Even in the midst of that wedding gloom I felt hopeful. I'm a great believer in love, you know, and I realised a wedding is enough to disconcert anyone. It's like a grief that has to be lived through. Margaret was fearfully upset after she got home, and had an attack of nerves, a very unusual thing for her. She called

in the famous Beauty Barton, who gave her some sort of a quieter and held onto her hands. She would have none of me and dismissed me finally. I went because I knew she didn't mean it, and she called me up the next morning to say so. I salute your superior knowledge of the fair sex and I will heed your advice. I will cease being ardent and play Old Dog Tray. Perhaps she is afraid. I am not sure I don't feel a bit that way myself. But I will advocate peace and Darby and Joan. I may really arrive somewhere. I've never tried it at all events, and my other method has been going for ten years. Long enough, in all conscience! Of course, I've seen women knit and crochet. Where do you suppose I was brought up? But Margaret doesn't know how to do either. I asked her. However, we both play cribbage and that is a favourite refuge of the married. Dear old chap, I'm going to make Margaret marry me! I envy you your peace and your home and your wife. Ellie is a charmer, I know that, and she has left a mark on poor Michael that he won't lose for many a day. I am consumed with joy over your newly found paternal interest. I wish I could see you treading the green with Farrell. And the picture of that model soul being led astray enough to consume a highball and cocktail nightly, has been engraved on my brain. I

don't doubt he will tango before he's done. I fully expect to drop into some Broadway café and see him entertaining a soubrette and liking it. Of course, I'll be in Bar Harbor. Isn't Margaret there? And when she's out of town all the harmony becomes discord. I go a lame, halting gait without her. You just wait! I'm going to win that elusive lady of mine, and before the ducks fly again at that. I say, Dal, you're welcome to the garden. It got on my nerves. Give me the Ritz for a pleasant afternoon. And Margaret's drawing-room has always been a refuge in time of need. I don't want any old gardens in mine. I'm leaving for Bar Harbor to-morrow and I shall insist upon being heard. You lucky dog, you're through with the hard part of it; but you've got to stand by me. We'll try a wedding in town, perhaps it will be gayer. My love to Ellie, whom I secretly adore, only I'm afraid you and Margaret might be jealous if I told you how much. Give my reverential regards to that estimable Farrell already being influenced by your worldly example. He did run your wedding rather well, though; he's no fool about practical things. By the way, I actually tried to make Margaret jealous and succeeded. I lunched Mrs. Jimmy Brent at the Ritz, when I knew Margaret was to be there with some

people I don't like. To say that it made a sensation is mild. Margaret, that night, almost said "yes" to me. And she didn't like my doing it one little bit. I've been full of remorse, though. It was rotten of me. Don't tell Margaret I told you. My best always, and wish me luck.

As ever, JOHN.

FROM ELEANOR DALLAS TO MARGARET BRINTON

BROOKLINE, July 9th.

Peg, Dear:

Your warm hearted, loving letter was such a pleasure to me. There's no one like you, and I am a very lucky creature to have such a friend.

There are so many things to tell you that I hardly know where to begin them, but if I forget any of them now, I'll remember them when I see you; for Dal and I are going to join you next week, and it will be so delightful to see you and John again.

I had a quiet little smile over your state of mind. Of course, you're to marry John. As if anyone could really stop you. And it's a pity you didn't do it years ago. Don't worry over it, dear. I did that and after all I am wonderfully, ideally happy. Just shut your eyes and ears to the little ghosts that troop up to frighten you; because they'll soon

fade away when you refuse to notice them. I want you to be as happy as I am, and both Dal and I think John is the one man in the world for you. Give in, dear. It's not easy, but you'll never be sorry. The wedding was awful! I can't see now how we ever got through it; but that was just because Dal and I were pretending; we both felt afraid to be just ourselves. It wasn't exactly false hair, Peg, but it was something very much like it. But that's all over, thank heaven, and we've had our say, and we love each other more than ever. Do you know, Peg, I believe we have found the happy medium! A great discovery. In New York I went to one extreme and in Brookline to another; now I've found an in-between that is what I've always longed for, and I shall never let it go again.

You see, dear, I'm not young, and neither is Dal, and neither are you or John. Let's face that fact cheerfully. What earthly difference does it make; we are all sensible people; and you and I are very blessed to have two splendid men like John and Dal to care for us.

Dal and I struggle no longer; we are just happy and peaceful. I took all of my gowns into Boston to an excellent dressmaker and had her change and alter them until they were both suitable and comfort-

able. They look just as pretty and Dal says I look better in them. I've taken off the false hair; but I have my own hair waved and I've found a new way of wearing it that I know you'll like. I'm not a frump, Peg; but I've ceased being an idiot. You won't be ashamed of me even at Bar Harbor, because I have a lot of lovely things in which I can walk and sit and breathe.

I wish I could have seen you in hysterics! And with Dr. Barton soothing you. No wonder poor John didn't like it.

The last time I was in Boston I went into Anna's shop, and had a manicure. Anna was overjoyed to see me. She looked well, but chastened, and she said a wonderful thing about Amos. I asked her how he was, and she shrugged her shoulders and replied: "He is always well and he is good to me, but he is a little crazy, as Madame knows." Incidentally I *do* think Nettie Brent has her eye on John, and not Michael; and as you say, she is very pretty. So don't wait too long, dearest, and remember John has served more than seven years!

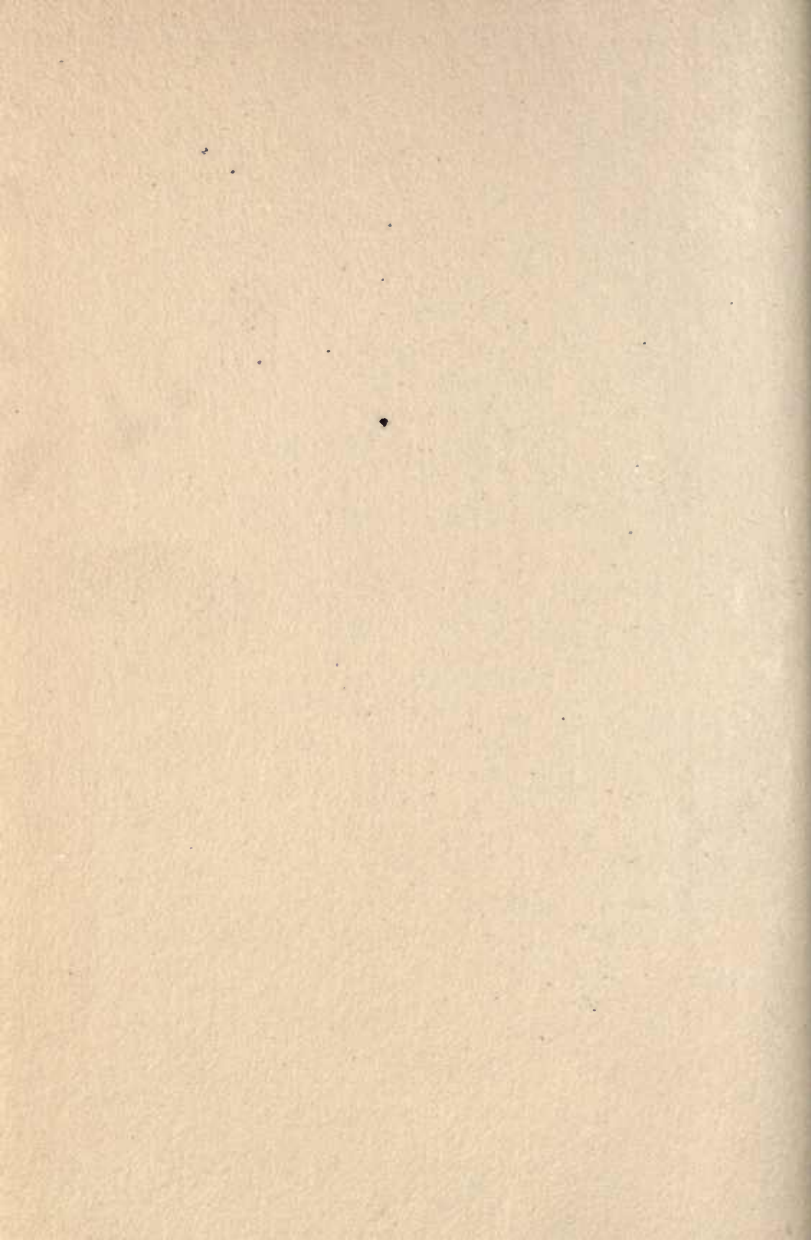
Farrell was never so nice; and he has grown so attached to Dal that he is actually trying to take him away from me for three days. He told me, not long ago, that he felt he had too narrow a view of

life, and he intended to broaden it; and he has bought a car of his own, and now takes a cocktail with us regularly. We're going to spend half the year in New York, be here while the garden is at its best, and drift about when we feel inclined. I'll find a nice housekeeper or wife for Farrell before I'm through. I'd love an apricot charmeuse for you, Peg, and I'll give you some topaz to wear with it. But don't delay. We'll expect to give up the second week in September to marrying you and John. I often think of Michael! He's the only drop of regret in my cup. I wasn't fair to him, and he's such a dear! It wouldn't be hard to love Michael; only I couldn't keep it up. Oh, Peg, Dal is so good to me, and he never looked so well. I *know* he is happy. And life is beautiful. I'm not one scrap afraid to get old now. Wait until you can say that.

We'll see you next week. I'll write later what day. And I want to find you engaged when we reach there. Never mind what was the matter the day I was married. It's past and gone. And I'm more in love than ever. My best love to you, and Dal's, too.

Your ELLIE.

THE END





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